



Teacher as a Change Agent for Gender Sensitization and Equality in Education: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is a profession that involves both academic and social settings in the modern world. Topics related to gender are now part of our curriculum. As a result, a teacher must critically understand the gender related issues. Teachers are change agents who encourage gender equality in the classroom and eradicate stereotypes from society by changing the viewpoints of the younger generations. A teacher develops tactics for creating a gender-friendly attitude based on the lessons they are teaching. As a gender constructivist, a teacher observes classroom practices, adopts new approaches, and, with a shift in perspective, fosters an environment where boys and girls are treated equally both within and outside of the classroom. Educational institutions must develop a program where teachers are educated to be sensitive to gender issues and enable students to overcome the gender stereotypes and prejudices that are prevalent in society in order to promote a positive attitude toward gender issues. This analysis explores the transformative role of teachers as catalysts for gender equality within and beyond the classroom. It examines how teachers can challenge deep-rooted patriarchal norms, break down gender stereotypes, and promote a gender-responsive learning environment. The study highlights that teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but are pivotal agents in shaping student attitudes and, by extension, societal structures. The necessity of developing an inclusive and gender-sensitive educational system is emphasized in this article, along with several steps to assure gender equality.

KEY WORDS

Teacher, Social change, Gender equality, Gender-sensitization.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful tool for social change, and gender equality is a key component of that progress. Since teachers are the focal point of student interactions, they have an impact on how gender roles are seen and applied in schools. Teachers may engage as change agents by challenging norms, promoting inclusive practices, and creating environments where all students, regardless of gender, can thrive. In every aspect of life, gender issues are prevalent in the society. Since the younger generation is the one with the ability to further transform society by their creative ideas, attitudes, and practices, one need to start transforming their mindsets in order to reduce these gender issues. Teachers typically see gender equality in education as only giving boys and girls equal access to education and actively promoting gender equality in their education. For this we need well-trained educators with strong gender-related understanding in this concern. Teachers' disparate expectations for boys and girls in their classrooms have been seen to perpetuate gender norms. Teachers possess a special role as change agents since they influence children's initial experiences, attitudes, and beliefs beyond the family. By using gender-sensitive teaching methods, they can break down long-standing preconceptions and promote social justice.

Concept of Gender

Different from biological sex, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and characteristics that a society considers suitable for males, women, and gender-diverse individuals. Gender refers to the roles, actions, activities, and expectations that are seen suitable for men, women, and other gender identities by society. Sex, which is about biological distinctions (such as chromosomes and anatomy), is not the same as this. Social interactions, media, education, family, and culture all influence gender. It affects how individuals view both themselves and other people.

Gender includes:

- **Gender roles:** What society expects people according to their gender (e.g., working outside the house, caring for children)
- **Gender identity** refers to an individual's internal feelings regarding their gender, which may be male or female, neither, both, or any other combination.
- **Gender stereotypes** are rigid beliefs about how members of a particular gender should behave or seem.

What is Gender Equality?

When everyone, regardless of gender, has equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources, and is treated with equal worth, this is known as gender equality. In other words gender equality is the elimination of discrimination, violence, and harmful preconceptions in order to create more equitable and prosperous communities. It means that all people, regardless of gender, have equal rights, resources, opportunities, and protections. This enables full participation in society, economic growth, and personal development. Since it values diversity and guarantees equal access to all facets of life, including decision-making and unpaid labor, it is both a human right and the basis of sustainable development.

Constitutional Provisions on Gender Equality in India

The Constitution of India contains provisions that aim to create gender justice and equality. Some of the important Articles that ensure that all individuals are treated equally and with dignity are:

- **Article 14: Equality Before Law:** The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India, prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

- **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- **Article 19 (1) (g):** To practice any profession or to carry out any occupation, trade or businesses.
- **Article 21: Protection of Life and Personal Liberty:** No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.
- **Article 42: Provision for Just and Humane Conditions of Work and Maternity Relief:** The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
- **Article 51A:** It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Gender Sensitization: Meaning and Importance

