BRIEFING

Reflections on a gender-sensitive pedagogy workshop in religious schools in Malang, Indonesia

Key messages

- Schools play a central role in shaping and instilling gender norms amongst students and in setting expectations for their later lives.

- In Islamic schools (madrasa and schools belonging to Islamic institutions), where religious teachings and texts are interpreted in a male-dominated context, girls are rarely encouraged to fulfil non-traditional roles.

- Yet girls' results in those schools are generally higher than those of boys in many subjects. They are perceived and expected to be more timid but more diligent than boys. This influences how teachers treat and interact with their pupils.

- With the aim of encouraging gender-equitable teaching practices, EQuIC's InsPiRASi project held training and mentoring sessions with teachers and school managers to support learning on gender-responsive and student-centred pedagogy.

- While the trainings increased knowledge and changed certain behaviours at the individual level, little change occurred at the organisational level.

- Some school managers also realised that corporal punishment is no longer an acceptable practice and have replaced it with disciplinary techniques that avoid violence.

- However, the results of the intervention with regard to the uptake of gender-sensitive pedagogies and practices in schools were not as positive as expected, particularly with relation to school policy changes.

- This is partly linked to most of the teachers and school managers failing to see a gender gap in participation by students as a big issue, which seemed to be the only visible dimension of gender inequality that they noticed.

- The intervention should have been more intensive in order to have better results and more influence on schools. The workshop, mentoring visit and a midterm meeting might not have been sufficient to encourage school managers to implement more responsive policies and programmes.

- In future, EQuIC will implement multiple trainings, mentoring sessions and advocacy activities targeted at whole school communities to include management, teachers and students, as well as relevant decision-makers within government.

About EQuIC and InsPiRASi

The Education Quality Improvement Consortium (EQuIC - equic.org) was founded in 2009 to work with rural schools to support improved education. Most EQuIC beneficiaries have been rural private Islamic schools, usually founded by community-based organisations with limited funding. It normally takes years for teachers or school managers to get the opportunity to participate in government-run professional development programmes, so EQuIC helps speed up the process by searching for external funding to provide training activities.

While EQuIC has been working with school stakeholders to improve the capacity of teachers, school managers and students (mostly on soft skills for this latter group), until the InsPiRASi project, there had been no specific activity focusing on gender equality. Although some teachers have had training on student-centered teaching practices, they do not use a gender lens to motivate both girls and boys to improve their performance.

Recognising that teachers' gendered attitudes and behaviour influence their students (Frawley, 2005), EQuIC set out to implement a project – InsPiRASi – to improve gender-equitable teaching practices at religious middle and high schools in rural areas in the southern part of Kabupaten Malang, East Java, Indonesia. By emphasising that both girls and boys have the rights to maximise their potential inside and outside school, EQuIC tried to encourage school managers and teachers to challenge traditional gender norms.

Through the project, we aimed for education institutions in rural areas of Malang to be inspired to improve their teaching practices and make them more gender-equitable. This was designed as an action research project with a number of interventions, including a two-day workshop, one mentoring/monitoring visit per school, a midterm meeting and a conference. The logic behind the project was that by training two to three school representatives (school leaders and teachers), most of the school policies and programmes and classroom practices would improve. The school representatives were expected to bring back their new knowledge and skills and share them with other school personnel, who eventually would modify their own inequitable gendered behaviours and improve the quality of education services provided.

The education profile of Malang Regency, East Java province, Indonesia

Kabupaten Malang is the second biggest regency in East Java, Indonesia. The 2018 census shows a 100% participation rate in elementary education for both girls and boys. At middle school level, the rate drops to 96.26% for boys and 98.44% for girls. The number drops further still at high school level, where 63.33% of boys were enrolled and 57.58% of girls were enrolled in 2018 (Statistik Daerah Kabupaten Malang, 2018). While no statistics are available on the performance levels of girls and boys, observations combined with the baseline survey conducted prior to the workshop show that in most schools girls reach higher performance levels than boys. However, this does not correlate with the number of girls and boys who continue to high school.

