

Chapter 6

Conclusions, Findings and Suggestions

This chapter summarizes the research design, major research findings, insights or suggestions for further research and suggestions for eliminating gender discriminatory practices from the educational system. The present study helped not only to understand the background and impacts of gendered practices in the school climate of Kerala but also to realize the gendered perceptions of teachers and students about the practices followed in the primary and secondary schools.

6.1. Summarizing and Discussing the Research Questions

The main focus of the present research was to explore the gendered practices if any in the primary and secondary schools of Kerala that are enforced by the school authorities and implemented by the teachers. To address this issue the various rules and regulations of the school and the classroom practices were examined through a gender lens. In order to understand whether the students and teachers are aware of these gendered practices, their perceptions were also analysed. The research also suggests recommendations on how to eliminate the existing gendered practices in the school climates of Kerala and make the schools actual agencies of social change. Based on the conclusions arrived from analysis, the answers to the research questions are to be sought.

Do the schools in Kerala show any kind of discrimination between boys and girls in their overall school climate and the specific classroom practices?

The first research question was to find out whether any kind of discriminatory practice exist in the overall school climate and specific classroom practices of the primary and secondary schools of Kerala. To analyse this, observation was used as the method of data collection. The conclusion from the findings of analysis reveal that there are gendered practices prevalent in the primary and secondary schools of Kerala. The

findings also show that the rules and regulations of the schools themselves are gendered with regard to the dress code of girl students and women teachers, the entry -exit gates and timings of girls and boys, classroom practices, play provisions for boys and girls, teachers' eye contact and attention, teacher-student interactions, allocation of roles and responsibilities to students, disciplinary practices, grouping of students and the seating arrangement of boys and girls. Discriminatory rules and policies are enforced and practiced by all schools in the pretext of providing a more safe and sound environment for girls. But without knowing the consequences most of these protective measures are effected by putting unwanted restrictions upon girls and boy-girl interactions at secondary level. Majority of schools which control the mingling of boys and girls, focus more on girls' movements and their dressing.

When compared to primary schools, secondary schools follow more strict regulations for girls and boys as the adolescents are viewed as a vulnerable group by the teachers and school managements. They fear about the unfair relations that may spring up when boys and girls interact closely. This is in tune with the do's and don'ts enforced on girls in the popular culture when they reach the adolescent stage. It was also found that girls at primary are more smart and active than those at secondary stage who seemed to be more silent and passive even within the classrooms.

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 levels. Majority of the schools have seated and grouped boys and girls in accordance with their gender except a few primary schools. With regard to play space and provisions, all the schools exhibit gendered nature. Boys are frequently engaged in the physical activities than girls inside or outside the classroom

and also in the playground. The classroom interactions of teachers were also discriminatory by focusing more on boys than girls. The findings showed that boys get more eye contact, attention and interactions with teachers than girls in the same classroom.

The findings also reveal that religion is a major factor influencing the formulation of rules and regulations of the aided and unaided schools. Muslim and Christian management schools were found to have more restrictions on girls and girl – boy interactions when compared to Hindu schools. Government schools in general were found to be more egalitarian but except one school, they also followed same sex seating and separate grouping in classroom activities. The protectionist approach followed by the aided and unaided schools need to be corrected as an empowering approach where girls will be enabled to discover their identities and boys will be enabled to accept girls as equals and respect their individualities.

Do the boys and girls perceive any kind of bias in the approach and behavior of teachers and in the general school environment?

The second research question focuses on how the students perceive the practices in the school and the behaviour of teachers. The findings reveal that the concept of gender is unknown to the students. They imbibe what they experience at school and accept them as the norms and standards to be learned and upheld. With regard to the dress code, all the students, both boys and girls conveyed that the dressing style of girls need more restrictions. School climate favours gendered play provisions and the children have accepted them as natural and unproblematic. The analysis reveals that majority of students perceived football as a game appropriate for boys than girls. Just like that majority of boys opined sweeping and cleaning the classroom as a work appropriate for girls than boys. Majority of boys and girls agree with the idea of mixed play and seating but they obey the rules and regulations as such

without expressing their likes or interests. Thus the boys and girls though well aware of the differential standards and experiences they receive on being a boy or a girl, they accept them as natural and normal and totally ignorant about the concept of gender and its implications on their lives.

Do the teachers in the schools perceive any kind of bias in the overall school climate?

