The Importance of Educating Girls

A critical discourse analysis of western development approaches to girls’ education

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Abbreviations

BMZ Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
CDA Critical Discourse Analysis
DFID Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DFAT Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
HRE Human Rights Education
MDG Millennium Development Goals
NGO non-governmental organization
SIDA Swedish Development Authority
UN United Nations
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
Introduction

During the past decade, gender and education have become central elements in debates over development aid. Today, almost all international development organizations have included a gender perspective in their work. The reason why education for girls and gender equality have become such central a part of development aid can be traced to the many direct effects it has on economic growth and human welfare. It is often argued that educating women is an investment worthwhile (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999).

There are different ways of arguing for the importance of girls’ education and the overall value of education. The three most common approaches used in debates over education are the human rights approach, the human capital approach and the capabilities approach (Robeyns, 2006; Tikly & Barrett, 2011) There is research on how these approaches have been endorsed by international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (Bessis, 2003; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). However, little is known about how these approaches have been endorsed by governmental development agencies in the western world. The ambition of this study is to fill this knowledge gap.

More specifically, the aim of this study is to find out in what ways western governments view the importance of girls’ education in developing countries. The aim is pursued by analysing texts written by governmental development agencies. I will scrutinize the way that these agencies discuss girls’ education with particular focus on how the agencies motivate its importance. Furthermore, this also touches upon the effects that various discourses may have on young women in developing countries and on gender equality. The research question addressed is: How is the importance of women’s education in developing countries discursively motivated by western governments’ development agencies?

I argue that the discourse on gender equality is an important part of creating equality. The reason why government agencies and organizations argue for gender equality and the discourse on gender equality is part of creating an equal world. The way a problem is formulated affects the actual solution to the problem (Bacchi, 2009). We can therefore not only focus on what practically is being done for girls’ education but also why it is presented as an issue in need of a solution. We must also critically scrutinise solutions that are presented in discourses.
The outline of this study is as follows: I will first present previous literature and the three approaches human rights approach, human capital approach and capabilities approach. Then follows a chapter covering my methodology and operationalizations. After that I go through my empirical finding and lastly follows a chapter with a concluding discussion.

**Previous literature**

In this chapter I present a historical background on gender and education. I go through and summarize previous literature under headings based on three dominant approaches often used in educational literature that also will be used in my analysis: the human rights approach, the human capital approach and the capabilities approach (Robeyns, 2006). In presenting the approaches, I give examples on how they have been used by various international development organizations such as the UN and the World Bank. I then present some criticism of the approaches and finally discuss how they relate to issues of gender and women’s education.

**Historical background on gender and education**

The focus on gender and education is quite recent in the development discourse. However, it has since its introduction in the 1990’s become a central priority for donor agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007; Heward & Bunwaree, 1999). The growing popularity of girls’ education was mainly due to the many effects it had on fertility, economic growth, child health et cetera. In other words, education was viewed as an investment as it increased both economic growth and human welfare (Schultz, 2002).

The fact that education for girls was argued to serve as a contraception made a lot of countries supportive, even those which earlier had been negative to discussions on birth control. In the international donor community, the biggest priority became to close the gender gap that existed in school enrolment, as most children not in school were girls. At the same time, studies show that the connection between education and fertility was quite complex and was affected by the social, cultural and political context and women’s lives in a patriarchal setting (Heward & Bunwaree, 1999). The studies claim that the connection was stronger in more developed and urban settings.
Individual freedom and autonomy is crucial for women to take control over their family planning, and cultural relations of patriarchy means a negative affect on women’s autonomy. To gain autonomy in patriarchal societies primary education is not enough; instead secondary or higher education is required. That higher education is needed for changes to occur has also proven to be true concerning women’s desired family size (Ibid.). Yet the practice of contraception and infant health and survival can be improved by even a brief schooling (Ibid.). Girls’ presence in schools became a priority for all countries involved with development aid. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education became a part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UN now states that more girls are enrolled in schools than ever before, however results are vague when concerning secondary and tertiary education (Baily & Holmarsdottir 2015). Scholars have also claimed that equal opportunities and girls’ access to education is necessary but not sufficient for achieving gender equality (Ibid). Thus, girls’ presence is school might formally improve the condition for women without improving their actual concrete situation. Baily and Holmarsdottir (2015) also argue that one needs to move beyond the discussion on girls’ presence in schools and focus on deeper issues like private and public funding, teacher recruitment and how oppressive curriculum hinders students from accessing quality education.

The human rights approach

The human rights approach view education as a human right that everyone is entitled to. During the last four decades, human rights have become an integral part of discussions on educational policy, school textbooks and work of non-governmental organizations (Bajaj, 2011). The definition of human rights and Human Rights Education (HRE) vary according to the organisations adopting it and as a consequence the concepts lack detailed definitions. However, at its basic level HRE concerns the provision and development of awareness about rights, freedoms and responsibilities (Struthers, 2015). The human rights approach is concerned with securing rights to education, rights in education and rights through education (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Amnesty International has presented a framework that links education and human rights through three prepositions: “education about human rights (cognitive), education through human rights (participatory methods that create skills for active citizenship), and education for human rights (fostering learners’ ability to speak up and act in
the face of injustices)” (Bajaj, 2011, p.483). Groups such as teachers, illiterate adults, children and women are targeted with the claim that they should know their rights and be able to claim them (Lohrenscheit, 2002). The approach views education as a fundamental right and is thus primarily focused on the intrinsic value of education. This means that education is guaranteed to everyone regardless of the effects on factors like economic growth, and is thus not concerned with the instrumental value of education.

