

GENDER EQUALITY EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: *Gender equality is a growing global concern, including in Vietnam. Recently, Vietnam has made significant strides in reducing gender inequality, with gaps in education, training, employment, and income gradually closing. More women are now participating in economic, political, cultural, and social spheres. Despite these advances, gender disparities persist within families and society, particularly in education, including inequalities in general education and vocational training. Promoting gender equality requires education and awareness-raising in schools, which positively influences the future workforce's quality. The Ministry of Education and Training has introduced an action plan for 2021-2030 to further reduce the gender gap and ensure equal participation and benefits for both women and men in education. While gender equality education has begun in Vietnamese primary schools, it is not yet integrated into many subjects in the current curriculum. Experiential activities in primary schools have proven to be an effective method for implementing gender equality education. This research explores the content and forms of gender equality education and the role of experiential activities in promoting gender equality among primary school students. Based on this examination, the study proposes a process for designing experiential activities and demonstrates an illustrative lesson plan to educate primary school students about gender equality.*

Keywords: *Gender equality, Experiential activities, Primary school student, Primary school teacher, Primary education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's society, the roles and positions of women and children are being more strongly affirmed. However, gender stereotypes and the mindset of "male preference" still prevail within families and certain segments of the population, posing significant barriers to gender equality. Inequality persists in various fields such as rights, obligations, labor distribution, employment opportunities, wages, income, and career advancement between men and women. The Party and the State have always prioritized the promotion of gender equality, including in education and training. The Education Law of 2019 clearly states that all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, personal characteristics, family background, social status, or economic conditions, are equal in terms of educational opportunities. The State ensures social equity in education, creates a safe educational environment, guarantees inclusive education, and provides conditions for learners to develop their potential and talents (Article 13).

A proper understanding of gender equality begins with education as the primary foundation. From an early age, children should be taught accurate concepts about gender, respect, and equality between men and women while still in school. This early education forms the basis for correct awareness and behavior and requires close collaboration between schools and families. Families play a crucial role in building a gender-equal society, as gender equality within the family creates a healthy environment where individuals, especially children, are treated equally and educated about their rights to gender equality. This is essential for successful childcare, nurturing, and education, contributing to an improved quality of life for all family members. Research indicates that early exposure to gender equality principles positively impacts children. Educating primary students about gender equality is crucial for fostering a more just, inclusive, and equitable society. Primary school is a critical time when children internalize gender norms and stereotypes (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Gender equality education at this stage can challenge rigid gender roles and biases, encouraging children to explore their interests without societal limitations.

Gender equality education in primary schools is linked to improved self-esteem, academic performance, and overall well-being for all gender identities (Blakemore et al., 2009). It helps children develop a healthy sense of self and respect for others, contributing to their holistic development. Early exposure can prevent gender-based discrimination, bullying, and violence, often rooted in rigid gender norms and power imbalances (UNESCO, 2016). This education fosters respect and understanding, creating safer and more inclusive learning environments. Educating primary students about gender equality equips them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to navigate a diverse and interconnected world (Leaper & Ayres, 2007). It helps them become critical thinkers and engaged citizens advocating for gender equity in their personal, professional, and civic lives. Providing gender equality education in primary schools aligns with international human rights frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on quality education and gender equality (United Nations, 2015). A 2019 study by the Center for Gender Equality in Education found that primary students who received comprehensive gender equality education demonstrated more egalitarian attitudes and were less likely to endorse harmful gender norms (Center for Gender Equality in Education, 2019). This suggests that early gender sensitivity can cultivate more equitable mindsets among Vietnamese youth.

Vietnam has shown significant interest in promoting gender equality in education. However, the implementation has been uneven across the country. A 2020 UNDP report noted inconsistent teacher training and resource materials on gender issues, with some schools struggling to deliver the curriculum effectively (UNDP, 2020). Patriarchal social norms and gender biases persist, posing challenges in effectively translating policy into practice. Experts recommend increased investment in teacher professional development, creation of gender-responsive teaching materials, and community outreach to engage parents and local leaders (Nguyen, 2018; UNDP, 2020). Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress is also critical.

