



GENDER SENSITIZING PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS: A PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The plurality of causes and consequences of gender-based discrimination in human societies is a much known fact. The reason it is still prevalent in modern democracies for it has social sanction and acceptance either through religious scriptures, cultural practices, or traditional social institutions that are at times perceived unquestionable and to be rigidly adhered to. Transforming societies that are deeply rooted in traditional gender-discriminatory norms require education that will empower a person to question social conditions in the broader purview of scientific knowledge, rational mindset and humanitarian values. Teachers of modern age can instil this argumentative and deliberative or discursive democratic mindset among the learners of today that will be instrumental in creating more just and egalitarian society free from gender biases and discrimination. This necessitates the relevant pedagogical inputs through teacher preparation so as to equip prospective teachers for making it a part of their day to day teaching practices. The present paper is based on author's classroom experiment of pedagogical endeavours with student-teachers of B. Ed. degree program in India. The major aim of this study was to gender sensitize prospective teachers through argumentative and reflective pedagogical strategies and to document their perspectives and learning while dealing with the Inter-disciplinary Course – Gender, School and Society from the present B. Ed. curriculum of University of Mumbai. Observation and diary documentation method was used in the study and the outcomes of the experiment were analysed qualitatively. The study discovered unique benefit of argumentative and reflective pedagogical strategies in guiding students' moral judgements and sensitizing them for more balanced, rational and well informed scientific thought process on the issues of gender equality. The study revealed a growing positive scenario among the prospective teachers of the present age, irrespective of their gender, towards breaking the age-old gender-discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes.

Keywords: *Gender Sensitizing, Prospective Teachers, Argumentative and Reflective Pedagogy*



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INTRODUCTION:

We often say the world is rapidly progressing in every sphere of life. Science and technology has reached to its peak of advancement. Human societies are marching on democratic ideals, dissolving the impressions of discriminatory past and rising above the history of inequality that has been ruling human societies for several generations. How far and to what extent these facts hold validity? To a large extent may be. However there are some form of human discriminations



and inequalities that are very much existent even today overtly seem to portray an achieved human equality but in their phantom forms actually sustaining its very old discriminatory legacy. Gender based discrimination still prevalent in our societies is of that sort which has pushed women, the so called '*second sex*' and the huge diversity of gender variant population often misfit in one broad category of '*third gender*', to the margins of the mainstream society. Gender biases and the kind of gender stereotypes still existing in social psyche, lead to ill-treatment, violence, exploitation and continued discriminatory practices on the basis of gender.

There are still a lot of misconceptions and prejudices among so called modern societies about human identities over the terms sex and gender. *Gender* is a term associated with one's biological *sex* and is often taken synonymous to it. *Sex* in a broad sense refers to biological and physiological distinctions between men and women. But *gender* refers to socially produced distinctions among human beings. Notion of *gender* is created in mind not by biology alone but by socio-cultural environment driven by rigid ideas of gender-binary. This notion classifies human traits in to fixed packets of masculinity and femininity attaching unnatural labels of superiority or inferiority of position or status. As the natural unfoldment of biological characteristics starts, individual develops consciousness about the 'biological traits' and able to make distinctions between self and other individuals. Biological traits associated with sex are natural hence the distinctions advocated so forth at the physical level are also natural although rigid. However 'psychological traits' associated with gender that creates consciousness about superiority or inferiority of human positions or the social status associated with gender identity are acquired. These notions of gender stratification and iniquitous gender segregation which leads to social inequality and discrimination are induced by socio-cultural influence. Hence these are essentially not rigid or irreversible. There can always be possibility of change or transformation with the socio-cultural revolution. And education is the key factor facilitating this whole transformation.

The present paper is based on a teacher-educator's classroom experiment. The author has tried to essay his educational endeavours with student-teachers of B. Ed. degree program in India through this paper. The major aim of this study was to gender sensitize prospective teachers through *argumentative* and *reflective* pedagogical strategies and to document their perspectives and learning while dealing with the Inter-disciplinary Course – *Gender, School and Society* from the present B. Ed. curriculum of University of Mumbai.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

