



Integrating Gender Studies as a discipline in the School Curriculum: A Critical and Intersectional Perspective

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Abstract

The excerpt from *Without a Place* foregrounds the early internalisation of gendered roles, where boys and girls are subtly directed into unequal spaces within both the household and the classroom. This paper examines the purpose of education in constructing, reinforcing, or altering gender roles. Attaining gender equality in education goes beyond facilitating access and increasing retention; it demands scrutiny of entrenched socio-cultural gender norms and practices embedded in institutions and reflected in curricula.

In this paper, we draw on Gender Studies and reflect on differences between sex and gender, gender as a performative and social construct, and how gender is shaped by processes of socialisation through family, school, media, etc. We engage with feminist theories and studies of masculinities. We discuss how gender is addressed in educational systems and how these address or even reproduce gender differences and inequalities. The paper also explores gender bias in classrooms, textbooks, and teaching approaches, and how these influence students' aspirations, participation, and perceptions of themselves as learners. The paper also uses the Indian socio-cultural context to highlight the additional layers of bias that girls and women face because of intersecting factors like class, caste, and tradition. The paper draws on the concept of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to highlight how different axes of inequality intersect to produce unique experiences of discrimination and marginalisation for girls and women.

The research also reveals the prospect of education becoming a transformative site of inclusivity and critical consciousness. Teachers can be crucial change agents as they create gender-sensitive classrooms that break down gender stereotypes and challenge binary gender identities. Studying gender also needs to be incorporated into curricula and pedagogy in order to promote greater empathy, critical thinking, and social responsibility among students and future citizens.

In the final section, a conclusion is drawn by stressing the urgency for a radical change in practice, addressing gender inequality and challenging dominant attitudes to encourage critical evaluation of the societal norms that dominate society and transform these to create a more equal society, where inclusivity and equity are integral to all aspects of education.

Keywords: *Equality & Inequality, Gender - Gender Equality in Education, Gender Socialisation, Gender Roles and Relations, Theory - Feminist Theory, Masculinity Studies, Intersectionality, Curriculum - Curriculum and Textbook Representation, Classroom Differences - Gender Bias in Classrooms, Teachers and Teaching - Teacher Agency, Inclusion - Inclusive Education, Gender, Sexuality & Society - Social Construction of Gender, Educational Development - Educational Reform*



Introduction

“We were shown our place
in the first grade.

We remembered our elementary school lessons

Ram, go to school, son,

Radha, go and cook pakora!

Ram, sip sugar syrup,

Radha, bring your broom!

Ram, bedtime, school tomorrow

Radha, go and make the bed for brother.

Aha! This is your new house

Look Ram! Here's your room

“And mine?”

-Without a Place, Anamika.

To achieve gender equality in education, it is incumbent to go beyond simply ensuring both girls and boys are enrolled and retained in schools—it requires strategic approaches to dismantle societal obstacles and promote inclusivity. Educational institutions need to tackle socio-economic issues, cultural prejudices, and infrastructural shortcomings that disproportionately impact one gender, particularly girls. By establishing mise-en-scène where each student can excel, schools play a role in advancing a more equitable and just society.

“Gender studies is a field of study that looks at the world from the perspective of gender. This means that while studying something – the distribution of resources within a household, a social unit like a caste group, a bill placed before Parliament, a development project, or the classification of different species – is done in a manner that takes into account the fact that different genders exist in the world.” The realm of gender studies critically analyses how society constructs gender and how this construction influences societal attitudes, roles, and responsibilities. It examines how patriarchal standards shape gender identities and perpetuate inequalities through various agents like family, media, and education. *Incorporating gender studies into educational programs challenges traditional narratives and empowers students to challenge stereotypes and engage thoughtfully with societal norms.*

Educational institutions serve as both reflections of societal norms and as catalysts for transformation. Schools need to go beyond just imparting academic knowledge to cultivating inclusive environments where varied experiences are acknowledged and valued. Curriculum development and teaching methods should highlight feminist viewpoints and other critical frameworks, preparing future educators to address gender issues with sensitivity and effectiveness. This includes examining how peers, teachers, and educational materials influence gender perceptions and socialisation processes.



By thoroughly investigating the gendered experiences of boys and girls in different socio-cultural settings, education can reveal the mechanisms of gender socialisation and emphasise the structural barriers to accomplishing equitable education for all genders. Teachers, as catalysts for change, are essential in fostering inclusivity, equity, and critical analysis of gender norms. Consequently, gender studies within education become a powerful instrument, nurturing a generation that appreciates diversity and equality while being ready to confront deep-rooted inequalities in society.

