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GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY AWARENESS: INSIGHTS FROM EDUCATORS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ETHIOPIA

Gender-responsive pedagogy involves teaching methods that address the specific learning needs of males and females, promoting equal opportunities regardless of gender. This approach is vital for reducing the gender gap in education. While several studies have explored gender inequality within the Ethiopian education system, they often fail to consider the awareness of teachers and academic leaders regarding gender-responsive pedagogy, which could be one of the factors perpetuating inequality.

This study aims to define the level of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in selected public universities in Ethiopia and identify participant-proposed solutions for enhancing this awareness. Understanding the awareness level of university educators and academic leaders helps assess their ability to recognise and address gender bias in teaching practices. Critical pedagogy serves as the theoretical foundation for this research.

The study was conducted at three Ethiopian universities – Madda Walabu, Arsi, and Ambo – with which the authors had strong academic ties, facilitating data collection. A qualitative research methodology was employed, using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. The study included 13 participants: seven academic leaders (two faculty deans and five academic programme leaders) and six teachers, all with experience in multiple public universities in Ethiopia. The participants represented diverse professional backgrounds and experiences, enabling the inclusion of varied perspectives on gender-responsive pedagogy. The primary themes for analysis were gender awareness and proposed solutions. The data were interpreted in a broader context to uncover their significance.

The findings reveal a significant lack of awareness and specialised training in gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in the selected public universities. Participants recognised the importance of gender equality in teaching and leadership. Proposed solutions included continuous training in gender-responsive pedagogy, institutional support for its implementation, and integrating its principles into teacher education programmes.

The study concludes that a lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders contributes to the persistence of systemic gender inequalities. To address this issue, universities must provide training and resources that support the implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy. Collaboration among policymakers, university leaders, and educators is critically important for raising awareness, implementing effective practices, and fostering a more inclusive education system in Ethiopia.

Keyword: *gender-responsive pedagogy, educational inequality, gender awareness, public universities in Ethiopia, critical pedagogy, gender equality in teaching, teacher training, inclusive education system.*

Тотоба Б.А., Мессарош Г. Обізнаність у гендерно чутливій педагогіці: точка зору викладачів та наукових лідерів державних університетів Ефіопії.

Гендерно чутлива педагогіка передбачає використання методів викладання, які враховують специфічні навчальні потреби дівчат і хлопців, сприяючи рівним можливостям незалежно від статі. Такий підхід є важливим для зменшення гендерного розриву в освіті. Хоча низка досліджень висвітлює питання гендерної нерівності в освітній системі Ефіопії, вони часто не враховують рівень обізнаності викладачів і наукових лідерів стосовно гендерно чутливої педагогіки, що може бути одним із факторів, які закріплюють нерівність.

Запропоноване дослідження має на меті визначити рівень обізнаності викладачів і академічних лідерів у гендерно чутливій педагогіці в окремих державних університетах Ефіопії, а також визначити запропоновані учасниками рішення задля підвищення цієї обізнаності. Розуміння рівня обізнаності викладачів і академічних лідерів університетів допомагає оцінити, наскільки вони здатні розпізнавати й долати гендерні упередження у викладацькій практиці. Теоретичною основою дослідження є критична педагогіка.

Експериментальною базою дослідження були три університети Ефіопії – Мадда Валабу, Арсі та Амбо, з якими автори мали тісні академічні зв'язки, що сприяло збору даних. Використовувалася якісна дослідницька методологія з напівструктурованими інтерв'ю як основним інструментом збору даних. У дослідженні взяли участь 13 осіб – сім академічних лідерів (два декани факультетів і п'ять керівників навчальних програм) та шість викладачів – із досвідом роботи в кількох державних університетах Ефіопії. Учасники представляли різні сфери діяльності та мали різноманітний досвід, що забезпечувало включення різних точок зору на гендерно чутливу педагогіку. Провідними темами аналізу стали гендерна обізнаність і запропоновані учасниками рішення. Дані інтерпретувалися в ширшому контексті для визначення їхнього значення.

Результати дослідження свідчать про значний брак обізнаності та спеціального навчання з гендерно чутливої педагогіки серед викладачів і академічних лідерів у відібраних державних університетах Ефіопії. Учасники визнають важливість гендерної рівності у викладанні та керівництві. Серед запропонованих рішень – проведення постійного навчання з гендерно чутливої педагогіки, інституційна підтримка впровадження цієї педагогіки та інтеграція її принципів у програми підготовки викладачів.

