Unit 8: Gender Responsive and Inclusive Pedagogy

Unit Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:
- Explain key terms related to gender and inclusive pedagogy to address gender biases and foster inclusive in your teaching practices.
- Describe the principles, strategies, benefits and barriers to gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy
- Apply gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy in the teaching and learning process to foster a successful learning environment.

8.1 Definition of key concepts

8.1.1 Gender

Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviors, norms, expectations, and stereotypes that are believed to belong to women and men in a given society. These expectations and roles are learned and can change over time and vary within and between cultures. Some examples of gender characteristics:

- In Viet Nam, more men than women smoke, as female smoking has not traditionally been considered appropriate for women. It is also the same case in Rwanda.
- In Saudi Arabia men were allowed to drive cars while women were not. But today both are allowed to drive.
- In most of the world, women do more housework than men.
- In education, more girls study social sciences than science subjects.

8.1.2 Sex

Sex refers to biological differences between men and women which are fixed, universal to human species and determined by birth. Some examples of sex characteristics:

- Women menstruate while men do not.
- Men have testicles while women do not.
- Women have developed breasts that are usually capable of lactating, while men do not have them.
- Men generally have more massive bones than women; they can also grow beards, and their voices change at puberty.
- Sex organs of men and women are different, etc.

These characteristics are determined by their biological make-up and, therefore, cannot change.

Differences between gender and sex

Gender is socially determined, determined by culture, culture-specific, changing over time and space. Sex is biologically determined, determined by birth, universal, unchanging. "Male" and "female" are sex categories, while "masculine" and "feminine" are gender categories.

Gender roles

Gender defines certain roles that men and women play in society. Gender roles refer to a set of behaviors or functions reflecting masculinity or femininity. Those roles are learned from childhood and are usually influenced by culture. Gender roles are determined by the society, which assigns different responsibilities to men and women. Social norms and values define the roles men and women should play in society. Gender roles can be changed and vary over time and from community to community. E.g., cooking for women and decision-making for men.

Sex roles

Sex roles refer to what a female or male can do NOT the opposite sex. Sex roles are purely biological, natural, and God-given and do not change. For example,
   o   Women give birth and breastfeed children. This is a sex role because men are not equipped to fulfill these functions. However, both men and women can take care of children. This is a gender role, as both men and women are able to do it.
   o   Men and women possess certain characteristics that are representative of their sex. However, both men and women can follow any career path that they so desire, be it teachers, politicians, engineers, etc. This public role is determined by society and culture.

8.1.3 Gender equality

Gender Equality refers to the state in which people of all genders (women, men, boys, and girls) have equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and access to resources. It focuses on treating everyone the same, regardless of their gender, to ensure that they can enjoy the same benefits and opportunities in areas such as education, employment, health care, political participation, etc.
Gender equality is a state where all individuals have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural, and political development. It is based on **women and men being full partners in their home, their community, and their society.** Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female and implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both

women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.

Gender equality in schools

Gender equality in schools refers to ensuring that all students, regardless of their gender, have the same opportunities to succeed, participate, and access resources in the educational environment. It involves creating a school culture where both boys and girls, as well as non-binary students, are treated equally and are not subjected to discrimination, stereotypes, or bias based on their gender. This includes:

- Equal access to education: Every student should have the same opportunities to learn, whether in terms of subjects, extracurricular activities, or resources.
- Fair treatment: Gender equality in schools means challenging gender stereotypes and biases in teaching practices, classroom interactions, and school policies, ensuring that no student is disadvantaged because of their gender.
- Supportive environment: Schools should offer a safe space where all students feel respected and valued, free from gender-based bullying, harassment, or violence.
- Encouraging participation: Encouraging both boys and girls to participate in all academic fields, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and leadership roles, breaking down traditional gender roles**.**

8.1.4 Gender equity

Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women (treating them in a way that is right or reasonable). It basically involves putting in place measures aimed at compensating for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on the same level. A typical example of a gender equity measure can be found under article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda which provides as one of the fundamental principles of the Rwanda State, ensuring that women occupy of at least thirty percent (30%) of positions in decision-making organs.

8.1.5 Gender equality and gender equity

Equality = Sameness
GIVING EVERYONE THE SAME THING _____. It only works if everyone starts from the same place

Equity = Fairness
ACCESS TO THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES _____. We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality

While gender equality focuses on treating everyone the same, gender equity addresses these differences and works to provide the resources, support, and opportunities needed to achieve fair outcomes for all.

Gender equity in schools

Gender equity in schools involves recognizing that different students may have different needs, experiences, and challenges based on their gender, and taking steps to provide tailored support to ensure fairness and equal opportunities for all students. In the context of schools, gender equity may involve:

- Targeted support for disadvantaged genders: For example, if girls are underrepresented in STEM subjects, schools may provide extra encouragement or mentorship programs to support their participation and success in these fields.

- Addressing gender-based barriers: Recognizing that some students may face specific obstacles based on their gender, such as unequal access to extracurricular activities, or gender-based bullying, and taking steps to reduce these barriers.
- Inclusive curricula and teaching practices: Ensuring that teaching materials, methods, and classroom activities do not perpetuate gender stereotypes and instead promote inclusivity and fairness for all genders.
- Safe and supportive environments: Creating a school culture where students feel free to express their gender identity without fear of discrimination or harassment, such as providing gender-neutral bathrooms or supporting students with diverse gender identities.

Gender equity challenges in East African schools

Examples of gender equity challenges in East African schools (Zuze & Lee, 2007; Mlama, 2005):
- Young girls who drop out of school take care of their young siblings.
- Young girls who drop out of school become nannies.
- Young girls who are not allowed to participate in school clubs like their brothers because of being busy with domestic chores.
- Young girls who are absent from school because there are no hygienic facilities.
- Girls being involved in sweeping while boys are playing or reading story books.
- Boys who drop out from school and perform child labour such as making bricks, mining, keeping animals etc.
- Social norms that boys are better at maths and science than girls.
- Girls are viewed as temporary residents in the parental home so returns on education will be enjoyed by the husband's family.

8.1.6 Gender awareness

Gender awareness refers to knowing that men, women, boys and girls have different roles, responsibilities and needs. It refers to the understanding and recognition of the social, cultural, and historical factors that influence gender roles and relationships. It involves being aware of how gender impacts individuals' experiences, behaviors, opportunities, and challenges

Gender awareness in schools

Gender awareness in schools refers to understanding and acknowledging the diverse gender identities and roles students may have. It involves recognizing how gender impacts students' experiences, interactions, and educational outcomes.

8.1.7 Gender blindness

Gender blindness refers to the inability to perceive that there are different gender roles, need, responsibilities of men, women, boys and girls, and as a result failure to realize that policies, programmes and projects can have different impact on men, women, boys and girls. Gender blindness is the lack of recognition or acknowledgment of the differences between genders, often leading to the assumption that treating everyone the same will result in equality. Gender blindness can overlook the unique challenges and needs of individuals based on their gender, leading to unintended disparities. It is essentially failure to consider the impact of gender on people's lives, which can perpetuate existing inequalities.

Gender blindness in schools

It refers to ignoring or being unaware of the different needs and challenges that students face based on their gender. In a gender-blind environment, students may be treated identically, regardless of the unique barriers they may face due to their gender identity. For example, this could result in overlooking the fact that girls might face obstacles in participating in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) activities, or that boys might be discouraged from pursuing traditionally feminine interests like the arts.

