

## Enrichment of gender consciousness at the University of Fiji

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### Abstract

Gender equity has been an important channel in the Sustainable Development goals which aims to encourage the expanded recruitment of women as students and staff into tertiary level of education. The Government of Fiji grants equal opportunities in education and other areas for both the genders. The main purpose of this paper is to determine the roles teachers can play in order to enhance gender consciousness and to distinguish the aspects that lead towards gender inequality. It also aims to find ways that will help improve gender consciousness at The University of Fiji. This research utilizes qualitative design using a structured questionnaire. The respondents are the academic staff of The University of Fiji. Convenience sampling was adopted for this study whereby 20 males and 20 females were selected. The results show that the teaching faculty of The University of Fiji is mindful of gender inequality but they require a superior improvement in order to bring about knowledge based developed society.

**Keywords:** gender, awareness, equality, education, development

### Introduction

Gender patterns in the eastern world are altering when it comes to circumstances, opinions, demands and activities. Boys and girls acquire knowledge; men and women are engrossed in nurturing children and play a part in the community. But are there same opportunities for boys and girls, men and women? It is believed that boys are given more chances to speak in schools and men are still in charge of higher positions and they earn more than women. This trend is now may be changing slowly. An equal community is one where each one has equal privileges, roles and opportunities.

Education plays a pivotal part in the road to accomplishing equality amongst men and women. Equality must be an ordinary and continuous part in everyday work. Universities have a responsibility to work against traditional gender perceptions and that it should actively and deliberately promote equal rights and opportunities for both sexes. More interest is drawn to how boys cope than to how girls cope in the field of education. Cultural differences has surpassed the question of gender though this question is important in universities as well as in the societies.

Many researchers have stated that girls have been treated unfairly and this has also been a central point in academic gender researches” (Bohan, 2015) [4]. However, in the last decade or so, this demoralizing focus on girls has been criticized as girls perform better academically than boys. Many academic researches show that boys talk a lot more in the classroom and they receive more attention from the teachers which is mostly true. However, it does not lead to an equal democratic university and society.

The primary objective of this paper is to encourage professional development of educators on the theme of spreading gender awareness at The University of Fiji and to ensure that teachers are better equipped to deal with stereotypes and discriminations regarding gender issues and

career opportunities. There are questions like: how do girls experience the domination from boys? And what do the teachers do in such cases? These questions are very important if we want boys and girls to have an equal education and to be equal as men and women later in life. Many things can be done to create a society more equal between the sexes and the need is to start at The University of Fiji when the gender patterns have set in.

The paper seeks to demonstrate at improving gender equality through education by generating knowledge, disseminating experiences and giving learning opportunities on how upgrading of gender equality can occur through conversation and capacity development at The University of Fiji. For instance, there are females who enter into conventional fields such as science, technology and engineering. Gender parity in education has been achieved at almost all levels, yet more effort is needed for tertiary level education specifically at The University of Fiji.

This research will elaborate on three major aspects. Firstly, it will emphasise various roles educators can play in order to achieve gender consciousness at the University of Fiji. Secondly, it will unveil certain aspects that lead towards gender inequality in the education system of University of Fiji. Finally, it will focus on the ways that could be implemented order to improve gender consciousness at the University of Fiji.

### Statement of the Problem

This study aims to examine the roles of teachers in enriching gender consciousness of the staff in University of Fiji. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following:

1. What are the roles played by the teachers in University of Fiji to enhance gender consciousness?
2. What are factors that affect gender inequality in University of Fiji?

3. What are some of the school's programmes and policies that will help improve gender consciousness?

### Significance of study

Gender inequality in schools and universities needs to be addressed in order to eliminate it. It has been noted that youths of this era still have that mentality of patriarchal era which states that men are superior than women and as a result gender inequality between two genders exists till date. It is very important for teachers to impart knowledge to the students about gender equality. It is vital for them to understand that both genders are created by god and are equal so why we discriminate? Another major significance of this research paper is to promote professional development of teachers on the theme of intensifying gender awareness at The University of Fiji and to ensure that teachers are better equipped to deal with stereotypes and discriminations regarding gender issues and career opportunities and maintain awareness among all teachers and educators of the need to eliminate gender stereotypes and foster positive roles models.

The research paper will also disclose some aspects of gender inequality. It aims to underline ways through which gender equality can be promoted in education system. The participants of this research paper are mainly the staff faculty of University of Fiji, Saweni Campus. If the teaching profession is genuinely to become re-engaged in the debate about gender equalities, it must find a voice and speak loudly and clearly. The commitment is there and, though never easy, the real progress is possible.

