

**Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in
Bhutan:
A Situational Analysis Focused on Children's
Valued Educational Capabilities**

PARTNER COUNTRIES



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Glossary

BBE	:	Bhutan Board of Examinations
BEB	:	Bhutan Education Blueprint
BF	:	Bhutan Foundation
CA	:	Capability Approach
CVEC	:	Children’s Valued Educational Capabilities
GESI	:	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GNH	:	Gross National Happiness
MoE	:	Ministry of Education
MoESD	:	Ministry of Education and Skills Development
MoHCA	:	Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs
NCWC	:	National Commission for Women and Children
PAR	:	Participatory Action Research
RBA	:	Royal Bhutan Army
RBP	:	Royal Bhutan Police
RENEW	:	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
RGoB	:	Royal Government of Bhutan
SAS	:	Situational Analysis Study
SEN	:	Special Educational Needs
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals
YGCD	:	Youth Guidance and Counseling Division

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Executive Summary

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) refers to efforts aimed at addressing both gender disparities and broader forms of social exclusion, ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender or social group, can fully participate in all aspects of society. This report provides details of the findings from the GESI situational analysis study (SAS) for assessing children's wellbeing in schools based on the capability approach (CA). The objectives focused on mapping potential well-being indicators for children, assessing students' understanding of these capability indicators, analyzing how these indicators are integrated into the existing school curriculum. Additionally, it also outlines the process for linking children's well-being indicators to their understanding of their own well-being through the curriculum, identifying and ranking the well-being indicators valued by children for promoting GESI, and mapping the entities within the school premises that children value for promoting GESI. The analysis also extends to understanding teachers' and students' perspectives on these indicators, providing a comprehensive view of how GESI is perceived and incorporated in educational settings.

The objectives of the SAS were to:

1. map potential children's well-being indicators (Appendix A) in Bhutanese schools;
2. assess students understanding of the capability indicators for their well-being;
3. investigate teachers' perception of students' awareness of the indicators for their wellbeing;
4. explore students' awareness of integration of indicators in the curriculum;
5. examine teachers' awareness of integration of indicators in the curriculum;
6. document children's scoring of the wellbeing indicators for promoting GESI in schools;
7. document teachers scoring of the wellbeing indicators for promoting GESI in schools;
8. explore the meaning and experiences of children's well-being from their examples;
9. investigate the meaning and experiences for promoting GESI in schools through teacher examples;
10. list children and teachers' valued entities within school premises, and
11. identify stakeholders responsible for promoting GESI in schools.

The findings from this GESI SAS revealed that students identified education, love and care as being well-integrated into the curriculum, while teachers emphasized participation and

education as the most prevalent elements across all grades. Additionally, students ranked respect and love and care as the most important factors for promoting GESI in schools, whereas teachers highlighted love and care, mental wellbeing, education, and social relations as key indicators. These insights will inform the development of GESI diagnostic tools through Participatory Action Research (PAR), customized to the specific contexts of Bhutan to GESI. The needs identified will guide the creation of intervention plans aimed at improving children's experiences of equality, inclusion, safety, and support within schools. Additionally, the study aims to generate evidence on the effectiveness and scalability of leveraging children's valued capabilities to promote GESI in education.

Keywords: gender equality, social inclusion, children's valued capabilities, secondary schools

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INTRODUCTION

The governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal are committed to improving education outcomes and advancing gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). National education policies in these countries, such as Nepal's School Education Sector Plan (2022-2032), Bhutan's Education Blueprint (2014-2024), and Bangladesh's National Education Policy (2010), emphasize addressing gender equity and social inclusion in education. In particular, Bhutan's education system has made significant strides in promoting gender equality, with nearly equal enrolment rates for boys and girls. However, challenges remain, especially in higher education and technical fields, where cultural perceptions and gender norms still influence participation.

While these policies are a step forward, they often focus on macro-level indicators like enrolment, attainment, and dropout rates, which do not fully capture the quality of education or the lived experiences of children in schools. To address these gaps, researchers are now exploring the dimensions of GESI by examining how children experience equality, equity, and social inclusion within their school environments. This approach aims to create a more inclusive, supportive, and safe learning environment where children can thrive.

In addition to government efforts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations have played a key role in advancing gender equality in education. However, there is a growing need to move beyond basic participation metrics and address issues like gender-based violence, harmful norms, and social exclusion, which continue to persist in many schools across South Asia.

A promising approach to addressing GESI in education is the capability approach, which focuses on providing students with the opportunities and resources they need to lead a life they value. This approach emphasizes children's well-being, taking into account factors like autonomy, respect, and mental and physical health. By implementing a GESI diagnosis tool based on children's valued capabilities, this approach offers a more comprehensive evaluation of well-being in schools.

A recent action research initiative carried out by Kathmandu University, Nepal, as part of the GPE KIX (Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange) supported project, seeks to scale these innovations across Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. The project focuses on diagnosing GESI in schools, raising awareness of children's educational capabilities, and developing programs that support gender-responsive and inclusive education. By promoting transformative practices and creating a supportive environment for both boys and girls, the project aims to ensure that all children have access to safe, inclusive, and high-quality education. This innovative approach not only addresses current gaps in GESI but also provides a framework for scaling these efforts across other regions.

By applying the CA to the study of GESI in schools, this project aims to create a comprehensive framework that highlights the need for equitable access to educational resources and opportunities. It promotes the development of key capabilities that enable students to not only succeed academically but also thrive in life by nurturing their autonomy, social inclusion, and well-being. This approach aligns with the broader global commitment to the SDGs, particularly those focused on education, gender equality, and social justice, by placing the well-being of individuals at the center of development and education policies.

Background of Bhutanese Education System and School Demographic Information

Bhutan, a small kingdom in the Eastern Himalayas, has an education system shaped by its cultural and socio-economic context. Since the introduction of modern education in the 1960s, significant changes have taken place, blending traditional values with contemporary practices to support well-rounded student development. Key reforms include the use of English as the medium of instruction, the expansion of educational facilities, Bhutanization of curriculum and instructors, and the integration of Gross National Happiness (GNH) principles, which emphasize holistic development, social equity, gender equality, and inclusion (Dargye, 2014; Schuelka, 2013; Penjore, 2013; Phuntsho, 2000).

BACKGROUND

Bhutanese education system (BES) dates back to the 17th century, when monastic schools laid the foundation for learning in the country. These institutions were deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy and practical skills, and education was reserved for individuals with demonstrated academic or religious potential. Access was limited to those with academic or religious promise

(Dargye, 2014). A major shift occurred in the late 1950s with the adoption of a Western-style education system, making education universal. This shift was driven by the need to develop an educated workforce to support national development and modernise the country's institutions (Penjore, 2013). The introduction of Western education expanded access to a larger portion of the population and created new opportunities for secular education. A pivotal moment in this transformation was the implementation of Bhutan's First Five-Year Plan in 1961, introduced by the late Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. This plan accelerated modernisation and laid the foundation for a secular education system with a modern curriculum, balancing traditional Buddhist values with the growing needs of a developing nation (Gyamtso, 2020).

Originally, Bhutan's education system was heavily influenced by the Indian model, with Indian teachers recruited to teach various subjects. However, Dzongkha, the national language, was also integrated into the curriculum, ensuring that Bhutan's cultural and linguistic identity remained a central aspect of education (Chhoeda, 2007). The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) has made substantial investments in the education sector over the years, recognising its critical role in the nation's development. These efforts have led to the establishment of 598 schools across the country and contributed to a significant rise in literacy rates. As of 2022, Bhutan's literacy rate stands at 72.1%, which is commendable for a small, developing nation (Bhutan Literacy Rate, 2024). To further enhance education quality, the Bhutan Education Blueprint (BEB) 2014-2024 was introduced, addressing challenges related to access, quality, and efficiency in the system.

In this way, Bhutan's education system has evolved from its monastic roots to a modern, secular framework that plays a vital role in the country's development while preserving its unique cultural heritage.

The BES is structured as shown in Table 1:

Table 1:

Bhutanese Education System

Level	Grade/Ages	Description
Early Childhood Education	Nursery/Kindergarten (Ages 3-6)	Focuses on basic skills and early development.
Primary Education	Grades 1-6 (Ages 6-12)	Covers fundamental subjects such as language,

Level	Grade/Ages	Description
		mathematics, science, and social studies.
Lower Secondary Education	Grades 7-8 (Ages 12-14)	Builds on primary education with a broader range of subjects.
Middle Secondary Education	Grades 9-10 (Ages 14-16)	Includes core subjects and electives, preparing students for further education or vocational training.
Higher Secondary Education	Grades 11-12 (Ages 16-18)	Offers specialized streams such as science, commerce, and humanities.
Tertiary Education	Undergraduate Programs	Bachelor's degrees in various fields, offered by universities and colleges.
	Postgraduate Programs	Master's and Doctoral degrees, pursued locally or internationally.
Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Various levels	Provides practical skills and training for trades and professions.
Special Education	Various levels	Tailored support for students with special needs, including specialized and integrated programs.

Arts and Humanities Curriculum

The social studies curriculum in BES is designed to provide students with a thorough understanding of their country's history, geography, culture, and societal structures, with the goal of promoting civic awareness and social responsibility. In primary education (Grades 1-6), students are introduced to fundamental concepts related to community, family, and the local environment, emphasizing Bhutanese culture and traditions. This initial stage aims to instill an appreciation of cultural heritage and students' roles within their communities. As they move into lower secondary education (Grades 7-8), the curriculum explores Bhutanese history,

geography, and social structures in greater depth, covering topics such as the nation's political system and concepts of citizenship. This stage is intended to deepen students' understanding of Bhutan's national identity and historical significance. In upper secondary education (Grades 9-10), students engage in more detailed studies of historical figures and events, regional and global geography, and analyses of governance and economic systems, which prepares them for more active roles both nationally and internationally. At the higher secondary level (Grades 11-12), the curriculum becomes increasingly specialized, offering advanced coursework in political science, economics, and sociology, along with comparative studies of various political and economic systems. This stage aims to develop students' analytical abilities and readiness for informed citizenship and higher education.

Overview of the School Demographics in Bhutan

In Bhutan, the school demographics reflect the country's rich diversity, encompassing a blend of ethnicities, languages, and social backgrounds. Formal schooling is divided into distinct stages: Primary education, Lower Secondary education, Middle Secondary education, and Higher Secondary education. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Education and Skills Development [MoESD] (2024), the student population is fairly balanced, with 48.7% being boys and 51.3% girls. Schools are categorized based on their locations, as rural, semi-urban, or urban, and there are both government-run (n=497) and private (n=26) schools (MoESD, 2024). Regardless of gender, caste, creed, ethnicity, or religion, students are accommodated in these institutions, with the option of attending private schools available to those who can afford it. In addition, Bhutan offers specialized schools for students with visual, hearing, and speech disabilities. The country is increasingly emphasizing inclusive education, ensuring that students with disabilities have access to appropriate learning opportunities through specialized programs and resources. As part of its commitment to education for all, Bhutan has integrated Special Educational Needs (SEN) programs into 12 public schools located in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, designed to support students with a range of disabilities and learning challenges, including physical, intellectual, sensory, and emotional needs (Bhutan Foundation [BF], 2024).

Gender Equity in Bhutanese Schools

Since the introduction of Western education in the late 1950s, the RGoB has actively promoted gender equity by ensuring that all schools are co-educational, enrolling both boys and girls together. Similarly, schools in Bhutan are staffed with both male and female teachers to provide balanced role models and support. This approach not only promotes gender equality within the school ecosystems but also ensures that students receive diverse perspectives and guidance from both genders. In terms of infrastructure, all schools in Bhutan are equipped with separate male and female toilets, and they also provide sanitary napkins to girls in emergencies. Schools across Bhutan observe Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28, focusing on both education and equity. On this day, girls are educated about menstrual hygiene and the normalization of menstruation, while boys are taught to be compassionate and supportive toward girls during their menstrual cycles. Additionally, male teachers and boys participate in the day's events by purchasing sanitary napkins for female teachers and students, promoting a culture of understanding and equity.

Recently, several studies have highlighted the need for a more gender-sensitive curriculum and pedagogy in schools. Gender stereotyping in the content, illustrations, and student activities within the curriculum framework for subjects such as Accountancy, Economics, Geography, History, and English has been reported, highlighting the need for increased gender sensitivity in textbooks for secondary education in Bhutan for grades 9 to 12 (Yuden et al., 2021). Similarly, Dorji (2020) has recommended capacity building for secondary teachers on gender-responsive pedagogy to enhance awareness and practices, aiming to shift educators' mindsets and promote gender equity. These studies emphasize the importance of integrating gender equity into educational content and teaching methods, advocating for the elimination of gender stereotypes and biases in textbooks, lesson plans, and classroom interactions. Gender issues, such as girls missing classes during menstruation, being unable to participate in sports events, and facing socio-cultural restrictions on visiting religious sites (Dorji et al., 2019), underscore the need for more equitable and supportive measures to assist and empower girls.

Social Inclusion in Bhutanese Schools

Social inclusion in Bhutanese schools is a fundamental aspect of the country's commitment to providing free, equitable, and quality education for all. As Bhutan continues to develop its educational system, the focus on creating inclusive environments where every student feels

valued, respected, and supported has become increasingly important. Bhutan's draft inclusive education policy, grounded in the national convention "Education for All" (Schuelka, 2012), emphasizes the importance of inclusivity by ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, or socio-economic background, have access to quality education. Bhutan has made significant strides in supporting students with disabilities through SEN programs, integrating those with physical, intellectual, sensory, and emotional challenges into mainstream schools by providing specialized resources, trained staff, and tailored learning plans to meet their diverse needs (Dorji et al., 2018). Bhutanese schools are home to students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, reflecting the country's rich diversity. Schools foster a sense of belonging, promoting mutual respect and understanding among students from different communities. The RGoB provides free education and healthcare to all students. Additionally, financially or socially disadvantaged students receive further support through His Majesty's Gyalpoi Tozey: A Window of Opportunity scheme, which offers financial assistance to help them continue their pursuit of academic excellence (Delma, 2016).