Зроблено висновок про те, що відсутність обізнаності стосовно гендерно чутливої педагогіки серед викладачів і академічних лідерів сприяє закріпленню системних гендерних нерівностей. Для подолання цієї проблеми університети повинні забезпечити навчання та ресурси, які підтримують впровадження гендерно чутливої педагогіки. Спільна робота політиків, керівників університетів і викладачів є критично важливою для підвищення обізнаності, впровадження практик і створення більш інклюзивної освітньої системи в Ефіопії.

Ключові слова: гендерно чутлива педагогіка, освітня нерівність, гендерна обізнаність, державні університети Ефіопії, критична педагогіка, гендерна рівність у викладанні, підготовка викладачів, інклюзивна освітня система.

Problem statement. Quality education for males and females is crucial for sustainable development. The quality of education cannot be achieved without considering the gender dimension in teaching practice and on university campus. Empowering women through education is a key factor in achieving this sustainability [Kumar Pathania, 2017]. Gender-responsive pedagogy refers to teaching methods that address the specific learning needs and experiences of girls and boys [Chapin, Warne, 2020; Mlama et al., 2005a]. Gender-responsive pedagogy plays a crucial role in bridging the widespread gender gap in education. Key strategies include using diverse teaching materials, promoting inclusive classroom interactions and challenging stereotypes [Chapin, Warne, 2020; Mlama et al., 2005b]. It promotes equal learning opportunities among students ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, receive tailored support to succeed academically and socially [Mlama et al., 2005a]. The core principle of gender responsive pedagogy is that the (1) "Learning needs of male and female learners are considered in teaching and learning processes (inside and outside the classroom)", (2) "Teaching staff are aware of gender and gender-responsive in the planning and delivery of courses and respond to gender needs by continuously reflecting and adapting them" [Chapin, Warne, 2020, p. 1]. "Gender-responsive pedagogy involves creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that challenges gender stereotypes and promotes equal opportunities for all students" [Deleu, Purakhyna, 2022]. There is a positive correlation between gender-responsive pedagogical practices

and teaching effectiveness [Lualhati, 2019]. Hence, by using gender-responsive pedagogy in classroom practice, educators can promote gender equality and pave the way for social justice.

Patriarchy is deeply rooted in cultural norms and practices that favour the subordination of women in various areas of life, including education in Ethiopia [Molla, 2018; Tekleselassie, Roach, 2021; MOWCY et al., 2019]. In Ethiopia, the gender gap is greater than in the neighbouring countries of Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2019). The country has strictly defined gender roles that are embedded in their culture Ethiopian society keeping women in a subordinate position and using traditional values as an excuse [Kelil, Asefa, 2019; Seleshi, 2019]. Traditional gender identities confine women to household work rather than public spheres. This has prominent impacts on women's participation in education, including higher education teaching and learning process. "The government has promoted education for all in recent decades, with additional policy efforts to increase the number of university-joining female students (FDRE, 2014) to address the "historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women". Despite long-held constitutional promise and some affirmative actions, gender equality in higher education is far from reality" [Asfaw, 2012]. In a country that has a legacy of gender discrimination behind it, access alone does not automatically lead to success unless structural adjustments are made to the education system, including the pedagogical knowledge and awareness of teachers. Higher educational institutions are not isolated from the traditions, culture and social norms of society and can reinforce gender stereotypes and inequalities that already exist in society. That is, since teachers, students and academic leaders are members of society, they cannot be free from the culture that perpetuates gender inequality in their practices. Therefore, the teaching and learning process in higher education can reproduce these traditions, culture and social norms that promote gender inequality if teachers are not aware of pedagogical approaches that consider the specific learning needs of males and females.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. A range of studies underscores that gender equality in education is still an important issue in Ethiopia, especially in higher education. The study by [Semela, Tsige, 2023] discussed gender policies in Ethiopian higher education, focusing on reducing gender inequalities in different disciplines. A study by [Egne, 2014] highlighted that gender inequality remains a significant issue in Ethiopian higher education, particularly in STEM fields. The study by [Molla, Cuthbert, 2014] underscores that women were facing qualitative inequalities, including prejudice and sexual violence. All the above studies have addressed the problems of gender equality in Ethiopian education, ignoring the awareness of Ethiopian higher education teachers and academic leaders, which could be one of the factors perpetuating gender inequality. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analysing the awareness of gender responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in some selected public universities in Ethiopia. This type of study could contribute to an improvement and broader international discussion on gender inequality from the perspective of teaching methods used by teachers. In addition, one of the researchers has been in close contact with some public universities in Ethiopia for fifteen years as a student, teacher and program leader. During this time, he has informally observed that there is a lack of awareness of gender responsive pedagogy and training for academic leaders and teachers. Therefore, he felt that a study on gender responsive pedagogy awareness among faculty and academic leaders is important to address the persistent gender inequality in higher educational institutions in Ethiopia.

