

## Secondary School Students' Perspectives on Gender Equality: An Attempt Towards Breaking Traditional Barriers

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### Introduction:

Indian society's dome was built with women as its cornerstones. In the Rig-Vedic era, women enjoyed high social rank. Women were properly educated in the early Vedic era, claim Katyana and Patanjali. Women had excellent opportunities to raise their own intellectual and spiritual standards. Women enjoyed having the freedom to select their partners, girls could go to school, and widow remarriage was popular (Swayamvara). Women were highly educated scholars (Bramhavadinis) like Vac, Ambhrni, Romasa, Khona, and many more. Women included Ghosha, Lopamudra, Sulabha Maitreyi, Gargi, Godha, Adhiti, Indrani, etc. among the rishis. Women were free to pursue a variety of economic endeavours at this time, including teaching, spinning, weaving, producing, and working in the agricultural sector. There is considerable evidence that women like Kaykayi, Sita, Rukmani, Urmila, Sathyabhama, Savitri, and numerous more served as models of bravery, fortitude, and strong will.

Due to tight constraints promoted by the caste system, women eventually began to experience low status in the post-vedic period. As a result, women were forced to deal with major problems like a lack of educational opportunities, early marriage, being limited to domestic labour, and the sati system. As the medieval era began, it became clear that women's time had passed. Women began to fight for their identities, and many social reformers—including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Dayananda Saraswati—tried to shield them from society's ills. The standing of women in contemporary India is rather paradoxical. She may be at the top of the success ladder, but she is also silently experiencing the brutality her family members are inflicting against her. Women in the current era have made significant advancements in comparison to earlier generations, but they still have a long way to go. There are several obstacles in their way. The women have left

the safe haven of their house and are now fully equipped with their talent on the battlefield of life. They had established their worth. However, they have not yet received their due in India. India's gender ratio demonstrates that there is still discrimination against women in Indian society. According to the 2001 census, India has 933 females for every 1,000 males, which is much fewer than the global average of 990 females. The issues that Indian women face on a daily basis are numerous. Indian women now deal with these issues on a daily basis, and some of them have learned to accept them as part of their fate (Shashi, 2017).

Humans are inherently interdependent with one another, requiring one another to meet all of their requirements. As a result, each person's actions in society should be beneficial to all members. Being a part of society is about bringing everyone along, and the fundamental goal of society is to advance as a group. Unfortunately, people tend to forget how society came into existence and what its goals are. Instead, economic injustice, racial discrimination, and gender disparity are today's top worries. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision-making at the local levels. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights for women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988, and the Platform for Action, Five Years After- An assessment".

Globally some progress on women's rights has been achieved. In India, 83.3% of legal frameworks promote, enforce and monitor gender equality under the SDG indicator, with a focus on violence against women. On gender equality, India is placed at rank 89 on the overall SDG gender index. SDG 5 creates clear linkages between its overall goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women, including its targets on ending discrimination and eliminating violence against women, and other SDG targets that reflect specific gender issues: the SDG 3 targets for family planning and reproductive health; the SDG 4 targets for gender parity in education; and the SDG 16 targets on the elimination of sexual exploitation and trafficking, among many others. Gender inequality in education remains a persistent challenge in many parts of the world, including India. The access and quality of education for girls in India has been historically uneven, with significant disparities across socioeconomic status, geographic regions, and social groups. ([Galiullin, 2015](#)) ([Stewart, 2009](#)) Understanding the perspectives of Indian secondary school students on gender equality can provide valuable insights into the barriers that still exist and the pathways forward for achieving greater equity in educational outcomes. A limited but growing body of research has explored Indian secondary school students' own perspectives on gender equality. Some studies have found that while students generally express support for gender equality, many still hold traditional views on the appropriate gender roles and expectations, particularly in areas like career choices and household responsibilities. Students' own confidence, aspirations, and sense of identity can also play a key role in their attitudes towards gender equality and their educational and career trajectories. ([Moneva & Malbas, 2019](#))

