

**GENDER INCLUSION IN EDUCATION IN INDIA: SOCIAL  
TRANSFORMATION****Dr. Jayshree Upadhyay***Ph.D. Home Science. Tilkamanjhi University. Bhagalpur. Bihar.**Corresponding Author: Dr. Jayshree Upadhyay***DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.15364139****Abstract:**

*Amongst the multiple obstacles faced on the path to equitable education in India, one of the pertinent challenges is gender inclusion and equality. The present paper aims to highlight the socio-psychological facets of gender dynamics to chart out any kind of effective gender inclusive policy. In a patriarchal society, the hegemonic masculine ideology of men being more powerful and competent than women pervades throughout the social life. A classroom represents a microcosm of the society and provides a stage for the gendered scripts to unfold. Thus, it is important to question the ontological absolutism that has been ascribed to gender roles and understand how this influences the interpersonal relations during the transactional process of education. The gender roles are social constructions, which can be subject to constant deconstruction and reconstruction. It is only through the reconstruction of the gender norms that inclusion and equality can be conceptualized and internalized. Mere systemic reforms through policy refinements may provide cosmetic level changes. This paper attempts to understand the complex issue of gender inclusion in education, particularly in STEM, from a psychological perspective using Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological model of human development (1999) and suggests focused strategies through involvement of the various stakeholders at multiple levels to achieve gender inclusion and equality in the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which pertains to the provision of quality education for all to create a better world.*

**Keywords:** *Bio ecological Model, Education, Focused strategies, Gender-Inclusion, Social Construction.*

**Introduction:**

Amongst the multiple obstacles faced on the path to equitable education in India, one of the pertinent challenges is gender inclusion and equality. Changes in policy and legislative frameworks have translated into outcomes that have not been able to fully address the dynamic and changing context of learning with issues of equitable and inclusive education still in question. The Current Scenario Despite

signing many international covenants, ratifying Education for All (EFA) goals and devising specific policies at the national and state level, the major roadblock in the country still lies in the form of gender disparity concerns in the education system. Many studies have constantly reiterated the role of gender biases, which spread throughout the life course of the girl-child including high dropout rates and low attendance for girls in early childhood as there is a

wide gender-based gap in enrolment in STEM as well as other technical courses in higher education (Gragnolati et al., 2005). In addition to this, other major problem areas which reflect gender disparities in the Indian education system include the discrepancy in enrolment ratio across all the levels, poor learning outcomes for girls in mathematics and science courses in school, skewed literacy rates, gender bias in the design of the curriculum and so on. Quite paradoxically with all the issues, trends of board examination result over the years have shown that girls have outperformed boys consistently at the school level. In 2023, girls recorded a pass percentage of 94.23% against the pass percentage of boys that stood at 92.23% (Raghav, 2023).

**Challenge:**

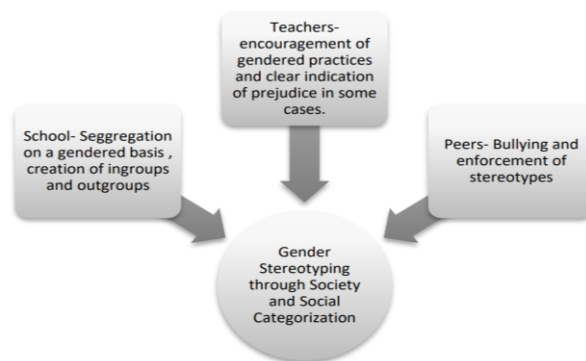
**Social Categorization** There is another primary source through which the gender stereotypes are, Strengthened in the most innocuous manner. i.e. by engaging in social categorization based on gender. Social categorization refers to the process through which people tend to classify themselves and others into differentiated groups. When these categories become salient, they can give rise to problematic biases and accentuate stereotypical perceptions of different categories. Gender stereotypes thus can be reinforced through various

pathways. While all aspects of the society play an important role, school-teachers and peers have a pivotal role in carving students' outlook and attitudes towards gender equality. Teachers In a study by Bigler and Liben (2006), teachers were asked to use gender to explicitly label children in their classroom exchanges and to organize classroom activities, e.g., they asked children to form lines according to their gender. Other teachers were asked to downplay students' genders while interacting with them. It was found that young children whose teachers used gendered labels showed high levels of stereotyping than the other students. Another study revealed that labels used by preschool teachers' increases their pupils' gender stereotyping and leads to an avoidance of them choosing cross-gendered playmates. (Hilliard and Liben, 2010). Peers Like teachers, peers too contribute significantly to the socialization of gender difference often by modelling traditional gender behaviour. In addition, gender segregation occurs in classrooms, in playgrounds, in school buses as children gradually tend to select same sex seat partners, same sex play mates and so on. A study by Martin and Fabes (2001) concluded that playing with same-sex peers led to stronger gender-based stereotypes in children. Peers and friends also have an important role in gendering attitudes (e.g., "Boys don't cry") and any form of disconfirmation is

met by disapproval and ostracism. Implicit gender stereotypes inadvertently become activated in various exchanges both inside and outside the classrooms. There has been a considerable amount of research on how implicit stereotypes affect our judgments and behaviour. (Bargh, 1999; Blair, 2001; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Social role theory proposed by Eagly and Wood (1999) provides a strong basis to understand how gender stereotypes are formed from society's gendered division of labor and subsequently influence behaviours in terms of gender roles and schemas. These cognitive frameworks exert a pivotal and tough influence on how social information is processed and enable us to pay attention to certain types of information that is in line with the existing stereotypes (Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schradron, 1997; Locke and Walker, 1999) rendering them with a self-fulfilling or self-confirming nature.

