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The Importance of Gender-Neutral Uniforms: A Study Based on the Perceptions of B.Ed. and M.Ed. Students

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Abstract

Persistent gender-based discrimination underscores the need to evaluate educational practices that foster inclusion. This study's objective was to assess B.Ed. and M.Ed. students' attitudes toward gender-neutral uniforms, their level of agreement with this trend, and perceived societal influence. A survey design was employed to elicit respondents' views on gender-neutral teaching attire and its potential impacts. Key findings indicate that B.Ed. and M.Ed. students generally hold positive attitudes toward gender-neutral uniforms; most aspiring educators view such attire favorably and believe it can help cultivate a welcoming learning environment. The study concludes that support for gender-neutral uniforms is salient among future teachers. The contribution and implication are that these attitudes may facilitate the adoption of attire policies aligned with inclusive educational climates and inform discussions about the broader social acceptance of gender-neutral practices.

Keywords: Gender-Neutral Uniforms; Teacher Education; Attitudes; Inclusive Education; Gender Equality; School Policy

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INTRODUCTION

In olden days, the students who identified themselves as transgenders, non-binary, or gender non-conforming faced many difficulties in schools based on their uniforms. These changes in the old pattern of uniforms to gender-neutral uniforms led them to their comfort zone. Gender neutral uniforms have a great role in reducing marginalization among students. To a particular extent gender gender-neutral uniforms also lead to the reduction of gender-based bullying and discrimination in schools and colleges. The implementation of gender-neutral uniforms are also having many challenges and difficulties; some of the major challenges and difficulties for it are existing cultural, social, and religious norms, lack of awareness about equality, uniformity, inclusion, etc. This study aims to explore the concept of gender-neutral uniforms, its importance, difficulties in implementing it, and knowledge about gender neutral uniforms among B.Ed. and M.Ed. students.

Many high schoolers living in India, who do not adhere to the gender binary, have often faced heavy dysphoria, limiting themselves under pressure to conform to a particular sex (Roots of Gender-queer Identity through Consumption, 2015). This leads people to experience a fair share of ambiguity and pressure. Unconventional, inclusive, and Gender-neutral clothing aids in creating an atmosphere of Equity and helps people safely explore their gender identity without being bound to the shackles of gender norms (Johnson, 2017). The goal of uniforms is to eliminate distractions and foster unity among students.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCF-TE, 2009) highly recognises the relationship between teacher education and school education as both sectors mutually reinforce the concerns necessary for qualitative improvements in education. Gender equality is what we need, and education is one of the critical paths. As teachers have a major role in the process, their training in this direction is essential. The debates and controversies in Kerala on gender-neutral uniforms and other such measures to encourage gender neutrality in schools (The Times Of India, 2022; The New Indian Express, 2022a; The New Indian Express, 2022b; The Hindu, 2022) point to the relevance and need for gender Sensitivity training for politicians, Policymakers, the general public, as well as those who are connected to the schooling process and teachers are one of the essential parts of the process.(Ruksana. K et al., 2023) The best intervention strategy in this context is developing gender awareness among the teaching community, which in turn

would bring about progressive changes in their attitudes and outlooks. Only such sensitized teachers can shape the mindsets of the student community in proper directions. (Kuruvilla et al., 2013).

Objectives

- To understand the perception of B.Ed. and M.Ed. students about the gender-neutral uniform.
- To find out how prospective teachers view the role of gender-neutral uniforms in promoting equality, inclusivity, and the reduction of gender bias in the school environment.

METHODS

The study used convenience sampling, with respondents comprising B.Ed. and M.Ed. students from several districts in Kerala. For the study, 64 samples were obtained. The sample includes B.Ed. and M.Ed. students from various government, aided, private, and university centers in Kerala. For the study questionnaire was constructed by the authors as research tool. In the study data collected were arranged in tabular form for the statistical analysis. Data analysis was carried out with the help of Percentage analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introducing gender-neutral uniforms in schools:

From the study, it was known that 39.1% of the students agree with the statement, 37.5 % students strongly agree with the statement, 15.6% are neutral with the statement, 6.3% disagree with the statement, and 1.6 % strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 1: Students responses on Support to the Idea of introducing gender-neutral uniforms in schools

B.Ed.					M.Ed.				
S A	A	N	D A	S D A	S A	A	N	D A	S D A
13	13	6	0	0	11	12	4	3	2

(S A-Strongly agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, D A- Disagree, S D A- Strongly Disagree)