**Need & Significance:**

Our nation is not behind in this regard in protecting and safeguarding the citizens of the country. The constitution is the supreme law of the country and makes all the provisions for every citizen. The preamble to the Indian Constitution declares that India is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic. The impartial aspects of the preamble are to secure justice, liberty and equality for all citizens and promote fraternity to maintain the unity and integrity of the nation. Despite all the provisions, it has been evidenced that such incidents in our society are related to issues like gender discrimination, gender inequality and so on. India was placed at

123 positions in the gender inequality index [2019 survey] and the report noted that the labour force participation rate of women in the country was 20.5%. despite the high growth rate and plentiful government measures to encourage gender equality, the gender gap still exists in India. Lack of gender equality not only limits women's access to resources and opportunities but also imperils the life prospects of the future generation (sumanjeet 2016). If this continues then there are chances of unbalancing the structure of the society itself, as a consequence, we may face of same serious issues of low literacy rate, lower educational attainment of women, child labour and so on. With evidence, one can say that every human being in this world is equal, both men and women play an equally responsible role in the erection of society. Under the roof of globalization, any individual can take a step ahead socially, culturally, politically, legally and economically irrespective of race, gender, caste, and creed. Some of the international organizations like UNO, ECOSOC, IWC, IUCN, IAEA, WTO, ICJ, and UNESCO have been established to enhance the people to have a good quality of life and deal with their life issues [related to any aspect of life].

Being born as a woman, one has to face gender discrimination at all levels. Women in every sphere of life have to deal with various hurdles and cope with immediate problems. At the household level, females are confined to their household chores, raising children and looking after families, irrespective of their education degrees or job profile. At her workplace: women have limited access to job opportunities and are paid less for the same work. As the breadwinner of the family, as the caretaker, as a mother, wife, daughter, and also a service provider to the society. Despite this fact, women's contribution to the development of the nation is equal, but still, discrimination is made based on gender.

According to A. T Jersild, adolescence is that span of years during which boys and girls move from childhood to adulthood, mentally, emotionally, socially and physically. In this adolescent stage social changes are reflected and new values in social acceptance and rejection. Adolescence is a period of great intellectual advancement as the young person matures mentally, there are changes in thinking and concept formation. Educating adolescents on gender sensitivity plays a sensitive role in their lives and that helps to avoid gender stereotypes, gender discrimination and

gender disparity in society. Hence the researcher felt the imperative need to study on perception of gender equality among secondary school students.

Addressing the persistent gender inequalities in Indian secondary education will require a multi-pronged approach that takes into account the complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors. Engaging with students' own views and experiences can provide important insights to inform more contextually relevant policies and programs.

Gender inequality remains a persistent challenge in the Indian education system, despite efforts to promote equal access and opportunities. ([Ellis, 2009](#)) Particularly at the secondary school level, disparities in enrollment, participation, and academic performance between male and female students continue to be a concern. ([Galiullin, 2015](#))([Stewart, 2009](#)) This study aims to explore the perspectives of Indian secondary school students on gender equality.

#### **Review of related literature:**

*Mount-cors et al. [2020]* attempted to study a radical transformation: Promoting gender equality when children start school through strategies to make early-grade education efforts more gender transformative and thus more effective. Authors collaborated on gender planning in a national language reading program in early primary grades in Senegal, the USAID-funded All Children Reading (ACR) program, which serves 3,572 schools and 59 daara (Koranic schools) in six regions of Senegal. The paper draws on the authors' collaborative work on the ACR program, as well as the expertise of the three authors in education, gender, early-grade reading and literacy. A mixed methodological approach allowed the authors to collect and examine the quantitative and qualitative data available at central and decentralized levels. The conclusion of the study was Promoting gender equality when children start school will lead to a radical transformation, with progress toward the SDGs for all children. *Cetin & Fatmanur [2019]* conducted a descriptive study to investigate the effectiveness of the gender equality course with a specific focus on the faculties of education. The study was undertaken with the purpose of collecting the opinions of the students of the faculty of education about gender equality and to what extent their opinions on gender equality have changed after the course. 433 female students of the

