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Gender Issues in the Moroccan Curriculum: A Case Study of Primary Education in the Béni Mellal-Khenifra Region

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Abstract

1. This study examines a sample of administrative staff and teachers in the Beni Mellal-Khenifra region to evaluate the integration of gender mainstreaming in the primary education curriculum. A structured questionnaire was developed to assess several institutional and sociodemographic dimensions. The institutional framework evaluates awareness of gender-related legislation, support for affirmative action measures, the design of gender-sensitive learning situations, the presence of educational clubs promoting gender equality, and the adoption of school projects aimed at combating gender-based violence and discrimination. The primary dependent variable is the perceived level of implementation of the gender approach and its associated challenges, analyzed against sociodemographic independent variables (e.g., gender).
2. Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted on a sample of 183 participants to examine demographic characteristics and the baseline distribution of the study variables. The analysis revealed the following results:
   - Females comprised 55.7% of the total sample.
   - More than half of the respondents (53.0%) were unfamiliar with legislation related to gender equality.
   - A minority of 18.0% opposed gender-based affirmative action.
   - A substantial majority (89.6%) implemented learning situations that promote life skills through gender cooperation.
   - Approximately one-third of the respondents (31.1%) did not integrate a gender-responsive approach into educational planning, management, and evaluation.
   - The vast majority (77.6%) reported the absence of school clubs addressing gender issues.
   - Nearly half (49.2%) indicated that their school projects lacked actionable measures to combat gender-based violence and discrimination.

3. To examine the relationship between participants' gender and their attitudes toward gender-based discrimination, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted. The results revealed a statistically significant association between the two variables: χ^2 (N = 183) = 4.646 and p = 0.031.
4. Based on these empirical findings, the research offers actionable recommendations for policy enhancement and curriculum reform.

Keywords: Primary education, curriculum, gender, gender-sensitive approach, gender equality, gender equity.

1. Introduction

Issues of equality, equity, equal opportunity, positive discrimination, gender-based violence, and gender-responsive approaches have gained significant prominence within international discourse. In the Moroccan context, the concept of gender is increasingly pivotal, offering a analytical entry point for understanding the profound societal transformations of recent decades (Al-Janabi, 2025). This evolution is particularly evident within the education and training system, which has experienced major historical milestones. While this trajectory began in the post-independence era as a foundational stage dedicated to establishing a modern, unified educational system, it has progressively evolved through successive strategic reforms to fully integrate the values of equity and gender mainstreaming into contemporary legislative frameworks and policy documents.

This evolutionary trajectory is marked by a series of foundational reforms. It advanced significantly with the 1999 National Charter for Education and Training, which prioritized expanding educational access, particularly for girls in rural areas, to establish broader equity among learners. This pathway culminated in the Strategic Vision of Reform 2015–2030 (Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research, 2015), which explicitly institutionalized gender equity and equal opportunity as core levers of the educational system. The strategic orientations of this vision were subsequently codified into Framework Law No. 51.17 (Official Gazette, 2019). This landmark legislation establishes a new, inclusive school system accessible to all, aimed at developing human capital while anchoring the system in the twin pillars of equity and equal opportunity. Furthermore, this framework law serves as a binding national contract for all educational stakeholders, securing the long-term implementation of its provisions for individual fulfillment and societal progress.

Crucially, this overarching goal requires a society that ensures the equal participation of both women and men, alongside the integration of a gender-responsive approach into its public policies, particularly within the educational sector. An analysis of strategic plans and programs indicates that a gender perspective occupies a prominent position in educational priorities. This focus aims to deconstruct discriminatory gender representations and socio-cultural practices, distinguishing them from inherent biological differences (Benzina, 2022). Within this framework, the 2011 Moroccan Constitution sought to consolidate a democratic and egalitarian society by advancing gender equality and parity across all fields, especially education. However, despite the legislative measures and international conventions adopted by the Kingdom of Morocco, a radical transformation in human development remains unattainable without a pioneering educational reform. This advancement relies on a primary leverage point: the school curriculum. Grounded in the principle of gradual pedagogical change, the curriculum serves as a key mechanism to address contemporary challenges related to gender dynamics (Moroccan Primary Education Curriculum, 2021). Consequently, the present research aims to examine the significance of the Moroccan school curriculum and the complexities of gender integration in primary

education.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants and Sampling

The study sample comprised 183 educational professionals (N = 183), including administrative and teaching staff, selected from various primary educational institutions (Normal, pioneer, and inclusive schools) in Beni Mellal-Khenifra region. A probability random sampling technique was employed to select the participants.