From observations and experience, we know that traditional gender norms practised within schools often impose expectations regarding the attitudes and behaviours of girls and boys that can result in students being held back from reaching their full potential and following their true interests. In Madrasas (Islamic schools) in Indonesia – some of which have segregated classes for boys and girls, while in others boys and girls study in the same class – the situation is particularly challenging for girls, where religious teachings and texts are interpreted in a male-dominated context. The norms affect them not only in their education but also in relation to the roles they play in their daily lives and their expectations for the future. When boys do not

Figure 1: Map of Indonesia

Source: Ezilon.com

Figure 2: Map of Malang Regency with all of its 33 sub-districts

Locations of the schools participating in this project

Source: sejarah-negara.com

show masculinity (such as being strong, brave and not crying), or when girls do not show feminine traits (for example, putting on make-up, wearing a skirt) they tend to be told that they do not act like a man or act like a woman.

Against this backdrop of gender inequality, EQuIC implemented the InsPiRASi project to encourage uptake of gender-sensitive pedagogies and practices in schools.

Implementation of the InsPiRASi project

The project started with a socialisation meeting during which 15 school representatives were introduced to the project and 10 schools expressed their interest in being part of it. Because one school withdrew from the program due to heavy tasks workload before the school accreditation process, the project was implemented in only nine schools.

We asked schools to send one teacher, the principal or vice principal, and a school committee member (for state-owned schools) or a representative from the institution that funds the school (for private schools). In total there were 24 teachers (16 female and 8 male) and 2 principals (1 male, 1 female) from the 9 schools who participated in the project. Schools sent whoever was available to participate over the two days, so the gender balance amongst the group was not representative of the balance of male and female teachers at schools as most have a greater number of male teachers and principals.

We conducted a baseline survey prior to the initial workshop during which interviews were held with school principals, female and male teachers, and female and male students.[1] Important findings from the survey that determined the topics of the workshop include: lack of student participation in school decision-making, girls participating more than boys, girls performing better than boys, teachers' dissatisfaction with their teaching performance, corporal punishment, and dirty and dark toilets affecting the students' hygiene and safety. Eighty percent of surveyed teachers said that in general girls participate more, have higher achievements than boys, and are more obedient.

During the workshop we ran parallel sessions for teachers and school leaders/managers, with participants choosing what group to participate in. Those joining the teachers' group were all female, while the male teachers joined the school managers group, so it was not evident whether male and female teachers were being affected differently by the content learned within each session.

We started the discussion by asking participants to draw pictures of a girl and a boy with statements regarding expectations towards them. When discussing these pictures, we found out about the traditional gender norms imposed in their community (family, school) that girls were expected to be feminine (timid/obedient, softly spoken, not staying out late), while boys were expected to be masculine (strong, not crying or showing emotions) and were understood as being rowdy.

The workshop materials covered the topics of sex versus gender, gender-based violence, students' rights based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and Indonesian national laws, creating supportive education environments by looking at the national accreditation standards, and fostering gender-equitable schools and teaching practices where school leaders analysed their policy and programmes while the teachers evaluated their teaching techniques and learned new teaching skills. At the end of the workshop, each school team created and presented an action plan to bring back their new knowledge and skills to their workplace and share their learning with colleagues. EQuIC only provided participants with general guidance about what could be important for them to take back and disseminate in their schools as new knowledge, so their plan was to share the workshop materials with their colleagues.

Participants developed a general implementation plan on how to disseminate their new knowledge, which they presented at the end of the workshop. However, it is not clear from the monitoring visits and subsequent discussion with school representatives whether these plans were implemented once participants returned to their schools.

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1   Two female students and two male students per school, selected through random sampling.

We measured what participants had learned at the workshop using pre-test and post-test of the workshop materials. This test showed an increase in participants' knowledge, with the overall score increasing from 10 to 60 points. The questions covered topics on definitions of gender, the impacts of gender stereotyping, gender-based violence, children's rights, and four aspects of gender equality (access, participation, control and benefits). The most significant increase in test scores was for their knowledge about the difference between sex and gender, child's rights, definitions of participation in equality, and active listening skills to encourage students' participation in decision-making.

