

EMPOWERING WOMEN, EMPOWERING NATIONS: TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT The role of teachers in primary education is pivotal in shaping the foundation of future generations, and their impact becomes even more profound when focused on empowering women and fostering gender equality. This study explores how teachers, as agents of change, contribute to empowering women and, by extension, empowering nations through their influence on young minds. The research highlights the dual role of teachers as educators and role models in primary schools, emphasizing how they can challenge stereotypes, promote inclusivity, and inspire girls to achieve their full potential. Drawing from global case studies and evidence-based practices, the paper examines strategies that enhance teachers' capacity to drive transformative change, particularly in underrepresented and marginalized communities. It concludes by proposing policy recommendations and innovative approaches to strengthen the role of teachers in creating equitable and inclusive educational environments, ultimately contributing to national development through gender empowerment.

KEYWORDS: *Empowering Women, Teachers as Agents of Change, Primary Education, Gender Equality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful tool for societal transformation, laying the foundation for individual growth and collective progress. Within this context, empowering women through education has been identified as a critical strategy for achieving sustainable development. Educated women are more likely to improve their families' well-being, participate in economic activities, and contribute to the social and political fabric of their nations, making their empowerment essential for national progress. Primary education, as the first formal stage of learning, serves as a gateway to this

transformative process and is instrumental in fostering gender equality and empowerment (UNESCO, 2017)

Teachers play a central role in this journey, serving as agents of change who shape the attitudes and aspirations of their students. Beyond delivering academic instruction, teachers influence the values and perspectives of young minds, helping to dismantle stereotypes and address structural barriers that impede girls' access to education (World Bank, 2020). By creating inclusive and supportive learning environments, they help young girls build confidence, develop critical skills, and envision broader opportunities for their future (Amartya, 1999).

This article explores the crucial role of teachers in primary education as catalysts for empowering women and fostering societal change. Through an analysis of their contributions, challenges, and potential strategies, it seeks to highlight the profound impact educators have on building equitable and inclusive societies (United Nations, 2023).

2. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the role of teachers as agents of change in empowering women through primary education. The focus is on understanding how teachers contribute to the empowerment of girls, creating inclusive learning environments, and fostering gender equality within the context of primary education. The research design includes interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis of educational materials (Creswell, 2014).

a. Data Collection

The data collection process involves semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers, education administrators, and gender equality advocates. These interviews aim to capture participants' experiences, challenges, and strategies related to empowering girls through education. In addition, focus group discussions with students and parents were conducted to gain insights into the impact of teachers' actions on girls' empowerment. Lastly, the study also analyzed classroom observations to observe the actual teaching methods and practices that support gender-inclusive education (Patton, 2015).

b. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who have experience and expertise in teaching, gender equality, and community engagement. This method ensures that the research captures a wide range of perspectives from teachers in diverse educational settings, including rural and urban schools. Schools with initiatives aimed at empowering girls were prioritized to gather information on best practices (Kvale, 2009)

c. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, patterns, and trends in teachers' approaches to gender empowerment. The analysis focused on identifying the key strategies that teachers use to promote girls' education, as well as the challenges they face in achieving these goals. Additionally, the study explores how these educational practices align with national goals for gender equality and sustainable development. The findings were triangulated with existing literature on gender and education to ensure validity (Braun, 2021).

This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of how teachers can act as agents of change in primary education and highlights the importance of their role in empowering women for the betterment of society and national development.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of teachers as agents of change in empowering women through primary education. Teachers not only deliver academic content but also influence social attitudes, foster inclusive learning environments, and challenge gender stereotypes, contributing to the empowerment of young girls. The analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations reveals several key themes related to teachers' contributions, challenges, and strategies for promoting gender equality in primary education (World Bank, 2020).

a. Teachers as Role Models and Influencers

Dominant theme that emerged from the data is the powerful role of teachers as role models for students. Many teachers reported that their behavior and attitudes toward gender equality have a profound impact on shaping students' views of what is possible for girls. Teachers who actively challenge traditional gender norms and encourage girls to pursue their aspirations beyond societal expectations were recognized as key influencers in empowering female students. These teachers not only impart knowledge but also instill a sense of self-worth and confidence in girls (UNESCO, 2014).

b. Inclusive Teaching Practices

The study also found that inclusive teaching practices are essential for empowering girls. Teachers who use gender-neutral language, highlight female role models in history, and create collaborative learning environments where boys and girls work together contribute significantly to the empowerment of female students. However, teachers noted that creating an inclusive classroom environment requires continuous effort and training. Some teachers expressed a need for

professional development to better address the unique needs of female students and to incorporate gender-sensitive materials into their teaching practices (Oxfam International, 2022).

