

Gender in Academic Settings: Role of Teachers

Dr. Anita Allana, Dr. Nargis Asad and Yasmin Sherali

Abstract—The influence of teachers and educators on gender roles of their students immensely impacts their educational outcomes as well as their roles in contemporary society. In an attempt to address the same Aga Khan University, Working Group for Women (AKU-WGW) designed and carried out a teacher training program with the support of Global Fund for Women. The objective of the training was to raise the awareness of teachers and train them to address prevailing gender and social issues in academic settings and in the society at large. Moreover it was to try and change teachers' frame of their own context to address gender and social issues in educational settings. The method of the training was interactive and included teacher awareness sessions, workshops, video clippings, activities, and case studies. The training resulted in providing gender education to teachers, gender sensitizing them, increasing their capacity to conduct gender analysis of curriculum material, teaching and learning practices and school structures and culture. This gender sensitivity of teachers will hopefully produce a rippling effect in the school manifesto.

Index Terms— Teachers, Social Change, Gender, Capacity Building.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Gender encompasses socially constructed and culturally based roles of women and men with a view to understand how unequal power relations between them are shaped and operate. Gender and its accompanying power relations are built in all institutions of society be it family, educational institutions, work place, religious systems, beliefs, norms etc. "Reference [1] postulates, Gender relations do not operate in a social vacuum but are products of the ways in which institutions are organized and reconstituted".

Moreover in the developing world's context such as Pakistan where women are marginalized, gender concerns are very relevant and extremely significant. Social norms, beliefs, values, behaviors, mindsets, policies, processes etc.

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all disclose gross discrimination against women. All institutions of society exhibit this gender disparity as gender is rarely thought to be important and hardly understood and addressed. Such behaviors and attitudes especially in educational institutions and academic settings are a further set back to gender equity and equality concerns thereby promoting gender based discrimination in the overall processes and performance of educational institutions. "Teachers and educators influence the gender roles of their students thus impacting their educational outcomes. When considering Education for All (EFA) goal 5, which aimed to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and now aims to achieve gender equality by 2015, it should be realized that teachers are a critical force for meeting the goal" as in [2].

Educationists, academicians and faculty greatly influence gender socialization and mould gender roles of students, thus having impact on quality of life and power distribution.

Since we are concerned how teachers act as change agents on prevailing gender issues in contemporary society, it is essential that the concept of gender and its sensitization be further clarified for our understanding. "Gender is determined socially; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female. Each society emphasizes particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviors for each gender" as in [3]. Moreover in "Reference [4] World Health Organization stresses, Gender is used to describe those characteristics of women and men, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined. People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles". Furthermore "Reference [5] suggests, Gender is the division of people into two categories, "men" and "women." Through interaction with caretakers, socialization in childhood, peer pressure in adolescence, and gendered work and family roles women and men are socially constructed to be different in behavior, attitudes, and emotions. The gendered social order is based on and maintains these differences". In addition "Gender relations refer to a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society" as in [6]. Besides this "It is evident that children are socialized to behave according to gender stereotypes from a very young age. It is also clear however that when a child enters school he or she is still developing their gender role identity and will continue to do so

throughout their education” as in [7].

Schools and homes are the basic sources of development of the understanding of gender and gender relations. The influence of teachers and educators as change agents in this area cannot be underestimated.

A. Gender and Education:

“Worldwide the commitment to Education for All (EFA) is stronger than ever before. The Dakar Framework for action plots a course towards (EFA) by 2015, with a key interim commitment to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. These commitments have been reinforced in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the International Development Targets.” as in [8]. UNICEF has been working hard to provide equal opportunities to both boys and girls in the field of education. There was a decrease in the number of girls enrolled in the schools because of widespread gender discrimination. A considerable school dropout was seen because of inadequate resources, number of girls’ schools and female teachers.

Gender equality education should be understood as not only eliminating gender discrimination, which could be inherent in educational practices, but also integrating the experiences and needs of both female and male students into all educational practices and, ultimately, enabling them to overcome traditional gender relations through education. Training teachers in gender equality education is essential in order to actualize gender equality education more effectively at school sites.

B. Global findings: Gender discrimination in Academic Settings:

Global researches glaringly reveal prevalent gender discrimination in educational settings. “In the Eritrean lowlands, for example, school age girl’s averaged about 4.5 hours of non school work every day, while school aged boys averaged 2.5 hours” as in [7]. It can be concluded that girls in school perform more work outside the school than a boy does. “Reference [9] states, In southern Malawi, girls spend 70 percent of their time on domestic work, on average, while boys average only 38 percent; boys spend 41 percent of their time playing and in other leisure activities, while girls spend only 13 percent”. In fact, between 1973 and 1993 alone over seven other important investigations were made into the ‘field of class room interaction and gender. “Research has shown that teachers treat boys differently than girls; identifying them more readily and giving them more attention” as in [10]. “Reference [11] emphasizes, Because of this, boys learned that they are valued and feel comfortable taking risks while girls feel that not much is expected of them and are not as confident in speaking out in the class”.

