

ARE TEACHERS AGENTS OF CHANGE? TEACHER TRAINING AND THE GENDER DIMENSION IN ADULT EDUCATION: ITALY AND NIGERIA IN COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT: Adult education can play a fundamental role in changing existing gender hierarchies, breaking down gender stereotypes, and promoting gender equality. Teachers can be important agents of change, but they not only have to be aware of their behaviours, attitudes, and views, they also have to be able to understand the specific needs and interests of learners, to use gender-based methods, and to implement practices free of gender stereotypes. In order to do this, adequate education and training are needed, but both in Italy and Nigeria, gender issues are not part of the education and training curriculum, and much remains to be done for raising awareness of this issue.

1. Introduction

According to The Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus issued by the EIGE (2009), sex is defined as the «biological and physiological characteristics that define humans as female or male», whereas gender is related to the ‘social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and the relationship between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men’. Therefore, when we talk about sex, we refer to characteristics biologically determined at birth; gender, in contrast, is related to categories and attributes that are socially constructed. Gender, like culture, is a human product, and it is continuously created and re-created by everyone, even unconsciously (Lorber, 1994; Connell, 2006). Roles and responsibilities associated with men and women can vary within and between cultures and change over time (UNESCO, 2015); they are determined in the family and in social and cultural contexts.

In spite of the considerable progress made, in many countries, women are still depicted as running the house and caring for children, whereas men are wage earners and protectors (European Parliament, 2013). According

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to Raghavendra (2014), it is at home and at school that the understanding of the relationships between men and women begins. But as much as education plays a fundamental role in contributing to social and cultural changes (Gender Equality Commission, 2015), it can also reflect and reproduce gender inequalities through teaching methods, school curricula, textbooks, and interactions within the classroom (Akpakwu & Bua, 2014).

That goes for all orders of school, from kindergarten to adult education. According to Akpan and Ita (2015), teachers are the most important component of any educational system because they have a key role to play in shaping the behaviour, thinking, and attitudes of the students in the teaching/learning situation. That is why teachers and educators must be qualified, trained, motivated, supported (UNESCO, 2015), and aware of their behaviours, attitudes, and views concerning gender. In order to perform their tasks in the best possible way, teachers need not only adequate education but also consistent pre- and in-service training.

Specifically in the field of adult education, the function of the teacher/facilitator is to help learners to live more successfully, that is, among other things, «to assist them to increase competence or negotiate transitions in their social roles» (Smith, 2007). This also means helping students to challenge gender constructions affected by political, cultural, economic, social, and religious factors, to name a few. In this field, teachers can really be agents of change, but competencies to address gender issues and encourage gender equality should be promoted through both pre- and in-service teacher training programmes (UNESCO, 2011).

This paper will take into consideration the profile of adult teachers/facilitators in Europe and Africa, considering the reality of two different countries where gender equality is still far from being achieved: Italy and Nigeria.

This work aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are adult teachers/facilitators educated and trained in Italy and Nigeria?

RQ2: What role does gender education play in the pre- and in-service training curriculum?

The comparison will be conducted analysing documents and regulations at an international and national level. The first chapter will examine the main international gender policies and the way in which they have been transposed and implemented at national level in Italy and Nigeria.

The second chapter will take into account the adult education system in the two countries with particular reference to the public sector. First, pre-service and in-service training will be taken into account, and then gender issues will be analysed in depth.

In the third chapter, similarities and differences between the two countries will be outlined and finally, in the last chapter, the conclusions will be drawn.

2. *The gender dimension in international policies*

In international legislation, there are many references to education and training, which are both perceived as the most effective tools for achieving gender equality in the social and working context.

The 1979 Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw) is the most important legally binding international document on women's rights. It encourages countries to eliminate any stereotype concerning male and female roles at all levels and to promote mixed education and other forms of education that contribute to achieving this goal (Article 10). Gender equality is considered a cornerstone for human progress and sustainable development.

In the context of the global conferences on gender equality, the IV International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 is paramount: after female poverty, education and training are considered the second strategic intervention area. The goal is to eliminate, through empowerment and gender mainstreaming, the obstacles that prevent the improvement of the female condition.

Likewise, the 2000 Millennium Summit and the Fourth World Conference on Women, both held in New York, consider the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment priority objectives to be achieved by 2015.

