



Gender Rights Disparity among teachers: Evidence from schools located in Madibeng District of the Bojanala in Brits

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Abstract

South Africa has been concerned about gender rights inequalities in education for many years. Gender disparity still seemed to prevail in hidden ways. We considered the changes in Bill of Rights and the behaviour of educators towards gender over the last 25 years. Drawing from current studies, it is clear that educators subject learners towards gender inequalities and are unaware of such behavior. Therefore, we argue that, whilst there have been changes in the education arena, gender equality remains unrealized. We used qualitative methods to collect data from 20 teachers (n=20) from Madibeng District. The findings suggest that feminism; masculinity; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people (LGBT); and Gender Based Violence (GBV) remain prevalent in schools despite the rights enforced by the Constitution Act 108 of 1996. We concluded that gender rights require a change in the social structure as it affects in their cultural practice.

Keywords: *Gender Rights; Gender Disparity; Awareness; Equality; Hidden Policies; Feminism and Masculinity*

Introduction

Large and continual hidden gender gaps in education are well observed in public schools in South Africa explaining their existence has proven more difficult. Gender rights awareness in public schools has a number of dimensions together with inequalities in the treatment of boys and girls students as much as LGBT students in schools that are completely hidden in schools according to Adebowale, O. F. (2012). I am therefore interested in seeing gender equality to be realized and therefore championed by educators in educational settings in South Africa. In the words of Mägi et al (2015:191) education is from time to time considered as to be the most significant instrument in shaping societal attitudes and therefore empowering the next generation. Moreover, the schools in particular are considered where equal opportunities such as gender equalities are protected and mainstreamed. Mägi et al (2015:191) also allude to the fact that through total education, it is most vital to mainstream gender equalities in curricula, culture, teaching materials and methodologies to protect the reproduction of gender stereotype that may as

well influence bullying, harassment and gender based violence that goes with learner's choices as well. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do educators perceive gender equality in schools?
2. What is the level of gender awareness among teachers based on hidden curricula cited in my proposal?
3. What are the expectations and attitudes of educators in terms of treating issues of gender disparity during their specialization expectations?

Relevance of the Study

Transition from Bantu education to democratic education set the stage for social development at the personal and the societal level. The study is very important for policy makers as it develops knowledge on how the provision of equal gender in education could change the cultural trajectories that affect educational experiences of learners. The creation of appropriate gender conditions enables people to access such rights and can also be translated into substantive equality through the enhancement of substantive freedoms and broader paradigm shift in the South African context. Thus, a study in this regard could contribute significantly to enhance the delivery of balanced gender education in the South African context in three ways, namely, by encouraging the acquisition of authentic knowledge in gender equality use rather than through disparity exercises; an evaluation of the education system in South Africa reveals that prior inequalities compromising constitutional gender rights in South African schools; and therefore, policy-makers need to identify ways to deal with such gender issues in the communities so that the full utility gender equality experiences can be achieved at the individual and societal level. The study could also make a significant contribution in enlightening South Africans about how gender disparities play role in defining the significance attached to education and youth development in the country and help in policy formulation.

Review of Literature

Current policies relating to gender equity in education are categorized into four main categories: Anti-discrimination legislation, equal access to educational resources, and inclusive education. Anti-discrimination legislation, as indicated above, include legislation extending the provisions of the conventions of the United Nations for which South Africa is a signatory to. Equal access to education policies include the Constitution Act no 108 of 1996. This act lays the foundation for human rights and broader transformation in South Africa. The Constitution, as supreme law of the country, ended all apartheid practices and introduced a democratic framework through the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights have far reaching results. One of the main contribution of the Bill of rights is bringing equality men and women everywhere, and between boys and girls in schools. For this reason, a set of measures related to promoting non-gender-stereotype are introduced to foster gender equality. Thus, such measures with provisions of 'girl friendly' settings are introduced in schools. The measures shifted the focus from boys to girls with the aim of empowering the girls to promote of their self-esteem, and create opportunities for growth and career advancement through support from teachers and peers., Van der Westhuizen (2010:151) alluded to the fact that a school policy provides guidelines and allows the executor to make decisions within certain procedures and frameworks. It is from these bases that certain policy guidelines of the school demarcate learners according to gender. Broadly, it is our view of that equity policy regime is favorable to protection and promotion of the rights of all learners irrespective of their gender.

