

Teacher Education and Gender Sensitivity Training

A Study on the B. Ed. Programmes in Kerala

RUKSANA K.* AND ANTONY PALACKAL**

Abstract

Education broadly attempts to eliminate gender-based inequalities. However, paradoxically, it often transmits the existing gender stereotypes, biases, values and norms. In this process, along with the curriculum and different rules and regulations in educational institutions, the role of teachers is also very significant. As the teachers have to be equipped to deal with the gender differences of students and to provide them with a gender-inclusive environment, teacher education is one of the most appropriate areas through which this kind of training can be given. This study attempts to take cognisance of the efforts made in this direction in teacher education in Kerala. B.Ed. Programmes of three Major Universities of the State are analysed, and the study found that the curriculum and the course need further modification to equip the prospective teachers to be more gender-sensitive. Changes are required in the curriculum and classroom activities, along with changes in the institutional environment and attitude of educators and student-teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education broadly attempts to eliminate all types of inequalities and is expected to play a vital role in

empowering those considered 'weaker sections of society'. As a marginalised group, women empowerment is of great concern and many highlight the role

*Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram

**Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram

of education in women empowerment. The National Policy on Education of India 1986 (Government of India, 1992) emphasised promoting women education in all areas of learning to eliminate any gender-based stereotyping with the guarantee of equality before the law and the emphasis on girls' education. So, education is considered one of the most potent weapons to fight against gender-based discrimination.

At the same time, gender inequalities worldwide are manifested in many aspects of education. These inequalities in education are simultaneously the cause and result of systemic discrimination and stereotyping based on gender (UNESCO, 2015). Often, children from the marginalised genders are denied entry to educational institutions. Even when admitted to these institutions, they are not given as many choices as privileged genders regarding the institutions, courses, etc.

Previous studies on the relationship between gender and education point to gender-specific socialisation in educational institutions. This gender socialisation appears disadvantageous to those who are regarded as the weaker genders, and it often widens the gender gaps leading to gender biases, stereotypes, discriminations and inequalities (Klein, 1985; Adler, Kless and Adler, 1992; Marshall and Reinhartz, 1997; Kimmel, 2000; Nair, 2003 and Thasniya and Kuruvilla, 2017). In this process of gender socialisation in education, along with

the curriculum and different rules and regulations in educational institutions, the role of teachers is very significant. The studies on the role of teachers in gender-specific socialisation in educational institutions found that teachers are often unable to deal with gender issues, and they think there are gender differences in learning (Kuruvilla, 2013; Anand, 2018). These findings point to the lack of gender sensitivity of teachers and its negative impacts on the development of children as they are denied equal accessibility and fair treatment.

Teachers have to enable the students to break the gender stereotypes they internalised earlier from family, religion, media, etc., for which they should be provided with an equitable learning environment. Teachers should be aware of the unequal access of different genders to educational opportunities and resources and the consequent differences in the learning process outcomes. They must treat their students equally irrespective of their gender and thus, empower them in their life. Teachers must be gender-sensitive to provide their students with gender equality in education. Being gender sensitive means acknowledging that the differences and inequalities between women and men require attention (UNESCO, 2015). It tries to ensure that people rely less on the assumptions about traditional and outdated views on the roles of women, men and other genders. Gender-sensitivity training for teachers and prospective teachers

will enable them to create an equitable learning environment.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCF-TE, 2009) highly recognises the symbiotic relationship between teacher education and school education as both sectors mutually reinforce the concerns necessary for qualitative improvements in education. In short, gender equality is what we need, and education is one of the critical paths to it; hence, those who are involved in the education process should be gender sensitive. As teachers have a major role in the process, their training in this direction is much essential.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to the earlier studies, the role of teachers in reinforcing gender stereotypes is apparent. At the same time, it implies that they can also play a vital role in creating more gender sensitivity among students if they get proper training. Some studies identify a need for more focused teacher education regarding gender sensitivity (Maher, and Rathbone, 1986; Kuruvilla, 2013; Anand, 2018). The recent debates and controversies in Kerala on gender-neutral uniforms and other such measures to encourage gender neutrality in schools (*The Times of India*, 2022; *The New Indian Express*, 2022a; *The New Indian Express*, 2022b; *The Hindu*, 2022) point to the relevance and need for gender sensitivity training for politicians, policymakers, the general public, as well as those who are connected to the

schooling process and teachers are one of the essential parts of the process.

