


**EDUCAÇÃO E EMPODERAMENTO: A ESCOLA FORMAL E NÃO FORMAL NA
CONSTRUÇÃO DA AUTONOMIA FEMININA**

**EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT: FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL SCHOOL IN
THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE AUTONOMY**

**EDUCACIÓN Y EMPODERAMIENTO: ESCUELA FORMAL Y NO FORMAL EN
LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA AUTONOMÍA FEMENINA**

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RESUMO

O presente artigo investiga a contribuição da educação formal e não formal para o empoderamento feminino, enfatizando seu papel na promoção da autonomia e na busca pela igualdade de gênero. Analisar essas modalidades de ensino pode ajudar a desconstruir estereótipos e fortalecer a presença feminina em diversas esferas. Por meio de uma revisão da literatura e da análise de casos práticos, avaliamos o impacto positivo da educação na autoestima e nas habilidades de liderança das mulheres, além de identificar e discutir os obstáculos enfrentados para o acesso e a permanência delas em instituições educacionais. Os resultados revelam que, embora a educação seja um caminho eficaz para a emancipação das mulheres, ainda existem barreiras significativas a serem superadas para que elas possam realizar seu pleno potencial. Isso reforça a urgência de políticas públicas e iniciativas sociais que promovam uma educação inclusiva e equitativa. Dessa forma, a educação se configura como um elemento essencial para o empoderamento, ampliando as oportunidades e fortalecendo a capacidade das mulheres de desafiar e transformar padrões socioculturais que restringem seu desenvolvimento integral.

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Palavras-chave: Educação Formal. Educação Não Formal. Empoderamento Feminino. Autonomia. Igualdade de Gênero.

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the contribution of formal and non-formal education to female empowerment, emphasizing its role in promoting autonomy and the pursuit of gender equality. Analyzing these teaching methods can help deconstruct stereotypes and strengthen the female presence in different spheres. Through a literature review and case study analysis, we assessed the positive impact of education on women's self-esteem and leadership skills, in addition to identifying and discussing the obstacles faced in accessing and remaining in educational institutions. The results reveal that although education is an effective path to women's empowerment, there are still significant barriers to overcome before they can realize their full potential. This reinforces the urgency of public policies and social initiatives that promote inclusive and equitable education. In this way, education is an essential element for empowerment, expanding opportunities and strengthening women's ability to challenge and transform sociocultural patterns that restrict their integral development.

Keywords: Formal Education. Non-Formal Education. Women's Empowerment. Autonomy. Gender Equality.

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga la contribución de la educación formal y no formal al empoderamiento femenino, destacando su papel en la promoción de la autonomía y la búsqueda de la igualdad de género. El análisis de estos tipos de educación puede contribuir a deconstruir estereotipos y fortalecer la presencia de las mujeres en diversos ámbitos. A través de una revisión bibliográfica y el análisis de casos prácticos, evaluamos el impacto positivo de la educación en la autoestima y las habilidades de liderazgo de las mujeres, además de identificar y analizar los obstáculos que enfrentan para acceder y permanecer en las instituciones educativas. Los resultados revelan que, si bien la educación es una vía eficaz para la emancipación de las mujeres, aún existen importantes barreras por superar para que puedan desarrollar todo su potencial. Esto refuerza la urgencia de políticas públicas e iniciativas sociales que promuevan una educación inclusiva y equitativa. De esta manera, la educación se configura como un elemento esencial para el empoderamiento, ampliando las oportunidades y fortaleciendo la capacidad de las mujeres para desafiar y transformar los patrones socioculturales que limitan su desarrollo integral.

Palabras clave: Educación formal. Educación no formal. Empoderamiento femenino. Autonomía. Igualdad de género.



INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there have been considerable advances in the discussion and implementation of policies aimed at gender equality. However, the trajectory towards women's full autonomy is still hampered by social, cultural, and economic barriers. Education stands out as a key strategy to change this reality, playing a vital role in both the individual and collective development of women. Thus, this article seeks to reflect on how formal and non-formal education influences the construction of female autonomy, evaluating its effects on women's empowerment and participation in society.

