

# Understanding the Influences on Girls' Primary Education in Ethiopia from the Perspectives of Girls and Their Caregivers

**Yisak Tafere, Louise Yorke, Pauline Rose, and Alula Pankhurst**

## Abstract

Over the past two and a half decades, significant progress has been made in relation to girls' education in Ethiopia. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of girls' progression, completion, and learning, with girls in more rural and remote areas facing the greatest difficulties. Drawing on data from the RISE Ethiopia qualitative study, we explore the factors at the individual, family, school, and community levels that impact girls' education and learning from the perspectives of girls themselves. Specifically, we include the views of 15 female students enrolled in Grades 4 and 5 of primary school and of their parents/caregivers from five different regional states in Ethiopia, and across both rural and urban locations. We situate our analysis within the context of the government's large-scale quality education reform programme (GEQIP-E) that has a specific focus on girls' education. Our findings highlight the importance of taking account of the heterogeneity of girls' experiences, including the varied challenges that diverse groups of girls face, and the different challenges they may encounter at distinct stages of their educational journeys. Our findings also highlight the importance of including the perspectives of girls and their families, within the context in which they are located.

## **Understanding the Influences on Girls' Primary Education in Ethiopia from the Perspectives of Girls and Their Caregivers**

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## **Summary and key insights**

In this paper we explore the influences on girls' primary school education both within and beyond the school setting, across five different regional states in Ethiopia, in both rural and urban locations. We draw on qualitative data collected by the Research for Improving Systems of Education (RISE) Ethiopia study. RISE Ethiopia is exploring the design and implementation of the government's largest education reform package, the General Education Quality Improvement Programme for Equity (GEQIP-E), which includes a specific focus on girls' education. In this paper aims to explore the extent to which the GEQIP-E reforms help to advance girls' education. We do this by considering the main support for, and challenges faced by girls in their respective schools and communities, and view these against the backdrop of the ongoing GEQIP-E reforms. We explore the experiences and perspectives of 15 female students enrolled in Grade 4 and Grade 5 of primary school, who were at a key transition point in their educational journeys. We also included the views of their parents and caregivers. We focus on three main research questions:

1. What are the factors at the individual level that affect girls' learning?
2. What are the factors within the school setting that affect girls' learning?
3. What are the factors beyond the school setting that affect girls' learning?

Some of the key insights that emerged through our analysis include:

### ***Girls' education and learning progress***

- Although great progress has been made in getting more girls into primary school in Ethiopia, many challenges remain, particularly in terms of girls' education progression, completion and learning outcomes.
- The move from lower primary to upper primary school marks a key transition point for girls, but many fail to make this successfully.
- Within the context of our study, we find that while some female students make great progress in their learning during the year, for others – especially those from low-income families - performance decreases.

### ***Factors influencing girls' education within the school setting***

- Increased inputs for girls' education are important (e.g., gender-separate latrines). However, attention must also be paid to the quality of these inputs to ensure students are able to benefit from them.
- Girls' clubs are a vital source of support for female students in our study. They have an important role to play in raising awareness of the issues facing girls and, in some cases, providing material support to girls (e.g., sanitary materials). However, these initiatives may not reach all female students, especially those who are most marginalised. The infrequency of some of the Clubs' meetings coupled with financial constraints, have limited the extent of the support they can provide. Increased financing for girls' clubs is greatly needed.
- Both male and female students experience high levels of verbal abuse and physical violence within the school setting. This is primarily from some, but not all, male teachers, and negatively impacts students' education, health and wellbeing. It also promotes a culture of violence within schools, which is potentially linked to other forms of violence.
- While targeted support is provided by the GEQIP-E programme for certain groups - e.g. girls, and children with disabilities - attention should also be given to students who may potentially miss out on important support within the school environment if they suffer from moderate disabilities. Currently, the provision of formal support for girls in these two categories is inadequate.

### ***Factors influencing girls' education beyond the school setting***

- Although female students are highly motivated in terms of their education and future outcomes, their career aspirations may be overly ambitious given the limited employment opportunities available to them. These students may benefit from career guidance, while viable and meaningful formal employment opportunities must be available for girls beyond education.
- For the Grade 4 and Grade 5 students in this study, pressure to marry early did not emerge as a key concern. However, evidence we find that this pressure may begin as the girls get older and progress through education. This highlights the importance of understanding the changing challenges girls face, at different stages of their educational journeys.

- Some female students face heavy domestic work burdens which negatively impact their education. However, rather than supporting these students, schools impose punishments, for example, by making late-comers clean the school compound. Assisting these students through the provision of material support, such as solar lamps, could help them balance their education and work responsibilities in the short-term, while efforts to reduce these responsibilities should be considered in the medium term.

### **Introduction and background**

Ethiopia is a low-income country and has increasingly viewed education as part of the engine for growth. Despite investing a significant proportion of its budget in education, the system remains resource constrained (Yorke, Rose and Pankhurst, 2021). In this paper, we provide a brief overview of the status of girls' education in Ethiopia, drawing on official government statistics, as well as a number of important studies in Ethiopia, particularly those undertaken by organisations such as Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE), Ethiopia WIDE and Young Lives (YL).

Over the past two and a half decades, significant progress has been made in relation to girls' education. Their enrolment overall has increased while the gender gap in enrolment between girls and boys has decreased. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of girls' progression, completion, and learning. According to official government statistics, in 2019-20, while almost all girls managed to enrol in primary school, only 53% progressed from lower primary education (Grades 1-4) to upper primary education (Grades 5-8); and of these, only 68% managed to complete a full cycle of primary education (MoE, 2020). Furthermore, substantial differences are found across regions and rural-urban locations. In most regional states and city administrations in Ethiopia, higher numbers of boys are enrolled in upper primary education, although this trend is reversed in Addis Ababa, Amhara and Tigray (Figure 1). This could potentially be due to increases in rural to urban migration amongst female students (Yorke, Gilligan, Alemu, 2021).

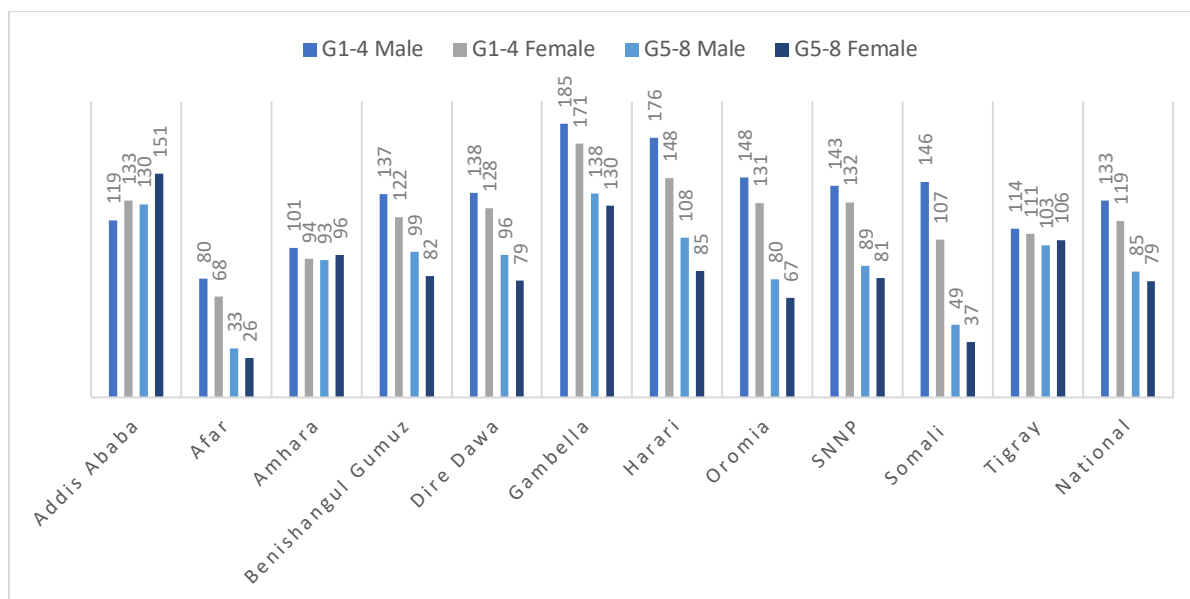


Figure 1: Upper primary school enrolment (gross enrolment rate) at the upper primary level (G5-8) across location and gender (%) (Ministry of Education, 2020). [Note GER above 100% could be due to enrolment of overage students and also inaccurate population statistics given population census data is dated].

In considering some of these dynamics at the community and school level, findings from different studies in Ethiopia, including those undertaken by Ethiopia WIDE (Dom, 2017) and Young Lives (Rossiter, Azubuike & Rolleston, 2017), reveal that the expansion of girls' education has not been equal across locations. Irregular attendance is common to both studies, with the former showing that many students attend on a 'dropping in and out basis' (Dom, 2017). Across both studies, girls' education and performance is generally found to be good at the lower grades, but their performance usually decreases as they progress through school. In addition, male and urban students are generally found to outperform their female and rural counterparts, meaning that rural girls are often those who are most disadvantaged (Dom, 2017; Rossiter, Azubuike & Rolleston, 2017).

