

Gender Studies Components in Teacher Training: An Essential Requirement for Teacher Empowerment and Gender Justice in the 21st Century

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Abstract: The world in general and developing countries in particular are facing challenges related to creating a suitable environment for mobilization of maximum human resource for development. The UN efforts like UN Decade for women and the various international conferences on women have been successful in highlighting the importance of involving women more fully and effectively in the development process, both as actors and beneficiaries in all fields of life. In spite of advancement in certain areas, the accelerated women empowerment programmes in general and especially that in the Indian context fail to attain the anticipated targets. The proactive role of teachers in solving the problems of poverty, ill-health, gender based violence and other inequalities prevailing in the society is called upon by the author. This is supported by the research undertaken on gender role perception of teacher trainees at B. Ed level. The study on 632 teacher trainees from 20 colleges of teacher education in the state of Kerala has revealed quite disappointing results. Significant difference is found between the gender role perception of men and women. Based on the findings of the study the investigator highlights the need for introducing gender studies components at UG and PG levels of teacher education and in the orientation and inservice training programmes of teachers so as to equip them fully to meet the needs of the 21st century, especially in the context of ensuring gender justice.

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenges of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance”. Kofi Annan

I. Introduction

The world in general and developing countries in particular are facing challenges related to creating a suitable environment for mobilization of maximum human resource for development. The UN efforts like UN Decade for women and the various international conferences on women have been successful in highlighting the importance of involving women more fully and effectively in the development process, both as actors and beneficiaries in all fields of life. In spite of the accelerated women empowerment programmes going on in the country during the last two-three decades, there is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors of life, irrespective of caste, colour and class. Gender equality has been a key objective of educational policy of India for over three decades. Our education system while responding to the demands for technology at par with international standards, fails to respond to social concerns in a proper way. The efforts made by the government through its educational machinery have served to improve the educational qualifications of women but not their actual conditions. Some progressive changes have been achieved with regard to greater enrollment of girls in schools and removal of gender stereotypes in textbooks. The NPE 1986 has envisaged education as an agent of basic change in the status of women and that the national education system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It stressed the need for developing new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators.

Sex role socialization researchers explain development as a combination of individual learning and wider social and cultural factors. These researchers identify four key agents in sex-role socialization, viz family, peer group, media and education and they argue that children learn how to behave in ways appropriate to their sex role or category through observation, imitation and modeling.

Our educational institutions often serve as pillars of patriarchy. The teachers and educational administrators who are products of patriarchy are totally unaware of the need for gender equality and they happen to act as agents spreading patriarchal values. When boys are encouraged to take up leadership roles both in schools and colleges, girls however smart they may be, will have to satisfy with the posts of assistant school leader in schools and vice chairperson and joint secretary roles in colleges and universities. When any programme is organized at such institutions, boys sit on the dais while girls will be put in charge of reception and decorating the hall, the boy will make the welcome speech while the girls will have to offer the bouquet to the guests, the boys get the opportunity to interact with the guests while the girls will be required to serve the food to the guests. Directly and indirectly such practices strengthen the stereotypic roles in girls and boys.

As part of co-curricular activities like SUPW, boys will get training in repair of electrical appliances while girls will be taught stitching and embroidery. In schools girls will be asked to sweep the floor and clean the classroom while boys will be sent out to play. When it comes to textbooks, there are several instances of gender bias in all subjects, which recently are getting eliminated due to the pressures made by women activists. Thus the gender bias in education is visible in the following major areas:

1. Objectives of Education (especially at Higher Education level)
2. Enrollment (especially at Postgraduation, Ph.D and Professional Education levels)
3. Retention (at all levels)
4. Content of texts (at school level)
5. Classroom Practices (at school level)
6. Gender Division of roles (at all levels)
7. Disciplinary practices (at school level)
8. Co curricular activities- SUPW (at school level)
9. Time and space for leisure/ play (at all levels)

The gender bias prevalent in the above mentioned areas in turn will have far reaching impacts on the growing minds whereby they become perpetrators of patriarchal values. The gendered classroom environment, like the overall gendered school culture, may have important implications for students' evolving identities and future lives. According to Streitmatter (1994), students in environments permeated with sexism tend to develop value systems that are gender differentiated, which in turn help perpetuate gender bias that they will carry with them into the adult world. Hence students' gendered experiences at school and in classrooms contribute to the gender divisions found in later lives that perpetuate gender inequality, such as the choice of occupational sectors, the standing and influence within sectors, and the prioritizing of the occupational relative to the domestic (Howe, 1997).

