

News Release

New research reveals that classes with more than 55% girls result in better exam results and less violence

The formula for success: more girls in the class

Jerusalem, January 10, 2008 – School students who study in classes that comprise more than 55% girls are more successful in their studies than students in classes composed mainly of boys. This is due to girls' positive influence on the class environment, according to new research published by Prof. Victor Lavy of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Prof. Analia Schlosser of Princeton University.

One of the findings of the research, which was carried out among half a million school children studying within the Israeli public school system during the 1990's, reveals that high school classes with a higher proportion of girls have a higher level of scholastic achievement – reflected among both the girls and the boys. Matriculation success rates are also significantly higher than from classes with fewer girls. In addition, boys who have a higher proportion of female peers have higher enrollment rates in advanced math and science classes during high school.

In primary schools, classes with a majority of girls also exhibit increased academic success – among both boys and girls – with a noted improvement in subjects like math, science and technology. In grades 7 and 8, the main improvement in classes with more girls is in the girls' academic level in math, languages and English.

The reason for the improvement in academic levels, according to the researchers, is the positive influence that girls have on the social and scholastic environment in the class. They found that a higher percentage of girls lowers the level of classroom disruption and violence, improves inter-student and student-teacher relationships as well as students' overall satisfaction with school, and lessens teachers' fatigue.

Interestingly, however, the research shows that the higher level of scholastic achievement in classes with a higher proportion of girls is due to the gender composition of the class, and not to improved individual behavior of either the boys or girls in the class.

In their research, Profs. Lavy and Schlosser used a range of measures to test the level of studies and the class environment. In order to ascertain the study level, they compared matriculation exam results, study units, and matriculation success rates in classes with different gender compositions. In order to ascertain the social and scholastic environment, the researchers compared questionnaires distributed to the students in which they asked them to express their opinion on their behavior and that of their friends toward their studies.

Understanding the effects of classroom gender composition is, say the researchers, important for assessing the consequences of imbalanced sex ratios in coeducational schools and for determining allocation of resources within and across schools. Resource allocations, they claim, must take into account the rate of boys in each year grade, in order to compensate for the negative influence of a majority of boys in a particular class on the school environment and on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. A class with a majority of boys, for example, requires a style of teaching and character of teacher to suit the gender composition.

Opening classes exclusively for girls will only take girls from mixed classes, which will negatively affect the scholastic achievements of boys. One therefore has to weigh the advantage girls get in a girls-only class versus the negative affect of boys in mixed classes with fewer girls.

For more information, or for press contact with students, faculty or spokespersons from HU, please speak in the first instance to Mikki Saperia, on +44 (0)20 7691 1479 or email mikki.saperia@bfhu.org.



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