Female empowerment is understood as a process by which women gain greater control over their lives, becoming protagonists of their own destiny. This process involves the development of skills and knowledge, the achievement of rights, and the expansion of opportunities for social and economic participation. Amid historical and structural inequalities, education proves to be a powerful tool to promote these achievements, providing women with the resources they need to challenge and overcome the barriers that restrict their potential.

Formal education, which is characterized by its institutional structure, defined curricula and certifications, is recognized for offering essential technical and theoretical skills. However, it often operates in an environment that still perpetuates values and practices that can reproduce gender inequalities, thus necessitating critical and inclusive approaches. On the other hand, non-formal education, which takes place outside the traditional standards, provides a flexible and innovative space where women can explore their skills freely and adapted to their realities. Examples of this modality include community programs, capacity-building workshops, and online learning initiatives, which are shown to be effective in complementing formal training, especially for those who face difficulties in accessing regular education.

In this article, we seek to analyze the ways in which these two educational approaches favor the development of self-esteem and leadership among women, providing the possible tools for them to become protagonists of their own stories. However, the process of women's education and empowerment faces considerable obstacles, such as inequality in access and permanence, gender prejudices and social pressure. Therefore, it is essential to identify and promote effective practices and successful initiatives that positively impact the lives of girls and women.

In this context, this study highlights the complexity of education as an instrument of female autonomy. By investigating the relationship between schooling and empowerment, we have the chance to challenge entrenched sociocultural norms that have historically

restricted women's full development. In addition, we propose reflections on the creation of public policies that encourage the inclusion of gender perspectives in curricula, as well as programs that expand access to lifelong learning.

Thus, the article supports the thesis that education, both formal and non-formal, is one of the main means for female empowerment. By making knowledge available and expanding opportunities, education strengthens women's ability to author their own narratives, thus playing a crucial role in promoting gender equality. This reflection is based on a dialogue with the existing literature and on the results of empirical research that demonstrate the transformative effects of education on women's lives. In this way, we hope to contribute to a more critical and comprehensive view of the possible strategies to advance in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

To understand the importance of education in promoting women's autonomy, it is essential to examine the concepts of formal and non-formal education, as well as their peculiar contributions to women's personal and social development. Formal education is typically associated with structured teaching, offered by institutions such as schools and universities. It prepares individuals for the job market by providing a theoretical and technical basis that can be used in various professional areas. Freire (2000) highlights that education must go beyond the mere transmission of content, focusing on the formation of critical individuals who can transform their reality. With regard to the training of women, this implies the need to incorporate gender issues into educational practices, promoting an environment of equality and mutual respect.

Non-formal education, on the other hand, takes place in less structured contexts, allowing for a more practical and tailored approach to learning. Sérgio Haddad (2000) argues that non-formal education complements traditional education, especially by developing skills and competencies not completely addressed in conventional schools. In non-formal education programs, women often have the opportunity to discuss topics relevant to their lives, such as rights, reproductive health, and leadership, in an environment that favors community interaction and the sharing of experiences.

These two forms of teaching are essential for female empowerment, each bringing different contributions. Formal education is seen as a pathway to economic opportunity, while non-formal education favors personal and social development. For the author Gohn (2010), both approaches act in synergy to enhance the effects on strengthening female autonomy and tend to favor gender equality.

Another relevant aspect in the discussion about education as an instrument of empowerment is the social construction of gender and its effect on women's access and



permanence in educational environments. Joan Scott (1995) argues that gender is a category of historical analysis that shapes the distribution of educational opportunities, often favoring men over women. Therefore, understanding gender dynamics is crucial for the formulation of truly inclusive and equitable educational policies.

Education, therefore, is configured as a space of resistance and change, where it is possible to question stereotypes and create narratives. Bell Hooks (2013) argues that education has the ability to challenge oppressive norms by providing women with the tools they can to question and redefine their positions in society. This form of resistance manifests itself not only in classrooms, but also in non-formal contexts, such as discussion groups, workshops, and community activities, which encourage women's active participation in the search for solutions to their lives.

Despite the clear benefits, the path to female empowerment through education faces several challenges. Institutional barriers, cultural biases, and financial limitations often make it difficult for women to access and stay in educational settings. Segato (2014) emphasizes the importance of combating these difficulties through educational policies that promote inclusion and the appreciation of differences, ensuring that all people, regardless of gender, have their needs and potentialities recognized and developed.

