



Minarah College

SCHOOL BASED RESEARCH PROJECT:

IMPLEMENTING CLASSROOM PRACTICES
TO SUPPORT GIRLS IN CO-ED ISLAMIC
SCHOOLS



Project Lead

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INTRODUCTION



Minarah College is a co-educational independent Islamic school in South West Sydney for students from Kindergarten through to Year 12. The motto of the college is from the Quran: Rabbi Zidni Ilma, 'O My Lord, increase my Knowledge' (Surah Ta-Ha; 20:114). As stated on the college's website, Minarah is committed to inspiring both male and female students to become seekers of knowledge and embrace the opportunities of a globalised and ever-changing world. Students are equipped with the skills and values to become principled leaders and active contributors to society, while holding strong to Islamic faith.

The School Based Research Project, Implementing Classroom Practices to Support Girls in Co-Educational Islamic Schools, was developed from an observation that female students in Stage 3 were quieter, less demanding of teachers' time and more cooperative than boys. Teachers observed many girls choosing to not participate in activities that would place them at the forefront of the classroom, and found they would shy away from extra-curricular activities. We therefore decided to research the reasoning behind girls' opting out of classroom contributions, and to delve into factors such as culture, age and social surroundings to research why they may be choosing to be less involved in the and if it was due to the presence of boys.

One of the original goals of the project was to develop a Teacher Resource Kit of digital and web resources to complement a term long Personal Development and Health (PDH) Unit, focusing on the Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyle strand. Our objectives shifted through the course of the projects and as a result, the project evolved to focus upon school activities and classroom practices that promoted girls' confidence and aspirations. It also explored teacher assumptions about differences in behaviour and the positive contributions of Stage 3 boys and girls in an Islamic School context. We then provided Stage 3 girls with meaningful experiences to shape their learning, confidence, self-esteem, and character, and thus also instil high aspirations for future careers.

Minarah's research team was led by the Associate Deputy Principal, Ms Marwa Abdallah. She was joined by Ms Lipika Kaura and Ms Trizzalyn Prasad. They were supported by Dr Roberto Parada, an Educational Psychologist from Western Sydney University and Dr Shani Hartley from The Evidence Institute at the Association of Independent Schools, NSW.

LITERATURE REVIEW



ARTICLES SUMMARIES:

Schultz, K. (2009, 2010)

Schultz's research discusses why some students are quieter and how gendered socialization can influence students' classroom behaviour, impacting girls' likelihood of speaking out and seeking attention. This source is valuable for understanding how quieter behaviour can be both a personal choice and a result of broader social expectations.

Doyle, W. (1983)

This study offers insights into how classroom interactions differ between boys and girls, with boys generally demanding more attention and engaging in more disruptive behaviours. Girls, by contrast, tend to be seen as more cooperative, a characteristic valued in traditional classroom settings, which may lead to a quieter, less visible classroom presence.

Pekrun, R., & Stephens, E. (2010)

This research explores the influence of emotions and engagement in classroom environments. Girls often report higher levels of anxiety in competitive settings and tend to avoid situations that place them in the spotlight, such as competitive extracurriculars, which impacts their participation in certain activities

These sources provide a foundation for understanding how classroom dynamics can reinforce gendered behaviour patterns and how these patterns affect students' educational experiences and engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW



ANALYSIS:

Gender differences in classroom behaviour are widely acknowledged, with studies indicating that girls are generally quieter, more compliant, and engage less frequently in behaviours that demand teacher attention compared to boys (Doyle, 1983). These behavioural differences are believed to result from both socialisation and classroom dynamics that reinforce traditional gender roles. Girls, in particular, are often socialised to be cooperative and considerate of others, which translates into classroom behaviours characterized by compliance, collaboration, and a reluctance to assume roles that draw attention to themselves (Schultz, 2009, 2010).

In her research on quieter students, Schultz (2009, 2010) notes that quieter students, particularly girls, may avoid participation in classroom discussions not due to lack of interest or competence but as a response to classroom norms and expectations that subtly discourage female assertiveness. Schultz's work also suggests that quiet behaviour can lead to girls being less visible in classrooms, which may unintentionally reduce opportunities for teachers to recognise their contributions. Similarly, Doyle (1983) found that boys tend to exhibit behaviours that are more disruptive, capturing a larger share of teachers' attention, whereas girls are frequently perceived as model students due to their compliance, which may limit active engagement and participation.

