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PREAM
Participatory Research
on Education and Agency in Mali

Participatory Research on Education and Agency in Mali

PREAM

Girls and Agency: A Review of the Literature

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- Belong to traditionally at-risk populations including those with low socioeconomic status, Indigenous peoples, and minorities

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1. Introduction

Situating the Review

This review of literature was undertaken for the project Participatory Research on Education and Agency in Mali (PREAM). The three years study is conducted in partnership between McGill University, the Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (ULSHB), Plan International Canada and Plan International Mali. PREAM aims to investigate the gendered association between agency and education in Mali to directly support interventions that aim to remove educational barriers for girls. By investigating the relationship between the agency of adolescents (aged 13-18 years), especially girls, and their experience of primary education in the conflict-affected regions of Mopti and Ségou, PREAM seeks to generate useful information to inform policies and practices related to education and gender equality in areas affected by conflicts both in Mali and in the broader region. This research will support the development of complex programming that responds to the intersection of conflict, gender, and education.

Study context

Nine years after the armed conflict in Mali broke out, a protracted humanitarian crisis and deteriorating security situation persist. In 2020, as a result of the insecurity prevailing in the central and northern parts of the country, the number of non-functional schools increased by nearly 17% from 1,151 schools in January to 1,344 in November 2020. UNICEF estimates that 403,200 children and 8,064 teachers were directly affected[1]. The situation on the ground is both complex and changing. Attacks and threats on schools are frequent and as some schools reopen, others close.

The conflict has had a devastating effect on access to education. According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics[2], between 2011 and 2018, Mali's gross enrollment ratio for primary education decreased from 84.2% to 75.6% (78.27% to 71.6% for girls and 89.96% to 79.47% for boys). In 2018, the primary net enrollment rate for girls was 56% versus 62% for boys and only 27% of girls were enrolled at the secondary level. The female literacy rate among the population aged 15-24 years was also low at 43.4 in 2018[2]. According to a study from WILDAF (2017), 17% of Malian girls were married by the age of 15 and 52% by 18. Malé & Wodon (2016) also suggest that more than 9 out of 10 married girls aged 15-19 in Mali cannot read.

[1] UNICEF (2021) Mali Humanitarian Situation Report No12 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Mali%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2012%20-%20Jan-Dec%202020.pdf accessed March 17th 2021

[2] http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ml accessed March 17th 2021

There is robust evidence of the positive impact of targeted interventions on increasing education outcomes for girls (Unterhalter et al. 2014) as well as the impact of non-targeted interventions in education supporting greater participation and achievement of girls in education (Evans & Yuan, 2019). However, evidence of the impact of interventions on gender equality in relation to education is mixed (Pereznieto et al, 2017). In crisis contexts, there is a disproportionate increase in the barriers affecting girls (UNESCO, 2011), even though girls' education correlates strongly with lower potential for fragility and conflict (El-Bushra & Rees Smith, 2016).

There is a critical need to better understand the role that agency and gender equality play in supporting and determining education outcomes in Mali, as it could influence education interventions to focus more on enhancing girls' agency. However, the relationship between agency, reduced gender barriers, and increased education outcomes is unlikely to be straightforward, requiring a conceptual model to identify certain pathways to association and contribution that can be tested. It is within that context that this review has been undertaken.

Purpose of the Literature Review

A key purpose of the literature review is to inform the overall conceptualization of the study and how to frame the concept of girls' agency in education. The results of the review will be used to support the initial contextualization of Plan International Canada's framework on agency and empowerment.

In particular, the literature review will provide information that will help answer the following questions:

1. How is agency being explicitly defined?
2. What components of agency are most important to adolescent (13-18) girls and boys?
3. How does agency influence adolescent (13-18) girls' and boys' participation in education?
4. How does adolescent girls' and boys' (13-18) participation in education influence their agency?
5. How does the relationship between agency and experiences of primary education in conflict-affected settings differ between adolescent (13-18) girls and boys?
6. How do adolescents 13-18 in formal and non-formal education in conflict-affected settings experience agency differently?
7. How is girls' agency being framed and how is it related to bodies of literature on women and gender more broadly [including SGBV]?

It will also help identify the gaps in the literature that may be addressed by the study.

Selection of documents and criteria of inclusion

In order to identify the documents that would be reviewed, searches in academic data bases and libraries' online catalogues were undertaken in both English and French. The work reviewed included academic papers, books and books' chapters, research reports as well as studies from international organizations. The following criteria were used to select the documents.

- Academic literature had to be peer reviewed and dated later than in 2000 unless the work was consistently cited in recent literature.
- Grey literature had to be properly referenced, published later than in 2000 by a credible organization, and be written by authors with research credentials.

Although more than 150 publications were read, not all of them are cited in this review, this is because key ideas around agency tend to be shared by authors from similar epistemological views and not all work reviewed specifically related to the review's guiding questions.

<u>Organization of the review</u>

This review begins, in section 2, by a brief presentation of education in Mali, then, in section 3, it explores the meaning of agency in the anglophone literature and the way it is defined in different disciplines. It highlights the different components of agency as identified by the different authors and presents the main distinctions within the concept of agency. Section 4 then presents the key messages of the literature reviewed on agency in childhood and youth studies. More specifically it exposes the main messages related to studying children's agency, youth agency and media production and girls' agency. Section 5 presents the literature on agency in the Francophonie and Mali. It discusses the terms used in the francophone literature and the translation issues that may arise and briefly introduced possible avenues to discuss agency in Mali. Section 6 summarizes the key features of agency and present some conceptual models of agency as proposed by authors. Section 7 presents the conclusions from the review and makes recommendations for PREAM and the study of agency in general.

2. Education and conflict in Mali

Education in Mali

The Republic of Mali obtained its independence from France in 1960. At the time, the rates of schooling and literacy were extremely low because only the sons of chiefs had been allowed to attend schools under the colonial rule. In 1962 the country began a series of reforms that would progressively democratize the education system and encourage girls' participation in school. The decennial program for the development of education or Prodec (1998-2012) played an important role in bringing girls into the education fold (Loua, 2018). In Mali, schools operate under a decentralized mode since 2003, which means that schools are managed in partnership between the state and the community. While official curricula and national assessments are developed by the State, local actors such as parents, elected officials, community members and teachers are taking the decisions on various matters including the day-to-day management of the schools and the hiring of teachers (Traore, 2018). Schooling is not entirely free because families have to cover several costs such as registration fees, school furniture, transport, parents' association fees, etc. The more a child progress in his or her education, the higher the costs and that lessen the education opportunities for girls of low-income families since parents tend to favor their sons (Loua, 2018).

Despite an increased attention to education in the country, the schooling system in Mali has known frequent crisis and teachers strikes are a frequent occurrence across the country. Diakite (2000), while recognizing that a perceived laxism from the State may have played a role in the situation, asserts that the problems of the education system are far more complex than mismanagement and somehow rooted into a societal identity crisis. The author points out to nearly a century of disconnect between the exogenous norms of a schooling system highly influenced by elites and prone to follow the guidance of western countries and the traditional values so important to a vast segment of the population still attached to endogenous cultural norms.

The Prodec coincided with global initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that raised international attention to the importance of education in general and educating girls in particular. The common objective of achieving universal education not only galvanized Mali and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa into confronting the problems related with their low enrolment rate, it also created new opportunities for funding (Akyeampong, et al., 2013). Schools were built across the country and the gross

enrolment ratio in primary schools increased sharply.[3] However, as discussed by Pryor et al. (2012), the rapid increase in schools' intake came with two main challenges: having enough qualified teachers and making sure children learn.

> First, such a rise in school attendance requires a large and rapid increase in numbers of teachers and in many African countries, the task of training so many teachers quick enough to respond to immediate needs is proving particularly daunting. Second, building schools and filling classrooms will have little social and economic impact unless children learn at least the basic minimum competences of literacy and numeracy. Unfortunately, much evidence suggests that many children who attend school may not learn enough to enable them to benefit from and contribute to their society's future. (Pryor et al., 2012:1)

In regard to the first challenge, the level of qualifications of teachers in Mali is quite heterogenous, especially in remote areas where qualified teachers are not eager to go (Akyeampong et al., 2013). The usual path of teacher training in Mali is through teacher training institutes (IFM), a college-level training lasting 1 or 3 years depending on whether the applicant already has a higher education degree. However, like in other African countries, a rapid increase in the demand for educators means that there aren't enough qualified teachers to meet the needs of the education system (Samake, 2008; Akyeampong et al., 2013). The Prodec was put in place following the difficult period of the structural adjustments, when the number of teacher training colleges had been considerably reduced and hundreds of teachers sent to early retirement. To succeed in its goal, the government had to hire contractual teachers through the 'strategie alternative de recrutement du personnel enseignant' (SARPE). Officially, these teachers received 3 months of training, however in practice, the duration and quality of the preparation varied (Samake, 2008; Pryor et al., 2012). The lack of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas, is a persisting problem across sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, forthcoming 2021). Even though teachers in Mali are no longer recruited through the SARPE, finding suitable teachers, especially in conflict affected areas, remains problematic. Insecurity has led many teachers to flee areas perceived dangerous, and as Traore (2018) reminds us, it is not rare to see classes delivered by a person with a technical diploma or having just completed secondary school.