But despite the improvements over the years, in 2015, on the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing conference, no country had yet achieved full gender equality. A cultural change to eradicate attitudes that maintain male superiority was still lacking; women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world.

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an action programme signed by 193 UN member countries, gender equality remains one of the priority goals for sustainable development, to be achieved by 2030.

The inter-relatedness of the different goals sends a strong message about the realisation of gender equality in different sectors. For example, gender equality in education cannot be achieved only through education-specific efforts; it also depends on interventions in other sectors. At the same time, progress toward gender equality in education can have important effects on equality in employment, health, and nutrition.

Furthermore, the Education 2030 Framework for Action, a tool to help the international community achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education, explicitly recognises gender equality as a guiding principle linked to the realisation of the right to education.

Moving now to Europe, the European Union has always made great efforts to promote gender equality in all sectors, introducing equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming, and specific measures for the ad-

vancement of women. When we talk about equal opportunities today, it is mainly because of the promotional role of the European Union, which has urged the Member States to legislate in this area. The Europe 2020 strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights represent a good opportunity for the EU to consolidate its efforts in the field of gender equality.

The strategy for equality between women and men presented by the European Commission in September 2010, the European Commission's work programme from 2010 to 2015, is aimed to promote gender equality, which is seen as a turning point in economic growth and sustainable development. It provides for economic independence for women and men, equal pay for equal work, equality in decision-making processes, and the promotion of women's rights outside the European Union.

In 2010, the European Union adopted a charter of women's rights to increase equality between women and men in Europe and worldwide. It focuses on five key points: the economic independence of women, the equal representation of women in decision-making and power places, respect for the dignity and integrity of women, the end of all forms of violence, and finally action beyond the borders of the European Union.

After 2010, gender policies were reaffirmed and renewed in the 'Europe 2020' Strategy. In the new proposal, education and training remain central to promoting empowerment, development, and progress, and play a crucial role in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental, and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens (Council of the European Union, 2009). In particular, for inclusive growth, the European Union underlines the need for lifelong learning for all, especially for women, who often stop working for family leave.

The triangle of training-employment-social inclusion is at the heart of many European policies aimed at promoting training, and especially lifelong learning, through the acquisition of new key competencies that guarantee the social inclusion of all the weakest sections of the population, including women. Europe is constantly questioning the institutions responsible for education and training, whose efforts must be aimed at promoting innovative methodologies, not at transferring and sharing knowledge between countries in and outside the union.

To sum up, much effort has been made, and gender mainstreaming has been embraced both at an international and national level, but gender equality is still far from being achieved although, in recent years, significant progress has been made.

Gender inequality remains, in fact, very much a reality in most societies: the World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap Report states that, at the current pace, it will still require 108 years to achieve full parity globally, in the sense of having equal agency, equal access to resources, and equal power concerning decision-making between women and men.

3. *The gender dimension in Italy*

According to one of the fundamental principles of the Constitution of the Italian Republic, ratified in 1948, all citizens are equal before the Law, «without distinction of gender, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions» (Article 3). The inclusion of gender equality among the Italian Republic's fundamental principles underlines the importance of this topic at the national level.

The Constitution indeed regulates gender equality in the main spheres of women's and men's life, and specific measures are adopted both to ensure equal treatment and rights and to promote equal opportunities between women and men (Article 51).

Since its adoption in 1995, the Italian government has firmly supported the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with the main aim of removing any form of discrimination and developing gender-sensitive policies, with special attention to the phenomenon of violence against women and girls (Italian Government, 2014).

In 1996, the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council was established to highlight the national approach to equal opportunity issues and to coordinate actions aimed at the implementation of gender equality policies. Furthermore, the National Code for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, established in 2006, constitutes the legal framework on gender equality and introduced the principle of gender mainstreaming.

The European Report *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes* (Eurydice, 2010) highlights how all countries, with some exceptions including Italy, carry out training activities for adults and students to educate them on the culture of respect and equality in school and to prevent gender discrimination.

