

# The Role of Modern Education in Historical Move Towards Gender Equality Issue in Ethiopia

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to understand the role of modern education in the historical development of gender equality in Ethiopia over time and political-ideological change. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research method was used to analyse various relevant literature on the development of gender equality in Ethiopia. The documents were selected based on their authenticity and consistency with the objective of this study. The findings of this study show that gender inequality in Ethiopia has experienced both change and continuity. The introduction and development of modern education has brought about significant political and social changes that have led to progress in gender equality over the years. One of the persistent problems is that traditional gender norms have influenced societal attitudes and expectations in Ethiopia, hindering efforts to achieve gender equality in the country. It is therefore necessary to challenge and change societal attitudes through gender-responsive education and the development and implementation of policies that promote equal opportunities and rights for all genders.

## 1. Introduction

There are various definitions of gender, as they can be understood and interpreted differently depending on cultural, social and academic perspectives. One of the definitions states that gender is "the way society creates, shapes and rewards our understanding of femininity and masculinity" (Shaw, Susan M. Lee, 2020). In this view, gender is a socially constructed role, behavior, activity, and expectation that a particular society or culture assigns to individuals based on their sex (Hall et al., 2021). Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation are central to a person's understanding of who they are, and these characteristics shape each person's experiences, relationships and opportunities throughout their lives (Dilli et al., 2019a). Gender equality refers to the equal rights, opportunities and treatment of individuals, regardless of their gender. It is the principle that all genders should have equal access to resources, opportunities and decision-making powers and should not be discriminated against on the basis of their gender. It is a form of social equality that aims to create a society in which all individuals, regardless of their gender, have the same rights, opportunities and access to resources. It is

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achieved when gender does not limit or determine a person's social status or opportunities (United Nations, 2015). Gender inequality refers to the unequal opportunities, unequal treatment and unequal expectations that society imposes on people based on their gender. Gender inequality happens due to some systems and cultural norms that systemically reinforce gender inequality. Some of the systems and norms that reinforce gender inequality are traditional discriminatory laws and policies and societal expectations of gendered behaviors and roles (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). These systems and cultural norms create barriers that limit women's rights and opportunities and reinforce harmful stereotypes in society.

Gender equality means equal rights and opportunities for all genders and is crucial for social development and well-being. It is a necessary basis for the realization of justice and inclusivity in all areas of society. Gender equality creates a world free from discrimination and prejudice ((Fredman & Goldblatt, 2015)). Gender equality is not only a question of social justice, but also a prerequisite for sustainable, people-centred development. It is a pillar of fundamental human right and crucial for promoting economic development, social justice and ensuring peace and stability (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Creating a just and inclusive society is impossible without promoting gender equality. Hence, gender equality is an important goal in modern societies because it benefits individuals, communities and society as a whole (Klein et al., 2014; UNDP, 2019). Despite the growing global awareness of the importance of gender equality, gender inequality is pervasive in the world (Amahazion, 2023). Thus it is important to understand the historical path to gender equality in order to recognize progress, identify patterns and trends, and recognize persistent challenges. Understanding the historical development of gender equality could help to understand the various challenges as well as the successes in promoting gender equality. This type of study contributes to a deeper understanding of history, both the successes achieved and the obstacles yet to be overcome. Understanding the historical process of gender equality provides crucial insights that can inform and guide efforts to promote gender equality in the present and in the future (Dilli et al., 2013, 2019b, 2019a). Understanding the historical development of gender equality and the role of modern education in moving towards gender equality in the Ethiopian context therefore provides valuable insights into the social norms, legal framework and evolving role of women while facilitating informed efforts to address persistent issues of gender inequality. Modern education in Ethiopia has played a complex role in the historical development of gender equality. There are a number of studies on gender inequality, but there are few studies on the role of modern education in the historical development of gender equality in Ethiopia. Understanding the role of modern education in the historical development of gender equality could help to bring education more into focus as the key to achieving gender equality. It can also contribute to the development of gender-responsive education policies and practices in Ethiopia. Therefore, this report aims to understand the role of modern education in the historical development of gender equality in Ethiopia in order to strengthen modern education in the current gender equality efforts in the country. This study examines the historical development of gender equality, focusing on the role of modern education in this process by answering the following questions:

1. When did the issue of gender equality begin and to what extent has it changed in different ideological and political contexts?
2. What role has modern education played in the progress towards gender equality in the country?
3. To what extent do culture and traditional gender norms hinder or promote gender equality in the country?

To answer these questions, this review draws on the scarcely available sources on the historical development of gender relations in Ethiopia. Accordingly, this review draws on the work of

(Bizuneh, 2001) a bibliographical review of women in Ethiopian history, which can provide valuable insights into the roles, contributions and experiences of women in Ethiopia across different time periods. A socio-historical analysis by (Semela et al., 2019) on women and development in Ethiopia that emphasizes the role of modern education in promoting the struggle for gender equality. In addition, the article by Chris Prouty Rosenfeld (1979), who was recognized for her work on elite women in Ethiopian politics, particularly during the “Zemene Mesafint (Era of Princes) (1769-1855)”, served as a source of information for this report. The article by Burgess (2013) sheds light on the contribution of Ethiopian women to public life. In addition, we used the article by (Haile, 1984), which provides an insight into “Rural Women’s Legal Status in Ethiopia”, as well as the article by (Mariam, 1994), which provides information on Ethiopian women during the period of socialist transition, and other documented materials related to gender issues in Ethiopia to enhance our understanding of the historical development of gender equality issues in the Ethiopian context. The documents we used as sources of information for the study were selected for their authenticity, as they provide data-based insights into the historical development of gender equality in the country and are consistent with the aim of this study.

