# CHAPTER 4

# Making Gender Sense in Malaysian Secondary Schools

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## Introduction

*'I hate having to do the dishes that my brothers leave in the sink, while they go out with their friends.'* ***15-year-old girl***

*'My mother supports me (in her studies) ...hmm... but I have to stay home to do housework. Itu biasa [that's normal].'* ***15-year-old girl***

*'I want to work as soon as I leave school.'* ***15-year-old boy***

*'I have to follow my father to sea to help him fish ... I do miss school sometimes.'* ***15-year-old-boy***

In 2007, when the Education Section, Social Transformation Programmes Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned its regional study, Malaysia was selected because of boys' low academic participation in education. This chapter sets out to discuss, document and evaluate whether the education system has contributed towards the advancement and development of gender rights and equality given the present context of a rapidly changing society in Malaysia. While it will interrogate some of the underlying reasons for boys' under participation at schools, the study will try to make gender sense and evaluate whether girls' improved performance and participation in education means that gender equality is being achieved.

The Sixth Malaysia Plan (6MP) (1991–1995) and the Seventh Malaysia Plan (7MP) (1996–2000) recognised equal opportunity and access for boys and girls to education as national policies and are being implemented. In 1995, the Malaysian government made a further commitment to gender equality by signing the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In its report to CEDAW, Malaysia acknowledges in article 5 the existence of 'widespread stereotyping of women as followers and supporters rather than leaders or equal partners in Malaysian society', and 'various cultural and institutional factors, which are predicated on restrictive notions of a woman's role in society' and 'often intersect to form barriers to the advancement of women's career and upward mobility in an organisation'.[1] Female

enrolment into public universities increased significantly from 57.8 per cent in 2001 to 61.7 per cent in 2007 (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), 2008:23) indicating a lower participation of boys at tertiary levels. Despite their progress, however, women in Malaysia still occupy a secondary position in the public and private spaces. The position of men as heads of household and decision-makers is still upheld in Malaysia. Boys are taught from a young age to be aggressive, not to cry or show their emotions, to be independent and to be a provider/protector. Girls are taught to be housebound, submissive, caring and self-sacrificing.

The socialisation process is deeply entrenched in the thinking of Malaysian society. In a survey on gender-based violence (Abdullah, 2006), 61.22 per cent (out of 2,055 respondents) of males and females strongly agreed that 'if a woman wants to visit her friends or relatives, she needs her husband's permission to go'. On the contrary, when another question was posed, 'A female has the right to express her opinion even if she disagrees with her boyfriend', 86.28 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement. Certainly, the young respondents had separated their social behaviours between being single and married. They do not see the contradictions, and accept that when married, women take on certain socialised roles. Institutions, such as the media, government and religious departments, have also reinforced stereotyped behaviour and some of them have taken on a biased, moral policing role.

Women, in particular, are bombarded with contradictory messages about what is desirable, expected and acceptable of them. Holding hands in public, women's dressing and wearing make-up are now contentious issues as over-zealous religious authorities and politicians propose fines and possibly jail terms for alleged offenders. Malaysian women are at crossroads. They are encouraged to contribute towards the national economy and yet when they do, they are pulled back, reminded of their family role and blamed for the social ills that youth are engaged in. Women are constantly reminded that their sole responsibility is still to care for the head of household and family. Government policies fortify such prejudices. In the 2008 budget, the government announced that working women in the public sector might take up to five years of maternity leave to allow them to take care of children. Such a move further confined women's contribution and identified it as being supplementary. Unfortunately, this choice is not offered to males, because they are expected to be the economic contributors of the family and not homemakers. Such double standards need to be contested.

When women ask for equality, it is often misunderstood as women wanting to be the same as men; this is not the case. They are asking for their basic human rights to be recognised. The roles of women and men are socially constructed by society, without recognising that they have differences in needs, competence and opportunities. This has resulted in women's worth or the contributions that women make to become devalued and, consequently, has led to discrimination and inequality. Advancing substantive equality means recognising the diversity and differences in the varied needs and roles played by women and men; it also means shaping, promoting and

empowering women, and men as well, to claim their rights to achieve equality, justice and non-discrimination. Institutions, such as those of the education sector, can either be the antithesis that brings about prejudices and discrimination or they can be the agents of change to advance equal opportunities and results for girls and boys.

## Education policy and the government's commitment

### *Malaysian education policy*

Children in Malaysia begin primary schooling at the age of seven for a period of six years. There are two major types of government-operated or government-assisted primary schools. They are the national schools (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*), which use Malay as the medium of instruction, and the national-type schools (*Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan*) which use either Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction. In 2003, science and mathematics were taught in English, starting with new entries into the primary 1 level.

Secondary education in government secondary schools last for five years. Government secondary schools use Bahasa Malaysia (formerly known as Malay language) as the main medium of instruction, but since 2006, selected subjects are taught in English, i.e. mathematics and science. The education system is exam-oriented. Students in year 6 are required to sit for the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)* or Primary School Assessment Examination, before they can proceed to the secondary school level. In the third year, or form 3, students sit for the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR)*, Lower Secondary Assessment. At form 5, students sit for the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)*, Malaysian Certificate of Education, which is equivalent to the British Ordinary or 'O' Levels (now GCSEs – General Certificate of Secondary Education).

Malaysia's primary and secondary schools follow the National Integrated Curriculum (NIC), which has been set by the Ministry of Education since 1983. There are vernacular schools that teach Chinese and Tamil and follow the NIC. In post-secondary and higher-level education, curricula are varied and depend on the educational institutions offering the courses. Colleges and universities are now under a separate ministry, i.e. the Ministry of Higher Education. Private schools do exist: those that offer the National Integrated Curriculum and those offering international syllabi.

The Ministry of Education develops and monitors the progress of the national school system and curriculum. It is guided by National Education Policy and its implementation includes the following areas:

- An education programme which encompasses all disciplines of knowledge, skills, norms, values, cultural elements and beliefs to assist in the full and holistic development of individuals physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally, as well as to inculcate and enhance desirable moral values and to impart knowledge (Government of Malaysia, National Education Policy, 2005:4).

- Implementation of various policies, as follows:
  - **1960–1970s**. Under the New Economic Policy, efforts were made to integrate the three major races and to eradicate poverty in Malaysia. Access and opportunities to physical facilities and infrastructure improved in rural areas with the introduction of double-session schools, a school health programme, a 'textbook-on-loan' scheme, a supplementary food programme, raising universal education up to the age of 11 years and with the building of hostels to increase participation by rural children.
  - **1991–2000**. In line with Vision 2020, the role of education on human resource development was emphasised to accelerate the country's economic growth and competitiveness. The education sector was liberalised, which led to the growth of private higher learning institutions to fill the gap in local universities' intake. In addition, programmes were introduced to cater for children with special needs. A special degree programme was initiated to upgrade the qualifications of non-graduate teachers. The Smart Schools[2] pilot project was launched in 1999.
  - **2001–2010**. Over and above its policy on 'Education For All', primary levels 1–6 were finally made compulsory in 2003 with an amendment to the Education Act. Plans were made to extend the Smart Schools project in 2004. The Education Development Master Plan 2006–2010 was launched in 2007 to further develop primary and secondary education.
  - The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, together with the Ministry of Education is developing a manual on sex education for schools. The manual aims to promote responsible and safe lifestyles and to encourage parents and teachers to participate.
  - In the recent 2008 budget, the prime minister made a long-awaited announcement to abolish school fees and to distribute free school textbooks to students at both primary and secondary levels.

### *Accountability processes*

The Malaysian education system, guided by the Educational Development Plan (EDP) 2001–2010, follows a set of processes and procedures. As stated in the EDP, there are four tiers in the education management system (Government of Malaysia, EDP, 2003:7–2) The Ministry of Education (MOE) is where 'all activities concerning policy formulation development planning, curriculum development, public examination administration, and financing are managed and co-ordinated at the ministry level. It monitors educational programmes, with support from the state and district education departments' (Government of Malaysia, EDP, 2003:7–1). The State Education Department (SED) is in charge of school management, monitoring and inspection of educational policies and implementation of programmes. The District Education

Department (DED) assists the state in its tasks, while the school management runs the day-to-day business of the school.

The management of the curriculum and assessment is carried out by several departments/divisions, such as the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Technical Education Department (TECED), Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES), Malaysian Examination Council (MEC), Special Education Department (SpED) and the Islamic and Moral Education Department (IMED) (Government of Malaysia, EDP, 2003:7–3).

The monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the education policy, programmes and finances is carried out by three key bodies at various levels, namely, the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), the Federal Inspectorate of Schools (FIS), and the Schools Audit Division and Internal Audit.

For sure the MOE has laid down its vision, action plans and institutions to ensure 'Education for All' is achieved. However, there are a number of issues and challenges that need to be addresses.

