

Gender Studies Components at All Levels of Teacher Education : Suggestions Based on Empirical Research

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ABSTRACT

Classrooms are the key social and cultural spaces for the production of a range of gendered performances and relations. A study was conducted to analyse the gendered classroom practices in the primary and secondary level classrooms using observation method. 12 primary and 12 secondary classrooms belonging to Malappuram and Thrissur districts of Kerala were selected as the sample. The findings using observation method revealed that there are gendered classroom practices existing with regard to teacher-student verbal interaction, teacher eye contact and attention, grouping of students, assigning roles and responsibilities, and disciplinary practices. Interviews with teachers at primary and secondary levels revealed that the teachers lack gender awareness and the concept of gender and its implications are unknown to several of them. They accept and uphold the popular gender norms and transmit them to the future generations.

Key Words: Gendered classroom practices, teacher eye contact and attention, grouping of students, assigning roles and responsibilities, perceptions about gendered practices

INTRODUCTION

Recent researches consider gender as an organizing principle in all social institutions like academic, workplace and legal systems. Researches on gender and education have burgeoned since the mid-1970s. Inequality in the classroom has been one theme in such research, including identification of school processes and practices which convey particular conceptions of and boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Gender bias and discrimination in the education system pose serious implications to the nature and quality of education that boys and girls receive from the schools. The classrooms as well as the overall school climate play a significant role in developing values of gender justice in the growing minds. According to Sadker and Sadker (1994) sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different education. Studies have revealed how gendered school experiences negatively impact upon girls' educational attainment (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Younger & Warrington, 1996).

Schools are the sites for the formation of beliefs about femininity and masculinity (Stromquist, 2007) and the sites for the construction of gendered identities among children (Butler, 1990; Dean, et al., 2007). This socialization covers a wide range of practices, from administrators' and teachers' attitudes and expectations, textbook messages, peer interactions, and classroom dynamics, to the larger school climate or environment (Stromquist, 2007). Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modelling (Abbott, 2007). Bandura opines that gender differences in any sort of behaviour – including morality – are largely due to learning of appropriate roles from observing the actions of adults and peers. Every society has its own gender role perceptions as a consequence of which men and women are rewarded for what is considered role appropriate behaviour and punished for behaviors that are considered inappropriate (Fleming, 2005).

The teachers and educational administrators who are products of patriarchy are totally unaware of the need for gender equality and they happen to act as agents spreading patriarchal values (Kuruvilla, 2011). School reflects the dominant gender ideology of the society around them and actively produces gender and heterosexual divisions (Ghail, 1994). According to Bandura (1977) "most human behaviour is learned observationally through modeling, from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for

action”. Bandura’s (1977), social learning theory rests upon three main concepts. First, the individuals have the ability to learn through observation, second- that mental states are a fundamental part of this process and thirdly, the theory alleges that when something is learned this does not always follow by a change in behaviour. Bandura (1965) found that boys were more likely than girls to act aggressively after viewing an aggressive model. The experiences afforded to girls and boys within schools are known to affect gender differentiation both directly, by providing differential skill practices and reinforcement (Leaper & Bigler, 2011) and indirectly, by providing inputs that lead children to actively socialize themselves along gender-differentiated pathways. Later on in 2013, Bigler, Hayes and Hamilton highlighted teachers and peers as the two primary sources who directly influence this gender differentiation.

