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Promoting Gender Equality in Education through Gender Responsive Pedagogy

A Brief Report on Gender Responsive Pedagogy Training

Organized by UNESCO-IICBA

July 18- 21, 2016 Adama, Ethiopia



INTRODUCTION

One major obstacle facing teachers today is an apparent lack of gender skills for instruction. However, the ability of the teacher to effectively use gender responsive pedagogy can be accomplished if the teacher is well grounded in gender responsive teaching skills. Her or his understanding and awareness of gender responsiveness is key to the effective participation of girls and boys in learning processes.

Teacher educators thus have a significant and multifaceted impact on the gender knowledge and skills of teachers through pre-service and in-service training. Teacher educators themselves should be equipped with gender responsive pedagogical and planning skills to ensure gender equality in teacher training and professional development. This is with the belief that quality education in all its forms cannot be realized without designing pedagogic approaches that address the needs of all students that enter the classroom.

Within the framework of the UNESCO-Hainan Fund-In-Trust (HFIT) project on “enhancing quality and relevance of learning for adolescent girls”, the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), organized a training workshop for teacher educators and teachers on Gender Responsive Pedagogy from July 18 to 21, 2016, in Adama, Ethiopia. The participants were from the Ministry of Education (MoE), teacher education colleges of three higher learning institutions and four secondary schools (Debre Tabor, Durbete, Bole and Wondirad). The three higher learning institutions included were Bahir Dar University, Hawassa College of Teacher Education and Kotebe University College.



Teachers from the four catchment schools were invited to create and strengthen a link on the efforts of teacher education colleges and universities so as to transcend the knowledge and skills of gender responsiveness both to the school community and school children as a way of ensuring gender equality.

OBJECTIVES;

With the mission of improving Gender Responsive teaching and learning in schools through teacher training and professional development, the following objectives were formulated for the training:

- Understand the historical perspective of gender and its impact on education;
- Explain critical pedagogy;
- List criteria to evaluate textbooks for gender responsiveness;
- Evaluate textbooks for enhancing gender responsive pedagogy;
- Evaluate the teaching-learning process for promoting gender responsiveness;
- Evaluate the classroom set up for equal participation of boys and girls;
- Evaluate the extra-curricular activities for equal participation of boys and girls in decision making; and
- Evaluate the nature of classroom interactions in terms of gender responsiveness.

MAJOR TASKS PERFORMED

The training topics were divided into four major tasks, which equipped the trainees with knowledge and skills on gender, critical pedagogy, gender responsive pedagogy, gender responsive school management, gender responsive curriculum, gender responsive classroom set-up, gender responsive classroom interaction, and the prevention of sexual harassment. The training was carried out with interactive and participatory methodologies such as brainstorming, group exercises and case stories.

The first day was devoted to the clarification of important concepts on gender and the historical developments of gender responsive pedagogy in relation to multicultural practices and critical pedagogy. It set out primarily to understand the participants' conceptions and attitudes toward gender and related issues. During discussions and debates, it became possible to identify the misconceptions of the participants on gender issues. One of the topics for debate was about whether sex difference is natural or socially constructed? Shall we eliminate the difference or work to maintain the difference? The participants also presented their experiences about the ways gender inequalities are practiced in colleges and schools.

Once the participants were made familiar with gender and gender related issues, the second day was devoted to understand the nature of gender responsive pedagogy and its components. Topics on gender responsive pedagogy, gender responsive school and gender responsive school management with major emphasis on gender mainstreaming were treated through presentations. An article review on local examples of gender mainstreaming in the Amhara region was done and presented by participants as a drill to best experience major components of gender mainstreaming. Further review on the actual gender mainstreaming practices in colleges and schools enabled the participants to understand their contexts of work and stabilize the essence of gender mainstreaming.

On the second day, additional tasks were given to the participants to explain the nature of active/student-centered learning as a strategy to introduce gender responsive teaching and learning. Scenarios were created for how to apply active learning and prepare a lesson that applies active/student-centered learning.