Lohrenscheit (2002) argue that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been the pioneers in the educational reform and the adoption of a human rights approach. The human rights based approach has also often been endorsed by UN organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF and is argued to be key in development (Bessis, 2003; Hüfner, 2011; Robeyns, 2006). These organizations have focused not only on the positive rights like student participation in democratic structure and debate but also negative rights like protection of abuse. It has also been argued by UNICEF that education for all children is a right that governments need to mobilize resources for to be able to offer a quality education. Creating legal right is thus a central part of government’s application of the human rights approach (Robeyns, 2006).

HRE has also focused on different issues in countries with different constituencies. Hence in post-conflict or post-colonial countries it is associated with rule of law and authorities trying to establish legitimacy. In countries that are repressive or undemocratic it focuses on popular empowerment. In countries that are democratic but undeveloped it focuses on human rights principles within sustainable development. In countries that have a strong democracy and economic development it often focus on discrimination in relation to groups like migrants, minorities or women (Bajaj, 2011).

Some scholars have also criticized the human rights approach. Robeyns (2006) argues that there are four primary issues/limitations with the rights-based approach. The first issue is that there is a risk that the approach becomes too rhetorical and thus loses its focus on real change before bureaucratic standards. Today, millions of children are not enrolled in schools, and children who are enrolled are not always present or lack quality education, despite governments promising education for all. The issue is thus that rights-based goals and declarations are presented in positive and optimistic terms, while there is no mentioning of how these goals are supposed to be reached or who is responsible for reaching them. Today
there are many promises and declarations of human rights that do not lead to the desired outcomes, and people are becoming more sceptical of these types of declarations by big organizations like the UN (Ibid.). Lohrenscheit (2002) claims that the human rights approach belong to the field of unreal utopia or morality.

The second issue presented by Robeyns (2006) is the risk of human rights becoming reduced to only concerning legal rights. Rights are to be viewed as both legal and moral by nature. If moral rights would be included then obligations to also pursuing the legal rights are created, and thus everyone who can help realize the legal rights have an obligation to try to contribute to the rights being realized. The third issue is that governments might view their work as completed upon executing the promise that every child has a right to education. Even if the basic steps to giving children education exist this does not guarantee that all children will in the end go to school. Hence there is a risk that governments become reluctant and restrain from taking the extra step that might be needed for real change to take place.

The fourth and final issue is the risk that the approach becomes too focused on governments. This is a consequence from the state-centred paradigm that dominates political thought today and the last few decades. This could become problematic in countries were the government is part of the problem. This focus on governments is also connected with rights being viewed as only legal rights. If moral rights are included then one can argue that individuals, families and communities also are responsible for giving children a quality education. As mentioned earlier, both NGOs and the UN have been adopting the human rights approach when reforming education. The fact that UN consists of its member states and thus work closely with national governments, in combination with the fact that NGOs often have placed themselves in confrontation with state forces, has created a dilemma (Bajaj, 2011).

As mentioned, the UN has adapted the rights-based approach in their view on education and development (Bessis, 2003). Since the 1970s, UN organizations have also included a gender perspective in almost all their work. The UN has had a major role in setting international standards concerning women’s issues. However, it has at the same time had problems with resistance from member states with conservative views. Due to its slow bureaucracy the UN has also been incapable of transforming the logic of their engagement in practice. Because of their interest in making everyone happy while not upsetting any member states, the application of their principled resolutions on women issues at the grassroots level has been
lacking (Ibid.). The conservative states have been given a disproportionate power during conferences and have thus prevented a lot of progress concerning gender issues (Bessis, 2003).

The issues that the UN has had concerning the application of their principles are quite similar to those presented by Robeyn (2006). This mainly concerns the importance and focus on governments. As the rights-based approach is mainly concerned with the responsibility of the state to provide human right like education, rights that are not accepted by their governments will not be given to the people. Hence, if the states do not agree on the importance of women’s issues, the issues will not become legal rights.

When it comes to girls’ education, there are also a lot of obstacles and constraining factors that legal rights won’t help prevent. Such factors could be violence towards girls or norms and beliefs like parents thinking that “overeducated” daughters are difficult to marry off. These types of issues will never be addressed, as long as conservative states in the UN refuse to take the extra step that might be needed to actually improve the situation for girls (Ibid.).

**The human capital approach**

The human capital approach to education is mainly concerned with the contribution or effect education may have in different areas of development. The term is today well established in economic theory. The framework views skills and abilities as forms of human capital that are either endowed or produced. Produced human capital is viewed as having three phases: pre-formal schooling, formal schooling and post-formal schooling (Robinson, 2015). The basic idea of human capital theory is that people invest in themselves through education (Schultz, 1961). Reading between the lines, the theory is also based on an assumption that students will be motivated to learn due to the anticipated value that these skills will have in the labour market and in their contribution to earnings (Little, 2003). According to the human capital approach, human beings act for economic reasons and are thus focused on the instrumental value of education. Education is thereby viewed as a relevant investment only if it creates skills that are an asset for productivity and work. Knowledge is thus viewed as a way to make workers more productive and earn higher wages.
The approach has received much support due to its emphasis on the fact that people are central in economic development, as the discussion on development earlier only focused on technical progress and macro-economic development (Robeyns, 2006). In the context of the shift from Washington to the post-Washington consensus, the scholars practicing the theory have also become interested in the role of education in alleviating poverty, improving women’s welfare and promoting growth and human security (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Due to the fact that education has been proven to be such an investment, human capital theorists are now promoting free primary education, and are also starting to include secondary and post-basic education (Jones, 2007; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). It is possible to relate this to the fact that the approach has recognized that there is an issue of costs. In countries where education is not compulsory nor free, poor families’ decisions about sending their children to school will depend strongly on its costs (Little, 2003). The framework does not however include a specific understanding of quality education nor its application. The World Bank, an endorser of the approach, has often instead adopted school effectiveness approaches that are based around a process model (Ibid.). However, this is mainly focused on making schools become basically functioning, meaning that staff and students are able to be physically present in a school building and that students are physically, emotionally and mentally well enough to learn. The human capital approach has also been adopted in the Dakar Framework for Action where governments have been viewed as having a mayor role as well (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

The human capital approach has quite uncritically been incorporated into policy discourses. However, the academic community has been more critical (Little, 2003). The approach has received criticism for its inability to explain why humans want to acquire knowledge on issues that will not lead to any economic benefits. As the term is strictly economic it also has issues dealing with gender, identity, emotions, history and so on. This makes it quite narrow and there are thus a lot of aspects concerning education that instrumentalism and human capital cannot explain (Robeyns, 2006).