To this end, the study has used critical pedagogy to explore the awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among faculty and academic leaders in the selected universities in Ethiopia. The central concept of critical pedagogy is to challenge and transform oppressive social structures through critical reflection and action. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, educators are expected to help students develop a critical consciousness that enables them to critically analyse and understand the social, political, economic and cultural forces that shape their lives [Suoranta, Moio, 2006]. It suggests that teaching must awaken the values of justice and equality in the minds of students. Critical pedagogy calls for a teaching strategy that aims to raise learners' awareness of justice and social equality while improving their knowledge. The aim of critical pedagogy in education is to create a just society [Breunig, 2005]. In this vein, teachers should be conscious and have awareness of justice and social equality to tackle them. This study

argues that teachers should have an awareness of gender and gender-responsive pedagogy to challenge the existing gender inequality in the context of university education. This is because awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy helps to challenge traditional gender norms and promote gender equality in the classroom, and in society as a whole [Kirylo et al., 2010; Wattimena, 2018]. J. Jarvis [2014] underscores the importance of teachers' awareness and reflection in addressing gender bias. When teachers lack an awareness of gender responsive pedagogy, their teaching practice reinforces gender inequality, promoting social injustice [Kahamba et al., 2017]. In the context of university education, awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders can be understood through the lens of critical pedagogy. Furthermore, investigating university teachers' and academic leaders' awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy helps to understand the extent to which they recognize and address gender bias in teaching practice.

In this sense, this **study aims** to define the level of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders at selected Ethiopian Universities by considering critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are teaching staff and academic leaders at the selected universities aware of gender responsive pedagogy?
2. What solutions do the teachers and academic leaders propose for raising awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy at the selected universities?

Methodology. Madda Walabu, Arsi and Ambo universities were included in this study using purposive sampling as the researcher had very close contact with these universities as a student and academic staff. The researcher believes that this could facilitate data collection. An exploratory qualitative research design was used for this study, with a semi-structured interview as the main instrument for data collection to enable the exploration of gender responsive pedagogy awareness among teachers and academic leaders of the chosen universities [Adams, 2015]. Accordingly, the participants were given a consent form in English before the interview, as this is the official university language in the country. The form explained the title and purpose of the study, assured confidentiality, explained that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. The semi-structured interview was conducted with the teachers and academic leaders after they signed a consent form agreeing that their participation was voluntary. The semi-structured interview followed a flexible interview protocol in which pre-prepared questions guided the semi-structured interviews on teachers' and academic leaders' awareness of gender responsive pedagogy. In developing the questions, the authors drew on existing literature, their own experiences and the principles of gender responsive pedagogy [Mlama et al., 2005a]. Intuitive and lived experience is valuable in this context, as one of the authors was born and raised in Ethiopia and has professional experience as a teacher at a university in the country. Accordingly, core questions were used to guide the discussion, which were supplemented by follow-up questions tailored to the interview. For example, the question 'Have you ever heard of gender responsive pedagogy?' was followed by the question 'Is there any kind of pedagogical training at your university?'

In this way, the semi-structured interview was conducted with six (N=6) teachers and seven (N=7) academic leaders (two faculty deans and 5 academic program leaders). Almost all academic leaders and teachers involved in this study have work experiences in different universities in Ethiopia, which could enrich the sample of the study. In this way, a total of 13 participants (teachers and academic leaders) were included in this study by the means of purposive sampling because the teachers are the driving force in teaching and learning and know more about pedagogical awareness in their universities. It is also expected that academic program leaders and faculty deans are both teachers and managers of teaching and learning and therefore know more about the pedagogical awareness of teachers in their universities. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was conducted with seven academic heads and teachers from three Ethiopian public universities with the assistance of three faculty members (one from each selected university). The semi-structured interview was conducted online in English via Google Meeting and the participants' responses were recorded, transcribed and used for this research data. The participants' responses were professionally reflected upon by the researcher. Table 1 below provides demographic information about the academic leaders.