On the third day, detailed explanation was provided on how the curriculum can serve both to perpetuate the existing stereotyped conceptions and/or to transform the school society to be gender responsive. The presentation on gender responsive curriculum constitutes the criteria to evaluate any teaching-learning material for its gender responsiveness.

After the presentation, the participants evaluated a research article on gender responsiveness of social science textbooks in the Amhara Region. This activity familiarized the participants with the criteria to evaluate whether or not textbooks and other teaching-learning materials are gender responsive.



On the same day, additional group activities were given to evaluate textbooks based on well-organized textbook evaluation criteria for gender responsiveness. Each group presented the evaluation results, which found that all textbooks perpetuated the existing gender stereotypes. Through these two activities, the participants internalized the procedures to prepare and evaluate textbooks that promote gender responsiveness as well as on how to address the gaps on text books in relation to gender so as thereby ensure gender equality.

The majority of the participants raised one question repeatedly. That is: “What can we do to make the teaching-learning materials gender responsive while an external body prepares the textbooks?” The response to them was that the role of teacher educators is so immense that their graduates are going to teach in schools and participate in textbook writing. Thus, on one hand they could suggest areas which need revision to the Regional Education Bureaus and Ministry of Education and on the other hand, they could apply the gender skills during module writing and teaching and learning processes.

Another topic that was discussed on the third day was extra-curricular activities. First, participants were asked to list the types of extra-curricular activities and the degree of the participation of female students in their respective colleges and schools. The discussion stressed that extra-curricular activities provide various opportunities for students to develop skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, organizational skills, and the skill of applying what they have learnt in the classroom into practice, which is necessary for their future careers. Thus, females should be encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities and the school management has to include extra-curricular activities in the annual plan of the school.

Gender responsive classroom set-ups and gender responsive classroom interactions were the two topics that were dealt on the fourth day. First, participants reflected on whether their actual school and classroom set-ups are gender responsive and how. After the reflection, presentation was given on the nature of gender responsive classroom set-ups and classroom interactions. To substantiate the discussion, participants reviewed an article on factors affecting female students' academic achievements at Bahir Dar University. Next, the participants evaluated their classroom set-ups and the nature of classroom interactions based on defined gender responsive criteria in groups.

The discussion on classroom interactions stressed teacher expectations. This is because teacher expectations can have an impact on the academic differences between boys and girls the longer they stay in school. Participants were made familiar with the ways through which teacher expectations are transmitted to students consciously or unconsciously. On the same day, student-student interactions were discussed as one means through which inequalities are perpetuated. Students' participation in decision-making has also been discussed as one strategy to empower female students. Similarly, gender responsive teacher characteristics were discussed.

At the end of the fourth day, the trainees were asked to discuss and report about the way forward regarding implementing gender responsive pedagogy and thereby ensuring gender equality in teacher education colleges and schools.

THE WAY FORWARD

The following action points were proposed by participants, which are summarized as follows:

- Ministry of Education should develop and distribute gender responsive pedagogy module and guidelines to teacher education colleges and schools;
- Ministry of education and teacher education institutions should make sure that GRP should be included in Higher Diploma Program (HDP) to train all academic staff of Teacher Education Institutions;
- Without gender responsive school/college management, GRP cannot be realized. Thus, Ministry of education and regional education bureaus should train educational managers in GRP;
- Ministry of education and regional education bureaus should train textbook writers and editors in GRP;
- GRP should be given as a course or integrated in the method/multicultural courses of teacher education as provided by Ministry of education and teacher education institutions;
- GRP should be included in teachers and school managers' performance evaluation criteria as provided by Ministry of education and regional education bureaus;

- Schools should plan and use Extra-curricular activities as a means to create smooth interactions between boys and girls and to empower girls;
- Ministry of education and schools should integrate GRP in teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program for the training of teachers in schools;
- Gender Units at TEIs and schools should be strengthened and supported with adequate resources;
- UNESCO LO should seek with policy to follow-up and facilitate implementation of above action points in the respective institutions;
- IICBA should continue its support to enhance implementation including through cross-fertilization of experiences between Ghana and Ethiopia.

