Integrating Gender Responsive Pedagogy into Higher Education: Our approach

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1 Introduction

In many African countries, female higher education students identify teaching practices as a major impediment to their attendance and retention, especially in STEM courses, reporting that their achievements and abilities are routinely under-estimated by male teachers and fellow students.[1]

It is imperative that teaching and learning in higher education focuses on including and enabling opportunities for all students, male and female. An important component of this is ensuring that teaching and learning processes pay attention to the specific learning needs of female students and male students, and that the structures and culture within the higher education system don't add a further obstacle to the achievements of female students.

Too often, prevailing pedagogical practices reinforce gender inequalities in the classroom, as a result of lecturers' unawareness of issues of inclusion or teaching and learning practices which do not actively enable women and men. A gender-responsive pedagogy addresses this by integrating gender into the fabric of teaching and learning - including the processes of curriculum design, the management and facilitation of learners in the classroom, and approaches to assessment.

> ## *Gender Responsive Pedagogy – a definition*
>
> **1. The learning needs of male and female learners are addressed in teaching and learning processes (inside and outside of the classroom).**
>
> **2. Teaching staff are gender-aware and gender-responsive in their planning and facilitation of courses, and continuously reflecting and adapting.**

A substantial amount of the research on gender responsive pedagogy is focused on either Northern education systems or on primary and secondary education. There is a dearth of research on what works in higher education and a lack of information on how to undertake gender responsive pedagogy when dealing with large class sizes and with limited facilities, and within Southern educational contexts. Our gender responsive pedagogy framework has been co-created with partners in East Africa[2] and draws on work from the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE)[3] to formulate a gender responsive pedagogy framework for higher education institutions in low-resource or low-infrastructure environments.

INASP's approach to gender responsive pedagogy aims to acknowledge social norms and power imbalances by working with faculty in higher education to build an awareness of gendered stereotypes and biases in their teaching and learning.

In our paper "Gender Responsive Pedagogy in Higher Education: a framework"[4], we review why gender responsive approaches to teaching and learning are needed, situate the concept within existing approaches to gender and pedagogical reform, and provide an overview of our framework. This paper takes a more detailed look at *how* we support institutions to go through their gender responsive journey in practice.

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[1] Morley, 'Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education'.
[2] Under the auspices of the TESCEA project - see more in 6 Testing and developing our approach
[3] Mlama et al., 'Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP): A Teacher's Handbook.'
[4] Chapin and Warne, 'Gender Responsive Pedagogy in Higher Education: A Framework'.

2   What is gender responsive pedagogy (GRP)?

Pedagogy as a concept embraces virtually all teaching and learning processes. Within the context of the classroom, pedagogy is a term that includes *what* is taught (the content)*, how* teaching takes place (the teaching process) and *how what* is taught is taught (the teaching methods).

Gender matters when looking at pedagogy because it is often poor pedagogical practices that reproduce gender inequalities in the classroom. When gender becomes a pivotal lens within pedagogy, it supports more inclusive and interactive teaching and learning practices that balance both women's and men's participation.

Our definition of gender responsive pedagogy is two pronged:

1.   The learning needs of male and female learners are addressed in teaching and learning processes (inside and outside of the classroom)

2.   Teaching staff are gender-aware and gender-responsive in their planning and facilitation of courses, and continuously reflecting and adapting.

We work with lecturers from the standpoint of their own awareness and skill-building on how to be more gender responsive in teaching and learning, what it means for their students, and how they can support their students to become more gender-aware members of society.

It is important to note that gender responsive pedagogy is not focused solely on addressing "women's needs" but about being aware of the intersection between gender and learners' needs in general - with a particular and important aim of redressing the imbalances in society which includes improving outcomes for women. By becoming gender responsive, educators improve the learning of *all* of their students.

