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## EFFECTIVE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL DECISION MAKING BODY: POSITIVE IMPACT ON GIRLS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION OF BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, gender bias in the teaching profession is a highly variable factor influencing girls' schooling and their retention in school. It is one of the vital factors for the girl students in secondary education, because the adolescent period is vulnerable and needs assistance from the liberal perception. The goal of the study was to assess the impact of increased number of female members in the school management committee (SMC) and the assessment on the recruitment rule of female teacher to increase the enrolment and retention of girl students in secondary schools of Bangladesh. The study used a questionnaire to gather the information and opinion for further development. Six Upazila (Sub-Division) have been selected from three divisions, and 18 schools were randomly selected to conduct the study. A finding of the study was that female participation in the secondary school management and decision making level is very negligible. In the secondary school, there is a government policy to recruit 30% female teachers, but practically in the rural areas female teachers account for about 19% only. While in the SMC, female participation is also negligible. Only the head teacher (if female) by dint of her chair holds the post of the member secretary in the school management committee. In a very few schools, maximum one teacher is participating as a member from the teacher's quota. So, it is recommended to increase the number of trained female teachers in rural schools by giving them the assurance of social safety. Once women can develop their self-esteem, no doubt government, non-government agencies and the donor agencies will come forward to help them. So, it is very important for the women to break the cage and to expose them in the decision making body.

**Keywords:** Female Teacher, Female Member (SMC), Secondary

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is deeply rooted in Bangladesh. Society is both hierarchical and patriarchal and women's status within it subordinate. Women's position is theoretically protected under the constitution but traditional norms and behaviors restrict women's access to resources and services. The women work in this country in a context of unequal social relation between women and men which puts women at a disadvantage (Gender Equality Strategy for DFID Bangladesh, 2000). Women are an inseparable part of the development of a country. Nearly half of the populations of a country are women. It has now been realized that national development cannot be achieved unless we ensure women's development.

Education is the media for achieving women's development where the female teachers play a very significant role. The female teachers are the active participants in improving the quality of secondary education. In the social context of Bangladesh, it is strongly believed that the female teacher plays the role of "substitute to mother" in secondary schools, and women have an "innate" ability to teach adolescent children especially. In Bangladesh the girls in rural areas mostly remain removed from secondary education for a number of reasons. Poverty, poor communication, lack of infrastructure, lack of knowledge regarding the advantages of female education are notable among those reasons.

The government of Bangladesh has initiated some significant programs to overcome those problems. These include scholarship/stipend to girl students and food for education programs. In this context as "substitute mother" the female teachers would stimulate girls' enrolment and retention in schools. The female teachers and the female members of the school management committee (SMC) should know that the rights are inherent in nature so there should be no discrimination between male and female. Knowledge about rights will obviously raise their will power to resist any discrimination. Generally female teachers and members are in favor of presenting themselves as role models from the viewpoint of sincerity, ideology and dynamism. Female teachers can play a vital role for a girl student.

Traditionally, it is seen in our society that the son follows the father and the daughter follows the mother. Though it is not desirable to make a difference between mothers and fathers so, as a mother, a female teacher could present herself in a more positive way before the girl students. The negative attitude toward women is deeply rooted in our traditional belief system that women love to do their functionally defined role within the boundary of four walls. Only women can break the myth by engaging themselves in the public field, in an educational management level as effectively as men. Despite progress made by the Bangladesh Government in primary and secondary education enrolment, the dropout and retention rate is very high. There are some social causes as well as some attitudinal causes; one problem is that girls are not continuing education or even if they continue they are not getting independence and empowerment. In order to explore the actual position of women in Bangladesh, it is necessary to analyze the diverse forces in society which mold the lives of the women.

"The dilemmas and directions of the women and society are not fortuitous. They are the result of multiple factors which determine the drift of the whole cultural complex considered as a part of the social realities of the period", Mary Wollstonecraft stated in the "Vindication of the Rights of Women". It seems that the root of all these disparities lies in a misconceived and misapplied education. The neglected education of women is the grand source



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of the misery. Once women can develop their self-esteem, no doubt government and non-government agencies and donor agencies will come forward to help them in all regards. So, it is very important for the women to break the cage and be exposed in the decision making body. The negative situation has already started to change, but the change should be as rapid as development works are going on. So, we need to hold gender awareness programs and pre-service as well as in-service training for developing quality female teachers and female members of SMC.

