

**Learners' Perspectives on Gender Inclusive Practices in
Teacher Education: A case study from a Nepali
University**

**Lina Gurung
Bhawana Shrestha
Roshani Rajbanshi**

Kathmandu University, Kathmandu, Nepal

ABSTRACT

Even though universities advocate for gender inclusiveness, when it comes to giving equal value to female teachers, the university lags. Female teachers have been in the academia for decades; however, female teachers are not given equal space and reward in academia in most countries, Nepal being one of them. This study explores gender-inclusive practices of a university from the learners' perspectives, which is a neglected topic in the universities. It aims to identify the status of the inclusion of gender in curriculum content, pedagogical practices, assessment and research activities, and organizational provisions from students' perspectives in the curriculum. The data were collected from the 2016 to 2019 batch of students from three

different graduate programs through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. The data was analyzed to describe the current situation of gender inclusion in content, pedagogy, assessment and research and organizational provisions. Usually, there are discussions regarding gender in universities, it is likely that the discussions are not in-depth for the learners to question their status quo. In line with this thought, the students mentioned that faculty members should bring gender discussion in the classroom and should take it seriously so that the discourse not only contribute towards the gender responsiveness but also based on the discourse, the institution or the university equally value and give space to the voice of the female, may it be the faculty or the student. The study concluded that research, especially the ones that keeps female teachers in the centre are necessary so as to shed light on gender related topics and action to be taken based on gender inclusiveness.

Keywords: Perspective, gender inclusive, teacher education, curriculum practices

Introduction

Education has to address socio-cultural and political factors and consider what is being taught and by whom the students are being taught in the postmodern era (Slattery, 2013). Inclusion in education means an individual's right to belong and participate in the educational system without any negotiation. The barriers perceived on the basis of gender have resulted in differences in the treatment of the students both inside and outside the classroom. One can understand the interdisciplinary nature of gender, the affluence of the domain, and the diversity of approaches by just taking a quick tour of various theoretical perspectives on gender mentions (Grunberg, 2010). However, the inability to understand its sensitivity in itself has become a barrier to inclusive education.

Gender inclusion goes beyond increasing girls'/women's participation in the teaching-learning process. Gender inclusion involves providing equal opportunities, advantages, and outcomes for all. It helps to identify different barriers for different genders to access quality outcomes in learning and bridging the gender gaps by ensuring that the teaching-learning process is designed and delivered in ways that will allow all the learners to participate equally and achieve learning outcomes, and access further study, employment opportunities and better well-beings. Due to gender hierarchical influence in the society (Morris, 2016), higher education also filters the curriculum and sees it with patriarchal eyes without question.

Gender, being a social construct, is in constant change. Women have been able to achieve a lot in terms of equality in relation to higher education, and research shows that gender-based inequality is still a topic that needs further work (Matus-Betancourt et al., 2018). Apart from the uneven distribution of women across various fields, gender-based bullying, sexual assault, and violence are still there. In this scenario, teaching and learning in higher education institutions are very important in shaping the social attitudes of students towards gender (Khan, 2015). Moreover, how the teacher treats the course from gender perspectives is equally important. However, most of the teachers are unaware of it (Mloma et al., 2005) rather than being intentional in reinforcing the gender stereotypes.

The persistent gender inequality in the higher institution needs to be unveiled. The integration of gender is one of the key components to ensure equity (Grunberg, 2010) and inclusion, particularly in Master's Level programs and other curricular activities. However, the hegemony of content is customary in higher institutions neglecting gender. With the increase in access to higher education, the idea that inclusion is no more concern is

rising. Meanwhile, inclusion in education takes into consideration not only the access and the participation, but it also includes the curricula, the teaching-learning methodologies, as well as assessment procedures, and the agency to both the teachers and the learners. Therefore, gender inclusion should be considered in the curriculum.

