



Political Socialisation And Participation Of Children A Study On The Influence Of Child-Friendly Governance In Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The process of political socialization carries significant weight in determining the nature of an individual's involvement with the political system. It not only influences the formation of political ideologies and perspectives but also affects their participation in political activities. Ascertaining the various factors that contribute to political socialization is essential in helping policymakers and educators design effective strategies aimed at promoting informed decision-making, civic engagement, and active citizenship among citizens. By understanding the intricate nuances of political socialization, policymakers can make informed decisions that positively impact the political landscape. (Matthews 2003)

The study endeavors to explore the intricate dynamics of political socialization and engagement among adolescent children. More specifically, the study aims to identify the key agents that influence the socialization process of young individuals and to examine the extent to which child-friendly governance philosophy can foster their participation in political activities. As such, this research project seeks to expand our understanding of the factors that shape the political attitudes and behaviors of young people, while also highlighting the crucial role that governance structures and policies can play in promoting civic engagement and democratic values among future generations. (Verba and Nie 1987)

Kerala, a state in southern India, is renowned for its decentralized development model that emphasizes grassroots democracy. This study investigates how local self-government bodies in the state handle child participation in politics. The study strives to understand the theme child child-friendly local governance which places children at focus in the governmental arena.

The study is of quantitative and qualitative nature. A survey based on a structured questionnaire was conducted among children who belong to the schools of the Idukki district in Kerala.

KEYWORDS: Child, Child-Friendly Governance, Political Participation, Socialisation.

Bio Sketch

Nidhin Jose is a research scholar at the Department of Political Science, Government College Kottayam. He was a faculty member at the Central University of Kerala (DACE) and the Institute of Multidisciplinary Programs in Social Sciences, at MG University Kottayam. He holds First Rank for B. A Political Science and M.A Political Science from MG University Kottayam. Indian Administration, Constitution, and Political Thought are his areas of interest.

Introduction

Political socialization is the process through which individuals learn about political values, attitudes, and behaviors. It is of immense significance, especially in a democratic system. Political participation, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which citizens engage in political processes and decision-making. (Sinclair 2004)

Unfortunately, political participation is often viewed as a matter solely for adults, while children are assumed to have a limited role in engaging with political issues. However, it is important to recognize that children are also members of society and are affected by political decisions, hence their involvement in political participation should not be overlooked. Political socialization and participation are fundamental concepts in the study of political science, particularly in democratic societies. Political socialization refers to the process by which individuals develop political attitudes, values, and behaviors, and is considered of significant importance in shaping the political space of a nation. (Havighurst and Davis 1943)

Political participation, on the other hand, is the active engagement of citizens in political processes, including voting, campaigning, and engaging with policymakers. While political participation is often viewed as an activity reserved for adults, it is crucial to recognize that younger members of society are also affected by political decisions and should have the opportunity to be involved in political participation.

Regrettably, children's participation in political activities is often overlooked, but it is imperative to consider their involvement in political processes. Therefore, political participation should be extended to children to provide them with the opportunity to learn, engage, and participate in the political affairs of their society.

Political socialization is a process through which individuals acquire their political beliefs, values, and behaviors. This process is influenced by various factors such as family, education, media, peers, and social interactions. (Johnson and Hamalian 2008)

The role of political socialization in children, particularly in developing countries and academic circles, has been undervalued. Kerala, situated in southern India, has been acknowledged for its unconventional approach to development which emphasizes community-led initiatives and decentralization. This method inculcates democracy at the grassroots level. The study investigates how local self-government bodies in Kerala manage the process of child socialization and evaluates the involvement of agents such as Balasabha.

Children's Political Socialisation and Participation

The notion of children's participation encompasses the opportunity for children, either individually or collectively, to generate ideas, articulate them, and exert influence on issues that affect them directly or indirectly (Lansdown 2009).

The right of children to participate in politics has been a subject of discourse among legal theorists and philosophers, who have advanced compelling arguments for children's rights that transcend the conventional rights of survival, development, and protection to include participation rights.

The idea that young children ought to be involved in decisions that impact them is becoming more and more popular. This notion is based on new understandings of the importance of early experiences for young children and new concerns about young children's rights as citizens (MacNaughton et al., 2007)

Significance of Child Socialisation

Political socialization plays a crucial role in shaping the way individuals engage with the political system. It not only influences the formation of political ideologies and perspectives but also affects their participation in political activities. Understanding the factors that contribute to political socialization can help policymakers and educators in designing effective strategies to promote civic engagement and informed decision-making among citizens.

