CHAPTER 7

Gendered Education: A Case Study of Schools in Pakistan

Dilshad Ashraf
Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Introduction

Pakistan's position on the equal rights of its citizens is well articulated in the constitution of 1973, which ensures women's inclusion in all walks of life by denouncing any discrimination on the basis of sex alone. The constitutional position and emphasis on equal rights and opportunities for women was meant to address the traditionally low social status and minimal participation of women in most social sectors (Farah and Shera, 2007). In the years 1949–50, two years after Pakistan's independence in 1947, the overall gross participation rates at primary and secondary levels were low at 16 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. These figures were even lower for female participation i.e. 4 per cent at primary level and 3 per cent at secondary level (Jalil cited in Farah and Shera, 2007).

To improve female participation in education, all education policies formulated from the year 1970 to 1998 (the most recent policy being for the period of 1998–2010) have unanimously committed to ensuring provision of primary education. Each of these policies also committed to promoting girls' education. Pakistan is a signatory to international declarations and commitments made since the World Declaration on Education for All was adopted in 1990. Commitment to this declaration led Pakistan to pursue basic education as an integral part of the human development plan and as a means to eliminate all disparity, including those related to gender. Due to these efforts, overall participation in education has increased significantly since the 1950s, although the pace of change has been slow, particularly for women.

According to the Global Monitoring Report on Education for All (UNESCO, 2006), the female adult literacy rate in Pakistan in 2002–2004 was only 28.5 per cent, while the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary education for girls was 69 per cent and the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) was 56 per cent in 2004. Similarly, the female GER in secondary education was only 18.9 per cent. However, in the fiscal year 2004–2005, the female literacy rate had apparently increased from 28 per cent to 40 per cent (Government of Pakistan, 2005–2006).

In line with commitments to the international undertaking of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Dakar Framework for Education for All, Pakistan has to accomplish a set of targets by 2015. The major commitment regarding universal primary education for all children rests in ensuring gender equality in education (Mukhtar, 2006; Khalid and Mukhtar, 2002). To meet these targets, the government of Pakistan developed a mid-term Education Sector Reform (ESRA, 2001–2005), and long-term National Plan of Action on EFA (NPA, 2001–2015) with an emphasis on overall education in the country and females' education in particular (Government of Pakistan, 2005–2006).

Improvement in the overall female literacy rate can be seen as a manifestation of Pakistan's international commitments. A review of the male and female literacy rates in both rural and urban centres, in Table 7.1 below, illustrates the nature of this improvement.

Pakistan's population is about 158.70 million (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2007) of which more than 50 per cent live in rural areas. The table shows that only 29 per cent of the country's rural females are literate, while urban women's literacy is 62 per

Table 7.1. Literacy rates (10 years and above): Pakistan and provinces (%)

Province/area	*1998–1999 *PIHS*			*2001–2002 PIHS*			*2004–2005 PSLM*		
	Total	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*
Pakistan	45	59	31	45	58	32	53	65	40
Rural	36	52	20	36	51	21	44	58	29
Urban	65	73	56	64	72	56	71	78	62
Baluchistan	36	54	16	36	53	15	37	52	19
Rural	33	51	12	32	49	11	32	47	13
Urban	56	72	39	54	71	36	60	74	42
NWFP**	37	56	20	38	57	20	45	64	26
Rural	34	54	16	35	55	16	41	61	23
Urban	53	66	40	56	70	41	61	75	47
Punjab	46	57	34	47	57	36	55	65	44
Rural	38	52	24	38	51	26	47	59	35
Urban	64	71	58	66	71	60	72	78	66
Sindh	51	65	35	46	60	31	56	68	41
Rural	35	53	15	33	51	14	38	56	18
Urban	69	79	58	64	74	54	72	80	62

Source: Pakistan Social and Living Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2004–2005, Economic Survey Pakistan 2006 (p.160) [*Pakistan Integrated Household Survey (PIHS)]

** NWFP=North West Frontier Province

cent – more than twice the rural literacy rate. Similarly, the table further indicates that in all provinces, the rural literacy rate is much lower than that of urban areas.

Furthermore, gender disparity is found at all levels of education. For example, at the middle level (gross middle-school enrolment) the gender disparity was 11 per cent in 2004–2005. The gender disparity is also found at matriculation level. However, if we examine the gender gap at the primary level of education in provincial, rural and urban levels in terms of GER and NER, we see great disparity. The disparity that is prevailing in rural and urban areas is alarming. A brief description of the gender gap in literacy and enrolment is shown in Table 7.2.

There may be various reasons for gender disparities – public expenditure could be one, for example. The government allocated 18.7 billion Pakistan rupees (PRs) to education in the budget for the year 2006–07, which is 2 per cent of the GDP and in some sources is 2.7 per cent (Ihtasham ul Haque, 2006). A lower financial allocation for education would mean less investment in initiatives to address such disparities. In the view of experts, this allocation should be not less than 4 per cent of GDP to achieve the MDGs (Ahmed, 2006). The Pakistan government has recently announced

Table 7.2. Gender gaps in literacy and enrolment at primary level (%) 2004–2005

Region/ province	*Gender gap in literacy %*		*NER gender gap at primary level*		*GER gender gap at primary level*	
	2001–02	*2004–05*	*2001–02*	*2004–05*	*2001–02*	*2004–05*
Urban areas	**16**	**16**	**3**	**3**	**7**	**7**
Punjab	11	12	–1	1	2	3
Sindh	20	18	6	5	13	9
NWFP*	29	28	8	6	14	16
Baluchistan	35	32	14	6	23	15
Rural areas	**30**	**29**	**10**	**11**	**28**	**21**
Punjab	25	24	6	7	19	14
Sindh	37	38	16	16	32	26
NWFP	39	38	16	15	44	30
Baluchistan	38	34	15	17	35	38
Total	**26**	**25**	**8**	**8**	**22**	**17**
Punjab	21	21	4	5	15	11
Sindh	29	27	12	11	25	19
NWFP	37	38	15	13	41	28
Baluchistan	38	33	15	15	33	34

Source: Pakistan Social and Living Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2004–05, Economic Survey Pakistan 2006: 166

*NWFP=North West Frontier Province

an increase to 4 per cent of GDP in principle; but putting aside 4 per cent GDP for education in theory only is not enough – the finance must be allocated in the annual budget by the government. So, it is important to increase GDP to achieve those targets and remove gender disparities in education. Other reasons for fewer enrolments of girls in schools may be poverty, social and cultural norms (Farah and Bacchus, 1999). One of the other constraints discussed in literature is parents' fear of girls' independent access to the outer world when they go to school. This access may have implications for girls' conduct, which is closely associated with a family's honour. Similarly, the gendered division of labour is widely stated as another factor that hinders girls' education. In conformity with societal norms, young girls start their caregiving role at an early age.

Sindh: The Study Context

Sindh is one of the four provinces of Pakistan and is located on the western corner of South Asia, with the Iranian plateau to the west. Geographically it is the third largest province of Pakistan, stretching about 579km from north to south and 442km (at the most) or 281km (average) from east to west, comprising a total area of 129,009 square kilometres of Pakistan's territory. Besides native Sindhis, different cultural and ethnic groups also reside here. The urban centres of Sindh accommodate migrants from all other regions of the country. Sindh is officially a bilingual province with large sections of the population speaking Sindhi and Urdu, while other languages spoken including Siraiki, Balochi, Brahvi, Punjabi, Pashto and Gujarati.

In accordance with the country's international pledges to promote Education For All, the Government of Sindh has taken a number of measures. Some of these include following:

- Free education for all children until they graduate with their Secondary School Certificate from government schools.
- Free textbooks for classes 1 to 5 and free textbooks for all girls studying in grades 6 to 10.
- Scholarships of 100 PRs per month are awarded for 10 months every year to all girls studying in grades 6 to 8 in government schools. In addition to this, girls who do well in classes 9 to 12 are also being paid scholarships.
- Twana Pakistan was launched in four districts i.e. Thatta, Badin, Tharparkar and Mirpurkhas to provide free lunch and other nutritional support to girl students in government schools.