At the school level, a range of factors have been associated with girls' education and learning, and the importance of a gender-sensitive school environment has been noted. These include increasing the proportion of female teachers and leaders, the availability of gender-sensitive infrastructure and facilities (e.g. gender-separate latrines), the availability of girls' clubs and the gender-supportive nature of the school environment (Rose, 2003). However, it seems that many schools do not cater for the needs of female students. For instance, across the Young Lives sample, Rossiter, Azubuike and Rolleston (2017) found that most teachers and leaders

were male (94% of school directors, 69% of English teachers and 91% of maths teachers). While water and sanitation facilities were available in most of the schools, the quality of these facilities was often poor and varied considerably by region. In terms of the schools' support for girls' education, the GAGE study found that school clubs were one of the most effective ways for girls to learn about rights and important issues around sexual and reproductive health (Jones et al 2014). Yet little evidence exists as to how these dynamics within the school setting impact girls' learning and educational progress, especially from their own perspectives.

At the community and household level, much attention has been paid to the role of gender norms and expectations and how they impact girls' education, especially for those living in rural areas (Colclough, Rose & Tembon, 2000). A complex relationship exists between girls' education and gender norms, whereby on the one hand, education can help challenge gender norms and expectations, while on the other they tend to limit girls' education and outcomes. Dom (2017) found that educated girls were more likely to: (i) resist being overburdened with domestic chores; (ii) stand up against arranged marriage and female circumcision; and (iii) choose their partners or become economically independent before marrying. Yet, Jones, et al (2014) suggest that while gender norms are changing, the pace is uneven, with the slowest progress occurring in rural areas. Similarly, drawing on Young Lives data, Camfield (2011) found that from the age of 12, different rural and urban trajectories emerged for girls. While those in urban areas were expected to continue their education until they reached their desired level of schooling, in rural areas, girls were expected to take on domestic responsibilities and get married, with pressure increasing as they approached the end of primary education. Increasing access to formal education is important for changing attitudes towards girls' education, and several studies have found that girls' educational aspirations, and those of their families, are increasing (Boyden, Porter, Zharkevich and Heissler, 2016; Tafere, 2014). This is important given that high aspirations have been found to be associated with better learning outcomes and higher levels of progression through education (Tafere, 2014).

Based on this short review of the evidence from Ethiopia, we have identified that while great progress has been made in increasing education access and achieving gender parity, substantial barriers exist in terms of progression, completion and learning outcomes. Just over half of enrolled girls transition from lower primary to upper primary school in Ethiopia, and even fewer manage to complete a full cycle of primary education. Substantial differences exist across regions and rural-urban locations, with girls in more rural and remote areas facing the greatest

difficulties. Factors within and beyond the school environment are found to impact girls' education. However, more evidence is needed from the perspectives of the girls themselves and their families, while also considering how the challenges themselves change and evolve as girls progress through primary school.

In this paper, we consider the experiences of 15 female students enrolled in Grades 4 and 5 five of primary school, and of their parents/caregivers, from five different regional states in Ethiopia, and across both rural and urban locations. Our analysis is located within the context of Ethiopia's ongoing education reforms - the General Education Quality Improvement Programme for Equity (GEQIP-E) - which focuses on girls' education, which is elaborated upon in the next section. At their current level of enrolment, the girls were deemed to be at a critical transition point in their educational trajectories as they move from lower primary to upper primary school. This paper focuses on the support for, and challenges faced by female students at the individual, household, community, and school level, in terms of their attendance and progression through primary school. We prioritise the perspectives of the female students included in our study, as well as their parents and caregivers. We focus on three main research questions as follows:

1. What are the factors at the individual level that affect girls' learning?
2. What are that factors within the school setting that affect girls' learning?
3. What are that factors beyond the school setting that affect girls' learning?

Through understanding the individual, family and school-level factors affecting girls' education from their own perspectives – with due consideration of the heterogeneity of the girls' experiences - we examine the potential of the GEQIP-E programme to improve equitable learning for girls, and what may be needed in the future. In the next section, we outline specific details of the GEQIP-E programme, the ongoing RISE Ethiopia research study, and our emerging findings.



## **RISE Ethiopia and the GEQIP-E programme**

### **Research for Improving Systems of Education (RISE) Ethiopia**

RISE Ethiopia is a large-scale, longitudinal and mixed-methods study, that seeks to explore the design, implementation, and impact of the government’s comprehensive education reform programme, GEQIP-E. The RISE Ethiopia study involves a number of research approaches including a system diagnostic with key government and donor stakeholders, a large-scale quantitative survey in 168 school and community sites, and in-depth qualitative research in five school and community sites.

### **The GEQIP-E programme**

At its inception, the GEQIP-E programme was originally planned to run from 2018-2022, but it has been extended due to COVID-19. It is the third phase of the government’s large-scale education reform programme, which seeks to improve equitable learning for all students in Ethiopia. The GEQIP-E programme is funded by a consortium of donors, led by the World Bank. In terms of equity, girls’ education is a key focal area, which is seen as “*one of the most effective channels to empower girls for social change*” (World Bank, 2018, p4). Specifically, GEQIP-E seeks to improve girls’ education in Ethiopia’s so-called ‘*emerging regions*’, including Afar, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali, where gender ratios were found to lag far behind other regions, particularly at the upper primary level (see Figure 1 above). Accordingly, strategies included in the GEQIP-E programme have focused on improving girls’ enrolment in upper primary education - which encompasses Grades 5-8 –in these regions. Key interventions include the provision of girls’ clubs, life skills training and gender-sensitive school-improvement planning.

### **GEQIP-E and girls’ education**

According to official GEQIP-E documentation, gender norms, especially in relation to early marriage and social roles, are seen the biggest barriers to girls’ education in these regions. At the community level, girls’ access to education is believed to be constrained by a lack of time and interest, early marriage, and demands for their labour at home. At the school level, gender-based violence is seen to: (i) reduce girls’ class participation; (ii) lower their school performance; and (iii) increase their grade repetition and dropout rates. The lack of gender-distinct latrines is also seen as a serious barrier (World Bank, 2018).

To improve girls' education, the GEQIP-E programme outlines the need to address restrictive socio-cultural practices and to make schools more accessible and safer for female students. This includes: (i) constructing separate latrines for girls; (ii) hiring more female teachers; (iii) developing - and delivering - life skills training; (iv) providing counselling; and (v) establishing an empowerment programme for adolescent girls. These initiatives also focus on community involvement and participation, to break down cultural barriers to sending girls to upper primary school.

Progress is measured through six key performance indicators, one of which focuses explicitly on improving the ratio of girls to boys in Grade 8 in the Afar, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali regions. The five remaining indicators which measure progress in enrolment, progression and learning outcomes are also disaggregated by gender. The activities/inputs, outputs, intermediate results, and outcomes for these interventions are outlined in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Results chain for Results Areas 2: Improved Equitable Access*

<b>Activities/Inputs</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Intermediate Results</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Develop and implement School Improvement Programmes that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Target the enrolment of girls</li> <li>- Develop and implement life skills training</li> <li>- Implement gender mainstreaming guidelines in targeted regions (G5-8)</li> <li>- Girls' clubs operationalised in the target regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- % of schools in emerging regions that have separate girls' latrines</li> <li>- % of schools in emerging regions delivering life skills training</li> <li>- % of girls' clubs in emerging regions operating according to improved guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved female enrolment in the target regions in Grades 5-8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved girls to boys ratio in Grade 8 in the target regions</li> </ul>

The focus on girls' education under the GEQIP-E programme should be commended. However, our identification of potential shortcomings and challenges raise questions about the programme's ability to achieve meaningful and sustainable progress in girls' education. For example, the programme is primarily focused on gender parity in specific regions and at the upper primary level only. This narrow view overlooks some of the challenges faced by girls at the lower primary level and across the other regions in Ethiopia. The interventions outlined in the programme focus on the school, and are mainly based on inputs, awareness raising and helping girls withstand the challenges that they face, rather than directly addressing the challenges themselves. Much of the evidence cited in the official GEQIP-E documentation in support of the chosen strategies for improving girls' education is not Ethiopia-centred, and where it is, the focus is on the urban capital of Addis Ababa, or on rural Amhara, with no evidence on the emerging regions, despite the interventions being aimed at them. In the remainder of this section, we consider some of the findings from existing RISE Ethiopia studies in relation to girls' education and the GEQIP-E programme.

