

GENDER SENSITIVITY IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN BHUTAN

Yuden*
Sonam Chuki**
Tshewang Dorji***

ABSTRACT

The terrain of gender inequities in education has seen many changes in recent times. The purpose of the study was to find out the gender sensitivity in pedagogical practices in secondary education in Bhutan. The study was qualitative in nature and used non-probability convenient sampling techniques. The study used classroom observations to gain the first-hand experience of a normal classroom and focus group discussions with teachers and students to get in-depth views. The classroom observation and focus group discussion data were analyzed using the process of emerging themes. The study revealed that teachers were not gendered sensitive in pedagogical practices in the secondary education level. There were challenges in understanding gender in education both by teachers and students. There was neither gender awareness nor conscious effort made by teachers to address gender inequality in the classroom. A gender-responsive education that supports the realization of student full potential requires the teachers to practice gender-sensitive pedagogy. To address the issue, there is an immediate need for gender awareness and sensitization among teachers and school leaders. Teacher education colleges should introduce modules such as gender and education or gender and development so that the classroom environment is gender-sensitive and gender friendly.

Keywords : Secondary education, higher education, gender sensitivity, pedagogical practices

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the Gender Inequality Index value of Bhutan was 0.476, ranking Bhutan 117 out of 160 countries (UNDP, 2018). Bhutan has 8.3 percent of parliamentary seats held by women. Six percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to men with 13.7 percent. Female participation in the labor market is 58 percent compared to 74.3 for men. In the parliament and the local government, women representative at decision making is less than men (with 15.27 percent in parliament and 11.6 percent in local government). There are 11.2 percent women in the civil service at policymaking or executive level (GNHC, 2019). A report of GNH analysis in Bhutan indicates that men were happier than women. 49% of men were happy, while only one-third of women were happy, a result which was both striking and statistically significant (Ura, Alkira, Zangmo & Wangdi, 2012).

Although the rate of total labor force participation has increased to 63.3 percent in 2017 from 60.4 percent in 2005, there were significantly

***Teacher, Dechencholing Higher Secondary School, Bhutan

higher males than women in the labor force supply (73.1 percent male and 52.2 percent female). There was a higher female youth unemployment rate with 13.2 percent than male youth with 11.2 percent (NSB, 2017). The female unemployment rate was estimated at 6.1 percent as compared to 3.6 percent for males in the urban areas, specifically, in the age group of 15-24, urban females are found more unemployed than urban males (NSB, 2017). Under such circumstances, there will be more pressure on men to make ends meet (UNESCO, 2004). Only 6.1 percent of female labor has paid regular jobs compared to 17.8 percent of the male labor force. 81 percent of female labor work is unstable, unprotected, and unregulated low paying jobs (NSB & ADB, 2012). 59.3 percent of females were employed and engaged in the agriculture sector compared to males at 34.2 percent (NSB, 2017). Therefore, it is very important to deliver high-quality teaching in schools and raise the bar of learning for the girls (iDiscoveri Education & REC, 2009). Bhutan aims of becoming a knowledge-based society through providing quality education in schools, but quality

*Researcher, Royal Education Council,

**Curriculum Developer, Royal Education Council,

education lags behind globally (MoE, 2014). In many developing countries, there was poor educational attainment especially at the secondary school and higher education level (OECD, 2011). Although the gender gap is closing, Bhutan is still far from reaching gender equality in education, health, labor force, and decision making. Quality education is at the heart of the education for all goals. Where schools fail to deliver quality education, girls are dropping out early (UNESCO, 2014). Education for girls must be seen as part of a much larger societal issue (UNESCO, 2004) in overcoming gender inequality. UNESCO (2000) fully recognize gender-sensitive education as one of the factors that enable the vision of Education for All to translate into reality. The major challenges concerning education and training include promoting greater female enrolment in higher education while ensuring continuing efforts toward gender parity at the secondary level. However, graduates from higher education are inadequately prepared to enter the workforce while most students are unable to meet the admission criteria of top tier higher education institutions abroad, particularly for professional courses. This reflects the poor learning outcomes of the education system not being commensurate to the requirements of youth today (GNHC, 2019). For example, in 2006, out of the 138 slots available for undergraduate programs abroad, only 26 girls were selected based on the required qualifications. Other elements of gender equality in education have received less attention, including equality of learning outcomes. Girls' poor performance in maths and science is a constraint on participation and options at higher levels (ADB, 2014). Despite the initiatives for equal opportunity policies in many schools aimed to empower girls and many teachers being keen to redress gender inequality to enable students' potential, equal opportunities for girls are found less in many schools even today (Warrington & Younger, 2020).

1.1. Objective of the Study

The main objectives of the study were to understand the classroom dynamics of secondary schools to ascertain the reasons for gender gaps and recommend strategies to enhance gender-

sensitive pedagogical practices in secondary education.

