RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRANSFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY: LESSONS FROM RESEARCH

[1,] *Dr. Florence Nyamu, [2] Dr. Leah Wanjama, [3] Rose Irungu and [4] Fred Kariuki

[1] Department of Educational Communications and Technology, Kenyatta University, Kenya
[2] Department of Gender and Development Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya
[3] Centre for Gender Equity and Empowerment, Kenyatta University, Kenya
[4] School of Public Health and Applied Human Sciences, Kenyatta University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

Teachersplay an incredibly important rolenot only in imparting knowledge, but also in shaping students' lives. Recent discourse on education considers gender equity and equality as crucial milestones for sustainable development. A gender equal society is one in which boys and girls, women and men have equal opportunities to realize expected educational and other forms of learning outcomes. There is evidence that for boys and girls to realize the same learning outcomes, it is important to consider different gender needs and address them appropriately. This can only happen if the teachers have the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes.The purpose of this paper is to review literature on teacher education processes, teacher practices in the classroom, transforming and engendering teacher education. It is expected that the literature will provide lessons on ways in which teacher education and teaching practices may be transformed to become a strategy for the achievement of gender equity and equality for sustainable development. It has been observed that in most cases teachers treat boys and girls "*equally*" in classrooms (a common saying from teachers, *here we do not discriminate, we treat boys and girls equally*) and yet the needs, priorities, concerns and interactions of boys and girls are different. To achieve gender equity and equality requires transforming both pre-service and in-service teacher education to make teachers more gender-aware and responsive. Teachers also need to undertake continuous learning and self-evaluation, embrace gender-responsive methodology/pedagogy, create friendly, conducive and interactive environments and become empowered as positive role models.

INTRODUCTION

Background information on teacher education

Teachers play an incredibly important role not only in imparting knowledge, but also in shaping students' lives. They educate, inspire, facilitate learning that builds and shapes the nation and act as role models. In addition to acquisition of knowledge, education incorporates skills development, shaping of attitudes and perceptions that are important for self-development and learning to live with others. In line with international and national agreements and conventions such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

*Corresponding author: Dr. Florence Nyamu,
Department of Educational Communications and Technology, Kenyatta University, Kenya.

governments have provided free basic education to their citizens. In Kenya, Free Primary Education was launched in 2003and Free Day Secondary Schooling was started in 2008 for day secondary schools (Gichura, 2003). In Tanzania, Free Primary Education was started in 2001, (Dennis and Stahley, 2012) and in Uganda, January 1997 (MOE, 2006). These provisions enabled unprecedented high enrolment in schools. Kenya's Vision 2030, the blueprint to development, aims to transform Kenya to a middle income economy. Under the Social Pillar, education is emphasized as critical driving force. Recent discourse on education considers gender equity and equality as crucial milestones for sustainable development. A gender equal society is one in which boys and girls, women and men have equal opportunities to realize expected educational and other forms of learning outcomes. There is evidence that for boys and girls to realize the same learning outcomes, it is important to consider different gender needs

and address them appropriately. This can only happen if the teachers have the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes. In 2007, the Ministry of Education developed a Gender Policy in Education to guide the process of attaining gender equity and equality in education. The policy, reviewed in 2016, provides a framework for the planning and implementation of gender-responsive education as well as literature and training at all levels. Despite the gender policy provisions, the content of teacher education has not been adequately revised to address gender equity and equality. In addition to the policies and programmes developed and disseminated by the Ministry of Education, it is important to focus on bringing about social change among all citizens. This is possible only if the teacher education process is transformed to respond to the development agenda. Current practices of teacher education in Kenya focus on understanding of teaching subjects such as Mathematics and History, teaching methods, peer teaching, preparation of teaching aids and teaching practicum in a real classrooms. The current structure of teacher education has not adequately incorporated contemporary issues of development. These include social values, national cohesion, life skills, gender equity and equality and women's empowerment that are necessary for sustainable development. It is expected that education is a continuum that links the past, the present and the future in order to promote development of personal autonomy and capacity to live together with others as equals (Rusen, 2008). Teachers need to understand not only education policies and programmes but also the national and international development agenda so as to influence the necessary learning outcomes through teaching. One of the most important and critical learning outcomes that is necessary for sustainable development is positive social and cultural values. These must be integrated in the pre-service and in-service teacher education. In order for teachers to be agents of change, there is need to develop a deliberate strategy to acquire requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to facilitate and guide the learning process. This will happen only if Kenya embraces the concepts of gender equity, equality and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) focusing on developing all rounded students in terms of intellectual, the affective and the manual (head, heart and hands)– *Johann Heinrich Pestalozi*. The purpose of this paper is to review literature on teacher education, teacher practices in the classroom, transforming and engendering teacher education and draw lessons on ways in which teacher education and teaching practices may be transformed to become a strategy for the achievement of gender equity and equality for sustainable development.

