



Building Gender Sensitivity: The Necessity of Gender Topics in Kerala s Higher Secondary curriculum

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Abstract

“Gender equality is a pillar of a strong and sustainable society (UNDP, 2015)”. Our country needs to take more effort to attain Sustainable Development Goals For Quality Education and for Gender Equality. Gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum helps to create a more equitable society with clear gender perspectives among students and solve problems through gender lens. Education has an important role to maintain gender justice in society as it is not only a medium to transfer knowledge but also to transfer values including gender as a social construct. Gender studies in higher education is the need of the hour. The main objective of this study is to find out is there any gap in the higher secondary curriculum which hinder to create the feeling of gender equality and also to find out is there any need for gender related topics in higher secondary as a separate paper in which the subjects are designed to be given separately or integrated with other subjects. This research is quantitative in nature and based on survey method conducted in 120 Higher Secondary School students. The data were obtained from students using questionnaire.

Key Terms: Gender equality, gender studies, gender justice, gender mainstreaming

Introduction

Curriculum plays a significant role in promoting gender equality in society. Education has an important role in how young people understand the world. What they get in school affects how they see themselves and others. With changing ideas about gender, schools can play a key role in promoting acceptance and inclusion for all genders among young people. Gender remains a significant factor in education. Research has explored how gender affects both learning and teaching. When schools use high-quality, gender-inclusive curricula and teaching methods, children are more likely to be eager to attend school and enjoy learning. Children learn about gender from a young age and form their sense of gender identity. The socialization process, shaped by family, school, peers, and media, influences a child’s understanding of gender roles, appropriate behaviour, and stereotypes. Gender-related topics helped to know how social and cultural values shape gender relations in society. It may increase the general understanding of gender.

The Department of Gender Studies (NCERT) conducted an analysis of the Textbooks of Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra,

Manipur, and Rajasthan: An Overall Report in 2016. It is a comprehensive analysis of elementary textbooks from 13 Indian states. The findings revealed that these textbooks used gender-biased terms, like “policeman,” “the story of man,” and “man-made,” rather than their gender-inclusive alternatives like “police officer,” “the story of humans,” and “human-constructed,” among others. Gender stereotypes were associated with various professions. However, the report also noted some progressive aspects, such as depicting men as emotional (NCERT,2016). Textbooks are an integral part of the curriculum and play an influential role in exposing children to ideas about gender and social norms. (Aikman & Rao, 2010; Davis & Willis, 2010; Riazi 2003).

The curriculum has an important role in creating a gender-sensitive society. The existing curriculum has a gap to provide adequate information about gender and sex. It creates misconceptions about gender identity and sexual orientation among higher secondary school students. To create an equitable and gender-sensitive society, including gender-related topics in Kerala State Higher Secondary School is essential.

Objectives

The main objectives are as under:

- To find out the level of student’s opinion on the inclusion of gender-related topics in Kerala state Higher Secondary School curriculum based on subsamples stream (commerce, Humanities, Science)
- To study whether there exists any significant difference in the mean score of students’ opinion towards adding gender-related topics in Kerala State Higher Secondary School curriculum-based sub-samples of study and gender.
- To study the need for gender-related topics in the Higher Secondary School curriculum.

Hypotheses of the study

The following hypotheses are formulated for the present study:

- There is no significant difference in the mean score of student’s opinion towards adding gender related topics in Higher Secondary School curriculum based on sub-samples of study.
- There is no significant difference in the mean score of student’s opinion towards adding gender related topics in Higher Secondary School curriculum based on sub samples and gender

Methodology

Method

Survey method was adopted in the present study

Sample and Sampling Method

The study was conducted among higher secondary students from Malappuram district. The study sample was 120 higher secondary students. The stratified random sampling method was used to collect data.

Tool Used for the Study

The Questionnaire was used for the present study.

Statistical Techniques

Statistical techniques are used for the data analysis are

- Percentage Analysis
- Test of significance difference between mean score (Independent sample t-test)
- One Way ANOVA

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Level of students' opinion on need of gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum based on subsamples subjects (commerce, Humanities, Science).

| Stream | High Level | | Moderate Level | | Low Level | |
|------------|------------|------------|----------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Commerce | 7 | 17.50% | 25 | 62.50% | 8 | 20% |
| Humanities | 3 | 7.50% | 30 | 75% | 7 | 17.50% |
| Science | 4 | 10% | 27 | 67.5% | 9 | 22.5% |

Discussion of the result

The table reveals that in the commerce stream, 17.50 per cent of students have a high level of need towards gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum, 62.50 per cent of students have a moderate level, and 20 per cent of students have a low level of need towards gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum.

In the humanities stream, 7.50 per cent of students have a high level of need towards

gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum, and 17.5 per cent of students have a low level of need towards gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum. Seventy-five per cent of students have a moderate level of gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum.

In science stream 10 percent of students have high level of need towards gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum. 67.50 percent of students have moderate level and 22.5 percent of students have low level of need towards gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum

It shows that the majority of students have moderate level of need towards gender related topics in higher secondary school curriculum.