The successful implementation of programmes to bring gender equality in schools requires the effective involvement of teachers, and it is possible only when they can realise the significance of these programmes and make the students and parents realise the same. Teacher training should equip prospective teachers to handle such situations. Hence, training programmes must be examined to investigate the gender sensitivity training they provide. This study is an attempt in this direction to analyse the gender sensitivity training during the two-year course of teacher education, Bachelor of Education, that is chosen by most of those who engage in and wish to engage in the teaching profession.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Here, the question is whether B.Ed. courses in Kerala, through which the majority of the teachers are trained before getting into the teaching profession, are successful in imparting gender sensitivity. Hence, the study has the following objectives:

- To identify the content of the curriculum of B.Ed. programme and different practices during the course that helps to inculcate gender sensitivity.
- To check whether the content in the curriculum are sufficient enough to give awareness to the student-teachers about the concepts and issues related to gender.

- To analyse the classroom discussions and activities, educators' attitudes and the institutional culture and environment of the training centres.
- To understand whether they are able to train the student-teachers to be sensitive to the gender issues they are likely to face during their teaching process in the future.

METHODS

B.Ed. programmes of three major universities of the state, Kerala University, Calicut University and Mahatma Gandhi University, are analysed in terms of their curriculum and different practices during the two-year Bachelor of Education programme. This Qualitative study uses content analysis of the B.Ed. curriculum of the universities mentioned above, which are available on their official website. In-depth interviews with B.Ed. holders were conducted using an interview guide to know the gender dimensions of different practices. The respondents were asked about gender-related discussions and activities they were involved in during the course, attitude of the educators and rules and regulations in the institutions.

SAMPLING

The study followed a multi-stage sampling procedure. Among the universities providing Bachelor of Education courses in Kerala, the three major universities from the North, Central and South zones of

the State, the University of Calicut, MG University and the University of Kerala, respectively, were chosen in the first stage. There are government or aided institutions and self-financing colleges offering B.Ed. programme under these universities. To get equal representation, the same number of respondents were chosen from all the different types of institutions. We identified only those respondents who completed the course from these universities after 2018. Both male and female respondents were included to have gender-wise representation. The number of respondents was limited to 12 from each university as that sample size reached the saturation point.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme is a professional teacher education programme in Kerala that is structured in tune with the framework suggested by National Curriculum for Teacher Education (NCF-TE). The programme consists of four semesters of 100 days each. The course consists of three components—theory, continuous evaluation (CE) and other related practical work.

Gender Dimensions of Enrolment to the Programme

Gender biases are much visible during the enrolment into B.Ed. course in Kerala. All the cases of the present study responded that girls were the majority in their institutions, and the number of male student-teachers

were less than 10. It points to the feminisation of B.Ed. programme. It is because of the widespread belief that the teaching profession is a female matter as it is closely associated with the caregiver role of females.

“Some of my male friends think that doing the activities and assignments of the B.Ed. programme is not their cup of tea, and they say they can’t enjoy the course like other degree courses, and also there is this belief that teaching is not for men. So, after UG, they did not join for B.Ed.”

One of the cases shared his experience. Another respondent said,

“When I told my husband and in-laws that I wanted to go for a job after marriage, they asked me to join B.Ed. and to opt teaching profession as they think it is safe and comfortable for females.”

Both responses indicate the popular beliefs of teaching as a comfortable and convenient profession for females with convenient working time and vacations. Also, some think that children can be better handled by female teachers with motherly affection. All these create and sustain the stereotypes that females fit more into the teaching profession. This leads to the feminisation of B.Ed. programme. Indeed, it is not a good trend, as we need a balanced number of teachers from different genders to create a more equitable and efficient learning environment for the younger generation.