1.2. Research Question

Based on the objectives of the study the following were the research questions:

1. What are the common classroom pedagogical practices in middle and higher secondary schools?
2. What is the level of understanding of teachers about gender in education?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women across the globe are treated unequally and placed less value on their lives and denied rights, opportunities, and resources due to gender (Reeves & Baden, 2000). In Bhutan, it is an age-old belief that 'a woman has to live nine lives to be born a man' (UNESCO, 2009) which in local terms is called *Kye rab gu*. A survey done by UNDP (2014) as cited in (Dorji, 2017) found that 44 percent of the survey respondents believe that Bhutanese culture considered females inferior to males. From the official statistics, often women's work of taking care of children, carrying out household chores, attending to domestic errands are not counted as labor and not considered as work. The statistics exclude both traditional and modern informed sectors and overlook the economic contribution of housework (UNESCO, 2004). Gender disparity is commonly found between boys and girls in terms of access, retention, and learning achievement. In most countries, girls are still found at a disadvantage (UNESCO, 2005). It was also found that men are said to be more collaborative with men than with women while also giving less credit to women while they collaborate and work with men (Wu, Fuller, Shi, & Wilkes, 2020). It is important to emphasize more on quality education for both boys and girls (Chisamy et al., 2011). In many countries including Bhutan, gender parity is achieved at the primary education level. However, gender disparity at secondary and higher education remains a challenge (Dorji, 2017). In Bhutan, there have been significant strides in the net enrollment and primary education completion and has substantial progress in access to secondary level education (UNICEF, 2012). The Adjusted Net Enrollment

Rate (ANER) was 96.8 percent (97.4 percent boys and 91.1 percent girls) in 2018. Similarly, Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in 2018 for class PP-X and VII-XII was 103 percent and 89.3 percent respectively. However, there is a need for emphasis on the creation of strong demand for girls' in secondary education and provide strong support for the secondary learning environment for all boys and girls (UNICEF, 2017).

The test score differences between boys and girls have been subject to many researchers (Buchmann, DiPrete & MCDaniel, 2008). Duckworth and Seligman (2006) found that boys tend to obtain a higher score on the standardized test while girls tend to get higher grades. National and international results show boys have a higher test score in mathematics while girls have higher test scores in reading (Marks, 2007). In the class XII Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate examinations (BHSEC), on average, girls are performing poorly compared to boys (Dorji, 2017). Girls are doing marginally better in English, Economics, Commerce, and Accounts while boys are performing better than girls in subjects like Mathematics, Science, Computer Studies, History, and Geography. Overall, the low scores by both boys and girls show a lower level of learning outcomes (BCSEA, 2014).

The Annual Status of Student Learning (REC, 2010 & 2011) studies show that boys outperformed girls in mathematics in class IV, VI, and VIII while girls outperformed boys in English. Similarly, the diagnostic standardized test (REC, 2008) cited in GNHC, (2019) found the learning outcomes of students were below the minimum expectations, unable to perform the literary task and basic numeracy. Many students were unable to understand concepts and apply knowledge to real-life situations. The Education without Compromise Report (Education Sector Review Commission, 2008) showed that the majority of students could not master the curriculum within the prescribed period. An education quality survey of primary schools in Bhutan (Classes II and IV) conducted by the World Bank in 2007 as cited in (MoE, 2014) found that the overall rate of learning was low. There were fewer numbers of girls studying science. The greater number of girls were pursuing Arts

and Commerce. Overall, at the higher secondary level, female enrollment was lower than that of boys with the total number of girls standing at 8,604 compared to 8,793 boys (MoE, 2014). Similarly, PISA-D Report (BCSEA, 2019) reveals that boys performed better than girls. Girls outperformed boys in Reading Literacy and Mathematical Literacy. However, both boys and girls performed almost at par in Scientific Literacy. Bhutanese students performed better in items of lower cognitive skills and significantly found Bhutanese students were below the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average and of the best education systems in Asia. According to Hodges (2001), male and female disparity is found in science courses, medicine, veterinary, English, and technology-based courses.

Gender-responsive classroom set-ups play a crucial role in the teaching-learning process. However, many schools face difficulty in classroom management due to the sheer size of students and limited classroom size (FAWE, 2005). Teachers and other educationists must be sensitized on the needs and situations of learners of both boys and girls (UNESCO, 2004). Studies show that there is a difference between boys' and girls' participation in the classroom. A gender friendly classroom environment can build harmonious relations between boys and girls at different stages of schooling. Several studies according to UNESCO (2004) have shown that many teachers do not believe in girls' intellectual capacity. Many teachers overwhelmingly believe that boys are superior to girls in mathematics and science. Students may not participate in the classroom because of fear and lack of confidence (Khan, Ahmad & Ahmad, 2014). Thus, learner-centered pedagogy is more applicable to teach girls and other students from marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2014) to promote equity.

So far, few studies were carried out on gender sensitivity in pedagogical practices in Bhutan. In the study by Dorji (2020), the Gender responsive pedagogy awareness and practice: A case of higher secondary school under Thimphu Thromde in Bhutan reveal that teachers teaching in higher secondary schools did not know about gender and gender responsive pedagogy. Teachers were not seen to practice gender

responsive pedagogy in the classrooms and their lesson plans also did not have elements of gender in education. The teachers use of language and classroom management did not reflect gender awareness. The study recommended the Ministry of Education to provide orientation workshops and conduct seminars to in-service teachers on gender to create awareness. The study also recommended the Colleges of Education of the Royal University of Bhutan to integrate gender in the teacher education programs and for its faculty model gender sensitive pedagogy. [SEP]

Having more women teachers does not guarantee a more equitable treatment of learners. Interviews with students showed that prejudicial statements are also often made by women as by male teachers (UNESCO, 2004). According to FAWE (2005), biased treatment by women teachers is often more blatant. Different treatment of boys and girls by teachers contribute to their learning and achievement (UNESCO, 2004). Teachers' attitudes, actions, and words can discourage girls and marginalized groups and hamper their progress in schools. There is a lack of gender sensitivity training in teacher training courses to sensitize teachers and school leaders to gender concerns. Very few countries have made efforts at integrating gender sensitivity into the teacher training course. Teachers need the training to understand and recognize their attitudes, perceptions, and expectation regarding gender thereby teacher interaction with students do not harm boys' and girls' learning experiences and achievement (UNESCO, 2014).