To implement the Law on Gender Equality and the Government's National Strategy for 2021-2030, the Ministry of Education and Training launched a project to introduce gender equality content into teacher training programs for preschool and university-level educators for 2024-2030 (MOET, 2023; Government, 2021). Additionally, the Ministry continues to implement Decision No. 732/QĐ-TTg, focusing on training teachers and school administrators for comprehensive education reform and providing female students with practical experience opportunities. Despite these efforts, gender equality education is not yet fully integrated into many subjects. Experiential activities in primary schools have proven effective for implementing gender equality education. The Faculty of Education at Hanoi Metropolitan University has focused on this issue, incorporating gender education content into their training programs and studying how to integrate gender equality education for students at all levels. This research explores the role of experiential activities in promoting gender equality among primary school students. Furthermore, the study proposes a process for designing experiential activities to educate primary school students about gender equality.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, emphasizing the systematic collection and analysis of data as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further developed by Charmaz (2006). The primary analytical techniques used included classification and coding, essential for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2014).

Data were meticulously gathered from a diverse range of academic sources, including books, newspapers, academic journals, research project reports, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations, both domestic and international, with a specific focus on gender equality education for primary school students. The collected data were then subjected to rigorous synthesis, classification, and comparison to explore the content and forms of gender equality education.

This analysis aimed to understand the role of experiential activities in promoting gender equality among primary school students. Based on the insights gained, the study proposes a structured process for designing experiential activities aimed at educating primary school students about gender equality. Additionally, an illustrative lesson plan was presented to demonstrate the practical application of the proposed process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Concepts of "Gender," "Gender Equality," and "Gender Equality in Education"

The term "gender" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that society considers appropriate for individuals based on their sex assigned at birth (World Health Organization, 2022). Gender is distinct from biological sex, being shaped by cultural, political, and economic factors rather than biology alone. It is a key aspect of individual and social identity, influencing experiences, opportunities, and power dynamics in society (Connell, 2002). According to Le, T. C. N. (2001), gender encompasses

the relationships and social status correlations between women and men in a specific environment, representing the differences in social relations. Le, N. H., and Nguyen, T. M. L (2000) argue that gender indicates the characteristics, positions, roles, and social relationships between men and women, essentially denoting their social characteristics. These authors suggest that gender highlights the differences between men and women in social contexts, emphasizing that gender traits are socially constructed and determined by society. Additionally, perspectives on gender vary according to the cultural, social, economic, and political characteristics of each country.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of individuals of all gender identities. It ensures that the interests, needs, and priorities of everyone, regardless of their gender, are considered, enabling all people to realize their full potential (United Nations, 2022). Sociologically, gender equality involves the equal treatment of men and women, as well as different groups of women, considering their unique characteristics and adjusting policies accordingly. It entails recognizing and respecting gender characteristics and establishing equal opportunities for both genders. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and essential for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Achieving it requires addressing systemic barriers and discrimination that hinder full participation in economic, political, and social spheres (Deutsch, 2007). According to Article 5, Clause 3 of the Law on Gender Equality of Vietnam, gender equality means that men and women have equal status and roles, equal conditions and opportunities to unleash their capabilities for community and family development, and equally enjoy the fruits of that development. Gender equality manifests in several aspects: (1) Equal conditions for men and women to fully unleash their capabilities and fulfill their aspirations; (2) Equal opportunities to participate, contribute, and benefit from societal resources during development; and (3) Equal rights and interests in all areas of social life. Gender equality goes beyond numerical parity, recognizing and respecting the similarities and differences between men and women. This equality provides equal opportunities and conditions to fully unleash their potential, participate, contribute, and benefit equally from the country's development. In education, gender equality means that students, particularly primary school students, have equal access to schooling and training. The Education Law of 2019 stipulates that primary education spans from grade 1 to grade 5, with the enrollment age for grade 1 being six years old, applying equally to both genders. Gender equality in education also entails equal access to academic majors and vocations, educational policies and training, and studying in a safe and equal educational environment. Education, a process of consciously forming and developing one's personality, occurs in schools, families, and society. Therefore, gender equality in education is a powerful factor impacting this process.

Gender equality education is based on human rights, social justice, and transformative learning principles (Stromquist, 2006). It involves teaching about gender equality, eliminating gender-based discrimination, and promoting equal opportunities for all gender identities (UNESCO, 2015). The goal is to challenge gender stereotypes, address power imbalances, and empower individuals to create a more just and inclusive society. Comprehensive gender equality education provides learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to

advocate for gender equity in their personal, professional, and civic lives (Kane, 2013). Schools play a crucial role in this process, as students spend significant time there. The influence of curricular and extracurricular programs, along with behavior and interactions within the school environment, greatly shapes students' perceptions. Teachers, through classroom subjects and activities, significantly impact students' understanding of gender equality, affecting their behavior towards gender equity. Experiential activities in primary schools, part of the educational process (MOET, 2018), are essential for teaching gender equality.