The rationale of this study is to understand gender inclusion in the curriculum from the students' perspectives and inform the reader about how to make gender-responsive curriculum. The students' experiences show whether the integration of gender is adequate or missing and how gender integration can be improved. So, this study explores whether one of the top universities of Nepal has applied gender-inclusive practices from the students' perspectives or is embracing the traditional norms. For this, the case of Kathmandu University, School of Education has been taken. Realizing the significance of the inclusion of gender in the teacher education program, the study aims to identify the status of inclusion of gender in curriculum content, pedagogical practices, assessment and research activities, and organizational provisions. In addition, by investigating the gender inclusiveness in the curriculum, this study addresses SDG goal 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and goal 5 to ensure gender equality and empower all women and girls (Desa, 2016).

Through mixed method, this study collected data from students through surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. Through the data, this study analyzed the current situation of gender in content, pedagogy, assessment and research and in organizational provisions. This study found out that universities are content-focused and inclusion of gender in the content is minimal, and the organizational provision needs to be gender sensitive. The study also implies that the universities need to break the normalcy of traditional concepts and be gender responsive

in the university by valuing the females' voices and participation.

Methodology

This study applied sequential mixed-method research, which included quantitative and qualitative methods to collect numeric data using structured questionnaires and narrative text data through focused group discussions (FGDs). The quantitative survey method was done to collect factual data about the inclusion of gender in the curriculum and the pedagogy. At the same time, FGDs were taken to collect the narrative expressions of students about their feelings, experiences, and perspectives about the inclusion of gender in their teaching-learning process as well as their personal lives (Patton, 2002).

The research design layouts the ways to arrange, collect and analyze the research in a way that meets the purpose (Sileyew, 2019). The questions were set to allow the researcher to capture the students' perspectives on how gender was included in the current teacher education program and the pedagogy. The study followed the descriptive research design that utilized the data gathered from the structured questionnaire method. The survey form was sent to three hundred and four students of four different courses from 2017 to 2020 batches of Kathmandu University, School of Education, one of Nepal's top universities. The teacher education graduate program is in four areas: English Language Teaching (ELT), Mathematics Education, Leadership and Management, and Master's in Sustainable Development.

Only 106 students filled the survey, out of which 56.6% were from male students and 43.4% were from female students. There were a maximum number of respondents (35.8%) from Master's in Sustainable Development (MSD), and this was followed by

Mathematics Education (24.5%), Leadership and Management (21.7%) and English Language Teaching (17.9%). For qualitative inquiry, four FGDs were conducted department-wise, and each FGDs had 3 –5 participants. After the quantitative data was analyzed, the qualitative investigations were carried out.

The ethical aspect of the research was emphasized in every research step from the beginning to the end of the research process. The students' values and inputs were significant in understanding the researched topic. The respondents' confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The respondents were not discriminated against their caste, gender, and ethnicity.

Findings

Through qualitative and quantitative data, this study found some gender practices of universities which are provided below.

Gender Practices in Universities

This research highlights a few gender practices in universities such as gender inclusive pedagogical practices, research and assessment in gender, gender inclusiveness in organization which are described in detail below.

Gender Inclusive Pedagogical Practices. In the survey, 92.4% of the students perceived that gender inclusion is very important in their program, 3.7% said they don't know, and 3.7% felt that gender inclusion is unimportant. So most of the students believed in the relevance and importance of gender inclusion in their program and courses. Likewise, 47% of the students reported that there were gender-related content in their courses, while 53% said there were not. However, when they were asked if there were gender-related issues discussed in the classroom, 84% reported yes, and 16% said no. Therefore, even if

there were no gender-inclusive contents in the courses, the teachers could bring the gender discussion in the classroom. It could be included during illustrations and group discussion as a cross-cutting theme. Out of various courses listed by the students it was found that 8.44 % of the Master in Sustainable Development courses, 5.28 % of the ELT courses, 3.17 % of the Leadership and Management courses, and only 2.11% of the courses in Mathematics Education included gender issues for classroom discussion.