Another contributing factor is the higher level of learning anxiety that girls experience in competitive or performance-based classroom settings. Pekrun and Stephens (2010) found that girls are more likely to experience anxiety in such environments, which can discourage them from participating in activities that place them at the forefront. This anxiety may also lead girls to opt out of competitive extracurricular activities, as these situations emphasize public recognition and self-promotion—traits less commonly encouraged in female socialisation. Consequently, while girls perform well academically, their participation in classroom discussions and leadership roles may be lower than that of their male peers, reflecting a gendered self-concept that aligns with cooperative, supportive roles rather than assertive, leadership-driven ones.

These findings underscore the importance of understanding gendered classroom behaviour to promote an equitable learning environment. Strategies that mitigate the effects of gendered socialization and reduce learning anxiety could help ensure that girls are equally engaged and visible in classrooms. Such approaches may include collaborative projects that emphasise inclusivity, supportive teacher feedback, and creating environments where quieter students feel encouraged to participate.



The study utilised a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Surveys were distributed to parents, teachers, and students to gather insights on current classroom practices and their effectiveness. Additionally, focus group discussions and classroom observations were conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and needs of female students.

STAGE 1 PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEYS

The research began with an investigation into the current opinions and perspectives of parents (n=36) and students (n=106) via an anonymous survey regarding workplace gender roles. Surveys were conducted in June 2022. The data collected informed potential changes in programming and the classroom.

STAGE 2 PLANNING THE INTERVENTION

Various events were planned and resources created with the aim to empower young girls to have high aspirations. Focus groups and workshops were conducted with parents in February 2023 to discuss the changes being considered.

STAGE 3 IMPLEMENTING THE INTERVENTION

Implementation of activities and resources:

Positive Affirmation Book

In June 2023, girls worked alongside a renowned Muslim author who has created a book that encompasses her faith, culture and identity. Our girls used this self-authoring process to write down authentic quotes, illustrations and diary entries to empower other Muslim girls in a collated 'Inspiration Journal'. This has been digitised and is available to Islamic Schools across the globe. We also printed hard copies for our girls to use.

Character Development

We used Deep Learning practices and workshops to encourage our girls to set high aspirations for themselves and work towards achieving these goals.

Mini Entrepreneurs

This part of the project gave students the opportunity to explore future career options. The intention was to empower young girls to have high aspirations for their future careers.

STAGE 4 POST-INTERVENTION SURVEYS

The surveys students completed in Stage 1 were performed a second time in August 2023 to understand the impact of the intervention on students' attitudes towards gender roles.

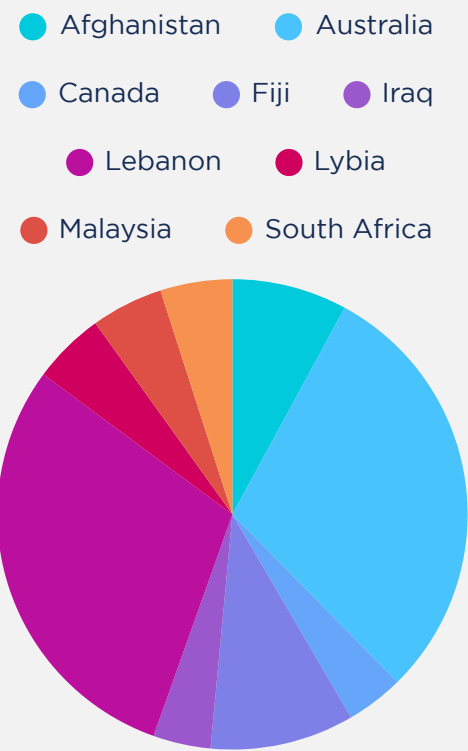
DATA ANALYSIS

PARENT SURVEYS



BASIC PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

COUNTRY OF BIRTH:



HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION:

Less than Year 12	2	5.6%
Year 12	4	11.1%
Vocational Qualification (e.g., Certificate III or IV from TAFE)	14	38.9%
University Degree - Bachelor	11	30.6%
University Degree - Master	3	8.3%
No response provided	2	5.6%

ANALYSIS

Majority of responding parents were born either Australia or Lebanon. All other countries listed saw similar numbers, with only Fiji and Afghanistan having slightly smaller percentages.

