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Localizing International Education Agendas:
Boys (still) Underachieving in Jamaica's Secondary Education
Rendre locaux les programmes de l'éducation internationale :
les résultats (toujours) insuffisants des garçons dans l'éducation secondaire en Jamaïque

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Abstract
The literature on basic education emphasizes the need to improve enrollment and access to girls' education in poorer countries. In Jamaica, the problem is not merely access to basic education but rather the quality of education outcomes, particularly for boys. Setting our research findings within the context of globalization and basic education, this paper explores the underachievement of boys within the contexts of international education policies at the domestic/national scale in Jamaica. Using a combination of participants' responses drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers across two rural high schools in Jamaica, an analysis of secondary sources, and (to a lesser extent) participant observations, we put forward a few claims regarding the process of "localizing" international education. It appears that global discourses in education (education for all) place demands on the local context—privilege girls, the problem of lack of access to education, and the overall quality of experience. And therefore, the Jamaican state can "evade" or palliatively address the ongoing problem of boys' underachievement. The paper also highlights the effects of neoliberal restructuring in education as well as the inconsistencies between domestic/national and international education policies.

Résumé
Les publications sur l'éducation de base soulignent le besoin d'améliorer le taux d'inscription et l'accès à l'éducation des filles dans les pays pauvres. En Jamaïque, le problème n'est pas seulement l'accès à l'éducation de base, mais plutôt la qualité des résultats éducatifs, en particulier chez les garçons. Plaçant les résultats de nos recherches dans le contexte de la mondialisation et de l'éducation de base, cet article explore les résultats insuffisants des garçons dans le contexte des politiques d'éducation internationale à l'échelle nationale en Jamaïque. S'appuyant sur une combinaison de réponses des participants provenant d'entrevues semi-structurées, menées auprès d'enseignants de deux écoles secondaires rurales, une analyse de sources secondaires (et dans une moindre mesure) sur des observations des participants, nous mettons en avant quelques affirmations relatives au processus visant à « rendre locale » l'éducation internationale. Il semble que les discours mondiaux en éducation (l'éducation pour tous) font peser des exigences sur les contextes locaux – privilégier les filles, et le problème du manque d'accès à l'éducation ainsi que la qualité d'ensemble de l'expérience. Par conséquent, l'État jamaïcain peut éviter le problème récurrent des résultats insuffisants des garçons ou le traiter de façon palliative. Cet article met aussi en lumière les effets de la restructuration néolibérale dans le domaine

de l'éducation ainsi que les incohérences entre les politiques en éducation nationales et internationales.

Key Words: Caribbean (Jamaica); globalization; gender; boys' underachievement; basic education (secondary education)
Mots clés : caribéen (Jamaïque); mondialisation; sexe; résultats insuffisants des garçons; éducation de base (éducation secondaire)

Introduction

The findings presented herein are drawn from a larger study that explores the gendered relationship between the suboptimal performance of boys and educational policies in Jamaica. We argue that the underachievement of boys in Jamaica transpires in the complexities of educational policies (and agenda) at the domestic/national and global scales. The study was conducted in the spring/summer of 2013 at two rural secondary schools (pseudonymously referred to as *X* and *Y*) in the geographically remote areas of Manchester, Jamaica, West Indies. The participants include 10 teachers who are responsible for providing classroom instructions to the Grade 10 boys and girls. Using a combination of participants' responses drawn from semi-structured interviews, an analysis of secondary sources, and (to a lesser extent) participant observations, we put forward a few claims regarding the process of "localizing" international education. It appears that global discourses in education (education for all) place demands on the local context—privilege girls, the problem of lack of access to education, and the overall quality of experience; therefore, the Jamaican state can "evade" or palliatively address the ongoing problem of boys' underachievement.

Scholars in the fields of gender, education, and international development have documented the efforts of international organizations and countries to improve enrollment rates and access to basic education, particularly for girls across poorer countries in the South (Akyeampong, 2009; Kirk, 2007; Kirk & Winthrop, 2008; Novelli, 2010; Turrent, 2011; Unterhalter, 2014a, 2014b; Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). However, these scholars contend that the Education for All (EfA) initiatives fell short on improving educational outcomes, particularly for girls in the poorer countries. Literature on gender differential education originating from the Caribbean reveals a contrasting scenario between the gender regimes (Bailey, 2004; Figueroa, 2000, 2004; Parry, 1997). Boys at the secondary level merit suboptimal grades to that of girls (Ellis, 2018; Jha & Kelleher, 2006).

