The Star

Co-ed or single-sex?

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Students weigh in on the merits and drawbacks of both types of schooling

SCHOOLS are where students gain more than just academic knowledge; interpersonal skills and personal growth are equally crucial.

But how significantly does attending a co-ed or single-sex school impact one's overall development?

BRATs
Bright Roving Ambitious Talents

Four participants of the BRATs Young Journalist Programme run by The Star's Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) team share their personal experiences and insights.

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1. With the theme of the article in mind, carry out the following English language activities. 1Whichtypeofschooldo you prefer: co-ed or single-sex? Explain your choice.

2. Daniel mentioned feeling somewhat unprepared for mixed-gender interactions at university. What tips would you offer to students in a similar situation? Discuss in groups and present your ideas to the class.

Balancing dynamics

“My educational journey began in a co-ed primary school. This environment provided a balanced introduction to gender dynamics from an early age. Friendships formed naturally across gender lines, fostering openness and mutual respect.

Yet, as much as I valued this inclusiveness, the social dynamics of a co-ed environment, especially during the pre-teen years, could sometimes become a distraction.

The natural curiosity and social pressures of interacting with the opposite sex occasionally diverted attention from academics.

Transitioning to an all-boys secondary school marked a significant shift in my journey. Initially, I was unsure of what to expect. Would the absence of girls limit my social development?

But as I settled in, I began to appreciate the unique atmosphere that single-sex education offered and how it influenced my evolving ‘Weltanschauung’ or world view.

In my all-boys school, there was a strong sense of brotherhood. With fewer social distractions, our focus on academics and extracurriculars intensified.

I observed that single-sex schools often specialise more deeply in particular areas – our school, for instance, placed a heavy emphasis on sports. This focus wasn’t just about excelling in competitions; it was also about building discipline, teamwork and pride in our collective achievements.

However, single-sex schooling also posed challenges, particularly in understanding gender dynamics.

Having spent most of my teenage years in an all-male environment, I found myself somewhat unprepared for mixed-gender interactions at university.

The absence of daily interactions with female peers during secondary school left me with a limited understanding of how men and women communicate, collaborate and compete.

Over time, I learnt to bridge the gap, and these experiences enriched my understanding of gender dynamics in a way that complemented my earlier co-ed experiences.

Ultimately, it's not about which type of school is better but about how each experience shapes us into the individuals we become." – **By DANIEL FADZLAN, 21**



Strength in sisterhood

"MY time in a co-ed primary school gave me valuable experiences in navigating social dynamics and building relationships with the opposite sex, offering early exposure to real-world interactions. In my class, I noticed distinct differences in how boys and girls handled conflicts. Boys often clashed over minor issues like a broken pencil or an offhand joke but quickly reconciled, whereas girls argued over differing perspectives, holding grudges for days or weeks.

I remember getting into a physical fight with a boy who tried to take my pencil sharpener and almost broke my mechanical pencil. Thankfully, our teacher intervened before it became a full-blown fight, and we reconciled quickly.

In contrast, conflicts within my group of girlfriends led to 'cold wars' that could last for days until we realised how petty they were.

Transitioning to an all-girls secondary school, I found an environment that fostered camaraderie and empowerment.

The school placed a strong emphasis on developing leadership and self-confidence. I was an active member of the Japanese Language Club and had the opportunity to manage competitions and trips.

The single-gender environment also allowed us to take on roles that might have been more difficult to attain in a co-ed setting, where traditional gender norms and biases can sometimes limit opportunities for young women.

For example, something as simple as moving slightly heavy objects like desks and shelves would usually be done by the boys in my primary school.

However, in my secondary school, we got it done easily through teamwork. This supportive atmosphere cultivated a sense of sisterhood and mutual encouragement that I found invaluable.

While I valued my time in the all-girls school more, it is important to note that other factors, such as the teachers, school culture and extracurricular activities, also contributed to my positive experience." – **By CHARIS CHIANG EN-HUI, 21**



Real-world diversity

"I GLANCED around the room and noticed that out of my 30 classmates, 20 were boys and the remaining 10 were girls.

I was new to this school for Form Six. Having attended an all-girls school from primary through secondary, this was a completely new experience for me.

At first, the boys seemed a bit reserved, but their vibrant personalities soon emerged. Most were eager to participate in sports or group activities, bonding over wins and losses. Some connected through artistic pursuits like dancing and playing music.

The all-girls schools I attended had a different vibe. Friendships were built on emotional connections and comfort. Topics like puberty and stress were openly discussed, with many of us connecting over shared experiences in sports, academics or hobbies.

I also noticed that some students thrived in roles or activities not typically associated with their gender. However, limited interaction with the opposite gender could sometimes lead to stereotypes or reinforce traditional gender norms.

So, how did the boys and girls interact in my Form Six class? We were generally polite and helpful, often discussing school tasks or shared interests and learning from each other's diverse viewpoints.

Co-ed schools more closely resemble the real world, preparing us to compete and socialise with both genders equally.

The diversity teaches us acceptance, inclusivity and adaptability, which are crucial skills for the future. But, of course, there are more distractions, like early relationships and intense competition.

All in all, while I find comfort in the familiar dynamics with girls, interacting with guys has introduced me to new perspectives and experiences. This has enriched my view of the world and shown me the value of diverse friendships." – **By WONG JO ANN, 22**



Mindset shift

"I HAD the unique opportunity to experience different learning environments, first at an all-girls primary school, and then at a co-ed secondary school. Both schools influenced my personal growth in various ways.

My early years in an all-girls school fostered a sense of camaraderie and sisterhood. I formed strong bonds with my peers, and we weren't shy about expressing ourselves.

The prefectorial board, librarians and club presidents were all girls. I was a librarian and the leader of the English subject, and I also won several academic and co-curricular awards. The confidence I gained during this time formed the foundation of who I am today.

Being in an all-girls school also made me comfortable participating in sports. Without the fear of judgement, I enjoyed getting dirty and rowdy with my friends.

In my co-ed secondary school, I encountered a broader spectrum of social dynamics. Interactions between boys were opaque to me, and I had to learn new social cues to communicate effectively.

Initially, I thought girls were superior to boys, especially in academics – a mentality I carried from primary school. However, my perspective gradually changed.

It was interesting to see how boys contributed varied and reflective ideas during discussions, and there was healthy competition between genders in leadership roles, academics and co-curricular activities.

As I became more conscious of the opposite gender, I learnt to take better care of myself. A clean and pleasing appearance gives a good first impression, not only to attract but to create a lasting, positive momentum for future interactions.

I don't believe any type of schooling is inherently better than the other. Instead, experiencing both has prepared me for the complexities that life has to offer." – **By TAN WEI YEE, 21**