Some of the above actions were launched under the auspices of the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) ordinance, which was promulgated in December 2001. A study conducted by the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) investigated the process of the implementation of the CPE ordinance and identified challenges and gaps in the implementation process (Kabani et al, 2003, quoted in Sindh Education

Foundation, 2007). The major findings of the study indicated that over-enrolment was one of the primary causes contributing to the deteriorating quality within schools. The study also highlighted teachers' incapacity to deal with the ever-growing number of students and the consequent inability to maintain a conducive learning environment within the classroom. Furthermore, the targets set out at the federal, provincial and district levels were primarily focused on raising numbers rather than launching educational reforms to attain qualitative revival and sustenance. At this point, however, quantitative targets also seemed elusive given the limitations of access and infrastructure (school preparedness) and affordability for parents to enrol at their children in formal schools (community readiness). In addition to the CPE study and participation in various EFA forums, it has been learned that so far the emphasis of government and donor agencies has been towards achieving quantitative targets (i.e. increases in enrolment) rather than seriously considering the issue of quality. Moreover, there is a dearth of research work focusing on the impact of EFA on the quality of education by critically evaluating at the 'pre' and 'post' stages for EFA initiatives.

Another critically important study has recently been conducted by the Sindh Education Foundation (Sindh Education Foundation, 2007), which examined the impact of EFA on the quality education in Sindh. Quality was defined as: i) whether or not the initiatives taken under EFA are relevant to the educational context of Pakistan and particularly to the province of Sindh; ii) whether quality enhancement is the priority of various stakeholders involved in the implementation of EFA at different levels; and iii) what processes have been employed for the implementation of EFA at the grassroots, district, provincial and federal levels and how they are linked to the quality of education. The Sindh data discussed in the study report provides the quantitative side to the qualitative outcomes of the present study, which aims at developing insights into secondary school processes from a gender point of view. While two of the four schools in the study come under the government Department of Education's jurisdiction, a discussion on the overall situation of achieving the EFA goal of ensuring access and eliminating gender disparities in education would allow deeper insights into the findings of the present study. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education to date remains a distant reality. The challenge is well articulated in the figures in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3. Number and distribution of schools in Sindh

	Primary schools	*Middle schools*	*Secondary schools*	*Total*
Boys' schools	17,813	1,202	902	19,917
Co-educational schools	16,232	485	270	16,987
Girls' schools	6,514	713	516	7,743
Total number of schools	40,559	2,400	1,688	44,647

Source: SEMIS quoted in Sindh Education Foundation (2007)

The above table clearly illustrates the discrepancy between primary and secondary schools, for boys as well as girls. For females, however, this discrepancy is all the more problematic for reasons such as lack of money, migration, the distance to school from home, poor facilities, involvement in economic activities, homework, and parents not valuing education for girls and lacking interest. More alarming still is the vast gulf between the number of girls' schools and boys/co-educational schools, a trend that remains consistent at all levels of schooling in terms of simple ratios: at the primary level, girls' schools account for a mere 16 per cent of the total number of schools. The significant number of co-educational primary schools allows better access to education for girls. However, their enrolment from grades 5 and above can nevertheless be hindered by varying and often conservative cultural attitudes, especially in the rural areas.

Table 7.4 clearly indicates the net effect of this discrepancy. There is a 15 per cent difference between the participation rates (the ratio of enrolment figures to the total population) of girls and boys at the primary level. Furthermore, the dramatic fall in participation rates, for both girls and boys, at the middle and secondary levels is reflective of the gap between the numbers of primary and secondary schools. Overall however, gender disparity in participation rates stands at 10 per cent – a figure that clearly reflects the divergence from EFA commitments, under which Pakistan had committed itself to end gender disparity at the primary and secondary levels by 2005.

Table 7.5 presents the figures for out-of-school children in Sindh, which at the primary level stands at 50 per cent for boys and 65 per cent for girls, while the figures

Table 7.4. Enrolment and participation rates in Sindh

School level	*Population*		*Enrolment*		*Participation rates*	
	Boys	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*
Primary	3,445,499	3,105,939	1,715,629	1,074,532	50%	35%
Middle	1,568,086	1,301,055	283,107	197,603	18%	15%
Secondary	746,679	632,410	146,215	100,350	20%	16%
Total	5,760,264	5,039,404	2,144,951	1,372,485	37%	27%

Source: SEMIS quoted in Sindh Education Foundation (2007)

Table 7.5. Out-of-school children in Sindh

School level	*Boys*	*Girls*
Primary	50%	65%
Middle	82%	85%
Secondary	80%	84%
Total	**63%**	**73%**

Source: SEMIS quoted in Sindh Education Foundation (2007)

for the middle and secondary levels are significantly worse. Overall, 63 per cent of boys and 73 per cent of girls remain out of school.

However, efforts to increase enrolment at all levels have often been impeded by several factors including lack of access, poor infrastructure, the presence of 'ghost schools' (schools that exist only on paper as teachers never go and open the school) and the low quality of education. Incentives to increase enrolment have been provided by state and donor agencies with mixed results. In this regard, a case study on enrolment of girls in secondary schools will aptly indicate the difficulties faced in increasing enrolment and participation on schools.

According to the statistics given Table 7.6, the enrolment of girls increased by an absolute number of 775 (0.38 per cent) from 2001–02 to 2002–03, while the enrolment jumped by 62,695 from 2002–03 to 2003–04 (31.14 per cent). The reasons for the jump in enrolment include the following:

- The direct impact of the financial subsidy on the enrolment of girls in secondary schools, which would point to poverty as one causal reason for out-of-school girls.
- The direct impact of the enrolment drive conducted in the province of Sindh by UNICEF. The drive registered more than 300,000 children for school in six weeks, of which 42 per cent were girls and 58 per cent were boys.

There are no statistics available separately on the enrolment of girls in secondary school in Sindh in 2004–05 to gauge the effect on enrolment in the long run. However, the SEMIS data reports that the number of girls of school-going age who are out-of-school in 2003–04 stood at 84 per cent of the entire secondary school-going female population in the province. To that end, the increase in absolute numbers is comparatively small if total enrolment is to be achieved for girls by the year 2015.

Studies conducted in Pakistan (e.g. Jan, 2007; Hafeez, 2004; Zafar and Malik, 2004; Pasha, Ismail and Iqbal, 1996) have largely dealt with both supply and demand factors that hinder girls' education in Pakistan. For instance, the arrival of an unwanted sibling in the family, parents' perceptions about investing in a girl's education, and the sense of security due to the distance between school and home are all recognised factors that influence the parents' decision about sending a female child to school. The absence of a school within the neighbourhood, the non-existence of boundary walls, lack of toilets and non-availability of adequate numbers of female teachers are all reported supply-side factors that impede female access to school. The respondents

Table 7.6. Total number of girls enrolled in public secondary schools in Sindh

Period	*2001–2002*	*2002–2003*	*2003–2004*
Girls	200,516	201,291	263,986

Source: SEMIS quoted in Sindh Education Foundation (2007)

of the studies mentioned above in particular viewed the poor quality of education and teachers' attitudes, including corporal punishment, as major reasons for girls' dropping out of school. These findings warrant researching school-based conditions to identify factors that are likely to contribute to gender disparities in education. A quick review of research carried out around gender issues in education identifies a dearth of such research in Pakistan. For instance, studies need to increase understanding of how school policies, structures and teaching and learning processes can influence male and female students' participation in education. Very few studies (e.g. Zainulabdin, 2007; Ali, 2006; Rarieya et al., 2006) have actually examined teachers' instructional practices and their beliefs about female and male students' academic performance. The findings of these three studies shoe the strong influence of teachers' gender-related beliefs on their practices. The participants of these studies (primary and secondary schoolteachers) considered girls hardworking and serious while boys were seen as intelligent beings, assertive and full of energy, which makes them hard to control. The present study takes a more comprehensive approach to understand school structures and processes from a gender perspective.

The Study Schools

Overview

The research methods are outlined in the introductory chapter of this book. The research was conducted in the following four schools situated in the province of Sindh:

- Government girls' higher secondary school, Karachi
- Government boys' secondary school, Karachi
- Muslim Community School (MCS), Karachi
- Quaid Secondary School (QSS), Karachi (a community-based school)

Two of the four schools are run by the provincial government's Department of Education and the two are community-organised schools. Both public schools are officially single-sex and are situated in rural Sindh. However, the single-sex boys' school has a long history of admitting female students. Their admission to the boys' school is recognised, as they are allowed to study alongside the boys from grades 6 to grade 10, when they graduate after completing their public exam. The private schools of the study are situated in urban areas; nevertheless they are away from the centre and the hustle bustle of the city.