> The teachers in fundamental schools in the different zones studied constitute a heterogenous category subject to professional mobility. From the standpoint of categorization, they are graduated from IFM or holding a technical diploma or a certificate of professional

[3] It went from 57.85% (49.3% for girls) in 2000 to 75.68% (71.54% for girls) in 2015 (UIS database, 2021)

> aptitudes. Besides those graduates, there are also those who whose studies have been shortened without professional diplomas such as the holders of the DEF and baccalaureate. Those without any diploma close the march. (Translated from Traore, 2018:92).[4]

Even teachers who have attended IFM have shortcomings because until recently the curricula did not closely align with the needs of the schools[5]. While Mali has received its fair share of international assistance to the education sector, that did not translate to sufficient support into teacher training (Lussier, 2015).

Mali's completion rate for primary schools have significantly improved from 19.27% (15.47% for girls) in 2001 to 48.08% (43.61% for girls) in 2015. In 2018 – the latest available year – it was 47.17% (42.26 % for girls)[6]. The progress is significant. However, there are real concerns about the quality of the learning. According to Mali's national center for educational examinations[7] (Mali CNECE, 2017), in 2017, 45,50% of the candidates registered for the national examination for the diploma of fundamental studies (DEF) were girls[8]. Only 45,72% of all the candidates who attended the DEF examination that year succeeded. The national success rate was 44.26% for girls and 55.74% for boys. In Mopti, the success rate for the 2017 DEF examination was 44.56% (55.31% for boys and 44.69 for girls). In Segou, the success rate was 42% (55.6% for boys and 43.6% for girls). The scores were particularly low in French and Mathematics. Indeed, the Ministry of Education (Mali CNECE, 2017; Mali MEN, 2018) reported that at the 2017 'Dictation-Questions' test, 80% of the students admitted to the DEF obtained a score lower than 7/20. The situation was also worrying for the 'Redaction' test, with average scores of 3.50 to 11 out of 20. In maths, the students also performed poorly. The reports reveal that nationwide, more than 60% of the students who succeeded the overall DEF examination obtained a score equal or inferior to 5/20 in mathematics.

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[4] « Les enseignants des écoles fondamentales dans les différentes zones d'enquête constituent une catégorie hétérogène soumise à une mobilité professionnelle. Du point de vue de la catégorisation, ils sont des diplômés de l'IFM ou titulaires d'un BT (Brevet de techniciens), CAP(certificat d'aptitudes professionnelles). A côté de ces diplômés existent aussi ceux dont les études ont été écourtées sans diplômes professionnels à savoir les titulaires du DEF et du Baccalauréat. Ceux qui sont sans diplômes bouclent la marche.» (Traoré, 2018: 92)

[5] A new teacher preparation curricula for the IFMS has been elaborated and piloted but it is not fully implemented yet.

[6] UNESCO Institute for Statistics's database accessed on April 15th 2021

[7] Centre National des Examens et Concours de l'Éducation

[8] The average age of the candidates that year varied by regions from 15.5 years at Bamako RG academy to 17.82 years at Mopti academy. In Segou's academy, 41.8% of the candidates were older than 16 years old. In Mopti, 41%.

A study from the MEN (2018) identified several factors that might explain the high rate of failure to the DEF examination. First, many young people reach grade seven without a sufficient mastery of the basic knowledge and skills. Several adolescents do not read well enough to understand the class materials because they rarely read at home. Students also reach grade seven with a level of French that tends to be very low. This severely undermines their chances of learning in the other disciplines since French is the medium of instruction. Another factor is the level of motivation. In the ministry's study, several educators reported a lack of efforts from the students. It is worth mentioning, however, that students were not interviewed during their research. Another factor is the conditions in which families live. Poverty forces many youths to work after school. There is often no light in the evening, so adolescents are not able to study at night. Most families do not have enough money to purchase books and there is little supervision from parents when children are meant to study. Finally, the teaching and learning conditions are difficult since schools lack resources such as books and teaching materials. The size of the groups can also be very big and not conducive to any form of formative assessment (MEN, 2018). The study from the ministry also listed other factors influencing success at school.

Table 1: Factors influencing success at school (MEN, 2018)

External factors	Internal factors	Structural factors
• Socio-economic context & poverty • Relationships between school and community • Parental supervision • Distance to school • House & farming work	• Headcount in class • Teachers • Pedagogical practices • Problems of discipline in class	• Pedagogical supervision • Resources • Pedagogical innovations

Women in Mali, like their counterparts from the west-African subregion, are confronted by the persistence of a patriarchal system that puts the exercise of power into men's hands and keeps women away from decision-making (Tounkara, 2015). By maintaining women in their role of mother and spouse rather than recognizing that they are at the heart of the social, economic and political changes, the country deprives itself of considerable development potential. In Mali, as in most of Africa, men and women differ in the division of labor, both at home and at work, the sharing of income, access to resources, the exercise of decision-making, institutional and customary power, and the level of schooling (Loua, 2018). Besides some areas in Bamako, girls also tend to have lower scores than boys at the DEF

examination (MEN CNECE, 2017)[9]. While girls' education has made great strides in Mali in recent years, some families still prefer to educate their sons. How girls' education is perceived varies considerably depending on the social and familial contexts. For example, the level of literacy and occupation of the parents may influence their willingness to prioritize their daughters' education. The weight of family obligations also tends to be heavier for girls who have to undertake many household chores and take care of younger siblings (MEN, 2018).

In Africa, the decade 2006-2015 was marked by engagements aiming to reduce the gender disparity in education and empower girls and women. In 2008, the association for the development of education in Africa (ADEA) made girls' transition from basic education to higher education its priority and proposed that more female teachers be hired at post-primary level but despite international commitments, female effectives and rates of admission and completion at secondary levels and higher education are still lower than that of their male counterparts (Loua, 2018). In Mali, girls' education is undermined by financial costs, gender-based violence, distance, pedagogical factors, early weddings and pregnancies, the weight of traditions and religious considerations, as well as insecurity.

Effects of the conflict on the education sector

According to Traore (2015:22) Mali has never been what could be called 'a stable country'. From the fratricidal wars that characterized its empires to its colonization and the five rebellions that the country has known since its independence, Mali has remained, in many ways, a turbulent region. The country's history is marked by multifaceted crisis but the last decade has been particularly scarred by weaponized attacks, the taking of hostages, murders and violence of all forms, particularly in the war afflicted northern regions but also in the south[10]. The security crisis in Mali has a profound impact on the education sector. While entire school communities are affected by the situation, pupils and students are especially feeling the perverse effects of the violence around them.

The conflicts in the north of the country have affected the population in several ways. Crimes committed by armed groups have led to school dropouts,

[9] In the CAP of Bacodjicoroni, Banankabougou, Bamako Coura, Centre commercial, Banconi, Bozola et Hippodrome girls obtained better results.

[10] For example, in 2012, young protesters in Kati ransacked a pharmacy belonging to a Touareg as well as the house of the former minister of tourism and craft.

migration, early and/or forced marriages (sometimes seen as a way to protect the girls), rapes, sexual slavery, lapidations, amputations, conscription of child soldiers, and to a lesser extent torture and murders. Conflicts also lead to the destruction of school furniture and materials and contributed to the disengagement of educational actors. Learners were exposed to the presence of armed men near the schools who frequently entered school grounds frightening children. In some areas, girls were forced to wear hijabs to attend class which added to the financial pressure of their families and sometimes lead some of them to stay at home. In Timbuktu, strict distancing between boys and girls was also imposed. In the northern regions of Mali, school canteens have played an important role in keeping children at school and are seen as a key feature to convince parents to send their child, especially adolescent girls to school, their closure, due to insecurity, also affected the education system (Traore, 2015; 2018; Loua, 2018).

Unfortunately, the situation in Mali is far from unique. According to UNESCO (2011) schools are increasingly targeted by belligerents and countries affected by conflicts have some of the worse indicators of education. Beyond human rights violation and the ransacking of school infrastructures, armed conflicts also deflect important financial resources that could otherwise be allocated to an education system or other measures that would improve human capital. Conflicts exacerbate poverty and households with the lowest incomes tend to be affected the most. Internal migration resulting from insecurity also impacts on education either by depriving displaced children from their right to attend school, or by overcrowding the classrooms of the host communities. UNESCO (2011) also suggest that education systems that do not equip youths with the competencies necessary to ensure their decent subsistence create a pool of possible recruits for armed groups and may even exacerbate the social tensions and inequalities that push people towards violence and conflicts.

3. Meaning of agency in the anglophone literature

According to a recent bibliometric analysis, agency is the fifth most important keyword used in women's empowerment literature (Priya et al., 2021). However, even though the social sciences have a long-standing literature on agency, it has been interpreted in numerous ways and there are divergences in how different disciplines frame it (Samman and Santos, 2009; Gammage et al., 2016). To structure this section, a search for the term 'agency' was conducted in academic search engines and a sample of 150 publications have been reviewed from the fields of human development, child development and education, psychology, international and development studies as well philosophy and sociology. From these publications, 30 definitions of agency were identified and submitted to a thematic analysis. The discussion below, although far from being exhaustive, presents a thorough examination of the concept of agency and its meaning in the literature reviewed so far across the different disciplines.

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's ideas about agency have been influential in various fields of literature. Indeed, the views of the famous economist and philosopher have inspired authors not only in human development, economics and philosophy, but also in international studies, education and psychology papers. Sen (1985:204) defines 'agency freedom' as "freedom to achieve whatever the person, as responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve." In later work, Sen (1999:19) defines an agent as "someone who acts and bring about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives". Sen's definition has been used and sometimes reformulated by several scholars such as Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), Alkire and Deneulin (2009), Robeyns (2017), Levey et al. (2018), Berhane et al. (2019) and many more.