In Jamaica, the poor performance of boys only gains national attention via vigorous debates in the wider society whenever results of the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC)[1] examinations are made public each summer (Reid, 2012). By and large, girls are more successful than boys in these exit examinations that are administered in Barbados; girls attain better scores that range between 50 and 100% or Grades I and III in 29 of the 35 CSEC subject areas (Jha & Kelleher, 2006, p. 84). But it begs the question: What accounts for this difference between

[1] Grade 11 students in Jamaica and other Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) countries write the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations. These national exit examinations are administered by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) which is based in the most eastern Caribbean island nation of Barbados.

genders, especially those who are academically weaker. The purpose of this paper is not to perpetuate gender essentialism. Instead, it seeks to examine the underachievement of boys across two rural high schools (*X* and *Y*) in the hilly parish of Manchester, Jamaica. Schools *X* and *Y* will be used as case studies to elaborate and enrich our understanding of how Jamaica's educational policies (and practices) have facilitated, contributed to, and perpetuated a policy environment that fails to remedy the suboptimal performance of boys. "Gender equity" in education is a global discourse, and the cases of Schools *X* and *Y* demonstrate that it plays out differently in the local context. It is within this context that the boys' underachievement must be explored in relation to the implementation of global educational policies (or agendas) at the national scale. This paper is important to the research agendas in the field of comparative and international education as the EfA objectives are not only homogenous in nature but are known to produce unintending consequences across different countries in the South.

Conceptual Considerations: Globalization and Basic Education

This article is informed by a combination of two theoretical concepts: globalization and basic education. The globalization literature acknowledges that the concept lends itself to a multiplicity of understandings (Crossley & Watson, 2003; Green, 1999; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). Globalization also enables the laissez-faire economic theory of modern-day state organization known as neoliberalism (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p.380). Stromquist and Monkman (2000, p.1) understand globalization as the political and economic transformations in the world's economy that (re)arrange the global patterns of production, consumption, and investments. Carnoy (1999) also sees globalization as a discourse and practice which manifest in the formation of economic blocs and political unions that influence or (re)structure the relationship between nation-states and their citizens. Stromquist (2002) extends the definition to include the economic transformations that have occurred in the institution of employment. The term also speaks to the diffusion of global capitalists' policies, culture, as well as technologies and communication flows that facilitate the proliferation in cross-border trade and the compression of time and space (Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 53; Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000; Stromquist, 2002).

For Carnoy (1999), the economic transformation in the world's economy elevated by the neoliberal doctrine has produced three types of global reforms in education; namely, competitiveness-driven, equity-driven, and finance-driven. In short, competitiveness-driven reforms examine the need to establish innovative and contemporary ways of conceptualizing and realizing educational achievement and output (Carnoy 1999, p. 37). Equity-driven reforms place emphasis on the political role of education as a tool to proliferate "the equality of economic opportunities" and to realize equalizing access to basic "high quality" education (Carnoy 1999, p. 37, 44–45). Whereas finance-driven reforms speak to educational restructuring for the purpose of cost-saving and not necessarily to improve quality in education or the learning process. Conventionally, the economic restructuring across countries in the South occurs at the insistence of the international financial institutions (IFIs: World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) (Carnoy, 1999). This necessitates a retrenchment in public education or a diminution in the amount of state funds allocated to education and skills development (Carnoy 1999, p. 37).

The IFIs and global aid donors have endured many criticisms for the harsh consequences resulting from the insistence of neoliberal structural adjustments policies (now Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) in public education in poorer countries. By the late 1990s, the World Bank and other international donors' public support for "radical privatization policies in education and other social services" have waned and given rise to a discourse of "partnership" in education (Robertson

& Verger, 2012, p. 26; Verger, 2012, p. 110). The contemporary "updated Washington Consensus" or "Post-Washington Consensus" era insists on a synergistic relationship between the market and state policies (Williamson, 2004/2005, 2009; Stiglitz, 2009, p. 49). Multilateral institutions and donors in international education maintain that it is irrational for poorer states to single-handedly manage the expansion of access in education (Verger, 2012). Therefore, international actors in education are encouraged to forge public-private partnerships in education (ePPP) and experiment with innovative "ways of providing education" (Verger 2012, p. 110). International donors also maintain that the state collaborates with private actors and not to perceive them as a threat in the provision of education (Verger, 2012).

Robertson and Verger (2012) contend that advocates of the ePPP discourse do not seek to question the state's jurisdictional boundaries in education but rather insist that the collaborative process between the two entities will restructure the "appearance" of the state. It is also expected that the synergistic process will result in a "thinner" and "more powerful" state (Robertson & Verger, 2012, p. 32). Thus, ePPPs dictate that the state re-examines its service delivery role or purpose in education. The state should centre its interest on "strategic control and planning," and surrender the role of providing education services to private actors in the partnership (Robertson & Verger, 2012, p. 32). Arguably, the "thinning" of the state which results from this partnership will restructure or reshape the existing social contract between the state and the citizens in poorer countries. Government budgetary allocations to education will be lessened as international donors increase their service delivery role in education. The World Bank, through its policies, vigorously advocates for large class sizes which it sees as antithetical to realizing public efficiency (Carnoy 1999, p. 42). Robertson and Verger (2012) also point to the contradictory nature of ePPPs; while public-private partnerships embrace "market solutions in education," intrusion or meddling on the part of the state is well-regarded as policy mechanism that fosters a thriving environment for the expansion and delivery of educational services (Robertson & Verger, 2012, p. 32).

