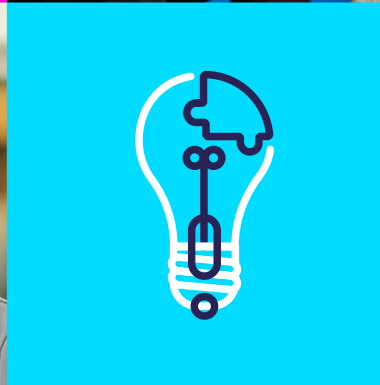
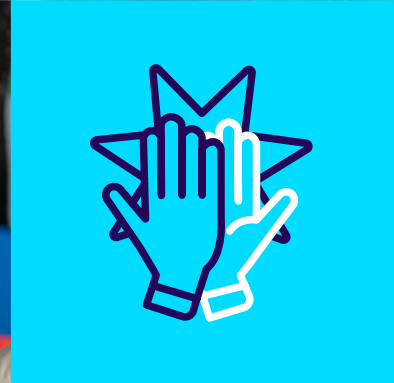
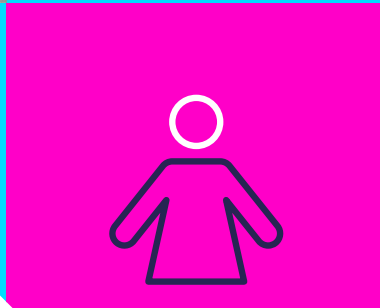


Schools Connect

Status of Gender Responsive Inclusive School Practices



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Status of Gender Responsive Inclusive School Practices in Ethiopian Primary Schools with a focus on Girls' Education

By CRADLE Training and Research Center

Key Points

- The number of girls in schools in Ethiopia is declining, especially in the Somali and Harari regions (ESDP-VI,2021). The MoE has developed the 'Gender Strategy for the Education and Training Sector' and the 'Girl's Education and Gender Equality Strategy' aiming to address this issue. In order to meet the MoE strategic objectives, it is important to understand the barriers to girls accessing – and remaining in – education.
- Research was undertaken in 19 primary schools in Ethiopia to understand teachers' and school leaders' knowledge about gender responsive inclusive education, and to make recommendations for education policy and practice.
- Issues highlighted by the research include: lack of awareness of and poor communication and implementation of the Gender Strategy for Education; limited school leadership focus on gender issues; few women in school leadership positions; limited support for gender equality initiatives; inaccessible or unusable school facilities for girls; teachers' lack of awareness of gender responsive pedagogy; no mechanisms in schools to address gender-based violence.
- Recommendations include: strengthen Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) to conduct gender training and monitor its implementation; create and implement school policies and codes of conduct; provide pre- and in-service training on gender equality; ensure teaching materials and processes are gender responsive; improve school environments and resource gender clubs; engage with parents and the wider community; undertake research to identify barriers to inclusive education; monitor and evaluate change.

Introduction

UNESCO (2020) reports that while progress has been made in females accessing education globally, in Ethiopia and many countries in the global South, girls have gained least from the expansion of access to education (Ibid 2020).

The Ethiopian Ministry for Education (MoE) has set their Gender Parity Index (GPI) at 1.00, meaning boys and girls should be in schools at equal numbers. However, the number of female students in schools is declining across the country, especially in the Somali and Harari regions (ESDP-VI,2021). The MoE has developed the 'Gender Strategy for the Education and Training Sector' and the 'Girl's Education and Gender Equality Strategy' aiming to balance these numbers. In order to meet the MoE strategic objectives, it is important to understand the barriers to girls accessing – and remaining in – education.

Research was carried out in 19 primary schools in four different regions of Ethiopia: Oromia, Somali, Amhara and SNNP. A mixed-methods approach was adopted with literature review, interviews and semi-structured questionnaires administered to teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders, and classroom observations.

The research objectives were to examine:

1. Teachers' and school leaders' existing knowledge about gender responsive inclusive education and any gaps in their skills or understanding;
2. Where work could start in responding to skills and knowledge gaps;
3. What policies should be focused on by education sector stakeholders and government bodies to ensure that girls have a positive experience of education.

Outcomes of the Assessment

Implementation of the National Gender Strategy in Education

No leader in any of the 19 schools assessed had heard of the Gender Strategy in Education. They had, however, written their own codes of conduct covering issues such as the prevention of School Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV), harassment and bullying and respecting the dignity and security of students. Most leaders explained that these codes of conduct mainly covered school rules such as uniforms, school facilities and property, and disciplinary measures.