Amongst those who built on Sen's ideas about agency, the most cited is Naila Kabeer[11] (1999; 2016; 2020), whose work on women empowerment and agency is frequently acknowledged in feminist and gender studies, health, economics, education, development and international studies, agriculture, psychology and management. Kabeer (1999:438) defines agency as the "ability to define one's goals and act upon them." This definition is referred to by both scholars (Basu, 2008; Trommlerova et al., 2015; Gammage et al., 2016; Donald et al., 2017; 2020; Strauss-Hugues et al., 2019) and international organizations (The World bank; 2011; UNESCO, 2016, etc.). Three main components of agency are implied in Kabeer's and Sen's definitions: the **ability to set goals or objectives**;

[11] Priya et al.' bibliometric analysis (2021) reveals that Kabeer's 2005, and 2009 papers are the two publications most cited in the women's empowerment literature with 443 and 424 citations respectively.

the **perception of the person of his or her ability** to achieve goals (what Kabeer calls sense of agency[12]); and **being able to act on goals**.

Other noteworthy definitions from the development field include:

- Alsop et al. (2006:11) "Agency is defined as an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices – that is, the actor is able to envisage and purposively choose options";
- the World Development Report of 2012 that defines agency as "an individual's (or group's) ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes" (WB, 2011:6);
- Gammage et al. (2016:6) for whom agency is "the capacity for purposive action, the ability to make decisions and pursue goals free from violence, retribution and fear but it also includes a cognitive dimension, what Kabeer describes as a "sense of agency".

Other definitions from education and child development scholars include:

- Gurdal and Sorbring (2018:1) who refer to child agency as "children's beliefs that they can affect an outcome; to have self-efficacy and be effective as agents";
- Basu (2008:891) for whom agency is "purposefully considering and enacting both small- and large-scale change in personal and community domains, based on one's beliefs and goals";
- Barton and Tan (2010:182) "Agency is at once the possibility of imagining and asserting a new self in a figured world at the same time as it is about using one's identity to imagine a new and different world".

The definitions reviewed so far in the human and child development, education and international studies all have three main elements in common. First, they all include the idea of **potential**, which is generally expressed by words such as ability, capacity, possibility or freedom. The second component is **action**, which is communicated through terms such as act, enact, achieve, transform, assert and affect. Finally, the definitions relate to a **purpose** often referred to as goals, outcomes or objectives. The definitions in education and child development publications sometimes include the notion of change (Basu, 2008; Sharma, 2007) which is also present in Sen's work. Some authors also add additional

[12] The 'sense of agency' is also called affordances in some education publications (Greeno et al., 1993; Lussier, 2016) and involves a change of consciousness.

specifications such as the World Bank's voice and agency report (2014:xv) that defines agency as "the capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution , or fear". In the economics literature, agency is often associated with **bargaining power**, or the relative ability of a person to exert influence over another (Donald et al., 2020). In the gender literature, agency is often a combination of **consciousness**, **voice** and **action** where 'voice' is the ability of an individual or a group to communicate practical needs and strategic interests in the private and public domains (Gammage et al., 2016)[13].

While some of the definitions found in psychology journals share most of the above-mentioned elements (see for example for instance Levey and al., 2018), agency is often associated with **autonomy**. Discursive psychologists tend to see agency in terms of the positioning of an actor in a conversation and the attribution of responsibility in the discourse through the specific linguistic elements used (Arnold, 2012). Articles in empirical psychology journals, on the other hand, tend to emphasize reflection and deliberation and agency is sometimes equated to '**personhood**' (Doris, 2009). For example, Alderson (2017:653) defines agency as "the ability to act in line with one's reflectively endorsed goals, whether through direct deliberative control or through automatic control". Empirical psychologists also remind us of the importance of the socio-cultural environment and the historical context[14].

> "Agency is the capacity to effectively manage multiple and sometimes competing goals in ways that enable him or her to sustain functioning, repair any damage, avoid harm or threats, and to implement plans that are cohesive and responsive to any relevant contexts – social, physical, and cultural" (Durrant & Ward, 2015:192 also cited in Strauss-Hugues, Heffman and Ward, 2019:946).

In the field of sociology, the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) is also influential. For these authors, agency is an analytical category in its own right and shapes social action in various ways. Agency is social and relational. It is a dialogical process.

> "We define agency as the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of **habit**, **imagination**, and

[13] See section 3 for further discussions on voice and youth.
[14] These dimensions are also important to sociologists who often include them in the notion of structure.

> **judgment**, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (1998:970).

For Emirbayer and Mische, agency is a **temporally embedded process of social engagement.** Agency is informed by the past, it includes what the authors call an '**iterational**' or habitual element. It is also oriented toward the future – as a '**projective'** capacity to imagine alternative possibilities – and the present through the capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects based on what is happening in the moment ('**practical-evaluative**' element). Agency is also about taking responsibility and being accountable for one's deeds, good or bad. It involves taking action and being able to transform a difficult situation into something worthy and positive (Keïta, 2014; Dahl, 2009).

Distinctions within the concept of agency

One of the challenges faced in discussing women and girls' agency is that it may not necessarily be deployed towards ends that contribute to gender equity. A person may choose not to act or to conform with patriarchal stereotypes. For example, if girls do not use their agency in collaboration with others, individuals may improve their own situations, but systemic gender inequalities will remain unaddressed (Jeffery, 2001). How women's agency is perceived and interpreted therefore depends on who's looking at it. For instance, resistances celebrated by feminists may appear like a dishonor for family members. For Kabeer (2008), it is therefore important to differentiate between agency in small day to day actions and more consequential forms of agency that affect women's capacity to control their own lives strategically or to renegotiate their relationships with others. Some forms of agency are therefore considered '**non transformative**' because they maintain or reinforce existing power relations and decision-making structures while others are described as '**transformative**' in the sense that they seek to question, challenge and transform the status quo. They contribute to shifting power dynamics (Kabeer, 1999; Gammage et al., 2016; Donald et al., 2017).

In her discussion of women education, Mary Ann Maslak builds on Jeffery (2001) to distinguish two types of women agency: oppositional and allegiant. **Oppositional agency** is "the act of challenge in which an individual, alone or in concert with others, acts and plans to act against the established norms in a system" (Maslak, 2007: XV). **Allegiant agency** is "the collective and collaborative movement of an individual or group that aligns with popular thought in order to achieve a purpose" (ibid). Oppositional agency is different from what Bordonaro (2012) and Bordonaro and Payne (2012) have called 'ambiguous agency', a

concept used to frame the actions of youth considered at-risk without falling into traditional notions of victimhood. It is particularly helpful when young people demonstrate their agency in ways that challenge societal views of how youth should behave. Johnson et al. (2018:578) define **ambiguous agency** as "actions, which go against normative assumptions about the nature of childhood". At the opposite side we have **'responsible' agency** where children's and youth's conduct conform with morally and socially approved goals. Bordonaro and Payne (2012:368) argue that while child-rights actors advocate for youths' right to exercise agency, child protection measures and other interventions aimed at youth 'at-risk', 'in need' or 'out of place' tend to be characterized by a "paternalistic, directive and supervisory approach" that bends children's and youth's conduct towards certain behavioral and social norms. In other words, youth are encouraged to be agents, as long as it is the 'right' type of agency.

Agency, like empowerment, can be experienced in different domains of life (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). For instance, a girl can demonstrate a certain level of agency at the local market where she works but feel constraint when attempting to do so at home or at school. Veneklasen and Miller (2002) write about three different 'realms' of power where agents can be active. The public realm refers to the visible face of power as it affects women and men in their jobs, employment, public life, legal rights, etc. The private realm of power refers to relationships and roles in families, among friends, sexual partnerships, marriage, and so on. The intimate realm of power has to do with a person's sense of self, personal confidence, psychology, and the relationship with his or her body and health.

Another important distinction is between individual agency and collective agency. In social theory, agency is a distinguishing feature of being human and relates to the capability to originate acts. But the extent to which a person's exercise of agency generates individual transformations and social change is debated (Cleaver, 2007). According to Sen (1999) **individual agency** plays a central role in removing inequities that constrain wellbeing, but it is also limited by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. It is therefore important to recognize the simultaneous contribution of individual freedom and the force of social influences. De Jaeger and Froese (2009:444) argue that "interindividual relations and social context do not simply arise from the behavior of individual agents, but themselves enable and shape the individual agents on which they depend". For these authors, individual cognition and interindividual interactions are two aspects of agency that mutually enable and constrain each other. Therefore, individual human agency is, to a large extent,

determined by social factors[15]. Power is often regarded as a form of agency (McGee and Pettit, 2020). From that perspective, individual agency relates to what scholars of power call the 'power to' (choice and decision making) as well as the 'power within' that represents a person's attributes such as self-confidence, desire to change, motivation and personal drive (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Gaventa, 2006; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Trommlerova et al., 2015). **Collective agency**, on the other hand is closely aligned with the type of power referred to as 'power with' associated with the synergy that emerges when groups of actors come together to build alliances and act collaboratively. Collective agency can be expressed at the level of family and friends, the community and beyond (Oosterom, 2020). It has been discussed particularly in the context of social movements (Dubois et al., 2006; Cleaver, 2007).

