

GENDER AND EDUCATION: FOCUS ON INCLUSIVITY

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Abstract

From time immemorial Indian tradition has been allied with a gender-neutral perspective. The situation has a dramatic twist with the continuation of the purdah system. Thus it becomes a requirement to focus on gender issues in inclusive quality education. It is a factual reality that a new form of economy comes with growing inequality and inescapable cultural fragmentation. Social exclusion is also significantly marked in the sphere of education. Inclusion is thus perceived as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of requirements of all through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves transformations and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and an assurance that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. For the implementation of the non-gendered educational system the necessary focus must be on substantive changes in existing conceptions, attitudes, and processes of teachers' training and minimizing the barriers are the most visible consequences in India. Ultimately, the notion of 'education for all' can't be practically feasible without the real association of inclusiveness and education.

Keywords

Gender, Equality, Inclusion, Culture.

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From time immemorial Indian tradition is allied with a gender-neutral perspective. The situation has a dramatic twist with the continuation of the purdah system. Thus it becomes a requirement to focus on gender issues in inclusive quality education. It is a factual reality that a new form of economy comes with growing inequality and inescapable cultural fragmentation. The existence of social exclusion is significantly marked in the sphere of education also. In this situation an approach of inclusive quality education with ample focus on gender neutrality becomes a requirement. The negative situation of women's education in India was connected with numerous socio-cultural customs, conventions and religious rituals.

Inclusive education is a process of escalating the ability of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy. It should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society from a holistic perspective. The Conference proclaimed that: 'regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system' .

Inclusion is thus perceived as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of requirements of all through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves transformations and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and an assurance that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Types of Justifications

Forms	Issues
Educational justification	The requirement for inclusive schools to educate all children together-- they have to develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and that therefore benefit all children
Social justification	Inclusive schools can change attitudes toward diversity by educating all children together, and form the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society
Economic justification	It is less costly to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specializing in different groups of children

Prepared by the present researcher

An inclusive educational institution must offer possibilities and opportunities for a range of working methods and individual treatment to ensure that no child is excluded from companionship and participation in the school. This implies the development of rights-based, child-friendly schools. A rights-based education helps children realize their rights. It is not only academically effective but also inclusive, healthy and protective of all children, gender-responsive, and encourages the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities. Support from the teachers and head teachers is essential, but support from the communities close to the school is also vital. All must be able and willing to ensure inclusion in the classroom and in learning for all children regardless of their differences. Thus seeing education through the inclusion lens implies a shift from seeing the child as a problem to seeing the education system as the problem that can be solved through inclusive approaches. Inclusive education of good quality is the best means to overcome future learning deficiencies among youth and adults. In today's situation, however, special efforts must also be made to ensure appropriate education and training programs using different modalities for those youth and adults who have so far been deprived.

Equality of opportunity as a means of separating educational attainment from social origins, is a preferred option but also difficult to achieve. Another perspective on equality of opportunity adopts a three-fold categorization: formal opportunities, actual opportunities and outcomes.

Equality of Opportunity

Types	Issues
Formal opportunities	the structural availability of access to and participation in education; i.e. that all students have an equal right to access and participation.
Actual opportunities	dependent on formal opportunities but also on other factors e.g. family background, orientation of school or quality of teaching.
Educational outcomes	as the best means of assessing actual opportunities i.e. those available and taken up

Prepared by the researcher

Theoretical Background

Most of the theories on the interrelationship of gender and education focused on the widespread unequal access and differential treatment that women face in educational institutions. A major outcome of socialization theory in educational settings was a push for gender-neutral curricula and teaching under the assumption

that by ensuring equality in treatment, there should be equality in educational outcomes. Instead of promoting a gender-neutral ethos in education, gender difference theory argues that femininity needs to be promoted as an important characteristic of the culture of educational institutions and in all over the society generally. Another picture comes forward with the works of sociologists. They opined that the educational underperformance of girls in the past led to the ultimate situation of equal opportunity in schools with a greater emphasis. The application of the process of equality has enabled girls to fulfill their potential. These policies included things like monitoring, teaching and supplying teaching materials for gender bias to help schools promote 'girl-friendliness', not only in male-dominated subjects but across the whole range of the experience of girls in schools [Browne:2011]. Gender stereotyping is not practiced in class now. Much more sensitive and conscious effort comes from the teaching community. This will ultimately help to overcome several academic problems which are linked with girls in schools previously. Sue Sharpe found in *Just Like a Girl* in 1976 that girls' priorities were 'love, marriage, husband, children, job and career, more or less in that order'. When she repeated her research in 1994, she found these priorities had changed to 'job, career and being able to support themselves'. [As referred by K. Browne in *An Introduction to Sociology*] On the contrary in some research boys are perceived as underachievers. Hardworking girls, peer group pressure, less maturity, lower expectations of teachers and less benefit from the process of equal opportunity irrespective of gender are reasons behind this interesting finding.