The gender schema theory was formally introduced by Bem in 1981 as a cognitive theory to explain how individuals become gendered in society and how sex-linked characteristics are maintained and transmitted to other members of a culture. Bem argues that there are individual differences in the degree to which people hold these gender schemata. These differences are manifested via the degree to which individuals are sex-typed. According to Streitmatter (1994), students in environments permeated with sexism tend to develop value systems that are gender differentiated, which in turn help perpetuate gender bias that they will carry with them into the adult world. Hence students' gendered experiences at school and in classrooms contribute to the gender divisions found in later lives that perpetuate gender inequality, such as the choice of occupational sectors, the standing and influence within sectors, and the prioritizing of the occupational relative to the domestic (Howe, 1997). According to Bem, in cultures where distinctions between men and women are emphasized, children learn to use gender as a way to process information about the world (Kretchmar, 2009). Two characters of gender schema are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, gender schemas tend to be polarized, so that children believe what is acceptable and appropriate for females is not acceptable or appropriate for males and vice versa. Secondly, gender schemas tend to be andocentric; that is children internalize the message that males and masculinity are the standard norm, and are more highly valued than females and femininity (Wharton, 2005). Based on Bem’s research there are three features of gender schematics. Gender schemas develop through an individual’s observation of societal classifications of masculinity and femininity, which are evidenced in human anatomy, social roles and characteristics. Males and females cognitively process and categorize new information in their environment based on its maleness or femaleness. Self-authorship is displayed by an individual’s categorization of and conformity to the sets of elements that belong to either definition of masculinity or femininity (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). Bem (1981, 1993) rejected Freudian beliefs of “anatomy is destiny” and proposed that an individual’s gender identification emerged from his or her cognitive development and societal influences (Hsiao, 2010).

As part of co-curricular activities like SUPW, boys will get training in repair of electrical appliances while girls will be taught stitching and embroidery. In schools girls will be asked to sweep the floor and clean the classroom while boys will be sent out to play. Directly and indirectly such practices strengthen the stereotypic roles among girls and boys (Kuruvilla, 2013). The roles and responsibilities assigned to girls and boys in schools are gender specific. When teachers sort children for different activities, and give roles to them in relation to their gender, the seeds of gender bias are getting deeply planted in young minds. Girls’ role in contributing to ‘care’ work in school and home is viewed as ‘just’ and ‘unavoidable’ (Jha, 2008). Girls are usually made responsible for cleaning classrooms and offices, watering the school garden (Dunne, Leach, Chilisa, Maundeni, Tabulawa, Kutor, Forde & Asamoah, 2005).), offering bouquets to guests, singing prayer songs etc. while the authoritative supervisory roles like controlling the class in the absence of teachers, school leadership, inviting guests etc. are given to boys (Kuruvilla, 2011). To fill the gaps in research and bring forth the gender bias in the classroom practices of schools to the limelight, the present study was undertaken.

Objectives Of The Study

1. To examine the gendered classroom practices in primary and secondary schools with regard to-
 - teacher-student verbal interaction
 - teacher eye contact and attention
 - grouping of students
 - assigning roles and responsibilities
 - disciplinary practices
2. To assess the perceptions of teachers about gender equality

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consists of 12 primary and 12 secondary school classrooms belonging to Malappuram and Thrissur districts of Kerala State and 48 teachers selected from these schools. The type of school - government, aided and unaided and the

location of the school as to urban/ locale were taken into consideration while selecting the sample. Since religion is considered as a major socialization agent, due weightage was also given to the type of management of the school as to Christian, Hindu and Muslim management in the case of aided and unaided schools. Six primary and six secondary school classrooms were selected from each district.

The teacher sample consisted of 24 male and 24 female teachers selected using convenient sampling from the 24 schools. 24 of them belonged to the primary level and the rest 24 to the high school.

Tools and Data Collection Procedure

Observation in qualitative research, usually consists of detailed recording of and analysis of behaviours, events and the contexts, surrounding the research topic, that occurs during a specific period of time. The ethos of the school and the social practices outside formal lessons, for example in the play ground, during meals times or in extra curricular activities have a bearing on the nature of what is learnt. Hence structured observation using a checklist was used to collect data regarding the gendered behavioural practices in schools. After taking prior permission from the concerned school authorities, the classroom practices like the student teacher interactions, student grouping, disciplinary practices etc were observed. To enhance reliability of data, observations were conducted two to three times on three different occasions- class time, lunch break and play time in each school at one month interval.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. Gendered classroom practices in primary and secondary school classrooms

Observation of the classroom practices in the present study revealed that there are gendered practices in the primary and secondary schools happening through teacher-student verbal interaction, teacher eye contact and attention, grouping of students, assigning roles and responsibilities and disciplinary practices. The findings are detailed below:

1a. Teacher-Student Verbal Interaction

The present observations showed that teacher-student interaction facilitates gender stereotypes and male centeredness in the primary and secondary classrooms. Teachers were found to interact more with boys than girls and it is 10 to 14 times more than that of girls. Body language of teachers always favoured boys than girls i.e., teachers are more close and most of the time near to the boys' side.

