



GENDER SENSITIZATION AND GENDER PARITY IN RAISING AWARENESS OF GENDER EQUALITY: EDUCATION AS A VITAL TOOL

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Abstract

Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype concept or idea to the modification of behaviour by raising awareness of gender equality concerns. Education is a vital tool for bringing about gender parity and simultaneously catalysing national development. Education constitutes one important sector that deserves special attention when tackling these obstacles and challenges. It has helped in reducing the gap and is empowering women to take their full place in the world of the 21st century, where multiple internationally agreed development goals should be reached with their help. Non-discriminatory education that could benefit both women and men is the key for keeping the promise of education for all. The mind has no sex, so it is important the recognition of the equal rights to women for all levels of education, including HE, the latter sector where women are becoming agents of change (Bonilla et al., 2005). Gender sensitization refers to the modification of behaviour by raising awareness of gender equality concerns. Gender Sensitization implies accepting the basic rights associated with Gender equality among all persons but, not against women to man. Gender sensitivity helps to generate respect for the individual regardless of sex. Through Gender Sensitization develop a cordial and amiable environment where there is mutual respect and trust between the sexes, without sexual innuendoes and obstructive chauvinism to mar the atmosphere. This paper considers that Gender sensitization seeks to question and subsequently change that very thought-process, and it also aims to make people develop a sense of empathy and acceptance towards the other gender. This paper further tries to trigger a behavioral change and enabling people examine their own perceptions and attitudes which ultimately help in shaping a just and unprejudiced society.

Key words: Gender Sensitization, Education, Gender Sensitivity, Gender Equality

Introduction

Education -that nowadays has been recognized by a number of international conventions as a human right and a development imperative-, is one of the spheres that has suffered this women's issue. As pointed out by UNESCO (2012), the preference to males over females in education has been a marked feature since ancient societies, practice that has shaped today's gender disparities in this sector in virtually all countries.

Education is recognized by UNESCO (2012) as "a fundamental human right – one that all individuals are entitled to enjoy whatever the circumstances in which they live – that also brings important benefits to human society as a whole" (p. 8). To achieve faster these benefits, states De Mcpherson (1999), it is necessary the participation of men and women on an equal basis. In that sense, stresses the author, keeping women away in all aspects of the development process only by reason of *gender*, is a waste of valuable resources, even more when they constitute half of the population. The position of the UNESCO (1998a) in this regard is that women have the right to the same opportunities as their male counterparts; therefore, they also have to be seen as part of the essential human resource base of every nation.

Education of both-boys and girls is recognized as a fundamental 'Human Right' and also a developmental necessity. Universal recognition should be given to the fact that both boys and girls receive basic education of at least 8 years and of an acceptable quality. Large gender disparity in enrolment and learning achievements persist even in the present day and the eradication of disparity is only possible with government capacity. Failure to provide this education results in a massive denial of Human Rights.

Relatedly, the importance of women's participation in education is critical (UNESCO, 1998c). Dunder and Haworth (1993) cited that "education of women is important not only from the angle of equal education opportunity between the sexes, but also for the substantial social and economic returns to female education that can be achieved by raising women's productivity and income level, producing better educated and healthier children, and reducing fertility rates" (p. 1). Vanderslice and Litsch (1998), in turn, expressed that women who have increased education are more aware about opportunities for themselves. They are more self-confident, open minded and more competitive, added the authors. Apart from that, point out Kelly and Slaughther (1991), "through qualifications and credentials secured through the higher learning, women would equip themselves for all manners of professional positions, entering the



market place and political arena with the same advantages as men” (p. 3). Taking into account these perspectives and context, Bonilla et al. (2005) concluded that women, through their participation in education, are becoming then agents of change.

‘Gender Parity’ is a numerical concept. It refers to the same proportion of boys and girls relative to their respective age groups who enter the Education System and participate in full primary and secondary cycles. Gender Parity is measured by the ‘Gender Parity Index’. Gender Equality is a complex notion and quite difficult to measure. Full Gender Equality refers to the situation when boys and girls are offered some chances, methods and curricula free of stereotypes. In this situation it is also assumed that academic orientation and counseling are unaffected by gender bias.

Education is a vital tool for bringing about gender parity and simultaneously catalysing national development. A UNICEF panel succinctly sums this up: “That women might have the chance of a healthier and happier life should be reason enough for promoting girls’ education. However, there are also important benefits for society as a whole. An educated woman has the skills, information and self-confidence that she needs to be a better parent, worker and citizen.”

Roughly speaking, Bosco (2009) assures that the progress reached has been the result of the development of human rights and the democratization of societies. From the UNESCO viewpoint, this has been the result of the changing values and attitudes related to the role and aspirations of women in society, the higher levels of schooling that women are requiring in order for them to attain social mobility, their need for higher incomes, and the ongoing diffusion of ideas on the subject of gender egalitarianism across countries (UIS-UNESCO, 2010). The research work carried out also notes the contribution done by international gender agendas from organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO which have been especially effective in areas of advocacy and have developed normative instruments, resolutions, declarations and recommendations to assure and advance, among others, the gender equality in education.

Women’s education is a special priority in India, with our history of gender discrimination, inequality in education and the workforce, and our current need to achieve rapid economic development. It is true there has been a positive trend in female student enrolment at primary levels, which currently stands at 48% girls to 52% boys. Unfortunately, there is a very high drop-out rate at the secondary level, at which point the state does not enforce compulsory education, with a drop-out rate of over 30% for girls, seriously reducing their higher education participation.