In summary, the literature review presented reinforces that both formal and non-formal education play a crucial role in women's empowerment. It offers the indispensable resources for women to maximize their potential, breaking down the barriers imposed by traditional gender norms. This transformative potential is essential for building a more just and egalitarian society. The latter's contributions highlight the need for a study of involvement in continuous educational practices that are inclusive, critical and focused on social transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach, based on an exhaustive literature review. Qualitative research is appropriate when it seeks to understand complex contexts and social phenomena, such as female empowerment through education. Collins (2019) highlights that the qualitative methodology, by allowing the analysis of narratives and the understanding of women's experiences in education, can bring deep insights into the effectiveness of various pedagogical practices.

Data were collected through a systematic review of the existing literature on formal education, non-formal education, and women's empowerment. Databases such as Scielo, Google Scholar and specialized journals in the area of education and gender studies were

consulted, focusing on publications in the last five years to ensure the timeliness of the information. In addition, classic contributions by authors such as Paulo Freire and Tadeu de Sousa Santos, whose theories are fundamental for the critical understanding of education as a tool for social transformation, were included.

For data analysis, we used an interpretative approach, as suggested by Bardin (2018), focusing on the identification of common patterns and themes that emerge in the reviewed texts. The analysis involved the search for evidence on the impact of education on women's lives, emphasizing aspects such as self-esteem, leadership skills, and the deconstruction of gender stereotypes. From this analysis, we seek to synthesize how formal and non-formal education contribute to female empowerment, as well as to identify the main challenges faced in this process.

The reviewed literature highlights the crucial role of formal education institutions in promoting women's empowerment. According to Freire (1996), education is an act of freedom that enables individuals to transform their reality. Recent studies, such as those by Smith et al. (2023), show that access to formal education expands women's power of choice and strengthens their presence in the labor market, promoting gender equality. Non-formal education, in turn, has proved to be equally powerful in the process of female empowerment. Community educational programs and specific workshops have provided women with the opportunity to develop practical skills and strengthen support networks. According to Fernandes (2021), non-formal education offers a safe space for the exchange of experiences and the construction of new female identities.

Despite the advances, studies point to persistent barriers that hinder women's full access to education. Socioeconomic inequalities, gender discrimination, and domestic responsibilities are some of the challenges highlighted by Santos (2020) as factors that still limit women's permanence and ascension in the school environment. The need for more inclusive public policies and specific support programs is widely mentioned as essential for overcoming these obstacles.

This study adopts a qualitative methodology focusing on literature review, an appropriate strategy for the exploration of complex social phenomena such as female empowerment through different modalities of education. Qualitative research is chosen for its ability to provide a deep understanding of human experiences and dynamic social contexts, essential for the analysis of the educational impact on female autonomy processes.

The choice for the bibliographic review method is due to the desire to systematically map and analyze the existing academic contributions on the subject, allowing an integrated

synthesis of the various theoretical and empirical perspectives on the interaction between formal and non-formal education and empowerment. According to Gil (2017), "the bibliographic review stands out as a valuable method for the construction of theoretical foundation, offering a robust and up-to-date overview of contemporary discussions".

The literature review was carried out through the careful selection of scientific articles, books and theses published on Brazilian academic platforms in the last five years, which guarantees the contemporaneity of the study. However, we cannot fail to use authors such as: Freire and Minayo, who are references when talking about emancipation and empowerment using education as a tool, and when talking about methodology. Therefore, we seek to address publications in the field of education and gender studies, with an emphasis on research that explores the emancipatory role of education from the perspective of feminist theories. In addition, we integrate classics of critical pedagogy and Brazilian educational thought, such as the reflections proposed by Paulo Freire and Tadeu de Sousa Santos, whose works offer a robust theoretical foundation for this discussion.

The qualitative methodology allows the interpretative analysis of the collected data, highlighting recurring themes and patterns that emerge from the selected sources. According to Minayo (2018), "the interpretation of data in qualitative research requires attention to the context and meaning of the information", allowing for a richer understanding of the dynamics underlying women's empowerment through education.

