

**INTEGRATION GENDER INTO CORE COURSES OF TEACHER  
EDUCATION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN UGANDA.**

**THEME: GENDER ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION**

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### ***Abstract***

*Teacher education is so far the most important and known way of preparing change agent in the school setting. How they are prepared in terms of the courses they are exposed to, pertaining to the values, beliefs, attitudes and practices significantly influence how they will in turn prepare citizens who will be charged with various responsibilities of societal development. Therefore, teachers who have been well trained would in turn be effective in their teaching, guiding and providing role models to both boys and girls.*

*This paper is a result of analysis of the course outline of the core courses of the 4 public universities namely Makerere University, Mbarara University, Gulu University and Kyambogo University, interviews and focus group discussion were held with staff teaching those courses and the students. The core courses analyzed included those of educational psychology, educational foundations and management and teaching, curriculum and media. The paper explored the extent to which academic staff in these universities prepare students to be gender sensitive teachers. In particular the study examined;*

- a) Staff and students understanding of gender and whether it is important for students to be exposed to knowledge on gender issues*
- b) Whether there were gender specific topics in the course outline of the core courses*
- c) Whether the academic staff integrated gender issues when teaching topics where gender could be integrated.*
- d) Challenges teaching staff encountered in integrating gender in their courses.*

*The findings showed that both the students and staff confirmed the importance of acquainting students with gender issues. However analysis of the courses showed that only 30% of the courses in Makerere University, 28.6% in Mbarara and 10% in Kyambogo and none in Gulu University had gender specific topics. Nevertheless some of the staff pointed out during interviews that they integrate gender issues when teaching. There are several challenges that staff faced as they integrate gender in their teaching. These included inadequate knowledge and skills of integration, inadequate time, large class size and attitude of the students.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Uganda, like other country places great importance on achieving equity and equality between men and women in all sectors. Since 1986 gender issues have continued to be the central focus of the Government of Uganda. This is evident in documents such as the Uganda Constitution (1995), White Paper on Education (1992). ESIP (1998 –2003), ESSP (2004 –2015) as well as other international policy pronouncements to which Uganda is signatory such as Millennium Development Goals and Education for All. In economic sector, a third of the ‘entandikwa’ credit scheme was put aside for women and

youth. In politics, structures of governance were created that opened channels for women to voice their dissatisfaction and ideas. These include the local councils introduced from village to district level. It is mandatory according to the constitution that ‘one-third of the membership of any local government council shall be women...’ (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995). Gender policy was also formulated in 1997 in order to redress gender bias and imbalance in Uganda. There is even a woman representative in parliament for each district in Uganda. The process of appointing women to senior ministries, judges and policy makers was accelerated. As a result, over the decades there have been tremendous changes on the status of and role of women.

In education sector, UPE policy provided opportunity for both boys and girls. In addition improvement of school environment was undertaken to ensure that it was conducive for girls. Article 30, for example provides that all Ugandans have access to education irrespective of sex, religion, and political or other differences. Furthermore, the National Strategy for girls’ Education was launched in June 2000. The strategy highlight 18 barriers referred to as the “wheel of misfortune” for the girl child. For example, socio cultural, patriarchal culture, lack of efficient sanitation and inhibition barring girls from male dominated science, poverty which influences parents choices on who should go to school, inadequate law enforcement of available laws and regulations which would protect the interest of the girl child. The strategy aims at changing the “wheel of misfortune into “wheel of fortune”. There has also been screening of textbooks for gender sensitivity All of these demonstrate commitment to achieve gender equity and equality between men and women.