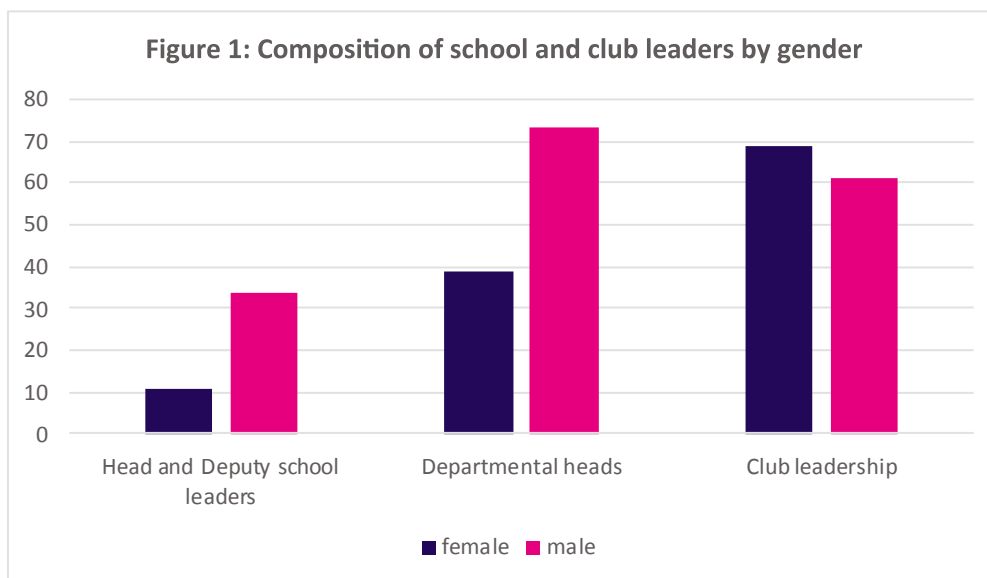
Almost all the leaders reported concern about the level of support from education offices regarding provision of gender mainstreaming documents, guidelines, and training opportunities. In turn, interviewees from the MoE and Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) blamed school leaders for not taking these issues seriously. Students in the focus group discussions (FGDs) explained that they had no knowledge of policies such as the National Gender Strategy for Education and Training Sector.

Gender Responsive School Leadership Practices

Although leaders were aware of how important mainstreaming gender across their schools is in theory, the research revealed limited discussion of gender issues during staff meetings, parent-teacher association (PTA) and committee meetings. Gender equality training was also minimal. A significant number of teachers complained how other school areas were given more emphasis and budget allocations for gender equality activities also reflected this. School strategic plans, annual plans and lesson plans rarely included gender equality. In the case of issues around violence, there was limited evidence that links or referrals had been made with local stakeholders such as the police or healthcare officials.

Roles and Representations in School Leadership

The research gathered data on the number of male and females in school leadership positions. Figure 1. presents the findings.



Of the 19 schools, females made up 24 per cent of the leadership roles, while men made up 76 per cent. However, 53 per cent of the club leaders were female, with 47 per cent being male. Therefore, although females are less represented in school leadership roles, the club leaders are slightly more likely to be female.

The lack of females in school leadership positions is also reflected in country-wide statistics. A recent ESDP-VI report shows a decrease in the number of female school leaders from 16 per cent in 2014/15 to 11 per cent in 2018/19 at primary level and 14 per cent to 8 per cent at secondary level (ESDP-VI, 2021, p.15).

Students in Leadership Roles

Both teachers and students said most leadership roles were shared equally between female and male students. However, the students' experience of leadership was not thought to be the same. There was often a lack of respect from other students when females took on roles such as classroom behaviour management. This can result in female students avoiding leadership roles.