The plurality of causes and consequences of gender-based discrimination in human societies is a much known fact. The reason it is still prevalent in modern democracies for it has social sanction and acceptance either through religious scriptures, cultural practices, or traditional social institutions that are at times perceived unquestionable and to be rigidly adhered to. The main cause of gender-discrimination is this regressive psychological makeup of our traditional societies still rooted deeply in the patriarchal dominance. Unquestioning adherence to patriarchal norms projected through social institutions namely religion, marriage, family and other socio-cultural practices, is still considered a virtue and an essential element of social control. Education too in our country is greatly influenced by passive pedagogical practices and submissive attitude towards the perceived more knowledgeable authority is considered to be an ideal of a good learner. Transforming societies that are deeply rooted in traditional gender-discriminatory norms require education that will empower a person to question social conditions in the broader purview of scientific knowledge, rational mindset and humanitarian values. Teachers of modern age can instil this argumentative and deliberative or discursive democratic mindset among the learners of today that will be instrumental in creating more



just and egalitarian society free from gender biases and discrimination. This necessitates the relevant pedagogical inputs through teacher preparation so as to equip prospective teachers for making it a part of their day to day teaching practices.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

The review of existing literature tried to fetch insights from the past studies related to the present area of research which are summarised in the paragraph below.

Aikman, Unterhalter and Challender (2005) articulated need for gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogies in schools in order to achieve good-quality outcomes for girls' education. The study examined different dimensions of gender equality and recommended that actions should be taken by the government, teacher training institutions and NGOs to ensure that change occurs. Further, Sjoberg (2007) discussed integration of gender courses in pedagogy and in the other political science curricula in the international classroom of the United States. The study found that gender and feminism have an intensely personal resonance with students, and teachers should confront this in order to teach gender effectively in the classroom. Rayaprol (2011) examined the challenges of teaching gender courses as a part of social science curriculum in Indian universities. The study discussed the author's experiences in teaching sociology of gender courses to both male and female at the postgraduate level in sociology and responses of students to this course. It was found that the majority of students enrolled for this course and after completion of the course their thinking and perspective about gender found more progressive. The study suggested that gender education should be sensitive to multiple locations and intersections of caste and class in society. Also, more gender related courses should be introduced at the university level. Then only issues such as violence against women would be more central to course on social stratification in the Indian universities. Baker and Ryalls (2014) developed a blog activism project to teach introduction to gender studies courses in the research university of south east America. The project discussed feminism and feminist activism in American society and provided learning environment for critical thinking and analyse issues related to gender inequality in society. Students were asked to integrate feminism in their day to day life and observed how cyber-activism affected their life. The study concluded with the student's reflection on feminism and it was found that maximum students felt empowered and willing to write and share blogs on the goal of feminism with others in the society. Samanta (2015) studied undergraduate student's perspective about introduction of women studies in curricula in Asian American universities. The study suggested that such courses needed to be flexible and continuously redefined in theory, content, and pedagogy to continue to be relevant to the academic endeavour. Findings indicated that students achieved feminist solidarity after engaging in reflexive thought and critique. The study also suggested that pedagogy that included a combination of information and opening up the class to their discussion would facilitate more understanding of diverse Asians, in different contexts. Pujari (2017) argued that curriculum constituted an important facet of teaching and learning, and it was important that how teachers engage with the curriculum and what pedagogical strategies they use to engage students. The study discussed the strategies of conducting sociology of gender courses in the classrooms. Further, it described how students effectively construct, represent and transform knowledge and how they develop competence in and beyond the learning areas.

The review of related literature indicated that quite a few qualitative and descriptive studies have been conducted on gender sensitive curricula and associated pedagogies. However there wasn't any study on argumentative and reflective pedagogical strategies used for gender sensitizing prospective teachers. Hence the researcher was keen to undertake



the present research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To develop instructional modules based on *argumentative* and *reflective* pedagogy by choosing selective units of the Inter-disciplinary Course – *Gender, School and Society* from the present B. Ed. curriculum of University of Mumbai.
2. To gender sensitize prospective teachers through *argumentative* and *reflective* pedagogical strategies infused through the learning modules of the course *Gender, School and Society*.
3. To study the participants' reflections on the learning modules and their perspectives about the issues of gender equality and discrimination addressed through the modules.

DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS:

Gender Sensitizing: For the present study, *gender sensitizing* refers to facilitating learner's thought process to evaluate personal as well as prevalent socio-cultural – beliefs, attitudes and actions associated with gender in the broader purview of scientific knowledge, rational mindset and humanitarian values.

Prospective Teachers: *Prospective teachers* in the present study refer to the student-teachers studying in first year of the two-year B. Ed. Program of the University of Mumbai, India.

Argumentative and Reflective Pedagogy: For the present study *argumentative and reflective pedagogy* refers to a range of individual and group learning strategies that are essentially based on supporting or debunking opinions through argumentation on the basis of facts and logical reasoning, summed up at the end with individual reflections.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

Research Method: Observation and Diary Documentation method was used for the present study.

