

Exploring the Knowledge of Tutors on Gender Equity and Equality in Teacher Education in Uganda

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Abstract

This study investigated on Gender Equality and Equity in Teacher Education in Uganda. The aim of the study was to examine the extent to which pre-service teacher education prepares future teachers to be gender responsive in their teaching career. A total sample of 90 tutors was obtained from 15 government teacher training colleges. Questionnaires, interviews to key stake holders in teacher education in the Ministry of Education and observations were used for data collection. Data was analyzed by using simple random sampling. The study revealed that though tutors understood what the term gender meant their socialization process continues to perpetuate gender inequality in their way of life. This socialization process impacts on how teacher trainers treat male and female students. The study found that tutors associated female students with weak issues while male students were associated with the hard work and good performance in class. The study concludes that low levels of gender responsiveness reinforces the superiority of males over females. The research demonstrated that the tutors' gender played a significant role in influencing how male and female students learn and conceptualize what they are taught. The outcome was the continuous gender inequalities and inequities in our societies. The study made recommendations that would help teachers to unlearn, relearn and reconstruct the way they perceive gender issues and how they teach and train teachers to- be who are the foundation of education systems worldwide.

Key Words: *Gender Equality, Responsiveness Teacher Training*

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated on gender equity and gender inequality in Teacher Training Institutions in Uganda. Teachers play unrivalled role in the growth and development of the child and therefore have a lot to account for in the attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of their learners. However, though the classroom managed by teachers is one of the major playgrounds where girls and boys come to learn the formal gendering process, gender concerns in teacher education have not been a subject of extensive nor intensive inquiry. Very little work has been done in Teacher Training programs to help enhance teachers' critical understanding of gender inequalities and how gender bias takes place in schools as well as their role in addressing such challenges (Chege, 2006).

Teacher education is therefore not simply a set of programs and activities that prepare teachers to manage a curriculum and produce learning results. Teacher education has a major responsibility to continuously be spot on in the process of unlearning, relearning and learning the wider social and cultural world.

Why Focus on Teacher Training in Addressing Gender Inequalities

The concern for gender equality in education provision continues to be a priority item on the world development agenda because of the negative and far reaching implications that gender disparities reflect through biases, stereotypes and discriminatory practices have for development interventions. The focus has been put on teachers because teachers are critical allies in schools' struggle to achieve gender equity. This paper is therefore set to find out whether teachers conceptualize what gender means to them if they have to sustain the struggle towards gender equality in their society and the school. Specifically the following question was addressed: What do you understand by the gender concept? The paper will first provide a summarized over view of the related literature on teacher education as related to gender equity and equality in teacher education.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature presented in this study is a summary meant to be representative of what is known about gender equity and equality in teacher education. Teachers do not come into the classrooms with gender neutral personality (Lubega, 2010). Teachers are likely to have internalized a patriarchal gender ideology through their years of socialization from both informal and formal settings. Gender equity and equality more appropriately fits the goal that educators must strive to reach.

The Power of the Hidden Curriculum

Various studies carried out in the recent past shows that the hidden curriculum continues to serve as a powerful tool in reinforcing inequities in schools. Lockheed, (2007) explains that the hidden curriculum goes beyond the formal curriculum made up of both subtle and overt messages of gender inequity that continue to exist in many school cultures. This author argues that teachers have a critical role to play if they have to successfully challenge and reconstruct the way gender issues are perceived in teacher education. What teachers say or do not say, what their body language may depict, what they do and who they call upon form a hidden curriculum that is more powerful than the textbook lesson (Lubega, 2010; Nieto, 2000). Implicit in this statement is the teachers' necessity for self- reflection. Nieto (2000) concludes that teachers need to reflect regularly on their own personal experiences in regard to challenges accruing from gender concerns in their teacher training programs.