Whereas the above positive changes are highly recognized, they seemed not to have influenced activities and curriculum of teacher education institutions. Research shows that teachers do not come into the classroom as gender-neutral personalities (Weiner, 1999). Having been brought up in the wider society, teachers are likely to pick up the dominant ideology in society. Teachers, like others in society, internalize patriarchal gender ideology through socialization at home, in the community and informally from the religious institutions. Such cultural beliefs in turn are unconsciously or consciously exhibited in the teachers’ classroom practices. Furthermore, this foundation determines how they interpret the curriculum, what they expect from individual pupils and defines their interaction. This in turn is likely to affect the teaching – learning process of boys and girls differently. Negative perception towards girls’ education is a historical phenomenon that was introduced when formal education started. As Ssekamwa explained,

*Especially in the early years of school education in Africa, girls who studied tended to receive less attention from men teachers again due to the feeling of many men that after all the role of women was to get married even if they attended school. So it was rather not necessary to spend ones time laboring hard to see to it that those girls who come to school gained as much as boys (1971, p. 10).*

Unfortunately 100 years after introduction of formal education this has not changed. As late as 1992 Uganda Government White Paper on education pointed out girls' education was being hindered more by school factors, in addition to cultural factors.

Yet, teacher education is so far the most important and known way of preparing change agents. How teachers are prepared in terms of courses they are exposed to pertaining to values, beliefs, attitudes for practices significantly influence how they will in turn prepare citizens who will be charged with various aspects of societal development. As Delamont observed,

*Schools are important agents of socialization... those who wish to change society frequently suggest that education will be the vehicle (Delamont, 1980. p. 3).*

Globally teachers are expected to play several roles singly or collectively so that the investment in education can have desired effects. Teachers define who will be taught what will be taught how it will be taught and the standard of evaluating what has been taught. Success in educational reforms would depend on the teachers' awareness of the new changes, their attitudes to it and incorporation of the reforms in the daily conversation, professional values and commitment and knowledge of content. Gender sensitive teacher would be cautious of the likely outcome of their actions and behaviors on the learners, both boys and girls. In 1980, Delmont asserted that many of the training institutions do not produce gender sensitive teachers (Delmont, 1980). Twenty years after, this still appears to be true of teacher training institutions in Uganda. This is evident by the continued outcry about gender problems in schools (MacMinn, 1997, Gender Alert, 1997).

There are several activities of the teacher that impact differently on boys and girls, for example, the teaching styles, classroom interaction and management (Smith, 1991). Both women and men teachers pay less attention to girls compared to boys and that boys get more attention because they are aggressive and stubborn while girls are quiet (MacMinn, 1997; Gender Alert, 1997). In questioning technique, research shows that girls are asked open-ended questions requiring "Yes or No" answers, while boys are asked challenging questions (Gender Alert, 1997). Harshness of teachers has also been reported as reasons for drop out (Carasco, et al 1996).

Teachers have also been found to label and predict certain learning and/or behavioral outcomes of their students. Teachers tend to behave in a manner that sometimes unconsciously encourages pupils to perform and /or behave in a way predicted initially. In a study conducted in Kenya, Wamahu (1994) found a link between the initial assumption of the teachers about pupils' potential and the actual performance in class. Thus Odaga & Henveld. (1995) asserts if teachers' interpretation of the curriculum, interaction and delegation of duties are not shaped, these will constitute a hidden curriculum to push the girls out of the school. A study in Ethiopia by Tsige (1999) showed that where teachers have been supportive, girls performed well and many completed their studies. Good relationship between teachers and students encourages students to attend class regularly while poor relationship discourages them from

attending. To what extent do teacher training institutions in Uganda prepare teachers who are sensitive to the needs of both girls and boys?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This was mainly a qualitative study that relied on document analysis, interviews and focus group discussion. A random sample of 80 third year students (20 from each university) and 25 teaching staff was made. Among the staff 10 were selected from Makerere University and 5 from the other 3 universities. Variation in numbers of staff selected from each university was because Makerere University had more academic staff than the 3 universities. Third year students were selected because they had covered all the in-service teacher education courses each university offered.

Focus group Discussions (FGD) were held with 4 groups of 5 students each. Male and female students were separated had during FGD. The FGD the discussion centered on identification of the courses that provided some knowledge on gender and whether the teachers taught them. Interviews were held with the lecturers. Interviews provided opportunity to discuss in-depth academic staff perception about gender, whether the courses they taught had specific gender issues, whether they integrated gender in topics where gender could easily be included.