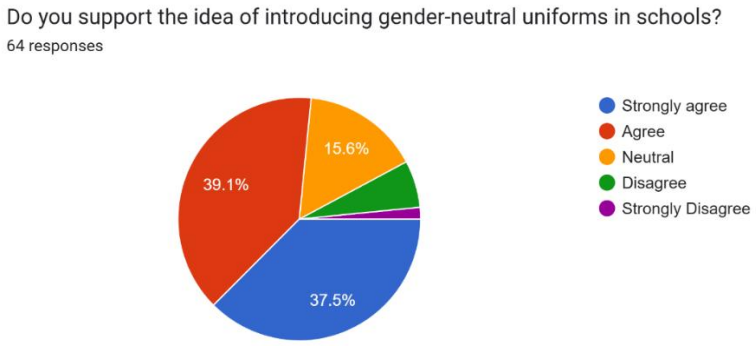

Figure 1: B.Ed. and M.Ed. students' overall responses on Support for the Idea of introducing gender-neutral uniforms in schools

Promoting gender equality:

From the study, it was known that 37.5% students agree with the statement gender gender-neutral uniforms help in promoting gender equality, 23.4% strongly agree, 21.9% are neutral, 12.5% disagree, and 4.7% strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 2: student's responses on gender-neutral uniforms in promoting gender equality

B.Ed.					M.Ed.				
S A	A	N	D A	S D A	S A	A	N	D A	S D A
11	11	6	4	0	4	13	8	4	3

(S A-Strongly agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, D A- Disagree, S D A- Strongly Disagree)

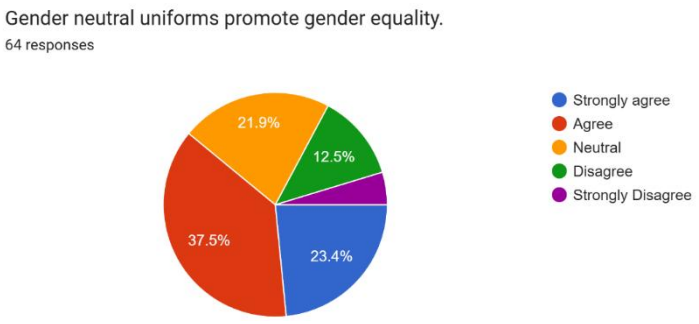

Figure 2: B.Ed. and M.Ed. student's overall responses on gender-neutral uniforms in promoting gender equality

Reducing discrimination based on gender:

From the study, it was known that 45.3% students are not sure whether gender neutral uniforms reduce gender-based discrimination, 28.1% of students says that it does not reduce it, and 26.6% students responded that they will reduce gender-based discrimination.

Table 3: Students responses to gender-neutral uniform in reducing gender-based Discrimination

B.Ed.			M.Ed.		
Yes	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure
8	8	16	9	10	13

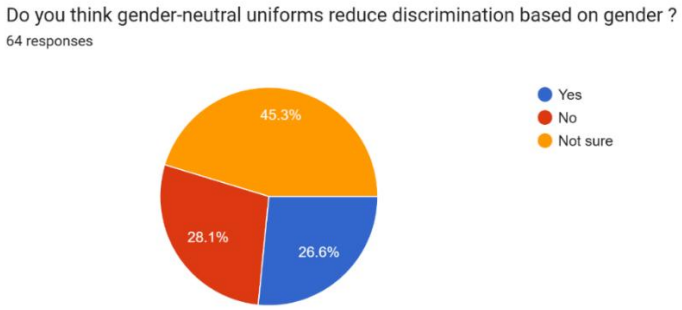

Figure 3: B.Ed. and M.Ed. student's overall responses on gender-neutral uniforms in reducing gender-based discrimination.

Gender-neutral uniform for school students:

From the study, it was known that 84.4% students are ready to recommend gender neutral uniforms to school students, and 15.6 % students are not ready to recommend it to the school students.

Table 4: Student's responses to recommending a gender-neutral uniform for school students.

B.Ed.		M.Ed.	
Yes	No	Yes	No
29	3	25	7

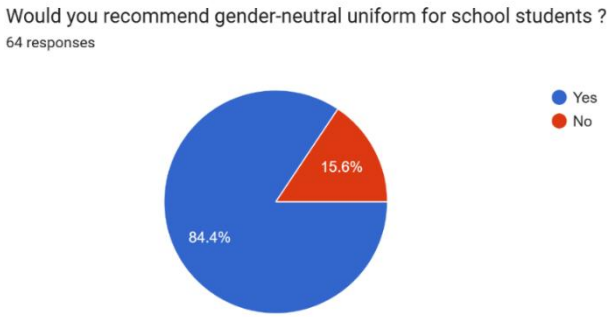

Figure 4: B.Ed. and M.Ed. student's overall responses to recommending gender-neutral uniforms to school students.