The Gender Block and Teachers' Gender Bias

Sadker (2000) coined the concept of gender block while sharing his own experiences in training teachers to detect and eliminate gender bias. Sadker (2000), interprets gender block to mean the inability to acknowledge the various subtle ways that gender bias plays in their daily practice. Sadker (2000) explains this phenomenon by arguing that not only has a false sense of accomplishment taken root but also that teachers are unprepared by teacher education programs to conscioutize the subtle, unintentional but damaging gender bias that characterizes classroom situations.

While many researchers emphasize raising teachers' awareness of their own practices, these same researchers fail to explicitly link teachers' work in the classroom to broader questions of power and access that are at the root of inequities in schools (Nieto, 2000). Scholars interested in engaging teachers in confronting the above issues assert that teacher education and the act of teaching need to be transformative (Nieto, 2000).

Teachers' Knowledge on how Girls and Boys Learn in the Classroom

Substantial research has been carried out on the knowledge of teachers on how girls and boys learn and achieve. These studies reveal that the messages conveyed by common stereotypes influence teachers in the way they respond to learners (Muganda, 2002). In summary, the literature shows that while teachers must readdress how they teach in order to bring out issues of gender equity and equality, at the same time teacher educators must seek to transform teachers by giving them correct knowledge, encourage teachers to analyze their own experiences on why gender matters. The need for teachers to reflect upon and analyze their own experiences, attitudes and behaviour that results from these experiences cannot be emphasized. Fore fronting the knowledge concept in understanding gender issues in teacher education is a critical element helping students in teacher education develop a critical lens that will awaken them to critically examine the tangled and overlapping dynamics of gender equity and equality in our world.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology underlying this study was both qualitative and quantitative. Both approaches were employed not only to bring out a deeper and clear understanding of the social relationships under this investigation but also to provide the necessary triangulation needed for getting a more composite data to articulate better the research findings.

The study population sample drew from tutors in Primary Teacher Training Colleges. There are 45 primary teacher training colleges in Uganda. There is on average 18 tutors per college with one Principal and one Deputy Principal. The population sample constituted 90 tutors from 15 teacher training colleges. Each College that participated in the study had 6 randomly selected tutors. 53 male and 37 female tutors participated in the study.

The criteria used by the researcher for the selected colleges was based on Krejcie & Daryle (1970) method of determining sample size from a determined population, where the size of the population and amount of error determines the size of a randomly selected sample. Simple random sampling (SRS) was used for selecting the sample from the target population in PTCs based on a sample frame that contained a list of names provided by the selected College. A sample for the pilot exercise was constructed from a list of tutors from 2 PTCs.

The study used questionnaires, interviews and observations. The instrument was pre-tested in two Primary Teacher Training Colleges which were not in the selected sample of the study.

FINDINGS

Introduction

When asked to give their understanding on the concept of gender, 53 male and 37 female tutors had different meanings of the concept. Their responses are shown in table 1(a) below:

Table 1(a). Tutors explanation on what they understood by the term Gender

Sex						
Response	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	%age	Count	%age	Count	%age
Disparity between male and female	6	6.6	3	3.4	9	100.0
Equal role assignment to both sexes	11	12.2 14.4	8	8.9	19	100.0
Being male or female	13	20.0	11	12.3	24	100.0
Roles assigned to members of society	18		12	13.3	30	100.0
Aspect of being male or female	5	5.5	3	3.4	8	100.0
Total	53	58.7	37	41.3	90	100.0

Source: Field Data

Table 1 (a) above shows what the tutors understood by the term gender. Six (6.6%) male tutors and three (3.4%) female respondents understood gender as the disparity between male and female persons. Eleven (12.2%) male respondents and eight (8.9%) female respondents understood the term gender to mean equal assignment of roles to both sexes. While thirteen (14.4%) male respondents and eleven (12.3%) female respondents' perceived gender as the fact of being male or female. However eighteen (20.0%) male respondents and twelve (13.3%) female respondents said that they understood gender to mean roles assigned to members of society. Lastly five (5.5%) male respondents and three (3.4%) female respondents said that they understood the term gender to mean the aspect of being male and female.

