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Sustainable
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Bangkok Office
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for Education

TOOL

21

Mainstreaming gender equality in teacher education and professional development



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Objectives

The objectives of this tool are to:

- introduce issues concerning gender equality in teacher education, including the importance of gender training and mainstreaming gender in teacher education programmes;
- help trainees to assess existing teacher education through a gender lens.

Key information

Setting the scene

The key role of teachers in promoting gender equality

In every country, gender-based barriers impair children's ability to gain a quality education. However, when teachers have the proper skills and experience, they can make learning much more equitable and effective.

No matter how well designed the teaching and learning materials and curricula are in terms of providing opportunities for structured learning about gender equality, it is the quality of the teachers who will facilitate this learning in the classroom that matters most.

Gender-responsive teachers who are adequately resourced are a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 agenda. Teachers help promote gender equality in education by using learner-centred, differentiated pedagogies that are age and gender appropriate.

The key role of female teachers in promoting gender equality

Ensuring the presence, visibility and active engagement of positive role models for girls and boys is a key factor in improving gender equality in education. In South Asia, the presence of well-qualified female teachers can often be critical in encouraging and motivating girls' access to and completion of education. The importance of



Box 1 Sustainable Development Goal 4.c

Target

By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher education in developing countries, especially least developed countries and Small Island Developing States.



Indicator

Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher education (e.g. pedagogical training), pre-service or in-service, required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country.

female teachers in the region can be illustrated by the following:

- In some communities, parents will not allow daughters to be taught by male teachers. This is the case in areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- Some mothers report that they are more comfortable talking about their children with a female teacher.
- The presence of female teachers in schools can impact positively on the retention of girls and on their learning outcomes.
- At the school level, female teachers may act as advocates for girls, representing their perspectives and needs and in the process promoting learning environments that are conducive for girls.
- Female teachers provide new and different role models for girls.

The key role of male teachers in promoting gender equality

In some countries there is an over-representation of female teachers, especially in pre-primary and primary education. This may be one factor in a complex range of conditions leading to boys' declining success in many education systems. It may also be linked to the historical roles occupied by women as caregivers. In East Asia, the Pacific, and Central Asia, the shortage of male teachers has been identified as one of the key factors in the low motivation, under-performance, and high drop-out rates of male adolescents.



Box 2 Recruitment and deployment of teachers in the Asia-Pacific region

A study of teacher status and rights in Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan was carried out by UNESCO in 2015. The research showed that in some countries there is a balance between male and female teachers (e.g. Indonesia and Mongolia). Countries like Sri Lanka, Samoa and Uzbekistan, however, have more female than male teachers. In some countries there are more men than women in senior leadership positions (e.g., Indonesia and Samoa).

The imbalance in the teaching workforce in some countries raises concerns about the possible impact of a lack of role models for boys in the education system. Likewise, the lack of female school leaders may also lead to a lack of role models for girls.

Source: UNESCO, 2015.¹

1 UNESCO, 2015. *Teachers in Asia Pacific: Status and Rights*. Bangkok: UNESCO.

The centrality of gender training

The mere presence of teachers of both sexes in schools is unlikely to be enough to promote gender equality in education. Teachers, male and female, come with their own social and cultural values and practices. They may unconsciously reinforce gender stereotyped attitudes and beliefs in the classroom. These attitudes and beliefs need to be addressed. Furthermore, being a female teacher does not necessarily imply that you will better address gender issues in your classroom; and we cannot assume that male teachers are less gender aware. Gender discrimination and inequality in education will persist if teachers are gender-biased or fail to understand and respond to the diversity and the different learning needs which girls and boys bring to the classrooms.

A coherent approach to gender mainstreaming is needed, where all components and processes of the education sector mutually support gender equality. For gender equality to be a 'lived' reality in classrooms, teachers must practise gender-responsive teaching. They must play a critical role in eliminating all forms of gender-related discrimination in and beyond their classrooms, and respond appropriately to the different learning and developmental needs of all children in an inclusive manner. To do this, teachers need to receive an education – at pre-service and in-service levels – in which gender equality principles and practices are embedded.

Mainstreaming gender in teacher education programmes

Because pre-service teacher education programmes are usually curriculum-based, they offer an excellent framework to facilitate gender mainstreaming. The same cannot be said for in-service training as this tends to be more responsive to narrowly identified needs and the structure is more fluid.