### **Female head teacher dealing with adolescents' problem: A case in Motijheel School**

One day while the respective researcher was discussing with the head teacher, suddenly she was informed that a group of 8-10 boys of two different grades played truant and were engaged in watching videos in a nearby shop. The head teacher stopped the discussion, sent two teachers to catch the boys and bring them back to school. On returning to school, they were identified and their parents were requested over telephone to come to the school. Most of the mothers turned up. The head teacher, in the presence of the parents and some of the teachers, talked to the pupils. She displayed the attitude of a great motivator.

The boys gave their word that they would not repeat the deed. Their parents, very much depressed, committed to give more attention to their sons. The pupils were warned that the incident would be recorded and a repetition of the same would lead to their expulsion from school. It is clear from the above situation that female teachers with decision making authority have an important positive impact on boys and girls and on their communities. Significant numbers of women in the teaching profession, particularly at the higher levels and in decision-making positions, can raise the aspirations of girls and young women and positively influence social attitudes toward women.

### **Gender in Education and Development in Bangladesh**

Education is an important sector in Bangladesh. Alam, Hoque, Ismail and Mishra (2010) argued that, in Bangladesh, the education sector was far larger than many other sectors and its problems had their own distinct characteristics. The structure and system of education, the fundamental factor, was not based on sound foundation. Policies, legislative provisions (rules and regulations, etc.), and formal and informal governance could serve as complementary units to support the education structure and system. However, the absence of or weak national education framework with abundance of complementary units caused problems instead of bringing about solutions in the education sector in Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2010). Another important factor behind the low participation of women in secondary education of Bangladesh is culture. Culture is attitude and frame of mind. It is not genetic or innate, but involves social practice. Culture should be distinguished from human nature on one side and from an individual's personality on the other (Hofstede, 2005).

Two types of culture affect job satisfaction. The first one is organizational culture; here it means school culture. The relationship between superior and subordinate, decision making, delegation of authority, leadership conflict, and bureaucratic power and exercise of power are part of organizational culture. Job satisfaction is related to all these criteria. Leadership and decision making power makes a man confident and confident persons are always



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satisfied with their jobs. The second one is social culture. Hofstede (2005) identified these two cultural dimensions in society. He defined “a society as masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct.” Practically in Bangladesh society is masculine (Jamil , 1994). Here, the men are more powerful than women in power relation which causes women to be undermined. Before law and policies, women have equal status with men but from the socio-cultural perspective women are lagging behind.

Quality is the topmost priority of any educational institutions. In the present day in national and international perspectives, quality is the top of most agendas. Quality of education has significant impact and makes an invaluable contribution to human development. Students, therefore, have the right to receive an education of good quality and quality of education is associated with different academic and institutional factors. Many determinants are used to justify and measure quality. In this article school management committee of secondary education and female teacher recruitment will be emphasized. The main focus of the article will be the concern of female participation in the school management committee and teaching profession.

In Bangladesh, the key to achieving high rates of economic growth and at the same time ensuring that the fruits of economic growth are equitably shared by all the population lies in development and utilization of human resources; the only resource Bangladesh has in abundance. Though education has been recognized as a priority sector by all governments since independence, the picture of equitable human resource utilization is frustrating. In the secondary education school, there is a government policy to recruit 30% female teachers, but practically in the rural areas female teachers account for only 19% (World Bank report, 2010) only.

In the SMCs, female participation is also negligible. Only the head teacher (if female) by dint of her chair holds the post of the member secretary in the school management committee. In a very few schools, a maximum one teacher is participating as a member from the teacher’s quota. Though government desires to have increased female participation in SMCs this will not happen till practice will develop in this regard and until the community undergoes an attitude change. But it is very frustrating that in the secondary school, female participation in SMCs is very negligible and the required number of female teachers is not recruited. Management of school is instrumental to its quality. School management is the outcome of the functioning of a number of factors – both in-school and out-of-school. Successful school management is the concerted effort of all these factors or inputs.

The Ministry of Education has indicated that they intend to increase the number of women working in Upazila offices and the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE). Research has already proven that an increase in number of women in teaching will have a major impact on girls’ education. Additionally, these women are income generators who are perceived in a more positive way by their families and communities, contributing to change in the traditional belief and social practices. The significant impact that education has on women and their households is well documented. It has been shown that educated mothers are able to contribute more efficiently to enhance the quality of their children’s education (Chaudry, 1995; Raj, 1982).