Inclusive environment for transgender students:

From the study, it was known that 48.4% students agree with the statement that gender-neutral uniforms help in creating an inclusive environment for transgender students,26.6% strongly agree with the statement,23.4% are neutral with the statement, and 1.6% disagree with the statement.

Table 5: Student's responses to gender-neutral uniforms can create a more inclusive environment for transgender students.

B.Ed.					M.Ed.				
S A	A	N	D A	S D A	S A	A	N	D A	S D A
10	16	5	1	0	7	15	10	0	0

(S A-Strongly agree, A-Agree, N-Neutral, D A- Disagree, S D A- Strongly Disagree)

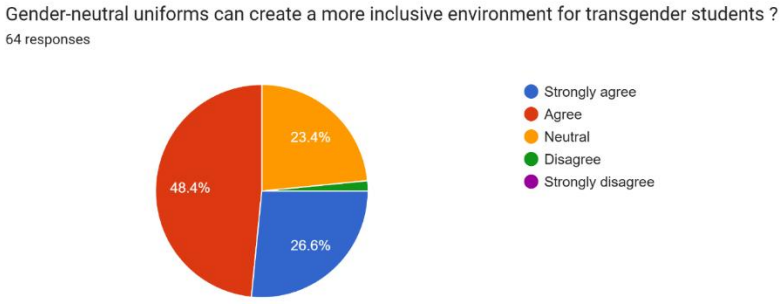

Figure 5: B.Ed. and M.Ed. student's overall responses on gender-neutral uniforms can create a more inclusive environment to transgender students.

Gender-neutral uniforms during teaching practice:

From the study, it was known that 70.3% students are willing to wear or recommend gender-neutral uniforms during teaching practice and 29.7% students are not willing to wear gender-neutral uniforms during their teaching practice.

Table 6: Student's responses about wearing and recommending gender-neutral uniform during teaching practice.

B.Ed.		M.Ed.	
Yes	No	Yes	No
26	6	19	13

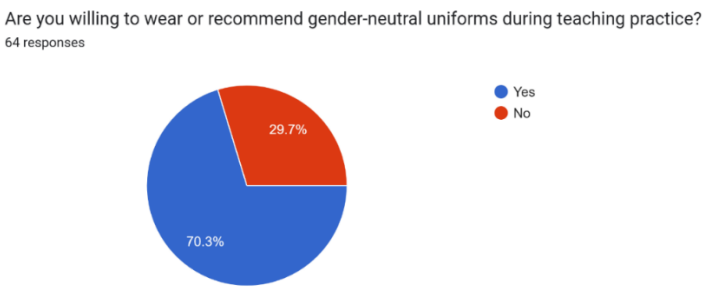

Figure 6: B.Ed. and M.Ed. student's overall responses on wearing and recommending gender-neutral uniform during teaching practice.

CONCLUSION

The term uniform means that everyone is same or uniformity. It refers to equality in every sense. That is freedom, opportunities, and everything else. Through this study, we can understand how B Ed and M Ed students are aware of gender neutral uniforms, what their perceptions and attitude towards.

According to available data, 23.4% are strongly agree that gender gender-neutral uniform can promote gender equality, and 37.5% are also agree with this. The majority of people are stance with a positive stance. However, regarding the statement that gender-neutral uniforms can reduce discrimination, only 26.6% responded positively, whereas 45.3% were uncertain, and 28.1% disagreed. In response to the question of whether gender-neutral uniforms help create an inclusive environment for transgender students, 48.4% agreed, 26.6% strongly agreed, 23.4% remained neutral, and only 1.6% disagreed. With respect to the willingness to wear or recommend gender-neutral uniforms during teaching practice, 70.3% reported being willing, while 29.7% indicated unwillingness.

In the present scenario, society is undergoing rapid changes, especially with technological innovations; however, significant changes in human attitudes have yet to occur. Even today, discrimination and exclusion continue to persist. If the concept of a gender-neutral uniform can help reduce such inequalities, it would indeed be a positive step. For meaningful change to take place in society, transformation must first begin within individuals. Through this concept, children can be guided towards reducing inequalities and discrimination while also promoting an inclusive educational environment.

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