Social inclusion in schools is reinforced by the active involvement of parents and communities. Schools are encouraged to engage with families and local communities to build a supportive network around students, addressing their specific needs and fostering a sense of collective responsibility for every child's education. Teacher education programs in Bhutan increasingly focus on building awareness and skills for fostering inclusive classrooms. Educators are trained to recognize and address the diverse needs of their students, implement inclusive teaching strategies, and create a classroom culture that values diversity and promotes social cohesion. While Bhutan has made notable progress in promoting social inclusion, challenges remain, particularly in remote and rural areas where access to resources and trained personnel may be limited. Continued investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and community engagement is essential to overcome these barriers and ensure that every student can thrive in an inclusive environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the Capability Approach

Countries around the world are working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a strong emphasis on enhancing children's educational capabilities to foster GESI. These dimensions are not only critical global objectives but are also key to advancing various SDG targets such as SGD 1 No Poverty, SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, and SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation. One promising approach for addressing GESI in education is the Capability Approach (Biggeri, 2011; Biggeri & Ferrannini, 2014; Biggeri & Libanora, 2011; Crespo, 2017; Terzi, 2007; Unterhalter, 2007; Walker, 2007). This study adopts the Capability Approach for several reasons: it focuses on individual capabilities and freedoms, provides students with the resources and opportunities to lead lives they value, and prioritizes children's well-being by considering factors such as autonomy, respect, mental, and physical health.

The Capability Approach is interpreted in different ways by scholars, each contributing unique aspects to its conceptualization. Amartya Sen (1999), the originator of the Capability Approach, defines it as a framework for evaluating individual well-being, social arrangements, and development progress. Sen (1999) argues that development should be measured not merely by economic growth but by the real freedoms and capabilities people have to pursue lives they value. Capabilities, as Sen (1999) describes, are the "real opportunities" individuals have to achieve functionality—what they can do or be.

Nussbaum (2011) expands on Sen's work, presenting the Capability Approach as a normative framework for evaluating justice and development. Nussbaum (2011) identifies specific essential capabilities, including life, bodily health, bodily integrity, emotional expression, affiliation, and practical reasoning. Her work emphasizes the importance of these capabilities in promoting justice and equality, particularly in contexts of gender and social exclusion. In her 2017 work *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Ingrid Robeyns further develops the Capability Approach by arguing that capabilities must be pluralistic, context-specific, and adaptable to various forms of evaluation. She underscores the importance of addressing gender and social justice issues and provides a structured framework for applying the Capability Approach across diverse fields such as education, economics, and gender studies.

Additionally, scholars like Alkire (2002) focus on measuring poverty and inequality beyond income, using the Capability Approach as a framework that prioritizes people's freedom to lead lives they value. Alkire's notable contribution to the Capability Approach includes the development of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which incorporates multiple dimensions such as health, education, and living standards to better understand human development while Chiappero-Martinetti (2006) applies the Capability Approach to the empirical measurement of human well-being and poverty. Her work emphasizes the importance of assessing both capabilities and functionings when evaluating development and social progress. In the field of education, Melanie Walker (2007) applies the Capability Approach as a framework for evaluating educational processes and outcomes. Walker (2007) argues that education should be assessed not merely in terms of academic achievements or resources but in terms of the capabilities it enables individuals to develop. Education, she contends, should empower students to achieve a range of valuable functionings, such as autonomy, social relations, emotional development, and personal aspirations. Similarly, Finnis (1980), a prominent legal philosopher, formulated a natural law theory based on seven basic human goods, which are essential for human flourishing. These goods provide the foundation for moral reasoning and legal systems. According to Finnis (1980), the basic goods are life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability, practical reasonableness, and religion.

In this study, the Capability Approach is used as a theoretical framework that shifts the focus from assessing well-being purely based on resources or income to evaluating what individuals are actually able to do and become. It highlights the need to provide students with the opportunities and resources necessary to lead meaningful lives, particularly in promoting GESI in schools. Drawing on the works of key scholars (Alkire, 2002; Finnis, 1980; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999; Walker, 2007), the study identifies 21 specific capabilities critical for understanding GESI in educational contexts. These capabilities include life and physical health, religion and identity, love and care, mental well-being, education, participation, bodily integrity, social relationships, freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation, respect, leisure, nutritional well-being, mobility, spirituality, understanding and interpretation, time and personal autonomy, planning, imagination, aspirations, shelter and environment, as well as gender equality and social inclusion.

Meaning/Definitions GESI in Education and Our Understanding of GESI

According to the World Bank (2012), gender equality is about equal access to the opportunities that allow people to pursue a life of their own choosing and the ability to influence and contribute to the development process. Gender equality is fundamentally linked to the capability of girls and boys to live a life they value and have reason to value. It is about ensuring that girls and boys have the freedom to make choices and take actions that will improve their lives (Sen, 1999). The pursuit of educational effectiveness and school improvement has evolved into a global phenomenon, with public policy discussions becoming increasingly sophisticated political strategies. These strategies address educational effectiveness by adopting new managerial approaches to social welfare and inclusion. According to David (2001), gender and sexual identities are changing significantly due to societal and familial shifts, influenced by evolving norms and cultural transformations. As attitudes toward gender and sexuality progress, individuals are redefining and expressing their identities more fluidly and dynamically, driven by greater awareness and acceptance. These shifts can have complex effects on gender equality, particularly concerning the educational achievements of young people, which are often interconnected with race, ethnicity, and social class.

Gender equality and inclusion are critical issues widely discussed in the social sciences, focusing on reducing disparities between genders in various social, political, and economic spheres. According to Kabeer (2005), gender equality entails not only providing equal opportunities but also addressing power imbalances and structural barriers that hinder equitable participation. Research by Acker (2006) emphasizes the role of gendered organizational practices, which often perpetuate inequality, particularly in leadership roles and wage disparities. Inclusion, as highlighted by Shore et al. (2011), is about creating environments where diverse gender identities are not only represented but also valued and empowered to contribute meaningfully. These inclusive practices have been linked to increased innovation and improved organizational outcomes (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Despite progress in some regions, Connell (2009) points out that entrenched patriarchal norms and legal shortcomings still limit gender equality in many parts of the world. Thus, achieving true gender equality and inclusion requires comprehensive policy reforms, cultural change, and sustained efforts to challenge discriminatory norms and practices.

Efforts in gender mainstreaming and social inclusion aim to promote gender equality and ensure social justice for women and marginalized communities. Gender equality in education

refers to the equal treatment and opportunities for individuals of all genders in accessing and benefiting from education. Research indicates that achieving gender equality in education is crucial for fostering social and economic development, as well as reducing poverty and improving health outcomes (Unterhalter, 2005). However, disparities persist, particularly for girls in certain regions, due to cultural norms, early marriage, and lack of resources (UNESCO, 2015). Beyond access, achieving gender equality also involves addressing hidden biases in curricula and teaching methods that reinforce gender stereotypes, which can limit students' academic and career aspirations (Stromquist, 2007). Therefore, comprehensive efforts are needed to create inclusive and supportive learning environments that encourage the potential of all students.

Importance of GESI in Education and Strategies of Promoting GESI

Integrating GESI) into education is essential to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, disability, or socio-cultural background, have equal access to learning. This access is not only a basic human right but also critical for enabling individuals to participate fully in the social, economic, and political spheres of their communities (UNESCO, 2020). Prioritizing GESI allows education systems to remove barriers that hinder marginalized groups from receiving an education, thereby fostering social justice and equality. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, a significant number of poor rural young women fail to complete secondary school, underscoring the urgent need for GESI-focused initiatives that address these vulnerable populations (UNESCO, 2020). Addressing these disparities is crucial to creating an education system where all students can thrive.

A lack of consideration for GESI in education compromises the safety and well-being of students, particularly girls. Research indicates that over a quarter of girls in some regions feel unsafe traveling to school, severely limiting their educational participation (UNESCO, 2020). GESI-oriented strategies aim to create secure and inclusive learning environments, addressing these safety concerns and encouraging regular attendance. Additionally, children with disabilities face considerable challenges in accessing education, comprising 15% of the out-of-school population. These children are 2.5 times more likely to have never attended school than their non-disabled peers (UNESCO, 2020). Implementing GESI ensures that this critical gap is addressed by offering tailored resources and support to help children with disabilities succeed in educational settings.

Education holds the power to challenge and reshape prevailing gender and social norms. By incorporating GESI into curricula and school culture, education systems can empower students to question and overcome harmful stereotypes (UNCT Nepal, 2011). This empowerment extends beyond individual benefits, fostering broader societal change that promotes equality and inclusivity. Schools that model inclusivity and gender sensitivity can influence communities, as children and parents exposed to these practices are more likely to adopt them in daily life, leading to transformative social change (UNCT [United Nations Country Team], Nepal, 2011). In this way, education serves as a driving force for advancing GESI both within and beyond the classroom.

GESI in education also addresses broader economic and social inequalities affecting marginalized groups. The stark gap in secondary school completion between the richest and poorest youth emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to reduce inequality and create equal opportunities (UNESCO, 2020). By prioritizing the needs of the most disadvantaged, education systems can create a more level playing field, ensuring every student has a fair chance at success. Education that emphasizes GESI contributes to building more inclusive societies where individuals, regardless of their background, can make meaningful contributions. These efforts are essential for promoting sustainable development and social cohesion, creating future generations that are more equal, just, and unified (UNCT Nepal, 2011).

Barriers in Promoting GESI in Education

Despite significant global initiatives aimed at narrowing the gender gap in primary education, substantial discrepancies persist, particularly in secondary and higher education. According to UNESCO (2020), while progress has been made, girls in many low-income countries continue to face socio-economic barriers such as poverty, early marriage, and child labor, which significantly restrict their educational opportunities. Promoting GESI in education is crucial for achieving global commitments such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Saini et al., 2023). Achieving this goal requires transformative changes in educational policies, curricula, teaching methods, and learning environments to make them more inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of learners (Tonegawa, 2022). Such an approach is essential for education to contribute effectively to broader goals of social equity and sustainable development. However, the full realization of GESI in education remains hindered by persistent challenges and issues,

particularly in developing countries. These barriers are often deeply rooted in cultural norms, institutional practices, and policy-related factors that perpetuate inequality and exclusion. Given these current challenges and issues, the following review examines the multiple barriers to achieving GESI, with a particular focus on the structural, cultural, and systemic factors that continue to drive inequality and exclusion in schools.

Structural Challenges in Promoting GESI in Education

Structural challenges are significant barriers to achieving GESI in education. These challenges are embedded within the frameworks of educational systems, including policies, infrastructure, resource allocation, and governance, which often perpetuate inequality and exclusion. One of the key structural challenges in promoting GESI is the inadequacy of policy frameworks and governance structures that fail to address the needs of marginalized groups effectively. Research shows that educational policies in many countries, particularly in the Global South, are often gender-neutral rather than gender-sensitive, ignoring the specific needs and challenges faced by girls and other marginalized groups (Subrahmanian, 2005; Unterhalter, 2017). These policies may also lack the necessary enforcement mechanisms, leading to ineffective implementation at the grassroots level (Aikman & Rao, 2012). Resource allocation is another critical structural barrier. Schools in marginalized areas, particularly in rural regions, often lack adequate infrastructure and resources, which disproportionately affects girls and students from minority groups. For instance, underfunded schools are less likely to provide safe and inclusive learning environments, which are crucial for promoting GESI (Unterhalter, 2013). Inadequate infrastructure, such as the lack of gender-sensitive facilities like separate toilets for girls and menstrual hygiene management facilities, has been linked to higher dropout rates among female students. The absence of these facilities can lead to increased absenteeism and impact academic performance (Sommer et al., 2015).

On the policy front, while many countries have implemented policies to promote GESI in education, several obstacles hinder their success. One major issue is the gap between policy and practice. Policies aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusion often lack effective implementation frameworks, monitoring, and accountability measures, resulting in limited impact (Nkya & Kibona, 2024; Unterhalter, 2013). Additionally, poor coordination between different sectors, such as education, health, and social services, can weaken the effectiveness of GESI initiatives (Stromquist, 2015). Funding constraints also pose a significant challenge to the successful implementation of GESI policies. In many low-income countries, education budgets are insufficient to cover the costs of necessary interventions, such as training teachers

in gender-sensitive pedagogy, providing scholarships for girls, or creating inclusive school environments (Bridges & Walls, 2018). Moreover, donor-driven agendas can sometimes prioritize short-term goals over sustainable, long-term change in promoting GESI (Unterhalter, 2013).

Role of Cultural and Social Norms

Cultural norms and societal beliefs play a significant role in perpetuating gender disparities in education. Gender stereotypes and societal expectations often dictate the educational and career paths considered suitable for girls and boys (Banks, 2015). For example, cultural beliefs frequently lead to lower enrollment and completion rates for girls, particularly in regions or countries where girls are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over education (Nkya & Kibona, 2024). Gender-based violence and harassment within schools further hinder girls' educational opportunities. Moreover, cultural norms may guide girls toward traditionally "feminine" fields of study, such as nursing or teaching, while boys are directed toward "masculine" disciplines such as engineering or technology. These expectations limit individual potential and perpetuate divisions in the workforce (Murphy & Whitelegg, 2006). Societal norms and perceptions about the value of education for marginalized groups often lead to lower educational attainment. For example, in some contexts, girls' education is viewed as less important than boys', leading to higher dropout rates among girls, particularly at the tertiary level institutions (UNESCO, 2020). Similarly, children from marginalized ethnic, religion or socio-economic groups often face discrimination and exclusion within the educational system, reinforcing social inequalities (Crenshaw, 2013).

Systemic Issues as Barriers

Systemic issues within GESI are fundamental barriers that perpetuate disparities across various dimensions of society. These issues often arise from entrenched practices and policies that fail to adequately address GESI in education. Systemic issues here refer to the institutional and organizational structures that perpetuate inequality and exclusion in education. Many curricula are Eurocentric and male-dominated, marginalizing diverse perspectives and reinforcing the exclusion of students from underrepresented groups (Sleeter, 2011). Additionally, the lack of gender-sensitive pedagogies limits teachers' ability to address the diverse needs of all students effectively (Subrahmanian, 2005). Teachers frequently lack adequate training in gender equality and social inclusion. Many teacher education programs and professional development

opportunities do not sufficiently cover these topics, leaving educators unprepared to manage diverse classrooms and create inclusive learning environments (UNESCO, 2020). Effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms are essential for enforcing GESI commitments. However, many countries have inadequate systems for tracking progress and addressing gender and social disparities, which makes it challenging to identify and address gaps (Unterhalter & North, 2017). Without robust accountability frameworks, discriminatory practices persist, further entrenching systemic issues in education (Aikman & Rao, 2012).

