

Gender Stereotyping in Schools: A Study in Rural Assam

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Abstract-

Developing countries face number of problems such as poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, poor educational infrastructure, of which one of the most fundamental problems is the gender disparity in schooling. School enrolments of girls are lower than the boys indicating that girls are disadvantaged in access to education. Apart from various factors that affect gender disparity in schooling, an important fundamental constraint that restricts attainment towards gender equality is gender stereotyping in school especially in class room activity. This paper tries to identify whether gender stereotype exist in the classroom activity in the schools under study. 18 government schools have been selected from six blocks from three districts of Assam and a sample of 90 in service teacher has been collected. A semi structured interview was also conducted to understand the attitude of the teacher towards gender stereotyping in class room activities.

Key Words: Gender Disparity, Stereotyping, Enrolment.

INTRODUCTION

Countries all over the world have initiated various programmes to make a literate world, with each and every person having access to education. This objective got an impetus with the adaption of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. According to UNESCO, one of the Millennium Development Goal that is Education for All (EFA) aims to eliminate gender disparities by 2005 in both primary and elementary schooling and also aims to achieve gender equality by 2015. This was reinforced by adoption of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and intended to be achieved by 2030. Here also emphasis was on education, especially 'Achieving Quality Education for all' was one of the goals along with 'Achieving Gender Equality' and 'Reducing Inequality'.

Along with the rest of the world, various programmes have been initiated by the Government of India towards achieving not only universal primary education but also gender parity in elementary schooling. The progress in educational development in the last few decades have made considerable impact on girls' access to schooling, however, data from various censuses and Statistics on School Education (SSE) suggests that girl dropout exist at all level of education. According to SSE 2013-14, the percentage of girl's dropout at the primary level was 4.14% and it was 4.49% at the upper primary level. Apart from removing supply side constraint towards access and retention the fundamental constraints that restricts the attainment towards gender equality is the gender stereotyping in schools especially in the classroom activity. Here the role of a teacher is very crucial in promoting equity in educational achievement of both boys and girls (Agarwal and Shukla, 2017). A child spends considerable amount of time in school with teachers, so they are influential models (Stromquist, 2007). A teacher understanding of gender norms is one of the most important factor determining their attitude and

behaviour towards their students which otherwise might results in gender stereotyping in classroom activity which in most cases might be unintentional. Teacher's thinking and action in the classroom is constructed by their own lived experience in the culture, community and the environment that surrounds them. Gender sensitivity of teachers will hopefully produce a rippling effect in the school manifesto (Allen, Asad and Sherali, 2010)

In this context it is necessary to understand the meaning of stereotype. Stereotype has been defined as the representation of abstract quality in human form which has been handed down from one generation to another through its wide acceptance among the members of a society (Hall, et al. 1988). Various studies (Smith, Hardman & Higgins, 2007; Stromquist, 2007) have indicated that the attitude of the teacher in the classroom may reflect biasness towards a boy and a girl student and thus reinforce gender stereotype. The teacher may highly favour an intelligent student over a mediocre student. Similarly, in a co-educational school, the teachers (due to their biased behaviour caused by a patriarchy society) may put more emphasis towards boys and they may be favoured in most of the classroom activities. However, this attitude towards the less favoured may develop a sense of alienation and hinder all round development (Stromquist, 2007).

Teacher expectations may result in inequalities in the realm of classroom interaction. For example, girls may be required to do the classroom cleaning, especially, sweeping the floor whereas boys are expected to engage themselves in task that require high physical activity and strength (for example moving desk and table). According to Baker (2005), boys were entrusted with more technical work and were called more often in the classroom thereby giving them ample opportunity to interact, reflecting gender bias in the teacher's attitude. As girls get less opportunity to interact in the class, it was found that they develop less efficient study behaviour compared to the boys. It was found that girls tend to answer lower risk question indicating lower confidence, particularly in the middle school.

Socio-economic factors determine learning achievement of boys and girls, studies suggest that the gender gap in school performance is narrowed with increase in the economic status of the household (Dube, 2016). But, once the child is enrolled in the schooling system, it is the quality of education, teacher's attitude and behaviour that plays a vital role in their learning achievement. The teacher can serve as a role model for the students (Allana, Asad and Sherali, 2010). Though considerable amount of time is spent by girl in household duties like fetching water, cooking, looking after younger siblings; studies suggests that gender differences in achievement level can be bridged if adequate attention is provided to girls, both within home and in the classroom (Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008).

