

Gender sensitivity and equal opportunities in higher education

Anastasiia Hrushetska

International University, Odesa

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1836-2331>

Yuliia Beznosiuk

International University, Odesa

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1165-2031>

Abstract. *The paper explores the concept of gender sensitivity as an essential component of a democratic educational environment. It emphasizes the need to integrate gender perspectives into university policies, curricula, and teaching materials. The role of both educators and students as joint agents of change in fostering a culture of equality is highlighted. Attention is given to Ukraine's legislative and strategic frameworks ensuring equal rights and opportunities. The development of gender-sensitive education is presented as a key factor in shaping a tolerant, fair, and inclusive society.*

Keywords: *gender sensitivity; equal opportunities; higher education; gender equality; non-discrimination; gender policy; gender approach.*

It is worth starting by clarifying what gender sensitivity actually means and why it matters in the educational process. The Guidelines on Integrating Gender Approaches in the Development of Regulatory Acts define a gender-sensitive approach as one that takes into account the specific social, cultural, economic, political, and other characteristics of the living conditions and needs of women and men. In simpler terms, it means that an educational institution does not ignore the distinct needs of both genders, but recognizes and addresses them to ensure a more equitable and supportive environment for everyone [4, c. 8].

Why do we focus our research specifically on the university educational process? In my view, student life serves as a concentrated model of real life — a dynamic period when we experience the good, the bad, the dull, and the inspiring all at once.

During these years, students build extensive social networks, encounter countless opportunities, and most importantly, form their own values, opinions, and beliefs. It is crucial to ensure that the right developmental directions take root during this stage — respect for others, openness to dialogue, and readiness to engage actively in the social contract. Otherwise, as a society, we risk unconsciously nurturing toxic masculinity, rigid gender roles, and gender-based discrimination.

I believe that gender sensitivity is a continuous and systematic effort shared by both educators and learners. To practice it effectively, one must begin with self-awareness — by transforming one's own perception of the world. It means refusing to categorize people by gender into “strong,” “weak,” “gentle,” or “manly,” and instead involving men in advancing gender equality [3, c. 36]. It also requires abandoning stereotypical images and learning to perceive reality as it truly is.

The next step involves transforming university policy. Gender aspects should be considered when creating or modifying institutional structures, assessing students,

developing syllabi and methodological materials, and introducing gender-sensitive courses. Such courses can enhance understanding of why gender neutrality does not always work, while also fostering universal human values. In higher education institutions — especially those with a legal focus, such as the one where I study — it is also essential to engage teachers in discussions about the university's gender sensitivity policy to prevent discriminatory or sexist incidents in the classroom (3, 500

Finally, the Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men” emphasizes that educational institutions must promote a culture of gender equality, nonviolent behavior, mutual respect, and equal sharing of professional and family responsibilities between women and men. In line with this, the Strategy for Implementing Gender Equality in Education until 2030, developed within Ukraine's commitments under the international Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality, provides for the mandatory anti-discrimination review of all educational content and the implementation of gender audits in educational institutions [3, c. 133].

A positive step toward promoting gender equality in higher education is the establishment of the position of a Gender Equality Advisor. For instance, such a position exists at the Donetsk State University of Internal Affairs. According to the Regulations on the Organization of the Work of the Gender Equality Advisor, the main tasks of the advisor include implementing state policy in the field of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men and preventing gender-based violence; integrating gender approaches into the University's activities — particularly in the educational process and internal staffing policy; and identifying effective ways to address gender-related challenges in management by providing recommendations to the Rector [2 c. 75].

The final stage involves assessing the existing mechanisms of influence within the university — how sexism and discrimination can be prevented, counteracted, or addressed within the faculty environment. Typically, these principles are reflected in codes of ethics and academic integrity, though the titles of such documents may vary between institutions. Analyzing these acts helps develop a clear understanding of the rights guaranteed to students and the procedures to follow when encountering discriminatory or sexist behavior.

References

1. Гендерні стандарти сучасної освіти: збірка рекомендацій. Частина 2. / ред. рада Семиколєнова О.І., Мелещенко Т.В., Данилевська О.М., Бака Т.В., Вихор С.Т. — Київ: Програма розвитку ООН в Україні, 2011. — 259 с.
2. Васильченко О. І. Гендерно-чутливе середовище як умова формування гендерної культури студентів університету // Педагогіка формування творчої особистості у вищій і загально-освітній школах. Вип. 39 (92), 2014. С. 500-503.
3. Марценюк Т. Гендерна рівність та недискримінація на практиці. Київ : Вид. дім “КОМОРА”, 2021.
4. Плетка О. Т. Гендерна чутливість в освіті: управлінський аспект: методичні рекомендації для керівників закладів освіти [Електронне видання] / О. Т. Плетка. — К.: Талком, 2023. — 27 с.