The government girls' higher secondary school caters for the rural community settled around it. It is a public-run school with 207 students currently enrolled in grades 6 to 12. Courses of study in humanities and physical sciences are offered to the students of higher grades (from grade 9 onwards). Around 16 teachers are teaching in the school, the majority of whom are qualified to teach in secondary school. The

school has some teaching positions that remain vacant, as qualified female teachers are not willing to work in a rural setting.

The government boys' secondary school is a Sindhi-medium school and is situated in the rural catchment areas of Karachi city. The school was constructed in 1905, first as a single-sex boys' primary school. However, at the request of community, girls were admitted later to study with boys. As a response to the ever-increasing number of students, the school was upgraded to secondary level in 1979.

The MCS community school is an urban, co-education secondary school with a total of 509 students enrolled (244 girls and 265 boys). Although the school is an urban school, it is situated in an area that is away from main city. Historically the school was established as primary school and it has been upgraded gradually. The 2007 grade 10 students were the first group to sit for the Secondary School Certificate exam. The school started as a co-educational institution, but recently switched to single-sex classrooms for grades 6 to 9 (this is discussed further below).

The QSS is a faith-based school run by a trust. The school was established in 1990 to cater for the educational needs of those sections of the community from a lower socio-economic background. The vision of the school states its aim is to: '*uplift the community economically, academically, spiritually, morally, physically, socially, aesthetically and mentally*.' The school further aims at providing quality education to its clientele with affordable fees. Furthermore, it has a policy of awarding fee remissions and waiving fees altogether for the needy students. The school places special emphasis on providing an environment and culture conducive for learning.

School management

All four study schools have different layers of administration for school management. QSS and MCS (the private community-based schools) have well-structured external bodies – the Board of Governors and School Management Committee – that oversee overall school functioning. The membership of these two structures is taken from the schools and respective communities. The majority of the members are male. The principal heads the school-based administration in MCS, supervising management of the school's academic affairs and the smooth functioning of school administration. The school-based administration in QSS School has two distinct offshoots: one headed by the principal, who leads academic matters, and one headed by administrators, who look after finance and other administrative matters. The school-based management teams in both private schools comprise of males and females. QSS has a predominantly women-led academic team, with the finance department run by male accountants. MCS has predominantly male-led academic team, with finance and administration again handled by men.

Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) form external bodies in both government schools to oversee school management, with community and parent representation, the school principal and a teacher forming the membership. The government boys' secondary

Table 7.7. Demographics of the study schools

Name of the schools		Government girls' higher secondary school, Karachi	Government boys' secondary school, Karachi	Muslim Community School (MCS), Karachi	QSS secondary school, Karachi (community-based school)
Status of the school		Single-sex girls' school	Officially single-sex boys' school, but co-ed in practice	Co-ed, with primary and secondary sections	Co-ed, Montessori, primary and secondary sections
Status of school building		Purpose-built building with basic amenities	Purpose-built building with basic amenities	School housed in a community hall and number of adjacent small residential apartments	Grand multi-storey building with fully equipped classrooms, staffrooms, principal's office and administration blocks
Gender equity measures		Free books for girls, stipend PRs1,000/year, School Management Committee, girl prefects	Free books for students, stipend PRs1000/year, School Management Committee, leadership opportunities for girls and boys as class prefects	Leadership opportunities for girls and boys as prefects, fee concession for deserving students, School Management Committee, health club, students' council	Parent Advisory Committee, leadership opportunities for girls and boys as class prefects, Early Childhood Centre, special counselling sessions for girls and boys
Provision of facilities and amenities		5 toilets, drinking water tank, playground, library, computer lab with no computers, canteen, 3 science laboratories	Drinking water cooler for girls, one toilet for girls, playground, library, computer laboratory equipped with computers, 3 science laboratories	Separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water for girls and boys, computer laboratory with 14 computers	Library, computer laboratory, 3 science laboratories, separate toilets for girls and boys, separate play grounds for girls and boys, toilets, water cooler for girls and boys (on each floor)
No. of students	Girls	207	207	244	1,173
	Boys	—	289	265	1,201
No. of teachers	Female	16 1		28	127[1]
	Male	—	18 6		71
Extra-curricular Activities		Occasional quiz programmes, recitation of Holy Qur'an and religious poems	Poster competition, quiz programmes, recitation of Holy Qur'an and religious poems	Discussion forum, poster competitions, quiz programmes, annual school picnic, recitation of Holy Qur'an and religious poems	Annual school picnic, separate discussion forum for girls and boys, poster competition, quiz programmes, recitation of Holy Qur'an and religious poems

school has an all-male PTA membership, while the government girls' secondary school has a mixed-gender PTA, although the female principal is the only woman on the committee. School-based management in these two schools is headed by the principals, who besides looking after academic affairs also supervise finance and administration. Male staff members make up the teams that handle financial and administrative matters in both schools.

Secondary School Certificate examination results

The Secondary School Certificate public examination is viewed as an important milestone in schooling processes and students' learning outcomes. A school's performance is generally measured by its students' grades in the Secondary School Certificate examination.

Curriculum and textbooks

All four schools follow the national curriculum prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education's curriculum section. Teachers use textbooks published by the Sindh Textbook Board Jamshoro, Sindh. These textbooks are developed with approval from the Federal Ministry of Education's curriculum section, and they are reviewed by the National Textbook Review Committee. These textbooks are available in Urdu, English and Sindhi to cater for the different mediums of instruction in the province.

Table 7.8. Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination results, 2006

Name of the school	*Total no. of students*		*Passed*		*Failed*	
	Girls	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Boys*
Government girls' higher secondary school, Karachi	52	–	47*	–	5	–
Government boys' secondary school, Karachi	39	70	36	69	3	1
MCS community school, Karachi	17	22	The first group of students reached grade 10 in 2007	n/a	n/a	n/a
QSS secondary school, Karachi	35	37	35	37	Nil	Nil

* The single-sex girls' school showed poor result in the grade 10 public examination, with only two girls securing a B grade while others secured C (31) and D (14) grades. Five girls failed. The majority of the students (both girls and boys) from the government boys' secondary school and the QSS secondary school secured A and B grades, with rare exceptions of grades C and D.

Education options

The data analysis reveals that the education options in the two private schools are determined by the availability of both financial and human resources. Information technology, biology and commerce are three options offered by the QSS secondary school, while the MCS community school offers science subjects to its students.

The government girls' higher secondary school offers two options: science (physics, chemistry and biology) and humanities (civics, home economics). The latter is a legacy of past practices by the government's Department of Education that, through teaching girls home economics, prepared them for their caregiving familial roles. Boys' schools, in line with socially constructed gender roles, always offered subjects related to science and technology. The girls, by the virtue of being enrolled at the government boys' secondary school, studied science subjects.

Teachers' qualifications and professional development

In line with government's defined criteria, the teachers of both government-run schools are professionally qualified. The majority have a bachelor's in education (BEd) or a master's in education (MEd). Due to the schools' status as higher secondary schools, many teachers have a master's degree in a particular school subject and are called 'subject specialists'. Both the private schools assign secondary classes to the teachers with a bachelor's or a master's degree. Experience of teaching is another criteria used to assign teachers at secondary level. In-service or continuous professional development of teachers is a priority in these private schools. Through their capacity-building initiatives, these schools have developed their senior teachers as teacher educators who are then able to plan school-based professional development for colleagues. Collaboration with other teacher-training institutions was also reported by these schools. The government schools' teachers joined the schools with a teaching qualification, but have had no in-service professional development opportunities. None of the principals or teachers from the study schools has attended a course on gender.

Three schools (the MCS, QSS and government boys' secondary school) have both male and female teachers; the latter, however, has only one woman teacher. The allocation of teaching subjects at times seemed guided by the widely dominant gender ideology. For instance, the whole of the primary section at the MCS school is assigned to the female teachers, while the secondary section is taught by male teachers with the exceptions of female teachers teaching Urdu and biology. The male teachers and the single woman teacher in the government boys' secondary school are given equal numbers of teaching periods. Teachers are also delegated responsibilities other than teaching assignments in this school. For instance, the male teachers are given tasks such as collecting fees from students, and filling in examination, discipline, and maintenance forms etc. The only female teacher has been given

responsibility for listening any girls' problems that they cannot share with the male teachers.