### **Key insights into girls' education from our RISE Ethiopia system diagnostic/political economy analysis**

In seeking to understand why persistent challenges remain in achieving meaningful and sustainable progress in girls' education, we recently explored some of the challenges within the education system itself (Yorke, Rose & Pankhurst, 2021). We found that while girls' education has consistently been a priority for the government, as outlined in their founding education policy (FDRE, 1994), strategies aimed at improving girls' education have remained have mainly focused on increasing inputs. In addition, the government's overemphasis on gender parity, has, to some extent, limited progress in gender equality and has had a role in shaping the views of system-level stakeholders as to what is needed to achieve progress in this area. We found that challenges in engaging stakeholders working in the education system to advance gender equality, were associated with their views of what gender equality in education entails, with many stakeholders believing that gender parity was equal to gender equality. Many stakeholders were unaware of the challenges girls faced and overlooked differences between different groups of girls. Furthermore, we found that women are under-represented in the education system. Our analysis identified the need for further research to understand what takes place at the school and community level, including girls' lived experiences, and to communicate these findings with system stakeholders.

## **Key insights into girls' education from our RISE Ethiopia ongoing quantitative study**

Our analysis of the ongoing RISE Ethiopia quantitative data, Tiruneh et al. (2021) revealed that significant gains were made for both male and female students from baseline to endline, across regions and rural-urban locations. However, boys significantly outperformed girls in numeracy both at the start and the end of the year, while students living in urban areas demonstrated higher rates of progress than those in rural areas. Key child (e.g., age, health, hours spent per day studying at home), and school- and teacher-related characteristics (e.g., provision of one textbook per subject for each student, urban-rural school location, and teachers' mathematics content knowledge) were found to be significantly associated with student progress in numeracy test scores over the school year. In terms of rural-urban differences, those in the latter category were found to have significantly higher scores than their rural counterparts. Together, these findings point to the importance of taking account of the context within which students are located, and the range of factors at the individual, household and school level, that may affect their education and learning.

One the main causes of girls dropping out of school is early marriage. According to Tiruneh, Sabates & Woldehanna (2021), school principals cited this as the main factor for high dropout rates among girls in 9 out of the 19 schools in Somali. By contrast, school principals in Addis Ababa did not see this as a factor for girls dropping out. On the availability of girls' clubs, we found that all 20 schools in Addis Ababa have established girls' clubs, while those in Somali lagged behind the others (Tiruneh, Sabates & Woldehanna, 2021). More than 60% of all schools in Addis Ababa and Benishangul Gumuz reported organising girls' club activities at least once a month or more. However, among the 12 schools in Somali that had reportedly established girls' clubs, only 5 of them organised activities at least once a month or more. The 7 remaining schools reported organising Girls' Club activities only 3 or 4 times per year (Tiruneh, Sabates & Woldehanna, 2021). Considerable discrepancies also exist in the types of in-school support that girls receive. Together, this evidence suggests that the support that female students received from girls' clubs is inadequate and varies considerably across location (region and rural-urban location).

Regarding the provision of adequate facilities for girls, school principals were asked to report on the availability of gender-separate latrines, as their absence is viewed as a significant constraint to girls continuing their education, especially when they reach puberty. All 20 schools in Addis Ababa, and 18 out of 19 schools in Benishangul Gumuz reported that separate

latrines are available. In Somali, although 16 out of 19 schools reported having separate latrines for boys and girls, the facilities were minimal, as was the case with the other emerging regions. In Somali, none of the 16 schools provided separate spaces for girls to wash out menstrual cloths. Similarly, out of the 18 schools in Benishangul Gumuz that reported having separate latrines for girls and boys, only 14 (78%) had separate spaces for girls to wash out menstrual cloths (Tiruneh, Sabates & Woldehanna, 2021).

## **Summary**

Our overview of the GEQIP-E programme and some of the emerging findings from existing RISE Ethiopia publications indicate that there is a need to move beyond a focus on enrolment and gender parity. It further identifies the need to understand the varied challenges that different groups of girls face, including across different locations. The narrow focus on girls' enrolment to date has not brought about the change needed, and it seems the programme diverges little from previous approaches. This also raises the importance of the need to better understand what takes place at the school level, particularly from the perspectives of girls themselves, as we explore in the following sections of this paper.

### **Design of the qualitative study**

The overall aim of this study is to assess the implementation and impact of GEQIP-E in improving equitable learning outcomes in Ethiopia, from the perspectives of local stakeholders. The design of the qualitative study was guided by the main research questions, as well as emerging evidence from other RISE Ethiopia methods (i.e. the system diagnostic and quantitative study). The qualitative study was designed in an iterative fashion that involved an ongoing process of consultation amongst RISE Ethiopia team members, and with key, external stakeholders in Ethiopia.

Accordingly, we adopted a case study approach and made use of a number of methods including individual interviews, focus group discussions, community mapping and classroom observations. We also included a range of stakeholders at the school level, such as school principals, teachers, students, and parents and caregivers. The use of multiple methods and the inclusion of myriad stakeholders provided in-depth insights into the process of implementation

of the GEQIP-E programme at the school-level in real time, and the various contextual factors that may influence this process.

### **Focus on girls' education**

Our study had a targeted focus on equity issues including girls' education and education for children with disabilities, reflecting the design and priority areas of the GEQIP-E programme. The qualitative study was particularly well suited to exploring these equity issues in depth, which couldn't be addressed through quantitative data collection. Moreover, it allowed us to also consider the presence of intersecting disadvantages, e.g. a girl with a disability from a low-income family. For girls' education we sought to understand the process of implementation and the perceived impact of GEQIP-E reforms related to improving equitable education for girls.

### **School and community site selection**

The school and community sites were selected based on a number of criteria, including geographical diversity and the nature of the GEQIP-E reforms, while also taking account of logistical concerns (Table 2). In terms of geographical diversity, we included one rural site each from the northern and southern regions, two sites (rural and urban) from an emerging regions (Benishangul Gumuz), and one site from the urban capital, Addis Ababa. The two sites in Benishangul Gumuz included schools in which the GEQIP-E programme had a specific focus on girls' education. Finally, in terms of logistical concerns, while we had originally sought to include a site from the Somali region, this was not possible due to security concerns.

Having selected the regions, we identified the specific *woredas* (districts) within these regions where the qualitative research study would be carried out. To select these *woredas* we drew on both the quantitative data and political economy data, and considered how these schools were doing in terms of the various GEQIP reforms. For example, in terms of girls' education, we considered schools that had made progress in relation to the establishment of girls' clubs.

Table 2: Criteria for selection of the school and community sites for the qualitative study

Geographical Diversity		Description of School and Community Site
Northern Regions	Tigray (Rural)	This is a GEQIP-E Phase I school, situated in a rural community. The school has an Inclusive Education Resource Centre (IERC). The <i>woreda</i> and school were included in the Political Economy interviews – we found that the school had some awareness of GEQIP-E.
Southern Regions	Oromia (Rural)	This is a GEQIP-E Phase I school situated in a rural community. The school has an IERC. The <i>woreda</i> and school were included in the Political Economy interviews – we found that the school had some awareness of GEQIP-E.
Emerging Region	Ben. Gumuz (Rural)	The GEQIP-E programme has a specific focus on girls’ education in this region, and the school is in a rural community.
Emerging Region	Ben. Gumuz (Urban)	The GEQIP-E programme has a specific focus on girls’ education in this region, and the school is in an urban community.
Urban Capital	Addis Ababa	The school has an IERC. The <i>woreda</i> and school were included in the Political Economy interviews – we found that the school had some awareness of GEQIP-E. This school is located in one of the most disadvantaged communities in Addis Ababa.

### Participant selection -female students and parents & caregivers

The female students in this study were purposively selected using the following criteria:

- they were enrolled in Grade 4 at the time of the quantitative data collection (2018/19) and
- they participated in both the baseline and endline quantitative study.

In addition, we sought to diversify our sample including a mix of the following:

- female students both low- and high-income families;
- female students who received low-, medium- or high grades on their beginning of year maths assessment and
- female students whose academic performance had either increased or decreased over the course of the school year, as identified through their performance on their maths test.

Furthermore, we sought to prioritise the inclusion of girls with disabilities in our study.

A total of 15 girls were included in the qualitative study along with one parent/caregiver for each student (see Table 5 for an overview). Six lived in urban areas (in Addis Ababa and Benishangul Gumuz) while the rest were in rural areas. At the time of the data collection, the average age was 12 years, although one student in rural Oromia was 15 years old at the time of the data collection. 9 were from low or low-medium income families, while six were from medium-high to high-income families (household quality index). Two female students were in Grades 4 and 13 female students were in Grade 5 at the time of the data collection. Despite our efforts to prioritise female students with disabilities in our study, only two were identified.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned, for each student, we included one parent or caregiver (10 mothers, 5 fathers) who participated in an individual interview. The parents or caregivers were between the ages of 29-65 years, with an average age of 39 years. Most were uneducated (9 out of 15), which they reported as mainly due to limited access to quality education, or early marriage. The highest levels of parental or caregiver education were seen in Addis Ababa (one mother and one father). The remainder had received primary education (one upper primary and three lower primary).