Teachers give all the instructions related to textbooks, writing, and homework focusing and looking at the boys than girls. Teachers call male students most of the time than girls and ask questions, or depute some responsibilities to them or have classroom discussion with them and it is 10 to 17 times more than calling female students. Observation also revealed that boys are dominant than girls in both teacher and student initiated interactions. The findings are summarized in fig.1

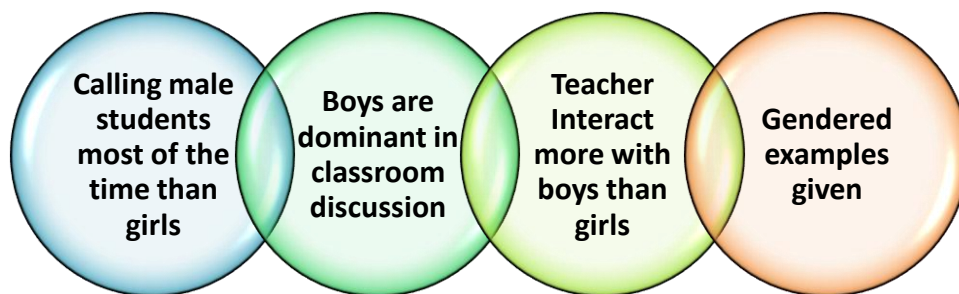


Fig. 1. Teacher-Student Verbal Interaction in Primary and Secondary Classrooms

While providing learning experiences it was found that the teachers use gendered examples for explaining the topics. In one primary classroom while providing an assignment related to the concept of 'nutrition', the teacher asked the students to list out the nutritional contents in the meals that their mothers cook at homes during the last two days. In one of the classrooms at secondary level, the language teacher explained the word 'lajhha' (shyness) as the shyness on the face of a bride and her eye contacts were focussed on the girl students while giving explanation. In another classroom, during the period of drill, the teacher's discussion about sports was directed only on boys.

1b. Teachers' Eye Contact and Attention

The study observed that boys get more eye contact and attention during teaching periods, especially while asking questions and it is four times more when compared to girls.

Teachers' eye contacts are different while dealing with topics of gendered nature. It is observed that the girls get more eye contact when the academic topic considered is feminine and if the topic is a masculine one, the eye contact is more on male students. In one of the secondary classrooms it was observed that when the teacher discussed about sports, the eye contact and related questions were focussed on boys alone. Girls get less attention because it is considered as a masculine topic. But when the topic is related to beauty, home or preparing food, the eye contact is on girls than on boys. Such gendered differences are frequently observed in the secondary classrooms than at primary level. The findings are summarized in fig.2.

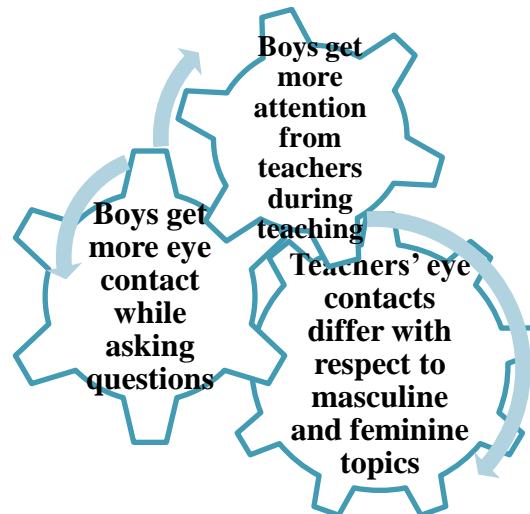


Fig. 2. Gendered Eye Contact and Attention of Teachers in Primary and Secondary Classrooms