Table 1

Demographic information of the academic leaders

Academic Leader (AL)	Sex	Field of Specialization	Position	Education Level	Teaching Experience
AL 1	Male	Sociology	Faculty Dean &Teacher	MA	14 at 2 universities
AL2	Male	Special Needs and Inclusive Education	Academic Program Leader &Teacher	MA	7 years
AL 3	Male	Gender and Development Studies	Academic Program Leader &Teacher	MA	15 years at 2 universities
AL 4	Male	Human Development and Learning	Faculty Dean &Teacher	PhD	25 years at one of teacher's training college and university
AL5	Male	Economics	Academic Program Leader &Teacher	MA	15 years at 2 Universities
AL 6	Male	Biology	Academic Program Leader &Teacher	MSc	8 years at 2 Universities
AL7	Male	Social Psychology	Academic Program Leader & Teacher	MA	6 years at a university
<i>Total</i>					7

Table 1 above shows the academic leaders' (Faculty Deans and Academic Program Leaders) sex, their role at their universities, their level of education and teaching experience, and the institution where they previously worked. From Table 1 above, we can see that the participation of women in leadership positions in universities is low as all academic leaders are male. Another important point in the above table is that almost all academic leaders have teaching experience in more than one public universities in Ethiopia, which can enrich the sample of this study. All the participants are involved in teaching activities and can share their experience and knowledge on gender-responsive pedagogy. In addition, the participants are from diverse fields of study and with various experiences which supports the inclusion of different experiences and perspectives in this study.

Table 2

Demographic characteristics of the teaching staff at the universities

Teachers (T)	Sex	Field of specialization (FS)	Education Level	Teaching Experience
T1	Male	Urban and Regional Development Planning	PhD	15 years at 2 universities
T2	Female	Sociology	MA	14 years at a university
T3	Male	Philosophy of Education	PhD	30 years at secondary school and a university
T4	Female	Computer Science	MSc	8 years at 2 universities
T5	Male	English Language	PhD candidate	15 years at a university
T6	Male	Computer Science	MSc	8 years at 2 universities
<i>Total</i>				6

Table 2 above contains information about the teachers, their sex, their field of specialization, their level of education and their teaching experience. From the above table 2, we can conclude that women are underrepresented in teaching faculty and leadership positions in Ethiopian public universities. The participants come from different fields of study, which can enrich the data for this study as they bring different views, experiences and perceptions. In addition, al-

most all the participants have had teaching experience at more than one public universities in Ethiopia, which contributes to the similar interpretation of a lack of gender-responsive pedagogy awareness and practice at other universities in the country.

Presentation of the main research material. The data collected for this study was analysed qualitatively. Accordingly, the data analysis involved various processes to transform the collected data into a form of explanation, understanding and interpretation of the participants' awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy. The data analysis for the study followed the analytical cycles of [Creswell, 2013] (1) organizing data; (2) reading and remembering; (3) describing and classifying the data into codes and categories; (4) interpreting the data; and (5) representing and visualizing the data. Based on these cycles, the data analysis for this study was done by transcribing the data collected from the teachers and academic leaders into appropriate textual units and reading them repeatedly to understand the meanings in the data. After the transcribed data were thoroughly read and understood, they were coded and transformed into categories (or themes). The themes for data analysis in this study were derived from the basic research questions guiding this study. Accordingly, the gender awareness of teachers and academic leaders and the solutions proposed by the participants are the themes for data analysis in this study. Finally, the data were interpreted beyond the codes and themes to capture the larger meaning of the data.

After coding the data, we concluded that the teachers and academic leaders lacked awareness and experience with gender-responsive pedagogy. By the end of the interview, the teachers and academic leaders suggested important solutions to improve teachers' and academic leaders' awareness and experience of gender-responsive pedagogy. The following section explains how the participants supported these themes by describing their awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy and how they can improve it.

Awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders

The result of the semi-structured interview shows that there is no awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among the teaching staff and academic leaders of the chosen public universities in Ethiopia. Academic leaders (deans of faculties and heads of academic programs) of the chosen public universities in Ethiopia were interviewed as follows:

Have you ever heard of gender-responsive pedagogy?

If yes, when did you hear about gender-responsive pedagogy?

Have you ever received training on gender-responsive pedagogy?

Is the training sufficient or do you need more training in gender-responsive pedagogy in the future?

The result of this study indicates that there is neither awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy nor conscious efforts by teachers and academic leaders to address gender equality in the classroom. A male academic leader with the role as the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities with 14 years' teaching experience in two public universities in Ethiopia (AL1) said that he lacked awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy. The participant sees a need for training on gender-responsive pedagogy and believes in the importance of gender equality in academic leadership and teaching. When asked if he had ever heard of gender-responsive pedagogy, he replied:

"No, I have been working as a teacher in university for about 14 years, but I haven't heard of gender-responsive pedagogy so far. I have not received any training in pedagogy or gender-responsive pedagogy so far. I got a lot of information from our discussion in this interview, and I realized that this is very important. I need to work on my pedagogical skills. I informally observed gender inequality in society, and if gender-responsive pedagogy can solve this problem, I would like to study and use it in my teaching" (AL1).