3.2. Content and forms of gender equality education for primary school students

3.2.1. Content

Gender equality education for primary school students ensures equal opportunities for both male and female students without gender-based discrimination. The key components include:

- Teaching students about gender equality, social roles, norms, and the importance of gender equality.
- Promoting respect and understanding for gender diversity.
- Removing gender stereotypes and discrimination from textbooks and learning materials.
- Instilling values of equality, respect, and fair opportunities for all genders, and encouraging empathy.
- Educating students on the consequences of gender-based violence and discrimination, and appropriate responses.
- Creating a non-discriminatory learning environment by eliminating gender bias in classrooms and activities to foster a gender-equal environment that enhances students' understanding of gender and diversity.
- Highlighting successful individuals from all genders to help students realize their potential without gender constraints.

Encouraging participation in various extracurricular activities and subjects, including science, art, and physical education, without gender limitations..

3.2.2. Forms

In Vietnam, primary school gender equality education is integrated through both subjects and experiential activities to embed these principles throughout the curriculum and school experience. This comprehensive approach ensures students develop a well-rounded understanding and appreciation for gender equality from an early age.

Subjects in school: Gender equality content can be incorporated into: (1) Moral education: Lessons on gender roles, stereotypes, and respect for gender differences; (2)

Natural and Social sciences: Discussions on the contributions of men and women to society, family structures, and gender-related issues; (3) Science: Exploring gender representation and participation in scientific fields; (4) Arts: Examining gender portrayals and expressions in art and music...

Experiential activities: (1) Students engage in debates, role-playing, and small group dialogues to explore gender-related topics, fostering critical thinking, empathy, and open dialogue; (2) Schools organize field trips, workshops, and hands-on learning experiences focused on gender equality themes, challenging stereotypes and promoting equal participation; and (3) Schools host seminars, exhibitions, and competitions related to gender equality, inviting external experts and role models. These events allow students to showcase their learning, raise awareness, and engage with the broader community on gender issues.

The gender equality education content and forms for primary school students are well-aligned with the 2018 General Education Curriculum of Vietnam. Both frameworks emphasize equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and the importance of teaching gender equality through various subjects and experiential activities. They focus on eliminating gender stereotypes, promoting respect and understanding for gender diversity, addressing gender-based violence, and encouraging participation in all aspects of school life without gender bias. Incorporating these principles into the curriculum ensures a comprehensive and consistent approach to gender equality education. For instance, gender equality lessons are included in moral education, where students learn about gender roles, respect for gender differences, and the negative impact of stereotypes. In subjects like science and social studies, discussions on the contributions of both men and women to society help dismantle gender biases and highlight the importance of gender diversity. By integrating gender equality education through both curricular subjects and experiential activities, the 2018 General Education Curriculum aims to develop students' well-rounded understanding and appreciation for gender equality from an early age. Experiential activities further reinforce these principles. Examples include organizing debates on gender equality topics, role-playing exercises to foster empathy, and group dialogues to encourage open discussions about gender issues. Schools may also host field trips to organizations that promote gender equality, conduct workshops on challenging gender stereotypes, and arrange seminars with guest speakers who are role models from various genders. This focus on addressing gender stereotypes, promoting respect for gender diversity, and creating an inclusive learning environment aligns with the curriculum's goals of fostering values of equality and non-discrimination. By removing gender-biased language from textbooks and encouraging girls and boys to equally participate in science and physical education activities, schools help break down traditional gender roles and promote equal opportunities. Overall, these content and forms contribute to the broader objectives of fostering non-discrimination, equal opportunities, and inclusive education in Vietnam. This comprehensive and integrated approach ensures that students develop a deep understanding and appreciation for gender equality from an early age, preparing them to value and practice gender equality throughout their lives.