## Methods

To elicit the perspectives of female students, we invited them to take part in focus group discussions and individual interviews, while parents/caregivers participated in individual interviews (Table 3). The methods were chosen based on what we considered most appropriate for gathering information relevant to the research questions. In this regard, we were guided by the RISE Ethiopia team members who have a wealth of experience in conducting research with

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<sup>1</sup> We sought to identify children with disabilities drawing on both RISE quantitative data collected using the Washington Group questions, as well as using data collected in schools on children with disabilities. However, it was not straightforward to use either of these sources for identifying these students. The two students who were included were identified by their class teachers.



vulnerable groups - including girls. The focus group discussions allowed us to explore general issues related to girls' education and to understand the issues on which participants agreed or diverged. The individual interviews allowed us to discuss issues in a more in-depth manner, especially in relation to sensitive issues that participants would not feel comfortable discussing as part of a group. These interviews were then compared with those of their parents and caregivers, which helped us triangulate our findings and achieve greater validity.

*Table 3: Methods in the qualitative study with female students and parents/caregivers across regions*

<b>Location</b>	<b>Female Students</b>		<b>Parents/Caregivers</b>
	<b>Individual Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Group Discussions</b>	<b>Individual Interviews</b>
Addis Ababa (Urban)	3	1	3
Ben. Gumuz (Urban)	3	1	3
Ben. Gumuz (Rural)	2	1	2
Oromia (Rural)	4	1	4
Tigray (Rural)	3	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>

Topics explored in the individual interviews with the female students included:

- their educational aspirations and expectations,
- their learning experiences and the factors impacting their learning,
- their participation in school activities,
- their relationships with teachers,
- the support they received from family members for their education, and
- their involvement in domestic chores.

Topics explored during the focus group discussions included:

- their perceived value of education,
- factors affecting their learning,
- challenges they believed disadvantaged groups faced and the support they received and
- their relationships with their teachers and their participation in learning assessments.

Topics explored with parents and caregivers include:

- their aspirations for, and expectations of, their daughters' education and
- their daughters' education access, attendance, progression, and achievement.

## **Procedure**

The qualitative data were collected in February 2020 from five schools in four of the seven regional states and city administrations that are included in the wider RISE Ethiopia study: Addis Ababa, Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and Tigray. A pilot study was carried out immediately prior to the main data collection exercise, which allowed us to refine our interview schedule and the interview process. A team of experienced fieldworkers undertook the data collection, after receiving in-depth training that covered: (i) the purposes of the RISE Ethiopia research; (ii) ethical considerations; and (iii) practical guidelines. All the fieldworkers were also required to sign a code of conduct. In each school, two senior and experienced field researchers conducted the interviews. Fully informed consent was received from all participants prior to the commencement of the study, and guardian consent was also received for all students. One father in Addis Ababa refused to provide consent for his daughter, which led to her exclusion from the study. Ethical approval was provided by the Faculty of Education, at the University of Cambridge, and Addis Ababa University. In line with the overall RISE Ethiopia approach, and considering best practice, compensation in the sum of 100 ETB was provided to the participants and their parents/caregivers, to cover their local transport and/or purchase school materials.

## **Analysis**

Data was collected in the form of written field notes, observation formats and audio-recordings. All individual audio interviews were transcribed/translated into English, and were anonymised, by substituting participants' names with pseudonyms. The data analysis was facilitated by

Atlas.ti Software. Thematic analysis was used to code the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The process was as follows:

- 1) We first familiarised ourselves with the data by reading through the transcripts and noting down initial ideas.
- 2) We then generated initial codes and defined and named the codes. These codes were then collated into possible themes, with reference to each of the three research questions.
- 3) We then cross-checked and finalised the themes.

An overview of the codes and themes that emerged in relation to each of the three research questions is provided in Table 4 below.

*Table 4: Code and themes*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
RQ1: What are the factors at the individual level that affect girls' learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual-level factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female students' progress in learning</li> <li>• Female students' values and aspirations</li> <li>• Female students' with disabilities</li> </ul>
RQ2: What are that factors within the school setting that affect girls' learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-level factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate latrines</li> <li>• Girls' clubs</li> <li>• Violence and harassment</li> </ul>
RQ3: What are the factors beyond the school setting that affect girls' learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family support for learning</li> <li>• Gender norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values and aspirations of parents/caregivers</li> <li>• Domestic work</li> <li>• Expectations around marriage</li> </ul>

In the findings section that follows, we discuss the main themes that emerged through our analysis.

Table 5: Description of female students and parents/caregivers

Region	Name	Age	Grade	Parent/ Caregiver	Parent's/ Caregiver's Age	Household Wealth*	Selected Family Information
Addis Ababa	Ekra	12	5	Mother	30	Low-Med	Ekra is from a family of three children. She is the second child, and she has a sister and a brother. She is healthy and has no difficulty in learning. Her father works in the <i>woreda</i> Safety Net Programme and is the bread winner in the family. Her mother is not active in the community.
	Keria	12	4	Mother	31	Low	Keria is from a family of four children, and she is the second in the family. She lives with her mother and her siblings - a sister and two brothers. Her father passed away recently. Her mother is a businesswoman and owns a shop and is active in the community.
	Hami	12	4	Father	45	Low	Hami has three sisters and three brothers and is the fifth in the family. She is healthy. Her mother sells potato chips, and her father runs a shop. The family used to live in a rural area but came to Addis Ababa 5-6 years ago to support the children's education.
Ben. Gumuz (Urban)	Feruz	12	5	Mother	30	Low	Feruz is the first child for her father and the second child for her mother. She has three siblings. Her family depends on agriculture.
	Rahma	12	5	Mother	35	Med-High	Fahma is the only child for her family. Her father is a tailor, and her mother is a trader. Fahma has a serious hearing problem that affects her education.
	Zeida	11	5	Father	37	Low	Zeida has an older brother. Her father is a carpenter and her mother died when she was in Grade 1.

Ben. Gumuz  (Rural)	Tsega	11	5	Mother	34	High	Tsega has two brothers, and she is the middle child. Her siblings live with her mother, but she has been living with her grandparents who are farmers. Her mother is a trader. Her father has a mental illness, and her parents recently were divorced.
	Zimta	13	5	Mother	29	Low	Zimta has two siblings, and she is the first child for her mother. She has four half-siblings. Her parents are farmers.
Oromia	Siam	13	5	Mother	65	High	Siam is the youngest child, and she has a sister and four brothers. She also has six stepsiblings from her father. The main livelihood activity of the family is farming. Siam's mother does not have a position in the community. Siam has a serious hearing problem that affects her education.
	Abeba	15	5	Mother	45	Med-High	Abeba has two older sisters who are married and two younger brothers who are in school. The main livelihood activity of her family is farming. Her father died 10 years ago so her mother is responsible for the family.
	Gelete	13	5	Father	56	Med-High	Gelete is the youngest in the household. She has five sisters and two brothers. The main livelihood of the family is farming. Her family is economically secure. Her father is active in the community.
	Fetiya	12	5	Mother	30	Low	Fetiya has two sisters and seven brothers. She is the seventh child for her mother. She has six stepsiblings through her father. Her mother is the first wife for her father and the main livelihood of the family is agriculture.
Tigray	Alganesh	11	5	Father	42	Med-High	Alganesh has two older sisters and a brother, as well as three younger brothers. She is the fourth child for her parents. Her parents are farmers. Her father has no position in the community.

	Halal	13	5	Father	45	Low	Halal has three brothers and two sisters. Her oldest sister failed in Grade 10 and got married. One of her older brothers is studying in college, while the other has terminated education at nine and migrated to Saudi Arabia. She has also o class student sister and a baby brother. Her parents are farmers.
	Meareg	13	5	Mother	30	Low	Mearag has two older brothers. She has also a younger brother who is grade two as well as the youngest sister who is 5 years old. Her parents are farmers.

*\* Classifications were generated based on the RISE Ethiopia quantitative study*

## Findings

### **Female students' Grade 4 learning progress**

Before considering the range of factors influencing girls' education both within and beyond the school setting, we first briefly consider the learning progress of the students included in our study. Given that they were purposively selected, we cannot generalise these findings to the wider group. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider their progress in learning to set the context for the remainder of this paper. We classified students as '*low*', '*medium*' or '*high*' performing, based on their baseline scores in maths tests at the beginning of the 2018/2019 school year (as captured by the RISE Ethiopia quantitative study), and by comparing their performance with others in their class. While this is helpful in setting the context for the qualitative analysis, it is important to remember that these classifications are not comparable across regions – a low performing student in Addis Ababa is not equivalent to a low performing student in Benishangul Gumuz, for example.

Overall, we included three students who were *high performing*, seven who were *medium-high performing*, two who were *low-medium*, and three who were *low performing* (see Table 6). The performance of nine of the students increased while that of six students decreased over the course of the school year, albeit to varying degrees. Amongst students whose performance decreased (from the baseline to endline data collection), the majority were from low-income families, although one was from a medium-high income family in Addis Ababa. Amongst those whose performance increased from the baseline to endline period, four were from low/low-medium income families, while five were from medium /medium-high income families. As such, there appears to be a link between wealth and learning progress for the girls who have been selected for this study. In the next section we consider some of the factors within the school setting that affect girls' education progress and learning.