## **2. Ongoing Debates about Equality**

Gender equality is the belief that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity, should have equal rights, opportunities, and treatment in society (Ramadhani et al., 2022). The elimination of all forms of discrimination based on gender so that girls and women, boys and men have equal opportunities and benefits. It involves challenging and dismantling gender-based discrimination and biases. Understanding these fundamental concepts is essential for promoting inclusivity, respect, and acceptance of diverse gender identities and expressions. Behind the scenes of the struggle for gender equality lie longstanding, and ongoing, debates about the meaning of equality. At the forefront of such debate lies the challenges posed by postmodernist analyses of gender and discourse, and the distinctly different ways in which gender equality has been understood and pursued throughout history (Woodward & Woodward, 2015; Young, 2011). These debates highlight the ongoing struggle to define and achieve true gender equality, as different perspectives and interpretations continue to shape the understanding and implementation of gender equality in all aspects of life including Education. These debates also underscore the complexity of gender equality, taking into account intersectionality and the varying experiences and oppressions faced by different groups of women (Stromquist & Fischman, 2009). These ongoing debates on the meaning of gender equality reveal a lack of consensus among scholars and researchers regarding the conceptualization and goals of gender equality (Walby, 2005).

Some argue that equality should be understood as treating everyone the same, while others advocate for a more nuanced approach that recognizes and addresses existing disparities and inequalities (Epstein, 1997; Webb, 1997). This debate indicates the tension between formal equality, which focuses on equal treatment under the law, and substantive equality, which seeks to address systemic barriers and structural discrimination. It is possible to identify three perspectives in “equality vs. difference” discussion in what has become known as the ‘equality/difference’ debate (Sayan Cengiz, 2020; Squires, 2013). The “equality versus difference” debate is a contentious and complex discussion that explores different perspectives on how to achieve social justice and gender equality (Squires, 2013). One perspective in the “equality/difference” debate is the belief in equality as sameness. This perspective argues that to achieve equality, individuals must be treated the same and have access to the same opportunities and resources regardless of their gender (Liff & Wajcman, 1996; Nentwich, 2006). This advocates strict equality that extends to women/girls the same rights and privileges

that men/boys have. For example, the advocate of this view argues that gender equality in the labor market will not be achieved without gender equality in the allocation of household and caring work between women and men. Therefore, gender is regarded as an attribute that should not be significant in the distribution of social value or social rights opportunity (Liff & Wajcman, 1996). Thus, the equality perspective suggests Equality is to be achieved through gender neutrality or androgyny.

Another perspective in the “equality/difference” debate is the difference perspective (Young, 2011). In contrast to the Equality (androgyny or gender neutrality) perspective, those within the ‘difference perspective’ insist on the recognition and valuing of the ways in which women are different from men (Fischer et al., 1993). They recognize difference and acknowledges that men and women may have different needs, experiences, and strengths. Scholars in this view point argue that achieving equality requires taking these differences into account to ensure equitable outcomes (Abu El-Haj, 2003). Women’s experiences, their cultural, bodily, and sexual differences from men, are celebrated and valorized in this perspective. Gilligan (1982) in (Cheryan & Markus, 2020) argue that women’s distinctive morality requires that equality is ‘gender-differentiated. The “equality” perspective is criticized for neglecting the socially constructed and patriarchal nature of evaluation criteria in social inclusion. On the other hand, the “difference” perspective is faulted for not adequately acknowledging the socially constructed nature of “maleness” and “femaleness” and downplaying the significance of other forms of difference (Chávez et al., 2015). This stresses the need for a clearer approach that recognizes both the constructed nature of gender roles and the plurality of differences in social inclusion. These two views of sameness and difference perspectives are often criticized by third perspective of “equality/difference” debate. The third perspective is Diversity perspective which involves ‘going beyond the dichotomy represented by the previous two perspectives (Squires, 1999) in (Chávez et al., 2015).

The Diversity perspective involves deconstructing the choice of either equality or difference. By critically examining social, cultural, and economic factors, the ‘diversity’ view seeks to address the root causes of gender inequality and promote systemic change. Iris Marion Young (1990) contends that the concept of equality requires reconceptualization. In (Young, 1990) terms ‘the politics of difference,’ group disparities are not neutralized or transcended; instead, equality emerges through mutual respect and affirmation among socially and culturally diverse groups. Young’s approach involves a feminist reading of structural injustice, emphasizing domination and oppression as key components. Difference now comes to mean not otherness, exclusive opposition, but specificity, variation, heterogeneity’ (Young, 2011). For Young, then, it is unrealistic and undesirable to pursue equality through the neutralization of group differences. ‘Instead, justice in a group differentiated society demands social equality of groups, and mutual recognition and affirmation of group differences. Attending to group-specific needs and providing for group representation both promotes that social equality and provides the recognition that undermines cultural imperialism’ (Young, 1990). This study adopted the Diversity perspectives by Young to explore the historical move towards gender equality issues in the Ethiopian context. In the equality/difference debate, diversity perspective is crucial to examine and analysis the historical development of gender equality movement in Ethiopia. This is because recognizing diversity as a core value in the in general will positively impacts progresses towards gender equality in the country.