Gender segregation at times is evident in the physical and social organisation with regard to the sitting arrangement inside the classroom (Stromquist, 2007). The boys and girls are required to sit in different groups. UNICEF advocated towards creation of environment which is girl-friendly. Single sex school may in fact lead to better academic performance of girls.

This paper tries to identify whether gender stereotype exist in the schools in the area under study. Samples of 90 in-service teachers from 18 government schools from Assam have been collected. The sample schools have been collected from 6 blocks, three schools from each block from the districts Kamrup (M), Baksa and Barpeta have been collected for the study. A sample of 5 teachers teaching in upper primary level from each school has been selected at random. The data has been collected through questionnaire. Also a semi structured interview

was also conducted to understand the attitude of the teachers towards gender stereotyping in class room activities.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from 90 respondents have been analysed in the following manner.

A five point Likert-type scale or an attitude scale has been prepared on the basis of different stereotype belief of the respondent. There were 10 statements rated on the attitude scale with five possible responses for each statement (1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Could not Decide, 4. Strongly Disagree and 5. Disagree). The statements are given below:

S₁= Boys are better and naturally clever than girls.

S₂= Boys score better in subjects like mathematics compared to girls.

S₃= Boys possess more scientific skills than girls.

S₄= Boys are better in sports than girls.

S₅= Boys are more active and outspoken compared to girls

S₆= Students both boys and girls should be treated equally across class and caste

S₇= Gender stereotype behaviour in the class room should be discouraged.

S₈=Teacher education programme and training should foster awareness of gender stereotype issue

S₉= Similar physical education should be imparted to both boys and girls.

S₁₀= Man should concentrate on career and profession and women's place at home.

The above ten statements are divided in to two parts: statement S₁ to S₅ refers to the teachers' gender stereotypes belief and statement S₆ to S₁₀ refers to teacher perception about gender stereotype with regard to class room practice.

The following table shows teachers responses to the above statements

Table 1: Percentage of teachers' responses towards gender stereotype beliefs and perception

Sl. No	State ment	SA		A		Ne		SD		D		Total
		f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	
1	S ₁	21	23.3	24	26.7	13	14.4	15	16.7	17	18.9	90
2	S ₂	30	33.3	22	24.4	4	4.4	26	28.9	8	8.9	90
3	S ₃	12	13.3	37	41.1	5	5.6	23	25.6	13	14.4	90

4	S ₄	33	36.7	32	35.6	4	4.4	15	16.7	6	6.7	90
5	S ₅	23	25.6	32	35.6	7	7.8	16	17.8	12	13.3	90
6	S ₆	55	61.1	26	28.9	3	3.3	2	2.2	4	4.4	90
7	S ₇	23	25.6	39	43.3	9	10.0	14	15.6	5	5.6	90
8	S ₈	14	15.6	46	51.1	8	8.9	12	13.3	10	11.1	90
9	S ₉	53	58.9	23	25.6	3	3.3	4	4.4	7	7.8	90
10	S ₁₀	12	13.3	21	23.3	7	7.8	27	30.0	23	25.6	90

The response of the teacher indicated through the attitude scale is shown in the following figures (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

Figure 1 Percentage of teacher's responses (Statement 1-Statement 5)

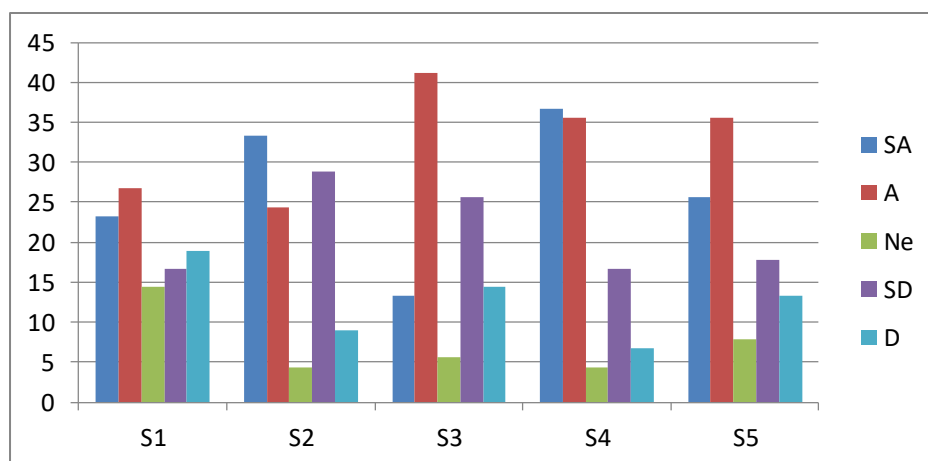
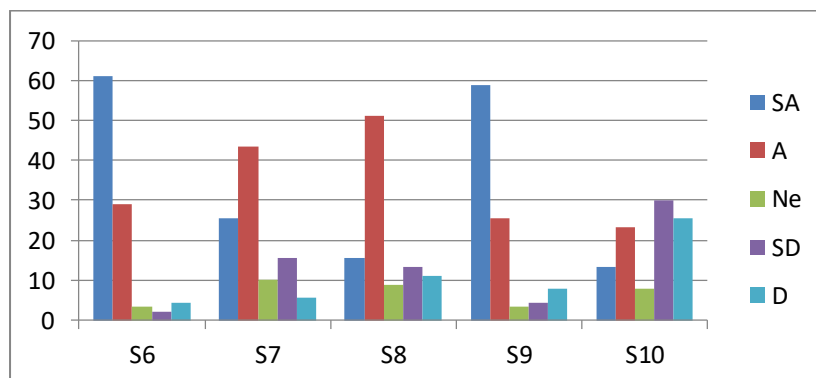