Agency is frequently conceptualized as relational. It is exercised in a social world where appropriate ways of being and behaving are not just a matter of individual choice (Cleaver, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). The opportunities and resources available to exercise agency are shaped by factors such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, social norms, rules and laws, etc[16]. These are often referred to as 'structure' (or social structure), a set of interconnected frameworks providing the social conditions for and requirements of action (Maslak, 2007). The dialectic relationship between **structure** and **agency** in social arrangements, conceptualized by Anthony Giddens (1984), is still relevant today because structures influence how power and agency are distributed among individuals and groups. "Structures shape the agency of individuals and groups, but the agency exercised by individuals and groups in turn shape structures, reproducing, modifying, or transforming them" (Gammage et al., 2016:1). Maslak (2007) distinguishes between two categories of structures: 'Macroobjective', which comprises institutions such as the state, the church, the community, and the family; and 'macrosubjective', that includes communal and societal values and norms, both secular and religious.

> "Empowerment relies on a strategic and creative dance of agency and structure in reshaping the ways in which we engage in education, development, and social change. Lasting and meaningful empowerment

[15] In their study of agency and policy dynamics, Capano and Gabaldi (2018) suggest three types of personal agency patterns: brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders.

[16] In the capability approach, these are called 'conversion factors' (Sen, 1999; Alkire and Deneulin, 2009; Levey et al., 2018)

depends on communities' abilities to alter social and cultural structures that promote inequalities" (Monkman et al., 2007: 107).

Recent conceptual models of agency

Some authors have proposed conceptual models of agency.

Whiteside (2009:145) presents the attributes of agency as an element of empowerment based on her research with indigenous people in Australia (Figure 1). What is particularly interesting in her model and possibly relevant to PREAM is the inclusion of 'addressing emotional issues' and 'helping others' in her model.

Figure 1: Attributes of agency (Whiteside, 2009)

Strauss-Hughes et al. (2019: 948) developed what they call a cultural-ecological predictive agency model (Figure 2) which highlights how the process of agency is influenced by cultural systems and historical contexts and processes.

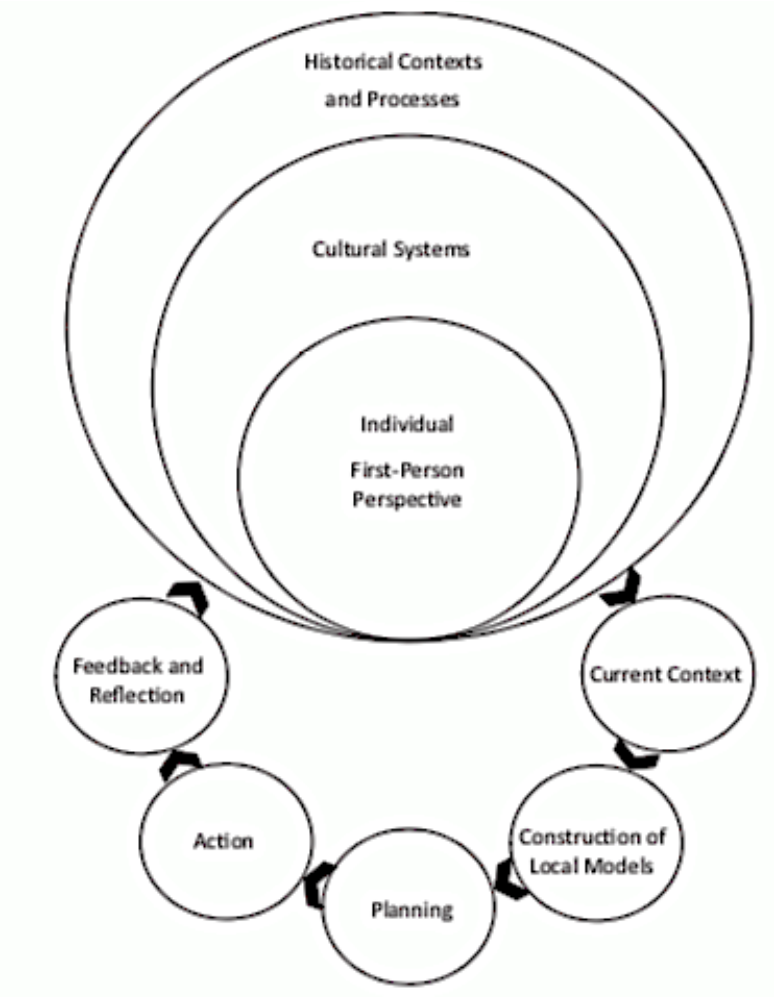


Figure 2: Cultural-ecological predictive agency model
(Strauss-Hugues et al., 2019)

Morin et al. (2019) propose another interesting model based on the capability approach (Figure 3). For these authors, empowerment is the process of increasing agency and other capabilities of individuals or groups in order for them to be able to make choices and transform these choices in actions and desired results. What makes this model different is that agency includes the sense of self-efficacy and action but not necessarily the feeling of being able to act, which is directly linked to the 'power to act'.

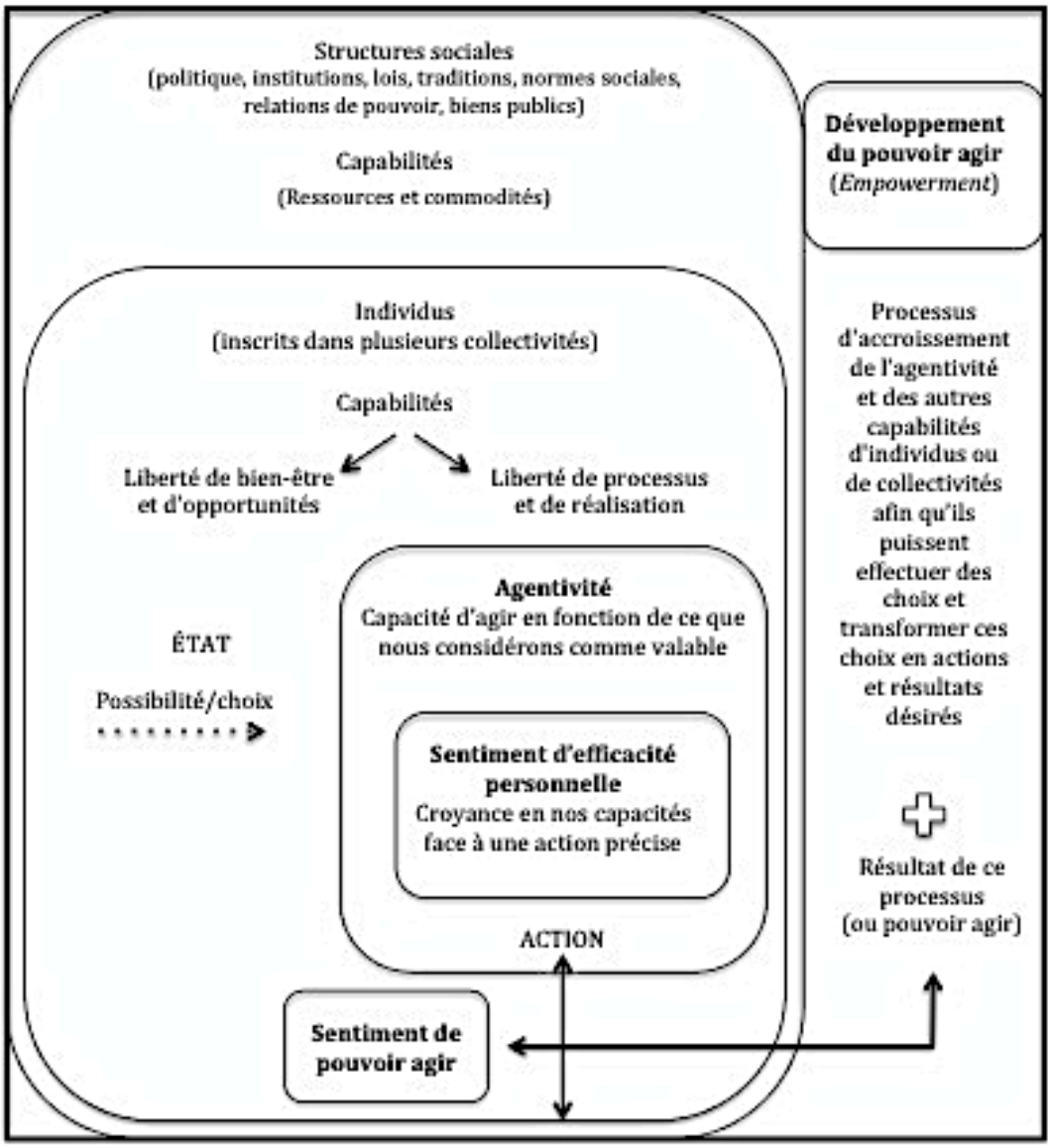


Figure 3: Agency and capability model
(Morin et al., 2019)

4. Agency in Childhood Studies and Youth Studies

Studying children's agency

When described as a "measure of autonomous action and empowerment in the context of choice", tensions can arise in attempts to apply the concept of agency to children (Biggeri et al., 2019:197). Children and youth are in an asymmetrical position with adults and the extent to which they are in a position to effectively make choices and act on them varies depending on their level of maturity and their specific circumstances. Increasingly, however, childhood sociologists agree that children are able to make decisions on issues that concern them, can influence their environment, and contribute to the process of cultural and social reproduction.