There are three main strategies that pre-service training curriculum developers can use to mainstream gender in the curriculum:

- focus on gender learning objectives/outcomes and related content in one specific subject, e.g. gender equality in education;
- integrate gender learning objectives/outcomes and related content in selected 'carrier' subjects;
- integrate gender learning objectives/outcomes and related content across all subjects in the training curriculum.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive. It is likely that they will be most effective in combination. Some examples of carrier subjects or courses that are used to promote learning about gender equality in education for teachers include:

- courses about the learner; foundations of education (e.g. development, psychology and sociology);
- courses about values in education (e.g. philosophy);
- courses about 'how to teach'; pedagogy, assessment.

There are four key professional areas where gender training for teachers is required:

- content mastery (i.e. the subject matter that will be taught);
- motivation for teaching (focusing on the needs of the teacher trainee/student);
- values in teaching (e.g. non-discrimination and non-violence);
- how to teach (the skills that are needed in the classroom), including teaching practice.

Gender also needs to be mainstreamed in teacher education college practices generally, beyond the training curriculum. This includes greater gender balance among the training college lecturers, administrators and managers.



Self-study and/or group activity

Critically investigate a teacher training programme

- Work on your own or in groups
- Identify a local teacher education programme.
- Investigate the programme in as much detail as possible, preferably through participatory consultation with staff and students.
- Use the following questions to guide your analysis.

Guide questions

- To what extent is gender mainstreamed into the pre-service or in-service teacher education programme at primary and secondary level?
- Can you find examples of the following?
 - content on gender in relation to training courses about the learner;
 - skills development for teachers so that they can teach in a gender-responsive manner in the classroom;
 - content that addresses teachers' attitudes to gender norms and relationships;
 - guidelines on gender equality for teaching practice.

What should teacher education on gender include?

Each country context will need to develop locally relevant curriculum content for teacher education. However, some key areas to cover are likely to include:

- **Attitudes and behaviours:** Teacher education needs to facilitate teachers to reflect critically on their own attitudes and those in society, and to understand how these attitudes impact on the education and lives of girls, boys, women and men. Teachers need to understand how attitudes translate into biased and discriminatory behaviour towards girls and boys, and how they can work continuously to ensure they do not allow this to happen in their own classrooms. For example, they need to reflect critically on how they organize and manage their class, to ensure that they avoid gender-stereotyping learners (e.g. giving boys the task of group leaders and girls the task of note-takers or tidying up after the group work).
- **Curriculum content:** To be inclusive, teachers need to understand how to adapt the national curriculum to the needs of all learners in their class. As part of this, they need to know how to adapt the curriculum to match the potentially diverse learning needs and interests of girls and boys. In addition, not all national curricula will already be gender responsive. Teachers therefore need to learn how to identify any potential bias in the curriculum they have been told to use, and then have the confidence to adjust what and how they teach to ensure that such bias is not reflected in the lesson content and activities. This might include, for example, ensuring that biased terminology found in the curriculum documents is not repeated in the lessons, or adapting suggested activities to avoid a gender stereotyped task that the curriculum document has suggested.

- **Teaching and learning materials:** Teachers are often given books and materials to use with the curriculum, but they may also have the freedom to select the materials they plan to use for each lesson. In some contexts, they may need to make teaching and learning materials themselves. They therefore need to know how to select and/or make materials that do not contain gender-biased messages, images, or learning activities. In contexts where the only available materials may be old and in need of revision, teachers need to develop the creativity and confidence to use gender-biased materials in a way that encourages girls and boys to reflect on and question, rather than just accept, the content. For example, if history text books only contain stories about important men, then the teacher needs to be able to do their own research to add examples of important women to the lesson; and maybe also facilitate a discussion about why history books might miss out key people, such as women, and whether some people still get missed out in our community today.
- **School environment:** Teachers may not have control over school infrastructure, but they need to learn about how the school environment makes girls and boys, with and without disabilities, feel included or excluded, safe, or unsafe. This includes learning about where, why, and how gender-based and other forms of bullying or violence might happen in and around the school, and how to deal with it – on an individual case basis and through developing or implementing school policy.
Teachers need to understand the impact that infrastructure issues – like the availability or quality of toilet and water facilities – can have on girls’ and boys’ presence, participation and achievement. And they need to learn basic strategies for minimizing the impact of infrastructure problems on girls and boys. This includes learning to work with other stakeholders (parents, learners, community) to address school environment and infrastructure problems that are causing girls or boys to be excluded.



Self-study and/or group activity

Reflect on your experience at school

- On your own or as a group, think about or discuss your memories of school.
- Think about the teachers at your school and list three things they did that were gender responsive and three things that were not.
- Think about who was, or may have been, affected by the teachers’ lack of gender responsiveness.
- How do you think they were, or might have been, affected?
- How could your teacher(s) have behaved differently, to make themselves more gender responsive?