8.1.8 Gender sensitivity

It is the opposite of gender blindness. Gender sensitivity is the awareness and understanding of the different needs, roles, and experiences of people based on their gender. It involves recognizing gender disparities and responding to them thoughtfully in ways that promote fairness and respect. Gender-sensitive practices in education, the workplace, or other environments seek to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and create a more inclusive, equitable atmosphere for all genders. It is considering the impact of policies, projects and programmes on men, women, boys and girls and trying to mitigate the negative consequences thereof. It is about recognizing different needs of women, men, boys and girls and acknowledges gender power dynamics but does not necessarily address these other than to try and integrate an understanding of these dynamics within programme design.

Gender sensitivity in schools

It is the recognition and understanding of gender-based differences and the effort to address these disparities with care. It involves being aware of how gender inequality can manifest in schools and actively working to create fair and respectful environments. Gender-sensitive schools create policies and practices that support all genders and are mindful of issues like sexual harassment, gender bias in teaching, and unequal access to resources.

8.1.9 Gender balance

Gender balance refers to the equal representation or participation of different genders in a particular context, such as in a classroom, workforce, or leadership roles. Achieving gender balance means ensuring that both men and women (and people of all gender identities) have an equal presence and opportunity to contribute, without domination or exclusion of one gender.

Gender balance in schools

Gender balance in schools refers to the fair and equal representation of all genders in various aspects of the educational environment, including participation in academic subjects, extracurricular activities, leadership roles, and classroom dynamics. It is about ensuring that every student, no matter what their gender, has the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of school life, breaking down gender barriers and promoting fairness and equity in education. Achieving gender balance means ensuring that no gender dominates or is excluded from opportunities, and that all students—whether male, female, non-binary, or gender-diverse—are equally supported in their academic, social, and personal development. For instance,

- Ensuring that students of all genders have equal opportunities to pursue and excel in subjects that are traditionally gendered, like encouraging girls to take STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) courses and supporting boys in pursuing the arts, humanities, and social sciences.
- Providing equal opportunities for students of all genders to take on leadership roles in the classroom, school government, clubs, and sports teams. Gender balance in leadership ensures that no gender is systematically underrepresented in decision-making processes.
- Promoting equal access to extracurricular activities, such as sports, drama, debate clubs, and student councils.
- Encouraging all genders to participate in a wide variety of activities helps to break down gender stereotypes and ensures diverse involvement.
- Inclusive teaching and learning practices: being aware of and actively preventing gender biases in their classroom interactions and teaching methods. Gender-balanced classrooms ensure that all students feel equally encouraged, supported, and valued, regardless of their gender.
- Confronting and challenging harmful stereotypes that may influence how students perceive their abilities or interests. For example, if a classroom only encourages boys to take leadership roles, or girls are always expected to assist with caregiving roles, these practices should be restructured to promote more equitable involvement from all genders.
- Fostering an inclusive school environment where all students, regardless of gender, feel safe, respected, and free from discrimination or harassment. Schools need to be spaces where students can express their gender identity without fear of judgment.

8.1. 10 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are preconceived ideas or generalized beliefs about the characteristics, behaviors, roles, and attributes that are considered appropriate for individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes are often rooted in traditional and cultural norms and can limit the way individuals express themselves or pursue opportunities.
For example:
- Boys might be stereotyped as being strong, aggressive, or interested in activities like sports and technology.
- Girls might be stereotyped as being nurturing, emotional, or interested in activities like arts and caregiving.

These stereotypes can influence how people view themselves and others, affecting their choices, behaviors, and opportunities.

Gender stereotypes in schools

Gender stereotypes in schools are preconceived expectations about how boys and girls should behave, look, or think based on their gender. In schools, gender stereotypes can manifest in a variety of ways, such as:
- Academic stereotypes: The belief that boys are naturally better at math or science, while girls are better at subjects like literature or languages. This stereotype can lead to gender biases in classroom interactions and discourage students from pursuing subjects they are interested in or capable of excelling in.
- Behavioral expectations: Boys may be expected to be assertive, competitive, and outgoing, while girls might be expected to be quiet, nurturing, and cooperative. These expectations can restrict students' behavior, stifle self-expression, and lead to gender-based bullying or exclusion.
- Career stereotypes: Certain professions or careers are often seen as "appropriate" for specific genders. For instance, boys may be encouraged to pursue engineering or technology careers, while girls might be steered toward healthcare, teaching, or caregiving roles. These stereotypes limit the scope of career aspirations and opportunities for students, perpetuating gender inequality in various fields.
- Social and cultural roles: Girls might be expected to take on more domestic or caregiving roles, such as cleaning, cooking, or looking after younger siblings, while boys may be pushed toward more public or leadership roles. These roles can reinforce traditional family dynamics and restrict the personal growth of both boys and girls.

Teachers and school leaders can reinforce gender stereotypes in other ways during teaching and learning:

- Asking more difficult questions to boys.
- Asking more questions to boys.
- Have higher expectations for boys than for girls
- Giving more opportunities to boys to solve problems at the blackboard
- Believing that boys are more able to do math and science than girls.
- Using examples that are more appealing to boys than to girls

Impact of gender stereotypes:

- **Limited opportunities:** Students may be less likely to pursue their interests and talents if they believe they are not "supposed" to do something because of their gender. For example, a boy who loves dance might avoid pursuing it because he fears it's "not masculine."
- **Low self-esteem:** Constant exposure to gender stereotypes can lead students to feel inadequate or insecure if they do not meet societal expectations of their gender. This may result in anxiety, stress, or a lack of confidence in certain areas.
- **Perpetuation of inequality:** Gender stereotypes often contribute to the ongoing societal inequality between men, women, and non-binary individuals. For example, the stereotype that women are not suited for leadership positions leads to a lack of female representation in political or corporate leadership roles.
- **Reinforcement of traditional gender roles:** These stereotypes promote the idea that certain behaviors, careers, or activities are "appropriate" for one gender and "inappropriate" for another, leading to an ongoing cycle of traditional gender roles.

Overcoming gender stereotypes in schools

- **Promote equal opportunities:** Schools can ensure that all students have equal access to subjects, extracurricular activities, and leadership opportunities, regardless of their gender.
- **Encourage diverse role models**: Expose students to diverse role models of all genders who break traditional stereotypes, such as female scientists, male nurses, or non-binary athletes.
- **Use inclusive language:** Teachers and staff should be mindful of the language they use, avoiding gendered phrases that perpetuate stereotypes (e.g., "boys will be boys" or "girls are always so sensitive").
- **Create an inclusive curriculum:** Teaching materials should reflect diverse gender experiences and challenge traditional stereotypes by including diverse perspectives, stories, and examples.

- **Foster critical thinking:** Encourage students to question stereotypes and explore their own identities, interests, and aspirations without being confined by societal expectations.

8.2 Gender in classrooms

Observations of classroom practices show that teaching and learning is often gender biased (Consuegra, 2015). Many teachers apply teaching methodologies that do not give girls and boys equal opportunities to participate, and often this happens unconsciously (Consuegra, 2015). They also use teaching and learning materials that reinforce gender stereotypes. This justifies the introduction of gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy in schools.

82.1 Typical role distributions in classrooms and schools

In classrooms and schools, typical role distributions often follow gender-based expectations, which can lead to unequal treatment or opportunities for students. These roles are shaped by societal norms and biases about what behaviors, actions, and responsibilities are appropriate for each gender. Some common gendered role distributions found in educational settings:

1. Teacher-student interactions
- Boys are often expected to be more outspoken, assertive, or dominant in discussions, particularly in subjects like math or science. Teachers may call on boys more frequently or praise them for displaying confidence or competitiveness.
- Girls, in contrast, are often encouraged to be quieter, more cooperative, or nurturing. They may be expected to excel in subjects that require empathy or communication, such as literature, social studies, or the arts. Teachers may also tend to favor girls for being attentive or obedient.