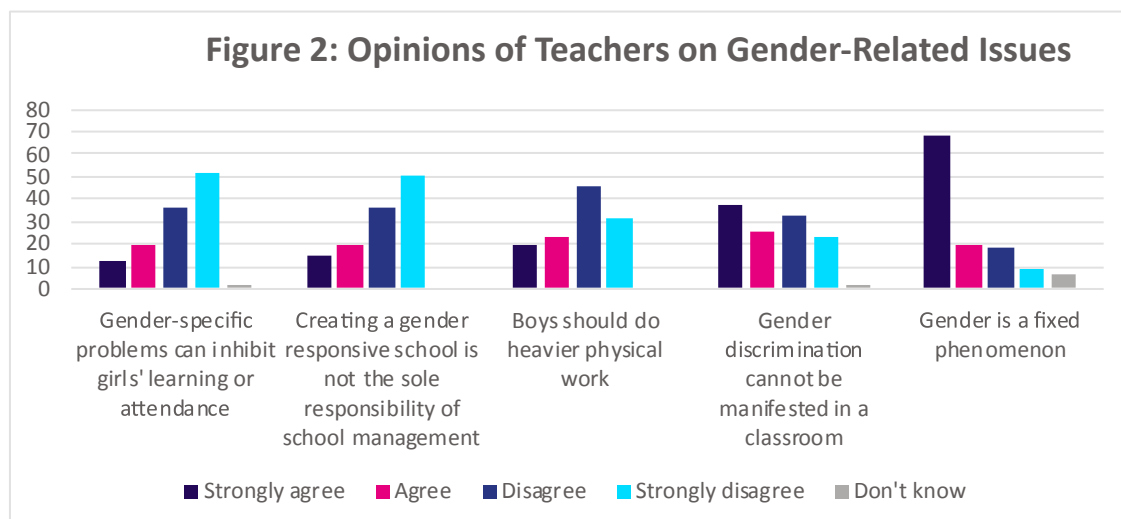
Gender Equality Initiatives and School Environments

Activities like gender clubs were acknowledged as valuable for building skills and knowledge on respectful relationships and for addressing gender issues. Gender based violence awareness training was also delivered, as well as campaigns to encourage female students who have previously dropped out to return to school. Gender clubs were more active in urban and semi-urban schools, due to lack of funds and training opportunities in rural schools, made worse by few incentives for club leaders and low levels of support from school leadership. In rural areas, there was also less available support from NGOs.

School facilities such as toilets were found to be unsuitable in all the schools. They were not practical or accessible for any students, including those with disabilities. Most schools lacked separate toilets for girls and boys, and did not provide sanitary pads. In the few schools where toilets were separate, some did not have doors, there was no water, they were not clean, and therefore could not be used. Female students complained of a lack of privacy when using toilets. Girls and boys did not have equal access to other facilities in schools such as playgrounds and sport materials, and there was no private space where students could change for participating in sports.

Gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy

Teachers were asked to reply to a questionnaire on their attitudes towards and knowledge of gender related issues. The responses are summarised in Figure 2.



The responses reveal the gap in teachers' knowledge and awareness of their role in promoting gender equity. Of the 120 teachers involved, a large majority (81 per cent) believed the concept of gender is fixed. Just under half (44 per cent) believed that gender discrimination cannot be manifested in the classroom. Sixty-two per cent of the teachers strongly disagreed that any issues specific to girls would stop them attending or learning at school. Most teachers felt that creating a gender responsive school is not the exclusive responsibility of school management. This opinion was confirmed during the FGDs where participants said teachers should also play their part.

Gender Responsive Pedagogy in Practice

This research examined teachers' involvement in reviewing teaching materials based on gender responsive and inclusive teaching. Results indicated that although teachers and leaders were tasked with reviewing materials, gender responsiveness was not considered: they could, however, recall examples of gender stereotyping in textbooks. (Note recent changes to the Ethiopian curriculum meant new textbooks had not yet been seen in full by schools.)

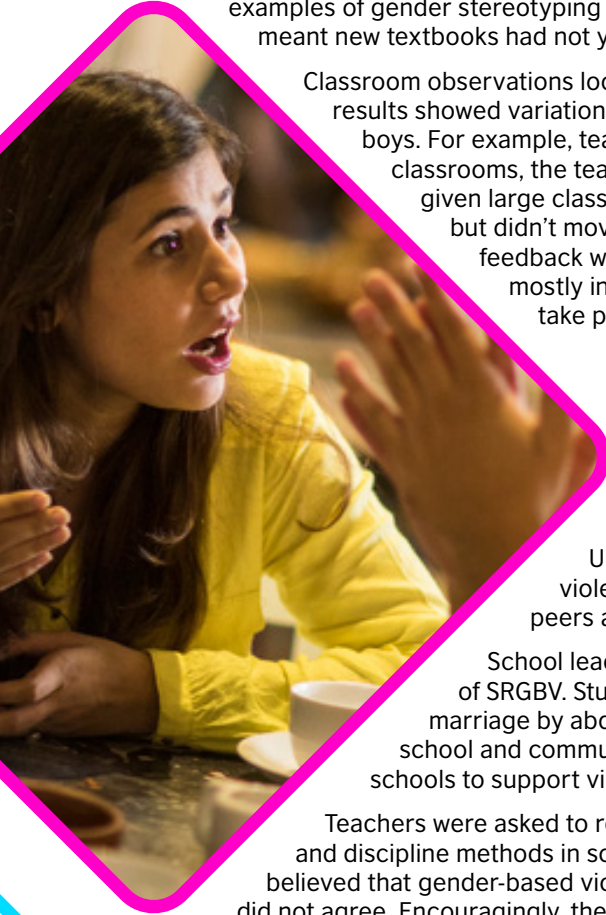
Classroom observations looked at whether teachers treated boys and girls equally. The results showed variations: in some schools, teachers often used language that favoured boys. For example, teachers usually used 'he' rather than 'she/he'. In most classrooms, the teaching and learning process was challenging, particularly given large class sizes. Teachers monitored students as they completed tasks but didn't move around the room, and little discussion, interaction or feedback was seen. There were question and answer sessions, but they mostly involved boys. Little encouragement was given for all students to take part.