Methodology

The paper is mainly based on secondary sources like books, journals, newspapers and different reports. A small survey is done by the present researcher. The study involves 100 samples using the purposive sampling method. All the respondents are students of schools and colleges. 50 of them are girls and the rest 50 is boys. A descriptive research design is followed here. Data are collected based on face-to-face interviews. A primary survey is done to evaluate the situation for practical realization. The objectives of this paper are – 1] to discuss the need for the abolition of gender discrimination, 2] to find out the role of educational institutions in the context of process of execution.

Conservative outlook is still related to preference for the education of boys in comparison to girls. Family resources are directed to boy's rather than girl's education. Girls are streamed into less challenging academic tracks. Gender discrimination is not biologically determined. Socio-cultural factors are the principal determinant of differentiation. Gender Sensitization means steps for eradication of

the practice of gender discrimination by professionals in the periphery of educational aspects.

NEED

Gender discrimination as a process hampers the ideal aim of the dispersion of universal education. Thus gender sensitization should be taken as an approach to elimination of this kind of discrimination. Sensitization is by far the most effective and non-confrontationist approach for reforming the society. Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype and conventional mindset of people in general. This specific mindset strongly believes that men and women are unequal entities. Gender sensitization increases the sensitivity of people at large towards women and their problems. Major components of gender-sensitive education must include curriculum content, teacher-student relations, and the safety and security of the learning environment. Research has also shown that girls seem to be more sensitive to school quality than boys and that the quality of teachers has a greater impact on the demand for girls' education than for boys' education (Kane, 2004)[as referred in *Designing Effective Education Programs that Promote Gender Equality in Education* by S. Baric and S. Bouchie]. A proper review should be done of curriculum and instructional materials to assess the inherent and unintended gender bias. A gender filter or lens is the basis for understanding the most successful educational sector.

Role of Educational Institution

When children start to go to school, they have a clear consciousness of gender differences. Schools are not supposed to be differentiated by gender. In a practical scenario several factors affect boys and girls differently. Peer group socialization in the friend circle tends to play a major part in reinforcing and further shaping gender identity throughout the phase of taking education. Children's friendship circles are normally either all-boys or all-girl groups. Specific gender feelings become initiated with those gatherings. Even in nursery schools, girls most often get attention and praise for being obedient and helpful while boys more often get attention for misbehavior. Gender-specific treatment is the root of all kinds of gender discrimination.

The formal curriculum in schools no longer distinguishes between boys and girls in a systematic way. There are several points of entry for the development of gender differences in education. These include the expectations of teachers, and school rituals in the execution of education. Gender typing starts with dress-related regulations. Girls are compelled to wear dresses or skirts in schools. As a consequence

girls lack the freedom to sit casually, to join rough-and-tumble games. School reading texts sometimes help to perpetuate gender images. Science textbooks show more pictures of boys doing chemistry or physics, by contrast childcare textbooks show females doing these subjects. Such imagery helps to reinforce masculinity or femininity. Even in story books boys are portrayed as showing initiative and independence, while girls, if they appear at all, are more passive. Sometimes girls appear adventurous in stories but this usually takes the form of mystery in the domestic world or school setting. Comparatively the adventures of boys are wide-ranging. Girls begin to learn that the classroom is the world of men. Thus their self-esteem starts to decrease. The overt and covert discrimination within the settings of schools should be identified with conscious effort. This kind of attitude arises out of ignorance and deeply ingrained ways of thinking on behalf of educational institutions involving teachers and educational administrators. Normally the intensity of difference is less in the sphere of education and cultural programmes.