The process of increasing knowledge, eliminating persistent misconceptions, and changing behavior to promote gender equality is known as gender sensitization. In order to eradicate gender-based prejudice in households, companies, and society at large, it promotes analyzing individual attitudes. This method seeks to address issues like violence and uneven opportunity while fostering empathy in order to build a more respectful and inclusive environment for everyone, particularly underrepresented populations. Gender sensitization aims to acknowledge and challenge preconceived notions and preconceptions about what men, women, or other genders should be or do. It encourages equality and respect for all genders; motivate individuals to establish inclusive settings where all persons, regardless of gender, have equal rights and opportunities. In India, gender sensitivity is necessary because it helps to create a fair and inclusive society where everyone, regardless of gender, can access equal opportunities in education, work, and social life. Therefore, a more methodical, well-planned, and professional approach is needed to foster this sensitivity and primarily highlight the contributions of both genders in the creation and development of a well-balanced society, especially in a country like India with the considerable diversity existing in terms of its customs, traditions, rituals, social values, family beliefs, and individual perception. The primary issue facing in Indian society is the lack of recognition of women's participation in a wide range of activities. The men who are reluctant to appreciate the contribution of women come forward as a result of being sensitized to do so. The practice of gender sensitization fosters an awareness that women are wise and should be included in decision-making. They should be given equal treatment and opportunities to share in the social and economic advantages since they have concerns.

Role of Teachers in Gender Sensitization and Equality

Gender sensitization is not about placing women against males. Conversely, gender-sensitive education is advantageous to both sexes. It assists them in identifying which gender-related presumptions are true and which are stereotypes. Gender disparities and inequalities (represented via prejudices, preconceptions, and discriminatory behaviors) have negative and far-reaching effects on educational institutions, making gender equality in and through education especially in classroom environments a major concern. Education is a powerful tool for bringing about change, but it won't happen until teachers and students support classroom programs that create new perceptions based on a positive gender equity worldview. The gender issue must be taken seriously by teachers. It is important that teachers have prior awareness of the problem in order to effect social change. Teachers require both gender equality education and gender-sensitive curriculum and texts. Teachers are essential in advancing equality and gender sensitization because they mold students' views and beliefs from a young age. By raising awareness of gender problems, they assist students in identifying and combating prejudices and stereotypes. Teachers provide an example for respectful conduct by speaking inclusively and treating every student fairly. They guarantee that boys and girls participate equally in class activities and incorporate gender-sensitive information into the curriculum. Additionally, educators create friendly and safe spaces for learning where students may express themselves without worrying about prejudice.

Role of School in Gender Sensitization and Equality

Since schools are the first social settings for students, they are crucial in fostering gender equality and awareness in the classroom. Student can acquire life's fundamental lessons only at school. Teachers are therefore essential in helping children become aware of this. First and foremost, educators must embrace gender equality and implement it in the classroom. When interacting with the boys and girls in the classroom, teachers must be mindful of their behavior. They should make an effort to instill in children a feeling of equality and respect for the other sex. Teachers may foster respect for one another between girls and boys by giving them equal opportunity and without discriminating against them based on their gender. Classroom competitions and activities should be conducted in mixed groups rather than based on sex. To raise awareness of gender equality and help them comprehend the value of both sexes in social situations, it is important to give boys and girls the chance to work and study together in a welcoming environment in a classroom. It is important to teach both boys and girls to value and respect one another's talents and shortcomings. The main goals of gender sensitization are behavior modification and the development of empathy for one's own and other sexes. It introduces men and women to one another and fosters respect for all people, regardless of gender. Gender bias starts at birth in patriarchal societies like India, where women face discrimination in sectors including labor, education, childcare, and nutrition.

Laws in India Promoting Gender Sensitization

The Government of India has taken several steps by passing various Acts to create gender equality and teach gender sensitivity. A list of important Acts passed by the parliament is given below:

1. **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act):** This law aims to protect women from sexual harassment at their workplaces. It requires employers to set up internal complaint committees to address complaints and ensure a safe working environment for women.
2. **The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976:** This act mandates that men and women workers receive equal pay for the same work or work of a similar nature. It prohibits discrimination in wages based on gender.
3. **The Hindu Succession Act, 1956:** This law governs how property is inherited among Hindus. It originally gave women limited rights to inherit property, but amendments (especially in 2005) have improved daughters' rights to ancestral property, making them equal coparceners with sons.
4. **The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017:** This amendment to the original 1961 Act extends maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks for women working in certain establishments, providing better support for new mothers. It also includes provisions for work from home and crèche facilities.
5. **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:** This law makes the giving or receiving of dowry illegal in India. It aims to stop the harmful practice of dowry, which can lead to harassment and violence against women.
6. **The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013:** After the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, this amendment strengthened laws related to sexual offenses. It expanded definitions of sexual assault, increased punishments, and introduced new offenses like stalking and voyeurism to better protect women.