Our gender responsive pedagogy framework identifies 7 teaching and learning spaces within which six dimensions of gender can be integrated to create a more gender responsive pedagogy. This pedagogical approach supports a transition from gender blindness to gender awareness, ultimately enabling both lecturers and their students to become gender-responsive professionals.
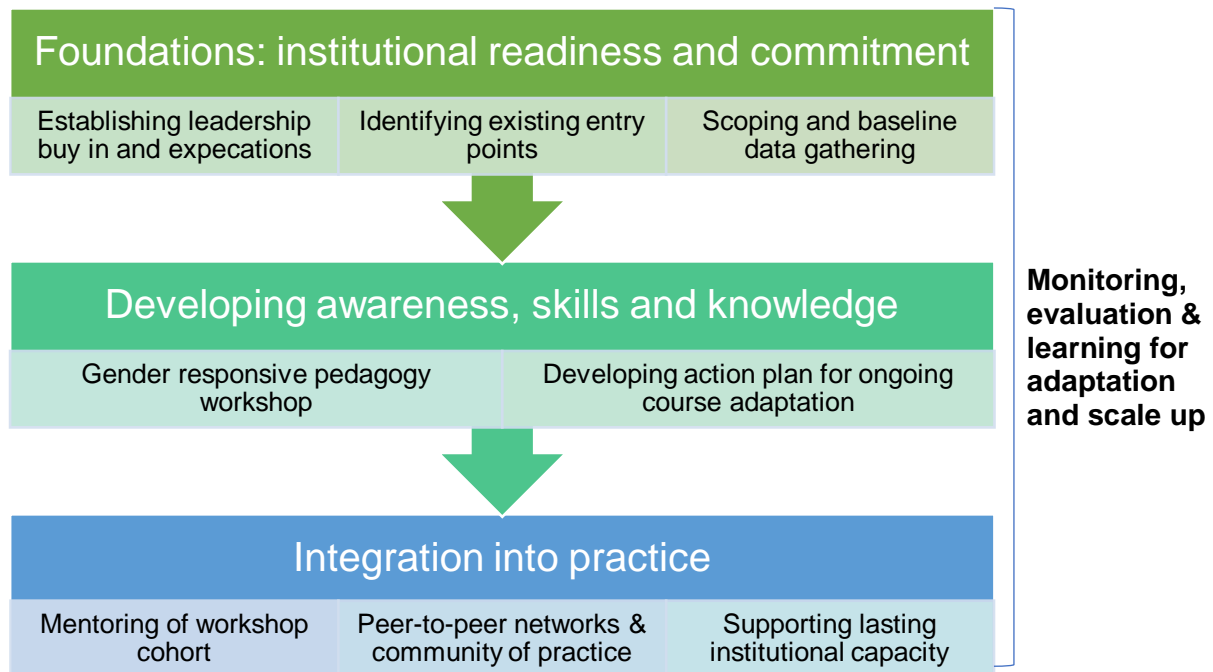

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3 Supporting the integration of Gender Responsive Pedagogy in higher education institutions

INASP has developed an approach to support institutions that wish to integrate this framework of gender responsive pedagogy into their teaching and learning practices, to ensure that the needs of both men and women are supported during – and subsequent to - their HE experience. Supporting the learning needs of both men and women will improve the employability and social impact of an institution's graduates as they bring the knowledge of gender responsiveness developed during their studies into their future careers.

Our approach is comprised of 3 phases of work, from scoping and establishing strong foundations for a gender responsive pedagogy project to the development and scale up of gender responsive pedagogy across an institution's programmes.

As with all of INASP's work, we are committed to genuine collaboration with our partners. Within the 3 phases of our approach, we work together with our partners to define the problem and identify the most appropriate solutions for this context. Our goal is to support institutions in developing the capacity to independently and sustainably continue to evolve and implement their desired changes in gender responsive pedagogy, beyond the life of our particular project.