2. Classroom behavior expectations
- Boys are sometimes seen as more active or energetic, so they may be given more leeway in terms of behavior, especially in physical activities. This can lead to more frequent disciplinary actions or expectations of high energy.
- Girls are often expected to be well-behaved, polite, and compliant. Disruptive behavior from girls may be viewed more negatively than similar behavior from boys. Girls may also be encouraged to display emotional intelligence and social skills.

3. Subject and career path expectations
- Boys are often steered toward subjects like mathematics, science, and technology, and are encouraged to pursue careers in engineering, IT, or leadership roles in business and politics. This is influenced by long-standing stereotypes about boys being more "logical" or "competitive."

- Girls, on the other hand, are often encouraged to focus on subjects like the humanities, languages, social sciences, and arts. There can also be an assumption that girls will gravitate toward teaching, healthcare, or social work careers due to perceived nurturing qualities.

4. Leadership and responsibility roles
- Boys are often assigned leadership roles or responsibilities in group work or school activities, as they are frequently seen as more natural leaders. Boys may also be encouraged to take on roles in sports teams, student government, or other visible positions of authority like group leader, class monitor, etc.
- While girls can hold leadership roles, they are more commonly assigned roles that involve caretaking or organizing, such as being group secretary, group leader assistant, fetching water, peel potatoes, clean the blackboard or taking care of younger children, . Girls may also face more challenges in asserting themselves as leaders due to societal expectations around being more passive or collaborative.

5. Peer interactions and social roles
- Boys may be more likely to engage in competitive or physically active play, with a focus on sports, games, or activities that emphasize strength, speed, or winning. These activities often reflect stereotypical masculine traits like aggression or dominance.
- Girls may be encouraged to engage in more cooperative, nurturing, or creative play, such as playing with dolls, doing arts and crafts, or engaging in group discussions. These activities reflect stereotypical feminine traits like empathy or cooperation.

6. Physical education and sports
- Boys often have more opportunities and encouragement to participate in sports, especially those that are considered "high status" like football, basketball, or soccer. There is often an expectation that boys will excel in physical activities, and this is reflected in the school's investment in male-dominated sports programs.
- While girls participate in physical education and sports, they may not receive the same level of attention or resources for female sports teams. Gendered assumptions can also affect what sports are offered or considered appropriate for girls, with activities like gymnastics, cheerleading, or tennis being more popular for females.

7. Disciplinary roles
- Boys are often more likely to be disciplined or reprimanded for behavior such as talking out of turn, physical mischief, or being overly active in class. This may lead to a higher rate of suspension or detention for boys.
- Girls are less likely to be seen as disruptive in the same way and may be penalized for being "too quiet" or not speaking up enough. Girls may also face criticism for non-

conformity to gender expectations (e.g., a girl being too aggressive or not showing enough nurturing qualities).

8. Parental and teacher expectations
- Teachers and parents may expect boys to be more self-reliant, to engage in more risk-taking, and to develop leadership qualities. There may also be an assumption that boys are more inclined to excel in subjects like math and science.
- Teachers and parents may have higher expectations for girls to excel in language arts, be nurturing, or maintain good behavior. They might also expect girls to be less boisterous and more emotionally regulated.

Impact of gendered role distributions
- **Self-perception**: Students may internalize these gendered expectations and feel pressure to conform to them, affecting their academic choices, career aspirations, and self-esteem.
- **Achievement paps**: Gender bias can contribute to achievement gaps in certain subjects. For example, girls may underperform in math or science due to societal beliefs about their capabilities in these areas, while boys may not pursue interests in the arts or humanities due to fear of being labeled as "not masculine."
- **Limited opportunities**: The reinforcement of gender roles limits the potential of students by narrowing the range of subjects, activities, or careers they feel comfortable pursuing, which can affect future job opportunities and personal fulfillment.

Overcoming gendered role distributions
To address these imbalances, schools can:
- **Encourage equal participation**: Teachers should ensure that all students, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to participate in class, extracurricular activities, and leadership roles.
- **Diversify curriculum**: Schools can create a more inclusive curriculum that challenges traditional gender stereotypes and includes the achievements of both men and women across all fields.
- **Gender-neutral language**: Teachers can use gender-neutral language in assignments, books, and communication to avoid reinforcing traditional gender norms.
- **Promote diverse career paths**: Encourage students of all genders to explore a wide range of subjects and potential careers, from technology and engineering to the arts, social sciences, and education.

8.2.1 Gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy

Gender responsiveness is about considering the specific needs and challenges faced by different genders and taking intentional steps to address them. In education, being gender-responsive means developing strategies, practices, and solutions that account for gender-related disparities. It involves creating environments, curricula, and initiatives that support gender equality and equity by adapting to the unique requirements of different genders.

Gender-responsive pedagogy focuses on how teaching practices can be adapted to address and challenge gender inequalities in the classroom. It seeks to create learning environments that are sensitive to students' gender identities and experiences, ensuring equal access to educational opportunities for all students regardless of gender. Gender responsive pedagogy refers to teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys (Mlama, 2005). It calls for teachers to take an integrated gender approach in the processes of lesson planning, teaching, class management and performance evaluation. The goal is to break down gender stereotypes, challenge societal norms, and foster an environment where both male and female students (and students of all gender identities) can thrive academically and socially.

Inclusive pedagogy: involves designing and using teaching and learning methods, strategies and practices that accommodate the diverse needs of all students, including those from marginalized groups, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status, or any other characteristics. It seeks to create learning environments where every student feels valued, respected, supported, and has equal opportunities to participate and succeed. Inclusive pedagogy focuses on removing barriers to learning and fostering an environment where every student can succeed. The main goal is to:
   o ensure that all students, regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background, or other factors, have equitable access to education and can engage fully with the curriculum and have equal opportunities to succeed academically by tailoring teaching to meet their diverse needs, strengths, and learning styles.

In inclusive pedagogy:
   o Teachers adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. This could involve varying the content, process, or product of learning activities to meet individual needs (**Differentiated instruction**).
   o Teachers design lessons that provide multiple means of representation (e.g., visuals, text, videos), engagement (e.g., hands-on activities, group work), and expression (e.g., oral presentations, written work) so that all students can participate and demonstrate their learning. Teachers makes sure, in their teaching approaches, methods, and strategies, that learning is accessible, and relevant, and engaging for all students. (**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**.

- o Teachers create a classroom environment where students feel emotionally and socially supported. This involves building a culture of respect, addressing bullying, and providing opportunities for students to work together and learn from each other (**Supportive learning environment**).
- o Teachers use strategies that encourage all students to actively engage in the learning process, including group discussions, hands-on activities, and problem-solving tasks. Teachers ensure that all students, regardless of their learning differences or personal characteristics, are actively engaged in learning (**Active participation).**

Inclusive education

Inclusive education is an approach to education that seeks to provide all students, regardless of their background, abilities, gender, or any other characteristic, with equal access to learning opportunities and resources. It aims to create an environment where all students, including those with disabilities, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and students who face other barriers to learning, can fully participate in the academic, social, and extracurricular aspects of school life. Inclusive education is about creating an educational system where every student has access to the same opportunities and can succeed according to their individual needs. It challenges traditional educational practices that often marginalize students who are different and instead focuses on creating a welcoming, supportive, and equitable environment for all learners. It benefits not just those who might traditionally be excluded from education but also enriches the educational experience for all students by promoting diversity, understanding, and mutual respect.