The discourse of education as a human right is embedded or reflected in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Akyeampong, 2009; Mundy, 2010; Unterhalter, 2014a, 2014b). Despite being the subject of much criticism, the global donor community (the United Nations, Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], civil society organizations and scholars) at the "Education for All" (EfA) conferences—the World Conference on Education for All (1990) in Jomtien, Thailand and the World Education Forum (2000) in Dakar, Senegal—initially announced and later broadened scope of the discourse on rights to promote universal access to basic education (Buchert 1995a, 1995b; Miller, 2014; Torres, 1999; Unterhalter, 2014a, 2014b). At this assembly in Dakar, Senegal, 164 countries including Jamaica, committed themselves to implement the EfA initiatives (Dakar Framework for Action) to remedy the learning needs of children, youths, and adults by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2000a, 2000b, p. 43). Within this internationally agreed upon framework, three aims (3, 5, 6) of the six established goals emphasized the salience of gender in terms of improved quality and educational access for women and girls across the globe (UNESCO, 2000a).

The EfA initiatives at Jomtien and Dakar also exemplified international cooperation in education (specifically to provide access to basic education) as well as the fluidity of norms and discourses in the supranational space. International norms which shape our actions, thinking, and choice are constructed and can change over time and space (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Mundy, 2010). Arguably, international cooperation in education via the EfA initiatives and World Bank policies have not only been globally diffused but have facilitated the burgeoning presence of civil society and a shift in the donor community, which now plays a broader function in addition to their

historical service provision roles (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Mundy, 2010; Samoff, 2009; Unterhalter, 2014a). It is also salient to note that the proliferation and ascendency of civil society groups coincide with the rise of neoliberal dominance which obliges the state to obfuscate and redefine its role in the provision and delivery of education (Howell & Pearce, 2002; Mundy, 2010). Consequentially, civil society groups (domestic and international) have taken on a more active role in the provision of basic education across the globe.

To align or make its educational policies distinctly "international" or "foreign," the Jamaican government, via the 2004 Task Force on Educational Reform report, signalled its intent to translate or "localize" the aspirations of the Dakar Framework for Action/EfA movement (Ministry of Education, 2012), a development agenda which seeks to perpetuate the "colonizing" (and "imperial") mission of the West. Further, recommendations set forth in the 2004 Task Force report have largely been incorporated into state policy; for example, the National Educational Strategic Plan (NESP) is expected to direct the country in the delivery and provision of education throughout the period 2011–2020 (Ministry of Education, 2012). In the Jamaican context, the enduring problem is not merely access to basic education for the different gender regimes but rather the quality of educational outcomes, particularly that of boys. Together with the implementation of finance-driven reforms, the EfA has resulted in several unintended consequences (Buchert, 1995a, 1995b; Martens & Wolf, 2009; Torres, 2000) for boys in Jamaica's rural education system. Thus, the design of EfA goals also raised questions about the context and the implementation of global policies in education across different countries. As this paper unfolds, it will become explicit to the reader that EfA policies, which form part and parcel of Western international development agenda, did not account for the contextual peculiarities in rural Jamaica.

The Research Methods and Process

Murray and Sixsmith (1998) detailed the importance of semi-structured interviews in the research process. Semi-structured interviews facilitate an environment in which teachers, who in the absence of their colleagues, are more liberated to express their opinions on the topics itemized for discussion (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). In addition to providing a freethinking and expressive space for respondents in our study, the semi-structured interviews made it possible for us to capture nuances and probe responses or tangential arguments raised throughout the interview process. Ten classroom instructors—six females and four males—across Schools *X* and *Y* were purposively selected to participate in the interview process. Five of the teachers are from School *X*, while the other five teach at School *Y*. At each school, these respondents were selected from six subject areas. In both schools, these included mathematics, English language, biology, physics, metals (School *X*), and electrical technology (School *Y*). The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually in a face-to-face manner and ranged between 25 to 60 minutes.

Employing the method of observation in the study allowed us to uncover and explore subtleties that the researcher might choose to conceal during the interview process (Bernard 1994). Observations of the teacher-student interactions were completed over 21 successive school days across both institutions in courses identified above. The observation process also made it possible for us to gather relevant data which helped to inform the questions that were later field to teachers. Although observations can be quite tedious and time-consuming, the process compelled us to contend with our bias towards the delivery of education in Jamaica's secondary schooling.