2.2 Research Instruments

A stratified sampling technique was employed based on school types. Data collection followed a mixed-methods design, utilizing semi-structured interviews for qualitative insights, while a structured questionnaire was distributed to the survey sample for quantitative analysis. The questionnaire investigated three primary domains: demographic characteristics, the integration of the gender approach in the curriculum, and strategic recommendations for curriculum development.

2.3 Variables

Independent Variables: Sociodemographic factors (gender, age, …) and institutional/pedagogical factors (knowledge of gender-related legislation, perceptions of positive discrimination, ability to design gender-sensitive cooperative learning situations, presence of school clubs promoting gender equality, and adoption of school projects combating gender-based violence and discrimination).

Dependent Variable: The perceived role of the Moroccan curriculum in addressing gender issues in primary education.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were managed using Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS (Version 28). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize the sample characteristics. To examine the statistical relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, Chi-square (χ^2) tests of independence were performed. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results and Discussion

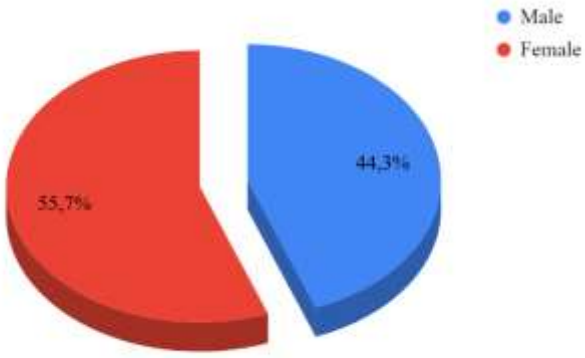
After processing and analyzing the 183 complete questionnaires, the results were as follows:

3.1 Integrating Gender Approach into the Moroccan Primary School Curriculum

3-1-1 Gender and Age

The demographic analysis of the research sample reveals a clear predominance of female participants, accounting for 55.7% compared to 44.3% for their male counterparts (Fig.1). This distribution closely aligns with the contemporary sociodemographic reality of primary education in Morocco, which has witnessed a progressive feminization of its teaching workforce over the recent decade. However, this quantitative prevalence does not automatically translate into qualitative empowerment within the institutional hierarchy. National and international educational literature (e.g., UNESCO…) consistently highlights the persistent underrepresentation of women in administrative leadership and strategic decision-making roles. Consequently, while women constitute the backbone of classroom instruction, their presence remains marginalized in the engineering and formulation of macro-educational policies. This discrepancy between grassroots representation and leadership access potentially restricts the transformative capacity of the gender-responsive approach in the Moroccan educational system.

Figure 1: Gender variable



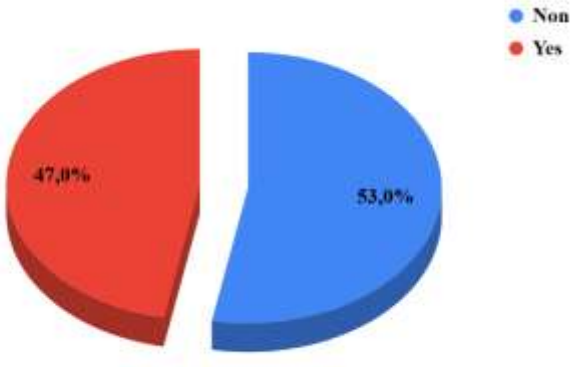
Source: Field Research 2025/26

3-1-2 Gender Awareness between Legal Frameworks and Educational Practices

a. Level of Awareness Regarding Gender Equality Legislation

The findings indicated that 53% of the participants were unacquainted with legislation pertaining to gender equality and gender-responsive approaches, whereas 47% reported being aware (Fig.2). This outcome reveals a significant gap between the national legal framework which establishes the principles of equality and non-discrimination and the degree of familiarity with these frameworks among educational stakeholders. This discrepancy may be attributed to limitations in professional training. Furthermore, this finding aligns with contemporary literature, which contends that the primary challenge does not stem from a paucity of legal texts, but rather from their inadequate pedagogical operationalization within classroom and institutional practices.