In addition to the survey, the gender revelation in the content was also done through FGD. In FGD, one of the students (Student 1, FGD1) of the ELT department mentioned that *gender was not a part of the content in our class. Whatever I gained knowledge on gender, it was because of self-study. Those who did their self-study, they came to know about it, and those who did not, they missed it. Teachers did not make it compulsory and we also did not take it seriously.*” Another student shared on similar lines, *“I did not find any gender-related content in my course. In my first semester, there was a topic on which the tutor superficially touched some aspects. However, the topic was more in line with females not being considered good in Mathematics as they cannot go deep into Mathematics”* (Student 1, FGD 4). Adding on to that, another participant, also from the Mathematics department shared, *“In other subjects, gender can be incorporated, but in math, it has to be content-based. In the case of Math, the CRP teaching method needs to be followed, which should be innovative and creative”* (Student 2, FGD 4). Another participant also highlighted, *“My topic is Ethnomathematics, and I did my thesis in Ethnomathematics. In this process, I read dissertations by female students of Kathmandu University itself. Maybe because my topic could be related to gender, I found plenty of articles by female scholars. But in the course itself, the articles provided by the teachers used to*

be less from female scholars and more from male scholars. But in the case of the dissertation, I found many dissertations written by female students. So why not bring that into the course contents” (Student 3, FGD 3).

The next component of the survey and FGD was a discussion on gender. In an in-depth interview, one of the respondents in her second semester from the Educational Leadership and Management department mentioned that the female students always initiated discussions related to gender. The student said, *“the number of female students is higher than male students in our classroom. Therefore, directly or indirectly, the teachers are forced to bring women's perspectives as women themselves start sharing their experiences. However, I haven't heard of or got enrolled in any courses that are explicitly related to gender” (Student 2, FGD 1).*

A participant of FGD from Mathematics Education stated, *“On women's day, our teacher told us about the first female mathematician and shared about her struggle. Also, in this pandemic, I attended many seminars, and so far I found talks by only two female mathematicians. That was very disappointing” (Student 3, FGD 4).*

Gender Inclusive Pedagogical Practices.

A teacher's attitude is vital with regards to fostering the environment of gender discussion in the classroom whenever necessary and relevant. If the teacher is quite democratic and encourages students to put their views in the classroom for healthy discussion, the female students will probably feel more comfortable bringing more gender issues on the table. In the survey, majority of the students (83.8%) reported that they feel comfortable in sharing their ideas with their teachers. Likewise, they found teachers quite liberal in welcoming their views (78.5%) and valuing each student's opinion in the class (92.2%). But in regard to discussing critical gender issues, the number has reduced to

65.7 percent. Only 53.1 percent of the students said that their teacher reflects on gender-sensitive topics, while 39 percent said sometimes and 7.6 percent said the teacher never does. More than half of the respondents reported that their teachers neither showed any kind of gender discrimination in the class (59.9 %) nor reinforced gender stereotypes while teaching (55.2%). Similarly, a majority (83%) of them said that their teachers used gender-neutral languages in the classroom.

Table 1: Teacher’s attitude in classroom discussion

Student’s Perspective	Never	Some times	Often	Total (%)
I feel comfortable in sharing my ideas with my teachers	2.9	13.3	83.9	100.0
Teacher welcomed alternative ideas in the class	1.0	20.0	78.5	100.0
Teacher equally valued every student’s opinion in the class	2.9	9.5	92.2	100.0
I was encouraged to discuss critically on gender issues	8.6	25.7	65.7	100.0
Teachers reflect on gender-sensitive issues	7.6	39.0	53.1	100.0
Teachers didn’t show gender-based discrimination	27.6	12.4	59.9	100.0
Teachers didn’t reinforce gender stereotypes during teaching	28.6	16.2	55.2	100.0
Teachers used gender-neutral languages in the classroom.	3.8	17.1	83.0	100.0

(Source: Survey Report, 2021)

Upon some serious reflection on this issue during the FGD and the in-depth interview, the students shared that the reason behind the students feeling uncomfortable sharing or discussing gender in their classroom was because of the fewer female faculties.

A student from the ELT department shared on the same lines, *“There was only one female teacher. I did not see any significant difference in teaching between male and female teachers, but I experienced one significant difference. Unlike male teachers, she used to begin class with social interaction and then move towards content. I personally felt comfortable to share my experience that enhanced our relationship”* (Student 3, FGD 1). Only 17.1 % of the respondents mentioned that their teachers reflected on gender-sensitive issues in the classroom.