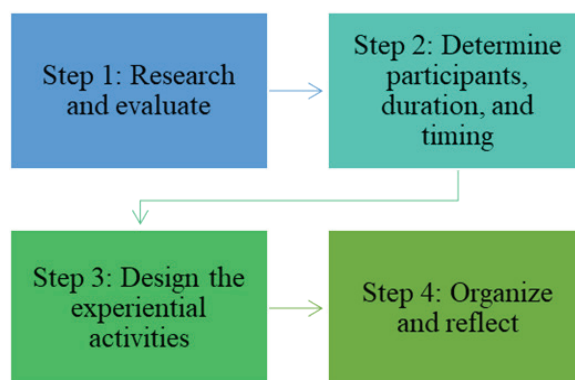
3.3. The role of experiential activities in gender equality education

According to Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT on issuing the General Education Curriculum (MOET, 2018), experiential activities involve students directly in practical tasks guided by educators. These activities help develop emotions, morality, personality, and learning abilities, while fostering creativity and accumulating experience. They promote positive habits, behaviors, and attitudes, enhancing personality development and growth. Engaging all the senses, experiential activities increase knowledge retention and maximize creativity, dynamism, and adaptability. They transform learning into an interesting, relatable experience. Exploring knowledge and solving problems help students develop individual abilities and self-confidence. These activities also train students in life skills relevant to real situations, enhancing their daily application. By discovering knowledge and finding solutions, students boost creativity, dynamism, and self-confidence. This approach makes learning more enjoyable and allows teachers to be more proactive and creative in the classroom.

According to the National General Education Curriculum (MOET, 2018), experiential activities are a mandatory component of the education plan. These activities connect educational content to social realities, linking theory with practice. Integrating gender equality education into experiential activities for primary school students is crucial as it helps children understand diversity and gender equality in society. This fosters critical thinking, proper evaluation of right and wrong, and the formation of correct values regarding gender equality and respect for gender differences. It builds positive attitudes like respect, empathy, and social responsibility. Furthermore, it enables students to connect their knowledge about gender equality to real-life experiences, promoting a deeper understanding and practical application of this knowledge. By participating in scenarios, games, or projects, students practice skills such as dialogue, problem-solving, and decision-making, increasing their interest, commitment, and proactiveness in learning about gender equality.

3.4. The design process for experiential activities to educate gender equality for primary school students

The design process for experiential activities to educate gender equality for primary school students can be implemented in the following steps:



The design process for experiential activities to educate gender equality for primary school students

Step 1: Research and evaluate

Review the general education curriculum, subject syllabi, and existing gender equality education practices.

Identify challenges, opportunities, and practical conditions in the locality and schools.

Choose relevant topics and set clear objectives aligned with the National General Curriculum (2018). The goals should aim to raise awareness, encourage participation, and improve skills and knowledge about gender equality.

Decide on the timing and length of the activities to ensure they fit well within the school schedule.

Step 2: Determine participants, duration, and timing

Determine which students will participate in the activities.

Select the suitable organizational form for the activities, such as project, seminar, workshop, debate, etc.

Decide on the timing and length of the activities to fit well within the school schedule.

Step 3: Design the experiential activities

Choose suitable educational methods and define specific activities.

Create detailed plans that include potential issues and solutions, ensuring alignment with the theme and lesson objectives.

Develop a lesson plan with clear objectives, specific activities (discussions, hands-on activities, etc.), and a detailed schedule (time, location, participants, budget, etc.).

Prepare necessary equipment, tools, and materials.

Step 4: Organize and reflect

Conduct the activities: Implement the experiential activities as planned.

Reflect on the experiences to evaluate and improve future activities

3.5. Illustrative lesson plan for experiential activities to educate 4th-grade primary school students about gender equality

- Theme: Exploring diverse careers and talents
- Lesson: Discovering the exciting world of jobs

I. Objectives

After the lesson, students will be able to:

Recognize that each occupation has unique characteristics, reflecting the personality of the person doing the work, regardless of gender.

Understand that anyone can pursue the work they love, irrespective of gender.

Demonstrate respect for all occupations, without gender-based discrimination.

Exhibit polite communication and behavior, showing appreciation for different professions.

Learn proactively and present opinions confidently.

Think independently to answer questions and express their perspectives during presentations.

Communicate effectively and cooperate with others during the learning process.

Show eagerness to learn, actively study the lessons, and participate enthusiastically in group discussions.