Table 6: Female students' performance in Grade 4 maths over time (beginning to end of 2018/19)

Region	Student	Age	Grade	Learning B1	Change (B1-E1)	HH Wealth
<b>Addis Ababa</b>	Ekra	12	5	High	Increase Large	Low-Med
	Keria	12	4	High	Decrease Large	Low
	Hami	12	4	Low-Med	Increase Large	Low
<b>Ben. Gumuz (Urban)</b>	Feruz	12	5	Med-High	Decrease Small	Low
	Rahma	12	5	Low	Increase Large	Med-High
	Zeida	11	5	Med-High	Decrease Small	Low
<b>Ben. Gumuz (Rural)</b>	Tsega	11	5	Low	Increase Large	High
	Zimta	13	5	Med-High	Decrease Medium	Low
<b>Oromia</b>	Siam	13	5	High	Increase medium	High
	Abeba	15	5	Med-High	Decrease medium	Med-High
	Gelete	13	5	Med-High	Increase medium	Med-High
	Fetiya	12	5	Low	Increase large	Low
<b>Tigray</b>	Alganesh	11	5	Med-High	Increase Small	Med-High
	Halal	13	5	Med-High	Decrease Large	Low
	Meareg	13	5	Low-Med	Increase Small	Low

Note: "Learning B1" captures females students' achievement in mathematics at the beginning of the school year in comparison with their classmates. "Change (B1-E1)" captures the change in students' achievement over the course of the academic year in comparison with their classmates, while 'HH wealth' measures the relative income status of families as captured by the RISE Ethiopia quantitative study 2018/19.



## **Influences on girls' education within the school environment**

The GEQIP-E programme outlines a number of strategies within the school setting, aimed at improving girls' enrolment and progression through primary school (World Bank, 2018). These include the development and implementation of school improvement programmes that target the enrolment of girls, the development and implementation of a life skills training programme, the implementation of gender mainstreaming guidelines in targeted regions, and the operationalisation of girls' clubs. Identified outputs include the percentage of schools that have separate latrines, have delivered life skills training, and have established these clubs. According to the GEQIP-E results chain, these strategies will lead to improved female enrolment in the emerging regions. In this section we consider some of these aspects of the GEQIP-E programme, and how they may impact girls' education from the perspectives of the students themselves. While we did not ask students about the GEQIP-E reforms explicitly (as they would be unlikely to be familiar with the programme), during both individual interviews and focus group discussions, we asked them about things they liked in their school compound, the facilities they had access to, and their experiences within the classroom. We did not ask students about their experiences of violence specifically, but these were raised by the participants through discussions of their experiences on their way to and within the school.

### ***Gender segregated latrines***

The students included in this study discussed several improvements that had been made to their school's facilities in the previous year, including fixing the windows, building toilets for teachers, maintaining some of the classrooms, and other changes to the physical appearance of the school compounds. However, they also identified a number of shortcomings in relation to the availability of gender-sensitive facilities, namely the provision of separate latrines. Across all regions, the students reported that while there were separate latrines available, they were generally not clean - particularly where there was no running water - and of poor quality, and as a result, the students did not use them. In all, they did little to improve girls' experience within the school setting (see also Rossiter, Azubuike & Rolleston, 2017). This provides important lessons for the GEQIP-E programme and suggests that the focus should shift from merely the presence of separate latrines, to their quality as well, and that attention should also be given to the availability of running water..

## ***Girls' clubs***

Supporting girls' education through girls' clubs is a key feature of GEQIP-E. In all five schools in our study, students reported that their schools had a girls' club, even though they were called different things in different regions - in Addis Ababa it was known as a *gender club* which also included male students, while in Tigray it was called the *girls' association*. Membership usually started when the girls entered upper primary school (i.e. Grade 5), and teachers are also included. In our sample, we found that the majority, but not all, of female students participated in these clubs. In Addis Ababa and in rural sites in both Oromia and Tigray, all female students participated in these clubs, while in rural Benishangul Gumuz only one student had participated a girls' club meeting on one occasion. The frequency of these meetings seemed to vary considerably by region. In Addis Ababa, for instance, a student indicated that the girls' club met every day; in Oromia, the club met twice a week; and in Tigray, Alganesh said that the club met "*twice or three times a year*". Our findings therefore suggest that the support provided through the clubs may not reach all students, given that not all are members. For the students who do participate in the clubs, the support they receive may be insufficient, given the varying frequencies of the meetings.

In terms of the activities supported by the girls' clubs, participants described how they provided a forum for discussing important gender-specific issues, and for trying to identify solutions to these problems, at both the community and at the school level. This included violence, menstrual hygiene, early marriage, and family planning. In Addis Ababa, Ekra describes how:

*"In the gender club, we are learning about challenges that women are facing, how to protect women from violence, etc. There is a teacher who teaches us about gender."*

In Addis Ababa, focus group participants described the topics discussed, such as the importance of reducing the workload on girls and women, within the school, and in the community. The girls' club also holds activities to help improve girls' confidence, thereby enabling them to participate in class. In rural Tigray, some of the issues covered by the girls' club included raising awareness about family planning and providing information to prevent early marriage.

Some of the clubs also provided material support: in Addis Ababa this included sanitary materials, as well as items such as textbooks and uniforms. The resources received by the girls' clubs, also seem to vary. In Addis Ababa, the girls' club received support from a non-

governmental organisation (NGO) with whom they had a close working relationship. In rural Oromia, one of the participants indicated that students were required to contribute money to the girls' club so that they could provide sanitary materials, but not all students were able to do so. This indicates the clubs' financial constraints, which in turn means that their ability to provide material support is limited. Based on these findings, it seems that there is incoherence between the support the club are expected to provide as part of the GEQIP-E programme, and the financing for these activities. Given the centrality of the girls' club within the GEQIP-E strategy for improving girls' education, more financing is urgently required.

### ***Violence and harassment***

The GEQIP-E programme documentation suggests that the exposure of girls to gender-based violence within the school setting, reduces their participation, lowers their performance, and increases their dropout rates. While not stated explicitly, it suggests that such violence is primarily perpetrated by male students and that by engaging them through the girls' clubs, the issue will be addressed. In our discussions with the girls, it emerged that they experience violence on their way to school, as well as within the school compound, particularly from teachers. These experiences of violence are seemingly overlooked by the GEQIP-E programme.

During a focus group discussion, girls in Addis Ababa mentioned how they experienced harassment and verbal abuse from male community members on their way to school:

*“Youngsters who sit near the school compound disturb the students especially the girls. They harass and they insult them a lot. And the kind of insults are very annoying. They also beat the students severely.”*

Similar findings were reported in rural Tigray: *“Male students assault and harass girls along with their way home”*. As a result, some of the female participants said they did not feel safe on their way to school.

Within the school setting, one of the issues most frequently raised by the girls and by some parents, was the substantial levels of violence they experienced in the form of corporal punishment, primarily from male teachers, but also from guards and cleaners. This is described by Ekra (Addis Ababa):

*“Some teachers and guards are not welcoming to students. Some of them beat students when students come to school without having an ID card. Teachers beat students when students come without doing homework. The cleaners get disappointed when students go to the toilet while they are cleaning”*

Alganesh, in rural Tigray, had a similar story:

*“I am afraid of one of the male teachers. When he sees us talking, discussing, or giving him a wrong answer, he takes us to the front of the class and beats us. He hits us with a stick or kicks us with his leg. He tightly pinches our ears. It is only him who punishes us physically. The other teachers do not beat us. For instance, our social study teacher never beat us. If we disturb, he simply orders us to kneel down in a class”*

Experiencing violence in school was a common theme. Most often, female students spoke of experiencing corporal punishment at the hands of male teachers. While they emphasised that not all teachers adopted this practice, it was often severe. Common forms of corporal punishment included being forced to kneel or walk on their knees, and being hit or kicked, including with a stick. Female students reported being “*afraid*” of certain teachers, and in the focus group discussions in Addis Ababa, female students mentioned how some teachers even encouraged other students to mete out punishments to their classmates/peers.

*“One of the things that is not fair is when teachers ask some students to punish other students. Some teachers grant permission for others to beat them as they please and maybe even break their hand if they wanted. A teacher may ask a student sitting by the side to slap the next student”*

Focus group participants also explained that while both male and female students were subjected to high levels of violence, in some cases, they felt that the male students received was more severe:

*“They can break the hands of the students and they might leave a scar on their body. Some teachers think that boys do not feel pain and hence punish them very severely. The teachers do not beat the girls, as much as they beat the boys. They said they are not happy when the boys are mistreated and when they cry after receiving severe punishment”.*

In addition to physical punishment, students explained that teachers also verbally insulted them, which was demoralising:

*“Some teachers insult students and the words they hear are not expected from teachers. For example, one female teacher insulted them by saying yedeha lij [literally a child from poor family]”. (FGD, female students, Addis Ababa)*

Evidently, the use of violence within the school setting was endemic, and it could be said that the culture of violence was promoted by some teachers.

Female students also discussed the various reasons why teachers used corporal punishment, which included: when they disturbed the class, when they forgot to bring their books to class, or when they had not completed their homework.