Foundations: institutional readiness and commitment		
Establishing leadership buy in and expecations	Identifying existing entry points	Scoping and baseline data gathering

Developing awareness, skills and knowledge	
Gender responsive pedagogy workshop	Developing action plan for ongoing course adaptation

Integration into practice		
Mentoring of workshop cohort	Peer-to-peer networks & community of practice	Supporting lasting institutional capacity

Monitoring, evaluation & learning for adaptation and scale up

4 Institutional readiness and commitment

Establishing leadership buy-in and expectations

Before any capacity development activity for gender responsive pedagogy is initiated, it is important to gauge levels of readiness and commitment to change within the institution. Therefore, the first step in our approach is to determine the buy-in and set expectations with institutional leadership. This ensures an understanding of the aims of integrating gender responsive pedagogy into institutional teaching and learning practice – and the support that lecturers involved in the process will need. Such support includes dedicated time for lecturers to develop skills in gender responsive pedagogy and integrate this into their teaching and learning practice. It might also include further institutional funding or support that will be allocated specifically for this work.

Identifying existing entry points

After buy-in has been established and expectations set with institutional leadership, we explore the existing entry points for this work: policies, initiatives and/or practices within the institution that can support the process. This includes identifying good practice in relation to gender and gender responsive pedagogy that might already exist at the institution and which can be brought into and further developed during the process. We also identify institutional champions who will be key in supporting their colleagues as they work to become more gender responsive and who can potentially co-facilitate the skills and awareness building activity during Phase 2.

Scoping and baseline data gathering

The final part of the institutional readiness and commitment phase is to undertake a scoping activity to establish the current level of gender awareness and understanding of gender responsive pedagogy among the lecturers who will participate in the skills and awareness building during Phase 2. In addition to agreeing the format of training interventions with the institutional leadership, we aim to gather information of existing gender ratios and other relevant data within the institution. The information gathered during the scoping activity feeds directly into the design of training initiatives and enables us to tailor activities to the particular needs of the institution and the participating lecturers.

Throughout this (and subsequent) phases of our approach, any gender gaps at institutional or departmental level are captured and mapped against four categories (see box to the right). These become additional learning outcomes from the developing awareness, skills and knowledge phase and can also be developed into a set of recommendation for taking to senior leadership.

> **Categories of institutional/departmental gender gaps**
> 1. Leadership and staff consciousness of gender and the impact of inequalities
> 2. Resources and capacity to support actions to advance equality
> 3. Rules and policies that govern gender within the institution
> 4. Organisational culture and norms

5   Developing awareness, skills and knowledge

After institutional readiness and commitment has been established, we move on to the second phase of our approach which focusses on developing awareness, skills and knowledge of how to make teaching and learning practices and environments gender responsive.

To support institutions to apply the gender responsive pedagogy framework, we have developed a flexible 5-day workshop for HE educators. This programme has been developed based on our experience of supporting gender responsive pedagogy with partners under the auspices of the Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) project. It has proven to lead to change in the teaching and learning practices of four East African Universities (Uganda Martyrs University and Gulu University in Uganda, and University of Dodoma and Mzumbe University in Tanzania).

Drawing on INASP's wider approach to capacity development[5] the workshop is designed using participatory and learner-led principles, based on the understanding that applying skills and knowledge in the context of the workplace helps individuals to internalise change, and become agents of wider change within their organizations.

The flexible 5-day programme can be adapted to specific institutional needs and context,and can therefore be delivered as a single 5 day event, or in a modular format over a longer period of time. Components can be delivered entirely face to face, or using technology enhanced learning

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[5] See more at https://www.inasp.info/theme/capacity-development

approaches to support a blended format of online and in-person activity. The workshop can either be delivered entirely by INASP or can be co-facilitated with institutional gender champions.

During the course of the programme, lecturers work on a live course and are supported to make adaptations to the materials they use in their teaching: this includes lesson plans, course outlines, promotional materials, formative assessment activities and teaching and learning materials, activities and styles.