Human capital and instrumentalism has in many ways focused on the role of women in development. Studies during the past decades have shown that women once educated, have a higher capacity to integrate innovation into their work and will also invest more in their communities than men (Bessis, 2002). Women’s education also improves their families’
quality of life and contributes to increased social viability (Ibid). One organization that has applied an instrumentalist view on education and development is the World Bank (Bessis, 2002; Bessis, 2003; Heward & Bunwaree, 1999). In the 1970’s, the World Bank started to realize the effect that women’s education had on development and economic growth. The attention that has been given by the World Bank to women’s education and gender is thus due to the fact that it will have a positive effect on other development objectives instead of it being seen as an end in itself (Jackson, 1996). Attention to women and women’s education is thus legitimised by its effectiveness as a tool to achieve economic and developmental goals and not because women’s subordination is unacceptable.

The instrumental view on women’s education has received a lot of criticism. The central argument against it is that women’s education is only of importance due to its effect on development. If it would be proven that it is instead women’s oppression and lack of education that would lead to economic growth the logic of the instrumental theory would thus lead to actions against women’s education. This is mainly a theoretical argument, but it is still worthwhile to consider the (a) moral aspects of instrumentalism (Bessis, 2002). Heward and Bunwaree (1999) have also argued that the World Bank’s instrumentalist view on women’s education has failed to include broader social issues and constrains of underlying social structures. Educating girls must thus be viewed in the context of their social environment rather than merely in terms of the education system (Ibid.). Bessis (2002) argue that the goal of the World Bank is to find other solutions for poverty in the developing world than redistribution of the world’s riches. The discussion of gender is thus a way to avoid an analysis of the complex issues both in the South and on a global level that affect poverty. Bessis (Ibid.) further argues that the World Bank is opportunistic and that it mostly serves its own interests. The discussion on instrumentalism then leads to the question of whether one should object to the projects of the World Bank due to their view on women’s education even if their consequences for women are positive. There is thus a dilemma for women’s movements that might have to collaborate with institutions and organizations without being manipulated and becoming instruments serving purposes other than women’s emancipation (Ibid.).
The capabilities approach

The capabilities approach to education moves beyond and critiques both the human capital and the rights based approach to education. The approach was formulated by Amartya Sen and is an alternative conceptual model (Sen, 2013). Capabilities are described as the “functionings” that a person can attain. Functionings are constitutive elements of living, and some examples are: being healthy, being educated, having a job or having meaningful friendships. Functionings are thus achievements and capabilities are the opportunities used to achieve valuable states of being and doing. Central for the capabilities approach is also the idea of agency freedom, meaning that individuals can act to create changes that they value (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). According to the capabilities approach education is valuable for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Education is thus viewed as a basic capability that also may affect the development of other capabilities (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Access to education and being knowledgeable is argued to be a valuable capability. Sen views capabilities and functionings as dependent on the needs and the particular context of the individuals or groups at question (Ibid.). An individual’s capability can thus differ depending on characteristics like rurality, gender, disability, ethnicity and so on. Sen argues that each person should be viewed as an end and not as a means to economic growth. This gives space for those directly engaged with educational practice and respects the agency of those using the approach to achieve change (Ibid). By evaluating capabilities in education instead of resources or outcomes, focus is shifted to the conditions that enable individuals to make decisions based on what they personally value. People thereby become active participants in development, responsible for shaping their own life instead of being shaped or instructed how to think (Ibid). Sen leaves his framework deliberately incomplete, as he argues that collectives and societies should be able to decide what capabilities should count as valuable. Hence, the public as well as the individual becomes an active participant in change making (Walker, 2005).

A drawback with the capabilities approach is its rather unspecified character. One needs to include additional social theories in capability assessments, and thus risk getting different results depending on which social theories one adds to the framework (Robeyns, 2003). Saito (2003) has questioned the capabilities approach applicability on education. He asks if the capabilities approach really applies to, for instance children and other actors incapable of making their own independent choices? Amartya Sen has replied this critique by arguing that
in the case of children one should focus more on securing freedom for the child in the future instead of solely in the present (Walker, 2005). However, it is still argued that children must have freedom and agency in the present, but that it should be in support from adults and society.

Martha Nussbuam (2003) has also presented some critique of Sen and his views on capabilities, even though she supports the basic idea of the capabilities approach. She argues that Sen’s view is too vague and that some freedoms will limit one another and that some freedoms must be viewed as more important than others. She therefore claims that one needs to specify a definite set of superior capabilities to prioritise over other (ibid.). She calls this proposed list of capabilities The Central Human Capabilities. The list includes ten capabilities although she argues that the list is open-ended and that it will continue to undergo further modifications. The ten capabilities that currently are on the list are life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one’s environment. Walker (2006) also present valued capabilities, as she argues that there are eight valued capabilities for girls in South African secondary schools. However I argue that these capabilities could be applied on a bigger scale. These valued capabilities are autonomy, knowledge, social relations, respect and recognition, aspirations, voice, bodily integrity and bodily health and emotional integrity and emotions.

