

## About the Editors



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**Gender, School and Society**  
**Critical Perspectives and Educational Transformation**

**Dr. Rupkumar Panda**  
**Mrs. Paromita Mukherjee**



## Gender, School and Society

### Critical Perspectives and Educational Transformation

(Peer-Reviewed)



**Editor-in-Chief**  
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**2026**

# **Gender, School and Society**

## **Critical Perspectives and Educational Transformation**

(Peer-Reviewed)

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**2026**

# **Gender, School and Society: Critical Perspectives and Educational Transformation**

*by: Dr. Rupkumar Panda, Mrs. Paromita Mukherjee*

**(Peer-Reviewed)**

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***N.B.:*** *All views and opinions expressed in the paper are sole responsibility of the author(s) concerned; neither the editor nor the publisher can in any way be held responsible for them.*

## A PREFATORY NOTE

It gives me immense pleasure to present this edited volume, *Gender, School and Society: Critical Perspectives and Educational Transformation*, published with ISBN as an academic initiative of Madhyamgram B.Ed. College. The volume reflects our commitment to encouraging student-teachers to engage critically with important social and educational issues and to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender, schooling, and society.

The contributions in this volume explore diverse dimensions of gender and education from critical and reflective perspectives. Through research-oriented writing, our B.Ed. student-teachers have been encouraged to examine prevailing practices, question established assumptions, engage with relevant literature, and articulate informed perspectives on issues related to gender equality, inclusion, social justice, and educational transformation. Such academic engagement can contribute significantly to the development of critical thinking, research aptitude, sensitivity, and reflective practice among prospective teachers.

I sincerely appreciate the enthusiasm and intellectual efforts of our student contributors. Their engagement in scholarly writing is a valuable step towards developing confidence in research and academic communication. I encourage them to continue cultivating the habit of questioning, investigating, and reflecting upon contemporary educational and social issues.

I also place on record my sincere appreciation for our faculty members for their dedicated academic guidance and encouragement throughout the process. Their mentoring, constructive feedback, and commitment to improving the quality of the manuscripts have contributed substantially to the academic merit of this volume.

My sincere thanks are also extended to the editors and reviewers for their valuable academic observations, constructive suggestions, and careful review of the contributions. Their scholarly involvement has helped strengthen the quality and coherence of the volume.

I hope this publication will serve as a meaningful academic resource and, more importantly, inspire future teachers to promote gender sensitivity, equity, inclusion, critical consciousness, and transformative educational practices in their professional lives.

**Dr. Rupkumar Panda**

**Principal**

**Madhyamgram B.Ed. College**

## EDITORS' NOTE

**‘Gender, School and Society: Critical Perspectives and Educational Transformation’** presents a critical and interdisciplinary exploration of the complex relationship between gender, education, and society. The volume recognises that schools are not merely spaces for academic learning; they are important social institutions where identities, values, aspirations, relationships and social inequalities are shaped and negotiated.

The chapters bring together diverse perspectives on gender equality, inclusive education, women’s empowerment, gender-responsive pedagogy, curriculum and textbooks, teacher education, school culture, socialisation, intersectionality, educational leadership, policy, health and social transformation. Particular attention is given to the ways in which educational institutions can either reproduce existing gender inequalities or become transformative spaces that promote equality, dignity, participation and social justice.

The volume moves beyond the narrow understanding of gender equality as numerical parity or equal access. It emphasises substantive inclusion, meaningful participation, agency, safety, representation and equitable opportunities for diverse learners. It also highlights the importance of understanding gender in relation to caste, class, disability, geography, culture and socio-economic conditions.

In the context of India, the discussions are particularly relevant to the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its emphasis on equity and inclusion. This volume seeks to contribute to scholarly dialogue and encourage educators, researchers and policymakers to reimagine education as a powerful instrument for gender justice and transformative social change.

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## Chapter 1

# Empowering Education Through Gender Justice, Equity and Social Transformation: A Study on Inclusive Schooling Practices

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### ***Abstract***

*Gender justice and educational equity are fundamental to inclusive, democratic and socially transformative societies. However, gender stereotypes, socio-economic inequalities, discriminatory institutional cultures, inadequate infrastructure, digital exclusion and unequal participation continue to affect the educational experiences of girls and other marginalised learners. This conceptual paper examines how inclusive schooling practices can transform education from access into agency, empowerment and social change. It focuses on gender-sensitive curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, teacher preparation, equitable participation, community engagement, digital inclusion, safe infrastructure, menstrual health management, mentoring and leadership opportunities. The discussion emphasises prospective teachers as future agents of change who can challenge stereotypes through classroom interaction, curriculum interpretation, assessment and participatory pedagogy. The paper also recognises the intersection of gender with caste, class, geography, disability and socio-economic disadvantage. It argues that genuinely empowering education develops voice, confidence, critical consciousness, decision-making capacity and leadership opportunities.*

**Keywords:** Gender Justice, Inclusive Schooling, Gender Equity, Teacher Education, Social Transformation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental instrument of social development, human capability and democratic participation. Its transformative potential depends not merely upon access to schooling but on whether institutions ensure dignity, participation, equality and meaningful learning for all. Gender equity therefore extends beyond numerical parity in enrolment and includes equitable access to resources, opportunities, participation, learning experiences and outcomes. Yet gender-based inequalities remain embedded in educational and social structures. Girls from economically disadvantaged, rural and marginalised communities may face poverty, domestic responsibilities, early marriage, safety concerns, inadequate sanitation, limited transportation and restrictive socio-cultural expectations. These barriers often intersect with caste, class, geography, disability and access to technology. In India, educational policies increasingly recognise equity and inclusion, but a gap remains between policy intention and implementation. Inclusive schooling must therefore include gender-sensitive curriculum, participatory pedagogy, equitable classroom interaction, supportive assessment, safe infrastructure, community engagement and leadership opportunities. Teachers are particularly important because they influence classroom participation, expectations, subject choices and learner confidence. Against this background, the paper examines inclusive schooling through gender justice, equity, teacher preparedness, learner agency and social transformation, with particular emphasis on the competencies required by prospective teachers.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this paper connects structural barriers, equitable educational inputs, inclusive schooling practices, teacher competencies, learner outcomes, learner agency and broader social transformation. Gender justice is treated as more than equal access: it involves questioning and transforming structures that generate inequality. Structural barriers may include gender, caste, class, geography, disability and socio-economic disadvantage. Equitable inputs such as scholarships, safe infrastructure, digital access, WASH facilities and support systems create conditions for participation. These inputs must be translated into gender-sensitive curriculum, participatory pedagogy, equitable classroom interaction and inclusive assessment.

Teacher competence forms a central link because teachers can either reproduce or challenge stereotypes through language, expectations, materials, assessment and classroom organisation. The expected learner outcomes include participation, confidence, critical thinking, STEM engagement, leadership and decision-making. These outcomes contribute to learner agency and empowerment, which can ultimately support gender justice and social transformation. The framework therefore views inclusive schooling as an interconnected institutional process rather than a collection of isolated programmes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The reviewed literature presents gender equality as a multidimensional issue requiring institutional, curricular and community-level responses. Zabaniotou (2020) emphasises networking and institutional commitment, while Cornwall and Rivas (2015) argue for a transformative approach to gender equality. Walker et al. (2019) connect educational equality and quality with reductions in economic and gender inequality. Blumberg (2008) and Islam and Asadullah (2018) demonstrate the significance of gender bias and stereotypes in textbooks. Wang and Degol (2017) and González-Pérez et al. (2020) highlight gender disparities in STEM and the importance of role models and supportive environments. McCleary-Sills et al. (2015) and Psaki et al. (2022) show that wider social barriers affect girls' participation. Chinyama et al. (2019) highlights menstrual hygiene as an educational equity concern. Chaudhary (2021) stresses gender-sensitive curriculum, teacher preparation, community participation and ICT-supported learning in India. Singisala (2026) adds an intersectional and critical perspective, arguing that education can reproduce caste, class and gender hierarchies.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **From Gender Equality to Gender Justice**

The distinction between equality, equity and justice is central to inclusive schooling. Equality implies similar opportunities, whereas equity recognises unequal starting positions and the need for differentiated support. Gender justice goes further by questioning the structures that produce inequality. Girls' disadvantage cannot be explained simply by school absence; cultural expectations, poverty, household responsibilities, unsafe environments, inadequate sanitation and gendered career expectations interact to influence educational trajectories. A school that admits girls but fails to provide safety,

participation, representation and agency cannot be regarded as fully gender-just. Gender justice should therefore be treated as a transformative condition that enables learners to participate meaningfully, challenge discriminatory assumptions and exercise agency.

### **Inclusive Schooling as A Transformative Educational Practice**

Inclusive schooling should be understood as an institutional culture rather than a collection of isolated programmes. The school environment communicates gender norms through curriculum, classroom seating, teacher expectations, language, examples, disciplinary procedures, assessment and leadership opportunities. Stereotypical representations can influence learners' understanding of social roles and occupational possibilities. A gender-inclusive school should provide equitable opportunities in classroom participation, leadership, sports, science, technology, arts and vocational learning. Learning resources should represent women and men in diverse professional and social roles. Gender-sensitive schooling must also examine the hidden curriculum alongside the formal curriculum.

### **Gender-Sensitive Curriculum**

Curriculum is a powerful mechanism through which social identities are constructed. A gender-sensitive curriculum should integrate gender perspectives across subjects rather than treating women's empowerment as a separate topic. History can include women's contributions to political and social movements; science can highlight women scientists; literature can critically examine gender roles; mathematics can use non-stereotypical contexts; and social science can engage learners with power, discrimination and social justice. Such curricular reform is important because learners encounter gender norms from an early age. Teachers therefore need to audit learning materials and identify representations that reinforce stereotypes.

### **The Prospective Teacher as an Agent of Gender Transformation**

Prospective teachers require gender-responsive professional competence in addition to general pedagogical knowledge. They should be able to identify bias in teaching materials, ensure equitable classroom participation, recognise intersectional disadvantage, use inclusive language, challenge stereotypes, design gender-sensitive activities, encourage girls' participation in STEM, facilitate respectful discussions

and connect schools with families and community resources. Teacher preparation should include reflective exercises through which prospective teachers examine assumptions about gender, subject choice, leadership and career aspirations. Such preparation can interrupt unconscious reproduction of inequality and help teachers develop equitable expectations and inclusive classroom practices.

### **Participatory and Dialogic Pedagogy**

A transformative classroom cannot depend exclusively on one-way transmission of knowledge. Learners need opportunities to discuss, question, collaborate, investigate and express their experiences. Cooperative learning, discussion, inquiry-based learning, problem-solving, debate, role play, case studies and project-based learning can redistribute classroom voice and provide opportunities for learners who may otherwise remain silent. Dialogic approaches also validate lived experiences and support critical consciousness. For prospective teachers, training in these methods is important because pedagogical choices influence who speaks, who leads and whose experiences are recognised.

### **Intersectionality and Inclusive Schooling**

Gender cannot be considered independently of other dimensions of disadvantage. A rural girl from a low-income household, a learner with disability, an adolescent from a socially marginalised community or a digitally excluded learner may encounter different forms of educational disadvantage. Inclusive schooling must therefore move beyond the generic category of 'girl students' and recognise differentiated needs. Teachers should identify structural barriers rather than attributing educational difficulties to individual learners. Intersectional awareness can make school responses more responsive to the complex realities of learners.

### **School Infrastructure, Safety and Menstrual Health**

Physical infrastructure is an essential component of gender equity. Safe sanitation facilities, drinking water, accessible classrooms, transportation and menstrual-health provisions can influence attendance, participation and dignity. Menstrual-health management requires more than sanitary products; it includes WASH facilities, awareness and emotional support. Teachers should be sensitised to the relationship between infrastructure and participation and should be able to identify barriers and communicate them through appropriate school-level mechanisms. This

demonstrates that educational inclusion must address the actual conditions under which learning occurs.

### **Digital Inclusion and the Gender Digital Divide**

Technology creates opportunities for flexible, personalised and accessible learning, but it can also deepen inequality when learners lack devices, connectivity or digital skills. The reviewed Indian policy analysis highlights low-cost technology and portable devices while noting unequal internet access. Inclusive ICT-based learning should therefore be accompanied by digital-equity strategies. Prospective teachers should learn to design blended activities that do not automatically assume individual device ownership or continuous connectivity.

### **Community Participation and Social Transformation**

Schools cannot independently eliminate gender inequality because many barriers originate outside school. Family expectations, community norms, early marriage, domestic responsibilities and attitudes towards girls' careers influence educational participation. Community partnerships can therefore support sustainable transformation. Teachers can contribute through parent meetings, awareness programmes, adolescent clubs, community projects and campaigns addressing stereotypes and educational barriers. Collaboration with families, community organisations and civil-society groups can strengthen school-level gender-responsive initiatives.

### **From Access to Agency**

Enrolment alone is an inadequate measure of empowerment. An inclusive school should ask not only whether girls are enrolled, attending and completing school, but also whether they participate confidently, make decisions, pursue non-traditional careers, receive leadership opportunities and challenge discriminatory assumptions. These indicators represent a movement from access to agency. Learner agency is important because the transformative purpose of education is not simply to place learners within existing structures but to equip them to question and reshape those structures.

### **Education, Leadership and Social Transformation**

Education can support social transformation when learners acquire knowledge together with confidence, critical consciousness, leadership

and decision-making capacity. Schools can provide girls and marginalised learners with opportunities to lead projects, clubs, discussions, community activities and peer-learning groups. Mentoring and exposure to female role models can expand perceptions of possible futures. STEM literature similarly emphasises role models, mentorship and supportive learning environments. Leadership development should therefore be incorporated into everyday pedagogy rather than treated only as an extracurricular activity.

### **Policy Implementation and Institutional Accountability**

India has developed programmes and policies intended to advance girls' education, including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and NEP 2020. However, the reviewed literature identifies an implementation gap. Progressive policies may produce inconsistent outcomes because of bureaucratic barriers, inadequate outreach, weak monitoring and unequal institutional capacity. Policy effectiveness should therefore be evaluated through qualitative indicators of agency, participation, safety and leadership rather than enrolment statistics alone. Institutional accountability is necessary to translate policy commitments into sustained school-level practice.

### **Implications For Teacher Education**

Teacher education institutions should integrate gender justice throughout the curriculum rather than confining it to one unit. Prospective teachers can engage in gender audits of textbooks, classroom observations, reflective journals, case analysis and lesson-plan development. Teaching practice should require demonstration of equitable participation strategies and inclusive assessment. Teacher educators should encourage discussion of intersectionality, digital inequality, menstrual health, disability and social discrimination. The central professional competency is not merely the ability to teach gender equality, but the capacity to teach equitably.

### **Conceptual Framework for Gender-Transformative Inclusive Schooling**

Structural Barriers → Equitable Educational Inputs → Inclusive Schooling Practices → Teacher Competencies → Learner Outcomes → Learner Agency and Empowerment → Gender Justice and Social Transformation. Structural barriers include gender, caste, class, geography, disability and socio-economic inequalities. Equitable inputs

include scholarships, infrastructure, digital access, safety, WASH and support systems. Inclusive practices include gender-sensitive curriculum, participatory pedagogy, equitable classroom interaction and inclusive assessment. Teacher competencies include gender awareness, reflective practice, inclusive pedagogy, critical consciousness, counselling and community engagement. Learner outcomes include participation, confidence, critical thinking, STEM engagement, leadership and decision-making. The sequence indicates that transformation emerges through interaction among structural support, institutional culture, teacher competence and learner agency.

## CONCLUSION

Gender justice, educational equity and social transformation are deeply interconnected dimensions of inclusive schooling. The reviewed literature demonstrates that access and enrolment alone cannot realise education's transformative potential. Gender inequalities are reproduced through cultural, economic, institutional, technological and pedagogical structures. Gender-sensitive curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, equitable participation, supportive infrastructure, menstrual-health management, digital inclusion, mentoring, community participation and leadership opportunities therefore need to work together. Prospective teachers require systematic preparation in gender-responsive pedagogy, critical reflection, intersectional understanding, inclusive assessment and community engagement. Truly inclusive schooling emerges when policy, institutions, teachers and learners operate within a shared framework of justice and equity, enabling education to nurture democratic citizenship, agency and social transformation.

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## Chapter 2

### Gender, Diversity and Educational Inclusion in Teacher Education: Toward a Systemic, Intersectional Framework

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#### **Abstract**

*Gender, diversity and educational inclusion have become central concerns in teacher education as classrooms increasingly bring together learners with different social, cultural, linguistic, gender, disability and economic backgrounds. This conceptual paper synthesises literature on gender-responsive pedagogy, multicultural and diversity-responsive teacher preparation and inclusive education policy. The review argues that these areas should not be treated as separate or supplementary reform agendas. Existing literature indicates that teacher education frequently addresses equity through isolated lectures, electives, policy statements, or short-term training, while deeper integration across curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, recruitment, leadership and professional learning remains limited. An intersectional approach is therefore necessary because gender inequality is shaped by class, disability, sexuality, culture, migration and other social factors. The paper proposes a systemic framework linking intersectional gender analysis, culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher diversity, inclusive leadership and sustained professional development. Such institutional coherence can strengthen equitable participation, belonging, social justice and wider social development.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equity; Teacher Education; Diversity; Inclusive Pedagogy; Intersectionality; Social Development

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender, diversity and educational inclusion have become defining concerns in contemporary education because classrooms are increasingly heterogeneous. Differences related to class, migration, language, disability, sexuality, culture, religion and gender identity may intersect within the same learning environment. Teachers therefore play a crucial role in translating formal commitments to equality into everyday classroom practice. Inclusive education is not simply a matter of accommodating learners who are perceived as different; it requires attention to the institutional routines, curriculum, relationships, assessment practices and power structures that can produce exclusion. Research on teacher education also suggests that awareness alone does not necessarily lead to inclusive practice. Teacher candidates may support equity in principle while remaining uncertain about how to challenge stereotypes, adapt instruction, or respond to diverse identities. Gender must similarly be understood interjectionally because experiences of inequality are shaped by multiple social locations. This paper therefore considers gender, diversity and inclusion as interconnected dimensions of teacher preparation. It focuses on the movement from additive approaches, where inclusion is taught as separate content, toward systemic approaches in which equity becomes embedded throughout curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, institutional leadership, recruitment and continuing professional learning. It also considers the responsibilities of teacher educators and institutions in sustaining this transformation.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this paper is based on a systemic and intersectional understanding of inclusion. A systemic perspective views exclusion as something produced through institutional structures, curriculum, school routines, recognition practices, leadership and social relationships rather than only through individual prejudice. An intersectional perspective recognises that gender does not operate independently of class, disability, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, migration, geography, or economic position. These dimensions can combine to produce distinctive forms of advantage and disadvantage. The framework consequently brings together five interdependent elements: intersectional gender analysis, culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher workforce diversity, inclusive leadership and sustained professional

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learning. Intersectional analysis helps teacher educators identify compounded inequalities. Culturally responsive pedagogy connects learning with learners' identities and experiences. Workforce diversity strengthens representation and can broaden relational perspectives. Inclusive leadership creates institutional conditions that support equitable practice, while continuing professional learning helps teachers translate principles into sustained classroom action. The framework treats these elements as mutually reinforcing rather than as independent interventions. Its central proposition is that meaningful inclusion requires institutional coherence, contextual sensitivity and transformation of practices that reproduce marginality. The model thus connects individual teacher competence with organisational responsibility and broader social conditions, while recognising that implementation must be adapted to different educational contexts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature indicates three closely connected patterns. First, gender equity remains incompletely integrated into teacher education, with programmes often emphasising equal opportunity or awareness while giving less attention to critical examination of stereotypes and gender norms (Khalil et al., 2023; Miralles-Cardona, 2025). Second, multicultural and diversity-responsive preparation increasingly promotes cultural competence, but systematic reviews describe the field as broad yet frequently superficial (Parkhouse et al., 2019; Rowan et al., 2020). Sustained, practice-based professional development appears more effective than isolated workshops. Third, inclusive education policy requires coordination among teacher preparation, curriculum, leadership and community engagement (Shaeffer, 2019; Smith & Heyward, 2023). Indian evidence further indicates a persistent gap between policy commitments and teachers' preparation for practical inclusion (Athira & Rajendran, 2023). Collectively, the literature supports a shift from fragmented interventions toward systemic and intersectional teacher education. Research on gender diversity also highlights the need to move beyond binary assumptions and to connect policy with practical teacher competence. This strengthens the case for coherent preparation.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Structural and Relational Exclusion**

The reviewed literature supports a clear conceptual shift: gender, diversity and educational inclusion should be understood as mutually constitutive rather than as separate reform agendas. The first implication concerns structural exclusion. Exclusion is produced not only by explicit prejudice but also through curriculum, classroom routines, assessment, disciplinary practices, peer relationships and institutional hierarchies. Consequently, a teacher education programme cannot become genuinely inclusive simply by adding a workshop or a short unit on diversity. Such activities may increase awareness, but they do not necessarily change the structures through which learners experience belonging or marginalisation. Inclusive teacher preparation must therefore examine how ordinary institutional practices classify, recognise, reward, or silence different learners.

### **Intersectionality in Teacher Education**

The second implication concerns intersectionality. Gender inequality cannot be adequately understood through a single-axis approach because gender interacts with class, disability, sexuality, culture, migration and other social factors. A learner may experience several overlapping forms of disadvantage and these cannot always be addressed independently. Teacher educators therefore need to prepare candidates to identify compounded inequalities and to avoid treating categories such as “girls,” “disabled learners,” or “minority students” as internally uniform groups. This requires case-based learning, reflective practice, classroom observation and opportunities to analyse real educational situations through multiple social lenses.

### **Teacher Identity and Representation**

The third issue is teacher identity and representation. Research suggests that who teaches can influence how learners experience representation, relationships and inclusion. Teacher diversity should therefore be considered alongside pedagogical reform. Recruitment, admissions, mentoring and professional development can contribute to a more representative workforce, while teacher education curricula can help all candidates critically examine their own assumptions and positionalities. A curriculum that discusses diversity without considering the diversity of the teaching workforce remains incomplete.