*“...if you don't bring books in class. For example, Yesterday was the first day that I don't bring my book, but [the teacher] punished me badly. I don't like punishment.” (Feruz, Benishangul Gumuz, urban).*

*“When students disturb [the class] the teachers punish them in different ways. First, they advise and warn them not to disturb in the class again and if not, they beat by twig, make them bow and hold their ear crossing their hand through their legs, kneel. The teachers also pressed the student's finger putting the pen between the two fingers. Latecomer girls are also made to cut grass, clean the school compound while boys are made to construct the school fence” (FGD, female students, rural Benishangul Gumuz)*

Sometimes students were issued with a “warning” and if this wasn't heeded, the teachers used severe corporal punishment.

*“If it is first time mistake, they are advised, if the mistake continues, students are ordered to fetch and bring water for the school garden, then they call their parents, and then they are beaten by stick/physically punished.” (FGD, female students, rural Tigray)*

This suggests that these teachers are unable to manage the class effectively, and consequently, resort to violence. However, rather than improving students' behaviour or incentivising them to do their homework, the use of corporal punishment had a negative impact on students' education. Some students explained that for fear of punishment from teachers, they avoided

going to school if they had not completed their homework and would instead roam around the neighbourhood.

Several female students had been physically harmed because of the corporal punishment they had received from teachers. Zeida, from rural Benishangul Gumuz, had a scar on her ear where she had been hit by a teacher, when she was in Grade 4. Similarly, Zimta, another student in rural Benishangul Gumuz had a scar on her knee because a teacher had made her, and some of her classmates, walk on their knees for disturbing the class. In our interview with Zimta's mother, she said that the severity of the punishment Zimta received was so bad, that she had to come to the school to talk to the teacher.

*[The male teacher] beat her saying she talked to others inside the classroom. I came to school to talk to the school principal because she got hurt. Her knee was wounded because [the teacher] made her kneel and walk with her knees outside in the sun...she got sick almost for two months. She got wounded on her kneels for two months.... I took her to the health facility..., it is not the right punishment. It was for two months that she felt sick”*

In such cases, the level of violence had long-term negative impacts on students' health and wellbeing.

Although the GEQIP-E programme raises the issue of gender-based violence, which it suggests is primarily perpetrated by male students, it does not consider the issue of corporal punishment by teachers, which seems to prevail across all regions and rural-urban locations in this study. In addition to the negative impact that it has on students' physical and mental health and wellbeing, it also establishes and promotes a culture of violence in the school, which affects their education. Given the normalisation of violence within these diverse settings, it seems that addressing the issue should be an important priority.

### ***Summary***

Although the GEQIP-E programme outlines strategies within the school setting to improve girls' education, our findings identify there are potential shortcomings to be addressed going forward. We identify that it is important to not only provide inputs to school, but also ensure that they can be used by students. We see this in relation to the provision of separate latrines, where their mere presence does not mean that they are used. In addition, while the girls' club

may have the potential to support girls' education, it is unlikely that this will reach all female students, and where it does, that the support provided will be sufficient for their needs. It appears that the potential of these clubs to support students' learning is constrained by inadequate funding which needs to be addressed. Finally, while the GEQIP-E programme recognises the issue of gender-based violence, it does not seem to recognise the related problem of corporal punishment used primarily by male teachers, which has negative impacts on students' health, wellbeing, education and promotes a culture of violence within the school. This is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

### **Effects of disability on girls' education**

One criticism to emerge of the design of the GEQIP-E programme through our system diagnostic is the fact that it does not account for differences among different groups of students. For example, in terms of equity issues, while the programme focuses on girls, those with disabilities and those from pastoralist communities, it does not take account of differences within these groups, i.e., a poor rural student with a disability (Yorke, Asgedom, Hagos & Rose, 2022). Government and donor stakeholders included in our research, criticised the fact that the GEQIP-E programme overlooks these multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, and called for greater efforts to understand the additional challenges that certain groups of children may face. Therefore, a key objective of our RISE Ethiopia qualitative research is to identify these challenges faced by different groups of students. In this section, we consider the self-reported presence of disability amongst students in our sample and how this may affect their education.

Overall, we found that most of the girls included in our qualitative study did not report facing severe disabilities. However, two students reported having hearing problems which negatively impacted their education. Their conditions were self-identified, rather than having been diagnosed through a formal screening process, and they discussed the impact their hearing problems had on their education.

Rahma is an only child from a medium-high income family in urban Benishangul Gumuz. She has problems hearing, described by her mother:

*“[Rahma] sometimes has trouble hearing...It was both [of her ears] ...but now one [ear] got better and only one [ear] troubles her. It starts to trouble her when she gets*

*the cold...she can hear but you have to talk to her loudly. If you talk to her in a low voice, then you have to repeat it for her”.*

Although Rahma’s mother has tried to seek medical help for her daughter, the treatment that she has received has not worked and she described how, “*after a while [the hearing problem] disappears and comes back again*”. Although we identified Rahma’s academic performance as low at the beginning of the school year, we found that she made good progress over the course of the year. Nevertheless, Rahma mentions she is often late or absent from school because of the problems faced:

*“I [miss class] when I get sick.... I didn’t go to school for two days this second semester.... When my ears hurt so does my head so then I don’t go to school.”*

Rahma says some of her teachers try to make accommodations for her in the classroom, such as seating her towards the front, where she can hear the teacher:

*“Yes, I do hear. You know since teachers normally shout when they teach, I can hear them. And also, because my group sits at front. “*

However, she also explains that not all teachers know about her challenges, and as a result, she receives very little support and instead must manage on her own:

*“Sometimes when I am at school my ear starts to bleed and the only option that I have is to wipe it with a tissue paper. Besides this there is nothing else... there was a girl who had pain in her eye in my class and at the time they signed her up saying that for those with eye problems glasses will be provided and medicine for those with ear problem.”*

Rahma’s experience in the classroom has had an impact on her wellbeing, and she tells us that she wishes there was a solution: “*I want my ear to heal and be like the other kids*”.

Similarly, Siam, from a high-income family in rural Oromia, had an illness that affected her hearing for the past three years. Siam’s mother is worried as her daughter has not received any medical treatment. Like Rahma, Siam’s mother brought her to the health facility, but they could do very little. She mentions that all she can do now is to use holy water to try to alleviate her daughter’s symptoms. Siam is sometimes absent from school due to her condition, and she also faces challenges in the classroom:



*“When I was in grade two, I got an ear illness in both of my ears. Sometimes the illness becomes serious, especially when I enter class, I face difficulty to hear what teachers say...Sometimes I am absent from class when I feel severe pain. Especially during the cold time, the illness becomes serious...”*

Siam’s difficulties with hearing affects her ability to follow the lesson in class, yet like Rahma, she receives very little support or help from the school or her teachers. While the teachers try to accommodate her within the classroom, they do not provide any additional support:

*“Always I cover my ears with a scarf and also teachers know this so they didn't prohibit me in class.... [the teachers] they didn't help me... they allow me to go home when I feel pain. And also, they didn't take any action when I absent from class because of this illness; they are collaborative. Other than this they didn't provide any support.... I copy from friends and classmates what I miss during my absence.”*

Siam tries to manage the difficulties that she faces as best she can and seeks support from her friends and classmates, but her hearing loss still negatively affects her education experience. Her mother hopes that Siam can continue her education as much as possible but worries about the effect it would have on her ability to achieve this goal.

### **Summary**

In summary, the hearing problems that both Rahma and Siam experience negatively affects their education experience: they are sometimes late for school or absent completely and face difficulties in the classroom in following the lessons and catching up on what they missed. Both students are from medium-high incomes families who seek medical support for them and support their education goals, which makes it possible for them to continue their education. However, a student from a low-income family may face even greater difficulties. Nevertheless, both Rahma and Siam continue to face difficulties in accessing the formal support that they require from both the health and education system. While some teachers try to make accommodations to support their needs, they receive little to no formal support.

In terms of the GEQIP-E programme these findings have important implications. First, they highlight the need to tailor support to the needs of individual students. Second, they highlight the need for an integrated set of interventions to support these students. While the GEQIP-E

programme seeks to support both girls and children with disabilities, it is perhaps likely that those with less visible disabilities may not be accommodated for under the current programme.

### **The values and aspirations of female students and their parents/caregivers**

As we discussed earlier, the value that students and their parents/caregivers place on education and their educational and career aspirations, has increased over time due to the expansion of formal education access (Boyden, Porter, Zharkevich & Heissler, 2016; Tafere, 2014). In the context of the current study, this is important, given that students' aspirations have been found to be linked with their education and learning outcomes and the level of support they receive from their family (Camfield, 2011; Tafere, 2014). In relation to the GEQIP-E programme, according to official documentation, female students' lack of interest and the low value given to girls' education in the community are identified as barriers to their education, especially in the emerging regions (World Bank, 2018). Therefore, this section considers the value and aspirations of the female students and their parents in the current sample.