Similarly, one of the other participants on the FGD from ELT department shared *“those who design courses that influence the learning resources and the discussions related to it. KUSOED advocates gender equality, but there is no gender balance in practice yet. In faculty, male members are higher in number than females. Gender sensitivity is lacking in the learning resources and discussion because of the minority of female faculty members”* (Student 2, FGD 1). Meanwhile, 36.2 % of the students who participated in the survey often had teachers who reflected on gender-sensitive issues, 39 % of them had teachers who sometimes did that and 7.6 % mentioned that their teachers never reflected on the issues sensitive to gender. A very serious revelation was made by one of the participants from the Sustainable Development department in relation to their gender sensitivity, *“Overall all, the teachers who taught me in the university, they are gender-sensitive but oversensitive. There was some skeptical viewpoints. Rather than being gender-sensitive, I think they are over-sensitive for being called insensitive. When I went to talk with those teachers personally, I did not find them to be gender-sensitive. There are some teachers who have embraced gender in their personal life, but there are also some faculties who just pretend to be gender-sensitive”* (Student 2, FGD 3).

According to a student who participated in the in-depth interview from the Leadership and Management department mentioned, *“There were more male teachers than female teachers. We had only one female teacher but I never felt any kind of gender discrimination or anything as such from male teachers as well”* (Student 4, FGD 3). Similarly, another student shared, *“I did not experience any difference between male and female teachers’ behavior. But I experienced domination by my male classmates as they used to debate with us and make us feel bad. They used to bring examples and tried to prove that males are superior to the female. Teachers tried to convince them”* (Student 5, FGD 2). Similarly, 46.7 % of the respondent’s ‘most often’ felt that their teachers used gender-neutral languages in the classrooms, 32.4 % felt so often, 17.1 % felt so sometimes, and 3.8 % of them never felt their teachers used gender-neutral languages.

Gender in Research and Assessments. Five yes/no questions were asked to understand how research has been incorporating the components related to gender (Table 2). In the first question, if the teacher encouraged them to carry out the thesis or research paper on gender issues, 44.8 % of the respondents answered positive while 55.2 % of them answered ‘No’. Similarly, 65.7 % of the respondents answered ‘No’ to the second question that asked if any issues related to gender were discussed in their paper while writing their thesis. However, around half of the students that are 50.2 % of the respondents have done some kind of research projects related to gender in their assignments. The fourth question revealed that 5.7 % of them actually wanted to do research on gender but their proposals were rejected by their teachers. In the final question if the respondents received any research grant for doing gender-related research 15.2 % of the respondents answered ‘yes’.

Table 2: Integration of Gender in Research Activities

Student’s Perspective	Yes	No
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	(%)	(%)
Did your teacher encourage you to carry your thesis or research paper on gender issues?	44.8	55.2
Was there any issue/s you analyzed or discussed within your research paper/thesis related to gender?	34.3	65.7
Did you do any research projects related to gender in any of your assignments?	50.5	49.5
Did you ever write your research proposal on the gender issue and was rejected by the teacher?	5.7	94.3
Did you ever receive any research grant for writing a research paper/thesis?	15.2	84.8

(Source: Survey Report, 2021)

One of the participants from the Masters in Sustainable Development shared her bitter experience regarding how her research interest on gender got discarded from the faculty. She shared, *“When I was in the third semester, I wanted to write about single women. I was told that I was from the ECD sector, so I had to write about child education. My assignment was rejected. So I feel, the teacher tried to impose the topic they are more familiar with. They bound you with their field of expertise and do not let you explore beyond. I felt, few teachers have that kind of mentality. There are few teachers who support in gender issues for research; however, there are also some who completely deny the idea”* (Student 4, FGD 2).

Similarly, gender inclusion and sensitiveness can be measured through the assessment in the course work. There are different activities for the in-semester and end semester assessment, like presentations, essays, group work, review, projects, and group work. During these activities, the students might bring the issues of gender.