Components of Inclusive Education (Ainscow, 2005)
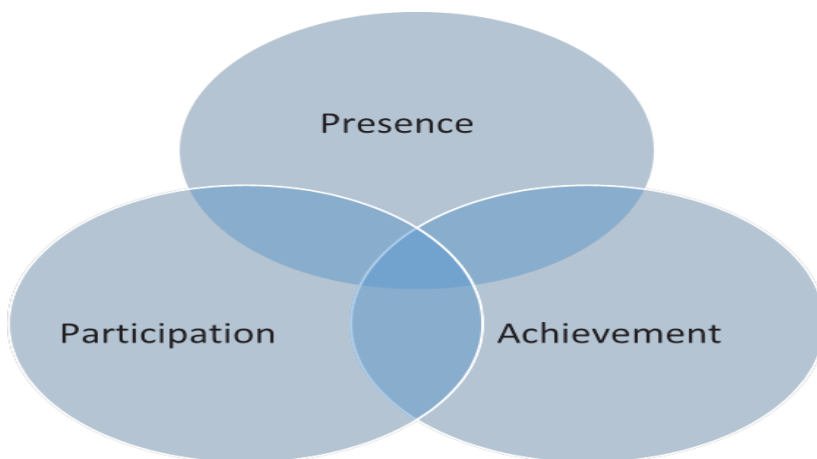
- • *Equal presence*: making sure all learners are present in school. Teachers should be instructed to do daily attendance of the children disaggregated by sex. If there is an
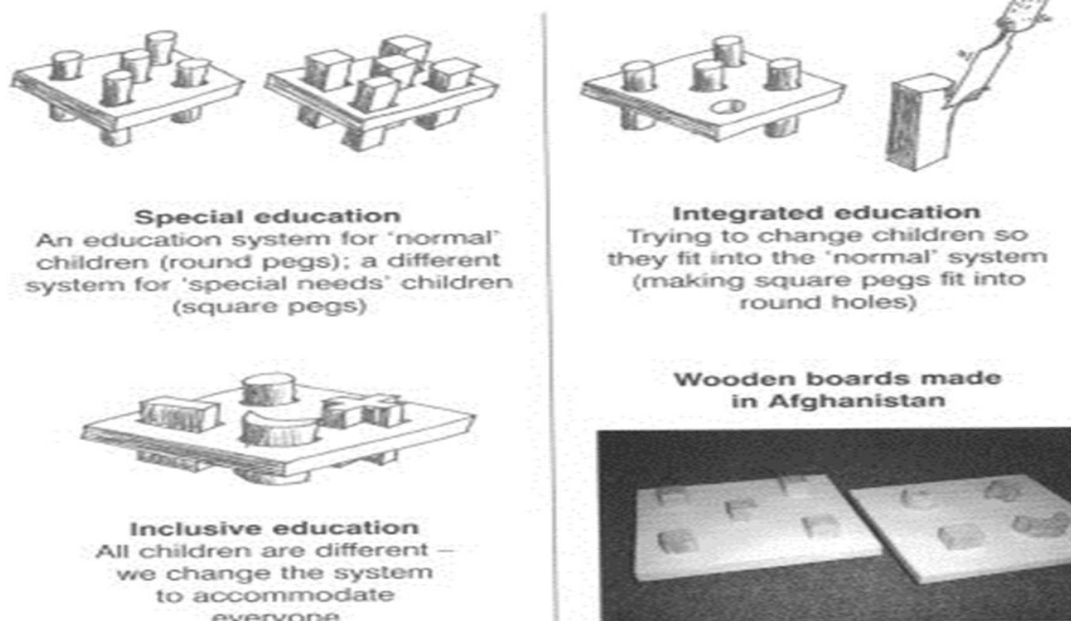
attendance issue specific to boys or girls, talk with individual parents or through SGA meetings

- *Equal participation*: Teachers should ensure that both girls and boys are participating actively and given chances to lead in classroom activities, classroom discussions, and different clubs.
- *Equal achievement/ Performance*: Parents, teachers and school leaders should ensure both boys and girls have equal opportunity to access learning materials and that there are not any achievement gaps. You may think it is too difficult to address the needs of a diverse range of children, as there are so many challenges.

Inclusive education is about treating all learners as individuals. It is about making sure that all learners can learn. Therefore, it is much broader than special needs education, which focuses on learners with disabilities. When we think about inclusive education, often we just think about getting children into school, i.e. making sure they are present in school. However, we also need to ensure that children are participating in lessons and school life, and that they are achieving academically and socially as a result of coming to school.

By working as a team within your school, with support from families and local communities, and by making small changes to your teaching methods, schools can meet the needs of all children − including those with disabilities.

Differences between special, integrated and inclusive education

Special education
An education system for 'normal' children (round pegs); a different system for 'special needs' children (square pegs)

Integrated education
Trying to change children so they fit into the 'normal' system (making square pegs fit into round holes)

Inclusive education
All children are different − we change the system to accommodate everyone

Wooden boards made in Afghanistan

Special Education

Special Education refers to educational programs and services designed specifically to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This approach recognizes that some students require a different teaching method, environment, or support to access the curriculum effectively.

Key features of special education:

- **Individualized Instruction**: Special education focuses on **individualized instruction**, tailoring teaching methods, strategies, and assessments to suit each student's unique learning needs. This often involves creating an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** that outlines specific educational goals and accommodations for the student.

- **Specialized teachers and support**: Special education teachers are trained to work with students who have a variety of disabilities, including physical disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, autism, and intellectual disabilities. These teachers use specialized teaching strategies and materials.

- **Separate classes or settings**: Students receiving special education services may be placed in a **separate classroom** or educational setting that is designed to accommodate their learning needs. This allows for more focused support and a quieter, less distracting environment for students who struggle in a regular classroom.

- **Support services**: In addition to specialized teaching, students may receive **therapies** (speech, occupational, physical), counseling, or behavior support services depending on their needs.

Integrated Education

Integrated Education refers to an approach where students with disabilities are educated alongside their peers in general education classrooms. The goal of integrated education is to provide students with disabilities equal access to the same educational opportunities as other students, in an inclusive environment that promotes diversity and understanding.

Key features of integrated education:

- **Inclusive classrooms**: In integrated education, students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms, with necessary modifications or accommodations. This allows students to interact with their peers and be part of the broader school community.

- **Collaboration between teachers**: Teachers in integrated education often work together, with **general education teachers** collaborating with **special education teachers** or **support staff**. This collaboration allows for tailored support within the mainstream classroom.

- **Support services**: Students in integrated education may still receive additional support services, such as **specialized instruction**, **speech therapy**, or **counselling**, but these services are delivered within the general education setting or through a pull-out system for specific support.

- **Diverse learning strategies**: Teachers in integrated classrooms use various teaching methods, such as **differentiated instruction**, to meet the diverse needs of students. This includes using visual aids, technology, hands-on activities, or alternative assessments to support learning.

Comparison of Special Education vs. Integrated Education

Aspect	Special Education	Integrated Education
Classroom Environment	Separate or specialized classrooms for students with disabilities	General education classrooms with some modifications or support
Social Interaction	Limited interaction with peers without disabilities	Promotes interaction with peers without disabilities
Support Services	Provides specialized support, therapies, and individualized plans	Support is provided within the general education setting, sometimes through co-teaching or pull-out services
Teaching Approach	Focuses on individualized instruction and tailored curriculum	Emphasizes differentiated instruction, collaboration between general and special education teachers
Philosophy	Aimed at meeting the needs of students with disabilities in a more structured and focused environment	Aimed at promoting inclusion, diversity, and equal access to education for all students
Stigma	May reinforce stigma or labeling of students with disabilities	Aims to reduce stigma and promote acceptance of diversity
Challenges	Potential isolation, lack of social interaction, and limited access to general curriculum	Requires adequate resources, teacher training, and peer acceptance to be effective

The shift towards Integrated Education or Inclusive education?