The possibility of hiring more female teachers in the government boys' secondary school was rejected due to the principal's particular reservations:

> *'There is no need to have more female teachers in the school as female teachers, particularly married ones, come with lots of their domestic [problems]. The home problems affect their work, so it's better to have only male teachers, even in co-education.'* **Interview, 6 April 2007**

Frequent unplanned leaves by the female teachers, due to their health and domestic issues, and a preoccupation with domestic issues were seen to be important reasons by the principals for women teachers' inefficiency. This reveals the gendered positioning of both male and female teachers in three co-educational schools. This situation in secondary schools poses a critical question about the messages that are being passed on to students through teachers' gendered attitudes. A later section of this chapter explains further the implication of this in terms of students' views on gender.

The dress code observed by male and female teachers varied in all four schools. Male teachers from the MCS and QSS schools wore pants and shirts, while the majority of male teachers in the government boys' secondary school were seen in *shalwar qameez* (baggy pants and a long shirt with slits on both sides). Female teachers in all four schools wore *shalwar qameez* with *dupatta* (a long, wide scarf or shawl). Some used their *duppattas* to cover their heads and upper parts of the body. Others used a *hijab* (a separate scarf to cover their heads).

Interestingly, despite the *hijab* being part of the official dress code for girls, many women teachers at the QSS school did not conform to the practice of wearing the *hijab*. The attitude of the female principal in this school regarding the freedom of teachers to choose whether or not to wear the *hijab* was reflected in teachers' dress code. Some covered their heads with 'proper' headgear, while others wore the *dupatta* (shawl) covering their shoulders. The principal reported the reaction of a donor who was on a visit to the school. He saw a female physical education teacher teaching children outside in the playground without her head covered. He immediately turned back and expressed his disapproval and anger over the female teacher's dress. In response, the principal remained persistent on her view of not jeopardising female teachers' autonomy and freedom.

Findings and Analysis

Views on gender

The principals and the teachers at the study schools interpreted the concept of gender generally as segregating males and females on the basis of their sex. The majority of teachers, principals and the management staff shared this fundamental

premise, with minor differences. The female principal of QSS secondary school, for instance, viewed gender both in terms of biology and male and female characteristics approved by society. One such characteristic of females is obedience and non-assertive behaviour. This, according to her observations, was reflected in girls' behaviour during the initial days of the school. The principal reported that the initial passiveness was due to their first experience of co-education, but was gradually replaced by more active participation in the teaching and learning processes.

For the principal of government boys' secondary school, the word 'gender' means segregating males and females on the basis of their sex. He saw segregation of this kind as a cultural norm. Since the school is a village school and all teachers and students come from villages, they (referring to himself, teachers and male students) have to adhere to cultural norms, in which they respect women. For example, they cannot penalise female students, even if they make a mistake. On the other hand, 'We can beat male students, but sometimes we use [a] warning to girls as well'. The gender-related views of the female principal and her teachers from the government girls' higher secondary school were quite in line with the views of the male principal. They perceived gender as 'men' and 'women' with the given tasks of 'providing' and 'caregiving' respectively. Female teachers in this school in particular identified men's job to be the provider and family head. Despite earning a significant income through teaching, these teachers did not consider themselves to be providers. Rather they termed their work as 'giving financial support to their families'. Women teachers viewed educated women's role to be disciplining the family, fulfilling home-related responsibilities and maintaining better relationships with their immediate and extended family members. One of them stated 'She [a woman] helps her husband with children's education for a better future'. These women teachers were convinced that exchanging their caregiving role with men's role of provider and decision-maker was not an option for them due to the innate challenges of the latter role.

With the exception of female students' future aspirations (which were somewhat similar to boys') all participants of the study viewed gender within the dominant parameters of productive and reproductive roles. Some male students from one school considered the gender division of space as 'public' and 'private' to be a culturally acceptable phenomenon. In general, male students were quite cognisant of their future role as providers:

> *'We boys are like chlorophyll for the family.'* [meaning the family is dependent on boys for survival, just like a plant depends on chlorophyll]
>
> *'We boys are the backbones of our families.'* **Boys in focus group discussion, MCS community school**

Boys believed in the dominant gender ideology. They considered themselves future providers for the family, which warrants their hard work as students to become qualified for good professional colleges. This, they believed, would enhance their

ability to secure a well-paid job. Caring for elderly parents, supporting their siblings' education and getting their sisters 'married off' were some of the responsibilities boys believed that they would have to assume as adults. The value of education for them is seen as different from girls due to boys' future productive roles. The same line of argument is also noticeable in the value these boys accorded to the support extended to them by their mothers and fathers. Analysis of the data reveals that the boys were only concerned about support from their fathers, who would ensure financial assistance for their education. Their mothers' support was not viewed as important, as one of the said:

> 'Ammi ki support nabhi ho tao koi perwa nahi hai. Aaboo ka support hona zaroori hai. Iss liyee ke woo kamatee hain' *[it does not make any difference if there is no support from mother, but father's support is necessary as he earns money]* **Focus group discussion, 13 April 2007**

This quote reflects boys' understanding of the gendered relationship as two distinct spheres of work and responsibilities for women and men to undertake.

Girls' perceptions of gender can also be viewed under the auspices of the wider gender ideology. All of them had a pride in their ability to perform multiple tasks ranging from household chores, school studies and religious rituals 'We are proud of being girls, as it allows us to perform variety of roles'. They believe their female identity provides them with a broad sphere of activity in comparison with their male counterparts. All of them were cognisant of their reproductive roles and believed 'no one else except a mother can perform the children's upbringing well'. One said:

> *'Men always need women's support to get their work done, because women are good advisers and they respond to situations accordingly – being more rational and cool-minded as compared to men.'*

Also expressed was the vulnerability related to being female, particularly by one student from the rural government school:

> *'We females are like a white handkerchief; any small mark of ink on it will be very visible.'*

This was an explanation of how family honour is associated with its female members' conduct. Even the slightest move away from the set norm of female conduct can cause a huge furore in close-knit communities and can also risk the continuity of a girl's schooling. Girls' actions, according to them, face scrutiny for potential threats of defaming the family's name and honour. Girls consider themselves intelligent and brave and that despite all the difficulties (e.g. restricted mobility, pressure to perform the familial role), they do not get discouraged.

Women's lower status as compare to men's concerned girls from all four schools. Their particular reservations were about girls' restricted mobility. In the context of their province, girls from the government girls' higher secondary school strongly denounced the oppression by men that confines women to within the four walls of the house. These girls seemed quite conscious and concerned about the injustice

meted out to them at home – whereby a male child is given more importance, as males are the family 'breadwinners'. The birth of a boy calls for jubilation and celebration, while the birth of female child fills the environment with sorrow and sadness. They mentioned girls' powerlessness:

> *'First, as a daughter, we have to listen to our parents, then after marriage we are expected to be obedient wives of husbands, then we have to sacrifice our lives for their children. So when will we live our own lives?'* **Focus group discussion, 13 April 2007**

Lack of opportunities for education and early marriages are some of the challenges these women face in Pakistani culture. Discrimination against them, they believe, is rooted in the patriarchal structure of the society that leads to a strong preference for the male child. While girls expressed their persistence in the face of multifarious challenges, the lack of future vision was yet another manifestation of their deprivation in a patriarchal context.

An interesting analysis of students' classroom participation was offered by the female students from the co-education schools. These girls thought that teachers generally treated both male and female students equally. While there was a general consensus among the girl participants of the focus group discussion on teachers' attempts to give all students equal attention, an explanation of teachers' different views of boys and girls was also presented by one of the girls:

> *'I think that boys are confident enough and they can ask questions in the class. This gives teachers the idea that they are understanding the topic and boys are intelligent. We girls also want to ask questions, but we are shy and cannot ask questions. Thus, we become only listeners in the class.'* **Focus group discussion, 13 April 2007**

Unquestioned conformity to parents and other elders in extended families is an expected norm, and is one that women/girls are required to follow in particular. Socialisation in such an environment apparently instils in them a tendency not to ask questions which is, according to the above explanation, interpreted by teachers in a different manner.

