

# Strategies for Eliminating Sexism in Teacher Education

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**Abstract:** Sexism in teacher education can cause profound harm, with consequences that ripple from trainees to the pupils they later teach. Therefore, eradicating it from such programs is fundamental to establishing a truly inclusive and equitable learning environment. This study systematically explores multiple effective strategies designed to help pre-service and in-service teachers transform gender-biased perceptions, behavioral patterns, and teaching practices, thereby achieving educational equity.

**Keywords:** Teacher Education; Sexism; Gender Equality

## 1. Sexism in education

Sexism does not only oppress adults; it also affects children and adolescents, particularly in the context in which they spend the majority of their time—schools<sup>[1]</sup>. Although sexism in postsecondary education has been documented and researched—especially following the passage of Title IX in 1972—it is often framed as "sex bias" and characterized by implicit, subtle behaviors that pervade classroom interactions and institutional dynamics<sup>[2]</sup>. Shaping the understanding of sexism in educational spaces inadvertently minimizes the immense oppression girls face; this marginalization should not only be named sexism when children become adults. Sexism does not have a minimum age requirement for the perpetrator or target. In everyday school life, sexism can surface through humor, informal comments, differential praise, or assumptions about who is naturally "good at" certain subjects, and it is often reinforced when these routines go unexamined over time.

There is no minimum age limit for committing or being the object of sexism. Sexism in educational institutions, highlighting its presence not only in classroom interactions but also in the hidden curriculum, textbooks, and institutional structures. It influences teacher expectations, student experiences, and career aspirations, thereby perpetuating gender disparities. Because teachers shape who is invited to speak, who receives challenging tasks, and how mistakes are interpreted, unexamined bias can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; teacher education therefore needs to treat gender equity as a core professional competence rather than an optional moral add-on.

## 2. Importance of establishing non-sexist teacher education

The value of non-sexist teacher education can be understood at four linked levels: fairness in access to learning, empowerment and well-being, an inclusive classroom climate, and the long-term professional identity and advocacy capacity of educators.

### 2.1. Promoting Equity and Justice

First, equitable learning environments are important. A core tenet of non-sexist teacher education is to provide uniform access to learning opportunities and resources, eliminating gender-based barriers. This means that students are not limited by gender stereotypes or expectations when it comes to choosing subjects, participating in class, or pursuing extracurricular activities. A curriculum that includes and acknowledges the contributions and lived realities of people throughout the gender spectrum offers a fuller and more faithful picture of the world. This helps students view themselves and others as valuable contributors to society. At the teacher-education level, equity also means ensuring that candidates repeatedly practice designing tasks, assessments, and classroom talk moves that distribute attention and intellectual authority evenly, not only "including" gender topics as a separate unit.

By promoting equity and justice in education, non-sexist teacher education contributes to broader social change. Educated individuals who have been exposed to these principles are more likely to advocate for gender equality in their personal and professional lives. A fairer education system can cultivate a more capable and diverse talent pool—crucial to economic expansion and innovation. Breaking down gender barriers in education helps ensure that talent is not wasted due to discrimination, and non-sexist teacher education is vital for creating equitable learning environments where all students can thrive. By addressing sexism and promoting justice in education, teacher education programs help break down barriers and ensure that marginalized groups have the same opportunities to succeed as their peers. This not only benefits individual students but also contributes to a more just and equitable society that values diversity. In other words, gender equity work is not simply about avoiding harm; it is also about expanding what counts as talent and participation so that classrooms become spaces where more students can be seen, challenged, and supported.

## **2.2. Empowering Students**

As a fundamental practice for building an equitable society, non-sexist teacher education cultivates students' confidence, self-esteem, and leadership by supporting their unrestricted growth. This is vital for supporting them in achieving their utmost capabilities. This is especially relevant during adolescence, when students are forming academic self-concepts; repeated messages about what is "appropriate" for their gender can narrow aspirations long before ability is fully developed.