In the gender-responsive pedagogy model to address the quality of teaching in African schools developed by FAWE (2005), the module includes training teachers to use gender-equitable teaching-learning materials, lesson plans, school management, classroom arrangements, and interaction strategies, sexual harassment, and gender-responsive school management. The 6,600 teachers trained by FAWE in 2005 using the model had been reported to have become more responsive to gender issues and made enabling support to girls and improved participation and learning outcomes (as cited in UNESCO, 2014). A one-term pre-service teacher education course on gender equality in Turkey had brought significant

impact on female teacher gender attitudes and awareness (UNESCO, 2014). Educators in five African countries agree that senior policymakers, middle management, and teachers need to become more gender-sensitive. However, despite increased sensitivity among policymakers, they often do not support gender. Many policymakers consider that gender training is designed to 'develop confrontational attitudes towards men' (Wamahiu, 1997). However, UNESCO's (1999) study on countries like Nepal, India, Indonesia, Leo, and Thailand agree that it was very important to sensitize both men and women on 'gender issues' and work collectively towards 'gender-aware culture'. Ideas about gender are changing. The UK and other countries are moving towards altering laws about gender recognition (Paechter, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used the following research methodology:

3.1. Research Design

The study was qualitative in nature comprising of classroom observations and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

3.2. Population

Teachers and students in the secondary school under the Ministry of Education.

3.3. Sample Design

A non-probability convenience sampling was used to identify schools. Two schools each under Thimphu *Thromde*, Samdrup Jongkhar, Bumthang and Paro *Dzongkhags* making a total of eight schools under the Ministry of Education participated in the study. The selected schools were either semi-urban or urban by the nature of the location.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Classroom Observation

Classroom observation plays a central role in practice teaching. The classroom observations were carried out to gain the first-hand experience with what is happening in a normal classroom and identify common patterns in structure, instructional practice, displays, and how a

teacher gives feedback to learners. For example, a teacher may not realize that they usually ask boys questions about mathematics and how many times they call on boys and not girls. The classroom observation also provides an opportunity to see whether teachers were consciously practicing gender-sensitive pedagogy (UNESCO, 2005).

Based on the research objective, classes IX to XII were selected, as the learners in these classes are adolescents who experience gender-based identities. The classes and schools were selected based on their availability following official approval from the *Dzongkhag* Education Office, the consent by school principals, and the teachers' volunteerism. This was particularly important because the teacher volunteers need to feel comfortable having strangers observe their classes and it was important for the classroom to be as normal as possible. The participant teachers included both males and females. The teacher participants were instructed to carry out their normal teaching without putting any extra effort into any special preparation. 10 male teachers and six female teachers volunteered to be observed. The specific teachers were notified through their respective school principals ahead of the visits so that the visiting researchers do not disturb the teachers' normal teaching schedule.

Two researchers observed different classes of teacher participants' classes in STEM and Social Sciences and Humanities areas. The observation period ranged from 45 to 50 minutes following the school's lesson time table. Specific subjects covered by the observation included Economics, English, History, Physics, Geography, Mathematics, Chemistry, and Biology. Each class was observed twice with a gap of at least one day. This was done to collect real-time information in an actual context. The researchers filled in the observation form and made additional notes outside the form. The observation form covered mapping classroom arrangement in terms of the student sitting arrangement, the proximity of girl and boy students to the teacher, number of times the teacher called out boy and girl students, and teaching-learning materials used. Classroom information covered the class levels, number of students, number of boys and girls, whether the

class teacher and subject teacher was male or female, student group discussion, learning activities, whether displays and wall posters were gender-stereotyped, quality of language used with the boy and or girl student and the number of times the teacher called out boy and girl students to answer questions or write on the board.

3.4.2. Focus Group Discussion

While the schools were selected using convenience sampling, participant teachers and students were determined by the schools. Eight FGDs were conducted with 24 teachers and 44 students in four middle and higher secondary schools spread around the country. The FGD with the teachers and students were conducted separately.

Table 1. Number of teachers and students for the FGD

Sl. No.	Schools	Teachers		Students	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Higher Secondary School	3	3	6	5
2	Middle Secondary School	3	3	6	5
3	Central School I	3	3	4	7
4	Central School II	3	3	5	6
	Total	12	12	21	23

The FGD with students covered student participants' understanding of the term gender, how the sitting arrangement help or inhibit the participation of boys and girls, what kind of teaching approaches encourage equal participation of boys and girls, if the school provided equal access to libraries, computers, sports, science laboratories. As of 2019, the average student to computer ratio in public middle secondary schools was 26 students per computer and 22 students per computer in higher secondary schools (MoE, 2019).