Besides Saito and Nussbuam, Peppin et al. (2012) presents a third obstacle for the capabilities approach and its views on education. They ask how one can examine the relationship between education and the expansion of an individual’s capabilities if the process of education at the same time may directly determine the nature of the capability set itself. They argue that a solution to this dilemma is to form an educational system that enables students to become aware of what they value and then develop these values further by fostering critical thinking, practical reason and access to knowledge instead of directly imparting values to students.

The capabilities approach has been argued to have a lot of potential for addressing feminist concerns, gender injustice in education and gender inequality (DeJaeghere, 2012). The approach is based on the idea that gender inequalities should be viewed both in terms of capabilities and functioning and which inequalities in resources that create inequalities in capabilities and functioning. Robeyns (2003) argue that there are three main strengths of the capability approach, especially concerning analysis of gender inequality. The first strength is
that the approach is an ethically individualistic theory. This is beneficial for a gender inequality analysis since the theory rejects the idea that women’s well-being can be included in units like the household or community. The second strength is that it is not limited to the market, but also includes the nonmarket aspect. This is beneficial for a gender inequality research. Inequality comparisons that only include market economy like income and earning exclude aspects that often are gendered like care labour and household work. The third strength is that it acknowledges diversity such as race, age, sexuality and gender. Sen argues that people have different utility functions and are differently influenced by personal, social and environmental characteristics.

Relating gender to education, Sen claims that education can have a redistributive effect that can help close the gender gap in employment and income as well as having an empowering effect. He argues that men and women should both be able to make their own decisions and make joint but equal decisions with the members of their household. It is also argued by Robeyns (Ibid) that the evaluation of gender equality can be misleading when only partly evaluated. If women’s discrimination in education and employment is eliminated, there are still other issues of gender inequality that needs to be addressed, like attitudes that make women the primary parent or ideas that men’s jobs are more important than women’s. According to the capability approach all types of inequality thus need to be addressed even if it is difficult.

The literature review shows that the three approaches are characterized by diverse views on education and especially on the importance of girls’ education. They all have different strengths and weaknesses and can in many ways be developed further and at the same time become clearer.

**Methodology**

In this chapter I present the method used in this study. Firstly, I present the methodological approach, namely Critical Discourse Analysis. Secondly I present my particular analytical questions. Thirdly, the data material and my operationalization of the three approaches are outlined. Finally I introduce my coding scheme and my analytical procedure.
**Critical Discourse Analysis**

The methodological approach used in this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is focused on the exercise of power in social relations, including for example gender and race. The approach is often associated with the tenets of Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 1992). Many critical approaches can be viewed as rooted in CDA. A central element in CDA based approaches is that language is a means of social construction and thus shapes and is shaped by society. The critical part of CDA is mainly represented by the way that it unravels ideology expressed in discourses and how it reveals power structures that are constructed in and through discourse. An important element of CDA is that it addresses social problems and unequal encounters. Some examples are counselling sessions, job interviews, news texts and political speeches. Social encounters often appear to be linguistically neutral on the surface but may be ideologically invested in some way. The approach is thus to be seen as a form of intervention in social practices, and many analysts are politically active against racism, or as feminists. CDA scholars often get involved on the side of the oppressed groups and against dominating groups (Simpson & Mayr, 2012).

Fairclough and Wodak (in Simpson & Mayr, 2010) have outlined eight key theoretical and methodological principles for CDA: CDA addresses social problems, power relations are discursive, discourse constitutes society and culture, discourse does ideological work, discourse is intertextual/historical, the lines between text and society is indirect or mediated, discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and discourse is a form of social action or social practice. Why I chose to use CDA in my study is due to its criticalness of power structures and its focus on finding the ideological message that might be under a linguistic surface. In this study I am looking for answers that are not directly visible but are in need of some critical analysis. CDA also fits the aims of this study due to its focus on gender and race and the fact that it addresses social problems. In this study I will also discuss who is placed in a power position in the discourse on girls education, thus analysing whom girls education will benefit. The approach is also quite normative and in this study I will present some conclusions that can be viewed as a bit normative.
Analytical questions in the lens of Bacchi

Aside from the CDA approach, an important element of the study’s methodology is Carol Bacchi’s (2009) approach to policy and gender mainstreaming. The idea behind ‘mainstreaming’ is that every policy should address the needs of so-called disadvantaged or marginalised groups (Bacchi & Eveline, 2012, p. 2). Bacchi bases her analysis on the question “What’s the problem presented to be?”. She claims that policy proposals imagine problems in ways that have real and meaningful effects. Hence, how social problems are understood and phrased in policy documents will determine their success rate and their general outcome (Bacchi & Eveline, 2012).

Due to the many possible meanings of the word ‘problem’, it should be defined for the purpose of this study. A key premise is that it is inappropriate to view problems as something that exists independently in the world. Instead, activities need to be problematized. An issue needs to be problematized while at the same time fixed (Bacchi, 2009). Bacchi (Ibid.) presents six questions in her approach to policy analysis:

1. What’s the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
6. How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended?

These questions have been an inspiration for my own analytical questions. The four analytical questions I have formulated are:

What is the problem?
What is the solution to the problem?
Who is responsible for solving the problem?
Why is it of importance to solve the problem?
I claim that these questions can better answer the research question and achieve the purpose of this study then the questions presented by Bacchi (Ibid.). The focus in this study lies more on the arguments used to motivate the importance of the problem then specifically how the problem is represented, which is what Bacchis (Ibid.) questions are used for.