Situating the approach – meeting educator-learners where they are

The process of working with HE educators to become more gender responsive in their teaching and learning practice begins with a focus on meeting participants where they are. The scoping activity within phase 1 ensures that we have an understanding of participants' current location with respect to gender responsive pedagogy and gender awareness, allowing us to tailor the workshop accordingly.

We begin with building foundational knowledge and awareness around transformative learning and the hidden curriculum[6], as well as developing a mutual understanding of key gender concepts (equality vs. equity, for example) and the gender gap in higher education globally and at country-level.

Exploring the six dimensions of gender responsive pedagogy

The six dimensions of gender responsive pedagogy are progressively introduced throughout the workshop programme, with each dimension incorporating at least one of the seven teaching and learning spaces, an aspect of gender awareness-building, and time for practical application of what has been learned so that lecturers can make hands-on changes to their course materials and teaching practices in real time.

1. Gender as representation

When we look at gender, we often think about gender parity – the numbers of women and men, girls and boys. We have found that encouraging HE instructors to review promotional and online materials of the institution through a gender lens creates a useful foundation for further discussion. This encourages thinking about how the institution, its staff and its students, are represented to the outside world, and can also be compared to the country's gender gaps.

This is the first step in formulating an understanding of the hidden curriculum and its invisible impact on the day-to-day activities of teaching and learning, where everyday actions may reproduce gender stereotypes rather than challenge or transform them. This can be linked back to student subject choices and why certain subjects may be gendered.

We start to look at **language** and the content of **teaching and learning materials**, including lesson plans and textbooks, focusing particularly on examples used, and asking the group to reflect and think about their role in understanding the impact of sexist examples, and if there are opportunities for them to surface these with their students to build their own gender awareness.

2. Gender as equity

Building on this foundational understanding of representation, we begin to look beyond equality between men and women, and explore the concept of equity. Based on a gender audit of male to female ratios across departments or faculty and the institution, we explore gaps between the aspiration for gender equality and the reality, and consider how equity measures - taking action to even out inequalities – are an important step in bridging these gaps

This is a key stage in building gender awareness amongst lecturers and a useful departure point for looking at **classroom setup and management**, and **classroom interactions**, thinking about how the classroom space itself can become gendered. This is also a point in which we can link more widely to the institution's gender gaps that may exist at leadership or department level, and which may impact on the institutional culture replicated in the classroom and by lecturers.

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[6] Morley, 'Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education'.

3. Gender as stereotypes

From the concepts of equality and equity, we then start to explore gender stereotypes. This is a useful opportunity to link the classroom and degree programmes to the world of work, encouraging lecturers to think about student graduation and career development. As lecturers prepare their students to become future professionals it is important that the outside world is reflected in the class, and that students are equipped to identify gender stereotypes so that they can challenge them in their workplace, rather than continue to reproduce them. Building on the previous audits of male to female ratios, we go a step further and undertake a gender audit of retention ratios and relevant industries.

Here, we focus specifically on **teaching and learning materials** and **language**. We ask educators to critically evaluate their teaching materials and texts to determine if they portray traditional gender roles or stereotypes. In addition to reviewing the language that is used in the materials, we explore the language used within class, both between the lecturer and student, and from student to student. This also encourages participants to think about their students in the context of the world of work to which they will eventually progress.

4. Gender as internalised bias

Having established the concept of stereotyping, we being to explore the internalised or unconscious biases. We look at the role gender plays within unconscious bias and how this intersects with social background, cultural environment and personal experiences. We ask participants to consider how they grade their students, and what impact their observations of their students have on their student assessment.

This part of the programme links to **assessment** and **classroom interactions**, and how lecturers' biases about their students' gender impacts on the way they grade their students.

5. Gender as interactions and space

Building on the earlier discussions about classroom management, setup and interactions, we next reflect on gender within the classroom, and within wider campus interactions. Here we ask participants to self-reflect on the gendered nature of their classes by bringing photographs of their lectures, revealing how students are arranged in them and who is sitting where.