The third research question is to find out whether the teachers perceive gendered practices in the overall school climate. The findings of the present study revealed that the perceptions of teachers are gendered with traditional concepts regarding gender roles of men and women and subject choices of girls and boys. While assigning responsibilities, majority of teachers divide them equally among boys and girls, but a few of them still hold traditional gender role perceptions. A good proportion of teachers share the popular patriarchal notion that dressing style of girls provokes men and it may lead to sexual harassment and violence against them. Teachers perceived gender segregated mentality on students' academic performance and characteristics that encourage the construction of masculine and feminine identities. Most of the teachers opined that girls academic achievement are due to their hardworking while boys natural talented especially in the subjects like maths and science.

Teachers who are born and brought up in the patriarchal culture are also taking part in promoting gender segregation process among students through classroom practices. Teachers though following the gendered practices do so without realizing that their behaviours are gendered. Those few who have belief in gender equality confessed that they fail to promote it or take up any gender positive initiatives as they feel intimidated by the PTA. In general the youngsters among the teaching community seemed to have more progressive outlooks than their counterparts.

It was found that a few of the teachers share the patriarchal notion that girls need to care more about their dressing and must obey religious instructions regarding the same. Some of them opined that dressing style is a reason for the increasing violence against girls and women. The element of women blaming that is popular in the society is internalized by the teachers also. The perceptions of teachers get reflected in the curricular and co-curricular experiences provided by them. The behaviours, practices and interactions of such teachers would serve to sustain the gender bias and discriminations in the society. Gender equality according to a few teachers is only an utopian idea and some of them have even declared ‘men are men and women are only women’. Such statements highlight the extent to which they have internalized the notion of men as the norm and women as the inferior other. As opined by Sadker and Sadker (1986), most of the teachers are unaware that they treat boys and girls differently in the classroom and only when they become aware of the problem they can change their behavior.

Does the school environment foster values of gender equality among the growing minds of children?

School authorities who are products of a gendered culture reproduce the same culture in their institutions. Naturally gender segregation and discrimination is replicated rather than fostering values of gender equality. A few schools which tried to follow mixed seating had to withdraw the initiative as per the objections raised by the school PTAs. The school managements and administrators are sustaining gendered practices without being conscious of its impacts.

The socialization of gender within our schools assures that girls are made aware of their unequal status when compared to the boys at a younger age itself. Every time students are seated or lined up by gender, teachers are affirming that girls and boys should be treated differently. When different

behaviors are tolerated for boys than for girls because 'boys will be boys', schools are perpetuating the oppression of females. Gender bias in education is a severe hazardous problem that causes very few people to stand up and take notice. The victims of this bias have been trained through years of schooling to remain silent and passive, and so are unwilling to stand up and voice out the injustices meted onto them or about the unfair treatment they often receive.

The gender socialization or gender segregation process begins within the home itself and gets reaffirmed within the school through different classroom practices. The study also reveals that students have no awareness regarding the gendered practices and they perceived them as important factors in their life. Children assume that the females have lesser value or see them as lesser being compared to men, and that they should be subordinate and obedient to menfolk. Traditional gender identities, norms, ideals and gender role perceptions cannot be transformed all of a sudden and put onto bright progressive paths as they fail to break away from the stereotypic notions; which should change and this change should begin from our families and schools which are the primary centres of learning.

6.2. SUGGESTIONS FOR ELIMINATING GENDERED BEHAVIOURS FROM PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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 and 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.

6.2.1. Role of Teachers

The teacher is the heart of the classroom, the one who moulds and enhances the quality and the rich lifelong experience 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 build gender disaggregated notions 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 down 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.
- There is a striking lack of documentation with regard to gender equality strategies currently in use in classrooms. 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 gender stereotypes 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 particular nuances of including local issues and involving problems based on these issues in the curriculum and pedagogy. For realising this it is essential to:

- Ensure 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,
- Develop teachers' capacities to design and deliver gender equitable life-skills in the curriculum, as well as support them in their training (pre – and in-service) to live by the same principles and understandings.
- Strategies need to be explored for storing the knowledge about gender equitable pedagogies at schools and training centers, so that future teachers can learn and become motivated and the expensive start-up costs for developing programmes do not have to be repeated endlessly.
- Use resources that reflect the current and evolving roles of women and men in the society
- Incorporate diverse grouping for projects and activities.
- Encourage gender-fair language in all class room interactions.
- Ensure that students of both genders have comparable time and access to equipment and resources including the teachers, time and attention.
- Seek and ensure a balance of female and male representatives of historical and contemporary concepts, issues and events.

6.2.2 Role of the School Management

- The school environment should be made gender neutral to promote gender friendly and safe environment for children. It is the responsibility of the schools to create an educational environment free of gender bias.