c. Challenges in Implementing Gender-Responsive Education

Despite these positive practices, several challenges were identified in implementing gender-responsive education. One significant challenge is the lack of resources and support for teachers to integrate gender equality into their teaching. Teachers in rural and underfunded schools reported limited access to gender-sensitive teaching materials and resources. Additionally, societal and cultural norms often place pressure on teachers to conform to traditional gender roles, which can hinder efforts to promote gender equality in the classroom (United Nations, 2023).

d. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher training emerged as a crucial factor in empowering teachers to become effective agents of change. Teachers who participated in gender-sensitive professional development programs demonstrated a greater understanding of how to address gender inequality in the classroom. These programs equipped teachers with the tools and strategies to challenge gender biases, promote girls' education, and create supportive learning environments for all students. However, the need for more comprehensive and widespread teacher training programs on gender equality was highlighted (Amartya, 1999).

e. Impact on National Development

The empowerment of women through primary education has a far-reaching impact on national development. Educated women contribute to the economy, engage in political processes, and foster a more equitable society. Teachers who actively promote gender equality in the classroom contribute to the long-term social and economic development of their countries. By equipping girls with the skills and confidence to participate fully in society, these educators are helping to build a more inclusive and prosperous future for all (Amartya, 1999).

Overall, the results of this study suggest that while teachers are making significant strides in empowering girls through education, additional support, training, and resources are needed to overcome barriers and fully harness the potential of primary education as a tool for gender equality and societal transformation.

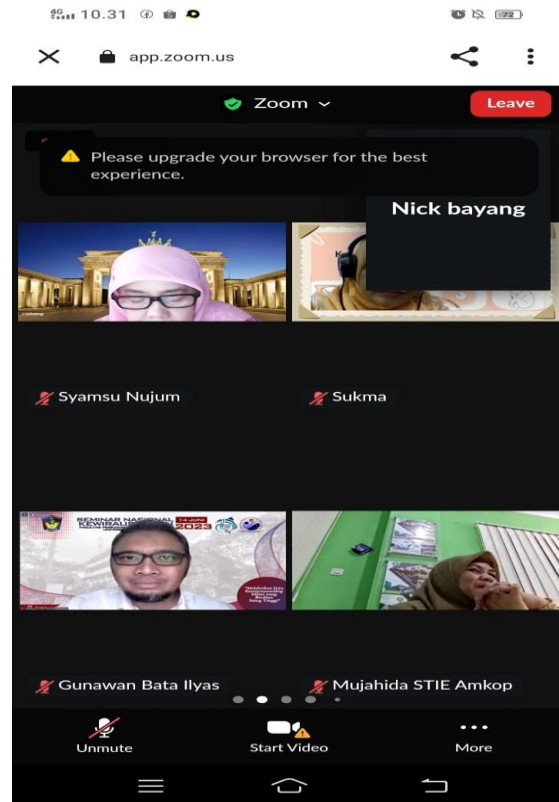


Figure 1. Participating in online activities and visiting Lukmanul Hakeem School Yala, Thailand

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the role of teachers in primary education is crucial to empowering women and driving societal progress. Teachers, as agents of change, have the unique opportunity to challenge gender stereotypes, create inclusive classrooms, and inspire young girls to envision a future filled with opportunities. Through their daily interactions and teaching practices, educators play a central role in shaping the values, aspirations, and potential of their students, fostering an environment where gender equality can thrive.

However, for teachers to effectively empower girls and contribute to national development, several factors need to be addressed. These include providing adequate training on gender-sensitive teaching practices, equipping educators with the necessary resources, and fostering an education system that supports gender equity at every level. The findings of this study highlight the need for continued investment in teacher development and the importance of creating policies that prioritize gender equality in education.

Empowering women through education is a fundamental building block for achieving sustainable development goals and creating equitable societies. By strengthening the role of teachers and ensuring that they are well-equipped to address gender inequality in the classroom, we

are not only empowering individual girls but also contributing to the broader goal of national and global development.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article, "Empowering Women, Empowering Nations: Teachers as Agents of Change in Primary Education." The research and analysis presented in this article were conducted in an objective and impartial manner, and no financial, personal, or professional relationships influenced the results or conclusions of this study. The findings are solely based on the data collected and the scholarly interpretation of the research topic.

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