In this study, we used content analysis techniques to identify and categorize the main ideas emerging from the reviewed texts. This approach is particularly useful for outlining the different forms of education that influence women's empowerment, as well as for highlighting the barriers and challenges faced by women in diverse educational contexts. Content analysis thus enables "a systematic approach to reduce and interpret textual data through the identification of themes, patterns, and meanings" (Bardin, 2018).

In addition, the literature review was structured to ensure a comprehensive and plural view of the available evidence, considering the diversity of experiences and contexts of the participants in the Brazilian scenario. This approach seeks to avoid hasty generalizations, recognizing the intersectionalities that permeate the educational experiences of women in Brazil, such as race, class, and geographic location. Finally, it is worth noting that the methodology adopted was guided by an ethical and critical commitment to review and present information faithfully and transparently, promoting an academic discussion that respects and values the diversity of women's voices and experiences.



The set of selected and analyzed works seeks to contribute to the construction of knowledge that is not only theoretical, but also applicable, helping the formulation of public policies and educational practices that effectively promote equality and autonomy for all women. In this way, it is hoped that the insights generated through this literature review will not only illuminate academic and political discussions around education and women's empowerment, but also serve as a basis for future research that deepens and broadens the understanding of this vital topic in contemporary society.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this study focused on the comprehensive and systematic review of relevant academic literature, which included articles, theses, dissertations, and books connected to the topic of education and women's empowerment. The collection process was meticulously planned in order to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of information sources, thus ensuring the depth and comprehensiveness necessary for a robust critical analysis. Initially, we delimited the temporal scope of the publications for the last five years, with the aim of capturing the current state of discussions and advances in the field of study. However, we do not rule out the inclusion of classic and fundamental works that offer essential theoretical support for understanding the subject, such as Paulo Freire's writings on critical pedagogy. Thus, it was possible to align the historical and contemporary context of these important issues.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected materials, the sources were extracted from recognized academic databases, such as the *SciELO* portal, Google Scholar, and theses and dissertations available in catalogs of Brazilian federal universities. The selection was guided by specific keywords such as "female empowerment", "*formal education*", "*non-formal education*", "*female autonomy*" and "gender equality". This systematic approach made it possible to survey more than one hundred initial references, which were later filtered based on criteria of relevance, originality, and impact in the field investigated.

Among the practices used in data collection, exploratory reading stands out, which helped to identify key documents, followed by analytical and critical reading, which enabled a deeper understanding of the discussions presented. Bardin (2018) reinforces that "a critical and directed reading of the sources is essential to identify the most significant contributions that are consistent with the objectives of the research". Throughout the process, we seek to ensure the inclusion of different geographical, racial, and socioeconomic perspectives, reflecting the multifaceted reality of education for women in



Brazil. This was particularly important to respect and validate the diverse voices and experiences that make up the Brazilian context, avoiding biases that could mask or minimize the distinctive experiences faced by women from different peoples and communities, especially those belonging to minorities or marginalized groups.

In addition to empirical and theoretical articles, the collection included concrete case studies, which provided practical examples of how formal and non-formal education positively impacted women in their communities. Such examples were essential to reinforce the conclusions derived from the theoretical review, illustrating the effective solutions and common obstacles faced in the implementation of educational programs. Another crucial factor during data collection was the consideration of current public policies and their implications for women's empowerment through education. We review official documents that describe government initiatives and their assessments, seeking to understand gaps and opportunities for improvement. For example, we analyzed the impact of initiatives such as the Thousand Women Program, a Brazilian public policy that offers technical and professional education as a means of social inclusion, as discussed by Lima (2020).

In summary, the data collection process was exhaustive and comprehensive, with the objective of providing a solid and varied basis for the analysis proposed in this study. The sources collected and analyzed were carefully selected to ensure that both the methods and the results could be considered reliable, valid, and relevant to the academic community and the general public interested in the intersection of education and women's empowerment.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the collected data was carried out based on a qualitative approach, using content analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes and meanings emerging in the reviewed sources. Bardin (2018) suggests that content analysis is an effective methodology for decoding messages contained in texts, allowing a deep interpretation of discourses and ideologies, especially relevant in education and gender studies.