Students' career aspirations

The career aspirations of the boys were clearly shaped by expectations of parents and society. They saw the value of education to be different for them compared to girls, who will assume caregiving responsibilities in future. Boys reported that due to societal perceptions (the gendered division of roles), girls – despite being professionally qualified – could not continue their careers, while they (boys) have the freedom to seek the best available careers and are expected to have a bright future. Most of the boys in the group discussions aspired (and were guided by their parents) to take up professional careers in the fields of engineering, information technology, the armed forces, banking and professional sport. One boy expressed his desire of becoming an education minister to improve the system, while some wanted to carry on to doctoral

studies. In terms of professional aspirations, they feel the 'sky is the limit' as they are confident of support from their parents and other family members. With strong determination, perseverance and hard work, they are confident of achieving their goals in life. The focus group participants from the government boys' secondary school and the MCS school envisaged poverty and their family's limited financial resources to be constraints on the achievement of their future goals. Freedom of mobility was perceived to be a privilege by the boys, as the girls, they admitted, were socially constrained in this respect.

Girls from all four study schools expressed various fields of interest for their future careers, which included flying, chartered accountancy, commerce, medicine and the armed forces. One girl wanted to go on to study for a PhD. They believed that their passion, hard work, encouragement from parents, teachers' and parents' blessings would help them achieve their future goals. As a supporting factor, the presence of qualified family members (male relatives) provided most of them with optimism. The majority of the girls believed that their parents would support their studies financially. Some, nevertheless, had not thought clearly about their future, as they believed family attitudes might hinder them in realising their dreams. Girls, particularly those from rural schools, envisaged early marriages, parents' disagreeing with their ambitions, and opposition from the extended family and the family patriarch as possible constraints.

Lack of thought over a career also surfaced during the students' description of their future aspirations. Two of the focus group participants from the rural schools hoped that medicine would be their future field of study; however, this did not fit in with their present studies in humanities. Some realism also surfaced, as these girls continued discussions on the likelihood of achieving their future goal. More optimism was shown about joining traditionally female areas such as nursing and teaching than becoming a pilot, for example. Despite parents' consent to their education, girls also envisaged that lack of resources would hinder their dreams of further education. Girls from the rural schools reported that as an indigenous cultural practice, the family patriarch or the patriarch of the community generally makes decisions related to family and community matters. At the behest of the family patriarch, female education is generally discontinued after grade 10 public examinations. One of the girls referred to her grandfather's opposition to girls' education: he had earlier prevented an older granddaughter from accessing education. Their brothers' influence over decisions about whether or not to send girls to school also surfaced as a hindering factor.

Students' daily routines

The gendered differences between how girls and boys spend their day were reflected in all accounts given by the participants. Female participants from all schools begin their day with prayers before dawn. After school activities varied due to their positions in sibling order, and also the presence of other active and older females in the

family influenced their afternoon routines. Some of the girls took care of domestic needs after school (e.g. cooking, washing). Some also reported going to private coaching in the afternoon. Staying at home watching TV and visiting relatives living close by were some other engagements reported by students. Generally, girls' after school routines took place inside the home, except for a few who went for private coaching.

The gender divide between public and private was obvious in these young girls' lives, as compare to their brothers' activities outside. Girls identified differences between theirs and their brothers' routines, who regardless of their age and status were more mobile in public sphere. Some of them were employed while some studied. The girls' brothers also spent their time outside the home playing or studying at private coaching centres. In comparison with male siblings, girls had limited option in terms of studying at home. Many of them spend their time after school performing caregiving roles. Many, unlike their brothers, lacked opportunities for private coaching, as such centres catered for boys only. Girls indicated a gender divide in families in relation to available resources: the male members of the family (including siblings) get preference in terms of the best food, clothing and education.

Generally, according to the female participants, parents liked their daughters to demonstrate utmost obedience. Girls from rural schools reported their parents' approval for their conforming to the traditional dress code and fulfilment of religious rituals as part of their daily routines. They invoked their parents' disapproval for not wearing their headgear properly. Frequent or independent mobility beyond the four walls of their homes was seen as prohibited by the parents (fathers) of all female students. While girls took pride in their ability of performing multiple tasks, they also showed their dislike for household chores such as cooking, washing dishes and laundry, which they reported interfered with their studies.

Male students' daily routines were very different from their female counterparts. Parents' expectations of the boys to prepare themselves for their future role as a provider put these youngsters under a lot of duress and pressure. Boys found it difficult to put prolonged time and energy into their studies, because other distracting factors around them. The majority of them managed to remain focused, as poor academic performance could upset their parents; their understanding of their future role also contributed to them staying focused.

School experiences

School experiences are enhanced by frequent extra-curricular activities (e.g. speech and debate competitions, recitation of the Holy Qur'an and religious poetry) and sports events. Boys from the QSS school reported their better performance compared to girls in these events (particularly in debates and speech) due to their confidence, which, they feel derives from their experience and exposure to the outside world. Nevertheless, they also noted that sometimes girls perform better and sometimes they remain equal. In this school, the games are gendered as girls play badminton

and handball while boys prefer to play cricket and soccer. The boys termed these games as 'girls'' and 'boys'' games. They felt that the girls could not play 'boys' games' as they need more energy and power.

Conformity to a certain dress code was observed in all four schools. Male students, except in the government-run boys' school, wore pants and shirts with ties. Besides the uniform (knee-length shirt and *shalwar*), girls in all four schools covered themselves with a dupatta in line with the dominant code of dress for women in general society. However, the practice varied from school to school. In all three co-education schools, girls were more conscious of maintaining their conformity to this practice. In MCS school, girls loosely covered their head and upper part of their body with a *dupatta*. Strict conformity to this practice was specifically demonstrated in the QSS school and the government boys' secondary school. Girls from the government girls' higher secondary school were observed wearing the complete *hijab* – a long, loose gown with head gear and a veil – while commuting between home and school. This dress code was an unwritten rule and was followed by all female students, who took pride in conforming to the 'religiously defined code of dress'.

While all four schools clearly marked gendered spaces inside and outside the classrooms, the girls' single-sex school posed restrictions on girls' movement inside the school. For instance, girls were not allowed play in the school courtyard due to the presence of male guard at the gate. This school has two cemented courtyards. According to the principal, due to absence of the physical education teacher, the school sports equipment could not be used. During their recess hour, girls spend time in the courtyard that is not manned by the male guard inner. Younger girls were running around and chasing each other, while the older ones sat or walked in groups. One explanation for not playing given by the girls was 'we are too big to play around'. There is a staircase present in the courtyard, but the girls are not allowed to go upstairs because that would expose them to the neighbourhood.

The government boys' secondary school also stands out for its strongly gendered outlook. Separate lines of girls and boys are made during the morning assembly. It is always the boys' duty to recite in the morning assembly. The boys have a five-minute recess before the girls. In addition, they are supposed to go outside the school premises, while girls are supposed to stay on the premises during recess. There are two hawkers allowed to bring food for the girls to buy on the premises of the school, but they come with the school's permission and sell under the observation of male teachers. Every class, as reported by the principal, has two prefects: a boy and a girl. However, the boy prefect is overall responsible for discipline and dealing with class issues. The principal said:

> *'We don't give such responsibility to girls. Boy prefects can deal with both girls and boys, but girls prefects cannot.'* **Interview, 6 April 2007**

Each girl prefect is expected to deal with the girls only – for example, she can only collect fees from girls. Moreover, it is not considered culturally appropriate for a boy

to collect fees etc. from the girls. That is why the school has to have girl prefects. The girls and boys are assigned different tasks, for example, the girls are responsible for cleaning their classrooms, and boys clean the areas outside the classroom, such as the playground during the '*Hafta-E-Safai*' (Week of Cleanliness).

Gendered spaces beyond school buildings also provided a reference to the extent students felt or experienced mobility. Commuting to school was especially taken care of by parents: girls were either escorted by a male member of their families or they commuted in groups. Many of them reported being stared at and teased by males on their way to school. Their response to the situation is to walk away with their eyes on the ground. Some girls are chaperoned by their father or a brother to ensure their safety during the commute, while the majority walk in groups and wear the full *hijab* for security.