The aim here is to encourage lecturers to reflect on how they can better facilitate gender-equitable interactions within class, and more widely across the entire campus. In this, they are asked to look at three kinds of gender equitable interactions: gender equitable interactions between them as lecturer and their colleagues within the higher education institution and with industry figures (modelling interactions); gender equitable interactions between them as lecturer and their male/female students (participating in a hierarchy); and gender equitable interactions between their students (facilitating interactions).

This is where we introduce a discussion of **teaching and learning methodologies and activities**, to look at *how* classes are taught and their impact on gender relations. Lecturers are reminded of transformative learning, and how knowledge-building is about interaction, critical reflection and peer learning, rather than the straightforward transmission of knowledge from lecturer to learner.

This part of the programme touches on **classroom setup and management,** and **learning spaces and campus life**. Linking back to earlier exploration of gender in campus, and the representation amongst faculty and leadership, this component can take a number of different directions, all of which are important to identify and record. For example, issues of student safety, harassment or institutional culture that impact on the progression of female faculty, campus spaces that may have a gendered nature (perhaps the computer laboratory is intimidating to female students because it is often exclusively male, or perhaps there are few female students in the library, working after-hours, because the bus service ends at dusk and it is too risky for them to travel alone after dark).

6. Gender as empowerment

Finally, we reflect back on the concept of gender responsive pedagogy, looking at both the terms 'gender' and 'pedagogy' to critically evaluate what we mean by them. We reflect on gender

responsive pedagogy as an approach and how it interacts across the six dimensions and the seven teaching and learning spaces, as well as how it is embedded within wider social structures.
We explore the directional flow of knowledge and power within a Higher Education context, surfacing discussions around how both lecturers and students shape what they learn.

Knowledge is not transmitted in only one direction from the lecturer to the student. Student aspirations, course materials and lecturer interactions all shape equalities or inequalities and help determine the mindset the student will graduate with. As power and knowledge are a set of connections, students also have a role to play in shaping what they learn.

| Institution | Lecturer | Curriculum | Students | World of work |

Throughout the workshop programme, participants are facilitated through a process of critical reflection – a continuous cycle of awareness-building, learning and adaptation. By the end of the process, lecturers have already started to make the changes needed to implement a gender responsive pedagogy in their courses, and are moving towards a broader sense of gender awareness.

Workshop outcomes

The outcomes of the workshop provide a foundation for lecturers to integrate gender awareness, skills and knowledge into practice. Specific outputs include:
- Individual plans for how participating lecturers will make their courses more gender responsive.
- Plans for subsequent mentoring support.
- A report of any institutional and departmental gender gaps that have been identified during the workshop and prior scoping activity.

Integration into practice

The workshop, while foundational, is just the beginning of a process. Our extensive experience in capacity development has taught us that workshop interventions need to be followed by support and dedicated time to integrate learning into practice for awareness, skills and knowledge to be effectively implemented by participants.

The workshop programme is followed by at least six months of one-to one mentoring support to each participant. Facilitators continue to support lecturers to manage the implementation of the approach, adapting lesson plans, teaching and learning practices, and addressing any challenges that may present themselves.

Where there is clear need and demand, we support the development of a Community of Practice for programme participants and the facilitators/mentors as a way to ensure that conversations and learning continues (in the online or face2face format that works best for everyone). The Community of Practice approach can support the development of a peer-to-peer network within the institution, facilitating ongoing institutional support and learning as educators deliver their gender responsive courses.

Further support to build lasting institutional capacity in delivering a gender responsive approach is also explored – including ways to address additional institutional gender gaps identified during the awareness and skills building activity.

A Training of Trainers programme can allow a dedicated team of senior staff to further build their skills in gender responsive pedagogy in order to deliver future workshops, and act as on-campus support to participants or new staff. We are also able to support a wider gender mainstreaming process to bring more staff into a process of identifying and recommending ways to address institutional gender gaps.