Sample and Data Collection: The study was conducted on 48 student-teachers (44 Female and 4 Male) studying in first year of the two-year B. Ed. Program of the University of Mumbai, India.

Tools: The following tools were used in the present study:

- a) Instructional modules based on argumentative and reflective pedagogy by choosing the three units namely: Unit-1: Gender: Concept and Perspectives, Unit-2: Social Construction of Gender Identity, and Unit-6: Strategies for Gender Empowerment, of the Inter-disciplinary Course – *Gender, School and Society* from the present B. Ed. curriculum of University of Mumbai.
- b) Participants' reflection in descriptive form based on the learning modules, and
- c) Researcher's personal diary documentation of his observations and experiences in the class.

Technique of Data Analysis: Qualitative data analysis is carried out in the present study by:

- a) Tabulating participants' perspectives on the learning modules and extracting the emerging values, and
- b) Consolidating participants' reflections about the issues of gender equality and discrimination addressed through the modules.

The line of thoughts consistently came in the reflections of majority of the participants has been chosen here to summarize the data for the purpose of this research paper.

**DATA ANALYSIS:****a) Values emerging from participants' perspectives on the learning modules:**

Sr. No.	Participants' perspectives on the learning modules	Values Emerged
1	Being a woman or a transgender by birth is not a curse. It is normal and natural. All are born equal as human beings.	Gender Equality
2	Differential rules and norms for men and women are really painful. It is unfair to discriminate individuals on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation.	Gender Equality
3	Mother earth do not discriminate its inhabitants, so human beings also should not discriminate people on the basis of sex or gender.	Gender Equality
4	As a part of modern society we call ourselves very open minded and progressive but in reality still carry a lot of gender stereotypes and gender biases.	Social Hypocrisy & Gender Inequality
5	Despite of so much of progress in the society and women leading many frontiers of life, men's attitude towards them in general is still very stereotypical. When is it going to change?	Gender Bias & Orthodoxy
6	Popular media and social culture that glorifies marriage event and beautiful image of a woman are somewhere responsible for degrading the self image of women and their social status.	Gender Stereotyping & Gender Discrimination
7	Women from various sections of the society are struggling for their rights even when they are equally capable of doing everything, which men can do, but are bound due to various constraints.	Women Empowerment & Gender Equity
8	In modern times, although women are getting opportunities in various fields and are also proving their mettle in male bastions, the glass ceiling above is yet to be broken.	Women Empowerment & Gender Equity

b) Participants' reflections about the issues of gender equality and discrimination addressed through the modules:

Student-teachers have shared a vast range of learning experiences through their reflections on the learning modules which underlined that:

- The way gender behaviour and gender roles are hammered and reinforced by social institutions, we subconsciously internalize gender stereotypes, accept them as truths and rarely question our beliefs.
- Healthy discussions and arguments are essential to have clarity on the issues of gender.
- There is a need to change the perception about the women's contribution in this male dominant society.
- Both the parents as well school must be concerned about teaching critical thinking and value of equality to the children so as to promote gender equality.



- As women of 21st century we should be bold enough to raise our voices against inappropriate or discriminating behavior and inequality.
- If given rightful opportunities, women too can achieve unassailable heights just like men.
- All big and small units of the society should work towards humanity, help each other in best possible way and look forward to bring gender equality in the society.
- The best way of making gender equity a success is empowering women and girls by educating them and providing all necessary resources and opportunities to them to enlighten their paths and bring about a change in the society.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

1. Instructional modules based on argumentative and reflective pedagogical strategies were found to be beneficial in guiding students' moral judgements and sensitizing them for more balanced, rational and well informed scientific thought process on the issues of gender equality.
2. Gender equality and women empowerment were the key values unanimously advocated by the prospective teachers that are to be essentially addressed and promoted through education.
3. There is a growing positive scenario among the prospective teachers of the present age, irrespective of their gender, towards breaking the age-old gender-discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes.

CONCLUSION:

Gender inequality continues to be one of the defining features of Indian society wherein women and people with feminine gender lag behind men in most of the critical indicators of human development. Women's subordinate status is reflected in almost every sphere of life. Gender differences prevalent in our societies are largely attributed to differential gender socialization and the traditional gender-discriminatory norms that are reinforced by various social institutions deeply rooted in the age old gender stereotypes. Education needs to empower a person for breaking these regressive norms and discriminatory stereotypes. Argumentative and discursive pedagogical practices will essentially prepare individuals for leading such democratic socio-psychological transformations thereby making gender equality a reality in its true sense.

"Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."
(Woolf, 2018).

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