In terms of the value placed on education by the students and their parents/caregivers, we find that they all perceived education to be important for many things, including gaining numeracy and literacy skills, to be able to carry out everyday tasks, to become more knowledgeable, to gain employment in the future and to achieve a better status in life. Several female participants also spoke of how education was important for the overall development of the country. For example, in the focus group discussion amongst female students in Addis Ababa, participants said that education was important for “...*students to be able to support themselves, but also to contribute their share in the growth and development of the country*”. Similarly in a rural school in Benishangul Gumuz, students said education was important “...*to create a good relationship and to live in harmony with others and maintain peace in the country*”. Both groups of participants believed that girls should have the opportunity to learn as much as possible, up until university level.

All the students included in our sample had high aspirations for their future. In most cases, they hoped to secure employment in careers that were notably different from those of their parents/caregivers who mostly worked in agriculture, especially in the rural areas. Over half the participants (8 out of 15) wanted to become doctors, while over a quarter (4 out of 15) wanted to become teachers. Other professions to which the students aspired included a nurse,

a health researcher, and an engineer. There were no obvious differences across regions or rural-urban locations in terms of their professional aspirations (Table 7).

*Table 7: Aspirations of students and their parents/ caregivers*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Students' aspirations</b>	<b>Caregiver</b>	<b>Caregivers' aspirations for their daughter</b>
<b>Addis Ababa (Urban)</b>			
Ekra	Doctor	Mother	Complete Grade 12. Secure employment.
Keria	Doctor	Mother	Complete university education. Doctor
Hami	Health Researcher	Father	Complete university education. Doctor
<b>Benishangul Gumuz (Urban)</b>			
Feruz	Doctor	Mother	Doctor or Nurse
Rahma	Doctor	Mother	Complete university education.
Zeida	Teacher	Father	Become a doctor
<b>Benishangul Gumuz (Rural)</b>			
Tsega	Nurse	Mother	Secure Employment.
Zimta	Teacher	Mother	Complete university. Secure Employment
<b>Oromia (Rural)</b>			
Siam	Migrate	Mother	Continue education (worries about her illness)
Abeba	Teacher	Mother	Complete education. Secure Employment
Gelete	Doctor	Father	Complete education. Secure Employment

Fetiya	Teacher or Doctor	Mother	Complete Grade 10.
<b>Tigray (Rural)</b>			
Alganesh	Engineer	Father	Complete university. Secure Employment
Halal	Doctor	Father	Complete education. Become a doctor.
Meareg	Doctor	Mother	Complete university. Secure Employment

Many of the female participants believed that they would achieve their goals through hard work and determination. Ekra, from a low-medium income household in Addis Ababa said: *“I want to finish my education and I wish to become a medical doctor. If I work hard and get educated well, I can reach my goal”*. Some also mentioned the importance of receiving support and encouragement from others to achieve their goals, especially from family members. They all indicated that they only wished to get married after completing their education, securing employment, and becoming financially independent. Therefore, it seems that for these students, being pressured into an early marriage was not something that currently threatened their education.

In most cases, parents and caregivers had similarly high aspirations for their daughters. For example, in Addis Ababa, Keria said, *“I wanted to be a doctor starting from my childhood”*, while her mother said, *“Her interest [Keria’s] is to be a medical doctor. I am pushing her pursue this direction and to achieve this goal. Her profession will be a physician”*. Other parents, especially mothers, often simply wished for their daughter to complete as much education as they could. While Ekra wanted to become a doctor, her mother told us, *“I want [Ekra] to finish her education to the last level”*. No observable differences were found between male and female parents/caregivers in terms of the level of education they wanted their daughters to achieve. However, it could be said that fathers were more likely to indicate specific careers, with three out of five expressing the wish that their daughters would become doctors.

Another common aspiration with parents and caregivers was the hope that their daughters would have a better life than they had had, to enable them to gain secure employment, that was

different to their own. As Zeida's father (low income), who worked as a carpenter, explained: "I want [Zeida] to be a doctor. I would love for her to get a job and get salary. I don't want her to work like me". Many parents believed that their lack of, or limited education was the reason for the existing challenges they faced, and were therefore, highly motivated to have ensure their daughters were educated. This was echoed by Feyiya's mother:

*"If I have an education, my life might not be difficult, I might not suffer from life and might not have too many children. If I should have an education, I might not suffer to lead my life and to manage the household. I haven't either sufficient resources (farmland) or decent work to support and help my children as well"*

For all the participants and their parents and caregivers, education was seen as an important route out of poverty.

In all cases, the parents and caregivers supported their daughters' education and did not want them to be married until they had completed their schooling, as stated by Rahma's mother (Benishangul Gumuz):

*"I want her to learn till the end of her education. The most profitable one is her education. Marriage is not that important nowadays. If she finishes her education and hold what makes her proud then the afterward is her choice. I just want her to learn"*

Similarly, in rural Tigray, Halal's father indicated that he would refuse to let his daughter marry while she was pursuing her education goals:

*"I will refuse it. I never give my daughters to a man for marriage in the middle of learning. I only decide to let them marry after termination or failure on education"*

This suggests that while entry into marriage was perhaps a threat, parents believed that girls could be supported to continue their education.

### **Summary**

Our findings demonstrate that in all regions included in this study, and across rural-urban locations, the students and their parents/caregivers placed a high value on education, with significant aspirations for their futures. It does not seem that students are uninterested in their

education, which was a suggested barrier to girls' education according to the GEQIP-E documentation (World Bank, 2018). In fact, our findings contradict this assumption.

### **Influences on girls' education beyond the school setting: gender norms and expectations**

As discussed above, the relationship between girls' education and gender norms and expectations is complex, and although progress has been made in addressing gender norms, this has been uneven and slowest in rural areas (Jones et al., 2014). Official GEQIP-E documentation identifies gender norms as one of the biggest challenges in terms of girls' education, especially in relation to domestic work responsibilities and the expectations around early marriage (World Bank, 2018). To address these barriers, it seeks to provide life skills training, counselling, and empowerment programmes for individual girls, together with raising community awareness. In this section, we consider the role of gender norms and expectations around girls' education, their involvement in domestic work, and early marriage expectations, while also considering the differences across rural-urban locations and income status.

#### ***Domestic work***

We found that that domestic work responsibilities were one of the main factors that affected girls' academic performance. Study participants were involved in a range of activities including household chores, childcare, and agricultural work. However, these responsibilities did not impact all girls in the same way. In both Addis Ababa and Benishangul Gumuz (urban) the focus group participants discussed how some female students had a lot of domestic work to complete, which impacted upon their education, as it meant they had insufficient time to study. Similarly, in Oromia, participants discussed how some girls were late to school and regularly absent because of the chores they had to complete. Thus, domestic responsibilities affected some, but not all participants.

Turning to the individual interviews with the students, they all reported being involved in domestic work, although differences were reported in relation to the extent to which they believed this impacted upon their education. In many cases, the girls - particularly in Addis Ababa and Oromia - indicated that their domestic responsibilities did not significantly impact their education. Abeba, from a medium-high income family in Oromia told us: "*I don't think [domestic work] has an impact on my education because I participate in domestic work out of schooling time. During the night I am free for schooling work*". Similarly, Gelete, from a medium-high income family in rural Oromia described how the domestic work she had to

complete did not affect her schooling, because she had access to a solar light, which meant that she could balance her domestic activities and school work:

*“Yes, I have enough time [for homework] as I am not overloaded with domestic work as much. Only I engage in cleaning of the home, fetching water, and herding cattle which doesn't impact my schooling activities... Commonly I do my homework during the night time when there is a solar light and also I can do during day time if there is no domestic work or I am free of herding of cattle”.*

This was also found to be the case for Zimta (low income) in rural Benishangul Gumuz, who explained that she was able to balance her domestic work and education by completing her domestic work activities during the day and then by using the light from a mobile phone to study at night.

For these students, the fact that they had to balance their work responsibilities with their education was seen as normal, and the access they had to resources and electricity helped them to cope with this challenge. In terms of their learning progress and outcomes, all of them were medium-high performers and their progress increased over the course of the year.

However, 5 of the 15 participants indicated that their involvement in heavy domestic work did have a significant impact on their education, resulting in lateness to school, incomplete homework, or absence from school. This was more likely to be the case in urban Benishangul Gumuz, rural Tigray and rural Oromia. Rahma, from a medium-high income family in urban Benishangul Gumuz, indicated that she was often absent due to her domestic responsibilities, which included cooking and cleaning, and she was usually required to complete two hours of domestic work before school. Similarly, Zeida (low-income), who was also from urban Benishangul Gumuz, described how she had a lot of domestic work and was often late to school, or unable to complete her homework. Some students spoke of how their domestic responsibilities were more demanding at specific times of the year (e.g. harvest time) or in response to specific shocks (e.g. the death or illness of a family member). Those who reported having heavy domestic chores were more likely to be from low or low-medium income families, although this was not always the case.