While it is widely acknowledged that children's involvement in politics is an issue, little research has been conducted on the experiences and behaviors that may foster political awareness and engagement among young people (Perry-Hazan 2016).

Culture of Political Participation

The incorporation of a culture of child participation is an integral aspect of facilitating children's perspective activity. It provides a platform for them to participate in both the planning and implementation stages, which is vital for their overall development. The involvement of children in decision-making processes ensures their voices are heard and valued, leading to a more inclusive and democratic society. As such, creating an environment that fosters child participation is crucial for promoting their growth and development. (Karlsson 2013)

In order to be considered a member of a particular culture, it is essential that one's participation is firmly rooted in the established structures and practices of that culture. This implies a thorough understanding of the customs, traditions, and norms that define the culture, as well as a willingness to adhere to them. Failure to do so may result in a lack of acceptance, or even rejection, by the members of that culture. As such, it is imperative for those seeking to participate in a given culture to invest time and effort in learning about its history, values, and practices, as this will enable them to engage with its members in a meaningful and respectful manner. (Sargeant 2017)

Decentralization and Democratic Local Governance in Kerala

Kerala has developed unique grassroots institutions and practices that provide an excellent example for improving and strengthening democracy. By mobilizing the society, the democratic decentralization process has created a new public space and effectively changed local governance and development planning by utilizing the social capital of the civic community.

These initiatives have enabled the state to effectively manage social issues and secure substantive gains for subordinate classes. Democratic institutions in Kerala have played a crucial role in this process, fostering state-society engagement conducive to democratic deepening. (Ramakantan 2009)

Child-Friendly Local Governance in Kerala

"Child-friendly governance" refers to a set of policies and practices that prioritize the rights and well-being of children in all governmental decision-making processes. It is a strategic approach aimed at ensuring that children's rights are upheld, their needs are met, and their voices are heard throughout all levels of governance (Rosenbury 2015).

Child-centered governance, on the other hand, is a framework that prioritizes the rights of children, including their survival, development, protection, and participation, and integrates them into local government policies, processes, and structures. UNICEF introduced the concept of Child-friendly Local Governance, which was implemented through a collaborative effort between UNICEF and the Kerala Institute of Local Administration. This initiative aimed to promote a culture of child-friendly governance at the grassroots level of democratic institutions.

In 2011, UNICEF and the Kerala Institute of Local Administration jointly established the Child Resource Centre (CRC) at KILA. The CRC serves as a support and training center for effective child-centric local governance throughout the state of Kerala. Its mandate is to promote practical and innovative approaches to child-friendly governance, establish partnerships with key stakeholders, and develop a knowledge-sharing platform to foster learning and best practices in this area.

UNICEF and KILA encourage Local Self Government adoption to facilitate child-friendly governance; and to prepare child development plans they have jointly prepared and published guidelines, training manuals and handbooks on the Comprehensive Child Development Plan, and conducted training based on these materials for panchayaths (village councils).

In 2016, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) initiated a collaborative effort to launch the Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) project in Kerala. The primary objective of this project was to ensure the protection and promotion of child rights across four key domains, namely child survival, child development, child protection, and child participation. The local governments were empowered to introduce child-friendly initiatives based on these domains to ensure their effective implementation.

The CFLG project aims to promote children's participation in the democratic process by facilitating the allocation of funds, development of child-friendly infrastructure, and educational development. However, participation remains one of the more challenging dimensions of child-friendly local governance. To this end, Balasabha serves as an efficient tool to facilitate and meet the aspirations of this dimension.

The CFLG project in Kerala has achieved significant strides in promoting child rights and child-friendly governance. The project's success can be attributed to the collaborative and participatory approach adopted by UNICEF and KILA, which has empowered local governments to take ownership of the project's implementation. This initiative provides an exemplary model for other regions to follow in ensuring the protection and promotion of child rights in their respective localities.

The collaborative and participatory approach adopted by the CFLG project has enabled diverse stakeholders to collaborate towards achieving a common goal. By empowering local governments to take ownership of the project's implementation, the project has fostered a sense of community ownership and accountability. This approach has not only ensured that the project is implemented effectively but also facilitated the sustainability of the project's outcomes.

The CFLG project serves as a beacon of hope for promoting child rights and child-friendly governance in other regions. By leveraging the project's success factors, such as collaborative and participatory governance, other regions can adapt and customize the project's model to suit their respective contexts. This can contribute towards achieving the broader goal of ensuring child rights and promoting child-friendly governance across the globe.

Child Friendly Governance successfully places children at the focus point of governance and it acts as a catalyst in fostering child participation and the socialisation process. One of the important agents that is used in child friendly governance is Child Gramasabhas and Balasabhas.