### Methodology

#### Research Locale of the study

The study was conducted in University of Fiji, Lautoka. The school has been providing quality education with an affordable tuition fees for over 10 years. Figure 1, below shows the map of the locale of the study.



Fig 1: University of Fiji, Lautoka

#### Research Design

The study utilized the descriptive method using a face-to-face interview with 20 respondents in University of Fiji. The purpose of employing this method is in order to analyse the information and arrive at a more comprehensive understanding about the enhancement of gender consciousness at the University of Fiji.

#### Research Instrument

The researcher designs a self-administered questionnaire for

the gathering process to get qualitative and quantitative data. The primary aim of the questionnaire is to determine the roles of teachers in enriching gender consciousness. The questionnaire is a mixture of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. The questions are divided into different parts: The various roles educators can play in order to achieve gender consciousness at the University of Fiji; factors that lead towards gender inequality in the education system of University of Fiji; and policies /programmes that could be implemented in order to improve gender consciousness at the University of Fiji.

#### Research Gathering

Since this descriptive study, the survey technique and secondary data method will be used to collect the needed information. In this study, a questionnaire will be used to solicit responses from the respondents. Secondary data sources will be employed to find theoretical information like books, published journals, and article and readings on the internet.

#### Respondent and Sampling

The questionnaire consists of closed questions and open-ended questions used in the study. The number of completed questionnaires distributed and received were 20, giving a response rate of 100% percent. Twenty male and female staff randomly selected from University of Fiji to represent the sample. This sampling method is conducted where each member of a population has an equal opportunity to become part of the sample.

#### Ethical Consideration

This study utilized human participants and investigated on the roles of teachers in enriching gender consciousness, certain issue were addressed. The consideration of the issue is necessary for the purpose of ensuing privacy as well as the security of the participants.

#### Literature Review

The purpose of this Literature review is to view the trends in composition studies within the past and see how various researchers have highlighted on the issue of gender inequality within the education system of the Universities. The objective is to review the work of the researchers and to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding about the enhancement of gender consciousness in tertiary teaching.

The issue of gender discrimination in education is very broad. Although there are many similarities among many societies, there are also a few differences that change the perception on the problem for each society and individual. It would be fair to claim that different cultures, societies, households and eventually individuals, perceive the role of education in different ways. Likewise, in order to understand the obstacles to gain gender equality in education, it is essential to understand the broader picture of the studied society, for instance, the perception of boys and girls, caring and leadership and their roles in society and the role of teachers and the education system.

Classrooms have children of different intellectual ability, from different cultural or social background, different language

facility and physical qualities. It is very important for the teachers to be well prepared to meet and deal with the varying social, educational and emotional needs of these children. "Teachers prepare students for entry into the public sphere, and in doing so instil the values of the dominant society, often to the detriment to marginalized voices," (Patti Larther, 1994). Indeed, the "work of the teacher is part of the discursive practices that enable these normative processes" (Amanda Coffey and Sara Delamont 2000, 13) that bring about institutionalized systems of power that directly hinder girls and women within a patriarchal society. Thus, to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students, the educational system must be transformed so that all students have an equal chance to succeed.

Violetta Zentai argues that gender mainstreaming should focus on teacher education and the society as a whole by changing the norms and practices that stand at the roots of gender inequality and sustain its reproduction. This implies the process should be continuous and gender mainstreaming should be a tool to be used in ensuring that none of the institutions instruments perpetuate gender inequality." On the other hand, it is argued that "there is need to consider gender dimension in discussions of inclusion because of the prevalence and complexity of gender differences in education and the interaction between gender and other sources of inequality," (in Teresa Tinklin, Linda Croxford, Alan Ducklin and Barbara Frame, 2003).

The researchers found that the combination of leadership, staff and curricular awareness and an understanding of gender fair and gender affirmative practices can serve to improve institutional effectiveness and lead to higher levels of student achievement. A number of advantages have been claimed for heightened gender awareness. Gender consciousness can play a supporting role in leading women to take political action, as noted by Tolleson Rinehart. Thus, gender consciousness plays a facilitating role in educational contexts, which are especially relevant to the present study.

## Results and Discussion

### The role of teachers in enriching gender consciousness at the University of Fiji

A teacher is a facilitator of learning and of the development of the youth as they render the best services by providing an environment conducive to such learning and growth. In order to do their work diligently it is vital for teachers to be competent in knowledge, skills and attitudes. The classroom is an ultimate environment where teachers can promote gender equality.

