

The Effect of Multi-Modal Communication Strategies on Teacher Educators' Adoption of Gender Responsive Pedagogy in East Africa

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Abstract

This study examines how multi-modal communication strategies enhance the adoption of gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) in teacher training colleges across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Implemented under the Foundations for Learning (F4L) project by the Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development, East Africa, the intervention aimed to equip college teacher educators with knowledge, attitudes, and practical tools to promote inclusive and equitable teaching. Utilising posters, brochures, flyers, social media platforms, and participatory community activities, the project fostered awareness and behavioural change toward gender inclusivity. The framework developed for this initiative emphasised “content, conversation, and connectivity,” aligning with socio-cultural, constructivist, and experiential learning theories. Data collected through interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis indicated significant positive shifts in teacher educators’ practices and beliefs regarding gender sensitivity. Teacher educators embraced digital and physical communication media as tools for instructional purposes and community engagement, thereby reinforcing the sustainability and scalability of GRP efforts. The study

highlights the importance of sustained monitoring, robust feedback loops, and contextually grounded professional development in ensuring long-term institutional change toward gender equity in education.

Keywords: Gender-responsive pedagogy, Professional development, Multi-modal communication, Inclusive education

1.0 Introduction

There is a growing emphasis on the need to provide inclusive, equitable learning environments that meet the requirements of a diverse student body through gender-responsive practices (Smith et al., 2010; Brown, 2015). Recent studies show that people learn differently through exposure to resources like digital stories, social media outreach, posters, flyers, brochures and other similar materials that intend to draw attention to information. Gender-responsive pedagogy integration has been acknowledged as a difficult task for teacher educators and instructors working in teacher colleges (Jones & Williams, 2018; Anderson, 2019), particularly in low-resourced contexts. In the latter contexts, some of the aforementioned communication formats are more accessible than others for educating on gender-responsive issues.

The Foundations for Learning (F4L), a four-year project implemented by the Aga Khan University, Institute for Education Development East Africa, initiated interventions deemed necessary for a radical transformation in teaching that is sensitive to gender-responsive pedagogy (Wango et al., 2024; Rarieya et al., 2024) among college teacher educators in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The F4L interventions attempt to close the gap between information acquisition and practical application to improve understanding of gender-responsive behaviours (Wango et al., 2024; Rarieya et al., 2024). The interventions comprised the use of multi-modal communication strategies to elicit gender-responsive behaviours among teacher educators. The multiple communication tactics were meant to provide teacher educators with broad exposure to gender issues in classrooms, thereby deepening their understanding and use of gender-responsive pedagogy (Roberts & Smith, 2018; Brown & Davis, 2022).

Various communication techniques were developed to address gaps in the teacher educators' pedagogical practices through carefully selected strategies meant to optimise their influence on student teachers (Woodcock et al., 2019). Communication materials developed and used for the aforementioned purpose included posters (physical and digital), brochures, flyers, and billboards. Adopting the use of the latter as a pedagogical approach was not only intended to capture the attention of the teacher educators but also to demonstrate how they, too, could use them in their classrooms by customising them to meet their unique teaching requirements and environments.

According to Johnson and Smith (2016), the first strategy calls for a sophisticated approach to content delivery. The intervention sought to increase the tangibility and applicability of gender-responsive practices by personalising material and integrating it with teacher educators' regular professional activities (Clark, 2019; Taylor, 2020). Teacher educators well

sensitised to gender responsive pedagogy might gain a greater knowledge of the significance of these activities by identifying practical entry points for integrating gender considerations into the teaching curriculum (Wilson et al., 2021).

The second strategy is centered on encouraging thought-provoking dialogue among educators (Lee & White, 2017). Through group discussions focused on obstacles to gender inclusion and elements of gender-responsive curriculum designs (Adams, 2020), an interactive platform was created. This not only refuted teacher educators' preconceived gender notions but also motivated them to actively adjust their lesson plans to incorporate gender-responsive strategies (Smith & Johnson, 2018).

According to Brown et al. (2022), the third strategy acknowledges the significance of communicating information in a way that appeals to the target audience. The intervention ensured that materials were easily readable and available by employing digital assets, platforms and materials (Jones, 2018).