Teachers trained in non-sexist practices can help build resilience in students, particularly girls and non-binary students, who often face societal pressures and stereotypes. By recognizing these challenges and responding to them, educators can help students build empowerment and a stronger sense of self-worth. Non-sexist teacher education encourages the use of positive role models from diverse gender backgrounds, which can significantly impact students' self-perception and aspirations. Visible role models in successful roles, along with a safe and welcoming learning climate, are essential for building students' self-esteem, confidence, and aspirations. Teacher education can prepare educators to counter these pressures by making stereotypes discussable, normalizing help-seeking, and building routines that recognize effort and improvement rather than rewarding only the students who already appear confident.

Non-sexist education promotes active participation and leadership opportunities for all students, regardless of their gender. Teachers can design activities that encourage leadership roles for girls and nonbinary students, helping break down the stereotype that leadership is primarily a male domain. Preparation in gender-fair practices enables educators to cultivate students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. These competencies, in turn, prepare students for leadership by enabling them to analyze contexts, decide thoughtfully, and act proactively. Non-sexist teacher education programs help students explore a wide range of career options without the constraints of gender stereotypes. This expands their outlook and motivates them to choose careers based on their interests and strengths, not on social pressure. When career exploration activities include diverse examples and invite students to talk about interests without ridicule, students gain permission to imagine futures that are not scripted by gender norms.

## **2.3. Creating Inclusive Classrooms**

The first is respectful learning spaces; a non-sexist approach fosters an environment where all students feel safe, respected, and included. This is crucial for effective learning because students who feel valued and supported are more likely to actively engage in the learning process. Teachers trained in non-sexist practices can model and teach mutual respect to their students. This includes respecting different gender identities, expressions, and experiences, which creates a more harmonious classroom atmosphere. Non-sexist teacher education programs can help educators identify and address bullying behaviors. This proactive approach ensures that all students feel protected and secure in their learning environments. Concrete classroom-management routines—such as explicit norms for respectful language, rapid responses to harassment, and restorative conversations after harm—help translate inclusive values into daily practice.

In addition, teachers trained in non-sexist practices are more likely to integrate diverse perspectives and lived experiences into their teaching. By introducing students to a range of viewpoints, educators can broaden students' horizons and deepen their understanding of the world. Such exposure also helps students learn to identify, question, and challenge bias—an essential step toward developing nuanced understandings of complex social issues<sup>[3]</sup>. Such exposure is most effective when paired with guided reflection, so teacher candidates benefit from rehearsing how to facilitate sensitive conversations and

how to respond when bias emerges in peer discussion.

When students feel included, they are more motivated to participate and excel, and inclusive classrooms promote social and emotional learning, helping students develop important life skills such as empathy, respect, and collaboration. These skills are essential for success in both personal and professional environments. An inclusive approach to education equips students for the diversity and complexity they will face after school. Practicing respectful interaction with people from different backgrounds strengthens their ability to meet real-life demands. Inclusive classrooms can also benefit boys and masculine-presenting students by loosening restrictive norms that discourage emotional expression or help-seeking, which can strengthen well-being and peer relationships.

#### **2.4. Preparing Future Educators**

Training in non-sexist practices enhances teachers' pedagogical flexibility, allowing them to adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Examples include student-focused pedagogy and teamwork-based learning strategies designed to promote gender equality. In addition, educators prepared in non-sexist practice are often more committed to sustained professional learning. This includes attending workshops, conferences, and courses that focus on gender equality and social justice. Reflective practice is encouraged, which involves regularly examining one's own beliefs, biases, and teaching methods to ensure they align with the principles of gender equality. Non-sexist teacher education programs often facilitate networking and collaboration among educators. This can include joining professional associations, participating in online forums, and collaborating with colleagues who share a commitment to gender equity in research. In teacher education, this preparation can be embedded through supervised practicum tasks so that candidates connect theory with real classroom decisions.

Educators trained in non-sexist teacher education are better equipped to advocate for gender equality in their schools and communities. They can push for policy changes and support initiatives that promote inclusivity. Teachers who are well-informed about gender-related concerns often become role models to students. They demonstrate the importance of challenging stereotypes and advocating for equity, which can inspire students to do the same. Training in non-sexist practice allows educators to create effects that extend well beyond their own classrooms. By promoting a respectful, inclusive culture, they contribute to how future leaders think and act. By fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity, they help shape the attitudes and behaviors of the next generation of leaders. In this sense, non-sexist teacher education functions as professional ethics training: it clarifies what responsible teaching looks like when learners' identities and opportunities are at stake.