The FGD has conducted around the teacher participants' understanding of gender and gender concepts, how a gender-responsive school is different and similar to ordinary schools, the emphasis of gender in policies, and how important was it for teachers to be mindful of gender sensitivity.

3.5. Ethical Consideration

The participants were briefed on the research aim and objectives. The participants were also brief on the confidentiality of the school, individual participant's identity, and the importance of their candid participation. The participants were informed on the option to opt-out anytime if they did not wish to participate. The permission on the engagement of students was provided by the school. The observers ensured minimal disturbance to the lessons. FGDs were completed within the stipulated time. As a part of research ethics, the researchers followed the existing school visits' official protocol. The researchers briefed the school principals about the topic and objective of the research and respecting the teacher and observed class' confidentiality. The specific teachers were briefed to keep the classroom teaching like their daily normal class so that the researchers can observe the class without any new or artificial creation.

3.6. Data Analysis

The observation of class recordings was analyzed for emerging themes. The FGD was recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data were coded and analyzed for emerging themes.

4. RESULT & FINDINGS

4.1. Classroom observation

4.1.1. Classroom setting and context

Generally, in all the classrooms observed, students were seated in groups of four and five except in a few classrooms where students were seated in traditional rows facing the blackboard. The groups were mixed in composition although where there are more girls the groups composed of more girls and vice versa. Students reported that grouping is usually done by class teachers based on the mixed ability of students. In a few classes, most girls were seated towards the front and boys towards the back, the reason cited by

the students for such a sitting was that girls were shorter than boys. Students were not allowed to change places throughout the year.

The classrooms observed were generally well lit with natural light and electric bulbs, students were seated comfortably on wooden chairs with tables. Some classrooms had table cloths and classrooms were decorated with student works, inspirational quotes, and portraits of kings and spiritual personalities. A few classrooms were crowded with a large number of students, but generally, the classrooms had between 20-25 students. Some classrooms had overhead projectors fitted from the class ceiling, whiteboard, and chalkboard while most classrooms had only chalkboard and whiteboard. Tables, chairs, walls, and cupboards (in some classrooms), were generally neat with no graffiti, but in some classrooms the floors were dusty.

Displays in classrooms were of the kings, queen, prince, and the spiritual head of Bhutan. Other displays consisted of wall magazines, inspirational quotations, dedicated posters for different subjects on the walls, announcements, and class timetable and class cleaning rosters. In a few classrooms, there were pictures of male thinkers and leaders with inspirational quotes. In a semi-urban Middle Secondary School, there was a row of pictures depicting fictional superheroes with similes written on them pasted on the walls (Examples, Be strong as Thor, Fight like Hulk, Never give up like Wolverine, Be cool as Deadpool, Make decision like Captain America, Like Thanos wait for the right time and make your dream come true). While there are encouraging messages, the fact that all these superheroes are males reinforces the typical stereotyping of males being strong, decisive, determined, and courageous.

Another example of stereotyping was how groups in classrooms had group names. One such name of a group consisting of only girls was "Girl Gang No Boy Allowed" evident of girls making a statement. The scribbled phrase "I love you" implied a typical adolescent behavior in terms of expressing emotions between teenage boys and girls.

Classroom cleaning was carried out by both boys and girls based on the cleaning roster prepared at the beginning of the school by the

class captains. There were both boys and girls as class captains. Blackboards and whiteboards are mostly cleaned by students sitting in the front. Both boys and girls were sitting in the front.

4.1.2. Pedagogical practice

In all the classroom observations, teachers mostly stood in the front usually in one place. Teachers are seen to have eye contact with all the students. Teachers normally moved about the class to monitor tasks assigned to students after a lesson was delivered. It was observed that not much discussion, interaction, or feedback happened during the monitoring. Although students were seated in groups, the teaching-learning methods used by the teachers were mostly traditional lecture, explanation, and question answer. Four teachers used PowerPoint to present slides, one teacher used a YouTube video related to the topic, one teacher used chart papers to assign group work for presentation and one teacher had decorated the class for the visit. Although well intended, it appeared artificial as such a classroom environment did not exist every day.

Normally lessons are well organized and presented within time, teachers are unable to put extra effort to encourage quiet students, especially girls because in almost all the classes girls appeared submissive, shy, quiet, while boys were seen to ask clarifying questions, raise hands frequently to answer questions. In an urban school although, the teacher provided equal opportunity to boys and girls to comment and answer, the boys were proactive, confident, and vocal in answering questions. A boy, for instance, volunteered to lead brain break during the process of the lesson on day two's observation. Another boy requested for extra time during group work. The teacher could call boys by names to share their understanding of the topic. The girls were silent. However, a girl shared her view without the teacher having to call her. Another girl raised her hand but the teacher could not see her and lost the opportunity to speak. During the individual work, the girls were active and fully engaged. The individual work was reading a topic related to the lesson. The girls were found reading attentively. The students shout out "bingo" upon completion of

their task. The boys and girls interacted with each other. A boy, for example, leaned a book to a girl. The teacher encouraged both boys and girls but the boys were confident and proactive. The girls were shy, silent, and less confident. However, there were a few girls who were confident and shared their views on the lesson.