faculty of education were the sample for the study. Gender equality scale [ by Gozutok, Toraman & Acar–Erdol,2017] and five-point Likert’s scale were used in the study and to analyze the data the nonparametric equivalent Wilcoxon test was applied. The finding showed the extreme views with regard to men’s superiority over women. Results also indicated different opinions in terms of gender equality among the students in different departments, from different geographical regions, with fathers of different educational backgrounds and different habits of reading newspapers. The study concluded that the majority of the participants were not of the opinion that men are superior to women. *Tube & Falma [2018]* attempted to study with the purpose of preparing a gender equality curriculum for pre-service teachers and making its reflective assessment. The design of the research was shaped in accordance with the Taba Model. Reflective evaluation forms and structured measurement tools were used. To analyze the data descriptive statistical tool, the frequency was used. The findings of the study revealed that the gender equality curriculum draft [GECD] results of the reflective assessment, have determined that learning outcomes, contents, learning experiences, measurement and evaluation dimensions of the GECD were suitable for their purpose and consistent with each other. The study recommended that the gender equality curriculum be implemented in faculties of education until social awareness of gender equality is gained.

Previous research on gender inequality in Indian education has highlighted several key barriers and challenges, including the persistent disparities in access to secondary education, particularly for girls from low-income and rural backgrounds. The lack of secondary schools in rural areas, concerns over girls' safety, and social norms that prioritize boys' education over girls' have all contributed to the gender gap in secondary enrollment and completion. ([Galiullin, 2015](#)) While the Indian government has implemented various initiatives, such as the Right to Education Act and schemes to promote girls' education, these interventions have had an uneven impact across different regions and socioeconomic groups. The income inequality in access to secondary education is greatest in the states of Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, with girls being only half as likely to enroll in secondary school as boys in states like Bihar and Rajasthan. ([Stewart, 2009](#))

Recent studies have also examined the role of cultural and social norms in shaping students' educational aspirations and preferences. Some research has found that students, both male and female, often hold traditional views on appropriate gender roles and expectations, particularly in areas like career choices and household responsibilities. For example, a study on track preferences in senior high school found that gender was a crucial factor in students' choices, with certain academic streams like Accountancy and Business Management perceived as more suitable for boys, while Humanities and Social Sciences were often preferred by girls. ([Moneva & Malbas, 2019](#)) Thus, understanding the nuanced perspectives and experiences of Indian secondary school students can provide valuable insights into the barriers to gender equality in education and inform more effective interventions.

**Aim:** To study the perception of gender equality among secondary school students.

**Objectives:**

1. To study the level of perception of gender equality among secondary school students.
2. To study the level of perception of gender equality among boys and girls of secondary school students.
3. To study the level of perception of gender equality among state board and CBSE students of secondary school.

**Hypotheses:**

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of gender equality among secondary school students.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean score in the perception of gender equality of boys and girls among secondary school students.
3. There is no significant difference in mean score in the perception of gender equality of state board and CBSE students of secondary school.

**Research Method:**

**The Method:** The study followed the methodology of a descriptive survey. A survey was done using a 'Perception of Gender Equality Scale', developed by the researcher.

**Population:** Students studying in secondary schools in Mysuru district.

**Sample:** A total of 125 secondary school students from Mysuru District were selected for the study as a sample based on the convenient paradigm.

**Variables used in the study:**

**1. Independent Variable:**

Secondary School Students

**2. Dependent Variable:**

Perception of Gender Equality

**Operational Definitions of the key terms:**

**1. Gender Equality:**

Operationally the term 'gender equality' refers to Gender equality as the state or condition that affords women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities and resources, allowing both sexes the same opportunities and potential to contribute to, and benefit from, all spheres of society (economic, political, social, and cultural). Gender equality is a transformational development goal. It is understood to mean that women (girls) and men (boys) enjoy the same status on political, social, economic and cultural levels. It exists when women (girls) and men (boys) have equal rights, opportunities and status. Perception of gender equality in this study will be represented by the scores on the gender equality scale developed by the investigator.