“Although in recent years there have been significant improvements in the quality and breadth of teaching materials, we still find an over representation of males in comparison to females and stereotypical gender roles are portrayed. Teachers must choose the resources that they use in class carefully to avoid promoting and propagating preconceived gender roles” as in [12].

“Sandra Stacki’s doctoral thesis focuses on a specific innovative and participatory teacher in-service program called the “Teacher Empowerment Program” (TEP) .In the

TEP training performance activities by both men and women such as storytelling or dancing, considered as the “female domain” helped women to surface more, feel more confident about their capacities, dispel misconceptions and encourage men and women to treat each other more as partners. Throughout the TEP many men teachers and trainers have come to understand their own socially constructed gender roles, attitudes and behaviors, to overcome their resistance and to accept and respect women as equals. Sensitive male teachers are needed, not only to demonstrate that girls are valued in the classrooms and in society, but also to develop understanding and sensitivity about their own gender issues and those of boys” as in [8].

To overcome the gender issues prevailing in Korea a training titled “A Programme Development for Enhancing Gender-Sensitive Teaching Abilities of Teachers,” was conducted in order to promote gender equality training for teachers by developing a model program. It aimed to bring gender awareness among teachers in gender equality education and ultimately to promote gender equality education in school. In addition to observation, a survey of 544 teachers (269 male teachers and 275 female teachers) from elementary and secondary schools was carried out by KWDI (Koreans Women’s Development Institute) in 2003 for the research “A Programme Development for Enhancing Gender-Sensitive Teaching Abilities of Teachers.” The main purpose of this survey was to understand gender sensitivity among teachers and educators. The survey results show that quite a number of teachers participating in this investigation have a gender-biased awareness of gender differences and the possible causes; yet, they do not precisely understand what gender equality education is, as in [13].

C. Role of Educators and Teachers as Change Agents:

Gender issues are prevailing in society in all areas of life. To minimize these gender issues we need to start changing the mindsets of the younger generation of society as they are those who can bring about further change in society, with their innovative ideas, thoughts and practices. To do this we need good educated teachers who have a sound knowledge regarding gender issues.

It has been observed that teachers reinforce gender roles also in the different expectations that they have for boys and girls in their classes. “Teachers may also create learning environment in which boys are encouraged to succeed while girls are allowed to fail. In extreme cases.....What’s more, many teachers may be completely unaware that they treat girls and boys differently. But none of these habits, when they occur, should be surprising. We all grow up among the influence of our family and cultures, and as teachers, we may see ourselves, rightly, in the role of instilling cultural values in the children in our classes” as in [7].

Teachers play a very important part in the early upbringing of the child and their ideas and beliefs can change the thought patterns of young students. A teacher must therefore constantly be aware of the fact that his or her actions/attitude/behavior/perspective/approach/manner/outlook/mind-set will help to shape a child’s gender role .He / she may use multiple strategies and interventions to ensure that students have equal opportunities to both create and obtain their goals. Studies have shown gender differences to have a

direct relationship to preferential treatment, classroom dynamics and academic success.

Teachers are required to be serious about the gender issue. For the teachers to bring about a change in the society they should be given pre hand knowledge over the issue. Teachers need not only gender sensitive curricula and textbooks but also gender equality education. Teachers can serve as role models for the students.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING

As the mandate of The Aga Khan University, Working Group for Women (AKU-WGW) is inclusive of the objective to gender sensitize the society at large and to promote harmonious relationships among women and men in society, it was concluded that a teacher training be organized in order to raise the awareness of teachers and educate them to address prevailing gender and social issues in academic settings and in the society at large. 28 teachers from 16 schools, private and public both were selected according to the developed criteria. Objectives of the training included:

- 1) To raise secondary school teachers' awareness on prevailing gender issues
- 2) To train teachers to address prevailing gender and social issues in academic settings and in the society at large
- 3) To build networking and linkages between different schools and service providers.

III. CONTENTS OF TRAINING

The training was titled as "Building Capacity to Initiate Change: Training Program for Secondary School Teachers on Prevailing Gender Issues".

The topics integrated in the training were:

- 1) Gender sensitive classroom / school processes
- 2) Gender sensitive teaching approaches
- 3) Gender sensitive learning approaches
- 4) Gender sensitive management structures
- 5) Distribution of resources and facilities
- 6) Use of gender neutral language etc.

Participants were made to understand basic concepts like gender, sex, division of labor and gender stereotyping. Differences between gender and sex and nature versus nurture were clearly highlighted and reinforced. Moreover social construction of gender was illustrated through real life examples.