In recent years, there has been a global shift towards **inclusive education** that focuses on integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms rather than segregating them into special education settings. The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD), ratified by many countries, including Rwanda, stresses the importance of

inclusive education for all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or emotional challenges.

In Rwanda, as part of its **vision for inclusive education**, the government has made strides in integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools, including the development of accessible facilities and promoting inclusive teaching practices. This aligns with the country's **Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)**, which emphasizes equity and inclusion.

Integrated and inclusive education

The terms integrated education and inclusive education are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct meanings and approaches when it comes to educating students, particularly those with disabilities. While both aim to provide equal educational opportunities, they differ in the extent to which they embrace diversity and provide support.

Integrated education involves placing students with disabilities or special needs into general education classrooms alongside their peers without disabilities. Students with disabilities may still receive additional support in separate settings (e.g., pull-out programs) for specialized instruction or therapy. Students with disabilities may have to adjust to a curriculum that doesn't fully accommodate their needs. It's about bringing students with disabilities into mainstream education but doesn't necessarily address full participation and equality. Example: A student with a disability may attend a regular school, but they might still be sent to a special education class for specific lessons, therapy, or individualized instruction outside of the general classroom.

Inclusive education, on the other hand, goes beyond simply integrating students with disabilities into general education settings. It focuses on creating an environment that fully supports and adapts to the diversity of all students—whether they have disabilities or not. Inclusion is about ensuring that all students, regardless of ability, background, or identity, are treated equally and participate fully in all aspects of the school community.

Key differences between integrated and inclusive education

Aspect	Integrated Education	Inclusive Education
Philosophy	Students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms, but the system may still be segregated.	All students, regardless of ability, are seen as equally capable of learning together in an adapted system.
Focus	Physical placement of students with disabilities in regular classrooms.	Full participation of all students in all aspects of school life.
Curriculum	The general curriculum is typically not modified; students may receive support separately.	The curriculum is adapted to meet the diverse needs of all learners, ensuring everyone can succeed.
Support	Support is often provided outside the general classroom (e.g., pull-out programs, separate lessons).	Support is embedded within the classroom, with teachers working together to support all students.
Teacher Collaboration	General and special education teachers may work separately, with special educators providing support outside the classroom.	Teachers collaborate actively to ensure every student's needs are met in the same classroom environment.
Social Inclusion	Students with disabilities may not be fully included in social activities and school culture.	Students with disabilities participate fully in academic, extracurricular, and social activities.
Goal	Integration of students with disabilities, but with the potential for continued separation.	A systemic approach to make schools accessible and welcoming to all students, fostering true inclusion.

Key differences between Inclusive Education and Inclusive Pedagogy

Criteria	Inclusive education	Inclusive pedagogy
Scope	Is the overarching system or framework that ensures all students have access to educational opportunities, support, and an inclusive environment. is the broad goal of making education accessible and equitable for all students, fostering an inclusive school culture.	refers specifically to the teaching practices and strategies used by educators within that system to ensure that all students can learn effectively. is the specific set of teaching strategies used to create inclusive learning experiences for all students within that system.
Focus	focuses on the policies, structures, and systems that create an inclusive learning environment. It includes physical access to the school, learning resources, support systems, and inclusive school culture.	is about the practical classroom teaching methods and strategies that teachers use to create inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning experiences for all students.
Implementation	involves school-wide efforts to ensure all students, including those with disabilities, diverse backgrounds, and different needs, are included in the educational process.	is implemented by individual teachers who design and deliver lessons that meet the needs of a diverse group of learners within the classroom.

How inclusive education and inclusive pedagogy work together?

- **Inclusive education** provides the framework and environment in which **inclusive pedagogy** can thrive. Schools and educational systems need to adopt inclusive education principles, ensuring policies and practices are in place to support diversity in the classroom.
- **Inclusive pedagogy**, in turn, is the tool or method through which teachers can make sure the diverse needs of their students are met in daily classroom activities, ensuring that learning is accessible and engaging for everyone.
- Both work hand in hand to ensure that all students—whether they have disabilities, come from diverse cultural backgrounds, or have different learning styles—are given the support and opportunities they need to succeed.

Example of how they interact: Imagine a school with an inclusive education policy that provides students with different learning abilities access to the same classroom, learning materials, and extracurricular activities. The teachers in this school would then use **inclusive pedagogy**—such as differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and Universal Design for Learning—to make

sure that every student can engage with the material and participate fully, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

The relationship between gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy

Gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy refers to teaching methods, strategies and practices that are designed to be inclusive of all genders and to recognize and address the diverse needs, experiences, and identities of students. This pedagogy aims to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and create a learning environment that is respectful and responsive to the differences among students, including gender, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, ability, and more.

While **gender-responsive pedagogy** specifically focuses on addressing gender inequalities, **inclusive pedagogy** encompasses a broader diversity, including gender but also extending to other aspects of diversity such as race, disability, socioeconomic status, and more. Both gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy are interrelated and essential for creating a more just and equitable education system.

8.2.2 Core principles of gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy

- **Challenging gender stereotypes**: Teachers should actively challenge and dismantle stereotypes about gender roles in both the content and the delivery of lessons. For example, encouraging boys to engage with the humanities or girls to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects helps to break traditional gender-based expectations.
- **Valuing diverse gender identities**: Gender-responsive pedagogy ensures that students who do not fit into binary gender categories (e.g., non-binary, gender fluid, transgender students) are respected and supported. Classroom materials, language, and activities should reflect and affirm diverse gender identities.
- **Inclusive curriculum and teaching materials**: The curriculum should include diverse perspectives and experiences, especially those of historically marginalized groups, including women, transgender individuals, and non-binary people. The curriculum should avoid reinforcing harmful gender biases or excluding the experiences of specific genders.
- **Encouraging equal participation**: Gender-responsive teaching strategies emphasize providing equal opportunities for all students to participate in class discussions, group work, and leadership roles. Teachers should be mindful of ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, feel comfortable expressing their ideas.
- **Creating a safe and supportive environment**: A gender-responsive and inclusive classroom creates a space where all students feel safe to be themselves. This includes

developing policies to prevent bullying, harassment, and discrimination based on gender or any other factor. Teachers must promote respect and understanding among students.

- **Differentiated instruction**: Teachers should recognize the diverse learning styles, abilities, interests and needs of their students. This includes accommodating students with disabilities, students from various cultural backgrounds, and students with different levels of academic preparation. This can involve varying the content, teaching strategies, and assessments to meet students where they are and offer multiple pathways for learning. Differentiated instruction allows students to engage with content in a way that suits their individual needs.
- **Bias-free assessment**: Assessments should be designed to be free of gender biases. Teachers should be mindful of their own biases in grading and ensure that their assessments fairly measure the skills and knowledge of all students, regardless of gender.
- **Collaborative learning:** Students are encouraged to work together in diverse groups, learning from each other's perspectives and strengths. Collaborative learning allows for peer support, fosters a sense of community, and helps students develop empathy and social skills.
- **High expectations for all students:** Inclusive pedagogy emphasizes the importance of setting high expectations for all students, regardless of their background or abilities. Teachers believe in the potential of each student and work to provide the necessary support to help them reach their goals.