Equity policy framework attacks the hidden curriculum was enormously used to re-inforce stereotypes among boys and girls exhibited in teaching and learning. For instance, the hidden curriculum is inherent in practices such as when teachers separate learners according to social-class, gender, race and

background and mostly consist of unexpressed and unexamined and therefore unusually values, ideas and behaviour conveyed to students teachers (Nelson, et al, 2004). Although these values, ideas and behaviour are unintended to harm, they enforce the stereotypes of gender inequality. Therefore, through these practices learners learn their defined role as they go on in their day to day teaching and learning. Later they translate into learnt human values, social relationships and ideologies rooted within the dominant human cultures.

Another way in which gender disparity is enforced is through what is known as planned curriculum. Planned curriculum is commonly manifested in the arrangements of classroom seating, chores such as wiping the board and cleaning given to learners from the early age as grade R until secondary school (Nelson, et al, 2004). It is clear that gender segregation is associated with arrangements of resources and the distributions thereof. It can be concluded that, how learners are placed in the classrooms clearly promotes gender disparity where the majority of girls are from time to time placed at the front part of the classroom and the majority of boys are placed at the back part of the classrooms for reasons only known to teachers.

Furthermore, Chisamya et al (2012) argue that the current spade of Gender-based violence originates from severe punishment that is meted to girls when they are young and are expected to persevere and tolerate into adulthood. In their eminent study, Chisamya et al (2012) conclude that abuse and violence currently ravaging the country is often related to harsh discipline by teachers or parents.

Literature also deals with teachers' responsibilities in regard to the establishment of gender equality. Bluestein (2001) argues that teachers have the responsibility to shape the future by helping children to be more respectable individuals by teaching them about human rights. In other words, teachers should instill in the young minds a culture of human rights. In addition to building a culture of human rights among children, Bluestein (2001) demonstrates that learners should be taught claiming a right imposes a responsibility. It means that learners must be taught to treat others like they want to be treated. Bluestein (2001) also argues teachers should watch their language. They avoid using harassment words to any child. Teachers should also avoid using stereotypes when dealing with learner with disability, different religious groups, different sexual orientation etc. The use of sexual language when communicating with boys or girls such as you "*don't be a sissy, you run like an old lady, this boy is too old for my liking*" and other *sexist languages used against most boys and girls in schools are a clear promotion of gender discrimination by teachers* should be avoided at all times (Ornstein and Levine, 1993). Teachers are expected to act *in loco parentis* towards the realization of and understanding of educational and constitutional rights as enshrined in the Bill of right.

Methodology

We used qualitative research approaches to collect data from twenty sampled teachers (n=20). Our choice was guided by the complexity of gender awareness dynamics and attitudes towards gender equality which are addressed in our research questions. The rationale for using qualitative approach is grounded on the fact we needed to consider context of the participants and to capture the dynamics and nature of gender disparities in schools as (Creswell, 2005). We considered that advise of Ivankova et al. (2006) who argues that qualitative approach is useful for studies that need to address contextual constraints in the analysis of data. The study was designed according to case study principles and used focus group interview for a more robust analysis as depicted by Ivankova et al (2006). The final sampling framework for this survey was 20 educators (n=20) from the schools in Madibeng District of the town, Brits, North West Province. The data collection was done through focus group interviews to explore comprehensive awareness of teachers and to explore their attitudes in relation to gender equality realization in schools. We used hermeneutic steps of data analysis.

Results

The results are presented in themes. are represented and discussed in the order of their appearance below.

Familiarity of Rights

Educator's responses to the question on whether they are familiar with equality rights shows that they are familiar with gender rights in the Republic of South Africa. This means that they fully know all equality laws that protect all genders from social irregularities. Hence participant A said:

"I am familiar with the Bill of rights and the equality clause. Those clauses are related to affirmative action law, and gender equality law. At school we even have South African Schools Act which echoes the need for equality in opening access to schooling".