**Data material**

The data consist of a number of texts, all written by western countries official development aid agencies where their approach to girls’ education is presented. The texts are sampled from some of the biggest aid donors in the world according to Maps of World (2016). My goal was to find texts from the top ten donor countries, but unfortunately, I was not able to find any relevant material to analyse from the agencies of the countries Japan, the Netherlands or Italy. I chose to instead analyse material from Finland and Australia, who also are big aid donors, but not in the top ten. The material is thus collected from the countries Sweden, United States (USA), Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, France, Norway, Finland and Australia. The texts are all collected from the agencies websites and open for the public to read. The Swedish and American agencies texts could also be downloaded. These texts were suitable for this study due to the fact that they all addressed women, girls and education in some way. They also presented their views of its importance for development and a presentation of their solution to women’s lack of education.

The text from the Swedish agency presents the agencies work on supporting women’s economic empowerment, which included a section on education (Sida, 2015). The text from the American agency is a fact sheet on their initiative Let Girls Learn (USAID, n.d). The German agency`s text is a short presentation on their activities and instruments concerning education for women and girls (BMZ, n.d). The text from the British agency is a guidance where they present girls education challenges (DFID, 2016). The Canadian agency`s text is more of a general presentation of education in developing countries, although one section is devoted to girls’ education (Global Affairs Canada, 2015). The French agency presents the importance of girls’ enrolment in their text (France Diplomatie, 2014). The text from the Norwegian agency is a presentation on girls’ education, its challenges and benefits (Norad, 2015). The texts from the Finish agency is perhaps the most arbitrary, as it is a PowerPoint presentation that has then been presented as a long but not very clear text (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2016). The Australian agency’s text is a quite short presentation of
The texts are directed at the public as opposed to other organizations or agencies. However, due to the fact that the texts are written in English one may assume that the authors have an international audience in mind. The texts are all rather short and there is not a lot of detail about the agencies’ work, they are often more of a presentation of the agencies’ perspectives and views on girls’ education. The fact that there is in many cases a possibility to share texts on social media also strengthens the claim that the public is the imagined audience. Such texts are of interest since they show in what way the agencies want to present themselves and their views on development and girls’ education.

The fact that the material is collected from the same type of agencies makes the data comparable. To collect the data, I searched the above mentioned countries aid agencies’ websites for texts where their views and work on girls’ education is presented. I have collected the material by using the search words “Girls education” on the agencies’ websites and chosen texts where the agencies present the importance of this subject and their work on this issue. Although varying in length, the texts are long enough to present the agencies’ views and work on girls’ education. I have strived to be as transparent as possible presenting my findings in order to minimize the risk of a normative bias.

**Operationalization of the approaches**

Below I present how I have operationalized and created an analytical tool of the three approaches discussed in the literature review. I have based the operationalisations on answers to my analytical questions previously presented. Thus presenting the approaches’ answers to these questions based on the information presented in the Previous Literature chapter. I have also included a table that concretizes the analytical tool further.

**Human rights approach**

*What is the problem?*

According to the human rights approach, the problem with girls not being educated is that education is a human right that every person is entitled to. Girls not getting the education they are entitled to is thus a problem in itself.
What is the solution to the problem?
The solution to the problem can, from the perspective of the human rights approach, largely be seen as the creation of legal rights stating that everyone (including women and girls) should have the right to go to school and become educated.

Who is responsible for solving the problem?
Those responsible for creating legal rights to education are mainly the governments of developing countries. However, international organizations like the UN are also an important actor, especially when it comes to making developing countries’ governments create such laws. The main beneficiaries of girls getting an education are according to the human rights approach the girls themselves.

Why is it of importance to solve the problem?
According to the human rights approach, the importance and value of girls’ education needs no further motivation than the fact that the right education is a human right currently denied to large numbers of people.

Human capital approach

What is the problem?
From the perspective of the human capital approach, women’s lack of education in developing countries is a problem because women are not part of the economic growth, which results in an untapped market.

What is the solution to the problem?
The solution is to provide education for women that give them knowledge that is relevant for different jobs outside of their homes and especially jobs with higher pay. A focus is thus to provide vocational training. Another example from the human capital approach of how to solve the problem of girl’s lack of education is to provide children with free primary education and perhaps also secondary and post-basic levels of education (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Who is responsible for solving the problem?
The ones who are primarily responsible for solving the problem are international development organizations like the World Bank. However, the approach has also been used in frameworks like the Dakar Framework for Action where the state has also been argued to be an important actor.

*Why is it of importance to solve the problem?*

Why this problem is argued to be of importance is mainly because of the instrumental benefits women’s education may have for their families, their communities and their country’s economic development.

### Capabilities approach

*What is the problem?*

According to the capabilities approach the problem is that women are not educated in the same extent as their male peers are and there is thus an inequality between the sexes that leads to women not being able to achieve the same capabilities and functionings as men.

*What is the solution to the problem?*

A solution to the problem is to provide education to girls that teach them to make their own independent decisions and that support what each person has reason to value.

*Who is responsible for solving the problem?*

The capabilities approach gives a lot of freedom but also responsibility to communities to decide what capabilities count as valuable. Public discussion is thus argued to be of crucial importance, and so the public as much as the individual is seen as an active participant in change. The citizens’ voices are the ones who count (Walker, 2005).

*Why is it of importance to solve the problem?*

According to the capabilities approach it is important to give girls’ educational opportunities because women and girls can become freer and more equal. Through education they women may gain more autonomy over their own lives and make more independent decisions. Girls and women are also argued to be the main beneficiaries from their education.
Analytical tool

The table below (table 1) summarises my operationalizations to enable a better overview for the reader, which in turn facilitates comparison.