Furthermore, we found that while some participants' involvement in domestic work meant that they were late or absent from school, or were unable to complete their homework, students

were often punished for their lateness when they arrived to school. Fetiya, a student in rural Oromia spoke of how she and other students who were late, were not allowed to enter the class:

*“...the teacher does not allow us to enter into class just after starting teaching. So I spend the first period outside the class. Then I can enter the class before a teacher enters into class for the second period. This is common because the majority of the students arrive late”*

Rather than seeking to accommodate the needs of these students, who were struggling to balance their domestic work and school work, the school adopted a punitive approach.

It was interesting to find that in a number of cases where students themselves reported facing heavy domestic burdens, their parents/caregivers did not believe that these responsibilities negatively affected their education. When comparing Rahma’s and her mother’s accounts, there was a difference in perceptions. Rahma said:

*“...when I have a lot of work I become late [for school]....I clean the house, cook, sweep the yard and mop the patio....I am not sure about the amount of days but there are days I come late”.*

Her mother, however, indicated that Rahma did not engage in any domestic work, but that she tries to teach Rahma some basic skills like cleaning the dishes. Similarly, Zeida’s father also does not believe that his daughter’s housework responsibilities are an issue:

*“If she has time, she does the house chores, but if it is time to go to school she stops immediately and goes [to school] .... she only does house chores on her resting days. If she says she needs to study...then I make the food myself. I don’t ask [Rahma] to do it until she finishes her study”.*

It seems that these parents were either unaware of the extent to which their daughters’ involvement in domestic chores affected their education, or else they did not believe that this was a serious issue.

### **Summary**

Together, these findings suggest a number of important points for consideration. The extent to which girls are required to undertake domestic tasks differs both across and within regions.



While all students in this study are engaged in domestic work to some degree, the impact on their education varies, depending on the amount of work they have to complete and how they navigate this. It appears that instead of accommodating these female students' needs, the schools further punish them. The burden of domestic work also varies over time, and may become more or less intense, depending on a range of household factors. Parents and caregivers have an important role in mediating the impact of domestic responsibilities on their daughters' education. The contrasting reports from students and their parents and caregivers, highlight the importance of understanding girls' experiences from their own perspectives. Finally, the research points to the fact that girls' domestic work burdens increase as they get older, which is also linked to their educational progression.

### *Expectations for marriage*

In addition to domestic work responsibilities, gender norms also have a role to play in limiting girls' education. Expectations that girls will marry early – often around the time they reach Grade 8, tend to limit their educational opportunities. In the current study, we found that marriage expectations were not an issue raised by either the students or their parents/caregivers, as something that might hamper their education. Some parents explained that attitudes at the community level were changing towards girls' education, for example in rural Oromia, as Abeba's mother explained:

*“In the past...there was no education accessibility, people gave value for marriage, there was abduction and forced marriage which were challenges for females. Now, there is a good opportunity for education, consent marriage, no forced marriage, there is the availability of jobs for a hard worker”.*

Given that the students in this study are enrolled in grade four and five, they are not yet facing pressure to enter marriage.

However, there was some evidence that these female students may face pressure to marry in the next few years. Zimta, who is from a low-income household in rural Benishangul Gumuz, described how she planned to move to an urban area to escape the harassment and pressure that she was starting to face from young men in her community to enter a relationship. Zimta described feeling ashamed when other community members were gossiping about this, and she viewed migration as a chance to escape. This suggests that where such pressure exists, it is difficult for girls to resist.

Another indication that girls may face pressure to marry in the coming years as they reach the end of primary school, is that several of them spoke of older sisters who had dropped out of education due to marriage. Abeba, from a medium-high income family in rural Oromia said:

*“I have two sisters and two brothers. The oldest sister got married in 2013 and she has two children. She dropped out of school from grade 5 because of marriage. My other sister who is my elder, is also married last year after completing grade 10.”*

These stories raise the question as to whether the girls in this study will be able to continue their education and resist the pressure to marry, given that their sisters had been unable to do so.

### ***Summary***

These findings present a mixed picture in terms of girls’ trajectories through education. On the one hand it seems that attitudes to marriage are changing and neither the girls nor their parents support early marriage. On the other hand, given that the participants are only at Grade 4 and Grade 5, it appears that pressure to marriage may arise as they progress with their education. The fact that one participant planned to migrate to an urban area to escape the pressure she was facing from young men in her community, combined with the fact the older sisters of many participants had dropped out of school to marry, raises the question of whether these girls will be able to resist the pressure and continue their education.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

For this study, we interviewed 15 female students in Grades 4 and 5 in primary school, as well as their parents/caregivers. The students were selected from five schools across different locations in Ethiopia (four regional states and city administrations) representing both rural and urban perspectives. This has enabled us to explore a range of factors influencing girls’ education and learning at a key transition point in their education (i.e., from Grade 4 to Grade 5).

We have situated these findings within the context of the ongoing GEQIP-E reforms which have focused on girls’ education. Accordingly, we have identified some of the potential shortcomings of this programme, as well as potential strategies for strengthening the support provided to girls’ education.

Our point of departure for this study is the fact that while great progress has been made in getting more girls into school and increasing gender parity, many challenges remain, particularly in terms of their progression, completion and learning outcomes. Therefore, while access to education has improved for many girls, they still face many challenges. In this paper, we have aimed to understand some of the continued challenges facing girls as they progress from lower primary education to upper primary education. In addition, we sought to take account of differences across location (region, rural-urban) and amongst different groups of girls considering difference in income status, achievement and learning and disability status.

Our findings are complemented by insights garnered through other strands of the ongoing RISE Ethiopia study, including political economy analysis and a large-scale quantitative survey in 168 school and community sites.

Our findings highlight the diversity in terms of girls' learning, both in terms of their starting points and the progress that they make during the school year. While some students make great progress, for others, especially those from low-income families, their performance decreases. However, while the GEQIP-E programme seeks to improve students' learning more generally, it does not focus on girls' learning specifically. Instead, it retains a narrow view on gender parity – in specific regions and at upper primary school (Grades 5-8) only. This, we suggest, is insufficient for achieving meaningful and sustainable progress in girls' education.

Even though the GEQIP-E programme seeks to move from inputs to results, much of the focus continue to be on inputs and raising awareness. In terms of girls' education, this includes increasing the provision of separate latrines and support provided through the girls' clubs. Our findings suggest the need to go beyond merely focusing on inputs, to ensuring that they can actually be used by students – while separate latrines are available in all schools, their poor quality means that they are not used by students. This suggests that attention to other aspects in the school environment is also needed, such as access to running water. While girls' clubs provide support for female students and give them a platform to discuss important issues - and in some cases even provide sanitary and other materials - our findings suggest that their potential to deliver meaningful support may be limited. The girls' clubs are unlikely to reach all girls, and in some locations, meetings take place infrequently. Importantly, the material support provided through these girls' clubs is insufficient. Therefore, to meaningfully support

girls' education, more financing should be directed towards girls' clubs, especially given their centrality in easing girls' progression through school.

Contrary to the idea that a lack of interest in learning is a barrier to girls' education, as highlighted in official GEQIP-E documentation, we find that the students in this study are highly motivated and have high educational aspirations. While pressure to marry is not currently identified as a barrier to their education, evidence suggests that this may become more of an issue for them over time. This in turn highlights the importance of understanding the different challenges girls face at different stages of their educational journeys.

Important issues overlooked by the GEQIP-E programme include the level of violence students experience from teachers, which negatively impacts their education, health and wellbeing, and promotes a culture of violence within schools. Another important gap we have identified through our research, is the fact that some students may miss out on essential support, given that they do not fall within the specific remit of the GEQIP-E programme. We have seen this with two female students who noted that they face problems hearing. They have not received any formal in-school support. While the GEQIP-E programme has focused on supporting female students and students disabilities, the needs of those with more less visible disabilities do not appear to be either identified or supported.

The burden of domestic responsibilities borne by some of the girls, acts as a barrier to their education. While the GEQIP-E programme seeks to raise awareness within the community of the importance of reducing this heavy workload our findings suggest that this also needs to take place in the context of the school. Ensuring that schools accommodate the needs of girls who have onerous domestic responsibilities, rather than punishing them, is imperative. We also suggest that the GEQIP-E programme could go further in providing material support to these girls such as through the provision of lamps for studying at night. While ideally the domestic burden on female students would be reduced completely, drawing on insights from other students who discuss the positive impact of access to electricity, providing such support may be one way of addressing this issue in the short-term.

In terms of more general recommendations for programmes aiming to support girls' education, our findings highlight the importance of including the perspectives of girls and their families, within the context in which they are located. Previous RISE Ethiopia research has revealed the limited evidence used at the planning stage of the GEQIP-E programme, particularly around

the experiences of female students in different locations in Ethiopia. We suggest that this may have contributed to some of the shortcomings in the design of the GEQIP-E programme in relation to girls' education. Furthermore, efforts to align the GEQIP-E programme with government's priorities outlined in official policy and plans without considering some of the shortcomings of these strategies, has limited the scope for transformative change in relation to girls' education. Lessons for future programmes seeking to support girls' education include the importance of drawing on evidence from within the Ethiopian context and accounting for the differences that different girls face, as we have started to capture in this paper.

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