### **Beyond Additive Approaches**

A fourth concern is the limitation of additive approaches. When gender or inclusion is confined to an elective, isolated lecture, or symbolic statement, teacher candidates may become familiar with inclusive terminology without developing the practical capacity to transform classroom practice. Evidence on sustained teacher training indicates that professional learning is more productive when it combines critical content, reflection, practice, feedback and follow-up. Assessment should consequently examine whether teacher candidates can design inclusive lessons, adapt learning activities, recognise bias, respond to diverse identities and create equitable participation rather than merely reproduce definitions in written examinations.

### **Inclusion and Social Development**

The fifth implication links inclusion with social development. Inclusive education can strengthen participation, belonging, dignity, social cohesion and democratic engagement. Teacher education therefore has significance beyond classroom management: it can contribute to the development of more equitable social relationships. However, the implementation of inclusive practices depends on school culture and leadership. Teachers may enter schools with strong preparation but encounter policies, norms, or resource constraints that discourage inclusive action. Institutional leadership, practical policy guidance, community engagement and continuing professional learning are therefore essential complements to initial teacher preparation.

### **Indian Context and Systemic Implications**

The Indian context adds an important qualification. Evidence indicates that policy commitments to inclusion may develop faster than teachers' practical preparation, particularly where institutional resources are limited. A systemic approach should not be interpreted as a demand for identical structures everywhere. Rather, systemic inclusion should be adapted to local cultural, social, policy and resource conditions. For teacher education institutions in India, this means embedding equity across curriculum and practicum, strengthening faculty capacity, using locally relevant examples and preparing candidates to work constructively with diverse communities. Overall, the literature points toward institutional coherence: intersectional analysis, culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher diversity, inclusive leadership and

sustained professional learning should operate together. The goal is not simply to accommodate difference within unchanged institutions, but to transform the conditions that produce exclusion. This integrated orientation can help teacher education connect professional competence with democratic and social responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION

Gender, diversity and educational inclusion are central to the contemporary purpose of teacher education. The literature reviewed in this paper shows that isolated lectures, electives and policy statements are insufficient when wider institutional practices continue to reproduce exclusion. A systemic and intersectional approach offers a stronger direction by connecting gender analysis, culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher diversity, inclusive leadership and sustained professional learning. Such an approach must remain sensitive to local contexts, particularly the resource and policy conditions of Indian education. Teacher education should therefore move beyond teaching the language of inclusion toward developing the practical capacity to transform classroom and institutional practices. Future research should examine how systemic frameworks can be implemented and evaluated over time across diverse educational settings.

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## Chapter 3

# Gender, Education and Social Change: Towards the Development of An Inclusive, Equitable and Empowered Society

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper examines the role of education in promoting gender equality and fostering social transformation. It argues that education should move beyond ensuring equal access to schools and instead focus on creating inclusive, equitable and empowering learning environments. The study highlights the influence of socio-cultural norms, poverty, gender stereotypes, digital exclusion and institutional barriers that continue to restrict equal educational opportunities. A conceptual framework is presented to explain the relationship between structural barriers, gender-responsive education, learner agency and social change. The literature reviewed indicates that transformative education requires inclusive curricula, gender-sensitive pedagogy, safe learning environments, teacher preparation, community participation and policy support. The discussion emphasizes that schools function as agents of social change when they encourage critical thinking, equal participation, leadership opportunities and empowerment for all learners. The paper concludes that gender equality in education can contribute significantly to an inclusive, democratic and socially just society.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equality; Inclusive Education; Social Change; Gender-Responsive Pedagogy; Educational Empowerment

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality has become one of the fundamental objectives of modern education because it promotes equal opportunities, social justice and sustainable development. Although educational enrolment has improved significantly, disparities remain due to poverty, patriarchy, discrimination, digital exclusion and unequal access to resources. Education should therefore be viewed not merely as a means of literacy but as a process that develops confidence, critical thinking, participation and empowerment. In the Indian context, structural inequalities related to caste, class, region and gender continue to influence educational experiences and future opportunities. Schools play a crucial role in addressing these inequalities by providing inclusive curricula, equitable classroom practices and safe learning environments. Gender-responsive education enables learners to challenge stereotypes and participate actively in social, economic and political life. Thus, education becomes a powerful instrument for transforming society and ensuring equal opportunities for all.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this study explains how gender equality develops through the interaction of educational opportunities, structural conditions, learner agency and social institutions. It proposes that educational transformation begins with identifying structural barriers such as poverty, discrimination, gender stereotypes and digital exclusion. Inclusive educational access should then be supported through gender-responsive curricula, equitable teaching practices and safe learning environments. These practices encourage participation, belonging, critical consciousness and learner agency. Ultimately, empowered learners contribute to wider social transformation by challenging discriminatory norms and promoting equality. The framework also adopts an intersectional perspective, recognizing that gender inequality intersects with caste, class, disability, geography and socio-economic status. Therefore, educational policies should combine curriculum reform, teacher preparation, infrastructure development, mentoring, community participation and policy implementation to ensure meaningful gender equality and inclusive social development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Existing literature consistently demonstrates that education plays a transformative role in achieving gender equality. Unterhalter (2017) emphasizes that educational access alone cannot eliminate inequality unless learners develop agency and critical awareness. Stromquist (2015) argues that education promotes empowerment through confidence, decision-making and critical consciousness. UNESCO (2020) highlights that inclusive education should address barriers related to poverty, disability, ethnicity and gender. Similarly, UN Women (2020) reports that educational progress must be accompanied by efforts to challenge discriminatory social norms. Together, these studies indicate that inclusive curricula, gender-responsive pedagogy, safe school environments and supportive educational policies are essential for promoting social inclusion and empowering both girls and boys.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Beyond Educational Access to Educational Equity**

The literature indicates that gender equality in education extends beyond increasing enrolment rates. Although access to education has improved considerably, equal participation, learning outcomes, leadership opportunities and empowerment remain unequal. Educational institutions must therefore focus not only on providing access but also on ensuring that every learner experiences equal opportunities for participation, achievement and personal development. Transformative education should develop critical thinking, confidence and decision-making abilities that enable learners to challenge discriminatory social norms.

### **Schools as Agents of Social Transformation**

Schools play a dual role in society. They may either reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or become powerful institutions for promoting equality and inclusion. A gender-sensitive school environment encourages respect, cooperation and equal participation among all learners. Educational institutions should create opportunities for students to question discriminatory beliefs and develop values of justice, equity and democratic citizenship. In this way, schools contribute not only to academic achievement but also to long-term social transformation.

### **Gender-Responsive Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Curriculum and teaching practices significantly influence learners' attitudes toward gender equality. Gender-responsive curricula should represent the achievements and contributions of women and marginalized groups while avoiding stereotypical portrayals. Teachers play a vital role by adopting inclusive teaching methods, encouraging equal classroom participation, promoting collaborative learning and using non-discriminatory language. Professional development programmes should equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement gender-sensitive pedagogical practices effectively.

### **Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Expanding Career Aspirations**

Gender stereotypes continue to affect students' educational choices, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Many girls possess the capability to excel in STEM subjects but often face social and cultural barriers that discourage their participation. Schools should provide mentoring, career guidance, exposure to successful female professionals and opportunities to develop confidence in these fields. Likewise, boys should be encouraged to participate freely in activities traditionally associated with girls, promoting a more balanced understanding of gender roles.

### **Inclusive Learning through an Inter-sectional Perspective**

Gender inequality is closely connected with other forms of social disadvantage, including caste, class, disability, economic status and geographical location. Consequently, educational policies should adopt an inter sectional approach that addresses multiple dimensions of exclusion simultaneously. Financial support, transportation facilities, digital access, sanitation and inclusive infrastructure are essential for ensuring meaningful participation among marginalized learners. Such an approach enables education to become genuinely inclusive rather than merely accessible.

### **Community Participation and Institutional Support**

The promotion of gender equality cannot be achieved by schools alone. Parents, local communities, government agencies and civil society organizations must work collaboratively to eliminate harmful

practices such as child marriage, gender discrimination and unequal educational opportunities. Community awareness programmes, parental involvement and partnerships with local organizations strengthen educational outcomes and encourage positive social attitudes. Furthermore, effective implementation of educational policies requires institutional accountability, continuous monitoring and adequate teacher training.

### **Towards Sustainable Social Change**

Education serves as a foundation for sustainable social development by promoting equality, empowerment and democratic participation. Gender-responsive education enables learners to become active citizens capable of contributing to economic development, social justice and community welfare. When supported by inclusive curricula, safe learning environments, digital inclusion and effective educational policies, schools become transformative institutions that empower individuals and foster long-term social change.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender equality in education is fundamental for building an inclusive and socially just society. Transformative education extends beyond equal access by ensuring participation, empowerment, agency and equitable opportunities for every learner. Gender-responsive curricula, inclusive teaching practices, safe learning environments, community participation and supportive policies collectively strengthen educational outcomes and social development. An intersectional approach is particularly important in addressing the diverse challenges faced by marginalized learners. By promoting equality, participation and critical thinking, schools become powerful institutions capable of transforming individuals and society.

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## Chapter 4

### Gender, Diversity and Educational Inclusion: Emerging Perspectives in Teacher Education and Social Development

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#### **Abstract**

*This conceptual paper examines the interrelationship among gender, diversity, educational inclusion, teacher education and social development. It argues that teacher education is an institutional space where gender norms, identities, pedagogical assumptions and power relations are reproduced or transformed. The paper highlights four concerns: patriarchal assumptions in curricula, the need for gender-responsive and intersectional teacher preparation, inclusive classroom cultures and institutional governance for equity. The literature suggests that integrating gender perspectives into teacher education can promote equitable attitudes, learner engagement and participation, while treating gender as peripheral may reinforce stereotypes and exclusion. A conceptual framework is developed linking structural conditions, curriculum, teacher competence, pedagogy, institutional culture and learner outcomes. The paper proposes curriculum mainstreaming, reflective pedagogy, authentic assessment, practicum-based learning, professional development, participatory leadership and accountability. It concludes that gender-responsive teacher education can foster agency, social justice, democratic participation and equitable social development through sustained institutional commitment.*

**Keywords:** Gender Diversity; Educational Inclusion; Teacher Education; Gender-Responsive Pedagogy; Social Development

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality is increasingly recognized as integral to inclusive and equitable education, yet inclusion cannot be reduced to access, enrolment, or numerical representation. It concerns whose knowledge is legitimized, whose identities are recognized, whose participation is enabled and how institutional power is distributed. UNESCO frames gender equality as central to inclusive education and emphasizes the removal of gender bias from curricula, learning materials and pedagogical practice. The sources provided similarly show that teacher education remains a decisive site because prospective teachers carry institutionalized beliefs into classrooms and can either reproduce or interrupt gendered patterns (Ghosh & Sankar, 2024; Njeri Muasya, 2021). The problem is therefore both pedagogical and structural.

Nurmansyah et al. (2025) demonstrate through ethnographic analysis that when gender discourse is not deliberately planned within teacher education curricula, it may survive as a hidden curriculum through classroom interactions, peer discourse and taken-for-granted assumptions. Malik et al. (2025) extend this argument to institutional governance, identifying tokenistic curricular treatment, limited intersectional depth, unequal leadership opportunities and weak implementation of gender-equity policies as interconnected barriers. Thus, gender justice must be understood as a systemic characteristic of teacher education rather than an isolated curricular theme.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The framework proposed here links six mutually reinforcing dimensions: (1) structural and cultural conditions, including patriarchy, stereotypes and intersecting inequalities; (2) explicit and hidden curriculum, through which gendered knowledge and expectations are selected and transmitted; (3) teacher competencies, encompassing gender literacy, reflexivity, inclusive communication and critical understanding; (4) pedagogical enactment, including gender-responsive instruction, differentiated participation, inclusive materials and the Culture of CARE; (5) institutional culture and governance, including leadership, policy, mentoring, accountability and resource allocation; and (6) learner and social outcomes, including belonging, agency, equitable participation, critical consciousness and social development.

Gender-integration studies indicate that explicit curriculum intervention can shift attitudes and participation, while competency-based teacher

education provides mechanisms for translating principles into observable practice (Boholano et al., 2024; Ghosh & Sankar, 2024). McFarland and Kuehn (2025) add compassion, awareness, respect and empathy as relational dimensions of inclusion. Kreitz-Sandberg and Lahelma (2021) caution that gender-equality strategies must be negotiated within particular institutional and national contexts. The framework also treats diversity as dynamic rather than categorical. Gender is understood not only through the binary categories of women and men but through socially constructed expectations, gender identity, sexuality, disability, class, caste, ethnicity, geography and other intersecting conditions. Inclusion consequently requires attention to both representation and lived experience. The conceptual model assumes that teacher education can function either as a reproductive mechanism for existing inequalities or as a transformative mechanism for social justice, depending on how curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture and professional accountability interact. In this sense, the framework connects individual classroom practice with institutional transformation and longer-term social change.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Recent literature highlights the growing importance of gender-responsive and inclusive teacher education. Nurmansyah et al. (2025) identified persistent patriarchal assumptions in teacher education and emphasized the need for documented gender-responsive curricula. Ghosh and Sankar (2024) highlighted competency-based approaches integrating gender awareness, practicum, mentoring, critical pedagogy and accountability. Boholano et al. (2024) found that gender-integrated curricula can improve attitudes, motivation, engagement and participation. Malik et al. (2025) revealed gaps between women's numerical representation and leadership participation, emphasizing mentoring and institutional reform. McFarland and Kuehn (2025) stressed compassion, awareness, respect and empathy for supporting gender-diverse learners. Njeri Muasya (2021) identified limited teacher preparedness for gender-responsive pedagogy. Naskali and Kari (2020) showed that gender and sexual-diversity education can promote reflection and transformation. Recent studies by Pov et al. (2024), Soeharto et al. (2024) and Suárez Brito et al. (2024) further emphasize knowledge, practical experience, self-efficacy and innovative pedagogies for sustainable inclusion.

## **DISCUSSION**

The reviewed literature establishes that teacher education is not merely a process of developing professional competence; it is also a socializing institution that shapes teachers' understanding of gender, diversity, equality, authority and inclusion. Therefore, gender-responsive teacher education is essential for creating equitable classrooms and promoting wider social development.

### **Gender-Responsive Curriculum**

The curriculum should address both explicit and hidden dimensions of gender. Nurmansyah et al. (2025) indicate that when gender is not intentionally planned, patriarchal assumptions may continue through classroom practices, examples, language and expectations. Therefore, gender should be mainstreamed across educational psychology, pedagogy, assessment, practicum, leadership and professional ethics rather than being treated as an isolated topic.

### **Intersectionality and Diversity**

Gender cannot be understood separately from poverty, disability, caste, class, language, ethnicity, sexuality and geographical location. Naskali and Kari (2020) and Malik et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of recognizing intersecting identities. Teacher education should therefore prepare teachers to identify multiple forms of disadvantage and create learning environments where diverse learners receive meaningful opportunities for participation and recognition.

### **Development of Professional Competencies**

Awareness of gender issues alone is insufficient. Njeri Muasya (2021) identifies a gap between gender awareness and the practical application of gender-responsive pedagogy. Ghosh and Sankar (2024) suggest that competency-based teacher education can address this gap through observable competencies such as inclusive lesson planning, equitable classroom participation, respectful language, stereotype identification and appropriate responses to discrimination. Assessment should include teaching demonstrations, reflective journals, case studies and practicum performance.

### **Critical Reflection and Transformative Pedagogy**

Naskali and Kari (2020) show that gender and sexual-diversity education may generate reflection, resistance and transformation. Teacher

educators should therefore use dialogue, case-based learning, reflective activities and critical pedagogy to help teacher candidates examine their own assumptions. Such approaches can transform gender education from simple awareness-building into a process of critical consciousness and professional growth.

### **Inclusive Classroom Culture**

An inclusive curriculum must be supported by a respectful classroom environment. McFarland and Kuehn (2025), through the Culture of CARE, emphasize compassion, awareness, respect and empathy. Teachers can promote inclusion through respectful communication, diverse learning materials, flexible grouping, equitable participation and timely responses to discriminatory behaviour. These everyday practices contribute significantly to learners' sense of belonging and safety.

### **Institutional Leadership and Governance**

Gender equality requires institutional commitment beyond individual teachers. Malik et al. (2025) highlight the importance of transparent leadership, mentoring, professional development and equitable participation in decision-making. Teacher education institutions should conduct gender audits, strengthen accountability mechanisms and ensure fair recruitment, promotion, leadership opportunities and resource distribution.

### **Practicum and Real-Life Application**

Teacher preparation should connect theoretical knowledge with school experiences. Kreitz-Sandberg and Lahelma (2021) emphasize the importance of context-sensitive approaches, while Pov et al. (2024) highlight the value of practical experience. During practicum, teacher candidates can examine gender representation in textbooks, classroom interaction, discipline, sports, career guidance and school leadership and develop appropriate inclusive interventions.

### **Gender Inclusion and Social Development**

Gender-responsive education can influence learners' attitudes, motivation, participation and aspirations. Boholano et al. (2024) found positive effects of gender-integrated curricula on attitudes and engagement. By challenging stereotypes and promoting diverse role models, teachers can expand learners' educational and career

aspirations and contribute to democratic participation, social justice and equitable social development.

### **From Policy to Institutional Transformation**

The literature indicates that policies alone cannot ensure inclusion. Gender equality should be evaluated through curriculum implementation, teacher competencies, classroom practices, learner experiences, institutional leadership and continuous monitoring. Competency-based education provides an implementation framework, intersectionality offers an analytical perspective, critical pedagogy challenges unequal power relations and the Culture of CARE provides a relational foundation.

Overall, gender-responsive teacher education should be understood as a continuous institutional process rather than a one-time programme. When curriculum, pedagogy, teacher competence, institutional culture, practicum and governance work together, teacher education can become a powerful pathway for promoting inclusion, agency, social justice, democratic values and sustainable social development.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender-responsive teacher education is essential for achieving meaningful educational inclusion and social justice. The literature shows that gender awareness must extend beyond curriculum content to pedagogy, teacher competence, institutional culture, practicum, leadership and accountability. Intersectional and reflective approaches can help teachers challenge stereotypes and respond to diverse learner needs. Inclusion should therefore move beyond symbolic representation toward transformative institutional practice. By embedding compassion, respect, equity and critical reflection into teacher preparation, educational institutions can strengthen learners' dignity, participation, belonging and agency. Ultimately, gender-responsive teacher education can contribute significantly to building more equitable, democratic and inclusive societies.

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## Chapter 5

### Education as a Catalyst for Inclusion: Strategies for Gender Equity and Societal Empowerment

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality and education are mutually reinforcing foundations of inclusive social development. In spite of progress in expanding educational access for girls and women, inequalities persist through socio-cultural norms, poverty, gender stereotypes, inadequate infrastructure, digital exclusion and unequal opportunities for participation and leadership. This conceptual paper examines the relationship among gender, education, empowerment and social change. Drawing on selected scholarly literature, it explores how equitable and quality education can challenge discriminatory norms, strengthen self-confidence, enhance economic opportunities and expand social and political participation. The discussion emphasizes that education is not merely a means of human-capital development but also a transformative institution capable of influencing individuals, families and communities. However, educational access alone cannot ensure substantive equality because caste, class, geography, poverty and digital inequalities may continue to restrict opportunities. The paper therefore advocates gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive curricula, institutional support, digital inclusion, mentorship, community participation and accountability to promote empowerment and sustainable social transformation.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality; Women's Education; Social Inclusion; Empowerment; Social Change*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender, education and social change are closely interconnected dimensions of human and societal development. Education is not only a fundamental right but also a powerful means of challenging inequality, expanding capabilities and promoting social transformation. Gender equity in education involves equal access, participation, opportunities, safety and outcomes, while addressing cultural, economic, institutional and structural barriers that restrict educational freedom.

Education plays a particularly important role in empowering women and marginalized groups by strengthening knowledge, self-confidence, decision-making, economic participation and awareness of rights. However, access alone cannot ensure equality. Poverty, early marriage, household responsibilities, gender-based violence, inadequate infrastructure, digital exclusion and traditional gender expectations continue to affect educational participation.

Quality education must therefore be gender-responsive and inclusive. Gender-sensitive curricula, critical pedagogy, diverse role models, mentorship and equitable classroom practices can challenge stereotypes and broaden educational and career aspirations. An intersectional perspective is also essential because gender inequalities interact with caste, class, disability, geography and socio-economic conditions.

The conceptual framework of this paper connects equitable access with gender-responsive education, empowerment, participation and social transformation. It argues that supportive policies, institutions, families, communities, infrastructure, digital inclusion and accountability are necessary to transform educational opportunities into meaningful social change and contribute to an inclusive, equitable and empowered society.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of the study explains how gender-responsive and equitable education can contribute to social change and the development of an inclusive and empowered society. The framework is based on the assumption that education becomes transformative when access, quality, participation, empowerment and institutional support operate together.

The framework begins with Equitable Educational **Access**, including affordability, safe infrastructure, sanitation, transportation, digital resources and freedom from discrimination. The second component is Gender-Responsive Quality Education, involving inclusive curricula, unbiased textbooks, critical pedagogy, equitable classroom participation, teacher preparation, mentorship and diverse role models. These educational conditions contribute to Capability Development and Empowerment, reflected in self-confidence, knowledge, decision-making, economic skills, awareness of rights and leadership capacity.

Empowerment subsequently promotes Economic, Social and Political Participation, enabling individuals to access employment, contribute to household and community decisions and participate in leadership and civic activities. These processes collectively contribute to Social Transformation, including changing gender stereotypes, strengthening social inclusion, promoting dignity and creating equitable opportunities.