Table 1. Analytical tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Human rights approach</th>
<th>Human capital approach</th>
<th>Capabilities approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Girls are not given the education they are entitled to.</td>
<td>Women are not an economic investment without education.</td>
<td>Women cannot reach the same capabilities as men without education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the solution to the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Making governments create legal rights.</td>
<td>Vocational training and free education.</td>
<td>Provide education that will strengthen the autonomy of girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who is responsible for solving the problem?</strong></td>
<td>The UN and governments.</td>
<td>The state and international development organization.</td>
<td>The collective or the society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why is it of importance to solve the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Education is a human right.</td>
<td>Women education is beneficial for their families, communities and countries economy.</td>
<td>Women will have more autonomy and become freer and more equal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis and coding

The analysis is based on four analytical questions used to expose the latent meaning of the agencies’ texts. The purpose of asking the questions to the texts is to analyse how the agencies argue for the importance of girls’ education and what power structures that are underlying these arguments. I have also used the three dominant approaches presented in the
literature review. To make this clearer, I have operationalized the terms and presented how the different approaches answer the four analytical questions.

Concretely, the analytical procedure consisted of coding of each of the four questions with a colour. Thus, when a paragraph or sentence answers one of the questions it has been coded with the colour given to that particular question. I have also coded the three approaches; making the human rights approach bold, the human capital approach italic and the capabilities approach underlined. I have then divided parts of the data according to which question they answer and analysed which of the three approaches is dominant and most frequently used when answering the question. I have also analysed in what way the arguments in the texts are similar to the ones used in the different approaches.

**Results**

In this chapter I present the findings of my critical discourse analysis of the texts written by the aid agencies. Firstly, I present the empirical findings. When discussing the empirical findings I present each question separately and examine the ways that I have found correlations and similarities between the agencies’ views on girls’ education and the three dominant approaches human rights approach, human capital approach and capabilities approach. Lastly I summarize and interpret the empirical findings.

**Empirical findings**

I here present the empirical findings under four headlines. These headlines are the analytical questions: What is the problem? What is the solution to the problem? Who is responsible for solving the problem? Why is it of importance to solve the problem?

**What is the problem?**

I have found that the agencies mainly use arguments that correspond with the human rights approach when presenting the main issue with women’s or girls’ education. I have also found that the agencies use some arguments that coincide with the capabilities approach. However, I do not find any arguments that are similar to the arguments used in the human capital
Countries’ agencies that use arguments inspired by the human rights approach are Germany, France, Norway and Australia. They draw a picture where the problem is basically that fewer girls than boys are given the opportunity to go to school, and that a lot of girls around the world are not getting an education. The Norwegian agency writes, “Education is a universal right. Girls are still in the minority in schools in low-income countries, accounting for 54 per cent of the children who do not attend primary school” (Norad, 2015, p.1). It is thus viewed as a problem in itself that a lot of girls are not being educated in developing countries. However, most countries’ agencies also present further issues behind girls’ lack of education. The problem presented in the texts is often more complex than just the fact that women are not getting an education. These presentations are in line with the capabilities approach, as it often focuses on the complex social issues behind girls’ lack of education in developing countries and inequalities concerning diversities like gender, race and age. The agencies that use arguments similar to the capabilities approach are from the countries Germany, USA, the UK, Canada, France, Norway and Australia. The other agencies analysed did not present an answer to why girls’ lack of education is a problem. The arguments used by the agencies often refer to the many issues that girls face and the reasons why so many girls do not attend school in developing countries. Some examples are early pregnancy, poor families prioritizing boys’ education, menstrual hygiene, lack of female role models and sexual violence. However, there are no clear arguments in these texts motivating why women’s lack of education is an issue, which is something that the capabilities approach presents. Thus, the agencies mostly explain why the problem exists instead of why it is to be regarded as a problem. This leads to the interpretation that the human rights approach is the dominant view, as the human rights approach mostly argues that women’s lack of education is a problem in itself and that there is no need for further arguments.

What is the solution to the problem?

When presenting the solution to the problem the agencies mostly introduce solutions that are quite similar to the arguments used by the human capital approach. However, some arguments can also be likened to those of the capabilities approach. Therefore, the human rights approach is the least present perspective in the agencies’ phrasing of the problem.
The solutions proposed by the agencies’ mainly correspond with the human capital approach in three ways. Firstly, there is a strong focus on vocational training and providing girls’ with education and skills that actually lead to employment and especially highly paid employment (Sweden, Germany, the UK, France and Australia). There is thus an instrumental element to their solutions, as they claim that the education that is being given must be used for something as opposed to being important in its own and having an intrinsic value. One example is the Swedish development agency, which argues that:

Vocational training offers viable options for girls unable to pursue higher education and for women who lack formal education and improves their economic status. Studies show that women are more likely to succeed in finding employment if training programmes are multi-dimensional that is, develops technical skills as well as job-readiness skills, and supports individuals with job search and placement services (SIDA, 2015, p. 23).

Secondly, there is a focus among the agencies on making girls present in school and to ensure they stay throughout primary and post-primary education. This is one clear example that exits in the human capital approach where it is argued that free primary and perhaps also post primary education is a possible solution to girls’ lack of education (Jones, 2007; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Thirdly, the solution ends with getting girls into school. There are thus no further solutions presented to the many problems in society that are the reasons why girls are not being educated. Furthermore, a discussion on quality education and what a quality education actually entails, is not presented by the agencies. There is consequently no presentation on how to understand or apply quality education, which corresponds well with the human capital approach. However, as many of the analysed texts are rather short, one could argue that there is not much room for more detailed discussions on the issues.