However, some teachers argued these rights are not practiced and adhered to within the school settings. They argue that most educators still segregate most boys from girls during the admission processes at schools and therefore legislature are not implemented accordingly. In support of this participant D said:

"But here in our school boys and girls are treated separately. For instance, in the classroom boys separately from girls in rows, and during morning assembly girls stand in separate rows. We assign chores according to gender. A boy will expected to wipe the board. Girls will sweep the classroom".

It appears that teachers know the provisions of the law but do not practice those laws in their daily practice. This creates uncertainty and perpetuate old practices. Consequently, laws remain unimplemented. Hence for theory development we can say that knowledge of law does not always translate into implementation.

The Hidden Curriculum

Most participants agreed to the fact that hidden curriculum, tailored policies, sex roles, division of gender roles and cultural mind-set amongst others prevail in public schools in the Republic of South Africa thus perpetrated by educators from all walks of life. Hence participant F said:

"I know the laws and what policies expect us to do. But it is difficult. From our childhood we know what is expected of boys and girls and we allocate chores and duties according to our traditional way of doing things".

The finding depicts the difficulty of breaking away from traditional practices. The teachers are struggling to implement gender equality laws as a result of built in perceptions and understanding the way boys and girls should behave.

Planned Curriculum

In the literature review we mentioned the issue of planned curriculum as the contributor to the differentiated treatment of boys and girls. We defined it as the arrangements of classroom seating, chores such as wiping the board and cleaning given to learners. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) arrange workshops and seminars to assist teachers deal with gender equality. In our research we asked participants who attended workshops, in-services training and seminars in and outside schools as part of gender rights awareness whether the interventions have enabled them to implement gender rights in planned curriculum. Participant B said:

“The workshops and seminars are very interesting. We gained more knowledge. However, translating that knowledge into classroom practice is often difficult. I feel guilty if I give boys chores that need physical labor. For example, when moving tables and chairs during seating arrangement I feel guilty when I order girls to do it. It feels like I am abusing them”.

It seems assimilated traditional ways of living overpower teachers. Hence, even they receive training they return to old ways upon returning to the classroom and are unable to take lead in gender rights awareness roles in their day to day interaction with boys and girls in schools. As a result of cultural mind-set teachers still adhere to old adage “some gender part belong in the kitchen”. This will also include elements such as stereotype attitude in community interpretations.

Structural Inequality

The recognition of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people (LGBT) amongst others in the school settings requires adjustment of infrastructure. For instance, sharing common separate bathrooms is a problem to LGBT community. It is clear that schools need additional infrastructure to reasonably accommodate LGBT learners. When asked about this, most educators attest to the fact that infrastructure impede total recognition of other genders and this is the same to activities such as sports. Responding to a question about this, participant H said:

“This is a problem. The infrastructure of our school was designed according to the old ways of living. There are separate toilets for boys and girls. I think this violates the rights of LGBT. In terms of equality law, the government must build unisex toilets that can be used by all genders”.

Reacting to the idea of building unisex toilets as panacea participants J said:

“Let us not solve a problem by creating another problem. Creating unisex toilets will cause problem. I mean in the country we are facing highest crime rates. Among these we have rape incidents at the highest level. I think unisex toilets will cause more rapes and other abuses”.

Teacher Responsibility

In the literature review we discussed the issue of teacher responsibility as a requirement for the promotion of gender awareness. We also indicated a set of expectation for teacher in promoting gender awareness. We also asked them in the focus interviews what they think their responsibilities are. With regard to acting in loco parentis, the participants said:

Participant M argued that:

“Raising other people’s children is not easy. Most of the time children learn their behavior from parents or their peers. As teachers we occupy a precarious position. If any wrong thing can happen to a child we are blamed. Parents will say their children learnt that from teachers. I think it is unfair to blame teachers in such instances. I think our role is very academic”.

On the contrary participant O said:

“No our role is not limited to academic issues for the child. We need to act as role models for the children. We need to act morally and ethically all the time. We should show children how people can live democratically”.