Gender Aspects of the Curriculum

The curriculum is important in selecting and presenting knowledge, shaping character, setting attitudes, and developing behavioural patterns in the learner and it reflects a community’s social norms. As social and cultural norms and practices form an unconscious part of underlying curricula, gender inequality is apparent in the curriculum of both schools and teacher education institutions (UNESCO, 2015). The curriculum of teacher education has to be designed in a way that the contents of the curriculum should be bias-free as well as they should enable the prospective teachers to reduce the impacts of a biased school curriculum when they exercise their teaching profession in schools. Gender equality issues need to form an integral part of the curriculum to make future teachers the agents of change by sensitising them.

The present study analysed the contents of the curriculum of B.Ed. programmes of University of Kerala, Calicut University and Mahatma Gandhi (M.G.) University that is available on their respective websites. The curriculum of Calicut University and M.G. University includes a core course titled ‘Gender, School and Society’ as a theory paper in semester four. Though the syllabus of University of Kerala B.Ed. Programme mentions that gender and inclusive education shall form an integral part of B.Ed.

curriculum as per the NCTE regulations 2014, there is no special course on gender studies or the relationship between gender and education, instead, one of the core papers includes a unit

titled ‘Gender, School and Society’. Major objectives and modules of the paper on ‘Gender School and Society’ by M.G. University and Calicut University are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Overview of the Course on ‘Gender School and Society’ in the
B.Ed. Curriculum of Calicut, M.G. and Kerala Universities

University of Calicut	Mahatma Gandhi University	University of Kerala
<p>‘Gender, School and Society’ (50 instructional hours)</p> <p>Objectives of the course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To familiarise the concept of gender as a social construct. • To identify important gender issues in schools and educational settings. • To examine the recent issues associated with gender in school and society. • To understand the inter-related functions of school and society. 	<p>‘Gender, School and Society’ (5 credits and 100 instructional hours)</p> <p>Objectives of the course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop basic understanding and familiarity with key concepts—gender, gender bias, gender stereotype, empowerment, gender parity, equity and equality, patriarchy and feminism. • Understand the gradual paradigm shift from women’s studies to gender studies and some important landmarks in connection with gender and education in the historical and contemporary period. • Learn about gender issues in school, curriculum, textual materials across disciplines, pedagogical processes and its intersection with class, caste, religion and region. • Understand the role of social media on perpetuating gender notions in Indian society. 	<p>There is no special course on gender studies or the relationship between gender and education.</p>

To be continued...

<p>Modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit I—Gender as a Social Construct Gender • Unit II—Gender Issues in Schools • Unit III—Recent Issues Associated with Gender • Unit IV—School and Society <p>Transaction Mode</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture method • Seminars • Small group discussions • Field survey or visit • Brainstorming sessions • Projects <p>Tasks and Assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting views from different newspapers on atrocities against girl students and prepare a report • Visit a school and conduct interview with teachers and parents on problem faced by girl students 	<p>Modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module 1—Gender Issues: Key Concepts • Module 2—Gender Studies: Paradigm • Module 3—Gender and Education • Module 4—Gender Issues in Curriculum • Module 5—Gender Issues in the Society <p>Mode of Transaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture-cum-discussion • Demonstration • Group presentations • Seminars and assignments • Debates • Brainstorming sessions • Peer group discussion • Interaction with community • Case study • Survey and dialogue • ICT-based teaching and learning <p>Practicum (Any One)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a report on any of the government initiatives for care and security of women in our society. • Documentation on various new initiatives of women empowerment based on newspaper, magazine and journals. • Conduct a newspaper analysis on atrocities against women and girl children.
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**Source: B.Ed. Curriculum of MG, Calicut and Kerala Universities*

In the course, 'Gender, School and Society' by the University of Calicut, gender is presented as a 'social construct' which is a good attempt at initiating gender sensitivity training. It addresses the issues of women in Indian and contemporary issues of girls in school, and it also discusses school and society as another module. Though the curriculum covers many of the major concepts in gender, the focus on the issues of women limits the scope of gender issues to women's issues. The curriculum should address the issues of other genders too and that is unfortunately absent in the curriculum.