In conclusion, GESI in education is vital for ensuring that all children, regardless of gender, disability, or socio-cultural background, have equal opportunities to succeed in life. GESI addresses access to education and aims to dismantle structural barriers, harmful cultural norms, and systemic issues that perpetuate inequality. While there has been progress, particularly in gender parity at the primary education level, challenges remain in secondary and higher education, especially in regions where cultural norms, poverty, and discriminatory practices hinder girls' access to learning.

Structural challenges such as inadequate policies, underfunded schools, and insufficient resources, especially in rural areas, continue to impede efforts toward inclusive education. Additionally, cultural and societal norms often dictate gender roles, limiting the educational and career aspirations of both girls and boys, reinforcing stereotypes, and excluding marginalized groups. Systemic issues within educational institutions, including outdated curricula, inadequate teacher training, and weak monitoring mechanisms, further exacerbate these disparities.

Promoting GESI requires comprehensive strategies that go beyond gender-neutral policies to create gender-sensitive, inclusive learning environments. By integrating GESI into education systems, empowering students to challenge harmful stereotypes, and addressing the structural and cultural barriers to equality, education can become a powerful tool for social change. Ultimately, achieving GESI in education is essential not only for individual empowerment but also for fostering more inclusive, just, and equitable societies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The project adopted PAR organized into three main phases: Participation Axis; Knowledge Development Axis; and Action Axis. The **Participation Axis** aims to enhance the capacity and involvement of researchers and stakeholders to foster a safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment. This involves engaging researchers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries in drawing up the CVEC (Child Valued Educational Capabilities) list, ensuring that their perspectives significantly influence the framework. Additionally, participants will be trained to critically assess and improve GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) practices and school functionality, addressing issues like discriminatory norms, violence, harassment, and exclusion. Students will also be involved in capacity-building programs that provide information and training to help them aspire to and work towards an improved school environment.

The **Knowledge Development Axis** focuses on making the CVEC and GESI tools transformative for gender equality, equity, and inclusion. This phase emphasizes the diversity of knowledge by incorporating various forms (written, oral, digital, visual) and ensuring representation from marginalized groups. It also addresses core values related to human development and children's capabilities, with methods and activities designed to enhance student participation in improving school safety, understanding GESI, and building their capacity for sustained learning outcomes.

The **Action Axis** involves implementing practical actions to create a self-sustaining, positive school environment and enhance student well-being. Researchers and stakeholders will engage in activities aimed at fostering a self-managed and liberated school environment, ultimately improving both institutional well-being and student experiences.

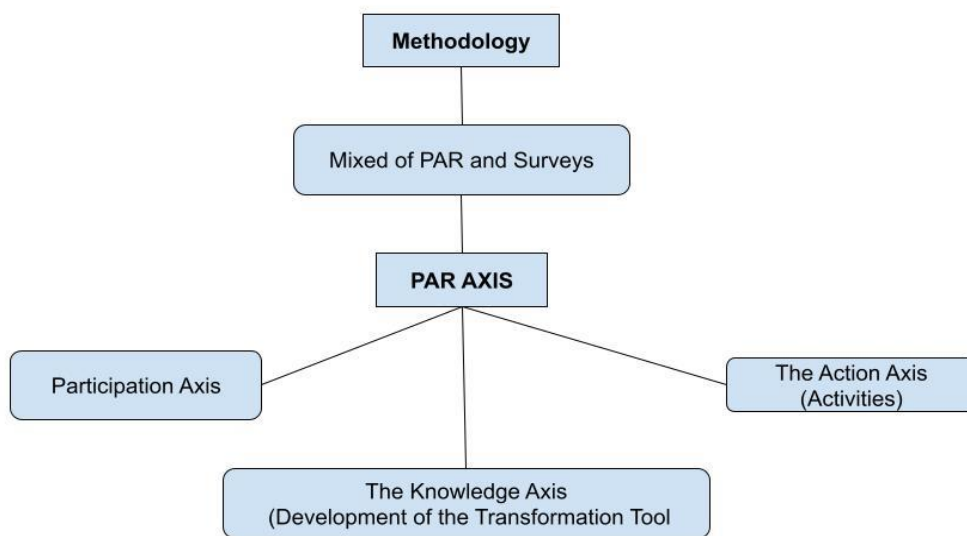
The project will be executed in 25 schools in Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, with subsequent capacity-building programs for the community, including parents, teachers, head teachers, students, administrative staff, and district and municipal education office staff. Evaluations will guide further capacity-building efforts to sustain and extend the benefits of the program.

Although the project has three axes, for the SAS which is at the data collection phase, the study adopted the participation axis, ensuring that all research tools used during the design and data collection phases were participatory in nature. This axis involved collection of GESI situational analysis data from teachers and students through surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs).

These tools were instrumental in conceptualizing ‘children's flourishing’ (children's well-being). Based on GESI SAS data, the project aimed to develop a multi-dimensional framework to identify, examine, and evaluate child-led indicators of gender equality and social inclusion, ultimately resulting in a GESI diagnosis tool. The final outcome will be a child-led GESI framework that assesses children's well-being, contributing to the analysis of GESI indicators and providing a structured approach to evaluating children's GESI priorities.

Figure 1:

Research Methodology



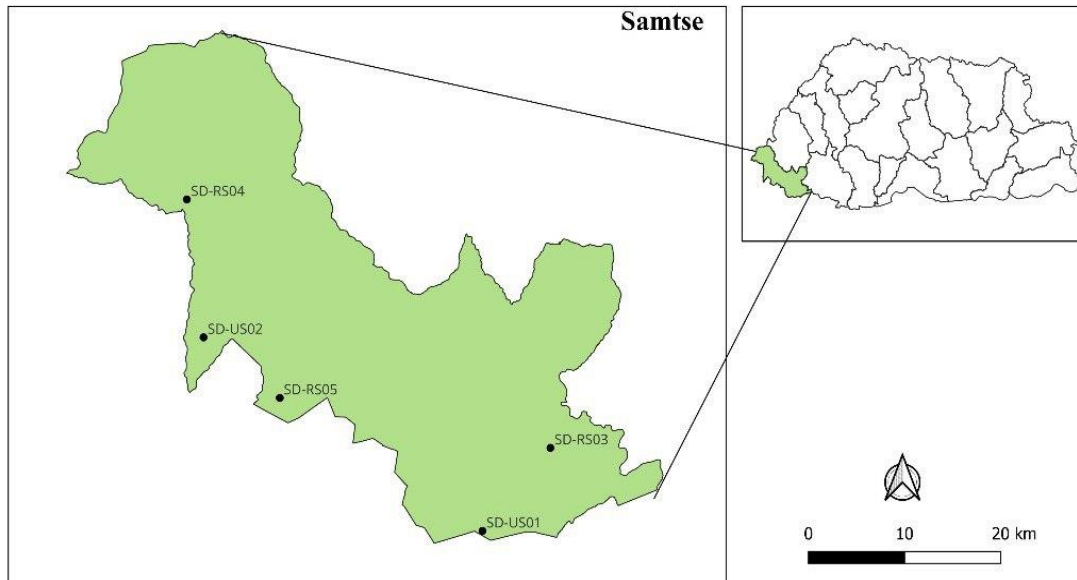
Research Field Site

Samtse Dzongkhag (District) was selected as the research field site due to its diverse population, rich cultural heritage, varying socioeconomic conditions, and a mix of rural and urban school distributions. Located in southwestern Bhutan, Samtse shares its southern and western borders with India, making it a significant region for cross-border interactions and economic activity. The district spans an area of 1,305 square kilometres and has a population of 62,590, making it the most populous district in Bhutan (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). The region is known for its ethnic diversity, with a blend of Lhotshampas, Drukpas, Adibashi, and Doyaps contributing to its unique cultural landscape. Additionally, Samtse's varied topography and climate, ranging from lowland plains to foothills, offer diverse environmental settings, further enriching the context of the research.

Figure 2:

A Map of showing the study site and the selected samples

Geographical Locations of Sample Schools in Samtse, Bhutan



Choice of Field Site

The research sites were selected considering a number of factors, which are discussed below:

Diverse Demographic

Samtse's diverse ethnic groups such as the Lhotshampas, Adibashi, and Doyaps, provide an ideal setting to explore the research question across a spectrum of ethnicities. The Dzongkhag representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and family backgrounds would enable a comprehensive understanding of how different demographic factors may impact levels of gender equality and social inclusion within the education system.

School

This study centers on government schools in Samtse Dzongkhags, encompassing schools from both rural and urban settings. Investigating schools situated in both rural and urban settings will allow for an exploration of various factors that shape educational endeavors. By examining the two settings, the study will be able to analyze the multifaceted impact of economic activities, social dynamics, cultural norms, and access to essential services on gender and disadvantaged communities. Additionally, the settings can illuminate how geographical

context can shape gender roles, societal expectations, and access to resources. Understanding the interaction between these factors will offer valuable insights for crafting more inclusive policies and interventions.

The schools involved in the research were pseudonymized to protect their identities, as shown in Table 3. Each pseudonym consisted of the initial 'SD,' representing Samtse Dzongkhag, followed by the initials 'RS' for rural school or 'US' for urban school locations, and a numerical identifier (e.g., SD-RS01, SD-US02). This system ensured that the schools' identities remained confidential while preserving relevant contextual information for the study.

Socio-economic status

Socio-economic hierarchies are prominent in Samtse, so students from various socioeconomic backgrounds will be sampled. This will ensure a comprehensive exploration of how socioeconomic status influences educational experiences and outcomes, contributing to a deeper understanding of equity and inclusivity in education.

Gender Stereotypes

Diversity within the study areas provides opportunities to explore the influence of stereotypical beliefs of different cultures on students' education and career aspirations. These stereotypes seem to be more prevalent in the Southern districts, which will allow the study to look at the influence of culture-based gender practices that could inform new policies about gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes.

Gender Balance

According to the Annual Education Statistics (2023) provided in Table 2, there is near parity enrollment of girls and boys in classes I - X across the nation. The data collected from the schools for the selected research schools also indicate a nearly close enrolment of girls and boys (Table 3). This equal distribution of gender within the selected grades presents an opportunity to comprehensively capture a diverse array of perspectives, challenges, and aspirations. It ensures that both girls' and boys' voices and experiences are adequately recognized and understood within the study.

Table 2:

National Primary Enrolment 2023

Class	Female	Male	Total
I	5441	5647	11,088
II	6293	6489	12,782
III	7746	7478	15,224
IV	7,233	7,439	14,672
V	6,569	6,283	12,852
VI	5,732	5,334	11,066
VII	6869	6448	13,316
VIII	8359	6856	15,215
IX	4380	4279	8650
X	5877	4954	10,831
Grand Total	64499	61207	125,696

Table 3:

Selected School's Enrolment for Class (I-X) 2024

School	Class	Boys	Girls	Total
SD-US01	I	28	28	56
	II	31	35	66
	III	33	41	74
	IV	74	67	141
	V	66	48	114
	VI	30	46	76
	VII	30	42	72
	VIII	66	67	133
	IX	40	48	88
	X	50	54	104

School	Class	Boys	Girls	Total
		444	476	920
SD-US02	I	27	43	70
	II	33	25	58
	III	45	32	77
	IV	53	75	128
	V	42	37	79
	VI	38	32	70
	VII	120	108	228
	VIII	95	100	195
	IX	71	83	154
	X	73	88	161
		597	623	1220
SD-RS03	I	20	21	41
	II	22	19	41
	III	26	28	54
	IV	36	34	70
	V	22	22	44
	VI	34	33	67
	VII	18	19	37
	VIII	80	83	163
	IX	44	41	85
	X	52	50	102
		354	350	704
SD-RS04	I	29	24	53
	II	36	18	54
	III	31	22	53

School	Class	Boys	Girls	Total
	IV	52	64	116
	V	54	64	118
	VI	55	54	109
	VII	51	46	97
	VIII	68	69	137
	IX	54	77	131
	X	60	59	119
		490	497	987
SD-RS05	I	27	19	46
	II	17	16	33
	III	30	19	49
	IV	41	41	82
	V	33	27	60
	VI	27	27	54
	VII	23	20	43
	VIII	22	36	58
	IX	16	29	45
	X	24	17	41
Total		260	251	511

Sample selection

Five schools from Bhutan have been purposively selected to take part in our research endeavor. The selection process was designed to encapsulate a diverse array of geographical, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, ensuring comprehensive representation across various socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, considerations were made to ensure a balanced representation of both rural and urban settings, and a diverse range of backgrounds, including variables such as parental education and financial standing.

Each of these selected schools will contribute through their student populations, as well as the involvement of 10 teachers as GESI implementers and 5 teachers as focal points, who will play pivotal roles in the school and our research. Under the Participation axis, 20 students from each school were selected as research participants, with two students representing one male and one female from each grade (I to X). Additionally, 10 teachers were selected from the 5 sample schools, with 1 male and 1 female teacher from each school, teaching either Social Studies, Geography, or Economics. Surveys were distributed to the teachers, and FGDs were conducted separately with male and female students based on the survey tool. Each FGD with the students lasted between 2 to 3 hours, while the teachers took approximately 2 hours to complete the survey. A total of 10 FGDs were conducted, involving 100 students, while surveys were collected from 10 teachers.

Data Analysis

The GESI situational data were initially entered into an Excel sheet, where scores and rankings were calculated separately for boys, girls, male teachers, and female teachers. Additionally, cumulative rankings for all students and teachers were generated to provide a comprehensive overview. The data were analyzed based on the key themes identified in the survey, ensuring a comprehensive and structured interpretation of the findings. Special attention was given to capturing the distinct perspectives of both students and teachers, ensuring that their voices were adequately represented. Additionally, to maintain confidentiality while interpreting teacher responses, pseudonyms such as T1, T2, and so forth were assigned to each teacher.