Table 3: Integration of Gender in Assessments

Student's Perspective	Never	Some times	Often	Total (%)
I was allowed to make a presentation on gender issues	29.5	24.8	26.7	100.0
I was allowed to related my assigned tasks with gender related issues	24.8	21.9	53.3	100.0
There was no discrimination in grades based on the gender	4.8	13.3	83.0	100.0
The teacher avoided sexist languages during feedbacks	15.2	10.5	74.3	100.0

(Source: Survey Report, 2021)

The survey revealed how the gender aspects had not been given much emphasis in its assessment process. It is not positive when 29.5 percent of the students felt that they were not allowed to make classroom presentations on gender issues while 26.7 said they often were allowed and 24.8 percent said ‘sometimes’. More than half of the students (53.3 %) stated that they had discussed gender-related issues in their assignments and there was no objection from their teachers. Students reported that sometimes their teacher had been biased in grading the assignments . When asked the same concern in the survey, the majority of the students (83%) did not feel such biases. About three-fourth of them (74.3%) believed that their teacher avoided sexist language while providing comments or feedback on their assignment. Nevertheless, about 15.2 percent of the students felt such sexist language used by their teacher during their course work. Though this number is less, it is still crucial.

The importance of the assignment related to gender was highlighted by one of our participants from the MSD

by sharing one of the classroom experiences in our FGD, *“We, each had to take one SDG goal and present in the class. One of our friends presented on gender. The presenter related the other 16 SDG goals to the gender perspective. It was an eye-opening presentation so I want to emphasize gender not as a separate subject but it should be included in all other subjects even in the form of some projects or assignments”* (Student 1, FGD 2). Some male students shared that the female students were provided flexibility in the deadline considering their specific needs. One of them from Educational Leadership and Management claimed, *“In my observation, female students were provided extra time to complete their assignments given their extra chores and challenges at home”* (Student 2, FGD 4). While the female students from the same department argued, the flexibility is not enough, especially in the cases when the teaching-learning process is online. She argued, *“I have experienced that studying from home. As you can see, I was around 15 minutes late for this conversation because I was busy cooking dinner and I have realized all of our female classmates share the same feeling given that we have to cook on the background even when the class is running. So these things have to be considered”* (Student 1, FGD 4).

Gender Inclusion in Organizational Provision. When it comes to the organizational provisions, the gender representation of the students in the classroom is an important measure. In the survey, 88.6 percent of the respondents reported that there were no equal number of male and female students in the classroom while 11.4 percent said there were gender representation. Women’s participation in higher education is a means to address gender parity issues (Khan, 2015). In fact all the four programs in Kathmandu University, School of Education had no similar gender balance in the class. The English

Language Teaching program had an encouraging number of female students in the program while it was quite very less in the Mathematics Education program. A participant of FGD from the Mathematics department shared, *“If we see the proportion of female versus male in higher education that determines the availability of learning resources and opportunities for female mathematicians. But unfortunately, we had very few female students in our batch. The ratio was 1:15”* (Student 4, FGD 4).

The survey revealed that only one female teacher taught the respondents throughout their programs. The case was almost the same in three programs, while the female faculty was completely missing in Mathematics Education. In organizational provision, it is vital that the university needs to introduce gender-friendly provisions within its system such as scholarships to needy female students, research grants, gender-friendly premises, and recruitment of female faculties. 50.5 percent of the respondents expressed that the university had gender-friendly provisions, while the other half (49.5%) didn't agree. One of the students from Education Leadership and Management mentioned, *“I feel highly motivated when a female faculty teaches. I look at female faculty and feel encouraged to teach like them. There are issues related to our babies and families that I, being a married woman, feel comfortable sharing with female teachers more easily than with male teachers”* (Student 3, FGD 2).

However, there weren't many gender-friendly provisions from the organizational side as well to bring in more female students. *“I guess this is one area where KUSOED can work. I don't know much but I had heard of an incident where one of our female friends was facing a problem. I don't know if it was a family problem or a financial problem. She was asking about scholarships in the college library to her friend. She was sharing not just as a female but also being someone from outside of the*

Kathmandu valley, she deserves to have some kind of scholarship. I think she dropped out later because I didn't see her in our other semesters" (Student 3, FGD 3). This was shared by one of the students from the Leadership and Management department in our in-depth interview.

