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## **Promoting Gender Equality in Classroom Teaching and Learning in Indian Context: Issues and Challenges**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The issue of gender inequality in education is very broad. Discrimination based on gender is one of the main obstacles to education and it affects both boys and girls. It appears in education with various forms, and gender bias in classroom teaching and learning is one of them. Equality is the touchstone of Indian Constitution. In Article 15 (1), it strictly prohibited the discrimination by stating that the state shall not discriminate against any citizens only on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any one of them. Yet, gender inequalities, biasness and discrimination in teaching-learning are found in almost every institution. This paper examines the content and the process of teaching and learning which appear in the form of delivering formal education, and expresses how these components reflect and reproduce gender inequalities in Indian context of classroom situation. It also highlights how, girls' and boys' learning, and interactions with each others as well as with the teachers are being influenced by methods of teaching, the content of the curriculum, and relations within the class. The paper considers these aspects of education provision, related curriculum, teaching and learning, the dynamic of the classroom and school to deal with said issue. It recommends changes needed to ensure that education provision will promote gender equality.*

**Key Words:** *Gender Bias and Disparities, Equity and Equality, Curriculum and Textbook, Teaching Learning Strategy.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality in education tends to be understood by teachers as simply providing male and female students with equal educational opportunities and fostering their gender equality teaching consciously. However, gender equality in education should be understood as not only eliminating gender discrimination, which could be inherent in educational practices e.g. including the instructional behaviors of teachers, 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 for teachers, who are the subjects of promoting gender equality, is essential in order to actualize gender equality in education more effectively at school sites. The roles of gender are taken from the society that plays a root cause for inequality in teaching and learning situation. Though women are gradually being educated and the past few decades have seen an improvement in the treatment of females in classroom methods and curricular materials, it would be premature to declare victory and dismiss the issues of gender bias. Today, our girls

and boys remain the victims of gender stereotypes in text and resource materials. They are also victims of unintended or sexist behaviors by many ways in institution. Often teachers reflect varied expectations for children, based on a student's gender, class, race and ethnicity. Most teachers care deeply about the youngsters in their class rooms. They are confident that they treat all their students the same. However, many teachers who analyze their own attitudes and behaviors discover the subtle and pervasive nature of gender inequity in the classroom. A common response from teachers, when asked about gender inequity in classrooms, is that they treat all their students the same. There are two problems with this statement. First, students are diverse and have different learning issues, thus treating all students in the same way means that some students will have a better learning experience than their peers. Second, teachers may be ignoring their unconscious gender biases towards their students, their schools and themselves.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

"I am uncompromising in the matter of Women's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by men. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."

*Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, 17-10'29*

In some cases, boys' educational opportunities are discriminated by gender roles that force them to work home labors rather than to attend school. These financial responsibilities are often increased in boys' adolescent years, making it difficult for them to complete secondary school in some regions. However, in many parts of the world, girls are often the victims of gender discrimination as they pursue an education. Education is the only key to bring gender equality. Increase in literacy rate should bring equality based on gender but in Indian society gender equality is not yet achieved up to the expected level. It is seen that not all biases favor on boys. In the recent passing years, there have been raising questions whether schools are serving boys well. The more dramatic accusations of this question include that bias classroom teachings and learning are also trying to destroy "boys' culture" and force "feminine" frilly content on boys (Connell, 1996).

"Discrimination against girls has ended, the argument runs. Indeed, thanks to feminism, girls have special treatment and special programmes. Now, what about the boys? It is boys who are slower to learn to read, more likely to drop out of school, more likely to be disciplined, more likely to be in programmes for children with special needs. In school it is girls who are doing better, boys are in trouble- and special programmes for boys that are needed." (Connell, 1996)

One explanation for why boys struggle in school is that the expectations of schooling do not fit the way boys learn. Critics suggest that boys need changes such as smaller classes, more discussions, better discipline, mentoring programmes and more male teachers in their schools as maximum elementary teachers are female.

The term 'gender' is a social construct that impacts attitudes, roles, responsibilities and behavior patterns of boys and girls, men and women in all societies, cultures and families. It is defined by FAO as 'the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or

men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution' (FAO, 1997). It is the concept of shared expectations and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behavior, characteristics and roles. Gender can be considered a social and cultural construct that differentiates female from male and thus defines the ways in which female and male interact with each other. These roles and expectations are learned and they can change over time to time as well as vary within and between cultures in society.