To provide context for our analysis, we also drew upon secondary data sources or grey literature housed at the Ministry of Education. These include the 2011–2020 National Educational

Strategic Plan (NESP) and the 2004 Task Force report on educational reform (Davis, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2012).

Embarking on this exploratory study, we entered the field occupying both an "insider" and "outsider" statuses. As young adolescents, we have had the privilege of pursuing our secondary education in Jamaica. Upon completing postsecondary studies in Canada, the first author obtained employment as a secondary school teacher in a well-known public school board, whereas the contributing author has worked in different capacities with young adolescents and students in the public postsecondary system. We are aware of our biases towards the structure and delivery of education in Jamaica. Thus, we situate the delivery of education within the broader debates on gender, international education and development, and their implications for countries in the South. Being mindful of the power dynamics that existed between us and the participants, we utilized the strategies of rapport building (O'Leary 2004) and informed consent to negotiate the research process.

The Local and the Global: Education in Jamaica and the Contemporary Sites of Study

The passage of the Education Act 1965 (7), formally established and outlined the structure and jurisdictional responsibility of education from kindergarten years to postsecondary studies in post-independent Jamaica (Ministry of Education, 2012). Prior to 1962, primary education in Jamaica, like other former British colonial states, was funded by the colonial government; whereas secondary education was predominantly financed by different trusts and ecclesial assemblages (for example, the Roman Catholicism, the Church of England, the Baptist Missionaries, the Moravians, and to a lesser extent the Methodist and Presbyterian faiths) that were affiliated with the early evangelical movement (Miller, 1990). Access to basic education in both sectors of the education system was predominantly restricted to the privileged, "fair-skinned" pupils, primarily belonging to upper and middle-class homes (Miller, 1990). Improved access to basic education in Jamaica became a reality in the post-independence era (in the late 1960s to 1977). By then Jamaica, like other newly decolonized countries, perceived and envisioned public education as a treasured possession that will improve literacy, numeracy, and socioeconomic conditions of children and young adults in the Black majority population (Manley, 1987; Mezahev, 2001; Mullings, 2009). Thus, the state was antithetical to threats of privatizations in public education. In the 1970s, the progressive political administration (the People's National Party) of the then Prime Minister Michael Manley nationalized industries and championed social commitments that aimed at addressing the plight of marginalized Jamaicans. An ardent intellectual influenced by proponents of the Fabian socialist persuasion, Manley democratized the public education system and implemented ameliorative mechanisms that improved access to basic education (Manley, 1987; Manley, 2008; Mezahav, 2001; Mullings, 2009; Weis, 2005). However, his leftist policies were castigated and attacked by advocates and proselytes of free market ideology (neoliberalism) presaged by the Washington Consensus (Weis, 2005). Since then, Jamaica's anemic economic growth and downward spiraling gross domestic product/debt ratio (resulting from the 1980s debt crisis and the 2008 global financial crisis) have left Jamaica with no choice but to seek loans twice from IFIs (1980s–1990s and 2012 onwards) in exchange for the implementation of austerity measures in education (and other sectors of the economy).

In contemporary Jamaica, education is centralized and administratively headquartered from the Ministry of Education in the capital, Kingston, whereas the educational services are decentralized across six regional offices throughout the island (Davis, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2012). Schools *X* and *Y* are co-educational institutions with one principal, and two vice-

principals each, and mostly female staff. School *X* has 40 females and 14 males staff, while School *Y* consists of 41 females and 13 males. A total of 1200 students are enrolled at School *X* throughout Grades 7–13. Of the total number 157 students (84 boys and 73 girls) are in Grade 10. School *Y* extends from Grades 7–11 with an enrollment of 900 students, 175 of whom are in Grade 10 (89 boys and 86 girls). Both Schools *X* and *Y* have an organized parent-teacher association (PTA) whose function includes facilitating regular meetings to discuss matters relating to the progress of their child(ren). Since the onset of neoliberal austerity, however, the PTA organizations have increasingly taken on a financial role that sees them assisting the schools with income-generating activities (for example, hosting barbeques and other fundraising events) to supplement the schools' economic operations. In contrast to School *Y*, School *X* often receives monetary gifts and educational resources from alumni associations in the Jamaican diaspora in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

The Unintended Consequences of Global Education Policies in Jamaica's Secondary Education