The study sought to explore how effectively multi-modal communication strategies can enable college teacher educators to adopt and implement gender responsive pedagogies, leading to equitable learning outcomes for their student teachers and other learners in schools. Hence, the pedagogical approach that the project was centred around reimagined the content on gender-responsive practices, drawing inspiration from established educational theories emphasising the significance of contextualised and personalised learning materials. For example, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) argues that learning is most effective when it is situated within a learner's social and cultural context. Applying this principle, the project team employed a localised approach by providing teacher educators with the knowledge and skills for in-depth analysis. Literature supports the idea that contextualised curriculum analysis enhances educators' ability to identify and integrate gender-sensitive themes and activities (Wango et al., 2024). This approach advocates practical application through activities such as role-playing and the use of non-stereotypical drawings. Such interactive methods align with the experiential learning theory proposed by Kolb (1984), which posits that learners gain a deeper understanding when engaged in hands-on activities.

Fostering dialogue among teacher educators finds support in constructivist learning theories that underscore the importance of collaborative and interactive learning environments. Rarieya et al. (2024) emphasise the role of social interaction in cognitive development. By engaging teacher educators and teachers in group discussions, this strategy leverages the collective wisdom of the educational community. Literature on professional development underscores the impact of collaborative discussions in shaping educators' beliefs and practices (Borko, 2004; Little, 2012). The emphasis on exploring barriers to gender inclusion aligns with critical pedagogy principles, encouraging educators to critically reflect on their existing practices and identify areas for improvement (Oluga, 2011). This dialogue-based strategy aligns with research suggesting that reflective dialogues contribute to transformative learning experiences (Wango et al., 2024).

The project team focused on optimising information delivery through suitable digital media, which aligns with contemporary educational technology literature (Taylor, 2020). Utilising

technology to present information reflects the principles of multimedia learning, emphasizing that the use of visual aids enhances comprehension and retention (Lillis, 2013). The strategy recognises the importance of delivering the right message at the right time, which resonates with research on just-in-time learning (Gleeson, 2009). Additionally, the emphasis on ensuring connectivity with teacher educators through digital media aligns with the sociocultural perspective, highlighting the role of technology in fostering social interaction and community building (Smith et al., 2018). Overall, this strategy acknowledges the evolving nature of information consumption in the digital age, supporting the idea that effective communication involves adapting to the preferences and needs of contemporary learners (Oluga, 2011).

2. Methodology

The study was conducted between 2022 to 2025 and adopted a qualitative approach in data collection and analysis. This qualitative study employed observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis to collect rich information about the influence of communication on integrating gender matters in teacher training colleges in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Four teacher colleges participated in the study, one (n = 1) in Kenya, two (n = 2) in Uganda, and one (n = 1) in Tanzania.

The study sample consisted of 144 college teacher educators, as listed in Table 1 below. Of these, 103 were male and 41) female.

Table 1. Sample breakdown of participants

SN	COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	TEACHER EDUCATORS		TOTAL
			Male	Female	
1	Kenya	College A	30	15	45
2	Uganda	College B	32	13	45
		College C	29	8	37
3	Tanzania	College D	12	5	17
	Total		103	41	144

2.1 Data Collection Methods

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews to understand respondents' views as teacher educators and to examine the effect of multimodal communication strategies on teacher educators' adoption of gender-responsive pedagogy. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 college administrators who are key to the curriculum's adoption among the teacher educators.

Focus group discussions comprising teacher educator participants sought to explore the teacher educators' experiences using the communication strategies they had been exposed to in their classrooms and beyond. A total of 12 focus group discussions (FGD) were held with the participants. Three FGDs were done in Tanzania and Kenya, and six in Uganda. In addition, the team engaged in document analysis to triangulate what was said in the focus groups or observed by the researchers. Lesson plans, curriculum documents, project documents, reports, communication records, and gender guidelines related to the F4L Project were reviewed to enrich the study. The researchers also conducted observations of classroom teaching as well as peer mentorship meetings to determine teacher educators' responsiveness to gender issues in their classrooms and the colleges as whole.

