

Preparing Teachers for Gender-Sensitive Classrooms: Challenges and Opportunities in Teacher Education Programs

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Abstract—Gender-sensitive pedagogy aims to create learning environments where all learners irrespective of gender feel valued, respected, and equally encouraged to participate. In India, teacher education programs have a critical role in preparing teachers to challenge gender stereotypes and ensure equitable classroom practices. This empirical study explored the challenges and opportunities in preparing pre-service teachers for gender-sensitive classrooms. Data were collected from 50 B.Ed. trainees and 5 teacher educators from two teacher training institutes in North Bengal using a mixed-method design (survey and focus group discussion). Results revealed that while 72% of the respondents were aware of gender equity concepts, only 38% felt confident implementing gender-sensitive pedagogy during teaching practice. Major challenges identified included limited curricular integration, lack of trained teacher educators, stereotyped textbooks, and insufficient exposure to gender workshops. However, opportunities existed in reflective practice, peer discussion, and the integration of gender modules in professional courses. The study concludes that continuous professional development, curriculum revision, and institutional support can transform teacher education into a powerful medium for promoting gender equality in Indian classrooms.

Index Terms—Gender sensitivity, pedagogy, teacher education, pre-service teachers, equity

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most powerful instruments for achieving gender equality. Teachers serve as both role models and agents of change who shape learners' attitudes toward gender roles and equity. However, traditional classroom practices in India often perpetuate gender stereotypes assigning specific roles

or behaviours to boys and girls. This imbalance is often reinforced through biased textbooks, unequal teacher attention, or lack of gender-neutral language. To counter these inequalities, teacher education programs must prepare future teachers to become gender-sensitive practitioners. A gender-sensitive teacher understands how gender influences learning, communication, participation, and achievement. According to the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020), inclusive and equitable education is central to India's vision of social transformation. Therefore, training teachers for gender-sensitive classrooms is both a pedagogical necessity and a moral responsibility.

This study aims to investigate how teacher education programs in India address gender sensitivity and what challenges and opportunities exist in preparing teachers for equitable classrooms

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender sensitivity in education involves recognizing gender biases and promoting equitable participation for all learners. Studies by NCF (2005) and NCERT (2023) emphasize that teachers need to challenge gender binaries in classroom practices and curricular content.

Khurana (2019) found that pre-service teachers often possess general awareness about gender equality but lack practical strategies for implementing it. Similarly, Sharma and Kaur (2021) reported that gender topics in Indian B.Ed. curricula are often confined to one elective paper and not integrated across courses.

Internationally, Turan and Gunes (2017) highlighted that organized gender sensitization courses increased

pre-service teachers' confidence and empathy toward gender issues. A Croatian study (Lukic, 2018) also revealed that gender components in teacher training were "weakly framed," meaning they lacked depth and continuity.

In the Indian context, Amity Journal of Teacher Education (2020) reported that many teacher educators themselves lacked training in gender sensitivity, resulting in a gap between policy and practice.

Research Gap:

1. Existing literature reveals that although gender sensitivity is emphasized in policy, its systematic inclusion in teacher education remains limited.
2. Few empirical studies in India have examined how pre-service teachers perceive gender-sensitive pedagogy and what institutional challenges or opportunities exist.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess pre-service teachers' awareness and attitudes toward gender-sensitive pedagogy.
2. To identify challenges faced by teacher education programs in preparing teachers for gender-sensitive classrooms.
3. To explore opportunities for integrating gender sensitivity effectively in B.Ed. curricula and practice teaching.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the level of awareness and preparedness of B.Ed. trainees regarding gender-sensitive pedagogy?
2. What challenges hinder the implementation of gender-sensitive teaching practices?
3. What opportunities exist within teacher education programs to strengthen gender sensitivity?

V. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design:

A mixed-method design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches was used.

5.2 Sample

- Participants: 50 B.Ed. trainees (30 females, 20 males) and 5 teacher educators.

- Location: Two government-aided teacher education colleges in North Bengal, India.
- Sampling Technique: Simple random sampling for trainees; purposive sampling for teacher educators.

5.3 Tools and Instruments

1. Gender Sensitivity Awareness Scale (GSAS) – a Likert scale with 20 items measuring awareness, attitudes, and confidence in implementing gender-sensitive pedagogy.
2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide – included open-ended questions on experiences, challenges, and opportunities.

5.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected during the second semester of the B.Ed. program (2024–2025). Respondents completed the GSAS questionnaire, followed by focus group discussions conducted in both institutions. Each FGD lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded with consent.