Figure 2: Legislation related to gender equality and the gender approach



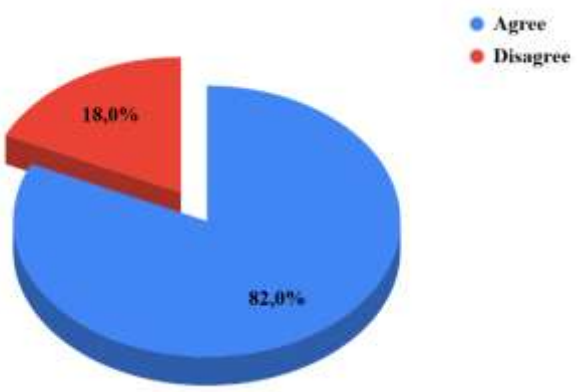
Source: Field Research 2025/26

A majority of the research sample (53.0%) indicated a lack of awareness regarding legislation on gender equality and social approaches, whereas the remaining 47.0% reported being aware. This finding may be attributed to gaps in training programs across all modalities, including basic, continuous, and self-paced learning.

b. Gender-Based Discrimination and Positive Discrimination

The results revealed that 67.8% of the respondents rejected gender-based discrimination, compared to 32.2% who approved of it (Fig.3). Conversely, 82% expressed support for positive discrimination. This discrepancy highlights a conceptual ambiguity among a segment of the respondents in distinguishing between formal equality and substantive equity. Consequently, while positive discrimination is supported by the majority as a transitional mechanism designed to reduce structural disparities, it is still perceived by critics as a violation of formal equality, particularly as addressing gender gaps has come to be viewed by some as an outdated issue (Hajib, 2024).

Figure 3: Respondents' positive attitude towards gender discrimination



Source: Field Research 2025/26

These findings underscore the necessity of a robust conceptual framework that aligns affirmative action with the promotion of equal opportunity, rather than the perpetuation of privilege (Table.1).

Table 1: The significance of differences in affirmative action's contribution to constructing learning according to the principle of equal opportunity

Positive Discrimination	Number	Arithmetic Mean $\bar{x}$	Standard deviation σ	Test-t	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance	Decision
The principle of equal opportunity (I agree)	142	1.11	0.31	0,839	172	0,403	Not statistically significant
The principle of equal opportunity (I disagree)	32	1.06	0.24				

As inferred from the table above, the arithmetic mean for respondents who agreed with affirmative action is 1.11, with a standard deviation of 0.31. Conversely, the arithmetic mean for respondents who disagreed is 1.06, with a standard deviation of 0.24. The t-test value between the two groups is 0.839 at

172 degrees of freedom, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.403. This is classified as statistically non-significant, as it is greater than 0.05.

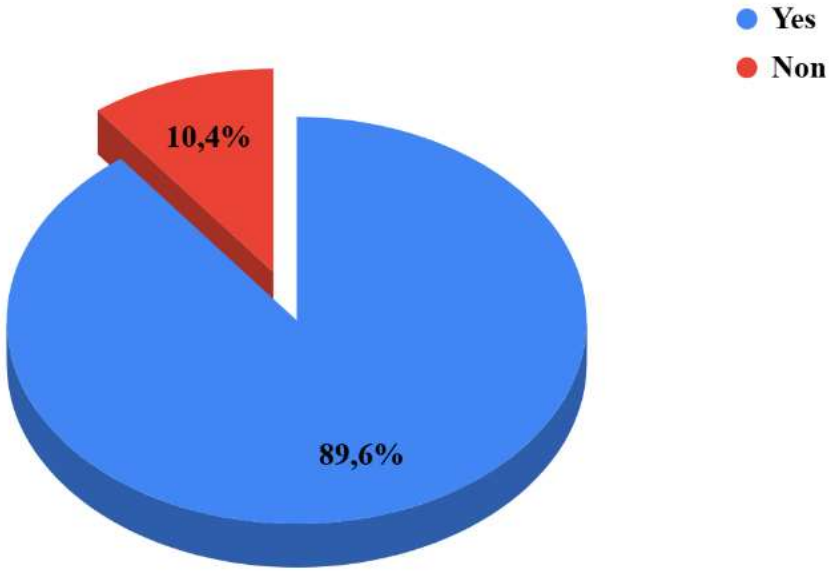
This implies that there are no statistically significant differences between respondents who support affirmative action and those who do not regarding the construction of learning according to the principle of equal opportunity. This indicates a similarity in results and a convergence of learning construction practices between both groups; meaning that the impact of affirmative action in this context does not manifest clearly or distinctively from a statistical standpoint.