### **3. Methods**

In this study, the method of comparative historical research was applied to analyse the historical development of gender equality over different periods of time and the political-ideological

change in Ethiopia. Comparative-historical analysis involves the systematic comparison of historical sequences using within-case and cross-case methods (Falleti & Mahoney, 2015). The study also uses this method to link the historical development of gender equality issues to the role of education in these processes. In this method, historical cases are examined and compared to understand their similarities and differences. This study focuses on the evolution of gender equality issues from the beginnings of modern education to recent times to examine how historical contexts influence gender equality issues in the country. We have thus examined the development of gender equality issues over time within the same country, but in different time periods and taking into account political changes, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of continuities, changes and how education has contributed to the changes that have taken place. The data sources for this study were documents related to gender and education as well as the documents related to state formation in the country. Accordingly, relevant documents on the history of gender equality and on gender and education in the country were selected and analysed qualitatively. In order to understand the context well and analyse the information, the documents selected for this study were carefully read, analysed and interpreted to uncover, understand and draw a conclusion on the role of modern education in the historical development of gender equality in the country. The overall process of the study involved selecting the topic to be studied, collecting the necessary historical sources, analysing the events and drawing meaningful conclusions.

#### **4. Historical Overview of Gender Equality; Global and Ethiopian Perspectives**

The historical legacy of gender inequality has had a profound impact on the current state of gender equality efforts. In Ethiopia, for example, the deep-rooted gendered social norms, gender stereotypes and gender biases embedded in the culture of the society have perpetuated gender inequality and hindered efforts towards gender equality (Amahazion, 2023). This traditional gender inequality continues to hinder current efforts towards gender equality in various areas of society, including access to and success on the educational ladder. These historical gender inequalities persist in various areas of society, such as education, employment opportunities, political representation and access to healthcare. Throughout history, societies have been characterized by deeply entrenched gender roles and expectations, with men typically holding positions of power and influence while women have been relegated (Inglehart et al., 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Gender equality has undergone a complex and multi-layered process that has been shaped by various social, cultural, political and economic factors as societies have evolved and progressed (Rajvi Desai, 2019). In prehistoric societies, roles and expectations were strictly gendered and women had limited rights and opportunities compared to men (Inglehart et al., 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). From ancient civilizations to modern times, the status and role of women underwent significant changes and transformations. The status and role of women have changed dramatically throughout history, reflecting changes in social attitudes, cultural norms and political systems. In ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt, women held positions of power as priestesses and rulers (Westermarck, 1904; Wiesner-Hanks, 2004), while in ancient Greece the role of women was mainly limited to domestic tasks and procreation (Streeter et al., 1997). In the Middle Ages, due to patriarchal feudal systems (Westermarck, 1904), the position of women was further limited to marriage, motherhood and running the household as the main tasks. Gender equality began to develop as traditional patriarchal norms were challenged and various women's rights movements advocated for equal rights and access to education, employment and political participation (Dilli et al., 2019b). Gender equality gained momentum as society developed and progressed. In this sense, the suffrage movement achieved important milestones in securing women's suffrage, the women's movements of the 20th century helped to draw attention to

gender discrimination and advocate for equal treatment before the law, while the creation of laws and international agreements helped to promote gender equality and protect women's rights (Ferranti, 2018). Women stood up for their rights, challenged traditional social gender norms and roles and achieved remarkable success in gaining equal opportunities in various areas such as education, employment and political participation.

From a global perspective, however, an overview of the historical development of gender equality shows a maltreated and divergent course and consequence. Studies on women and gender are very unevenly distributed geographically and chronologically (Wiesner-Hanks, 2004). This uneven distribution hinders our understanding of different experiences and limits the development of comprehensive knowledge in this area (Acker, 1988; Ackerly, 2001). It also perpetuates existing power imbalances by neglecting the voices and perspectives of marginalized groups, hindering progress towards gender equality and social justice (A Castillo, 2015). Numerous historical events and movements have played a crucial role in advancing gender equality. These historical events and movements have collectively shaped the history of gender equality and entrenched the notion that everyone deserves equal rights, opportunities and respect regardless of their gender (Shaw, 2023). This has fueled efforts to create a more equitable society for all people, regardless of their gender identity (Ekvall, 2013). Understanding these events and movements that have shaped society's view of gender roles and rights is crucial to exploring the historical evolution of gender equality. Therefore, this review aims to understand the events and movements that have shaped the historical evolution of gender equality in the Ethiopian context. This approach offers insights into the progress and challenges that had to be overcome in the various periods. It also enables a deeper understanding of both the successes achieved and the obstacles still to be overcome. It provides an insight into the strategies required for ongoing efforts to ensure equal opportunities and treatment for all people, regardless of their gender.