Importance of institutions such as home, school and society were discussed and how they influence gender roles and expectations was talked at length. Gender stereotypes were thus addressed in detail.

Moreover gender analysis of the following was done in detail:

- Curriculum material
- Teaching and learning processes
- School structures
- Culture

Further to analysis, activities were carried out to put forward suggestions to improve school structures, teaching, learning and curriculum material etc.

Possible changes in the existing practices were

identified and practical applications emphasized.

In addition participants were guided to identify and address gender issues that prevail in education, in schools and in academic settings.

Social issues addressed in the training were:

- 1) Child Abuse
- 2) Domestic Violence
- 3) Hudood Ordinance
- 4) Women's Rights in Islam
- 5) Harassment at Workplace

Child abuse was elaborated; its forms were highlighted and these included physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, sexual abuse etc. Attention was brought to the forms of sexual abuse such as:

- Touching (in a way that the child feels uncomfortable)
- Fondling
- Kissing (in a way that the child feels uncomfortable)
- Looking at the child's private parts
- Showing the child pornographic material
- Making the child touch or look at the abuser's private parts
- Child pornography and prostitution
- Oral sex
- Rape/Sodomy
- Verbal sexual abuse

Existing facts and statistics of prevalence of child abuse were shared.

Special emphasis was laid on child sexual abuse and its after effects on children. Teachers were trained how to respond to a child who discloses sexual abuse. Moreover participants were told about the facts to share with children regarding prevention of child sexual abuse. In addition the role of teachers at all levels of abuse including prevention, intervention and support was stressed. The training also integrated coaching teachers to recognize and provide support to victims of abuse.

The session on domestic violence included explaining the forms of violence which were

- Physical abuse
- Verbal, emotional abuse
- Economic abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Social abuse

Facts and figures about prevalence of domestic violence in Pakistan and globally was highlighted. Myths and realities were clarified. The effects of domestic violence on survivor in terms of short and long term effects were shared. Also effects on children who witness domestic violence were brought to attention.

Lastly it needs to be emphasized that the teaching learning process and methodology of the training deliberately and constantly promoted and facilitated networking and building linkages between different schools and service providers.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the training was inclusive of:

- 1) Teacher education and awareness sessions
- 2) Workshops
- 3) Video documentary

- 4) Dialogue
- 5) Individual activities
- 6) Group activities
- 7) Discussions
- 8) Case studies

Moreover there was a gallery tour of related researches done in the country. This was supplemented with a video clipping for teachers which they could use in their classrooms for gender sensitizing the students from a very young age.

The training provided maximum opportunity to teachers to interact with facilitators, service providers as well as amongst themselves. The participants were fully interactive and engaged during the sessions.

V. FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

During the course of the training it was found that not a single school had a gender interest group or a committee to address gender issues and combat sexual harassment and child sexual abuse. More than half of the teachers did not even clearly understand the difference between gender and sex. "The term gender is seen on admission forms and I thought it to be used interchangeably for sex" shared a teacher. Majority of the teachers were not clear about gender and its implications. "Now I really understand how gender operates in our lives" commented a participant. Another added "Understanding gender roles and expectations has helped me analyze my own differential behaviour towards girls and boys". Participants commented that understanding gender and using the gender lens would facilitate them to avoid gender discrimination in their personal and professional lives.

Participants shared that it was a novel experience analyzing the text and curriculum books after they were clear about gender. "We can now try to apply this knowledge in our teaching and learning approaches" reflected a senior teacher. This was supplemented by "Gender neutral language truly needs to be encouraged". Facts and figures of violence and child abuse were found alarming by participants who shared unawareness of the intensity of prevalence of the same. "Being a woman I can better handle social problems now", stated a class participant". Another remarked that "This training has promoted in me awareness and learning about social problems of women & their solutions"

The notion of conducting sessions on social issues with relevance to the role of teachers and how teachers could play an important part in handling these issues was absolutely new for most participants. Teachers were not equipped to conduct gender analysis of curriculum material, teaching and learning practices and school structures and the prevailing culture. "I will now use the "gender lens" to review methodology and lesson plans" shared a teacher. The training created awareness as how to analyze texts before giving them to students, consider its holistic impact on them, and understand the hidden messages conveyed by pictures.

On the whole it was found that educational system was not gender friendly and gender bias was visible in games, activities, and management structures, distribution of resources and facilities and leadership.

School-parent partnership on gender issues was absent or

weak. There was lack of training for parents, teachers, administrators, and local officials on their legal obligations and children's rights. Educational authorities and schools were not provided with a suitable budget to promote and sustain the gender sensitive agenda.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS / SUGGESTIONS

This teacher training resulted in recommendations which were based on stark truths staring us in the face and one of the most unpleasant one is that despite our claiming to be a progressive society, gender discrimination is rooted deeply in it. Gender inequality is the order of the day and is seen subtly existing in all areas of life regardless of the girls and women proving themselves to be equal if not better than men and boys in many areas.