Class Sizes and the Inadequate Resources in Rural Secondary Schooling

Observations done at Schools *X* and *Y* suggest that the presence of large class sizes at both schools negatively affects the learning process and outcomes of boys in the rural education system. The Ministry of Education stipulates that the teacher-student ratio in secondary schools should be 1:28 (Ministry of Education, 2012). However, instructors at both institutions reported that the number of students per class has mushroomed since the government re-entered negotiations with the IMF in 2012. This happened under austerity measures, such that in 2010, for example, Jamaica spent 60% of total revenue on servicing foreign debt, 30% on public sector salaries and only 10% on education, health, national security, and other sectors (McFadden, 2011). The teachers involved in the interview process pointed out that the 2008 global financial crisis and the neoliberal restructuring was followed by a hiring freeze across the public sector. And so, the tight fiscal space in which schools have been operating has made it impossible to hire new teachers. Enrollment data (corroborated with daily school attendance) indicates that class sizes within School *X* and *Y* generally exceed the teacher-pupil ratio (1:28) established by the Ministry of Education. In fact, only two of the 10 classes we visited across the schools were in line with these guidelines (See Table 1). Class sizes at Schools *X* range from 28 to 44 students and at School *Y*, from 30 to 39 students. A senior instructor of biology at School *X* metaphorically described the disadvantageous effects that huge class sizes have on boys who struggle to grasp the course content:

> Some [of the students] will get lost in the system. It's not every time the rain falls that all the trees get it. [Look] in that forest over there. [Not] all the trees get the sunlight. The taller ones get the sunlight, while the shorter ones are being shaded. And that is what happens to the boys who have a challenge learning and are in huge class as well.

Table 1: The Disaggregated and Aggregated Number of Pupils in Grade 10 Classes Across the Sites of Study

Course	Girls	Boys	Total No. of Pupils	MOE Ratio	Ratio Exceeded?	Overage Amount
School X						
Biology	26	17	43	1:28	Yes	15
English Language	17	11	28		No	-

Mathematics	16	12	28		No	-
Metals	0	30	30		Yes	02
Physics	18	26	44		Yes	16
School Y						
Biology	6	29	35	1:28	Yes	07
Electrical Technology	0	35	35		Yes	07
English Language	17	22	39		Yes	11
& Reading Class	*(7)*	*(14)*	*21*			
Mathematics	17	22	39		Yes	11

NOTE. The acronym MOE means Ministry of Education, whereas the MOE Ratio speaks to the mandated teacher-pupil proportion that Jamaica's Ministry of Education theoretically expects to find in any given class.

Teachers at School *Y* also complained that instructors are handicapped by the large pupil-teacher ratio which prevents them from reaching more boys who often receive suboptimal learning outcomes. The instructor with responsibility for English language and reading at School *Y* offered the following opinion:

> In part, I believe that these boys perform lower than girls because the teacher-student ratio is too large … and most of these were already having learning challenges. Throughout my career, I noticed a pattern. The bigger the class [size], the number of failures in this subject usually increase. I have witnessed this [occurrence] several times. But I believe that if the class sizes were smaller then I [believe that I] would [have] be[en] able to reach more boys and this could allow them to improve their performance. A few of the girls also experience similar problems too but to a lesser extent than boys. In fact, the girls in my class have better grades than the boys.

An electrical technology instructor added that:

> The classes are too large. The recommended class size [established] by the Ministry [of Education] is 28 [students per teacher]. We [here at School *Y*] almost double [that ratio]. Reaching [these boys] individually presents us [teachers] with a great challenge …. [In the past] when I have had smaller classes, and I was able to … give [the students] a problem to solve … and then I would be able go around the class[room] and help those who are weak … or having a learning challenge. Now, I can't do that because the problem is more complex now. And it is complex because … the class size has increased … and most of the boys are weaker than the few girls who are in this class and so [the boys] end up receiving lower grades on tests.

Two of the three accounts presented above detailed how large class sizes complicate and contribute to the underachievement of boys. The presence of large class sizes means that teachers have a minimal amount of time in any given period to provide instructions, impart knowledge, and devote one-on-one attention to the students, particularly to the boys who need it. Observations of the student-teacher interactions also corroborate the perspective shared by the electrical technology instructor as four boys were awaiting the teacher's help towards the end of the class which lasted approximately 90 minutes. To a layperson, electrical technology may appear as a vocational/hands-on course, but it necessitates a transference of learning from other courses which "these boys find to be a challenge." As the teacher also opined, "this subject requires the [boys] to do some amount of reading and comprehension as well as apply the basic concepts, principles and

formulae from their daily math classes." At School *Y*, the majority of boys enrolled in electrical technology obtain a passing grade of 50% or more on their June 2013 examinations but most of them did not realize favourable outcomes in other subject areas (See Table 2). A similar trend is noticeable across other subject areas at School *X* where a passing grade of 65% is established by school officials.

