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Vasanthan R¹

Ancymol Joy²

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¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, National College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli,

²Research Scholar, Department of English, National College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli,



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Vasanthan R¹, Ancymol Joy²

¹.Assistant Professor, Department of English, National College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli,

².Research Scholar, Department of English, National College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli,

Email: vasanthleut@gmail.com, srancym@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Literature has always been a key component in the development of children's linguistic skills as well as their moral awareness. This study will look at how literature can be used to teach gender awareness as well as other aspects of learning to literature students. A survey was conducted using a series of questions to learn about literature students' perceptions about the use of literature for emotional refinement. Based on the replies, a thorough evaluation has been conducted, and suggestions for classroom discussion, as well as the possibilities for further research, have been provided.

Keywords: Literature, Gender equality, Gender Sensitivity, Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature teaching is being introduced at the school level, right from primary education for teaching grammar and language. Literature has long been a subject of study at the secondary or tertiary level in many nations. Still, it has received little attention concerning the positive effects on learners that it is capable. For instance, one of the pressing issues that we have today is gender equality and gender sensitivity, and this awareness can be better achieved through the support of appropriate literature. It is generally believed that it can be achieved through various sensitization drives, training, workshops, programs, etc. Gender sensitivity refers to the understanding of people concerning the role of the sex according to the society that he or she belongs. Ozumba (2005) states that gender sensitivity indicates the level of consciousness and the assessment of the need to sustain a reasonable level of gender difference between men and women. Sandra Harding in *The Science Question in Feminism* pinpoints how society treats the concept of gender from the beginning of human history. She explains the notion of gender that "Gender is an ancient symbol-system, cultures use to understand and to organize both human behavior and non-human entities" (Harding, 1986). As her words indicate, gender is an age-old concept that society has exercised to organize both men and women's role in human society. Nandia Dutta and Sumitral Jha (2014) articulate the concept of gender as that gender as a long-standing symbol system that societies have applied to interpret and organize both human and nonhuman behaviours. Sally Engle Merry (2009) considers "gender as a way of describing identities that are socially constructed" and rooted in culture (Aaltio and Mills, 2002). The world is progressing in technology and advancing almost in all fields. However, there is still a necessity to make people come out of the social setup that is gender-based where women meet inequality compared to men (Hamberg 2008). Kate Millet in her work, *Sexual Politics* provides a detailed explanation of the gender concept that "Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or 'masculine,' roles and that women always have the subordinate, or 'feminine ones'". Thus, the traditional patriarchal structure emphasizes the dominant responsibilities of the masculine world and the subservient responsibilities of the female society throughout the ages.

As one of the primary goals of education is to liberate individuals from irrational practices and attitudes, educational content needs to focus on the importance of helping the students understand the essentials of gender equality. Weitzman et al. (1972) suggest that by the time they enter kindergarten, the youngster can distinguish between the sex role preferences. It is also obvious that literature has the best content in the best form to learn about things in general and society in particular. However, dealing with literature in the classroom is often overshadowed by the story narration part of it then affecting the character of an individual or helping towards rational and unbiased thinking. Lizbeth Goodman and Alison Smith (1996) believe that the stories and principles that are unravelled through children's literature, frame the viewpoints of children from their early childhood. They explain it as "The stories told and the morals which unfold help to shape our view as we learn

to read and take meaning from what we read". Therefore, the teaching of literature and literary texts could be further trimmed to positively influence the children from the start. This paper reviews the possible ways of choosing literary content and taking them to the students to positively affect their minds.

The first and foremost thing about teaching literature and creating awareness on sensitivity among the children is choosing the right content and avoiding the types of content which will indirectly promote the social construct of gender significance. Dr. Montessori (1969) emphasizes the importance of education that disrupts the barriers of social violence related to gender issues as, "an education from birth that brings about a revolution that eliminates every violence". Literature here has to be scanned for the stereotype roles played by males and females, which would go according to society's way. The second essential thing is handling the content effectively at the time of classroom discussion. Implementing gender stereotype reflections into classrooms empowers students to question misconceptions in school and society (Taylor & Ligozat, 2019). People belonging to several generations over the years usually enjoy literary content prescribed for children. It is essential to note here that along with the development of the human mind, our understanding about ourselves and society also changes. In this context, it is essential to upgrade the literary contents based on the present social set up or with a futuristic perspective. For example, the typical portrayal of women who are always in need of support from men and a man as someone who helps women presented to be in need has to be reworked as it is not how the world is at present. When discussing the content, the teacher needs to ensure that, even unconsciously, they do not go back to the normal understanding of gender roles.