Starting one month after the workshop, the EQuIC project team conducted one mentoring/monitoring visit to each school, where we observed the classroom and later on had conversation with the teacher(s) and their principal to provide feedback on the observation, as well as discussing with them how their school could improve their programmes and policy to be more gender-equitable. The visits were conducted by EQuIC's Project Leader, Quality Assurance Specialist, the Trainer/Mentor, Data Analyst, Activity Coordinator and surveyors. The meeting with schools usually lasted three to four hours, depending on how many classes were observed and what topics were discussed with the teacher(s) and principal.

Most of the schools were very open to EQuIC's feedback and ideas, at least in principle. They said it was important for girls and boys to participate equally, even if then they did not take this knowledge on board very easily. We discussed again the four aspects of analysis – access, participation, control, and benefits – to help them assess if gender equality was being implemented at the school level. This covered the teaching techniques (for example, if teachers made sure boys in the back of the class participate and if teachers give equal opportunity to girls and boys to answer questions), the facilities (for example, if the toilets are located in safe areas with sufficient lightning), and activities outside of the classroom (for example, if female students participate in sports activities).

Main findings

While the workshop increased the knowledge of teachers and school leaders, in practice most of the changes happened at the individual level in terms of behaviour change amongst teachers rather than at the organisational level with regards to school policies and programmes. After the workshop, based on the survey responses, it was possible to identify some initial changes in the willingness to improve practices:

Speaking after the workshop, a female middle school teacher of Bahasa Indonesia said: "*Now I can treat all students fairly, both boys and girls, low and high achievers, front and rear rows, to develop their potentials*". Similarly, another female middle school teacher expressed: "*...from the training I can map the slow learners and higher achievers. From that I can develop more effective teaching strategies*".

Additionally, there were two female teachers who were highly motivated and demonstrated an improvement in their teaching practices during the monitoring visits. They were observed using teaching techniques that encouraged equal participation of female and male students, including seating arrangements to make sure all students had access to equal resources (for example, clear writing on the whiteboard), a reward system (giving points or small rewards, e.g. Student of the Week and Student of the Month awards), alternating questions to female and male students, giving motivation amd encouragement, and grouping students (with mixed groups of female and male students, and mixed groups of low- and high-achieving students).

A female lower secondary teacher in Malang said that they had been giving opportunities for female students to lead classroom discussions. "*The male students are now more respectful to female students,*" she said. Another female participant from MA Ibnu hajar Bulu Pitu Gondanglegi said she paid more attention now to the male students sitting in the back, asking them to move to the front seats to make sure they pay attention. She also motivated the students by giving points or small rewards (e.g. stationery). "*Now they understand the materials better and participate more.*"

The monitoring visits did not include interviews with students that would have generated some insights about whether they had noticed changes in teaching practices and how they felt about this. However, noting one young teacher who was very motivated to implement gender-equitable teaching practices, we made a video that includes interviews with her students about changes in their classrooms. This video aims to inspire other teachers to implement gender-equitable teaching practices as well.

At the school managerial level, we found a common change in terms of the implementation of positive disciplinary practices. Before the workshop, many schools implemented corporal punishment when students broke the rules. Being introduced to the concept of positive discipline and bullying as a form of gender-based violence, we note that two schools have since shifted from corporal punishment to a positive discipline system. For example, instead of having to do push ups or squats, students who are late are asked to re-write short verses from the Qur'an, giving them an opportunity to memorise the verse and improve their calligraphy skills. These practices were implemented in two schools.

Another school realised the importance of dealing with bullying. Following the workshop, the school principal held an anti-bullying training session for teachers and students. With a local health education institute, her school developed an early warning system to identify cases of depression in students who could be victims of bullying, to support them to integrate back into school. When bullying incidents occur, the principal and teachers give counselling sessions to the bully and the victim, making sure the bully knows the consequences of their actions, while at the same time building the confidence of the victim to be able to participate in school again.