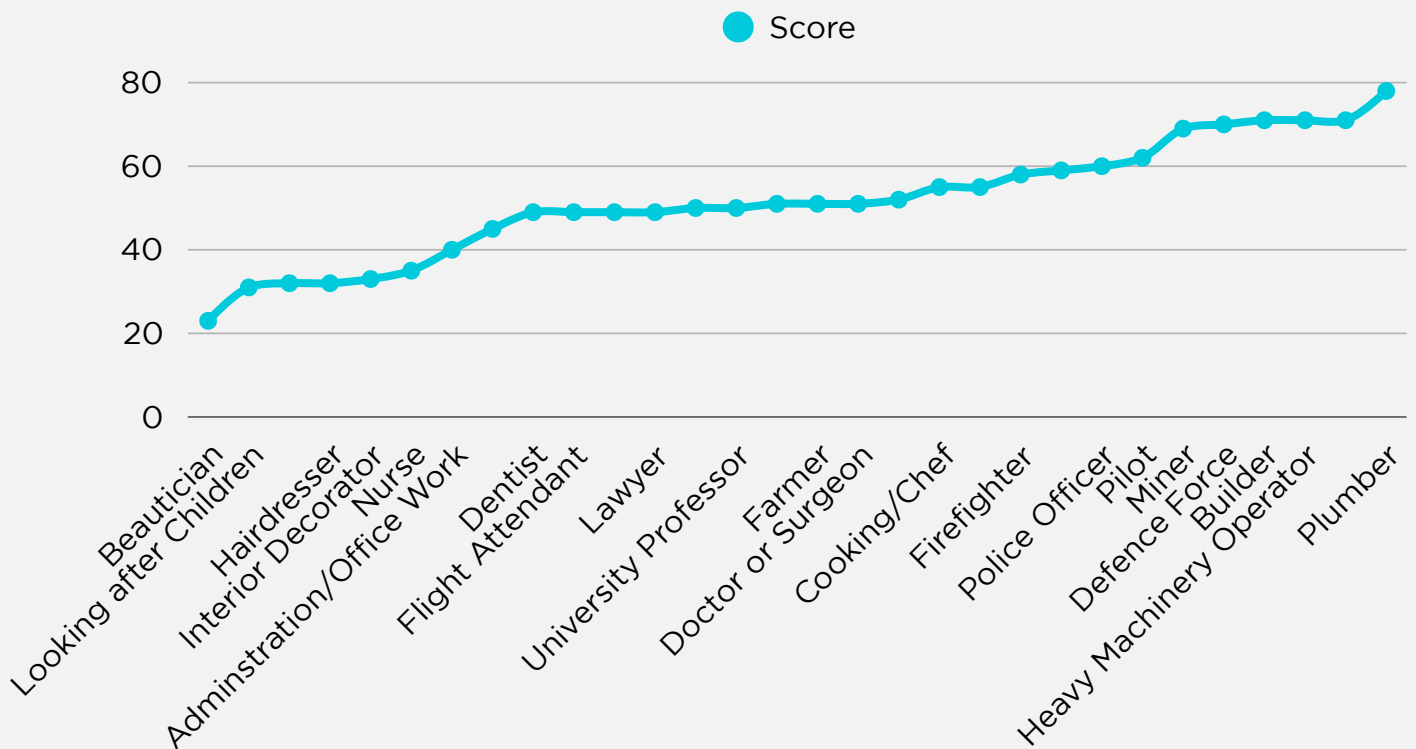
Education levels of respondents were varied, however the majority of respondents had continued on to further education after completing their schooling.

DATA ANALYSIS

PARENT SURVEYS



GENDERED EMPLOYMENT OPINIONS



ANALYSIS

The graph above indicates gender bias for particular careers. Parents were asked to give each of the listed professions a score out of 100. A Score of 50 meant that role was equally suited to both males and females, above 50 indicated it was more suited to males, and under 50 more suited to females.

Whilst there are some noticeable dips and peaks indicating that certain professions are seen to be more suited to males or females, for example, at the extremes, beautician scored a 23 and plumber scored a 78. The majority of professions near the 50% mark could be described as 'more prestigious' professions, for example, dentist, lawyer, scientist, university professor and CEO. Many of the professions skewed more towards males tended to be professions which require more physical exertion, for example, plumber, bricklayer and firefighter.