Though the term literature is usually given to works that have a universal appeal, it is not always the same when it comes to portraying gender roles. Nor can it be ignored just because of not giving equal importance to the characterisation of men and women in the work of art. Readers of any particular time need to travel time if required to the past are to the future as per the requirement. It is because beautiful literary works are meant to outlive time. It will only be a sensible approach if we begin to analyse the characterisation of men and women in the works, as one of the main aims of any literary creation is to satisfy the needs of the contemporary readers. So, better reading of the literary works in the light of the context, cultural elements involved and emotional attributes will help reveal the characterisation of men and women as the representatives of a particular age with limitations in their roles. In this way, students will be able to visualise the characters as the creations with liberties and limitations of a particular age then as the ideal ones for all ages. This will also lead to a biased understanding of the characters influenced by the cultural and emotional attributes of the reader. The following paragraphs will analyse the essentials of dealing with a literary work in the classrooms to understand gender pictures in literature and come out of gender bias.

1.1 Research Questions

1. Is there any general awareness about the use of literature?
2. Do students learn about gender sensitivity in the class rooms?
3. Is there any special importance given for gender understanding in the class rooms?

2. Methodology

The study was conducted with the responses of 50 students. In order to support the study, a questionnaire has been prepared with six questions related to the objective of the study and the demographic details of the respondents including their name, Email ID, and age. A Goole Form has been created and distributed among the students. Instead of giving the multiple choices questions, the respondents were asked to supply their responses in the form of short answers to indirectly understand their perceptions about the topic and to get a clear design to draw the conclusion of the study. Data analysis has been done with the help of the graphical representation of the responses given by the participants. The responses are categorised according to the understanding and responses of the respondents.

2.1 Participants

The participants of the survey were 50 in number: Degree and M. Phil students of the English Department of National College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu. The participants of the study come under three categories of age such as 17-20, 21-25 and above 25.

2.2 Data Collection

A questionnaire has been prepared through Google Form to understand about the students' knowledge about gender sensitivity and the class room practices regarding the importance of the topic. The responses were categorised and analysed with the help of graphical representation.

2.3 Data Analysis

The questions given to analyse the study are given below.

- Why do you think literature is important?

- What are the benefits of learning literature?
- What is it that you believed to have gained through literature?
- Do you think literature will change one’s personality?
- Do you feel that you can understand about the emotions of people because of literature?
- Is there anything you learnt about gender sensitivity in your class?

The analysis and interpretation of the study based on the graphical representation are given below.

1. Why do you think literature is important?

Table 1: The reason of the importance of literature

Importance of literature	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Mirror of life	25	50
To understand people	10	20
To identify emotion	8	16
To understand language	7	14