II. Teaching and Learning Materials

For the Teacher: Multimedia teaching aids (videos, images, electronic presentations), textbooks and other reference materials

For the Students: A4 paper and Colored pens/pencils

III. Teaching – learning activities

Time	Content	Teacher's activities	Students' activities
5'	<p>Activity 1: Warming up</p> <p>Objective: Create an enthusiastic and engaging atmosphere for students before starting the new lesson and connect it to the upcoming lesson.</p> <p>Teaching Method: Question and answer, visual Aids.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize students to use clapping and singing the song "Beautiful Hands." - Ask: What kinds of occupations are represented by the hands in the song? - Provide feedback and praise the students for their participation. - Lead into the new lesson: <i>You have just participated in a singing and clapping activity with the song about the work done by hands. In this lesson, we will explore in more depth the various occupations and professions represented by the hands and the people who do this work.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participate in the clapping and singing activity. - Observe and respond to the teacher's questions. - Share their observations, add additional ideas, and express their opinions. - Listen attentively to the introduction of the new lesson
13'	<p>Activity 2: Exploration</p> <p>Objective: Recognize that each occupation has unique characteristics, reflecting the personality of the worker, regardless of gender. Understand that anyone can pursue the work they love.</p> <p>Teaching methods: Question and answer, visual aids, learning games.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize the "Guess the Occupation" game: - Divide students into two teams of three. - Two students act out an occupation, and one guesses. The team with the most correct answers in two minutes wins. - Ask 1-2 students to comment on the game. - Display images and ask students to identify occupations and their features. - Ask students to name other occupations they know. - Show pictures and ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Is the person male or female? +What is their occupation? + Can a girl become a police officer? Why? + How can we identify someone's occupation? - Encourage student comments and ideas. - Ask: Do we rely on gender to know a person's occupation? - Conclude: <i>Each occupation has its own distinctive characteristics, reflected in the personality and nature of the work, regardless of gender. Anyone can choose the occupation they like, as long as it is suitable for them.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participate in the game. - Comment on the game and restate the experience. - Share their thoughts and respond to the teacher's questions. - Think and respond to the teacher's prompts. - Observe images and identify occupations. - Engage in discussions and add their ideas. - Listen attentively to the teacher's conclusion.

10'	<p>Activity 3: Practice</p> <p>Objective: Develop an attitude of respecting every occupation, without gender discrimination.</p> <p>Teaching Methods: Role-playing, question and answer, group discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize role-play scenarios where individuals face gender discrimination at work. - Have students observe each scenario and discuss solutions in pairs for 2 minutes. - Ask students to reenact and handle the situations. - Pose the question: What attitude should we have towards honest occupations in life? - Conclude: <i>All occupations have unique characteristics and deserve respect. We must be polite, respect all jobs, and avoid gender discrimination or mocking roles against traditional stereotypes.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen to instructions. - Observe scenarios and discuss in pairs. - Reenact and propose solutions. - Comment and share thoughts. - Answer the question and listen to the conclusion.
7'	<p>Activity 4: Application</p> <p>Objective: Encourage students to think about and share their future career goals; Instill respect for all occupations, regardless of gender or societal stereotypes; Foster clear and confident articulation of thoughts and aspirations.</p> <p>Teaching Methods: Lecture, think-share</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize students to share: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + List the occupations of their father, mother, and other relatives. + Share their own future career aspirations. - Ask students to think for 2 minutes and then share their thoughts with the class. - Conclude: <i>Each occupation is valuable and deserving of respect. Everyone can choose a career they love and feel suits them. We must always respect and treat all occupations and individuals politely, without discrimination or gender bias.</i> - Guide students to share what they learned today with their families at home. - Provide feedback on the lesson and praise the students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share their thoughts and aspirations. - Listen attentively to their peers and teacher. - Participate in the discussion.

4. CONCLUSION

Integrating gender equality into Vietnam's primary curriculum is a crucial step toward building an inclusive society. Despite ongoing efforts, challenges still remain. Comprehensive gender equality education in primary schools empowers children to challenge stereotypes, develop respectful relationships, and become positive change agents in their communities. At the Faculty of Education at Hanoi Metropolitan University, we recognize the importance of gender equality education and have incorporated it into our teacher training curriculum. We have also studied how to integrate this education for students at all levels, including primary schools, through experiential activities. This approach aims to guide pre-service teachers in designing and organizing activities to educate primary school students about gender equality.

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