



Potential for transformation? Two teacher training programs examined through a critical pedagogy framework

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HIGHLIGHTS

- This article evaluates two teacher training programs through a critical pedagogy lens.
- The authors identify 13 best practices for gender awareness training based on critical pedagogy.
- Evidence of eight out of 13 practices is evident in FAWE's teacher training interventions.
- The TEGINT program demonstrated only four out of the 13 best practices.
- The authors conclude that the programs are unlikely to transform gender norms.

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that teacher training programs, with the objective of transforming gender norms in schools, should employ a critical pedagogy framework in order to achieve the transformational learning goals necessary to change the deep-seated beliefs and patterns of behavior that characterize these gender norms. Using document analysis, this study evaluates the teacher in-service training component of two school-based intervention programs, aimed at promoting gender equality in school communities. This paper finds that the trainings miss opportunities to employ elements of critical pedagogy and therefore, are not likely to create a transformative change around gender norms in schooling.

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1. Introduction

Teacher training has become a common tool for addressing challenges within the educational sector. In a UNESCO (2002) summary chart of recommended interventions for tackling barriers to girls' education, teacher training was recommended for 6 out of the 13 identified barriers. Both nongovernmental institutions and governments alike have supported this approach through funding, human resources, and programming.

This paper argues that teacher training programs with the objective of transforming gender norms in schools should employ a critical pedagogy framework in order to achieve the transformational learning goals necessary to change the deep-seated beliefs and patterns of behavior that characterize these gender

norms. Upon establishing the need for this framework and outlining best practices, the article examines how two school-based intervention programs for girls education, the Forum for African Women Educationalists' (FAWE) Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) model and Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT), integrate elements of a critical pedagogy in their approaches to teacher training. This review is significant in contributing to the ongoing scholarly discussion on the effectiveness of teacher training as a tool for easing the challenges to girls' education.

The first section establishes the importance of in-service teacher training to address gender inequalities in the classroom. Following the review is a summary of the critical pedagogy approach and its usefulness for this study. The third section reviews the two separate interventions: FAWE's GRP model and the TEGINT program with the fourth section explaining the study's methodology. The analysis examines the alignment of established best practices with the critical pedagogy and how these practices are used within the

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teacher training component of each intervention. Finally, the paper will conclude with a section discussing the findings of this review.

2. Why teacher training?

Teachers are key to the classroom environment (Lloyd, 2013; Miske, 2013), and they are not immune to cultural norms. They can also bring a culture of gender inequality to the classroom (Aikman & Nitya, 2012; Kalu, 2005; Lloyd, 2013; Morojele, 2013). Research shows that students receive overt and covert messages, such as the idea that boys are smarter, based on their classroom interactions with teachers. Teachers exhibit subtle discrimination by calling on boys more frequently, and giving more feedback and praise to boys (Bhattacharjea, Wadhwa, & Banerji, 2011; Kalu, 2005). Teachers' low expectations and lack of attention and responsiveness lead to girls' dropping out, low achievement, and continued marginalization both within schools and within society (Aikman & Nitya, 2012; Halai, 2011; Kalu, 2005; Lloyd, 2013; Miske, 2013; Morojele, 2013). Levtoy (2014) concludes that teachers' attitudes and beliefs are more important than the sex of the teacher when addressing gender equality.

Studies demonstrate the potential, positive impact that an investment in gender awareness training for teachers can have on girls' education. In an econometric analysis, Glick (2008) found that increasing general teacher training improves overall achievement, but had a greater impact on girls' education. Hoque, Alam, and Abdullah (2010) conducted a quantitative study that supported in-service training as an important investment for gender equality and overall school quality.

Given these findings, the prevalence of calls for teacher training in gender awareness to address challenged to girls' education is not surprising (Halai, 2011; Kuruvilla, 2014; Levtoy, 2014; Miske, 2013; UNESCO, 2002). Teacher training can allow for teachers to become aware of conscious and unconscious discrimination practices in the classroom and unlearn the harmful beliefs and practices that they engage in (Halai, 2011; Kamwendo, 2010).

3. Critical pedagogy as a means for transforming gender norms

Challenging the acceptance and reproduction of gender inequalities in schools requires a deep transformation in the gendered ways that individuals within the school system behave in relation to one another, whether these individuals are teachers, students, administrators, or other stakeholders within the community. A teacher training program for gender awareness must therefore seek to transform the conscious and unconscious ways in which teachers engage with students, administrators, community members and with one another in ways that work to reproduce the patriarchal forces operating within society. The main pillars of patriarchy are the sexual division of labor and male control of female sexuality; both of these need to be addressed to change the condition of women (Walters & Manicom, 1996).

Transformative learning experiences are necessary for confronting the deep-seated ways in which gendered norms guide the conscious and unconscious thoughts, actions and subtle behaviors of individuals. According to Mezirow (2000) definition,

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true and justified to guide action (p. 8).

Thus, transformative learning experiences can be an effective means of promoting the deep, individual level changes that can serve as the basis for individual and collective empowerment to shift gender norms in schools. An effective workshop for training gender-sensitive educators in South Africa, for instance, made use of feminist pedagogy to promote consciousness-raising through reference to lived experience, acknowledgement of difference (on the basis of race, social class, etc.), social activism (the assumption that the status quo must change), and the position of the educator (reflecting on their own privilege, oppression and role in school and society) (Walters & Manicom, 1996).

The sorts of transformative learning experiences necessary to empower individuals and groups to become change agents within their communities and societies can be fostered through a process approach to education and learning, which is most often associated with Freire (1970) critical pedagogy approach. The process approach draws from the psychodynamic theory of individual change that relies on changing individuals' basic perceptions and understanding of their reality (La Belle, 1986). Thus the application of a critical pedagogy in gender awareness training could empower teachers to act through reflection and deconstruct the structures of gendered privilege and power.

Critical pedagogy relies on several elements to foster transformational change. As a critical theory, the pedagogy addresses the need to problematize issues surrounding education. This requires unlearning false assumptions, often surrounding disenfranchised groups, through reflection and dialogue among privileged and oppressed groups. Freire (1970) details the importance of critical dialogue as a process in which all participants come to new knowledge and interpretation of reality through self-reflection, group discussion, and being open to a new way of addressing a situation by listening to others' experience. Smyth (1989) supports the use of Freire's critical pedagogy framework in teacher trainings due reflection progress allowing teachers to problematize the issue, giving them the consciousness to address inequalities through action. By acknowledging oppression, critical, productive dialogue is achieved which can lead to empowerment and action (Stromquist, 2014). A critical pedagogical approach that fosters transformative learning experiences is thus key to achieving lasting changes in the gendered behavior patterns that teachers display in the classroom.

4. Two models of teacher training as an intervention

This study examines the pedagogical approach to teacher training employed by two interventions aimed at tackling challenges to girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa. FAWE and TEGINT were selected for three main reasons: First, both interventions include teacher training as a component of their approach; second, both interventions are well documented in the gray literature through NGO supported studies, and relevant program documents, curriculum and materials are available for the document analysis this study relied on; third, both of these programs explicitly state the transformation of gendered norms within schools as part of their program goals.

4.1. Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)

FAWE started a school-wide intervention, GRP, in 2005. The organization developed GRP to be incorporated into teacher colleges and FAWE's Center of Excellence (COE) schools. COEs are gender responsive schools that employ the GRP model as a holistic approach to gender equality. The goal of the model is to transfer

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