It seems that the participant began to see situations that he would have previously overlooked because of the interview discussion. In addition, this shows that academic leaders recognize the need for gender equality but do not know how to implement it in their teaching and learning process.

All the academic leaders of the chosen Ethiopian public universities replied that they have never heard about gender-responsive pedagogy with the exception in the response of academic leaders (AL3 and AL5). The academic leader (AL4) was the Dean of the Faculty of Education and

Behavioural Science, has 25 years' teaching experience in two public universities in Ethiopia and holds a PhD in Learning and Human Development. He emphasized that he was aware of gender-responsive pedagogy because of his educational background. He (AL4) replied and defined gender-responsive pedagogy as:

"Yes, I know what gender-responsive pedagogy is because of my academic background as a pedagogy graduate. It is pedagogy that can accommodate learning needs of both boys and girls; I learned about gender-responsive pedagogy when I was involved in preparing a project on engendering higher education curriculum".

A male Academic leader (AL3) who has specialization in Gender and development studies and has 15 years of teaching experience in two Ethiopian public universities emphasized that there is a lack of awareness of gender and gender-responsive pedagogy at his university and a lack of training for teachers. When asked if he had ever heard of gender-responsive pedagogy, he replied 'yes' and defined gender-responsive pedagogy as:

"Yes, gender-responsive pedagogy is a pedagogy that takes gender into account in the curriculum and in teaching and learning. I understood about gender-responsive pedagogy during my gender and development postgraduate studies".

On the other hand, the academic leaders (AL5, AL6, AL7) admitted that they received short-term training on teaching in higher education institutions and noted that the training did not include how to address gender issues in the classroom as:

"I received short-term training on how to teach in Higher Education Institutions. The training focused on teaching methods but not on how to address gender issues in the classroom, I need training on gender-responsive pedagogy" (AL5).

"I have completed a Higher Diploma program. However, the training does not include gender-specific pedagogy. The Higher Diploma is not enough to understand how to teach in higher education. I need more training in pedagogy, including gender-responsive pedagogy" (AL6).

"I have never heard of gender-responsive pedagogy. There is a program called Higher Diploma Program that is designed to meet the pedagogical skills needs of university teachers in Ethiopia. I have participated in this program, but I have not seen any topic that deals with gender-responsive pedagogy. I need training in gender-responsive pedagogy to be more gender-responsive in my teaching career" (AL7).

When teachers and academic leaders at universities express a strong interest in training in gender-responsive pedagogy, this indicates several important factors. This shows that they recognize the importance of gender equality and the ways in which traditional teaching methods can unintentionally perpetuate gender inequalities. This gender awareness among the selected Ethiopian Universities academic leaders who were from gendered society seems to be the outcome of modern education in the country. This interest may also reflect a desire to influence broader cultural and institutional changes in their country's educational environment. If they get opportunities for more gender-responsive pedagogy, these educators can challenge existing norms and contribute to a more gender-responsive education system (Ananga, 2021).

Similarly, the semi-structured interview was conducted with the teachers at the selected public universities in Ethiopia regarding their awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy. The teachers were asked the following questions:

Have you ever heard of gender-responsive pedagogy?

If so, when did you hear about gender-responsive pedagogy?

Have you ever received training on gender-equitable pedagogy?

Is the training sufficient or do you need more training in gender-responsive pedagogy in the future?

When asked if they had ever heard of gender-responsive pedagogy, all the selected university teachers replied that they had never heard of gendered pedagogy, except for a male teacher with a PhD in philosophy of education who has 30 years of teaching experience from secondary school to university in Ethiopia (T3). When asked if they had ever heard of gender-responsive pedagogy, he (AL3) replied and defined gender-responsive pedagogy as:

"Yes, it is the pedagogy that accommodates the learning need of boys. I know it from my educational background. But I need continuous training in gender-responsive pedagogy" (T3).

The rest of the teachers at the selected Ethiopian public universities acknowledged that they lacked awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy, but expressed the need for training and support to improve their awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy as follows:

“I have never heard of gender-responsive pedagogy. I have never received training in gender-responsive pedagogy” (T1, T2, T4, T5, T6).

Critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of recognizing and challenging power structures in education [Darder et al., 2017]. The lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy at the selected public universities in Ethiopia suggests that teachers are unintentionally perpetuating existing gender inequalities. The goal of gender-responsive pedagogy is to create an inclusive learning environment that recognizes the unique experiences of all students [Saunders, Wong, 2020]. Teachers who were unaware of these approaches in the selected public universities in Ethiopia are missing opportunities to engage students more effectively. The participants expressed their interest in training in gender-responsive pedagogy and shows that they recognize the importance of gender equality. This interest could be due to their exposure to modern education and their desire to achieve gender equality in their country's education system. The findings of the present study indicate that there is a lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in the selected public universities in Ethiopia. This was due to lack of training on gender-responsive pedagogy, lack of universities' readiness and commitment to address gender inequality. If university teachers and academic managers lack awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy, this means that several problems are linked in terms of critical pedagogy. A lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy suggests that educators unintentionally perpetuate existing gender inequalities because they fail to recognize how gender can affect students' experiences and opportunities in the classroom. If educators and academic leaders are unaware of these approaches, they may miss opportunities to engage students more effectively, resulting in lack of engagement, and poor performance. Critical pedagogy requires educators to constantly reflect on their teaching methods and their impact on students [Uddin, 2019]. A lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy indicates that educators are not thinking critically about how their own biases and assumptions affect their teaching, limiting their ability to foster an inclusive learning environment. Critical pedagogy ultimately aims to promote social justice and empower students as agents of change [McArthur, 2010; Tolman, 2019]. The lack of understanding of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders of the chosen Ethiopian universities could hinder the efforts to create transformative learning experiences that challenge societal inequalities. Research on gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) in different educational contexts shows that there is a consistent lack of awareness and implementation among teachers. For instance, studies in Tanzania, Bhutan, Palestine, Ghana and Kenya show that educators have limited knowledge and skills regarding GRP, leading to gender-insensitive teaching practices [Chuki, Dorji, 2020; Dorji, 2020; Kahamba et al., 2017; Khalil et al., 2023].

The great interest in training in gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders could be a promising situation for the future to promote more inclusive teaching in the selected public universities in Ethiopia. To summarise, the lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy in the selected public universities in Ethiopia could hinder the goal of promoting critical consciousness and social justice in education and undermine the potential for transformative learning experiences in the country's educational landscape. This study recommends continuous professional development and training workshops to improve the understanding and application of gender-responsive pedagogy in the selected public universities in Ethiopia.

Participants proposed solutions to improve Gender-Responsive Pedagogy awareness at their universities.

The participants, male and female teachers and academic leaders at public universities in Ethiopia, have proposed solutions to improve awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders as follows:

“A policy must be formulated at the national level and the Ministry of Education should work on gender-responsive pedagogy awareness among all universities teachers” (AL1). The call for a national policy suggests the need for a coordinated and systematic approach to addressing gender issues in education. This policy would likely outline goals, strategies and actions to pro-

mote gender equality in education to ensure that both male and female students have an equal opportunity to succeed. The Ministry of Education is the main authority in the country responsible for implementing this policy. This suggests that the Ministry should take an active role in developing guidelines, resources and support mechanisms for universities to adopt gender-responsive practices.

“Raising awareness at the grassroots level can be one of the solutions to this problem” (AL2).

“Gender-responsive pedagogy training should be offered at all universities for educators” (AL3).

“The Minister of Education works with education policy makers and universities to provide the necessary training on gender responsiveness of teaching learning” (AL4).

“Training must be provided for lecturers and academic leaders on gender and gender-responsive pedagogy. Gender-responsive pedagogy should be considered at the level of national education policy” (AL5).

“Giving inclusive and continuous training about gender and gender-responsive pedagogy for instructors and the University leaders. Gender-responsive pedagogy shall get attention at the national education policy level” (AL6).

“All university staff should be trained in gender-responsive pedagogy” (AL7).

The academic leaders' response emphasizes training to improve awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders of the selected Ethiopian public universities. The focus on raising awareness among university teachers underlines the importance of training and professional development. Educators need to understand the principles of gender-responsive pedagogy and how to apply them in their classrooms [Dorji, 2020; Lualhati, 2019]. This could include workshops, seminars and resources to help teachers recognize their own biases, adapt their teaching methods and create inclusive curricula. We can conclude that participants (academic leaders) suggest a comprehensive approach to improve gender equality in higher education by creating a national framework promoting awareness and implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy among university faculty. This initiative could help to create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students, regardless of gender.

The participants, male and female teachers at the chosen public universities in Ethiopia, have proposed solutions to improve awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders as follows:

“Teachers should be sufficiently informed about gender issues and gender-responsive teaching.”

“The Ministry of Education should draw up rules and regulations for the implementation of gender-responsive teaching in all sectors of education in the country” (T). Here we see that the participants' response focuses on raising awareness among university teachers, which underlines the importance of training and professional development. The participants focus on the Ministry of Education to develop rules and regulations for the implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy. This shows that the current Ethiopian Ministry of Education does not pay attention to gender-responsive pedagogy. Participants suggested that the country's Ministry of Education should take an active role in developing guidelines, resources and support mechanisms for universities to implement gender-responsive teaching practices.