**2. Perception:**

Operationally the term 'perception' refers to the ability to see, hear, or become aware of equal opportunities and access with respect to all spheres of life for both males and females.

**3. Adolescence:**

Operationally the term 'adolescence' refers to the students who are studying secondary school students.

**Tools:** A perception of Gender Equality Scale was developed consisting of 80 items based on 4 components. 10 Teacher Educators validated the scale and provided feedback on the same. Based on the validator's feedback 2 items were deleted from the draft and the final tool consisted of 78 items in the Perception of Gender Equality Scale. 27 statements focusing on Component 1 (School), 22 statements focusing on Component 2 (Home Environment), 10 statements focusing on Component 03

(community), and 05 statements focusing on Component 4 (Playground and environment).

**Reliability:** *Cronbach Alpha* (.95) and *Guttman Split-Half Coefficient* (.89) were used to check the reliability of the Perception of Gender Equality scale.

**Data collection:** Perception of Gender Equality Scale was distributed to secondary school students in the classroom. Students were asked to describe by marking each statement against Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree on how they might feel about it after careful reading.

**Statistical Techniques Used for Data Analysis:** The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis to verify the hypotheses formulated in the study.

- Percentage analysis was used to assess the levels of perception of gender equality of secondary school students.
- ‘t’-test was used to find a significant difference between boys and girls perception of gender equality studying at the secondary level.
- ‘t’-test was used to find a significant difference between state board school and CBSE board school student's perception of gender equality studying at the secondary level.

**Analysis and Interpretation of data:** Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were applied to obtain responses collected from secondary school students to meet the objectives of the study.

### Results & Discussion

**Objective 1:** To study the level of perception of gender equality among secondary school students.

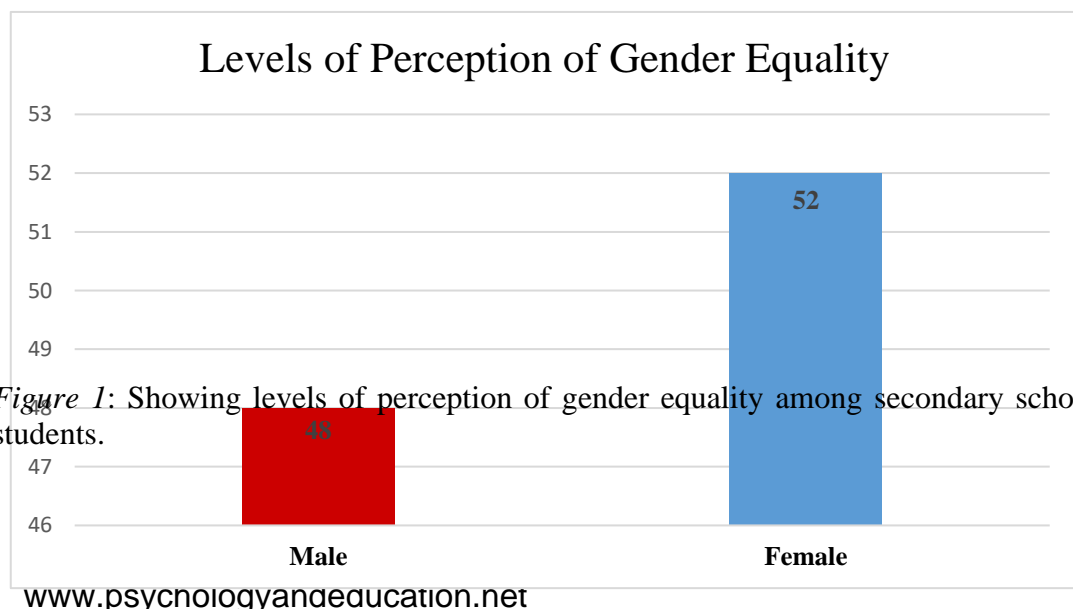


Figure 1: Showing levels of perception of gender equality among secondary school students.