Gender equality has been a long and arduous journey in Ethiopia, with significant progress made over the years. Gender inequality has long been a prevalent issue in Ethiopia, where women have always been systematically discriminated against and have limited access to opportunities and resources (Von Massow, 2000). Women have been severely subordinated in every aspect of society, including education, resources and political participation. In the past, there has been very limited academic work on gender issues in Ethiopia. Ethiopian society is patriarchal, with men holding the majority of power and women playing a subordinate role; (Semela et al., 2019; Zewde, 2019). This subordinate position of women has been perpetuated by cultural norms and practices. Nevertheless, women have managed to navigate these structures and negotiate their role in society (Semela et al., 2019). The historical struggle for gender equality in the country can be traced back to ancient times, where women played important roles in society. Research on ancient societies in East Central Africa, including Ethiopia, suggests that the power of matriarchy was a significant force. Saidi (2012) argues that women played a key role in these societies, with female political leaders being as common as male rulers. The presence of matriarchal power in these societies challenges the assumption of universal patriarchy in ancient Africa. Matriarchs primarily refer to female leaders or figures who have a great deal of power and influence within a family, community or society (Goettner-Abendroth, 2012), while patriarchs are male leaders or figures who have similar positions of power and influence. These roles and dynamics can be very different in different cultures and historical contexts. Saidi (2012). Farrar (1997), challenges the patriarchal narrative of ancient East and Central African societies, particularly in Ethiopia, by emphasizing the power and influence of matriarchs (Farrar, 1997). Eresso (2021) adds to this by examining the institution of the queen mother in the pre-colonial West African monarchy, which could be seen as a parallel to matriarchal power in East Africa. These studies generally provide a better

understanding of ancient East and Central African societies and emphasize the influence of matriarchs. The aim of this paper was to paint a comprehensive picture of the historical development of gender equality, emphasising the role of modern education in promoting gender equality in Ethiopia. To gain a deeper understanding of the approach to gender equality in Ethiopia, this report refers to academic works, historical analysis and scholarly research that examine this issue in more detail. The following section identifies the historical aberrations that gender equality (equality between men and women) has gone through to reach the current level, as well as the situations that have hindered or promoted this equality throughout Ethiopian history. In the last section of this article, the authors conclude their analysis with some suggestions that can contribute to the promotion of gender equality in the country.

## **5. Gender Equality in Various Ideological and Political Changes in Ethiopia**

### **5.1. The Influence of Traditional Gender Norms in Ethiopia**

Gender relations are always diverse and constantly in flux, but there are almost always hegemonic notions of femininity (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002) within particular cultural contexts that shape women's roles and relative positions (Secor & McDowell, 2001). Imbalances in gendered power resulting from ascribed roles and embedded power relations are perpetuated through everyday practise (Staeheli et al., 2004), and the most serious stage is when they are perpetuated through gender-based violence. According to (Connell, 2005) these power relations and hegemonic notions of femininity and women's place are continually challenged and altered by counter-hegemonic gender relations and behaviours. The place of women in the public sphere, politics, the economy and education was marginal in Ethiopia. As a result of changing times and political ideologies in the country, women in Ethiopia were offered new spaces. This led to gender norms being challenged and the role of women changing from housewife to a part of society.

Most of the world's cultures have a system of two main genders in which there are enormous differences between what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman" (Wiesner-Hanks, 2004). In Ethiopia gender based kind of social stratification and social norm resulted in the belief that women are docile, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence, for which culture has been used as a justification (Cherinet & Mulugeta, 2003). This deep rooted cultural traditions enhanced men's control over economic resources and determines gender power relations in Ethiopia. Studies shown that Ethiopian women traditionally have suffered sociocultural and economic discrimination (Amahazion, 2023) and have had fewer opportunities than men for personal growth, education, and employment (Aregu et al., 2015). Gender roles in Ethiopia have deep historical roots, with men often assigned roles related to active work like leadership, and decision-making, while women were primarily responsible for childrearing and household tasks (Mjaaland, 2018). Although these roles have evolved over time, traditional norms and expectations still persist in many areas playing paramount role in perpetuating gender inequality in Ethiopian society. Ethiopia is home to different ethnic groups, each with its own language, values and cultural norms. These cultural norms often shape gender roles and expectations. While some cultures promote gender equity, others may perpetuate traditional gender hierarchies, affecting women's rights and opportunities (Poushter et al., 2019). For instance, Oromo culture in Ethiopia plays a role in promoting gender equality through various means like community decision-making, where both men and women participate in inclusive approach that can foster gender equality by including women in important matters that affect their lives.

Overall, traditional gender norms and gendered roles have influenced social attitudes and expectations in Ethiopia, making it difficult for women to access education, employment and leadership positions. This was/is an obstacle to women's economic empowerment and to the country's efforts to achieve gender equality. It is therefore necessary to challenge and change societal attitudes, promote gender-sensitive education and implement policies that promote equal opportunities and rights for all genders. Social constructivism emphasizes that gender is a product of social interactions and perceptions (Risman, 2009) while Feminist perspectives highlight the need to challenge traditional gender norms and power structures (True & Mintrom, 2001). It emphasizes the need to deconstruct traditional gender norms and empower individuals, particularly women, in challenging societal expectations. The concept of "doing gender" refers to the performative nature of gender roles, where individuals actively engage in behaviors that align with societal expectations (Risman, 2009). This can include conforming to traditional roles or subverting them based on personal agency. Undoing gender involves challenging and dismantling established gender norms, promoting inclusivity, and recognizing the fluidity of gender identities. The following section looks at the development of gender equality in different political ideological eras starting from Emperor Haile Selassie's rule (1918-1974) to the present situation of gender issues in Ethiopia.