The course on Gender by M.G. University addresses various concepts related to gender issues, gender studies, gender and education, gender issues in curriculum, etc.; and hence, seems to cater to the understanding of the essential concepts related to gender. Also, in its objectives, the paradigm shift from the discipline of 'Women Studies' to 'Gender Studies' is also referred and if discussed properly, unlike the curriculum of Calicut University, 'gender issues' won't be limited to 'women's issues'.

The transaction modes of the course contents suggested by the University of Calicut seem to be more traditional, while M.G. University has added some more methods. If they are put into practice, it will help the student-teachers to develop their understanding of gender issues. But the assignments and tasks given in the curriculum are not sufficient.

Another problem is that these modules by Calicut and M. G. University are taught in semester four which is after the four-month internship in schools. This internship as teaching practice has a crucial role in the teacher's training course and before going for the same, the students should get a clear understanding of how to deal with gender-related issues in schools and also how to provide an equitable classroom for all genders.

Regarding Kerala University, it should be noted that no separate paper focusing solely on gender studies is available. The B.Ed. programme curriculum is developed following the directives of NCF-TE, UGC and NCERT. However, individual universities can create their syllabi without requiring endorsement from NCTE or UGC. Thus, the decision to include specific papers is at the discretion of the respective university's Board of Studies. A member of the Board of Studies at the University of Kerala, responsible for curriculum design, has indicated that gender studies has not been introduced as an independent paper. They explained that the University of Kerala has integrated a module named 'Gender, School, and Society' within the core course 'Learner in the Educational Perspective'. The Board of Studies has not received formal requests or proposals to introduce a core paper exclusively focused on gender studies. The member further elaborated that due to the existing curriculum load, allocating separate papers for all curriculum components

might not always be feasible. As a result, educators advise student teachers to engage in comprehensive discussions on gender-related issues in the classroom and encourage them to incorporate gender-related subjects into their research projects during the fourth semester.

The unit in the curriculum of Kerala University titled, 'Gender, School, and Society' in the core course of 'Learner in the Educational Perspective', analyses the historical perspectives of gender bias in India, situations of gender differences in educational, social, political, and economical realms, gender bias in educational institutions, empowerment of girls as empowerment of society, the role of teacher to develop an attitude of equity and the Gandhian views on women empowerment. However, this unit predominantly concentrates on women-centric matters, encompassing only specific conventional subjects. Gender studies in modern academia encompass a more extensive spectrum of topics. Also, relying solely on a single module about gender issues is considered insufficient for cultivating gender sensitivity among students and teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that a thoughtfully designed core paper encompassing contemporary debates and discussions concerning gender studies be incorporated into the curriculum of Kerala University.

In the curriculum of Calicut University, the course 'Creating an Inclusive School' also stresses the need

and challenges for gender inclusion and the core course 'Development of the Learner' in the first semester includes the gender-related problem of adolescence. M.G. University also mentions the role of education in compacting social evils like violence against women. Regarding the activities to create more gender awareness, Calicut University has instructed to conduct a workshop on gender and upbringing. University of Kerala has included gender sensitivity as one of the themes for field study, and the list of activities for the core paper 'Education in Indian Society' includes brainstorming gender issues in education to know the challenges and trends in Indian education. All these contents will facilitate a more gender-sensitive attitude of the student-teacher when they are properly followed in the classrooms.

The analysis of the curriculum gives the idea that the curriculum of University of Kerala has to include a course on gender, and both Calicut University and M. G. University should include more gender studies content. Activities given in the curriculum can also be focused more on developing gender awareness as a whole and not only on the issues of women. None of the curricula has included the issues of those who don't belong to the binary of females and males. It will leave the course unfriendly for non-binary people and also the student-teachers won't be able to handle the students exhibiting such non-binary traits properly.