The performance of the Perception of Gender Equality Scale on Secondary School Students with the total number of participants, is graphically represented in Figure 1. Graphical representation of data describes that girl students studying in secondary school possess a high level of Perception of Gender Equality compared to the boy students studying in secondary school.

**Objective 2:** To study the level of perception of gender equality among boys and girls of secondary school students.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the mean perception of gender equality scores of boys and girls studying in secondary school.

Table 1: Gender-wise Mean Perception of Gender Equality Score

Gender	N	Mean	't' value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Results
Male	60	259.18	4.9	0.00*	Null Hypothesis Rejected
Female	65	295.02		0.00*	

\*Significant at 0.05 Level

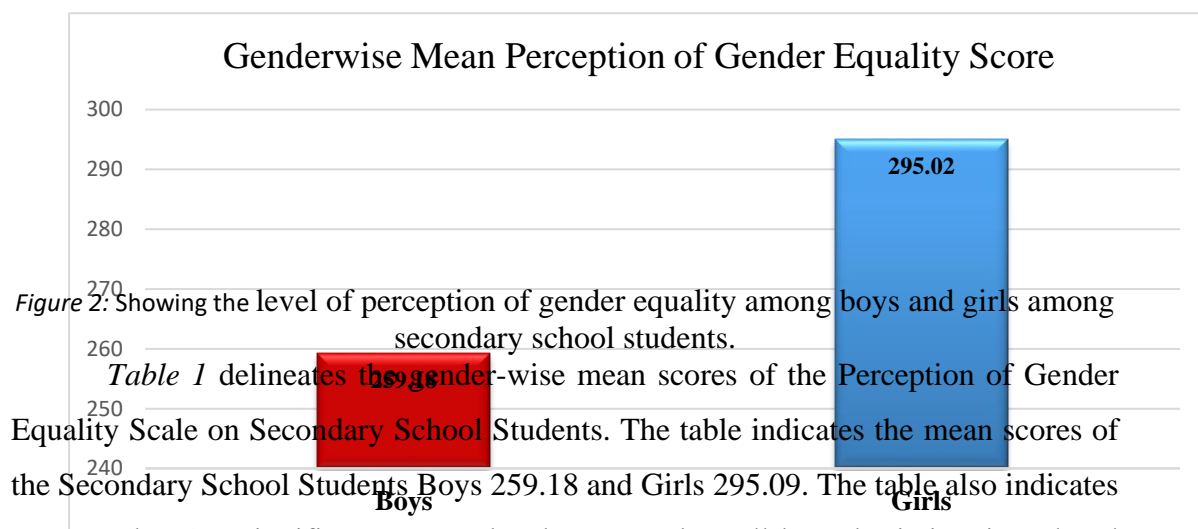


Figure 2: Showing the level of perception of gender equality among boys and girls among secondary school students.

Table 1 delineates the gender-wise mean scores of the Perception of Gender Equality Scale on Secondary School Students. The table indicates the mean scores of the Secondary School Students Boys 259.18 and Girls 295.09. The table also indicates the 't' value 4.9, significant at 0.05 level, Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and accepted alternative hypothesis - There is a significant difference in the mean perception of gender equality score of boys and girls studying in secondary school.

The mean performance of each group is graphically represented in Figure 2.

**Objective 3:** There is no significant difference in mean score in the perception of gender equality of state board and CBSE students of secondary school.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the mean perception of gender equality scores of students studying in state board and CBSE schools.