## Issues and challenges

### *Literacy rate*

While there is almost equal access and opportunities offered to both girls and boys, statistics from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD, 2008) show that while Malaysia's female adult literacy rate for those aged 15 years and older increased from 86.6 per cent to 89.5 per cent in 2007, the rate is higher for the males – increasing from 93.8 per cent in 2000 to 95.1 per cent 9n 2007 (ibid., 2008:22).

### *Gender stratification*

Table 4.1 shows that in 2007 girls and boys had almost equal participation at primary and secondary levels. It was only at the matriculation and tertiary levels

**Table 4.1.** Literacy and enrolment rate by level of education, 2000–2006

| *Literacy* | 2000 | | 2002 | | 2004 | | 2006 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *rate 10 +* | *93.8%* | | *94.0%* | | *95.1%* | | *Not available* | |
| | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* |
| Primary | 1,425,889 (48.6%) | 1,507,988 | 1,454,338 (48.7%) | 1,534,946 | 1,517,386 (48.6%) | 1,603,500 | 1,539,387 (48.6%) | 1,628,388 |
| Secondary | 985,692 (50.5%) | 965,054 | 993,176 (50.4%) | 977,947 | 1,013,702 (50.1%) | 1,010,186 | 1,065,416 (49.8%) | 1,074,879 |
| Post secondary | 45,071 (66.4%) | 22,759 | 70,783 (66.7%) | 35,382 | 104,492 (66.4%) | 52,781 | 86,180 (65.1%) | 46,115 |

*Source:* Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) 2008:22

that boys' participation dropped to 34.9 per cent as compared to the girls at 65.1 per cent.

Female enrolment into public universities continues to increase from 57.8 per cent in 2001 to 61.7 per cent in 2007 (MWFCD 2008:23). However, it must also be noted that in 2005, participation rates for postgraduate levels showed that female students accounted for 52.9 per cent for the master's level but dropped to 38.1 per cent at the doctorate level (see Table 4.2).

Ironically, even though more women continue to enter the tertiary level, the labour force participation rate has remain stagnant, registering an average of 46.4 per cent in 2005, as compared to male participation, which averaged 79.5 per cent (see Table 4.3).

Women's lower participation was further confirmed when the 2007/08 Human Development Report (HDR) ranked Malaysia in 63 out of 177 countries under its gender empowerment measurement (UNDP, 2008). The formal equality for girls may have been achieved through their entry into education, but substantive equality in terms of women's labour force participation still requires attention.

**Table 4.2.** Percentage of enrolment by level of study and sex, 2003–2006

| *Levels of Study* | *2003/4* | | *2004/5* | | *2005/6* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* |
| Diploma | 40.6 | 59.4 | 41.2 | 58.8 | 41.8 | 58.2 |
| First degree | 36.6 | 63.4 | 35.9 | 64.1 | 38.1 | 61.9 |
| Postgraduate diploma | 45.1 | 54.9 | NA | NA | 35.2 | 64.8 |
| Master's | 51.2 | 48.8 | 46.3 | 53.7 | 47.1 | 52.9 |
| PhD | 64.3 | 35.7 | 61.4 | 38.6 | 61.9 | 38.1 |

*Source:* MWFCD, 2008:27

**Table 4.3.** Percentage labour force participation rate by gender, 1990–2005

| *Gender* | *1990* | *2000* | *2002* | *2003* | *2004* | *2005* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 85.3 | 83.1 | 81.5 | 82.1 | 80.9 | 79.5 |
| Female | 47.8 | 47.2 | 46.7 | 47.7 | 47.3 | 46.4 |
| Overall labour participation rate | 66.5 | 64.7 | 65.4 | 64.4 | 64.4 | 63.2 |

*Source:* MWFCD online, 2006:7

### *Students' dropout rates*

Despite efforts to make education more accessible to students, there are still students who do not complete the 11 years of basic education. Table 4.4 shows a higher dropout rate among male students and this trend starts at the primary school level.

The UNESCO EFA report in 2001 also indicated that in 1995, 11.9 per cent of the students in form 3 (lower secondary level) did not continue their education into form 4 (upper secondary level) in 1996. For both levels of schooling, male dropout rate was higher, registering 16.53 per cent in 1995 as compared to females' dropout rate of 7.48 per cent (UNESCO, 2001:3).

### *Quality of management and teachers*

Most school personnel are graduate and non-graduate teachers or education administrators from the education service, while other administrative and support staff make up the non-education personnel. In 2006, female teachers in primary schools formed 67.4 per cent of teaching staff and 64.4 per cent in secondary schools (MWFCD online, 2006).

The ratio of officers in the education service with a diploma (non-graduate teachers) is 12:1 (Government of Malaysia, EDP, 2003:7–5). The promotion of education service officers occurs in three ways: selection for a promotional post, time-based promotion and selection of master/excellent teachers. However, there is not much incentive when it comes to promotion for graduate teachers as opportunities

**Table 4.4.** Dropout rates in public schools at primary level, 1992–2003

| | *1992* | | *1995* | | *2000* | | *2003* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* |
| Year 1 | (–1.91%) | (–3.22%) | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Year 2 | –1,882 (–0.84%) | –1,933 (–0.84%) | –799 (–0.35%) | –1,685 (–0.69%) | 533 (0.22%) | 26 (0.01%) | –4,101 (–1.63%) | –5,111 (–1.93%) |
| Year 3 | –1,082 (–0.51%) | –1,061 (–0.48%) | –390 (–0.17%) | –389 (–0.16%) | –638 (–0.27%) | 906 (0.36%) | 745 (0.30%) | 925 (0.36%) |
| Year 4 | –1,161 (–0.55%) | –1,275 (–0.57%) | –605 (–0.26%) | –211 (–0.09%) | –4,770 (–2.04%) | –3,113 (–1.26%) | 115 (0.05%) | –26 (0.01%) |
| Year 5 | –2,281 (–1.11%) | –2,539 (–1.17%) | –1,146 (–0.52%) | –1,381 (–0.59%) | 2,271 (1.05%) | 1,357 (0.59%) | –795 (–0.33%) | –366 (–0.14%) |
| Year 6 | –2,798 (–1.44%) | –3,537 (–1.72%) | –2,561 (–1.23%) | –3,199 (–1.46%) | –2,123 (0.9%) | –3,267 (–1.31%) | –1,143 (–0.49%) | –1,595 (–0.66%) |
| Total Loss (%) | NA | NA | NA | NA | –2.73 | –3.46 | –4.13 | –4.21 |

*Source:* SUHAKAM, 2006:12

are limited, coupled with long waiting periods (Government of Malaysia, EDP, 2003:7–5).

The average class size for students has not significantly changed over the years. In 1990, average class size was 33.6 for secondary schools and in 2005 it was 32.5. This is high when compared to the OECD countries, where the average class size is 23.9. The teacher to student ratio has also remained almost the same: in 1990 it was 1:18.9 and in 2005 1:16.3. The OECD countries' average is 1:13.6. This continues to add stress to teachers, as they face difficulty coping with their many tasks: preparing and teaching, attending to students' academic problems, examinations, overseeing students' co-curriculum (extracurricular) activities and upgrading their skills as and when required (Arifin, 2004:5–7).

### *Approach to school discipline*

In the last two to three years, there has been much debate on the disciplinary approaches taken by teachers, as some teachers still practice the traditional disciplinary approach which comes with public caning, slapping and/or public humiliation of students. Increasingly, there is pressure for a much more equitable and respectful approach towards misbehaving students. Some of the following incidents of public discipline being used by teachers have come under public scrutiny and criticism:

- A teacher from a primary school forced 120 girl students to lift up their skirts to see who was menstruating, as a sanitary pad was found in the toilet.[3]
- A teacher in a rural school tore the baju kurung (an item of Malay female attire) off 13 schoolgirls because she found their attire to be too short.[4]
- A teacher from a secondary school forced nearly 200 girls to soak in a fishpond as a punishment because the school's toilet bowls were repeatedly blocked by sanitary pads.[5]

While these reported cases may be few, it is important to note that the approach taken by teachers to resolve problems is through harsh punishment. Girls' sexuality is controlled through the use of punishment. Menstruation and 'indecent' dressing are viewed as 'dirty' and shameful. These are the kind of informal 'moral' teachings used to repress girls' sexuality. Such punishments are arbitrary, unwritten and are totally at the discretion of the school teachers or heads. There are competing interests, where on the one hand the government is committed to the greater participation of women, yet on the ground such values are not held by all teachers. Stereotypes are reinforced and challenge any attempts by girls to exert their rights and to foster a more equitable relationship. The government has called 'to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation and nurture [a] "first class mentality"' (Government of Malaysia, NMP:30). Humiliating punishment will not bring about a non-violent environment, but will only serve to suppress critical minds and reinforce skewed sexuality.

## The Malaysian Study

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Malaysian government had to deal with girls' underachievement and participation at all levels and, in particular, in male-dominated subjects like science and mathematics. At that time, boys seemed to be performing well in these subjects. However, since 1990s, the trend shows a slow decline in boys' enrolment at schools after form 3.