## **5.2. Emperor Haile Selassie Rule (1918-1974) and the Beginning of Gender Equality Movement**

Modern education expansion gained priority under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie's reign since 1918-1974. The first attempt for gender equality practices was the establishment of the first modern school for girls in the capital city Addis Ababa in 1931 (Semela et al., 2019). It was the first time where girls started participating in Education of the country. As girls started to participate in Education their awareness increased against the male domination. Aydınlik (2019) highlighted the establishment of girls' modern education as a departure from the traditional religious education and the limited role of women in public life. The school was launched after the name Emperor Haile Selassie's wife as Menen as 'Empress Menen School' in 1931 (Wuhibegezer, 2014). A woman appointed as assistant school director in the first girls' school in 1940 (Semela et al., 2019) marking the first women involvement in Educational Leadership position. However, according to (Pankhurst, 1992), in the first modern school for girls only the daughters of rich families enrolled. The curriculum of this first girls' school designed to prepare girls as future wives and mothers perpetuating stereotypical traditional gender roles (Bishaw, 2012; Semela et al., 2019). In this manner, the first girls' school was the institutionalization of subordinate status of women and was a kind of hegemonic masculinity. This kind of gendered role and expectations has been significantly influencing the way women define themselves and are treated by others resulting in the existing gender inequality in Education. This aligns with the concept of Gender Schema theory which posits that what people believe to be appropriate behaviour and actions by men and women reflect and affect what they imagine a man or a woman to be and how they expect men and women to behave (Ellemers, 2018; Sprecher, 1992). This indicates the sociohistorical construction of gender roles and expectations is deeply ingrained in the Ethiopian culture.

During Haile Selassie's reign, there were efforts to improve gender equality in Ethiopia. The government introduced reforms aimed at addressing gender disparities in education and employment. For instance, the 1963 Education and Training Policy emphasized the importance of providing equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls, and the 1967 Labor Proclamation prohibited gender-based discrimination in employment (Burgess, 2013). One of the benefits of this period was expansion of education both in the capital and in the provinces for the daughters of the nobility and the higher officials in the imperial government. As a result



Female enrolment increased. However, girls' access to education was affected by different factors like social class differences, dominance of religious conservatism and paternalistic cultural norms (Semela et al., 2019). The dominance of religious conservatism and paternalistic cultural norms in Ethiopia has had a significant impact on girls' education. Traditional gender roles and religious conservatism have often limited girls' access to education in Ethiopia. These norms prioritized boys' education over girls', leading to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates for girls. Paternalistic cultural norms were another factor encouraging early marriages, which has further hindered girls' education. In this kind of paternalistic cultural norms, girls are married at a young age; they are less likely to continue their schooling. Because women's rights and opportunities remained constrained by traditional gender roles and societal norms, women were underrepresented in political and decision-making positions. Gender-based discrimination also persisted in various aspects of society. However, it was within the Emperor Haile Selassie's modernization efforts that the discourse around women's roles and rights gained prominence in Ethiopian society, laying the foundation for future advancements in gender equality.

The gender equality movement in Ethiopia began to gain momentum in the 1970s, with various women's organizations and activists advocating for women's rights and advancing gender equality. This movement aimed to address the prevailing gender inequities and challenges faced by women in Ethiopian society, including issues such as access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political participation (Ogato, 2013). The reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1918-1974) marked as a period of modernization in Ethiopia. The discourse about the role and right of women got attention during Emperor Haile Selassie (Semela et al., 2019). In that time, the country's education, political and economic life was influenced by Western-educated elites and many new ideas and concepts, involving those related to women's roles and rights. As a result, the gender equality movement in Ethiopia began to emerge with the establishment of the Ethiopian Women Welfare Association (EWWA) in 1935 under the patronage of Empress Menen, the wife of Emperor Haile Selassie. It was mainly composed of urban elites in Addis Ababa and was a good example of the beginning of organized women's activism in the country (Burgess, 2013). Its activities were initially limited to raising funds and sponsoring projects for urban women. Subsequently, other women's organizations began to emerge, marking the beginning of a more visible and vocal movement for gender equality in Ethiopia (Burgess, 2013).

However, (Burgess, 2013) failed to include the Oromo women's traditional organization and groups that exist within the Oromo community in Ethiopia even prior to the Ethiopian Women Welfare Association of 1935. The Oromo women's traditional organization specifically focused on women's issues and empowerment. The Oromo people are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, and they have a rich cultural heritage and traditional practices. These organizations are often community-based and operate within the framework of Oromo cultural values and traditions (Kumsa, 2011; Nicolas, 2018). For instance, Siiqqee Institution is a traditional institution among the Oromo people that plays a significant role in promoting women's rights and addressing gender-based issues. Siiqqee leaders, known as Siiqqee elders, are responsible for advocating for women's rights and resolving disputes related to women's issues (Debisa, 2022; Gerbi et al., 2019; Kumsa, 2011, 2014) (Kumsa, 2014). They provide a platform for women to come together, share experiences, and work towards improving their social, economic, and political status within the community. However, the Oromo women's organization did not get more attention from writers due to the political, cultural and economic marginalization of the Oromo people for about a century. In spite of the lack of attention from writers, the Oromo women's traditional informal organization such as Siiqqee continues to play

a crucial role in promoting women's rights, addressing gender-based issues, and empowering Oromo women within their communities for centuries.