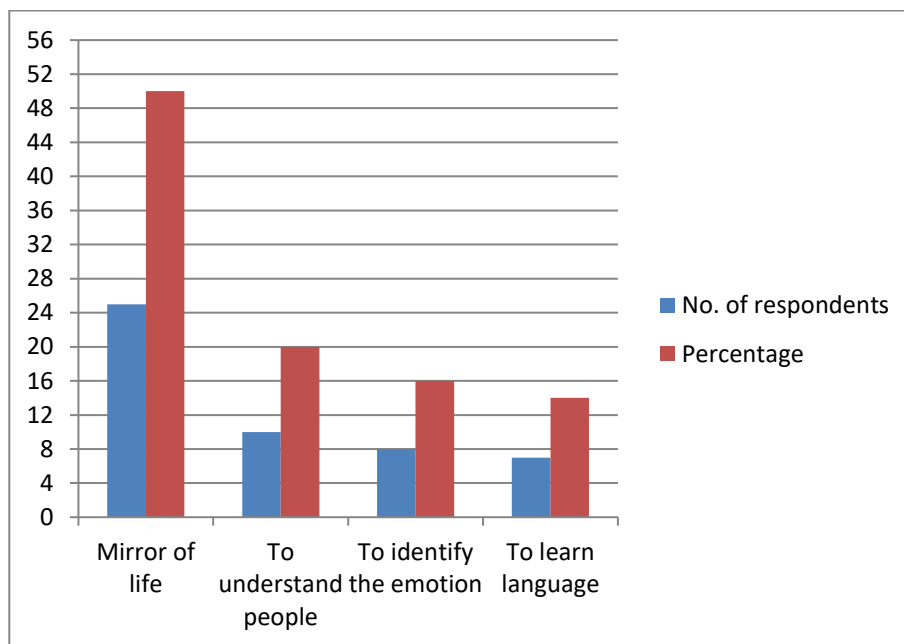


Fig.1: Percentage distribution of the reason of the importance of literature

According to the above graph, 50% of students agreed that literature is important because it is the mirror of life whereas 20% of respondent have the opinion that literature is helpful to understand people. 16% and 14% of the students provided their suggestion that literature is helpful to identify the emotions and to understand language respectively.

2. What are the benefits of learning literature?

Table 2: The benefits of learning literature

Benefits of literature	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Creativity	15	30
To understand the emotion of others	7	14
To understand the personality of others	22	44
Language acquisition	6	12

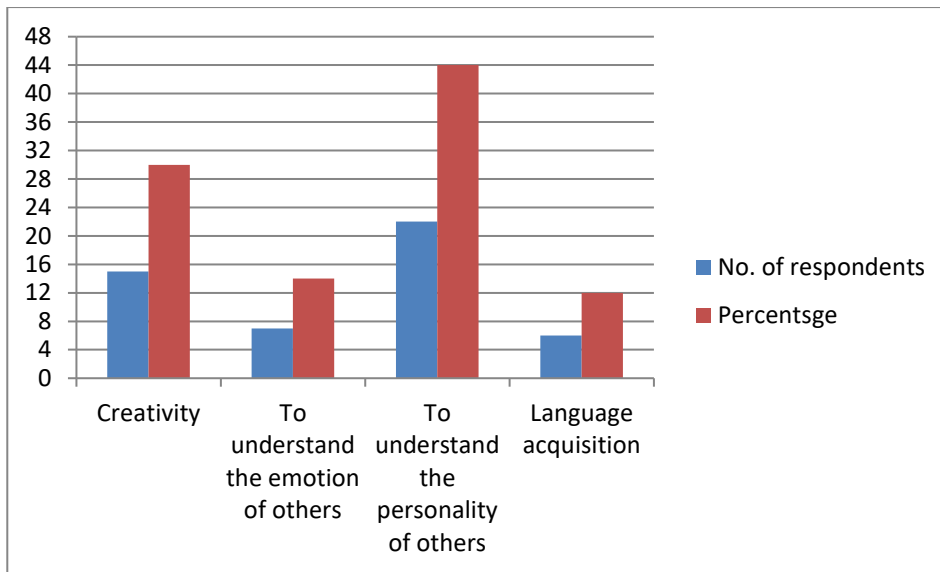


Fig.2: Percentage distribution of the benefits of learning literature

From the graph it is clear that 44% of the students agreed about the benefits of learning literature so as to understand the personality of others. For 30%, literature is to build up their creativity whereas 14% and 12% of students provided their opinion as literature helps to understand the personality of others and for the language acquisition respectively.

3. What is it that you believed to have gained through literature?

Table 3: The profit through literature

Profit through literature knowledge	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Empathy	18	36
Entertainment	7	14
Getting information	4	8
Understanding of life	21	42