During the analysis, the materials were organized into thematic categories created from the research objectives, such as the impact of formal education on women's empowerment, the relevance of non-formal education in specific contexts, and the main obstacles faced by women in accessing and remaining in educational environments. This categorization allowed for a more systematic examination of the evidence and facilitated the identification of recurring trends in academic discussions.



An interpretative analytical approach was adopted, where the content of the works was examined not only for their explicit statements, but also for their implications and implicit contexts. This phase of the study involved a critical reading of the data, fostering the identification of contradictions or gaps in the evidence presented. As recognized by Minayo (2018), the interpretive method is vital to understand the deeper meanings and interrelationships between the data, enriching the understanding of the social phenomena analyzed.

The analysis also benefited from triangulation of the data, comparing evidence from different sources to ensure consistency and validity of interpretations. Cross-referencing information derived from theoretical articles, empirical studies, and public policy provided a robust framework to confirm the findings and ensure that the conclusions derived were well-founded. This triangulation was especially important in addressing complex issues such as the impact of gender inequalities in education.

In addition, a critical analysis of the educational and social policies analyzed was included, evaluating their short- and long-term effects on women's empowerment. The review of government policies, as mentioned by Lima (2020), provided valuable insights into the effectiveness and limitations of institutional efforts in promoting a more equitable educational environment. The data were then contextualized in the light of feminist and educational theories, using the principles of critical pedagogy of authors such as Paulo Freire. This theoretical contextualization allowed a deeper analysis of the power dynamics that influence access to education and its repercussions in terms of female autonomy. Freire's ideas about education as a practice of freedom offered a potent conceptual framework to explore how both formal and non-formal education modalities can facilitate or hinder empowerment.

In addition to identifying trends, the analysis sought to highlight examples of good practices and innovative initiatives that have the potential to be replicated in other contexts. This analytical practice is important for offering practical, evidence-based recommendations to policymakers, educators, and social activists. In summary, the analysis of the data was guided by a commitment to academic depth and rigor, providing a rich interpretation of the sources and integration of different perspectives and contexts. The approach adopted sought not only to synthesize existing knowledge, but also to add value to the academic and social debate on women's empowerment through education. The resulting analysis seeks to contribute to the construction of a fuller and more developed understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the educational field in relation to women's rights and aspirations.



RESULTS

IMPACT OF FORMAL EDUCATION

The analysis of the results obtained in the research highlights the significant contribution of formal education to female empowerment, although it also reveals persistent challenges that need to be faced in order for its full effectiveness to be achieved. Formal education institutions, such as schools and universities, have played a central role in transforming women's lives, promoting not only the development of technical and academic skills, but also expanding their opportunities for social and economic participation.

The positive influence of formal education on women's empowerment is supported by several studies that show how women's schooling results in higher rates of employability, economic autonomy and decision-making capacity. According to a report by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), there is a direct correlation between women's educational level and their insertion in the qualified labor market (INEP, 2020). This reinforces the idea that formal education not only opens doors to professional opportunities but also contributes to gender equality by allowing women to challenge traditional social and economic constraints.

However, the analysis also reveals that the mere presence of women in formal educational settings is not enough to guarantee their full empowerment. As discussed by Pessoa (2019), the way the curriculum is structured and implemented can sustain gender stereotypes rather than challenge them. Formal education often reflects the inequalities of power that exist in society, and without a critical approach, institutions can inadvertently perpetuate discriminatory norms. This is observable in the unequal representation of genders in traditionally male fields of study, such as the exact sciences and engineering, where women still face significant barriers in terms of access and success.

In addition, the analysis highlights the importance of creating inclusive educational environments, where women of diverse identities and backgrounds can feel represented and supported. A study by Graupe and Grossi (2014) indicates that the absence of effective policies to deal with issues such as harassment, racial and gender discrimination in educational institutions contributes to school dropout among women, particularly those from minority groups. "Thus, for formal education to be a true agent of empowerment, it is essential to address these gaps and implement policies that promote inclusion and diversity." (GRAUPE and GROSSI, 2014, p. 107)

Another relevant finding is the role of teachers and school administrators in the empowerment process. The critical training of educators is crucial, as pointed out by Silva, Rossato and Oliveira (2024), when they state that "teachers aware of their socio-

educational role can effectively mediate the deconstruction of stereotypes and promote a more equitable and inclusive education". Training programs that encourage pedagogical practices centered on gender equality are vital to transform formal education into a truly emancipatory space.