### **5.3. The Roles of Modern Education in Boosting Gender Equality Movement in Ethiopia**

At the beginning of modern education, the beneficiaries were only male and access to modern education was limited for girls. With the expansion of education both in the capital and in the provinces, girls enrollment increased. Later the establishment of the first higher education (HE) institution, the then University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA), today Addis Ababa University in 1950, initiated more girls (Zewde, 2014) though a very limited number of females managed to enroll in the newly established HEI. Following the establishment of University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) the number of girls enrolled in schools dramatically increased (Semela et al., 2019). The organized effort against male domination in Ethiopia began following the events of the at the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) (Zewde, 2014) in (Semela, 2019). According to (ibid) a public debate was organized at UCAA under a highly controversial theme: "Higher Education for Women is Undesirable" in 1964. In this period females faced challenges of male domination and lack of access to resources to fight for their right (Semela et al., 2019). As a result, of this event, young female intellectuals contemplate the need to have an independent organization for women. Then World Wide Ethiopian Women Students Group (WWEWSG) emerged in 1971 in Europe (Burgess, 2013). The organization aimed to organize a worldwide Ethiopian women's Study Group to conduct systematic studies on women's oppression across various nationalities in Ethiopia. It later motivated the publication "Tanash Labadarit" (Reflecting the idea of progress and empowerment among Ethiopian women students) in 1972, signifying its commitment to women's studies and activism. The WWEWSG championed women's legal and political rights (Burgess, 2013; Mariam, 1994; Semela et al., 2019). The organization played a crucial role in addressing women's oppression in various Ethiopian Ethnicity, aiming for systematic studies and publications on the subject. The year following motivated by Communist ideology young generation including young girls desired for more freedom and equality (Zewde, 2014). In this regard, Communist ideologies have historically influenced youth movements globally, emphasizing social equality and challenging existing power structures. The Communist ideology introduced to Ethiopia in 1960s and 1970s and initiated the youths, both boys and girls to desire for more social equality and challenging existing male dominated power structures.

### **5.4. Gender Equality During Derg ( 1974 -1987)**

In 1974, after a wave of civil unrest in Addis Ababa led by students, teachers and taxi drivers, power was seized by a 'Co-coordinating Committee' of the Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia (PMAC), also known as the Derg. What began as a popular revolution by the people degenerated into a coup by armed forces (Vestal, 1996) and December 20th 1974, a socialist state was declared (Harbeson & Keller, 1990). Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam became Chairman of PMAC and Head of State. After the institution of socialism, Worker's Parties in many former socialist countries including Ethiopia gave special attention to the question of women and took practical steps to involve them. One of the major steps in Ethiopia was women organization and movement initiated by the former socialist state (Mariam, 1994). Derg regime was well known government with socialist political ideology in Ethiopia. The women's movement and Organization was broader framework of socialist movement in the context of the former socialist countries like Cuba, China, Soviet (Mariam, 1994). Thus, Derg socialist political ideology in Ethiopia repeatedly declared that women's oppression and exploitation would end when the feudal and capitalist system abolished together with its supporters and replaced by the socialist system (Bekana, 2020; Mariam, 1994). Among the effort made during

the Derg regime to address gender equality in Ethiopia was the separate organization for women both city and countryside. As a result the “Revolutionary Ethiopia Women’s Association (REWA)” was established on July 17, 1980. This was part of the framework of socialist movement in Ethiopian context. The Revolutionary Ethiopia Women’s Association (REWA) was considered by many writers a more systematic engagement and organisation of women at the grassroots level than the the women organization during Emperor Haileselassie I. This was a large state organisation, with member of almost million as listed on paper. The organisation contributed to the establishment of various development, projects such as handicrafts, retail shops, flour mills, and the expansion of kindergarten, aiming to produce a new generation with “revolutionary morale” (REWA 1982:24) in (Burgess, 2013). The Derg regime also saw the rise of women's activism and feminist movements, with organizations such as the Ethiopian Women's Association advocating for gender equality and women's rights.

Derg regime arrived with the slogan: “We struggle to eradicate Double Oppression!” and the women hoped that their situation will be improved. According to (Mariam, 1994) in the early days of the the Derge regime, sexual division labour and double oppression of women have been subjects of the media for quite a long time time. There was also a promises like, "a green light emerged for the equality and freedom of women" (REWA 1982) in (Mariam, 1994). However this women's organisations and movements were mainly manipulated by the state as in any socialit countries of the time. The persistent demands of women's movement through women's organisations has brought positive effect on the changing landscape of patriarchy. During the Derg Regime women issue to some degree included into the country’s Constitution, and in jobs within its institutions, although the number of women employed in higher government position were lower. Many writers however argued that, that the degree to which women benefited during Derg regime compared to the promises was was limited. Despite the promise, however in reality, situation of Ethiopian women during Derg did not change much (Bekana, 2020; Burgess, 2013; Haile, 1984; Mariam & Mariam, 1994; Semela et al., 2019). The Derg regime's focus on socialism and class struggle often overshadowed gender issues, and women's rights were not fully realized during this period. Despite the appearance of addressing women's issues, gender inequality intensified under Derg rule (Bekana, 2020; Mariam, 1994; Semela et al., 2019) and women continued to face discrimination and marginalization in various aspects of their lives. The Marxist-Leninist ideology of the ruling party emphasized gender equality and women's rights in words but the reality on the ground was often different. The government's policy on gender equality often did not translated into meaningful change in women's lives(Burgess, 2013; Mari, 2001; Mariam, 1994; Semela et al., 2019).