For Corsaro, agency in children is generally accepted across theoretical traditions but problematized by the need to focus on individuals and engagement in wider societal and peer frameworks as "[...] children's membership in these local cultures and the changes in their degree or intensity of membership and participation over time" (2005: 231). In this way, Corsaro explores beyond the micro-macro divide (socialization) in sociological/psychological interpretations of individual agency using 'interpretive reproduction': "children's agency in their production and participation in their own unique peer cultures" (2005: 232). This approach highlights the ways in which children use information from the adult world to inform creative play amongst their peers. Corsaro's work illustrates the way children employ hypothetical thinking to negotiate with peers, how they are able to project themselves into their futures both near (when in elementary school) and far (when they are in adult occupations) (2005: 242) and how the practical-evaluative aspect of their play demonstrates a form of collective agency. The author concludes that children's agency, far from being innate, must be considered through theoretical and practical frameworks in order to "take us from general claims that children are active agents to evidence of their agency situated in concrete activities and in the theoretical perspectives on agency in sociology more generally" (2005: 246).

Ballet, Biggeri and Comim assert that the capability approach[17] (CA) can be used as a conceptual framework when working with children: "seeing children as subjects of capabilities means that we can consider them endowed with agency and autonomy, able to express their points of view, values and priorities" (2011: 22). They argue that children possess inherent agency from engagement with their

[17] Sen (1985, 1999)

world and must not be regarded as “irrational or immature, and instead consider them to be active actors, agents and subjects of capabilities” (ibid, 2011: 6).

To gain a more inclusive understanding of children’s capabilities, Ballet et al. (2011) posit that we have to look at the evolution of the autonomy of the child in relation to their development. According to their age, circumstance, status in the family, children can demonstrate agency through action, for example, by getting dressed and equipped for school, by taking charge of books and organizing homework, by negotiating social relationships, supporting a parent in the aftermath of divorce, etc. (Mayall, 2000). Children are also capable of exerting influence over adults and advocating for their own needs and desires which could imply a relationship between agency and self-fulfillment. That being said, though children may possess and develop varying capabilities at different stages, autonomy and agency are not synonymous and vary greatly according to circumstances. For instance, children’s agency can be constrained by the decisions of their parents, guardians or teachers and whether children are able to take their capabilities at the individual level and convert them into functionings still largely depends on their caregivers and how they influence education and socialization (Ballet et al., 2011).

Caregivers may be ‘**autonomy supportive**’ – making the child feel competent, allowing choices, and catalyzing on the child’s “intrinsic motivation, curiosity and desire for challenge” (Ryan and Deci, 2000:71) or ‘**controlling**’ for instance by pressuring the child to behave in specific ways. In this way, children’s agency is still very much shaped by household, structures and circumstances. In this sense, children’s capabilities may be impacted by inter-generational factors such as the circumstances of parent (e.g. maternal education, poverty, etc) and the access to resources at crucial stages of child development for instance nutrition (for growing brains and bodies), access to appropriate education for their age, etc. (Ballet et al., 2011).

Rainio (2009) studied the potential of imagination and classroom fantasy play in developing children’s agency. She found that girls’ unplanned fantasy play gave the girls a sense of agency crucial to their enactment of agency in the wider playworld setting. She argues that the girls were able to become agentive players in the activity through questioning the gendered categories openly in the classroom.

According to previous studies, adolescents’ agency is positively correlated with self-esteem, mastery-related and achievement-related goals, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Korlat et al., 2021). Studies investigating the

intensification of gender role identities, however, have yielded heterogeneous results (ibid).

Children's agency can also be looked at as part of the broader area of the social construction of childhood within the discourse of 'the sociology of childhood" (See James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1993). In their co-edited book *Reconceptualising agency and childhood: New perspectives in childhood studies*, Esser et al. (2016**)** address the misconceptions associated with agency and the need keep in mind that the term agency is not universal . Agency does not imply automatic autonomy. Rather as Punch (2016) writes, it is relational. Lan Anh Hoang and Brenda S. A. Yeoh (2014) argue that "children's agency is contingent on a social construction of childhood that is neither static nor universally uniform" (p. 182) and is often shaped by "adult perceptions of children's agency and needs" (p. 180). Therefore, it is key to understand the context and structures that form agency. Louise Holt (2011) observes that while children's agency is essential, what is often left out of discussions is the socio-spatial context. As Mweired (2021) argues: "If the model of agency is to remain the same with its ideal ambition that with agency comes independence (that is separate from the family and is desired by all), then what happens to children who have limited agency, inability to assert their agency or a lack of desire to do so (as that may vary at different points in their lives and depends on individual dis/abilities and context)? Are they excluded from processes and decisions that concern them?" (p.107) Punch (2016) observes that many of the misunderstandings about agency come from the fact that they come from the Global North (or what she and others refer to the minority world) rather than the majority (Global South) world of childhood. It is vital to draw "on examples of children's agency in majority world countries" (p. 192) This would allow us to better understand how "children's potential as social actors is located within the generational order" (p. 192).

Youth Agency and media production

Discourses portraying youth as passive and disengaged from political and civic life have been refuted by studies of less traditional media outlets where young people have shown active and interactive political engagement (Kress, 2010; Raby et al., 2017). Research findings suggest that, over the last decade, young people have embraced the civic potential of new technologies (Hirzalla, 2010; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013) and are increasingly valued as social agents (Raby et al., 2017; Kress, 2010). New media technologies, such as the internet, provide young people with a degree of freedom and autonomy (Ito et al., 2008) and have created exciting possibilities for young people to mobilize and help shape agendas (Cohen and Kahne, 2012). By making it easier to produce and disseminate content, media

technologies have contributed to break barriers to youths' participation such as lack of transportation and other material resources and enabled young people to demonstrate greater agency and independence from formal institutions. (Caron et al., 2018). Digital media can also play an emancipatory role, particularly for youth from less privileged backgrounds (Denner and Martinez, 2019; Kane et al., 2014)[18].

Increasingly, children and youth are using technologies to make products that challenge the 'adult-driven world' of conventional and digital media and help addressing injustice in their communities. By creating media that adds to and critiques mainstream news providers, "youth are engaging in disruptive and potentially transformative acts by circumventing the dominant media and producing and distributing their own stories." (Kane et al., 2014:403). However, the subjects presented by young people do not necessarily align with what adults may consider to be political or social-change oriented. The content produced by young people addresses issues that matter to youth and they advocate for social change in their own personal way (Raby et al., 2017).

Social media have become a key site for fostering youth voice, especially for those experiencing marginalization. They provide young people opportunities to participate and interact in ways that were not available before, including the production of content for potentially large and responsive audiences, and the opportunity to do it from their own initiative (Caron et al., 2016). The increasing availability of resources on participatory politics has also led to growing opportunities for youth to exert agency in the public arena. "By circulating content, [youth] can influence what others are exposed to. When people are especially interested, outraged, or committed, they can comment on broadcast content, write and distribute statements, or remix content to make a point. Individuals and groups can also enter into dialogues with each other and with leaders in an effort to 'talk back' and play a role in shaping agendas" (Kahne et al., 2014:11). Moreover, through their decentralized and interactive platforms, social media can have a positive impact on participation and provide a space for youths to realize both traditional and alternative forms of political engagement free from the constraints of the adult world (Raby et al., 2017). Ito et al. (2008) summarize the agentic role that the peer learning from social media may play:

> "Whether it is comments on MySpace or on a fan fiction forum, participants both contribute their own content and comment on the content of others.

[18] For example, a growing number of undocumented youths are sharing their stories using digital media, which gives them a means of self-definition and spontaneous messaging (Khane et al., 2014).

> More expert participants provide models and leadership but do not have authority over fellow participants. When these peer negotiations occur in a context of public scrutiny, youth are motivated to develop their identities and reputations through these peer-based networks, exchanging comments and links and jockeying for visibility. These efforts at gaining recognition are directed at a network of respected peers rather than formal evaluations of teachers or tests. In contrast to what they experience under the guidance of parents and teachers, with peer-based learning we see youth taking on more "grown-up" roles and ownership of their own self-presentation, learning, and evaluation of others." (Ito et al., 2008 :39)

Building on Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001)'s premise that human agency is central to social processes of meaning-making, Caron et al. (2018:699) see young media creators, and vloggers in particular, as "agentic subjects engaged in an interactive and subjective process of social semiosis". For these authors, the young vloggers demonstrate their agency in two ways: first, by using multimodal resources carefully and strategically to impact their intended audiences; second, by managing the risk of online hostility with tactics and rhetorical devices that soften counter-positions (Caron et al., 2018). Young video-makers can therefore be described as 'strategic, agentic choice-makers' (Kress, 2010). Even gaming can serve to organize collective action. "Players are engaging in a complex social organization that operates under different sets of hierarchies and politics than those that occupy them in the offline world. These online groups provide an opportunity for youth to exercise adult-like agency and leadership that is not otherwise available to them" (Ito et al., 2008:30).

As in the gender literature mentioned earlier, the concept of 'voice' is also very important to authors in youth and media studies. Caron et al. (2016:3) describe it as a "form of self-expression, where someone publicly shares a personal story, a lived experience or an opinion that represents his or her own perspective on the world." The importance of voice lies in its empowering potential, that is the sense of ownership, control and leadership that often arises when young people – who are often ignored – get the chance to express themselves (ibid). 'Voice' is "having power over the presentation of reality and meaning, and the ability to construct, articulate, and therefore shape one's experience as it is presented to others" (Quiroz, 2001:328). It is not just about speaking out but also designing a message that expresses personal concerns and subjectivity. It involves the choice of the issue to address, the framing of the message and the various production details that enable a young person to communicate a message to an audience (Caron et al., 2016). For Caron et al. (2016:10), the audience plays a key role in fostering

youth voices “not only in terms of who is listening, but in terms of who is engaging in a community of meaning-making in a responsive and supportive way.”