Girls are not the only victims of the gender bias in education with its unyielding concept of what is appropriate for each gender (Delamont, 1990; Streitmatter, 1994; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Kimmel, 2000). Hegemonic, heterosexist constructions of 'proper' masculinity marginalize and denigrate boys who do not conform to these constructions, as well as girls (Connell, 1995; Lesko, 2000; Skelton, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2004). Among other negative consequences, barriers are established that prevent boys and girls from learning about and from each other. Thus, rather than opening opportunities for students, gender segregation and differential treatment based on students' gender help reinforce gender-related problems in their adult lives and in the larger society.

Whether the institutional culture and the educational experiences of students are gendered or not depend to a great extent on the gender sensitivity of the teachers. As far as teachers are concerned, their outreach impact is intangible and hence it is a matter of utmost significance that teaching community must have proper convictions regarding gender roles of men and women and the consequences of gender stereotypism and gender division of labour. It was in this context that a study on gender role perception among teacher trainees of Kerala was conducted with the objective of understanding the gender role perception of teacher trainees for the total sample and the sub samples formed on the basis of the classificatory variables of gender and religion.

II. Method

Sample

A sample of 632 students from 20 B.Ed (Teacher Education) colleges of the state was selected giving due weightage to the nature of institution- government, aided and unaided colleges of teacher education. The sample consisted of 390 girls and 242 boys among which 320 were Hindus, 240 were Muslims and 72 were Christians.

Tool

An Inventory on Gender Role Perception was used for the collection of data. The inventory consists of 20 statements related to life goals and roles of men and women in various aspects of life such as education, health care, employment, property rights, political leadership, decision making power etc. There are 18 positive statements and 2 negative statements with a score of 2 marks for each and the total score coming to 40. The respondents are required to mark their agreeableness or disagreeableness with each statement.

Procedure

The teacher educators of respective colleges facilitated the data collection procedure. The teacher coordinators of the Women Development Cells which function with the objective of facilitating self empowerment of girl students in the colleges and serve as forums to discuss gender issues, were highly supportive in the conduct of the study in the colleges affiliated to University of Calicut. In cases of colleges affiliated to other universities, the investigator made direct visits for data collection. Quantitative analysis using SPSS was used for analysis.

III. Results and Discussion

The data and results of analysis are given in Table 1.

	n	m	SD	t value
Girls	390	32.95	4.67	
Boys	242	26.74	5.77	14.18**
Hindus	320	32.14	3.85	
Christians	72	32.90	5.58	0.07
Muslims	240	27.79	5.96	5.64**
Hindus	320	32.14	3.85	9.87**

TABLE 1

Data and Results of Test of Significance of Difference in Mean Scores of Gender Role Perception between Sub samples of Teacher Trainees Based on the Classificatory Variables of Gender and Religion

** indicates a significant mean difference

As evident from the Table, there is a significant difference in the gender role perception between boys and girls with girls having highly progressive and boys having traditional perceptions regarding gender roles.

Significant difference in gender role perception is seen between Hindu and Muslim students with the former having progressive and the latter having traditional perceptions regarding women's roles.

Similarly significant difference exists in gender role perception between Christian and Muslim students with Christian students having progressive and Muslim students having traditional perceptions about women's roles in the society.

No significant difference in gender role perception is seen between Hindu and Christian students.