2.2 Data Analysis

To effectively analyse the qualitative data gathered through the above-mentioned methods, a structured data analysis was employed. The process began with transcription and organization of the data, followed by anonymizing participants for confidentiality. A coding framework was then developed deductively based on the study's research questions. The researcher then used the analysis software NVivo to systematically code data from each source to identify patterns, contrasts, and significant insights. The analysis involved the examination of each data source independently and this was complemented by the document analysis which highlighted institutional commitments or gaps. Triangulation was used to compare findings across data sources, thereby strengthening validity and revealing nuanced insights. Finally, themes were synthesized and interpreted in relation to the study's objectives, with illustrative quotes and contextual reflections enhancing the richness of the findings.

3. Results

As noted earlier, different communication materials were used to assist teacher educators in adopting gender-responsive practices, resulting in attitudinal change and better knowledge acquisition of gender issues in education. Communication modes like banners and dialogues significantly propelled the teacher educators' and students' understanding of gender issues. The foregoing are captured in the following section:

3.1 Fostering Gender in Teaching Practice

The gender-responsive strategies that teacher educators participated in had an influence that went beyond the short term and changed the way they approached their teaching practices in the long run. It is important to remember that most communication materials in themselves are not powerful enough to change behaviour (Miller, 2017). The communication materials' goals were to assist practising teacher educators to undergo a notable change by promoting a smooth incorporation of gender-responsive practices into regular practice. For example, one of the teacher educators from a college in Kenya stated:

When you move around the college campus, you can vividly see the signposts promoting our college as a gender sensitive area. This helps send this information to the community and reminds them to be gender sensitive. Most student teachers have taken it forward...and displayed duplicate copies of the signpost on their dormitory's main

entrances, playground and cafeteria. This is a sign that gender sensitivity is becoming clearer among student trainees. (MCT12/103)

This change indicates a significant shift in the teacher educators' attitudes and actions, demonstrating a renewed dedication to promoting gender inclusion in the college and the larger educational community.

The study also showed that participants recognised the support of communication materials to foster gender and inclusivity in their teaching practices, as was evidenced in the post-training evaluation. A participant noted:

We would like the facilitator to use the educational material to teach us to understand gender better. I recommend the posters with images and pictures that are easy to understand. (MCT21/103)

This increased use of communication materials highlights how gender responsiveness was progressively recognised as important in creating inclusive, equitable, and supportive learning environments. A college teacher educator from Uganda shared:

There is a saying that to see is to believe, and through our communication materials supporting gender sensitivity displayed around the college, including the main entrance and the outside surrounding... we are certain that they will bring about some impact and create a gender sensitive community and teachers who serve with a gender sensitive mindset. (FCT21/41)

A potentially deep and long-lasting impact from the F4L intervention is further evidenced by the participants' commitment to using gender-sensitive language when interacting with student teachers, developing instructional materials that encourage equal participation, and teaching with sensitivity. One educator in Uganda mentioned:

When we visited the teacher trainees during the school practice assessment, we were impressed to see the way they had created teaching resources that were gender sensitive and how they were interacting with both genders in the classroom. They also shared examples that were all gender sensitive. This shows how they have embraced and are keen to pay attention to details regarding gender issues. (MCT37/103)

Although the foregoing seems promising, it is crucial to continue providing support and follow-up to teacher educators to enable the communication strategies used during the F4L intervention to have a lasting effect, as they would be sustained and institutionalised. Such long-term assistance and reinforcement would help to cement the newly acquired knowledge and behaviours, which in turn, will ultimately lead to an inclusive and gender-responsive learning environment.

Focus group discussions with the teacher educators showed they were firmly committed to implementing gender-responsive practices. As one of them pointed out:

The gender knowledge I have acquired has no expiration date; I will use it to prepare good teachers. (FCT12/14)

Another explained:

In the coming teaching practice, expect to see exceptional students from this cohort with a good understanding of gender, who are able to integrate into their teaching. (FCT7/41).

The profoundness of this commitment cannot be underscored, as these teacher educators are likely to have the opportunity to promote gender responsiveness in various settings, such as communities, colleges, schools of practice, and classrooms.