### **What is Gender Equality in teaching and learning?**

“Gender equality” in teaching and learning refers to boys and girls experiencing the same advantages or disadvantages in attending school, the same approaches in teaching methods, gender neutral curricula, and academic orientation, all of which aim to ensure equal learning achievement and subsequent life opportunities.

**Gender Equality:** female and male have same and equal education opportunities.

**Gender Inequality:** female and male do not have the same and equal education opportunities.

### **Why is Gender Equality important for education?**

1. Gender inequality impacts the ability of learners to access and participate in quality education
2. Providing men and women equal access to education is critical for breaking the cycle of poverty
3. Promoting gender equality is the same as having good classroom management
4. The best form of teaching is the most fair and equal form of teaching!

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The gender inequities pervading society are carried into the school environment. There is an evidence of inequalities in school processes such as teaching strategy, teacher-student interaction, school management, and the planning and designing of the physical infrastructure. Teaching and learning materials, for example, may contain gender stereotypes. Teachers are not always aware of the gender specific needs of both girls and boys. School management systems may not sufficiently address gender constraints such as sexual harassment, and many schools do not have adequate or separate toilets for girls and boys. As a result, the schools are facing these arising problems to provide a gender responsive environment for effective teaching and learning to take place. In order to arrive at such a school, a holistic approach involving various interventions is required.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

1. Understand the importance of gender equality in classroom situations
2. Practice in identifying gender bias in classrooms
3. Understand how to establish an equal classroom learning environment

4. Discuss classroom strategies to promote gender equality
5. Identify gender bias in classroom texts or materials

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper is basically prepared on the basis of qualitative analysis. A qualitative study is the systematic process of collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive, narrative and non numerical data to go insights into a particular component of interest. The present qualitative study seeks to probe deeply into real and natural classroom setting to obtain in-depth understanding about the way issues of gender in classroom are arising, why it is this way, and how the teachers, students and others in the present context perceive it. To obtain in-depth understanding of concern problem, the researcher goes through the tools of classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, opinionnaires, non numerical documents analyses, uncover subtlest, less covert and personal understanding.

## **SOME FINDINGS**

The study finds out some issues and challenges in school situations as follows-

### **Bias Student Teacher interaction**

The research has found the outcomes of gender biases in the classroom teaching and learning process. It is found that class teachers often call only male students to answer the questions by standing in one place at the front of the class. Sometimes, when female students try to answer, she is interrupted by the male students. In school level, when girls fail to answer of asked questions, boys laugh loud at her and make jokes even in front of teachers. Therefore the teachers in the classroom give separate reinforcement to boys and girls for the same responses and create a sense of gender bias by giving more emphasis on male students' responses. Biases should be stopped. The teacher needs to support and encourage female students also when their turns come to answer. Teacher should use more alternate method between calling on female and male students. And equally same complex responses are to be provided for both male and female students.

### **Classroom Arrangement**

In India, from elementary to higher education, it is a common scenario that all the male students sit together on one side of the class, and female students sit together on the other side. And class teacher standing or sitting in a particular place of class, teaches the lessons. Among the students, there are no interaction, learning collaboration, classroom participation, discussion, and debates on the lesson; become only receiver from text materials and class teachers. Sometimes, for collaborative learning, teachers divide the class into a number of groups on gender basis. But, for effective teaching and learning, there will be no biases on gender in classroom. The teacher should create more interactive and collaborative classroom, exercise to accommodate both male and female students who have different learning strength and style. Sitting arrangement from school levels should be randomization and on the basis of students' wish so that the teacher and student can reach each other very easily.

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### **Language and Body Language used by Teacher**

Basically, the school teachers in most of the times knowingly or unknowingly address the whole class using masculine words like 'He' where both boys and girls are present. To get response or answer from class, the teachers call boys more number of times in compare with girls. Even all teachers in class are more sympathetic to female students and try to avoid them in classroom interactions and spend most of the times in boys' sides. Therefore, a bias sense is being created inside the class among students. So, every class teacher must use gender neutral language to address the class such as "She" or "he", "he" or "she", or "students", "Pupils", "Dears", "Kids", teacher should use female names and pronouns an equal amount as men's in class, exercises, or in textbooks. They must be aware of his/her informal cues of leaning forward, and walking away, etc. and make sure that they (teachers) are giving the appropriate nonverbal cues when both male and female students are talking. Teachers move around the room, or to different locations of class when teach and must provide equal praise to both male and female students.

