Perspectives on Participatory Strategies for Inclusion of Girls in Education

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Abstract

Education for girls is essential for the exercise of all other human rights and an important means for upward mobility to achieve higher status, a position that enables them to play a very significant role in the development of the country. Gender differentials exist in access to education. Participatory approaches which are a product of long-lasting interaction between researchers, development workers, government agents and local populations, are positioned as one of the approaches used to impart education. This paper deliberates on the role of education as a tool for inclusion of girls and traverses through the national response to the same. It contemplates over the significance of the participatory approaches for promoting education for girls leading to strengthening of the decentralisation process succeeding in creating space to make the invisible girls visible. It shines light on the complications experienced on the actual implementation of the participatory strategies in the field. Capabilities have to be strengthened both at policy and grassroots levels to address the gender related issues and the participatory methodologies. The success or failure of any participatory strategy rests on its ability to evolve and adapt to local dynamics, needs and interests.

Keywords: *Education for girls, government's schemes, participatory approaches.*

Introduction

The investment in the education of both boys and girls with focus on equity is consistently the most powerful and important indicator of national development, as well as being a vehicle for the advancement of the present and future generations. It is essential for the exercise of all other human rights; while being an important means for upward mobility to achieve higher status, position and that enables them to play a very significant role in the development of the country. Contemporary discourses and initiatives on decentralisation have showcased the exclusion of girls in all sectors of the development including education. Today, their exclusion has given rise to the concern for their active participation and inclusion in the development process.

When the educational opportunities are not available equally to all sections of the society the inequalities in the social structure continue to be perpetuated. The inequalities stem from the factors rooted in the socio-cultural milieu which propagates from a patriarchal mindset and sustains low status of women. The State-initiated programmes in the field of education clearly point out that the major impediment to the people's participation is their social and economic backwardness. There is thus, great necessity to focus on girls' education leading to their social inclusion.

There is a need to design meaningful interventions and realistic development strategies. The role of meaningful participation of people is now acknowledged as crucial for the success for any kind of programme or policy.

National response to education of girls: Education for girls in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society, as educated girls can play a very significant role in the development of the country. Women constitute about 48% of the total population of India (Census, 2011). The principle of gender equity is enshrined in Indian Constitution in its preamble, as fundamental rights, fundamental duties and the directive principles for reducing the gender gap in education as a focus area. Several strategies have been adopted to promote their participation in education as an integrated part of the planned socio-economic development of the country. Education for girls is increasingly being seen as a basic human right and a crucial input for national development.

Before 1976, education was the exclusive responsibility of the States. The Constitutional Amendment of 1976, which included Education in the Concurrent List, was a far-reaching step. Through the 42nd Amendment, Act of 1976, it has been transferred to concurrent subject, where division of responsibility is of both Centre and State. The Union Government accepted a larger responsibility of reinforcing the national and integrated character of education. The central government continues to play a leading role in the evolution and monitoring of educational policies and programmes. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and the Programme of Action (POA), 1992 are the notable ones. The government launched *'Bharat Shiksha Kosha',* to facilitate donations from India and abroad for implementing programmes connected with the education sector, in January, 2003.

Several schemes targeting the girl child in the field of education, with the primary emphasis on increasing enrolment were part of the first two decades of policy focus on education. The Ministry of Human Resource Development points at the intensification of efforts to universalise elementary education in the eighties and the nineties with a series of programme and scheme interventions like: *Operation Black Board, Shiksha Karmi Project, Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project, Bihar Education Project, U.P Basic Education Project, Mahila Samakhya, Lok Jumbish Project in Rajasthan, and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).*

This trend of including the girl child as a special beneficiary of policy finds continuity in all subsequent policy interventions on education, with *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (2001) and *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (2009-10) also laying emphasis on removing discrimination in access to education. The *National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level* was launched by the government with the view of reaching the hardest to reach sections of the female population and ensuring their access to education. The programme constitutes a significant part of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* since 2003.

In 2018-19, Government of India had proposed to treat school education holistically, under an umbrella programme *Samagra Shiksha*, that subsumes the three schemes: *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and Teacher Education.* The programme is aimed at a single scheme for school education from Class I – Class XII; treats school education

holistically as a continuum from Pre-school to Class 12; and supports States to initiate pre-primary education. The programme also proposed administrative reforms, enhanced funding for education with primarily focus on girl education by empowering them, upgrading *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya* scheme from class 6-8 to class 6-12, self - defence training to girls, stipend to *Children with Special Needs* and enhancing commitment for '*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao'.* Provision of additional support is envisioned through the setting up of model schools, gender sensitization of teachers, creation of gender sensitive learning materials and provision of other need-based incentives like uniforms.

However, national statistics also showed that while improvements in enrolment were tremendous and often surmounted the gender barrier, the tougher challenges were being faced in the areas of retaining girls in school and the quality of education delivered to them. Incentivisation schemes in turn follow a variety of models, including conditional cash transfers, scholarships, subsidised or free transport opportunities for accessing school, uniform and residential schools. Since the decade of the nineties, India has adopted cash transfer schemes with varying objectives. In this regard, *Tamil Nadu's Girl Child Protection Scheme,* 1992, could be said to be the oldest scheme on cash transfer for girl child in the country. There are some national and state-level schemes for residential schools and vocational training and education programmes for women. The Indian government has laid claims to support the education of girls as early as 1968, with the Resolution on National Policy on Education that highlighted the need for enhanced focus on the girls' education.

Among the schemes that have been launched, conditional cash transfers programmes have been used increasingly. There are more than twenty schemes in India that are aimed towards the welfare of girls, mainly in context of promotion of education and age enhancement for marriage. Some of these schemes are *Dhan Lakshmi scheme* across the country (conditional cash transfer for immunization and education and unmarried till reaching age 18), *Ladli Scheme* in Haryana and Delhi, *Girl Child Protection Scheme* in Andhra Pradesh.

Another remarkable policy shift in this period was the movement to a rights-based perspective on education, which considered universal education as responsibility of the State and the right of every child in India. The Constitution of

India, through its eighty-sixth Amendment in 2002, established education as a fundamental right through Article 21-A. In 2009, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act was passed. The RTE Act is a defining moment in the history of education policy in India as its approach is two pronged – on one hand, it consists of provisions that recognise duty of the State and its bodies in enforcing this right, while on the other, it lays emphasis on encouraging and incentivising education among children from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups.