In congested classrooms where students sat in traditional rows, the teacher could not move around the class freely. The teacher encouraged the students' shoulder partner to discuss during the discussion. However, based on the sex-segregated sitting arrangement, the student's discussion was limited within one sex. In a remote school, presentations were made by a group representative nominated by the members. Usually, girls came forward to present. In a couple of schools, the teachers seem to have been influenced by the observations because in observation on Day 2, which was after a day's gap, intended calling out to girls to present or answer questions or "now it's the girls turn, next will be boys turn" were seen. In other schools, the teachers encouraged both boys and girls, but boys were more confident and proactive. The girls were shy, silent, and less confident. But during the debrief meeting with the principal and the teacher, they shared that girls were disciplined, hardworking, studious, and were academically better than boys.

4.1.3. Classroom use of language

One teacher taught in English language and often used informal English words like "guys", whereas in another school the teacher used a mix of English, Dzongkha, and Hindi. For example, "Are ho samba", a phrase coming from a Hindi cinema where the actor uses it to order others carried a gendered message of "maleness" was used. In a semi-urban school, a teacher was observed using derogative words like "Deu" (meaning idiot) and "Zedu" (meaning useless) to refer to a boy who was not as active as other students in the class. The phrase in itself does not imply gendered meaning but carries a condescending connotation. It may affect the particular learner's self-esteem.

Teachers were observed to use words and phrases from other languages to reinforce participation or correct answer, or to create some

fun and excitement in the class. For example, a teacher used the French word (Sawa Sawa and We We) to gain a student's attention. It roughly translated to "class class, yes, yes" as was taught to teachers during a nationwide workshop on new methods of teaching, basically to draw students' attention, another teacher used a Sharchop word "Brokpa incha" to explain the idea of Himalayan salt in the lesson on trade and transport. The teacher exhibited a lot of energy, enough eye contact with students, and good use of gestures and had a good command of the English language. Another teacher in another school gave a hi-fi to a boy sitting at the back for a correct answer. Mindful use of classroom language by teachers can support direct instruction or create a conducive learning environment. In most of the classes observed, girls seemed confident and participated actively. In one class, the teacher had a good rapport with students, and classroom interactions appeared casual when the teacher used derogatory words to address boys who were not very active in the class. The words may not imply gender meanings, but it carries the condescending connotation that might affect the particular learner's self-esteem.

In an urban Higher Secondary School, the teacher seemed to be influenced by the knowledge of gender research and classroom observation. He seemed conscious and a bit tense. The teacher provided equal opportunity to boys and girls to comment and answer. The boys were active, confident, and forthcoming. They participated actively in answering questions. The girls were silent and appeared disempowered. Eight boys and only a girl participated in answering questions. Even she seemed less confident and used a soft tone to answer the question. Some girls actively made notes during the presentation. During the group work, the girls were searching for information using their cell phones on their own. The group work was on information search related to the lesson using a cell phone. They appeared shy to talk. Two boys discussed the group task with their face partners.

4.1.4. Debrief with teachers and principals

During the debrief with the school principals and teachers upon completion of the observations,

the principals shared about discipline and substance abuse issues mostly with boys while girls were disciplined and better at academics. A principal was proud to share how girls in that school topped the classes and how girls were selected to represent the schools at the national level competitions. In one school the principal was genuinely concerned about improving girl students' self-esteem and confidence. He invited the two female researchers to give a talk to the boarder girls after their class. For an hour, the two researchers shared their personal stories of building self-confidence and working towards being a confident and self-reliant person in life. Some girls open and shared their experiences.

In an urban Higher Secondary School, the principal encouraged girls to be prayer captain, a student office position shouldered by boys. He commented that the particular girl prayer captain was confident, lead the prayer with *Drilbu* (bell), and had a beautiful chanting voice. The student nicknamed her "*Aum Drilbum*" or female ringer implying a girl who held a bell. She did not mind and carried out her responsibility. She added that she was a little worried about her new responsibility as a prayer captain at her current school. So, she practiced *Drilbu* ringing at the hostel before the actual performance. She said that she could do it well with practice and she is proud of being a prayer captain. Some girls commented that although they are shy to show that skills in front of the boys they are proud of their peers. Besides, the principal made girls scout leaders and announced that he will make a girl leader in audiovisual. This shows that the need for gender-sensitive leaders to truly work towards girl students' empowerment in school education. Many teachers and school leaders although are keen to rectify the gender inequality in classroom practices, teachers are unaware of strategies. Teachers complained that textbooks which are the primary educational materials have not addressed gender biases in the content and illustration.

4.2. FGD with teachers

4.2.1. Understanding gender and gender concepts

The FGD revealed the existence of a limited understanding of gender. The concepts that were

known among the teachers generally included gender terms such as 'gender equality, gender discrimination, gender equity, gender bias, gender is male, female, and LGBT'. One female teacher participant believed that *"gender is socially constructed because we believe men will not cry only women will cry, men are stronger and women are weak"*. Two male teacher participants said, *"gender means confrontational attitudes towards men"*. All male and female participants share that, *"a woman has to live nine lives to be born a man"*. Three male teacher participants and two female teacher participants were confused with the words 'Gender' and 'Sex' and consider gender and sex as synonyms. One female teacher participants remarked, "gender means male and female". Discussions around the concepts reveal mixed understanding, such as giving equal opportunities for boys and girls meant gender equality as well as equity and addressing gender discrimination. During FGD, all teacher participants agree *"that there is a lack of gender sensitivity training in teacher training courses to sensitize teachers and school leaders to gender concerns"*. All teacher participants have not pursued any module related to Gender and Education or Gender and Development in teacher training colleges or higher education.