Data was analyzed qualitatively. Themes were identified from the responses and categorized. Thereafter percentages were calculated.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Staff and students understanding of gender and whether it is important for students to be exposed to knowledge on gender issues**

Both staff and students were asked their understanding of gender, 56% (14 out of 25) defined it as biological difference between boys and girls while 44% (11) explained it in terms of social construct of beliefs about women and men. Various responses given by the staff included "*being a male or a female*", "*considering the interest of both sexes*". Similarly among the students 28% defined it as a social construct while the majority 72% referred to the biological aspects. The responses given were;

“it is a mixture of both males and females in all aspects”

“It is male and female involvement in society”

“Tendency to balance and incorporate the two sexes”

It is clear from these findings that a large number of staff in the schools and faculties of education in the public universities associate gender with biological issues and reduces their ability to include and integrate gender in their courses.

When they were asked whether it was important to for teacher trainees to be equipped with skills and knowledge on gender, respondents unanimously agreed. This was reported

by the majority (81%). However, although the staff affirmed the importance of gender, very few made efforts to either include as a topic in their course outlines or integrate them when teaching as discussed below. In addition some of the respondents reported that it was better to have a course on gender rather than integrate. This is discussed below.

### **Integration verses whole course approach**

There were worries from the teaching staff that integration was not the best way of producing gender sensitive teachers. This category of staff preferred gender issues offered as an independent course. Their fear was based on the difficulties of integrating and that it might not be taken as an important aspect in the course and could be left out. One of them wondered, “how integration should be done; how will one ascertain that it was being done? This worry confirms that of Kwesiga (1998) who reported that integration would make gender invisible and easily muzzled up. As Kwesiga argued, integration was done when the subject was not fully accepted to stand on its own and where it was difficult to secure academic tenure. The situation seemed to have changed since the study showed that academic staff recognized the value of gender sensitive teachers. Consequently some respondent suggested a new course to cater for gender. As one explained,

*I would rather suggest that it is made a separate core course in the school of Education other than adding components of gender to the existing core courses. It might be easier to handle and administer one course rather than scattered units.*

On the other hand, there were those who preferred integration. Their response was that believe that if gender issues were made autonomous, they would run the danger of being isolated and therefore becoming ineffective and not being taken seriously. It was pointed out that whole course approach would only be successful if the course was compulsory. It would make it hard for students to dodge since it would be acceptable with space for it in the timetable.

### **Availability of gender specific topics in the course outlines of the core courses**

Analysis of the courses revealed that there are 20 (including school practice) core courses in Makerere University, 30 in Gulu University, 14 in Mbarara University and 15 in Kyambogo University. All these courses are spread across the three years. In all the 4 universities there were very few courses that had gender specific topics. In Gulu University, none of the courses had a topic on gender issues while in Makerere university 30% of the courses, in Kyambogo University 10% and Mbarara Universities 28.6%. For example, Makerere University had topics such as included “Equity in Education” “equality in educational opportunities” and “feminization of teacher education” which enables students to explore gender issues.

### **Integration of gender issues when teaching topics where gender could be integrated.**

Since the staff were optimistic that gender was important, attempt was made to find out whether they integrate it during their teaching. The students reported that some of their teachers integrated gender during their classes. They singled out sociological and

psychological courses. Analysis of the course outline however revealed that there were a number of topics where staff could easily integrate gender issues. For instance, “Education and the labor market”, “performance indicator in education”, “pupils’ control and discipline”, “what should be taught and how it should be taught”, “democratic concepts in education and the labor market”, “wastage alienation”, “teacher education program for teachers in rapidly changing world”, “interaction as a feed back”, “classroom environment”; “physical, emotional behavior”. The respondents agree that they could bring in gender issues in those topics but they do not have the time.