In the analysis process, inclusivity was prioritized, ensuring that the insights and experiences shared by all participants, regardless of gender or role, were given equal consideration. This approach not only allowed for a deeper understanding of GESI issues but also facilitated a more nuanced evaluation of GESI within the school environment.

To further enrich the analysis, word clouds were generated to visually represent the school mapping data for boys, girls, and teachers. These visual tools provided a clear and accessible way to identify key terms and recurring themes in the participants' responses. For the stakeholder mapping exercise, data were organized into separate tables for "place," "people," and "things." This structured approach allowed for a more detailed analysis, where each category was carefully examined and interpreted. The combined use of visual aids like word clouds and organized tables provided a more holistic view of the GESI situation, enhancing the

overall interpretation and ensuring that the findings are actionable and insightful for future interventions.

The data was interpreted by a group of experienced researchers to ensure credibility and reliability. Multiple methods were employed during the analysis to cross-verify findings, and the team collaborated closely to minimize biases and maintain the accuracy of the results. Regular peer reviews and consultations with the lead team further strengthened the validity of the interpretations. Additionally, the lead country guided us through the data entry process, making data handling and interpretation more efficient and streamlined. Furthermore, a detailed revision and editing of the document was conducted by the project core team to ensure logical flow, language clarity, and precision of the content and analysis.

FINDINGS

Between August 10th to August 16th, 2024, a total of 10 focus group discussions were conducted, engaging 100 students—50 boys and 50 girls—from five different schools in Samtse Dzongkhag. During the same dates, a survey was administered to 10 teachers, 5 males and 5 females, who teach Social Studies, Geography, and Economics.

Theme 1: Students' Understanding of Capability Indicators

In the FGD, students from grades 1 to 10 were asked if they understood the 21 capability indicators. The responses were scored out of 50 points, scaled to 1, and ranked based on their understanding of each capability indicator.

The boys' understanding of various capability indicators that contribute to promoting GESI is presented as follows. Their scores 1 in Love and Care, Education, Respect, and Nutritional Well-being demonstrate a deep comprehension of key factors such as emotional security, educational access, mutual respect, and physical health that promote GESI.

For boys, the lowest scores in GESI and Freedom from Economic Exploitation, with the scores 0.66 and 0.62 respectively indicate that boys have significant gaps in understanding the impact of economic factors and GESI principles. Similarly for girls, 'Nutritional Well-Being' with the score of 0.98 ranks the highest suggesting a solid grasp of the importance of nutrition for physical health and well-being, a critical aspect of health equity and good health (SDG 3). 'Respect' and 'Love and Care' with the scores of 0.86 and 0.9 respectively, indicate that they value emotional warmth, nurturing, mutual dignity, and the rights of others, all essential for fostering inclusive and supportive environments.

The cumulative analysis of boys' and girls' understanding of different capability indicators for promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) reveals some significant differences and similarities. Both boys and girls show a strong understanding of Nutritional Well-Being, with boys scoring 1 and girls scoring 0.92, reflecting its importance for physical health and GESI. Boys also scored 1 in Love and Care and Respect, surpassing girls in these areas, as well as in Education, Social Relations, and Leisure Activities, indicating a slightly better grasp of these domains. However, both genders exhibited lower understanding in Mental Well-Being and Freedom from Economic Exploitation, highlighting a need for increased awareness and support in these critical areas (**See Table 4**).

Table 4:

Scoring of students' understanding of capability indicators in promoting GESI in schools

Cumulative Ranking		Boys Ranking		Girls Ranking	
Indicators	Scale	Indicators	Scale	Indicators	Scale
Nutritional Well-Being	0.96	Love and Care	1	Nutritional Well-Being	0.92
Love and Care	0.95	Education	1	Love and Care	0.9
Respect	0.93	Respect	1	Respect	0.86
Education	0.92	Nutritional Well-Being	1	Life/Physical Health	0.84
Social Relations	0.88	Leisure Activities	0.98	Education	0.84
Leisure Activities	0.88	Social Relations	0.94	Social Relations	0.82
Life/Physical Health	0.85	Mobility	0.94	Religion and Identity	0.78
Mobility	0.85	Time Autonomy	0.92	Leisure Activities	0.78
Time Autonomy	0.84	Participation	0.9	Spirituality	0.78
		Shelter and		Understand and	
Participation	0.83	Environment	0.9	Interpret	0.78
Shelter and				Plan/Imagine and	
Environment	0.83	Bodily Integrity	0.88	Think	0.78
Bodily Integrity	0.81	Life/Physical Health	0.86	Participation	0.76
Understand and		Understand and			
Interpret	0.80	Interpret	0.82	Mobility	0.76
Religion and Identity	0.78	Personal Autonomy	0.8	Time Autonomy	0.76
Plan/Imagine and					
Think	0.77	Religion and Identity	0.78	Aspiration	0.76
		Plan/Imagine and		Shelter and	
Spirituality	0.76	Think	0.76	Environment	0.76
Aspiration	0.76	Aspiration	0.76	Bodily Integrity	0.74
Personal Autonomy	0.75	Mental Well-being	0.74	Mental Well-being	0.72
				Gender Equality and	
				Social Inclusion	
Mental Well-being	0.73	Spirituality	0.74	Curriculum	0.72
Freedom from		Freedom from			
Economic Exploitation	0.67	Economic Exploitation	0.66	Personal Autonomy	0.7

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	0.67	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	0.62	Freedom from Economic Exploitation	0.68
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Theme 2: Teachers’ Perceptions on Grade I-X Students’ Awareness of Inclusion of Capability Indicators in the Curriculum

Table 5 presents students' awareness of various capability indicators within their curriculum. Each domain is ranked based on its importance.

Male teachers perceive that students are most knowledgeable about participation and education activities within their curriculum. There is strong awareness in life/physical health, respect, and leisure activities as well. However, awareness drops significantly for domains such as religion and identity, mental well-being, bodily integrity, and especially nutritional well-being, which scored the lowest. The average point across all domains is 39.19, indicating moderate overall awareness, with notable areas where student knowledge could be enhanced.

Female teachers perceive that students are most aware of life/physical health, participation, and education activities within their curriculum. However, there is a noticeable drop in awareness for domains such as mental well-being, gender equality, mobility, and especially nutritional well-being, which scored the lowest. The average point across all domains is 41.14, indicating moderate awareness overall, but with significant variation depending on the specific domain.

Teachers believe students are most knowledgeable about participation and education, with high awareness also noted for life/physical health and respect. However, there is a significant drop in awareness for domains related to mental well-being, time autonomy, and especially nutritional well-being, which scored the lowest. The overall average point of 80.33 indicates a generally high level of student awareness across most domains, with some areas needing more focus in the curriculum.

Table 5:

Which grade students know about the inclusion of capability indicators in the curriculum?

Cumulative Rank		Male Ranking		Female Ranking	
Capabilities	Rank	Capabilities	Rank	Capabilities	Rank
Participation	1	Participation	1	Life/Physical health	1
Education	1	Education	1	Participation	2
Life and Physical Health	3	Life/Physical Health	3	Education	2
Respect	4	Leisure Activities	4	Understand and interpret	4
Love and Care	5	Respect	4	Respect	5
Understand and Interpret	5	Love and Care	6	Bodily Integrity	6
Social Relations	7	Social Relations	7	Religion and Identity	7
Leisure Activities	8	Understand and Interpret	8	Social Relations	8
Aspiration	9	Aspirations	9	Love and Care	8
Personal Autonomy	9	Shelter and Environment	9	Mental Wellbeing	8
Bodily Integrity	11	Personal Autonomy	9	Aspiration	8
Mobility	11	GESI Curriculum	9	Personal Autonomy	8
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	13	Mobility	9	Mobility	13
Religion and Identity	13	Nutritional Wellbeing	14	Time Autonomy	14
Mental Wellbeing	15	Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	14	GESI Curriculum	14
Time Autonomy	16	Mental Wellbeing	16	Leisure Activities	16
Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	17	Bodily Integrity	17	Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	17
Shelter and Environment	18	Plan/Imagine and Think	18	Plan/Imagine and Think	18

Cumulative Rank		Male Ranking		Female Ranking	
Capabilities	Rank	Capabilities	Rank	Capabilities	Rank
Spirituality	19	Religion and Identity	18	Shelter and Environment	18
Plan/Imagine and Think	20	Spirituality	20	Spirituality	20
Nutritional Wellbeing	21	Mobility	21	Nutritional Wellbeing	21
Average Point	80.33		39.19		41.14

Theme 3: Inclusion of Capability Indicators in the School Curriculum of Grades I-X

In the context of incorporating GESI principles into the school curriculum, the highest scores reflect a strong consensus on the importance of certain capability indicators. Boys perceived that, ‘Love and Care’ the highest (1.00 scale), indicated an inclusion of the value of emotional support and nurturing environments in promoting GESI. Education also scored high at (0.98 scale), underscoring its inclusion in the curriculum.

Conversely, the lowest scores highlight significant gaps in perceived importance for GESI principles. ‘Freedom from Economic Exploitation’ scored the lowest at (0.50 scale), suggesting limited awareness or emphasis on the impact of economic factors on gender equality within the curriculum. ‘Religion and Identity’ also scored low at (0.58 scale), reflecting a lesser focus on how these aspects intersect with gender inclusivity.

From the girls' perspective, ‘Education’ scored the highest (0.90 scale), highlighting its prominent inclusion in the curriculum in promoting GESI, along with ‘Love and Care’ and ‘Participation’ scoring (0.84 scale). Conversely, ‘Freedom from Economic Exploitation’ received the lowest score (0.16 scale), with ‘Mobility’ and ‘Leisure Activities’ also scoring low, indicating these areas are less emphasized within the school curriculum.

The comparative analysis shows that both boys and girls highly value ‘Education’ and ‘Love and Care’, and ‘participation’ with boys scoring slightly higher in these areas. Both genders also recognize the inclusion of ‘Respect’, ‘Understanding and interpret’, and ‘Nutritional Well-Being’, although boys score higher. However, ‘Freedom from Economic Exploitation’ and ‘Mobility’ received low scores from both, indicating significant gaps in understanding their relevance to GESI (See Table 6). This suggests a need for improved focus on these areas to enhance GESI in the curriculum.

Table 6:

Children's Identification of Capability Indicators in the Curriculum of Grades I-X for Promoting their Wellbeing

Cumulative Scale		Boys' Scale		Girls' Scale	
Indicators	Scale to 1	Indicators	Scale to 1	Indicators	Scale to 1
Education	0.94	Education	0.9	Education	0.9
Love and Care	0.92	Love and Care	0.84	Love and Care	0.84
Participation	0.87	Participation	0.84	Participation	0.84
Understand and Interpret	0.85	Life/Physical Health	0.8	Life/Physical Health	0.8
Respect	0.84	Nutritional Well-Being	0.8	Nutritional Well-Being	0.8
Nutritional Well-Being	0.84	Respect	0.78	Respect	0.78
Plan/Imagine and Think	0.82	Understand and Interpret	0.78	Understand and Interpret	0.78
Social Relations	0.80	Plan/Imagine and Think	0.78	Plan/Imagine and Think	0.78
Life/Physical Health	0.79	Social Relations	0.74	Social Relations	0.74
Spirituality	0.73	Religion and Identity	0.72	Religion and Identity	0.72
Shelter and Environment	0.73	Spirituality	0.7	Spirituality	0.7
Bodily Integrity	0.72	Mental Well-being	0.68	Mental Well-being	0.68
Mental Well-being	0.71	Bodily Integrity	0.66	Bodily Integrity	0.66
Time Autonomy	0.70	Shelter and Environment	0.64	Shelter and Environment	0.64
Leisure Activities	0.68	Time Autonomy	0.6	Time Autonomy	0.6
Religion and Identity	0.65	Leisure Activities	0.52	Leisure Activities	0.52
Personal Autonomy	0.56	Aspiration	0.46	Aspiration	0.46
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	0.56	Personal Autonomy	0.46	Personal Autonomy	0.46

Cumulative Scale		Boys' Scale		Girls' Scale	
Indicators	Scale to 1	Indicators	Scale to 1	Indicators	Scale to 1
		Gender Equality and Social Inclusion		Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	
Aspiration	0.54	Curriculum	0.42	Curriculum	0.42
Mobility	0.49	Mobility	0.38	Mobility	0.38
Freedom from Economic Exploitation	0.33	Freedom from Economic Exploitation	0.16	Freedom from Economic Exploitation	0.16

Theme 4: Teachers' Perception of Inclusion of Capability Indicators in the School Curriculum of Grades I-X

Table 7 presents male and female teachers' perceptions of how various activities are incorporated into different grades within the curriculum. Each capability indicator is ranked based on its inclusion in the curriculum. The rank indicated reflects the level of value or prioritization, with rank 1 representing the highest level of importance. Subsequent ranks (e.g., 2, 3, 4, etc.) signify progressively lower levels of value or priority.

For instance, male teachers ranked participation and education (ranked 1) as their top priorities, while female teachers placed them second. Conversely, female teachers ranked life and physical health, along with aspirations (ranked 1), as their highest priorities, whereas male teachers ranked these third and ninth, respectively. This indicates that male teachers perceive participation and education as being well-represented in the curriculum, while female teachers feel that life and physical health, as well as aspirations, are consistently included. Both male and female teachers ranked mobility the lowest, placing it at twenty-first, suggesting it is the least emphasized activity in the curriculum.

The cumulative rankings suggest that teachers view participation and education as the most comprehensively integrated activities throughout all grades in the curriculum. Life and physical health, respect, and social relations are also perceived to have a strong presence. However, certain areas, such as spirituality, mobility, and planning/imagination, are seen as being less prominently included (See Table 7 and Fig. 3).