Monitoring & evaluation for impact and scale up

Throughout the process of establishing and implementing gender responsive pedagogy it is important to monitor and evaluate how understanding and practice is progressing across the institution – in order to make adjustments as needed and to maintain ongoing support for the process.

Information gathered during the institutional readiness and commitment phase is analysed and synthesised into a baseline report for the intervention.

Following the developing awareness, skills and knowledge phase, insights into lecturers' gender awareness and how they intend to apply this learning to their courses provides a valuable mid-point reference of the impact of the approach.

During the integration into practice phase we use "value creation stories"[7] to capture emerging good practice as experienced by both lecturers and students. These stories provide valuable inspiration for sharing within Communities of Practice and can be shared with institutional leadership to support wider scale up.

Following the integration into practice phase, we review the overall impact on the gender responsiveness of lecturers' teaching and learning practices and how this has translated into student experience.

During all three phases of the approach learning is fed into subsequent activities and shared back to the institution to inform wider work.

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[7] Value creation stories are a particular type of story which enable individuals to describe the value they have gained from participating in a process or activity.

6 Testing and developing our approach

Our approach to supporting gender responsive pedagogy was initially developed under Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) - a three-and-a-half year project to support four East African universities to strengthen their pedagogy and curricula, and from this to develop a model for scalability to other East African universities.

During our curriculum redesign components, we learnt that fostering gender awareness and understanding of gender concepts required substantially more time than initially planned. Running dedicated gender responsive pedagogy sessions - distinct from other new pedagogies within the curriculum redesign workshop programme - provided lecturers with more time to absorb gender concepts and rationale, and enabled them to move from gender-blind to gender-aware over the 5 day redesign period.

The pilot indicated the importance of establishing buy-in across key stakeholder groups. Understanding and buy-in to the need for gender responsiveness was not immediate at leadership or facilitation level, and adaptations to our initial plan were needed to deliver further sensitization and awareness-building activities.

Evidence of impact: Changes in teaching and learning

Within all four universities, faculty that had not previously considered gender within their teaching have now incorporated it into lesson plans, also pledging to adapt their teaching and learning examples to be more gender-responsive, and to become more active in promoting positive and equal gender roles in course content. Many have adapted their classroom management strategies so that all students have an equal opportunity to lead - considering where students sit within the classroom, and techniques such as group work and assigned group roles. Students taking redesigned courses have noticed and appreciated the emphasis on gender awareness, with female students citing greater confidence and comfort in participating in classroom discussions. Above and beyond this, gender responsive pedagogy interventions have catalysed the university teams in prioritising gender more widely. The Gender Leads within each university are delivering gender responsive pedagogy session, gender awareness sessions, and supporting sustainable gender knowledge beyond the life of the project.

The learning from the TESCEA project has evolved into the standalone, dedicated gender responsive pedagogy approach described here, which can be implemented independently of a broader curriculum redesign process. Our standalone approach places greater emphasis on establishing understanding and buy-in within the institutional readiness and commitment phase, and recognises the importance of building a foundation for ongoing gender responsiveness.

As with any training or learning centred on gender, lecturers will not become 'gender transformed' overnight. Knowledge-building gradually builds on previous knowledge and experiences. It is worth reminding ourselves of this and making it clear to participating lecturers that becoming gender responsive is a long journey - which for many, starts with first building gender awareness.

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA)

Due to end in September 2021, TESCEA is supported by the FCDO-funded SPHEIR programme, and brings together four universities – Uganda Martyrs University, Gulu University, University of Dodoma and Mzumbe University – two supporting organisations in Kenya – Ashoka East Africa and the Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (AFELT), and INASP in the UK.

TESCEA uses a rigorous methodology of curriculum redesign to strengthen the ability and motivation of lecturers to deliver student-focused teaching – helping students learn *how* to think, not what to think. The TESCEA model focuses on critical thinking, problem solving, negotiation and relationship development – and ensuring that gender-responsiveness is woven through each curriculum redesign component.

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