In Malaysia, most studies refer to the underachievement of boys when referring to the overall progress of education in the country. The Malaysia report for UNESCO on Education for All (2001); the UNDP Malaysia Report on the MDGs (2005); and the SUHAKAM Report on the Human Rights Approach to the MDG Goal 2 on Achieving Universal Primary Education (2006) have described the trends affecting education and students and highlighted the statistics on the academic under-participation of boys. However, these studies and papers have not provided an in-depth analysis to understand why boys underachieve and what does this mean. The national statistic tends to relate the underachievement of boys to their low enrolment rate rather than performance.

### Selection of schools

Four secondary schools in the state of Kedah (north of Peninsular Malaysia) were selected. The selected schools represent a contrast between the urban and fast-growing economy of Sungai Petani and two nearby, stagnating rural towns.

The state of Kedah is well known as the 'Rice-bowl of Malaysia' and is responsible for between 40–50 per cent of the country's rice crop. Economic progress has taken place in leaps and bounds the urban centres of Sungai Petani is now classified as one of the fast growing towns in Peninsular Malaysia. In contrast, economic progress seems to have remained the same in nearby rural towns, where residents' main sources of income are farming and fishing. In 2005, the town of Kuala Muda was hit by the tsunami (which caused vast destruction in Aceh and some South Asian countries) and this drastically changed the economic purchasing power of its residents. The average monthly income of fishermen in Kuala Muda is about US$167–US$257 per month, depending on the catch or harvest. Poverty in these areas borders Kedah's

**Table 4.5.** Types and location of the selected schools, 2007

| *Schools* | *Types and location of schools* | *Gender* |
|---|---|---|
| School A: | National secondary school (urban) | All girls |
| School B: | National secondary school (rural) | Mixed girls and boys |
| School C: | National secondary school (rural) | Mixed girls and boys |
| School D: | National secondary science school (urban residential) | 2/3 majority boys with 1/3 girls |

rural poverty line of 655 ringgit (RM) for 2005 (Government of Malaysia, NMP, 2006:329).

### *Respondents*

The students selected for the classroom observation and the focus group discussions were aged 16 years. It was not possible to expand the age group. One of the conditions from the Ministry of Education was that the study should not disturb those students of ages 15 and 17 years old as they were preparing for their major public examinations. Other respondents included principals, teachers, administrative staff and officials from the District Education Department.

## Profiles of schools

The four schools that were involved with the study were as follows:

### *School A: national secondary school (urban, all-girls school)*

School A is located in an urban centre and is a top school, awarded with a 4.5 star for its students' academic performance. For the past ten years, the pass rate of students averaged 98 per cent for the final form 5 examinations. School A started as a missionary school and was later transformed into a national government-run school.

At the time of the study, school A had a total of 770 students, which comprised 409 (53.1 per cent) Malays, 54 (7.0 per cent) Chinese, 297 (38.6 per cent) Indians and 10 (1.3 per cent) others (usually caucasian and foreign students). Form 4 had a total of 144 students. In school A, 12 female students, five teachers (with one male teacher), the headmistress and a female administrator were interviewed. The students were from a mix of ethnic backgrounds. The working language of the teachers and students is Bahasa Malaysia, but most of them speak English and occasionally a student will use their vernacular language.

### *School B: national secondary school (rural and mixed school)*

School B was set up by the government as a national school. The classes offered are from forms 1–5, lower and upper form 6 ('A' Levels). At the time of the study, the pass rate of students averaged 78 per cent for the final form 5 examinations. School B had a total of 1,059 students, which comprised 1,054 (99.8 per cent) Malays. Form 4 had a total of 290 students.

In school B, the people interviewed comprised ten female and eight male students, along with five teachers (two of whom were male). The headmistress was busy and not available, even though three attempts were made to establish an interview. The working and spoken language of the teachers and students is Bahasa Malaysia.

*School C: national secondary school (rural and mixed school)*

School C, also set up by the government as a national school, had an average pass rate of 80 per cent per cent for the final form 5 examinations at the time of the study. This school had a total of 1,045 students, which comprised 1004 (96 per cent) Malays, 26 (2.5 per cent) Chinese and 15 (1.4 per cent) Indians. Form 4 had a total of 154 students.

In school C, the people interviewed comprised 12 male and 12 female students, six teachers (two male teachers), the headmistress and one assistant head, who was in charge of students' affairs. The working and spoken language of the teachers and students is Bahasa Malaysia.

*School D: national secondary science school (urban with 2/3 boys majority)*

School D is an elite boys' residential school, located in an urban centre. The school was established by Kedah royalty and has greater access to finance as compared to the other three schools. The school boasts a 100 per cent pass rate for the final form 5 examinations. Entry into the school is through a selection process and students are selected based on their having above-average results. School D had a total of 661 students at the time of the study, which comprised 94.9 per cent Malays, 0.45 per cent Chinese, 2.7 per cent Indians and 1.2 per cent others. Form 4 had a total of 135 students.

In school D, the total number of people interviewed was nine male students, six teachers (three women and men respectively) and a senior administrator. The working and spoken language of the teachers and students is Bahasa Malaysia.

*Vision and mission*

The schools all shared a similar vision to achieve excellence in their performance. School B added that it aimed to be among the top ten best schools in the state of Kedah, while school D gave a timeframe of 2010 to achieve its vision. The mission statements set by the four schools had common principles:

- to consolidate the management unit so as to lead, manage and administer with efficiency and effectiveness,
- to nurture their students with love, positive values and thinking,
- to ensure a conducive and safe school environment for teaching and studying,
- to consolidate the maturity and discipline of the school to be effective and sustainable,
- to give attention to the welfare of students, in terms of finances, motivation, social support and counselling.

Schools B and C put special emphasis on fostering a good relationship with the community. This reflected their position as rural schools situated near to villages.

### *School management*

The school managements in schools A, C and D were dominated by female teachers (Table 4.6). Not all teachers were degree holders, except for school D, which claimed that all its teachers held a degree. Teachers' skills in management and teaching are upgraded through courses offered by the MOE.

On closer look, Table 4.7 shows an interesting gender representation with three schools out of the four having female heads. This female-dominated representation matches national statistics, where female teachers made up 64.4 per cent of teaching staffs in 2006.

In school D, males held the top four positions at the time of the study, while in school B, key positions were all held by males, except for the female head teacher. In school C, fewer males dominate, but they were placed in charge of students' affairs (i.e. mainly discipline), science and mathematics and technical and vocational subject areas.

In terms of the ratio of teachers to students, Table 4.8 shows an average of about 1:18 teacher: student ratio. This ratio was higher than the Malaysian national statistics of 1:16 for year 2005.

**Table 4.6.** Teachers' population by gender

| *Employment* | *Gender* | *School A* | *School B* | *School C* | *School D* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. of posts sanctioned | Female | 39 | 36 | 37 | 41 | 153 |
| | Male | 7 | 43 | 21 | 26 | 97 |
| **Total** | | **46** | **79** | **58** | **67** | **350** |
| No. of teachers in position | Female | 39 | 36 | 37 | 41 | 153 |
| | Male | 7 | 43 | 21 | 26 | 97 |
| | **Total** | **46** | **79** | **58** | **67** | **260** |
| No. of permanent teachers | Female | 39 | 36 | 35 | 41 | 151 |
| | Male | 6 | 43 | 21 | 26 | 96 |
| | **Total** | **45** | **79** | **56** | **67** | **247** |
| Contract/part-time | Female | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | Male | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | **Total** | **1** | **0** | **2** | **0** | **3** |

**Table 4.7.** Schools' hierarchy by gender, 2007

| | *School A* | | *School B* | | *School C* | | *School D* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Posts* | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* | M |
| Principal/head | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Senior assistant | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 |
| Senior assistant (students affairs) | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | | 1 |
| Senior assistant (co-curriculum) | | | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Afternoon school supervisor | 1 | | | | | | 1 | |
| Senior teacher (co-curriculum) | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |
| Senior teacher (language) | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | |
| Senior teacher (science and maths) | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | |
| Senior teacher (humanities) | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | |
| Senior teacher (technical and vocational) | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | |
| Counsellor | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | **9** | **1** | **4** | **6** | **6** | **4** | **6** | **5** |

**Table 4.8.** Ratio of teachers to students, 2007

| | *School A* | *School B* | *School C* | *School D* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total no. of teachers | 46 | 79 | 57 | 67 |
| Total no. of students | 770 | 1,596 | 1,045 | 661 |
| Teacher–student ratio | 1:17 | 1:20 | 1:18 | 1:10 |

### *Enrolment and academic achievement*

The study team made repeated attempts to obtain the enrolment for the year 2007. Unfortunately, two of the schools were unable to provide this as their records were not in order or were not held with the school. Table 4.9 confirms that girls'

**Table 4.9.** Enrolment of students in surveyed schools, 2006/07

| | *Total* | *Total male* | *Total female* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Form 1 | 826 | 384 | 442 |
| Form 2 | 893 | 395 | 498 |
| Form 3 | 860 | 405 | 455 |
| Form 4 | 723 | 291 | 432 |
| Form 5 | 662 | 256 | 406 |
| Total | 3,964 | 1,731 | 2,233 |

enrolment is higher compared to boys. It also indicates that from form 1 to form 3, boys stayed on but their numbers reduced as they reached forms 4 and 5. In contrast, the number of girls enrolled from form 1 to 5 remained almost the same.