But classrooms are not homogenous environments; students vary according to their learning abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or access to cultural capital. Obviously, students with access to extra resources, books, other learning materials outside regular hours of schooling and other forms of cultural capital will have better learning outcomes than the grades obtained by boys in Table 2. These atrocious learning outcomes make it questionable regarding the implications of budgetary allocations to these school by the Ministry of Education, the learning experiences and cognitive development of students who are categorized as underachievers. Are their learning needs being met? How do teachers find the time to address their learning expectations without sacrificing the learning of others? Do teachers have adequate resources to address learning expectations within the curriculum? The reduction of state expenditures in education speaks to the broader issue of the role of institutions in development and growth. The low grades merited by boys (in Table 2) also raise questions about the persistence of patriarchy in the Jamaican educational system. In other words, why is it that boys (and not girls) are encountering learning challenges in a system that was built on patriarchy (Chevannes, 2001; Gayle, 2002; Thomas, 2019)?

Table 2: Educational Attainment Realized by a Select Number of Grade 10 Boys in the June 2013 Examinations Across the Two Sites of Study

Name	Established Satisfactory Score	**Courses & Grades:** Mathematics	English Language	Biology	Physics	Metals	Electrical Technology	Average
School X								
	65%							
Al-Wayne		59	60	63	61	73	-	**63.2**
Barrington		16	59	59	55	67	-	**51.2**
Cebert		08	63	75	58	65	-	**53.8**
Desmond		44	60	53	63	66	-	**57.2**
Ezekiel		63	66	50	62	68	-	**61.8**
Fitzroy		30	58	53	60	70	-	**54.2**
Geoffrey		14	65	50	59	65	-	**50.6**
Hyman		30	68	55	58	65	-	**55.2**
Isaac		24	72	55	48	71	-	**54.0**
Jerry		02	58	60	52	38	-	**42.0**
School Y								

50%							
Kirk	36.5	30	60	-	-	65.3	**48.0**
Leon	45.6	43	43	-	-	68.7	**50.1**
Michael	65	67	60	-	-	55.4	**61.9**
Nathaniel	12	34	34	-	-	60.4	**35.1**
Oscar	56	78	56.4	-	-	76.7	**66.8**
Peter	20.4	54	43	-	-	54	**42.9**
Quincy	43	43	54	-	-	34	**43.5**
Rodwell	54	43	76	-	-	63	**59.0**
Stephen	54	45	45	-	-	70	**53.5**
Theophilus	45	54	54	-	-	33	**46.5**

Of the two educational institutions, the administrations at School *Y* has devised a plan to remedy the underachievement of boys but the chosen intervention reveals systemic concern that is steeped in the country's colonial past. At School *Y*, the English Language class consists of 14 boys and 7 girls who are also a part of the reading class (See Table 1). This remedial program, according to the English language and reading instructor, is designed for pupils who display weak comprehension skills and read below their chronological age. But when asked about the impact that the program has on the learning outcomes of these boys, the reading instructor's response was limited to "we have seen tremendous improvements in the boys." In these learning environments, the teaching-learning process is largely influenced by the rote learning or "banking" model of pedagogy (Freire, 1970, p. 72) that was established with the development of the formal education system by the former colonial master, Britain. Teachers rarely employ classroom activities that accommodate different learning styles. And so, the "dull" and "monotonous" nature of the teacher-learning process makes it challenging for boys (and girls). Except for the mathematics and metals instructors, all teachers in Schools *X* and *Y* were observed dictating notes to students from the confines of their chairs or another fixed position in the room. Therefore, it is questionable whether boys (and girls) with low marks lack the ability to comprehend. Could it be that the rote method—recalling and reproducing answers on tests—that limit these boys from demonstrating what they have learned? It is also questionable what role the Ministry of Education and teacher training institutions could play in developing policies and practices that can encourage teachers to teach using different learning styles and developing alternate methods of learning evolution.

We also advanced another argument here that for instructors in Jamaica's rural education system, boys' underachievement persists due to the twin processes of underfunding and inaccessibility to learning resources. Select responses provided by teachers indicate how these problems play out across Schools *X* and *Y*. A teacher at School *X* argued:

> If the Ministry of Education provides schools with more resources, then I have no doubt that the boys would perform better academically. For example, if we had more access to computers, the students could use them to reinforce what they have been taught. [The] administrator could [also] use that funds to cater [to] the learning needs of boys… because there are some machines that you would need to buy for your Industrial Arts Department that would enhance [the learning of] boys who desire to take more practical subjects. [But] schools in Jamaica are really underfunded. That is why some schools are going under … because parent-teacher associations [are] not so strong. And if the PTA [parent-teacher association] is not [able to] raise funds … then you are in deep [financial] trouble because [the school] can't wait on government.

As the English language and reading teacher at School *Y* maintained:

> [Our school] do not receive funding from the Ministry [of Education] for this [reading] program. Every time we ask the Ministry [of Education] for more funds to purchase learning resources … like those used in North American classrooms to improve student learning … [ministry officials] tell us that teachers have to find a way to do more with the little resources that exists. But the reality is that boys need the hands-on resources that will help them to make sense of learning materials and improve their grades.