1.c. Grouping of Students

Grouping of students for classroom activities is significant, because it will help to the sharing of knowledge and ideas as well as the improvement in the skills of girls and boys, acceptance and respect of each other's abilities, especially while it is mixed grouping. But the observations of the present study reveal that mixed grouping was mostly followed in the primary classrooms than in secondary. The study also reveals that the nature of grouping of students as to same sex or mixed vary with the type of management of schools. Out of the 12 primary classrooms studied, all except the three Muslim management schools follow mixed grouping of students for classroom activities. The results of the observation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of Observation of Group Activities in Primary Classrooms

Statements	Frequency of Behaviour	
	Primary	Secondary
Grouping students into same sex groups during group activities	12	7
Grouping students into mixed groups during classroom activities	19	3
Girls show inhibition to engage in mixed group activities	9	0
Boys show inhibition to engage in mixed group activities	11	0

However at the secondary level, 11 schools follow separate or bench wise method for grouping of students, only one school (Government) follow mixed grouping for the classroom activities. Teachers grouped students based on their roll number and the mixed group activities were found to be very rare in secondary school classrooms unlike that at primary level.

1.d. Assigning Responsibilities

Gendered practices were observed in the roles and responsibilities assigned by teachers to the boys and girls. Most of the time teachers assigned responsibilities like leadership or controlling of the students in the classroom to the boys than the girls whereas girls are entrusted with assisting or helping boys. In two of the schools, boys were assigned the role of controlling the classroom in the absence of teachers. The specific feature to be noted here is the fact that this assignment of duty to boys is happening in presence of the actual class leaders who were girls. Boys are also deputed to read the lessons and do maths problems on the blackboard during class periods. Majority of the schools deputed girls to bring teaching aids like book, register, charts etc. from the staff room to the classroom.

In most of the aided and government primary schools, girls and boys were assigned the responsibility of classroom cleaning, with boys to clean their side only and girls cleaning their side. Few of the primary schools were found to assign cleaning responsibility to mixed groups. On such occasions girls were found to clean the class and boys help replacing the benches and desks. In some schools girls only were found to do their duty seriously and clean the classroom while the boys run and jump around throughout the classroom. In government and aided primary school classrooms where free midday meals are supplied to students, the responsibilities of bringing lunch from the school kitchen to the classroom and supplying it to the students were assigned to boys and a few girls were deputed to assist them. The results of the are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Observation on Assignment of Roles and Responsibilities in Primary and Secondary Classrooms

Statements	Frequency of Behaviour	
	Primary	Secondary
Girls deputed for bringing material requirement like chalk, duster and other teaching aids	6	5
Boys deputed for bringing material requirement like chalk, duster and other teaching aids	6	3
Boys entrusted with classroom cleaning	3	3
Girls entrusted with classroom cleaning	3	3
Boys assigned classroom leadership	4	0
Girls assigned classroom leadership	2	3
Boys deputed to read the lessons	5	2
Girls deputed to read the lessons	3	1
Boys deputed to control the class in the absence of teacher	7	3
Girls deputed to control the class in the absence of teacher	3	2

In all the secondary schools, the boys and girls were grouped separately while assigning responsibilities of classroom cleaning. Since unaided schools at secondary levels have sweepers for cleaning the classrooms, such a responsibility was not found to be assigned to students. In most of the government and aided schools, the boys’ side of the classroom was to be cleaned by the boys and girls’ side by the girls themselves. The girls seemed to accept the cleaning of the classroom as their responsibility but the boys seemed not bothered about this. After lunch, the girl groups immediately clean their side neatly, but the boys did not seem to take it seriously. In one classroom at secondary level, the teacher was found scolding the girls for keeping the classroom unclean with pieces of paper scattered around. Immediately the girls picked up the waste papers from the floor and dumped them into the waste basket while the boys seemed not at all bothered about this.

1.e. Disciplinary Practices Because of the strict government rules and regulations regarding disciplinary practices, no strict punishments are given to students in Kerala schools. Beating, scolding, shouting, making children stand in the corner of the class, calling parents, giving impositions are the main punishments usually given by teachers to their students. In the present study gendered disciplinary practices were observed in the primary and secondary classrooms. The teachers were found to scold boys four times more than girls in the classroom. This is mainly because the boys are largely undisciplined and often misbehave than girls in the classroom during teaching hours while girls most of the time sit very silent, calm and quiet and due to this the need to scold them does not arise. But whenever girls are found fault with, gender differences were found in the nature of scolding showered upon boys and girls. For instance in a secondary school classroom when the class teacher came inside, she found both boys and girls making noise and creating disturbance. The teacher ignored the boys and scolded the girls with statements like, “girls have no discipline, how come girls make more noise than boys, it is quite unfair”. In general not much difference was observed between the primary and secondary schools with regard to the disciplinary practices followed for boys and girls. The findings are summarized in fig.3.