8.2.3 Benefits of gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy

- **Promotes equality and equity**: It ensures that all students, regardless of their differences, have equal opportunities to succeed in the classroom. It fosters an equitable learning environment where all students have the same opportunities to succeed.
- **Empowers students**: Gender-responsive pedagogy helps students feel validated, accepted, and empowered to pursue their academic and personal goals, regardless of gender. It

empowers students by acknowledging their individual strengths, needs, and identities, allowing them to feel confident and engaged in their learning.

- **Enhances social understanding**: It encourages students to be more socially aware and respectful of the diverse identities and experiences of others.
- **Promotes social and emotional development**: Inclusive classrooms foster empathy, respect, and understanding, helping students develop important social and emotional skills.
- **Reduces discrimination**: By addressing and deconstructing gender biases, students learn to recognize and challenge discrimination, both in the classroom and beyond.
- **Improves academic engagement and outcomes**: When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and teaching practices, they are more likely to engage with the content and feel a sense of belonging. By addressing the varied needs of all students, gender responsive and inclusive pedagogy has been shown to improve learning outcomes, especially for students who might otherwise be marginalized.
- **Community building:** A gender responsive and inclusive classroom promotes a sense of belonging, where students can appreciate diversity and work together toward common goals.

8.2.4 Challenges to implementing gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy

- **Resistance to change**: Some teachers or students may resist the shift toward more inclusive teaching practices, particularly if they come from cultures or backgrounds where gender norms are rigid. There may be resistance to adopting gender-responsive pedagogy due to traditional views on gender roles or the belief that gender equality is not a priority in education.
- **Limited resources**: Teachers may face difficulties finding appropriate, gender-inclusive materials, especially in subjects that traditionally have been gender-segregated. Many educational resources, including textbooks and classroom materials, reflect outdated gender roles. For example, textbooks might depict men in leadership roles and women in passive or domestic roles. This can reinforce harmful stereotypes and limit students' perceptions of what they can achieve. Materials often fail to adequately represent women in a variety of fields, such as science, politics, or business, or do not reflect the experiences of gender-diverse individuals. Many schools lack sufficient resources to accommodate diverse learners, including students with disabilities, students from marginalized communities, or those with special educational needs. For example, schools may not have Braille textbooks, assistive technologies, or accessible facilities for students with physical disabilities.
- **Insufficient funding**: Implementing inclusive pedagogy often requires additional resources, such as specialized staff, training, and materials. Schools in resource-poor settings may struggle to secure the funding necessary to support inclusive practices.

- **Overloaded curriculum**: Teachers may already feel burdened by large class sizes and extensive curricula. In such cases, adding the responsibility of accommodating a diverse set of learners can lead to burnout or neglect of inclusive practices.
- **Teacher bias**: Teachers might have unconscious or implicit biases about students based on their gender, which can affect how they interact with students, assign tasks, or assess students' abilities. For example, teachers may offer more opportunities to boys to speak in class or may praise girls for compliance rather than academic achievements. Teachers may have preconceived notions about students from marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities, students from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds, or LGBTQ+ students. These biases can lead to unequal treatment or low expectations for certain groups of students.
- **Limited training on gender-awareness and inclusivity:** Teachers may not be sufficiently trained or aware of the principles of gender-responsive pedagogy. Without proper understanding, they might not incorporate strategies that ensure both male and female students are treated equally and given the same opportunities for success. Effective gender-responsive teaching requires teachers to be aware of their own biases and to undergo training in inclusive practices, which may not always be readily available. Many teachers are not trained in how to deliver a gender-responsive curriculum. Without adequate professional development opportunities, teachers may not be equipped to challenge gender inequalities or adopt gender-sensitive teaching methods. Communities and families may not fully understand the importance of gender-responsive pedagogy or may not support efforts to challenge gender-based discrimination in schools. Teachers may not be trained in inclusive teaching strategies or how to effectively address the needs of students with diverse backgrounds or learning abilities. This gap in training can prevent teachers from creating an inclusive learning environment.
- **Cultural barriers:**
  - ➤ **Cultural and social norms** like traditional gender roles and stereotypes**.** In many societies, traditional gender norms are deeply ingrained, and these norms influence how students are expected to behave in the classroom. These expectations can lead to gender bias, where girls may be discouraged from pursuing certain subjects (e.g., STEM fields), or boys may face pressure to avoid subjects traditionally associated with femininity (e.g., arts and humanities). In addition, teachers and students may unconsciously perpetuate stereotypes about the capabilities of different genders. For example, the stereotype that women are less capable in subjects like mathematics or science may result in biased teaching practices and less encouragement for female students.
  - ➤ **Cultural insensitivity**: The curriculum or teaching practices may not reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students. This can create feelings of alienation or disengagement among students from marginalized communities, especially if

their language, traditions, or histories are not represented or valued in the classroom.

- ➢ **Language barriers**: For students who speak languages other than the official language of instruction, the lack of appropriate language support can impede their participation and learning. In some cases, the teaching language itself might be a barrier to full inclusion.
- ➢ **Cultural expectations**: Parents and communities may have strong views on gender roles, which can sometimes conflict with the goals of gender-responsive pedagogy. For instance, parents may believe that girls should focus on domestic skills rather than academic achievement, leading to resistance against girls' participation in certain subjects or extracurricular activities.

- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** including harassment or bullying, is a significant barrier to creating a gender-responsive environment. If students feel unsafe or uncomfortable in the classroom due to their gender identity or expression, it can hinder their ability to learn and participate.

  School social stigma and discriminatory attitudes: Prejudices and discrimination within the school environment can create a non-supportive atmosphere for students from diverse backgrounds. For instance, students who speak a different language or come from minority ethnic backgrounds might be marginalized or left out of classroom activities. Students with disabilities may face social exclusion or stigma from their peers, which can undermine their ability to participate fully in classroom activities. The lack of a supportive peer environment can be a significant barrier to inclusion. Some schools may unintentionally engage in exclusionary practices, such as segregating students with disabilities or not providing accommodations for students with special needs, which limits their access to a truly inclusive education.

- **Curriculum rigidity (Standardized curriculum and lack of flexibility)**: In many education systems, curricula are rigid and standardized, which can make it difficult to adapt to the needs of diverse learners. For example, students with learning disabilities may find it challenging to keep up with the same materials and assessments as their peers. Inclusive pedagogy requires the flexibility to adapt teaching methods, assessment strategies, and classroom activities to accommodate the diverse needs of all students. The lack of flexibility in the curriculum or teaching approach can undermine efforts to be inclusive.

- **Lack of supportive policies and legislation:**

- ➢ **Absence of inclusive and protective policies**: Without clear policies supporting inclusive education, schools may not prioritize the creation of an inclusive environment. Policies may fail to address issues such as differentiated instruction, accessibility, and support for students with disabilities. Schools that do not have strong anti-bullying policies or mechanisms to address sexual harassment may struggle to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

➤ **Weak enforcement of inclusive practices**: Even when policies exist, there may be a lack of enforcement or monitoring to ensure that inclusive education practices are being implemented effectively.