### **School Learning Materials**

School textbooks, contents, curricula, teaching and learning materials are not completely free from gender biases. Studies have found that many texts contain stereotypes about women, under represent women, mention men first and make offensive jokes about women. It is observed that textbook images of men and women are being portrayed in biased manner which show gender-stereotyped jobs in learning group activities. Most of the women pictures in text do not have jobs as high level as men do. In learning activities, always women are doing nursing and household works whereas as men are in pictured of offices and other higher level works. Even, there are more pictures of men rather than women which affect classroom learning. Not only this, in state level school textbooks, there are gender discrimination in the uses of words, languages and sentences by selecting masculine words and sentences which over emphasis on boys only. So, there is a need to be prepared effective teaching and learning materials which will be free from gender discrimination. Authority must ensure that males and females are depicted equally in class materials and that the themes, subjects, and pictures used in class materials are relevant to the life experiences of both female and male students. Textbook materials are to be prepared by the gender balance of authors who must have concerned about neutral words and language in contents.

### **Gender and Hidden Curriculum**

Hidden curriculum is also an important component of diverse schooling system operating across our country. It is an integral part of all learning activities that take place within and outside classrooms that are learned but not openly intended. Hidden curriculum is related to the transmission of norms, values, beliefs and behavior that either reinforces existing social and cultural ethos of the society or attempts to question and critique them. But in many cases, content, learning activities, learning objectives, which are being put in syllabus, not reflect the needs and importance of both male and female students. These are framed on the basis of gender either for men or for women, which are delivered by class teachers in an integrated classroom. So, the teacher as a syllabus maker must see that the hidden curriculum reflect the needs and life experiences of both females and males and promote peace and equality for both students regardless of their race, class, disability, religion, or ethnic background.



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### **Method of Assessment and Evaluation**

Students' study performances throughout an academic year depend upon examinations system which tends to dominate assessment and evaluation for grading or marking practices, but the methods of assessment and evaluation are not accessed properly because of gender-stereotyped questions pattern in examination. Therefore, in continuous classroom assessment, teacher often becomes bias in favor of some students on gender basis for comprehensive evaluation. But, girls and boys should be given more equal opportunities for participating in different classroom activities to make assessment in a fairly manner. Studies have shown that there are gender differences among learners due to physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic factors. So, there is a need to focus on gender sensitive for purposes of making assessment fairly. The teachers can use analytical films, videos, television shows, news, current affairs, radio, music, video clippings to link assessment with real life situations. The using of different forms of print and audio visual medias as an assessment strategy in day to day classes, will enable children to understand the meaning of equality, equity, diversity and differences operating in different contexts related to family, school, work places and society at large. Teachers can use the strategy of group assessment exercises to all children for promoting human values related learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together for addressing and solving varieties of gender based problems and issues. For these, teachers need to be trained on above mentioned parameters; in addition, they need to analyze their own perceptions on assessment procedures to make it inclusive for all.

### **Problem of Boys in Gender Inequality**

We have seen that from the past decades, gender issues in education were associated primarily with a focus on the achievements and aspirations of girls, in order to redress the power imbalance in favor of male students. However, because of the increased emphasis on examination achievement in recent years and the narrowing of the gender gap in favor of female students, much interest in gender has reverted to concern about the perceived underachievement of males. Thus in recent years in India, gender issues in education have come to be equated with boys' relative underperformance in examinations, and a so-called crisis of masculinity. The Overconcentration on masculinity in crisis of girls' education is potentially fruitful in the sense that it shifts emphasis away from structural factors in our developing country which positions boys at the confined level. Now focus is giving more on equity on gender basis to bring them at the mainstream of education which creates an imbalance of equality in teaching and learning in classroom situations. So, above said issue should be understood and be maintained a sound educational framework for proper balancing of equity to all genders.