49.5 % of respondents felt that the university had some forms of provisions for the female students like scholarships for female students in Mathematics, NOHRED and Nepal Youth Foundation Scholarship for females, the facility of vehicle, separate restrooms for males and females, holidays on Teej and Women's day, and the provision of sanitary pads. However, the students in the in-depth interview and the FGD stressed on the insufficiency of these scholarships. A participant from the Mathematics department shared, *"Out of three female students, two were married. They used to come unprepared in the classroom. This might have been because they could not give time at home. Also, in the classroom, they used to come late, which might be why they could not concentrate. I think making the condition easier on the organization and policy level itself might be a solution"* (Student 2, FGD 4).

Discussion on Findings

These days, informing pedagogy is insufficient in the universities. Being one of the top universities of Nepal, KUSOED aims to transform the educational landscape by providing high-quality teacher education programs (KUSOED, 2017), which might not be the case in all universities. Universities need to bring change in the schools and ultimately the society, bringing gender equity in the university itself is not the ultimatum. Unlike other countries, for example, Spain (Alonso & Lombardo, 2016), Nepal has not mainstreamed gender in higher education, gender is not part of the curriculum and there is no law to implement gender mainstreaming in curriculum in regard to the university.

Analyzing the findings, this study highlights the current practice of one of the universities of Nepal which shows problem in gender inclusiveness in the curriculum. And we cannot escape the fact that this problem might persist in other universities of Nepal. There is a need to integrate gender in all the master's courses. Gender integration, as part of the course in the Master's program, helps to understand the contemporary issues and problems through the lens of gender for the development and betterment of society. This study explored the status of gender in the curriculum in terms of content, pedagogy, assessment and research, and organizational provision and found out that gender should be a part of the course and curriculum. The concept of bringing gender into higher education is to provide gender equality and transform the organizational process (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). Unfortunately, many higher education institutions reinforce the existing structures (Khan, 2015). A study in Pakistan revealed that women were still under-represented, lacked power and status in higher education institutions and their education is still plagued with gender and subject biases for women (Khan, 2015).

Teaching in higher institutions is subject-centric and mainly concentrates on the content without the inclusion of gender. In universities, the textbook as teaching and learning materials are not gender inclusive in terms of content. However, teachers in universities have autonomy for selecting the reading materials and even add to the contents (Gurung & Rajbanshi, 2020). Content includes structures, practices, social relationships within the classroom, what is taught, and the way of teaching, which can be gender inclusive. Armstrong (1999) claim that content is both the processes and the procedures while the “repartitions of physical, social and curricular space are reproductive of social relationships and values in society”, it is not limited to that, “the counter selections and the

development of creative pedagogies can bring a shift of control” in what is taught and also in the cultural spaces (p.83). Therefore, gender inclusion in content holds significance in higher education. In a study done in Saudi Arabia, the author found that the EFL textbooks are gender-biased with less representation of women (Sulaimani, 2017). The integration of gender in the course content and the curriculum in university education should be the prerequisite.

Gender integration not only helps the students understand the gender issues that are prevalent in everyday life, but it also helps them be more participative, reflective, and critical. Even though the teachers in the university portray that they are gender-sensitive and value students’ opinion or ideas on gender, this study showed that teachers stay neutral in fostering gender discussion for critical analysis in the classroom. Snell (1999) had the opinion that the learner’s participation, reflective thinking and emotional satisfaction get heightened through interactive lecturing. Students participate effectively in learning when there is no gender gap in classroom instruction and if teachers’ implementation strategies are gender-sensitive and no sex group is favored or isolated. Moreover, gender-neutral pedagogy reduces consideration of gender and gender stereotypes (Shutts et al., 2017). Promoting gender-neutral pedagogy in the classroom requires endorsing equal participation from all the students and living as well as teaching gender equality.