DATA ANALYSIS

STUDENT SURVEYS



BASIC STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

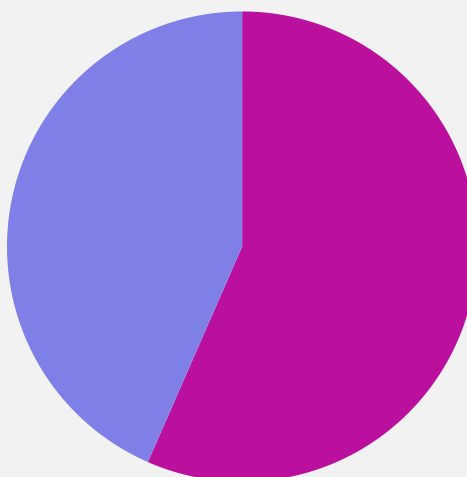
GRADE:

● Year 5 ● Year 6



GENDER:

● Girl ● Boy



ANALYSIS

In 2022 there were 106 students in Stage 3 at Minarah College of which 52.8% are in Year 5 and 47.2% are in Year 6 (as seen in the pie graph on the left above). In Year 5 there are 29 girls and 21 boys and in Year 6, 31 girls and 25 boys. Therefore, across Stage 6 there are 56.6% girls and 43.4% boys (as seen in the pie graph on the right above).