3.2 Behaviour Change Package in Improving Gender Awareness

The study findings demonstrate the efficiency of the communication strategy, which has helped advance the promotion of gender-responsive practices in college communities. This was demonstrated by the teacher educators, who, in teaching the student teachers how to integrate gender perspectives into their lessons, employed different communication media simultaneously, which they referred to as a behaviour change package. A teacher educator from Uganda explained:

My student teachers and I developed a communication package that would complement each other in addressing behavioural barriers to promote gender equality when they go for school practice and after their studies. Issues around gender cannot be handled on one side; you need multiple strategies to impact the knowledge for the community to change. (FCT 19/41)

Despite the teacher educators' early presumptions of the student teachers' familiarity with gender issues, the latter appeared to have benefited from the communication interventions. The notion that students already knew something was questioned as the teacher educators began to see gaps in their instruction. This emphasises the importance of recognising that even seasoned professionals might not have thoroughly examined gender concerns in the curriculum. A few teacher educators freely acknowledged that they had previously attended workshops on gender-responsive practices. However, the breadth of these experiences was insufficient for a thorough examination of gender issues and how to incorporate them into day-to-day professional work. One of the teacher educators stated:

I participated in workshops on gender-responsive practices twice, but the workshop output was insufficient, and the teachings were shallow. I was not confident enough to stand and say that I am conversant with gender issues, incorporate them in my day-to-day teaching, or at least share with the students the basics. (MCT92/103)

It was apparent that employing a range of communication media facilitates dialogue among the college community members. In the study, the use of various communication media helped the student teachers embrace behavioural changes that would enable them to integrate gender matters in their teaching. The dissemination of gender-responsive practices by both the teacher educators and their student teachers to their immediate community members was suggestive of the positive transformation of their behaviour and attitude. One teacher educator from Kenya explained:

Community-based activities such as dialogues, meetings, bonanzas and edutainment activities can create a deep-rooted impact, and so can unforgettable conversations, games, theatre and football matches, which in their totality portray gender sensitivity. Sometimes it is hard to persuade the community. However, through community activities, the majority are persuaded to participate ... because it is part of relieving stress and being entertained while being educated. (FCT6/41)

No doubt, behaviour change takes time, effort and persistence, and can be achieved through well-crafted strategies on how to engage the community. The former was an outcome of no less than four years' intervention. Nonetheless, the involvement of communities who are aware of gender issues and how they impact the quality of education offered to their children and teachers who were gender sensitive and responsive helped to ensure the sustainability of the learning they derived from the project.

3.3 Robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Mechanisms

Study findings show that to attain gender responsive pedagogy, the use of robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) mechanisms is inevitable. Teacher educators emphasised the necessity of ongoing monitoring and support systems to help teachers address existing gaps. However, this is dependent on the latter's ongoing involvement in the MEL processes, as this continued engagement ensures that teachers stay informed about the communication materials, which helps them to negotiate and implement gender-responsive practices successfully. This is exemplified by a head of department at one of the participating colleges in Uganda who stated:

Teaching only and thinking students will adopt gender responsive pedagogy cannot completely work. There is a need to have follow-up mechanisms ...which are measurable and can perpetuate learning and improvement. This can be done throughout learning sessions and during school practice. This will alert student trainees to the importance of gender sensitivity in their teaching, which would greatly benefit their prospective students. (FCT29/41)

The foregoing statement was corroborated by another teacher educator and head of department from a college in Kenya:

It is important to have a monitoring pathway, and in the process, we can point out strengths and challenges student trainees are encountering. The same can be said of lessons reflecting best practices that teacher educators can adopt to improve our student teachers. We should also disseminate what MEL uncovers to the public, especially the education stakeholders, including learning institutions. (MCT9/103)

Since educational environments are dynamic and prone to change, it is important to monitor and support gender-responsive practices that are in place regularly. Regular check-ins can consistently facilitate this and provide opportunities for further training or professional development for the teacher educators. This is necessary because lasting efforts and a dedication to continuous development are necessary for bringing about transformative change.