As previously mentioned, there are to some extent solutions presented by the agencies that correlate with the capabilities approach. These arguments are often based on the idea that gender inequalities in society needs to be addressed. The UK’s aid agency argues that one needs to tackle “community attitudes or harmful social and gender norms such as child marriage, early pregnancy, domestic work, or violence“ (DFID, 2016). The Swedish development aid agency SIDA (2015) also argues that improvements in gender equality,
empowerment and well-being have a strong correlation with women’s access to post-primary education. Even if the term “capabilities” is not explicitly used, some of the valued capabilities presented by Walker (2006) are mentioned by the agencies and described as important (USA, UK, France, Norway, Finland). These capabilities are knowledge, bodily integrity and bodily health. However, there is a lack of solutions that correlate with the capabilities approach idea of providing education that makes girls able to make independent decisions and supports what each person values.

Solutions from the human rights approach are to an even lesser extent then the capabilities approach presented by the agencies. I claim that there are two examples of solutions from the human rights approach presented. These examples are from texts from the American and British agencies, although they are still not clear examples. As mentioned, the solution presented by the human rights approach is to make governments create legal rights that state that education is a human right that every child is entitled to. These two agencies claim that they should challenge governments to commit resources to helping young girls and creating sustainable solutions.

**Who is responsible for solving the problem?**

When presenting who is responsible for solving the problem, the agencies mostly introduce solutions that are quite similar to the arguments used by the human rights approach. The ones who the agencies argue to be responsible for solving the problem are often organizations in the UN like UNICEF, UN Women and UNESCO (France, Norway, Finland). Giving the responsibility to the UN is in a way giving the responsibility to governments, as the UN in many ways consists of and is to a large extent affected by government’s decisions. The American aid agency USAID also claims that they must challenge governments to commit resources to young girls worldwide. Therefore, the agencies’ views are here in line with the human rights approach because the approach views governments as key actors in solving the problem. However, concerning this particular question, one could argue that the human rights approach is quite compatible with the human capital approach, as governments have also been viewed as an important actor in frameworks that has embraced the human capital approach.

To some extent I have also found arguments concerning who is responsible for solving the
problem that can be connected to the capabilities approach (USA and Norway). This is mainly due to the fact that civil society, communities and public-private partnership is argued to be a part of the solution. Nevertheless, the societies’ and communities’ role in solving the issue as discussed by the agencies is quite different from what the capabilities approach claim. The agencies are more focused on making civil society adapt their own views and guidelines in school than giving societies and communities the possibility to decide what capabilities that should count as valuable. The discourse used by the agencies suggest that people should be instructed how to think instead of being active participants responsible for shaping their own life.

**Why is it of importance to solve the problem?**

When the agencies discuss why the issue of girls’ lack of education is important, their arguments are in many ways very similar to the human capital approach and instrumentalism. Almost all of the agencies argue that women’s education is an investment because it is so beneficial for their societies, environments, families, the economy and so on. The Canadian agency writes “For a country, investing in the education of girls yields better development results than investments aimed at any other demographic group” (Global Affairs Canada, 2015, p. 1). Thus women’s education is viewed to a large extent in instrumental terms. The arguments are also focused on the individual economic perspective and the ways that education makes it easier for women to find a job and obtain a higher income. One example of the human capital approach is from the Australian aid agency, which focuses a lot on all the benefits women’s education have for different aspects and actors.

(...) educating girls is one of the world’s best investments as it offers truly wide-reaching returns. Educating girls not only leads to economic growth and increased incomes but it contributes to reduced rates of maternal and infant mortality. Educating girls reduces the incidence of malaria and HIV/AIDS, and educated girls are less likely to be forced into child marriage. Educated women have a positive impact on agricultural production, communities’ resilience to natural disasters and they take more of a leadership role in decision-making (DFAT, 2016, p.1).

Some arguments are also quite similar to the capabilities approach view of the importance of women’s education. These arguments are mainly built on the fact that women’s education will
make them more equal to their male peers and help change stereotypes and attitudes about gender. The Swedish aid agency SIDA (2015) also argues that one needs to develop young girls self-esteem to overcome restrictive labour markets and social norms. Developing one’s self-esteem can also be viewed as a way to make a person more independent and give a person more autonomy, which is very much in line with the capabilities approach.

The few arguments presented that seem inspired by the human rights approach are often based on the simple fact that education is a right, hence women have the right to an education. The Norwegian aid agency Norad (2015) argues that equal educational opportunities for girls and boys are a human right and the basis of equal opportunities later in life.

**Summary**

The empirical findings show that the agencies’ texts use arguments from all three approaches. Arguments inspired by the human rights approach are most frequent used in the agencies’ phrasing of the problem. Arguments from the human capital approach are most frequently found in answers to the question “What is the solution to the problem?”. The human rights approach is most dominant in answers to the question “Who is responsible for solving the problem?”. And the human capital approach is again most frequently found in answers to the question “Why is it of importance to solve the problem?”. I have summarized these findings in the table below. The table presents how frequently the approaches have been used through a ranking from 1-3 where 1 is the approach most frequently used.
Table 2. Ranking of the approaches frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Human rights approach</td>
<td>Capabilities approach</td>
<td>Human capital approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the solution to the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Human capital approach</td>
<td>Capabilities approach</td>
<td>Human rights approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who is responsible for solving the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Human rights approach</td>
<td>Human capital approach</td>
<td>Capabilities approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why is it of importance to solve the problem?</strong></td>
<td>Human Capital approach</td>
<td>Capabilities approach</td>
<td>Human rights approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The empirical results show that the human capital approach is most frequently used by the agencies, even if there is next to zero traces of the approach in the answers to the question about what the problem is. This interpretation is not based on the fact that the human capital approach is dominant in two of the four questions asked, as the human rights approach is dominant in the other two questions. It is based on two other observations. Firstly, the arguments used by the agencies were much more clearly connected with the human capital approach than the other two approaches. I find that my connections to the other approaches where less clear and more arbitrary then with the human capital approach where I could find clear examples like vocational training and arguments about girls’ education being an investment and beneficial for economic growth.