### **3. How to Eliminate Sexism in Teacher Education**

Eliminating sexism requires alignment across what is taught, how teachers learn and are evaluated through training and assessment, what happens in classrooms through pedagogy, and what the institution rewards or sanctions through policy; isolated efforts often fade without this coherence.

#### **3.1. Curriculum Revision**

First, we must ensure diverse perspectives are considered. Curriculum revision involves updating educational materials and content to ensure that they reflect diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of women and nonbinary individuals. This helps to counteract gender biases and provides a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of society. Including a balanced representation of genders in textbooks, lesson plans, and other learning materials ensures that all students can see themselves and their experiences reflected in what they learn. Updating the curriculum to feature historical figures, events, and narratives that foreground the contributions of women and non-binary people helps address their longstanding exclusion from the historical record. A useful starting point is a curriculum audit that maps whose voices appear, who is positioned as a problem-solver or leader, and how gender is represented in examples, images, and scenarios; the results can guide targeted revisions rather than relying on ad hoc additions.

Second, gender bias should be eliminated by revising curricula to include examples and stories that challenge gender stereotypes, so that educators can help students develop a more nuanced understanding of gender roles and expectations. Incorporating materials that prompt critical thinking about gender can help students recognize and question biases in their thinking and the world around them. Integrating gender perspectives across subjects and disciplines ensures that students receive consistent messages

about the importance of gender equality. Beyond content, teacher educators can model analytic questions—such as "Who is missing?" and "What assumptions are embedded here?"—so that candidates learn to critique the materials they will later encounter in schools.

Implementation can be supported through teacher training, expert consultation, and community participation. This includes offering professional learning that helps educators incorporate diverse perspectives and respond to gender bias in classroom practice. It also involves working with specialists in gender studies and education to ensure curricular content is accurate, inclusive, and culturally responsive. Finally, engaging parents and community leaders can provide valuable feedback and local insight for strengthening inclusivity across the curriculum. Programs can strengthen implementation by piloting revised materials in partner schools, collecting student and teacher responses, and iterating, which helps ensure revisions are workable and sensitive to local context.

### **3.2. Professional Development**

First, offering workshops and training sessions focused on gender awareness can enhance teachers' understanding of gender issues and improve their ability to address them effectively. Such sessions often address core ideas from gender theory, including how sex differs from gender and the effects of stereotypical assumptions. Sensitivity training aims to increase teachers' awareness of the diverse experiences and challenges faced by students of different genders. This includes exploring the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other identities<sup>[4]</sup>. Professional development should also include practical strategies for integrating non-sexist practices into daily teaching. This may involve using gender-inclusive language, designing equitable classroom activities, and fostering an inclusive learning environment. Effective workshops often combine input with practice, using classroom video, case studies, and role-play so teachers can rehearse responses to biased comments or unequal participation in a low-stakes setting.

Second, improving teachers' abilities: Workshops and training sessions should focus on developing specific skills that teachers can apply in their classrooms, such as recognizing and addressing gender biases, fostering respectful classroom discussions, and promoting equitable participation. Professional development programs should provide teachers with a range of resources, including books, articles, videos, and websites, that can support their ongoing learning and application of non-sexist teaching practices. Continued assistance, along with follow-up meetings, reinforces learning and enables teachers to evaluate their development and the barriers encountered. Sustained formats—coaching cycles, peer observation, and communities of practice—are particularly helpful because bias is situational, and teachers benefit from feedback tied to their own classrooms rather than generic advice.

Teachers who participate in gender-focused professional development are better equipped to recognize and challenge gender bias in their classrooms. This enhances their overall professional competence and effectiveness as an educator. Through professional learning, teachers can foster a classroom environment that affirms and respects all students, irrespective of gender identity. By addressing gender issues, teachers can better support the academic and personal success of all students, especially those who may face additional challenges due to gender-based discrimination. To make learning visible, programs can encourage teachers to set small equity goals, such as tracking who speaks, revising feedback language, and diversifying examples, and to review evidence of progress over time.