3.4 Communication Channel in Gender Issues

The newly collaborative and supportive work environment to promote gender matters in the colleges indicated the improved relationship between teacher educators and administrators. Further, it appeared that the communication media used to integrate gender-responsive practices in the colleges created an atmosphere that supports the adoption and continued usage of gender-inclusive practices. The continuing dialogues among the college community members, particularly, entrenched this. We noted that the training sessions took a significant turn when one participant shared a false belief that being gender responsive was primarily a concern for females. This revelation sparked a heated but fruitful discussion that uncovered barriers to gender inclusion and destroyed long-held beliefs among the participants (Eskay et al., 2012). The seminars conducted by the project instructors facilitated the development of a shared understanding of gender issues among participants by tackling issues such as unfavourable cultural norms, information gaps, and group attitudes toward girls. The post-training evaluation revealed a significant shift in perceptions, with 75% strongly agreeing and 25% agreeing that facilitators effectively presented techniques to address gender equality and inclusion in the classroom. We felt this augured well for the lasting impact of the instructional strategies shared by the team.

A significant finding of this study is the creation of continual feedback chains in which the college's project instructors and teacher educators constantly exchanged ideas about gender-responsive teaching methods. This feedback mechanism improved the ability to meet the changing demands of the college communities. Indeed, it was a useful tool for assessing the strategies' efficacy. The communication efforts fostered a proactive and involved teaching staff, and the teacher educators' sense of self-motivation highlights the personal empowerment that emerged from these efforts (Brandt, 2020).

3.5 Effective Utilisation of Technology and Diverse Media Platforms

The study showed that college teacher educators can effectively utilise the media and social media to engage their student teachers and create fully up-to-date learning environments. The study showed that the teacher educators used WhatsApp groups and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (X) to interact with students on diverse aspects of teaching, including gender-related issues. This seemed appropriate, as was explained by a teacher educator from Tanzania:

Our students are all over social media and use different media platforms, because the world is now at our fingertips. I have observed that there are also a number of learning platforms which students surf during workshops and which ease their learning. We, too, have to utilise them. (MCT102/103)

The foregoing view resonated with another teacher educator from Kenya:

A majority of the students have smartphones and thus can access the internet and media. We have a WhatsApp group in each class to share news and updates. The same platform can be advanced to a learning platform where teacher educators and student teachers can share their insights, learning materials, videos and graphics promoting

gender-sensitive pedagogy. We can extend this idea to having a gender sensitive Facebook, Instagram and X ... I have heard that TikTok challenges reach a large audience ... I have witnessed some events featured on National Television news. (FCT13/41)

In the same vein, a teacher educator in Uganda stated:

We cannot run away from the fact that technology has taken over ... the community is informed much more than we can imagine ... using the same technology as teaching platforms will help us reach a larger audience from our specific communities and beyond in facilitating people's understanding of what it means to be gender sensitive and responsive. I believe education has no borders ... Local TV stations and radios, as well, can be effectively used. They are likely to have a big impact. (MCT61/103)

Indeed, today, media platforms are not only places for relaxation and entertainment but also for learning. Therefore, educational institutions such as this compel institutions like teacher colleges to fall in line with this trend and improve their technological infrastructure. This would also put those teacher educators who are uncomfortable with technology at ease. At the project's start, we observed that technology use among teacher educators was quite low. However, technology usage among the teacher educators continued to rise as they better understood how to use it in their teaching. Once the teacher educators are technologically savvy, they can disseminate the same knowledge and expertise to their student teachers. This knowledge can even be useful during catastrophes such as pandemics, as teaching could go on uninterrupted.

4. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that communication resources are vital in promoting gender-responsive pedagogy in educational settings. The increased use of multi-modal communication strategies in the teacher colleges has positively affected the adoption of gender-responsive pedagogy by teacher educators and their student teachers. The teacher educators' commitment to this approach was heightened by the dialogues they engaged in among themselves, their students, and other members of their college communities. This inherent communication strategy helped foster a deeper understanding of the notion of gender responsiveness and enhanced collaboration among members of the college communities. The numerous feedback loops enhanced the collaboration and openness to learn. No doubt this was enhanced by the varied communication media resources the participants were exposed to and which helped to create a better understanding of gender issues in education.

The teacher educators' response to the communication strategy demonstrates a practical approach to closing the gap on how teacher educators conceptualise gender issues in education. The strategy also drew the educators to put the ideas they learnt into practice and persuade others to follow suit.

All in all, the study highlights the crucial role of an excellent communication strategy in encouraging gender-responsive behaviours in educational settings.

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