Girl’s Agency

The concepts of resistance and agency have played an important role in the study and conceptualization of the relationships between youths and their social worlds. However, some authors argue that discourses of women agency and resistance are frequently commodified by the ‘capitalist machine’ to further a neo-liberal and post-feminist agenda (McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2008; Gonick et al., 2009). Increasingly, girls and women are being constructed as exemplary rational actors who have reinvented themselves successfully and managed to adapt to shifting global market forces due to their educational and work achievements (Gonick et al., 2009). Concerns have also been raised regarding a new generation of young women, raised in a post-feminist society, for whom femininity is increasingly tied to a ‘hyperculture of commercial sexuality’ and complicit silence regarding male oppression (Willett, 2008). “The effects of neo-liberal discourses individualize and de-politicize and have enabled post-feminist discourses to thrive, since the individualizing, fragmenting logic works to destabilize collective movements like feminism.” (Gonick et al., 2009:2)

Weems (2009) suggest that the discourses of ‘girlhood’ are not simply a product of local cultural scripts or transnational campaigns, but a hybrid space of contested terrain. The author argues that in transnational contexts, ‘girlhood’ has become a site where assumptions and practices around difference, colonial power, and economic relations among and between gendered subjects are being consolidated. A shift is therefore needed in the way we research girlhood in order to take into consideration how global capitalist and imperialist dynamics infiltrates representations, discourses and practices related to ‘girlhood’ or ‘the girl child’.

> “[...] I argue that utilizing a framework of transnational feminist practice may more clearly illuminate forms of girls’ agency and resistance in post-colonial contexts. Specifically, a transnational feminist framework demonstrates how terms like ‘sexuality’ and ‘violence’ must be interpreted through multiple regional, civil and transnational contexts of interpretation.” (Weems, 2009:59)

Amongst the various discourses on girlhood, one has generated a lot of debate, particularly from feminist scholars: the idea of ‘Girl Power’ and whether it is good for young women and girls. Taft (2004) identifies four versions of Girl Power that create barriers to girls’ activism and political engagement: Girl Power as anti-

feminism, Girl Power as post-feminism, Girl Power as individual power, and Girl Power as consumer power. She also discusses how some organizations have redefined Girl Power to challenge the depoliticizing versions of Girl Power in an attempt to empower girls as socio-political actors. Doing so, the author highlights how barriers to girls' activism are also discursive. Gonick et al. (2009) argue that discourses of Girl Power are culturally and contextually contingent, thus have highly unequal effects on girls. They give as an example the use of discourses of Girl Power to promote development in low-income countries during the era of the Millennium Development Goals. The authors therefore suggest that understandings of girlhood and agency in the context of globalization should be analyzed in light of the various asymmetries in power dynamics that can be seen in the movement of people, information, cultural production and capital.

> "In posing the question "what comes after girl power?" we suggest that girls' agency and resistance needs to be theorized as articulated and evidenced within the logic of the production of gender, the body, and sexual, racial, cultural (etc.) differences. This presents a complex, embodied equation of gendered subjectivity that is less about balances of agency (girl power) and compliance (girl victims) than it is about contingent and ambiguous practices of identity. Girls' gendered agency is practiced within normative social, economic and political processes of creating and reproducing gendered identity. The constraints of gender and normative femininity are therefore always a factor in its production, expression and resistance." (Gonick et al., 2009:6)

In recent years, researchers have paid attention to girls' use of the Internet and their online identity in order to investigate the extent to which the development of online communities, the kind of interactivity within them and the quality of the virtual experience complements and expends other forms of social interactions (Raby et al., 2017; Kahne et al., 2014; Hirzalla, 2010). Studies suggest that Internet gives girls a chance to express themselves, connect with others and explore ideas. Additionally, the anonymous environment enables them to express views that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to communicate. There is, however, little account of the structures, which operate at various levels in these girls' lives and concerns have been expressed that this emphasis on girls' choice and agency means that the structures that continue to create inequitable power relations are overlooked. (Willet, 2008) For example, during their online activities, girls often present themselves as highly sexualized and sexually active. "Instead of seeing these girls as benefiting from the sexual revolution, which is allowing them to celebrate their sexual selves, we might want to ask whether these girls have simply dismissed feminism and the need to critique dominant cultures." (Willett 2008:59).

Online environments are not only supplying new forms of spaces to support and extend girls' development, but also sub-cultures and communities that provide girls with alternatives to the mainstream (ibid).

Research on girls' sub-cultures have examined the dissentions between girls' efforts to control their lives and the gendered options presented to them in representations of everyday life. In society, girls often have to deal with contradictory positions of masculinity and femininity – for instance caring and winning – but subcultures provide private spaces where girls can control and master themselves and where they can momentarily escape gender-related expectations in acceptable ways (Walkerdine, 2006; Rainio, 2009). Sub-cultures have their own power hierarchies and social norms that may build on or even reproduce traditional gendered categories, but they also offer the possibility to modify them and provide a space for girls to rehearse agency in the group (Rainio, 2009).

In many African countries, adolescent girls are believed to have lower agency than boys. This is due to the prevailing social norms[19] that tend to favor male children. For example, girls are often encouraged to marry at an early age in order to preserve their virginity and prevent out of wedlock births. In some patriarchal communities, it is also customary to give priority to boys in matters such as nutrition and education (Berhane et al., 2019; Burkina Faso MENA, 2017; Mali MEN, 2018). Norms are often internalized at a young age and influence how adolescents behave. When inequitable, norms reinforce power imbalance and undermine girls' capacity to make the right choices at the right time. During their study of the relationship between adolescent girls' agency and social norms related to early marriage, education and nutrition in Ethiopia, Berhane et al. (2019) found a significant correlation between agency and social norms. Their findings suggest that in order to empower adolescent girls there needs to be changes in the social environment that conditions their choices as well as in their agency. These authors assert that enhancing girls' agency is critical in order for adolescent girls to develop the ability to cope with the various inequalities that undermine their self-worth (ibid).

Agency and War-affected Children and Young People

[19] Berhane et al. (2019) distinguish between two types of social norms. First, the **injunctive norms** relate to the perceived pressures to conform, avoid social sanctions and gain social approval. Second, the **descriptive norms** relate to the belief that an individual has regarding what others commonly do.

An important sub-set of work with children and young people, given the global context of children and youth in conflict and post-conflict zones and related areas of displacement and migration, can be found in the literature on war-affected youth. Many international NGOs and local organizations are working to mitigate the impact of conflict and war on the lives of children and within this work there is an emerging body of research and interventions that pertains to children's agency although the term agency is not often used. A particularly rich body of work can be seen in the literature on the use of arts-based methods such as drawing, photovoice, digital storytelling and drama where there is a focus on youth voice and youth engagement (See Akesson et al, 2014; Linds et al, in press; D'amico et al, 2016) As Friesem (2014) highlights, arts-based approaches with war-affected youth are useful both in terms of enriching our knowledge and understanding of their lived realities, while also building critical skills by fostering opportunities for "youth [to] express their voices, connect with communities and increase their civic engagement" (p. 45). Arts-based research with war-affected youth has been found to promote participant activism, engagement and empowerment (Denov et al., 2012). Another angle on the agency of war affected children can be seen in the work of Martino and Schormans (2018) and others who write about children's rights, pointing out the danger of undermining participation of individuals labelled as 'vulnerable' as it "can sometimes lead to forms of protectionism that take precedence over participants' agency, including their right to make their own decisions, share their own perspectives, and take informed risks" (p. 14). Supporting war-affected children and youth in addressing the related mental health issues resulting from their experiences and advocating and applying this knowledge "would bring progression to the implementation of the children's [and youth's] right to participation (Convention on the Rights of the Child, art.12)" (van Os, Zijlstra, Knorth, Post, & Kalverboer, 2018, p. 16). Using arts-based methodologies allows war-affected youth to be recognized as important actors in the realization of their rights (Arnold, 2012).

5. Agency in the Francophonie and in Mali

Terms used in the francophone literature

In French, translations of the terms empowerment and agency have not yet reached a consensus and terms used by both academic and practitioners somehow fail to evoke the same mental imagery that these concepts have in English. Two academic terms are frequently used to refer to agency, they are 'agencéité' and 'agentivité'. However, many authors prefer to use the English term (see for instance Labrecque, 2001 who uses it alongside 'agencéité' and Montenach, 2012) or short sentences such as 'pouvoir d'agir' or 'faculté d'agir' (power to act) ou 'capacité d'action effective' (capacity to act) in order to capture what they mean by agency. This is because 'agencéité' and 'agentivité' are rarely used outside of academia and may lack resonance for practitioners and policy makers. Unfortunately, while such terms are more easily understood, they do not fully capture the full meaning of 'agency' and are sometimes used to talk about different things. For instance, Nagels et al. (2018) define a learners' 'pouvoir d'agir' differently from 'agentivité'[20] while Morin et al. (2019) use 'développement du pouvoir agir' as a translation for empowerment and 'agentivité' for agency. For this reason, authors sometimes prefer to talk about 'agents', which has a similar meaning in English and French rather than 'agency'.