The Derg borrowed its ideology from competing Marxist parties, all of which arose from the student movement. Policy reforms in education have considerable potential to correct social inequities and assist in the building of more inclusive societies(Ihebuzor, 2014).With a Marxist agenda, the Derg regime sought to promote equality in education, advocating for the education of women alongside men Education is a crucial force in developing in the individual a set of attitudes appropriate to life in the "modern" world(Howard-Merriam, 1979). It initiates a general openness to the idea of change and egalitarian orientation. Thus education contributes to the promote social equality regardless of gender and build inclusive society. Derg regime in Ethiopia had a significant impact on women's access to education. The regime's policies, including the nationalization of education and the promotion of Marxist ideology, aimed to increase access to education for all, including women(Wondemetegn, 2016). This had contributed in increasing awareness of men and women towards social equality in general and facilitated the women’s struggle for their right. Before Derg's rule, the Ethiopian education system had been characterized by a distinct urban bias, with the majority of educational

resources concentrated in urban areas and the needs of the rural population largely neglected. The Derg recognized education's pivotal role in national development and initiated a comprehensive campaign to combat illiteracy and promote education. Education can play a significant role in shaping gender perceptions and attitudes of the society (Uzun et al., 2017). The Regime sought to reshape the country's educational landscape, with the goal of promoting equity and accessibility for all citizens. Overall, although there were significant challenges and limitations, Derg era marked a significant period for the development of women's activism and the promotion of gender equality in Ethiopia. However, deep-rooted gender stereotypes and cultural factors have hindered women's involvement in education (Kabeta & Gebremeskel, 2013). The Derg regime policies and programs designed to promote gender equality and women's rights is considered by many writers as the foundation for future efforts to address gender disparities and women empowerment in Ethiopia.

### **5.5. Gender Equality Issues Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia from 1991-to Date**

Soon after the downfall of the Derg in 1991 the Transitional Government of Ethiopia was introduced with a new political and socio-economic orientation. The collective efforts of liberation movements such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) marked the end of the Derg regime in Ethiopia in 1991. After the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, Ethiopia underwent a period of transition to democracy as a result of long years of armed struggle by those collective efforts of liberation movements. The Derg regime was blamed for exploiting the women's question to its own political advantage. The TPLF led party formed united to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Women members were heavily involved in what became the EPRDF through the armed, political and propaganda struggle against the Derg regime (Bizuneh, 2001). Women actively participated in the armed opposition against Derg regime, contributing to the overthrow the regime in 1991 (Bizuneh, 2001b; Burgess, 2013). However most writers argued that the collective efforts of liberation movements against Derg regime such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were not importantly different from the Derg regime with regard to gender equality issue (Bizuneh, 2001b). This was supported by Kumssa (1998) on the internal workings of the Oromom Liberation Front (OLF) reveals the predominance of patriarchal gender relations with respect to female participation in the OLF's leadership. Therefore although the liberation movements played important roles in overthrowing the Derg, the emphasis on gender equality within these movements were not significantly differed from the Derg's approach during the struggle. The Influences of traditional gender role and patriarchal culture of their Ethiopian society was evident even in the armed struggle for liberation where male fighters lack readiness to allow women to participate in decision-making and leadership position.

The new political party was composed of different Ethnicity Established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia which later formed Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This new Government introduced Democratic political structure in Ethiopia which focused on gender equality a priority (Burgess, 2013). This was because the party, was mainly made up of communist-oriented, radical young men and women who studied at the University College of Addis Ababa and had been involving in Ethiopian student Movement of the 1960 & 1970s (Semela et al., 2019). The members of the (EPRDF) part were well aware of the ongoing struggle against gender inequality and male domination (Zewde, 2014). During the armed struggle against Derg regime, EPRDF members in general were composed of women fighters sharing about a third of all its fighters (Burgess, 2013). This can provide the information that because large number of women involved as fighters in the struggle against Derg and the

new part (EPRDF) gave top priority for gender quality in their policy. Their communist ideological orientation which was one of the central characteristics of socialist revolutions in the former USSR, Cuba, and China was another main justification why gender equality issues got top priority. This was also the case in Derg regime even though the Derg used this ideology to serve its political purposes (Mariam & Mariam, 1994).

The Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front inaugurated the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in August 1995 after series of election. This new Ethiopian Constitution was designed based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and full recognition to the rights and liberties of people and individuals clearly stipulated in the Document (The Federal Government of Ethiopia, 1995). Based on the constitution National Policy on women introduced and a structure of Women's Affairs Offices (WAO) established. Women's Affairs Offices (WAO established at, Federal, Regional, zonal and Woreda level government department through decentralization ((Burgess, 2013). In FDRE regime, a number of women's civil society organizations have established in the country, among which the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) was the well-known and first (Bekana, 2020; Burgess, 2013; Semela et al., 2019). The others like the Addis Ababa Women's Association (AAWA), the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) and the Organization Against Gender-Based Violence (Burgess, 2013). National institutional machineries were established at federal, regional and Woreda (district) levels to implement the policy. The Women's Affairs Office has been reestablished as a full-fledged Ministry in October 2005 with the duties and responsibilities of ensuring participation and empowerment of women in political, economical, social and cultural matters.