The framework recognizes moderating factors such as poverty, caste, class, disability, geography, family support, community attitudes, digital access, institutional culture, policy implementation and accountability. Thus, the framework can be represented as:

Equitable Access → Gender-Responsive Education → Capability & Empowerment → Participation → Social Transformation → Inclusive, Equitable and Empowered Society.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The literature on gender, education and social change has developed progressively from examining structural inequalities to emphasizing transformative and inclusive approaches. Blumberg (2008) highlighted gender bias in textbooks as a hidden barrier that can reproduce stereotypes. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) advocated moving beyond narrow equality toward transformation of social structures and power relations. McCleary-Sills et al. (2015) identified child marriage as a major barrier to girls' educational participation. Islam and Asadullah (2018) further demonstrated how gender stereotypes in Asian textbooks reinforce unequal social expectations. Wang and Degol (2017) emphasized the interaction of educational, individual and socio-cultural factors in STEM inequalities. Juvonen et al. (2019) stressed that inclusion requires attention to institutional and interpersonal processes.

Walker et al. (2019) emphasized equitable, quality public education as a means of reducing inequality. González-Pérez et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of female STEM role models. Lwamba et al. (2022) supported multidimensional approaches to women's empowerment. More recently, Kuteesa et al. (2024), Nag (2024) and Swagatanjali et al. (2025) emphasized gender-responsive education, empowerment and social transformation.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Education as a Foundation of Gender Equity and Social Transformation**

The literature establishes education as a major pathway to gender equity, empowerment and social transformation. However, access alone does not guarantee equality. Education becomes transformative when learners receive quality instruction, supportive environments, meaningful participation and opportunities to convert knowledge into social and economic agency (Nag, 2024). Thus, educational equality should be assessed through access, participation, learning outcomes, safety, representation and post-educational opportunities.

### **Socio-Cultural and Economic Barriers**

Persistent gender inequalities are shaped by traditional gender roles, early marriage, family responsibilities, poverty and gender-based violence. Kuteesa et al. (2024) and Nag (2024) emphasize that these barriers influence girls' educational continuation and career aspirations. Economic disadvantage also increases educational exclusion through costs of transport, learning materials and household labour. Therefore, scholarships, financial support, childcare, employment opportunities and social protection are necessary to connect education with genuine empowerment.

### **Infrastructure, Safety and Inclusion**

Safe schools, sanitation, transportation, digital facilities and supportive learning environments are essential for meaningful participation. A learner may be formally enrolled but remain substantively excluded because of unsafe transport, inadequate sanitation, or household responsibilities. Gender-responsive educational planning should therefore include safe infrastructure, accessible facilities and mechanisms to prevent discrimination and violence.

### **Curriculum and Gender-Responsive Pedagogy**

Curricula and textbooks can either challenge or reproduce gender stereotypes. Blumberg (2008) and Islam and Asadullah (2018) demonstrate the significance of gender representation in educational materials. Gender-responsive pedagogy should therefore promote diverse role models, equitable classroom participation, critical thinking and inclusive learning materials. Teacher education and professional development are equally important for developing teachers' capacity to identify and address gender bias.

### **STEM, Mentorship and Career Aspirations**

Gender disparities remain evident in STEM despite improvements in educational participation. Wang and Degol (2017) highlight the influence of educational and socio-cultural factors on STEM choices, while González-Pérez et al. (2020) emphasize the positive influence of female role models. Schools should therefore provide mentorship, career guidance, practical STEM experiences and opportunities to interact with women professionals to broaden learners' aspirations.

### **Intersectionality and Digital Inclusion**

Gender intersects with caste, class, disability, geography, religion and socio-economic status. Consequently, women and girls do not experience educational inequality uniformly. Inclusive policies must address these overlapping disadvantages. Similarly, digital education creates opportunities while potentially widening inequalities through unequal access to devices, connectivity and digital skills. Digital gender equity therefore requires affordable technology, digital literacy, safe online participation and inclusive design.

### **Policy, Institutional and Community Responsibility**

Policies such as NEP 2020 and legislation addressing child marriage, workplace safety and women's empowerment provide important frameworks, but effective implementation requires institutional accountability. Educational institutions should monitor gender-disaggregated enrolment, retention, learning outcomes, subject choices, leadership, digital access and employment transitions. Families, communities, governments, civil society and educational institutions must share responsibility for transforming gender norms.

### **Towards an Integrated Model of Social Change**

The literature supports an integrated pathway: Equitable Access → Participation and Learning → Capability Development → Empowerment → Economic, Social and Political Participation → Transformation of Gender Norms → Social Change. This process is shaped by poverty, infrastructure, social norms, digital access, policy implementation and institutional support. Ultimately, gender-equitable education can generate intergenerational benefits by influencing family aspirations, community participation, employment and leadership. Future strategies should therefore integrate curriculum reform, teacher preparation, STEM mentorship, digital inclusion, safe infrastructure, financial support, community engagement and institutional accountability to transform educational parity into substantive social equality.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender, education and social change are closely interconnected. Education can promote gender equity by strengthening knowledge, confidence, economic opportunities, participation, leadership and awareness of rights. However, educational access alone cannot eliminate inequality because poverty, early marriage, violence, inadequate infrastructure, curriculum bias, digital exclusion and social discrimination continue to influence outcomes. Meaningful transformation requires equitable access, gender-responsive pedagogy, institutional support and intersectional approaches. Policies should therefore promote safe infrastructure, scholarships, teacher development, curriculum reform, STEM mentorship, digital inclusion, community participation and accountability. Ultimately, gender-equitable education should expand not only access to knowledge but also individuals' agency, capabilities, dignity and freedom to participate equally in society.

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## Chapter 6

### Breaking Barriers: A Critical Exploration of Gender Inclusion and Educational Empowerment in Contemporary Society

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#### **Abstract**

*Gender inclusion and educational empowerment are essential foundations of a socially just and sustainable society. In spite of progress in girls' enrolment, literacy, higher education, employment and public participation, structural, cultural, economic and institutional barriers continue to restrict substantive gender equality. This conceptual paper examines the relationship between inclusive education, gender equality and women's empowerment through a synthesis of relevant literature. It conceptualizes educational inclusion beyond equal access, emphasizing curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, safety, leadership, participation and agency. The literature indicates that education can strengthen women's knowledge, confidence, skills, economic opportunities, decision-making and social participation. However, educational parity alone cannot transform unequal gender relations because patriarchy, poverty, caste, rurality, stereotypes, inadequate infrastructure and unequal institutional power continue to reproduce exclusion. The paper proposes an integrated framework linking access, participation, pedagogical inclusion, agency, institutional transformation and social empowerment. It concludes that transformative education enables women and girls not only to participate but also to exercise agency and reshape social institutions.*

**Keywords:** Gender Inclusion; Inclusive Education; Women's Empowerment; Gender Equality; Educational Empowerment

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender inequality is closely connected with educational, social, economic and institutional structures. Gender equality therefore extends beyond equal access to education and requires equitable participation, opportunities, resources, decision-making and freedom from discrimination. Women's empowerment similarly involves access to resources, confidence, voice, agency and the ability to influence decisions affecting individual and collective life (Kabeer, 2005; Reza & Yasmin, 2019).

Education has a significant role in this process because it can challenge traditional gender norms while developing knowledge, skills, confidence and economic capabilities. Evidence from Bangladesh indicates that educational expansion has contributed to female literacy, economic opportunities, health awareness, reduced child marriage and greater participation, although cultural, socioeconomic and infrastructural barriers remain (Mahbub et al., 2023). However, enrolment or numerical gender parity does not automatically produce empowerment. Chisamya et al. (2012) emphasize the limitations of viewing parity as evidence of genuine gender equality, while Dejaeghere and Lee (2011) highlight the importance of safe, supportive and quality educational environments.

This paper therefore conceptualizes gender inclusion through five interconnected dimensions: access, participation, pedagogical inclusion, agency and institutional transformation. An intersectional perspective is also essential because gender interacts with caste, class, poverty, geography and other forms of disadvantage. Thus, transformative education must move beyond numerical representation toward meaningful participation, empowerment and structural change.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of Gender Inclusion and Educational Empowerment is based on the assumption that education becomes transformative when it moves beyond equal access towards meaningful participation, agency and institutional change. Equitable educational access, including enrolment, retention, financial support, safe infrastructure, sanitation, transportation and digital resources, provides the foundation for inclusion. However, meaningful participation in classroom activities, decision-making, leadership and academic opportunities is equally important. Gender-responsive pedagogy through

inclusive curricula, unbiased learning materials, supportive teachers and equitable classroom practices can challenge stereotypes and create enabling learning environments. Such educational experiences can strengthen knowledge, confidence, skills, voice and decision-making capacity, thereby promoting women's social, economic and political empowerment. Empowered individuals can contribute to transforming institutional practices, family expectations and wider social norms. This process can be represented as equitable access → meaningful participation → gender-responsive education → agency and empowerment → institutional and social transformation → inclusive and equitable society. The framework is influenced by intersectionality, socioeconomic conditions, family and community support, infrastructure, digital inclusion and institutional culture, which collectively determine the extent to which education produces substantive gender equality.

#### **REVIEWS OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Dejaeghere and Lee (2011), in *What Matters for Marginalized Girls and Boys in Bangladesh: A Capabilities Approach for Understanding Educational Well-Being and Empowerment*, examined educational well-being and empowerment among marginalized learners. The study emphasized that educational access alone is insufficient and highlighted the importance of safe, supportive and quality learning environments for developing capabilities, dignity and empowerment.

Chisamya et al. (2012), in *Gender in Education: An International Perspective*, examined whether progress towards gender parity produces genuine gender equity. The study demonstrated that increased girls' enrolment does not necessarily transform gender relations, as patriarchal norms and gendered expectations may continue to influence educational experiences. It therefore emphasized substantive rather than merely numerical equality.

Mahbub et al. (2023), in *Breaking Barriers and Empowering Girls: A Study on the Impact of Education on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh*, examined education's contribution to women's empowerment. The study found that education enhances economic opportunities, confidence, decision-making, health awareness and social participation, while poverty, patriarchal norms and rural disadvantages remain important barriers.

Genua-Olmedo et al. (2025), in *Breaking Barriers: Ten Essential Steps to Achieve Gender Equality in Academia Through Scientific Societies*, examined institutional barriers affecting women's academic progression and leadership. The study emphasized gender-inclusive practices, equitable resource distribution, protection mechanisms and sustained institutional action to achieve meaningful gender equality.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **From Educational Access to Substantive Inclusion**

The literature indicates that educational access is necessary but insufficient for gender equality. Increased enrolment does not automatically ensure meaningful participation, safety, learning outcomes or empowerment. Mahbub et al. (2023) show that although girls' literacy and enrolment have improved in Bangladesh, rural poverty, patriarchal norms and inadequate infrastructure continue to restrict educational opportunities. Therefore, gender inclusion should be assessed through access, retention, participation, achievement and post-educational opportunities.

### **Curriculum and Gender-Responsive Pedagogy**

Curriculum is an important site for challenging gender stereotypes. Gender-responsive curricula should represent women's contributions to science, technology, politics, literature and social development and encourage learners to question traditional gender roles. Teachers also require appropriate training to ensure equitable classroom participation, unbiased assessment, inclusive communication and encouragement of girls in non-traditional fields. Thus, teacher education should develop practical gender-responsive competencies rather than only theoretical awareness.

### **Intersectionality and Multiple Exclusions**

Gender inequality is closely connected with caste, class, poverty, disability and geographical location. Yoganandham et al. (2024), drawing on Ambedkar's vision, emphasize the relationship between gender, caste and social justice. A uniform gender policy may therefore benefit relatively privileged women while leaving marginalized groups behind. Gender-responsive education should use disaggregated data and provide targeted scholarships, mentoring, residential facilities, digital resources and academic support according to contextual needs.

### **STEM, Higher Education and Career Opportunities**

Gender disparities remain visible in STEM education and academic careers. Islam and Jirattikorn (2023) identify stereotypes and social perceptions as barriers to women's STEM participation. Genua-Olmedo et al. (2025) further highlight invisible institutional barriers that contribute to women's underrepresentation in senior academic positions. Mentoring, career guidance, research opportunities, leadership training, transparent promotion and equitable recognition are therefore essential. Higher education should promote not only employability but also entrepreneurship, technological skills, leadership and economic agency.

### **Safety, Wellbeing and Institutional Culture**

Educational inclusion also depends upon safety, dignity and belonging. Gender-sensitive institutions require effective anti-harassment mechanisms, confidential reporting systems, supportive leadership and timely institutional responses. A student may have formal access to education but remain substantively excluded if she experiences discrimination, intimidation or exclusion. Institutional climate should therefore be considered an important dimension of educational equity.

### **Community, Family and Digital Inclusion**

Schools and universities cannot transform gender relations independently. Family expectations and community attitudes strongly influence girls' educational participation. Community awareness, parental engagement and participation of boys and men can support sustainable change. At the same time, digital access has become an important dimension of educational inclusion. Affordable devices, connectivity, digital literacy and safe online participation can expand educational and economic opportunities for women, particularly those facing geographical or mobility constraints.

### **From Individual Empowerment to Institutional Transformation**

The most significant implication is that empowerment should not be reduced to individual resilience. Institutions themselves must change their curriculum, recruitment, assessment, leadership, resource allocation, safety mechanisms and grievance procedures. The literature supports a transformative cycle: identify barriers → widen access → ensure participation → develop agency → transform institutions → monitor outcomes. Thus, gender-inclusive education should move

beyond numerical parity towards equality of experience, agency and outcomes. Such an approach can strengthen women's participation in education, employment, leadership and wider social development.

## CONCLUSION

Gender-inclusive education is essential for meaningful social transformation. The literature shows that access alone cannot eliminate inequalities created by patriarchy, poverty, caste, stereotypes, unsafe environments and institutional barriers. Education must therefore promote participation, agency, dignity and leadership through gender-responsive curricula, teacher preparation, STEM opportunities, mentoring, digital inclusion and supportive institutions. Community participation and effective accountability are equally important. Ultimately, the goal is not merely to enable women to enter existing educational and social structures, but to equip them with the knowledge, confidence and agency to participate in, lead and transform those structures, creating a more inclusive, equitable and empowered society.

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## Chapter 7

### Transforming School Education for Gender Justice: Inclusive Pedagogies, Gender-Responsive Practices and Institutional Change

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality remains a persistent challenge in school education in spite of significant policy and legislative efforts to promote inclusion. This conceptual paper examines how transformative pedagogical and institutional practices can reposition schooling as an instrument of gender justice. Drawing on feminist educational theory, sociology of education, the capability approach, intersectionality and relevant secondary literature, the paper analyses gender bias in curricula, textbooks, classroom practices, teacher expectations and institutional governance. Particular attention is given to gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum reform, teacher sensitisation, intersectional approaches and India's National Education Policy 2020 and Gender Inclusion Fund. The analysis suggests that increased educational access alone does not guarantee substantive gender equality, as hidden curricula and institutional practices may continue to reproduce gender stereotypes. The paper argues that meaningful transformation requires coordinated changes in curriculum, pedagogy, teacher preparation, institutional culture, safety and policy implementation. It concludes that gender-just schooling requires a shift from formal inclusion towards transformative and accountable educational practices.*

**Keywords:** *Gender equality; Inclusive education; Transformative pedagogy; Gender-responsive curriculum; School education*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is widely regarded as an important instrument for promoting equality and social transformation. However, school systems may simultaneously reproduce gender inequalities through curricula, textbooks, classroom interactions, teacher expectations, disciplinary practices and institutional norms. Gender is socially constructed and reinforced through everyday educational experiences, influencing learners' participation, subject choices, aspirations, leadership opportunities and perceptions of appropriate social roles (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Connell, 2009). Thus, formal equality in enrolment does not necessarily ensure substantive gender inclusion.

The present paper examines the gap between educational access and lived gender equality, particularly within the Indian school context. Although policy initiatives have expanded girls' participation, inequalities remain in retention, subject selection, classroom participation and leadership opportunities. The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes gender inclusion as a significant educational priority and proposes measures such as the Gender Inclusion Fund (Government of India, 2020).

Therefore, achieving gender equality requires more than increasing access. It demands transformation of curricula, pedagogical practices, teacher preparation and institutional cultures. This paper critically explores these dimensions and argues that schools should actively challenge gender stereotypes and unequal power relations. Such transformation can enable education to become a meaningful foundation for dignity, agency, participation and social justice.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this paper views gender-transformative school education as an interconnected process involving curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture and policy. The first dimension, curricular content and representation, focuses on removing gender stereotypes and ensuring balanced representation of women and diverse social experiences in textbooks and learning materials. The second dimension, pedagogical practice and teacher disposition, emphasizes gender-responsive teaching, equitable classroom participation, inclusive language, unbiased assessment and teacher awareness of implicit gender

expectations. The third dimension, institutional governance and safety, includes supportive leadership, transparent practices, safe learning environments, mechanisms for addressing discrimination and opportunities for equal participation in decision-making. The fourth dimension, policy architecture, connects school-level transformation with broader educational policies, including the National Education Policy 2020 and the Gender Inclusion Fund.

These four dimensions operate within an intersectional context, where gender interacts with caste, class, disability, religion, geography and socioeconomic conditions (Crenshaw, 1991). The framework therefore proposes that meaningful transformation occurs when inclusive curriculum + gender-responsive pedagogy + equitable institutional culture + supportive policy → agency, participation and empowerment → gender-just school education.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The literature shows a gradual shift from viewing gender equality as educational access towards understanding it as substantive inclusion and transformation. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Acker (1990) explain how schooling and institutional structures reproduce gender hierarchies through hidden norms. Crenshaw (1991) and Connell (2009) broaden this perspective by highlighting intersectionality and gender as a relational social structure. Sen (1999) emphasizes education's role in expanding agency and substantive freedom, while Subrahmanian (2005) argues that equality must include participation, curriculum and outcomes beyond enrolment. Chanana (2010) and Nambissan (2013) identify continuing structural, caste and class-based inequalities in India. Morley (2013) highlights women's underrepresentation in educational leadership. UNESCO (2019) and Government of India (2020) emphasize gender-responsive curricula, teacher training and policy interventions. More recently, Rayaprol et al. (2023) stress teacher sensitisation, while Nag et al. (2025) identify integrated school interventions as effective. Bai (2026) calls for transformative institutional reform to address persistent hidden inequalities.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Hidden Curriculum, Textbooks and Gender Norms**

Schools can reproduce gender inequality through textbooks, curriculum and everyday practices. Gender-stereotyped representations often

position men as leaders and professionals while associating women with domestic and caring roles. Such hidden curriculum shapes learners' aspirations, subject choices and perceptions of authority. Therefore, curriculum reform should include diverse gender representations and women's contributions across science, history, politics and culture. However, revised textbooks alone are insufficient unless teachers also adopt gender-responsive classroom practices.

### **Teacher Attitudes and Gender-Responsive Pedagogy**

Teachers are important agents of gender socialisation. Unconscious differences in questioning, praise, classroom responsibilities and expectations can influence learners' confidence and participation. Rayaprol et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of teacher sensitisation in challenging patriarchal attitudes. Gender-responsive pedagogy should therefore become a continuous professional competency involving reflective practice, equitable participation, inclusive language, unbiased assessment and encouragement of learners across diverse academic fields. Sustained mentoring is more effective than one-time sensitisation programmes.

### **Institutional Structures, Safety and Retention**

Gender equality also depends on the physical and organisational environment of schools. Inadequate sanitation, unsafe transportation, restrictive practices and insufficient support can affect girls' attendance and retention. Institutional leadership is equally significant because women may remain underrepresented in decision-making in spite of their numerical presence. Schools therefore require safe infrastructure, accessible grievance mechanisms, transparent leadership opportunities and supportive institutional cultures. Protection should not become restrictive; instead, schools should promote safety while strengthening learners' autonomy and agency.

### **Policy Architecture and NEP 2020**

The National Education Policy 2020 represents an important shift by recognising gender as a cross-cutting educational priority and introducing the Gender Inclusion Fund. However, policy commitment must be supported by resources, monitoring and institutional accountability. UNESCO (2019) similarly highlights uneven implementation of gender-responsive curricula and teacher preparation. Periodic gender audits, gender-disaggregated data and school-level

monitoring can help translate policy objectives into measurable changes. Thus, policy should move beyond welfare-oriented interventions towards structural and gender-transformative reform.

### **Intersectionality and Multiple Exclusions**

Gender cannot be examined independently of caste, class, disability, religion and geographical location. Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional perspective demonstrates that overlapping identities can produce compounded disadvantage. Nambissan (2013) similarly highlights the interaction of caste, class and gender in Indian education. Consequently, gender policies should avoid treating girls as a homogeneous group. Context-sensitive interventions, targeted support, inclusive infrastructure and disaggregated data are necessary to ensure that the most marginalised learners benefit from educational reform.

### **Towards Gender-Transformative School Education**

The literature suggests that sustainable transformation requires simultaneous reform across curriculum, pedagogy, institutional governance and policy. Curriculum must challenge stereotypes; teachers must develop reflective and inclusive practices; schools must ensure safety, participation and equitable leadership; and policies must be adequately implemented and monitored. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Gender equality should therefore be understood not as a separate programme but as an institutional lens through which all aspects of schooling are continuously examined. Such an approach can reposition schools from spaces that reproduce gender hierarchies to institutions capable of challenging them and promoting dignity, agency and social justice.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender equality in school education requires transformation beyond enrolment and formal policy commitments. Hidden curricula, teacher bias, institutional practices and intersecting inequalities continue to restrict substantive inclusion. NEP 2020 provides an important policy foundation, but effective implementation requires gender-responsive curricula, reflective teacher preparation, safe environments, intersectional planning and institutional accountability. Sustainable change depends on coordinated action across curriculum, pedagogy, governance and policy. Schools can therefore become powerful spaces for challenging gender stereotypes and expanding learners' agency.

Ultimately, transformative education should ensure not only equal access but also equal participation, dignity, opportunity and voice, enabling every learner to contribute to a more equitable society.