'Agentivité' or 'agencéité'? Both terms can express the capacity to define goals and act in a coherent, purposeful manner to achieve them. They have also both been used to refer to individual or collective agency[21]. According to Dubois et al. (2008), 'Agencéité' is used more in human and social sciences and emphasize the purpose of an action in relation to others. These authors suggest that 'agentivité' is more frequent in cognitive sciences and is interested in the mechanisms that define the action such as motivation, target, levels of decision, the process, etc. For example, Bulot et al. (2007) define 'agentivité' as "le fait de se vivre auteur de nos propres actions" (the fact of living yourself as the author of your own actions). However, a growing number of scholars in the fields of gender studies and education are also using the term 'agentivité'. For example, Lang (2011) talks about 'l'agentivité sexuelle des femmes' (womens' sexual agency). Nagels et al., (2018:4) define 'agentivité' as "la capacité d'intervention sur les autres et le monde où les individus et les groupes sont tout à la fois les producteurs et les produits des systèmes sociaux" (the capacity to intervene on others and the world, where individuals and groups are both producers and products of social systems) and

[20] For these authors le 'pouvoir d'agir' involves influencing one's material and social environment through productive action and transforming oneself by thorough reflection and constructive action.
[21] See for example De Herdt and Bastiaensen (2009) on agencéité collective

Guilhaumou (2012) discuss the multidimensional paradigm of 'agentivité' with similar building blocks to those found in the anglophone literature. 'Agentivité' is also frequently used in linguistic where it relates to the construction of discourse and positionality. See for instance, Keïta (2020). The use of 'agencéité' is popular across disciplines as well[22] but appears to be the most common term used in economics and anthropology.

Amongst the contributions of francophone authors to our understanding of agency, we can underscore the following: Ndiaye (2010) introduces the term 'agencéité située' (situated agency) to remind us that freedom of wellbeing is contingent on the site where it is exercised. Labrecque (2001) underlines how agency carries with it a part of history because 'it implies the capacity to consider oneself in the present (the experience of daily life), in the past (the structure constituted of multiples experiences) and the future (the transformation of the structure, the resistance)' (translated from p.11). Nagels et al. (2018) show that learners' agency (l'agentivité des apprenants) can be manifested in three different ways: as the direct effect of a person's intervention; by procuration – when someone else's action is harnessed to achieve the desired goals; collectively, through a group's coordinated efforts. For these authors, agency is understood within a model of the agent systematically negotiating his behaviors and motivations with his physical and social environment. Learners' agency therefore enables them to create or cease opportunities to initiate or develop learning projects. Dembele's study (2018) of young people living in the street or growing up in institutions in Mali suggest that a good self-image and the capacity to project oneself into the future are complementary and that both of these dimensions matter for youth empowerment and social insertion. They can therefore also be considered components of agency.

While the lack of consensus around agency's terminology complexifies attempts to talk about agency in a way that is understood by study participants without defining it for them, the main translation hurdle may well lie not in the term 'agency' itself but in capturing power and empowerment. Indeed, in French, there are two words for power (puissance et pouvoir) and a multitude of terms for 'empowerment' (émancipation, autonomisation, responsabilisation, potentialisation, habilitation, capacitation ou renforcement des capacités,

[22] See for instance Chartrand (2017) in the field of cognitive informatic and philosophy and Labrecque (2001) in anthropology.

empouvoirisation, pouvoir d'influence, développement du pouvoir agir, désinfériorisation, et démarginalisation)[23].

Attempts by Dufort and Guay (2001:83) to deconstruct the term 'empowerment' in its linguistic components to better appreciate the meaning of the concept, although helpful, still fall short of capturing what empowerment has come to mean both in the anglophone academic literature and for development practionners[24]. In addition to the diversity of terms proposed, a further challenge is the difference in the trajectory and the evolution of interpretations of 'empowerment' in the francophone discourse and literature depending on contexts and disciplines (Bacqué et Biewener, 2013).

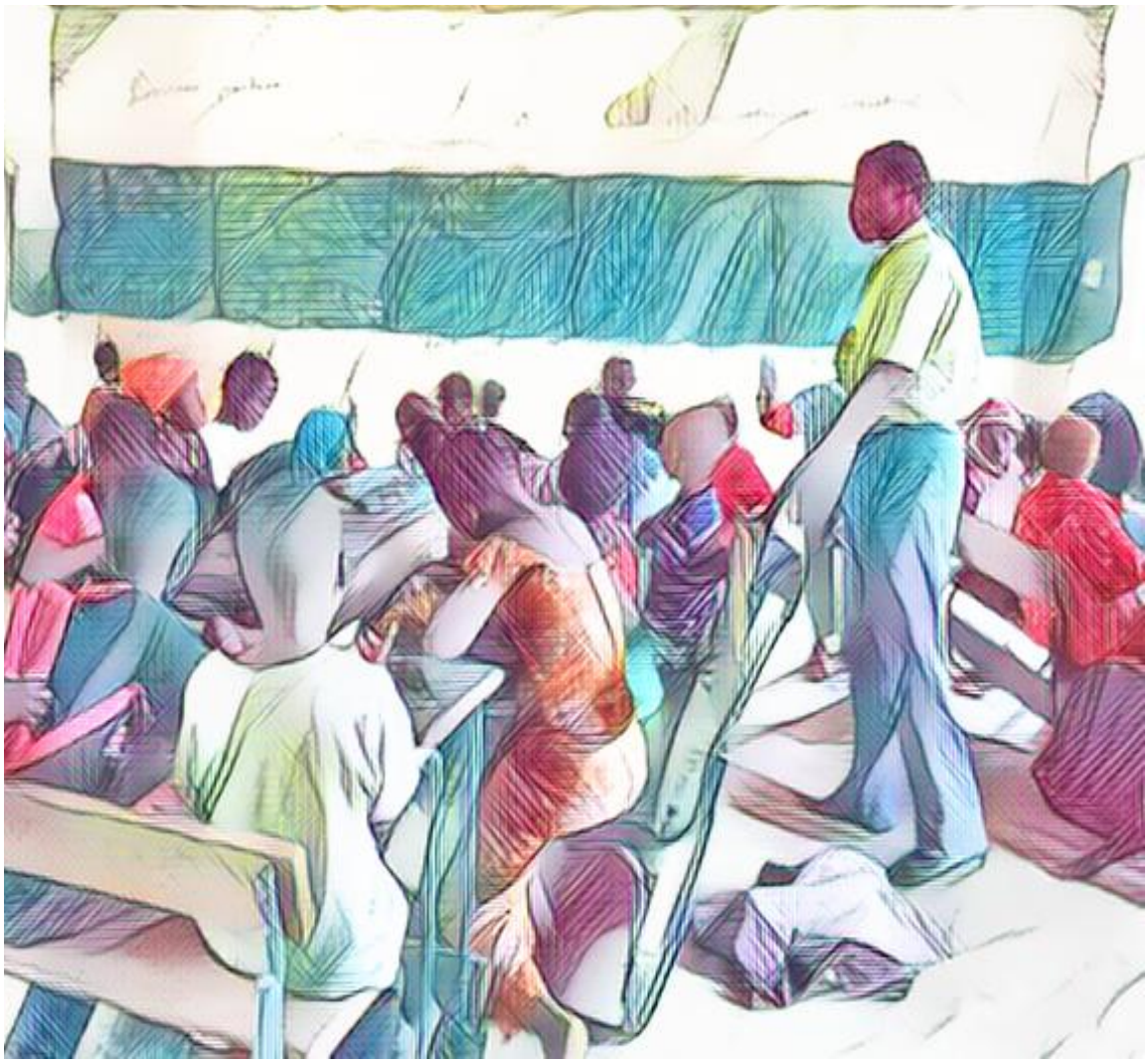
Discussing 'agency' in Mali

Central to PREAM's premises is the need for adolescent girls to define agency themselves and express their own views of what being an 'agent' means in their own context and lives. French may not be the most appropriate way to do so. While more work is still required to identify the most appropriate ways to engage PREAM's young participants in discussions on agency, earlier work from Elise Klein may provide interesting insights. In her study of women's agency and the psychological domain in the urban fringe of Bamako, Klein (2016) began by asking women and men what was necessary to overcome hardship. The bamanankan word 'hèrè' was used to describe the desired state, that is 'good things' in the sense of general wellbeing and happiness. 'Hèrè' loosely translates to good life and can be used to describe both personal and community well-being. Informants understood this concept and did not need probes or examples of what 'hèrè' could look like. Her questions were asked using 'niè ta' when talking about improving well-being: 'niè' means "forward" and 'ta' means "go." Two other important concepts also emerged as central to Klein's study of agency: 'dusu' and 'ka da I yèrè la'. 'Dusu' refers to internal power, strength, courage and internal motivation and 'ka da I yèrè la' means believing in yourself (the opposite of 'ka da I yèrè la' is 'Fugani' – which means you do not believe in yourself and are lazy).

[23] See for example Le Bossé (2003) and Dufort et Guay (2001) for discussions on the translation of the term 'empowerment'.

[24] « D'un point de vue linguistique, cette expression peut être décomposée en trois éléments. Le premier est le radical power qui signifie « pouvoir » en anglais. Le second est le préfixe em qui, ajouté au radical power, exprime un mouvement d'accession au pouvoir. L'association de ces deux éléments forme le verbe empower qui désigne généralement une augmentation d'une forme ou l'autre de pouvoir. Le dernier élément est le suffixe ment qui suggère la présence d'un résultat tangible lié à l'augmentation du pouvoir. »

Languages other than bamanankan are also spoken in the research area. For instance, in the region of Mopti, dogon and fulfulde (peul) may also be used. The terms used in Klein's research may, however, still be helpful to the local research team in order to illicit possible translations in other local languages.