A huge disparity exists: India stands at 74.04% national literacy rate where male literacy rate is 82.14% and the female literacy rate is a dismal 65.46% (Census, 2011). Apart from low levels of literacy at the national level, disparities across regions, gender, etc. are of serious concern. Level of literacy or education is directly associated with poverty, population growth, health and crime rate. Despite its significance, education for girls continues to be a neglected area. This highlights the need to look at the multi-faceted problems facing the girls on their way to join the education bandwagon and better future prospects.

Various studies have reported gender differentials in access to education and that gender differentials could possibly be due to historical attitudes, giving less importance to girl child education, social and family outlook towards girls, engaging girls in non (paid) work etc. (White, Ruther, & Kahn, 2015).

In the field of child education, nutrition and protection, vital differences among boys and girls in their school education, access, usage and perceptions are seen (CRY, 2019). This difference is believed to lie in the social and systemic determinants of education.

Ramachandran (1998) has provided an exhaustive gamut of the issues to sum up the problems coming in the way of education for the girl child. The three types of issues are (1) the Systemic issues; (2) Content and process of education related issues; and (3) Economy, society and culture related issues. Although these issues are not gender-neutral yet it must be recognised that they affect girls in a special way. Systemic issues include problems of access, dysfunctional schools, quality of schools, motivation of teachers, existence of multiple delivery systems- formal, non-formal, condensed, satellite and residential, calendar and timings. Content and process of education are gender stereotyping, perpetuation of gender-bias,

relevance of curriculum, language, joyful learning, ready access to books, magazines, papers and appropriate reading material for the newly literate and so on. Economy, society and culture issues are poverty and powerlessness, status of women, cost to family, child labour / domestic chores, farm / non-farm work, caught up in survival battles, perception of herself, post puberty practices, child marriage.

Participatory approaches to education: If we are to make progress in the future towards inclusive education, we must involve students and trainers themselves in the journey. One of the reasons is the lack of opportunity in the conventional approach to education and its limited applicability in diverse situations and especially in meeting the challenges. There can be no upliftment unless there is social democracy at the grass roots.

The conventional approach of 'giving' in an education imparting situation is being gradually replaced by 'sharing', 'learning together' or acting as a 'facilitator'. The role of a facilitator is to encourage participation without being judgmental and by listening with interest and empathy to help the students to tap into the reservoir of their own abilities gained through their experiences.

Participatory approaches are positioned as one of the alternatives to conventional approaches used in imparting education as they are a product of long-lasting interaction between researchers, development workers, government agents and local populations.

Participation strategies, as against the conventional strategies with 'Top down' or 'trickle down' approach, propose the 'Bottom up' or 'Grass roots' development - helping people directly to help themselves. It is learner centred and strengthens the capacity, the potential and the competence of learners as individuals by ensuring participation of all. Research has shown that the participatory approach leads to increased sharing of benefits and decision-making power in the development context.

It is not easy, however, to institute a participatory method because trainers must also be able to learn and adjust and because it is very time consuming to "support from behind" instead of "leading from the front." In order to rescue "participation" from the realm of fashionable terms with no basis in reality, it will be necessary to exchange information about experiences with this technique that is demanding but essential for creating the self-esteem that girls require in

order to assume a full role in society (Postel, 1997).

Participation remains an iterative process which develops and occurs over a significant period of time as it requires patience and commitment from all and it would be a mistake to expect benefits over a small frame of time.

Problem definition

This paper deliberates on the role of education as a tool for inclusion of girls and traverses through the national response to the education for girls. It ponders over the significance of the participatory approaches to fulfil the need for learning and evaluation. It attempts at understanding participation of girls for learning and leading to strengthening of the decentralisation process succeeding in creating space to make the invisible girls visible. There is a need to strengthen capabilities both at policy and grassroots levels to address the gender related issues and the participatory methodologies. It specifically shines light on the complications experienced in the actual implementation of the participatory strategies in the field.

Methodology

The methodology makes use of the case study approach as a qualitative methodology. Case studies are ways to explain, describe, or explore phenomena. The depth and richness of case study description helps in understanding the case and applicability of findings to a larger perspective.

Sources of evidence for case study include documentation, and archival records. It uses a descriptive case study approach where this methodology is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. Efforts have been made to answer "how" and "why" questions, because they are relevant to the phenomenon under study

The methodology includes extracts from documented cases of participatory approaches and their applications in the field of education for girls in the arena of development programmes by the government. It includes the detailed and critical discussions on the selected case study, which is descriptive and reflective in nature and draws lessons for the future.

Results and discussions

A case of applying participatory approaches in DPEP in a remote, poor village in Karnataka is examined and analysed (IGNOU, 2010a).

Participatory Approaches in DPEP: DPEP is one of the first social sector development programmes where participatory approaches are being put into practice on a very large scale. DPEP is one of the most extensive interventions by the Government in primary education development. It was launched in 1993 in seven states and 42 districts, and has subsequently been expanded to several more states and districts across the country. The broad objective of DPEP is to operationalize the goals of universal elementary education (UEE).

DPEP and Community Involvement: DPEP emphasizes the need for a participatory process, whereby local communities would play an active role in enrolment, retention, learning achievement and school effectiveness. It is done through setting up village education committees (VECs), with members from all sections of the local community with the purpose to achieve active participation from the village community as a whole and to serve as a means to institutionalize the participatory process.

The Local Village Context: The status and dynamics of community participation in a village, *Palmagudu*, a remote, poor village in Karnataka were examined. Most of the inhabitants own small scale land holdings with low productivity. The settlement is a small one, with approximately 36 households and there exists an Ambedkar Colony – a colony of low caste families.