Gender equity, equality and sustainable development

Recent discourse considers gender equity and equality as crucial milestones for sustainable development. A gender equitable society is one where gender needs have been identified and resources allocated to meet the unique needs so as to attain equality of learning outcomes. It denotes equivalence in life outcomes, fairness and justice in the distribution of resources and benefits between men and women. It also recognizes that men and women, boys and girls do not always have the same needs and rights in various situations. On the other hand, a gender equal society is one in which boys and girls, women and men have equal opportunities to realize expected educational and other forms of outcomes. It refers to providing same opportunities in life to women and men including the ability to participate in the public sphere. Gender equality means equal rights, possibilities and obligations for both men and women in society. As an objective, attainment of gender equity and equality ensures that stereotyped concepts of gender roles must not restrict the opportunities of individuals. It also means equal appreciation of the values, choices and life experiences typical of women and men. It is important to note gender equity is a prerequisite for gender equality and that gender equality does not seek to make women and men the same. Sustainable development implies the ability of natural systems to provide resources and services upon which the economy and society depend. The desirable end result is a society in which living conditions and availability of resources are adequate in meeting human needs while maintaining integrity and stability of the natural systems. In 2015, countries adopted Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Although only Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and Goal 5, (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls)relate directly to gender equity and equality, a closer look at all the 17 goals, reveals that gender equity and equality is a necessary condition for achievement of each goal. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is imperative to search for alternative pathways in which gender equity and equality and sustainability can powerfully reinforce each other. One such pathway to development is to reconstruct teacher education and classroom practices to empower teachers to embrace gender equity and equality and become agents of change for sustainable development. Teacher education and classroom practices. In order to empower teachers to embrace gender equity and equality and become agents of change for sustainable development, it is important to review teacher education and teacher classroom practices to respond to emerging challenges of development.

Teacher education

The quality of teacher education has been questionable according to the various debates in developing countries (Sifuna and Sawamura 2010; Mwambu and Ackerman, May 28, 2013; UNESCO Reports, 2015). Further to this, focus has been directed to issues regarding the learning outcomes of education. It has become increasingly evident that having children in school does not always translate to equitable learning outcomes. For desirable learning outcomes to be achieved, teacher education must be strengthened to ensure that training opportunities and deployment are equitable. In the recent past, research evidence has revealed that education is not adequately imparting the knowledge, skills and attitudes requisite for today's demands of life. For example in Kenya, a study by Uwezo (2014) indicated

"one in every 10 Standard eight pupils cannot do simple arithmetic meant for aStandard two pupil; one in every five children cannot read an English word and only a third of Standard two children can read a paragraph meant for their level. In Central province, where reading level is highest, 27 per cent of children are incompetent in numeracy, reading and arithmetic while in North Eastern, it is 55 per cent."

The study further observed that many children were promoted to higher classes without proper learning. According to a study by Linda Darling-Hammond, (2000) in the United States of America, there was overwhelming public dissatisfaction with teaching in schools that was understood to emanate from

teacher education. Teacher education was considered ineffective in preparing teachers for their work, unresponsive to new demands and remote from practice. Voices of dissatisfaction have been raised from within the profession as well (Goodlad, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986). This calls for the redesign of teacher education to strengthen its knowledge base, connections to both practice and theory, andcapacity to support development of teaching that would result in desirable learning outcomes. However, teacher education need not bare the blame wholly considering that teacher trainees have preconceived ideas which can be traced to their socialization and growing up (Boyle, White and Boyle -2004). Research by Lazar, (2006) asserts that young trainee teachers take a long time to let go of deeply-rooted social and cultural beliefs and convictions. In addition, the trainees hold diverse perspectives especially about what constitutes effective teaching. It has been observed that attempts to bring change often results in failure or at best minimal impact as trainee teachers are reluctant to change (Gore, Griffins, Ladwig, (2004). There is a'wash out' effect on trainee teachers who may have developed "good" morals of practice which are then eroded as they become socialized into school environment – hence need to examine the school system in terms of its support for change. Whatever views are held, the single most important role of the teacher trainer is to offer challenge and support trainees to rethink and reassess their ideas.