Although the gender composition of all four schools was not of equal, some observations can be made. Table 4.10 shows a comparison of schools A and D and indicated that girls tend to do well in language and art subjects (e.g., moral studies, history, commerce and accounting). In school D, boys showed better results in science and engineering subjects such as physics, chemistry, additional mathematics and engineering technology and drawing. Girls also do well in science subjects, but mainly in general science, mathematics and chemistry. Boys in schools B and C had much lower results. One possible reason could be that boys when placed in a more disciplined environment, as in the case of school D, could perform better.

### *Availability and accessibility of facilities*

All four schools are well equipped with more than basic facilities, which is in line with the government's push to build competitive and information communications

**Table 4.10.** Total results for the form 5 examination taken in 2006

| **SCHOOLS** | **A** | | **B** | | **C** | | **D** | | **A** | | **B** | | **C** | | **D** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *GENDER* | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* | M | *F* |
| SUBJECTS/GRADES | 1A | 1A | 1A | 1A | 1A | 1A | 1A | 8E | 8E | 8E | 8E | 8E | 8E | 8E | | |
| Bahasa Malaysia | 60 | 2 | 24 | 3 | 17 | 12 | 20 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 0 | | |
| English | 54 | 1 | 8 | | 1 | 8 | 11 | 6 | 19 | 37 | 13 | 12 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Islamic studies | 13 | 3 | 22 | 1 | 3 | 42 | 44 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Moral studies | 28 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| History | 40 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 35 | 21 | 4 | 16 | 20 | 14 | 7 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Commerce | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Principles of accounting | 53 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Home economics | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Art | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 5 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Mathematics | 69 | 5 | 29 | 3 | 8 | 71 | 46 | 0 | 24 | 37 | 19 | 10 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Additional math. | 14 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 24 | 18 | 12 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | | |
| Engineering technology | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Engineering drawing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Science | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 7 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Physics | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Chemistry | 10 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Biology | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Jumlah | 371 | 11 | 102 | 10 | 41 | 233 | 186 | 48 | 80 | 111 | 124 | 76 | 2 | 2 | | |

*Note:* 1A and 2A are top scores while 8E denotes failure.

technology- (ICT-) based human resources. Schools are equipped not only with the basic facilities of electricity, water and telecommunications equipment, but most teachers (especially those teaching science and mathematics subjects) are equipped with a liquid crystal display (LCD) projector and laptop for presentations.

### *School building*

Schools B, C and D are owned and administered under the MOE. However, school A, a Catholic Missionary turned national school, does not own its land or school building, which are owned by various church groups (all Catholic) and a token monthly rental of RM200 is paid for the hire of the teachers' room. The disparity in land and facilities between school A (the all-girls school) and the other schools was apparent. School D, being a boarding school, not only has two halls and more land space, but is also more financially sound. Even schools B and C have better facilities and more land.

### *Facilities for management and teachers*

All four schools are well equipped and have special offices for their principals with a large administration room next door. School D**,** being resource rich, has better facilities in terms of rooms, equipment and the school is kept clean as it has the funds to pay for its upkeep. Its computers are sited in a special room, adjacent to the staffroom, and are only used by teachers. A corner has been set aside for reading and interaction purposes. Table 4.11 shows the kind of equipment and facilities available to the teachers at the four schools.

**Table 4.11.** Equipment and facilities in all four schools, 2007

| | *Equipment and facilities for teachers* | | | | | | *Amenities For students* | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Tables and chairs* | *Air conditioners, lights and fans* | *Refrigerators, sofa sets* | *ICT equipment, e.g. computers, scanners and printers* | *Toilets – teachers* | | *Classrooms* | *Science laboratories* | *Computer laboratories* | *Counselling rooms* | *Living skills* | *Sick bays* | *Art rooms* | *Library* | *No. of library books* | *Indoor halls* | *Toilets with 7–11 cubicles – students* |
| School A | 92 | 14 | – | 3 | 1 | | 22 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 14,862 | – | 3 |
| School B | 90 | 19 | – | 2 | 2 | | 31 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 1 | – | 2 | 16,200 | 1 | 4 |
| School C | 80 | 18 | 2 | 3 | 2 | | 24 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | – | 1 | 15,000 | 1 | 8 |
| School D | 92 | 32 | 2 | 15 | 2 | | 22 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 18,000 | 1 | 5 |

*Facilities for students*

The number of classrooms range between 22 and 31; they are well ventilated with adequate lighting, and have three to four ceiling fans per classroom. Table 4.11 indicates that a wide range of equipment and facilities is made available for the students. Some of the classes had LCD projectors and white screens, but these were only available for teachers. However, the following observations were made on the kind of gender bias that exists in the provision and utilisation of the facilities.

**Living skills.** Living skills refer to domestic science, carpentry and other skills that students, boys and girls, learn besides mainstream subjects. Students have to sit for examinations in living skills. However, the kind of skills offered to girls and boys depend on the schools. School **D** had better facilities than the other schools, as it had three rooms available for sewing, cooking and a well-equipped mechanical workshop. School **A** only had two classrooms for cooking and sewing, with no other options offered. The teachers themselves did not question this and accepted the classes as fixed. Two of them said: 'It has always been like that – from day one'. Others offered the excuse that there were insufficient classrooms to conduct more technical classes.

Schools B and C had rooms for sewing and cooking classes, but more rooms for electrical and plumbing lessons. In school B, it was pointed out that boys' dropout rates were high and such lessons would equip the boys before they left school. In 2006, only 16 male students from school B made it to form 6 out of 116 males who studied form 5. Those who did not pursue form 6 may have enrolled in vocational or private schools or joined the labour market. Statistics for the other three schools were not available, so comparison was not possible.

When asked if the teachers expect girls to respond better (than boys) to 'domesticated' living skills, most teachers did not think so. However, the living skills lessons offered by the schools reinforce this perception.

**Libraries**. The procurement of reading materials in schools B, C and D indicated bias towards boys' interest. School D had 18,000 books with most shelves on science, mathematics, computers, engineering and sports (e.g., rugby and football). School C had 16,000 books and school B had 15,000, mainly on engineering and technology. This suggests that more emphasis is being placed on boys' interests. In comparison, school A had only 14,862 books on art subjects as well as fiction in diverse languages, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil, and more books on philosophy and general sciences.

**Art.** School A had an art and a music room with a piano for the students' choir group. School D has a big art studio, which was popular among the students. School B allocated a corner, under the staircase, for art classes and school C had no specific art room. Little effort was made to encourage art classes, even though more girls were interested.

**Toilets**. Separate toilets were allocated for girls and boys, with private cubicles, common sinks and mirrors. Hygiene and cleanliness of the toilets was far from satisfactory, except for in school D. Waste disposal was not provided for properly, as small waste paper baskets become full quickly. Inadequate disposal facilities may be one of the reasons why sanitary pads were not disposed of properly, as in the case with the schools in Melaka and Sarawak.

**Sports and games**. School A offered women-oriented games in school, such as netball, basketball, hockey and volleyball, but other games were played outside the school – as will be discussed later. Schools B, C and D encouraged male-dominated games, such as, football, hockey, cricket, softball and *sepak takraw* (a game where you kick a shuttle using one's ankle). Girls in these schools were only offered netball, hockey and volleyball. Girls and boys in schools B, C and D do not play games together. The segregation of girls and boys was an unwritten policy carried out by the schools.

**Science and ICT facilities**. Compared to its living skills facilities, school D placed greater emphasis on science and technology. It had nine laboratories – three general science laboratories for forms 1 to 3 and two laboratories for physics, chemistry and biology for form 4 and 5 students. School A had two laboratories, one for lower secondary students (13 to 15 years old) and a separate laboratory for physics, chemistry and biology that was utilised by upper secondary students (16 and 17 years old). Schools B and C placed less emphasis on science – they only had one general science laboratory each.

## Limitations of the study

The study had some limitations. As all the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, it was difficult to observe any grammatical gender bias – the language itself makes no such distinction, as compared to the English language. For example, the word '*dia*' is a generic word used to refer to both male and female and there is no 'he' or 'she' in Bahasa Malaysia. Bias can only appear when names of people, denoting their gender, or pictures are used to illustrate a situation or action.

The study only covered four schools and a small geographical area. It was not able to compare its findings with other factors that affect performance and participation, such as, ethnicity, religion and income levels. Schools such as those with *orang asli* majority and vernacular schools were not covered, and these perhaps may have given a different perspective to the analysis. The study was limited to only using gender relations as a factor to analyse girls' and boys' performance and participation.