The village has a single teacher primary school, one Anganwadi and the nearest secondary school is seven kilometres away. Although school records show 100% enrolment, the dropout particularly at the class 5 level is high. The location of this Anganwadi in the Ambedkar Colony, was a major bone of contention among the villagers as the parents belonging to the upper castes were reluctant to send their children to the Anganwadi. As a result, the children (particularly girls) were left at home to care for their younger siblings. Lower caste families were also not satisfied and complained about the low quality of food grain provided by the government as an incentive for the children to be sent to the Anganwadi, about the irregular attendance of the Anganwadi worker and the poor quality of care their children receive in the Anganwadi on the fact that they belong to a lower caste. However, the villager's attitude towards education was found positive. The primary school was constructed on land donated by a local inhabitant. The villagers also contributed towards various cultural events held at the school. Despite the fact that the majority of the adult communities were illiterate, the value of formal education was recognised.

Local Community's Experience of DPEP: The DPEP implementation process in *Palmagudu* took a while to gain momentum. The news of the programme first reached the local community in 1994. The teacher received a curriculum from the Block Education Officer, following which he called a meeting of a few senior (male) members of the village community and which led to the VEC being formed. Initially, DPEP – related inputs were targeted more at the school than at the local community. The Project officials visited the village for discussions with the teacher, enrolment figures were updated and the teacher attended training at the Block Education Office. The training had a beneficial impact, both in terms of increasing the teachers' understanding of the program and enabling quality improvements in the teaching/learning methods. Several parents observed these changes and were pleased.

The first attempt to actively involve the Village Education Committee (VEC) was made in 1996 – a considerable time interval after the formation of the body. Three members, including awoman member, were invited for training at the Block Education Office. They found the program to be useful and learnt that the government was offering an annual fund of Rs. 2000 to VECs.

However, the impact of the training program on the village community as a whole was negligible. Most of the villagers were not even aware that the DPEP was in operation. The VEC members who had attended the training program, on returning to the village had a realization of the following questions within them:

"What good is it to send children to school when we have no food to feed them with?";

"in other villages the VEC ensures that parents are sending their children to school regularly… how can we do the same thing here?";

"Most of the families are so poor, they need their children's help in the fields";

"Who will listen to me? I am a VEC member, but I am just an illiterate woman."

In the early part of 1998, a micro planning exercise was held in *Palmaguddu* for awareness generation. Resource persons and project officials spent an entire day interacting with villagers. The major setback encountered in improving the primary school was the lack of resources to operationalise their plans. They were unclear about how to obtain the Rs. 2000 annual fund. Furthermore, as *Palamgudu* is part of a Group Panchayat, and none of the elected representatives in this Panchayat are from

Palmgudu, they have not tried mobilizing funds. Moreover, within the village there was dispute over whether money should be spent on education or on village development needs.

The Lessons Learnt: Many important lessons have been obtained in the implementation of the participatory approaches and the Strengths and Weaknesses of Participatory strategy have been revealed. A comparative analysis has been made based on the activities suggested in the participatory strategy and compared to actual practice in the field with several inbuilt challenges that cropped up.

For the formation of VECs, democratic means need to be followed whereas it was reported that the teacher formed the VEC. The implications that the information about VEC does not reach the entire village was realized. As per DPEP, VEC membership has to include girls but in reality, it was not initiated, as a result that girls' participation continues to lag behind expectations.

The issue with regards to VEC training included - not being held on time, but instead it took place after several months, and VEC remained inactive during this period, pointing to a lack of commitment and resulting in inefficiency. About the Annual Fund for VEC, the community had inadequate information. As a consequence, the Fund was not used and specifically it was not used for the purpose of activating the VEC body.

Were the people of the village involved? In practice, only passive involvement of people was observed. This clearly shows that VEC is a long way off from playing the autonomous, pro-active role envisaged in the participatory strategy. The strategy envisages the primary (VEC, local community) and secondary stakeholder participation but in practice primary stakeholders were dependent on the secondary stakeholders. This resulted in huge implications for the participation of the local community because the project had not enabled the secondary stakeholders such as project officials to transfer control to the VEC/local people, thereby limiting the quality of their participation.

Participation of marginalised groups including - the girls and the lower castes is envisioned. At the village, VEC was an all-male body because no special efforts were made at the time of VEC formation to include girls and the lower castes. It emerged here that the project strategy did not address the special constraints and problems faced by the girls and the lower caste families, their participation remained limited and was not fully represented.

The lessons learnt from the case study of the *Palmagudu* on the inclusion of participatory approaches in the implementation of DPEP, exhibits that there is a clear mismatch in the policy expectations and practices mired in the ground reality of the village.

The Way Forward: There is a need to balance the strengths and weaknesses of participatory strategies to create transparent, plausible qualitative scenarios without predisposition. Although Participatory strategy has made a valuable contribution to the research community by challenging the historical tendency to ignore and discount the rights of communities under study, the actual working out of this approach is complicated and sometimes difficult. The identification and naming of issues that are frequently encountered by participatory researchers is important to ensuring a more practical and valid understanding of what the approach actually entails. A balance needs to be found in the field between ensuring that the core aims of participatory research are maintained.

Blackburn and Holland (1968) point out that 'participation would not make sense as long as power-holders do not allow others to participate in processes of setting priorities, making decisions, managing and controlling resources. If there is a low level of democracy and decentralization, the absence of a culture of cooperation among the community institutions at the regional and local levels also impedes the process of reforms.

Cooke and Kothary (2001) point out that there is naivety about the complexity of communication processes, group dynamics and power relations around the concept of participation. They assert that participation in practice is nowhere near to the participatory, bottom-up, open process that it is commonly held to be. Participation can be described as largely maintaining existing power relationships, through masking this power behind the rhetoric and techniques of participation. This masking, therefore, 'represents the tyranny of participation'. It is the deep-rooted socio-cultural factors that prevail and come in the way of accruing the benefits of Participatory approaches.

To overcome these challenges, the use of Participatory approaches should be based on knowledge and a holistic understanding of local settings, in order to avoid biases determined by the local institutional and group structures as well as the communication process.

The success of Participation and civic engagement depends on a favourable socio-cultural, socioeconomic and political context, and level of decentralisation. In order to have long term sustainable impacts, Participatory strategies should be linked with wider processes of democratization and decentralization.

Conclusion

The problem of education for all, particularly for girls, transcends the economics of provision and is entwined with critical issues deeply embedded in the socio-cultural and political realm. Therefore, there is a need to disentangle problems of social apathy, backwardness, prejudice and marginalised groups, which are more in the-realm of social change than in educational planning.