Table 7:

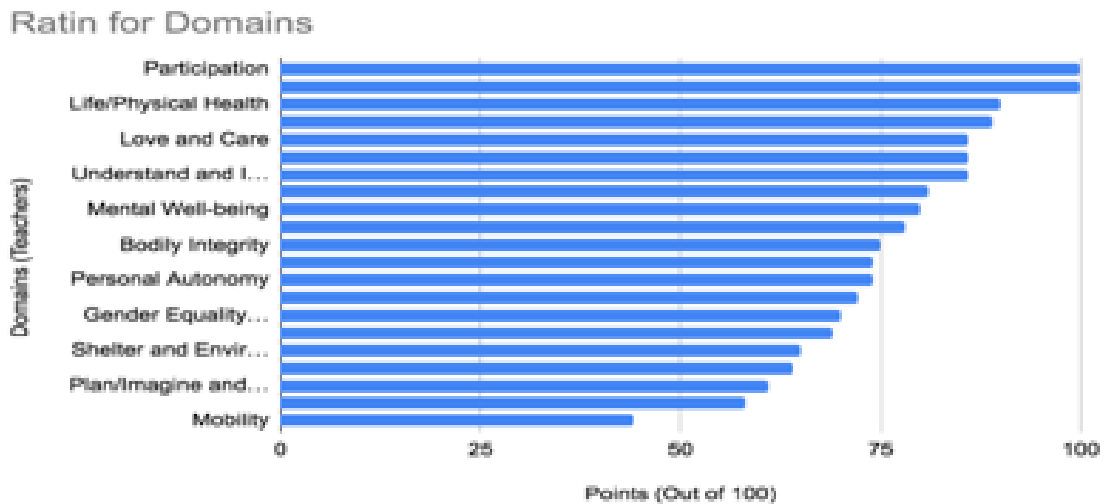
Teachers' Perception of Inclusion of Capability Indicators in the School Curriculum of Grades I-X

Cumulative Ranking (Teachers)		Male Ranking		Female Ranking	
Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank
Participation	1	Participation	1	Life/Physical health	1
Education	1	Education	1	Participation	2
Life and Physical Health	3	Life/Physical Health	3	Education	2
Respect	4	Leisure Activities	4	Understand and interpret	4
Love and Care	5	Respect	5	Respect	5
Social Relations	5	Love and Care	5	Love and Care	6
Understand and Interpret	5	Social Relations	5	Mental Wellbeing	6
Leisure Activities	8	Understand and Interpret	8	Social Relations	6
Mental Wellbeing	9	Aspirations	9	Time Autonomy	9
Time Autonomy	10	Shelter and Environment	9	Bodily Integrity	10
Bodily Integrity	11	Personal Autonomy	9	Aspiration	11
Aspiration	12	GESI Curriculum	9	Personal Autonomy	11
Personal Autonomy	12	Mobility	9	Nutritional Wellbeing	13
Nutritional Wellbeing	14	Nutritional Wellbeing	14	Religion Identity	13
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	15	Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	14	Leisure Activities	13
Religion and Identity	16	Mental Wellbeing	14	GESI Curriculum	16
Shelter and Environment	17	Bodily Integrity	17	Shelter and Environment	17
Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	18	Plan/Imagine and Think	18	Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	17
Plan/Imagine and Think	19	Religion and Identity	19	Plan/Imagine and Think	19

Cumulative Ranking					
(Teachers)		Male Ranking		Female Ranking	
Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank
Spirituality	20	Spirituality	20	Spirituality	20
Mobility	21	Mobility	21	Mobility	21
Average Point	80.33		39.19		41.14

Figure 3:

Teachers' Perception of Inclusion of Capability Indicators in the School Curriculum of Grades I-X



Theme 3: Capability Indicators and its Importance to Promote GESI in Schools According to Students

Table 8 highlights students' scoring of the capability indicators based on their importance in promoting GESI in schools, with cumulative ranking and separate ranking for boys and girls. The capability indicators are ranked based on their perceived significance.

For boys, the most important indicators include 'Life/Physical Health', 'Mental Wellbeing', and 'Time Autonomy' with all of them ranked 1. Capability indicators such as 'Respect' and 'Love and Care' (ranked 1) are also highly prioritised, reflecting a focus on mutual respect and emotional support within the school community. Conversely, capability indicators such as 'Mobility' and 'Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation' were ranked the least important (ranked 20 and 21), suggesting they are not seen as pressing concerns within the

school context. The average score across all indicators is 47.19, reflecting a moderate level of importance assigned to most themes, with only minor differences in their ranking.

In the analysis of examples stated by boys for the highest-ranked indicators for promoting GESI, they prioritized both physical and emotional well-being. They emphasized the importance of 'Life and Physical Health' (Ranked 1) through equal participation in sports, activities such as jogging and yoga, and maintaining hygiene, demonstrating their belief that health and active involvement are key to fostering inclusivity. 'Love and Care' (Ranked 1) is also highly valued, with examples of emotional support through mentoring, social gatherings, and celebrations, highlighting the significance of mutual respect and care. Boys acknowledge the role of 'Mental Health and Well-being', highlighting examples such as mindfulness, counselling, and meditation as crucial for emotional balance and inclusivity. 'Respect' (Ranked 1) is another focus, where boys placed importance on mutual respect between genders through good behaviour, greetings, and advocacy efforts.

In contrast, boys view 'Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Activities' (Ranked 20) as less important, associating it with tasks such as school canteen services, cleaning, and cultural programs, indicating a limited understanding of its broader significance for GESI and economic freedom's role in gender equality. Similarly, 'Mobility' Ranked 20, the lowest is perceived as not important, mainly viewing it through transportation options like school buses and private cars. This reflects a narrow perception of mobility's connection to social inclusion, with activities like scouting and community service seen as peripheral rather than integral to fostering GESI.

Similarly, the girls placed significant emphasis on 'Respect' (ranked 1), underscoring its critical role in fostering GESI in schools. They also highlighted 'Love and Care' (ranked 2) as integral to promoting an inclusive and equitable environment, alongside 'Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum' (ranked 2). Similar to the boys, the girls ranked 'Mobility' (ranked 21) as the least important indicator, suggesting that they view this factor as having a more secondary role in shaping their school experience. The overall average score across all indicators is 44.48, suggesting that most themes are viewed as moderately important, with only slight differences in how they are prioritised.

For girls, respect for both genders among students and teachers is emphasised through consistent practices that promote mutual regard and cultural values. Girls consider greeting and bowing as important gestures that demonstrate respect, fostering an environment where both

teachers and peers are acknowledged. In addition to showing respect for teachers, girls cited examples of caring for younger classmates and obeying instructions as actions of respect, which helps to cultivate a nurturing and disciplined atmosphere. Driglam Namzha (Bhutan's code of etiquette) programs reinforce these values by incorporating cultural practices that emphasize obedience and proper conduct. Similarly, for girls, 'Love and Care' is reflected through various forms of support and nurturing relationships within the school environment. They cite the importance of equal treatment for both genders, which is reinforced through daily activities such as eating lunch together and receiving guidance from teachers. Teachers show love and affection by expressing concern for students' studies and actively encouraging their success. Additionally, support from the matron, warden, and counselling services, along with cooperation among students and mentoring through clubs, further emphasizes a sense of love and care, fostering an environment where girls feel valued and supported.

While girls consider 'Mobility' less important compared to other indicators, it still plays a role in their school experience. Girls provided specific examples regarding 'Mobility,' highlighting different modes of transportation and the importance of accessible infrastructure. For those coming from distant areas, buses are the primary mode of transport, while girls living nearby

often use cars or walk to school. Public transportation is also a key option, ensuring that girls from various locations can access education. They stressed the significance of well-maintained footpaths and safe roads for secure travel. While some teachers excuse late arrivals due to transportation issues, girls noted that there are still instances where they face consequences for being late, suggesting the need for fair and consistent mobility policies in schools.

A notable contrast emerges in the ranking of 'Time Autonomy,' which was placed at 19 by the girls but ranked as the highest priority (ranked 1) by the boys. Girls highlighted 'Time Autonomy' by emphasizing the value of having abundant free time for activities such as sleeping, establishing routines, and personal care. They view free periods as crucial for balancing academic and personal life, allowing time for relaxation and informal activities such as talking and washing. Effective time management, including setting fixed times for studies, is seen as essential for maintaining a structured routine. However, challenges such as being late for activities and insufficient time allocated for each subject also impact their perception of time autonomy, indicating a need for better time allocation and management strategies. In contrast, boys focused on their use of free time for engaging in sports, cycling, dancing and other leisure activities, valuing breaks and weekends as key to their overall well-being. They

highlighted the importance of having flexibility in their schedule during intervals and free periods, which allows them to balance academic work with personal interests. While boys appreciate having the freedom to choose how they spend their time, they have not mentioned any challenges with time management or scheduling, suggesting a difference in how time is managed between the genders.

Across both boys and girls ranking, the top three indicators that are viewed as most important are ‘Respect’, ‘Love and Care’ and ‘GESI curriculum. In contrast, ‘mobility’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation’ (ranked 19, 19 and 21) are considered secondary based on their scores.

Table 8:

Students’ scoring of the capability indicators in terms of its importance in promoting GESI in schools

Cumulative Ranking		Boys Ranking		Girls Ranking	
Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank
Respect	1	Life/Physical Health	1	Respect	1
Love and Care	2	Love and Care	1	Love and Care	2
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	3	Mental Well-being	1	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	2
Life/Physical Health	4	Respect	1	Bodily Integrity	4
Bodily Integrity	4	Time Autonomy	1	Education	5
Understand and Interpret	4	Understand and Interpret	6	Understand and Interpret	5
Mental Well-being	7	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	6	Life/Physical Health	7
Participation	8	Participation	8	Personal Autonomy	7
Education	8	Bodily Integrity	8	Religion and Identity	9
Religion and Identity	10	Social Relations	8	Mental Well-being	9
Social Relations	10	Nutritional Well-Being Shelter and Environment	8	Participation	9
Nutritional Well-Being	10	Religion and Identity	13	Leisure Activities	9
Aspiration	10	Spirituality	13	Aspiration	9
Leisure Activities	14	Aspiration	13	Social Relations	14
Personal Autonomy	15	Education	16	Nutritional Well-Being Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	14
Time Autonomy	16	Education	16	Economic Exploitation	16

Cumulative Ranking		Boys Ranking		Girls Ranking	
Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank	Indicators	Rank
Plan/Imagine and Think	17	Leisure Activities	16	Plan/Imagine and Think	17
Shelter and Environment	17	Plan/Imagine and Think	16	Shelter and Environment	18
Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	19	Personal Autonomy Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	19	Spirituality	19
Spirituality	19	Economic Exploitation	20	Time Autonomy	19
Mobility	21	Mobility	21	Mobility	21

Theme 3: Capability indicators and its Importance to Promote GESI in Schools According to Teachers

Table 9 provides an analysis of the scoring of the capability indicators in terms of their importance in promoting GESI in schools. The indicators are ranked based on their perceived importance.

For instance, male teachers emphasize a broad range of indicators—such as mental well-being, participation, autonomy, social relations, and education—ranked highest for promoting GESI in schools. Initiatives like the mentor-mentee program, counseling sessions, value education, Health and Physical Education (HPE), and well-being committees are central to fostering mental well-being. These efforts include guidance from mentors, teachers, and parents, and emphasize self-care and positivity, contributing to a comprehensive framework for student well-being.

Furthermore, participation is bolstered through professional development, workshops, and gender-sensitive curricula, supported by teacher training on gender equality. Opportunities are provided equally across literary, sports, and cultural activities, with students collaborating in a positive and inclusive environment. A variety of subjects and extracurricular activities, including clubs, sports, and cultural events, enrich the learning experience. Diverse teaching methods—such as online resources, practical applications, and project-based learning—help expand students' understanding and prepare them for future opportunities. Education is further enhanced through concept explanations, internet exploration, practical work, and research

projects. Job opportunities are also regularly discussed to assist students with career development.

Social relations are fostered through festivals, games, and regular Parent-Teacher meetings that engage parents in students' progress. Students participate in various school activities, including literary, sports, and cultural events, promoting holistic development and community involvement.

Capability indicators such as freedom from exploitation, physical health, religion, spirituality, and mobility are acknowledged but receive slightly less emphasis. Regarding mobility, T4 mentioned that special education needs children are supported with wheelchairs, ramps, and transportation facilities like a bus and utility vehicle for emergencies and sick children. In contrast, T1, T2, T3, and T5's knowledge on mobility appears limited, as their examples—such as physical exercise education, roads for all, English and Dzongkha, social studies, and bus services—are not directly relevant. This suggests a lower level of awareness on the topic.

While freedom from exploitation is somewhat less prioritized, there is a strong emphasis on aspects such as safe and decent working conditions, financial discipline (e.g., preventing financial abuse), value education (included in VE), teaching children about the dignity of labor (Economics), assigning group work, and teaching relevant lessons. Leisure activities, ranked the lowest in importance, are still offered and include games, sports, HPE, ICT classes, and co-curricular programs. To engage students during free time, educational videos, storytelling, traditional songs, and games are utilized, along with access to an open library, singing, and reading as part of their leisure activities. The average point across all themes is 49.19, indicating a strong overall emphasis on the importance of most themes, with minimal variation in prioritization.

Female teachers place the highest importance on indicators related to emotional well-being, autonomy, social relations, and education when promoting GESI in schools. They report that emotional well-being is supported through studying social issues and creating a positive, stress-free environment that values self-care and self-love. This is reinforced by counseling and career guidance classes, mentor-mentee sessions, and advice from class teachers. Additional support comes from mindfulness practices, cultural programs, religious discourse, counseling sessions, and adventurous trips.

In terms of time autonomy, female teachers stress the importance of teaching students effective time management and balancing work with personal activities. Both genders are given equal rights to their time, including scheduled periods for morning and evening studies, meals, scouts

activities, and cleaning duties (SUPW). Students are encouraged to wisely use their time for reading, writing, and playing.

For personal autonomy, students are guided in making informed decisions and understanding their consequences, such as voting for captains and maintaining privacy. The focus is on student-centered learning, goal setting, and empowering students through leadership opportunities. Students are encouraged to explore their interests in clubs and school activities, with awareness raised on their rights and responsibilities, including equality, privacy, and bodily integrity.

Social relations are prioritized in schools through teaching acceptance and respect for diverse backgrounds, emphasizing teamwork, and highlighting contributions from all genders while encouraging mixed-gender activities. Guidance is provided through school-parent-teacher meetings and supported by awareness and educational programs and various clubs.

