

Chapter 2 Education

Topic 4 Gender differences in education

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Activity: Research

Gender and subject choice

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity, you should be able to:

- Identify the patterns of gender and subject choice for A-level students in your school/college.
- Compare patterns of gender and subject choice in your school/college to those nationally.
- Describe the reasons students give for their choice of subject.
- Summarise the factors that affect gender and subject choice in your school/college and compare the results for boys and girls.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of group interviews in investigating gender and subject choice.

A. Using the information in Tables 2C and 2D on page 60, make a list of which of these subjects are available at A-level in your school/college. Split into groups of three and share out the subjects equally among the groups.

1. For each of your subjects, find out from the teacher or someone in each class how many boys and how many girls take that subject at A-level. Work out the percentages of boys and girls for each subject. Put these findings into a table like the ones in Tables 2C and 2D.

How do these compare to those in Tables 2C and 2D?

2. If your results differ significantly from those in Tables 2C and 2D, can you suggest any reasons for the differences in your school/college? E.g. why does your school/college have a much higher percentage of girls doing science subjects than the national average?

3. Using your data, as a class note which subjects in your school/college have a higher proportion of one gender.

4. As a class formulate the questions you will ask in your group interview. Use pages 60-62 of the text to help you formulate your questions. You can also reflect on your own experiences.

5. Each group of three will carry out a group interview with 5 or 6 pupils of one gender from a given subject e.g. 5 boys from A-level Physics or 5 girls from A-level English Literature.

6. Allocate the roles in your research group as follows:

a. The interviewer, who asks pre-prepared and follow-up questions and makes the interviewee feel at ease and builds rapport. Think about what kind of person you are going to interview and which of you is more likely to establish the kind of relationship that will encourage them to open up.

b. The recorder, who makes sure the interview is recorded. You can use pen and paper or an audio recorder. Remember, you must get the interviewee's consent to record their

answers. This will include explaining the purpose of your research and what you are going to do with their answers, as well as guaranteeing them anonymity.

c. The observer, who makes notes on any other aspects of the interview such as body language, tone of voice, emotional response, the physical setting etc. Also makes notes on the effectiveness of the interviewer in gaining information from the interviewee.

B. As a class, share all the findings of your research.

a. What do your findings tell you about gender and subject choice?

b. What differences were there, if any, in the reasons given by boys and girls? E.g. was peer pressure more important for boys? Were gendered careers more important for girls?

c. What conclusions can you draw about gender and subject choice in your school/college?

C. Using information from the observers, write a brief summary of the strengths and limitations of using group interviews to investigate gender and subject choice.