In Italy, until 2010, there was no binding legislation to prevent gender stereotyping and discrimination because, as far as education is concerned, equality seems to be a reality: female enrolment in high school and university is higher than male enrolment, and women graduate in a shorter time and with better outcomes than men. As a number of studies underline (Ulivieri, 1996; Biemmi, 2010; Guerrini, 2015), teachers are not very aware of gender stereotypes at school and the importance of gender education because they think school is a neutral space that guarantees equal opportunities to all.

But in recent years, something has changed, and a number of measures have been implemented. Decree-Law n. 104 of 12 September 2013, which contains «urgent measures in the field of education' with reference to school staff training» (Article 16), says that «in order to improve the teaching performance, there are training activities and mandatory updates of school staff with particular attention to increasing skills related

to education for affectivity, respect for diversity and gender equality, and overcoming gender stereotypes».

Similar indications can be found in Decree-Law n. 93 of August 2013, where attention is paid to the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, first and foremost trying to train the educational staff to raise awareness and to inform, also through textbooks, male and female students. Finally, the most important legislative reference is Law 107 of 2015, known as 'Buona Scuola' (good school), which forces all levels of schooling to prevent gender discrimination and gender violence, for instance through teacher training. Besides, the Law sets forth that the three-year educational plan of each school has to ensure the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, promoting education for gender equality at all school levels and the prevention of gender violence and all kinds of discrimination. Students, teachers, and parents have to be aware of the topics related to sexual or gender-based violence.

Other important tools are the National Operational Programmes (PON) administered by the Ministry of Education, University, and Research and funded by European Structural Funds. The PONs are intervention plans designed to help improve the educational system, and the principle of equality has been present from the very beginning of the project (Italian Government, 2014).

Moreover, gender equality is a transversal goal of Erasmus+, the European Programme to support not only education, training, youth, and sport but also teaching, research, networking and policy debate on EU topics.

However, there is no compulsory training in gender issues for teachers, trainers, and educators, so it still depends on individual initiative. Often women are more interested in the subject than men. However, the issue of gender education begins to be perceived as an indispensable prerequisite for the prevention of violence and the creation of equal relationships between men and women.

4. The gender dimension in Nigeria

In most developing countries of the world, issues around gender inequality are laced around the socio-cultural practice of the community, and this forms the basis of how gender is treated and addressed in each sector and activity. In Africa, and Nigeria specifically, the culture of patriarchy is deeply rooted, and men dominate all spheres of women's lives. Women are often in a subordinate position, particularly at the household and community level, and this permeates all activities and sectors (UNESCO, 2015).

The principle of equality is stated by the Nigerian constitution of 1999, which bans any form of discrimination based on origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties.

The first national machinery with a specific mandate for women's affairs in Nigeria, the National Commission for Women, was established by Decree in 1989. It was upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in 1995 and was renamed Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development in 1999. The current name of the Ministry is Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which is decentralised to local government structures through the Women in Development Units.

Besides, Nigeria adopted a National Gender Policy in 2006 to reduce gender inequality, not as an end in itself, but as a prerequisite for achieving 'peace, security, well-being and poverty reduction for all, including women' (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2016).

5. Adult education and teacher education and training

UNESCO (1976) defines adult education as

[...] the entire body of organised process whatever the content, level or method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, college and universities as well as apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two-fold perspectives of full personal development.

In this process, the teacher plays a key role in achieving high-quality education for all learners. As stated in the Nigerian National Policy in Education (2009), «no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers», in other words, teachers have an important role in any meaningful transformation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Teachers are no longer seen as merely a source of knowledge but have the task of facilitating access to different forms of knowledge, both inside and outside the classroom (Bohan, 2015).

According to the definition of UNESCO, training is meant «to equip teachers with the knowledge, attitude, behaviour and skills required for teaching at the relevant level».

The knowledge and skills acquired during the initial training are only the starting point in the professional career of teachers. Initial training and mentoring programmes enable teachers to develop their professional skills and establish useful links with the school environment. Continuous professional development provides teachers with the opportunity to improve their skills and adapt them to today's rapidly

changing environment (European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice, 2018). In its Communication on School Development and Excellence in Teaching to Start Life in the Right Way, the European Commission stresses the importance of teacher training for the quality of teaching, highlighting the role that collaborative work and continuous professional development can play (European Commission, 2018). It also highlights the need to provide specific support to teachers, especially during the early stages of their careers. Besides, «the stage at which newly trained teachers move from initial training to professional life is seen as crucial for further professional engagement and development and for reducing the number of teachers leaving the profession» (European Commission, 2013:9).