So what can the teachers do to promote gender equity and challenge stereotypes? To find the answer to this question, a set of questionnaires were distributed amongst the staff members of The University of Fiji. Majority of the participants stated that educators should oppose the cultural essentialism it enables students to believe that boys are superior than girls in all aspects. They can oppose this by signifying examples of a particular field whereby both men and women have excelled. For instance, highlighting the achievements of Nelson Stone and Sisila Sevula in the field of athletics. Through giving such examples to students teachers will be able to create gender equality in their eyes. It also

suggested by respondents that teachers should emphasise to the students about the roles they can play in order to create gender equality. For example, at home when they are told that a girl is only bound to do household chores and boys are eligible for outdoor chores such as; mechanical work in vehicles they can oppose to this by opposing this. As both types of chores can be done by boys and girls

Although teachers might not be making decisions about what texts and materials are on the syllabus, they do have the opportunity to ask students to question gendered examples within those materials. It is vital for educators to highlight the students about the texts that reflects gender equality between men and women. Teachers are in a position to call out examples of gender stereotyping and encourage students to question and dispute them. This might be through highlighting examples in teaching materials or through calling out students' comments and behaviours.

One of the participant said that teachers should avoid statements that generalise, for example, 'girls tend to...' or 'boys are more...'. Teachers should not limit what they ask their students to do, for instance, ask female students to carry books or equipments. Teachers must encourage students of both genders to engage in all activities such as; playing all kind of sports regardless of promoting soccer amongst boys and netball amongst girls. It is important to interact with students in a way that they would expect them to in the real world.

Gender consciousness can also play a facilitating role in educational contexts. In Brody *et al.*'s (2000) study of three Catholic high schools about to transition from single sex to co-educational, "participants' consciousness of gender issues was heightened: faculty and administration were formally and informally discussing gender concepts and students were talking about male and female issues." The researchers found that "the combination of leadership, staff and curricular awareness, and an understanding of gender fair and gender affirmative practices can serve to improve institutional effectiveness and lead to higher levels of student achievement."

Finally, teachers guide individuals to become valuable members of the society. Teachers educate, inspire and facilitate the learning process that helps build and shape nations. World Teachers Day is a global observance to acknowledge all teachers for their contributions to society. Equality in the teaching profession must also be realized in order for teachers to be effective advocates for gender equality in education in the teaching profession. Thus, training in gender sensitive and responsive teaching must become an integral and regular part of initial and in-service teacher training, so that teachers will be able to appreciate and respond to the different learning and developmental needs of girls and boys in an inclusive manner.

### Related factors causing gender inequality in education at the University of Fiji

Gender equality includes equality in the quality of education received and in teaching and learning processes as well as in the opportunities available through education. Despite progressing in few fields Fiji is still behind in achieving gender equality in terms of education, a goal that goes beyond

gender parity and access to education. Many factors are causing hindrance in the promotion of better gender equality in the education system.

50% respondents stated that the main aspect that leads towards gender inequality is low motivation. Motivation is a key factor needed for promoting equality between two genders. While assertive behaviour is promoted among boys, passive behaviour is promoted and encouraged among girls. According to Florence Bamora (2010), "boys get more praise in classrooms for their active participation while girls are praised for their good behaviour and neatness."

The other 30% participants said that bias education curriculum is also a major factor causing gender inequality in the education system. Biased educational curriculum can make girls look down upon themselves as inferior. For instance, at University of Fiji, few males are enrolled in Hindi and English courses while few females are enrolled in science and IT courses. It can be argued that the existing curriculum and the way it is implemented may be source of inequality in access to education between boys and girls. Thus, curriculum is another angle which hinders gender equality in access to education.

Another 20% participants commented that moral teachings at homes are major factors that lead to the existence of gender inequality. Kira Appel (2014) implies that "gender stereotyping begins from the very moment that parents await the birth of their baby with a series of expectations, which will vary depending on whether it will be a boy or a girl. The subjects often taught as part of core curricula are in the main male-centric. It is male knowledge and theory, constructed within the framework of a patriarchal paradigm of human society, which is being passed down as our intellectual inheritance." The mindset of parents in regards to gender roles of boys and girls is of a major concern.

Incorporating gender training and training teachers in regards to gender issues and analysis is crucial for generating gender awareness about inequalities that exist and how it can be addressed. It is important that the results of such training are observed and assessed to review the application of skills and knowledge gained and to access changes in practice.