Results of the test of significance of difference between mean score of need of gender related topic in higher secondary curriculum for total sample based on gender.

| Categorical Subgroup | N | Mean | SD | t-value | Level of significance |
|----------------------|----|------|-------|---------|-----------------------|
| Male | 60 | 6.08 | 2.586 | .262 | .05% |
| Female | 60 | 6.22 | 2.981 | | NS |

As shown in the table, there is no significant difference between mean scores of needs of gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum for total sample based on gender. It means that students have no difference of opinion on adding gender related topics in their existing Kerala State Higher Secondary School Curriculum.

Results of the test of significance of difference between mean score of need of gender related topic in higher secondary curriculum based on stream of study and gender.

| Stream | Categorical Subgroup | N | Mean | SD | t-value | Level of significance |
|------------|----------------------|----|------|-------|---------|-----------------------|
| Commerce | Male | 20 | 5.15 | 1.927 | .658 | .05% |
| | Female | 20 | 5.65 | 2.796 | | NS |
| Humanities | Male | 20 | 8.15 | 1.694 | 1.825 | .05% |
| | Female | 20 | 6.40 | 3.939 | | NS |
| Science | Male | 20 | 4.95 | 2.724 | 2.210 | .05% |
| | Female | 20 | 6.60 | 1.930 | | S |

The table reveals that the t-value obtained in commerce stream between male and female higher secondary students is .658 which is less than the table value 1.96 required for

significance at 0.05 level. Hence there did not exist a significant difference in mean scores of male and female higher secondary students.

In humanities stream t-value obtained between male and female higher secondary students is 1.825 which is less than the table value 1.96 required for significance at 0.05 level. Hence there did not exist significance difference in mean scores of male and female higher secondary students.

The t-value obtained in science stream between male and female higher secondary students is 2.210 which is higher than the table value 1.96 required for significance at 0.05 level. Hence there exists a significant difference in mean scores of male and female higher secondary school students. Their mean score indicates that female students show higher interest towards adding gender related topics in higher secondary school curriculum.

One Way ANOVA

To find out if there exist any significant difference in the opinion towards inclusion of gender related topics in Kerala State Higher Secondary School Curriculum based on their stream of study, one way ANOVA employed.

| Sources of Variance | Sum of Squares | F | Mean square | F | Sig |
|---------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|
| Between Group | 78.750 | 2 | 39.375 | | |
| Within Group | 840.550 | 117 | 7.184 | 5.481 | .005 |
| Total | 919.300 | 119 | | | |

The F value obtained for opinion towards adding gender related topics in Higher Secondary School Curriculum based on streams is 5.481 and the significant value of it is .005, which is lesser than the p value.05. It means that there exists a significant difference in the opinion on adding gender related topics in Kerala State Higher Secondary School curriculum between students of different streams of study.

Discussion

Observations from students' responses across diverse academic streams reveal a unanimous opinion that gender-related topics should be incorporated into their curriculum. Students have expressed interest in learning about gender concepts. They also perceive a significant gap in their current curriculum, which fails to address these critical concepts of gender adequately. The overall findings suggest an urgent and widespread need to integrate gender-related topics. The negligible differences in the results across streams reinforce the universality of this need. It underscores that regardless of disciplinary focus, students recognize the importance of gender education for their holistic development and future societal contributions. The curriculum developers and policymakers must prioritize

incorporating gender-related themes to bridge this educational gap and align the curriculum with the evolving demands of a progressive society. This inclusion is vital for fostering learners' awareness, sensitivity, and critical thinking.

Question analysis

Open ended question: "Do you have the opinion that more gender related content should be added in your curriculum? If yes, why? And if not, why?"

Level of interest in adding gender related topic in your curriculum based on total sample

| Total Sample | Yes | | No | |
|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| 120 | 95 | 79.17% | 25 | 20.83% |

From the table it is clear that 79.17 percent of students answered yes to the item "Do you have the opinion that more gender related content should be added in your curriculum? If yes, why? And if not, why?" And 20.83 percent of students answered 'no' to the same.

Level of interest in adding gender related topic in the curriculum based on stream of study

| Stream | Yes | | No | |
|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Commerce | 35 | 87.50% | 5 | 12.50% |
| Humanities | 28 | 70% | 12 | 30% |
| Science | 32 | 80% | 8 | 20% |

From the table, it is clear that 87.50 percent of commerce students answered yes to the item "Do you have the opinion that more gender related content should be added in your curriculum? If yes, why? And if not, why?" And 12.5 percent of students answered 'no'. In the humanities stream 70 percent of students answered yes and 30 percent of students answered 'no' to the item. 80 percent science students answered yes and 20 percent answered no. It is a clear indication that the majority of students have the opinion that adding gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum.