6. Adult education in Italy: The Provincial Centres for Adult Education

In the field of adult education in Italy, there are both public and private institutions offering a range of courses for adult learners: non-profit associations, unions, church, folks universities, and universities of the third age. The Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA), managed by the Ministry of Education, University, and Research, established by DPR 263/12 and D.I. 12.03.2015, are the main public structures specifically focused on the promotion of both formal and non-formal adult education activities.

They have been in operation since the school year 2014/15, when they replaced the Permanent Territorial Centres (CTP) of 1997 to meet the needs of «all adults without a compulsory school qualification, as well as those adults who, although they have obtained a qualification, intend again to involve themselves in the education and training system» (Ministerial Ordinance 455/1997, Article 3, Paragraph 2).

Unlike the CTPs, the new centres are independent educational institutions, structured by province; currently, there are 128 Provincial Centres for Adult Education operating in Italy.

They provide courses leading to certificates in compulsory education and secondary school qualifications but also courses to promote the enhancement of basic skills, foreign languages, and digital competencies, as well as literacy and Italian courses for foreigners. Students are citizens aged 16 and over. In the last few years, the number of displaced people attending the courses has increased as well because a certificate of proficiency in Italian at level A2 is required for obtaining a residence permit.

The courses are financed by public funds both at the European and national and regional level.

The centres employ teachers appointed by the Ministry of Education, University, and Research.

The staff consists of primary school teachers, who work on the literacy of foreigners, and secondary school teachers, who usually teach Italian, history and geography, mathematics and science, technology and foreign languages. A new teacher profile, with specific training in Italian as a second language, was introduced in 2016.

7. Teacher education and training in Italy

Teacher training in Italy varies by age group: nursery (3–5 years old) and primary school teachers (6–10 years old) have the same initial teacher training, whereas secondary school teachers (11–19 years old) have a different one.

Until 1998, only a four-year upper secondary school diploma was required to teach in primary schools. Currently, there is a specific and compulsory five-year degree programme. The curriculum includes courses and exams in pedagogy, didactics, intercultural pedagogy, and child psychology. Besides, in order to obtain professional teaching status, teachers must pass an examination at national level.

This innovation implies a different perception of the teacher's work, which is less and less considered a mission but increasingly considered a profession that requires practitioners to develop and refine their skills in the course of their life (Federighi & Boffo, 2014).

Secondary school teachers, in contrast, need a master's degree in a subject field as well as a certificate of attendance of a specific course in pedagogy and didactics.

The academic training curriculum of primary school teachers does not include mandatory gender-related exams; students can choose 'gender education' as a minor subject if offered by their university. Issues about gender discrimination and gender equality can be introduced in general and social pedagogy, but it depends on the sensibility of the lecturer and, in any case, it is not compulsory.

Even for secondary school teachers, gender education is not a compulsory subject in the specialisation course.

Both newly recruited primary and secondary teachers must complete a one-year training course that includes preparatory meetings, training workshops, peer-to-peer activities, and online training.

In general, each teacher in the probation year has a tutor, preferably of the same subject area.

At the end of the probation year, the teachers will have their final interview in front of an evaluation committee.

In Law 107/2015, the Ministry of Education and Research states that teacher training is «compulsory, permanent, and structural», identifying nine national priorities to which the contents of the various actions

should be linked. Individual schools have the opportunity to decide how to provide in-service training, according to the three-year school project, but the number of hours per year is not defined.

In addition to the compulsory courses, teachers can participate in other training activities according to their interests. They can choose between different courses focused on intercultural education, didactics, special needs, technologies, and education. Gender-related courses are not very common, although in recent years, they are offered more often, also in online mode.

In fact, due to the incredible growth of gender violence, recent years have seen an increase in legislative proposals regarding gender education in schools. There are some initiatives at the local or regional level, which, however, remain isolated. Besides, there are many differences between the different parts of Italy. Recently, the Ministry of Education specified the main areas of in-service teacher training, which include the achievement of gender equality, inclusion and disability, failure and early school leaving.