## Findings of the study

### Education system processes and practices

#### *District Education Department (DED) hierarchy*

The Sungai Petani District Education Department (DED) had 12 women and 29 men holding positions in the hierarchy at the time of the study, out of which seven women were in the Administrative and Finance Department. The head District Education Officer (DEO) was a woman and she had two female and seven male assistant DEOs. Unfortunately, the study team was unable to speak to the DEO head as she was busy. An interview was conducted with senior personnel at the Education Department at Sungai Petani.

The senior DEO confirmed that the infrastructure of all schools in Kedah was being upgraded and teaching aids were supplied to enhance teaching. He also confirmed that different training workshops were held and offered to those teachers who were involved in that particular subject, but there were none on the concept of gender.

As for the subjects such as sewing and cooking, the DED had left it to the discretion of the schools to select their own curriculum activities. There were no guidelines on how schools select such activities for females and males. He stressed that there was no gender discrimination when it came to employment of school heads and teachers. Two-thirds of the teachers were females and one-third males. He did not think that gender bias happened in the allocation of teachers' school tasks as the criteria were based on competence and experience. This point of view was confirmed by the principals and teachers from the schools, as discrimination in promotion was based on perceived factors, such as favouritism.

#### *Understanding gender*

The senior DEO had heard of the word 'gender' when attending seminars organised by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and read it in the papers. However, he did not really understand the meaning of the word. Upon clarification, he agreed that girls and boys do behave differently. Girls do better in science, mathematics and art subjects, as they are more conscientious and dedicated to their goals, while boys tend not to be such high achievers. Having said that, he pointed out that statistics also indicate that boys do better when they are in standard 6 and form 3, but their results decline when they reach form 5. He felt that the problem was the attitudes of the boys, as those from the rural areas are more carefree and do not show much interest in their studies, while boys in urban areas perform better.

#### *Tackling violence against women*

In cases of violence, a system has been set up by the DED. The school has to make the initial report – written or by phone and followed by written (in case of

emergency) – and only then does the DED step in. A police report will then be made if the case warrants police investigation. For example, there was a case where a girl was pregnant; the DED in consultation with the school management relocated the girl to another school, the reason being that the girl did not want to continue her studies in the same school, and there was the concern about the stigma that she may suffer if she remained. Unfortunately, the usual response is still to transfer girls in such cases to another school without dealing with the psychological impact she has face.

#### *Sex education*

When the sex education curriculum was mentioned, the senior DEO was supportive of its introduction. He felt that sex education had to go beyond physical or biological understanding. It was important to inculcate values of non-violence and respect to both girls and boys.

#### *Discipline*

Disciplinary actions are taken at the school level. State / district education departments are informed of cases and they give their advice on the course of action, depending on the severity of the case.

### School management

Girls and boys face different social issues and management handle them differently. These issues are outlined below.

#### *Bullying and violence against women*

The school management deals with issues such as bullying and forming gangs among the girls. There is a system to resolve these issues, which are usually handled by the principal and the senior assistant. Bullying does occur in the girls' school: the principal of school A discussed how she usually talks to each member of the gang individually, before bringing them together for a group discussion. She felt this method was able to bring a more amicable resolution to the problem.

Three of the schools reported cases of violence against women. They were as follows:

- In 2006, a girl became pregnant by her boyfriend. She stopped coming to school because her parents no longer allowed her to go.
- In 2003/4, there was a case of incest and this was brought up to the DED level. An investigation was conducted and eventually the perpetrator was caught.
- Sexual harassment by 'flashers' does occur outside the school gates. However, when incidents have been reported to the State Education Department and police have patrolled the area, no further incidents have been reported.

In school A, discussions on violence against women tend to happen after the event. In other schools, there were no such discussions. School D emphasised that violence against women does not occurred in the school and this was confirmed by the teachers.

One of the girls from school A expressed that she expected the school to be able to provide protection for students. Information on violence and crime was only disseminated to the students whenever 'big' incidents occurred, but according to her by that time 'it's too late'.

### *Discipline*

School A emphasised that it followed an unwritten school motto: to forgive (wrong doers), perhaps due to its strong missionary influence. However, the principal explained that this does not mean there is no penalty for wrong doers or that the problem is not dealt with. A student who has misbehaved does get punished or suspended for a temporary period. When she returns to school, conditions are set for the student to improve herself: she has to work hard to get back her merit points within the year and her work and behaviour is monitored by her class teacher. Support is given to her to regain her confidence and to help her work towards increasing her merit points. If she improves, she will be given additional merit points so that she is encouraged to be better. The manner in which the school handles students' issues appears to be encouraging as opposed to the traditional disciplinary punishment, such as public caning and disgrace.

In schools B and C, the teachers did not want to comment on their disciplinary measures. In the classroom observation, it was noticed that teachers in the mixed and all-boys school seemed to be more lenient in their discipline with boys. For example:

- Boys were observed to wander in and out of the lessons.
- Boys were chatting among themselves while lessons were in progress.
- In a language class, eight boys were late and another two entered ten minutes later.

On none of these occasions were the students reprimanded or asked for an explanation. The difference in the disciplinary actions taken against boys may reflect an acceptance by the teachers that boys are irresponsible and there is nothing they can do about their behaviour. This may further reinforce the boys' attitude that there is no penalty, or simply that they receive a lighter reprimand (than girls would) for their bad behaviour. In contrast, no such expectation is directed to the girls, as they are expected to be obedient and responsible.

School D, on the other hand, has strict disciplinary rules which students are aware of. They include no television, no going out of the school premise unless within

specific times, not being allowed to wear fashionable trousers and students not being permitted to visit the toilet for too long. Students' time was managed with homework sessions, group study sessions and games.

## School textbooks

The study reviewed the form 4 textbooks to analyse if there was any gender bias in the contents. The findings are outlined below.

**History**. There was no mention of women heroes and the contribution that women have made, be it internationally or nationally. Pictures used as illustrations depict mainly men who were in power, in leadership and as inventors, e.g., Julius Caesar, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, King Alaudin Riayat Syah (Melaka ruler) and so forth.

**Biology**. There was little bias detected except when it came to inventors. All male inventors were highlighted in the introduction to photosynthesis, such as Joseph Priestley and Jean Baptiste van Helmont.

**Bahasa Malaysia**. Gender bias was located in the pictures, e.g., *rukun tetangga* (residents' association), which depicted all males, and male runners in sports with girls cheering on.

**English**. On many occasions, the pictures in the textbooks portrayed men in leadership positions, e.g., when introducing the concept of greetings, a male was portrayed as the speaker while the majority of the audience were women.

The findings indicate strong gender bias in the portrayal of men's and women's roles and a lack of recognition for women's contributions in Malaysia. Women are underrepresented and when they did contribute, they are not mentioned. Biased gender language is used by teachers to describe the roles of women, which further reinforces the idea that women are subordinate to men.

## Principals and teachers

Changing attitudes is a long process and one of the quickest and most efficient channels is through education. Gender stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes are learned and can be changed. The education system can play a role to bring about a more gender-sensitised attitude among young Malaysians. Teachers can play this role and, therefore, what and how teachers think and what they value becomes crucial in promoting gender equality and non-discrimination. Their perceptions and the roles they play in and outside the school environment will help shape the behaviour and thinking of students. Below summarises the expectations and perceptions of the school personnel who were interviewed.

### *Expectations*

#### *Students' performance*

Students' performance in schools A and D were higher than in schools B and C. Teachers from these two schools put in extra effort to maintain their high academic records. In school A, teachers experiment with various teaching methods to upgrade the learning curve of students. School D seems confident that its students will maintain its all-time record of 100 per cent pass rate in the form 5 examination. As put forward by the senior administrator, 'it's a matter of how many A's the students score'. Evidently, teachers place high expectations on the students. Most of the teachers expressed that the trend was for boys to do well in mathematics, additional mathematics, physics and engineering subjects while girls were better in languages and art subjects, but were catching up with the boys in science subjects. This opinion was also verified by schools B and C.

#### *Students' participation*

Boys' participation in other non-academic subjects and parts of the school curriculum left much to be desired. A male teacher from school C lamented:

> *'We have tried every way to involve the boys ... when it came to volunteering, they pretend to look away. In class, we try to think of ways to involve them, but most of them don't seem interested. Ah! when it's sports, they become alive! ... but unfortunately they are only interested [in] play[ing] the games but not [in] do[ing] the hard work of organising.'*

Another female teacher from School B said:

> *'I am happy to work with the girls ... you get better feedback.'*

Boys did not seem to want to volunteer to do any work, e.g., in preparation for sports day, and seemed to have no interests in school clubs. They tended to be only interested in male-dominated games, such as football, rugby and *sepak takraw*.

Outside school activities seemed to attract boys more. A number of the boys were involved with '*mat rempit*' (motorbike racing), black metal, hanging out at cybercafés and shopping malls. A male teacher from School B said:

> *'One day, we tracked these students (those who played truant) and found most of them at an urban shopping mall. I am not joking ... they prefer to* lepak *(loiter) there and not go to school.'*

Central Square in Sungai Petani was identified as the mall most frequented by the young. Raids have been carried out, but they have had no effect on those who regularly played truant. Such activities were less observed among female students.