During the FGD, teacher participants shared extensively about how social and parental expectations and peer pressure influence the behavior and attitude of children. 16 teacher participants said that *"parents and society believe that girls do not need to study as much as boys because they can get married and they will be supported by their husbands. It is all right for girls to have basic education. Girls can become teachers and nurses. Boys should become doctors and engineers"*. Upon birth, society stamps how a boy and girl should behave, talk, dress up including color choices and toys. One female teacher shared an example *"girls can grow hair, wear a red, pink and floral dress. Can play with toys like Barbie dolls, can play the role of a mother or sister or daughter in playing family games. Boys can play with guns, plow, bow and arrow, and play football"*. Society at large and family, in particular, incite beliefs in children which are passed down generations. It is hard for children not to develop a particular belief, behavior, and look forward to shouldering a certain kind of responsibility in society as they enter adulthood. While there is a

deep respect for culture and tradition, beliefs that create inequality and injustice that do not add value to the development and progress of humankind requires attention.

4.2.3. Gender-responsive versus ordinary schools

Nine teacher participants did not have any points to share and said *"they were hearing words 'gender-responsive' verses 'ordinary schools' for the first time in their teaching career"*. Three teacher participants mentioned that *"a gender-responsive school will be one where students are respected, students can reach out to each other and ensuring equality for boys and girls in co-curricular activities"*. One teacher participants said *"gender-responsive schools are where students are told that all skills and knowledge are relevant to both boys and skills and where there is respect for intellectual power and capability in both men and women. Whereas an ordinary school will be those where there are gender biases, discrimination, backward in thinking"*. One female teacher participant shared some examples of how teachers of ordinary schools remind boys and girls to behave in ordinary schools, *teachers would be saying "Do not behave like a boy. Don't behave like a girl. Be like a girl. Try to be strong, boys are supposed to be strong'."*

4.2.4. Emphasis of gender in policy

Respondents at the FGDs reported not being aware of the explicit mention of gender in the school rules and policies. Participants paused to answer this question. Upon probing, seven teacher participants of the FGDs said that an emphasis on "mass participation" was there but they were not sure if it was a policy to encourage equal participation of both boys and girls. Two teacher participants (one male and one female teacher) mentioned that *"we focused more on teaching and we are least bothered on the policy. So far, our policy was all taken care of by the school management. Our job is to do well in the classroom"*. During FGD it was known that, while it was not a policy in the schools, the school conduct all co-curricular activities class-wise to encourage maximum participation. In all schools, it was found that leadership responsibilities such as school captainship and house captainship were equally represented by both boys and girls.

During FGD all teacher participants shared *"the school has a policy on disciplinary issues,*

disaster management, education policy but they have not heard about gender policy in school. They would like to know what gender policy is from the researchers so that we can incorporate it into our school policy".

4.2.5. Teachers being mindful of gender sensitivity

When asked how important it was for teachers to be mindful of gender sensitivity, all teacher participants shared about the current scenario of student participation programs and activities in the schools. Girls are more forthcoming in cultural programs while boys are more forthcoming in games and sports. All teacher participants said, *"in classroom participation, girls are usually shy, not confident and maybe are worried that they will be criticized and often boys participate in the class"*. Ten teacher participants said, *"I assign muscular tasks to boys which I think are heavy and require physical strength to boys"*. The pre-conceived notion among the students about boys and girls seem to be brought from home and family. As an example, one participant said that *"when I send my daughter to shop I go with her when I send my son, I only instruct him not to be naughty and break other's things and I don't go with him"*. It was also shared that in lower classes girls are more active but in higher classes, boys are more active and performed better. Six male teacher participants and two female teacher participants shared that *"it was important for teachers to understand the capabilities of both boys and girls and give them confidence, appreciate them, and make students know their potential and capability"*. Three female teacher participants said that *"children should be treated equally to make them feel confident, work collectively and feel positive"*. Four teacher participants said, *"I scold both boys and girls equally. I never differentiate between boys and girls in the school"*. Similarly, one female teacher participant said *"I never differentiate between boys and girls in the classroom"*. One male teacher participant reported *"mentoring students on the importance of acquiring skills for employment and livelihood. There was no stereotyping of trades for either girls or boys"*. Although participants brought out and shared observations and issues in differences in student participation and achievement, the importance of teachers being gender-sensitive to inform their actions did not come out clearly.

4.3. FGD with students

4.3.1. Understanding gender and gender concepts

All student participants shared about having heard about gender equality between ladies and gents, gender meant being a male or a female, gender equality meant males and females being equal. A male student shared *"In olden day boys and girls could not do the same thing but now with technology and mechanization what men can do women can do too, so this is gender equality"*. A female student participant said that *"they knew gender equality and equity but did not know if there was any difference between the two or if they meant the same"*. One female student participant shared examples of gender discrimination in society *"girls not allowed to make water offering, it was considered bad luck for the archers and that one would lose the game if girls crossed over the bow and arrows when a girl menstruates she was not allowed to touch kitchen utensils or touch pickles lest the pickles do not turn out to proper taste"*. A male student participant shared that *"dart game, locally known as Khuru which used to be predominantly played by men in the past, but today women to play Khuru for gender equality"*. One female student participant shared about participating in an international game as a part of gender participation when she was in class X, she saw women players at the games. Still, she said that she feels uneasy to play like boys but feels proud when she can play well. The general understanding of gender among students seems to be influenced by observations made in society and personal experiences. All student participants said that they have not studied any chapter or topic related to gender or how gender and education are related. The FGD also revealed that there is an absence of explicit reference to gender equality and equity in the school policy which is given in the annual student diary. However, teachers believe that schools promote "mass participation" of students in cultural, sports, and other co-curricular activities" to support gender equality among the students.