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## Chapter 8

### From Gender Bias to Gender Equity: Rethinking School Education in the Context of the Twenty-First Century

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality in school education has evolved from ensuring equal access to promoting equitable participation, learning experiences and educational outcomes. In spite of considerable progress in enrolment, gender bias continues to influence curriculum, classroom interaction, teacher expectations, peer relationships and subject choices. This paper examines the transition from gender bias to gender equity through the lens of twenty-first-century school education. It highlights the importance of gender-transformative education, inclusive pedagogy, gender-responsive curriculum and institutional accountability in creating equitable learning environments. The study also emphasizes the significance of intersectionality, recognizing that gender inequalities are often intensified by poverty, disability, caste and geographical location. By reviewing contemporary literature, the paper argues that schools should move beyond merely providing equal opportunities and instead become transformative institutions that challenge stereotypes, encourage critical thinking and empower every learner to participate equally in educational and social development.*

**Keywords:** Gender Bias; Gender Equity; Transformative Education; Inclusive Pedagogy; School Education

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is one of the most powerful instruments for promoting individual development, social justice and democratic participation. Although significant progress has been made in reducing gender disparities in school enrolment, equal access alone does not guarantee equal educational experiences or outcomes. Gender bias continues to exist in various forms, including classroom practices, teacher expectations, curriculum representation, career guidance and peer interactions. These biases often influence learners' confidence, participation, subject preferences and future career aspirations. Therefore, the focus of educational reform has shifted from achieving gender equality, which emphasizes equal treatment, to promoting gender equity, which recognizes that learners may require different forms of support to overcome historical and social disadvantages. Gender-transformative education seeks to challenge stereotypes, unequal power relations and discriminatory practices by creating inclusive learning environments that encourage critical thinking and equal participation. In the twenty-first century, schools are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to prepare learners for responsible citizenship, innovation and social inclusion. Consequently, rethinking school education through the perspective of gender equity has become essential for building an educational system that values fairness, diversity and equal opportunities for every learner.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the idea that achieving gender equity requires transformation at multiple levels of the educational system. Structural transformation includes educational policies, leadership, institutional accountability and equitable allocation of resources that support inclusive education. Curricular transformation emphasizes the development of gender-responsive curricula that fairly represent the contributions of women and men while challenging traditional stereotypes. Pedagogical transformation focuses on classroom practices, equitable participation, inclusive assessment and teacher expectations that encourage every learner to develop confidence and academic potential. Cultural transformation addresses school climate, peer relationships, family expectations and institutional values that influence learners' perceptions of gender roles. The framework also adopts an intersectional perspective, recognizing that gender interacts

with poverty, disability, caste, ethnicity, language and geographical location to create multiple forms of educational disadvantage. Therefore, meaningful gender equity requires coordinated efforts involving curriculum reform, teacher education, institutional leadership, community participation and continuous evaluation. This comprehensive framework supports the creation of schools where learners are empowered to pursue their interests and abilities without being limited by gender-based stereotypes or discrimination.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Recent literature demonstrates that gender equity requires systemic educational transformation rather than simply increasing girls' access to schooling. Zanchi et al. (2026) identify teachers, parents, curriculum, peers and school environments as major contributors to gender bias in secondary education. UNICEF (2021) explains that gender-transformative education challenges stereotypes, unequal power relations and discriminatory practices throughout the education system. UNESCO (2020) highlights that although gender gaps in educational access have narrowed, inequalities continue to affect learners facing poverty, disability and other intersecting disadvantages. UNESCO (2017) further emphasizes that girls' underrepresentation in STEM subjects results largely from stereotypes and socialization rather than differences in ability. Similarly, UNGEI (2021) advocates a whole-school approach that encourages inclusive pedagogy, equitable learning opportunities and institutional accountability. Collectively, these studies support the view that sustainable gender equity requires curriculum reform, teacher development, supportive school cultures and active participation from all educational stakeholders.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **From Gender Bias to Gender Equity**

The movement from gender bias to gender equity represents a significant change in educational philosophy. Traditional educational policies mainly focused on providing equal opportunities for boys and girls to attend school. However, equal access alone cannot eliminate inequalities when learners continue to experience stereotypes, unequal expectations and discriminatory classroom practices. Gender equity therefore emphasizes fairness in educational experiences, participation and outcomes rather than identical treatment. It encourages schools to

identify and remove barriers that prevent learners from achieving their full potential.

### **Gender Bias as an Institutional Issue**

Gender bias should not be viewed only as individual prejudice but as a structural issue embedded within educational institutions. Teacher expectations, classroom interactions, textbooks, extracurricular activities and administrative practices may unconsciously reinforce traditional gender roles. Teachers may unintentionally encourage boys to participate more actively in science or technology while assigning girls supportive roles. Such practices influence students' confidence, aspirations and academic performance. Consequently, schools should regularly review classroom participation, curriculum representation, leadership opportunities and institutional policies to identify and reduce hidden forms of gender discrimination.

### **Gender-Responsive Curriculum and Pedagogy**

A gender-responsive curriculum ensures balanced representation of women and men across academic subjects while challenging stereotypical portrayals. Inclusive teaching practices encourage equal participation, collaborative learning and respectful classroom interaction. Teachers should adopt fair assessment methods, provide constructive feedback and promote critical discussions about gender stereotypes. Continuous professional development enables teachers to recognize implicit bias and implement equitable pedagogical strategies that benefit all learners.

### **Transforming STEM and Technology Education**

Improvements in educational access, girls remain underrepresented in STEM and technology-related fields due to persistent social stereotypes and limited encouragement. Schools should provide positive role models, mentoring programmes, practical learning opportunities and supportive classroom environments that strengthen girls' confidence and interest in STEM. At the same time, boys should also be encouraged to explore a wider range of academic and career choices without being constrained by traditional gender expectations.

### **Intersectionality in Educational Equity**

Gender inequality often overlaps with poverty, disability, caste, language and geographical disadvantage. Therefore, educational policies

should adopt an intersectional approach that recognizes the diverse experiences of learners. Financial assistance, digital access, inclusive infrastructure, transportation and community support are essential for ensuring equitable educational participation among marginalized groups. Equity should address learners' individual needs rather than applying identical solutions to everyone.

### **Student Voice, School Leadership and Community Partnership**

Students should actively participate in identifying gender-related challenges within their schools through discussions, surveys and student councils. School leaders must establish clear institutional policies promoting equality, inclusion and accountability. Parents and communities also play an essential role in challenging traditional stereotypes and supporting learners' educational aspirations. Collaboration among teachers, families, policymakers and community organizations strengthens the effectiveness of gender-equity initiatives.

### **Towards a Transformative School Framework**

Achieving gender equity requires a comprehensive whole-school approach integrating gender-responsive curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, reflective teacher education, equitable STEM participation, supportive school culture, student agency, community engagement and institutional accountability. These components work together to create learning environments where gender no longer determines educational opportunities or future aspirations. Such transformation enables schools to contribute meaningfully to social justice, democratic participation and sustainable development.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender equity represents a transformative approach to education that goes beyond providing equal access to schools. It requires educational institutions to challenge stereotypes, promote inclusive teaching practices, ensure equitable participation and create supportive learning environments for all learners. The reviewed literature demonstrates that curriculum reform, teacher development, institutional accountability, community participation and intersectional educational policies are essential for achieving meaningful gender equity. Schools therefore have a vital responsibility to prepare learners not only for academic success but also for active participation in an inclusive,

democratic and socially just society where opportunities are determined by ability rather than gender.

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## Chapter 9

### Reimagining Gender Equality through Transformative School Education: A Critical Study on Inclusive Educational Practices

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality in education has improved significantly in terms of access and enrolment, yet many learners continue to face discrimination arising from gender stereotypes, unequal power relations and intersecting social inequalities. This paper critically examines how transformative school education can promote gender equality through inclusive educational practices. Drawing on the Gender Transformative Education framework proposed by UNICEF and related international literature, the study conceptualizes gender equality as a multidimensional process that includes equitable participation, safety, agency, recognition and equal opportunities for all learners. The paper reviews contemporary literature on gender norms, intersectionality, curriculum, pedagogy, teacher self-awareness, learner participation, community engagement and institutional accountability. It argues that sustainable gender equality requires schools to move beyond gender-sensitive approaches towards transforming discriminatory structures and practices. By integrating inclusive policies, gender-responsive pedagogy, reflective teaching and community partnerships, schools can become democratic and transformative spaces that empower learners and contribute to a more equitable and socially just society.*

**Keywords:** *Gender-Transformative Education; Gender Equality; Inclusive Pedagogy; Teacher Self-Awareness; Whole-School Approach*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful instrument for promoting social justice, equality and sustainable development. Schools influence learners' knowledge, attitudes, aspirations and understanding of social relationships, making them important institutions for addressing gender inequality. However, education systems may also reproduce gender stereotypes through curricula, textbooks, classroom practices, institutional structures and everyday interactions. Although many countries have achieved substantial progress in gender parity regarding school enrolment, numerical equality alone does not ensure equitable educational experiences or outcomes. Learners continue to experience disparities in participation, leadership opportunities, subject selection, safety and academic achievement because of persistent gender norms and unequal power relations. Gender-transformative education therefore extends beyond increasing access by challenging the structural and cultural factors that perpetuate discrimination. It seeks to create inclusive learning environments where every learner can participate equally, develop confidence and exercise agency irrespective of gender or social background. Furthermore, gender inequality intersects with poverty, disability, caste, ethnicity, language, migration and other forms of marginalization, making an intersectional approach essential for educational reform. Consequently, schools must adopt inclusive policies, equitable pedagogical practices, reflective teaching and collaborative partnerships with families and communities to promote meaningful gender equality and democratic participation.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the Gender Transformative Education (GTE) framework proposed by UNICEF (2021), which views gender equality as a multidimensional process extending beyond equal enrolment to include equitable participation, agency, safety, recognition and shared decision-making. The framework proposes that transformative school education operates through six interrelated dimensions: transformative policy and leadership, gender-equitable curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, teacher self-awareness and professional agency, safe and participatory learning environments and

family-community partnerships. These dimensions function collectively rather than independently. Institutional policies establish an enabling environment, while gender-responsive curricula and inclusive pedagogical practices challenge stereotypes and promote equal participation. Teachers, through reflective practice and self-awareness, become catalysts for transforming classroom relationships and reducing implicit bias. Safe and democratic school environments encourage learner voice, confidence and critical thinking, whereas partnerships with families and communities help extend gender-equitable values beyond the classroom. The framework also adopts an intersectional perspective, recognising that gender inequalities are often intensified by poverty, disability, caste, ethnicity, language and other social identities. Consequently, meaningful gender equality requires coordinated institutional, pedagogical and community-based interventions that collectively transform discriminatory norms, redistribute educational opportunities and empower every learner to participate fully in school and society.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The development of gender-transformative education has evolved through successive scholarly contributions. Dunne (2007) demonstrated that everyday school practices, classroom interactions and institutional cultures reinforce gender norms that influence learners' participation and aspirations. Haberland (2015) further established that educational programmes addressing gender and power are more effective than those focusing only on information, highlighting the importance of transforming unequal power relations. Hassan et al. (2015) emphasized teacher self-awareness and emotional intelligence as essential components of effective and equitable teaching. Kwauk et al. (2019) connected girls' education with broader sustainable development goals, illustrating its social and economic significance. UNICEF (2021) introduced the Gender Transformative Education framework, advocating a shift from gender parity to structural transformation through inclusive curriculum, pedagogy and institutional reform. More recently, Zeine et al. (2025) highlighted reflective self-awareness as fundamental to teachers' professional identity and transformative educational practice. Together, these studies demonstrate that sustainable gender equality requires systemic educational change rather than equal access alone.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **From Gender Parity to Gender Equity**

Although significant progress has been made in achieving gender parity in school enrolment, equal numbers of girls and boys do not necessarily indicate genuine equality. Many learners continue to experience unequal opportunities, limited participation and discriminatory expectations within educational settings. UNICEF (2021) argues that gender equality should move beyond numerical representation towards substantive equity, where every learner enjoys equal dignity, participation, safety and opportunities for personal development. Gender equity therefore recognizes that historically disadvantaged groups may require additional support to overcome structural inequalities and achieve meaningful educational outcomes.

### **Schools as Sites of Gender Transformation**

Schools are not neutral institutions; they actively shape learners' perceptions of gender through curricula, textbooks, classroom interactions, leadership opportunities and disciplinary practices. Gender stereotypes embedded within educational practices often influence learners' aspirations, confidence and subject choices. Dunne (2007) demonstrated that everyday school environments reinforce gendered expectations regarding leadership, participation and behaviour. Therefore, transformative education requires schools to critically examine whose knowledge is represented, whose voices are valued and whose achievements are recognised. Such reflection enables schools to challenge discriminatory norms rather than unintentionally reproducing them.

### **Transformative Curriculum, Pedagogy and Teacher Agency**

Curriculum and pedagogy are central to promoting gender-transformative education. A gender-equitable curriculum should represent women and men in diverse social, professional and leadership roles while encouraging learners to question traditional stereotypes. Inclusive pedagogical practices further ensure equitable classroom participation, collaborative learning, fair assessment and respectful interaction among learners. Teachers play a crucial role in translating these principles into classroom practice. Their ability to recognise personal assumptions and unconscious biases significantly influences teaching effectiveness. Hassan et al. (2015) highlight teacher self-awareness and emotional intelligence as important dimensions of

professional practice, while reflective teaching enables educators to create equitable learning environments that empower all learners regardless of gender.

### **Safe, Inclusive and Participatory Learning Environments**

Meaningful gender equality cannot exist where learners experience bullying, harassment, violence, or discrimination. Schools must therefore provide physically, emotionally and socially safe environments that encourage participation and respect for diversity. Gender-transformative education also promotes learner voice by involving students in decision-making processes, leadership activities and discussions concerning equality and inclusion. Such participation develops confidence, critical thinking, democratic values and social responsibility. Furthermore, educational programmes should encourage boys to challenge restrictive forms of masculinity while empowering girls to participate confidently in leadership and academic opportunities. These strategies contribute to healthier relationships and more inclusive school cultures.

### **Intersectionality and Community Engagement**

Gender inequality rarely exists independently of other social inequalities. Learners' educational experiences are shaped by poverty, caste, disability, ethnicity, language, geographical location and other intersecting identities. Consequently, educational policies and practices should adopt an intersectional perspective that recognises diverse learner needs. Schools alone cannot transform discriminatory social norms; meaningful change also requires collaboration with parents, community organisations, school management committees and local leaders. Community engagement helps reinforce inclusive values beyond the classroom while supporting initiatives addressing early marriage, violence, discrimination and unequal educational opportunities. Such partnerships strengthen the sustainability of gender-transformative educational practices.

### **Towards a Whole-School Transformative Framework**

The findings indicate that sustainable gender equality requires a comprehensive whole-school approach integrating policy reform, curriculum transformation, inclusive pedagogy, teacher professional development, learner participation, safe school environments, institutional leadership and community partnerships. These components

operate as interconnected elements that collectively challenge discriminatory norms and redistribute educational opportunities. Effective monitoring should therefore extend beyond enrolment and academic achievement to include indicators such as learner agency, changing gender attitudes, leadership participation and school climate. When educational institutions adopt this integrated approach, schools become transformative spaces that promote democratic participation, social justice and lifelong gender equality rather than merely achieving statistical parity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gender-transformative school education requires moving beyond gender parity towards creating equitable, inclusive and empowering learning environments. The literature highlights that education can either reproduce gender inequalities or challenge discriminatory norms through transformative pedagogy, curriculum reform, teacher reflection and participatory practices. Gender Transformative Education emphasizes changing unequal power relations by engaging schools, families, communities and institutions. Teacher self-awareness and emotional intelligence further strengthen the ability of educators to promote inclusive classrooms. Thus, schools should become spaces where all learners develop agency, critical consciousness and freedom from restrictive gender expectations, contributing to a more democratic and socially just society.

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## Chapter 10

### Gender Sensitive Education: Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Learning Communities through Transformative Pedagogies

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender-sensitive education has emerged as an essential strategy for promoting educational equity and inclusive learning communities. Although access to education has improved globally, gender inequalities continue to persist through stereotypes, biased curricula, unequal classroom participation, institutional practices and sociocultural norms. This conceptual paper examines how gender-sensitive education can move beyond awareness towards transformative pedagogies that promote participation, agency and social justice. Drawing on recent studies from different educational contexts, the paper argues that meaningful gender equity requires coordinated changes in curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, institutional leadership, learner participation and community engagement. It highlights the importance of inclusive learning materials, equitable classroom interaction, gender-responsive assessment, mentorship and continuous professional development. The paper further proposes a conceptual framework linking institutional commitment, transformative pedagogy, learner agency and continuous evaluation. It concludes that sustainable educational equity can be achieved only when gender sensitivity becomes an institutional culture rather than an isolated classroom practice, enabling all learners to participate, learn and flourish in inclusive educational environments.*

**Keywords:** *Gender-Sensitive Education, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy, Inclusive Education, Educational Equity, Transformative Pedagogy*

## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in promoting equality, social mobility and democratic participation. However, equal access to schooling has not automatically ensured equal learning experiences. Gender inequality continues to influence curriculum, classroom interaction, teacher expectations, assessment and institutional culture, limiting learners' opportunities and participation (UNESCO, 2021). Consequently, educational equity must be understood not only in terms of enrolment but also through participation, recognition, safety, achievement and learner agency.

Gender-sensitive education seeks to identify and reduce biases that influence teaching and learning. It promotes inclusive language, balanced classroom participation, diverse learning materials and respectful learning environments where all learners can develop without restrictive gender stereotypes (Warin & Adriany, 2017). Recent studies further emphasize that sustainable change requires gender-responsive curriculum, teacher preparation, supportive institutional leadership and community participation (Rarieya et al., 2025).

Contemporary scholarship also distinguishes gender awareness from gender-transformative education. While awareness recognizes inequalities, transformative pedagogy challenges the social and institutional structures that reproduce them (Makamure, 2025). Therefore, this paper critically examines gender-sensitive education as a pathway towards inclusive and equitable learning communities and argues that meaningful educational transformation requires coordinated changes in pedagogy, curriculum, leadership, assessment and learner participation.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper conceptualizes gender-sensitive education as a dynamic process connecting institutional commitment, pedagogical practice, learner agency and continuous improvement. Sustainable educational equity cannot be achieved through isolated classroom interventions; rather, it requires coordinated institutional and pedagogical transformation.

*The proposed framework is represented as:*

***Institutional Commitment***



***Gender-Responsive Curriculum and Pedagogy***



***Inclusive Classroom Participation***



***Learner Voice, Confidence and Agency***



***Equitable Learning Outcomes***



***Continuous Monitoring and Institutional Improvement***

Institutional leadership provides supportive policies, adequate resources, teacher development and inclusive infrastructure. Gender-responsive pedagogy promotes balanced participation, collaborative learning, reflective dialogue, inclusive teaching materials and equitable assessment. These practices strengthen learner confidence, participation, critical thinking and leadership while reducing gender stereotypes. Continuous monitoring through gender-disaggregated data, classroom reflection and professional development helps institutions identify inequalities and improve practice.

The framework recognizes intersectionality by acknowledging that gender interacts with socioeconomic status, disability, culture and geographical location. Thus, transformative pedagogy becomes a continuous institutional process that promotes participation, inclusion, agency and educational justice for all learners.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Warin and Adriany (2017) introduced gender-flexible pedagogy, emphasizing early childhood learning environments free from restrictive gender roles. UNESCO (2021) highlighted the need for gender-responsive educational systems beyond enrolment. Mukagiahana et al. (2024) demonstrated that teacher training strengthens classroom implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy. Rarieya et al. (2024) emphasized teacher educators' role in promoting inclusive teaching practices. Makamure (2025) showed that institutional policies and professional development are essential for sustaining gender-responsive education. Nandi et al. (2025) identified persistent gender stereotypes within STEM textbooks, reinforcing the need for curriculum reform. Yuma (2025) proposed continuous monitoring and learner participation

as central to educational equity. Finally, Nalla and Mangaran (2026) identified teacher training, institutional support, inclusive resources and community participation as critical factors for implementing gender-sensitive pedagogy and developing equitable learning environments.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Gender-Sensitive Education as Transformative Practice**

Gender-sensitive education extends beyond equal access by addressing the ways gender shapes classroom participation, expectations and educational opportunities. It encourages schools to replace stereotypical assumptions with inclusive practices that enable every learner to participate confidently and equally. Rather than treating gender equality as a numerical issue, it focuses on fairness, dignity, participation and educational success.

### **Transforming Classroom Pedagogy**

Teachers play a central role in creating equitable learning environments. Everyday classroom practices—including questioning, leadership opportunities, group work, assessment and feedback—may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes. Gender-responsive pedagogy promotes balanced participation, collaborative learning, inclusive language and equitable assessment so that learners are evaluated according to their abilities rather than gender-based expectations. Such practices increase confidence, engagement and academic achievement.

### **Curriculum and Teacher Preparation**

Curriculum significantly influences learners' perceptions of gender roles. Textbooks that predominantly portray men as leaders and women in domestic roles reinforce stereotypes and restrict aspirations. Gender-sensitive curricula should include diverse representations of women and men across science, leadership, literature, technology and public life. Equally important is teacher education. Pre-service and in-service training should develop teachers' understanding of gender equality, classroom bias, inclusive teaching strategies and reflective practice. Continuous professional development enables teachers to translate policy into effective classroom practice.

### **Institutional Leadership and Inclusive Learning Communities**

Transformative pedagogy requires institutional commitment rather than isolated classroom initiatives. School leaders should establish gender-responsive policies, provide professional development, improve infrastructure and ensure safe learning environments. Gender-sensitive institutions also promote mentoring programmes, student leadership opportunities and effective grievance mechanisms that foster belonging and respect.

