



Introduction

Saudi Arabia is one of the countries which progress toward EFA since 2000 was not fully reflected in the 2015 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) due to lack of sufficient enrolment data. The country has not reported any number of children enrolled in school to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) before 2005. In order to monitor progress made by Saudi Arabia across some of the EFA goals since 2000, the GMR Team used enrolment data from the country EFA 2015 review report particularly for the earlier period in addition to data from the UIS database. Gross enrolment ratios at pre-primary and primary level by gender were then calculated using the UIS population data while net enrolment ratios come from the national EFA 2015 Report.

Pre-primary education

In Saudi Arabia more children were enrolled in pre-primary education between 2000 and 2013. Indeed, pre-primary school participation as measured by gross enrolment ratio (GER) increased from 6% to 13%. However, despite this increase, early childhood learning programmes remains a luxury for the vast majority of children and the country is characterized by very low levels of pre-primary participation.

Primary education

Saudi Arabia has increased participation in primary education since Dakar, with the primary GER increasing from 78% to 106% over the period. The country progress towards universal primary enrolment is confirmed by the increase in net enrolment ratio (NER) that rose from 89% in 2001 to nearly 97% in 2013. Saudi Arabia has then moved from the intermediate category to close to the target.

Access to school is an important step to universal primary education, but it is equally important to ensure that all children, who enrol in primary education, complete it. In terms of primary school completion, in Saudi Arabia, almost all children who enter primary school were reaching the last grade with the average survival to last grade of nearly 99% in 2011. School retention has improved since 2001 when the survival rate stood at 95%.

Gender Parity

Saudi Arabia made great strides to reach gender parity in primary education, increasing its gender parity index (GPI) of GER from 0.92 to 1.03 between 2000 and 2013.

Learning achievements

Since 1990s, there has been a great development in terms of international, regional as well as national assessments, with more countries covered. More specifically, Saudi Arabia participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011 round, at primary level for both surveys.

The PIRLS results of 2011 show that 84% of grade 4 pupils in Saudi Arabia performed at level 1 in reading. In other words, about one-sixth of pupils did not have basic reading skills. This average masks important gender disparities at the expenses of boys. Indeed, while nearly 95% of girls demonstrated basic skills in reading, the percentage was only 73% for boys.

Learning achievement is also an issue in science and even so in mathematics. Results of the 2011 TIMSS survey showed that, almost 86% of grade 4 pupils performed at level 1 in science and only 63% achieved level 1 in mathematics. Here also, important gender disparities are noted and still in favour of girls. In science, 94% girls in grade 4 were performing at level 1, well above the national average, while 77% boys were doing so. This pattern of gender disparities in science and mathematics is also found in other Arab States such as Jordan and Qatar and it is different from what is commonly observed elsewhere.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia has made great progresses towards universal primary education and gender parity. However, despite some increase participation in pre-primary education remains very low, and more efforts are expand early childhood education and make it available to all children in the country. Finally, the country must further improve learning achievements particularly in mathematics and reduce and even eliminate the important gender disparities in learning.