### **Ways to enhance gender consciousness at the University of Fiji**

It is important to promote gender equality in schools and other educational organisations. Through promoting gender equality between boys and girls teachers will be able to eliminate gender inequality from their minds. Before promoting gender equality it is vital for the teachers to understand about the importance of promoting gender equality between the two genders. While many are exposed to gender stereotypes, young people are particularly susceptible to them when forming an understanding of their place in society and their potential. Schools are the perfect place whereby the issue of gender inequality can be addressed amongst the students as a whole. Students are the future of a country and if they are able to eliminate gender differences from their minds then it will be eliminated from the country.

According to the respondents there are many ways that can be implemented in order to eliminate gender inequality in education system. 30% of participants commented that gender mainstreaming is a major factor needed in order to spread

gender equality in schools and universities. There is a need to embrace gender mainstreaming as a strategy in order to promote gender equality. The representation of males and females should be addressed by incorporating a gender perspective as a policy of gender mainstreaming.

Another 50% of participants stated that there is a need for females to undertake leadership roles in the education system. Teachers are role models and they are in a position to call out examples of gender stereotyping and encourage students to question and dispute them. It has been highly noted that female teachers hold assistant teacher position in schools and universities while men dominate higher positions such as; dean of schools and vice chancellor. In order to promote gender equality it is vital for education system to first practice it by employing both genders in dominating positions.

The other 20% respondents said that an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning process is needed. For instance, teaching about those females who have excelled and broke the barrier of gender inequality. This creates an all-inclusive culture for the staff and students.

"Combating gender stereotypes in the education system should focus on its irreplaceable role: the construction of knowledge", Teresa Alvarez (2014). It has been highlighted by many researchers that in nineteenth century women have been seen as a symbol of oppression by the hands of men and as a result gender inequality exists. Carolina Suarez Garcia (2014) states that, "education plays an essential role in the training process of future generations. For this reason, the parents of children and youngsters are also commissioned with this practice, since they highly influence the way boys and girls embrace cultural patterns, including gender-based stereotypes."

The education system is the reflection of cultures and moral values of a particular society. In many countries, gender differentiation continues to be a key principle in shaping the practices and curricula of schools. Gender categorizing is one of the major hindrances in the promotion of gender equality. As cited by Tarja Halonen, "all nations have their own traditions, and gender stereotypes are part of it. But it is good to remember that they are made by people and can be reformed by people" (Halonen 2014). As quoted by Krista Kiuru, "the essential objective is that by using ...concrete tools; gender awareness and promoting gender equality are incorporated into teaching and the national core curriculum. The overall objective is a shift to gender sensitive education."

### **Conclusion**

The teachers played an important role in enriching gender awareness and gender consciousness. There is abundant evidence of how education can and is effective in promoting gender equality. The challenges reported by the respondents correspond with the research findings and the main issues highlighted were low motivation, bias education curriculum and level of parental knowledge.

Gender stereotyping remains the greatest obstacles to the achievement of gender equality. Promoting gender awareness in classrooms requires raising consciousness at different institutional levels as well as amongst different groups of educators. Within the institution of the school, gender awareness needs to be promoted amongst a variety of different

groups, that is, the pupils themselves within the classroom, the teachers, the school administrators, the parents, the school board and educational policy makers.

### Recommendations

Gender equality in education is a much wider and more complex issue. There is a need to promote educational programmes that challenge stereotypical masculine identities as well as feminine identities. Gendered identities are socially constructed and multivalent as they intersect with social class, ethnicity, religion, culture, disability, sexuality and age. One is not just a girl or boy, a woman or a man but a girl/boy of a particular culture, social class and age. Gender equality policies in education need to be designed in a way that recognises how social class, ethnic, cultural, disability and other status differences impact on gender outcomes. Girls and boys, women and men must not be treated as homogenous categories in policy terms. To overcome gender stereotypical subject and career choices, firstly there needs to be a systematic mainstreamed education regarding gender and gender stereotypes for girls and boys, men and women at all levels of education. Secondly, gender education needs to be a compulsory part of professional degree/diploma/certificate programmes in both further and higher education. The attitudes of teachers and teacher educators to gender issues are frequently conservative and uncritical and that such attitudes reproduce traditional gender stereotyped ideas and expectations unproblematically. Most teachers do not learn how to promote gender equality (or equality generally) in schools, and they are not evaluated on the degree to which their learning relationships contribute to gender change or social justice. All teacher education programmes (from pre-school to higher education) should have a core module on gender equality. Teachers should be assessed in their equality practices during pre-service and in-service education programmes. Appraisal of qualified teachers should include appraisal of their equality practices. Eliminating gender inequality is far away from possibility but dealing with stereotypical issues and educating people on gender consciousness can be a step further towards a bias free society.

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