Examples of considering girls' developmental were also present. In three schools, girls said that advice on their monthly menstrual cycle was available. Students from one school had arrangements to meet their menstrual needs. Girls reported teachers' flexible attitude towards their needs – for example, to leave class if necessary. In one school, students reported being able to meet with a particular female teacher who would help them.

Teachers' perceptions

Teachers' views about male and female students across the four study schools reflected the gendered image of their students.

Gender and space

Gender differences were observed in terms of how male and female students occupied physical space. Observations of classroom teaching and learning, games lessons and recess hours revealed a gendered pattern. For instance, girls were found huddled together both inside and outside the classroom, while boys occupied space more comfortably by spreading around. This was also explicit in one teacher's description of how boys and girls occupy the space available in the science laboratory. According to the science teacher, girls generally hover around one table while doing experiments. Boys, on the other hand, spread out and occupy all the tables. The science teacher interpreted this as girls' attempts to seek security and help from their peers. The patterns in which students occupy space, in other words, can be associated with hierarchical social structures in which women are considered weak and dependent. Furthermore, the socialisation of females into femininity and feminine ways to conduct themselves could be yet another explanation of this behaviour.

Learning styles and needs

Male teacher/s reported that boys are visual learners while girls are auditory learners and require teachers to repeat concepts often; boys in contrast do not seek repeated

explanations. Teachers also reported gender differences between girls' and boys' responses in written work. Girls reproduce the given text, while boys have the ability to articulate the same concept in their own words. A set pattern for a question paper was considered to be helpful for female students' written responses, as they 'regurgitate' text following the expected pattern of examination. According to a male teacher, changes in the pattern of questions, content and the context of an assessment affect girls' performance in other institutions where they go after graduating from this school.

Disruptive behaviour by boys was observed in two schools, and an explanation was given. Male teachers believe that due to boys' certain developmental needs, they must take part in physically engaging activities. This also hinders boys' concentration on their studies. All the teachers were conscious of boys' responses to their teachers, which can sometimes be disruptive. Girls take teachers and teaching relatively seriously. Male teachers reported that girls relate emotionally to their teachers, while boys relate to teachers through content.

Boys are 'intellectual' and girls are 'hardworking'

The data reveals teachers' unanimous agreement on boys being more intelligent than the girls. This notion is reflected in the fact that teachers believe boys are good at physics, chemistry and computer studies, while girls do better in Urdu and Pakistan studies. These two groups of subjects are perceived to demand different levels of intellectual engagement by students. In curricular activities, however, all the study participants observed girls' better performance. One explanation of this phenomenon was given by the teachers to be girls' serious attitude towards their academic performance through preparation for all tests and examinations. Boys, on the other hand, choose to work hard only for the final examination. All the teachers unanimously agreed that girls outperformed boys in tests and exams, but said this was because of previously established patterns in the exam papers. According to a male teacher's analysis, boys do better in assessment that requires application of their learning, while girls generally reproduce answers. Teaching boys was perceived to be more challenging than girls. Engaging girls in a relatively plain and boring lesson was easier, but a monotonous lesson could easily put boys off – which then leads to disruptive behaviour. To avoid such situations, teachers are constantly required to update their lessons with more challenging tasks.

The data from the co-educational schools reveals that having girls and boys studying in the same classroom is considered to provide a competitive edge for both, as they want to perform better. This helps students build their confidence, interpersonal skills and improves their academic performance – a prerequisite for their entry into colleges. However, according to some boys, sitting with girls may damage boys' confidence as they hesitate to participate in the class for fear of the teacher telling them off for giving a wrong answer. Such a response from a teacher would be damage their self-image in front of girls – an unacceptable situation.

Studying together

The case study schools offer an interesting picture of schools' and the community's efforts to ensure gender equity in accessing education at the secondary level. Apart from the single-sex government girls' school, all three schools offered co-education. To address disciplinary issues arising from boys' conduct towards girls in the MCS school, the school administration and the board of governors decided to shift to single-sex classrooms for boys and girls. Presently, girls and boys from grade 6 onwards study in their own sex groups. The chair of School Management Committee regarded this a timely measure to avoid the likelihood of girls discontinuing their education. The single-sex policy has posed a huge challenge to the teachers. The boys' disruptive attitudes have been reported as a constant hindering factor in the boys-only classrooms. Boys admitted creating havoc in the classrooms, and believed that girls' presence there would have made them more focused on their studies, as their underperformance in front of girls would be unacceptable to them. Girls, however, felt more comfortable in single-sex classrooms and did not see any reason to return to co-educational classes. Having minimum interaction with boys, they believe, makes the classroom an enabling environment and more acceptable to their parents.

Girls and boys from the MCS school seemed to follow the same 'minimum interaction' approach during recess, forming their own single-sex groups. However, the building compound's limited space made the groups stay closer to one another. Many men and boys were observed watching the students' recess time while standing on their apartment balconies at various floors. Some women were also seen, but they were busy putting clothes on washing lines.

The QSS school started off as a secondary school, with single-sex instruction for girls and boys. The school management, particularly the principal, found boys underperforming due to their disruptive behaviour in the classroom and decided to switch to co-education as a measure to address this issue. Both female and male students find co-education boosts their confidence, and that it keeps the boys focused on their studies. Male students do not like to be seen to be unable to respond to teachers' questions or participating poorly in classroom processes in their female classmates' presence. Studying together with boys in the same classroom boosts girls' confidence and morale. Besides, girls reported the liveliness of the classroom environment due to boys' constant jokes.

Observations and focus group discussion data reveal boys' visibility in the classrooms through their jokes and disruptive attitudes. Teachers were observed spending significant amounts of time having to discipline boys. In one instance, an extra teacher was present to monitor boys' engagement in the assigned tasks. While there was unanimous agreement on bringing challenging tasks to the teaching and learning environment to engage boys, female teachers disagreed with a male teacher that boys posed more challenges to female teachers than to the male teachers. QSS offers an opportunity for boys and girls to study together throughout their school years in

the same classrooms. However, the gender divide is clearly visible outside the classroom. The playgrounds and courtyards where students spend their recess and sports periods are separate for boys and girls. Both courtyards have a separate tuck shop with exclusively male and female staff.

The government boys' secondary school offers instruction in the provincial language Sindhi. The school started officially as a single-sex boys' school, but opened its gates to girls later on. Now, the school has girls enrolled throughout grades 6 to 10. Yet the increase in female students in this school has not warranted the entry of more female teachers. At the time of writing, the school had only one female teacher teaching the lower grades. The teachers as well as the students belong to the local village community, and they developed a shared sense of urgency for female education at community level. The community, according to the teachers, was greatly concerned about girls' inability to find a high-quality Sindhi-medium school and negotiated with the provincial Department of Education to allow girls' enrolment in the school. Now girls can officially sit for their grade 10 public examinations.

The school provides a 'protective' environment to girls, as reported by the students and teachers. Certain policies and practices are enforced to avoid any interactions between female and male students. Seating arrangements in the classrooms portray gender segregation. Girls are sent home earlier than boys as the school day ends. At the same time, the water facility placed near the principal's office is apparently only for girls: boys are not allowed to come to the tap in the presence of girls during class. During recess, boys leave the school premises while girls must remain there.

Observation data reveals no evidence of interaction between female and male students. Any interaction with male students, according to the girls, may invite teachers' scrutiny and doubts. This data also reveals that boys are the focus of teachers' attention, who directed their explanations and questions towards them.

Teachers' disciplinary measures further explained the gendered nature of teachers' interaction with their students. Teachers reported that they might beat boys when they misbehaved in class; however, they could only reprimand girls, but not punish them physically. According to the teachers, the sight of boys being beaten was warning enough for girls to make them realise that they could also be penalised for not listening to the teacher. This attitude on the part of teachers was apparently directed and guided by culturally approved seclusion of both genders, 'We cannot touch (physically punish) girls as they are mature and grown up', said the teacher in a focus group discussion (6 April 2007).

Teaching and learning processes

Teaching/learning processes in all four schools were clearly influenced by the dominant gender relationships of the society. Gender segregation worked as a basic principle to guide these processes in all the schools. The single-sex girls' school was established on the basis gender segregation, while the other three schools dem-

onstrated their belief in gender segregation through their practices and arrangements that discouraged interaction among girls and boys inside and outside the classroom.