3-2 Curriculum and Gender Approach: Between Planning and Practice

3-2-1 Adopting Teaching-Learning Situations Based on Gender Cooperation

Data analysis reveals that a significant majority of the sample (89.6%) reported incorporating teaching-learning dynamics that promote gender cooperation and life skills development. While this positive trend reflects a recognition of participatory learning models, a critical contradiction emerges when cross-referenced with the educators limited legislative awareness. This discrepancy questions whether school staff possess a comprehensive understanding of the deep gender-responsive dimensions of their practices, or if these interventions are merely spontaneous behaviors lacking a robust theoretical and conceptual framework (Fig.4).

Figure 4: The adoption rate of teaching-learning situations that foster life skills based on co-education and respond to gender challenges

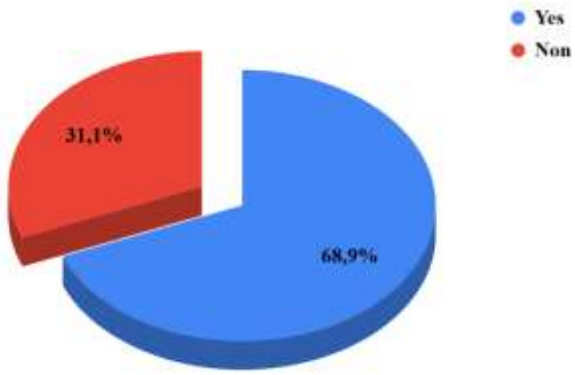


Source: Field Research 2025/26

3-2-2 Integrating the Gender Approach into Planning, Management, and Evaluation

A majority of respondents (68.9%) reported incorporating a gender approach into planning, management, and evaluation, whereas 31.1% did not (Fig.5).

Figure 5: Integrating the gender approach into planning, management, and evaluation considering the curriculum



Source: Field Research 2025/26

These results indicate that one-third of educators still operate under an oversight of gender neutrality, which inadvertently reproduces inequalities within the classroom. This confirms that integrating a gender perspective is not automatic; rather, it demands critical awareness, continuous pedagogical support for teachers, and targeted educational guidance. As the cornerstone of the educational system, the teacher's professional and pedagogical competencies directly determine educational quality. According to Ayman (2025), these are manifested in three core domains: planning, classroom management, and evaluation (Table.2).

Table 2: The significance of differences in the involvement of administrative and educational staff within educational institutions in promoting learners' life skills.

Learning and teaching situations	Number	Arithmetic Mean $\bar{x}$	Standard deviation σ	Test-t	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance	Decision
Gender mainstreaming in planning	156	1.24	0.43	-4.946	172	0,000	Statistically significant
Lack of gender-responsive planning	18	1,77	0.42				

It can be inferred from the table above that the arithmetic mean for respondents who incorporated the gender approach into planning was 1.24, with a standard deviation of 0.43. Meanwhile, the arithmetic mean for those who did not incorporate the approach was 1.77, with a standard deviation of 0.42. The t-test value between the two groups was -4.946 at 172 degrees of freedom, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.000, which is classified as statistically significant as it is less than 0.05.

This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between respondents who incorporated the gender approach into planning and those who did not, regarding the engagement of administrative and educational staff in promoting life skills among learners. This suggests that implementing the gender approach in planning is positively and effectively associated with the level of engagement in promoting

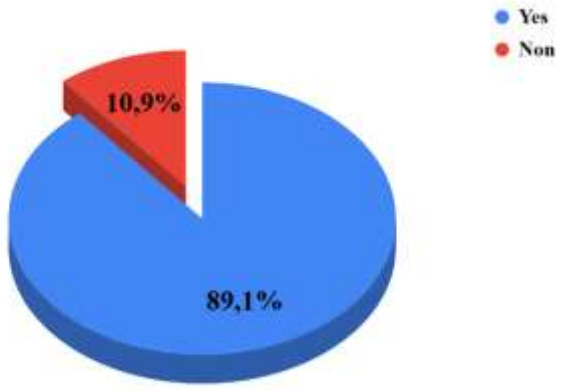
life skills, highlighting the importance of integrating the gender approach as an essential component of educational planning within educational institutions.

3-2-3 Constructing Learning that Respects the Principle of Equal Opportunity

A significant majority of the sample (89.1%) affirmed their commitment to constructing learning experiences that respect the principle of gender-based equal opportunity. This finding aligns with national curriculum orientations and the strategic reports of the Supreme Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (CSEFRS) in Morocco. Specifically, it echoes calls to operationalize the principle of citizenship-based equality, guarantee equal opportunities, and ensure universal access to quality education (Supreme Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research, 2017).