Studies from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, however, have clearly shown that parents refrain from sending their daughters to school not so much because they fear for their daughter’s safety, but because they are worried of upsetting traditional gender roles which give girls little choice in matters of education (Kanwar & Taplin, 2001). In rural areas qualified women are uncommon and posting of urban women to villages far away from their families is unappealing and dangerous. About 95% of the secondary schools are non-government. The SMCs have broad local power over school affairs, head teachers and teachers whom they alone can appoint and dismiss. SMCs



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are comprised predominantly of male elites and are not always representative of their communities. Their performances are varied; some are models of dedication and ingenuity, others are fraught with irregularities and local power struggles.

### **Government Policies and Circular: Female Teacher Recruitment Rule Female Teacher Recruitment Rule**

As mentioned before, in the secondary school in Bangladesh, there is a government. policy to recruit 30% female teachers, but practically in the rural areas female teachers comprise about 19% of the teaching staff. Considering the practical situation, a new circular was published (Ministry of Education, People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2009) stating that within the sub-division and metropolitan areas at least 40% female teachers should be recruited and outside these areas, at least 20% female teachers should be recruited. In these areas when the circular is publishing for a vacant post, it should follow the following rule:

1. First time, it should mention, only female candidates are eligible to apply
2. Second time same circular will be published
3. Third time the circular should announce that recruitment is open to both male and female candidates.

### *Female Member of School Management Committee Recruitment Rule*

1. One female teacher should be selected from the reserve seat
2. No female teachers
3. One reserve seat from the guardian category.
4. No guardian

### **School Management Structure and Organization**

Generally the head teacher along with the assistant head teacher and the SMC are responsible for managing non-government secondary schools. Senior teachers also come within the purview of the management in large schools. According to the Managing Committee of the Recognized Non-government Secondary Schools Regulations 1977, a managing committee comprising 11 members is to be elected for each school. It includes a chairperson, the member secretary, two teacher representatives, four parents, one founder member, one donor member, and one person nominated by the zonal deputy director of secondary education.

The chairperson is nominated by the respective Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), the head teacher is the member secretary (ex-officio), teacher representatives are elected by the teachers from among themselves, parent members are elected by the parents, and so on. The committee has the power to: (i) raise and



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manage funds; (ii) appoint, suspend, dismiss and remove teachers subject to prior approval of the BISE; (iii) grant leave to teachers other than casual leave (iv) approve the annual budget; (v) make provisions for all physical facilities and teaching materials; and (vi) ensure regular payment of salaries and allowances to the teachers and other employees.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The impact on women teachers of being in a male-dominated profession is also likely to be a salient factor in some countries. Research has shown that motivational patterns are different among men and women in OECD countries with men more concerned with extrinsic rewards (most notably pay) and women focusing more on intrinsic rewards, for example, the satisfaction of teaching children (Bennell, 2004). Female participation in SMC would create a friendly environment for girl students because they could express their problems easily with the female members; female members will feel honored to be in the high decision making body and it is expected that gradually they will develop their capacity for decision making in a broader perspective.

Increased number of female member in SMC is needed because they could maintain a good relationship with the guardians of the girl students and also could motivate girls for education. Increase in female members in the SMC will make schools more accessible and close to the communities where girls live because many guardians do not like to come public because of seclusion. If female members are in the decision making body it will be easier for them to promote advocacy programs and social mobilization in collaboration with the local elite to minimize teasing and sexual harassment in schools. In this context the following objectives have been set for the present study:

- To determine the social causes behind the lower participation of females in the secondary education management level
- To determine the impact of female participation in secondary education on girl students
- To suggest some alternative approaches

## **METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative approaches were employed to collect and analyze the data. The questionnaire was developed through field visit, discussion with head teachers, chairman of the SMC and the local elite people, and female teachers. The respondents were selected from several schools from six selected Upazilas.

To assess the impact of increased female participation in school teaching, female participation in SMC and to document the special concern of the female teachers in the secondary schools a questionnaire was supplied to the respondents. The studies were conducted in six selected Upazilas where the sample includes 322 teachers (both male and female), 69 female teachers and 137 members of the SMC. The responses were measured based on dichotomous scale (i.e., respondents were asked to select 'yes' or 'no' based on their agreement and



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disagreement). Finally the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, percentage and tabulation.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The feedback from the questionnaire sets for the female teachers and the general teachers was satisfactory. The opinion collected is shown in Table 1 and various tables, charts and paragraphs.