Inclusive learning communities encourage learner voice through dialogue, collaborative projects, peer mentoring and student participation in decision-making. Such opportunities strengthen confidence, leadership and critical thinking while allowing students to question gender stereotypes and contribute to institutional improvement.

### **Challenges and Future Directions**

In spite of growing awareness, several barriers continue to limit implementation. These include insufficient teacher preparation, persistent cultural stereotypes, limited inclusive teaching materials, inadequate institutional support, assessment bias and community resistance. Gender-sensitive initiatives often fail when they depend solely on individual teachers without systemic backing.

Future educational practice should therefore strengthen teacher education, revise curriculum and textbooks, diversify assessment, promote gender-responsive leadership, encourage community engagement and monitor educational outcomes using gender-disaggregated data. Educational policies should also adopt an intersectional perspective by recognizing how gender interacts with poverty, disability, ethnicity, language and geographical location.

Ultimately, transformative pedagogy requires collaboration among teachers, school leaders, families, communities and policymakers. When institutional commitment, inclusive pedagogy, learner participation and continuous evaluation operate together, schools become spaces where educational equity, learner agency and social justice can be achieved.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender-sensitive education is essential for developing inclusive and equitable learning communities. The literature demonstrates that educational inequality is shaped not only by access but also by

curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture and social norms. Transformative pedagogy therefore requires coordinated action involving teacher education, inclusive curriculum, learner participation, supportive leadership and continuous monitoring. Sustainable educational equity can be achieved only when gender sensitivity becomes an institutional commitment rather than an isolated classroom activity. By promoting participation, challenging stereotypes, strengthening learner agency and supporting inclusive educational practices, schools can contribute significantly to social justice, democratic citizenship and long-term educational transformation.

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## Chapter 11

### Gender, School and Society: Transforming Educational Practices through Gender Equity and Inclusive Pedagogy

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender and education are interconnected social processes through which identities, opportunities, expectations and inequalities are developed and reproduced. Although educational access has expanded significantly, gender disparities continue to influence classroom participation, curriculum representation, subject choices, leadership opportunities, STEM participation and learning outcomes. This paper examines the relationship between gender, school and society by analysing how educational institutions shape and respond to gender perspectives. It explores the role of hidden curriculum, teacher expectations, classroom interactions, school culture and institutional practices in constructing gendered experiences. The study highlights the influence of social norms, cultural expectations, socio-economic conditions and intersectional factors on educational opportunities. Drawing upon feminist, interactionist, cultural reproduction and intersectionality perspectives, the paper argues that schools can either reproduce gender inequalities or become transformative spaces. Gender-sensitive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, reflective teacher education and equitable institutional practices are essential for achieving gender equity and social empowerment.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equity, Gender Socialization, Hidden Curriculum, Inclusive Pedagogy, Educational Practices, Social Empowerment

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender is a socially and culturally constructed concept shaped through family, community, media, institutions and everyday interactions. Among these institutions, schools play a significant role in developing students' identities, values and perceptions of social relationships. Schools do not only provide academic knowledge but also transmit social expectations through curriculum, classroom practices, discipline, peer interactions and institutional norms.

Contemporary educational research shows that gender inequality extends beyond access and enrolment. Differences continue to appear in classroom participation, subject selection, leadership opportunities, STEM education, curriculum representation and career aspirations. These inequalities are influenced by cultural expectations, socio-economic conditions and social identities. Gender also intersects with class, disability, ethnicity and geographical location, creating diverse educational experiences.

The school environment may reproduce gender stereotypes through hidden curriculum, teacher expectations, unequal participation patterns and institutional practices. However, schools also possess transformative potential by promoting inclusive pedagogy, gender-sensitive curriculum and equitable participation. Therefore, understanding the relationship between gender, school and society requires examining how social structures influence educational experiences and how educational practices can challenge inequality.

This paper explores gender perspectives in education by analysing the role of schools in reproducing or transforming gender relations and highlights strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Literature on gender and education highlights that schools are important spaces where gender identities and inequalities are produced and negotiated. Acker (1994) explains that educational institutions reflect wider gender relations through their structures and practices. Apple (1979) introduced the concept of hidden curriculum, showing how classroom routines and institutional processes communicate social values beyond formal teaching. Connell (1995) examines gender

hierarchy through the concept of hegemonic masculinity, while Butler (1990) explains gender as socially performed through repeated practices. Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality framework highlights how gender interacts with class, ethnicity and other social factors. Sadker and Sadker (1994) demonstrate unequal classroom interactions, whereas Wang and Degol (2017) examine gender differences in STEM participation. Recent studies emphasize the importance of inclusive pedagogy, gender-sensitive curriculum and institutional reform for achieving educational equity.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this paper explains the relationship between society, school structures, classroom practices and educational outcomes. It is based on the understanding that gender inequality is produced through interconnected social and institutional processes.

At the societal level, cultural norms, patriarchy, economic conditions and social identities influence educational expectations and opportunities. These social influences enter schools through institutional structures, policies, curriculum design, resource distribution and leadership practices. At the classroom level, teacher expectations, questioning patterns, classroom participation, discipline, seating arrangements and task allocation create a hidden curriculum through which gender norms are communicated.

The framework is informed by major theoretical perspectives, including Mead's interactionism, Butler's theory of gender performativity, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Connell's theory of gender relations and Apple's concept of hidden curriculum. These perspectives explain how repeated social interactions and institutional practices make gender differences appear natural and permanent.

The framework proposes the following process:

Societal Gender Norms → School Structures and Policies → Classroom Practices and Hidden Curriculum → Student Identity, Participation and Achievement → Social Outcomes

However, this process can be transformed through gender-sensitive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, reflective teacher education, supportive leadership, mentoring and community participation. Thus, schools can

become spaces that challenge gender inequality and promote equity, empowerment and social justice.

## **DISCUSSION**

Gender, school and society are deeply interconnected, as schools function as important spaces where gender identities, expectations and social relationships are developed. Education is not limited to the transmission of academic knowledge; it also influences students' understanding of appropriate behaviour, abilities, responsibilities and future possibilities. Therefore, schools can either reinforce existing gender inequalities or become transformative spaces that promote equality and inclusion.

Gender socialization within schools occurs through both formal and informal processes. While the formal curriculum provides subject knowledge, the hidden curriculum communicates social values related to authority, leadership, discipline, competition and emotional expression. Everyday practices such as classroom responsibilities, seating arrangements, teacher feedback, school ceremonies and co-curricular activities contribute to the formation of gender expectations. These practices often appear neutral but may unintentionally communicate different expectations for boys and girls. For example, boys may be encouraged to take leadership roles and participate in challenging tasks, while girls may be associated with organization, cooperation and responsibility. Such repeated experiences influence students' confidence, aspirations and participation.

The concept of the hidden curriculum, introduced by Apple (1979), helps explain how educational institutions transmit social meanings beyond official learning objectives. Gender inequality can persist even when schools formally support equality because classroom practices and institutional routines may continue to reflect traditional assumptions. Unequal distribution of classroom attention, questioning patterns, discipline practices and leadership opportunities can shape students' perceptions of their own abilities. Therefore, achieving gender equity requires attention not only to curriculum content but also to the everyday organization of learning environments.

Teachers play a crucial role in either reproducing or challenging gender norms. Their expectations influence students' participation, recognition

and academic confidence. Research by Sadker and Sadker (1994) demonstrates that differences in teacher attention, questioning and feedback may create unequal learning experiences. However, gender bias is not always intentional; it often emerges from socially accepted assumptions about behaviour and ability. Teacher education should therefore emphasize reflective practice, enabling educators to examine their own beliefs and classroom interactions. Strategies such as equal distribution of responsibilities, balanced questioning, mixed collaborative groups and inclusive teaching materials can promote more equitable classrooms.

Curriculum and textbook representation are also significant areas of gender analysis. Educational materials shape students' understanding of social roles by determining whose achievements and experiences are valued. When textbooks predominantly represent men as professionals, leaders and innovators while limiting women to domestic or supportive roles, they reinforce traditional gender hierarchies. A gender-responsive curriculum should represent diverse contributions of all genders across professional, social and cultural fields. It should also encourage students to critically examine stereotypes rather than simply accept existing social assumptions.

Gender inequality is particularly visible in STEM education. Although girls' participation in science and technology has improved, social expectations, lack of representation, limited role models and perceptions of competence continue to influence participation. Schools can address these challenges through mentoring programmes, exposure to women professionals, career guidance, practical learning experiences and equal encouragement. Increasing participation alone is insufficient; students must experience genuine inclusion, recognition and belonging within STEM fields.

Socio-economic conditions further influence gendered educational experiences. Poverty, inadequate infrastructure, transportation difficulties and household responsibilities may restrict girls' educational participation. Therefore, gender equity requires both educational and material support, including scholarships, safe learning environments, sanitation facilities and community-based interventions. However, such measures must be combined with efforts to challenge cultural norms that restrict educational opportunities.

Intersectionality provides an important framework for understanding these complexities. Crenshaw (1991) explains that gender interacts with other social factors such as class, disability, ethnicity and geographical location. Consequently, educational policies must recognize diverse experiences rather than applying a single approach to all learners.

Ultimately, transformative gender education requires cooperation among teachers, students, families, communities and policymakers. Schools should adopt inclusive pedagogy, reflective teacher education, equitable leadership practices and continuous monitoring of participation patterns. Through these approaches, education can move beyond reproducing gender inequality and become a powerful means of empowerment, social justice and democratic participation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gender, school and society are interconnected systems through which educational opportunities, identities and inequalities are shaped. Schools are not neutral spaces; they may reproduce gender stereotypes through hidden curriculum, teacher expectations, classroom practices and institutional structures. However, they also possess the potential to transform gender relations through inclusive pedagogy, gender-sensitive curriculum, reflective teacher practices and equitable opportunities. Achieving gender equality requires moving beyond formal access towards meaningful participation, recognition and empowerment. Collaborative efforts among teachers, schools, families, communities and policymakers can create educational environments where every learner experiences dignity, agency and equal opportunity, contributing to a more inclusive society.

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## Chapter 12

### Gender Justice in Education: Transformative Pedagogies, Inclusive Practices and Institutional Change

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender justice in education requires more than equal access and numerical representation; it demands transformation of institutional structures, pedagogical practices, curriculum frameworks and social norms that influence educational experiences. This conceptual paper examines the challenges and opportunities associated with achieving gender justice in educational environments. It analyses how patriarchal structures, cultural stereotypes, socio-economic barriers, inadequate infrastructure and ineffective policy implementation continue to restrict equitable participation. Drawing upon critical pedagogy, feminist theory, intersectionality and the capabilities approach, the paper explores the role of teachers, curriculum reform, inclusive leadership and institutional governance in promoting gender equity. The study argues that sustainable gender justice requires moving beyond tokenistic equality towards systemic transformation. Gender-responsive teacher education, inclusive curriculum design, reflective practices and supportive institutional policies can create empowering learning spaces where all learners experience dignity, participation and agency.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Justice, Inclusive Education, Critical Pedagogy, Gender-Responsive Curriculum, Institutional Change, Social Empowerment Intersectional Framework*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is considered a powerful instrument for social transformation; however, achieving gender justice within educational systems remains a continuing challenge. Gender inequality in education is not limited to differences in enrolment or access but is reflected in classroom participation, curriculum representation, leadership opportunities, institutional decision-making and learning outcomes. Educational institutions often reproduce existing social inequalities through hidden curriculum, cultural expectations and unequal distribution of opportunities.

Gender justice requires a shift from numerical equality towards substantive equality, where all learners receive equal recognition, freedom, participation and opportunities. Critical pedagogy highlights that education is not socially neutral; it can either reinforce existing power structures or empower learners to question and transform inequality. Feminist perspectives further reveal how institutional practices and governance systems may maintain gender hierarchies.

Contemporary challenges such as socio-economic barriers, patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, inadequate infrastructure and limited representation in leadership positions continue to influence educational experiences. Intersectionality further explains that gender interacts with caste, class, ethnicity, disability and other identities, creating complex forms of disadvantage.

Therefore, achieving gender justice requires comprehensive transformation through gender-responsive curriculum, reflective teacher education, inclusive pedagogical practices, transparent institutional governance and community participation. This paper examines the challenges, opportunities and future directions for creating equitable and inclusive educational environments.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this paper is based on the understanding that gender justice in education requires transformation at individual, institutional and societal levels. It integrates the perspectives of critical pedagogy, feminist theory, intersectionality and the capabilities approach.

At the societal level, cultural norms, patriarchal values, economic conditions and social identities influence educational opportunities and expectations. These factors affect schools through institutional structures, policies, leadership practices, curriculum design and resource distribution. At the institutional level, gender justice depends on inclusive governance, transparent decision-making, gender-responsive policies and supportive school cultures. At the classroom level, teacher attitudes, teaching methods, student participation and curriculum representation shape learners' everyday experiences.

The framework proposes that gender inequality is reproduced through social norms and institutional practices but can be transformed through critical awareness, inclusive pedagogy and reflective educational practices.

The conceptual pathway can be represented as:

Social Norms and Inequalities → Institutional Structures and Policies → Classroom Practices and Curriculum → Learner Participation, Agency and Empowerment → Gender Justice

Transformative strategies such as teacher education, gender-sensitive curriculum, mentoring, community engagement and institutional monitoring act as mechanisms for change. Thus, gender justice is viewed as an ongoing process of creating equitable, inclusive and empowering educational environments.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Silva et al. (2012) examined gender policies in education across different democratic contexts and argued that equality cannot be achieved through policy measures alone; institutional practices and pedagogical realities must also be transformed. Paul and Chatterjee (2023) highlighted socio-cultural and economic barriers such as poverty, early marriage, stereotypes and inadequate infrastructure that restrict gender equity in education. Malik et al. (2025) explored teacher education institutions and revealed that gender issues are often treated as optional concerns rather than integrated into professional preparation, emphasizing the need for feminist and intersectional approaches. Sarkar and Mondal (2021) analysed regional disparities in female education in West Bengal and found that socio-economic conditions, household responsibilities and infrastructural limitations continue to affect girls'

educational participation. These studies collectively demonstrate the need for structural reform and inclusive educational practices.

## **DISCUSSION**

Achieving gender justice in education requires a shift from equality as a numerical goal towards a transformative approach that addresses structural, pedagogical and socio-cultural inequalities. Educational institutions are not neutral spaces; they reflect wider social relations and may either reproduce existing gender hierarchies or challenge them through inclusive practices. Therefore, gender justice requires simultaneous transformation of classroom processes, institutional governance, teacher preparation and community engagement.

### **Transformative Pedagogy and Gender-Responsive Curriculum**

One of the major challenges to gender justice is the continuation of gender stereotypes within curriculum content and classroom practices. Textbooks and learning materials often represent men in positions of authority, leadership and professional achievement, while women are frequently associated with domestic and supportive roles. Such representations influence learners' aspirations and reinforce traditional gender expectations.

A gender-responsive curriculum should move beyond adding occasional examples of women's achievements and should integrate gender perspectives across all disciplines. Critical pedagogy encourages learners to question unequal social structures and develop awareness of gender-based discrimination. Gender-fair language, diverse representation and inclusive learning materials can contribute to creating classrooms where all students see themselves as capable participants.

Comprehensive sexuality and relationship education is also essential for gender justice. Instead of focusing only on biological information or risk prevention, education should address consent, respect, identity, emotional awareness and power relations. Such approaches empower learners to develop healthy relationships and challenge gender-based discrimination.

### **Institutional Governance and Gender Equality in Leadership**

Gender justice requires transformation not only in classrooms but also in institutional structures. Although women constitute a significant proportion of the teaching workforce, they remain underrepresented in

administrative and decision-making positions. This reflects the existence of structural barriers such as unequal professional networks, biased promotion practices and limited leadership opportunities.

Educational institutions must therefore adopt transparent governance systems and actively promote gender-equitable leadership. Gender audits, fair recruitment processes, leadership mentoring programmes and supportive workplace policies can help reduce institutional inequalities. When schools and universities demonstrate gender equality within their own governance structures, they create models of democratic and inclusive practice for learners.

### **Teacher Education and Professional Transformation**

Teachers are central agents in creating gender-just educational environments. However, many teacher education programmes provide limited preparation for identifying and addressing gender bias. Without critical reflection, teachers may unintentionally reproduce stereotypes through classroom interaction, task allocation, discipline practices and expectations regarding student abilities.

Teacher education should therefore integrate gender-responsive pedagogy, feminist perspectives, intersectionality and reflective practices. Action research, self-reflection activities and professional development programmes can help teachers examine their assumptions and develop inclusive teaching strategies. Teachers who understand gender justice can become facilitators of social transformation rather than merely transmitters of existing norms.

### **Intersectionality and Inclusive Educational Practices**

Gender inequality cannot be understood separately from other social inequalities. Learners experience education differently depending on their socio-economic background, caste, ethnicity, disability, geographical location and social identity. Intersectionality highlights that some groups face multiple forms of disadvantage simultaneously.

Therefore, gender justice policies must consider diverse learner experiences rather than applying uniform solutions. Special attention is required for marginalized communities through scholarships, accessible infrastructure, safe learning environments and targeted support systems. Inclusive education must ensure not only access but also participation, recognition and achievement.

### **Socio-Cultural Barriers and Policy Implementation**

Cultural norms, poverty, child marriage, household responsibilities and inadequate infrastructure continue to restrict educational opportunities for many learners, particularly girls. Policies promoting gender equality often face challenges during implementation due to weak institutional support and limited community participation.

Sustainable gender justice requires collaboration among schools, families, communities and policymakers. Financial support, safe transportation, sanitation facilities, awareness programmes and community dialogue can strengthen educational participation. However, these interventions must be combined with efforts to challenge patriarchal attitudes and social expectations.

Overall, gender justice in education requires a holistic transformation involving curriculum reform, inclusive pedagogy, equitable leadership, teacher development and intersectional policy implementation. Educational institutions can become spaces of empowerment when they actively challenge discrimination and provide every learner with dignity, agency and equal opportunity.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender justice in education requires moving beyond formal equality towards structural and transformative change. This study highlights that gender inequality is sustained through curriculum biases, institutional barriers, socio-cultural expectations and inadequate policy implementation. Achieving meaningful equity requires gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, reflective teacher education, transparent leadership structures and intersectional approaches. Schools and educational institutions must not only provide access but also ensure participation, recognition and empowerment for all learners. Through coordinated efforts among teachers, institutions, communities and policymakers, education can become a powerful space for challenging gender inequalities and promoting social justice, inclusion and democratic development.

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## Chapter 13

### Gender-Just Inclusive Schooling: Transformative Practices for Equity, Agency and Social Transformation

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender justice in education requires a shift from achieving numerical parity towards creating equitable, inclusive and transformative learning environments. This conceptual paper examines how inclusive schooling practices contribute to gender equity, learner agency and social transformation. Drawing on Aikman, Halai and Rubagiza (2011), Chisamya et al. (2012) and Harris and Leonardo (2018), the study analyses gender inequality through the interconnected dimensions of access, pedagogy, school culture, participation and institutional accountability. The paper argues that educational inclusion cannot be measured only through enrolment but must consider learners' experiences of recognition, safety, voice and opportunities. Incorporating intersectionality, the study highlights how gender interacts with social, cultural and economic inequalities to shape educational experiences. The proposed framework positions schools as transformative spaces where inclusive curriculum, equitable practices and accountable institutions can challenge gender-based disadvantage and promote empowerment, equity and social change.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Justice; Inclusive Schooling; Gender Equity; Transformative Education; Intersectionality; Learner Agency; Social Transformation*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is widely recognised as a powerful instrument for social transformation; however, schools do not automatically function as spaces of equality and justice. Educational institutions are embedded within broader social structures where gender norms, power relations and inequalities influence students' access, participation, recognition and opportunities. Therefore, gender justice in education requires moving beyond numerical equality between girls and boys towards examining the quality and fairness of educational experiences.

Aikman et al. (2011) argue that gender equality in education should be understood through multiple perspectives, including human-capital, human-rights, postcolonial and empowerment approaches. Their work highlights that educational quality depends not only on resources and access but also on the transformation of unequal social relations. Similarly, Chisamya et al. (2012) demonstrate that improvements in gender parity do not automatically eliminate discrimination, unequal participation, or gender-based violence within schools.

Intersectionality further strengthens this analysis by explaining how gender inequality interacts with other forms of disadvantage, including class, ethnicity, disability and social identity (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). Thus, inclusive schooling must address both visible and hidden forms of exclusion.

This paper explores gender-just inclusive schooling through five dimensions: equitable access, inclusive pedagogy, safe school culture, learner agency and institutional accountability. It argues that schools can become transformative spaces when they promote participation, recognition, empowerment and social justice.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this study presents gender-just inclusive schooling as a transformative process involving five interconnected dimensions: equitable access, inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, safe school culture, learner participation and agency and institutional accountability.

The first dimension, equitable access, moves beyond enrolment numbers and focuses on retention, meaningful participation and equal learning opportunities. The second dimension, inclusive curriculum and

pedagogy, examines how teaching practices, classroom interactions and knowledge representation can either reproduce or challenge gender stereotypes. The third dimension, safe school culture, emphasises respect, dignity, protection from discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence.

The fourth dimension, participation and agency, highlights learners' ability to express their voices, make choices, develop confidence and challenge restrictive gender expectations. The fifth dimension, institutional accountability, includes leadership commitment, gender-responsive policies, teacher practices and monitoring mechanisms.

Intersectionality acts as a connecting principle across all dimensions by recognising that gender experiences are shaped by multiple social factors such as class, ethnicity, disability and cultural context. Together, these dimensions transform schooling from a system of access into a space of equity, empowerment and social transformation.

#### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The literature on gender justice in education demonstrates a gradual shift from access-oriented approaches towards transformative understandings of equality. Aikman, Halai and Rubagiza (2011) conceptualise gender equality as an issue of education quality and identify human-capital, human-rights, postcolonial and empowerment perspectives. Their work highlights that equal access does not necessarily ensure equitable educational experiences. Chisamya et al. (2012) examine gender parity initiatives in Bangladesh and Malawi and reveal that increased enrolment alone cannot eliminate discrimination, unequal learning experiences and gender-based violence in schools. Their study emphasises the importance of school culture, safety and participation. Harris and Leonardo (2018) extend the discussion through an intersectional framework, explaining how gender interacts with race, class and other systems of power to shape educational inequalities. Together, these studies establish that gender-just schooling requires inclusive pedagogy, institutional accountability, learner agency and structural transformation.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Moving Beyond Gender Parity towards Gender Justice**

Gender-just inclusive schooling requires a conceptual shift from numerical equality to substantive equality. Achieving equal enrolment of girls and boys is an important foundation; however, it does not guarantee equal participation, recognition, safety, or learning opportunities. Aikman et al. (2011) argue that gender equality should be understood as a dimension of education quality rather than merely a question of access. Their analysis demonstrates that educational systems may achieve formal parity while continuing to reproduce unequal gender relations through institutional structures and social expectations.

Therefore, inclusive schooling must examine not only who enters schools but also whose voices are heard, whose knowledge is valued and who receives opportunities for leadership and participation. Gender justice requires transforming the conditions under which education occurs.

### **Inclusive Pedagogy and Curriculum Transformation**

Pedagogy and curriculum are central spaces where gender equality is produced or challenged. Traditional educational practices may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes by representing limited social roles for girls and boys. A gender-just curriculum should therefore promote diverse representations, challenge stereotypical assumptions and recognise different identities and experiences.

The human-rights and empowerment perspectives discussed by Aikman et al. (2011) suggest that education should enable learners to question unequal social structures. Teachers play a significant role in this process by creating classrooms based on dialogue, participation and critical reflection. Inclusive pedagogy should ensure equal classroom participation, fair distribution of responsibilities and recognition of learners' abilities beyond gender expectations.

### **School Culture, Safety and Institutional Responsibility**

A gender-equitable school requires a safe and respectful environment. Chisamya et al. (2012) demonstrate that improvements in gender parity do not automatically eliminate discrimination or gender-based violence. Their findings highlight that educational inclusion depends on the quality of school experiences and institutional responses to inequality.

School culture influences how learners understand gender relations. Practices related to discipline, classroom interaction, leadership opportunities and peer relationships can either reinforce or challenge gender hierarchies. Therefore, schools need effective safeguarding mechanisms, anti-discrimination policies and supportive leadership structures to ensure that all learners experience dignity and security.

### **Intersectionality and Multiple Forms of Inequality**

Gender justice cannot be achieved through a single-axis understanding of inequality. Harris and Leonardo (2018) emphasise that intersectionality provides an important framework for examining how multiple forms of power and disadvantage interact. Learners' experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by factors such as class, ethnicity, disability, language and social background.

This perspective challenges schools to move beyond generalised approaches to inclusion. A policy designed for "girls" as a single category may overlook the specific challenges faced by marginalised groups. Intersectional schooling requires recognising diversity and developing targeted strategies that address unequal experiences within educational contexts.

### **Learner Agency and Participation**

A central feature of gender-just education is the development of learner agency. Education should not position students as passive recipients of equality policies; rather, learners should actively participate in shaping inclusive environments. The empowerment perspective identified by Aikman et al. (2011) highlights the importance of developing learners' confidence, decision-making ability and capacity to challenge social inequalities.

Participation includes classroom engagement, student leadership, collaborative learning and opportunities to express opinions. When learners experience voice and recognition, schools become spaces where democratic values and social responsibility are developed.

### **Teachers as Transformative Agents**

Teachers are essential actors in implementing gender-responsive education. Policies and institutional reforms can achieve limited results if classroom practices continue to reproduce stereotypes. Teachers require professional preparation that enables them to recognise gender

bias, encourage equal participation, use inclusive teaching strategies and create respectful learning environments.

Teacher education should therefore integrate gender awareness, reflective practice and critical pedagogy. Teachers who examine their own assumptions can contribute significantly to creating classrooms where all learners experience equal opportunities.

### **Institutional Accountability and Social Transformation**

Gender justice requires sustained institutional commitment rather than isolated interventions. Schools must establish accountability mechanisms through inclusive policies, leadership practices, monitoring systems and continuous evaluation. Institutional responsibility ensures that gender equality becomes part of everyday educational practice rather than only a policy objective.

The combined insights of Aikman et al. (2011), Chisamya et al. (2012) and Harris and Leonardo (2018) suggest a transformation pathway: equitable access creates opportunities for participation; inclusive pedagogy improves educational experiences; safe school cultures protect learners; agency enables empowerment; and institutional accountability sustains long-term change.

Thus, gender-just inclusive schooling contributes not only to educational equity but also to broader social transformation by preparing learners to participate in a more democratic and inclusive society.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender justice in education requires moving beyond gender parity towards transformative and inclusive schooling practices. The reviewed literature demonstrates that access alone cannot eliminate gender inequality unless schools address curriculum, pedagogy, safety, participation and institutional structures. Aikman et al. (2011) highlight the importance of power and empowerment perspectives, while Chisamya et al. (2012) reveal the limitations of parity-based approaches. Harris and Leonardo (2018) further emphasise the importance of intersectionality in understanding complex inequalities. Therefore, gender-just schools must promote equitable opportunities, learner agency, inclusive practices and institutional accountability. Such

transformation enables education to become a pathway for equity, empowerment and social change.

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## Chapter 14

### Transforming Schools through Gender Equality and Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches: A Critical Perspective

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality in education has expanded beyond ensuring equal enrolment to addressing participation, learning experiences, safety, agency, representation and institutional transformation. This conceptual paper examines how gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogical approaches can transform schools into equitable and socially just learning spaces. Drawing on existing literature and the principles of NEP 2020, the paper analyses the role of teacher education, curriculum reform, inclusive classroom practices, school leadership, safeguarding mechanisms and community participation in promoting gender equity. The study highlights that hidden curriculum, gender stereotypes, socio-economic barriers and inadequate institutional support continue to influence educational experiences. The analysis suggests that sustainable gender transformation requires a shift from isolated interventions to a whole-school approach integrating policy, pedagogy and institutional accountability. The paper concludes that gender-inclusive education can empower learners, challenge social inequalities and strengthen schools as spaces of equality, dignity and social transformation.*

**Keywords:** Gender-responsive education; Inclusive pedagogy; Gender-transformative approach; NEP 2020; Educational equity; Social empowerment

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education plays a significant role in promoting social equality, individual empowerment and democratic development. However, gender-based inequalities continue to influence learners' access, participation, achievement and experiences within educational institutions. Although many countries have achieved progress in gender parity, deeper challenges remain in the form of gender stereotypes, unequal classroom participation, curriculum bias, unsafe learning environments, socio-economic barriers and limited representation in leadership positions. These inequalities are often reinforced through both formal structures and the hidden curriculum of schools.

Contemporary educational perspectives emphasize that gender equality requires more than equal access to schooling. It demands transformation of teaching practices, institutional cultures, curriculum content and social attitudes. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides an important framework for inclusive and equitable education by emphasizing universal access, gender-sensitive learning environments, teacher preparation and support for disadvantaged groups.

This paper explores how gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogical approaches can contribute to transforming schools into equitable learning spaces. It examines the relationship between structural barriers, policy initiatives, teacher practices and educational outcomes. The study argues that teachers, institutions, families and communities must work collectively to create learning environments where every learner experiences equal dignity, participation, opportunity and empowerment.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of gender-transformative schooling is based on the interaction between social barriers, policy mechanisms, educational practices and empowerment outcomes.

The first dimension involves structural and socio-cultural barriers, including gender stereotypes, poverty, cultural expectations, inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns and unequal opportunities. These factors influence learners' participation, subject choices, confidence and educational achievement.

The second dimension focuses on policy support and institutional commitment, particularly the principles of NEP 2020. The policy promotes inclusive education, gender-sensitive practices, equitable access, learner diversity, safe educational environments and improved teacher preparation.

The third dimension represents educational implementation, where transformation occurs through gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum design, teacher professional development, equitable classroom participation, mentoring, safeguarding systems and community engagement. Teachers act as key agents who can either reproduce or challenge existing gender norms.

The final dimension includes empowerment outcomes, such as increased participation, learner agency, confidence, academic opportunities, leadership capacity and social equality.

Thus, the framework proposes:

Reducing Structural Barriers + Gender-Inclusive Policies +  
Transformative Pedagogical Practices + Institutional Accountability →  
Gender Equity, Learner Empowerment and Social Transformation

This framework highlights that gender equality in education requires a coordinated whole-school approach rather than isolated classroom interventions.

## **REVIEWS OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Gender-responsive and inclusive education has evolved from focusing on access and participation towards transforming educational structures and practices. Miske (2013) highlighted that gender inequalities in teaching and learning are produced through classroom interactions, curriculum practices and institutional environments, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive pedagogy. UNESCO (2020) examined global efforts toward gender equality in education and emphasized that meaningful equality requires addressing social norms, discrimination and institutional barriers beyond enrolment. UNICEF (2021) introduced the concept of gender-transformative education, arguing that schools must challenge unequal gender norms and promote agency, participation and empowerment. Global Partnership for Education (2023) emphasized teacher professional development, gender-responsive

curricula, safeguarding and system-level reforms as essential for sustainable transformation. Mas de les Valls et al. (2025) further demonstrated that continuous professional learning and institutional support are necessary to translate gender equality policies into effective educational practices. These studies collectively establish the importance of a whole-school approach to gender justice.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Transforming Schools through Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Pedagogy**

Gender transformation in education requires moving beyond the traditional understanding of equality as equal access or numerical representation. Although increasing enrolment of girls has been an important achievement, genuine gender equality depends on the quality of educational experiences, participation, safety, recognition and opportunities available to all learners. The literature demonstrates that schools are not neutral spaces; they can either reproduce existing gender inequalities or become transformative institutions that challenge social stereotypes and power relations.

### **From Gender Equality to Gender-Transformative Education**

A major shift in contemporary educational thinking is the movement from gender-sensitive approaches toward gender-transformative education. Gender-sensitive approaches identify differences between learners, while gender-responsive approaches attempt to address these differences through supportive teaching practices. However, UNICEF (2021) argues that transformative education must go further by questioning the social norms and institutional structures that create inequality. Therefore, schools should not only provide equal opportunities but also challenge gender stereotypes embedded in curriculum, classroom practices and social expectations.

### **Teachers as Key Agents of Change**

Teachers play a central role in transforming educational experiences because they directly influence classroom culture, learner participation and student confidence. Gender-responsive pedagogy encourages teachers to examine their own assumptions, language, questioning patterns, assessment practices and classroom management strategies. Research by GPE (2023) indicates that inadequate teacher preparation remains a major barrier to implementing gender-equitable practices.

Professional development should therefore move beyond short-term awareness programmes. Continuous reflection, mentoring, peer collaboration and practical classroom strategies are essential for enabling teachers to recognize and challenge unconscious gender biases. Teachers who adopt inclusive approaches can encourage equal participation, provide leadership opportunities and create classrooms where all learners feel valued.

### **Inclusive Curriculum and Representation**

Curriculum is a powerful mechanism through which social values and identities are communicated. Gender stereotypes may be reinforced when textbooks and learning materials present men primarily as leaders, scientists and professionals while limiting women's representation to traditional roles. Transformative curriculum reform requires balanced representation of diverse contributions and experiences.

Inclusive curriculum should also recognize intersectionality by considering how gender interacts with disability, poverty, ethnicity, language and other social factors. Such an approach ensures that educational inclusion benefits all learners rather than only those who already possess social advantages.

### **Whole-School Approach and Institutional Accountability**

Gender equality cannot be achieved through classroom practices alone. Schools require supportive leadership, effective policies, safe infrastructure, safeguarding mechanisms and accountability systems. The whole-school approach emphasizes that teachers, administrators, families and communities must work together to create equitable learning environments.

Safe and accessible infrastructure, including adequate sanitation facilities and protection mechanisms, is essential for meaningful participation. Gender-based violence, harassment and discrimination directly affect learners' confidence, attendance and academic achievement. Therefore, safeguarding must become a fundamental component of educational quality.

### **Student Agency and Social Transformation**

A gender-just school promotes learner agency by enabling students to express opinions, participate in decision-making and challenge

discriminatory practices. Student-centred pedagogy, collaborative learning and inclusive classroom discussion can strengthen confidence and leadership abilities, particularly among marginalized learners.

However, participation must be intentionally supported because equal opportunities do not automatically result in equal voices. Teachers and institutions must monitor participation patterns and ensure that classroom activities do not reproduce existing inequalities.

Overall, transforming schools through gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy requires alignment between policy, teacher preparation, curriculum reform, leadership, infrastructure and community engagement. Gender equality should not be treated as an additional educational programme but as a core principle of educational quality and social justice. When schools challenge restrictive norms and promote inclusion, they become powerful spaces for empowerment and social transformation.

## CONCLUSION

Transforming schools through gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy requires a shift from access-based equality towards meaningful participation, empowerment and institutional change. The reviewed literature highlights that gender inequality is produced through interconnected classroom practices, curriculum structures, social norms and institutional barriers. Teachers, supported by professional development and effective leadership, play a critical role in creating equitable learning environments. However, sustainable transformation requires a whole-school approach involving inclusive curricula, safe infrastructure, safeguarding systems, community participation and accountable policies. Gender-responsive education therefore represents not only an educational strategy but also a pathway toward social justice, learner empowerment and a more equitable society.

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## Chapter 15

### Reimagining Inclusive Education: A Gender-Transformative Approach to Pedagogy, Leadership and Systemic Change

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#### ***Abstract***

*Achieving substantive gender equality in education requires dismantling the institutional, relational and cultural systems that reproduce gender hierarchies, rather than relying solely on access parity or gender-sensitive measures. Drawing on core propositions from UNICEF, Yadav and Uzabakiriho et al., this conceptual paper synthesizes the structural dimensions necessary for gender-transformative schooling. It evaluates the impact of curricular revision, gender-responsive and critical pedagogy, teacher agency, safe school environments, aspirational mentorship and transformative educational leadership. The analysis demonstrates that persistent inequities stem from hidden curricula, unexamined teacher bias, gendered discipline and intersecting structural disadvantages. Addressing these barriers requires critical consciousness, institutional accountability and active engagement of all students across diverse gender identities. By proposing an integrated model linking policy reform, inclusive pedagogy and school-community partnerships, this paper positions gender-transformative education as an indispensable social justice strategy for building democratic and equitable school ecosystems.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equality; Gender-Transformative Education; Inclusive Pedagogy; Educational Leadership; Intersectionality

## INTRODUCTION

Schools are powerful socialization engines where young learners construct identities, internalize cultural values and navigate authority. However, educational institutions frequently perpetuate systemic gender disparities through unexamined textbooks, implicit teacher expectations and gendered institutional spaces. The UNICEF (2021) framework notes that numerical gender parity—the simple metric of equal girl-to-boy enrollment—fails to capture whether students have equitable opportunities to learn, lead and exercise agency.

Genuine equality demands moving beyond gender-sensitive (acknowledging differences) and gender-responsive (addressing targeted needs) interventions toward gender-transformative education. This paradigm directly confronts the underlying power relations, stereotypes and institutional norms that sustain disadvantage (UNICEF, 2021; Kabeer, 2005). Achieving substantive equality requires educational systems to interrogate which voices are prioritized and whose aspirations are legitimized. Yadav (2024) emphasizes that inclusive gender practices mandate curriculum overhauls, bias-free pedagogical approaches, gender-neutral infrastructure and systemic teacher training. Uzabakiriho et al. (2025) further demonstrate that institutional leadership, community perceptions, mentorship and visible role models are decisive in dismantling barriers in areas like STEM education. Transforming education therefore requires shifting from simply assimilating marginalized learners into existing paradigms to fundamentally restructuring the schooling apparatus.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper conceptualizes gender-transformative schooling through an integrated, multidimensional framework consisting of five interdependent domains:

**Transformative Policy and Leadership:** Translates formal equality mandates into institutional audits, equitable resource distribution and proactive administrative accountability.

**Inclusive Curriculum and Pedagogy:** Replaces stereotyping textbooks with gender-balanced narratives, paired with reflective pedagogical practices that democratize classroom discourse.

**Safe, Equitable School Environments:** Establishes physical, psychological and institutional safety by eliminating gender-based violence, biased disciplinary systems and exclusionary infrastructure.

Student Voice, Agency and Relational Engagement: Empowers learners of all genders to challenge restrictive expectations, fostering critical consciousness through student-led initiatives.

School-Family-Community Partnerships: Mediates broader cultural change by aligning classroom interventions with familial and community values.

Grounded in intersectionality (UNICEF, 2021) and the "Hills of Equity" leadership model (Uzabakirho et al., 2025), this framework posits that educational transformation is systemic rather than linear. Transformative policy creates institutional legitimacy, educational leadership converts strategy into practice, inclusive pedagogy and safe spaces dismantle micro-inequities and community engagement anchors long-term cultural change. Inclusive practices become genuinely transformative only when they systematically dismantle the interconnected social and institutional structures that sustain disadvantage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Nussbaum (2000): Framed education within human capability expansion, demonstrating that gender equity develops learners' substantive freedoms and social participation.

Kabeer (2005): Analyzed structural constraints and women's empowerment, arguing that substantive equality mandates altering unequal socio-cultural power relations.

Dunne (2007): Illustrated how everyday schooling spaces, peer interactions and informal micro-practices subtly reproduce gendered hierarchies.

UNESCO (2020): Affirmed that global progress in numerical enrollment parity has not dismantled deep-seated classroom and socio-cultural gender inequalities.

UNICEF (2021): Outlined the gender-transformative framework, unifying policy, curriculum, safety and community leadership to shift institutional power dynamics.

DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra (2022): Documented the adverse effects of teachers' implicit biases on student engagement and academic self-efficacy.

Yadav (2024): Identified persistent curriculum biases and bullying, advocating for gender-neutral facilities and inclusive pedagogies.

Uzabakiriho et al. (2025): Demonstrated how transformative educational leadership and mentorship dismantle psychosocial and structural barriers in girls' STEM education.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Moving from Parity to Substantive Gender Equality**

Educational equity is frequently conflated with numerical parity. Parity metrics obscure significant internal inequities: girls and gender-diverse students may enter classrooms in equal numbers, yet encounter subtle marginalization, diminished teacher expectations and limited access to leadership or STEM tracks (UNESCO, 2020; Yadav, 2024). Substantive equality evaluates the distribution of voice, authority and agency within learning spaces, demanding institutional transformation rather than cosmetic inclusion.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogical Overhaul**

Textbooks and instructional materials have historically normalized rigid gender roles, portraying men as intellectual producers and leaders while restricting women to domestic or supportive domains (UNICEF, 2021). A transformative curriculum replaces these narratives with balanced, diverse representations across history, literature and the sciences. Concurrently, teachers serve as cultural intermediaries who must challenge unexamined biases. DeCuir-Gunby and Bindra (2022) emphasize that teachers' implicit assumptions frequently shape questioning patterns, feedback quality and behavioral enforcement. Transformative pedagogy counters this dynamic through cooperative inquiry, equitable facilitation and structured dialogue that encourages students to deconstruct cultural stereotypes.

### **Safe, Whole-School Ecosystems**

A transformative model requires addressing the total institutional environment. As Dunne (2007) and Yadav (2024) observe, informal school spaces, playground dynamics, segregated sanitation and discipline policies often reinforce gender boundaries. Realizing an inclusive school necessitates robust protections against school-related gender-based violence, explicit anti-bullying protocols and gender-inclusive facilities that safeguard psychological and physical security.

### **Transformative Leadership, Mentorship and Role Models**

Policy statements frequently fail during classroom implementation without proactive leadership. Drawing from Uzabakiriho et al. (2025), the Gender-Transformative Educational Leadership for STEM (GTELS)

framework bridges this gap by positioning school administrators as institutional change agents. Transformative leaders conduct gender equity audits, reallocate budgets to underrepresented cohorts and cultivate female mentorship pipelines. Exposing students to diverse role models in non-traditional disciplines disrupts deep-seated occupational stereotypes and broadens learners' academic aspirations.

#### Student Voice, Relational Engagement and Intersectionality

Sustainable institutional change requires positioning learners as active co-designers of school culture. Crucially, boys must be actively integrated into gender-transformative programs to deconstruct restrictive patterns of masculinity and promote collaborative equity (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, as Nussbaum (2000) and Kabeer (2005) highlight, gender operates across intersecting socio-economic axes, including poverty, disability, caste and ethnicity. Transformative practices must avoid universalist assumptions, tailoring institutional support to the compound disadvantages faced by doubly marginalized learners.

#### School-Family-Community Synergy

Institutional gains made within school walls are vulnerable to erosion if patriarchal attitudes persist at home. UNICEF (2021) and Uzabakiriho et al. (2025) note that community and parental partnerships are essential for institutionalizing change. Engaging families, local elders and civic organizations establishes continuous support that protects learners' educational rights beyond the school gates.

Ultimately, gender transformation cannot rely on disconnected, episodic interventions. Lasting reform depends on aligning administrative leadership, curricular restructuring, teacher development, safe infrastructure and community networks into a cohesive, self-reinforcing operational framework.

#### CONCLUSION

Reimagining gender equality requires moving past access metrics toward structural transformation. As demonstrated, schools function as critical arenas that either entrench gender hierarchies or actively dismantle them. Gender-transformative education challenges ingrained power imbalances by synthesizing inclusive curricula, bias-reflective pedagogy, whole-school safety, aspirational mentorship and community-aligned leadership. By addressing intersectional barriers and cultivating critical agency among all learners, schools transcend mere instructional

delivery. Educational systems become authentic vehicles for social justice, fostering democratic, equitable learning ecosystems capable of preparing learners for a diverse, self-determined future.