The teachers pointed to both the underfunding and inaccessibility to learning resources that limits them from addressing students' learning needs. Again, the English language and reading instructor's comments raise questions not only about the pedagogical practices that structure the culture of teaching and the teacher-learning process within classrooms at Schools *X* and *Y* but also about factors that might be ignored by policy discussions. These include the notions of teacher training, support, and resourcing (Boyle, Scriven, Durning, & Downes, 2011; Faubert, 2012) which are salient in the suboptimal pedagogies employed by many teachers within the Jamaican context. The teachers at Schools *X* and *Y* lack access to the training and resources that could allow them to work more effectively with the male student population.

Governmental Inaction or an Impaired Vision?

It appears that the Ministry of Education and by extension the Jamaican state has ignored the education challenges facing these Manchester boys. An examination of the National Educational Strategic Plan (NESP) and other Ministry-related documents indicate that Jamaica still has not outlined a clear policy to address boys' underachievement. It is also important to note that the status quo exists despite decades of research on boys' educational outcomes throughout the Caribbean (Bailey, 2004; Figueroa, 2000, 2004; Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Parry, 1997, 2000). Teachers at Schools *X* and *Y* are also not convinced that government officials are conscientiously treating the problem with the level of gravity that it deserves. For these teachers in the rural high school system, successive political administrations across continue to skirt the issue of boys' educational underachievement which has been observed in the education system for more than two decades. The teachers complain that the government opt for an ad hoc policy rather than addressing the subterranean problems that result in some boys not performing academically well. Interview data from one of the senior male staff members at School *X* points to the palliative solution that government administrations commonly used to remedy boys' underachievement:

> [Boys are] underachieving [because of] the policy being used by the government to address underachievement in schools. Consecutive administrations that get elected to the Jamaican Parliament are quite familiar [with the] discourse and problems contributing to underachievement of boys. [The] government believes that the underachievement of boys can be solved by building more schools. Politicians on the whole know what it takes to fix the system and resolve this issue of boys' underachievement. Successive governments come into power … and nothing gets fixed. The government is using band-aid solutions. They [government and other stakeholders] continue to build schools…instead of addressing the problems.

Another senior female instructor at School *Y* also holds a similar view about the state obfuscating or skirting the question of boys' underachievement:

> [E]lected officials know what is required to fix the system and resolve this issue of underachievement but they continue to leave the problem to charitable groups, [donor] agencies, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like USAID [United States Agency for International Development, though not an NGO, operates in a sub-contractory role promoting the

> interest of the United States]. It's almost like [the legislators] do not care about these boys. We want them to help us save our boys. This is why we vote for them. Just like the girls, our boys are equally important to the development of this nation. They are our future teachers, community leaders, and fathers. I just wish that the government [would] help [teachers] to solve this problem [the suboptimal performance of boys] because it's been going for too long now.

In these excerpts, the teachers' desire for adequate funding for education can be heard as well as their discouragement over the government for not designing and implementing more effective policies to help educators do a better job (i.e., to teach)—and for not finding solutions that will improve the learning outcomes of boys. The senior female teacher's ardent plea for policies reminds us that the provision and delivery of quality education require the effective participation of all stakeholders.

Further, the EfA as a transnational equity policy falls flat because of underfunding, and the focus on girls means that boys' underachievement can be ignored (when engaging transnational policy). The responses from the teachers above also highlight what appears to be the "cavalier" policy response of the government towards boys' underachievement as well as (un)intended consequences of neoliberal policies in education. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in these rural schools, however, is also a consequence of the global economic restructuring (Mundy, 2010). Critics point to how the Washington D.C.-based IFIs (World Bank and IMF) insist that countries in the South rationalize public education and then "manufacture" a role in public education which is filled by local and international aid donors or civil society organizations (Howell & Pearce, 2000; Mullings, 2009, p. 175–184; Samoff, 2009). The role of international aid in education has increasingly become a norm or global trend in international education, particularly across poorer countries (Howell & Pearce, 2002; Samoff, 2009). International education, which includes equity for all but also contemplates girls education, when taken in the Jamaican context becomes inconsequential because of a lack of funding in public education that can truly support learners. This particular focus on girls education means that national policy makers "evade" addressing the problem of boys' underachievement (as a local/national problem), which then becomes an issue that is left to the purview civil society, particularly, its service provisioning role. This creates a situation in which boys' underachievement becomes depoliticized and dislocated from being the state's responsibility and is then mapped unto the learners. But the broader problem is that the transnational policy (i.e., the EfA objectives) did not contemplate the contextual challenges or specificities across the Global South. Owing to the universal distinctiveness of these international education agendas conceptualized in the West, it is difficult to "localize" or translate these policies in Jamaica's secondary education. Consequently, the suboptimal performance which is evident via poor test scores will inevitably persist if policy makers do not implement policies that consider boys' underachievement in the Jamaican context.