Optional extension activity for self-study and/or group work

- On your own or as a group, read the scenarios in **Handout 1**. These scenarios focus on the role of teachers in promoting or hindering gender equality in education.
- Decide whether each scenario helps or hinders gender equality in education, and tick the relevant box. If working in a group, discuss and explain the reasons and have a debate if group members disagree with each other.
- Once you have completed **Handout 1**, see **Handout 2** for answers and explanations.



Further reading

Grace, S. and Gravestock, P. 2009. *Inclusion and Diversity: Meeting the Needs of All Students*. New York: Routledge.

UNESCO. 2006. *The impact of women teachers on girls' education: advocacy brief*. Bangkok: UNESCO.

UNESCO. 2015. *A Guide for Gender Equality in Teacher Education Policy and Practices*. Paris: UNESCO.

US Department of State/IREX. 2016. *Creating Supportive Learning Environments for Girls and Boys: A Guide for Educators*. Washington: IREX.



Handout 1

Scenarios that promote or hinder gender equality in education

Read the following scenarios relating to teachers and decide whether they will help to promote gender equality in education, or whether they will contribute to continued gender inequality. Tick the appropriate box.

Scenario	This may help to promote gender equality in education	This may perpetuate gender inequality in education
There are equal numbers of male and female teachers in preschools and primary schools.		
Most head teachers, education officials, and school inspectors are men.		
Teacher education colleges require certain minimum qualifications from prospective students.		
Education authorities have a policy on maternity leave and child care which seeks to support female teachers to stay in/return to work when they have children.		
The ministry of education determines where in the country teachers will be placed.		
There are male and female trainers at the teacher education colleges.		
Male and female trainers at teacher education colleges have all received gender equality training.		
Education projects run by NGOs and the government have a policy to consult male and female teachers in all baseline studies and all design, implementation and monitoring activities.		
Extra-curricular activities are divided among teachers along gender stereotyped lines (e.g. the sports club run by a male teacher, the domestic crafts club run by a female teacher).		



Handout 2

Answers for Handout 1

The shaded boxes show whether the scenario promotes gender equality or perpetuates inequality. The third column provides some explanations too.

Scenario	This may help to promote gender equality in education	This may perpetuate gender inequality in education	Explanations
There are equal numbers of male and female teachers in preschools and primary schools.			Often there are more women teaching in the lower levels of education, which means that boys may be deprived of male role models and support in their early years of education. Getting more men to teach in preschool and primary levels is a challenge many countries need to address.
Most head teachers, education officials and school inspectors are men.			This is likely to lead to gender-biased decisions (including recruitment decisions), if no women are in senior decision-making positions. It also sends out a message that women are not welcome 'at the top', and may perpetuate stereotypical beliefs that women are not capable of leadership roles.
Teacher education colleges require certain minimum qualifications from prospective students.			This can help to maintain a cycle of gender inequality in education. If one gender receives a poorer education than others, there is less chance of them reaching the minimum qualifications for entering teacher education. Progressive approaches to college entry requirements may be needed.

Scenario	This may help to promote gender equality in education	This may perpetuate gender inequality in education	Explanations
Education authorities have a policy on maternity leave and child care which seeks to support female teachers to stay in/return to work when they have children.			Teaching can be a demanding profession, and without support (from their family or the education system), women may find it difficult to juggle motherhood with maintaining a career as a teacher.
The ministry of education determines where in the country teachers will be placed.			This approach to teacher deployment can deter women from becoming or remaining teachers. They may find it impossible (logistically or culturally) to move away from their home location to teach.
There are male and female trainers at the teacher education colleges, and they have all received gender equality training.			This is likely to make it more attractive for female students to choose teacher education and to receive the necessary academic and pastoral support they need to complete their course.
Education projects run by NGOs and the government have a policy to consult male and female teachers in all baseline studies, design, implementation and monitoring activities.			A project that seeks male and female perspectives on education is more likely to develop a gender-responsive plan and have that plan implemented. Of course male and female parents and children would also need to be consulted.
Extra-curricular activities are divided among teachers along gender stereotyped lines (e.g. sport club run by male teacher, domestic crafts club run by female teacher).			This may reflect the actual best skills of the teachers, but also potentially reflects prejudiced assumptions among those making decisions. It may also perpetuate stereotyped beliefs among the students.



References

UNESCO. 2015. *Teachers in Asia Pacific: Status and Rights*. Bangkok: UNESCO.



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