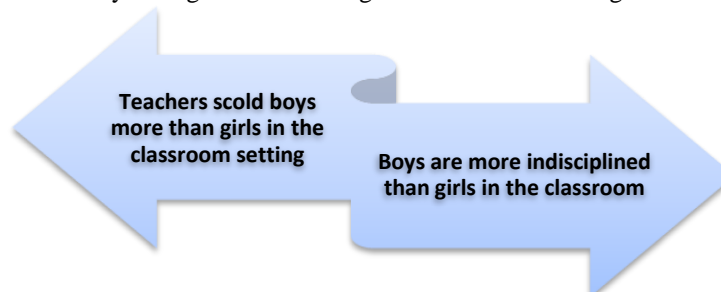


Fig.3. Disciplinary Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms

II. Perceptions of Teachers on Gender Equality

The data collected from interviews of the teachers regarding their perceptions on gendered practices in the school and gender roles of men and women in general was subjected to qualitative analysis. Teachers agree with the existence of differential practices for boys and girls with regard to their dress code, assignment of roles and responsibilities, seating arrangements, disciplinary practices, student grouping, and teacher-student interaction. The analysis also revealed that the perceptions of majority of teachers are gendered with traditional concepts regarding gender roles of men and women and subject choices of girls and boys. The results of analysis are discussed in detail below:

II.a. Teacher Perceptions on Dress code

Teachers in general were found to support dress code, specifically of girl students even when it is not there in their schools. Two of the teachers from Muslim management schools opined that girls may enter any field or any job but they must strictly follow the religious instructions on dressing. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Teacher Perceptions on Dress Code

Teacher Perceptions on Dress Code	Agree
Girls need to care more about their dressing pattern	100%
Dressing style is the main cause for violence against women	100%
Girls should avoid wearing of tight dresses, which would invite unwanted attention and trouble	100%

II.b. Teacher Perceptions on Seating Arrangements

The present analysis shows that there is gender bias in teachers' perceptions regarding seating arrangements in the classrooms and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Teacher Perceptions on Seating Arrangements

Teacher Perceptions on Seating Arrangements	Agree
Mixed seating is good to be followed at primary level only	39%
Mixed seating is good, because it reduces segregation or difference among boys and girls	17%
It facilitates classroom management	15%
Mixed seating is not good as it may lead to unfair relations among boys and girls.	44%

As per Table 4, 44% of the teachers, from both primary and secondary classes opined that they do not agree with the mixed seating in the classroom. According to them mixed seating is not good as it is not in our culture, girls reach maturity earlier than the boys and the touch and intimate contacts between boys and girls may lead to unwanted consequences at this tender age. Teachers, who agreed with mixed seating conveyed that this system would help to reduce gender segregation or difference between boys and girls and also would reduce the shyness of girls and promotes mingling between the opposite sex.

II.c. Teacher Perceptions on Grouping of Students in Classroom Activities

Majority of teachers, both at primary (92%) and secondary (71%) levels except teachers of Muslim management schools in Malappuram district accept and agree with the mixed grouping in classroom activities. Most of the teachers conveyed that they do not follow the mixed grouping system because of the resistance from the PTA. The results are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Teacher Perceptions on Grouping of Students

Teacher Perceptions on Grouping of Students	Primary	Secondary
Mixed grouping is good	92%	71%
Mixed grouping is not good and not encouraged	8%	29%

II.d. Teacher Perceptions on Teacher-Student Interactions

Majority of teachers at secondary level responded that both boys and girls are interactive in the classroom and some of them opined that boys are more interactive than girls in the classroom discussions. Regarding the attention given to students, 62% of teachers of secondary schools opined that they give more attention to boys in the classroom as boys are more restless than girls.