Education is enriched by offering diverse skills and knowledge through hands-on experiences, field trips, and other methods. Key aspects include Education for All, co-education, and discussions on sex education, bullying, and appropriate boundaries. The focus also includes various teaching strategies, such as online and practical methods, and fostering respect, attentiveness, and mixed-gender grouping.

Leisure, mobility, spirituality, and physical health are considered secondary. For leisure, despite its lower ranking, female teachers recommend incorporating HPE and arts classes and forming various clubs. They also suggest adding recreational areas like a party space and gazebo. Other activities include sports days, cultural programs, library classes, and engaging students with games, educational videos, songs, and poems.

Regarding mobility, although it is ranked low, female teachers highlight that students have the freedom to visit any part of the school while being cautioned about safety. Reserved seats for females are provided, and topics such as transportation and road safety are covered. The school SD-RS04 has constructed wheelchairs for special educational needs (SEN) students and provides a bus for transportation, including for sick children and emergencies, with a focus on teaching rights and responsibilities and raising awareness about traffic rules and consequences. Spirituality, though secondary, is promoted by inviting khenpos/lamas (religious personnels) as guest speakers, conducting morning and evening prayers, and holding religious discourse sessions open to all backgrounds. Additional practices include religious excursions, Choesey Layrem (annual prayer day), and offering grace before meals.

Physical health is promoted through games and sports, accessible to both genders, and included in the curriculum. Activities like football, volleyball, and basketball are part of this, along with cultural activities and class participation, supported by SUPW, mind training, and HPE classes. Games, sports, and yoga sessions are integral to this approach.

Overall, the average point across all capability indicators is 49.10, reflecting that most indicators are seen as important, with slight variations in prioritization. Overall, teachers generally view the following as highly important for promoting GESI in schools: education, love and care, social relations, bodily integrity, mental well-being, , respect, understanding and interpretation, time autonomy, planning, imagination and thinking, and gender equality and social inclusion in the curriculum (Ranked 1). In contrast, leisure activities, mobility, spirituality, nutritional well-being, religion and identity, and life/physical health (Ranked 18, 20, 21) are considered secondary based on their scores.

Table 9:

Teachers' scoring of the capability indicators in terms of its importance in promoting GESI in schools

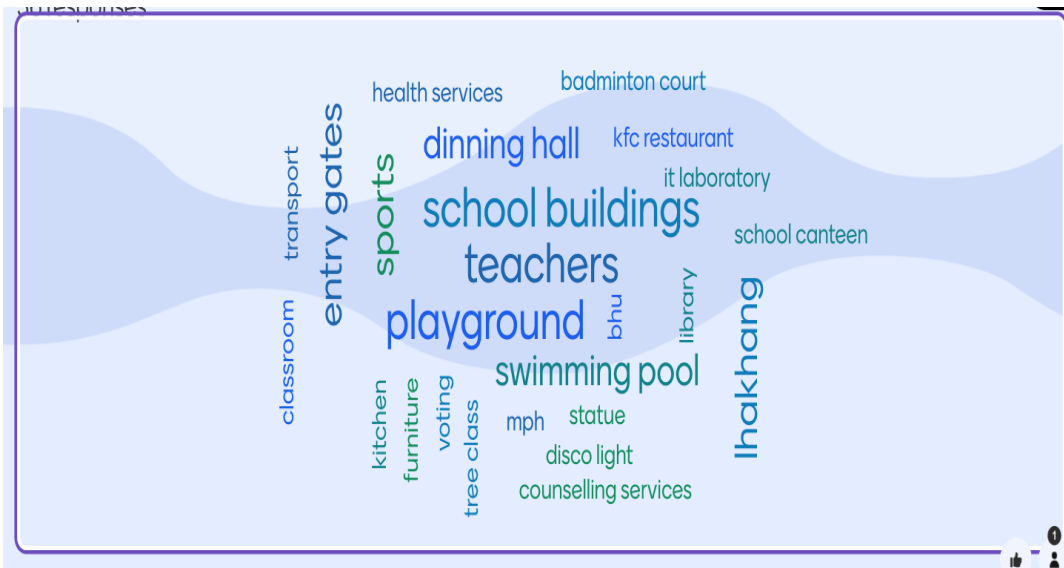
Cumulative Rank		Male Ranking		Female Ranking	
Capabilities	Rank	Capabilities	Rank	Capabilities	Rank
Education	1	Participation	1	Love and Care	1
Love and Care	1	Education	1	Mental Wellbeing	1
Social Relations	1	Mental Wellbeing	1	Education	1
Bodily Integrity	1	Love and Care	1	Social Relations	1
Mental Wellbeing	1	Bodily Integrity	1	Participation	1
Respect	1	Understand and Interpret	1	Bodily Integrity	1
Time Autonomy	1	Social Relations	1	Respect	1
Plan/Imagine/Think	1	Time Autonomy	1	Understand and Interpret	1
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion					
Curriculum	1	Aspirations	1	Personal Autonomy	1
Understand and Interpret	1	Shelter and Environment	1	Plan/Imagine/Think	1

Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	11	Personal Autonomy	1	GESI Curriculum	1
Aspiration	11	GESI Curriculum	1	Aspiration	1
Participation	11	Respect	1	Shelter and Environment	1
Shelter and Environment	14	Plan/Imagine/Think	1	Time Autonomy	1
Personal Autonomy	14	Freedom from Economic/Non Economic Exploitation	15	Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	15
Life/Physical Health	16	Spirituality	16	Religion and Identity	16
Religion and Identity	16	Life/Physical Health	16	Life and Physical Health	16
Spirituality	18	Religion and Identity	16	Spirituality	16
Nutritional Wellbeing	18	Nutritional Wellbeing	19	Nutritional Wellbeing	19
Mobility	20	Mobility	19	Mobility	19
Leisure Activities	21	Leisure Activities	21	Leisure Activities	21
Average Point	80.33		39.19		41.14

Mapping School Entities

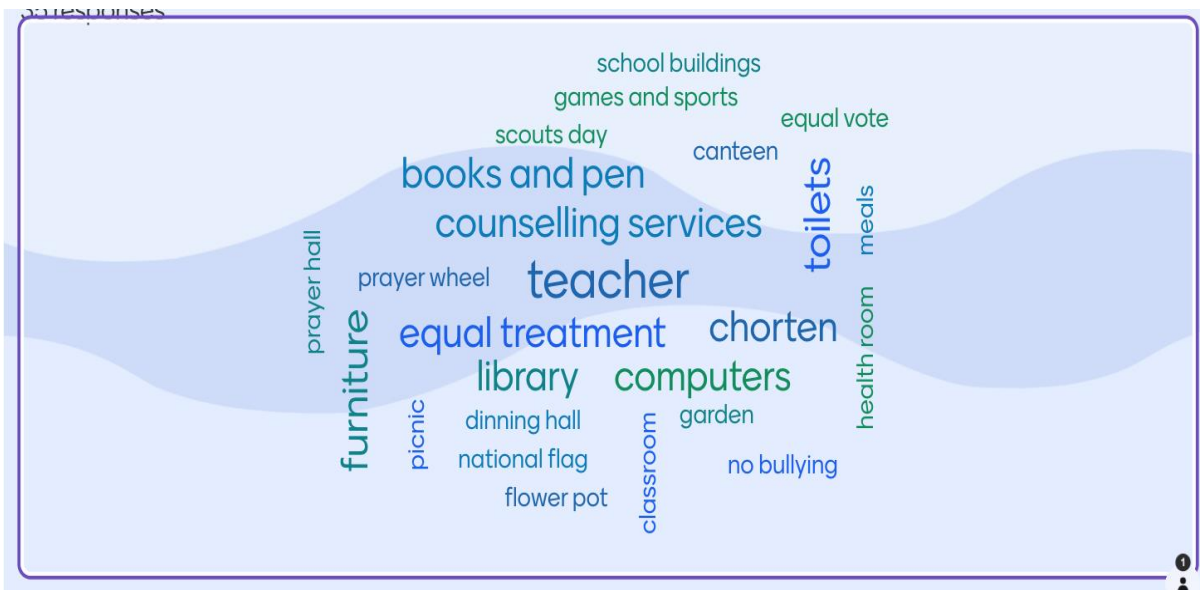
Both students and teachers were asked to draw elements within the school premises that they value. These drawings were analyzed for recurring themes, with results presented through word clouds. Students were asked to draw elements within the school premises that they value. These drawings were analyzed for recurring themes, with results presented through word clouds.

Figure 4: *Word cloud of School Mapping through Boys' Arts*



Based on the focus group discussions of the boys, it is evident that they consider ‘school building’, ‘teachers’, and ‘playground’ to be the most important aspects for GESI in schools. The focus on infrastructures such as ‘school building’, ‘playground’ and ‘dining hall’ suggest that boys see the physical environment as vital for creating inclusive spaces. Teachers also play a central role, highlighting the importance of awareness and guidance in fostering GESI conditions (See Fig. 4).

Figure 5: *Word cloud of School Mapping through Girls' Arts*



From the word cloud generated by girls' art activity, it is clear that 'teacher', 'equal treatment', 'books and pens' and 'counseling services' are considered crucial elements in promoting GESI in the school environment. The emphasis on 'equal treatment' highlights the importance of fairness and inclusivity in the learning process, with 'teachers' as important figures in this process. Additionally, access to educational materials such as 'books and pens' and mental health support systems such as 'counseling services' reflects the girls' priorities for a supportive and resource-rich school environment (See Fig.5).

The differences between boys and girls in their views on promoting GESI in schools are distinct. Boys tend to emphasize physical infrastructures, such as 'school building' and 'playground' indicating they see the school environment and recreational spaces as essential for fostering a culture of gender and social inclusion. Conversely, girls focus more on social and emotional aspects, highlighting 'equal treatment' and 'counseling services' as one of the essential aspects to promote GESI conditions. Both groups value the role of teachers in ensuring equality.

Theme 4: Teachers Mapping of School Environment for Promoting GESI

Figure 6: Word cloud of School Mapping through Teachers' arts



Teachers view the physical aspects of the school—such as the building, sports facilities, and washrooms—as vital for promoting GESI. These elements are seen as fundamental in creating an inclusive environment where all students have equal opportunities. Classrooms, the school

board, and computers are considered moderately important, as they support learning and interaction but are not seen as central to directly fostering GESI.

In contrast, factors like the roles of teachers, students (both boys and girls), school policies, and the library are perceived as having less immediate impact on GESI. While these elements contribute to the overall school environment, they are considered less critical compared to the physical infrastructure in ensuring equitable access and participation for all students. For example, although teachers' roles and school policies are important, they might not be as influential in directly promoting GESI as the physical amenities (See Fig. 6).

Overall, the emphasis on physical resources highlights their perceived importance in creating a fair and inclusive educational environment. However, it is also recognized that other factors play a role in the broader GESI framework. This suggests that teachers' understanding of promoting GESI is currently limited to physical resources. Therefore, there is a need to provide training for teachers on additional aspects essential for effectively promoting GESI in schools.

Theme 5: Mapping of Educational Stakeholders for Promoting GESI in schools

Table 10 outlines various places that teachers' recognized as Initiators, Competitors, Enablers, and Users/Beneficiaries for promoting GESI in schools. According to the teachers, these groups play distinct roles in shaping GESI initiatives, particularly in education and social systems. For example, they identified Schools, Samtse College of Education, and the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) as responsible for implementing GESI principles within educational environments while the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) can drive policy changes, focusing on gender equality and inclusive education. NGOs such as RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women), YGCD (Youth Guidance and Counseling Division), and UNICEF, (United Nations Children's Fund, Bhutan), and UNICEF can actively promote GESI through technical assistance, advocacy, and community-based projects. While **MoESD** and the **community** act as primary enablers, setting educational policies and cultural norms that integrate GESI into schools and colleges, they might also help create an environment that allows GESI projects to flourish by offering institutional support, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement.

Organizations such as Royal Bhutan Army (RBA), Royal Bhutan Police (RBP), and Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs (MoHCA) and a few NGOs (like the Loden Foundation) and Tarayana may compete for similar resources, influence, or outcomes related to GESI projects.

They may also represent government institutions that could prioritize traditional roles, sometimes conflicting with progressive GESI measures.

The users and beneficiaries of these GESI initiatives include: i) Schools and colleges, which benefit from policies and programs that promote inclusion and equality and 2) The community, particularly marginalized groups (e.g., women, children, vulnerable populations), which directly benefits from more inclusive, equal, and equitable education and social services. This shows that various agencies work together, sometimes in competition, to advance GESI goals, with key enablers supporting the beneficiaries of these initiatives.

Table 10:

Mapping of Educational Stakeholders (Places)

PLACES	
INITIATORS	COMPETITORS
Schools	NGOs (Loden Foundations)
Samtse College of Education	Sky Hydrant Project from Australia
Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD)	Tarayana
Royal Bhutan Army (RBA)	Royal Bhutan Police (RBP)
Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)	Y-Via
Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)	Community
Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs (MoHCA)	Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women (RENEW)
RENEW	National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC)
Youth Guidance and Counselling Division (YGCD)	
Hospitals	
Local Community	
The PEMA	
Ministry of Health (MoH)	
UNICEF	
ENABLERS	USERS/BENEFICIARIES
MoESD	School
	Community
	MoESD
	Colleges

Table 11 categorizes key individuals identified by teachers as central to promoting GESI initiatives in schools into four groups: Initiators, Competitors, Enablers, and those Impacted.

Teachers view Initiators as school leaders, teachers, parents, local leaders, and wellbeing teams who actively implement and support GESI policies to create inclusive environments in schools. They also identified principals, teachers, student leaders, and community figures as Enablers, working to promote inclusion and ensure the smooth execution of GESI-related initiatives. However, Competitors, such as traditional leaders, religious figures, and individuals with conservative views, may present obstacles to the success of GESI efforts in schools.

According to the teachers, the Impacted group primarily includes students, teachers, and the general public, who benefit from the focus on equality, inclusion, and supportive learning environments.

Overall, the table underscores the roles and interactions of these groups in either advancing or challenging GESI initiatives, highlighting the importance of collaboration to achieve inclusive education.