The events and the nature of the participatory process in *Palmagudu* clearly illustrate some of the key challenges, which policy makers and the practitioners engaged in similar initiatives face. The given descriptive case study has certainly demonstrated that community-based knowledge structures form the backbone of participatory planning and that the success or failure of any participatory strategy rests on its ability to evolve and adapt to local dynamics, needs and interests.

The education of girls plays a very important role in the development of the country. Imparting education using participatory strategies in a realistic manner has potential to become one of the means to stop the perpetuation of inequalities in our social structure, as a means of improving their status within the family and remains as the most powerful tool of change of position in society.

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Aspirations of Primary School Students: A Study of a Government School in Delhi

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Abstract

The paper 'Aspirations of primary school students: A study of a government school in Delhi' posits that when children are motivated to dream and aspire, they become aware of a world full of opportunities, choices and the world itself. The research is based on the various aspirations that the learners of age ten to twelve years have. The purpose of the paper was not just to inquire about the aspirations of the students of a government school of Delhi but also to introduce them to a pool of career options that they could choose from, irrespective of gender, post or income. A mixed approach, both qualitative and quantitative, has been employed throughout the whole study. The objectives of this paper have been fulfilled by activities like, 'drawing oneself after fifteen years from now', 'using circle of influence worksheet', 'storytelling on Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam', 'role-play', 'using flashcards for portrayal of different occupations', and 'survey questionnaire'. A range of literature has been the foundation of this research work. It has been found that children aspire on the basis of their current lifestyle and past experiences. Their aspirations, influenced by parents and neighbours, are often gendered. Their aspirations change over time and often revolve around earning a handsome salary. Children strive for a change in their lifestyle and in their societies as well. They believe that their status in the society shall be uplifted by learning and speaking English language and attaining a government job. The research concludes on a note that children should be encouraged to dream and to aspire. They should be supported by their parents and facilitators and also the choice of profession should essentially be based on interest rather than the income or the post.

Introduction

The postulate of this research paper is that when children are encouraged or motivated to aspire, they become familiar with a world full of choices, opportunities and the world itself. Scaffolding should be provided to children   to dream and to aim throughout their lives.

There are certain processes that don't require efforts doing; those that begin from early childhood and are continued till the last breath. We watch others playing, working for survival, loving and dream all of them on our part. The children don't just watch but also observe and internalize the various tasks their caretakers do, as Sigmund Freud mentions in his 'psycho-sexual theory'.

From the pre-school days, children begin to dream and aspire. Primarily, as the children are around their families, they may aspire for the profession of a family member but as the social sphere of the child enlarges, she/he may choose the profession that best suits her/him. This is what the paper aims to do.

What is the need to aspire? What if we don't? Avatar Singh Sandhu in his poem – '*sabse khatarnaak hota hai hamare sapno ka mar jana*' highlights the very need to aspire. To keep up the spirits, hopes and dream despite several failures and sorrows in life, is what the poet wants.   Often as a child, we are told of either becoming a doctor, teacher or an engineer. We are given limited options.

This paper has been chosen to widen the scope of available jobs in the market, that is, to introduce the V graders to various career options available for them as per their passion and talent. With this paper, I not just wish to know and record the aspirations of the V graders, but also introduce to them the vast pool of occupations, they could choose from. Also, I hope to eliminate certain gender stereotypes like a nurse or a teacher is a lady and only a father can go out to earn. In 'Neighbourhood attributes as determinants of children's outcomes: How robust are the relationships?', a process was suggested by Wilson (1987) according to which the status, choices or values of the neighbours helps in the attribution of positive and negative attributes in those particular neighbourhoods, which affects the aspirations and motivations of individuals in these areas and thus their achievements.

Second reading called 'Elementary school pupils' aspirations for higher education: The role of status attainment, blocked opportunities and school context' explains about the term *educational aspirations*. These are the goals or ambitions which pupils and their parents hold with regards to their educational experiences, developments and outcomes. The role of family has been emphasised by the status attainment model which leads to the formation of a child's aspirations related to education and career. The blocked opportunities model emphasises the role of school experiences of children in forming educational aspirations. Besides these models, other

variables have also been used in predicting the educational and career aspirations of pupils like the peers' influence, parental involvement, social support from teachers, neighbourhood and social capital.

Literature 'Capabilities and aspirations' talks about one's capacity to aspire as unevenly distributed among different groups which depends on the pre-existing capabilities and practices. Modifications in the aspirations can be made by consciously intervening in the nature of education and the widening world. Aspirations help individuals relate to what kind of life they want to live. The capability set determines the ability of individuals to live different kinds of lives and to work upon their capabilities to live those chosen lifestyle. In a traditional system, one might say that parents expect their children to be as they have been but now-a-days there is a dissatisfaction with the way they have been, leading parents to want something different for their children. Aspirations are realistic, not fantasy ones that are clearly beyond reach. The capacity to aspire is related to the past, the history of the group. It is also a link between the past and the future - since it is determined by past capabilities.

In 'The cognitive map of occupations: Factor structure in a Spanish sample', Gottfredson (1981) entails that there are three criteria upon which adolescents develop an idea of 'acceptable' occupations, namely, gender (a biological criterion); status (a social criterion) and field of interest (a psychological criterion). The occupational space at the age of seven to eight years can be divided into two parts: jobs that comply with the sex-role criterion and unacceptable jobs (say, traditionally masculine jobs for girls like mechanical engineering and feminine ones for boys like caretaking). Children of age ten tend to restrict their occupations in terms of their social status, which takes place in a 2-D mental space (gender and status) known as 'cognitive map of occupations.' The research domains have coordinates nearly two-thirds of the way along the gender axis. The domain in which the occupational coordinates are lowest in terms of social status and are nearest to the masculinity pole of gender axis is the realistic domain while the domain in which occupational coordinates are lowest in social status and near the femininity pole is the conventional domain.

The next reading, that is, 'Awakening aspirations of primary school students' defines the term *capacity to aspire*. Aspirations are said to be a complex process which are developed by including not just the gender, background, and peer group of the pupil but also by the expectations their parents or carer or family holds for them. The experiences to which pupils are exposed, shape their aspirations. St. Clair and Benjamin (2011) assert that aspirations are not within the control of the individuals as their parents can dissuade them to follow a certain career path. Only some career choices can be considered valid under parents' point of view. The pupils' aspirations often revolve around earning a handsome wage. Also, the aspirations are influenced by their sense of self and capabilities which target the roles which they find interesting and achievable. There is a symbiotic relationship between the interest in a particular job and skills required for that role, for which children try harder to enjoy the activities comparatively more because of greater competence.