5.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores). Qualitative responses were coded and thematically analysed under "Challenges" and "Opportunities."

VI. FINDINGS

6.1 Quantitative Results

Indicator	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Teachers should use gender-neutral language in class	89	7	4
Boys and girls should receive equal attention in discussions	87	8	5
Curriculum provides adequate gender sensitivity training	34	30	36
Teacher educators model gender-sensitive behaviour	40	34	26
I feel confident handling gender bias in classroom	36	35	29

Interpretation:

- High conceptual awareness (above 85%) but low self-confidence (36%) and low satisfaction with institutional training (34%).
- Only 40% agreed that teacher educators modelled gender-sensitive behaviour consistently.

6.2 Qualitative Themes (from FGD)

Theme 1: Challenges

1. Limited curricular integration: Gender sensitivity is confined to one unit of “Gender, School and Society.”
2. Teacher educator preparedness: Most teacher educators have not attended specialized training.
3. Stereotyped learning materials: Textbooks and examples still depict gendered roles (e.g., mother cooking, father earning).
4. Cultural resistance: Some trainees feel hesitant to discuss gender diversity or non-binary identities due to social stigma.
5. Insufficient practical exposure: During internship, schools rarely emphasize gender equity practices.

Theme 2: Opportunities

1. Reflective and dialogic learning: Group reflections and peer discussions enhanced understanding of gender issues.
2. Workshops and role plays: Gender sensitization workshops helped students experience empathy and reduce stereotypes.
3. Use of case studies: Real-life classroom situations facilitated better understanding of subtle gender bias.
4. NEP 2020 emphasis: Policy reform creates an enabling framework for integrating gender equity into teacher training.
5. Institutional collaboration: Partnerships with NGOs such as UNGEI and Breakthrough India can strengthen training modules.

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a consistent pattern: while pre-service teachers possess awareness of gender sensitivity, they lack confidence and structured guidance to apply it in real classrooms. This aligns with the findings of Sharma and Kaur (2021) and the Amity Journal (2020), which emphasized the disconnect between knowledge and practice.

One major barrier is the weak framing of gender topics in the B.Ed. curriculum an observation also supported by Lukic (2018) in Croatia. The single paper “Gender, School and Society” often remains theoretical and does not translate into practical teaching competencies. Furthermore, teacher educators’ limited exposure to gender-sensitive pedagogy affects

modelling behaviour, a critical element in the training process.

Despite challenges, opportunities are growing due to policy support from NEP 2020 and NCF (2023). Reflective and participatory learning methods role plays, case studies, and simulations prove effective in transforming attitudes. Studies by Turan and Gunes (2017) confirm that experiential learning helps future teachers recognize unconscious biases.

Overall, the findings highlight that gender sensitivity must be embedded in the ethos of teacher education institutions, not treated as an add-on module.

VIII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Curricular Integration:

- Teach gender sensitivity in all B.Ed. subjects, not just one.
- Give assignments, lesson plans, and teaching practice tasks that promote gender equality.

ii. Capacity Building for Teacher Educators:

- Conduct regular workshops to help teacher educators learn about gender issues and inclusive teaching.
- Encourage teachers to use gender-friendly language and behaviour.

iii. Development of Resource Materials:

- Update textbooks to remove gender stereotypes.
- Create new digital and printed materials that show examples of gender equality.

iv. Reflective Practice:

- Ask students to keep journals where they note what they observe about gender issues during internships.
- Use peer review so trainees can learn from each other’s experiences.

v. Institutional Policy and Monitoring:

- Teacher education institutions should adopt a gender policy promoting equality, inclusivity, and non-discrimination.
- Add gender-sensitivity points in the evaluation of teaching practice.

vi. Partnerships and Community Engagement:

- Collaborate with NGOs and local education authorities to conduct sensitization programs in schools.
- Engage parents and community leaders to reduce resistance to gender-inclusive practices.

IX. CONCLUSION

Preparing teachers for gender-sensitive classrooms is essential to achieve equitable education in India. This study demonstrated that while awareness among B.Ed. trainees is high, confidence and practical readiness remain limited due to curricular gaps and insufficient mentoring. Teacher education programs should go beyond small, symbolic efforts and include gender sensitivity in all area's curriculum, teaching practice, and the overall culture of the institution.

If teacher educators' model inclusive behaviour and institutions provide continuous training, future teachers will be equipped to create classrooms where every learner regardless of gender has equal opportunities to learn, participate, and succeed. Building such gender-sensitive classrooms is not just an educational goal but a pathway to social transformation proposed by NEP 2020.

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