8.2.5 Strategies for implementing gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy:
- **Use of inclusive language**: Teachers should avoid using gendered language (e.g., "he" or "she" as generic pronouns) and use gender-neutral language instead. For example, referring to students as "they" or "students" instead of "boys" or "girls" helps to ensure that no one feels excluded based on gender.
- **Representation in learning materials**: Ensure that teaching materials (books, images, videos, etc.) include diverse representations of all genders, roles, and identities. For instance, including stories or biographies of women in history, or showcasing male nurses and female scientists, can help students see beyond traditional gender roles.
- **Encourage critical thinking**: Encourage students to critically analyze societal norms, stereotypes, and biases around gender and other social categories. Providing space for discussions around issues like gender equality, sexual orientation, and identity can help students become more aware of these topics and their implications.
- **Support gender diversity in group work**: Group work is an opportunity for students to collaborate across gender lines. Teachers should ensure that all students are included and encouraged to contribute equally during group activities. Teachers should intervene if they notice that certain students (often girls or gender non-conforming students) are marginalized or not given equal opportunities.
- **Support for diverse learners:** Teachers provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities, language barriers, or other learning challenges to ensure they can fully participate in lessons. Discussions and classroom activities that include various viewpoints, ensuring that all students feel their experiences and ideas are valued.
- **Provide safe channels for expression**: In a gender-responsive classroom, students should feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives. Offering anonymous feedback channels or opportunities for private conversations can give students the chance to express concerns about gender issues or harassment.
- **Use of inclusive materials:** Textbooks, reading materials, and digital resources reflect diverse voices, cultures, and experiences, ensuring that students can see themselves represented in what they are learning.

Conclusion

Both **gender-responsive pedagogy** and **inclusive pedagogy** have the potential to transform educational environments into more equitable, supportive, and inclusive spaces. However, significant barriers such as cultural norms, teacher biases, lack of resources, and inadequate

training can hinder the full realization of these pedagogical approaches. Overcoming these barriers requires systemic changes in educational policies, continuous teacher professional development, and active engagement from all stakeholders to create inclusive, gender-responsive learning environments for all students.

8.2.6 Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Pedagogy in Rwanda

Rwanda has made significant strides in education, focusing on gender equality and inclusivity in its education system. **Gender-responsive pedagogy** (GRP) and **inclusive pedagogy** are essential strategies in ensuring that all students, regardless of their gender, background, or ability, can thrive in the classroom. In the Rwandan context, these approaches are integral to achieving Rwanda's broader development goals, particularly in promoting equality and creating a learning environment that supports all learners.

Key achievements in gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy in Rwanda

- Rwanda signed the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** on 26 January 1990. According to this Convention, disabled children have a right to education, and schools have a responsibility to educate all children. The UNCRC protects and promotes the rights of all children including disabled children. Key articles are: article 2: non-discrimination, article 23: disabled children's rights and articles 28 and 29: right to education.
- **Curriculum and content review**: Rwanda has actively worked on eliminating gender stereotypes from its curriculum. The Rwandan National Curriculum (Competency-Based Curriculum - CBC) encourages gender-sensitive content by ensuring that teaching materials represent both men and women in a diverse range of roles, particularly in fields where one gender has historically been underrepresented, such as leadership, science, technology, and engineering. The 2015 Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) was designed to be accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. Textbooks and learning materials are being reviewed to reflect gender-neutral language and provide balanced representation, avoiding reinforcing traditional gender roles.
- **Teacher training and capacity building**: Teacher education programs in Rwanda emphasize gender sensitivity, ensuring that teachers are equipped to foster an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Professional development programs and workshops focus on raising awareness about gender bias and equipping educators with strategies to combat it. In-service teacher training continues to focus on gender-responsive pedagogy,

ensuring teachers can identify and address gender-related challenges in the classroom. All schools have at least one trained professional in special needs education and inclusive education.

- **Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**: Rwanda has enacted laws criminalizing GBV and implemented policies and strategies to address gender-based violence (GBV) in schools. The government has established safe schools' initiatives, which aim to protect girls from harassment, sexual violence, and exploitation in educational settings. There are anti-bullying and gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms in place to ensure that girls and boys can attend school in a safe and supportive environment free from gender-based violence.

- **Promoting Girls' Education**: Rwanda approved the **girls education policy** in 2008 and has launched **campaigns and programs** aimed at promoting girls' education, particularly in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), where girls have been traditionally underrepresented. Programs like STEM Girls Empowerment focus on breaking down barriers and encouraging more girls to pursue careers in these fields. Additionally, the government supports female mentorship programs to guide girls in navigating their educational and career choices. Rwanda has built **girls' rooms** in schools as part of a broader effort to promote gender equality and ensure that girls have access to a safe, supportive, and conducive environment for learning. These girls' rooms serve several important purposes, which align with the country's commitment to advancing gender equality in education and addressing the specific challenges that girls face. One of the primary reasons for building girls' rooms is to provide a safe space where girls can access to private and clean sanitation facilities. Menstrual hygiene is an important issue that can impact girls' school attendance and participation. Girls' rooms are often equipped with private, clean, and hygienic spaces to manage menstruation. This provides a sanitary environment for girls to change their menstrual products, wash up, and maintain their dignity during menstruation. In many areas, menstruation is still considered a taboo subject, and girls may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing it. Having dedicated girls' rooms helps to reduce stigma and gives them a place to rest and recover if they experience any discomfort during their menstrual cycle. Girls' rooms can serve as a confidential space where girls can report cases of sexual harassment, abuse, or other forms of GBV without fear of retaliation or stigma. This can help to address and reduce the incidents of GBV in schools by giving girls a voice and the confidence to speak up.

- **Challenging gender stereotypes in classroom interactions**: teachers in Rwanda are encouraged to create **gender-balanced classroom environments**. This includes ensuring equal participation of boys and girls in all classroom activities, promoting both genders' contributions, and challenging any gender-biased behavior among students. For example, teachers are trained to give equal opportunities for girls and boys to answer questions, present ideas, and lead group activities.

- **Special Education and Inclusive Education Policy 2018**: a critical framework designed to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, children from disadvantages, and those facing socio-economic challenges, can access and benefit from education. The policy encourages the **integration of students with disabilities** into regular schools, and special accommodations are made to support their learning. This includes providing accessible infrastructure, specialized learning materials, and training for teachers on how to work with students who have different learning needs. The policy has five goals including:
  1. Improved access, enrolment, and retention rates in 9YBE & 12YBE levels.
  2. To establish and support present schools of excellence for early SEN Identification, Assessment, and Rehabilitation.
  3. Capacity development for SNIE services.
  4. Improved quality in SNIE services.
  5. Promote Inclusive/Child-Friendly school approaches.
- **Differentiated instruction**: Teachers are encouraged to use differentiated teaching methods to cater to the diverse needs of students. This involves adjusting content, processes, and products to accommodate various learning styles and abilities. For example, teachers may offer different levels of support or provide learning activities that cater to a range of abilities, ensuring that every student can participate fully. Group work and collaborative learning are also promoted as methods for supporting inclusive learning, as they allow students to learn from and support one another.
- **Support for students with disabilities**: Rwanda's education system provides specialized support services for students with disabilities. This includes the provision of assistive devices, the training of special education teachers, and the creation of accessible school environments. Schools are being equipped with resources such as Braille textbooks, sign language interpreters, and ramps for wheelchair access.
- **Special education units** have been established within some mainstream schools to support students with significant disabilities, while others may require specialized institutions. At each school, there is a teacher in charge of special and inclusive education. The Special Needs and Inclusive Education Unit was formed in the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) in 2020 to strengthen system capacity on special needs education, gender, and inclusion for the full participation of all learners in schools.
- **Community and parental engagement**: In Rwanda, community involvement is seen as crucial in supporting inclusive education. Schools work closely with parents and local communities to create a supportive learning environment for children with diverse needs. Raising awareness about the importance of inclusive education helps parents and community members recognize their roles in fostering an inclusive mindset. Awareness campaigns are held to change attitudes about students with disabilities, ensuring they are not marginalized in the classroom.