Hart in 'How do aspirations matter?' describes that children aspire for a better future and that their intentional and unintentional motivations drive them. The aspirations may be short, medium or long and may vary in importance to the individual as well as their significant others. They vary in importance and time scale, that is, aspirations change. Some aspirations may provoke criticisms. Some may be harmful for the society but, some individuals may aspire in a non-specified way for wanting a 'better life' whereas others might strive for a transformative change in their society. Habitus, as mentioned by Bourdieu, also influences the aspirations of the learners. It relates to the roots, both cultural and familial, from which an individual grows. Aspirations may be altered and adapted pertaining to different histories, cultures and power dynamics.

The book 'Constructing School Knowledge: An ethnography of learning in an Indian village' mentions that the contents of schooling are in relation to the hierarchy of the aims of schooling. Literacy and numeracy, both more functional skills are in order to get jobs. Additional skills and knowledge, acquired with increased years spent in school, provide advantage in getting jobs, in securing promotions and ultimately becoming a *'bada admi'*. Children in the village were also very sensitive to the school as a source of 'cultural capital', providing access to the knowledge of English, General knowledge and social adeptness. They were aware that it was possible to convert cultural capital – especially the knowledge of English into social capital through government employment.

Subsequent to these articles, there is a list of questions that were inquired for the fulfilment of this paper's objectives. The questions are as follows:

a. Choose one of the following:

1. Caretaker/ carpenter

2. Job which interests you/ job of your parents' choice

3. Better life-style/ better society

4. Good person/ rich person

5. English/ Hindi

6. High income job/ dream job with lower income

7. Private job/ government jobMother's profession/ father's profession

8. What do you aspire for?

b. Do you feel inspired by any of your neighbours? If yes, how?

c. Have your parents ever denied you regarding any career option? If yes, name it.

d. Which of the following occupations would be denied by your parents? Why?

Dancer, Chef, Political leader, Ice-cream seller

f. i) What educational qualifications do you aspire for?

-Till primary school (grade 1-5)

-Till middle school (grade 6-8)

-Till high school (grades 9 and 10)

-Till secondary school (11 and 12)

-Bachelor's degree

-Master's degree

ii) What is your parents' opinion? Give reason

g. i) Do you want to live like your parents lived or are living (in terms of opportunities and facilities available to them)?

ii) If you wish to change, what is it?

Objectives

This paper has been carried out based on the following objectives:

- To inquire about the dreams and aspirations of young children.

- To introduce different professions the learners could choose from, irrespective of gender or post or income.

- To assist understand the relation of the nature of aspirations with the development of the human being.

Methodology

This section addresses the sample size and the procedure for data collection. A mixed approach (both qualitative and quantitative) was employed throughout the whole study. This is a paper which looked into aspirations of the learners, to inquire about the dreams and aspirations of the learners, to introduce different professions irrespective of gender or post or income, and to build an understanding of how the nature of aspirations is related to the development of humans

Sample

The participants in this paper are 28 girls from class V of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidhyalaya, Delhi. Their age range was between ten to twelve years. The sample size has been selected based on the regularity of learners.

Data collection

Data for this paper was obtained during the activities planned in the Environmental Studies for the theme – 'work and play', like, drawing how the children see themselves after 15 years; introducing occupations on flashcards; mentioning reasons on 'circle of

influence'; storytelling on 'Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam' and role-play and the survey questionnaire.

Data obtained from the above-mentioned activities were analysed in the form of tables, pie charts and bar graphs wherever necessary.

Data Analysis

In this part of the paper, the data collected through survey questionnaires and different activities have been analysed with respect to different literatures reviewed earlier.

From the reading – 'Neighbourhood attributes as determinants of children's outcomes: How robust are the relationships?', the survey question was:

- Do you feel inspired by any of your neighbours? If yes, how?

According to the writer, attributes in a particular neighbourhood affect the aspirations of those who grow up in these areas.
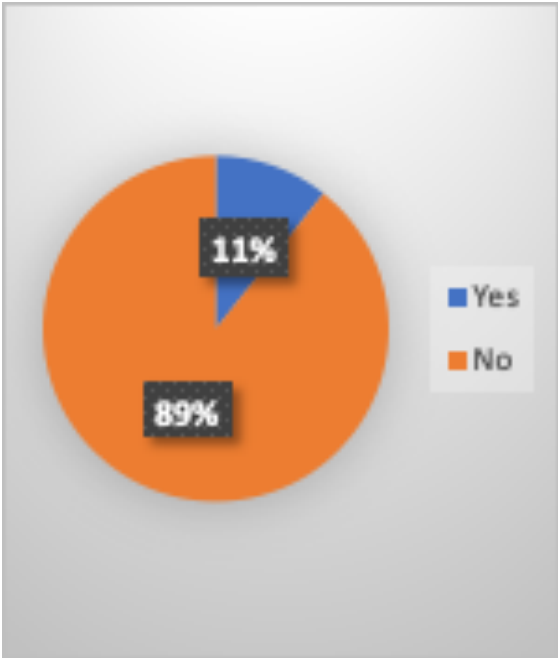

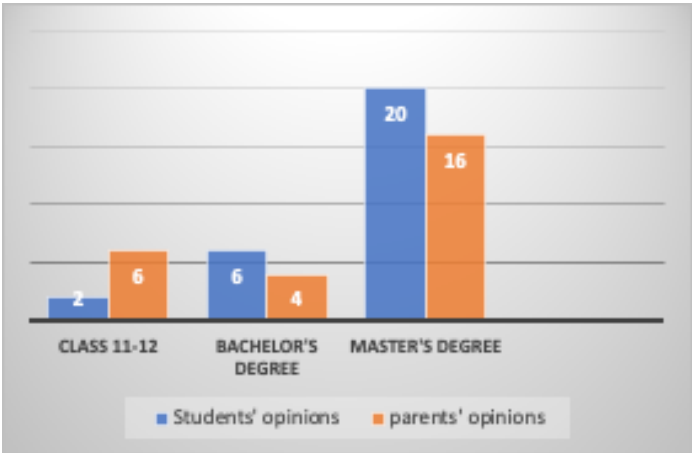*Figure 1: Availability of an inspiring neighbour*

Figure 2: Students' vs parents' opinion of students' educational qualifications.