History and Evolution

The origins of gender studies can be dated back to the liberation movements of women of the 1960s and 1970s, which confronted conventional gender roles and fought for women's rights. This movement itself has taken inspiration from earlier feminist thinkers and activists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who advocated for women's education and equality, and suffrage leaders like Emmeline Pankhurst, who campaigned for women's political rights. During this era, academics began to question the notion that gender was solely a biological reality rather than a social construct. Influential thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir further strengthened this perspective by examining how society shapes gender roles. Scholars posited that gender is an intricate interplay of cultural meanings and practices that are created and reinforced through socialisation.

As the field has developed, it has broadened to include the exploration of the role of men and identities, as well as the experiences of non-binary and transgender individuals, and the overarching idea of gender as a social construct. It also acknowledges the contributions of reformers like Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai, who worked towards women's education and empowerment in diverse cultural contexts. Presently, gender studies integrates perspectives from a variety of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, literature, and others, emphasising its essential role in gaining a holistic understanding of human behaviour and societal evolution.

The significance and essence of gender studies are clear in its dedication to analysing gender in all its manifestations and consequences. This field offers insights into the varied experiences of gender across different cultures and societies and also advocates for a more just world by confronting gender biases and stereotypes—an effort historically supported by activists like Sojourner Truth and Betty Friedan. By employing an interdisciplinary approach, gender studies cultivates a greater appreciation for the complexities of gender and its significant influence on both individual lives and shared identities.

Features of Gender Studies

Gender studies refers to the academic study of the phenomena of gender. Within feminist thought, a variance has been made between 'sex' and 'gender'. Sex is commonly understood as a classification based on genetic, chromosomal, and anatomical differences, traditionally defined

as male, female, or intersex. Gender, on the other hand, represents the social meanings and expectations attached to these categories. While often seen as distinct—sex as biological and fixed, and gender as fluid and socially constructed—this distinction is far more complex. Both are, to varying degrees, shaped by societal norms and cultural interpretations. As Bittner and Goodyear-Grant (2017) argue, equating sex with gender is a flawed assumption that excludes individuals whose experiences and identities don't fit neatly within these conventional categories. Recognising this complexity invites a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of human identity. As philosopher Judith Butler famously articulated, "*Gender is not something one is, but something one does – an act, a 'doing' rather than a 'being.'*" This viewpoint emphasises the gravity of recognising and challenging conventional gender norms within educational settings.



Gender Roles and Relations

Gender roles are the roles and behaviours that society believes individuals should adopt according to their gender. These roles can differ greatly across various cultures, social classes, historical contexts, and economic conditions (FAO, 1997). Additional factors like family structure, resource availability, and environmental conditions also influence these expectations. For example, labels such as "housewife" and "repairman" illustrate traditional role assignments that have often reinforced gender biases in both professional and personal domains.

Gender relations describe how societies organise interactions, rights, and responsibilities between men and women (Bravo-Baumann, 2000). These relations are shaped by cultural norms and social conditioning rather than being rooted in inherent biological characteristics. Historically, men are typically considered the primary earners and decision-makers, whereas women have mainly been tasked with caregiving and household responsibilities. Such societal frameworks create power disparities, leading to men frequently dominating financial, legal, and social decision-making.

Different social institutions play a vital role in reinforcing these roles throughout an individual's life. Socialising agents, such as parents, teachers, peers, media, and religious institutions, educate and normalise gender expectations. Parents, in particular, have a considerable impact by modelling behaviours and emphasising gender-specific responsibilities from an early age. These acquired roles are internalised and often perpetuate gendered norms in subsequent generations.

The continuation of rigid gender roles nurtures societal models that delineate "acceptable" behaviour for men and women, with those who deviate often facing social stigma. In numerous societies, family structures are arranged around these traditional roles, reinforcing power inequalities that limit personal development and self-expression. Tackling these deeply rooted roles and fostering more inclusive, equitable gender relations is vital for creating progressive and just social environments.