4.3.2. Teaching approaches used by the teacher

FGDs revealed that the popular teaching approaches used by teachers were traditional, such as the lecture method where teachers stand in the front of the class and explain and ask

questions while students take down notes, answer questions, and make notes. Five student participants shared that *“group work, group projects, discussions in groups helped them learn better. When teachers lectured and asked questions, girls shared that they feared being ridiculed by their classmates or scolded by their teachers and did not participate. When working in groups, they shared that inhibitions were not there and they were able to share their ideas freely”*. Ten student participants said that *“they felt encouraged and happy when teachers invited students to seek clarification and when they respectfully spoke a simple language”*. All participants mentioned that *“debates and inter house competitions where both girls and boys are given equal opportunities they participated willingly without anyone having to request or pressurize them”*. Three boys and two girl student participants reported having monthly student meetings, but generally, boys participated more in the discussion and decision making, while girls were shy to talk. The female student participants said, *“we request some of our male friends to talk on our behalf when there were some proposals or ideas that touched or appeared important for the girls”*. This could be a symptom of girls’ contributions having been undermined, which when prolonged over a period effect the confidence of girls. For example, men give less credit to women while women collaborate and work with men (Wu et al., 2020).

4.3.3. Access to library, laboratories, computers, and sports facilities

The FGDs revealed that generally there were no problems with toilets, water, class space, sports facilities, library, laboratory, and computers. Some problems that the participants shared were on the access, for example, there were not enough computers for optimal use of students, students share computers and that reduces the time they get to use the computers. In one or two schoolgirls were not able to play basketball due to some incidence of misbehavior in a past game. Fifteen female participants shared *“girls are not allowed to visit the school academic block during weekends”*. All-female participants shared about how girls missed out on learning during group projects. Usually, it was the boys in the group who would be engaged in internet research for materials for group projects, which they are

mostly able to do on weekends when they had no classes to attend. Due to a few incidences that disrupted the school, the whole opportunity of learning for students is missed out. Understanding the educational purpose and value of co-curricular activities for the wholesome development of human beings no school, teacher, school leader, and parent will fail to put in proper measures to support every child to take advantage of the facilities for the overall growth and development. There are examples of support from the school made consciously to support the less noticed ones. For example, in one school a girl has been appointed prayer captain, a position normally served by boy students. The newly appointed prayer captain shared about her experience, having felt very nervous knowing that prayer captainship was a boys' domain by practice in most schools. But support from the school leaders, teachers, and other students, both boys and girls, the new prayer captain enjoys leading the prayer sessions in the school. Such stereotypes can be broken in educational institutions such as schools. Through FGD, it was revealed that there is unequal access to libraries, laboratories, computers, and sports facilities in the schools.

4.3.4. Activities that promote equal participation by both boys and girls

Without a tinge of doubt, all student participants in all the FGDs said that *“equal participation by both boys and girls can be promoted through enforcement of mass participation by the school and encouraging equal participation in games and sports, literary activities, and cultural programs”*.

10 male participants and 10 female participants said *“group project works with a mix of boys and girls, high and low performers supported participation because working in smaller groups made members less awkward to work together”*.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All the schools that participated in this study did not cover gender themes in the school policy to improve the equal participation of boys and girls in the curricular and co-curricular activities of the school. There were challenges in the teachers’ and students’ understanding of gender in

education. There was neither gender awareness nor conscious effort by teachers to address gender inequality in the classrooms. The findings further exposed that there was a lack of gender sensitivity training in the teacher preparation programs that could have sensitized teachers and school leaders with gender concerns and a teacher's role in enhancing gender-friendly classrooms and schools. The classroom setups and classroom instruction and interaction did not address gender fairly. There is also unequal access to libraries, laboratories, computers, and sports facilities for both boys and girls. Therefore, it calls for integrating gender into educational programs and school activities. The teachers teaching secondary education needs gender sensitization through awareness programs and in-service professional development programs to reshape the pedagogical practices of teachers. Teacher education programs should introduce modules such as gender and development and gender and education so that the classroom environment is gender-sensitive, gender-friendly, free of gender biases in lesson delivery, learning tasks, in communicating, and in assessing learning.

The result and findings of the study is consistent with the findings of previous similar study done on gender responsive pedagogy awareness and practice: A case of higher secondary school under Thimphu Thromde in Bhutan by Dorji (2020). The findings from the present as well as the past studies had not reached the attention of teachers, educational policy makers and teacher training colleges within Bhutan because of a lack of professional forums and platforms for scholarly discourse. The smallness of the sample size could be a limiting factor in publicizing in the research because of the engagement of much fewer subjects, and that the research was based in classroom practice.