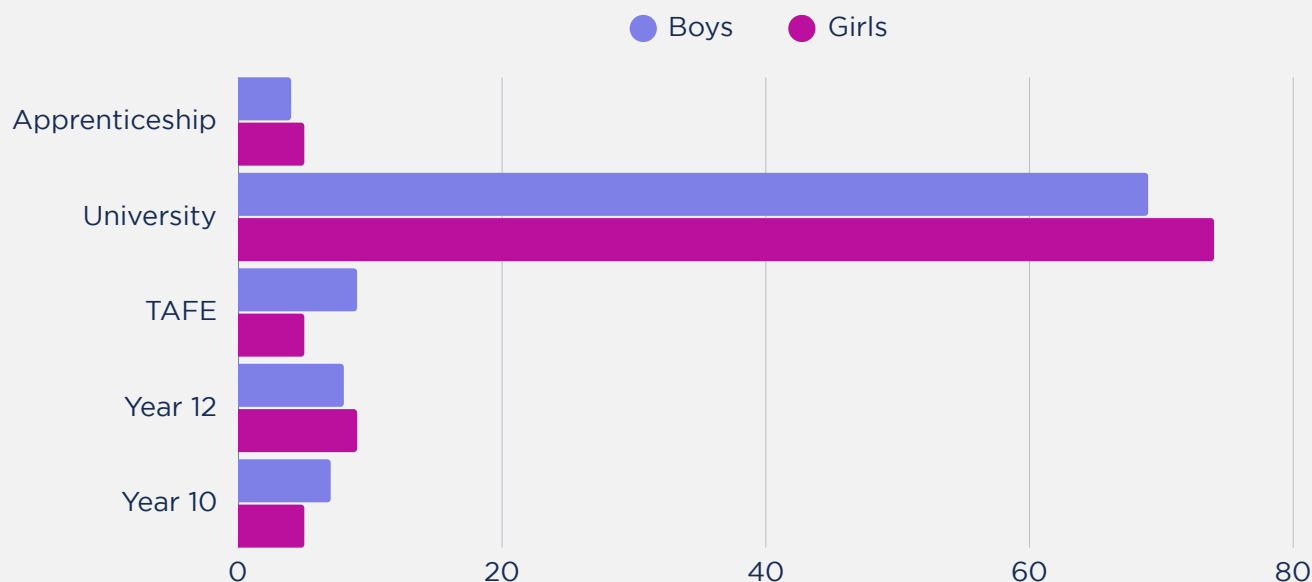


DATA ANALYSIS

STUDENT SURVEYS

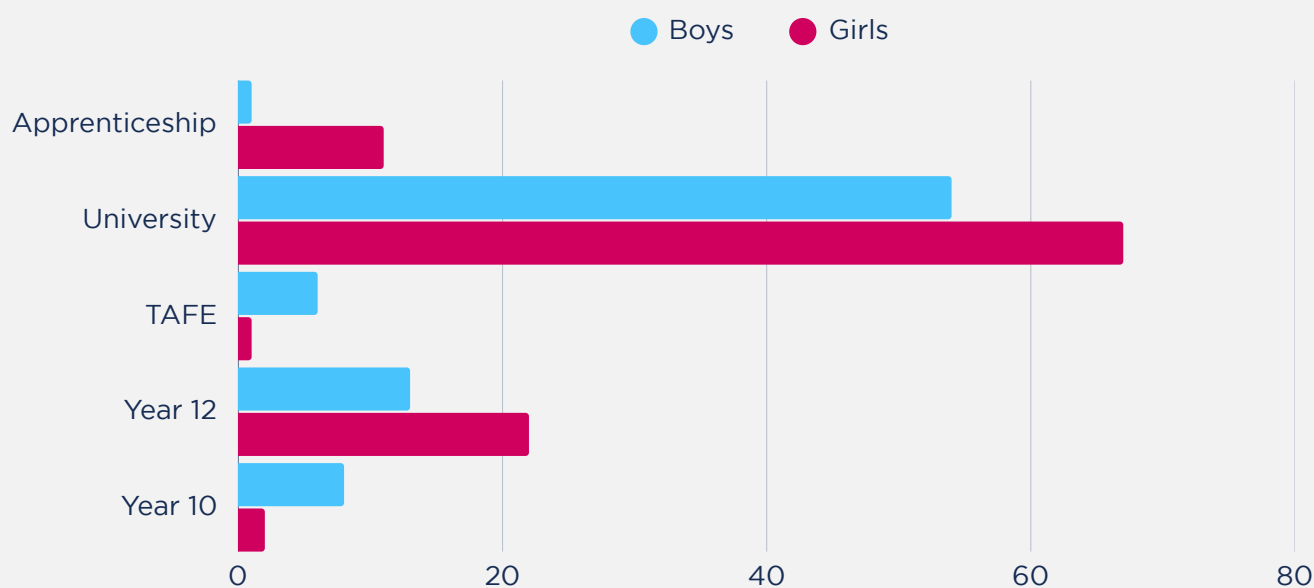


WHAT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION YOU WANT TO COMPLETE?



The above results indicate high aspirations for Tertiary Education for most of the cohort, with girls aspiring more towards University Education than boys

AT PROJECT CONCLUSION:



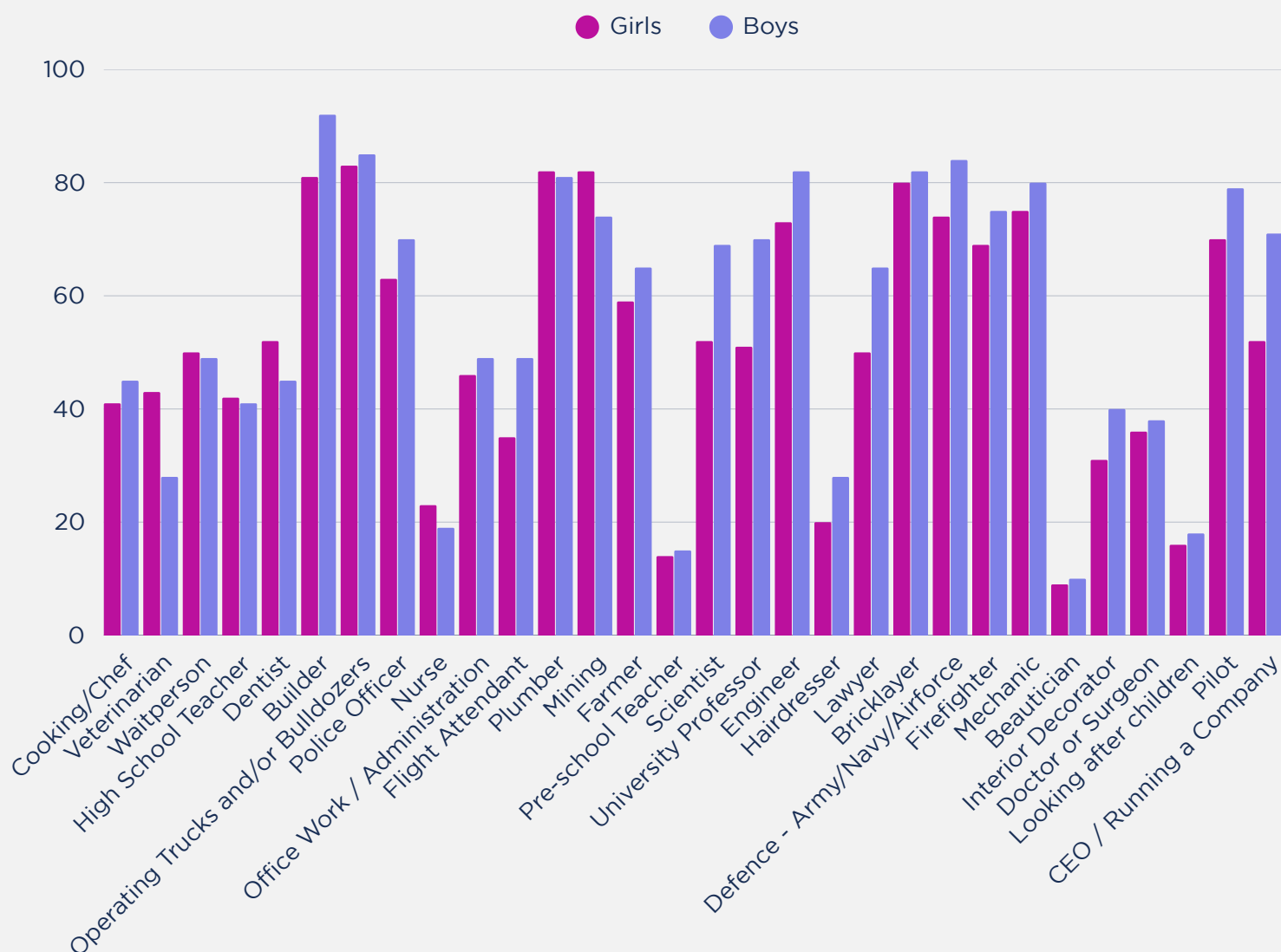
After the intervention, there were some shifts in students' aspirations. For instance, less girls aspired for only completing Year 10 or TAFE and more wanted to complete Year 12 or an apprenticeship. Curiously, boys aspirations for university and apprenticeships reduced.