### **Discrimination in Teaching Profession**

Teaching jobs have long been considered as a good and suitable job only for women in elementary schools by the feminists of the societies. Indian society has considered teaching as the integral part of the long struggle of women to gain access to this profession because of their mothering and caring role in the family. Meanwhile, studies show that due to the lack of sufficient male teachers in elementary levels, boys show low interest in classroom participation and sometimes feel poor confidence in front of female teachers. They may not share their personal life experiences and expectation to female teachers. Therefore, it is a wrong idea that female teachers are best for elementary education. The number of male

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teachers from elementary to higher education must be equal so that there will not create any sense of gender inequality among students.

### **Single Sex Setting**

The issue of co-education and single sex setting in teaching and learning is a wide blame over the country in the age of demands for equality. As co-education has been formed as more ideologically and associated with policies of gender equality, it accepts the biological difference between men and women, but rejects the assumption of male and female stereotypes. But, According to conservative society, studies of mixed-sex classrooms have consistently shown that boys receive more teacher attention and that teachers place more importance on boys' learning and perception. The conservative argument for single-sex schools is that they enable the boys and girls to be inducted into the prescribed roles demanded by society. Feminist, advocates of single-sex schools, argue the contrary that single-sex schools allow girls and boys greater freedom to choose subjects not associated with their gender and to flourish in a wider range of school subjects than conventionally acceptable in mixed sex schools. On the contrary, research shows that many female students loss their study interest in single sex setting and feel loneliness of opposite gender peer interactions in classroom. The authority should take care about the issue of such thing and will send female students in co-education those who are interested in.

### **Motivational and Psychological Issue**

Motivation to do well at school is also an important factor especially in subject preference and choice for higher study. When choice is allowed, boys generally choose 'male'-identified subjects and career pathways and girls 'female'-identified subjects. Studies show that many young people still opt for gender-stereotyped career choices and it has been therefore argued that careers advisers need to be more gender aware, and thus more able to challenge stereotyped assumptions of students, schools cultures and employers. Even in class, teachers of school advise students to choose subjects on the basis of gender. Teacher as counselor must treat students psychologically to attain class regularly and to choose subjects on the basis of their strengths through motivation and not on the basis of gender.

### **Bias School Management**

Most of the arising issues of gender equality in classroom teaching and learning dominate because of disparity school management systems. It is seen that most of the school management members are men. Because of this inequality, syllabus, curriculum, hidden curriculum, content, learning objectives, teaching and learning materials, seating arrangement, classroom infrastructure framed by them give over emphasis only on the reflection of male students' life experiences. Therefore, equal and adequate female teachers shall be evolved in school management to balance an equality and equity in every component of teaching and learning.

### **Gender Study in Teacher Education**

Trainee-teachers and teacher-educators are considered to be the future teachers in institutions. They should be taught gender education in their syllabus for concerning class teaching with effective manner by balancing gender equality. As research has shown that most of the issues of gender discrimination in classroom during teaching and learning process are due to the

lack of sound gender consciousness; for concerning more gender equality in teaching and learning, gender study in teacher education will be a good tool among all other aspects.

### **Policy Development and Interpretation**

Above all, there is a need to frame more policy in respect of gender equality in teaching and learning focusing on major issues. The solution of all gender issues in education is possible to be implemented when proper step will be taken through policy making. The authority should support research into specific gender issues in teaching and management, to guide comprehensive policy development and should ensure the consistent communication between policies and procedures to teachers and managers to be implemented in the root level of classroom situations.

### **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the study shows that the issues of gender discrimination in teaching and learning draw a great attention in the field of holistic education. It compels the country to feel deeply about the concern issues of gender inequality in education, even since the long past decades to the recent era of modernization. Increasing attention has been given to the importance of achieving gender equality in education. Today, however, most efforts have focused on addressing gender parities - an equal number or proportion of girls and boys accessing educational opportunities. Therefore, years after years, the focus of gender in education has revolved around inequality for girls, but in recent years there is a need of more awakening regarding boys' academic decline in each and every field of education as gender lives are intertwined equally between girls and boys. So, there is a time to balance equal opportunity as well as equity in education from class root level of school education for effective implementation.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION FOR FURTHER STUDY**

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