Challenges to gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy in Rwanda

In Rwanda, like in many other countries, gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy faces several challenges, even though there have been notable progress toward achieving gender equality and inclusion in education. These challenges often arise from historical, cultural, social, and structural factors that can influence both the classroom environment and the broader education system. Below are some of the key challenges to gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy in Rwanda:

- ➢ **Cultural norms and gender stereotypes:**
- • **Traditional gender roles:** Despite significant progress, cultural norms still influence perceptions of gender roles. In rural areas, traditional beliefs about girls' roles in the family still impact their participation and performance in school, especially in subjects perceived as more masculine. Girls are still expected to prioritize household responsibilities over education, while boys may be encouraged to pursue higher education and leadership roles. These stereotypes can limit girls' participation in certain subjects (e.g., STEM) and activities.
- • **Community influence on education:** In some communities, gender biases and patriarchal norms may persist, influencing how children are raised and educated. These norms might encourage boys to dominate in the classroom, while girls may be expected to prioritize home responsibilities. Teachers and parents alike may hold these assumptions, which can shape educational outcomes.
- • **Social stigma**: Students with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds may still face social exclusion or stigma in some areas, which can affect their educational experience and participation in school activities.
- • **Rural-urban divide:** In rural areas, traditional gender norms can be stronger, and girls may face more pressure to stay home and help with family chores or farming. This rural-urban divide can contribute to unequal access to quality education for girls.
- ➢ **Inadequate training in gender-inclusive pedagogy:** many teachers in rwanda may not have received specific training on gender-responsive teaching and inclusive pedagogy. without professional development on gender equality, teachers might not fully understand how to address and dismantle biases or create inclusive learning environments for all students. many teachers still lack the specific skills and knowledge to effectively teach students with disabilities or other learning needs.
- ➢ **Limited resources and infrastructure:**
- • **Inadequate learning materials:** While progress has been made in reviewing textbooks, more work is needed to ensure that all learning materials are free from gender bias and adequately represent women and girls in diverse roles. Textbooks and teaching materials in some schools may perpetuate gender stereotypes or fail to represent the contributions of women and marginalized groups. If girls' achievements, historical figures, or perspectives

are not adequately represented, it can affect their engagement and motivation. Besides, there is still a lack of adequate resources to fully implement inclusive education across the country. Some schools, especially in rural areas, lack basic infrastructure such as ramps, assistive devices, and trained personnel.

- **Lack of accessibility for students with disabilities:** Although there has been progress in improving access to education for children with disabilities, many schools still lack the necessary infrastructure (such as accessible classrooms, ramps, or specialized learning materials) to support these students effectively. This limits the inclusivity of the learning environment.
- **Limited technological resources:** In rural or underserved areas, there may be insufficient access to technology, which can impact students' ability to participate in inclusive, modern, or differentiated learning activities. This inequality further exacerbates gaps in educational access for marginalized students, including girls and students with disabilities.

➤ **Economic barriers:**
- **Poverty and gendered economic expectations:** In some areas, economic factors still disproportionately affect girls' education. Families may prioritize sending boys to school over girls, or girls may be expected to contribute to household income or work, limiting their ability to stay in school or pursue higher education. This economic pressure can hinder gender equality in education.
- **School fees and costs:** Despite the government's efforts to provide free education, hidden costs such as uniforms, supplies, and transportation may still disproportionately affect girls, particularly in rural areas, where families may be less able to afford these expenses.

➤ **Gender-Based Violence** (GBV) in schools are significant concerns. Girls are often more vulnerable to rape, sexual harassment, bullying, etc. which can result in school absenteeism, lower academic performance, and even early dropout. Such issues can create an unsafe learning environment, affecting students' ability to learn and engage.

➤ **Cultural taboo on discussions of gender and sexuality:** Conversations about gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and LGBTQ+ rights may be avoided or seen as taboo. This lack of open dialogue can make it harder to address such issues effectively within schools.

➤ **Curriculum and teaching practices:**
- **Gender-insensitive curriculum:** Although there has been some progress, the curriculum in many schools may still contain gender biases, either in the way subjects are taught or in the materials used. For instance, girls may be underrepresented in subjects like technology, mathematics, and engineering, leading to a lack of encouragement for girls to pursue these fields.
- **Gendered pedagogical approaches:** Teaching practices may still reflect traditional gender roles. For example, girls may be assigned tasks like organizing materials or cleaning the classroom, reinforcing the idea that girls' roles are primarily in caregiving and domestic tasks. This can influence their career aspirations and limit their academic potential.

- **Gendered expectations in the classroom:** Teachers may unknowingly reinforce gender stereotypes, such as expecting girls to be more passive or nurturing, while boys may be encouraged to be more vocal or assertive. This can affect how teachers interact with students and which students are given more attention or praise in class.
- **Teacher bias:** Teachers may unintentionally hold biases that affect how they treat male and female students. For example, they might call on boys more often in subjects like mathematics or science, or give girls more opportunities for nurturing roles, such as taking care of classroom materials or organizing events.

➢ **lack of gender-responsive school policies:**

- **Absence of clear gender-responsive strategies:** While Rwanda has made significant progress toward gender equality in education, some schools may lack clear policies on gender inclusion, such as specific measures to address the underrepresentation of girls in certain subjects or ensure equal opportunities for both genders.
- **Lack of support for disadvantaged groups:** There may be limited support systems for students with diverse needs, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, girls who have been victims of GBV, or students with disabilities. Without tailored interventions, these students may face barriers to fully participating in educational activities.

Addressing the challenges

While Rwanda has made significant strides in promoting gender equality in education, there are still numerous challenges to achieving fully inclusive and gender-responsive pedagogy. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from the government, educational institutions, communities, and families to create a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all students. To overcome these challenges, Rwanda can continue to focus on the following areas:

- **Teacher training**: Implementing more comprehensive professional development programs for teachers on gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching methods. This can help educators recognize and address biases, foster gender equality, and support diverse learners.
- **Curriculum reform**: Updating the curriculum to ensure that it is inclusive and free from gender bias, promoting equal opportunities for boys and girls in all subjects, and representing both genders equally in educational materials.
- **Community engagement**: Engaging communities in discussions about the importance of gender equality in education, especially in rural areas, and challenging traditional gender norms that limit girls' opportunities.
- **Improving access to resources**: Ensuring that schools, especially in rural areas, have the necessary resources to support inclusive education, such as accessible learning materials, technology, and infrastructure for students with disabilities.

- **Policies and legal frameworks**: Strengthening national policies on gender equality in education and ensuring that schools implement these policies effectively. This can include stronger responses to gender-based violence and clear strategies for promoting the participation of girls and marginalized groups in education.
- **Addressing economic barriers**: Providing support to low-income families, including scholarships, school supplies, and transport subsidies, to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, can attend school and thrive**.**

Conclusion

Rwanda's commitment to gender-responsive pedagogy and inclusive pedagogy reflects the country's broader goals of equality, social justice, and national development. Gender-responsive pedagogy ensures that both boys and girls have equal opportunities in education, while inclusive pedagogy seeks to accommodate all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. While Rwanda has made significant progress, ongoing efforts are needed to address the challenges of resource limitations, teacher training, cultural norms, social stigma, etc. By continuing to implement gender-responsive and inclusive teaching methods, Rwanda can build a more equitable and inclusive education system that supports the success of all learners.

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