**Solution:**

As per Probing Stereotypes through Student's Drawings of Scientists. American Journal of Physics, 65, 774-778. Rampal, A. (2002). Enablers of Gender Disparity in Education Socialization and Internalization Gender beliefs constitute the universal representations of women and men and define it by a narrow set of features. Individuals are socialized throughout their lives into these hegemonic gender beliefs as absolute realities, which act as unstated rules of interaction in public contexts. In a patriarchal society like ours, status has been attached with genders and men and women enter the mainstream society with fixed gender stereotypes in mind, which hint towards men being more competent than women. (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). The omnipresent gender evokes the pre-existing beliefs about stereotypes quite automatically and contributes to the biases in people's behaviour and thought processes in almost every socio-relational context, education being one of the ubiquitous one



**Fig - Gender Stereotyping**

**Materials and Methods:**

According to Gender vertigo: American Families in transition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Rueckert, P. (2018, May 30) Schools provide a major context for socialization. They can either increase or decrease differences based on gender by promoting gender homogeneity and instilling confidence in students to be able to challenge incorrect belief systems wherever found. Teachers and students directly influence gender differentiation by providing gender specific learning opportunities and feedback. A study by Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben (2009) presents curricular materials that contain gender stereotypic Behaviour, and peers too exhibit gender stereotypic attitudes and behaviour due to which students often internalize gender stereotypes and prejudices, which in Turn guide their own preferences and behaviours. It has been noticed that many teachers themselves encourage and promote gender stereotypes and are prejudiced towards one gender over the other. They might hint towards males being more capable of performing in STEM related subjects than girls. These beliefs shape the classroom discourse as they unintentionally end up serving as a role model for gender stereotyped behaviour- e.g. not many sports teachers are female, not many art and craft teachers are male etc.). Also,

teachers often communicate their differential expectations implicitly or explicitly (e.g. expecting girls to participate in, 'girly events' such as "fancy dress competitions"; and boys in more 'macho events' such as sports competition), Ram, U., Strohschein, L., & Gaur, K. (2014). Gender Socialization: Differences between Male and Female Youth in India and Associations with Mental Health, Present Study The education research literature so far has focused on the relative contributions of both social background and school environment to learning and academic achievement (White, 2015). However, there's a need to have an eclectic approach that studies the impact of the interaction of various stakeholders at multiple levels within the child's developmental context on education outcomes. This paper attempts to use Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological model (2005), a theory that studies human development over time, as a conceptual framework to shed light on various challenges in achieving gender inclusive education and suggest strategies to overcome these challenges. Bronfenbrenner described five major systems in which an individual develops, namely: 1. Microsystem consisting of the immediate relationships and surroundings of the individual- e.g.: parents, peers, school, etc. 2. Mesosystem encompasses the interaction of the constituents of the

microsystem- e.g.: interaction between the parents and teachers of the child; 3. Ecosystem includes the components of

microsystem that do not affect the individual directly-e.g.: Parents' job loss or job roles.

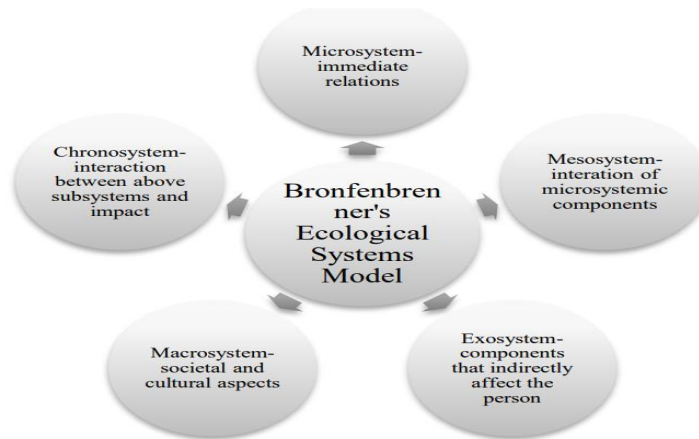


Fig: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Model

**Conclusion and Way Forward:**

It is important to realize that education has an immense inherent ability to bring about social change in the context of gender relations. The various agents have powerful societal influences but are not working alone. Hence it is important to focus on the strategies through an eclectic approach by keeping all the forces in tandem. Some of the focused strategies to achieve gender inclusion in education have been discussed below. Reconstructing Gendered Scripts, the interaction of the various stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, policymakers) in the classroom, which provides a social relational context, is guided by the cultural beliefs they value. These beliefs and expectations are mere scripts that have been constructed over time. They can be reconstructed, and it

is through the change or reconstruction of these norms that ideas about inclusion and equality can be conceptualized. Mere systemic reforms through policy changes may work up to some extent, beyond which they hold no value or fail to get the desired outcome as the system is rooted in the traditional patriarchal setup. This requires that change is to be targeted at the societal level by revising the notions and concepts about gender hierarchy and stereotypes. Multilevel Stakeholder Approach Micro Level Grassroots Approach (involving parents, teachers and peers and other socializing agents) This approach calls for involvement of the primary socializing agents of the child including the parents, teachers, peers and other providers of education. Teacher training Teachers need to be sensitized and made aware of their own

biases and how it impacts the students. The significance of use of gender-neutral language and disconfirmation of stereotypes in classroom discourses needs to be stressed. There has been a greater stress in academia on the pivotal role of gender-neutral classrooms to better the educational experiences of students as well as prevent the possibility of gender-based inequalities. A prominent bias identified in classrooms is gender dichotomy that expects males to act in one way and females in another. This differential treatment results from an ideology that is harmful for students. Literature review on this subject has identified various areas that teachers should focus on such as the one present in course materials; enactment of standardized punishments/praise; and emphasizing awareness of unconscious biases. (Giolandino & Michael, 2019).

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