A STUDY OF GENDER DISPARITY AND SOCIAL BIAS IN CO-EDUCATION SCHOOL SYSTEM-NEED FOR CHANGE

Minor research project

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Gender has indeed emerged as an important issue in recent times with its increasing pace in discussion forums and due to the shift, in focus in public domain from women’s welfare to overall development of girl children and women.

Schools act as effective social institutions that reinforce the traditional stereotypes regarding gender, in terms of the curriculum division of labour among male/female students, dress code etc (Meenu, 2005). To change the gender education of boys and girls in a school may need to reassess and change its gender regime as a whole. The school curriculum needs to be analyse and be made more gender sensitive.

Effective change among student’s attitudes and action begin only through effective and systematic education. A number of factors play a significant role for molding and shaping the behavior of the students. Socially committed and dedication teacher gender-free curriculum, gender-free school environment, healthy interaction between male and female students, healthy and sound PTA, and equal access of physical infrastructure are the factors which foster a spirit of equality and harmony between boys and girls and prepare them for equal partnership and shared roles for a common future. Hence a study on the structure and functioning of educational system with special focus on co-education school system is necessary. This study will help us to understand whether the present school environment perpetuate gender inequality and gender difference. The specific objectives were set forth for the study.

Objectives:

1. To know whether the school is functioning in a manner free from all the gender biases and it effectively re-socialize the child from acquired understanding of gender based roles, behaviours and expectations to gender equity and gender equality.

2. To assess the availability of physical infrastructure and other basic facilities of the schools and to know how far these facilities are enjoyed by both girls and boys in the school.

3. To understand the manner in which the teacher interacts with the students and to know whether teachers reinforce negative attitudes, social biases and stereotypes and beliefs.
4. To know the attitude of parents towards the overall functioning of the school and how far this help for the students to develop self-esteem, confidence and personality. And it also understands through the present practice related to gender whether it induce gender disparity or gender equality.

5. To understand and analyse how far this institution impart value oriented classes and gender related issues in order to remove gender barriers and promote gender equality.

**Universe and Sampling**

The study was conducted among the co-education schools in Thrissur district in Kerala state. The list of co-education Higher Secondary school was collected from the District Education Office. Out of the total Higher Secondary schools 140, from which 35 schools- ten to twenty percent representation was randomly selected for study.

**Selection of Area**

Multi stage sampling procedure was followed. Out of the fourteen districts in Kerala, Thrissur district is purposively selected, because Thrissur has been called the most women unfriendly district in Kerala. According to the district wise figure of gender based violence in the year 2010-11, the largest number of assault cases of women have been reported from Thrissur, second largest number of case of divorcee have been reported from Thrissur. Even though Thrissur is known as the cultural centre and educational centre of Kerala, at the same time the district has increase instances of gender based violence against women. Hence this study concentrated in this district.

**Pilot study**

A broad theoretical framework is prepared after analyzing the problem; through scanning literature related to gender disparity and education system. A pilot study was conducted in Thrissur district of Kerala to get a comprehensive idea of the way these schools are functioning.

**Tool of data collection**

A well structured interview schedule was constructed. It consists of both open ended and close ended questions. The schedule consists five sections. First section deals about the structure and location of school, facilities, resources, rules and regulations. Second section deals about the opinion of head master, third section on teachers’
opinion, fourth section on PTA presidents view and the fifth section on students (both the gender) view on school.

**Pre-test**

A pre-test was conducted among five co-education higher secondary schools in Thrissur district in order to check the feasibility and clarity of the interview schedule.

**Sources of data**

The primary and secondary data were used for the study. The investigator collected the primary data directly from the school authorities, teachers, PTA presidents, students by using structured interview schedules. The investigator also conducted informal interaction with the parents, students to gain more information about the problem under study. The secondary data is collected from reviewing the literature. The secondary data were collected from the journals, books, internet and various websites.

**Data collection**

The data collection was conducted during the period between December 2009 to August 2010. The investigator visited 35 Higher Secondary Schools in Thrissur District in Kerala and interviewed school principal, teachers, PTA president, students etc. with a structured interview schedule. A field diary was also maintained to note the specific situation and extra information.

**Analysis**

The collected data from all the completed questionnaire were again checked to ensure the completeness of the data. Coding was done for the purpose of appropriate statistical analysis and then transferred into a master chart. Simple distribution tables were prepared from the master chart and then the tables were interpreted.

**Organization of project report**

The minor project report has eight chapters. The significance of the research problem is enlightened in the introductory chapter. An overview of theory and research about gender, gender difference, gender disparity etc are given in the second chapter. Third chapter deals about methodology. The fourth chapter explains the structure location and other details of the schools, fourth chapter deals about the views/opinion of
Head master, teachers, PTA president and students about school and the last chapter deals about the summary, conclusion and suggestions

**Major findings**

Four out of ten schools consist of more than 300 students, a little less than forty percent schools consist 200-300 students, a little less than one fifth of schools consist 100-200 student, while remaining (5.7%) schools have students below 100. A little more than one third (37.3 %) of schools consist maximum 50 percent of male students, a little more than half (54.2%) of the schools have below 50 percent, whereas remaining (8.5%) consist of above fifty percent of male students. One fourth (25.8 percent) of the schools have fifty percent female students, whereas little less than four out of ten schools have less than fifty percent female students, and little less than four out of ten schools have more than fifty percent female students.