II.e. Teacher Perceptions on Interaction Between Boys and Girls

Majority of teachers, both males and females were not in support of free mingling of adolescents with their opposite sex. According to them despite all the restrictions imposed they come across lots of issues including unfair relations and love affairs on a daily basis and the parents and teachers remain helpless in some cases. The influence of TV and misuse of mobiles and internet were also specified by majority of those who disagreed with too close interactions and contacts between adolescents of opposite sex.

Table 6: Teacher Perceptions on Interaction Between Boys and Girls

Interaction between boys and girls is not good	10%
Accept interaction between boys and girls to a certain extent and stress the need for a limit	55%
Boys and girls must mingle freely	35%

II.f. Teacher Perceptions on Assignment of Roles and Responsibilities

Above 65% of the teachers in the primary and secondary levels responded that they employ voting system for selecting the class leader and school leader. The rest of the teachers select class leaders based on the students' performance in the classroom. 30% of teachers at the secondary level opined that girls are reluctant to come forward to the leadership positions, but the teachers at primary level responded that there is no such difference at the primary level. All the teachers, both at the primary and secondary level opined that the girls are actively engaged in all the responsibilities assigned to them.

In assigning the responsibilities of classroom cleaning, 89% of teachers conveyed that they group the students separately dividing the responsibilities equally for boys and girls – to clean the girls' side by the girls and the boys' side by the boys. They also responded that majority of boys do not give seriousness to the cleaning responsibilities while girls do it with utmost sincerity.

But it was also found that majority of teachers despite dividing roles and responsibilities including that of classroom cleaning equally among boys and girls, still hold traditional gender role perceptions.

DISCUSSION

The observations of the present study reveal that the classrooms produce gendered practices among students through various activities. Through such practices schools develop and reinforce gender segregation, stereotypes, even discrimination, which exaggerates negative aspects of sex roles in the outside world. The gender ideology of the society is found to influence such rules and regulations in schools that are constituted by the society. Thus a reciprocative influence is seen between what happens within the schools and what is considered ideal by the society. The findings of the present study are in agreement with the opinion of Ghail (1994) that the school reflects the dominant gender ideology of the society around them and actively produces gender and heterosexual divisions. Gender discrimination in the education system leads to deep-rooted disparities in society.

Majority of the schools have seated and grouped boys and girls in accordance with their gender. The overall gender segregation in the society and the gendered school environment has watered and nurtured the preference for same sex groups among boys and girls at both the primary and secondary school levels. Similar findings were obtained by Kuruvilla and Najumunnisa (2011) in their study in six primary schools of Malappuram district. Wherever a mixed seating arrangement was followed in classrooms, children were found to be more willing to mingle freely with members of the opposite sex. This further indicates that a positive reformation on the part of the school would enable and encourage children to overcome the gendered segregation imposed upon them by other biased socialisation agencies. The findings of the present study are in agreement with the observations of Kunjumon (2012) that, every school has its own culture and has

a prominent role in creating the gender differences in students. Each school tries to transmit their cultural patterns to their students through their rules and norms, in a formal setting.

There are schools where mixed seating scenario gets changed as per the demand of parents. The teachers in the schools, especially at the secondary level seemed to be anxious of the consequences of mixed seating arrangements in classrooms. They are not confident of encouraging the interactions and closer mingling of students because they carry an immense fear that it may lead to ‘unhealthy and out of way’ relationships among them which in turn would affect the learning outcomes of the students. This way, the teachers and school authorities in general are unknowingly practicing gendered behaviours and are unaware of the consequences of such discrimination in the schools.

Teachers are also taking a part in promoting gender segregation process among students through classroom practices. The findings of the present study endorse the observations of Bassi (2003) and UNICEF (2009) that gender bias is clearly visible in the classroom and playground, even in the minds of teachers and administrators. The findings showed that boys get more eye contact, attention and interaction with teachers than girls in the same classroom. The argument of Kelly (1988) that the teachers interact more with boys than girls both in teacher and student initiated interactions, teachers ask more questions and give more response opportunities to boys and also pay more attention to the boys than the girls in classroom seems true as such in the schools of Kerala also.