Article 'Elementary school pupils' aspirations for higher education: The role of status attainment, blocked opportunities and school context' highlights the parental influence for higher education. The survey questions under this article are:

- What educational qualifications do you aspire for

- Only primary schooling

- Till middle schooling

- Till high school

- Till secondary school

- Till graduation
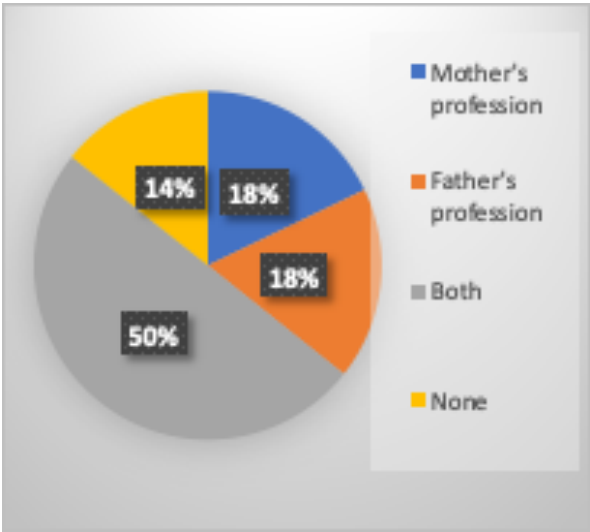
- Till post-graduation

- What are your parents' opinions? Give reason.

Figure 3: Students' choice of profession

Another survey question which relates to parental influence for children's aspirations was to choose between the profession of mother and father.

This article also speaks about the school context that helps in predicting pupils' educational qualification. As John Dewey states that a school is a society in miniature and that the role of a teacher is to relate home environment with the school environment, an activity – role-play was planned with the learners. With the class of 34 students, seven groups were formed – six groups of five students each and one group of four students. The groups performed a role-play on one of the professions: cobbler, taxi-driver, rickshaw-puller, sweeper, peon, florist and vendor. The objective of this activity was to respect all sorts of labour and develop empathy towards labour classes.

'Khushbu' (the name has been changed), a student of V grade was a member with four other classmates and performed a role-play over the struggles of a rickshaw-puller. Co-incidentally, this matched with her father's profession and this was what made their performance different from the rest. Khushbu was able to narrate several incidents which not only

melted our hearts but also raised awareness about the difficulties faced by the rickshaw-pullers and daily wage earners, like the nights spent on the roadside, unpaid journeys covered, travelling and pulling rickshaw in mid-days with sun at the horizon and also irrespective of rain and fog.

The survey questions and role-play together are in light of the fact that parents and school influence children's aspirations.

The survey questions from the third article, 'Capabilities and Aspirations,' were:

- Do you wish to live like your parents lived or are living (in terms of facilities and opportunities available to them)?

- What is it that you wish to change?

The survey showed that most students wanted to change their life-style and attain higher educational qualifications in comparison to their parents.
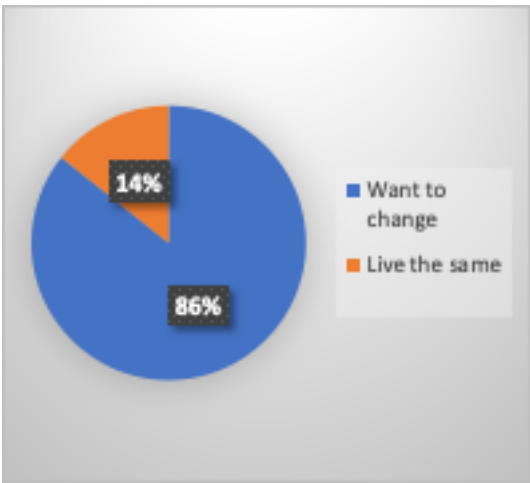

Figure 4: Lifestyle students would like to have.

An activity was done in which students were asked to 'draw how they see themselves after 15 years from now'. Various responses were given as shown in the table below:

T1: Table showing the aspirations of the students.

Profession	Frequency
Doctor	5
Police inspector	3
Dancer	2
Engineer	1
Air hostess	1
Artist	1
Singer	1
Skating coach	1
Magician	1

Astronaut	1
Prime Minister	1
Actor	1
Ice-cream seller	1
Carom player	1
Teacher	7

This table shows that the majority of the learners aspire to become a teacher and also doctors. However, the aspirations range from becoming an ice-cream seller to becoming the prime minister of the country.

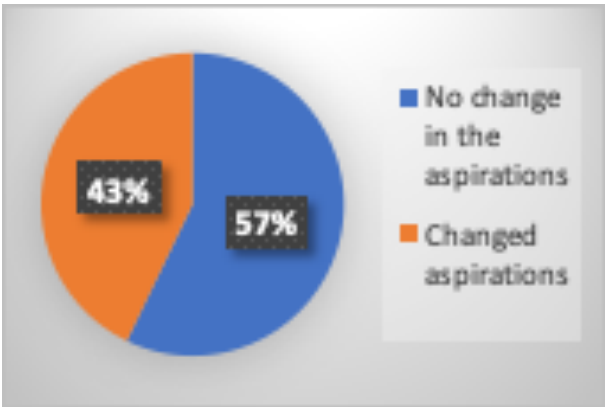Another noteworthy thing was the change in the aspirations, when students were given a survey question – What do you aspire for?

Figure 5: Changes observed in the aspirations over three months.

The article – 'How do aspirations matter?' also states that the aspirations may vary with importance and time-scale. The survey question under this article also includes a choice between a better society and a better lifestyle. The survey holds the same opinion as the article does, as about 43% of the learners aspire for a better life-style.

To make sure that every individual is blessed with a talent and that it is important for her or him to identify it and aspire for it, a storytelling session was conducted.