Figure 2 percentage of teachers' responses (Statement 6 –statement 10)



FINDINGS

The analysis of the primary data as shown from table 1 reveals the following-

(a) Majority of teachers (26.7%) agreed and strongly agreed (23.3%) to the first statement, 'Boys are better and naturally clever than girls', indicating gender stereotype belief among the teachers of the upper primary schools in the area under study.

(b) 33.3% of the teacher strongly agreed to the statement that 'boys score better in subjects like mathematics compared to girls'. However, they were also of the opinion that gender difference in learning achievement especially in subjects like Maths depends on interest and practice and since girls spend considerable time in other domestic work their grades seem to decline and similarly their interest falls with lower grades.

(c) Highest majority of teachers' (41.1%) strongly agreed to the statement 'boys possess more scientific skill than girls'. This relates to the gender stereotype belief of the teachers that the boys are better in handling difficult tasks whereas girls should be engaged in more light and decorative tasks, thus reinforcing gender stereotype attitude in the class room teaching.

(d) Similarly 35.6% and 36.7% of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed to the statement 'boys are better in sports than girls'. Most of the teachers revealed that parents are more interested in enrolling their sons to extracurricular activities, especially sports compared to girls.

(e) Majority of the teachers (35.6%) agreed and 25.6% strongly agreed to the statement, boys are more active and outspoken compared to girls' indicating teachers' preponderance of gender stereotype belief and attitude.

(f) More than half of the teacher, 61.1% strongly agreed that both boys and girls should be treated equally across class and caste. However, teachers were also of the view that students coming from good economic background were found to dress in a decent manner.

(g) 30.0% of the teacher strongly disagreed to the statement 'man should concentrate on career and profession and women's place is at home'. Major strongly agreed (58.9%) that 'similar physical education should be imparted to both boys' and girls' and similarly more than half (51.1%) agreed that 'teachers' education programme and training should foster awareness of gender stereotype issues'.

Interview with the teacher revealed the fact that 'gender' as an issue was never a subject of discussion in any of the pre-service teacher training. Therefore, they were interested in knowing gender sensitive issues and how that can be incorporated in everyday class room teaching in order to make the teaching gender neutral. Though there is variability in the responses of the teacher, however majority of the respondent generally agreed with most of the statement indicating prevalence of gender stereotype attitude in the class room teaching.

DISCUSSION

The teachers selected for the survey had little or no idea about gender stereotype behaviour which may create a sense of alienation among the less favoured one within the classroom. Therefore, the first and foremost task that hold immense importance is that teachers' education programme and training that should focus on awareness of gender stereotype issues in classroom teaching. Understanding gender issues and using the knowledge in the class room teaching will develop a gender friendly environment in the school. Gender sensitivity must be

reflected not only in the curriculum and teaching learning materials but also in the context of extra curriculum activities, games and sports for both boys and girls. Various sports and physical education must be imparted to both boys and girls; this will not only promote cooperation and competition but also develop a sense of positivity among girls.

CONCLUSION

Though the improvement in educational system has contributed towards improving girls' access to education, however one important constraint that restricts girls in attaining their full potentiality is gender stereotype behaviour and attitude in the class room teaching. Gender stereotype in school is not only reflected in textbook and learning materials but also in the differential attitude of the teacher towards a boy and a girl. Therefore, government needs to play a very crucial role by providing training on gender issues to teachers. Along with teachers, parents, administrators and planners also must be made gender sensitive through organising various seminars, workshop etc. Some innovative practices must be encouraged like female sports teacher, self-defence training for both boys and girls etc.

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