Gendered teaching and learning

Textbook reading and 'chalk-and-talk' were the widely used teaching strategies in all four schools. Within this conventional teaching approach, the gendered nature of teaching was obvious. More visible gender messages surfaced specifically in co-educational instruction.

In the government boys' secondary school, the teacher-centred lecture method was used in biology and chemistry classes. Male students were the main focus of the teachers' attention; they maintained eye contact with the boys and most questions were directed at them. Furthermore, the distance between the teacher and the boys was always less compared to the distance between the teacher and the girls. For example, in the chemistry class when the teacher showed a diagram in the textbook, it was kept in front of the boys' row; the girls were unable to see the diagram clearly.

Assigning tasks to boys and girls was seemingly determined by the level of challenge it may pose to students. For instance, in one English lesson, the teacher asked girls to read the given passage from the text while boys were asked to summarise the lesson – the task required an advanced level of comprehension and language skills. In another lesson, while explaining the digestive system, the teacher directed all the teaching towards the boys, hastily passing through content that pertained to particular parts of the body. Teachers also reported their difficulty in teaching such 'sensitive' topics in the presence of girls. Interactions between strangers are not approved of, while discussions on sex and related topics are taboo in the context of these schools.

Gender-segregated classrooms

The seating arrangements inside the classroom, as shown in Figure 7.1, depicted visible gender segregation at different levels. Boys and girls sat in pairs at separate desks in the co-educational schools. In QSS, students did not follow a set pattern in terms of seating arrangement, but same-sex pairs were always the basic organising principal. Here, males and females were sometimes observed sitting in the same rows. They were also seen exchanging jokes, accessories and books. Nonetheless, even with this rather flexible seating arrangement, teacher-directed interaction among male and female students was not observed.

The seating arrangement in the government boys' school enforced a rather stringent divide between the two genders. While girls and boys sat in different rows, the space between the two rows was maintained at certain level in all the observed classrooms, which required students to walk up to the other row if they needed to exchange any

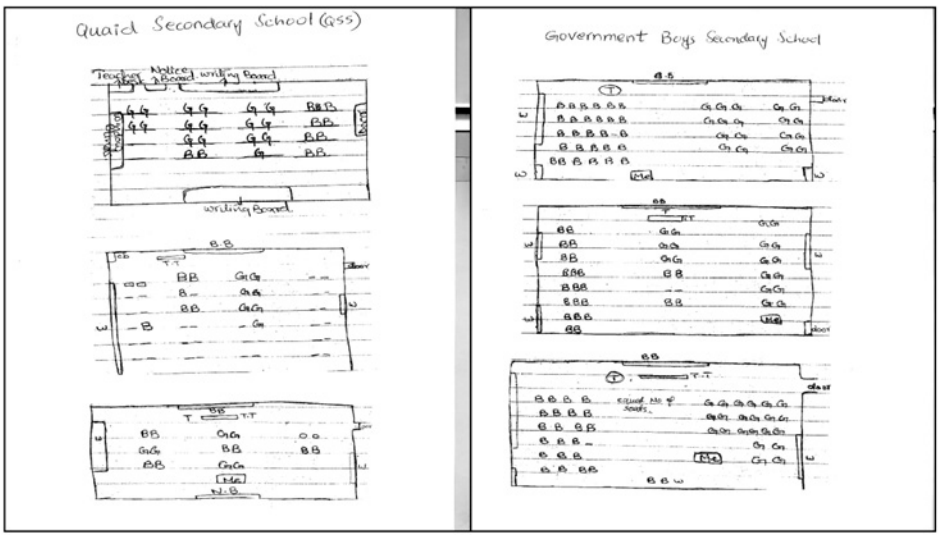

Figure 7.1. Seating arrangements inside the classroom for the QSS school and the government boys' secondary school

item. The classroom here had big windows on one wall and the smaller, sometimes only one, window on the other wall. It was also observed that girls always sat by the wall that had fewer, smaller windows. Student interactions with fellow students proved to be non-existent in this school.

The seating arrangements in the schools were apparently meant to discourage any possibility of male and female students' interaction. Nonetheless, the flexible seating arrangements in the QSS secondary school did allow students to talk frequently and exchange accessories. The female students from QSS reported frequent interactions with boys, who they thought made the classroom lively with their jokes. Yet despite this apparent flexibility, a sense of (gendered) interaction is present when boys and girls divide tasks according to the nature of those tasks. For example, the boys made the stage for a particular function and carried out tasks to be done outside the school premises; the girls, meanwhile, performed tasks inside the school.

Student–teacher relationships

Two of the four schools (QSS and MCS) had both male and female teachers working at the secondary level. The study revealed the students' views on how they related to their teachers. Interestingly, boys and girls shared their liking for male teachers. These feelings were based on how these teachers related to the students during the lessons. The students reported use of different pedagogical skills by the male teachers. Female teachers, on the other hand, were categorised as 'not favourite' by some

of the students. In one school, the boys reported liking female teachers' presence in the class when they were in the mood for playing pranks. A female teacher was also named as the most disliked teacher for her blunt behaviour towards students.

A sense of comfort with male teachers surfaced in girls' views. For instance, although girls from the government boys' school wished for more female teachers to be present in the school, teaching by male teachers was reported to be equally acceptable to them. While effective teaching strategies in a 'lighter' mood of teaching were the general criteria used by the students to judge their teachers, male teachers' physical behaviour in class was yet another criteria used by female students. A group of girls denounced a particular male teacher who, while teaching, would causally move around and pat girls on their backs just as he would do to the boys.

An analysis of the observations quoted above demonstrates students' increasing recognition of their gendered selves in the manner in which they relate to their teachers. Boys made their male identity obvious by disrupting female teachers' lessons, while girls observed their interactions with male teachers in accordance to their (male teachers') culturally appropriate or inappropriate behaviours.

Equity of access by schools

The focus group discussions with teachers and the principals from the QSS secondary school, MCS school and the government boys' school articulated a realisation about female education being a matter of urgency. Various steps have been taken in these schools to ensure girls' as well as boys' access to education. For instance, girls were admitted to an officially single-sex boys' school as a gender equity measure. A shift from co-educational instruction to single-sex instruction was made in the MCS school to ensure continuity of girls' education. This contrasts with the QSS secondary school, which moved to co-educational instruction from single-sex classrooms to improve boys' underachievement. The community's role in managing school administration and finances, through an active board of governors or a school management committee, ensures students' access to a physically enabling environment. Although the government boys' school has an active Parent–Teacher Association (PTA), the interests of students are well taken care of by the teachers, who have their own children studying in the school. Girls' introduction to what was 'officially a boys school' was possible because of these teachers, who needed proper schooling for their own daughters. Therefore, a sense of community presence and monitoring female students' participation in the school prevails. In contrast, the government girls' higher secondary school did not report community involvement in female education, except the presence of a rather inactive PTA.

The data revealed parents' indifference towards their daughters' schooling. The majority were concerned with the girls passing the grade 10 public examination to obtain their Secondary School Certificate, but were less interested in whether they had quality learning opportunities in the school. Girls' absenteeism was a grave issue

facing the schools, which teachers and principals saw to be rooted in the low value given to girls' education by their parents. A family affair (a wedding, birth or a death), the sickness of a family member or the pressure of studying were frequently observed excuses for sometimes a week-long absence from school. The teachers also reported pressure from parents in response to teachers' attempts to take disciplinary action. The prevailing low value that is put on education for girls has a visible impact on students' outcomes, particularly in the grade 10 public examination (see Table 7.8). Issues such as vacant teaching positions and disparities in the language used for instruction are worthy of serious attention to improve learning opportunities for girls in the single-sex girls' school.