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## Chapter 16

### Dismantling Parity: A Conceptual Framework for Gender-Transformative Schooling

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#### **Abstract**

*Gender disparities in school education remain a persistent global challenge, often masked by superficial statistics of enrollment parity. This paper critically examines the limitations of numerical parity and establishes a conceptual framework for Gender-Transformative Schooling (GTS). Grounded in critical feminist theory, social constructivism and intersectionality, this study interrogates the institutional mechanisms that reproduce gender inequalities in education. The analysis examines six core themes: the critique of numerical parity versus substantive empowerment, the operationalization of the hidden curriculum, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) in educator development, an intersectional approach to marginalization, gender-responsive infrastructure and school-community synergies. The paper argues that structural interventions—such as safe transportation, private sanitation and menstrual hygiene management—must converge with pedagogical and cultural shifts to dismantle entrenched patriarchal power dynamics. Synthesizing models like the Gender-Transformative Educational Leadership for STEM (GTELS) framework, this study outlines an actionable blueprint for systemic educational reform.*

**Keywords:** Gender Parity, Gender-Transformative Education, Hidden Curriculum, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy, Intersectionality

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education carries a fundamental duality: it serves as a primary space for socialization, identity formation and skill acquisition, yet its power to achieve genuine gender equality remains underutilized. International development frameworks over the past quarter-century have successfully driven progress toward numerical gender parity in school enrollment. However, statistical parity represents a surface-level benchmark that frequently masks deep-seated structural, cultural and institutional inequities within the schooling ecosystem. Rather than accommodating gender differences through gender-sensitive measures, school systems must actively dismantle the underlying power structures that perpetuate inequality.

Moving beyond parity requires adopting Gender-Transformative Schooling (GTS), an approach that utilizes all components of an education system to challenge power asymmetries, dismantle restrictive gender binaries and foster critical consciousness. Persistent disparities are reinforced by socio-cultural norms, institutional inertia and unexamined stereotypes that limit academic persistence, particularly in STEM disciplines. Adolescent girls face systemic hurdles including domestic burdens, early marriage, gender-based violence and inadequate sanitation infrastructure. Simultaneously, rigid gender expectations restrict non-conforming youth and impose harmful norms on boys. Achieving substantive equality requires deconstructing the “hidden curriculum”- the implicit daily habits, biased language and gendered domestic assignments embedded in school cultures. Grounded in Critical Feminist Theory, Social Cognitive Theory and Social Constructivism, this study outlines how schooling can be reimagined as an engine of social transformation.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework for Gender-Transformative Schooling (GTS) establishes a dynamic, multi-dimensional system designed to shift educational research and practice from surface-level enrollment parity to substantive equality and social change. Operating on the premise that isolated interventions are insufficient to dismantle entrenched patriarchal structures, this framework integrates six mutually reinforcing structural and pedagogical pillars.

At its foundation, Transformative Governance and Policy embeds equity directly into institutional administration, budgeting and resource allocation. This policy backing enables the development of an Inclusive and Critical Curriculum, which systematically removes gender stereotypes, revises biased narrative tropes and incorporates diverse social identities into learning materials.

To operationalize these curricular changes, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) equips educators with critical tools to eliminate unconscious bias, manage classroom dynamics equitably and employ non-sexist language in daily interactions. Crucially, these pedagogical efforts depend on Safe Physical and Social Infrastructure- guaranteeing private sanitation, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) resources, safe transit and anti-bullying policies to ensure bodily autonomy and dignity.

Together, these structural and instructional elements foster Intersectional Student Agency, recognizing that gender disadvantage interacts with caste, economic status, disability and geography, while empowering learners to challenge societal expectations. Finally, School-Community Synergies connect progressive school values with domestic environments by actively engaging parents, elders and grassroots leaders. By operating in unison, these six dimensions transform traditional school environments into equitable ecosystems that drive systemic social transformation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Vygotsky (1978) established Social Constructivism, framing learning as culturally mediated. Bandura (1997) formulated Social Cognitive Theory, linking self-efficacy and agency to social modeling and environmental cues.

Ridgeway (2011) theorized gender as a primary cultural frame organizing institutional interactions, while Collins (2015) conceptualized intersectionality to analyze overlapping systems of oppression.

Sommer et al. (2018) established WASH infrastructure deficits as primary drivers of female absenteeism. Unterhalter (2019) critiqued global indicators for prioritizing parity over structural equality. Eccles and Wigfield (2020) demonstrated how gendered social expectations shape academic motivation and task choice.

UNICEF et al. (2021) formalized the Gender-Transformative Education framework. Asare et al. (2023) established the impact of GRP teacher training in STEM contexts. Uzabakiriho et al. (2025) introduced the GTELS framework linking leadership to female STEM participation, while Vanner (2025) conceptualized transformative education through youth feminist activism and systemic restructuring.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Dismantling Parity: From Statistical Access to Substantive Equity**

Educational policy has long treated gender parity, equal male-to-female enrollment ratios, as the ultimate indicator of success. However, equal representation in school registers does not guarantee physical safety, equal classroom participation, or intellectual autonomy. Numerical parity frequently conceals severe internal inequalities, such as high female dropout rates at adolescence, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), lower academic self-efficacy and restricted access to advanced quantitative and STEM tracks. Substantive gender equality operates as a qualitative, transformative condition that requires dismantling traditional power hierarchies within the school.

### **Unpacking the Hidden Curriculum and Institutional Habits**

While formal curricula define explicit academic topics, the “hidden curriculum”- unwritten rules, informal values, implicit teacher expectations and routine institutional habits- silently reinforces traditional gender roles. This manifests in assigning domestic tasks to girls while reserving leadership or physical work for boys, utilizing biased instructional language and condoning male dominance in recreational and verbal spaces. Unquestioned daily practices normalize patriarchal structures, making a deliberate, critical interrogation of the hidden curriculum essential for institutional reform.

### **Operationalizing Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP)**

Teachers are crucial change agents, yet without targeted professional development, they frequently reproduce societal biases in their instructional methods. Unconscious educator bias often leads teachers to give male students preferential attention during mathematics and science instruction while expecting passive compliance from female students. GRP equips educators with the analytical tools to audit instructional materials, manage classroom interactions equitably, employ non-sexist language and foster inclusive participation.

### **An Intersectional Framework for Educational Inclusion**

Gender disadvantage does not operate in isolation. An intersectional lens reveals how gender interacts with socioeconomic class, caste, disability and geographical isolation to create compounded vulnerabilities. For instance, a rural girl living with a disability encounters distinct structural barriers compared to her urban peers. Educational interventions must move beyond generic, one-size-fits-all strategies and deploy context-specific support to ensure no learner is excluded.

### **Gender-Responsive Infrastructure as a Foundational Condition**

The physical environment directly impacts student attendance, dignity and retention. The absence of gender-responsive infrastructure- including safe transportation, private, well-lit sanitation, clean water and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) resources- operates as a major structural barrier to female education. Adolescent girls routinely experience absenteeism or drop out entirely upon reaching menarche due to inadequate sanitation facilities. Safe, dignified physical infrastructure is not a secondary administrative task, but an essential condition for learning.

### **Aligning School Reform with Community Ecosystems**

Progressive educational policies fail if they remain confined within school walls without engaging the broader community. When the egalitarian values taught at school are contradicted by discriminatory practices at home, progress stalls. Models like the GTELS framework highlight the necessity of community mobilization- engaging Parent-Teacher Associations, local elders and youth groups- to build an enabling environment where families become active advocates for gender equity.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dismantling parity as the sole metric of educational progress requires viewing gender equity as an institutional transformation rather than an additive policy. Simply expanding school enrollment within unexamined patriarchal structures is insufficient. Schooling systems must systematically reform governance, curricula, teacher development, physical infrastructure and community relations. Guided by critical feminist and intersectional frameworks, Gender-Transformative Schooling addresses the root causes of inequality. Ultimately, success

must be measured by students' safety, agency, critical consciousness and capacity to pursue non-traditional academic and life opportunities within an equitable society.

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## Chapter 17

### Education For Gender Justice: An Analytical Study of Challenges, Opportunities and Future Directions

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#### ***Abstract***

*Education plays a crucial role in promoting gender justice by expanding opportunities, developing agency and challenging social inequalities. However, educational systems often continue to reproduce gender disparities through unequal access, stereotypes, socio-cultural barriers, economic limitations and institutional practices. This conceptual paper analyses the relationship between education and gender justice by examining challenges, transformative opportunities and future directions. Drawing on perspectives of gender equity, empowerment, capability development, inclusive education and social transformation, the study highlights that gender justice requires more than equal enrolment; it demands equitable learning experiences, safe environments, inclusive curricula and meaningful participation. The paper emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive pedagogy, teacher preparation, STEM opportunities, digital inclusion, community engagement and effective policy implementation. It argues that education can become a transformative force when it strengthens learners' agency, confidence, leadership and ability to challenge unequal structures.*

**Keywords:** *Gender justice; Gender equity; Women's education; Inclusive education; Social empowerment*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a powerful social institution that shapes individual capabilities, identities and participation in society. From the perspective of gender justice, education extends beyond access and enrolment to include equality in learning opportunities, participation, representation, safety and outcomes. Gender equity in education ensures that individuals receive fair opportunities regardless of gender and that educational systems actively address barriers that create unequal experiences (Kuteesa et al., 2024).

The capability approach of Sen (1999) explains education as a means of expanding human freedoms, while Kabeer's (1999) framework highlights resources, agency and achievements as essential dimensions of empowerment. These perspectives establish education as a pathway through which individuals develop confidence, decision-making abilities and social participation.

In spite of progress in female literacy and educational participation, gender inequalities continue due to poverty, cultural expectations, early marriage, safety concerns, inadequate infrastructure, digital exclusion and limited participation in STEM fields. In India, these challenges are particularly visible among rural and marginalized communities (Pandit, 2024). Furthermore, gender stereotypes within curricula, textbooks and classroom practices may continue to reinforce unequal social roles (Islam & Asadullah, 2018).

Therefore, achieving gender justice requires a transformative educational approach that integrates inclusive pedagogy, gender-sensitive curricula, teacher development, institutional accountability and community participation. This paper examines the challenges, opportunities and future directions of education as a means for achieving gender justice and social empowerment.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework of this paper views education for gender justice as a transformative process involving the interaction of structural conditions, educational practices, learner empowerment and social transformation.

At the first level, structural factors such as poverty, cultural norms, gender stereotypes, caste, geographical location, disability and unequal

access to resources influence educational opportunities and experiences. These barriers often restrict participation and reinforce existing inequalities.

The second level focuses on inclusive educational processes, including gender-responsive curricula, equitable pedagogy, teacher sensitization, safe learning environments, digital access, mentoring and institutional support. These practices enable schools to challenge discriminatory norms and create conditions for equal participation.

The third level involves learner agency and empowerment. Education becomes transformative when learners develop confidence, critical consciousness, leadership abilities, decision-making skills and the capacity to challenge social inequalities.

The final level represents social transformation, where gender-just education contributes to changes in family attitudes, community practices, employment opportunities and broader social structures.

## **REVIEWS OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Sen (1999) introduced the capability approach, arguing that education expands substantive freedoms and enables individuals to achieve valued ways of living. Nussbaum (2000) further emphasized dignity, agency and human capabilities as essential dimensions of gender justice. Kabeer (1999) conceptualized empowerment through resources, agency and achievements, highlighting that education must create real decision-making power. Blumberg (2008) revealed how gender-biased textbooks reproduce unequal social roles and limit educational equality. Ridgeway (2009) explained how gender norms shape social relations and influence educational experiences. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) advocated a transformative approach that challenges unequal power structures. Islam and Asadullah (2018) demonstrated the persistence of gender stereotypes in textbooks. Juvonen et al. (2019) emphasized belonging and social inclusion in education. González-Pérez et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of female STEM role models. Recent studies by Kuteesa et al. (2024) and Pandit (2024) focus on gender equity, policy implementation and educational challenges in contemporary contexts.

## DISCUSSION

Gender justice in education requires a shift from viewing equality as equal access toward understanding education as a transformative process that develops agency, dignity, participation and social empowerment. The literature demonstrates that educational inequality is not created by a single factor but through the interaction of socio-cultural norms, economic conditions, institutional practices, curriculum structures and unequal opportunities. Therefore, achieving gender justice requires comprehensive educational transformation rather than isolated interventions.

A major challenge is the persistence of socio-cultural barriers. Traditional gender roles often influence decisions regarding girls' education, career choices and participation in public life. Early marriage, domestic responsibilities and social expectations can interrupt girls' educational journeys. These barriers are particularly visible among marginalized communities where gender disadvantages intersect with poverty, caste, geography and limited resources. Kuteesa et al. (2024) emphasize that gender equity requires community participation, supportive policies and inclusive educational environments rather than focusing only on enrolment.

Economic inequality also significantly affects educational opportunities. Families with limited resources may prioritize boys' education due to traditional beliefs about economic returns. Expenses related to transportation, learning materials, digital devices and school attendance can create additional barriers for girls. Therefore, scholarships, financial support and targeted educational programmes are essential to ensure that disadvantaged learners can participate meaningfully.

School infrastructure and safety are equally important dimensions of gender justice. Access to safe transportation, sanitation facilities, menstrual hygiene support and secure learning environments directly influences girls' attendance and retention. Educational institutions must establish inclusive environments where students feel respected, protected and valued. Teacher preparation and institutional accountability are necessary to address discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence within schools.

Curriculum and pedagogy play a central role in either reproducing or challenging gender inequality. Studies by Blumberg (2008) and Islam and Asadullah (2018) reveal that textbooks often contain gender stereotypes by representing men and women through traditional roles. A gender-just curriculum should include diverse representations of women's contributions in science, literature, politics, technology and social development. Furthermore, teachers should adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that encourage equal participation, critical thinking and confidence among all learners.

STEM education represents both a challenge and an opportunity for gender justice. Female participation in science and technology continues to be influenced by stereotypes, lack of representation and limited encouragement. González-Pérez et al. (2020) highlight that female role models can positively influence girls' confidence and aspirations toward STEM careers. Thus, mentoring, career guidance, digital literacy and exposure to women professionals are important strategies for expanding opportunities.

Policy initiatives provide significant opportunities for advancing gender justice; however, effective implementation remains a major concern. Policies related to girls' education, inclusive education and gender equality require adequate funding, monitoring, institutional commitment and community involvement. As Pandit (2024) highlights, educational progress in India has improved women's literacy and participation, but regional, socio-economic and infrastructural disparities continue to limit equality.

Future directions require an intersectional and transformative approach. Gender cannot be separated from disability, poverty, caste, ethnicity and digital inequality. Schools must become spaces where learners develop capabilities, confidence, leadership and critical awareness. Collaboration among governments, teachers, families, communities and organizations is essential for sustainable change.

Thus, education for gender justice should move beyond increasing access toward transforming educational cultures, relationships and structures. A gender-just education system enables individuals not only to participate equally but also to challenge unequal norms and contribute to a more inclusive and empowered society.

## CONCLUSION

Education for gender justice requires transforming educational systems from access-oriented models into inclusive and empowering spaces. The literature demonstrates that gender inequality is influenced by socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, unsafe environments, biased curricula and unequal opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, teacher development, safe infrastructure, STEM opportunities and effective policy implementation. A transformative approach must also recognize intersectional inequalities related to caste, class, disability and geography. Ultimately, education becomes a powerful instrument of social change when it develops agency, confidence, equality and meaningful participation, contributing to a more democratic and socially just society.

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## Chapter 18

### From Parity to Transformation: Reimagining Inclusive Pedagogical Practices for Gender Equality in Schools

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality in education must progress beyond numeric parity and access to address the institutional practices reproducing social hierarchies. This conceptual study examines how curricula, learning materials, pedagogy, teacher expectations and institutional cultures shape gender dynamics in school settings. Reviewing contemporary literature reveals how implicit textbook biases, subtle classroom interactions and gendered streaming—particularly in STEM—constrain student agency. Parity-focused interventions often leave structural inequalities intact; therefore, a gender-transformative framework is necessary. This approach emphasizes balanced representation, gender-responsive pedagogical design, safe learning environments and strong school-community linkages. By reframing educational equality from mere access to systematic structural transformation, schools can cultivate critical consciousness and inclusive participation. Ultimately, embedding transformative practices prepares learners to interrogate cultural stereotypes, embrace diversity and advance democratic, equitable educational environments.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality, Gender-Transformative Education, Inclusive Education, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy, Hidden Curriculum, Student Agency, Intersectionality, Teacher Education*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Schools serve as foundational spaces for socialization where students continuously construct, negotiate and internalize norms surrounding gender roles, capabilities and future aspirations. Consequently, schooling either reinforces existing social hierarchies or offers a platform to interrogate and dismantle them. A critical perspective demonstrates that ensuring equal access and enrollment is insufficient; institutional mechanisms deeply affect educational equity.

Curricular materials frequently transmit implicit gender biases through the underrepresentation of women and skewed portrayals of domestic and professional roles (Blumberg, 2008; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Beyond text materials, everyday teacher-student interactions, pedagogical choices and expectations also perpetuate normative assumptions. In disciplines such as STEM, stereotypical notions regarding technical competence frequently undermine female students' confidence and participation trajectories (Spieler et al., 2019; Martinez, 2022).

Addressing these disparities requires shifting from basic parity toward gender-transformative education. Rather than treating learners homogenously, transformative practices analyze underlying power dynamics, incorporate intersectional identities and reform pedagogical cultures (Nandi et al., 2024). Reimagining school education demands a holistic appraisal of textbooks, classroom discourse and school leadership to cultivate safe, democratic environments where every learner exercises authentic agency.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The proposed conceptual framework models the shift from Access-Centric Parity to Gender-Transformative Schooling across four interdependent dimensions:

**Curricular & Representational Reform:** Eliminates stereotypical portrayals in textbooks and teaching materials, ensuring diverse and equitable representations of leadership, professions and social roles.

**Gender-Responsive Pedagogy & Teacher Interaction:** Replaces implicit biases in instruction, grading and questioning with conscious strategies that encourage equitable classroom voice, especially in non-traditional subjects like STEM.

**Institutional Culture & Environment:** Establishes safe, non-discriminatory physical and emotional spaces supported by gender-sensitive school leadership, inclusive policies and active student agency.

**Intersectional & Community Linkages:** Connects classroom realities with the broader socio-cultural ecosystem, bridging schools, families and communities to address overlapping marginalizations based on gender, class and social background.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Scholarly discourse reflects an evolution from numeric parity to structural transformation. Early foundational research demonstrated that gender bias operates as an invisible curricular barrier (Blumberg, 2008) and that expanding physical access does not eliminate classroom inequities (Chisamya et al., 2012). Cross-national analyses subsequently confirmed pervasive stereotypical representations within textbooks (Islam & Asadullah, 2018), while critical teacher training was identified as essential for transformative pedagogy (Spear & da Costa, 2018).

Recent scholarship emphasizes institutional structures and intersectionality. Chotim (2022) highlighted persistent cultural barriers in school operations and Keating and Baker (2023) demonstrated the efficacy of whole-school interventions. Murphy-Graham (2024) and Morales (2024) argued that co-educational spaces must actively dismantle discriminatory norms rather than assume neutrality. Current studies underscore intersectional STEM barriers (Madale et al., 2025), gender justice in teacher preparation (Malik et al., 2025) and the critical role of youth agency (Vanner, 2025).

## **DISCUSSION**

Transformative school education requires moving beyond gender parity toward addressing the structural, pedagogical and cultural mechanisms that perpetuate inequality. While parity focuses primarily on equal enrollment and access, it leaves subtle forms of discrimination unaddressed. A transformative approach positions schooling as an active site for interrogating social hierarchies, fostering critical consciousness and cultivating student agency across several interconnected dimensions.

First, reforming the curriculum and instructional materials is fundamental to dismantling the "hidden curriculum." Textbooks and

learning resources frequently communicate implicit messages regarding gender roles, occupational prestige and social power. Transforming these materials requires eliminating biased language, ensuring balanced visual representation and embedding diverse role models across all academic disciplines. In fields such as STEM, actively highlighting women innovators disrupts entrenched stereotypes regarding technical competence and expands learners' aspirations. Transformative curricula must encourage students to critically examine how gender norms are constructed rather than treating knowledge as neutral.

Second, pedagogical practices and educator expectations directly shape classroom equity. Teachers act as primary mediators of the learning environment. When educators harbor implicit biases, they may unintentionally reinforce gendered divisions through feedback, questioning patterns and discipline. Gender-responsive pedagogy replaces these routines with collaborative learning, equitable participation strategies and inclusive dialogue. Continuous professional development based on critical pedagogy equips educators to interrogate their own assumptions, design inclusive lesson plans and model democratic classroom interactions.

Third, institutional culture and school leadership establish the operational conditions for equity. A transformative school environment ensures both physical and psychological safety. This entails establishing clear anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, providing accessible student support systems and ensuring equitable access to school facilities, leadership positions and co-curricular activities. Leadership must treat gender equality as a core institutional priority through regular gender audits of school practices and participatory decision-making structures.

Fourth, fostering authentic student voice and agency shifts learners from passive recipients of equity policies to active co-creators of institutional change. Democratic classrooms provide platforms for students to lead equity campaigns, engage in peer dialogues and participate in school governance. When students develop critical consciousness, they gain the capacity to recognize and challenge discriminatory practices within their peer groups and broader communities.

Fifth, an intersectional perspective is vital because gender disparities do not operate in isolation. Gender interacts continuously with socioeconomic status, disability, race, caste and cultural backgrounds. Addressing educational disadvantage requires policies and practices that recognize these overlapping barriers rather than treating students as homogenous groups.