In conclusion, the analysis of the impact of formal education on women's empowerment indicates that, although it is a powerful tool for social transformation, its effectiveness depends on its continuous evolution as a critical and inclusive structure. Educational institutions must commit not only to access but to the quality and equity of the education they provide. This implies not only rethinking curricular content, but also reformulating institutional practices that ensure the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of academic and social life. Formal education, therefore, has the potential to be not only a mechanism for advancement, but an engine of change for a more just and egalitarian society (SILVA, ROSSATO and OLIVEIRA, 2024. p. 455).

IMPACT OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The analysis of the results, considering the impact of non-formal education, reveals that this educational modality plays a substantial and complementary role in the promotion of female empowerment. Non-formal education, characterized by its flexibility and adaptive capacity to the specific realities of women in their communities, emerges as a powerful strategy for developing practical and social skills that are often not contemplated in the formal curriculum.

For Souza et al (2023), a central characteristic of non-formal education is its ability to respond quickly to local and contextual needs, offering more personalized and immediate learning. Compared to the formal system, non-formal education is often delivered in less hierarchical settings, which can provide a more inclusive and empathetic learning experience. This form of education often encompasses activities such as workshops, short courses, community training programs, and support groups, which are crucial in facilitating women's access to practical knowledge and personal development.

Santos (2020) highlights that, in the Brazilian context, non-formal education programs have proven effective in enabling women for entrepreneurship, community leadership, and political participation. This is due to its ability to operate outside the constraints of conventional education, allowing for the creation of more accessible and less formal education spaces. Another vital advantage of non-formal education is its ability to create and sustain support networks among participants. These networks are described by Cunha (2019, p. 58) as "a critical element in promoting collective empowerment," as they



allow women to share experiences, resources, and strategies to overcome common challenges, thus strengthening their capacity for joint action.

For Monteiro and Villa Verde (2022), this solidarity is often motivating, encouraging participants to believe in their capabilities and to pursue meaningful change in their communities. However, despite its numerous advantages, non-formal education faces constraints that impact its full potential. The sustainability and consistency of non-formal educational programmes often depend on limited funding and variable support from NGOs and public initiatives. In addition, the legitimacy of credentials acquired in non-formal contexts can be questioned in formal labor markets and educational institutions, perpetuating a type of marginalization that minimizes the learning and development efforts obtained through these avenues.

In view of this, the analysis points to the need for greater recognition and appreciation of non-formal education by public policies and social structures. This institutional integration would enhance not only the legitimacy of certificates issued by non-formal education, but would also attract more investments to expand and sustain these programs. Collaboration between the formal and non-formal sectors is essential to maximise educational benefits for women. From the field activities observed and analyzed, the alignment and reciprocity between the modalities allow for an educational continuum that strengthens individual and collective capacities, creating a multiplying impact on the lives of women and their communities.

In summary, non-formal education plays a significant role in strengthening and empowering women, serving as a crucial bridge between theoretical learning and practical application in everyday environments. For women to achieve complete autonomy and active citizenship, it is imperative that this form of education be recognized and supported in an integral way. This step not only values the diverse learning that women have acquired, but also solidifies their position as agents of change capable of positively influencing their own lives and those of their communities. The joint valorization of formal and non-formal education is, therefore, a vital foundation for the promotion of a more equitable and just society. (Monteiro and Villa Verde, 2022)

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Despite the advances evidenced in the positive impact of formal and non-formal education in promoting women's empowerment, the analysis of the results highlights the persistence of significant obstacles that still need to be addressed. These challenges are complex and interconnected, influencing numerous facets of women's lives and limiting



their educational access and progress. That said, we infer that one of the most evident challenges concerns the socioeconomic barriers faced by many women in Brazil. According to the 2021 National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), poverty is still one of the main factors that restrict women's access to education. Economic inequalities directly affect women's ability to attend schools and additional courses, as a lack of resources can force many to prioritize low-paid jobs or domestic work over education.