Challenges and Limitations

The effectiveness of teachers as change agents is often hindered by several factors:

1. **Personal Conditioning:** Teachers may unwittingly perpetuate preconceptions they were raised with since they are the children of rigid hierarchies.
2. **Socio-cultural Pressures:** In many areas, resistance to gender-neutral education is a result of embedded patriarchal norms and parental expectations.

3. **Systemic Support Deficit:** A lot of teachers complain that their pre-service education (such as B.Ed. programme) did not include organized, required gender sensitization training.
4. **Infrastructure Gaps:** A teacher's personal attempts to advance equality may be hampered by problems with safety and inadequate sanitation (such as unclean facilities for girls) or poor safety and sanitation facilities, especially for girls, affect attendance and participation.
5. **Lack of Training and Professional Development:** Many educators lack proper training or instruction in gender sensitization. Without the right information, they could find it difficult to recognize gender biases or successfully incorporate ideas of gender equality into their lessons. Their confidence and ability to deal with delicate gender-related issues are limited by this incapacity.
6. **Deep-rooted Cultural and Social Norms:** Traditional gender norms and prejudices are sometimes heavily reinforced in the communities where teachers work. Teachers may encounter opposition to new ideas of gender equality as a result of these cultural norms, which can make it difficult to change the attitudes of parents and students as well.
7. **Unconscious Gender Bias:** Even with good intentions, teachers may unintentionally exhibit gender bias in their language, classroom interactions, or assessments. For example, they might encourage boys more in science subjects and girls in arts, reinforcing stereotypes. Such biases can affect students' self-esteem and choices
8. **Curriculum and Teaching Materials Limitations:** Often, textbooks and learning materials contain gender stereotypes or lack representation of diverse gender roles. Teachers may find it challenging to teach gender equality when the curriculum itself does not support it, requiring extra effort to adapt or supplement content.
9. **Resistance from Students and Colleagues:** Some students may reject or feel uncomfortable with discussions on gender, especially if it challenges their upbringing or beliefs. Similarly, colleagues might not support gender sensitization initiatives, creating an unsupportive environment for teachers.
10. **Time and Resource Constraints:** Teachers typically have busy schedules and a lot of work to do, which leaves little time for planning and carrying out gender-sensitization exercises. Their efforts are further hampered by a lack of resources, such as workshops, training materials, or professional advice.
11. **Lack of Institutional Support and Policies:** Teachers' efforts may be isolated and inefficient when educational institutions lack defined regulations that support gender equality. Programs for gender sensitization are difficult to maintain and associated concerns are difficult to systematically address without administrative support.
12. **Fear of Controversy and Conflict:** Gender topics can be sensitive and sometimes controversial. Teachers may avoid them to prevent conflicts with students, parents, or management, especially in conservative settings. This fear limits open dialogue and learning.
13. **Underrepresentation of Gender Diversity in Staff:** Students' exposure to gender equality in practice may be reduced by a lack of varied role models among teaching staff (for example, a dearth of female or gender-minority professors), which makes it more difficult to motivate change.
14. **Difficulty in Measuring Impact:** Teachers frequently find it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of gender sensitization initiatives. It is difficult to enhance strategies or show success to stakeholders in the absence of well-defined assessment techniques.

These difficulties highlight the importance of teachers in advancing gender equality and sensitization, but they also highlight the necessity for structural assistance, resources, and training in order to successfully overcome these obstacles.

Key Strategies for Gender Sensitization and Equality

1. Awareness and Education

- Conduct workshops, seminars, and training sessions on gender concepts, stereotypes, and equality.
- Use stories, videos, and case studies to highlight gender issues and their impact.

2. Gender-Responsive Pedagogy

- Use teaching methods that treat all genders equally and encourage participation from everyone.
- Avoid gender-biased language and examples in textbooks and classroom discussions.

3. Inclusive Curriculum

- Integrate topics on gender equality, women's rights, and contributions of all genders in history and society.
- Ensure learning materials represent diverse gender roles and experiences.

4. Encouraging Critical Thinking

- Ask students to question and reflect on gender norms and stereotypes.
- Use role-play, debates, and group discussions to explore gender issues.

5. Creating Safe Spaces

- Foster a classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves regardless of gender.
- Address and challenge sexist remarks or behaviors immediately.

6. Role Modeling

- Teachers and leaders should model gender-sensitive behavior and attitudes.
- Highlight role models from various genders in different professions and fields.

7. Community Involvement

- Engage parents, local leaders, and community members in gender sensitization programs.
- Organize awareness campaigns and activities beyond school.

8. Policy and Institutional Support

- Develop and implement school policies promoting gender equality.
- Set up committees or clubs focused on gender issues.