While implementing positive discipline and handling bullying are not directly related to gender equality, violence is no longer tolerated at some of the institutions. They also responded to the students' needs and aspirations to be educated in a conducive learning environment.

As the impact of the intervention did not align with our expectations, particularly in relation to gender-responsive school policy changes, in the endline survey we asked the school leadership and teachers what they thought about gender equality in learning. We found out that they perceive gender equality as important, and that both girls and boys should be able to show their true potential and improve their participation and performance. It is interesting to see that most of the teachers and school leadership did not see a gender gap in student participation (girls participate more than boys) as a big issue. They seemed to enjoy the fact that female students are timid, obey the rules, and are more disciplined and dependable in completing tasks. They did not make any connections between these different behaviours and their expectations for the future – and possible gender differences in these – but rather complained that boys were less diligent than girls.

A possible explanation for the low buy-in to gender-sensitive pedagogical adaptations or approaches is the perception (perhaps rooted in gender parity in schooling and good performance of girls) that there were no significant gender inequalities and that gender-responsive pedagogy was perhaps not as important or necessary as other improvements in teaching. Through our observations and discussions with teachers and school leadership we identified other challenges to bringing about change, including lack of facilities, the need for more assistance (mentorship, facilitation), monitoring and knowledge, poor enforcement of regulations, and lack of rewards for those individuals and institutions implementing gender-responsive policy and programmes. Further, the school superintendents said there were other programmes that were more important, such as literacy and teacher training on the new curriculum.

Culture also played a big role in the village communities where religion and social norms are very much integrated into people's way of life. In the workshop, for example, a vice principal warned us that gender equality cannot be implemented when it comes to religious practices (such as prayers), because men are destined to be leaders. This is illustrative of the gendered differences in expectations for girls and boys as adults.

Conclusions and ways forward

Changing the whole education system requires support from decision-makers at the government offices. Currently, the Office of Education and the Office of Religious Affairs do not support efforts towards gender equality in education by creating guidelines, training or monitoring of schools – a fact mentioned by the school leadership in the endline survey.

Teachers and school leaders also mentioned that changes had not happened at the organisational level (schools) due to lack of rewards, incentives and funding, different school priorities and particular cultural values – especially religion – that support patriarchy.

As a result of the findings, EQuIC will take a different approach in promoting gender equality in its future projects. For example, instead of asking two to three people to take the lead on organisational change, EQuIC will implement the intervention process with the whole school community (leadership, teachers, students, and staff) through training and multiple mentoring activities. We will also create a pool of human resources with adequate skills to roll this out on a larger scale.

Further, EQuIC will seek to promote and encourage change from higher level government offices. For example, instead of inviting school superintendents as observers in the activities, EQuIC will ask the Head of Education Office and Office of Religious Affairs (or high rank officials from their offices) to facilitate a training session or to join mentoring visits. This can be done when EQuIC has secured adequate funding.

Another useful approach could be to organise individual advocacy meetings between EQuIC and officials, using evidence from this and other projects about the problems that can occur when gender-equitable practices are not promoted in school. As EQuIC's greatest focus is the community, we are also looking at opportunities for partnering with highly motivated community-based organisations to work on improving gender equality through informal education or other community-based programmes.

References

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ALiGN | **Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms**

About ALIGN

ALIGN is a four-year project aimed at establishing a digital platform for the Community of Practice (CoP) centred on gendered norms affecting adolescents and young adults. Project ALIGN seeks to advance understanding and challenge and change harmful gender norms by connecting a global community of researchers and thought leaders committed to gender justice and equality for adolescents and young adults. Through the sharing of information and the facilitation of mutual learning, ALIGN aims to ensure knowledge on norm change contributes to sustainable gender justice.

ALIGN's Research Fund

ALIGN's Research Fund supports small-scale action research or research translation projects which advance knowledge and evidence on gender norms across a wide range of contexts.

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