Inclusion of Gender Studies Across Countries: A Comparative Overview

Gender Studies have a different status in different countries. In the Western world, countries such as the US, UK, and Canada have well-established programs of Gender Studies with departments, strong research communities and a range of degrees at all levels that are connected to Gender Studies. Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that can stimulate discussion and critical thinking on issues of identity, power, inequality and a range of other social structures. In many European Union countries, Gender Studies are taught as an independent subject and also as a cross-cutting theme in a variety of educational programs and curricula. This is supported by education policies aimed at promoting gender equality.

As opposed to a more advanced stage of Gender Studies existing in many developed countries, including Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Gender Studies are in their infancy in South Asia and in numerous countries in Africa. In some countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the subject may be absent or dealt with obliquely for cultural and/or political reasons. Although Gender Studies are offered as optional courses or as part of broader sociology or education programmes in several countries, they are not offered as a standalone programme. Gender Studies have gained international recognition with respect to their relevance for education, but, while included in curricula in many countries, the level of implementation differs due to national-specific circumstances.



Theories of Gender Identity in Education

Gender identity is an intricate and multifaceted notion that begins to develop at birth through a combination of genetic, biological, and societal factors. In educational contexts, various theories have emerged to explain how individuals construct and articulate their perceptions of gender. Generally, a child's fundamental gender identity is formed around the age of three, making any later alterations quite difficult. Societies often impose defined gender categories that influence a person's social identity and interactions. However, these identities can either correspond with the sex designated at birth or diverge from it, illustrating the fluid and evolving characteristics of gender.

Grasping gender identity theories is crucial for educators who aim to cultivate inclusive spaces that honour diverse expressions of identity. Education plays an essential role in shaping societal perceptions, highlighting the importance of examining these theories through three distinct lenses: feminism, masculinity theories, and social constructionism. As philosopher Judith Butler famously articulated, "Gender is not something one is, but something one does—an act, a 'doing' rather than a 'being.'" This viewpoint emphasises the importance of recognising and challenging conventional gender norms within educational settings.

Feminist and Masculinity Theories

Feminist and masculinity theories provide a window into how gender dynamics impact educational experiences and results. These frameworks expose how educational systems frequently uphold traditional gender roles, perpetuate inequality, and influence students' identities and self-esteem.

Feminist theory, emerging in the 1830s alongside the feminist movement in the U.S. and Europe, advocates for eliminating gender inequalities and dismantling patriarchal structures. It emphasises that gender roles are socially constructed, granting power and privilege to men while marginalising women (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2018). Feminist theorists assert that women's struggles, including mental health issues and experiences of violence, are consequences of systemic inequality rather than personal failings. Feminist viewpoints stress the necessity of addressing gender imbalances within educational spaces. Historically, girls have faced marginalisation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines while being steered towards "feminine" fields like the humanities and caregiving professions. Feminist educators espouse curricula that confront gender stereotypes and support gender-sensitive teaching methods.

Consciousness-raising in classrooms is a vital strategy employed by feminist educators to help students recognise and evaluate societal structures that uphold gender norms. Intersectional feminism, as articulated by scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, further emphasises how race, class, and other identities intersect with gender to influence educational access and experiences. In diverse societies like India, addressing these intersections is essential to advancing equitable educational opportunities for every student.

Masculinity theories investigate how boys and men navigate education while facing the pressure to comply with traditional masculine norms. Educational institutions typically reward traits associated with hyper-masculinity, such as competitiveness and assertiveness, while discouraging emotional openness and vulnerability. As Michael Kimmel, a prominent scholar on masculinity, noted, "Masculinity is a constantly shifting landscape, a terrain fraught with contradictions and tensions."

Pleck's Gender Role Strain Paradigm (GRSP) demonstrates how strict gender expectations can result in academic stress, behavioural problems, and disengagement from learning. Pleck identified three categories of gender role strain: **Discrepancy Strain**, where failing to meet societal gender expectations lowers self-esteem and causes distress; **Dysfunction Strain**, where adherence to harmful gender norms (such as



emotional suppression and risk-taking) fosters violence and social issues (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995); and **Trauma Strain**, where socialization into masculinity, including rites of passage and emotional stoicism, can cause lasting psychological damage (Levant & Powell, 2017). Additionally, Pleck introduced the idea of Masculine Ideology, which pertains to the internalization of cultural beliefs regarding masculinity. This ideology significantly influences an individual's self-worth and actions, often reinforcing damaging stereotypes that impact educational involvement and personal growth.