9. Monitoring and Feedback

- Regularly assess gender sensitivity in school practices through surveys and observations.
- Provide feedback and support for improvement.

These strategies help to create an environment where everyone respects and values each other equally, breaking down harmful stereotypes and promoting fairness.

Government Policies and Schemes for Gender Sensitization and Equality

The Government of India has introduced various schemes and policies for the development and empowerment of women, which will help in creating awareness about gender equality and inclusion. These are given below:

- 1. Education and skill development:** Girls' hostels in STEM institutions, scholarships for STEM girls, Skill India Mission with Women Industrial Training Institutes, and digital learning platforms (SWAYAM, National Digital Library).

2. **Health and nutrition:** Poshan/ Abhiyaan, Pradhan/ Mantri/ Matru/ Vandana/ Yojana cash incentives, and over 10.3/ crore clean cooking gas connections under Ujjwala Yojana.
3. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** It focuses on the protection, survival and education of the girl child.
4. **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK):** It aims to empower rural women with opportunities for skill development and employment.
5. **The Working Women Hostel (WWH):** It aims to provide a safe and secure place for working women.
6. **Scheme for Adolescent Girls:** Focuses on empowerment of girls in the age group 11-18 and also improve their social status through nutrition, life skills, home skills and vocational training
7. **The National Crèche Scheme:** It aims to ensure that women take up gainful employment by providing a safe, secure and stimulating environment to the children.
8. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandna Yojna:** It focuses on providing maternity benefit to pregnant and lactating mothers.
9. **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana:** It aims to provide housing under the name of the woman also.
10. **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** It aims to enable a large number of Indian youth including women to take up industry-relevant skill training in securing a better livelihood.
11. **Deen Dayal Upadhyay National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAYNULM):** It aims to create opportunities for women in skill development, leading to market-based employment.
12. **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** Its aim is to empower women and protect their health by providing LPG cylinders free of cost.
13. **Sukanya Samridhi Yojna (SSY):** Under this scheme girls have been economically empowered by opening their bank accounts.
14. **Economic Inclusion Schemes:** PM/ Jan/ Dhan/ Yojana, Stand Up/ India, Mudra/ Yojana, and the National Rural Livelihood Mission mobilise women into self help groups, provide credit, and support entrepreneurship/.
15. **Reservation and Political Empowerment:** The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam (Women's Reservation Act) 2023 reserves one third of seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women, aiming to boost their decision making role/.
16. **Community & CSR Initiatives:** Vocational training, micro entrepreneurship, health camps and menstrual hygiene drives reach over 15/ states, targeting millions of women/.

Educational Implication of the Study

The integration of gender sensitization into education has several important implications for teaching and learning:

1. **Curriculum Design:** Educational materials must be gender-neutral and inclusive. In order to assist students form balanced perspectives, textbooks and educational resources should fairly depict both genders in responsibilities and accomplishments.
2. **Teacher Training:** Teachers need regular professional development on gender sensitivity to recognize and address unconscious biases, use inclusive language, and create equitable classroom environments.
3. **Classroom Practices:** Pedagogy should encourage equal participation, group work, and leadership opportunities for all students, regardless of gender. Teachers must actively challenge stereotypes in student interactions and classroom discussions.

- 4. Policy Implementation:** Schools should adopt and enforce policies that promote gender equality, such as anti-harassment measures, equal access to resources, and support for girls in STEM subjects.
- 5. Assessment and Evaluation:** Evaluation methods should be gender-neutral, ensuring that assessments measure ability and understanding without cultural or gender bias.
- 6. Community Engagement:** Schools should involve parents and local communities in gender sensitization programs to reinforce messages of equality beyond the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Gender sensitization and equality are fundamental to building a just and inclusive society. They challenge stereotypes, eliminate discrimination, and ensure that every individual, regardless of gender, has equal opportunities to grow and contribute. Teachers, educational institutions, and communities play a vital role in spreading awareness and nurturing respectful attitudes. By promoting gender sensitization and equality in education and everyday life, we can create a society where dignity, respect, and fairness are shared by all. Education systems must place a high priority on continuous professional development that addresses personal bias reduction if they want teachers to effectively make the shift from passive educators to active change agents. Teachers who successfully raise awareness are able to model gender equality as a fundamental classroom principle in addition to teaching it as a subject. As facilitators of social change, teachers not only empower learners to question inequality but also contribute to creating a school culture that values diversity and equity. Therefore, empowering teachers with gender awareness and pedagogical tools is essential for achieving sustainable gender equality in education and society at large.

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