The reasons for boys truanting tend to differ. Truants in the urban schools included students from high-income households, or students who were neglected by their parents. Those from rural areas were boys with parents who fish or farm for their

living and from lower-income brackets. These parents need the boys to help out in their work, which results in them missing school. According to a teacher:

> *'... there is a pattern – they tend to miss school during Sundays and Thursdays. When we look for the students, we are told by their parents that they are at sea.'*

In certain states, like Kedah, Sundays and Thursdays are work and school days as they follow the Muslim calendar. Efforts were made by the teachers, especially in schools B and C, to organise motivation camps for the boys, conduct talks on local radio stations on students' education and also to offer parenting classes for the community. However, the parents' turn out was very poor.

In contrast, boy students from School D had little chance to play truant as they are in a residential school with very strict rules and regulations. Nonetheless, the boys were also found to be unenthusiastic in their attitudes towards helping out and volunteering their assistance. A teacher said:

> *'Even though they do get good results, some boys tend not to want to help out in organising school activities and they leave it to the girls.'*

Different expectations are placed on boys, as their parents, and to a large extent society, expect them to be the breadwinners, while girls' roles are supplementary and domestic in nature. From an early age, boys begin to learn that they are the head of family and the breadwinner – and because of such expectations, in many ways society excuses boys when they behave irresponsibly.

### *Perceptions*

#### *Understanding gender*

None of the teachers in the schools understood the meaning of 'gender'. Two male teachers said that they had read about gender in the media when it was mentioned by the MWFCD. Two female teachers had read the word 'gender' when it was used in government forms. Besides that, they did not understand what gender meant. Only the principal of school A and another teacher from school D had heard and understood gender as being socially constructed by society and as such is something that can be changed.

The study team carried out an exercise with the teachers and asked them to state the positive and negative characteristics of a woman and a man. Table 4.12 summarises their responses. Most of them presented stereotypical perceptions of both females and males. When the concept was further discussed with them, some female teachers (six) from school A felt that even when women do not play the traditional roles, opportunities were limited and discrimination existed. A female teacher said:

'More women are going out to work. However, they still need to prove that they are able to excel well in their work. There are more opportunities open for men.'

**Table 4.12.** Gender roles as perceived by teachers in the four schools

| *Female* | | *Male* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Positive* | *Negative* | *Positive* | *Negative* |
| Have mothering skills/ homemakers<br>Serious about their work<br>Responsible for their children<br>Able to handle problems well<br>Patient<br>Suitable as educators for their children<br>Perform better than the males<br>Biological differences<br>Shy<br>Weaker<br>Emotional<br>Better in time management | Men have more employment choices than women | Strong<br>Can share housework<br>Clever<br>Leaders<br>Hardworking<br>Take care of the family and able to work at the same time | Lazy |

Reflecting on their personal lives, most of the teachers (six) from school A said they shared out the housework among their children – regardless of gender – and encouraged and supported their children in their studies and the choices that they make. When asked further, some of them admitted that they do differentiate the kind of work that they ask boys to do, especially for work that required more energy. They were stricter with their female children's mobility, and are reluctant to allow them to go out too late at night. A male teacher responded that he felt that men as well as women are educators, and such responsibility should be shared as parents are role models for their children. He felt that as a male he felt more responsible towards the family, especially for their safety.

### *Expression of stereotypical ideas*

During the focus group discussions, it was observed that there was some gender-biased language being used. Expressions such as women 'are good at being mothers', that they have 'soft' skills, are 'mature and able to look after the house well', they are 'more hardworking, more honest than boys', 'women are more patient', they are suitable 'as educators' and 'homemakers' were used to describe a woman and her role. Teachers themselves classified how girls and boys should behave and what their social roles were. They also put boundaries on what girls and boys can and cannot do. A male teacher said:

> *'Girls need to be protected and be cautious when mixing with boys. I will make sure my girls (referring to his children) do not go out of the house.'*

Another teacher said:

*'Boys are boys and girls are girls.* Itu biasa *(it's normal).'*

In the discussions, it was also observed that female teachers tend not to speak up when their male colleagues dominate the discussion. They whisper among themselves to exchange opinions. The exception was school A, where the female teachers were more outspoken and held strong opinions. However, in this case there was only one male teacher present.

Yet as teachers utter these biased ideas and unconsciously display gender stereotypes in their attitudes and behaviours, they do realise that times have changed and that girls are not only performing well academically, but are able to build successful careers if they want to.

### *Gender-sensitive training*

No gender training programmes were offered to the teachers, nor were gender concepts incorporated into any teacher training courses.

### *Sex education*

The teachers were informed by the study team that the MWFCD had intentions to introduce sex education and a manual was being drafted. All respondents, both principals and teachers, were unaware of this document, except for one teacher who had read about it in a newspaper. Nor was there any consultation of school personnel, even though consultations were carried out with non-governmental organisations.

On a more positive note, all the teachers agreed that it was necessary to introduce sex education at the school level, as it was not covered in the curriculum. Six of the teachers stressed that it was important that social relationships between boys and girls be introduced. One male teacher said:

*'...it's not enough to talk about it in biology classes; it does not touch on values and morals.'*

Another teacher said:

*'We can't avoid this subject when the students are becoming more aware.'*

At the time of writing, the issue of introducing sex education or education on sexuality was still in the early stages at the Women's Ministry.

## Students

### *Aspirations and motivation*

At all the focus group discussions with female students, they showed high motivation to excel and to further their studies. In school A, 90 per cent of the females wanted to study for a degree, master's and some of them aspired to obtain PhDs. Some of the

girls (three) expressed that they would prefer to go into employment after form 5. Male students did not exhibit such a high academic drive, except for those in school D. Some of the boys (18) said they would prefer to start work after completing their secondary education; some (five) were contented with having a diploma, while the others wanted to continue up to form 6. Only boys (six) from school D were motivated to go on to obtain a PhD (see Table 4.13).

### *Expectations*

There was a strong expectation from the student respondents that they would have support and guidance from their parents, especially in helping them plan their studies. Most of the girls showed confidence in their parents' support, e.g., 'they are happy when we get good results'. For the boys in schools B and C, their parents

**Table 4.13.** Aspirations of girls and boys, 2007

| *School/Gender* | *Aspirations* | *Female* | *Male* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **School A** | Architect | 3 | | |
| Art designer | 1 | | | |
| Engineer | 2 | | | |
| Hotel manager | 1 | | | |
| Lawyer | 1 | | | |
| Medical doctor | 3 | | | |
| University lecturer | 1 | | 12 | |
| **School B** | Medical doctor | 3 | | |
| Manager | 2 | | | |
| Pilot | | 1 | | |
| Soldier | | 4 | | |
| Teacher | 5 | 3 | 18 | |
| **School C** | Accountant | 1 | | |
| Architect | | 1 | | |
| Firefighter | | 2 | | |
| Lawyer | 2 | 1 | | |
| Medical doctor | 6 | 1 | | |
| Police | | 2 | | |
| Soldier | | 4 | | |
| Teacher | 3 | 1 | 24 | |
| **School D** | Business person | 2 | 4 | |
| Medical doctor | 4 | 6 | | |
| Surgeon | | 4 | | |
| Teacher | 6 | 1 | 27 | |
| **Total** | | **46** | **35** | **81** |

expected them to help in the padi (*rice*) fields, to be hard working, help in the shop and vegetable farms, but placed less emphasis on studies. The male students from school D did not have to manage their schoolwork along with helping their families, as they were in a boarding school. They expressed the view that there were high expectations from teachers and parents for them to excel in and further their studies.

Most of the students said that they would like to have better communications with their parents. About 85 per cent of the girls said that they preferred to talk to their mothers rather than their fathers, as the latter did not seem to have time or showed lack of understanding. Some of their responses included:

*'there's nothing to talk about....'*

*'[I'm] scared to talk to him.'*

Among the girls, there was high expectation for them to do housework after or before completion of school homework. About 20 of the girls said they had to do a lot of housework. They all said it almost in unison:

*'... sweeping, looking after [our] younger brothers and sisters, washing the plates left in the sink by [our] brothers – we hate that!'*

The girls were resentful that there was so much favouritism of their brothers. They all seemed to refer to males as '*lelaki*' (the boys) even though they were their brothers.

*'... the boys... they seem to get everything they want.'*

*'... the boys get more than me.'*

Only two girls who had no male sibling said that they were not discriminated against. Five girls were of the opinion that if they do get married, they will teach their sons to be more responsible and make them do housework. However, most of the girls accepted the 'state of affairs' as given, as these domestic roles were 'girls' work'. Even though they were unhappy, they did not raise them with their parents. It appears that they have accepted that such chores and relationships cannot be changed. It was observed that these girls were, therefore, brought up to accept a stereotypical domestic role, even if they perform well in their studies.