Teacher classroom practices

Classroom interaction is at the heart of learning. Learning takes place through teacher-learner interactions, learners' own discoveries, learner-learner interactions as well as experiences from learning materials. Current discourse on teacher classroom practices is challenging the traditional way of teacher-centered teaching and encouraging more teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction. This is because teachers may present attitudes that support social justice and equality of opportunity but their actions in the classroom may militate against this because of their beliefs about what constitutes good teaching. A study Klassen (2002), showed that although teachers understand the importance of imparting social and cultural values, they are reluctant to do it themselves. However, when interaction is active and participatory, both teachers and learners are enthusiastic and motivated to share and learn more. In response to the set targets to achieve Education for All (EFA), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), conducted several studies on teaching and classroom practices. It established that teaching and learning practices were largely gender-biased in textbooks and learning materials used by learners and in examples given by teachers. Many teachers were found to apply teaching methodologies that did not give girls and boys equal opportunities to participate. Teachers were found to use abusive and negative language, showed lack of respect, ridiculed learners and used gender-insensitive teaching methods and learning materials. They grouped pupils according to abilities. Since boys were perceived to be better performers, they were grouped together and girls were put in their own groups. Teacher instructions were gender-biased in favour of boys. Boys were given more opportunities to participate in classroom activities such as presentations, preparation of materials for classroom instruction and leadership positions (FAWE, 2000). This led to poor performance for girls and attracted constant repetition and high dropout. Research evidence from India, revealed that in most

cases teachers reported that they treated boys and girls "equally" in the classroom (a common saying from teachers, *here we do not discriminate, we treat boys and girls equally*) and yet the needs, priorities, concerns and interactions of boys and girls are different. Classroom interaction involves discussion and communication. Research by Grace and Gravestock (2009) found gender-based trends among some teachers oblivious to gender equality implications and the gender stereotyping they embody. For example, some teachers calledon male learners more frequently, waited longer for male learners to respond to questions, gave male learners more eye contact following questions, remembered the names of male learners and used these names when calling on male learners. Teachers were found to interrupt female learners before the end of their responses and to ask male learners more questions that called for 'higher-order' critical thinking as opposed to 'lower-order' recounting of facts. The foregoing shows that teaching behaviour is largely influenced by how teachers themselves perceive the world and are trained. Yet teachers 'must learn to address the multiple needs arising because of gender, class, ethnicity, language and location' (Scott and McCollum, 1993). Teachers need to be aware of their own beliefs and behaviour towards male and female learners. For example, they need to reject long held beliefs that boys excel in Mathematics and that girls should catch up with boys (UNESCO, 2015).

Transforming/Engendering teacher education

In its current status, teacher education in Kenya poses a threat to the achievement of gender equity and equality which are regarded as critical for sustainable development. This is despite the fact that the Ministry of Education has a Gender Policy which commits the Ministry to eliminate gender disparities and enhance gender equity and equality in education. Although the policy provides for institutionalization of gender expertise in curriculum design, development and learning assessment processes, a critical look at the current curriculum does not give evidence that this is happening. This is despite the fact that the policy has been in existence since 2007 hence denying teacher education the much needed infusion of gender equity and equality. There is, therefore, a need for deliberate implementation of the Gender Policy in Education to bring about transformation in teacher education. This calls for re-designing/modernizing and strengthening teacher education to respond to current needs of development. This will only happen if teachers are equipped with requisite and gender transformational knowledge, skills and attitudes. As we move towards transforming teacher education, it is necessary to transform teachers themselves to understand how broader social forces influence schooling and curriculum. This will enable them make the needs and interests of boys and girls central to their classroom teaching practices (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001). Therefore, teachers must be prepared to be public intellectuals who show the moral vision, demonstrate the courage, and possess the analytical tools to mold future citizens to participate actively in development (Bates, 2008; Freire, 1970; Giroux and McLaren, 1986; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001). From this perspective, one of the primary responsibilities of teachers is to equip a nation's future workforce with gender-responsive values and qualities. For teachers to undergo "transformative experiences" there is need to create an opportunity for them to examine their own biases and beliefs before they can infuse gender into classroom teaching practices.

They need to have appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes (Baylor and Ritchie, 2002; Gooler, Kautzer and Knuth, 2000). Clouse and Alexander (1998) suggest that the most effective training programmes must provide practical hands-on experiences and meaningful activities that are appropriate for an individual's understanding of societal needs. Teachers need time to reflect on new learning and integrate this new knowledge into classroom practices to enable them make appropriate gender-responsive adjustments (Gooler *et al.,* 2000). This would only be possible if the curriculum is redesigned to mainstream gender.

Conclusion

A gender equal society is one in which boys and girls, women and men have equal opportunities to realize expected educational and other forms of learning outcomes. To achieve gender equity and equality needed for sustainable development requires transforming teacher education to empower teachers to be more gender aware and responsive to undertake continuous learning and self-evaluation, embrace gender-responsive methodology/pedagogy, create friendly, conducive and interactive environment and be positive role models. This can only happen if the teachers have the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to do so given that teachers are part of society and may not be gender-responsive. Therefore, the teacher education process should prepare teachers to be public intellectuals who show moral vision, demonstrate the courage, and possess the analytical skills to mould future citizens who are gender-responsive and are able to participate actively in sustainable development.

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