Child-Friendly Governance and Participation

The four dimension of Child-Friendly Governance are Child Survival, Child Protection, Child Development, and Child Participation. One of the important agents in the local governance area is Balasabha. The incorporation of Child Friendly Governance has positively contributed to the working of Balasabha thus it has positively accelerated Child Participation. So study attempts to understand how Balasabhas can positively contribute to the theme child friendly governance.

Trainings associated with Child friendly governance have created a positive impact among the stakeholders associated with local governance. Trainings were imparted to representatives from local self governing bodies. The awareness about child friendly governance is quiet high among the beurocrats and elected representatives. This gives a very favourable environment developing child friendly culture.

Important Agents of Participation for Children: Students Police Cadets and Bala Sabha Balasabha

The Kudumbasree Mission, an organization based in Kerala, has implemented a neighborhood network of children, an initiative previously experimented by UNICEF, to enhance children's involvement in community development processes. This grassroots network ensures that children's rights are safeguarded while empowering them to prevent the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next. The primary goal of the Balasabha initiative is to improve the capabilities of children, thereby promoting their overall development. This approach has proven to be an effective strategy for engaging children in community-building activities and establishing a foundation for sustainable development.

The Sabhas are an organized neighborhood network that focuses on children. Each Sabha is composed of fifteen to thirty children between the ages of five and eighteen. The primary objective of Balasabhas is to enhance children's abilities and prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Small learning groups for methodical and experimental learning, opportunities to understand the democratic process, involvement in environmental conservation, and the ability for children to comprehend the complexities of collectivization are all key focuses of Balasabha. (Joseph 2013)

The main goal of creating these balasabha is to strengthen children's capabilities to stop the transfer of poverty from generation to generation. Initially, UNICEF provided support for the initiative. The balasabha and balapanchayats' Kudumbashree projects allow youngsters from disadvantaged socioeconomic situations to gain voice and authority. A tripartite structure akin to the kudumbashree is intended to facilitate the efficient operation of balapanchayats. Children's needs and demands are coordinated by balasabha at the neighborhood level, balasamathi at the ward level, balapanchayats/balanagarasabhas at the panchayat nagarasabha level, and bala parliament at the level.

Student Police Cadet

According to the study the body or association that children found most useful and beneficial was Student Police Cadet Programme which is a initiative of Kerala Police department.

The Departments of Home and Education together developed the school-based youth development program known as the SPC Project, which also received support from the departments of transportation, forest, excise, and local self-government.

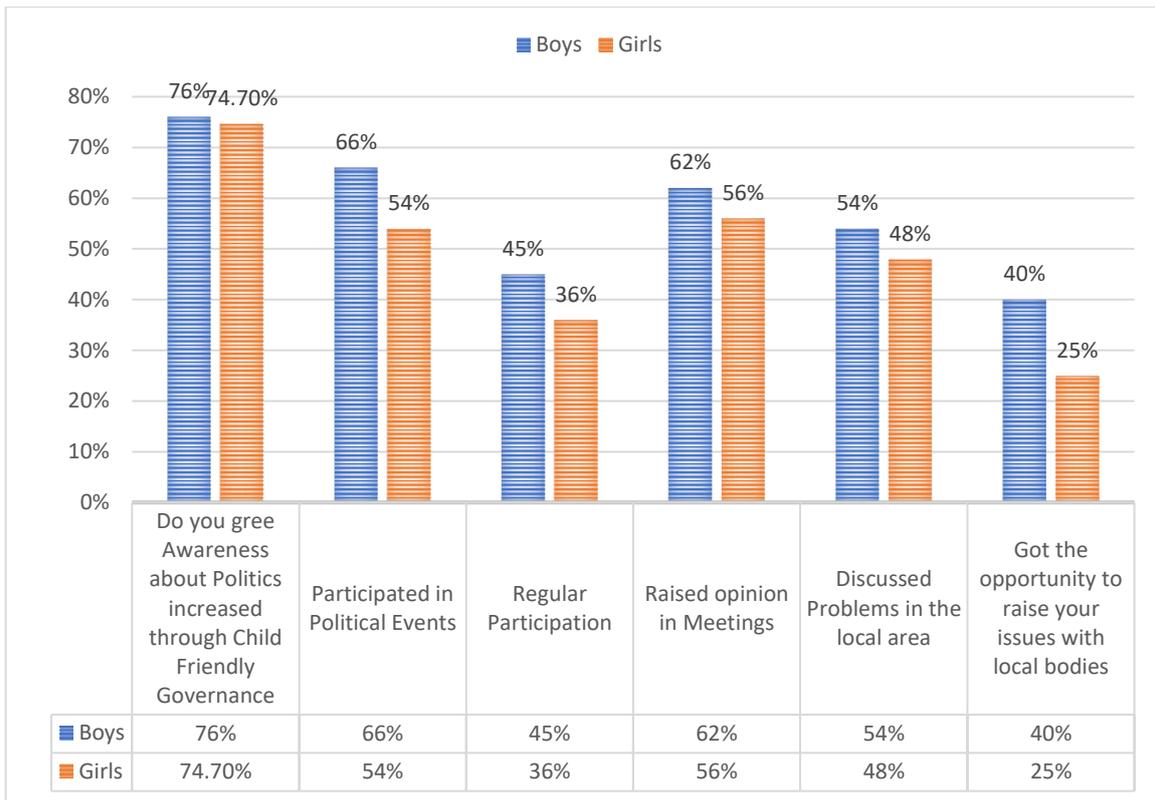
The overarching objective of the project is to prepare high school students to emerge as future leaders of democratic society. The initiative endeavors to instill in them a profound respect for the law, discipline, civic duty, empathy for the weaker members of society, and opposition to social ills. The program aims to provide young people with the liberty to explore and develop their inherent potential, while equipping them to combat harmful inclinations such as anti-establishment violence, substance misuse, deviant behavior, and societal intolerance. The SPC Projects serve to reinforce students' commitment to their families, communities, and the environment. (Student Police Cadet Year Book 2015).