Name of the story – Shifty McGifty and Slippery Sam

Publisher – Nosy Crow

Writer – Tracey Corderoy

Illustrator – Steven Lenton

Genre – Fiction

Summary – Shifty and Sam are two dogs, who are failures in robbing. One day, they planned to rob their neighbour's house while they would be busy partying. After serving them with tasty items, they decided to rob the place, however it was again a failed attempt. The neighbours praised them for their hand at cooking and baking and it was then that Shifty and Sam decided to open their café, earn money and respect with their work.

When this text was read in the class, there were some questions raised by the students:

- Are talents hidden?

- Has everyone got a talent? / Is everyone talented?

- How to identify the talent?

- What would be the consequence if I aspire for my talent against the social and financial demands?

- What if I know my talent and I still don't pursue it?

The answer to the first question was given by one of the students – "It's not necessary for the talents to be hidden. We may do certain types of work differently and we are simply unaware of the talent that we own."

"Everyone has a talent, which may or may not be hidden"

"Keep on working and go with the flow and you will realize that you are doing something different or creatively, that's how you will identify your talent. Sometimes, praises from others also help us know our talent."

"Meeting the demands of your parents is even possible if your talents help you earn good enough. Society has to be given back. Aspire high and always aspire more for yourself. That's not selfish"

"Again, the social, personal and emotional or financial priority will come into play. Remember only you can take yourselves to a higher or a lower platform. You can make yourself happy."

Probably the above statements helped the V graders understand and truly reflect to themselves. Two students were able to make public announcements declaring that no one can mimic like her and no one can dance like her respectively.

'Cognitive maps of occupations' states that there are three criteria upon which adolescents develop a sense of 'acceptable' occupations, namely, gender, status and field of interest. Based on this, the sample questions were:

Choose one of the following:

- Teacher/ Engineer

- Caretaker/ Carpenter

- Middle class/ Higher class

- Job which interests you/ Job of your parents' choice

The results are shown in the pie charts. The figures 6 and 7 show that the students' choices are feminine in nature. This is much in line with the conventional domain of the article - Cognitive maps of occupations.
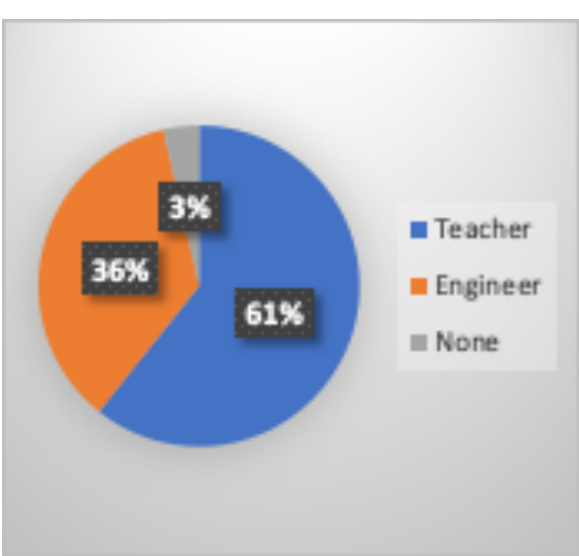
Figure 6: To check the gender-based choices.

Figure7: To check gender-based choices.

Figure 8: To check the social criterion acting on the students.

Based on Padma Sarangapani's 'Constructing School Knowledge', following questions were taken up for survey.
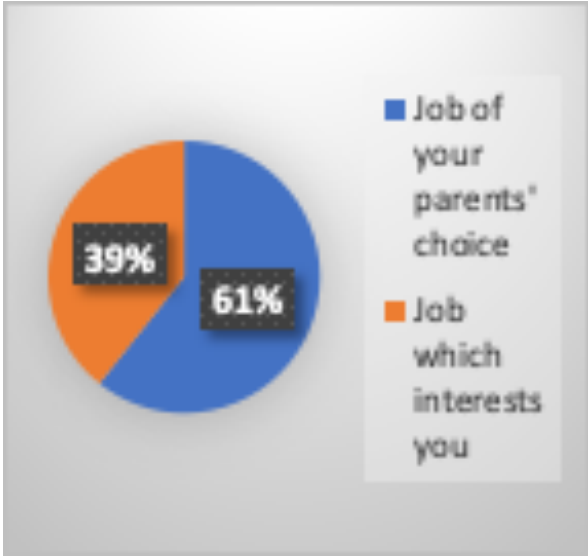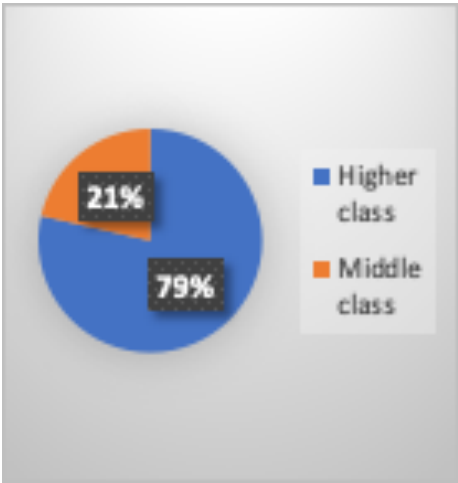

Figure 9: To check the field of interest of learners

- Choose one of the following:

- Good person/ Rich person

- Hindi/ English

- Private job/ Government job

This book shows that students aspire being a *bada admi* by learning English language and attaining a government job.

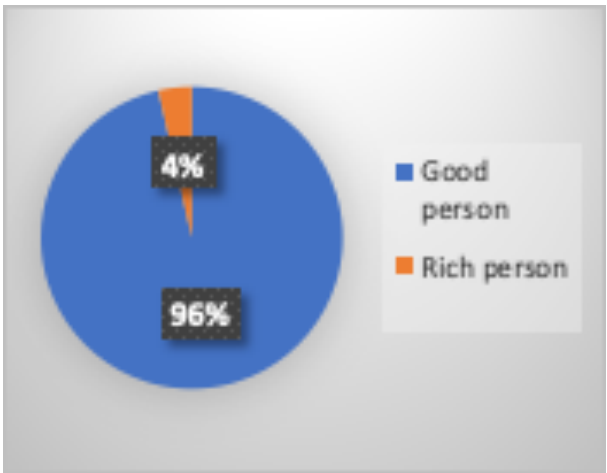Figure 10: The type of jobs students aspires to have.