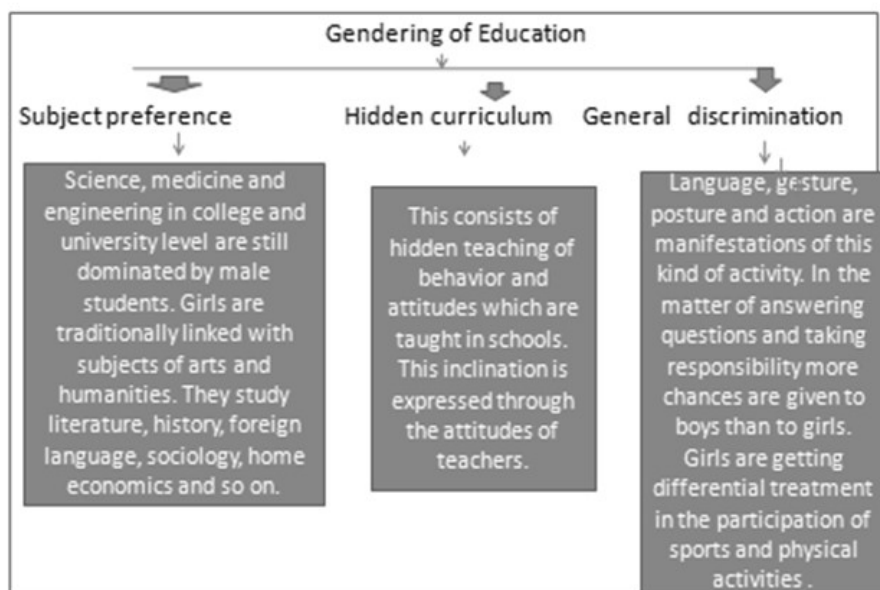


Diagram prepared by the researcher

Process of Execution

The process of building and applying a gender-neutral educational system includes several ways. Knowledge of empowerment-related laws and policies should be provided to all on a general basis. Thus it will be easier for society as a whole to accept equal status for girls. Normally girls lack self-esteem in this male-dominated

society. Thus they have to groom their personality in such a way that they can fight with all hindrances. Girls should develop self-confidence to get rid of the inferiority complex within them. For this purpose co-scholastic areas should be given preferences in schools. The environment must be free from all kinds of gender biases. The decision-making power of girls should be encouraged with the help of co-curricular and classroom-related activities. Girls should learn self-defense mechanisms to put their position in a strong way. The prevailing societal culture has its reflection in classrooms. So, girls are restricted from taking leadership. Educational institutions should take the necessary steps to give the girls ample scope for achieving leadership. **Creative Meets** (based on science and technology, fairs, Group discussions, seminars) should be organized for girls.

Empirical Context

Link between gender discrimination and education —

Opinion of Girls

Age	Yes	No	Neutral	Total
16-18	12(48%)	8(32%)	5(20%)	25(100%)
18-20	4(16%)	15(60%)	6(24%)	25(100%)

Opinion of Boys

Age	Yes	No	Neutral	Total
16-18	8(32%)	12(48%)	5(20%)	25(100%)
18-20	2(8%)	18(72%)	5(20%)	25(100%)

Data show that there is a little gender difference in the opinion of students for determining the link between the process of gender discrimination and education. But the age factor plays an important role here. In comparison to college students [age 18-20], students of schools [age 16-18] point out link between gender discrimination and education in greater numbers. This is true for girls and boys. Thus it can be said that the execution of gender feeling is less prevalent in college curriculum in general. 72% of boys say that there is no link but 60% of girls point out no link between gender discrimination and education. Hence it can be said that in comparison to boys, girls find more discrimination on gender.

Now there has been widespread debate on how education is the most effective means of impacting and re-orienting gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. The contemporary mind is going through a change in the traditional mindset in society. Education certainly has the potential to contribute a key role player in the formation of gender identity in the broader social spectrum. Gender is a socially constructed and intersectional identity with the incorporation of various facts. It is

always linked with social class, ethnicity and religion, culture, disability, sexuality, age etc. Education itself offers real opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes. Education has the potential to contribute to alternative socialization, challenging conventional gender ideologies, leveling the playing field between males and females in relation to skills, credentials and qualifications, and allowing women the use of knowledge to empower themselves in diverse ways. [As referred in Report of Expert Committee on Gender and Education by C, Walikhanna]

Focus should be given to Compliance with the National Education Policy ie. the factors indicated on gender sensitivity be compulsorily implemented—The National Policy (1986) states, “Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, and textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators and the active involvement of educational institutions. [As referred in Report of Expert Committee on Gender and Education by C, Walikhanna]

Conventional educational framework is challenged by Gender equality policy. In the execution of proper inclusive education two most important aspects should be assessed. Subject preferences and choices with a view of perception in reading materials are recognized for their effective implication. Required components for the successful coordination of this purpose include equal life chances outside educational institutions, open competition for scarce opportunities and equal cultivation of capacities. Consequently in a broader sense inclusivity can be achieved with a motive of social justification to form a gender-neutral society. For the implementation of the non gendered educational system the necessary focus must be on substantive changes in existing conceptions, attitudes, and processes of teachers’ training and minimizing the barriers are the most visible consequences in India. Ultimately, the notion of ‘education for all’ can’t be practically feasible without the real association of inclusiveness and education.

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