What is even more alarming is that female participation in the labour force has dropped from 34% in 1999 to a low of 27% in 2015. This decline in workforce participation in recent times points to the fact that we don’t just need access to education, but access to quality education, in order to overturn centuries of entrenched prejudice against women. Access to education, one of the most potent tools of empowerment, is out of reach for many women in India, especially those in the low income groups, rural or remote areas. There are several barriers to access. Traditional gender norms result in girls being kept at home to help with household chores or to look after younger siblings. Poor facilities, especially the lack of usable toilets, are deterrents to older girls attending school. Often, concerns for the safety of adolescent females travelling long distances to (secondary) school increase drop-out rates. Under-age marriage and low aspirations for education for girls are also contributing factors.

In recent times, from Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao to Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, the government has taken several enabling, affirmative actions. Initiatives like distribution of bicycles to girls to tackle concerns regarding safety and improvement in infrastructure by adding usable toilets enhances retention of girls at schools. Digital platforms can also be used to augment access to education and can be delivered through our gram panchayat and rural development systems that are already in place, thereby ensuring access to education for women across India. It is expected that, by June 2018, there will be 500 million internet users in the country, with 87% reach in rural areas. E-learning can be the technological vehicle for women’s groups to handle issues around health, hygiene, child bearing and other information they rarely have access to.

The other challenge is to improve the quality of education. Entrenched gender stereotypes—a woman’s place is in the home or she isn’t as smart as male peers—come in the way of women’s employment. For women to break the gender prejudices that legislate against their employment, they may even need to perform twice as well as their male peers to get hired.

On one hand this calls for improving the quality of teachers, sensitizing them to gender concerns, and training them to adopt new forms of pedagogy that engage students. On the other hand it is imperative that education imparts critical thinking skills to students, both boys and girls, to equip them to face the challenges of the fast-changing environment of the 21st century. Education in India must move away from the traditional imparting of knowledge, which quickly gets outdated, to focusing on teaching students ‘how to think’ and to develop the ability to problem-solving in dynamic situations.

Providing women with quality education would break the existing hurdles to their employment, leading to the emergence of successful role models. The advent of these role models and leaders is critical for changing the perception of women in the community, particularly in areas where gender stereotypes are most entrenched. A corollary to this would be the improvement in self-esteem of girls, which would then enable



them to actively challenge gender biases and achieve societal change. If we wish to create skilled, globalised, effective human capital based on a revived education system, we cannot afford to leave our girls behind.

Gender Sensitization and Teacher's Role

We must endeavor to create a Gender sensitive society to remove Gender discrimination or inequality. We should work out strategies for prevention and control of violence against women as well as change in the cultural mindset about them and create a peaceful world. Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype concept or idea to the modification of behaviour by raising awareness of gender equality concerns. Gender sensitization refers to the modification of behaviour by raising awareness of gender equality concerns. Gender Sensitization implies accepting the basic rights associated with Gender equality among all persons but, not against women to man. Gender sensitivity helps to generate respect for the individual regardless of sex. Through Gender Sensitization develop a cordial and amiable environment where there is mutual respect and trust between the sexes, without sexual innuendoes and obstructive chauvinism to mar the atmosphere.

Teachers play a very important role in the early upbringing of a child. Their idea and beliefs can change the thought processes of young children. Children in the formative years easily nurture values and virtues taught to them. Gender sensitivity training should be mandatory for teachers. The training will enable them to disseminate the desirable attitude based on mutual respect and trust between girls and boys.

Classrooms need to be gender sensitive. Teachers can play the following roles:

- Encourage both male students and female students to be class leaders (perhaps one of each gender). Appoint two monitors in each classroom, a boy and a girl
- Address and call on girls and boys equally. Do not segregate boys and girls in the classroom in primary classes
- Make mixed groups including both boys and girls for group activities and games
- Try to 'switch role' for breaking down gender barriers and stereotyping of gender roles
- Make both boys and girls share activities like cleaning, moving furniture, to the chalkboard during a lesson.
- Plan and conduct activities that give opportunity to all children accepting one another as equals.

Conclusion

Despite that nowadays voices of all women everywhere have been acknowledged, human rights have been developed in favor of them, societies have been subject of democratization and changing values processes, and international gender egalitarianism agendas have been settled, the World Economic Forum (2010) assures that we still need a true gender equality revolution. From the UNESCO viewpoint –other of the international organizations that have been especially effective in the areas of advocacy and aims to foster a gender-inclusive culture-, this revolution implies, in more or less, a public recognition that innumerable obstacles and challenges exist and need to be tackled (UNESCO, 1998c).

In conclusion, it can be said for eliminating gender disparities we need to consider the followings-

- Strong political commitment to support women in both development and education.
- Related to this, policy development has been informed and influenced by demands of strong women's networks and other key stakeholders such as teachers and parents.
- Along with key and universal access for all groups, comprehensive strategies are implemented which tackle the key cause of gender inequalities in education.

Gender sensitization is possible with the help of education. Education helps in changing the mind of a person by teaching and training in the following way:

1. Enhancing self confidence level by various participation in social, political and economical area.
2. Education rising the status in the family and society.
3. Reducing dependability by self activities performing in various fields.
4. Education develops the leadership quality among women by self confidence and self esteem.
5. Social awareness, Political awareness, health awareness can be better understood in the higher level with the help of higher education.

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