“Train all university teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy. Then monitor the results of the training through action research” (T2). From the participant's statement, we can conclude that the participants are advocating for a systematic approach to improving gender-responsive pedagogy in higher education, through comprehensive training for university teachers combined with action research to monitor and improve the effectiveness of this training. This dual approach not only empowers educators, but also helps to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students. Participants call for a strong national commitment to promoting gender equality and emphasize that government attention to gender equality issues is crucial for educational institutions to contribute effectively to this goal. By prioritizing gender equality at the national level, the government can help create an environment in which educational institutions can make meaningful changes that benefit all genders and ultimately lead to a more equitable society. A teaching participant replied as *“We need to work hard at the national*

level to ensure gender equality. If the government paid more attention to gender issues, the country's educational institutions could work effectively towards these goals" (T6).

The participant's statement highlights the importance of ongoing training for both faculty and university management in gender-responsive pedagogy. This perspective recognizes that achieving gender equality in education requires more than initial training; it requires a sustained commitment to learning and adaptation. "Teachers and university management must be continuously trained in gender-responsive pedagogy" (T3). "It is necessary for teachers to be trained in gender equality" (T4). This ongoing commitment to education ensures that all members of the institution can promote an inclusive and equitable learning environment [Morningstar et al., 2015]. By prioritizing professional development in this area of pedagogy in general and gender-responsive pedagogy in particular, the public universities in Ethiopia can effectively address gender inequalities and work towards a more equitable educational system for all students in Ethiopia.

Previous studies have shown that addressing the lack of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among university teachers and academic leaders requires a multifaceted approach [Khalil et al., 2023], including targeted training, resource allocation, and institutional support to enhance Gender-Responsive Pedagogy awareness and implementation in higher education [Dorji, 2020; Kagoda, 2019; Kahamba et al., 2017]. Some of the solutions that can help improve awareness and implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy are as follows: (1) Organize regular workshops and training that focus on gender-responsive pedagogy [Dorji, 2020; Kahamba et al., 2017]. These workshops can cover topics such as inclusive teaching practices, recognizing and eliminating bias, and creating an inclusive learning environment. (2) Providing resources and materials that highlight gender-specific issues can prepare teachers to address these topics in their classrooms [Kahamba et al., 2017]. (3) Establish mentoring initiatives where experienced educators can guide their colleagues in understanding and applying gender-responsive pedagogy [Hudson, 2013]. (4) Encourage collaborative research initiatives that address gender issues in education [Kahamba et al., 2017]. This can help faculty members to explore the topic in depth and develop innovative teaching approaches. (5) Advocate for institutional policies that support gender equality in education [Sibbons, 1998]. This may include guidelines for inclusive teaching practices and accountability mechanisms. (6) Introduce systems for students to provide feedback on teaching practices related to gender responsiveness [Moore, Kuol, 2005]. This can help faculty identify areas for improvement and adjust their methods accordingly.

The solutions proposed by the teachers and academic leaders of the selected public universities in Ethiopia include continuous training on gender-responsive pedagogy, policy reforms, leadership engagement, regular monitoring, the inclusion of gender studies in the curricula and the creation of platforms for sharing best practices. The solutions proposed by the teachers and academic leaders of the selected public universities in Ethiopia are in line with the solutions recommended by various researchers. Male academic leaders and teachers express the need for more training and awareness-raising on gender-responsive pedagogy to promote gender equality in teaching and leadership positions. They emphasize the need for the government to support and budget for the implementation of gender-responsive practices. By implementing these solutions, universities can foster a culture of awareness and commitment to gender-responsive pedagogy, ultimately leading to more equitable and inclusive educational experiences for all students at the country's universities.

Conclusion. The findings of this study show that faculty and academic leaders in the selected public universities in Ethiopia lack awareness and training on gender responsive pedagogy but recognize the importance of gender equality in teaching and leadership positions. Academic leaders and faculty at Ethiopian universities proposed solutions to promote awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy to promote gender equality in academic leadership and teaching. Participants' suggestions for creating a more gender-responsive teaching environment include continuous training, policy reform, leadership engagement, creating platforms for sharing best practices to promote gender equality, and addressing gender stereotypes in education. Based on the findings of this study, we conclude that teachers and academic leaders who lack awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy contribute to the perpetuation of systemic gender inequalities that impact society. Previous research has shown that teachers and academic leaders who lack awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy inadvertently perpetuate gender inequalities in education and society [Kahamba et al., 2017]. Almost all participants in this study are not aware of gender-responsive pedagogy

and the likelihood that their teaching practices reinforce gender inequality and promote social injustice is high in the selected public universities in Ethiopia. To mitigate these problems, it is important that universities provide training and resources for gender-responsive pedagogy for all at the selected public universities in Ethiopia. It is critical that policy makers, university leaders and educators work together to effectively promote awareness and practice of gender-responsive pedagogy and create a more inclusive education system in Ethiopia.