We can conclude that most armed political opposition groups against the Derg had significant number of female fighters resulting the first-time move to introduce the first "National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW)" in September 1993. The subsequently the first education policy Education and training Policy happened a year later in 1994 was the first education policy where the issue of gender inequality in Ethiopian education system has been clearly articulated. Later on, new proclamations and policies started to emerge to specifically address gender issues in all education sectors. The current Ethiopia has shown a strong political commitment to promoting gender equality and women's rights. Ethiopia has ratified various international conventions aimed at gender equality and women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA), the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Solemn Declaration on gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). The commitments to gender equality are also clearly outlined in the country's laws and policies arising from the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The current Ethiopian government has undertaken several initiatives to address gender-based disparities in education. Progress has been made with regard to achieving the MDGs ("Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education" and "Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women) and implementing the Beijing commitments. The National Education Policy, which is prepared in the spirit of achieving the Universal Primary Education by 2015, recognizes the importance of affirmative action in enhancing girls'/ women's participation in decision-making. Education Sector Development Programs, which are prepared on the basis of the "Education for All" (EFA) initiative formulated at the Jomtien (Thailand) World Conference, are being implemented throughout the country with the objective of achieving gender equality in education by 2015. The recent work by (Semela & Tsige, 2023) highlighted that the Micro-level policies enacted from the mid-1990s to the early 2020s are diverging from the constitutional pledge to address historical injustices against women. This shift is evident in various sectors, including education. There is no coherence between system

and institutional level policies aims to redress gender inequality and inequity in higher education. A number of policies regarding gender equality but women's access to and control of productive resources, information, training and education, employment and in decision-making are limited in Ethiopia (Darartu et al., 2016). Thus significant policy directions to come up with viable gendered instruments at the system and institutional levels is desirable. The government's dedicated efforts have led to progress in reducing gender disparity in education. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in achieving full gender equality in Ethiopia: (Berhane, 2005). Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, is still prevalent (Molla, 2013) and women continue to face barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Factors contributing to gender inequality in education include political instability, poverty, negative cultural values, and sexual harassment (Victor & Ombati, 2012). Traditional gender norms and cultural practices continue to influence societal attitudes towards women (Gashaw et al., n.d.). There are gender gap in terms of political empowerment, educational leadership both at lower and higher level of education. The number Female teachers and students are lower compared to male in higher education institution. While there have been some improvements in recent years, Ethiopia still ranks low in terms of gender equality indicators among sub saharan countries. Achieving true gender equality in the country, requires ongoing efforts, policy changes, and societal shifts to challenge and dismantle traditional patriarchal norms and historically installed gender systems of the society.

## **6. Result and Discussion**

The aim of this study was to understand the role of modern education in the historical development of gender equality in Ethiopia over time and political-ideological change. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research method was used to analyse various relevant literature on the development of gender equality in Ethiopia. To this end, various documents related to gender relations, the development of modern education and various political ideological changes were selected based on their authenticity and consistency with the objective of this study. From the historical documents, we found that Ethiopian society in ancient times was patriarchal and men held power in both public and private spheres. However, over time, Ethiopia has made progress in promoting gender equality and empowering women. With each passing year and political ideology, Ethiopia is making progress in its commitment to gender equality as the country recognizes the importance of empowering women and creating a more inclusive society. In short, Ethiopia has made progress in gender equality over the years. The beginning of gender equality movement in the country started with inauguration of first modern girls' school in 1931 and organizations such as the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association were established to improve women's social and economic welfare through educational initiatives. These efforts have contributed significantly to advancing gender equality in educational institutions and in the development of the legal framework. This effort grew up to the level that the current Ethiopian government commitment to gender equality by signing global agreements on women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA), the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). The commitments to gender equality are also clearly outlined in the country's laws and policies arising from the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). Thus, should be recognized that the current political establishment has introduced important policies and programs that address women's concerns. Thus, gender inequality and discrimination were

deeply entrenched in Ethiopia, but the country now seems to be at an encouraging historical juncture to address this gender inequality and discrimination.

## **7. Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that Ethiopian women were excluded from traditional and modern education in the past, resulting in a significant gender education gap in the country. However, the introduction of modern education brought about significant political and social changes that led to progress in gender equality over the years. Thus, even if political and ideological change played a decisive role, the path to overcoming gender inequality appears to be closely linked to a modern higher level of education. Women are better off if they can achieve the highest possible level of education in a comparable ratio to men. However there are still significant challenges due to deeply ingrained cultural norms and traditions that perpetuate gender inequality. These deep-rooted cultural norms and traditions limit women's ability to fully participate in and benefit from the country's emerging social, economic, political and educational development. Therefore, it is necessary to challenge and change the societal attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality in the country through gender-responsive education. This could be done through the development and implementation of policies that promote equal opportunities and rights for all genders.

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