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From Kindergarten To College, Girls Are Outperforming Boys. U.K. Study Finds

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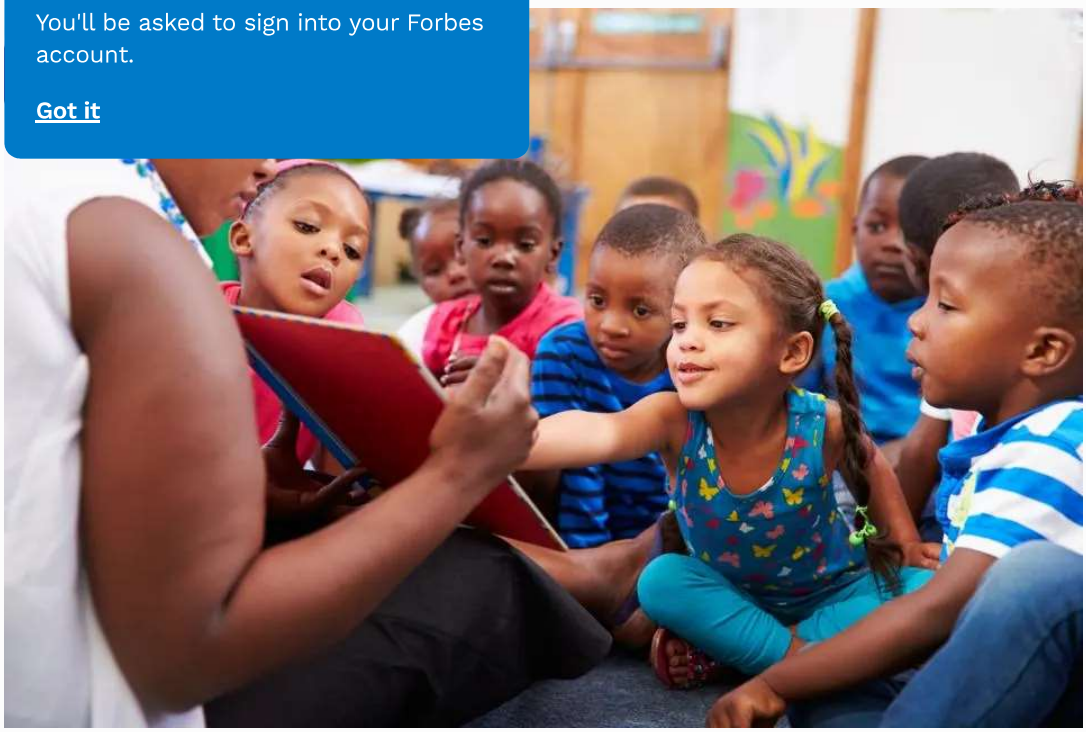

The gender gap is apparent even in pre-school children (Pic: Getty Creative) GETTY

Girls are outperforming boys at all levels of education from kindergarten to college, according to new research from the University of Cambridge.

The findings will reinforce fears that not only are boys lagging behind girls by the time they graduate from university, but that they are at a disadvantage right from the start of their formal schooling.

While the high school gender gap has caused concern for some time, the Cambridge University study based on U.K. data is one of the few to identify the differences at all stages of education.

The only subject where boys consistently did better than girls was math, but this was only apparent at the highest levels of attainment.

“The most striking pattern from the analysis was that sex gaps were present from the earliest stages of education to the latest,” said Matthew Carroll, who led the research.

The gender gap was visible even in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), when children are aged four and five — the equivalent of the pre-K year in the U.S. — with teacher assessments on whether children are meeting or exceeding expectations.

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More girls were assessed as meeting expectations in all areas of learning, by between eight and 14% on average, with the gaps relatively stable over the seven years data was analyzed.

Girls were also significantly more likely to be assessed as exceeding expectations in all areas apart from math, where boys did slightly better, and "understanding the world," where the figures were broadly even.

This pattern was repeated in assessments taken at age 10 and 11, when female attainment exceeded male in almost every area, with the exception of math, where it was virtually identical.

Girls also do better than boys in virtually every subject taken at General Certificate of Secondary Education level - exams taken at 16 in the U.K.

The exceptions were math, economics, physics, ancient history and the "other sciences" group, which includes astronomy, geology, applied science and environmental science.

But even in these subjects, boys outperformed girls by a smaller margin than when girls outperform boys in other subjects, with many of the biggest gaps in arts or creative subjects, such as art and design, drama and English.

The gap persists at A-levels - exams taken at 18 - when female students get better results in almost all subjects, even those considered to be male-dominated, such as computing and physics.

This could be because relatively few female students take these subjects, suggesting that those who do are those who are likely to

perform particularly well.

The reverse could explain why male students do better in modern foreign languages, despite it being a female-dominated subject at this age, with lower-achieving students having been filtered out.

And the gap continues post-school, with female students significantly more likely to go into higher education and to get a first class degree.

The findings illustrate that sex gaps are not only present but are highly persistent, from teacher assessments to standardized tests, said Carroll, of Cambridge University Press and Assessment, the university's publishing and assessment department.

Teacher assessments are known to favor girls, and it may be that differences at the EYFS stage sow the seeds for different education experiences and the differences later seen in external examinations, he added.

Despite female students outperforming males virtually across the board, this advantage is not necessarily carried through to employment, said Carroll.

Young women are still under-represented in some STEM subjects, have fewer opportunities available and command lower salaries than men.

"We need to figure out why female students are still less likely to pursue technology, engineering and maths, and what the possible implications of these gender-based patterns are for labor markets," Carroll added.

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