Offering a paper on gender is not sufficient for effective gender sensitivity training, but Universities have to frame the entire curriculum as gender-responsive as the curriculum of a teacher education programme exposes future teachers to consider attitudes and values that will later inspire their students. "Developing a gender perspective through teacher education necessarily requires a pedagogic approach that allows not just systematic study of gender theory but also an engagement within their own position in society vis-a-vis gender roles" (NCF-TE, 2009, pp. 31). The mere inclusion of gender-related concepts, theories and issues in the teacher education curriculum is not at all sufficient to build gender sensitivity in the student-teachers. How the gender differences in opportunities and access to resources can create different outcomes for different genders has to be made clear in the curriculum and it will facilitate the understanding of a teacher as to why certain genders that are regarded as 'weaker' needs special considerations in education to bring equity.

The curriculum should be designed in a way that clearly directs the practices in the teacher education institutions to be gender sensitive and gender-responsive. As gender-related issues are changing day-by-day and so does the perspectives, the curriculum of teacher education should also reflect these changes.

Classroom Discussions and Activities

Gender-related content in the curriculum help the gender sensitivity development of teacher, student-teachers only when they are properly discussed and debated in the classroom and also when these contents are able to influence the activities of the student-teachers. One of the cases from M. G. University responded that they had enough discussions in the classroom on gender issues. But other cases observed that it was not properly taught or discussed, rather, the gender issues were given as seminar presentation topics to the students, the focus of which was only to get internal marks. "The seminar presentations on gender were just made for the assessment's sake, no interactions or discussions followed", one case responded. It is good that gender issues are included as topics of discussions and seminars but teacher educators should ensure that the actual purpose of such activities is served. Otherwise, it will not be helpful for gender sensitivity training.

Another respondent spoke about the limitations to include more gender sensitivity training in B.Ed. programme:

"Often the syllabus and activities along with the teaching practice and its preparations make the students and educators too busy. So, we may not get enough time for more discussions and activities related to gender issues."

It reveals the attitude that gender issues are secondary. As education should be inclusive and it shall not discriminate against anybody because of their gender, gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming are not to be treated as secondary. So, it should be given priority like all other measures to ensure inclusive education.

Another issue related to inclusive education is that the course often treats transgenders and other non-binary people as someone who does not exist.

"I had no idea about transgender people as we had no proper discussions about them. Later I realised, as a teacher, I should learn about their issues and I educated myself. Every teacher should be aware of the non-binary people to treat such students better".

One case shared her experience.

Some respondents pointed out the disparity between classroom activities and discussions.

"Even those who speak much about gender issues during discussions often follow the exact stereotypical values in their behaviour in other activities. They say 'these are easy to argue but not practical'. It will be practical only when we practice it and it requires a clear attitudinal change that should stem from our training activities. Otherwise, when these people become teachers, they show the same attitude in the schools", another respondent's words say about this disparity.

Attitude of Educators

The attitude of an educator has a significant influence on the learners in different ways. The teacher can establish a healthy, gender bias-free environment in the class that will equip the student-teachers more capable of creating such an environment to their students. So, the attitude of the educator is very determinantal in imparting gender sensitivity in teacher student-teachers .

From the responses, it is understood that educators often exhibit biased behaviour regarding gender in teacher education institutions. The biasness of educators is present in the duty assignments during event organisations like male students are preferred for many activities that are thought to be masculine. One case opined that:

"We are supposed to make changes in the attitude of children, especially in terms of gender biases and stereotypes in the future. But unfortunately, in our classes, we are getting conditioned to those stereotypes."

Another case added; "Our educators themselves are gender biased often and they are much used to it making it difficult to change their attitude. I decided to become a teacher because I was influenced by some of my favourite teachers. During the B.Ed. course also, there were some good teachers, but some others were having conservative attitudes, especially on gender issues".

Most of the respondents shared similar experiences with some of the educators. The educators have more responsibilities as they are training the prospective teachers who are expected to mould more students in the future. Educators must be gender sensitive in their attitude and behaviour. So, first of all, they should get proper training to mould the student-teachers into becoming more gender sensitive.

