International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research

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SCHOOLING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Education is widely perceived as the great liberator of the mankind and the supreme force for social progress. Quality education is the vital factor for achieving social justice. The major challenges of contemporary educational system are to address the issues related to gender inequality in the social systems. The deeply rooted social believes perpetuates unequal treatment of girls and boys in schools. Schooling represents a "culture of power" which create a culture of silence to the extent that they mirror unjust social relations that exist in the larger society. Teachers' unconscious biases, negatively influence children self confidence and thereby affect their potential abilities in classrooms. Our school should ensure an education system which allows all individuals, irrespective of gender, to develop their capabilities and freedom. Thus schools and teachers at all levels have a key role to play in developing a gender-sensitive future generation. Schooling should strengthen equity and justice in the entire process of teaching and learning thereby ensures a peaceful and sustainable world. Hence the scope of this research paper is to enlighten the perception of teachers on gender bias as an impediment in achieving equity and inclusion and also their perception on promoting social justice in schools.

Keywords: Social justice, Schooling, Gender bias, Equality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools are considered as the formal institutions that strongly influence the formative years of a child's life. In Indian democratic social structure, education act as an agent of state and committed to guarantee societal progress and justice. The common sense understanding of schools perceives them as democratic, liberal institutions, committed to make social progress and social justice (Apple, 2004). But in real, school augments the inequalities existing in an already unequal and stratified society. The real challenges of the educational system in society are to create a world where the equal dignity and worth of each individual is respected and valued.

Social Justice is a philosophy which advocates for the full participation of all people, as well as for their basic legal, civil, and human rights. It aims to achieve a just and equitable society, pursued by individuals and group through collaborative social action so that all persons share in the prosperity of society (Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework, 2001). The current schooling should have an awareness and understanding of the diversities prevalent in our society. In reality school generates gendered injustice which is already prevailing in society through differential forms that includes the formal and hidden curriculum and the teacher's classroom behaviors. As a socio cultural institution school reflects gendered injustice and reproduces this injustice through numerous activities and practices. Progressive educators committed to social justice seek to disrupt those social relations in the classroom that function to silence marginalized students, especially girls.

Schooling should try to prevent social injustice then students will be more vibrant and dynamic to understand those groups they experience both attitudinal and systemic barriers in society and ensure their full and equitable participation for the sustainable development of our country.

Kerala state has reached its peak in literacy and education as compared to other states in India. But the situation in the schools of Kerala with respect to gender equality is in utter chaos. Some recent research studies shows that girls were abused physically and mentally in school days. The detrimental effects of gender bias and unequal treatment on self-confidence, girls' self-esteem and achievement have been the centre of attention of numerous articles (Sadker, 1994; Streitmatter, 1994). Here education instead of acting women in decision making process in their future life and contributing to the sustainable development of the country, it unknowingly widen or reinforce the already stratified and unequal gender segregation or stereotyped gender roles. In our schools girls and boys have different socialization experiences. By the time they enter nursery school, most of them have a fair understanding of their gender identity which is largely acquired from parents, siblings, television and other socializing agents. As the primary agents of socialization, teachers play a critical role in shaping appropriate gender role to their children. Here the researchers formulate some research question that to what extend school guarantees social justice? What is the real role of education? How can we battle the existing inequalities?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to have theoretical backing to the problem the study draws its roots mainly from three perspectives. First, literature from prevalence of Gender bias in elementary classrooms (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) and also cited the gender inequity in society, which is also reflected in the sub system of society like school. The second theoretical backup of this study was derived from the work of

Arnot & Fennell (2008) regarding the role of schooling in relation to gender justice. The democratic countries have long been setting Gender inequality in education as the agenda of their political goal and research. However equal access and opportunities to schooling has not been achieved, along with this gender stereotypes in textbooks, under representation of women in the formal curriculum, boys underachievement in schools, differential allocation of duties' and responsibilities to both genders or lack of opportunities to women teachers in the decision making positions within the school structure and gender biased language in the micro interaction between teacher and student also noticed. The third theoretical strand was a socio cultural perspective, which stresses that development and learning cannot be separated from the activities and social context in which they take place (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000). From this, individuals and the contexts in which they operate are not observed as separate constructs. Theory and praxis is equally important to explore the ways in which the philosophy, goals, resources, and structures of these small school contexts influence learning. Implications were also drawn out from analysis of analysis of how the teachers' equity-oriented practice was influenced by context-specific curriculum, materials, and resources is informed by the work of Grossman, Thompson, and Valencia (2001) and Grossman and Thompson (2004) who have examined how curriculum shapes teacher practice.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the perception of teachers on the influence of gender bias on social justice in secondary schools of Kerala

2. To suggest possible measures to reinforce social justice in the schools of Kerala.

4. METHOD

Participants and procedures

Hundred high school teachers from different secondary schools of Malappuram district forms the participants of this study. A survey (using questionnaire) was designed to collect data on teachers' perception on gender bias as obstacle to social justice in schools. Here the researchers explores the extent, pattern and nature of gender stereotypes which restrict a girl's freedom in her future endeavors and also to what extend school guarantees social justice? This paper tries to finds out how school creates gender segregated behavior reinforcing the existing inequalities thereby prevents socially just society. Out of the total sample, 45 were male teachers and 55 were female teachers. Percentage Analysis was used to analyse the data.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Responses to questions were primarily analyzed: whether our schools promotes social justice or social exclusion in the form of excluding the girl child in school by perpetuating gender bias, six domains of gender bias in schools were emerged from analysis. Table 1 demonstrates teachers' perception on gender bias in schools in percentages.