Domestic and care responsibilities also pose significant obstacles, particularly for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. They often take on most of the unpaid work in their families, which reduces the time available for participation in educational courses. Studies carried out by Gomes (2020) reveal that "the workload of domestic work is an important vector of inequality in education", directly affecting women's ability to seek and complete formal and non-formal studies. In this way, we also have another critical challenge is gender discrimination and gender violence, present both in domestic and institutional contexts. In the educational environment, cases of harassment, prejudice, and discrimination continue to occur, often not being reported due to a climate of impunity and lack of institutional support, as highlighted by Silva Mendes (2022). These factors end up creating a hostile environment that discourages and keeps women away from continuing their educational journeys.

The analysis of the results also highlights the need to reformulate curricular practices beyond the mere inclusion of more women in courses traditionally dominated by men. The often superficial approach to gender issues in formal curricula fails to address the roots of systemic inequalities. Educators and administrators are often not adequately trained to address diversity and equality directly and effectively, making it a substantial challenge for educational transformation towards greater gender equity. In addition, Souza et al (2023), consider that cultural restrictions and social norms, which perpetuate patriarchal gender stereotypes, are invisible but powerful barriers against female education. Women face difficulties in challenging traditional roles expected by their families and communities, which often results in internal dilemmas and social pressures that discourage the active pursuit of transformative educational experiences. (SOUZA et al, 2023, p. 6).

Finally, the lack of robust public policies and incentives can be seen as one of the biggest challenges in promoting education as a tool for empowerment. Educational policies that fail to provide adequate financial, logistical and psychological support to women, especially those from remote or marginalized communities, perpetuate existing inequalities, as Brasília (2025) points out. Overcoming these challenges requires multifaceted strategies, which include increasing investment in gender equality policies in education, promoting



inclusive and equitable learning environments, and strengthening support networks for women in educational and community settings. Only through a coordinated and sustained effort can a future be envisioned in which quality education is effectively within the reach of all women, enabling them not only to dream but to fully realize their potential.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to investigate the essential relevance of formal and non-formal education in women's empowerment, emphasizing their contribution to autonomy and the search for gender equality in different contexts. The analysis highlighted both the opportunities and the limitations of these teaching modalities, highlighting the need for innovative and integrated strategies to face the challenges identified. Formal education, while vital for the development of academic and professional skills, faces the challenge of not only ensuring access but also fostering a truly inclusive and equitable environment. It is necessary to reassess institutional and curricular elements to avoid the continuation of gender inequalities, which are often exacerbated by cultural and systemic barriers. Reforms are essential for curricula and pedagogical practices to demonstrate a genuine commitment to equity, as pointed out by several researchers involved in the analysis.

Non-formal education stands out for its ability to offer an additional pathway, often more aligned with women's needs. With its flexible and communitarian nature, it is a crucial space for the development of social and practical skills, promoting empowerment through the strengthening of support networks and overcoming challenging local situations. However, it is essential that these programs ensure sustainability and formal recognition to enhance their impact.

The challenges identified are socioeconomic inequalities, disproportionate domestic burdens, discrimination and the absence of specific public policies, concrete barriers that require comprehensive and well-coordinated interventions. Overcoming these barriers requires not only improvements in the education sector, but also intersectoral actions that integrate health, economic development, and gender equality into public policies. The final conclusions emphasize the urgency of investments in education that promote genuine social transformation and the eradication of discriminatory practices.

It is also necessary to point out that the relevance of community engagement in building environments that promote mutual respect and gender equality is essential. Families, in turn, must be empowered to support their daughters' educational goals, while governments and nongovernmental organizations can join efforts to strengthen initiatives that span the education sector and beyond.



For education to function as an effective instrument of empowerment, it needs to be not only accessible, but also meaningful and transformative. This transformation requires ongoing dialogue among diverse stakeholders and a firm commitment from all sectors to foster educational environments that celebrate diversity and empower all women to reach their full potential. As indicated in the contributions of Freire and other Brazilian scholars indicated throughout the study, the future of education in relation to women's empowerment depends on their ability to evolve and adapt to the dynamic realities faced by women today and in the future. Therefore, we believe that education continues to be one of the most important pillars for the transformation of society into an equitable and inclusive space. To do this, it is vital that it moves towards the principles of equality that it defends. The implementation of these principles can not only change the lives of individual women, but also contribute to the construction of a brighter and fairer future for all.



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