DATA COLLECTION AND STUDY

The study was conducted using a sample survey method that entailed the selection of high school students from three distinct schools, each of which fell under a different local governing body. The selection of panchayats was based on a specific criterion, with only those that implemented child-friendly governance and ranked high on the child-friendly index in the district being shortlisted. It is important to note that the study was limited to government schools..

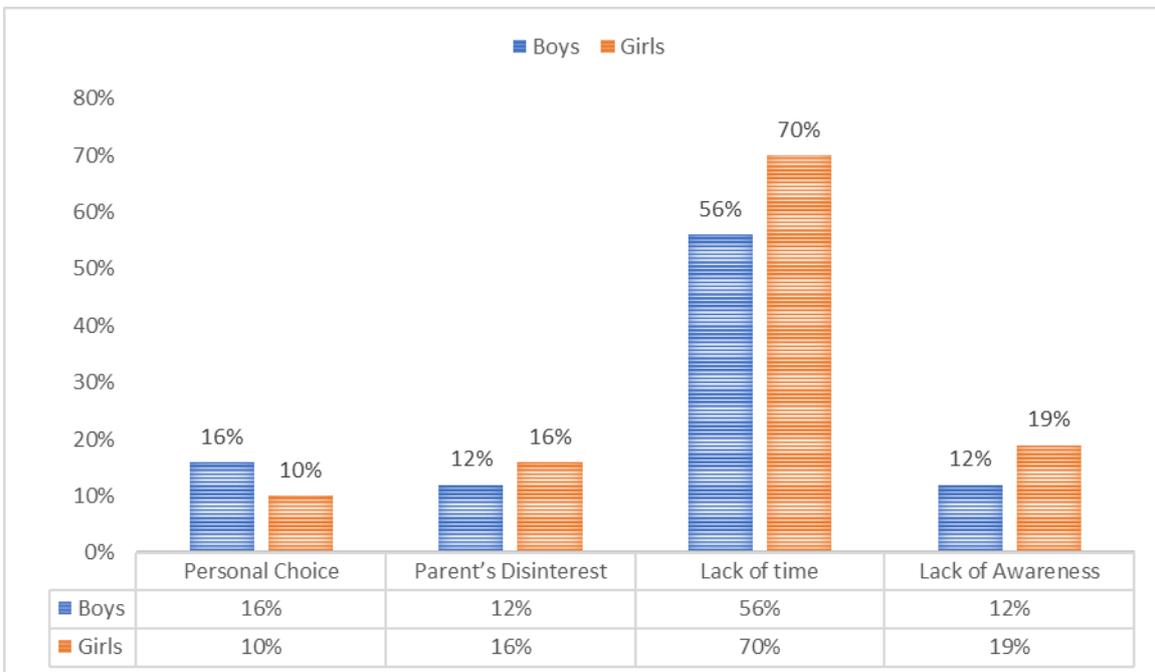
DATA ANALYSIS

Variables	Boys	Girls
Do you agree Awareness about Politics increased through Child Friendly Governance	76%	74.7%
Participated in Political Events	66%	54%
Regular Participation	45%	36%
Raised opinion in Meetings	62%	56%
Discussed Problems in the local area	54%	48%
Got the opportunity to raise your issues with local bodies	40%	25%



Factors Inhibiting the Participation and Socialisation

Variables	Boys	Girls
Personal Choice	16	10%
Parent’s Disinterest	12%	16%
Lack of time	56%	70%
Lack of Awareness	12%	19%



Analysis

The results of the survey indicate that a substantial proportion of students possess an understanding of politics. A total of over 70% of students have participated in political meetings at least once, although regular participation was comparatively lower.