Table 1: Teachers Perception on Gender Bias in Secondary Schools

Sl. No.	Dimensions on Gender bias	Agree	Disagree
1	Method of teaching	40%	60%
2	Instructional material	65%	35%
3	Infra structure	60%	40%
4	Group activities	64%	36%
5	Co curricular activities	55%	45%
6	Academic achievement	75%	25 %

The first category of gender bias in school is Method of teaching that constitutes use of examples in classrooms; focus of instruction, asking questions, 40% of teachers agreed that boys are centre of attraction in method of teaching than girls whereas 60% of them disagreed that. To instructional materials teachers responded (65%) that textbooks are more reflecting boys' views and their life experiences than in favor of girls. Sixty percentages of teachers agreed that the infrastructure of schools including classroom, library, seating arrangements etc. perpetuates gender bias. Sixty four percent of boys try to dominate classroom activities and to enjoy scientific experiments than girls. To the domain co curricular activities primary school teachers (55%) said that boys are more active than girls. In academic achievement most of the teachers said that girls are more efficient than boys.

Similar studies also acknowledge that girls are more diligent and present a higher standard of work than boys (Barber, 1996). Therefore it was found that school reproduces gender bias and inequitable practices against girl through the differential activities employed in schools.

6. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

Schools are perceived to be the laboratories of a just society. Schools now fail to address the racial, class, and gendered inequities prevalent in our social fabric. Teachers are unknowingly becomes executor and victims, with little control over their daily routines in schools, or the broader school policies. Millions of girls who attend school today are the first in their families ever to do so. Success in getting girls into school may be sustained if schools are made welcoming for them, with positive changes in approaches to learning and teaching and in the curriculum. Without this, although larger numbers of children will enter school, many of them will quickly drop out again, and of those who stay, only some will learn in ways that will help them to thrive. Both teachers and pupils often have very set ideas about the ways in which girls and boys should behave, and the organization of the school day can reinforce these ideas. Being an effective agency of social change schooling should act as a means for enrolling and retaining all girls and boys in school, it should make opportunities for the recognition of their full potential and at the same time ensures their full and equal participation in building a socially just society.

The researcher explored perception of teachers on promoting social justice in schools to battle the gender inequalities exists in schools. Five suggestions were emerged from the analysis as presented in Table 2. Explanation on how each of these can be facilitated followed in the description.

Table 2: Teachers' Perception on Promotion of Social Justice

1	**Multicultural**	75%	25%
2	**Life centered**	65%	35%
3	**Participatory and experiential.**	60%	40%
4	**Critical.**	55%	45%
5	**Academically rigorous**	76%	24 %

6.1 Multicultural

Table 2 shows that 75% of the secondary school teachers' agreed that multicultural education is essential for school reform, and a movement for equity, social justice, and democracy. This will contribute to restructure schools so that all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world. The traditional curriculum viewed all history and the recent events from the point of view of the dominant

groups. They excluded the voices of women and other marginalized sections of the populations. Teachers agreed that multicultural curriculum will ensures social justice and attempt to embrace the lives of all those in our society, specifically the marginalized.

6.2 Life Centered

Sixty five percent agreed that education should be life centered; they stated that the real worth of teaching starts from knowing the real background of children, their inherent curiosity and their ability to learn. Curriculum should be embedded in children's needs and experiences, the topics discussed in the classroom should be related with the lives of the pupil and how it is connected with the broader society and often constrained by the society itself.

6.3 Participatory and Experiential

Teachers were very much favored (63%) participatory and experiential learning. Their response stated that the traditional curriculum gives little scope for learners' freedom and it restricts the divergent thinking of the students. Hence they emphasized that classroom; concepts need to be experienced directly, not through reading and hearing. Learning through role plays, projects, simulations, mock trials, or experiments, make the students mentally and physically lively. Our classrooms must transform in such a way to promote democratic spirit among the students and to empower them to question, challenge and to take right decision in, solving the problems they encounter. If our class room or school should be changed in this way we can expect social justice and thereby a just society.

6.4 Critical

Majority of the high school teachers were agreed (55%) that classroom should be critical enough to question the inequalities or the hidden power structure which limits the freedom of learner. Classroom should be democratic, critical and responsive to question the inequalities confronted by the learner.

6.5 Academically Rigorous

Classroom with the principle of justice prepares children not only to change the world but also to be act tactfully in the forthcoming issues of the emerging social world. Majority of the teachers commented (76%) that an academically rigorous classroom is critical and vibrant which challenge the deep rooted patriarchal notions which alienate millions of students, especially those of the girls' students from acquiring the academic skills. The classroom which promotes social justice expects more from students than do traditional classrooms. Critical teaching aims

to inspire levels of academic performance greater than those motivated or measured by grades and test scores.

7. CONCLUSION

Schooling is considered the ontology of the educational structure; it is the means to upward social mobility and equips learners to participate successfully in the future endeavors. Being a sub system of society school acts as a bridge between individual and society. Hence it should cater the democratic principles equality and social justice. But instead of cultivating equality in the minds of learner it unconsciously reinforces inequality and injustice by widening the social gap between males and females. The real goal of education is to reform and solve the existing inequalities and discrimination in society. Hence   school should make an ideal one which is based on social justice and will ensure equality and justice among the minds of the learner.

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