Table 11:

People

People	
<i>Initiators</i>	<i>Competitors</i>
Principals	Seniors
Vice Principals	Leaders
Academic and Non-academic managers	Teachers
Teachers	Educators
Local Leaders	Religious Head/practitioners
Parents	Local Leaders
Educators	Parents and Guardians
Councillors	Senior citizens
Wellbeing Team	Students
Subject Teachers	Learners
Warden	Staff
Matron	
Hostel Parents	
Administrative people	
School Management Board	
<i>Enablers</i>	<i>Impacted</i>

Principals	General Public
Vice Principals	Citizens
Local Leaders (Gups, Mangmis, Tshogpas)	People experiencing GESI issues
Adults	Students
Teachers	Teachers
Captains	Staffs
Councillors	Parents
Parents	Children
High Officials	Women
Dzongkhag Education Officers (DEOs)	Every individual
Wellbeing Team	
Warden and Matron	

The table 12 reflects teachers' categorization of various things related to promoting GESI in schools, focusing on **Initiators**, **Competitors**, **Enablers**, and those **Impacted**. While some categories are not fully detailed, it underscores the importance of policies and programs as key enablers for advancing GESI, while inadequate infrastructure and facilities are seen as potential barriers that may obstruct its effective promotion in schools.

Table 12:

Things

Things	
<i>Initiators</i>	<i>Competitors</i>
Not specified	Infrastructure/resources
	Facilities
<i>Enablers</i>	<i>Impacted</i>
School Policy	Not specified
GE-LGBT programme	
SEN policy	

DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Students' Understanding of Capability Indicators and Teachers' Perception of Students Awareness of Capability Indicators

The literature review on the Capability Approach (CA) provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining gender equality, equity, and social inclusion (GESI) in education. The CA emphasizes providing students with the resources and opportunities to lead lives they value, focusing on individual well-being, autonomy, and freedom (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). This perspective aligns well with the objectives of GESI, as it seeks to promote equitable access to education, respect, and emotional and physical well-being.

The application of the CA to education, as seen in the work of Walker (2007), suggests that education should be evaluated not merely in terms of academic achievement but in terms of the range of capability indicators it fosters—such as autonomy, social relations, and personal aspirations. This theoretical framing is particularly relevant when analyzing the findings from the focus group discussion, where students' understanding of various capability indicators for promoting GESI was assessed.

The students' scores in the focus group discussion reflect their understanding of key capability indicators that are vital for promoting GESI. Boys showed a strong understanding of capabilities such as Love and Care, Education, Respect, and Nutritional Well-being, scoring 1 on each. These findings align with the CA's emphasis on well-being and emotional security as fundamental to GESI. The boys' comprehension in these areas suggests they recognize the value of emotional warmth, mutual respect, and physical health—factors emphasized by scholars like Nussbaum (2011) and Walker (2007) as central to justice and equality in education.

However, the lower scores for boys in Gender Equality (0.66) and Freedom from Economic Exploitation (0.62) highlight significant gaps in their understanding of broader GESI principles. This suggests that while boys grasp certain emotional and physical aspects of well-being, they may not fully comprehend how economic inequalities and gender issues intersect with education. This aligns with Alkire's (2002) focus on the need to address inequalities beyond income, as well as with Robeyns' (2017) argument that capabilities must be contextual and responsive to gender and social justice issues.

Girls, on the other hand, exhibited their strongest understanding of Nutritional Well-being (0.98), which is crucial for health equity—a concept rooted in the CA’s emphasis on physical health and well-being. Girls also showed high scores in Respect (0.86) and Love and Care (0.90), indicating a solid grasp of emotional and relational aspects that contribute to a supportive and inclusive educational environment. These findings suggest that girls value dignity, emotional security, and mutual respect—capabilities that are essential for fostering GESI, as discussed by scholars such as Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (1999).

The findings also indicate areas of similarity and divergence between boys and girls. Both genders demonstrate a strong understanding of Nutritional Well-being, which aligns with the CA’s focus on physical health as a key capability. However, both boys and girls scored lower in areas such as Mental Well-being and Freedom from Economic Exploitation, suggesting a need for more targeted interventions in these critical areas. This aligns with the CA’s emphasis on addressing multidimensional aspects of well-being (Alkire, 2002) and highlights the need for educational initiatives that promote mental health awareness and economic literacy within the context of GESI.

The data from teachers offers further insights into students' understanding of GESI-related capabilities. Male teachers perceive students as most knowledgeable in participation and education, while female teachers report higher awareness in life/physical health and participation. These findings suggest that the curriculum effectively fosters student knowledge in areas like participation and education, as highlighted by Walker’s (2007) application of the CA to education. However, both male and female teachers noted significant drops in awareness in domains like mental well-being and nutritional well-being, areas which scored low among students as well.

The overall moderate awareness levels reported by teachers, with average scores of 39.19 (10 male teachers) and 41.14 (10 female teachers), suggest that while some progress has been made, there is room for improvement in how the curriculum addresses key GESI-related

capabilities. This aligns with the literature’s call for a more comprehensive approach to education that goes beyond academic achievements and focuses on capabilities that enhance students' well-being and social inclusion (Walker, 2007; Robeyns, 2017).

In conclusion, the findings from the focus group discussion reveal both strengths and gaps in students' understanding of GESI-related capability indicators. Boys and girls demonstrate strong awareness in emotional and physical well-being, but both groups need further education on mental health and economic exploitation, areas crucial for promoting GESI in schools. The CA, as applied in this study, provides a useful framework for identifying these gaps and guiding future curriculum development aimed at promoting GESI, and equity in education. This approach aligns with the global commitment to the SDGs 4, 5, and 10, particularly those focused on education, gender equality, and social justice.

Theme 2: Discussion of Integration of Capabilities Indicators in the Curriculum

In the context of integrating CA principles into the school curriculum for Grades I-X, the findings from both students and teachers reflect how GESI principles are perceived and prioritized. When examined through the lens of the CA, these findings reveal strengths in some areas and significant gaps in others. The CA framework, as proposed by scholars such as Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011), emphasizes the importance of providing individuals with opportunities and freedoms to lead lives they value. This aligns with GESI goals in education, which seek to foster equality, inclusion, and well-being.

The students' responses reveal a strong consensus on the inclusion of certain capability indicators in the curriculum, particularly around "Love and Care" and "Education," which scored highest among both boys (1.00, 0.98) and girls (0.90, 0.84) respectively. This indicates that emotional support and nurturing environments, along with access to education, are perceived as integral to promoting GESI. These results align with Nussbaum's (2011) assertion that capability indicators such as emotional expression, affiliation, and education are essential for justice and equality, particularly in contexts of gender inclusion. The high scores in these areas suggest that the curriculum fosters opportunities for emotional security and educational attainment, both critical for promoting GESI.

However, the low scores for "Freedom from Economic Exploitation" (0.50 for boys, 0.16 for girls) and "Mobility" highlight significant gaps in the curriculum's emphasis on these areas. These capability indicators are vital in the CA, as they represent the freedom to avoid economic and non-economic exploitation and to move freely—both crucial for achieving gender equality (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). The low emphasis on these capability indicators suggests that the curriculum may not be adequately addressing the structural barriers that prevent students, especially girls, from achieving gender equality in the broader socio-economic context. As

Alkire (2002) points out, addressing poverty and inequality requires a focus beyond income to include multiple dimensions of well-being, such as freedom from exploitation and mobility.

The lower scores for "Religion and Identity" (0.58 for boys) also reflect a lesser focus on how these aspects intersect with GESI. This finding aligns with Robeyns' (2017) critique that the CA must be pluralistic and context-specific. The lack of emphasis on religion and identity within the curriculum may indicate that it does not fully consider how social and cultural factors influence GESI. In contexts where religion and cultural identity play significant roles in shaping gender norms and social structures, the inclusion of these aspects in the curriculum could be vital for advancing GESI.

The analysis of teachers' perceptions revealed further insights into how capability indicators are prioritized within the curriculum. Both male (n=10) and (n=10) female teachers ranked "Participation" and "Education" highly, which reflects their understanding of the importance of these indicators in promoting GESI. Participation, as highlighted by Walker (2007), is a crucial capability indicator for empowering students to take an active role in their education and social environments. Similarly, education is not only a capability indicator in itself but also a means to develop other valuable capability indicators, such as autonomy, social relations, and personal aspirations.

However, significant differences emerge in the prioritization of certain capability indicators between male and female teachers. For example, female teachers ranked "Life and Physical Health" and "Aspirations" as the highest priorities, while male teachers ranked these lower. This suggests that female teachers may place a greater emphasis on the well-being and future aspirations of students—capability indicators that Nussbaum (2011) and Walker (2007) argue are essential for GESI. The lower ranking of "Aspirations" by male teachers could indicate a lesser focus on encouraging students to envision and pursue their long-term goals, which is crucial for fostering personal autonomy and social inclusion.

Both male and female teachers ranked "Mobility" as the lowest priority, placing it at twenty-first. This aligns with the students' perceptions and reinforces the idea that mobility is not seen as a significant capability indicator in the curriculum. Yet, mobility is a key factor in achieving gender equality and social inclusion, as it affects individuals' ability to access education, participate in social and economic life, and escape restrictive environments (Sen, 1999). The low prioritization of mobility suggests that the curriculum may not be addressing the barriers that limit students' freedom to move, especially for girls, who may face greater restrictions due to gender norms.

The cumulative findings indicate that while certain capability indicators such as participation, education, and love and care are well-integrated into the curriculum, significant gaps remain in areas such as "Freedom from Economic Exploitation," "Mobility," and "Religion and Identity." These gaps are critical because they limit the curriculum's ability to promote comprehensive GESI. According to Sen (1999), development should be measured not just by economic growth but by the real freedoms people have to pursue lives they value. If students are not given the tools to understand and challenge economic exploitation or restricted mobility, their ability to achieve true GESI will be hindered.

Additionally, the lack of emphasis on capability indicators such as "Mental Well-being" and "Time Autonomy" reflects a broader issue in the curriculum's approach to well-being. The CA argues for a multidimensional view of well-being that includes mental health, autonomy, and social relations (Alkire, 2002; Robeyns, 2017). The curriculum's focus on participation and education, while important, may overlook these critical areas that contribute to overall well-being and social inclusion.

In conclusion, while the current curriculum does incorporate important aspects of the CA, such as education and emotional well-being, there are significant areas where it falls short. By addressing these gaps, particularly in economic exploitation, mobility, religion and identity, the curriculum can more effectively promote GESI and ensure that students are equipped with the capabilities necessary to lead inclusive and empowered lives.

Theme 3: Discussion of the Importance of Capabilities Indicators

The analysis of the scoring of activities aimed at promoting GESI in schools reveals both alignment and divergence with existing literature on GESI. This discussion highlights key areas where the perspectives of students and teachers align with theoretical frameworks and where they diverge, offering insights into the practical implications of GESI indicators.

The strong emphasis placed on "Respect" and "Love and Care" by both male and female teachers aligns closely with the literature, which underscores the importance of emotional support and mutual respect in fostering an inclusive educational environment. Research highlights that such indicators are crucial for creating spaces where students can thrive socially and academically (UNESCO, 2020; Aikman & Rao, 2012). This alignment reflects a shared understanding of the need for supportive and caring school environments that underpin holistic student development.

Both students and teachers have ranked the "GESI Curriculum" highly. This finding resonates with existing literature that advocates for inclusive curricula as a means to challenge harmful gender norms and promote long-term social change (Sleeter, 2011; Unterhalter, 2013). The recognition of the curriculum's importance suggests that its implementation is seen as integral to fostering awareness and promoting gender equality within schools.

The significant emphasis on "Mental Well-being" by both student genders in the study aligns with the literature's focus on mental health as a critical component of inclusive education. Research highlights the role of mental health support in enhancing student engagement and creating a learning environment free from discrimination (Aikman & Rao, 2012; UNESCO, 2020). The alignment with the literature underscores the importance of addressing mental health in promoting GESI.

There are also a few capability indicators that had a notable divergence in terms of importance such as slower importance assigned to "Mobility" by students, particularly boys, compared to its strong emphasis in the literature. The literature frequently discusses mobility as a significant issue, especially for girls in rural areas who face barriers related to safe transport and school accessibility (UNESCO, 2020). The lower prioritization of mobility by students suggests a potential lack of awareness or experience of mobility-related challenges, particularly in urban or well-resourced settings.

The literature also highlights "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation" as essential for promoting GESI, focusing on issues such as child labor and gender-based violence (UNESCO, 2020). However, students ranked this indicator lower, which may reflect a lack of immediate awareness or experience with systemic exploitation issues within their educational context. This divergence points to the need for increased education on the long-term impacts of exploitation and its broader implications for gender equality.

The importance of "Time Autonomy" is emphasized more by boys than girls in the findings, contrasting with the literature's focus on the significance of time autonomy for girls, who often juggle educational opportunities with household responsibilities and caregiving duties (UNESCO, 2020). This divergence suggests a gendered difference in how time is perceived and valued within the school setting, with boys potentially associating free time with leisure, while girls may experience their time as more constrained.

The lower ranking of "Physical Health" and "Leisure" in the findings contrasts with the literature, which emphasizes the importance of physical health and leisure activities in GESI. The literature highlights physical health, including reproductive health education and access to healthcare, as critical components of GESI (UNICEF, 2019). Similarly, leisure is noted for its role in social integration and personal development (Unterhalter, 2013). While physical activities and leisure are acknowledged, their lower prioritization in the findings suggests that these aspects may not be fully appreciated in terms of their long-term impact on gender equity.

The findings place "Spirituality" and "Religion" lower in importance, reflecting a perception of these themes as secondary to more immediate social and economic issues. The literature, however, notes that religion and spirituality can play both positive and negative roles in promoting inclusion (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). While the findings indicate some engagement with spiritual activities, the need for a deeper exploration of how these themes intersect with gender equality is evident.

To sum up, the alignment between students' and teachers' perspectives with the literature is evident in the prioritization of respect, emotional well-being, and gender-sensitive curricula. However, the divergence in areas such as mobility, economic exploitation, physical health, leisure, and spirituality highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of GESI that incorporates both theoretical insights and the lived experiences of students and teachers. To effectively promote GESI, it is essential to address both broad systemic issues and the immediate needs and perspectives of those within educational environments.