Preventing School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV)

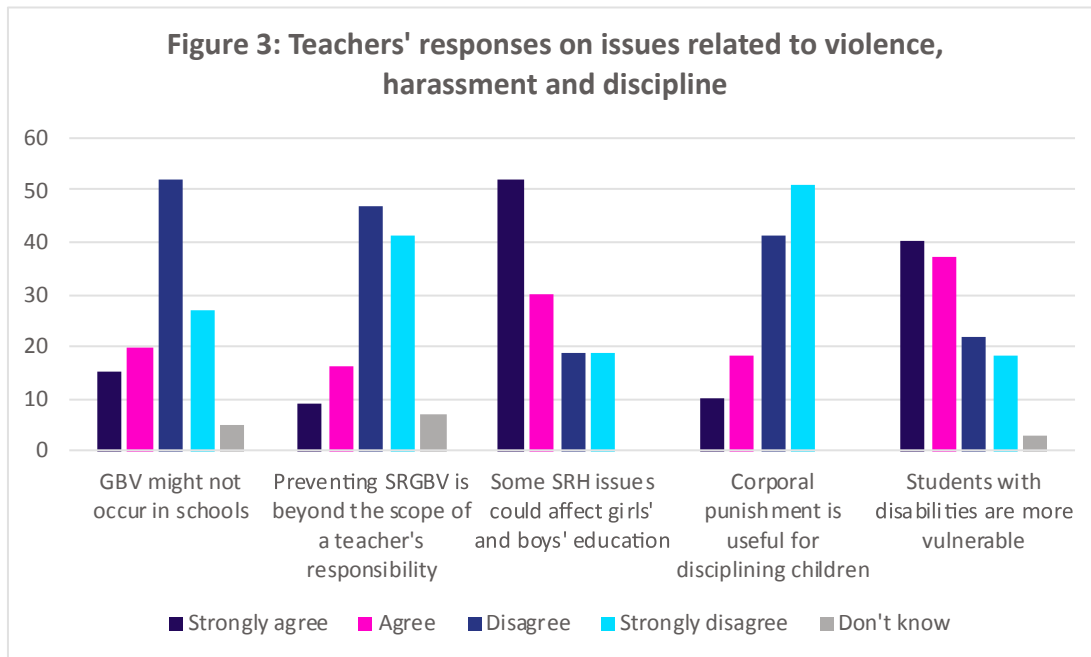
Studies in Ethiopia indicate that despite the legal framework prohibiting GBV (Gender Based Violence), it has continued to be a pervasive national issue (Cordon et al. 2018). UNICEF (2018), reported levels of school-related, gender-based violence, including corporal punishment and sexual abuse from peers and people in positions of authority.

School leaders, teachers and students were similar in their understanding of SRGBV. Students considered bullying, harassment, child marriage, marriage by abduction and FGM as examples of GBV that are common in their school and communities. They said that there was no mechanism in place in schools to support victims of GBV or for reporting problems.

Teachers were asked to reply to a questionnaire on their views on violence, harassment and discipline methods in schools. Although a significant number of teachers (41.6 per cent) believed that gender-based violence might occur in schools, some teachers (25.8 per cent) did not agree. Encouragingly, the majority of teachers (73.3 per cent) believed they could contribute to preventing SRGBV. Most teachers (68.3 per cent) believed that some sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues, for instance, a potential pressure to have sex, could affect both girls and boys. However, a still significant number of teachers did not consider this as problematic (31.6 per cent). This calls for awareness raising training for teachers.



The responses gathered from teachers are presented in Figure 3.