Type of Institution	N	Mean	't' value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Results
State Board	61	290.36	3.2	0.02	Null Hypothesis Rejected
CBSE Board	64	265.86		0.02	

Table 2: Type of Institution Mean Perception of Gender Equality Score

\*Significant at 0.05 Level

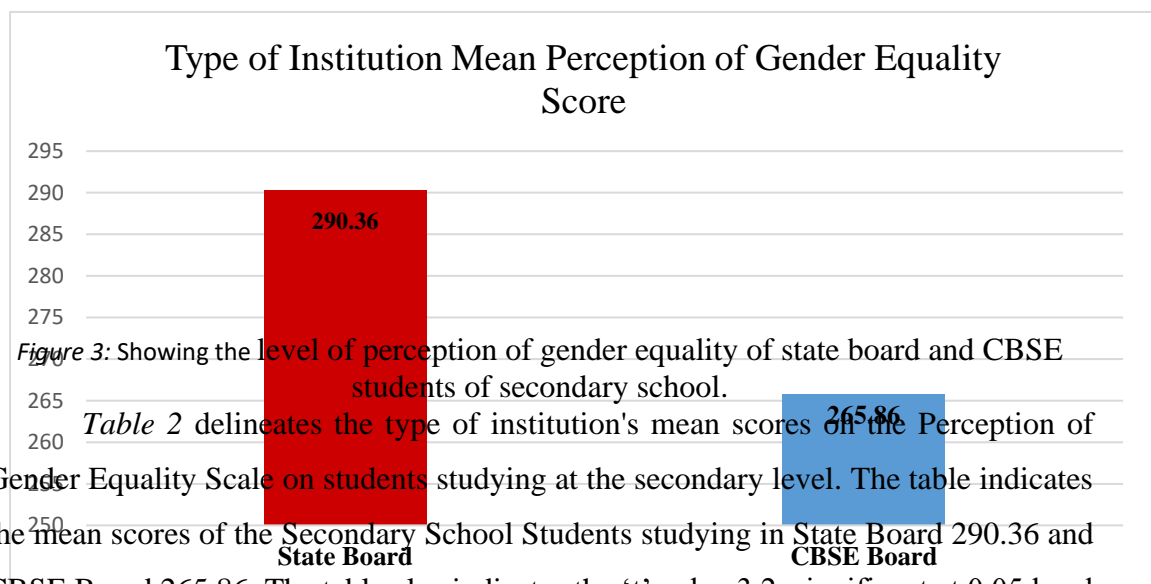


Figure 3: Showing the level of perception of gender equality of state board and CBSE students of secondary school. Table 2 delineates the type of institution's mean scores on the Perception of Gender Equality Scale on students studying at the secondary level. The table indicates the mean scores of the Secondary School Students studying in State Board 290.36 and CBSE Board 265.86. The table also indicates the 't' value 3.2, significant at 0.05 level, Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and accepted alternative hypothesis - There is a significant difference in the mean perception of gender equality scores of students studying in state board and CBSE schools. The mean performance of each group is graphically represented in Figure 3.

**Summary and Conclusion:**

Gender equality in education means that all students, regardless of gender, have access to a supportive, responsive, and empowered educational environment. Raising gender awareness seeks to advance and foster a general comprehension of issues relating to gender inequality. Additionally, it seeks to demonstrate how values and norms shape our reality, feed preconceptions, and support the systems that give rise to disparities. Being able to see, hear, or become aware of equal opportunities and access with respect to all spheres of life for both males and females will ensure that everyone

benefits from any provisions of gender equality policies of the government. The results of this study provide valuable insights into the perspectives of Indian secondary school students on gender equality in education. The study underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to addressing gender inequality, one that involves not only improving access and infrastructure, but also addressing the deeply ingrained social and cultural norms that continue to shape the educational experiences and aspirations of students. Effective interventions will need to engage with students, families, and communities to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and encourage a more equitable and inclusive approach to secondary education. By amplifying the voices and perspectives of Indian secondary school students, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex and nuanced barriers to gender equality in the education system, and can inform the development of more targeted and impactful policies and programs. On average, Female students studying in secondary school possess a high level of Perception of Gender Equality compared to Male students studying in secondary school. There was a statistically significant difference in gender-wise mean Perception of Gender Equality Scores and Type of Institution Mean Perception of Gender Equality Scores.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ Perception of Gender Equality among the students at the primary level and upper primary level plays a significant role in developing an ability to see, hear, or become aware of equal opportunities and access with respect to all spheres of life for both males and females. Hence the present study can be extended to the students at the primary level as well as upper primary level.

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