Table 1

*Number of female members in SMC*

Division Total 03	District Total 04	Upazila Total 06	Institution Total 18	Female members Total 09	
Chittagong	Comilla	Chowddagram Homna	03 03	03 02	
Rajshahi	Rajshahi Chapainababgang	Godagari Shibgang	03 03	01 00	
Dhaka	Tangail	Bhuapur Gopalpur	03 03	02 01	

Out of 18 institutions from 6 Upazila, it is found from the field survey that in Rajshahi division out of six institutions there was only one female SMC member, in Dhaka division out of six institutions there were three female members in the SMC and in Chittagong division five female SMC members exist. We know that generally in SMC, eleven members exist. So, it is very frustrating to see that only nine female members out of 132 (approximately) are in SMC. In most of the institutions with only one female member the member is also the female head teacher of the respective institution.

Table 2

*Positive impact on decision-making power of female members in SMC*

Response	No.	%
Yes	76	55.48
No	27	19.71
No Response	34	24.81
Total	137	100

Table Note: Out of 137 respondents 55.48 percent believe that the female participants in SMC apply their decision-making power in the meeting and they should be more vocal. They also desire to have more women in a decision-



making body. Some 19.71 percent disagree that female participants do not have any decision-making power in the committee because they are not habituated to share their opinions with others. This is one of the most important causes of having low female participation in the decision-making body.

#### **Female Teachers' Concern for Girls' Academic Excellence**

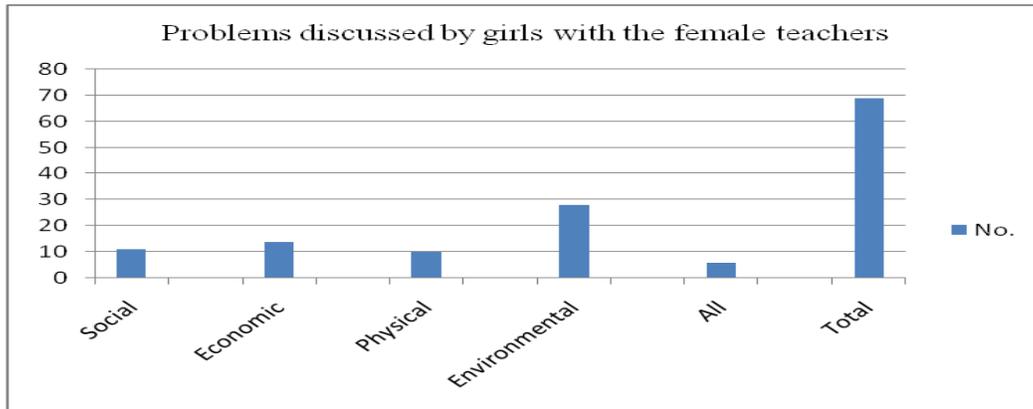
It is found that 100 percent of female teachers said that they are more concerned with the girls' academic excellence rather than their appearance, social status, personal relationship and economic solvency. No discrimination is existing regarding their judgment on the girl students; female teachers judge them impartially.

Table 3  
*Self-esteem Program for the Girl Students*

Response	No.	%
Encourage them to have knowledge of the women of the developing countries.	10	14.50
To impart the knowledge of human rights.	16	23.19
Playing as a role model for the girl students.	37	53.62
All	06	8.70
Total	69	100

Maximum respondents 53.62 percent are in favor of playing their part as a role model for the girl students. Furthermore, 23.19 percent respondents are in favor of imparting the knowledge of human rights to the girl students, so that they themselves fight against the discrimination prevailing in society.

Some 14.50 percent of respondents believe that the girl students will feel encouraged after having the knowledge about women of the contemporary world and 8.70 percent respondents believe that the entire components are necessary to transform the girls into empowered women.



**Figure 1.** Problems discussed by girls with the female teachers.

Adolescence is a vulnerable period for the girls in Bangladesh. Girls can neither share their problems with their family members nor can they share with their relatives. In the rural areas most of the girls come from poor and conservative family, where the trend of sharing is rare. In this situation, the female teacher is seen as an educated and progressive person who can play the role of a counselor for them. Some 15.94 percent of respondents said that girl students are interested to discuss some social problem with them, 20.28 percent said the topic of discussion is economic, 14.50 percent said that girl students discuss some of the common physical problems of the adolescent period. The majority of teachers (40.58 percent) revealed that the girl students face environmental problem mostly, such as eve teasing and sexual harassment.