Table 1(b). The chi-square test for what the term gender meant to the tutors

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	No. 11.120	2	004
valid Cases	90		

Source: Field Data, July-September 2007

The analysis in table 1(b) above shows that there is significant knowledge on the tutors' understanding on the meaning of gender concept. This is shown by the level of significance which indicates .004.

DISCUSSION

The study findings in the table above indicate that the term gender is not new to tutors. It was noted that not every teacher described the concept of what they understood by the term gender in the same way. The findings show that tutors know the meaning of the gender concept by describing the concept through their daily activities. This personal conceptualization of the meaning of the term gender has led many to miss the point that gender equality as a social phenomenon is about ensuring that boys and girls, men and women of all ages develop to their full potential so that they can equally participate in building a better equitable world (Oxfam, 2005).

Despite that personal interpretation of the gender concept, the results in the table above imply that education still remains a major force that will initiate change and this will only occur when teachers and learners are encouraged to adapt classroom level initiatives that enhance new images based on positive gender equity ideology. Facilitated attainment of gender equality as a strategy has great potential to create desired change because it has the capacity to address both practical and strategic needs of males and females nationally and globally.

Several studies examining teachers' understanding of the gender concept reveal challenging conclusions. Lewis, & Lockheed (2007) for example, found out that tutors and teachers believed that gender perspectives which highlighted gender bias in the classroom were only "over-reacting" and used disclaimers such as, "you are reading too much into this," thus forgoing their responsibilities in addressing gender in the classroom. Other researchers noted that tutors/teachers do fail to "see" how gender relations operate in the classroom, while unwittingly implementing inequitable practices, such as praising male students more often for performance and female students for appearance, encouraging boys to participate more intensely, and using language that reinforce broader social gender stereotypes (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007).

The implications of being knowledgeable on what gender means in one's society is another way towards challenging gender discriminatory behaviours. Having appropriate knowledge on what it means to be male or female goes a long way in encouraging society address gender inequalities that exist in their society today. This understanding implies that education as a major force will help initiate change and this will only occur when teachers and learners are assisted in adapting to classroom level initiatives that reflect new images based on positive gender equity ideology. Gender equality as a strategy has great potential to create desired change because it has the capacity to address both practical and strategic needs of males and females of nations worldwide. Therefore with this scenario before us we see that teachers are strategically positioned to act as agents of change in order to achieve gender equality especially through what they teach, how they teach and how they role model their own attitudes, beliefs and practices in the classroom and beyond. To address both teachers' professional and personal orientation, opportunities are needed for student teachers and teachers who are already in the service to understand their own gender socialization and identities (Chege, 2006).

Because gender is complex, mere training sessions, or just seminars either at the pre-service stage or through in-service courses, are not sufficient to create a gender responsive environment. At the same time any training that does not extend to support teachers' in developing practicable solutions will have limited impact. Strategies need to be explored for storing the knowledge about gender equitable pedagogies that are developed at schools and training centres, so that future teachers can learn from them and become motivated and benefit from lessons learned and experience already gained. In order for the education system to effectively address gender inequality, teachers and teacher educators must be transformed into active and effective change agents for gender equity. This can only be achieved with the support and cooperation, which teacher education programs should aim to cultivate through gender equality interventions <http://iafrica.com/highlife/features/624620.htm>.(2007).

To this effect, action research as a methodological framework could be an appropriate tool to be adopted to develop effective interventions that target gender inequality in education. However, the author warns that uncritical action research will not change teachers' beliefs and practices on gender issues. Instead,

she theorizes that the intersection of feminist analyses of lived educational experience and the action research movement or feminist praxis may offer a strong foundation for pre-service and in-service teacher education. According to her, feminist analyses can assist students to become aware of the problematic nature of knowledge, to become critical of 'authoritative experts' and to reconstruct alternative knowledge from their own experiences.