However, findings from the staff showed that, although there were some topics where gender could easily be integrated, the majority (81%) did not integrate gender issues when teaching. These voices showed their responses,

*I try to avoid such situation. I do not see students as block A and B but as learners and address them as such. Using ‘he’ or ‘she’ takes so much time. May be at the secondary school level. I mean telling these people that women can be doctors. When you go to teach, they see you, a female then a male teacher; then they know that women and men do the same thing (A man, Gulu University).*

*Integration? No. I don’t because it is rarely the central concern of the issues I teach. We follow the historically determined modes of delivery knowledge (A man, Makerere University)*

*When learners are in class, they are not taken as boys and girls only. In many cases they are more than boys and girls. There are individual difference caused by peer pressure, and home background. So the issue of girls and boys do not arise ( A woman, Kyambogo University).*

*This issue of he or she does not help much. I do not see how far one can go in creating gender awareness.*

These findings illustrate that when there is no specific topic, it would be difficult to expect the teachers to introduce them in class. One respondent explained that integration was not easy. “Apart from using examples, what does one do?” he questioned. Another suggested that the issue of gender needed rethinking because ‘we also need to study the boys’ situation, girls are at an advantage.

Although, few staff integrated gender issues when teaching, many reported that were gender sensitive. The basis of these response was that during classes they gave equal chances to male and female students to ask and answer questions. Secondly, involving both sexes in class activities and stopping boys from booing girls. The following showed the responses.

*Yes, I give deliberately boys and girls opportunity to air their views. I try to give equal opportunity to all. I bring gender issues in class; so by creating space for such issues I promote awareness about gender (A man, Makerere University).*

*'When boys boo down girls, I bring it to their notice and tell them its oppression'  
(A woman Mbarara University)*

*'I always talk about gender, emancipation especially for women'. Encourage the female students to aspire for leadership position' (A woman, Kyambogo University).*

Highlighting gender issues in the courses is meant to provide learners with basic knowledge that would help them function in a world that is becoming increasingly gender sensitive. Using actions or treating students 'equally' as explained by the respondents may not yield positive results since the learners might not realize the equal treatment being given by the teacher. Secondly, they might not recognize that they are expected to emulate the practice of their teachers. Thus another respondent pointed out that it was possible to identify the gender problems during teaching but many times teacher educators did not show student teachers on how to deal with such problems when confronted with them. 'How do you teach how to do it? You can come out with a rich course outline but how do you do it? Another respondent wondered.

### **Challenges teaching staff encounter in integrating gender in their courses.**

According to the respondents, the major constraints in integration of gender issues in the core courses included lack of awareness about gender issues, lack of time and attitude of the students. These are discussed below.

#### **i) Lack of awareness of how to integrate**

Integration was reported as difficult in situation where many people did not know how to integrate. Do they have the ability to recognize gender issues?, a lecturer from Kyambogo University asked. One of the respondents also complained that those who sensitize on gender issues usually tell them about the problem but hardly give them ways of dealing with it. This was particularly in relation to teaching. Another respondents summarized the problem of lack of awareness as follows.

*Lack of coordination, consistence and awareness on the part of the lecturers. Are we gender sensitive ourselves; both the female and male lecturers in this school of Education? Is the environment conducive? These are the constraints I can mention (A man, Makerere University).*

Furthermore, many teachers teach the way they were taught. It is not surprising that one of the respondents reported that his failure to integrate gender issues when teaching was due to his educational background. He explained,

*I do not really integrate. Gender issues were not emphasizes during my training. Perhaps this affects my teaching. How do I do it when I have not been told?(Makerere University).*

It is surprising that such response came from Makerere University where there is a fully fledged department of Women and Gender Studies and Gender mainstreaming division.

In 1990 Makerere University pioneered establishment of Department of Women and Gender Studies. Since then the department has organized several short courses and research grants on gender issues. In addition gender mainstreaming has been one of the priority areas in the strategic plan since 2000. Inability to reach all the staff in Makerere University is a reflection of weaknesses in the support structure. Alternatively it could also mean that changes in the policies do not translate into changes in the organizational culture.