- Provide gender sensitive education to students through gender sensitive teaching and learning materials.
- Take measures to change the curriculum and the classroom organisation which allow increased participation of girls and boys.
- Educational system needs to be gender sensitive and gender friendly by providing equal opportunities in sports, games and other cocurricular activities for girls and boys.
- A gender responsive school environment should be seriously practised through the interactions, communications and management of academic processes by addressing the specific needs of both girls and boys.
- The PTA needs to be strengthened to identify and address gender issues in homes and in educational institutions.
- Gender awareness must be provided to parents, teachers, office staff, administrators and other officials of school management.

6.2.3. Role of the State

- Through appropriate policies like scholarships, incentives and reservations, the government must ensure that all girls gain equal access to quality education and must take serious steps to provide equal opportunities of education free from gender discrimination.
- Take measures to implement the National Policy on Education effectively.
- Provide gender sensitization of the educators and policy makers, teachers and parents so as to make them aware of the existence of

gendered practices and their impacts on growing minds whereby such practices could be eliminated from the school system

- Gender sensitivity training must become part of PTA activities and pre service and in service teacher training.
- Curriculum planners and text book writers must be gender sensitized in its true spirit.
- The contents of textbooks require inputs from those who have struggled to bring women's voices, narratives, experiences and world views in to the academic mainstream.
- Handbooks and resource materials for teachers need to be developed in a gender sensitive manner. Thus gender roles and expectations reflected through textbooks should be gender sensitive to promote the concept of gender equality among students.
- Integrate inputs of Women's Studies Research in Textbooks, Syllabi and Teacher Training.
- Government can lead campaigns and take initiatives to eradicate gender bias from curriculum, educational materials, text books and school practices through gender equity programmes in schools.

6.2.4. Role of Society

Family

- Notions of egalitarian relationships between men and women are to be nurtured by parents among children
- Ensure equal treatment of children and make them aware of the fact that sex of the child should never be a basis for discrimination.

- Since children learn much lessons on egalitarian men -women relationships from their parents through observational learning, parents should be role models to children.

Media

- Make timely modifications in their approaches and policies in tune with the gender mainstreaming efforts and avoid the gender stereotyping.
- Since media constantly reinforce the traditional stereotypes of women and men, it needs to undergo drastic changes in addressing gender issues by viewing things through a gender lens..
- The media should cover and telecast positive portrayal of women. Programmes should include real female heroes who have fought hard to reach great heights, who have excelled in leadership, science, social work etc. All this would be a source of inspiration to the young girls who are the women of tomorrow.

Religion

- Religious leaders must take a proactive role in changing the mindsets of men and women to dispense with the gendered traditions.
- Religious leaders should take initiatives to change the wrong traditions in our age old culture to foster and undergo timely modifications in their approaches.
- Each community must take initiatives to educate their girl children and take needy steps for further improvement. Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy which form barriers to education of girls must be discouraged. Religion is the most potent agent to bring about positive

changes in this regard. The protectionist approach needs to be modified into an empowering approach based on respectful behaviour.

- Religions must also play a proactive role in changing the focus of attention from dress code of women to enhancing their mental horizons and enabling men to accept the bodily integrity of girls and women.

Complete elimination of gender bias in school climate is not possible as long as the society remains male dominated. Hence it should be the responsibility of all concerned - the government, policy makers, educationalists, administrators, teachers, parents, pupils and the community to ensure that education is free of gender bias.

6.2.5. Further Research

In educational research, gender bias is an important area of research which is multidimensional in nature and like any other research it is an unending phenomenon. The findings of the present study identify the scope of further research on several aspects in the education system. The present study was focussed on gendered practices in the school climate and explored the perceptions of students and teachers on them. School management has a significant role in perpetuating gendered practices in the school climate and detailed studies are required to analyse how the school management perceived the gendered practices in the schools.

There is scope for further research to focus on the curriculum, especially the content analysis of the text books at various levels of schooling. Research on gender bias in enrolment, retention, subject and institutional choices etc with a gender perspective is also required. The gendering practices in single sex and co-education schools also need to be compared.

The present study was limited to the primary and secondary schools

only, so research can be elaborated in to the higher secondary levels also. This will provide detailed information about the gender bias and discrimination involved in the choice of college, subject etc. of girls and boys.

The present research has not provided a comparison of the perceptions of male and female teachers on gendered practices and hence an investigation into this aspect is essential. Further studies centered on the experiences of teacher trainees in teacher training institutions would also add to the understandings on gender bias and practices adopted by teachers.

Another area of further research based on this study is regarding the role of religion as a socialisation agency and how it impact upon the school climate and classroom practices. Familial socialisation was found to have strong influence on gender identities and gender role socialisation of children as evident from the responses of the primary school children. Hence studies on gender socialisation happening in families need to be probed further. Similarly the gendering effected through other socialisation agencies like media and peer group also need to be explored with a gender perspective.