DATA ANALYSIS

STUDENT SURVEYS



STUDENT OPINION: IS THIS JOB MORE SUITED TO BOYS OR GIRLS?



The above graph highlights boys' and girls' perceptions of job suitability by gender. A score of 100 indicates a job perceived solely for boys, 0 solely for girls, and 50 as equally suitable for both. No job received scores at these extremes, suggesting that students do not view any job as exclusively gendered.

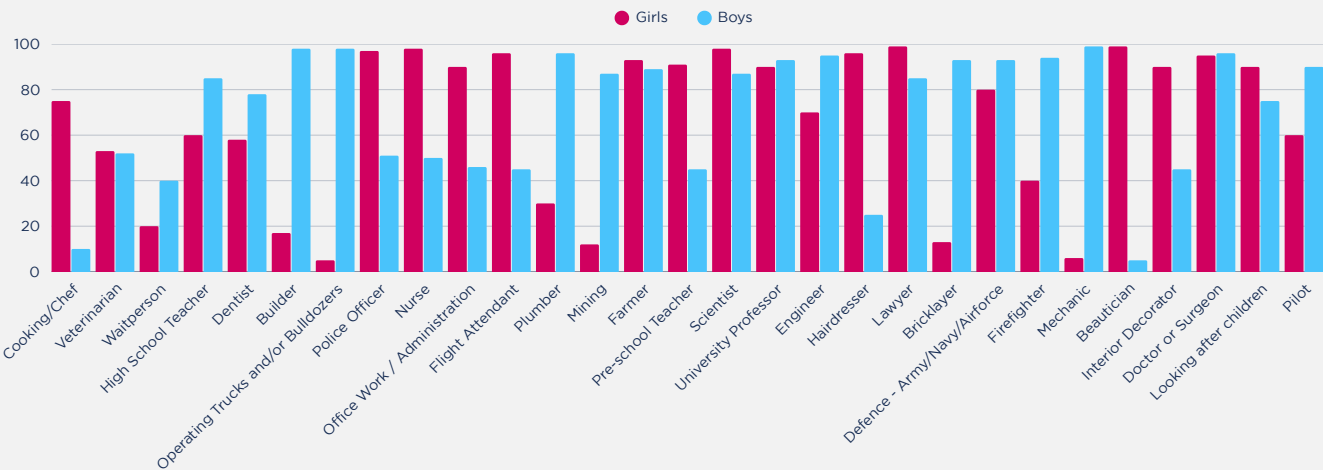
Generally, both genders agreed on job suitability, with roles like beautician and pre-school teacher seen as more female-oriented but not exclusively so. Physical or dangerous jobs, like firefighter and bricklayer, were rated as more male-oriented, though not exclusively male. Notably, girls viewed professions in medicine, law, science, and leadership as equally suitable for both genders, indicating a progressive outlook on gender roles in professional fields.