6. Summary of Key Features of Agency

The concept of agency is used widely in the social and cognitive sciences, but it is not always addressed with the depth it deserves. Agency is being framed and interpreted in various ways depending on the disciplines and epistemological backgrounds of the authors. For instance, agency is associated to bargaining power in economics, consciousness, voice and action in gender studies, and autonomy and personhood in psychology. This means that unless researchers take the time to clearly specify what they mean by agency, they run the risk of discussing different things. Overall, there seem to be a general agreement that **agency is temporally embedded and combines purpose, potential, and action**. It can manifest itself differently in different domains of life (or realms of power) and needs to be interpreted within specific historical contexts and socio-cultural environments in order to adequately identify the normative and structural constraints to its exercise.

From the various definitions analyzed, different components of agency have emerged. We list them here in four categories (cognitive, social, psychological and crosscutting) for greater clarity though the authors who presented these components did not categorize them as such. We are also aware that the boundaries between the categories are somehow porous and that there may be overlap between the components. Table 1 should therefore be seen as an attempt at mapping out the meaning of agency rather than used as an analytical framework.

Table 2: Components of Agency

Cognitive components	Social components	Psychological components
- Ability to set goals or objectives (purpose) - Perception of the possibility to act (affordances) - Capacity to project oneself in the future - Capacity to act on goals (action or change)	- Bargaining power - Voice - Deliberative control - Automatic control - The ability to imagine a new and different world - The ability to choose	- Consciousness - Autonomy - Self-confidence - Self-esteem - Self-efficacy - Personal drive - Motivation - Desire to change
Components cutting across all categories		
- The perception of a person's own ability to achieve goals (sense of agency) - A person's actions in alignment with goals and values - The belief that change is possible		

Agency can be both **individual** (power to and power within) or **collective (**power with) and can be positioned on three continuums or axes in each realms of life.

Continuum of transformation

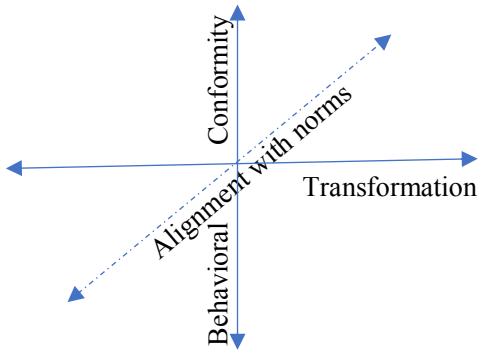
Non transformative ---------- Transformative

Continuum of alignment with the norms

Allegiant ---------- Oppositional

Continuum of behavioral conformity with accepted standards of conduct

Responsible ---------- Ambiguous



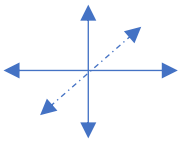
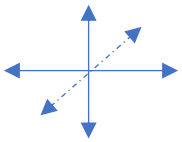
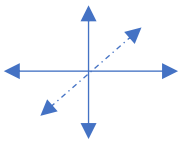
 **Public** (school, work, community)	 **Private** (family, friends, couple)	 **Intimate** (sense of self, confidence, relationship to body and health)

Figure 4: Positioning of agency

The factors that shape the opportunities and resources available to exercise agency include:

- Gender
- Class or level of income
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Local customs
- Communal and societal values
- Social norms (injunctive and descriptive)
- Rules and laws
- Etc.

The literature reviewed suggest that when studying agency with children and youth, researchers should keep in mind their asymmetrical position with adults based on their level of autonomy and development but still regard them as being able to make decisions and influence their environment in their own unique peer cultures. It may also be helpful to look at the influence of the different caregivers on agency as they can be 'autonomy supportive' or 'controlling'.

New technologies such as Internet, social media in particular, are providing new spaces for youth to express themselves and engage socially. Youth are both producers and consumers of ideas and can engage in both traditional and alternative forms of social and political engagement. Social media are also a source of peer learning and as such, can play an agentic role. However, some of the authors also raised a warning not to overlook the way structures operate within the online environment and to pay attention to the way neoliberal/ post-feminist discourses may appear agentic but end up reproducing traditional gender norms thus undermining girls' agency.

> "The problem for research, however, is that the concept of agency easily directs our attention to what is active and visible. The challenge is how to grasp agency in what is seemingly passive or hidden on the sidelines of the classroom activity. Since our culture still symbolizes activity as male and passivity as female, the question of agency often turns into a question of gender." (Rainio, 2009:39)

While agency is a common concept in the anglophone literature, the same cannot be said in the francophone literature – where there is no agreement around the terminology of power. Rather than joining the debate, some authors simply use the term in English, talk about agents or describe what they mean in a few words. The terms ‘agencéité’ and ‘agentivité’, while they have not yet entered official dictionaries, are now commonly used by academics and while some fields appear to have marked preferences for one term over another (for instance ‘agencéité’ in economics) the choice of which term use still appears to be a matter of preference from each individual author.

An earlier study conducted in Mali (Klien, 2016) used Bamanakan words to prompt participants to discuss agency. ‘Dusu’ refers to internal power, strength, courage and internal motivation and ‘ka da I yèrè la’ means believing in yourself. ‘Hèrè’ was used to describe the desired state, that is ‘good things’ in the sense of general wellbeing and happiness and ‘niè ta’ was used to indicate a sense of progression (‘niè’ means “forward” and ‘ta’ means “go”). Given the multi-linguistic context of the study, a similar lexicon may need to be developed to discuss agency with the study’s adolescent participants.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

> "There are young people who are not disengaged, but active and concerned about civic issues, and aware of themselves as young video-makers seeking social change." (Raby et al., 2017:13)

Overall, the literature reviewed had a positive outlook on adolescents' agency and girls' agency in particular. However, there are still too few studies looking at agency in the African region and in west-Africa specifically. We must therefore be careful not to project upon PREAM's research participants discourses that have been shaped by observations made in western countries.

Answering the guiding questions of the literature review

Even after reviewing more than 120 publications and searching for literature in various data base, we were not able to answer some of our initial questions, which means that **there are still important gaps in the literature** that PREAM can address. For example, the literature reviewed so far did not specifically address the question of agency in conflict settings. There is also scarce information on the relationship between experiences of education and agency. For this reason, the following questions will be answered only after the fieldwork is completed.

- How does adolescent girls' and boys' (13-18) participation in education influence their agency?
- How does the relationship between agency and experiences of primary education in conflict-affected settings differ between adolescent (13-18) girls and boys?
- How do adolescents 13-18 in formal and non-formal education in conflict-affected settings experience agency differently?

How is agency being explicitly defined?

As presented in section 2, there are various definitions of agency. Kabeer (1999)'s definition – the ability to define one's goals and act upon them – appears to be the most popular. It has been specified and expanded upon by some authors and organizations and considering the particular focus of PREAM, the following two definitions agency may be of particular interest:

- "the capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear" (World Bank, 2014:xv).
- "the capacity to effectively manage multiple and sometimes competing goals in ways that enable him or her to sustain functioning, repair any

damage, avoid harm or threats, and to implement plans that are cohesive and responsive to any relevant contexts – social, physical, and cultural" (Durrant & Ward, 2015:192)

What components of agency are most important to adolescent girls and boys?

Various authors have identified components of agency. These are presented in section 2 and listed in section 5. However, there is no evidence that these components are important for adolescent girls and boys and PREAM will need to investigate whether the components identified in the literature align with the views of the Malian youth.

Here are the main clusters of components that emerge from the literature

- Ability to set goals or objectives, perception of one's own ability to achieve goals, being able to act on goals
- Potential, action, purpose
- Consciousness, voice and action
- Habit, imagination and judgement

How does agency influence adolescent (13-18) girls' and boys' participation in primary education?

While this question was not specifically answered in the literature reviewed so far, earlier studies suggest that agency is not always 'transformative' and that adolescents may use their agency to choose to conform to social norms. As such, the literature also suggest that agency is not a guarantee in itself that adolescents will behave in ways that adult believe to be in their best interest. Agency is also related to personal values and these are influenced by various factors. PREAM can therefore make a valuable contribution to answering this question.

How is girls' agency being framed and how is it related to bodies of literature on women and gender more broadly?

This question is addressed in section 3. Discourses on girlhood are being framed from different lenses but the literature included in this review tended to adopt similar frameworks as those used in feminist and gender study. Some authors also presented the controversy regarding discourses of girl power and the risks associated with the alignment of neo-liberal and post-feminism views of girls agency.

Recommendations

One of the key lessons from the literature is that efforts to enhance girls' agency have to go hand in hand with addressing inequitable social norms and sociocultural barriers. PREAM should therefore make sure that sufficient space is given for youths to share their perceptions on these.

PREAM should also endeavor to address the gaps in the literature in particular in regard to the relation between education and agency, agency and conflict, and the difference between formal and non-formal education.

The research team will need to invest time in reflection on the kind of prompts and the vocabulary they can use in order to encourage young people to talk about agency without defining it for them.

> "Adolescent girls in the age group 13–17 years are in a critical phase of their life. During this phase, girls are either supported to walk along a path that allows them to thrive, or they will fall back on traditional roles that quash their capabilities, halt their aspirations, and increase their vulnerability to a variety of risks […] [available data sources] do not address this age group sufficiently. Systematic study of younger adolescents is required to better understand what supports and holds back girls in this stage of life" (Berhane et al., 2019:S53).

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