This intersection does not only offer a critical theoretical framework for educating teachers, but also highlights a practical argument for focusing more attention and resources on education for practicing teachers. According to her, even if pre-service teachers do come to acknowledge the importance of teaching for social change, they often lack the experiences that transform that realization into lasting changes in their behaviours and beliefs. Teachers who experience discriminatory educational practices in schools need teacher educators to educate them as critical action researchers, so that they can transform their own classrooms, and perhaps even their schools and communities.

Professional development programs designed to improve teacher qualifications and conditions of employment should continue, but should give attention to beyond those narrowly defined by teacher unions which often obscure the importance of professionalism and quality education. Such programs should demonstrate an understanding of gender not as involving women's interests alone, but as focusing on both men and women and the power relations between them. Such an understanding should include the role of the local contexts, in which gender inequality operates (Muganda, 2005).

Interventions emanating from this understanding need to be carefully designed, well-resourced and intensive, and should avoid quick-fix, large-scale and generic approaches which tend to reach people only on a superficial level. Instead, contextual interventions that address specific local issues related to gender inequality must be developed and implemented. Through ongoing professional development support, they should develop a sense of ownership in the process of developing and implementing gender equality programs, and understand and accept their responsibility to strive for gender justice in and through education. Accepting this responsibility entails showing support for the work of gender reform, developing an authentic commitment to tracking and eradicating gender discrimination in schools, acknowledging a professional duty to offer both a 'gender just' education and an education that seeks gender justice, and understanding the collective nature of the gender reform processes (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Kennyway, & Kelly 2000).

Although educational disparities between male and female learners start much earlier than at tertiary level, increased involvement and respect for women in tertiary education will help to enhance participation of women as students, teachers, researchers and administrators, and improve the tertiary environment. Providing student teachers with relevant knowledge on gender issues is giving them an eye opener to social happenings and broadening their horizons to understanding how they address gender related situations in their environment. Teacher educators' biggest task in gender education should be geared to helping their students develop an understanding of how to apply the acquired knowledge to a wide range of topics and contexts.

Gender education would at the same time empower and conscientize student-teachers to change their own stereotyped practices not only in classrooms but even at homes and surrounding communities. Conscientizing future teachers on gender concerns would compel them to be reflective and thoughtful of their gendered social, cultural structures (Kikampikaho & Kwesiga, 2002). This will form a relevant ground for the upcoming teachers to unlearn, relearn and learn skills and strategies that ensure a gender fair education for female and males.

These findings also show that existing knowledge and interpretation of the gender concept is inadequate for promoting gender equity and equality concerns for it is the same understanding that has shaped the scholarship process of our teachers. The revelation from the study shows there is a greater need to develop in teacher educators' knowledge that would help them conceptualize, identify, analyze and criticize gendered behaviour and norms in their environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings are an eye opener for teacher educators. These findings indicate that Primary Teacher Training Colleges must continue to reflect back to society a different image about a gender equitable life style. Teacher education is a critical entry point that will trigger change but this will only occur when teachers initiate classroom levels that reflect new images based on a positive gender ideology. This study also demands to raise the consciousness of teacher educators on values of gender fairness and gender equality in teaching. Values of gender equity reinforce good quality education. These values are suppose to ensure that female and male students can effectively and responsibly participate in building a better world. In all this, teachers remain a critical force in facilitating initiatives aimed at enhancing learners' active participation.

This study concludes by asserting that training and retraining teacher trainers in a gender responsive approach to education is one step ahead in impacting on and reversing the trends in gender stereotyping. Training more female or more male teachers will not necessarily in itself eliminate gender stereotyping. Teachers will continue to replicate and transmit gender stereotypes unless they are actively trained and sensitized on gender issues at all levels of education. The study recommended that a gender perspective must be incorporated at all levels of education and that training in gender equality should be an integral part of teacher education programs for both pre-service and in-service college based training.

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BIO-DATA

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