Female education in a single-sex school

The study data reveals the challenges facing girls to secure equal learning opportunities in the co-educational schools. The same struggle, however, also surfaced in the single-sex girls' school. This school seems comfortable in the dominant gender ideology, which has implications in terms of the overall quality education offered to girls. The principal believes the manner in which boys and girls are nurtured ought to be different because of their fundamental differences: '... boys can be out and can go out, but we have to control girls. We need to treat girls as girls'. School, in her view, teaches girls the etiquette of behaving within the specified norms and culture of society. In other words, school is engaged in nurturing (female) students' femininity with constant reminders. 'Be like girls' (teacher's emphasis to the girls in a physics class). A talk about an academic task by the teacher could also be accompanied by a piece of advice or a reprimand about the students' femininity. One teacher explained to the girls the rationale behind her reprimanding them during the academic year:

> *'My objective of reprimanding you was just to ensure that you have [a] proper upbringing ... because not the certificate but your behaviour will reflect your education. For instance, how you behave when there is a guest at home.'* **Grade 9, physics lesson**

This view, along with parents' low expectations for their daughters' education, seems to be determining the low-quality learning opportunities in the school. Parents' attitudes towards girls' education are constrained by cultural norms of early marriage and girls' and women's status in the patriarchal society. The incongruity of using multiple languages for teaching, homework and examination apparently also has serious implications for students' motivation and performance in physics (as well as in all other subjects taught in a language other than the language of instruction). The complexity of this issue hinders the quality of teaching/learning processes, which leads to the below-average academic performance of these female students. Their poor performance in public exams diminishes their chances of further education in a context already burdened by poor resources and negative attitudes towards female education.

Beyond the prescribed curriculum

The study schools all functioned within Pakistan's prescribed curriculum examination system, and teaching and learning were geared towards preparation for public examinations. The frequency of extra-curricular activities followed a similar routine, with most schools organising such events in the middle or at the beginning of an academic year. The QSS secondary school, in collaboration with an NGO, initiated a programme to contribute to the social, moral and physical health of its students. This was the only school that offered some 'out of the box' options to students such as interior decoration and woodwork. Initially, there was a gender division in these subjects (e.g. interior design for girls and woodwork for boys). However, this division was later abolished. Some girls in particular performed very well in woodwork. Teachers, nevertheless, were not sure if any boy has crossed the gender divide. The data did not reveal any evidence of teachers' attempting help students move across the socially constructed gender boundaries.

Teaching aids and displays

Observations of lessons taught in all four schools revealed exclusive use of textbooks and the blackboard. No other teaching aids were used. Fast approaching secondary school examinations were one explanation for this phenomenon. Displays inside and outside the classroom were also a rarity, although the QSS secondary school had some displays in and around the classroom. Quotes, drawings of science experiments and concepts, and inspirational religious lessons were also on display. Both male and female students made those displays there were. The MCS school had a few displays that portrayed the demonstration of 'action' words (e.g. cook, run, play) and some male saints. The few displays also portrayed gender in a traditional manner: a number were made by girls who, for example, drew boys kicking a football and running; girls meanwhile were shown watching television and reading inside the home. Government schools had a very small number of displays containing scientific concepts and verses from the Holy Qur'an.

Textbook analysis

To achieve curriculum objectives, Pakistani schools rely heavily on textbooks as the legitimate and only source of knowledge. Therefore, textbooks were analysed to understand what gender-related messages were being passed on to the students. While all textbooks were scanned to identify gender messages, Urdu and English books were analysed most closely, because all secondary school students study these books, regardless of their subject stream. The analysis revealed the following:

- Deeply rooted traditional beliefs and perceptions of women's position in society were portrayed in the text and illustrations. Women are shown in their reproductive roles. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed in productive and decision-making roles.

- The visibility of women is low as compared to the appearance and visibility of men in the textbooks.
- Women and men are identified with certain stereotypical attributes. Men, for instance, are portrayed as being brave, heroic, honest and strong, while notions of caring, self-sacrifice, love and kindness are associated with women.
- Members of textbook review committees and textbook authors are almost all men, with an insignificant number of female writers. However, in one instance, a team of female authors and reviewers were able to produce a comparatively gender-inclusive textbook (class 9).

The analysis confirms that textbooks used in secondary schools perpetuate the dominant gender ideology. Through highlighting gender-related attributes, textbooks are found to be reinforcing the stereotypes that students carry with them to schools. Such presentation of gender ideology through textbooks not only limits girls' chances of having equal opportunities, it also prevents young secondary school students more generally from being prepared for more gender-aware roles in their future lives.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The study draws the following conclusions on the basis of the findings discussed above:

- The concept of co-education surfaced more in the context of the three secondary schools that offer schooling to boys and girls in the same premises and during the same hours. Boys and girls (in two instances) perceived the presence of the opposite gender as boosting their confidence and preparing them for adult life. However, no visible attempts by the teachers or schools were seen to use the presence of both genders as an opportunity to create a conducive learning opportunity. Conversely, every attempt was made to discourage any interaction between boys and girls to promote their academic strengths. Gender segregation remained the underlying principle in all schools, both inside and outside the classrooms. As a result, boys more than the girls appeared to be trapped in dominant gender relationships – by having to exhibit a 'macho' image, for example.
- The single-sex school for girls is engaged in socialising girls into a passive role within existing gender relationships, with little or no concern for encouraging their future potential.
- Despite the equity measures taken by the schools and government Department of Education, boys and girls have different learning opportunities inside the classroom. Girls remain invisible by being task-oriented and demonstrating obedience to teachers. Boys get more than their fair share of the teachers' attention.

- The equity measures (e.g. yearly scholarships, provision of textbooks and free education) taken by the Department of Education attempt to address poverty (which is recognised as being a major hindrance in retaining girls in schools, particularly at secondary school). However, school management processes – including teaching and learning processes – have not been explored to develop insights into how such processes facilitate or impede gender equity as the school level. Thus, schools as a whole continue communicating to young people the dominant gender ideology that views men and women within the strict boundaries of productive and reproductive roles.
- The teachers and principals from all four schools hold preconceived notions of their students' capabilities and attitudes towards learning on the basis of gender. This is reflected in teachers' pedagogical practices and has implications for teaching/learning at the classroom level.
- Expectations of boys and girls are significantly gendered. Male students live the dominant image of masculinity with attributes such as being assertive, moody, adventurous, intellectually demanding and uncontrollable. This has implications for the quality of teaching and learning processes – both in single-sex boys' classrooms and in co-educational settings.
- Teaching and learning processes, particularly through displays, textbooks and teacher–student interactions, perpetuate dominant gender ideologies. This dilutes any concerted efforts carried out by schools to ensure equity of access to all students.

Recommendations for policy and practice

Federal Ministry of Education

- Integration of a gender perspective into school processes needs a clear articulation in education policy. This will help generate resources and develop mechanisms for the successful implementation of such policy.
- An analysis of the situation is fundamental for the Federal Ministry of Education to understand the gravity of the existing situation in schools and beyond. A situation analysis will help develop a comprehensive gender strategy.
- The Federal Ministry of Education needs to develop a gender focus group, with specialists in gender in education and a portfolio to plan and implement gender strategies at the provincial level. Some of these strategies should include advocacy campaigns, curriculum and textbook guidelines, capacity building for teacher educators, curriculum developers and textbook writers, and developing a mechanism for the implementation of a gender strategy.
- Public–private partnerships – the government needs to develop partnerships with private organisations to build its strength for effective gender-based interventions at the macro and micro levels.

Capacity building for teachers and management teams

- Teacher empowerment through equipping them with appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes is fundamental for promoting gender equalities at the school and classroom levels.
- Teacher training curricula (both pre- and in-service) need to be revised to eliminate concepts and contexts that are gender insensitive. Furthermore, a component of gender in education needs to be offered in all teacher-training programmes to help teachers develop relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes to ensure gender equity at the classroom and school levels.
- A leadership and management-training programme can be offered to the principals of secondary schools, with a focus on how a gender perspective can be integrated into school management policies and practices to ensure gender equity.

Curriculum and textbooks

- The composition of textbook author teams needs to be revised to ensure equal participation by women. Gender training should be a prerequisite for inclusion in textbook author teams.
- Textbooks need to be reviewed to identify what gender messages are conveyed through the text lessons and illustrations.

School based interventions

- Developing and establishing school (and district level) forums (e.g. students' debate and literary groups, councils) can help male and female students express their beliefs; this is fundamental if these young people are to act as more gender-fair adults – men and women.
- Schools with a co-educational setup need to appoint a gender focal person who can ensure gender equity across school policies, structures, the distribution of resources and processes.

Exploring and disseminating good practices of how teachers and schools have been able to promote gender equality at the school and classroom levels will help practitioners develop their ideal of gender-informed teaching.

Note

1. This number includes teaching and other academic staff (e.g. floor supervisors, lab attendants, librarians, computer instructors).