### **3.3. Inclusive Pedagogical Practices**

Equity-oriented pedagogy is foundational to building a classroom climate where every student can flourish, irrespective of gender. Through structured collaboration, learner-centered instruction, and deliberate approaches that affirm all gender identities, teachers can create learning spaces that feel safe, respectful, and participatory. In such environments, students are more likely to engage actively, develop a stronger sense of belonging, and take intellectual risks without fear of bias or exclusion. These practices do more than support individual achievement; they also help normalize fairness and mutual respect, laying the groundwork for a society that is more just, inclusive, and socially responsible. Teacher education courses can make this work explicit by debriefing the pedagogy used in the university classroom, helping candidates notice how facilitation choices distribute voice and authority.

Teachers can adopt practical approaches to ensure every student has a fair chance to contribute to discussions and classroom activities. One option is to use structured participation routines, such as planned turn taking, speaking queues, and paired discussion before whole class sharing, which can prevent a few voices from dominating. Rotating classroom roles also helps distribute responsibility more

evenly and encourages quieter students to take part. Digital tools, including anonymous polls and shared online boards, can further reduce barriers by offering multiple ways for students to express ideas. Alongside these methods, consistent use of gender inclusive language, for example choosing gender neutral terms and avoiding unnecessary gendered pronouns, helps create a more welcoming learning environment where all students feel recognized and respected. Simple participation tracking—by gender, but also by confidence levels or linguistic background—can help teachers see patterns they might otherwise miss and adjust grouping, questioning, and wait time accordingly.

A variety of teaching strategies can support varied learning styles while encouraging participation from every student. For example, combining lectures with hands-on activities, group projects, and multimedia presentations can appeal to a wider range of students. Culturally responsive teaching integrates students' diverse backgrounds and gender perspectives into instruction. A key component is ensuring that feedback and assessments are constructive and free from gender bias, thereby supporting holistic student development. Teachers should ensure that their feedback is based on merit and not influenced by preconceived notions of gender capabilities. Rubrics and feedback templates can be reviewed for biased descriptors, such as praising girls for neatness and boys for originality, to ensure that evaluation language remains anchored to learning criteria rather than gendered expectations.

### **3.4. Policy Implementation**

To be truly inclusive, these policies should explicitly prohibit discriminatory behaviors and outline procedures for incident reporting and resolution. They should recognize gender diversity in the community, including those who identify as non-binary or transgender. Practical guidance regarding names, pronouns, facility access, and support services is essential to this commitment. Policies should aim to create supportive environments that foster respect and inclusivity among students. This includes provisions for anti-bullying measures, mental health support, and resources for students and staff who may face gender-based discrimination<sup>[5]</sup>. Policy language should be paired with clear responsibility structures, including defined reporting pathways, response timelines, and documentation standards, so that commitments do not remain merely symbolic.

These policies need to be supported by regular professional learning and education for all members of the educational community, from teachers and administrators to support staff and students. This training should focus on gender sensitivity, awareness of gender issues, and the importance of inclusive practice. Implementing clear and accessible reporting mechanisms for incidents of discrimination ensures that all community members know how to report their concerns and seek support. Confidentiality and safety should be prioritized to encourage such reporting. Policies must be consistently enforced to maintain their policy effectiveness. This includes following up on reports of discrimination, conducting thorough investigations, and taking appropriate action against the perpetrators. Regular climate surveys, anonymous reporting options, and publicly shared summaries of actions taken, with privacy protected, can strengthen trust and signal that the institution takes equity seriously.

## **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, establishing non-sexist teacher education is a critical step toward creating a more equitable and inclusive educational system. By addressing sexism in teacher education, we not only promote equity and justice but also empower students, create inclusive classrooms, and prepare future educators to be advocates for gender equality. The establishment of non-sexist teacher education is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for creating a more equitable and effective educational system. Through concerted efforts and sustained commitment to these strategies, we can work towards a future in which gender equality is a fundamental aspect of every classroom and school. Future work could examine which combinations of strategies are most effective in different cultural contexts and how teacher educators themselves can be supported to sustain this work, especially when resources or community attitudes vary.

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