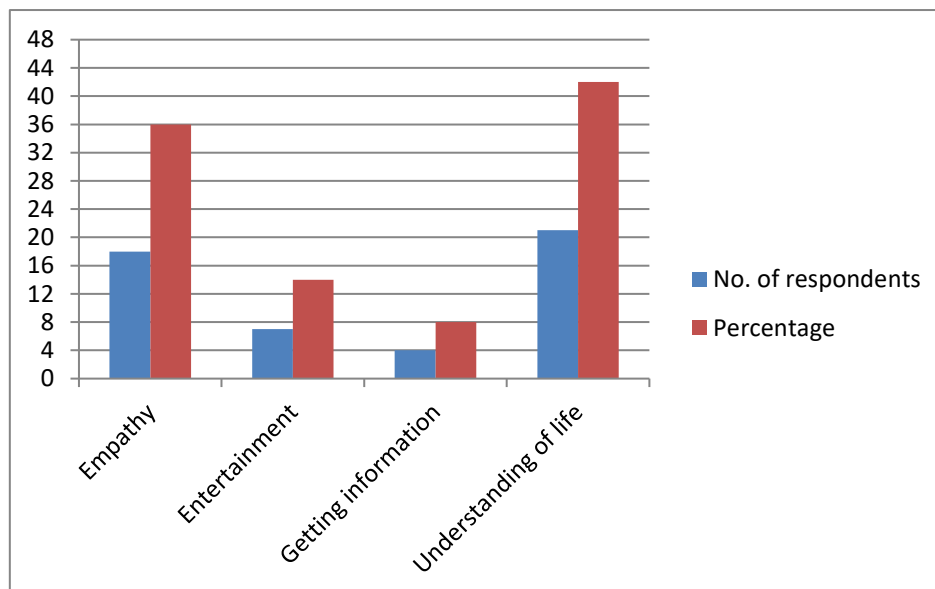


Fig.3: Percentage distribution of the profit of literature

As the graph shows, literature knowledge helps 42% students to understand life of others, but 36% get empathy through literature. For 14% and 8% of students, literature is for entertainment and for getting information respectively.

4. Do you think literature will change one's personality?

Table 4: Relationship between literature and personality

Relationship between literature and personality	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	38	76
No	8	16
Can't say	4	8

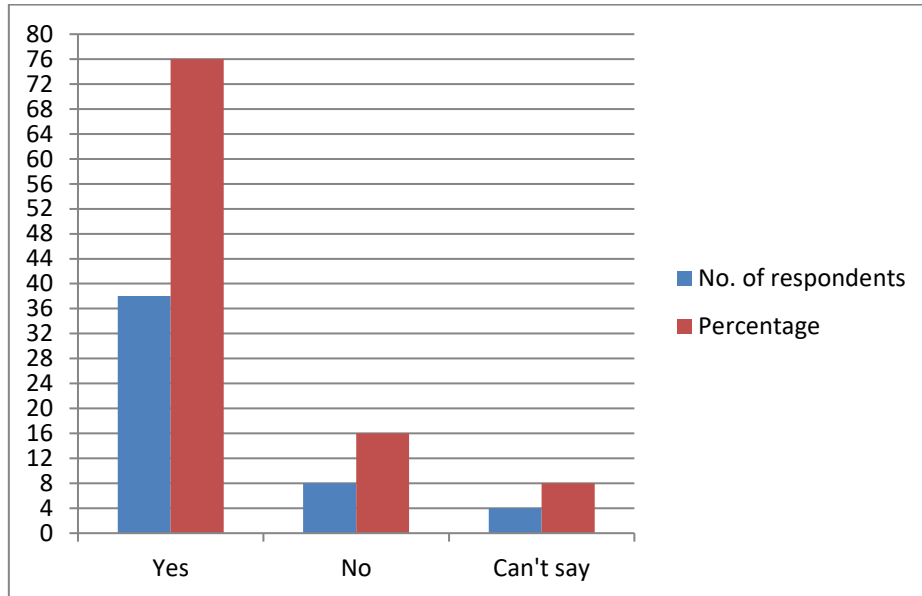


Fig.4: Percentage distribution of the relationship between literature and personality

According to the opinion of majority (76%), literature has the potentiality to change the personality, but 16% rejected the idea.