Conversely, the remaining 10.9% (Fig.6), though a minority, reflects the persistence of traditional sociocultural representations that potentially hinder the substantive impact of equality principles. This discrepancy underscores how formal equality often fails to translate into equitable outcomes in the absence of affirmative action as a corrective mechanism. Such ideological stagnation persists despite Morocco's institutional efforts to mainstream gender in public policy planning, particularly within the education sector, which explicitly aims to bridge gender disparities (Derrij, 2017; Framework Law 51.17, 2019).

Figure 6: The proportion of knowledge construction adhering to the principle of gender equality of opportunity



Source: Field Research 2025/26

3-3 School Life and the Establishment's Project as Levers for Integrating the Gender Approach

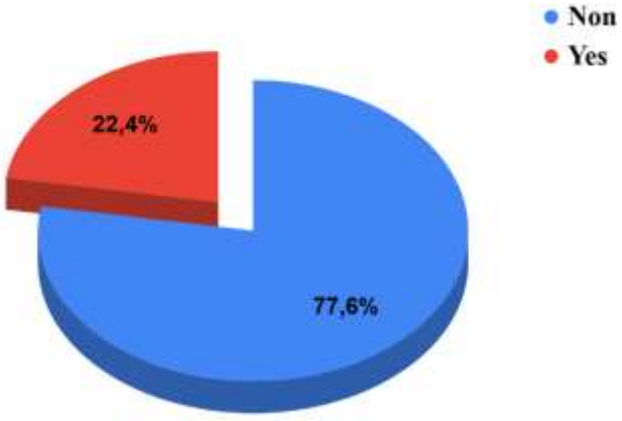
3-3-1 Educational Clubs and Gender Issues

Quantitative analysis indicates that 77.6% of the surveyed sample reported a lack of educational clubs dedicated to gender issues in their establishments, contrasted with a minority of 22.4% hosting such initiatives (Fig.7). This outcome demonstrates that school life remains underutilized as a non-formal educational sphere capable of reinforcing classroom instruction, institutionalizing egalitarian values, and mitigating school-based violence.

Moreover, this trend reflects a suboptimal operationalization of national educational policies, particularly Ministerial Note No.146-24 regarding the prevention of violence in school environments (Ministry of National Education, Preschool and Sports, 2024). This note explicitly called for the optimal

activation of educational clubs, the promotion of citizenship, human rights, and coexistence values, and the enhancement of these clubs' appeal to both male and female students.

Figure 7: The percentage of educational clubs that address gender issues



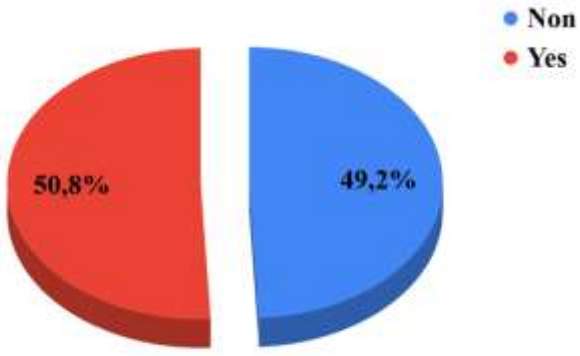
Source: Field Research 2025/26

3-3-2 School Project and Combating Violence and Discrimination

The results revealed an almost even split between educational institutions whose school projects incorporate procedural interventions to combat gender-based violence and discrimination (50.8%) and those whose projects do not (49.2%) (Fig.8). These data highlight the underutilization of the "School Project" (Projet d'Établissement) as a strategic lever for cultural and educational transformation, despite its fundamental role in enhancing school life.

The institutional framework for promoting equity, parity, and equal opportunities among learners and educational actors across both curricular and extracurricular activities is strictly defined by national guidelines. Notably, this includes the dedicated gender equality sections in the strategic vision of the Supreme Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (2024) and the School Life Guide (2019).

Figure 8: The degree of integration of the school success plan in combating gender-based violence and discrimination



Source: Field Research 2025/26

Generally, the school project aims to foster a safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environment by preventing school-related gender-based violence, dismantling gender stereotypes, and enhancing girls' protection. This is achieved through comprehensive, systemic strategies such as raising awareness, integrating gender-transformative pedagogy, and implementing safe reporting mechanisms, which collectively contribute to improving girls' educational retention and learning outcomes (Table.3).