Finally, bridging the policy-to-practice implementation gap demands robust collaboration between schools, families and communities. Formal gender-equality policies often fail when schools lack practical implementation frameworks, administrative resources, or community buy-in. Because gender norms are reinforced in domestic and societal settings, schools must engage parents through dialogue, awareness initiatives and collaborative partnerships. By aligning institutional culture, curriculum, pedagogy and community engagement, schools can realize their transformative potential and cultivate genuinely inclusive, socially just educational environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

Achieving genuine gender equality in education requires a structural shift from "equality as access" to "equality as transformation." As this study demonstrates, parity in enrollment is insufficient if curricula, pedagogical interactions, teacher expectations and institutional cultures continue to reproduce gender hierarchies. Sustainable change demands gender-responsive pedagogy, bias-free learning materials, safe school climates and the active promotion of student agency and intersectional awareness. By aligning leadership practices, teacher education and community partnerships, schools can transcend traditional stereotypes and establish democratic, inclusive and socially just environments that empower all learners to thrive equitably.

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## Chapter 19

### Transforming Gender Equity in Education: A Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Capability and Social Change

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender and education are mutually constitutive drivers of social development. Educational institutions often reproduce systemic inequalities while serving as potential sites for transformative social change. This conceptual paper synthesizes existing literature to examine how education fosters an inclusive, equitable and empowered society. It argues that gender equity must transcend numerical parity in enrollment to encompass equitable access, inclusive experiences, capability development, agency and voice. The paper presents a dynamic five-stage pathway connecting access to systemic social transformation. Literature highlights that persistent barriers—such as socio-cultural norms, child marriage, inadequate infrastructure, gender-biased curricula and STEM stereotypes—restrict meaningful participation. An intersectional perspective reveals that gender disadvantage interacts with socioeconomic status, geography and technology. Addressing these complex dynamics requires coordinated action across individual, institutional and structural levels. Ultimately, education becomes truly transformative when equal access leads to enhanced capability, voice and leadership.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equity, Inclusive Education, Capability Framework, Agency, Social Transformation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a catalyst for individual growth and social progress. However, educational institutions operate within broader cultural and economic structures that often perpetuate systemic inequalities. Gender remains a primary driver of educational disparity, as socially constructed roles shape access, subject choices and occupational outcomes. Consequently, gender equity in education must extend beyond mere numerical parity in enrollment to ensure equality of opportunity, experience and personal agency.

The relationship between education and social change is reciprocal. Schools transmit foundational knowledge while communicating cultural values and social expectations through curricula and institutional practices. While gender-biased learning materials reinforce traditional roles, inclusive curricula and gender-responsive pedagogies foster critical thinking and self-efficacy. Education can thus become a venue to challenge discriminatory norms and cultivate progressive social possibilities. Because gender disadvantage intersects with poverty, rural isolation and technological barriers, policies focusing solely on enrollment fail to achieve substantive equality. Achieving meaningful transformation requires addressing the structural and cultural conditions that govern learners' capacity to participate and succeed.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper proposes a conceptual framework consisting of five interconnected dimensions: equitable access, inclusive educational processes, capability development, agency and voice and participation and empowerment.

**Equitable Access:** Encompasses physical safety, affordability, adequate sanitation, digital connectivity and freedom from discriminatory barriers.

**Inclusive Educational Processes:** Addresses curriculum design, representation, pedagogical strategies and institutional culture.

**Capability Development:** Enhances critical thinking, knowledge acquisition, confidence and practical skills.

Agency and Voice: Empowers learners to make informed choices, make decisions and express perspectives.

Participation and Empowerment: Translates individual growth into civic engagement, economic participation and leadership roles.

The pathway is dynamic rather than linear; breakdown at any point disrupts social transformation. Increased enrollment without inclusive pedagogy fails to build genuine empowerment, while inclusive classrooms without financial or infrastructural access continue to exclude marginalized groups. Education becomes a true driver of social change when access directly connects with equality of experience, capability and voice.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2015–2016: Early research emphasized transformative justice (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015), structural barriers like child marriage (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015), systemic rights frameworks (Mundial & UNICEF, 2016) and household economic constraints (Wolf et al., 2016).

2017–2019: Focus shifted to internal barriers, including STEM stereotypes (Wang & Degol, 2017), textbook bias (Islam & Asadullah, 2018), educational quality (Walker et al., 2019) and institutional belonging (Juvonen et al., 2019).

2020–2025: Recent studies highlight systemic mechanisms, such as engineering networks (Zabaniotou, 2020), STEM role models (González-Pérez et al., 2020), multidimensional choices (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Gokulsing, 2021), context-specific policy (Psaki et al., 2022), institutional collaboration (Thomson et al., 2022), physical infrastructure (Small & Rodgers, 2023) and integrated community action (Rathod & Parmar, 2025).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Education as a Transformative Social Institution**

Educational institutions do more than transmit academic content; they shape learners' identities, aspirations and understandings of social hierarchies. Schools can either reproduce gender inequalities or serve as spaces to challenge them. Parity in enrollment alone does not guarantee gender equity, as discrimination often persists through hidden curricula,

biased classroom dynamics, unequal leadership distribution and gendered subject tracking.

### **Access Is Necessary but Not Sufficient**

Access must encompass physical safety, economic feasibility, proper sanitation and reliable transportation. While scholarships and financial aid reduce economic hurdles, their impact increases when paired with interventions that address cultural and household expectations. A comprehensive policy must address the economic, physical, technological and social dimensions of access.

### **Curriculum, Hidden Curriculum and Gender Norms**

While formal curricula deliver explicit academic lessons, the hidden curriculum conveys implicit values regarding power, authority and capability. Underrepresenting women in leadership, scientific fields and public life reinforces restrictive gender roles. Gender-responsive education requires inclusive instructional materials and teacher training to prevent educators from unintentionally perpetuating bias in classroom interaction.

### **STEM Education and Gendered Aspirations**

Gender disparities in STEM stem from societal stereotypes, institutional climate, lack of visible role models and low feelings of belonging rather than academic performance. Addressing this gap requires structured mentorship, early exposure to diverse professional role models and supportive learning environments that encourage long-term participation.

### **Intersectionality and Multiple Forms of Disadvantage**

Gender intersects with socioeconomic status, rural residence, ethnicity, disability and technological availability. Disadvantages vary significantly across contexts: rural learners may face infrastructure barriers, while lower-income students require financial assistance. Effective policy must deploy tailored, intersectional interventions rather than relying on one-size-fits-all solutions.

### **Gender, Family, Community and Social Norms**

Educational reform cannot succeed isolated from the surrounding community. Practices such as child marriage interrupt learning and limit opportunities. Sustainable progress requires engaging parents,

local leaders and communities through dialogue, awareness programs and supportive social protection measures.

### **Digital Inclusion as an Emerging Equity Issue**

Digital tools offer expanding opportunities for learning, yet gender gaps in access to devices, digital literacy and internet connectivity risk deepening educational inequality. Ensuring equitable access to technology and safe digital spaces is an essential component of modern educational reform.

### **From Capability to Agency and Empowerment**

True transformation shifts focus from basic access to building capability and agency. Capability builds critical thinking, knowledge and confidence, while agency enables individuals to make independent choices and participate in decision-making. Inquiry-based learning, student governance and leadership opportunities cultivate these qualities.

### **Institutional Transformation and Collective Responsibility**

Sustainable progress requires systematic institutional accountability rather than individual efforts. Educational organizations should evaluate admissions, hiring, curriculum content and governance through an equity lens, tracking long-term metrics such as retention, field selection and post-graduation outcomes.

### **The Proposed Conceptual Pathway for Social Transformation**

The framework outlines a progression: Equitable Access → Inclusive Educational Environment → Capability Development → Agency and Voice → Participation and Empowerment → Social Transformation. Removing structural barriers enables an inclusive environment, which builds skills and confidence. This fosters agency, driving active participation in economic and civic spheres and ultimately leading to broader social change.

### **CONCLUSION**

Addressing gender disparities in education requires moving beyond enrollment numbers to ensure equality of experience, capability, agency and leadership opportunities. Structural obstacles—including gender-biased curricula, harmful social norms, inadequate infrastructure and digital exclusion—continue to hinder progress. The proposed framework demonstrates that access, inclusive learning, capability and agency are

mutually reinforcing stages necessary for social change. Because gender disadvantage intersects with socioeconomic and geographic factors, solutions must be context-sensitive and intersectional. Systemic transformation relies on sustained collaboration among educators, policymakers, families and communities to turn educational equity into a practical reality.

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## Chapter 20

### Reimagining Schooling: From Gender Parity to Transformative Social Change

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#### ***Abstract***

*Gender equality in school education can no longer be defined solely by enrollment ratios or numerical parity. Schools act as sites of socialization and power, capable of either reproducing inequalities or driving transformative change. This conceptual paper synthesizes recent literature to examine how transformative school education advances substantive gender equality through inclusive practices. It demonstrates that meaningful progress requires shifting from access-oriented models to systemic reform across curricula, pedagogy, leadership, safeguarding and community engagement. Integrating feminist and gender-responsive pedagogies introduces critical consciousness, student agency and participatory learning while addressing structural power dynamics. An intersectional framework further highlights how gender interacts with socioeconomic status, caste, disability and geography. By unifying inclusive policy, responsive leadership, safeguarding and school-community partnerships, schools move beyond "adding girls" to existing structures, effectively reimagining educational spaces into equitable, empowering and safe environments for all learners.*

**Keywords:** *Gender-transformative education, Inclusive pedagogy, Feminist pedagogy, Intersectionality, Educational leadership*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education carries a fundamental duality: it can reinforce existing social hierarchies, yet it offers a critical space to challenge and redefine them. Gender dynamics shape school environments through formal curricula, classroom interactions, instructional language, subject tracking and informal cultures. Consequently, true gender equality demands more than achieving equal male-to-female enrollment ratios. Numerical parity often masks ongoing disparities in classroom participation, educational quality and post-school opportunities. Transformative education must intentionally dismantle discriminatory norms, unequal power structures and institutional barriers rather than merely accommodating gender differences.

Achieving substantive equality relies on three main pillars. First, feminist pedagogy questions hierarchical classroom power, honors lived experiences and encourages critical dialogue. Second, gender-responsive pedagogy provides practical techniques—such as differentiated instruction and unbiased learning materials—to address distinct learner needs. Third, intersectionality reveals how gender disadvantage is compounded by class, caste, disability and geographical isolation. Finally, transformative educational leadership ensures that inclusive practices move beyond isolated classrooms to become sustained institutional commitments. Transforming school education thus requires an interconnected strategy where progressive policy, inclusive teaching, responsive governance and community engagement dynamically reinforce student agency, belonging and long-term empowerment.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper establishes a conceptual framework that maps the transformation of school education across six mutually reinforcing components:

**Transformative Policy & Governance:** Integrates gender equity directly into school planning, budgets, resource allocation and accountability metrics.

**Inclusive & Critical Curriculum:** Removes gender stereotypes from learning materials and incorporates diverse representation.

**Gender-Responsive Pedagogy:** Utilizes differentiated, participatory and learner-centered instruction to engage all students equally.

**Responsive Leadership & Safeguarding:** Fosters an equitable institutional culture backed by anti-bullying policies and physical/psychological safety.

**Intersectional Student Agency:** Recognizes overlapping forms of marginalization (caste, poverty, disability) to support student voice.

**School-Community Partnerships:** Engages families and community leaders to align home and societal expectations with school reforms.

This model shows that isolated interventions are insufficient. When governance, pedagogy, safeguarding and community support operate together, they transform school cultures to deliver equitable participation, critical thinking, safety and expanded life outcomes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2021: UNICEF et al. established the Gender Transformative Education framework, urging system-wide reform across policy, administration and community structures.

2024: Murphy-Graham differentiated numerical parity from substantive transformation, advocating for norm-shifting education. Simultaneously, Yadav highlighted how rigid binary frameworks exclude learners, emphasizing gender-neutral facilities and anti-bullying policies.

2025: Murthy showed how feminist pedagogy and inclusive language disrupt classroom power dynamics. Link Education Ethiopia demonstrated the impact of gender-responsive teacher training on student engagement. Uzabakiriho et al. presented the GTELS framework, linking leadership, mentorship and STEM participation. Finally, Rathod and Parmar emphasized community engagement to challenge structural barriers to education.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **From Access and Parity to Substantive Gender Equality**

Educational analysis must shift from a quantitative focus on enrollment ratios to a qualitative assessment of schooling experiences. While parity indicators track entry and completion rates, they often obscure deeper inequalities in classroom participation, resource allocation and leadership distribution. Schools actively transmit social values; when gender expectations remain unexamined, formal parity fails to

dismantle systemic discrimination. Substantive equality requires transforming institutional norms and power dynamics.

### **Transforming the Curriculum and Hidden Curriculum**

Curricula frequently perpetuate stereotypes through gendered examples, skewed historical narratives and the underrepresentation of marginalized identities. Beyond formal textbooks, the "hidden curriculum"—implicit messages regarding leadership, authority, care work and academic suitability—shapes student aspirations. Transforming curricula involves replacing biased content with diverse representation while ensuring that daily instructional practices align with principles of equity.

### **Feminist and Gender-Responsive Pedagogies**

Feminist pedagogy transforms classroom structures by encouraging shared authority, critical questioning and participatory learning. Complementing this, gender-responsive pedagogy provides structured methods, such as differentiated instruction and unbiased questioning techniques. Together, these approaches help students identify societal stereotypes, analyze power structures and participate actively in their learning processes.

### **Inclusive Language and Daily Classroom Interactions**

Language serves as a constant mechanism of inclusion or exclusion. Unexamined teacher forms of address, feedback and disciplinary choices can reinforce gendered expectations. Adopting gender-inclusive language and equitable interaction patterns creates an environment of mutual respect, ensuring that language reflects a systemic institutional commitment to dignity.

### **Intersectionality and Differentiated Inclusion**

Gender disadvantage does not operate in isolation. It intersects with economic status, caste, ethnicity, disability and geography. A standardized, one-size-fits-all equity initiative can unintentionally favor relatively privileged learners while leaving doubly marginalized students behind. Effective educational strategies must utilize disaggregated data and equity audits to identify specific barriers and deliver targeted support.

### **Teacher Preparation as the Operational Foundation**

Teachers are key to implementing educational reform. Without ongoing professional development in gender-responsive methodologies, educators may default to traditional, biased practices. Sustainable change requires reflective practice, peer observation and institutional support rather than one-off training workshops.

### **Safeguarding as an Essential Condition**

Inclusive learning cannot occur without physical and emotional safety. Bullying, harassment and discrimination directly impede student participation and retention. Integrating robust safeguarding protocols into school operations ensures that equitable environments remain baseline standards rather than secondary goals.

### **Leadership, STEM and Institutional Transformation**

School leadership determines whether gender initiatives thrive or fade. Effective leaders establish clear equity policies, allocate necessary resources and foster mentorship networks. In disciplines like STEM, proactive leadership and visible role models actively dismantle persistent social stereotypes, opening diverse academic pathways for girls.

### **Community Engagement and Whole-School Systems**

Because gender norms are reinforced outside the classroom, schools must engage directly with families and community leaders. Aligning community expectations with educational goals helps mitigate factors like early marriage and unequal domestic workloads. A whole-school framework—unifying policy, pedagogy, safeguarding, leadership and community partnerships—ensures that equity initiatives are mutually reinforcing and structurally sound.

### **CONCLUSION**

Reimagining gender equality requires viewing equity as an institutional transformation rather than an additive initiative. True progress cannot be achieved simply by expanding enrollment while leaving traditional school structures intact. Schools must systematically reform curricula, pedagogical practices, teacher training, leadership models, safeguarding and community relations. Guided by intersectional, feminist and gender-responsive frameworks, transformative education addresses the structural causes of inequality. Success should ultimately be evaluated

by students' safety, agency, critical consciousness and capacity to pursue non-traditional life opportunities within an inclusive society.

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## Chapter 21

### Beyond Parity: Operationalizing Gender-Transformative Education and Inclusive Pedagogy in Indian Schools

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#### **Abstract**

*Gender equality in education has evolved from a narrow emphasis on numerical parity to a broader interrogation of institutional structures, power dynamics and pedagogical practices. This conceptual paper critically examines how school transformation can be achieved through gender-transformative and inclusive pedagogical approaches within the Indian educational context, with particular reference to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Moving beyond mere access-oriented interventions, the paper demonstrates how curricula, classroom interactions, assessment models and institutional cultures often reproduce gendered hierarchies. Drawing upon critical, feminist and intersectional frameworks, the study highlights how gender intersects with caste, class, disability and geography to shape learner experiences. While NEP 2020 offers significant opportunities through multidisciplinary pathways, flexible learning and holistic assessment, policy intent requires structural realization. Sustainable progress demands gender-responsive teacher education, participatory student governance, safe school environments and robust institutional accountability, positioning gender equality as a core principle of democratic and socially just schooling.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equality; Inclusive Pedagogy; Gender-Transformative Education; Intersectionality; School Transformation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Schools serve not merely as places of academic instruction, but as critical spaces of socialization where societal norms, identity structures and power relations are constantly negotiated and reproduced. Historically, gender initiatives in education focused primarily on increasing girls' enrollment and retention. While parity-oriented measures expanded physical access, they frequently left the structural mechanisms of marginalization unexamined. Contemporary educational discourse stresses the need to move beyond numerical parity toward gender-transformative approaches that challenge restrictive social norms, gender binaries and institutional power imbalances.

In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a pivotal framework for systemic reform. By advocating multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, flexible subject options and inclusive educational spaces, NEP 2020 provides a conceptual foundation for dismantling traditional gendered divisions. However, policy guidelines do not automatically transform classroom dynamics. Gender biases often persist through subtle linguistic practices, biased curricular representations, unequal teacher expectations and inadequate safety infrastructure. Furthermore, an intersectional approach is essential, as gendered educational experiences interact dynamically with caste, socioeconomic status, disability, geography and language. Transforming schools therefore requires an integrated shift across curriculum, pedagogy, teacher preparation, school climate and community engagement, establishing gender equality as an indispensable foundation of democratic education.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework for gender-transformative school reform models a continuous, dynamic progression from policy alignment to systemic social justice. At its base, Institutional Policy & NEP 2020 Alignment provides the structural mandate and resource backing necessary to establish Inclusive Curricula & Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP). These instructional elements operate within Safe, Accessible & Intersectionality-Aware Infrastructure, ensuring that physical, emotional and social barriers are systematically addressed across diverse social identities. The interaction of these dimensions fosters Critical Consciousness & Intersectional Student Agency, enabling learners to question patriarchal norms and participate actively in school

governance. Supported by School-Community Synergies, these integrated school processes break away from simple accommodation models to achieve Systemic Social Transformation and Democratic Schooling.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theoretical evolution of gender in education spans several decades, progressing from structural analyses of educational access to critical, intersectional frameworks of institutional transformation. Early research documented historical gender disparities in literacy and formal enrollment across Indian schools (Ramachandran et al., 2004). Social constructivist approaches subsequently framed learning and identity as culturally mediated processes (Vygotsky, 1978), providing a foundation for critical and feminist pedagogies that challenged oppressive structures and authoritarian classroom hierarchies (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Theoretical critiques of rigid gender categories further disrupted binary assumptions in schooling (Butler, 1990), while intersectional frameworks demonstrated that gendered disadvantage operates alongside race, caste and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2015). Recent scholarship shifts the focus from simple numerical parity toward analyzing systemic power dynamics and gender relations within institutions (Unterhalter, 2012; Bešić, 2020). Modern studies emphasize critical consciousness, root-cause transformation and youth participation as core principles of gender-transformative schooling (MacArthur et al., 2022; Asadullah et al., 2024; Vanner, 2025), while policy evaluations analyze the structural possibilities and implementation challenges of NEP 2020 in India (Sharma, 2025).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **From Gender Parity to Structural Transformation**

Achieving numerical parity between male and female students is a critical milestone, but it does not automatically yield equitable educational experiences. School environments can maintain quantitative balance while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gender roles through hidden curricula, teacher dynamics and administrative practices. Transitioning from gender-sensitive or gender-responsive models to a gender-transformative framework requires examining the underlying power structures within educational institutions. This paradigm shift demands critical reflection on classroom authority,

subject allocation, leadership opportunities and institutional language, ensuring schools function as sites of structural change rather than normative reproduction.

### **Transformative Pedagogy and Curricular Reform**

Inclusive pedagogy extends beyond basic instructional techniques to question traditional power dynamics between educators and learners. Grounded in critical and feminist pedagogical frameworks, transformative classrooms emphasize shared knowledge creation, critical thinking and equitable participation across all subjects, including STEM and vocational streams. However, revised learning materials and multidisciplinary pathways under NEP 2020 can only achieve their intended impact if educators actively unlearn implicit biases. Professional development must prepare teachers to identify microaggressions, use gender-affirming language and foster collaborative learning environments.

### **Intersectionality and Inclusive Infrastructure**

Gender cannot be analyzed in isolation from other social markers. An intersectional lens highlights how gender intersects with caste, socioeconomic status, disability, language and regional location to shape individual educational experiences. Consequently, uniform gender programs often fail to address the specific vulnerabilities faced by marginalized learners. Institutional inclusion requires comprehensive physical and social infrastructure, including accessible sanitation, safe transportation, anti-bullying policies and clear reporting mechanisms, ensuring that safety, dignity and student voice remain central to school governance.

### **Policy Implementation and Whole-School Accountability**

While NEP 2020 introduces structural provisions such as flexible subject combinations, holistic assessment and continuous teacher professional development, policy intentions depend entirely on execution. Bridging the gap between framework design and school practice requires dedicated funding, transparent administrative monitoring and active community engagement. Gender equality cannot function as an isolated initiative; it must serve as an overarching standard for institutional evaluation, leadership performance and daily educational practice.

## CONCLUSION

Transforming schools through gender equality and inclusive pedagogy requires moving beyond enrollment numbers to evaluate the quality, safety and equity of the educational environment. Sustainable progress relies on combining policy commitments, such as those in NEP 2020, with gender-responsive teacher education, intersectional curricular materials, safe infrastructure and meaningful student participation. When educational institutions dismantle traditional gendered hierarchies and address overlapping social inequalities, they move from basic accommodation to genuine structural reform. Ultimately, gender-transformative schooling serves as an essential foundation for fostering agency, dignity and social justice across broader society.

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