Gender Inequalities and Biases in Classrooms

Gender bias within the educational setting remains a widespread issue with serious consequences. Nevertheless, schools should serve as environments where children can explore concepts and develop new skills. Gender discrimination serves as a major barrier to education, impacting both boys and girls in different ways, especially in their social development. Studies frequently indicate that the school curriculum perpetuates these obstacles related to gender perceptions. In light of gender roles in Indian culture, achieving gender equality remains an ongoing challenge. In certain areas, boys' access to education is restricted by societal expectations that require them to work instead of attending school. Likewise, in many regions worldwide, girls often experience gender discrimination while striving for an education.

When teachers are asked about their views on gender inequality in the classroom, they commonly claim that they treat all their students uniformly. However, this viewpoint could reflect either a belief or a misunderstanding because this statement presents two issues. First, students are varied and possess different learning requirements; asserting that all students receive the same treatment suggests that every child ought to have equal learning opportunities. Second, teachers might unwittingly overlook students who struggle to learn as effectively as their classmates. Such biases toward particular students can lead to unnoticed and unintended effects on the thoughts of teachers, administrators, and peers within educational institutions.

These biases can impact classroom interactions, teacher-student relationships, and educational policies. Girls may face stereotypes that diminish their potential in STEM areas, while boys may be confronted with norms about being stoic or demonstrating leadership. These biases can sustain inequality, restricting students' options and reinforcing societal gender expectations. Addressing gender bias necessitates deliberate actions, which include training teachers to recognize and address biases, creating inclusive curricula, and fostering a setting that appreciates diversity. A gender-inclusive educational environment not only fosters equality but also improves the overall educational experience by encouraging individual talents and aspirations, regardless of gender.

Representation of gender roles in school textbooks and curricula

The representation of gender roles in educational materials and curricula significantly influences the learning experiences of students, as school textbooks serve as foundational resources. These resources communicate vital information across various subjects and viewpoints. How gender roles are illustrated in school textbooks is pivotal in shaping societal perceptions and expectations. Ensuring that educational materials accurately represent gender roles is essential for challenging damaging stereotypes, promoting critical analysis, and helping to cultivate a more inclusive and progressive society. It fosters the belief that individuals, regardless of their gender, can pursue any career or role, dismantling barriers and encouraging a more equitable and diverse future.

Proponents of gender equality advocate for more inclusive and varied representations in textbooks to mirror the realities of different gender experiences and to encourage a fairer understanding of the roles individuals can occupy in society. Nearly all socialization that occurs within schools can play a crucial role in either



reinforcing or altering what children have learned within their families. The content found in textbooks and curricula impacts students' comprehension of history, science, literature, and social norms.

Consequently, contemporary textbooks strive to provide a balanced view of men and women, highlighting their accomplishments across various domains. Advocacy against stereotypical portrayals of genders needs to be obligatory, and societal biases must be eradicated from educational materials. Although there is still a limited understanding of gender and equality in practice, one way to tackle barriers to women's progress is through development.

Textbooks may depict historical events with a gender bias, emphasizing one gender's contributions while minimizing the roles of others. Thus, policymakers are vital in creating more inclusive and neutral portrayals of gender roles within educational resources. Such efforts can

help mitigate the reinforcement of stereotypes and expand the representation of diverse gender identities and expressions. Well-designed textbooks and curricula encourage critical thinking and contribute to the comprehensive development of students by offering a rounded and thorough education.

Role of Education in Addressing Gender Norms

Education functions as a powerful mechanism for challenging and transforming societal standards concerning gender. By incorporating feminist and masculinity theories into lesson plans, educators can motivate students to critically analyse traditional gender roles and cultivate a more inclusive comprehension of identity. Schools need to establish environments where students feel secure expressing themselves genuinely, liberated from the restrictions of stringent gender expectations.

Welcoming a range of perspectives on gender identity in education not only nurtures empathy and understanding but also equips students to navigate and contribute to a world that is increasingly intricate and inclusive.

Gender identity is shaped at birth through genetic or other biological influences. In education, various theories seek to explain how individuals form and express their understanding of gender. Typically, a child's core gender identity is established by around the age of three, and altering it afterward can be quite challenging. Societies typically have a set of gender categories that form the foundation of a person's social identity in relation to others. However, these gender identities may align with the sex assigned at birth or may differ from it. Grasping these theories enables educators to foster inclusive environments that acknowledge and honour diverse expressions of gender identity, enhancing the equity of the educational experience. Gender extends beyond a mere personal trait; it has significant implications for various social and cultural practices. Therefore, discussing theories of gender identity within educational frameworks can facilitate the planning and adjustment of social viewpoints, making it essential to consider these theories from three distinct angles.