In general, the training was an eye-opener for the participants. The approaches used in the training, which included presentations by the trainers, question and answer sessions, group work and presentations of the results of the group work by the participants, debates among the participants on some issues, experience-sharing among the participants on each topic and reflection, gave participants an opportunity for self-reflection, exploration of situations in their surroundings, as well as on identifying possible ways to address the gaps on gender equality. During the reflection time, one of the participants emotionally stated, "We males are unaware of gender equality and as a result commit many aggressions on women and children. Such type of training clears up our misconceptions about gender and triggers us to work towards gender equality."



Finally, the participants evaluated the overall training using eight criteria using a Likert scale of four. The results depicted that the training is rated 3.52 out of four. Two participants gave comments orally. One of the comments suggested that such training has to be supported by videos, charts, and photographs on related issues. The other comment noted that the trainer dominated the first day.

TESTIMONY



My Reflections on Gender Responsive Pedagogy Training

I am Turuwark Zalalam, a young and energetic lecturer and researcher in the department of Adult Education and Community Development, college of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Bahir Dar University (BDU). I am currently leading the department. I have a bachelor's degree in Pedagogical Sciences and a masters' degree in Adult and Lifelong Learning. I have been working for the BDU since 2010. During my stay at BDU, in addition to teaching and researching in teacher education, I have provided various

trainings and developed life skills and couple communication manuals in collaboration with colleagues. I have provided many teacher education courses for both pre service and in service trainees at BDU.

By virtue of my experience as a gender office coordinator and Teacher Educator at BDU, I was invited to participate in the Gender Responsive Pedagogy Training (GRP) that was organized by UNESCO IICBA at Adama town for four days.

Various issues were covered during this training. To mention a few: the concept of gender, gender equity and equality, pedagogy; the concept of critical pedagogy and its implications; the role of GRP in ensuring gender equality and thereby quality education; the defining elements and roles of gender responsive teacher and gender responsive school compound; textbook evaluation criteria were treated. Moreover, common challenges of female students at secondary school and higher education institutions, etc. The training was lively, engaging and related to real life experiences and challenges.

I feel that the training is a turning point in my teaching profession as it helped me see things from a different perspective and to improve my teaching practice as well. I never noticed how the seating arrangement of female students affects their learning, but now I learned that I should be keen with this regard. When boys scored low on their exams, I used to tell them that I do not expect that from them, however, I rarely did this for females because I feel that they are soft and that they would feel ashamed. Now, I recognized that I should tell my expectations to female students like the way I do for boys. I also received the necessary skills for evaluating learning materials against GRP principles. In general, the training helped me to know my role as a teacher educator to ensure gender equity and realize quality education. I expect the pre service and in service teacher education trainees (many thousands in number) will benefit from the competencies teacher educators of three higher education institutions obtained in GRP during the training.

As for future policy direction, in addition to integrating GRP into Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT), I suggest that all university teachers (public and private) should receive the GRP training and that GRP should be part of Higher Diploma Program (HDP) and Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership program (PGDSL). I also suggest that teacher-training colleges should integrate GRP into their curriculum so that primary school teachers would be better equipped with GRP knowledge and skills. I also suggest that the existing learning materials at all levels should be evaluated through GRP lenses and be revised accordingly. Moreover, in addition to training teachers and revising learning materials, secondary and university learners should receive relevant and contextual life skills training (on which I could contribute to by offering training manuals and ToTs).

Thank you!

SUMMARY

The training on gender responsive pedagogy for teacher educators was the first training in such organized form. The participants have expressed their satisfaction and its relevance as a strategy to achieve quality education. As a result of the training, the assumption that quality education cannot be realized without ensuring gender equality in education has been well understood by the participants. Ensuring gender equality is a cultural transformation that requires continuous efforts. As for the suggestions given by the participants, the training should be given to many stakeholders in the field of education. The efforts to introduce gender responsive pedagogy in teacher education should follow different approaches, such as, integrating the issue into the already existing courses or offering GRP as a separate course, integrating GRP in Higher Diploma Programs and providing short-term trainings on GRP and gender mainstreaming for educational leaders.