**The way female teachers believe to resist harassment against girl students**

To avoid the unpleasant situation the girl students sometimes like to share their problems with the female teachers of the schools. The ways female teachers like to resist are diversified. Some 60.87 percent respondents said that they prefer counseling to resist the violence against the girl students, while 15.94 percent respondents are in favor of direct punishment and 11.60 percent prefer complaining to the school authority. Only 10.14 percent are in favor of complaining to the guardian. A very negligible 1.45 percent did not respond to this question

Table 4  
*Role of Female Teachers in Social mobilization*

Response	No.	%
Communication with the community people	64	92.75
Communication with the local elite	03	4.35
No Response	02	2.90
Total	69	100

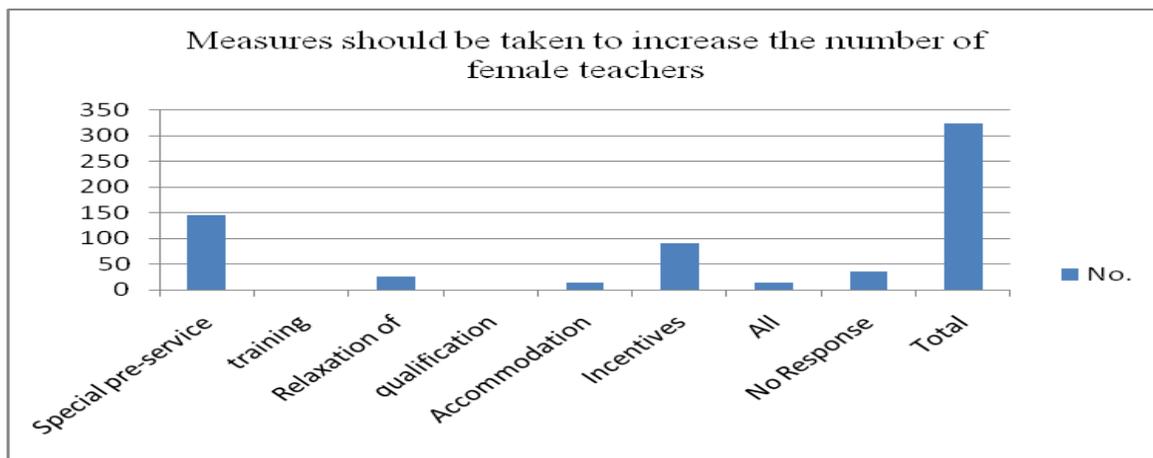


Regarding the role of female teachers in social mobilization, 92.75 percent respondents believe that effective communication with the community people will minimize the problem and 4.35 percent respondents are in favor of communication with the local elite. In this regard, emphasis should be given to PTA. In most of the schools no PTA is functioning and even if functioning, it operates in a very casual way.

#### **Staffing schools with female teachers can provide visible role model for girl students**

Although the government goal is that at least 30 percent of the secondary teaching force should be female, currently less about 19 percent of secondary teachers are female and they are concentrated in urban areas. Inclusion of sufficient number of female teaching staff is expected to have a positive effect on girl students. It will change the social norms and thus expand the enrolment trend of the girls in the school where more female teachers are working.

Out of 322 respondents, 81.05 percent believe that the increased number of female teachers will provide a visible role model for girl students, although 18.05 percent of respondents do not believe in the ripple effect of female teachers on girl students.



**Figure 2.** Measures should be taken to increase the number of female teachers

Pre-service training 45.03%, relaxation of qualification, 7.77%, Accommodation, 4.03%, incentives 27.95%, no response, 11.19% , all, 4.03%.



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Table 5  
*Social Causes of Low Female Participation in Secondary School Teaching*

Response	No.	%
Not interested in Rural posting	90	27.95
Social insecurity	69	21.43
Lack of quality School	34	10.55
Lack of proper Accommodation	102	31.68
All	20	6.21
No Response	07	2.18
Total	322	100

Some 27.95 percent of respondents said that most of the qualified women are not interested to work in a rural area, 21.43 percent said that lack of social security made women not interested to be assigned to rural areas, while 10.55 percent of respondents attributed the low participation to lack of quality school, 31.68 percent said it was due to accommodation problems and a very small minority, 2.18 percent, identified all the factors as the causes of low female participation in secondary school teaching.