Documentary materials also point to the perceived unwillingness on the part of the Ministry of Education to implement policies that address the dismal performance of boys. An analysis of the National Educational Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011–2020 shows that the Jamaican state has not positioned itself to deal with the problem (Ministry of Education, 2012). Designed to satisfy the recommendations put forward in the 2004 Task Force on Education, the NESP document merely lists the objectives and target areas in which the education ministry expects students, at differing grades, will demonstrate mastery. The NESP policy document did not itemize the learning outcomes of either gender regimes (boys or girls) as an issue that demands attention (Ministry of Education, 2012). Instead, the document uses gender-neutral language, for example, the word "students" is used when referencing or discussing learning outcomes of both genders. From a

critical perspective, the idea that the NESP steered clear of invoking the issue of boys' underachievement raises question about the interests and role of policy-makers and global governors in international education and the contextual specificities (or the lack thereof) of global education agendas.

The NESP document also appears to be inconsistent with the intent or spirit of international frameworks to which Jamaica is a signatory. Because boys' educational challenges have not received the same attention as girls, in the context of EfA, countries where boys face disadvantage relative to girls do not have the same incentives or pressures to deal with underperforming boys. Simply put, we argue that because the global community (including donors and IFIs) does not seem too concerned about disadvantaged boys—those successive Jamaican government administrations have also failed to identify underperforming boys as a policy priority. Here, we briefly return to the earlier discourse of the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action/Education for All initiative and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The EfA multilateral agreement clearly outlines that each country should provide "education for all" to students at the primary and secondary levels (Mundy, 2010; Torres, 2000). What does the word "all" stand for if the Manchester boys are not part of it? Let us examine for a moment the third EfA aim: "ensuring that the needs of all young people and adults are being met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes" (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 14; Mundy, 2010; UNESCO, 2000a, 2000b, p. 43). While these boys have access to education, our research has uncovered that the learning needs of these rural boys are not being addressed. Teachers point out that the Jamaican government fails to outline clear policies to address the boys' education, and public education continues to be underfunded. And so, one could argue that these boys in the rural areas fall outside the parameters of the "all." Jamaica, like other poorer and richer countries, has also endorsed the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. This international agreement undergirds EfA initiative by way of recognising the right of every child to education (UNESCO, 2000b, p. 47; OHCHR, 2017). Therefore, if boys are falling behind and even outside of the education system, that directs us to query whether Jamaica is positioned to effectively translate this international policy objective to meet local demands. As our research suggests, the education system is not tailored to facilitate learners who are experiencing challenges.

Conclusion

The underachievement of boys in Jamaica has been lost in the discourse of educational policies (and agenda) at national and global scales. At the domestic/national level, large class sizes result from the retrenchment in public investments in education and have negatively impacted the learning outcomes of students in the geographically remote areas of Manchester. Instructors at Schools *X* and *Y* indicated that teacher-pupil ratio had mushroomed when the government re-entered into negotiations with the IMF. For the teachers, the increase in class size means that instructors have less time to impart knowledge and dedicate individual attention to students who have difficulty grasping the specific areas of the curriculum content. As a corollary, these students (most of whom are boys) realize lower learning outcomes than their female counterparts.

School *Y* developed a reading program to remedy the underachievement of boys, but the program reveals embeddedness of the colonial structure in the education system rather than addressing underachievement. Consequently, teachers devote much of their contact time dictating notes rather than teaching to the different learning styles in the classrooms, and this makes it questionable whether boys receive low marks because they have comprehension problems.

Boys' underachievement in Jamaica can also be framed as persisting due to underfunding in education and the general inaccessibility to learning resources. The English language teacher at School *Y* said that the lack of funding in secondary education prevents the school from expanding the reading program to more effectively accommodate boys.

The state has not addressed the challenge that the boys are facing. An examination of current policies reveals the government's failure to lay out any concrete policy objectives to deal with underachievement. Successive governments or administrations have also failed to demonstrate a willingness to address the problem. Interpretation of the data gathered across the two schools indicates that the teachers are not convinced that the government is serious about addressing the boys' underachievement. One teacher at School *X* believes that the government uses a "palliative approach" and the "construction of edifices" to address the suboptimal performance of boys, while another at School *Y* contends that the state shifts the problem to civil society groups or associational life.

The exclusionary discourse in the NESP also appears to be inconsistent with the state's commitment to honour its international obligations, specifically the Dakar Framework for Action/Education for All and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The state's failure to address the low performance of boys in policy documents coupled with the lack of funding leads to the following questions: To whom does the "all" in the EFA refer? If boys are realizing dismal outcomes, does it mean, in the case of Jamaica, international education agendas focused on gender equity remain inconsequential?

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