Key points for improving girls' education in Ethiopia

1 Putting School Related Gender Policies into Practice

It is encouraging that the MoE Gender Directorate was set up to mainstream gender equality in education at the federal level, however, the capacity of REBs also needs strengthening at regional and school levels. The National Gender Forum and Girls' Education Advisory Committees need support to coordinate and work with partners at local, regional and national levels. School policies and codes of conduct need to be created, improved and implemented. A national policy with resources and structures for on-going professional development on gender-equitable teaching and learning is required.

2 Supporting School Leadership and Teachers

For gender equality to become a 'lived' reality in schools, leaders and teachers must receive training at both pre and in service levels.

3 Promoting Gender Responsive Inclusive Pedagogy

Making teaching and learning processes gender responsive, for example, through taking gender bias out of the curriculum and materials, and ensuring classrooms and other facilities are welcoming, is important to meet the needs of different students. A checklist should be developed for materials to be assessed consistently.

4 Improving School Environments for All Students

Policies and plans must be created and implemented to focus on the prevention of SRGBV. They should include reporting processes and data gathering so all stakeholders can be informed and targeted interventions developed.

School facilities must be accessible for all students. Bathrooms must be separate for female and male students and kept clean with running water.

Creating gender clubs where students can discuss issues like gender inequality and reproductive health strengthen students' ability to stand up against GBV and other forms of harassment. Training and assigning teachers or counsellors to discuss issues with all students will provide further support.

5 Parental and Community Engagement

School leaders need to build stronger links between schools, parents and communities (like PTAs) to ensure there is continued improvement in gender equal education.

6 Future Research

More research is needed across the education sector to identify barriers to equal and inclusive education.

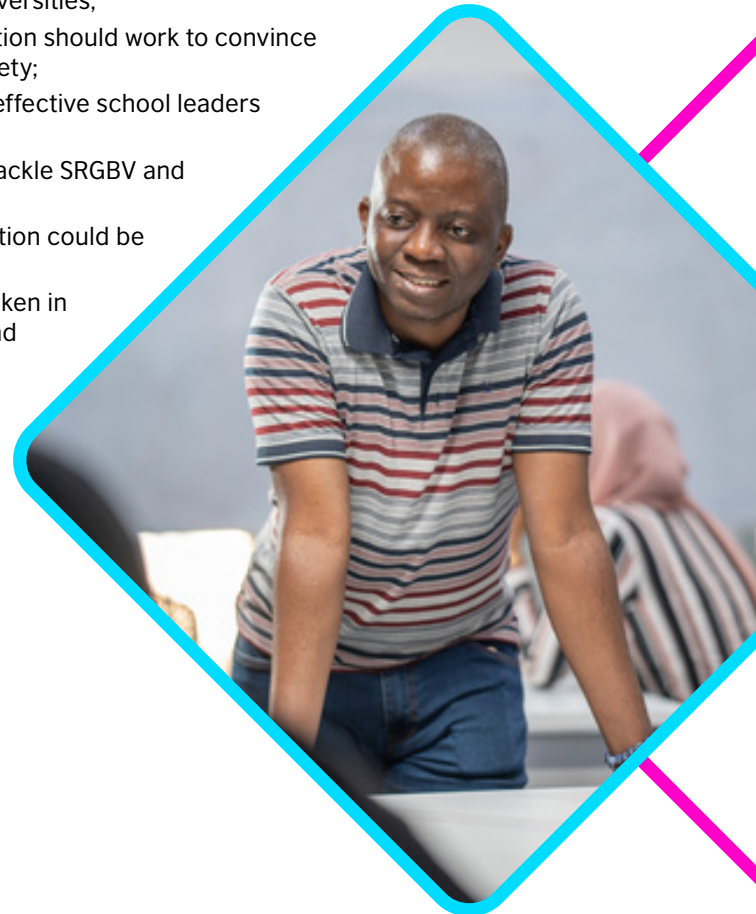
7 Monitoring Change

To know change is happening, school leaders must be supported to consistently monitor and evaluate gender responsiveness and inclusive education in their schools.

Further recommendations

In addition, the following recommendations were made at the Gender Responsive Inclusive Education Conference, organised by the British Council in Addis Ababa, where this report was presented:

- Build school leaders' and teachers' knowledge and skills around gender responsiveness by working closely with teacher training colleges and universities;
- Organizations responsible for the promotion of education should work to convince communities that educating females is educating society;
- Females need support to acquire training to become effective school leaders and to hold senior positions;
- Indigenous knowledge and practices can be used to tackle SRGBV and negative social norms against girls' education;
- Platforms to debate on the issue of gender and education could be organised;
- Planned intervention programmes need to be undertaken in different schools, with cross fertilisation of learning and sharing of best practice.



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