Institution Culture and Environment

Gender stereotypes that are part of the larger society are also visible in the B.Ed. training institutions also. The gender-based discrimination in power positions is apparent from the response of one case of the study:

“In our institution 90 per cent of the students were girls. Even then, for most of the key positions in decision-making roles, boys were preferred as they were thought to be ‘willing and capable to do anything more than girls. There were girls who can handle things pretty well but the gender bias kept them away from the key positions of power’.”

Though majority of the student-teachers are females, the male student-teachers who are a minority get selected to key power positions such as chairperson. Leadership in arts and such stereotyped feminine activities are vested in girls. Here the stereotypes of men as ‘physically strong’ and ‘always accessible’ than women and will be ‘willing and capable’ of going out and doing things are at work.

“B.Ed. programme helps us to develop our skills to coordinate, lead and organise any programme and do everything that is needed in the everyday activities of a school. As the girls are the majority, they are in a need to do all the tasks for organising programmes even the tasks thought to be done by the male students. But when they join schools as teachers, they expect male teachers to do certain tasks and there is no permanent change in the attitude of students. They should be aware that both genders are capable of doing all tasks irrespective of their gender.”

This was the observation of a male case who currently works as a school teacher, regarding the assignment of tasks during the programme.

Again, in the case of the dress code of the student-teachers, certain clear stereotypes can be observed. The image of the typical teacher as a woman wearing a saree is much popularised in Indian society and the burden of being in line with this image is imposed on the female teacher student-teachers in the state. In certain institutions, almost everyday, they have to wear saree as the prescribed uniform and that is really constraining on them. One female trainee said:

“Wearing saree is very uncomfortable for us and it is very difficult to manage that dress when we have to take our bags, charts and other teaching aid materials and all.”

Though some of the institutions do not insist on wearing a saree as

uniform, during teaching but enforce wearing other schools a saree every day, as they have to be like a 'proper teacher'. The 'proper teacher' is one who wears a saree and whose attire will not distract the attention of the students. Here, the disciplining of the female body is clearly seen because most of these restrictions are not applicable to male teacher student-teachers. Instead of training the students to treat a female teacher with respect irrespective of what she is wearing, women are asked to wear clothes that do not create any temptation for men even when they are not comfortable in that dress. This will also adversely affect the confidence level of female teacher student-teachers .

"During my school days teachers were segregating boys and girls to avoid unhealthy relations between them, we were not even allowed to freely interact with students of the opposite gender. They didn't know how to deal with the issues related to the unhealthy relationships between boys and girls. So, as future teachers, we should get the proper training to deal with gender differences and gender relations".

This response from one of the cases affirms the need for gender sensitivity training for the teachers and prospective teachers.

This may not be the case for all teacher training institutions; there are certain institutions geared to break gender stereotypes but most of the institutions fail to provide an environment that helps the student-teachers to think beyond

the biases, and stereotypes about gender. These institutions should not be a mere reflection of society rather it should facilitate the deconstruction of patriarchal values.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the curriculum, pedagogy, programmes and activities of B.Ed. courses offered by the three major universities in Kerala reiterate the fact that teacher education in the state has to be modified further to provide gender sensitivity training to the student-teachers. In the curriculum, though there is some gender studies content included, it is inadequate to equip teachers for the morrow with the desired level of awareness on gender issues. It is desirable that more content which enables student-teachers to familiarise themselves with the key concepts related to gender and also the newly emerging discourses on gender issues. The mere inclusion of these content would be inadequate unless the practices during the course are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive. But the study found that there are many practices in teacher training institutions that are gender biased. These practices reinforce the existing gender norms and values and restrict prospective teachers from having the ability to handle gender issues they face in future as teachers. This will restrict our goal of attaining gender equality in and through education. The student-teachers should have a gender bias-free learning environment to equip them to provide such an environment

to their future students. Hence, this study suggests immediate interventions to modify the B.Ed. course to make it more gender sensitive.

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