



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

SUMMARY OF REPORT ON GENDER ISSUES IN EDUCATION AND INTERVENTION STUDIES TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF BOYS

There is growing concern worldwide about the level of achievement of boys. There is much research published on the gender gap in educational achievement in which girls seem to be out-performing boys. It was against this backdrop that this consultancy was conducted under the support for a Seamless Education System programme.

The overall purpose of the consultancy was interpreted to be the generation of strategies to correct the perceived underperformance of boys in the school system in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly at the primary level.

The research was conducted in stages as follows:

- Review of the Literature (local, regional, and international research reporting on underachievement in boys)
- Review of Reports (Policy documents and reports issued by MOE and other stakeholders)
- Statistical Analysis of Examination Results (National Tests, SEA, CSEC)
- Field Work and Analysis of Data (5 schools across different educational context)
- Content Analysis of Curriculum and Assessment Instruments
- Toolkit

Following is a **summary** of the findings from the components of this study:

- The debate in the literature about male underperformance in the education system is a complex one. While some feel that there is excessive attention being paid to the phenomenon, others argue that it poses a serious threat to the stability of society.
- Not all boys are underperforming and not all girls are performing well. There is therefore need to pay attention to “which boys” and “which girls” are experiencing difficulty.
- Strategies for dealing with underperformance should take on board ways of paying attention to the individual, general classroom pedagogy, the school context and the socio-cultural background of the learner, and the involvement of the whole school.

- Education policy documents in Trinidad and Tobago portray the need to ensure learning by all students, regardless of gender.
- In Trinidad and Tobago girls are performing better than boys in nearly all examinations in the primary and secondary education sectors. Many of these differences in performance are found to be statistically significant but only some are found to be of practical significance.
- In the primary sector in Trinidad and Tobago, differences between males' and females' performance tend to be most marked in the area of Language Arts.
- Boys in some rural and inner city schools in Trinidad and Tobago have displayed the lowest levels of performance in all aspects of the Secondary Entrance Assessment.
- The limited classroom observations carried out indicate that initiatives aimed at addressing under-performance in local primary schools focus on both improving academic performance and promoting the holistic development of students. This is done primarily by focusing on improving the language competencies of students, particularly boys.
- The role of male teachers in the effort to enhance the performance of boys in the schools observed was not consistent. It ranged from active participation to disengagement.
- A collective community effort, collaboration within the schools and involvement of stakeholders outside of the schools seemed to facilitate the implementation of interventions. The provision of training through workshops, the availability of appropriate teaching/learning resources, and the creation of enabling learning environments also appeared to serve as facilitators to some interventions.
- Generally, interventions in the classrooms observed were not monitored in a systematic way and often only one or a few members of staff were involved in the intervention.
- There is a lack of uniformity in the way curricula for primary schools are presented. The Language Arts curriculum presents teachers with many useful examples of teaching strategies and resources that could enhance the learning of students.
- The content of the Language Arts curriculum is such that the areas of reading mechanics and reading comprehension are more heavily dealt with at the lower primary level than at Standards 1 and 2. It is unclear how this might be impacting on boys who are thought to often lack interest in reading at this level.
- The level of cognitive demand in the science and mathematics curricula seems to be low in the initial stages but, generally, this increases up the school system.
- While the Social Studies curriculum promotes the understanding of self, it does not specifically address the understanding of self as a gendered human being. This is a grave omission.
- Some skills promoted in the national curricula cannot be tested by the paper and pencil test which is the predominant form of testing in Trinidad and Tobago. Otherwise, there is a good match between skills outlined in the curricula and skills tested in the National Test.