DATA ANALYSIS

STUDENT SURVEYS



AT PROJECT CONCLUSION:



Comparisons of the pre and post surveys reveal some significant changes. Before the intervention, students largely believed there were equal opportunities across many professions. However, post-intervention, shifts were observed in perceptions of roles like bricklayer, mechanic, and miner, with most students now viewing these as predominantly male-dominated. Student voice, choice, and autonomy played a key role in challenging their initial assumptions.

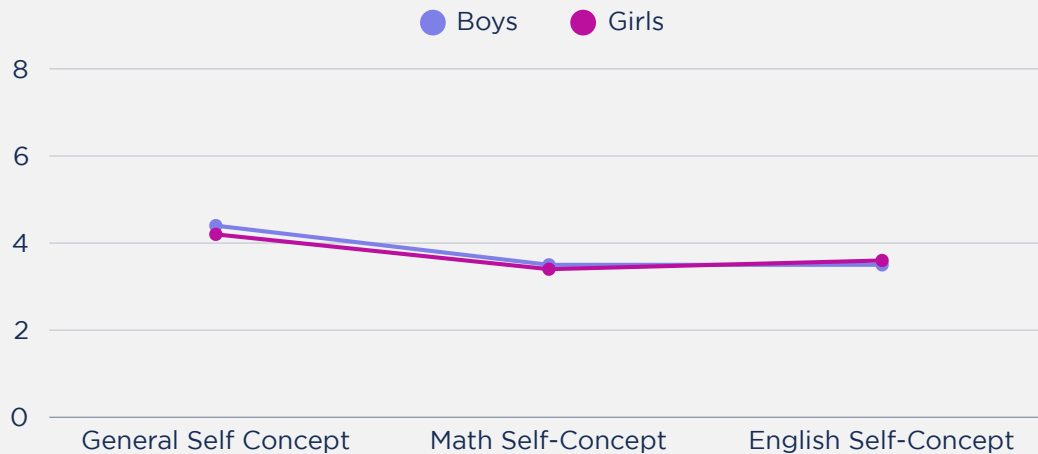
Additionally, more students now associate roles such as preschool teacher, office work/administration, hairdresser, and beautician with females. While some of these findings reinforce societal gender norms, it's important to recognise that the initial survey results may not have fully captured the students' honest perceptions.

DATA ANALYSIS

STUDENT SURVEYS

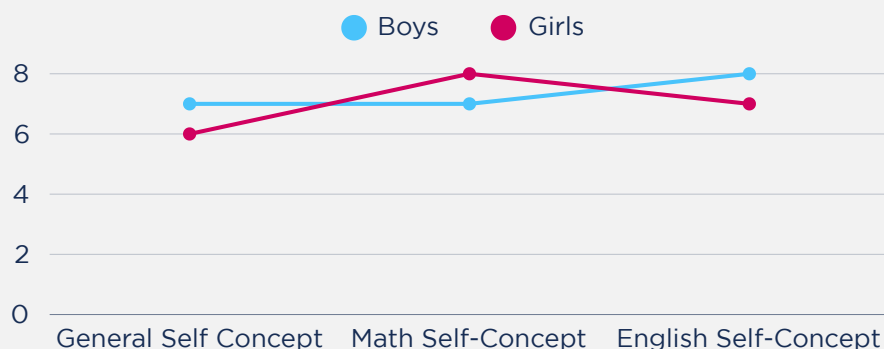


SELF-CONCEPT: HOW DO STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR ABILITIES



We asked students about their overall self-concept, as well as their self-perceptions in mathematics and English, covering aspects like ability, performance, enjoyment, and confidence. Responses were rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 indicating the most positive outlook. The results show that both boys and girls report high levels of self-concept in general, as well as in mathematics and English. Self-concept plays an important role in career choices, and these findings suggest no gender-based bias in perceptions of ability or enjoyment in either subject.