Most of the boys replied that they do not do much housework. Some of the boys giggled and said:

'... itu kerja wanita *(it's girls' work).'*

Others said:

*'... my mother does all the work.'*

Only two boys in school B said that they did help to wash plates, clean shoes and ironed their own clothes. In school D, some of the boys said that they do housework, but sheepishly admitted that they only do it occasionally. In general, the boys leave housework and serving to their sisters and mothers.

### *Perceptions*

#### *Understanding of gender*

In common with the teachers, the students did not understand the meaning of the word 'gender', nor did they indicate that they had heard of it from their teachers or the courses they attend. When asked to name the positive and negative characteristics of a woman and man, they listed the usual stereotyped roles that they ascribe to males and females (see Table 4.14).

**Table 4.14.** Gender roles as perceived by students in the four schools

| *Female* | | *Male* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Positive* | *Negative* | *Positive* | *Negative* |
| Women do win in the 'Fear Factor' (a cable TV series)<br>Can do the same work as males<br>More mature and able to be rational<br>They are able to think through things before acting<br>Mentally stronger<br>More alert<br>Not easily influenced by 'bad factors' (referring to drugs and smoking)<br>Possess 'soft' skills<br>Able to look after the house<br>Good homemakers and able to take care of the family<br>More hardworking<br>More honest<br>Don't need to do heavy work<br>Careful<br>Receive a lot of praise<br>Ambitious<br>Need to dress up | Have to take care of their reputation<br>Menstrual flow becomes cumbersome during camping trips<br>Forced to do housework<br>Always bullied by boys as they give girl work to do<br>Emotional<br>Dependant<br>Discriminated against in academic choices | Strong<br>Energetic in sports<br>Clever<br>Able to socialise freely and make friends easily<br>Open to positive aspects<br>Are leaders<br>Creative<br>Critical<br>Innovative<br>Have high aspirations<br>Have more opportunities | Easily influenced by 'bad factors' (drugs, smoking)<br>Immature<br>Don't seem to be able to think about their actions<br>Not responsible<br>Don't need to do housework<br>Have too many distractions<br>No direction in their lives |

Girls from schools A and B felt that women do have limited choices in terms of occupations. Some jobs are already slated for boys while girls are excluded –as, for example, in the political arena and in top corporate positions. Opportunities for boys were viewed with resentment. For example, if a boy obtains average marks, why is it that he can get into IPTA (Public Institute for Higher Learning) while a girl with a similar grade cannot? They expressed that women were discriminated against in some jobs because corporate companies tend to use the excuse that when women get pregnant they have to leave their jobs or they have to give women maternity leave. So, preference is given to men as they do not have such responsibilities.

The findings indicate that while girls are able to realise their potential, especially in academic achievement, they feel discriminated against as they watch boys sailing through applications that girls have to work twice as hard for in order to be consider as candidates. Discrimination was also felt at home when household chores were burdens placed only on girls and yet parents expect them to complete their school-work in time. While boys had no such burden, they can do what they want and had the freedom of movement.

### *Low participation of boys*

Different responses on boys' underachievement were recorded. A majority of the girls felt that boys were more relaxed with schoolwork, were lazy, that they liked to go out riding their bikes, wasted money on shopping, lacked the drive to study and that their parents did not seem to be able to control them. Few of the boys disagreed with the girls' point of view. However, no boy expressed the need to change.

### *Students in decision-making processes*

School prefects are appointed by the principle and senior teachers. Any complaints are made directly to the class teacher or students' affairs officer, but not through the prefects.

In schools B, C and D, all the students accepted that the two key positions – head prefect and class monitor – should be occupied by a male and not a female. No one appeared to want to question this process. There were female prefects, but their roles were viewed as being supportive. In terms of gender balance, all three schools had almost equal numbers of girls and boys acting as prefects.

Merit as the basis for selection was not used as a yardstick, as appointment was based on sex – as long as you are a male you are a leader. Girls, despite of their academic performance, were placed subordinate to males. Giving such privileges to boys had unconsciously created discrimination between the girls and boys.

### *Sex education*

Some girls expressed that they would welcome sex education, even though they did not understand what it meant. Upon further explanation from the study team, most of them felt that the sex education offered by sanitary towels companies was insufficient. When sex was taught in biology classes, it was on reproductive issues only and not on relationships. None of the girls said that they shared issues regarding boyfriends with their teachers. They prefer to share their problems with their friends. The boys also shared this view.

### *Expressions of stereotypical ideas*

Gender bias was often reflected in the language used when the students described the roles of women: 'good as mothers', 'having soft skills', 'mature', 'able to look after the house well', 'more hardworking', 'more honest than boys', and 'girls are weak' (see Table 4.14).

Gender-biased behaviour was observed among the group. In a mixed group discussion, the girls tended to be quieter and needed a lot of encouragement before they gave their opinions. It was difficult to get them to participate in the discussion. The girls tended to listen when the boys spoke and they seldom contradicted the boys' opinions. When they were separated, it was easier to get responses from the girls.

In school D, gender-biased ideas were expressed as one of the boys said:

*'I expect to find a good wife and [to] be able to look after my parents.'*

This aspiration was echoed by his friends. Boys from the school were more vocal (than boys for the other schools), more directed in their goals and confident. In school A, three of the girls showed confidence and they were unwilling to accept existing stereotyped roles as prescribed by society. One of them cried out:

*'... why should I change ... I like being a girl.'*

But what does 'being a girl' mean? The respondent seemed confident that she would be able to assert herself and make her own choices.

## Classroom and outside classroom processes

### *Classroom engagement*

During the Malaysian study, a total of 21 classes were observed and 626 students, both males and females, were involved in the classroom observations. Table 4.15 shows the breakdown of the students in the various classes.

In school A, there was good rapport between the teachers and the students. For example, when a student does not understand a particular issue, the teacher takes time to explain. Efforts were taken to help the weaker students. In school A, the teachers who were observed expected students to develop their own notes in the

**Table 4.15.** Classes observed and number of female and male students, form 4

| | *Classes* | *Teachers and subjects* | *Girls* | *Boys* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **School A** | Form 4 (1) | Male teacher, chemistry | 33 | |
| | Form 4 (2) | Female teacher, history | 21 | |
| | Form 4 (3) | Female teacher, physical education | 25 | |
| | Form 4 (1) | Female teacher, English | 24 | |
| | Form 4 (2) | Female teacher, moral education | 37 | |
| | Form 4 (1) | Female teacher, Islamic studies | 21 | |
| **School B** | Form 4 (1) | Female teacher, mathematics | 16 | 17 |
| | Form 4 (2) | Male teacher, Islamic studies | 13 | 5 |
| | Form 4 (3) | Male teacher, Malay literature | 10 | 18 |
| | Form 4 (1) | Male teacher, English | 24 | 12 |
| **School C** | Form 4 (1) | Male teacher, physical education | 8 | 28 |
| | Form 4 (2) | Male teacher, additional mathematics | 22 | 4 |
| | Form 4 (3) | Male teacher, English | 21 | 4 |
| | Form 4 (4) | Female teacher, Islamic studies | 15 | 19 |
| | Form 4 (5) | Male teacher, history | 8 | 12 |
| **School D** | Form 4 (1) | Male teacher, chemistry | 10 | 33 |
| | Form 4 (2) | Female teacher, history | 6 | 21 |
| | Form 4 (3) | Female teacher, physical education | 6 | 25 |
| | Form 4 (4) | Female teacher, English | 10 | 24 |
| | Form 4 (5) | Female teacher, moral education | 1 | 37 |
| | Form 4 (6) | Female teacher, Islamic studies | 15 | 21 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **346** | **280** |

class, and guided them with questions related to the subject. This worked well, as observed in the history class where a roster for teams of four to five students was set up. Each team was expected to present (on large pieces of white paper) their summary notes on the relevant subject. Every student had a turn to do a presentation. According to the history teacher, this had helped them to learn with understanding. Questions were asked and the student or her team were expected to answer.

Another instance of this good rapport was when the students wanted to go home early, they were able to approach and discuss the matter with their English teacher. While this could be due to school A being an all-girls school, which resulted in less inhibition, the friendly environment in the school played an important part in breaking down barriers as well.

In schools B, C and D, the relationship between the teachers and students did not appear to be close and there was a stricter teacher–student relationship. The teaching method used was a top-down approach, whereby the teacher teaches and

the student responds. Seating arrangements separated the girls from the boys, and those who were weaker in ability were placed in the front seats. Again, such segregation was an unwritten rule set by the schools. Boys usually occupy either the side or the back rows, while girls are in the front rows or side rows. Generally, there was less response and participation by boys, but in some instances boys tended to be more active learners. When this happened, girls tended to retreat, keep quiet or talk among themselves.

In school B, in the Malay literature class when the boys were vocal and responsive to questions posed by the teacher, girls tended to giggle and speak softly among themselves in response to the questions. In school C, girls were more diffident. During the history class, the girls tended not to ask questions during lesson, but preferred to do so after class. When solving a mathematic problem, the girls discussed in small groups among themselves, while the boys solved it individually. In contrast, in an additional mathematics class, the teacher had to repeatedly engage the boys to answer her questions while the girls were more responsive. In school D, the boys were vocal, asked a lot of questions and responding politely to the teachers. The girls were quieter and always allowed the boys to speak first. The teachers did not seem to make much effort to encourage girls to speak in such instances.