In conclusion, at present, growing attention is paid to gender education, but the process is still very slow.

8. Adult education in Nigeria

The field of adult education in Nigeria has been neglected and under-explored, as in other British colonies, for a long time because both the colonial masters and the missionaries who brought education to Africa mainly dealt with formal education (Chijioke, 2010). In the post-independence period, the relevance of adult education was recognised especially concerning literacy (Obasi, 2014).

According to UNESCO, 35 million Nigerian adults are illiterate, and this has an impact both at the individual and societal level. Therefore, the state organises mainly literacy programs even though one of the goals of the National Gender Policy is to expand the scope of adult literacy and vocational training, regardless of gender, disability, and geographical location. In recent years, the government, in order to reduce unemployment, has given more importance to entrepreneurship courses, starting the Skill and Entrepreneurship Acquisition (SAED) programme, which offers a wide range of courses: agro-allied, automobile, beautification, construction, cosmetology, culture and tourism, film and photography, and the like.

Adult literacy courses are mainly organised by the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, an agency of the Ministry. Literacy is considered critical both to economic development and to individual and community well-being. In 2017, the federal govern-

ment, through the Ministry of Education, established 780 adult education classes nationwide and employed adequate facilitators to run the programme (Aluko, 2017).

9. Teacher education and training in Nigeria

Although much progress has been made in recent years, a low entry standard of trainee teachers, fruitless pre-service training, and inadequate in-service training are still a reality in Nigeria's education (Fasoyiro, 2016). With regard to adult education, Ukwuaba (2015) points out that Nigeria has a shortage of teachers and that staff often does not have qualifications or proper training. Sometimes adult education institutions have no choice but to use anybody as an adult educator. This has a major impact on the quality of teaching.

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and the Nigerian Union of Teachers are working hard for the registration, accreditation, and certification of the teachers and to reduce the number of uncertified teachers in an effort to promote professionalism (Fareo, 2015).

Since 1998, the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) has been the minimum qualification required for primary school teachers and junior secondary school teachers; it can be achieved at a College of Education after three years of study and, in terms of level, it is comparable to one year of a bachelor's degree in education. Teachers working in a senior secondary school need a bachelor's degree in education or a bachelor's degree in a subject field combined with a postgraduate diploma in education (Nuffic, 2017).

Newly recruited teachers are supervised during the first year by an experienced professional mentor, who helps them with both subject knowledge development and professional practice. In addition, during the first few (induction) years, teachers are assigned a mentor in the school where they are appointed (Fasoyiro, 2016) in order to develop a professional identity. Other forms of support are provided through education experts or peer networks (Okoli, Ogbondah & Ekpefa-Abdullahi, 2015).

Even though teachers for all levels of the educational system shall be professionally trained, as stated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014), there are no specific gender-related courses.

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) specifies gender-related topics to be present at all levels of education, including gender-sensitive learning environments, gender roles in society and culture, gender equality, gender gaps (meaning, causes, and ways of closing gaps). Besides, the Nigerian teacher education curriculum was revised in 2012, in part to address gender issues (Unterhalter, Poole & Winters, 2015).

Continuing professional development of teachers comes from various sources and agencies and in various forms. There are different institu-

tions that are responsible for providing professional training for teachers: universities, colleges of education, the National Teachers Institute, schools of education in polytechnics, the National Mathematical Centre, and the National Institute of Nigerian Languages (Okoli, Ogbondah & Ekpefa-Abdullahi, 2015). Also, each state/province organises periodic training and assessment exercises for teachers, which form the basis of their promotion from one level to another (Fareo, 2013).

Two models of in-service training for teachers in Nigeria are most commonly used (Oyebade, 2008): the workshop model, that is, the most common form of continuing professional development, and the school-based teacher professional support model. In this second case, activities may include direct classroom support by the facilitators and supervisors, staff meetings involving head-teachers and teachers, demonstration lessons by teacher-educators or mentors, and visits to the school by mentors (if external).

Additionally, in-service programmes are provided through distance learning. The National Teachers Institute, a distance education college, for example, provides courses for the continuing professional development of teachers (Amadi, 2013).