Role of teachers in reinforcing gender equality

Educators' role in promoting gender equality is sacrosanct. Teachers are individuals who cultivate a classroom atmosphere that encourages equality, ensuring that each student feels appreciated and respected, regardless of their gender. Consequently, they are essential in upholding gender equality within the educational framework and beyond. To start, educators act as powerful role models, confronting traditional gender roles by showcasing diversity in their professional paths and actions. They motivate students to explore any area of interest, regardless of conventional gender expectations. In addition, teachers play a pivotal role in developing a gender-inclusive curriculum, making certain that educational resources and



activities are devoid of bias. By advocating for varied viewpoints and accomplishments across different fields, teachers assist in dismantling gender stereotypes present in textbooks and coursework.

Nonetheless, millions of girls worldwide remain out of school. It is evident that gender discrimination largely impacts these young individuals globally, due to various specific hurdles hindering their access to and completion of education. Thus, promoting awareness and education concerning equality among various gender identities is essential. Teachers must tackle these concerns and discourage gender-based discrimination, thereby fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue. Training educators in gender sensitivity and inclusiveness provides them with the necessary skills to recognize and confront biases, nurturing an educational setting that enables all students to flourish without gender-related restrictions. In the end, teachers are instrumental in cultivating a future generation that values and practices gender equality in every facet of life.

Conclusion

Incorporating gender studies into the school curriculum is crucial for breaking down gender-based social norms and promoting a learning atmosphere that appreciates diversity and inclusivity. Although there has been progress in enhancing the visibility of girls' education, the curriculum often does not adequately represent the achievements and contributions of girls in Indian society. A curriculum that is regularly updated and sensitive to gender issues, along with well-equipped teachers, can foster classrooms where various identities are honoured. The curriculum should confront conventional gender stereotypes and biases while fostering critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of gender identities. This methodology empowers learners by expanding their viewpoints and providing diverse role models, ultimately preparing them for an ever-evolving and interconnected world. Successful integration starts with pinpointing gaps in current curriculum resources and evaluating them for gender biases. Learning goals should directly address gender roles and diversity, fostering conversations about gender inclusivity. Ongoing training for educators is essential to provide them with the expertise and resources necessary for gender-sensitive teaching. Utilizing inclusive examples, case studies, and scenarios that reflect a broad range of gender identities ensures that every student feels acknowledged and appreciated. Motivating students to thoughtfully consider and question conventional gender roles encourages them to become more compassionate and socially conscious individuals.

Feminist critiques of conventional knowledge frameworks provide transformative educational insights, advocating for 'child-friendly' classrooms that empower both students and instructors. These critiques support the integration of curricula that tackle gender-based discrimination, promote gender equality, and offer a thorough comprehension of the fluidity and complexity of gender roles. Teachers are vital in executing these transformations, cultivating classroom settings that not only impart knowledge but also encourage respect, empathy, and inclusiveness.

The teachers are the frontline soldiers who are not only in bringing about change in society but are also acting as a shield against the prevailing prejudices and stereotypes. As the principal agent responsible for delivering the curriculum, the teacher's everyday actions in the classroom are where educational theories come to life. Adopting a gender-responsive pedagogy ensures that all children have opportunities to participate equally and are challenged to think critically about stereotypes. Additionally, lesson activities and examples used by teachers should reflect the diverse gender identities and experiences of pupils.

In this role, it is also obligatory to promote inclusive behaviour, where respectful, empathetic and fair behaviour towards all students is modelled, and gender equality is made a normal practice as opposed to just having it as a stated principle. The class teacher plays a key role in identifying, preventing, and



addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including bullying, harassment, and other gender-based discriminatory behaviour and practices. The teacher creates a safe and inclusive classroom environment, encourages discussion and debate on GBV, establishes procedures and channels for delineating incidents of GBV and intervenes appropriately in response to such incidents. A teacher plays a key role in promoting gender equity amongst pupils, and this should be articulated and embodied in the hidden and the formal curriculum of schooling.

Therefore, integrating gender studies provides upcoming generations with the insights and principles needed to create a fairer, more accepting, and inclusive society, establishing the groundwork for a more equitable future.

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