Commerce

The investigator put an open-ended question to know their opinion about the need to include school gender related topics in higher secondary curriculum. The item is "Do you have the opinion that more gender related content should be added in your curriculum? If yes, why? And if not, why?" Majority of the students answered the question. One of the students answered like this "it is good to include gender related content because everyone needs equal treatment in the society and everyone is equal". Other students also favoured

including gender related subjects because this subject helps us to understand whether there is gender discrimination in the society and also women have equal freedom to do what she likes. One of the students responded that if there are relevant gender related contents in the curriculum, there will be no differentiation within us. For knowing the need of including gender related topics in the curriculum, the majority of students responded that the topic should be included in the curriculum. They believe that in order to understand concepts like gender, sex etc this type of content will be useful for us. They added that in today's society, the main cause of gender related problems is the lack of knowledge about these concepts and this can be overcome through the process of education. So, including gender related topics is mandatory in the curriculum. These concepts help us to understand the feelings and condition of men, women and transgender in society. A few students are opposites in the opinion that they are not interested in studying this type of topic.

One of the students responded that there is no need for any gender equality, all have power, and one should need to find it. This statement shows the importance of gender related topics in the higher secondary curriculum. It is the result of the power relationship that exists in the patriarchal society.

Humanities

The majority of humanities students answered the open-ended question "Do you have the opinion that more gender related content should be added in your curriculum? If yes, why? And if not, why?" One of the students responded like these topics provide insights about gender related issues and serve to dispel misconceptions and enhance our knowledge. Some students express disinterest in studying gender related topics in school. Other students had interest in including gender-related topics in the curriculum, it will be helpful in daily life. Some of them responded like including gender-related topics in the curriculum is essential to combat gender discrimination in society.

One student responded that it's important for kids to learn about human reproduction, hormone changes, genetics, and related subjects through specialized classes.

Science

The opinions of students towards inclusion of gender related topics in curriculum are some believe that gender inequality is a significant issue in our society, largely due to a lack of knowledge about gender and sex. They argue that understanding these topics is crucial for combating discrimination. Others express a desire to learn more about these topics, recognizing the importance of gaining more knowledge about these topics. Many emphasize that studying this subject is essential for understanding the importance of giving respect to both men and women in society. It is also seen as a way to prevent problems and address the current negative aspects of society. Overall, these topics should be included in the curriculum to promote equality and peace in society and to address the

lack of awareness, particularly regarding LGBTQ issues.

Some students are not interested in this topic, while others stress the importance of sex education and some suggest that there should only be two genders male and female starting from the earth, while others requested to provide sex education classes.

Conclusion

The investigator finds a gap in gender-related awareness among the students from the study. Many students do not even understand the difference between sex and gender. Students requested to take sex education classes for them. From this, the investigator finds the importance of gender-related topics in the higher secondary school curriculum. Sex education is the need of the hour, but there is a serious issue related to this. Students even differentiate between sex education and gender studies. 79.17 per cent of students answered yes to the item "Do you think more gender-related content should be added to your curriculum? If yes, why? And if not, why?" Moreover, 20.83 per cent of students answered 'no' based on the total sample. It shows the need for gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum.

Implications and suggestions

The study findings have practical implications in educational settings. Students' responses revealed the importance of gender-related topics in the higher secondary school curriculum. Students are the important stakeholders of the curriculum, and they are the actual beneficiaries of the educational system.

- Exposure to gender-related topics helps to understand the fundamental difference between gender and sex. It helps students understand gender as a social construct, fostering awareness about equality, equity, and respecting all genders. Students gain a deeper understanding of gender equality, learn to treat all genders equitably and challenge the gender stereotypes and biases that students may have internalized unconsciously. It contributes to healthy and respectful interpersonal relations among students.
- The integration of gender-related topics in the curriculum has significant implications for students in shaping their gender perspectives and understanding and changing the attitude towards gender roles that exist in society.
- Exposure to gender-related topics fosters a culture of respect and helps to reduce the incidents of gender-based discrimination.
- Foster the ability to critically analyze traditional gender roles and help them to question the norms and develop independent thinking.
- Students will be able to analyze curriculum materials and identify the gender bias

in the curriculum.

- Students can identify gender diversity, including LGBTQ+ rights, promote empathy and create a more inclusive school culture.
- Gender education helps students better understand their identities and roles, boosting their confidence and self-esteem.
- It equips students with knowledge about gender-based violence, harassment, and abuse, promoting prevention and encouraging reporting.

Suggestions for the stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers include equipping teachers with skills to handle sensitive gender-related discussions without bias. Provide workshops to help educators understand and promote inclusive classrooms. Promote gender-neutral policies in dress codes, sports, and classroom interactions in educational institutions. Create safe spaces for students to discuss gender-related issues freely. Ensure gender topics are embedded throughout the curriculum, not confined to isolated chapters. Develop textbooks and supplementary materials that represent diverse gender identities and roles. Incorporate global perspectives and examples of gender equality movements in the curriculum.

Incorporating gender-related topics in the higher secondary curriculum equips students with the skills and mindset to build a more equitable society. Collaborative efforts from curriculum developers, policymakers, and researchers are essential to create impactful and inclusive educational experiences that resonate with students' needs and societal demands.

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