10. Two countries in comparison

When it comes to gender equality, the two countries considered here, Italy and Nigeria, are at the bottom of the list, one in Europe and the other in Africa, despite the fact that gender equality is one of the fundamental principles of their respective constitutions. Furthermore, the gender perspective plays an important role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies, and different laws have been issued to guarantee equal opportunities and to promote women's empowerment. It should be noted that both countries have a political authority that deals with gender equality and equal opportunities. In theory, therefore, all the conditions for men and women to have equal rights and opportunities are in place, but in reality this is not the case: the transformation of cultures and practices remains a challenge.

11. Education and training of teachers in Italy and Nigeria

As already noted, education has a fundamental role in creating awareness and challenging gender stereotypes, but in both Italy and Nigeria, there is still much to be done to train teachers to be agents of change.

In both countries, the professional preparation of teachers does not generally provide effective approaches, techniques, and methods of intervention specifically aimed at adults.

In Italy, a university degree is needed to teach adults in a public institution, whereas in Nigeria, the minimum qualification is a Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE), equivalent in terms of level to one year of a bachelor's degree in education.

Besides, Nigeria has a shortage of qualified teachers and tries to solve the problem by requiring teachers to upgrade their qualifications. In this regard, it should be noted that even in Italy, it was possible to teach adults with a four-year high school diploma until 1998.

In the first years of service, in both countries there is a special focus on teachers and their training, as if the first years of work were a test to demonstrate whether the training received was functional or not. In Nigeria, the role of peers and the figure of a tutor or mentor is particularly strong and important, especially in the first years of service, whereas in Italy, this figure is not as influential and important as in Nigeria: Mentoring is limited only to the first year of teaching, and the mentor is more a formal role than a reference point for the newly recruited teacher.

12. Gender education in the teacher training curriculum

In teacher education, both in Italy and Nigeria, gender education is not compulsory; its inclusion in the curriculum depends on the sensitivity of lecturers. It has only been in recent years that both countries have focused on a gender-based training of teachers, mainly because of the high number of gender-based assaults, but gender education has not officially entered the training curriculum of teachers. In-service training, although compulsory, does not include gender education either. The topics of the in-service courses are chosen by the teachers, which means everything depends on personal sensitivity. This reveals a lack of awareness in both countries regarding gender issues and the need to enable teachers to combat stereotypes and prejudices that have taken root in society.

In both countries, it is mainly the Ministry of Education that organises and gives directives on the subjects of in-service training courses, even though other bodies, public or private, may offer training courses to teachers. These courses are mainly carried out through lessons and, above all, through workshops, where the teachers, often in small groups, work together to produce didactic activities and simulate lessons. Increasingly, updates are provided in blended forms or online to help overcome differences between different parts of the countries or between different educational institutions.

Neither of the two countries has a history and tradition of gender-based teacher training, because gender issues were not covered, at least not until now. In Italy, things have been changing since 2015, and there are now national indications to introduce gender training, but in Nigeria, this aspect is still struggling to get off the ground.

13. Conclusions

Gender discrimination does not appear to be such an urgent and important problem, neither in Italy nor in Nigeria, especially in the world of education and teacher training.

In both countries, gender sensitivity and gendered instructions are found to be based on the teacher's perception of 'what is'. There are no guidelines or rules on gender issues in classrooms. Invariably, the issue of differentiation and closing the achievement gap between female and male learners has not been addressed. The gender brain difference and its impact on instruction and learning have not been emphasised either. The issues of nature and nurture, school dropout, discipline, behavioural disorder, and learning disabilities are not handled by gender. Studies have shown that the male learner needs more space to learn, is not as good in reading and writing as the female learner, and tends to be more physical, whereas the female learner multitasks better. It must be acknowledged, therefore, that there are different behavioural management and learning needs. To effectively tackle this, the teacher should be given several days per year to be trained and retrained to acquire skills and gain knowledge to handle gender issues in classrooms and to really become an agent of change.

In both countries, much remains to be done, especially in the initial phase for raising awareness on the issues. Teacher training, in general, reflects a country's political and social commitment, revealing how much more needs to be done at the political and educational levels to raise awareness of the issue of gender inequalities. Gender education is not only useful when there is an episode of discrimination or marginalisation but should become a fundamental part of the training path, pre- and in-service, of teachers and other professionals in the adult education sector.

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