Table 6  
*Type of recruitment rule is desired by the female teachers*

Response	No.	%
Decentralize Recruitment Rule	288	89.44
Increase Quota	27	8.39
No Response	07	2.17
Total	322	100

Out of 322 respondents 89.44 percent are in favor of a decentralized recruitment policy, 8.39 percent believe in a quota system and 2.17 percent did not respond.



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## **DISCUSSION**

The above mentioned analyses and findings are indicating negligible female participation in SMCs and in the teaching profession. The prevailing barriers to female students are due to lack of female teachers in the secondary school. In addition, female teacher participation in the rural areas is rare. Not only that, the SMC selection procedure is questionable given its lack of transparency. While female teachers can contribute to changing the traditional practices of the male dominated society their appointments are selective in the school.

Causes of less female participation in the rural areas include male domination, social barrier, lack of awareness, lack of self-confidence and motivation among the women themselves, lack of opportunity, lack of qualification to compete with their male counterparts, lack of transparency in recruitment procedure and so forth.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Inclusion of two women in SMC in any newly participating school is expected to have a ripple effect on social norms and expand the role of women in high profile educational management positions. The School Management Committee (SMC) should have broad local power over school affairs, head teachers especially on female head teachers, they alone can appoint and dismiss. So, it is recommended that regular monitoring of SMCs be done by the Ministry of Education and District Education office. SMC's accountability to the District Education Officer should be strictly maintained. In case of irregularities, discontinuation of accreditation should be enforced.

As SMC are comprised predominantly of male elite members, they are not always representative of their communities. It is therefore suggested to bring positive change in the situation through public awareness campaign. In this regard, seminars and workshops could be arranged, and booklets, brochures, leaflets and TV spots could be produced. In Bangladesh non-government secondary schools are currently being managed by their respective SMCs. Although primarily the head teachers shoulder the responsibilities of running the school, actually they enjoy little power and authority. This anomaly needs to be removed and the role of SMC should ideally be transformed from that of a Regulator to a Facilitator. At present, no educational qualification is required for SMC membership. So, the uneducated persons are allowed to capture the authority of entire schools. The membership rules need to be amended so that only educated persons interested in promoting education can become members.

It is also recommended to the policy makers in revising the policy of guardianship by giving the option to be guardian to either the father or mother. It will maintain fairness in the election procedure of the school management committee and in other places also. From the teacher's category, it should be compulsory to include at least one female teacher in the SMC, otherwise the accreditation and subvention should be canceled.



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## **Female Teacher Recruitment**

A recruitment campaign is necessary to identify the new women interested to work in secondary schools. Promotion of gender awareness is required amongst stakeholders. Revising administrative policies in favor of increasing female teachers in secondary schools should be taken into consideration. In addition systematic assessment of the impact prevailing recruitment policies have on female teacher participation would be useful to get information for designing future initiatives. These initiatives may include implementation of a quota system, removal of age restrictions, local recruitment and posting, relaxation of qualification and building rural teacher training institutions giving emphasis on women who are interested in joining the teaching force.

So, it is recommended to make the school environment healthy for girls and female teachers by increasing enrolment of female teachers in schools. It is believed that the increased female participation will create a safer place for the girl students as well as for the young female teachers. It is also suggested to increase the number of female teachers through awareness campaigns. The local elite and the community must be aware of peoples' attitudes to change their negative attitude to female employment and to take initiatives to recruit more female teachers. It is recommended to take effective strategy to motivate the community members and the women members of the family.

Female SMC members and the female teachers in this regard could play the potential role to help other females overcome the social barriers. The authority should provide secure and cheap accommodation for female teachers. Promotion of gender awareness amongst stakeholders is necessary. So it is recommended to give them gender awareness training. Media could be used to sensitize the stakeholders. Improved school facilities are needed for creating a friendly environment for the female teachers. The teachers' privacy should be assured by providing separate latrines, separate common room, prayer room and so forth.

The Government of Bangladesh implements a 1:40 teacher-student ratio, as indicated in the National Education Policy 2000. This will provide many more teaching vacancies. So, it is suggested to fill the gap by the required number of female teachers in the secondary schools. Hence, effective networking between female teachers would also help them to overcome the problems they are facing inside and outside the schools. It would also develop their self-esteem and self-confidence to fight against any irregularities and discrimination. Finally, as women face discrimination in certain professions because it is expected that they may become pregnant or have children to care for, in that case it is recommended to introduce parental leave instead of maternity leave so that employers would judge both male and female equally at least in one aspect.



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