Adherence to Ethical Standards

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee, the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments, or comparable ethical standards. The participants were given a consent form before the interview. The form explained the title and purpose of the study, assured confidentiality, explained that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. The interview was conducted with participants after they signed a consent form agreeing that their participation was voluntary.

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GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY AWARENESS: INSIGHTS FROM EDUCATORS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ETHIOPIA

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Keyword: *gender-responsive pedagogy, educational inequality, gender awareness, public universities in Ethiopia, critical pedagogy, gender equality in teaching, teacher training, inclusive education system.*

Gender-responsive pedagogy refers to teaching methods that respond to the specific learning needs and experiences of males and females. It plays a crucial role in overcoming the widespread gender gap in education by promoting equal opportunities for students regardless of their gender. A number of studies address the problems of gender equality in the Ethiopian education system. However, none of them address the question of whether teachers and academic leaders are aware of gender-responsive pedagogy, which could be one of the factors perpetuating gender inequality in the country's educational institutions.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by defining the level of awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in some selected public universities in Ethiopia. This type of study could contribute to an improvement and broader international discussion on gender inequality from the perspective of teaching methods used by teachers. The objective of this study was to explore the awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in public universities in Ethiopia. The study also aims to identify the solutions proposed by the participants to improve the

awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders. Investigating university teachers' and academic leaders' awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy helps to understand the extent to which they recognize and address gender bias in teaching practice. In this sense, this study explores the awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among teachers and academic leaders in selected public universities in Ethiopia using critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework.

Methodology. The aim of this study was to explore teachers' and academic leaders' awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy and participants' proposed solutions. Madda Walabu, Arsi and Ambo universities were included in this study using purposive sampling as the researcher had very close contact with these universities as a student and academic staff member. The researcher believes that this could facilitate data collection. An exploratory qualitative research method was used with a semi-structured interview as the main instrument of data collection. To explore the awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy among educators and academic leaders in three selected public universities in Ethiopia, seven academic leaders (two faculty deans and five academic programme leaders) and six university teachers, a total of 13 participants (teachers and academic leaders) were included in this study by the means of purposive sampling. All the selected academic leaders and teachers have teaching experience in more than one public universities in Ethiopia, which can enrich the sample of this study. All the participants are involved in teaching activities and can share their experience and knowledge on gender-responsive pedagogy. In addition, the participants are from diverse fields of study and experiences which supports the inclusion of different experiences and perspectives in this study. The data collected for this study was analysed qualitatively. Accordingly, the data analysis involved various processes to transform the collected data into a form of explanation, understanding and interpretation of the participants' awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy. The data analysis for this study was done by transcribing the data collected through semi-structured interviews from the teachers and academic leaders into appropriate textual units and reading them repeatedly to understand the meanings in the data. After the transcribed data were thoroughly read and understood, they were coded and transformed into categories (or themes). The themes for data analysis in this study were derived from the basic research questions guiding this study. Accordingly, the gender awareness of teachers and academic leaders and the solutions proposed by the participants are the themes for data analysis in this study. Finally, the data were interpreted beyond the codes and themes to capture the larger meaning of the data.

Findings. The findings of this study show a lack of awareness and training on gender-responsive pedagogy among the educators and academic leaders of the selected public universities in Ethiopia. The teachers and academic leaders in the selected public universities in Ethiopia lack awareness and training on gender-responsive pedagogy but recognize the importance of gender equality in teaching and leadership positions. These participants proposed solutions such as continuous gender-responsive pedagogy training, university support and commitment for the implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy and integrating gender-responsive pedagogy into teachers' education curricula.

Conclusion. Based on the findings of this study, we conclude that teachers and academic leaders who lack awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy contribute to the perpetuation of systemic gender inequalities that impact society. To mitigate these problems, it is important that universities provide training and resources for gender-responsive pedagogy for all at the selected public universities in Ethiopia. It is critical that policy makers, university leaders and educators work together to effectively promote awareness and practice of gender-responsive pedagogy and create a more inclusive education system in Ethiopia.

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