Agreeing to participant O, participant E said:

“I agree but I need to indicate that acting on behalf of a parent is not easy. For example, between us parent we may not share the same religion, class or the same culture. These complicates the role. What I disapprove as a teacher may be approved by the parent and vice versa”.

Discussion

Teachers expressed their awareness of “gender equality”. For them, gender equality meant that there should be no segregation between the sexes and that both girls and boys should be treated equally. Swinson and Harrop (2009) explain gender equality in a similar way that both girls and boys should have the same rights and opportunities no matter what sex they have. Even though some teachers did not give full explanation for their answers, it still shows that the teachers are aware of the meaning of the term gender equality. However, it was clear that other teachers were more familiar with the actual activities.

The findings suggest that some teachers do not practice rights in teaching and learning environments. It appears that most educators still segregate most boys from girls. Gender inequalities and diversity in education are either largely ignored or the focus of hostility and bias across the South African schools. Nevertheless, there are some minor indications that educators are beginning to become aware of this form of diversity.

South Africa, like most postcolonial African societies, exhibits damaging-tensions between traditional and modern ways of life and between indigenous and foreign (usually Western Dutch and British) cultural values and beliefs. Gender and sexual orientations are among the most problematic for many cultural groups. Most African cultures, have traditionally been shy and silent about discussing intimate matters in public. Traditional ways of living have hostility towards the opposite gender groups. This is due to the conflicting messages from the old traditional education, hidden opinions, culture and politics and that of modernization and society promoting human rights. In contrast, the progressive South African Constitution protects and promotes nondiscrimination towards LGBTI people according to Francis et al, (2018). This protection is underpinned in the equality clause (Section 9) of the Bill of Rights (RSA 1996a) and these pronouncements of protections and promotions of anti-oppression and wider social values are broadly, not explicitly, reflected in curriculum policy. In short, the philosophy of Ubuntu that provides a foundation for an inclusive and fair education system and society in South Africa is significantly undermined and compromised by how gender diversity is responded to.

Most participants agreed to the fact that hidden curriculum, tailored policies, sex roles, division of gender roles and cultural mind-set amongst others prevail in public schools. The exclusion of gender equality in the curriculum could be the strongest determinant of gender based violence in the country. Hence, Francis et al, (2018) posit that diversity appears to be closely tied to levels of gender based violence [GBV] in school systems. For example, in the history of South Africa since inception of democracy in 1966, a key element of transformation was the opening up of traditional practices for accommodation, instead of assimilation, other cultures. Therefore, a cultural mix has become a component of nation-building and socio-economic transformations.

In the search for a solution Ubuntu is invoked as part of broader transformation. The traditional South Africa ideologies of “Ubuntu and diversity” are used to direct and influence social harmony, mutual respect, conflict avoidance, consensus, and cooperation in South Africa (Francis et al, 2018). Ubuntu and diversity have become the cornerstone of transformation. Through reconciliation a change in the indigenous cultural framework displayed in the development and extension of individual rights, respect for diversity, and solidarity in South Africa. The principle of Ubuntu and diversity enjoins schools to place emphasis on kindness, compassion, and respect.

Conclusion

From the findings we can conclude that teachers are aware of gender rights as enshrined in the Constitution Act No.108 of 1996, but practice different things in the classrooms. The practice is influenced by traditional and cultural ways of life predominant in their upbringing. This happens despite the training given to them and the academic knowledge they have regarding gender rights. The hidden curriculum prevalent in schools seems to be a barrier to the realization of gender rights. Children are still grouped according to their gender, they are assigned roles according to whether they are boys or girls. In formal teaching and learning, planned curriculum remains the contributor to the differentiated treatment of boys and girls.

In the school settings gender equality requires adjustment of infrastructure. For instance, sharing common separate bathrooms is a problem to the LGBT community. This appears to be a challenge as it compounds the problem of infrastructure shortage currently miring the education system. Therefore, there is a slow shift towards the realization of human rights in general and gender rights specifically. In conclusion, we can say that there is a slow and inadequate movement towards gender awareness from teachers and policy makers.

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