Secondly, arguments from the human capital approach are dominant in answers to the questions “What is the solution to the problem?” and “Why is it of importance to solve the problem?” which I have found to be the most important and interesting analytical questions. I base this on the fact that I found the most answers to these questions in the material analysed and that they clearly present the agencies’ views on girls’ education. The fact that arguments from the human rights approach are dominant in answers to both of these questions is
noteworthy because it strengthens the view presented by Bacchi (2009), namely that one’s view of the problem also affects the presented solution to the problem. Thus, when seeing the problem in human capital terms one will also present solutions from the human capital approach.

I have nevertheless not found any clusters or clear similarities between the different countries; instead they all mix and use arguments from the different approaches when it suits them. I have however found that in some instances the approaches are compatible with each other. For example, one can both argue that education is a human right and present all the social issues that lie behind the fact that girls are not being educated, thus using arguments from both the human rights approach and the capabilities approach. Another example of compatibility can be found in the text by the American aid agency USAID, who argue that many different actors like governments, organizations and the public are responsible for solving the issue of women’s lack of education. The approaches have different views on who is responsible for solving the issue but by claiming that everyone is part of solving the issue one can see that the approaches are quite compatible. However this might not be practically possible in all cases, as critics of the human rights approach have argued (Bajaj, 2011).

**Concluding discussion**

The research question that has been addressed in this study is as mentioned; *How is the importance of women’s education in developing countries discursively motivated by western governments’ development agencies?* The result of this study shows that western governments development agencies primarily view the importance of girls and women’s education in instrumental and human capital terms, mostly motivating it by arguing that it is an economic and developmental investment.

Among the three approaches, the human capital approach appears to be the most frequently used by the agencies. This holds especially true when it comes to proposed solutions to the problem of girls’ education and motivations of its importance. The ones who are in power in the human capital and instrumentalist approach to gender issues are mainly the organizations and agencies that apply the approach in their work. These development organizations decide why women’s education is important and what these women should do with their education.
Women are thus not placed in a position where they for themselves can decide what to do with their lives, as their education is given to them for a direct purpose. My analysis shows that women are not always seen as the primary beneficiaries of their own education; instead their communities, families and country’s economic growth is placed in the centre. By using arguments and a discourse from the human capital approach, women are continuing to be told what to do by others than themselves. Instead of being controlled by a patriarchal society where they are told that they should become wives and mothers they are instead being told by western development actors that they should become a part of the economy and strive for high paying employment in specific sectors. Women themselves are therefore not the ones in power and lack the freedom to decide what to do with their own lives. Power may shift, not to women themselves, but to governments and organizations telling women what they should do and how to act.

By only focusing on all the effects girls’ education can have, the agencies risk creating the image that girls’ education is the solution the all development and equality issues that exist and other solutions to the problem are viewed as less important. In the human capital approach there is also a lack of a discussion on the problems that lie behind the fact that girls are not being educated, as their only goal is to make girls physically present in the school environment without a discussion on what a quality education is.

The human capital approach to girls’ education is also based on the idea that when girls are being educated their societies, communities and countries’ economies will develop. Motivating women’s education using this fact can of course be positive because women and girls may feel that they can create change and have an influence. On the other hand, I argue that when this claim becomes the dominant argument for why women should be educated it could put pressure on young girls to perform well. Using instrumental arguments creates the image that women’s education is only important when it has a positive effect on development and education and is thus of no use if girls do not use it for something that has an economic or human welfare effect. If girls then fail or do something with their life that does not positively affect other people or their societies they might feel like they have failed. This might in turn create psychological problems. I do realize that the discourse on girls’ education might not reach the girls affected by it. Still, the human capital approach is so clearly dominant in discourses on the importance of girls’ education, one needs to discuss the effects it might have, especially if this type of discourse will continue to dominate public discourse.
It should also be acknowledged that the instrumentalist view is present in other discussions on women and equality too. Two examples are politics, where women are argued to be less corrupt and the field of peace and conflict, where the number of women in parliament is argued to decrease warfare (Bjarnegård & Melander, 2013; Bjarnegård, 2009). There is a risk that the effect women can have in these fields becomes focus instead of it being viewed as indisputable that half of the population should be represented. My claim is thus that if we constantly argue for gender equality and women’s presence in the public sphere in instrumentalist terms and argue that it is important because of what effects it can have real gender equality will thus not be reached, as women presence only becomes valued when it has a positive effect. We will thus never reach real equality if the discourse on equality will argue for equality in instrumental terms.

I have found that discourse analysis and especially CDA was a very useful approach to use in this study. I found the research questions and analytical tool suitable and I thus argue that the validity in this study is quite high. The fact that there was some attrition bias due to the fact that I was unable to find relevant material from some of the top ten donor countries should also be addressed. If texts from Japan, the Netherlands and Italy had been included it might have affected the results of this study.

It is promising that many of the texts analysed in this study include a discussion on the wide range of difficulties that young girls face when trying to acquire an education. This shines light on the fact that just getting girls physically into schools is not the final solution but that a change in societal views of women and equality is needed. If the human capital approach dominates the discourse on girls’ and women education then women will continue to not be placed in a power position of their own lives, but instead be told by a new authority what to do. My conclusion is that the discourse on gender and education must move past the instrumental arguments that only view women as an investment if gender equality is to be reached.
References