There was general agreement among some of the informants that in order to produce gender sensitive teachers, there is need to deliberately make teacher educators gain awareness about some of the ways in which gender could be brought in the forefront in their teaching. They would in turn help the student teachers prepare for the dynamic environment they are likely to get in the schools, help student teachers understand the existence of gender difference among learners, how they can cater for them in their teaching and avoid the 'subconscious' discrimination or bias.

#### **ii) Lack of time**

The issue of time also featured very strongly among the answers given by the respondents. The respondents explained that the strict semester system and the need to complete the syllabus prevents them from mentioning any thing that would side tract the students. Many believe that integration might require increasing contact hours of each of the core course, which will cause a problem with timetabling. One warned that integration should be in such a way that the content was not bulky.

#### **iii) Large class size**

Poor instructional methodologies were also identified as a hindrance to successful integration. Academic staff explained that with the large numbers they handle all they could afford to do was lecture and walk out. The number of students in core courses ranges between 300 to 400 per class. They complained that with such large numbers they cannot give everybody chance to express themselves or voiced their fears.

#### **iv) Attitude of the students**

There was also fear that students would regard gender aspects as none issues and a digression.

*These students we have, many who do not even know why they are here. Many do not want to be teachers. So if you bring in other issues they may lose interest. If you do not annoy them, they will annoy you. I do not know how you can overcome it.*

The fear of this respondent is the reaction of others. She further explained that

*We have to think about people's attitude to gender. When so much drumming has been done already, people become negative. People are fed up, as women have not lived to their expectation. Women do not come to lead as women; they must take on men's character.*

One of the male respondents used this chance to put across what has been bothering him for a long time. He explained that they are a product of history and that history needs to be removed slowly, although he acknowledges that historically women have been marginalized. According to him the method women activists' use in attempting to change things is a problem. This is his view

*Cultural beliefs are still a force. The methodology used is still poor. People want to change issues, which has been there since biblical times over night. Yet it should be evolutionary approach. I mean a slow process (A man, Department of curriculum, Teaching and Media)*

The approach used to change things should be slowly. 'See what the causes/ problems are and solve them first'. He cautioned.

This study revealed that, respondent agree that gender was an important issue that could not be ignored by educationalists and they were eager to see it incorporated into their courses. As one respondent explained, 'slowly a few of us should begin with hope that we shall be able to realize the goal.' Meanwhile they also reported that there was need for more awareness and that mass sensitization program would be the best starting point for conscientization. Others also explained that there was need to sensitize the teachers and the instructors themselves so as to enable them incorporate gender aspects in their teaching. This would entail restructuring the education system to be gender sensitive would so as to allow them more time to bring in gender issues.

### **Conclusions**

This study has shown that although government, non governmental organization and community based organization are advocating for gender equity and equality in schools, few of the teachers passed out from public universities have the skills and knowledge on gender issues. Academic staff believed the curriculum could be adjusted to cater for gender issues and they are aware that teachers' action affect girls and boys differently but many did not know how to effectively help their students overcome this problem. There is need to make all the teaching staff clear on how to integrate them otherwise independent course may be a better option. As seen from this study, lack of gender specific topics meant gender issues would not be integrated into such courses. It is therefore better to clearly spell out the topics that are important to cover if the products of teacher education institutions are to be gender sensitive.

There were many challenges that were identified by the respondents for example, lack of awareness of the teacher educators, lack of time and poor instructional methodologies. Many of these challenges could be overcome. Time issue bothered many because they felt that the university required them to complete the syllabus in order to set the university examination. In addition, the external examiners are there to oversee you work through the examination. Many therefore felt adding on things that were not stipulated as important would prevent them from completing their syllabus. Overcoming the challenges are complex as handling one without other would still not lead to success. There is need for a multi-pronged approach when dealing with constraints.

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