AT PROJECT CONCLUSION:



Upon re-evaluating students' general self-concept, boys demonstrated notable improvement, achieving a higher understanding of their self-concept compared to their earlier responses. While girls also maintained a strong self-concept, their gains were not as pronounced as those of the boys.

DATA ANALYSIS

STUDENT SURVEYS



POSITIVE INTERACTIONS WITH THEIR TEACHERS



We asked students to share their experiences with teachers, rating the frequency of positive interactions on a scale from 1 (never) to 6 (always). Overall, students reported frequent positive interactions with their teachers. While differences are small, girls generally reported slightly more frequent positive experiences than boys, with one exception: boys report receiving slightly more feedback on task performance. Further analysis of these findings will allow us to provide teachers with constructive feedback, emphasising and reinforcing effective practices. Additionally, we aim to workshop strategies to address any identified challenges and explore alternative pedagogies to bridge gaps.

AT PROJECT CONCLUSION:



The data on student-teacher relationships reveal that boys have shown an increased perception that their teachers care about them and provide meaningful opportunities.



DISCUSSION

Through targeted interventions, female students at Minarah have developed a deeper understanding of their future options and greater autonomy in decision-making. As a result, more girls than boys are now opting for university as their chosen career path. Prior to the parent dinner, some parents were strongly opposed to the idea of their child pursuing a university education. However, following the interventions and skills workshops, many of the female students are now eager to continue with tertiary studies.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Student voice, choice, and autonomy played a key role in challenging their initial assumptions
- While some of these findings reinforce societal gender norms, it's important to recognise that the initial survey results may not have fully captured the students' honest perceptions.
- Initially, girls perceived their mathematics self-concept as lower than that of the boys. However, through the integration of deep learning strategies and enhanced support within their programs, girls significantly outperformed boys in this area. Despite this progress, boys continued to exhibit a stronger self-concept in English compared to the girls. This highlights the need for ongoing interventions to further support the development of self-concept in English for girls at Minarah.
- Further analysis of these findings will allow us to provide teachers with constructive feedback, emphasising and reinforcing effective practices. Additionally, we aim to workshop strategies to address any identified challenges and explore alternative pedagogies to bridge gaps.
- This improvement can be attributed to teacher observations, which identified a tendency to focus more on disciplinary discussions than on content delivery. Through the implementation of deep learning initiatives, students are now more engaged, motivated to learn, and viewing their interactions with teachers more positively. Female students continue to report strong relationships with their teachers, but it is particularly encouraging to note the positive shifts in both behaviour and engagement among male students

The findings indicate that there is a need for gender-sensitive pedagogy, such as clubs and excursions specifically targeting girls to lift their expectations for their future careers. Parental and community involvement helps to garner support for implementing female educational approaches that are not necessarily reflective of the culture and can also influence attitudes at home.

Teacher observations and the Deep Learning initiative helped teachers to create more safe and Inclusive classroom environments. Girls need to feel more physically and emotionally safe if they are going to achieve academically and build confidence to aspire for higher education and careers



CONCLUSION

To conclude we found that our anecdotal observations that girls were quieter and less likely to participate in classroom activities where they may have the focus on them was supported by the data collected.

In order to combat this our focus turned to empowering these young girls, to build, confidence, resilience and high aspirations before they reached the additional layer of complexity that is high school. Shaping girls in this key stage means that they head into their secondary education with skills to thrive. We have continued to provide enrichment experiences with enrichment clubs and enrichment excursions for female students since the conclusion of the project and these are set to continue into the future.

We produced a Positive Affirmations Book, based on inspirational quotes the students wrote during their workshop with a professional author. This resource can be utilised by Minarah students and any other students across the country as a digital resource.

As a result of the project and our findings, we have been able to shine a light on the importance of empowering our students to have high aspirations, particularly our female students. As a result of this since the conclusion of the project we have been able to create enrichment opportunities for students including extra curricular 'enrichment clubs.' These clubs provide students with opportunities to explore new fields in science, faith and sports to name a few. There have also been exciting extra curricular excursions, planned only for female students identified as needing empowerment for higher aspirations, including a trip to the Australian Open and the opportunity to meet with female sports stars. We will continue to look for opportunities to empower our students.

WHERE TO NEXT?

Further studies could seek to evaluate the resources developed based on their impact over the next 12-24 months.



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