### *Gendered practice in language*

Gender bias was observed in the way language was used to maintain and reinforce norms about how girls or boys, men or women should act and speak.

**Gender stereotypes used in sentences by a teacher:**

Example 1

- *'He inherited money from his family.'*
- *'Assuntha cooked and looked after Wilson.'*

**Male (but no female) inventors used in examples:**

Example 2

- *'John Loud introduced the first ballpoint.'*
- *'Hungarian brothers improved on the pen introduced by Loud.'*
- *'Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.'*

**Gender stereotypes used in sentences by students:**

Example 3

Two girls were selected by the English teacher to construct active and passive sentences. The girls wrote the following sentences, which reflect gender stereotyping:

- *'Ahmad kicks a ball. The ball was kicked by Ahmad.'*

- *'Salmah looks after her younger sisters and brothers. The younger sisters and brothers were looked after by Salmah.'*

#### *Gender-biased ideas*

In school C, during a biology class on balanced diets for teenagers, a special mention was made to the girls about the dietary needs of pregnant women. No reference was made about boys' nutritional needs. The teacher assumed that the girls would all become pregnant eventually.

The above examples show that both teachers and students hold stereotyped ideas on the roles of boys and girls.

#### *Outside classroom engagement*

In school A, while the sports facilities offered to the girls were limited, an interest in sport was still encouraged by the teachers. In a hockey lesson, the teacher was joking with the girls and encouraging them to try, even though some of them kept missing the ball. The teacher showed patience and the students were able to reciprocate. There were also sufficient hockey sticks for everyone to have a go at the game. School A's head confirmed that the students were active in games and sports and that they had won many awards for the school, e.g., in hockey and tennis. They had also won three times in a *pantun* (poem) competition.

As mentioned earlier, schools B, C and D emphasised boys' sports more (than girls'). There was a tendency for the teachers in these schools to be more interactive, patient and engaging with male students when it came to games and sports activities.

## Conclusions

Arguably from the above findings, schools and teachers work on an already-tested model for good teaching and resource management. From the study, teachers do know their purpose and subject matter well, and in some cases demonstrated excellent interpersonal skills, especially in mediating the learning processes and students' behaviour. The learning environment was also well equipped in all four schools to aid the learning and teaching process of both students and teachers. There were no issues concerning lack of basic facilities, therefore.

However, one cannot assume that having efficient and well-organised teaching methods, a well-equipped environment and trained teachers will automatically help to promote gender equality. The study found evidence of gender bias and this surfaced at almost all levels: in the classroom, school textbooks, interaction between students, in the attitudes and thinking of principals, teachers and state education personnel, in the use and construction of language and in the gendered behaviour of students and teachers. Below are some summarised points and conclusions drawn from the study in Malaysia.

### *The feminised nature of teaching profession*

In all four schools, women dominate the teaching profession. This contrasts with the 1960s and 1970s when teachers were mainly men. In school D, male teachers were placed in the school's top four positions and in school B, men were put in charge of important areas, such as students' affairs, science, mathematics and technical and vocational subjects, despite both schools registering more female teachers.

### *Provision and access to facilities*

In schools B, C and D, there was little gender-sensitivity in the provision of facilities such as sports and games and library materials, as most of these catered for boys' interests. Girls' interests were not seen to be important and their opinions were not sought on whether or not they wanted other options.

### *Classroom engagement*

Both boys and girls tend to respond well to a learning environment that encourages their interests and commitment and has a strong learning culture. However, boys tend to perform well in a more guided system that emphasises good behaviour, inspires high standards of achievement and gives rewards when certain goals/standards are met (as in school D). Girls, on the other hand, tend to prefer an environment that provides them with encouragement and a close bond with teachers (as in school A). For example, where weaker students are provided with more encouragment.

Boys tend to do better in pure science, additional mathematics and technical subjects, while girls are better in language and art subjects. Both do well in general science and mathematics.

### *Teachers' gender perceptions*

Stereotyped ideas are held by teachers, females and males alike, and some of these ideas are transferred to students in their teaching. Gendered practice can be observed in the language used, which tends to maintain and reinforce norms about how girls and boys, men and women should act and speak. This appeared in the way sentences were constructed, examples used to illustrate concepts, and in making gender assumptions about girls' and boys' sexuality.

Teachers accept the stereotypical roles of girls and boys. Examples include boys being made head prefects, being considered less responsive and less responsible, and the view that they cannot be controlled, falling back on the myth that 'boys are boys'. As for girls, they are considered intrinsically well behaved, responsible and that they will do well in exams. Such acceptance gives the impression that changing gender roles is not possible.

At the same time, the interests of girls were not always taken into consideration by teachers – as in schools B, C and D, where sports and games were geared more

towards boys' needs. Issues of violence against women/girls were only addressed when such incidents occurred. There did not seem to be any efforts made to equip girls and boys to deal with violence. The long-awaited introduction of sex education does not seem to be a priority for schools.

### *Students' aspirations*

Boys from rural schools have lower aspirations as compared to those from urban centres. At an early age, boys from low-income families are expected to work and bring an income to the family. Their position as leaders is reinforced in the family structure, which may give boys the impression that they have special privileges and are superior to girls.

Most girls are consistent in their aspirations to do well acadmically, even though they may be average students. Despite the high performance and participation of girls, they are still taught to accept stereotyped 'women's' roles, even though they are unhappy with those roles, and such teaching further discriminates against girls and depicts them as being supportive and subordinate to males. Girls tend to feel that they are less important than boys.

It is impressive that the four schools studied were all provided with proper and adequate facilities and equipment, as these help to create a good learning environment for students, allow them to explore and seek information. By taking on a gender-neutral approach to Education For All, the government has assumed that the system will cater to the needs and concerns of both girls and boys and, therefore, the question of discrimination will not arise. However, the study has shown that there are other factors at play: these limit certain students in their development, while at the same time providing special privileges to others and creating a false assumption that such privileges are their right.

The disparity and differences in girls and boys development is closely related to highly stereotyped thinking, values and unwritten policies that are carried out or held by district heads, school heads, teachers, parents and also by the students themselves. These have restricted girls to demure, passive and non-critical roles. A hidden and subliminal form of consciousness that teaches girls and boys to accept inequalities and discrimination as being unchangeable is contributed to by factors such as: being insensitive to the interests of girls in sports and elective subjects; girls and female teachers not speaking or feeling constrained to speak their opinions in front of males; segregation of girls and boys in classes and sports; gender-biased language used in lessons and in school textbooks; and accepting that girls have to do housework and serve their brothers. On the other hand, catering to boys' interests in sport, accepting that boys will not volunteer for social tasks, ensuring that only boys hold key decision-making positions like prefects and class monitors, have made boys to assume and expect themselves to lead and girls to follow. The special privileges given to boys have created discrimination, as they have resulted in the trend shown

by Malaysia's national statistics, whereby women's participation in the labour force has remained the same for more than two decades. The assumption is that women's work is supplementary and when 'push come to shove', they are meant to stay at home to care and to serve, despite of their high academic achievements.

There are numerous cross-cutting challenges, including ethnicity, poverty and accessibility to schools, which are not discussed in this chapter. The task of delivering and strengthening the values of gender equality is only true if there is a realisation that equality and justice are the norms and not the exceptions.

Suggestions for the Ministry of Education

Below are some suggestions for Malaysia's Ministry of Education to advance gender equality:

- Conduct a nationwide study to ascertain the key factors influencing the participation and performance of both girls and boys, so that appropriate measures can be taken.
- Re-educate and gender sensitise teachers to recognise women's contributions to society so that their approach to students is more inclusive, responsive, humanistic and so that they are able to teach girls and boys to become comfortable as equal partners.
- Compile and provide up-to-date sex disaggregated data on students' performance and mobility, dropout rates and truancy, so that a holistic analysis can be achieved.
- Enforce and implement sex education in all schools, starting from primary to tertiary levels, so as to inculcate values of respect, equality and non-violence.
- Involve parents and the community by having sessions with parents so that they understand the long-term value of education for their children, as opposed to placing importance on their immediate economic contribution.

## Notes

1. Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), Malaysia Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination against Women (First and Second Report) (2004), para: 89 and 90. Malaysia.
2. The Malaysian Smart Schools, set up in July 1977, were meant to promote best practices in technology-enabled teaching, learning and school management. Website: www.moe.gov.my *[accessed 7 May 2009]*
3. *New Straits Times* (2007) Shocking Punishment: Cold, dirty penalty over sanitary pad. 22 July 2007. Malaysia.
4. *The Star Online* (2007) Teacher tears 'too short' baju kurung uniforms. 19 August 2007. Malaysia. Available: http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/8/19/nation/18636963andsec=nation.
5. *The Star Online* (2007) 200 schoolgirls to soak in a fishpond, 23 July 2007. Malaysia.