Gender-inclusive pedagogy values prior experiences and learning while at the same time also addressing current needs, interests, concerns catering to an individual’s preferred learning and assessment styles. Chetcuti (2008) claims that to cater to individual learning styles, gender-inclusive pedagogy uses “multisensory teaching strategies, and multisensory assessment tools through practical, oral, drama, creative writing, and Information and

Communications Technology use” (p. 93). The experiential knowledge that the teacher and the students embody makes it dangerous to overlook gender in any form of discourse in addressing diverse needs. In that context, gender-inclusive pedagogy is a socially constructed pedagogy based on situation and interactional cognition, which helps make the personal constructs explicit and help critically reflect those constructs by constantly evaluating and re-evaluating practices inside the classroom and beyond.

Simply analyzing the content will not help us understand the gender-based social ideology and its stereotypes that have been running through ages. Both the research and assessment process in higher education should promote the notion of choice, rationale, and opportunity for personalization when it comes to being gender-inclusive (Lee et al., 2015). Research and assessment help to improve students’ learning and conceptualizing gender. The inclusion of gender in assessment creates a conducive environment for students to conceptualize gender with the curriculum. Learners also need to consider the existing difference based on gender and the power relations that it is fostering gender difference (Lott, 1977).

“Doing gender” is a norm of everyday life and is unavoidable (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and higher institutions are not left alone. Gender is done in the classroom, during discussions, while choosing learning materials, and while doing assignments as well as research. Though the students acknowledge that there are discussions regarding gender when they are studying certain courses, they also think it is not enough if the university’s goal is to be more gender-responsive. In this study, even though the male teachers have adopted gender-balanced pedagogy, the students felt a lack of female faculty in the university. Lack of female faculty reduces diverse pedagogy in academia. The inclusion of females and marginalized people increases

diversity, which likely enhances innovative pedagogy in the university.

Furthermore, Valian (2004) mentions innovations is acceptable where there is diversity rather than in a homogenous group, for which university needs to embrace diverse people. As mentioned by the students that there is domination by male students in the classroom. Domination by a homogenous group is usual, so the inclusion of diverse students as well as diverse faculty can break this normalcy. Therefore, there is a need to have diversity in the faculty as well as students in the university.

Given that the integration of gender is being overlooked in the university curricula and needs a long time to revise all of the courses, change can be brought by simply increasing the number of female faculties and also by including the gender concepts in different projects, assignments and research. Providing female students with encouragement from the women faculty enables females to draw upon the unique and individualized aspects of their personhood to overcome subtle barriers to attaining leadership roles in academic settings (Hill & Wheat, 2017). With very few female students in some of the departments, the increment in the number of female faculties will serve as a role model. Lack of female faculty leads to a lack of female role models (Cassese et al., 2012). Furthermore, without female bodies in higher education, female students feel excluded and marginalized. As Fotaki (2013) mentioned, the females feel as “object outsiders in academia” (p. 1270), their voices and experiences silenced by patriarchal discourse and representation of females as ‘other’. The absence of females in academia also discourages female’s participation. Increasing the number of females in any institution will not help eliminate the gender disparity, but it definitely encourages the female students to hope for betterment. This fosters self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness (Khan, 2015).

There is evidence that more publication is one of the requirements for promotion in academia and females produce less publication than males (Long, Allison, & McGinnis, 1993). Therefore, it is necessary to encourage females to research and write papers for knowledge production and information dissemination. Research in education uses scientific analysis methods to produce information needed to make improvements in educational planning, decision making, teaching and learning, curriculum development, understanding of children and youth, use of instructional media, school organization and education management (Boykin, 1972). The students believe that both the students and the faculty members should engage in the research work in the topics related to gender so that these issues get enough attention in the classroom discussion as well as in larger academic discourse, making the organization provisions stronger. There is also a need of gender inclusion in the courses to understand the real problem of the societies. The more research in the issues related to gender is done, the more it enables substantial progress to be made in curriculum development and reform, educating diverse learners, understanding the psychological traits of the learners and in adapting pedagogical approaches to meeting the needs of diverse learners.