The philosophy of child-friendly governance entails a wider perception of the participatory dimension. It believes in occupying children with full potential by participating in local self-governance bodies.

Both boys and girls are almost equally interested in participating of Politics but when it comes to the participation percentage girls participation is relatively higher than boys. The general perception about the limited participation of women or girl children fails here.

One of the positive aspects that attracted the attention of the study was most of the children are interested in participating in politics and they believe more opportunities should be given to them at participatory levels. This study disproves the general notion that the modern generation is apathetic to politics. The children are interested in politics but what is required is the willingness of the political system to incorporate the children in politics.

The study tried to understand the factors that restrict participation among children. In general, the most important inhibiting factor that affects child participation is want of time. Children are busy mostly with high workload from schools and co-curricular training.

It is interesting to note that one of the major reasons that inhibit girl's participation is the lack of support and interest of parents.

Among the other groups that students think are beneficial for children, a high majority of students chose the SPC Student Police Cadet system as the most useful. Below that Balasabha, School Clubs and Clubs in the locality were ranked.

The research demonstrates that initiatives promoting child-friendly governance by the state have had a positive impact on the political participation and socialization of children. The findings of the study revealed that the state's efforts to establish child-friendly governance initiatives have had a significant impact on promoting the active participation of children in political affairs.

These initiatives have created a conducive environment for children to engage in civic activities, thereby contributing to their socialization and development. The study highlighted that such initiatives foster a sense of responsibility, citizenship, and empowerment among children, which in turn, promotes their political awareness and participation. These findings underscore the importance of promoting child-friendly governance initiatives as a means of encouraging civic engagement and fostering democracy from an early age..

Limitations

The theme of Child-friendly governance relies on 4 principles which are reflected in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Child Survival, Protection Development, and Participation. (UNCRC). Among these, the most forgotten or less addressed area is the participation dimension of children. One of the main factors that limit child political participation is the conventional attitude that believes the child is immature and not capable of dealing with politics. Many think the child is immature and not capable of dealing with politics. Many fear the negative implications and potential drawbacks of such involvement (Pauliina Kallio & Häkli, 2011)

Suggestions to Improve Child Participation

In the course of focus group discussions with Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) supervisors and Kudumbashree workers, obstacles related to Child Participation were identified. Among these, a significant challenge was the insufficient allocation of funds. To address this issue, the proposal was put forth that local self-governments increase their financial support to enhance the effectiveness of child participation. Furthermore, the recommendation was made to offer financial incentives as a means of encouraging active participation by children.

More enthusiasm should be shown by the concerned authorities to ensure the participation of children from marginalized or socially deprived groups. This is necessary because it will help future citizens come to the mainstream of the political system. More focus should be given to improving the participation of girl children. Leadership skill development programmes should be initiated for the development of children.

One of the positive aspects that was found is members of Balasabha are engaged with other activities of Panchayath. More integration of Balasabha in all kinds of activities in the panchayath will be appreciable. Field visits or study tours are expected from students as part of Balasabha.

Conclusion

The subject of children's involvement in politics has been extensively discussed and researched. Despite some opinions stating that children lack the comprehension to grasp the intricacies of politics, recent academic studies suggest otherwise. Numerous researches have demonstrated that young individuals possess an eagerness to engage in politics and hold the potential to fulfill their civic responsibilities by participating in democratic systems globally (Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2018).

In order to foster a political culture that is conducive to active engagement in politics, it is crucial that authorities recognize children as important stakeholders in contemporary politics, rather than merely as future voters. One potential solution is the establishment of Blaasabhas, which serve as political platforms designed specifically for children. These platforms not only provide a space for political education, but can also serve as the foundation for the political system.

It is of utmost importance that we recognize the significance of cultivating a political culture that encourages active participation from all members of society, including children. By doing so, we can ensure that our democratic societies remain stable and continue to thrive. This can be achieved through the recognition of children as legitimate participants in the political process and the establishment of platforms that cater to their needs. Such an approach can help to instill a sense of civic responsibility and democratic engagement in children from an early age, which can have long-lasting positive effects on society as a whole.

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