One of the best possible strategies to minimize gender discrimination in society is to promote gender awareness in parents and teachers. Gender trainings for teachers should be organized as they will facilitate the change to be brought about in the syllabus and at policy level. Further recommendations include:

A. Curriculum / Text:

It is important that all text, reading material and books be free of notion of gender inequality as bias is embedded in textbooks, lessons and teachers' interactions with students. This type of gender bias is part of the hidden curriculum taught implicitly to students through the everyday functioning of their classroom.

Thus gender roles, expectations reflected by written text and pictures should be gender sensitive to promote the concept of gender equality.

B. Educational System:

Educational system needs to be gender sensitive and gender friendly. This should be reflected in the sports, games and activities for girls and boys. Moreover the leadership also needs to be granted using a gender lens.

C. Guidelines by Gender Experts:

There needs to be development of criteria of meeting gender sensitive guidelines. These need to be set down by gender experts.

D. Role of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations:

Governmental and Non- Governmental Organizations can play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality. They need to join hands and cooperate to meet the challenges of minimizing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality at all levels.

E. Use of Gender Sensitive Vocabulary

Gender neutral language needs to be promoted at all levels and throughout the institutions for students, staff, and faculty and management levels.

Special watch out required for usage of tagging occupations, using feminine endings on words, use of the generic "man", inconsistency in names and titles, patronizing and demeaning expressions etc.

F. Educational Policies:

All policies, programs, interventions need to be gender sensitive.

G. Teacher Training Programs:

Gender sensitivity training needs to be mandatory for all teacher training programs, certificate and academic courses. All teachers should be gender sensitized especially male teachers must be exposed to gender sensitivity trainings.

H. Extra fringe benefits:

Benefits must be offered in rural areas to promote girl education e.g. scholarships, food packs etc. Women's education to be considered a fundamental right of the individual.

I. School – Parent Partnerships:

School -parent partnership needs to be strengthened to identify and address gender issues in homes and in educational institutions.

J. Gender trainings / Sensitization sessions:

Gender trainings must be provided for parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and local officials.

K. Monitoring:

Gender sensitivity progress must be constantly reviewed by gender experts and steps should be taken to sustain the same.

L. Gender sensitivity counseling:

Gender sensitivity counseling must be made available for students, staff, teachers, and parents.

M. Allocation of Budget:

Educational authorities and schools must be provided with a suitable budget to promote and sustain the gender sensitive agenda.

N. Commitment from Senior Leadership / Government:

Gender fair practices are effective when top leadership supports gender equity and equality measures and also effectively communicates the organizations commitment to gender equality. This could include institutionalization of relevant policies and procedures and allocation of resources for gender equity process.

O. Gender sensitive organizational culture:

Organizational change needs to be institutionalized by promoting gender balanced staff, gender sensitive governance structure; equal valuing of women and men's working styles etc.

P. Gender Audit:

Gender audit of institutions should be carried out by gender experts to review curriculum, policies, programs, interventions etc.

Q. Creation of a gender responsive school:

A gender responsive school is one where the academic, social and physical environment and its surrounding community take into account the specific needs of both girls and boys. The academic delivery, including teaching methodologies, teaching and learning materials, classroom

interaction and management of academic processes, is also gender responsive.

R. Institutionalization of special committees / groups in academic settings:

In order to promote gender friendly and safe environment for children it is important to institutionalize special committees

- Committee for preparing and implementing Code of Ethics at workplace
- Gender interest committee / group with gender focal person
- Sexual harassment committee
- Child Abuse committee

S. Gender Mainstreaming:

In order to address gender concerns holistically it is essential to mainstream gender in all institutions of society. "Reference [14] defines, mainstreaming is ...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated."

T. Role of Media:

Media constantly reinforces the traditional stereotypes of women and men and thus needs to address and promote gender equality by using a gender lens sensitively.

VII. CONCLUSION

The importance of building capacity of teachers for addressing gender and social issues has been supported by literature as Dr. Sandra Stacki in her doctoral thesis presents "...presence of empowered teachers committed to gender equity in the classroom can be critical to the development of girls into empowered women. Gender-sensitive, empowered women teachers can serve as positive role models for girls and pass on new values to all their students" as in [8]

We can conclude by saying that the requirement is for a lifelong learning on gender equality through the development of social partnership between organizations from civil society and political world in order to enhance understanding of women's issues as issues of power in society and gender training for teachers is the first step towards accomplishment of this goal. It is proposed that such leadership, empowerment, and gender trainings should be a part of teacher training programs in order to enable teachers not to gender discriminate and give equal opportunities to girls and boys thus promoting gender equity and equality.

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