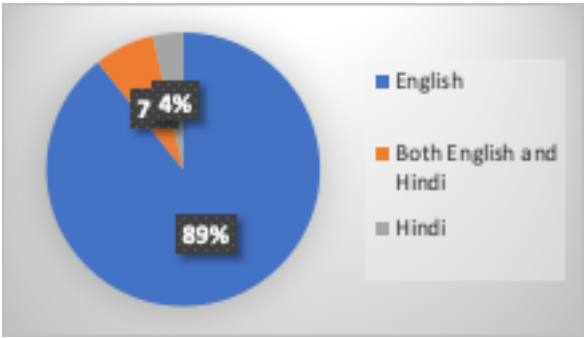Figure 11: The type of person students aspires to become

Figure 12: To represent the most influencing language that students wish to master.

The study by Padma Sarangapani does not apply to the V graders as students aspire to be a good person. Figures 10 and 12 are in consonance with the text 'Constructing School Knowledge' as students of the author's study claim to learn English and aspire for a government job, like the sample of this paper.

Another activity called 'Circle of Influence' was executed to find out the reason or factors affecting the choice of professions.

T2: Table showing the frequency of the reasons for selecting a profession:

Factors	Frequency
Money	24
Fame	3
Helping poor people	4
Parental pride	3
Revision of Content	5
Parental aspirations	2
Inspirations from external sources	9

From this table, it is clear that students chose professions which could give them good income. This is much against figure 11 which showed that students aspire for becoming a good person than becoming a rich person. Hence, it can be said that Padma Sarangapani's study stays valid in this aspect as well.

Money factor and inspiration from teachers, parents and relatives play a dominant role in choosing a profession.

Another question in the survey was to choose between Job with higher income/ Dream job with lower income

The analysis shows that Survey questions from 'Awakening aspirations of primary school students' were:

- Have your parents ever denied you for any career option? What is it?

- Which of the following can be denied as your future profession by your parents: Dancer/ Chef/ Political leader/ Ice-cream seller?
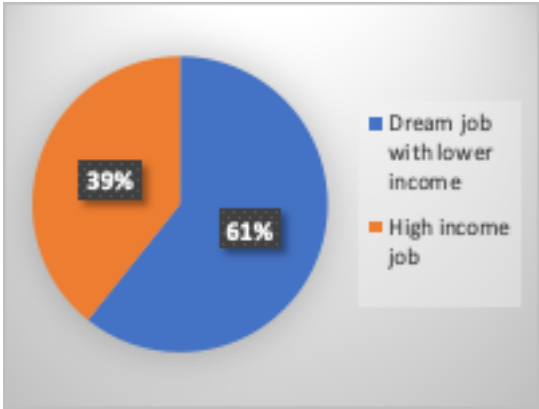
The result is as follows:

Figure 13: To represent the choice of job in relation to income

Key findings

- Children aspire on the basis of their current life-style.

- Aspirations are influenced by parents and neighbours too.

- Aspirations change with time.

- They revolve around earning a handsome salary.

- Status in the society shall be uplifted by learning and speaking English language and attaining a government job.

- Children strive for a change in their society and in their life-styles as well.

- Gendered choices are made for the selection of profession.

- Money factor and inspiration from teachers, parents and relatives play a dominant role in choosing a profession.

- It is found that students would take up their dream job even if they are paid little.

Further research

- Upon assisting the learners in designing path towards fulfilment of occupations.

- Scope for a comparative study of aspirations among boys and girls.

Educational implications

- Students should be encouraged to dream and aspire.

- Support from parents and teachers is essential.

- Choice of profession should not be gender stereotypical but based on interest.

Conclusion

This paper has acted as a stimulus upon which the formation of aspirations, its refinement and adaptation of individual or group practices could be reflected and evaluated. To fulfil the objective – 'to inquire about the dreams and aspirations of young children,' an activity was taken up where the children had to draw (or simply write) how they see themselves after 15 years. Theories by Ginther, Haveman and Wolfe (2000); Sabic and Jokic (2019); Elsom, Terton and Greenaway (2017) and Hart (2016) suggest that feasibility is subjective and socially situated. It varies as per the agent which can be their resources like some form of capital or their significant others and problem solving will differ.

After 3 months, when in survey students were again asked about their aspirations, 43% changes were noted (figure 5 may be referred), thereby proving the theorists correct. The activity 'Circle of Influence' was executed with the objective of enlisting the factors that affect students' choice of profession. T2 shows the reasons with 'money' as the most common factor of influence. Padma (2003) entails that students in her sample aspire for a government job and to become a rich person but in this study only one learner aspires to be a rich person, when asked directly to choose between becoming a rich person or a good person. However, 78% aspires for attaining a government job.

For the objective which demanded 'to introduce different occupations irrespective of gender or post or income', several professions were introduced in the form of flashcards. This investigation confirms that there are certain factors which affect the capacity of individuals to be a part of primary and higher education. By favourably this, I mean that the pupils'

aspirations can expand as they gain cognition of the various opportunities or chances available to them. The research agrees with Mullet, Sastre and Semin (1999) as the sample in majority chooses to be caretakers and not carpenters and teachers not engineers, that is, they incline towards the femininity pole of the gender axis (figures 6 and 7 may be referred).

On a concluding note, I suggest that aspirations are of vital importance to human development. Children should be provided autonomy to aspire and we should also support them in the process of conversion of aspirations into capabilities, especially for the underprivileged.

'To build understanding of the nature of aspirations in relation to human development', role-play was conducted. Students showcased empathic conditions of 'cobblers', 'rickshaw-pullers', 'florists' and other jobs which are considered to be of lower dignity. The research goes in hand with Nathan (2005) stating that the capacity to aspire is related to the past, the history of the group. Reading the interactive book, Shifty McGifty and Slipper Sam, promoted dialogues among the learners and questions from them. The students enjoyed the story. This research also included discussion with children about the aspirations of their parents, the difficulties and formation of the pathways to achieve their aspirations. Gary Crew (1997) has mentioned the future of children as limitless as stars. Children should be encouraged to face the starry sky and should never be criticized. They should dream from a young age.

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