



GENDER INCLUSIVE PRACTICES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM TO CREATE GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The quality of education has become an issue of paramount importance and quality education cannot be achieved without addressing the gender dimension. Gender is an essential part of our modern vocabulary and refers to socially determined roles and relations between males and females. It continues to be an influential component within education and the article argues for the need to consider the gender dimension in discussion of inclusion. Gender inclusion in education requires responding to the diversity of needs among all learners, through changes in content, approaches, structures, and strategies. Hence, through this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the gendered and inclusive practices of a teacher. It begins by explaining gender inclusion in classrooms by considering the various issues in the teaching-learning process such as pedagogy, lesson planning, teaching and learning materials, language use in the classroom, set up and classroom interaction. Finally, the paper discusses the key issue of the role of school management in making school and classroom environment inclusive. In order to facilitate the success of inclusion as an approach and philosophy, it is important that all school members as well as their teachers develop the skills to understand one another, and to communicate and work together effectively.

Key words: Gender, Gender-responsive, Inclusion and Inclusive practices

Introduction

Gender is a concept that is widely used and perceived in many quarters to mean “women’s issues”. In reality, gender refers to socially determined roles and relations between males and females. From the wider picture, the term “gender” refers to a socio cultural classification of women and men. This classification is based on societal norms and values that define the roles men and women should play in society.

Gender roles are quite different from sex roles of men and women. Sex roles are purely biological, natural and God-given. They cannot be changed. The man makes the woman pregnant and the woman gives birth to the child and breastfeeds. Gender roles, on the other hand, are determined by the society, which assigns different responsibilities to men and women, e.g., cooking for women and decision-making for men. Gender roles can therefore be changed and vary over time and from community to community.

The gender inequities pervading society are carried out into the school environment too. This is evidenced in school processes such as teaching, teacher–student interaction, school management, and the plan and design 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 do not provide a gender responsive environment for effective teaching and learning to take place.



A gender responsive school is one in which the academic, social and physical environment and its surrounding community take into account the specific needs of both girls and boys. This implies that the teachers, parents, community leaders and members, and the boys and girls are all aware of and practice gender equality. It also assumes that school management systems, policies and practices recognize and address the gender-based needs of both girls and boys. In addition, in a gender responsive school the academic delivery, including teaching methodologies, teaching and learning materials, classroom interaction, and management of academic processes, is gender responsive.

Some Fundamental Gender Concepts

A number of related concepts underlie the development of a clear understanding of gender:

Gender discrimination: Denying opportunities and rights or giving equal preferential treatment to individuals on the basis of their sex.

Gender equality: The elimination of all forms of discrimination based on gender so that girls and women, boys and men have equal opportunities and benefits.

Gender equity: Giving equal treatment to girls and boys, women and men to access resources and opportunities. In the provision of education it refers to ensuring that girls and boys have equal access to enrolment and other educational opportunities.

Gender stereotype: The constant portrayal, such as in the media, conversation, jokes or books, of women and men occupying social roles according to a traditional gender role or division of labour.

Gender responsiveness: Refers to taking action to correct gender bias and discrimination so as to ensure gender equality and equity.

Gender Inclusive Practices

Gender Responsive Pedagogy

Pedagogy as a concept embraces all teaching and learning processes. Within the context of classroom settings, pedagogy is a term that includes what is taught, how teaching takes place and how what is taught is learnt.

Gender responsive pedagogy refers to teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys. Gender responsive pedagogy calls for teachers to take into account gender approach in the processes of lesson planning, teaching, and classroom management and performance evaluation.

Gender Responsive Lesson Planning

Quality in a lesson depends upon effective planning. Lesson planning involves a wide range of decisions – the learning materials to use, methodologies, content, learning activities, language use, classroom interaction, classroom set up, assessment of the learning, etc. Whereas many teachers have the skills to develop good lesson plans, making the plans gender responsive requires a special set of skills and attitudes. A gender responsive lesson plan takes into consideration the specific needs of girls and boys in all the teaching–learning processes.

Teaching and learning materials: Review the teaching and learning materials for gender responsiveness. Does the material contain gender stereotypes? If so, what techniques can be used to address them? Faced with a history textbook that portrays only male heroes draw up a list of female heroines. If a chemistry textbook portrays only male scientists as inventors, include a discussion of female scientists. Throughout, carefully review the gender responsiveness of the language used in the teaching and learning materials.

Teaching methodologies: Select teaching methodologies that will ensure equal participation of both girls and boys. Some teaching methodologies like group work, group discussions, role play, debates, case studies, explorations and practicals can be very effective in encouraging student participation and will therefore give the girls opportunity to



participate more actively. In practice, take care that dominant individuals do not side-line less assertive ones.

Learning activities: The lesson plan should make allowance for all students to participate in the learning activity. When doing a practical science experiment, ensure that both girls and boys have a chance to use the equipment and chemicals. There should also be equal participation in such activities as making presentations. When assigning projects, ensure that both girls and boys are given leadership positions and roles. Take into account how the learning materials will be distributed equally to both girls and boys, especially in cases of shortages.

Classroom set up and interaction: The lesson plan should consider the classroom set up. Consider how to arrange the classroom and interact with the students in a way that will promote equal participation of both girls and boys. Plan in advance to ask substantive questions to both girls and boys. Think about where to stand, sit or move about the classroom during the lesson.

Feedback and assessment: Make time for adequate feedback from both girls and boys to ensure that both girls and boys have understood the lesson.

Hence in order to make teaching-learning process gender responsive the teacher should take into consideration the above mentioned points.

Role Of School Management In Creating Gender Responsive School Environment

The effort to establish a gender responsive school environment will not succeed if it is not supported by a gender responsive school management system. The school management has a critical role to play in transforming a school into a gender responsive environment. For example, it is the role of the school management to provide teaching and learning materials that are gender responsive and to train teachers in gender responsive pedagogy.

Moreover, the school management should provide the necessary human resources for efficient gender responsive management and governance of the school. For the school to have a gender responsive management system, the teacher has an important role to play by working closely with the school management system through regular communication on classroom related gender issues.

Recommendations

The first step of gender equality should begin at the school level because school is a miniature society. Therefore, the schools should involve various interventions:

1. Undertaking gender sensitization of parents, community leaders and members, teachers, girls and boys in order to raise their awareness and understanding of the need to support girl's education.
2. Training teachers in the skills for making teaching and learning processes responsive to the specific needs of girls and boys.
3. Establishing guidance and counselling desks in order to provide services for the social and psychological development of girls and boys.
4. Providing scholarships and support to needy girls and boys to ensure that they do not drop out of school.
5. Establishing a gender responsive school management system that ensures gender equality in the governance and operation of the school.
6. Undertaking gender training of the school management team, including the school board, parent-teacher association, heads of departments and prefects, in order to raise their awareness on the need to support girls' education.
7. Involving the community and other stakeholder's in monitoring and taking action to ensure improved enrolment,



- attendance and performance of both boys and girls.
8. Establishing a database to track student performance and welfare as well as the levels of gender responsiveness of all aspects of the school

Conclusion

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