The findings of the present study that boys get more eye contact and attention from teachers are supported by the observations of Becker (1981), Sadker and Sadker (1992), Spender (1982) and Thorne (1979). What Jandhyala (2004) opined about teachers is found to be true in the present study also. Teachers stand nearer and closer to boys than girls in the classroom while teaching and asking questions. Both boys and girls suffer from these; but it affects girls more negatively than boys. What Sadker and Sadker (1994) opined about differential experience of boys and girls in classrooms is endorsed by the findings of the present study.

The gender role perceptions of teachers are transmitted to the students through the classroom practices. This may lead to different identities and aspirations about the future among children.

The gender role stereotypes that schools help to reproduce include the notion that girls are caring, nurturing, quiet, helpful, considerate of others, and place others' needs before their own. The gendered behaviours in the class room may lead to low self-esteem among girl students. As the school plays a significant role in the socialization process, the gendered behaviours in schools especially from the classroom practices lead to a gender segregated mentality among students which in turn reinforces gender stereotypes and gender division of labour in the society. Proper awareness regarding gendered practices in the school environment among teachers, school managements, students and parents is necessary. Educators and policy makers need to initiate actions to eliminate the gender bias from education system.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Across the world, schooling has not always fulfilled its potential as a change agent capable of challenging existing gender inequalities. However, in schools gender equality is central to achieving rights of not only access but participation, recognition and valuing of all children. It is also integral to improving the quality of education bringing in democracy in the classroom as democratic learning is based on gender equality and quality education. However, assumptions about what is appropriate for boys and girls to learn often undermine aspirations for equality in pedagogy. Historical and geographical contexts play a crucial role in shaping these assumptions and creating the conditions in which an agenda for gender equality does or does not develop. All socialization agencies need to take up the responsibility and enhance their respective efforts to wipe away the unequal gender relations and gender division of labour that still persist in the Indian society that sustain the secondary status of women. In this regard the teachers, the parents, the school management, the state and other socialization agencies all have their respective roles to play.

The teacher is the heart of the classroom, the one who moulds and enhances the quality of learning. The teacher has the key role to provide a safe and gender friendly space for boys and girls to express themselves and simultaneously develop notions of gender justice among students. Teachers should encourage mixed group activities in the classroom and structure the activities so that boys and girls get opportunities to cooperate and mingle with each other. Teachers should reduce the gender-role stereotyping through their own behaviours, classroom practices and language, especially when communicating with children. The interactions and communications in the classroom should be in such a way that ensures the breaking of gendered hierarchies and power that exclude girls and women and increase the ability to challenge age old conceptions, prejudices and practices which have a negative toll on the empowerment of girls and women. Within classrooms, teachers can involve children in developing strategies for gender equality through changed pedagogies. Specific approaches focusing

on particular topics, for example, helping children to understand sexual maturation without shame and discuss histories of feminism in different countries help dispel some of the ignorance that sustains gender inequality.

Expectations about teachers to become effective change agents for gender equality – inside reformers – will not be met unless teachers are supported and empowered to do this through the coordinated efforts of pre-service training institutions, providers of in-service training and ongoing professional development.

Teachers need to be made aware of how their pedagogies can sustain gender inequalities and have severe consequences for girls' and boys' learning. 'Gender sensitization' is not enough to empower teachers to develop gender responsive teaching methodologies and pedagogies that go beyond recognising and questioning stereotypical expectations of boys and girls. Gender differences pervade the choice of learning style, assessment, students' ability to express their voice and use space, as well as how reforms geared to developing 'independent learners' are expressed and implemented.

Teacher education courses should take it seriously and devise special strategies to make prospective teachers engage in and understand the implications of gender and the need for including multifaceted gender issues in the curriculum. For realising this it is essential to include gender studies components at all levels of teacher education. It should also be ensured that training staff are trained and have the capacity to provide strong examples of gender equitable pedagogies in all their teaching, as well as develop modules to be taught as part of all pre-service and in-service courses. The Handbook for teachers are to be restructured with inputs on gender equitable pedagogies. Gender awareness training must be made a mandatory session in all in-service teacher training programmes.

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