Theme 4: Discussion of School Mappings

The findings from the focus group discussions and the word cloud activity reveal important gender-specific perspectives on the promotion of GESI in schools, which align with broader literature on gender, inclusion, and education.

Boys prioritize physical infrastructures like school buildings, playgrounds, and dining halls as critical to fostering GESI in schools. This finding resonates with Connell's (2009) assertion that material conditions play a crucial role in reinforcing or challenging gender norms, and Shore et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of inclusive environments where all students, regardless of gender, feel comfortable and valued. The boys' emphasis on these physical spaces

also aligns with Acker's (2006) exploration of how organizational structures can either perpetuate or reduce inequality.

However, Kabeer (2005) and UNESCO (2020) note that true gender equality requires more than just the presence of physical infrastructure. It also necessitates addressing systemic barriers such as power imbalances and social norms. While boys' focus on infrastructure is understandable, it points to a gap in understanding the deeper, systemic challenges to gender inclusion, such as economic exploitation and social hierarchies, which are crucial to GESI but less visible in discussions centered solely on physical spaces.

Conversely, girls' focus on social and emotional factors, such as equal treatment, counseling services, and access to educational materials like books and pens, highlights the need for a supportive and nurturing learning environment. This aligns with Stromquist (2007), who discusses how hidden biases in curricula and teaching methods often reinforce gender stereotypes, thereby affecting students' academic aspirations. The girls' emphasis on these softer elements, such as mental health support and fairness, underlines a more nuanced understanding of inclusion, which also resonates with UNCT Nepal (2011), which emphasizes how education systems must empower students to question and reshape harmful stereotypes.

The finding that boys and girls have distinct views on promoting GESI—boys focusing on physical infrastructure and girls on emotional and social support—reflects broader gendered perceptions in society. Boys may be more attuned to tangible, structural elements of inclusion, while girls, perhaps due to socialization, might emphasize relational aspects like care, equality, and support. These differences align with Kabeer's (2005) and Acker's (2006) discussions on how social structures and organizational practices are gendered, influencing how individuals perceive equality and inclusion.

The low scores on indicators like economic exploitation and mobility from both boys and girls highlight gaps in the current school curriculum's approach to GESI. This reflects a limited understanding of how economic and social factors intersect with gender equality in education, a gap also noted by Unterhalter (2005), who stresses the importance of addressing hidden inequalities in educational systems.

The finding that economic exploitation scored particularly low suggests that the curriculum does not sufficiently engage with broader socio-economic issues that affect gender equality, particularly for marginalized groups. This aligns with UNESCO (2015), which identifies economic barriers as significant factors limiting girls' education, particularly in low-income

regions. Addressing economic exploitation, whether through education or policy reform, is essential to achieving gender equality in education.

Both boys and girls recognized the pivotal role of teachers in promoting GESI, emphasizing that teachers are key figures in fostering inclusive environments. This aligns with the literature by Shore et al. (2011) and Ely and Thomas (2001), which emphasize that inclusive leadership and practices enhance organizational outcomes, such as student performance and innovation in education. Teachers are positioned as both facilitators and role models in promoting gender-sensitive practices, further reinforcing Kabeer's (2005) argument that power relations need to be actively addressed within educational spaces to ensure equity.

However, the focus on physical resources such as buildings and playgrounds by teachers suggests a somewhat limited understanding of GESI, as highlighted by UNESCO (2020). The literature calls for a more holistic approach to GESI in schools, one that extends beyond physical infrastructure to include policies, teacher training, and curriculum reforms that directly address gender biases and promote equality.

Theme 5: Discussion of Stakeholder Mapping

The findings regarding various actors' roles in GESI initiatives—schools, universities, NGOs, and government ministries—highlight the importance of collaboration in promoting gender equality. UNESCO (2020) and UNCT Nepal (2011) both emphasize that achieving GESI requires multi-stakeholder engagement, where education systems, policymakers, and civil society organizations work together to challenge gender norms and promote inclusion.

Teachers' recognition of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) and NGOs as crucial facilitators of GESI initiatives highlights the vital role of institutional support in driving progress. However, the fact that teachers have categorized the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) as a competitor suggests a lack of awareness about the organization's contributions. The NCWC has consistently been an active force in promoting GESI-related activities in the country. As Kabeer (2005) and Connell (2009) argue, policy reforms and institutional frameworks are essential for dismantling structural barriers to gender equality. Therefore, while physical infrastructure is significant, policy changes and targeted interventions that address both visible and invisible barriers are crucial for achieving a more gender-equitable education system.

In the people category, schools, principals, teachers, educators, counselors, and well-being teams are recognized as key enablers of GESI due to their extensive educational experience. However, other groups, such as seniors, local leaders, religious heads, parents and guardians, senior citizens, and learners, are seen as competitors. This categorization may stem from their potentially stereotypical cultural and religious beliefs, as well as resistance to change, which could impede GESI initiatives both within schools and in the broader community.

In conclusion, the findings from the focus groups and teacher perspectives reveal important insights into how GESI is perceived and promoted in schools. The emphasis on physical infrastructure by boys and teachers underscores a tangible but limited view of GESI, while girls' focus on social and emotional support reflects a deeper understanding of inclusion. The literature supports a more comprehensive approach, calling for systemic changes that address not only the visible aspects of gender inequality but also the underlying social and economic factors. Achieving GESI in education, as the literature suggests, will require ongoing efforts to integrate inclusive practices into curricula, policies, and school environments, ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, can thrive.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The cumulative analysis of students' understanding of capability indicators for promoting GESI revealed that students have a strong grasp of the capabilities related to 'Education,' 'Love and Care,' and 'Respect.' Teachers also noted that students exhibit high awareness of 'Participation,' 'Education,' and 'Life/Physical Health.' However, there is a noticeable difference in students' awareness of 'Mental Well-being,' 'Time Autonomy,' and 'Nutritional Well-being'.

In terms of curriculum inclusion, students identified 'Education,' 'Love and Care,' and 'Participation' as the most prominently featured indicators, while 'Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation' and 'Mobility' received minimal attention. Similarly, teachers considered 'Participation' and 'Education' as the most thoroughly integrated activities across all grades, with 'Life and Physical Health,' 'Respect,' and 'Social Relations' also notably included.

Students prioritised 'Respect,' 'Love and Care,' and 'GESI Curriculum' as crucial for promoting GESI within the school setting, while 'Mobility,' 'Spirituality,' and 'Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation' are viewed as secondary. Conversely, teachers ranked 'Education,' 'Love and Care,' 'Social Relations,' 'Bodily Integrity,' 'Mental Well-being,' 'Respect,' 'Understanding and Interpretation,' 'Time Autonomy,' 'Planning, Imagination and Thinking,' and 'Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum' as essential for GESI promotion. In contrast, 'Leisure Activities,' 'Mobility,' 'Spirituality,' 'Nutritional Well-being,' 'Religion and Identity,' and 'Life/Physical Health' are deemed less critical.

Moreover, boys placed importance on physical infrastructure such as 'School Buildings' and 'Playgrounds' for GESI, while girls emphasised social and emotional aspects, particularly 'Equal Treatment' and 'Counseling Services.' In contrast, teachers viewed physical aspects of the school—such as buildings, sports facilities, and washrooms—as crucial for promoting GESI, with less focus on other elements such as education, participation, and mental health. This indicates that there is a noticeable difference in the way teachers, boys and girls perceive what is important to promote GESI within the school environment.

Limitations

The study's scope is limited to the perceptions of a small group of students and teachers from Samtse Dzongkhag and does not reflect the broader perspectives of teachers nationwide. Furthermore, the focus on physical resources in promoting GESI may overshadow other crucial factors, suggesting that the current understanding and implementation of GESI may be somewhat limited. The low scores in areas such as nutritional well-being and mental health highlight gaps in the curriculum that may not adequately address the full range of student needs.

Recommendations

Curriculum Enhancement:

The curriculum needs to align more closely with the CA and effectively promote GESI, the curriculum should incorporate a broader range of capabilities. It should emphasize "Freedom from Economic Exploitation," "Plan/Imagine/Think," "Spirituality," and "Mobility" more strongly, as these are crucial for addressing structural inequalities that limit students' opportunities, particularly for girls. Additionally, greater focus should be placed on "Mental Well-being," "Nutritional Wellbeing," "Time Autonomy," and "Religion and Identity" to ensure that the curriculum fosters a holistic approach to GESI. This aligns with the CA's emphasis on providing individuals with the freedom to lead lives they value, which requires addressing multiple dimensions of well-being beyond education and participation.

Teacher Training:

Provide targeted training for teachers to broaden their understanding of GESI beyond physical resources. This should include strategies for promoting mental health, time autonomy, and holistic student well-being.

Student Awareness Programs:

Develop programs to increase student awareness in domains where there is currently a significant drop, particularly in mental well-being and nutritional health.

Ongoing Evaluation:

Implement regular evaluations and feedback mechanisms to continuously assess and address gaps in the curriculum and teaching practices related to GESI.

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Disclaimers

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethical Statement

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines specified by the IDRC's Advisory Committee on Research Ethics. The research design was reviewed and approved by the Department of School Education, Ministry of Education and Skills Development, Bhutan. In addition, all individual participants provided informed consent through signed consent forms, which also granted them the flexibility to withdraw from the study at any stage, should they wish to do so.

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Biography

Dr. Kinley Seden

Dr. Kinley Seden serves as the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages (DRIL) at Samtse College of Education. With more than 20 years of experience as a teacher educator and researcher at the Royal University of Bhutan, Dr. Seden will lead the research initiatives for this project in Bhutan. Her expertise in Participatory Action Research (PAR) will be invaluable in designing meaningful participatory activities. Her research interests encompass the psychology of teaching and learning, assessment practices, gender and education, teacher education, and professional development.

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Ms. Tshering Om Tamang is a lecturer in the Department of Language Education at Samtse College of Education. She holds a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, and an undergraduate degree in English Literature (Honours) from the University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia. Her Master's research focused on evaluating bilingualism among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, while her Honours dissertation provided a comparative analysis of the Bhutanese English curriculum, with particular emphasis on Bhutanese literature in English. Her expertise significantly enhances the department's focus on language pedagogy and literary studies.

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Karma Gayphel, a faculty member in teacher education and contemplative counseling at Samtse College of Education, has been actively involved in teaching and training since 2007. He holds a Master's degree in Human Service Counseling from Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia, and is an ICAP I (International Certified Addiction Professional – I), accredited by the International Centre for Credentialing and Education (ICCE) under the Colombo Plan Secretariat. As a National Trainer in Addiction Counseling, he has trained school counselors, healthcare professionals, and peer helpers. From 2018 to 2021, Karma served as the Dean of Student Affairs, significantly contributing to student well-being. He has also held leadership roles, including Head of the Department of Counseling and

Psychology and Programme Leader for the Post-graduate Diploma in Guidance and Counseling, where he was instrumental in developing and reviewing the college's first contemplative counseling program.

Dr. Kinzang Dorji

Dr. Kinzang Dorji (PhD) is lecturer and Head of the Department for STEM Education Department at Samtse College of Education (SCE), Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). He has a master degree in Botany from the University of New England, Australia, and earned his PhD in Freshwater Ecology from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Australia in 2016. His ongoing 16 years of university-level teaching experience in the College involves multidisciplinary teaching areas in both professional and subject-specific educational modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate level programmes. His research interests include educational teaching and learning, bioassessment of stream and river health (stream ecology), and health and wellbeing.

Dr. Kinley

Dr. Kinley, is an assistant Professor at Samtse College of Education (SCE) and has been working at SCE since 2006. He has PhD in education from Aalborg University, Denmark and Masters in Botany from University of New England, Australia. He served the college in various capacities such as the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages (2017-2020) and Head of the Science Department (2016-2017). Currently he is serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of STEM Education at Samtse College of Education teaching numerous subject specific, pedagogy, and research modules to postgraduate and undergraduate students. He is a passionate teacher and a keen researcher. His research interests are in educational research, educational technology, science education, inclusive education, and social research.

Dr. Reeta Rai

Dr. Reeta Rai is a faculty at Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan, where she teaches Chemistry, Environmental Science, Research Methods, and pedagogical modules to student-teachers at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She holds a Ph.D. in Environmental Science and an M.Sc. in chemistry. Her research interests encompass STEM education, teacher education, and Environmental Science. She has also authored book chapters

and published international peer-reviewed journal articles in the fields of Environmental Science, STEM education, and teacher education.

Mrs. Sonam Wangmo

Sonam Wangmo is the Programme Leader for BEd Secondary Arts at Samtse College of Education. She holds a Master's in Education, specializing in Early Childhood Studies, from Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. Her research interests focus on issues related to families and children, gender, and social inclusion. Currently, she serves as the country coordinator for the Gender and Inclusive Pedagogy (GIP) Project, funded by GPE KIX and IDRC.

Ms. Sonam Zangmo

Sonam Zangmo is a lecturer at the Department of Arts and Humanities Education, Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan, where she has been teaching since 2010. She holds a Master's in Psychology from Andhra University, India, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, and a Bachelor's in Psychology, Journalism, and English from Bangalore University, India. As the Programme Leader for the Postgraduate Diploma in Education, she teaches across various programs, covering topics like educational psychology, human development, and teaching strategies. Her research interests focus on motivation, counseling, academic performance, depression, and internet addiction. Sonam is actively involved in curriculum development and professional development workshops on communication skills and digital resource creation, while also leading research on assessment methods and teaching strategies.

Dr. Sonam Rinchen

Dr. Sonam Rinchen is the President of Samtse College of Education, where he is dedicated to fostering a supportive and inclusive academic environment. With a PhD in Science Education from Queensland University of Technology and an MEd from the University of New Brunswick, he brings a strong foundation in educational leadership. As the President of the college, he will provide overall support and oversight to the project.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Student Survey Tool

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12OVizmLfsNDDee_V6XGt7LdiqSM_psw37/view?usp=drive_link

Appendix 2: Teacher Survey Tool

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N_yrUt4EuOjmQAFsd4Nrvo9UUuazQ-jR/view?usp=drive_link

Appendix 3: Students and Teachers Capability Mapping

This data can be assessed through the shared link:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Jxjg2_37zap8H9yp2HjAEc70wVOrbVjn/edit?gid=2010556264#gid=2010556264