About nine out of ten schools (91.4%) strictly have Anti mobile cell, while a few schools (8.5%) do not have such cell. Except a few, all schools (94.2%) have Anti ragging cell.

Almost all schools provide all the facilities to both boys and girls equally and also distributing school resources equally without any gender discrimination.

More than eighty percent of schools regularly keep tutorial hour and assign a tutor in each class. Almost all the schools provide value oriented class. About eighty percent of schools arrange ethic classes to the students.

With regard to the academic performance of schools shows that almost all the school keeps regular class test. A great majority of schools regularly give home work. More than eighty percent of schools encourage students to participate extracurricular activities. About seventy percent of schools arrange class on contemporary relevant topics by experts.

With regard to the absence of students, it is clear that about 50% of the boys are absent frequently when compared to girls. Reason for taking frequent absence by the boys is that they are doing part-time jobs and other reason is that they are not interested in their studies. Reason for taking frequent absence by the girls is because of health problems. It is also noticed that girls have very much interest in attending class and in their studies when compared to boys.
With regard to percentage of success in competitive examination, nearly three out of ten (28.5%) schools have 100 percent of success in the competitive examination.

Section on gender relationships in the school shows that a little more than one tenth (14.2%) reported some misbehavior in the part of students, while a great majority (85.8%) campus is gender free-environment and they do not face any such problems in the campus.

Except a few (5.8%) schools, all other schools (94.2%) promote healthy relation between male and female students. Great majority (91.4%) of schools treat male and female students equally. Almost all schools provide equal opportunity for female students and male students as well as facilities are also provided the students from both the gender equally. Almost all the schools encourage gender equality classes to the students to eliminate gender difference and gender inequality. Most of the schools (94.2%) authorities are always conscious that girl students are cared by all means and not harassed by anyone in the campus. Only about three fourths (74.2%) schools are giving priority to girl students by all means.

With regard to the attitude towards various statements related to gender difference shows that about ninety percent schools have a favourable attitude towards the statement that girls should go for higher education and achieve a good position in the society.

All the schools agreed that they give priority to gender equality in the classroom. About ninety percent schools do not have any impartial in punishing the students. Almost all the school authorities said that they are well aware about the students in their class rooms.

About ninety percent of schools very much conscious that gender disparity should not reflect in the class room teaching. At the same time except a few schools, all other schools are very conscious about correcting the students when there is gender inequality in classroom.

With regard to dropout rate, about forty percent of schools reported a high level of female dropout, reason is marriage. Some of the schools reported that very rarely boys disrespect the girls. A great majority of schools maintain good relationship between girls and boys in the class. About eighty percent of school teachers said that
boys and girls are helping each other in the class. Almost all school provide a gender free environment in the class and campus.

With regard to assessing gender inequality while assigning responsibilities to students in the classroom shows that more than ninety percent of schools, girls are in charge for classroom cleaning, arranging and collecting money etc. Assignment collecting, decorating class rooms are the other two activities which female students dominate.

Nearly ninety percent of schools girls are the leaders. Most of the teachers prefer to select girls as class leaders. Teachers said that women have more organizing capacity and high level of patience of doing things.

With regard to PTA presidents view about school, a great majority of PTA presidents of schools expressed high level of satisfaction towards the interaction with teachers and students. Nine out of ten PTA presidents expressed that their school maintain good academic excellences. A great majority of PTA presidents expressed high level of satisfaction towards the facilities provided by the school to the students. Except one president, all others said the girls are respected in all means in the campus.

Almost all the Presidents said the campus provides gender free environment. Except two schools, all other schools PTA Presidents said that the staff members have cordial relationship with girl students. All school PTA Presidents are highly satisfied with the statement related to girl students are cared by all means.

As to the views of students from both gender towards gender inequality and social bias in co-education school system reveals the facts that more than ninety percentage of students particularly girl students expressed that they enjoy equal opportunities in the class room as well as they enjoy enough freedom to mingle with boys. They said teachers do not show any partiality in putting internal marks and entrusting responsibilities, asking questions and giving punishments, organizing programmes and providing facilities etc. Teachers are equally treating both boys and girls while giving remedial coaching. None of them reported any harassment either from the classroom or from the campus. A great majority said they can share their personal problems freely with their teachers. Almost all the schools, students expressed that the teachers equally treat boys and girls for academic achievement and for extracurricular
activity. Students expressed that all the teachers are ready to interact with parents whenever necessary. Except a few schools, almost all the schools arrange class on sex education and health education.

On the whole the girl students openly agreed that their school provide gender free environment and they do not feel any gender difference in the class room, in the library or while interacting with staff members or non-teaching staff.

From this study, it could understand that a healthy relationship existing between male and female students in the co-education Higher Secondary schools in Kerala. Almost all schools provide equal opportunity for the students irrespective of sex. Teachers also treat male and female students equally. Teachers are also conscious about girl students and students are well cared by the teachers. In the classroom atmosphere also give priority to girl students by all means. Most of the school campus provide gender-free environment. None of the school treats girl students as a subordinate or submissive.