LIMITATION & IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some limitations were inherent in the study. It was not possible to have an equal number of male and female respondents since it was not within the ability of the researcher to select participants. The qualitative nature of the study limited it to

cover only a few schools, teachers, and students. Future research in the same field are recommended to employ a mixed method approach including surveys with students, teachers, policy makers; focus group discussions with parents, teachers and students; and interviews with policy makers and school leaders.

It is also recommended to include the faculty and students of the Colleges of Education to find out the relationship between the practice of in-service teachers and the preparation of pre-service teachers.

REFERENCES

- ADB. (2014). *Bhutan Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors*. Manila, Philippines: ADB.
- BCSEA. (2019). *Launch of Bhutan PISA-D National Report*. Thimphu, Bhutan: BCSEA.
- BCSEA. (2014). *Pupil Performance Report 2014, 2017*. Thimphu, Bhutan: BCSEA.
- Buchmann, C., DiPrete, T. A., & MCDaniel, A. (2008). Gender Inequalities in Education. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 319-337. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134719
- Chisamy, G., Dejaeghere, J., Kendall, N., & Khan, M. A. (2011). Gender and Education for All: Progress and Problems in achieving gender equity. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 2012, 1-12. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.10.004
- Dorji, T. (2020). Gender Responsive Pedagogy Awareness and Practices: A Case Study of a Higher Secondary School under Thimphu Thromde, Bhutan. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 1(2), 100-111. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v1i2.21>
- Dorji, T. (2017). Gender Gap in the Constituent Colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan-Reasons and Implications for Gender Equality. *RABSEL the CERD Educational Journal*, 18(2), 61-82. ^[1]_{SEP}
- Duckworth, A.L., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). Self-

- discipline gives girls the edge: gender in self-discipline, grades and achievement test scores. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 198-208.
- Education Sector Review Commission. (2008). *Education without Compromise Report*. Thimphu, Bhutan: Education Sector Review Commission.
- FAWE. (2005). *Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher's Handbook*. Nairobi, Kenya: FAWE.
- GNHC. (2019). *Twelfth Five Year Plan 2018-2023: Just, Harmonious and Sustainable Society through Enhanced Decentralization*. Thimphu, Bhutan: GNHC.
- iDiscoveri Education and the REC. (2009). *The Quality of School Education in Bhutan: Reality and Opportunities*. Thimphu, Bhutan: REC.
- Khan, F.W., Ahmad, S.M., & Ahmad, N. (2014). The Interplay between Gender and Student Classroom Participation: A Case Study of University of Swat. *PUTAJ-Humanities and Social Sciences*, 21(2), 41-50.
- Marks, G.N. (2007). Accounting for the gender gap in reading and mathematics: evidence from 31 countries. *Oxford Review Education*, 34 (1), 1-21.
- MoE. (2014). *Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014 – 2024: Rethinking Education*. Thimphu, Bhutan: MoE.
- MoE. (2018). *Annual education statistics 2018*. Thimphu, Bhutan: MoE.
- MoLHR. (2017). *Labour Force Supply*. Thimphu, Bhutan: MoLHR.
- National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan & Asian Development Bank. (2012). *Bhutan Living Standards Survey 2012 Report*. Thimphu, Bhutan: National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan & Asian Development Bank.
- NSB. (2017). *Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017*. Thimphu, Bhutan: NSB.
- OECD. (2011). Report on the gender initiative: gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/social/48111145.pdf>
- Paechter, C. (2020). Implications for gender and education research arising out of changing ideas about gender, *Gender and Education*. 1-15. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2020.1798361
- Reeves, H., & Baden, S. (2000). *Gender and Development: Concepts and Definitions Prepared for the Department for International Development (DFID) for its gender mainstreaming intranet resource*. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex).
- REC. (2010 & 2011). *Annual Status of Student Learning*. Thimphu, Bhutan: REC.
- Srivastava, G. (n.d). *Gender Concerns in Education*. New Delhi, India: NCERT.
- UNDP. (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators 2018 Statistical Update*. New York, USA:
- UNESCO. (1999). *Expert Meeting for the Preparation of Training Framework for Women Education Managers*. Dhaka, Senegal: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (1999). *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999*. Paris, France: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2000). *World Education Forum-Framework for Action*. Dakar, Senegal: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2004). *Gender Sensitivity: A training manual for sensitizing education managers, curriculum and material developers and media professional to gender concerns*. France: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2005). *Exploring and Understanding Gender in Education: A Qualitative Research Manual*

for Education Practitioners and Gender Focal Points.
Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2009). *Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA) Toolkit: Promoting Gender Equality in Education.* Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2014). *Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all.* France: UNESCO.

Ura, K., Alkire, S., Zangmo, T. & Wangdi, K. (2012). *A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index.* Thimphu, Bhutan: Centre for Bhutan Studies.

al.pone.0230043

Wamahiu, S.P. (1997). *The Empowerment of Women through Functional Literacy and the Education of the Girl-Child: Report of the African Conference in the Empowerment of Women through Functional Literacy and the Education of the girl-child.* Nairobi, Kenya: UNICEF ESARO.

Warrington, M., & Younger, M. (2020). The Other Side of the Gender Gap, *Gender and Education*, 12 (4), 493-508. doi: 10.1080/09540250020004126

Wu, C., Fuller, S., Shi, Z., & Wilkes, R. (2020). The gender gap in commenting: Women are less likely than men to comment on (men's) published research. *PLoS ONE* 15(4): e0230043. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230043>