Table 3: The significance of differences between Discrimination and school project

School Project	Number	Arithmetic Mean $\bar{x}$	Standard deviation σ	Test-t	Degrees of freedom	Level of Significance	Decision
School Project (Agree)	58	1.58	0.49	**1.830**	172	**0.069**	Not Statistically significant
School Project (Disagree)	116	1,43	0.49				

Therefore, it can be inferred from the table above that the arithmetic mean of the respondents who approved of the school project was 1.58, with a standard deviation of 0.49, while the arithmetic mean for those who did not approve was 1.43, with a standard deviation of 0.49. The t-test value between the two groups reached 1.830 at 172 degrees of freedom, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.069. This is classified as statistically non-significant since it is greater than 0.05.

This implies that there are no statistically significant differences between respondents who support the school project and those who do not regarding the project's effectiveness in combating gender-based violence and discrimination. In other words, the respondents' scores show a relative similarity in opinion concerning the institutional project, indicating that despite its strategic importance, the project did not demonstrate a statistically tangible impact in this aspect based on these data.

Furthermore, the research findings reveal that the Moroccan curriculum includes, at the theoretical level, clear pillars for the gender approach. However, its practical implementation on the ground remains contingent upon a set of factors, foremost among which are training, perceptions, educational leadership, and school life. Consequently, the gender issue in primary education is not tied to a lack of reference frameworks as much as it is linked to how they are implemented within daily educational practice.

4. Participants' Recommendations

Based on the respondents' feedback, their proposals were classified into overarching themes that reflect their perceptions and expectations concerning the integration of the gender approach in the Moroccan education system:

4.1 Recommendations associated with cultural values and references

Adopting the purposes of Islamic Sharia to achieve equity and justice, in alignment with the constitutional and socio-cultural specificities of Moroccan society.

Consolidating the values of cooperation and complementarity between the sexes, as opposed to confrontational or essentialist paradigms.

4.2 Suggestions Related to School Life

Activating educational clubs to raise learners awareness of gender equality and equity.

Implementing school-wide activities centered around the values of gender equality, inclusivity, and the prevention of violence and discrimination.

Providing educational programs aimed at institutionalizing gender-responsive pedagogy and practices within educational institutions.

4.3 Proposals Related to Training and Capacity Building

Building the capacity of administrative and pedagogical personnel in gender-responsive approaches.

Developing targeted training initiatives to enhance leadership and empowerment skills, with a particular focus on women.

Promoting self-directed and continuous learning in gender equality and dynamics.

4.4 Curriculum and Program Proposals

Reviewing curricula and syllabi to explicitly and practically integrate the gender approach.

Consolidating the gender approach when constructing learning processes and teaching-learning situations.

4.5 Propositions Related to Governance and Partnerships

Partnering with civil society organizations focused on gender issues.

Executing interventional research on gender within school environments.

Promoting women in leadership positions and implementing gender parity policies.

5. Research recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- Institutionalizing gender mainstreaming within both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs.
- Expanding the network of school clubs dedicated to gender equality and human rights across all educational institutions.
- Mandating the inclusion of operational protocols targeting the prevention and mitigation of gender-based violence and discrimination within School Development Plans (Projet d'Établissement).
- Enhancing institutional monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to audit and ensure gender-responsive pedagogy and equal opportunities within classroom practices.
- Fostering context-specific, empirical educational research on gender dynamics tailored to the Moroccan socio-cultural and legislative framework.
- Affirming structural mechanisms to promote women's representation and equity in educational leadership and administrative decision-making positions.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that while the Moroccan educational curriculum incorporates theoretical and legislative foundations supporting a gender-responsive approach, its practical implementation within primary education faces significant systemic challenges. The empirical findings reveal a distinct gap between the official policy framework and daily pedagogical practices. This discrepancy is primarily attributed to inadequate professional training, conceptual ambiguity among educators, and the limited operationalization of co-curricular "school-life" activities and institutional school projects.

Furthermore, this research emphasizes that gender mainstreaming cannot be achieved solely through curricular content modification; rather, it necessitates fostering critically conscious educational stakeholders capable of translating egalitarian values into practice. Such a transformation is essential for

establishing an inclusive, equitable environment that contributes to sustainable human development. Consequently, the ultimate challenge lies in transitioning from an ostensibly neutral educational institution to a gender-conscious school capable of deconstructing stereotypes and nurturing future generations that embody equality, equity, and equal opportunities.

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