IV. Discussion

If the teacher trainees who are the prospective teachers of tomorrow continue to be traditional in their outlook, the consequences will be far reaching. The interesting finding in this regard is the significant difference between boys and girls regarding gender role perceptions. When almost all the women students consider employment as a must for women, men students consider women's employment as a luxury or a supplementary income. When majority of women students agree with the need for equal property rights of women with men, men students do not agree with it. Similarly in every aspect of social life such as economic participation, political leadership, professional education etc. women students seem to be ready for a take off to the heights while men students maintain traditional conservative mindsets regarding women's roles in the society.

Both boys and girls belong to similar age groups and have had the same type of exposure to education. The women empowerment programmes might have had its impact in reshaping the attitudes and outlooks of girls, making them aware of their rights and new responsibilities in a changing world. Boys still do consider wifehood and motherhood as the ultimate goals of women's lives. They seem to have failed in accepting the changes in the conceptualization of womanhood and their modern roles in the society.

The role of religion in shaping gender role perception is highlighted by the findings of the study with Muslim students having the most traditional outlooks. This could be explained on the basis of the protectionist approach to women which is more prevalent among Muslim community than Hindus and Christians. In the Kerala context, early marriages are most common among Muslims as wifehood and motherhood are prioritised in women's lives than higher education and employment. Religious teachings also support the protectionist approach whereby girls and women are expected to be taken care of and protected by men who are either in the capacity of father or that of husband.

The findings are explained on the basis of internalization of patriarchal values existing in the society transmitted by the various socialization agencies like family, education system, media, religion etc. Being brought up in a patriarchal world and having internalised the patriarchal values so deeply, the teachers and educational administrators unknowingly perpetuate gender stereotypism and transmit patriarchal values to the students. The proactive role of teachers in solving the problems of poverty, ill-health, gender based violence and other inequalities prevailing in the society is envisaged in the opening sentence of the Kothari Commission. Accordingly, "the destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms". This shaping would become just and effective only if the teachers themselves are gender sensitized and become aware of the significance of gender equity in the society.

Suggestions for Including Gender Studies Components in Teacher Training

Education has always been considered as the most powerful instrument for bringing about attitudinal changes and social change. Education is the only means to arouse social consciousness and bring about a change in the traditional patriarchal mindsets of men and women. Only proper education can instill the knowledge, capacities and skills in men and women that would equip them with the coping strategies inevitable to cut one's safe path amidst violence and atrocities and to lead a successful life in the modern society. The contribution of education to enhancing the dignity of girls and women is also comprehensive and extensive.

The present system of education has only served to worsen the condition of women. Girls who used to excel in their studies have turned out to be utter failures in real life. All these pinpoint certain lacunae in our educational system. The undue preference for quantitative mass education to quality promotion and breakaway from essential holistic education to serve the needs of technology and business rather than a balanced transition is doing more harm than good. The affective domain seems to be totally neglected by the educationists. Today the Indian higher education system is strengthening its pursuit for meeting technological needs of the modern world at par with international standards. The thrust on Engineering, Management Studies and IT is essential to equip our youth to meet global needs. But this must not deny the need for components on social justice and peaceful living. Our education system fails on one side to enable the girls to discover their identity and on the other side to enable boys to respect the individuality of girls. The best intervention strategy in this context is developing gender awareness among the teaching community which in turn would bring about progressive changes in their attitudes and outlooks. Only such gender sensitized teachers can shape the mindsets of student community in proper directions.

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made for enabling prospective teachers and existing faculties in the education system to serve as social engineers and agents of gender equality and gender justice in the society.

- Gender Studies components to be included at TTC, B. Ed and M. Ed levels as a compulsory paper.
- Gender Studies components to be included at all levels of education in schools.
- A Foundation course on Gender Studies to be included as a compulsory paper at UG and PG levels including professional education.
- A five Day Orientation / Refresher programme on Gender Studies to be provided to all teachers in higher education.
- Gender Studies components to be included as mandatory in the in- service teacher education programmes for school teachers and orientation programmes to college and university teachers.

V. References

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