Some of the barriers to women's career advancement to leadership positions have been identified as: “lack of mentoring; fewer opportunities for training and development, low aspiration level of women managers and gender stereotypes” (Okafor et al., 2011, p. 6722). Fotaki (2013) also mentions women's exclusion is “continual, reiterated over time and therefore involves a continuous process of exclusion that is never final” (p. 1270). The participation and access of women in higher education has been taken only as a number count (Khan, 2015), but it is also about acknowledging their capability and providing

equal priority in all aspects. Given the multiple layers of struggle that women go through even when they are enrolled as a student in the university, the university must improve on their organizational provisions as per the respondents' opinion if the university wants to play a role in removing the structural barriers from the women students. The higher institution should not make females, both the faculty and students, feel marginalized, which is often the case in developing countries like Nepal. To adjust females usually adopt masculine behavior or females become a showpiece when they work in a male dominated organization (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009) or females are kept as outsiders in organizations and males takes the lead for the reproduction of male norms in policymaking (Benschop & Verloo, 2006), due to which, the topic on gender equality and inclusion could not be mainstreamed. Thus, we think that higher institutions/universities need to break this norm and establish an example by appraising females and enhancing gender equality.

Conclusion

There is hierarchical superiority of males in every organization and this study unveils as well as challenges the gender inequality in higher institutions. This study concludes that even though one department explicitly includes gender, all the departments still need to be more mindful of integrating gender on all the fronts: content, pedagogical practices, research and assessment, and organizational provisions. The higher institution needs to focus on the content and make students proficient in their subjects. However, gender should not be neglected and higher institutions should make space for gender in the curriculum. Having gender discussions is not enough if a university aims to be more gender-responsive.

Furthermore, research is a way to expose the truth. Higher institutions need to engage in research focusing on

gender and highlight gender discussion in the class to make students aware of gender inequality in society and education. Similarly, the number of female students in a class also plays a huge role in integrating gender issues in the class. The more female students, the more the discussions will be around gender issues. Improving gender equity in the university means investing more resources on gender, making content gender-inclusive, adopting gender-neutral pedagogy, researching on the gender issue, and improving organization provision.

Gender norms are based on history and culture. History cannot be changed; however, the culture on which this society is based can be changed. There is a need to bring change in the culture and, ultimately, the gender norms. This is to begin from the second home that is an educational institution. For this, educational institutions need to educate the students on gender through content, pedagogy, assessment, and research, or through organizational provision. Furthermore, to make the students gender-responsive, the curriculum needs to be gender inclusive, for which the curriculum needs to be revisited time and again with gender lens.

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AUTHOR BIOS

Lina Gurung, PhD completed her doctorate degree in areas of learner's experiences in online and distance education from Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED). Dr. Gurung works as an Assistant Professor in the department of Development Education in KUSOED. She has altogether two decades of teaching experience in schools, colleges and universities in social science discipline. She worked as a journalist for six years from 2006-2011 B.S and as a 'Gender Coordinator' in KUSOED under NORHED QUANTICT project from 2016-2020. She has done several quantitative as well as qualitative

researches for one and half a decade . Her research areas of interest are online and distance education, curriculum assessment, digital pedagogy, gender analysis, women and development, mentoring, project evaluation, digital divide.

Bhawana Shrestha is an Echidna Global Scholar 2022 of Brookings Institution. She is also a Ph.D. scholar of Educational Leadership at Kathmandu University School of Education and is the founder of the organization ‘My Emotions Matter’ that works on fostering Emotional Intelligence in Nepal. She also works as a faculty member at King’s College Nepal and teaches undergraduate, and graduate students. The author’s major fields of study are emotional intelligence, educational leadership, gender, educational equity, critical self-reflection.

Roshani Rajbanshi, Ph.D. is working as an Asst. Professor in the STEAM Department, school of Education. She was a post-doctoral fellow candidate under NORHED fellowship at School of Education, Kathmandu University, Lalitpur, Nepal. She earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from New Mexico State University with a major in Educational Learning Technology and a minor in Biology. Her area of interest are inquiry approach to teaching and learning, participatory action research, afterschool and STEAM