5. Do you feel that you can understand about the emotions of people because of literature?

Table 5: The understanding about the emotions of people because of literature

Emotions of people and literature	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	34	68
No	10	20
Can't say	6	16

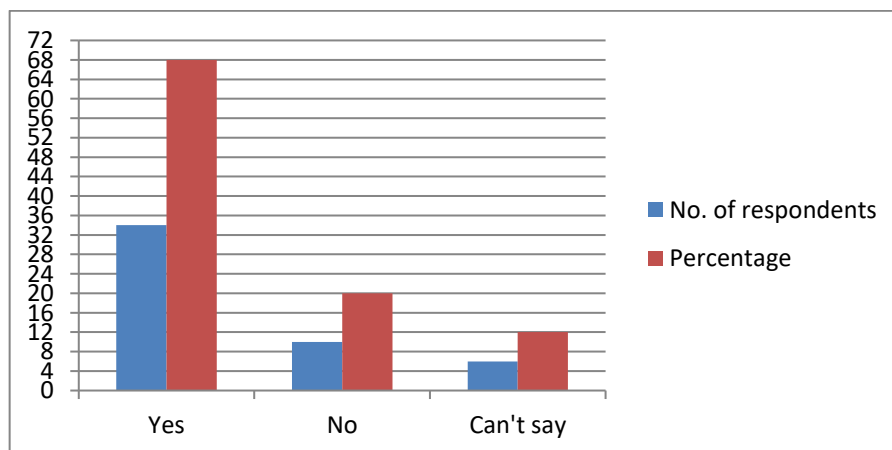


Fig.5: Percentage distribution of the understanding about the emotions of people because of literature

The above graph shows that majority of students (68%) have the attitude that literature is a medium to understand the emotions of people, whereas 20 % disagreed to this opinion. 6% respondents didn't give a proper feedback to this question.

6. Is there anything you learnt about gender sensitivity in your class?

Table 6: The teaching of gender sensitivity in the class rooms

Teaching of gender sensitivity in the class rooms.	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	39	78
No	11	22

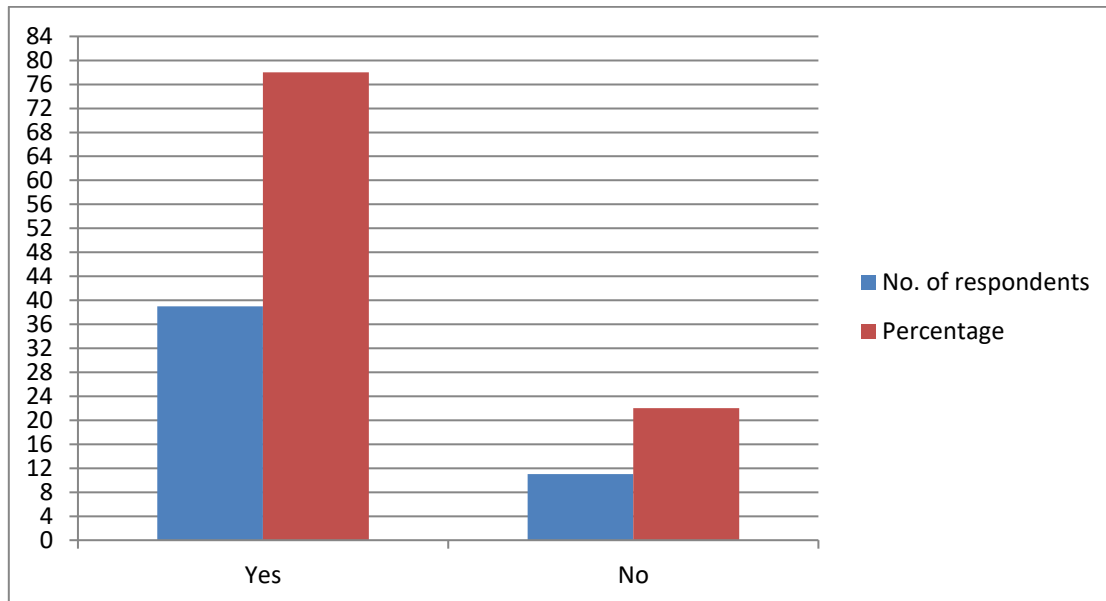


Fig.6: Percentage distribution of the teaching of gender sensitivity in the class rooms.

As the graph suggests, 78% of the respondents support that they can acquire some knowledge about gender sensitivity from the class room, but 22% of the students are against the concept.

3.RESULTS

The study, based on survey, tries to give answer to the research questions with ample suggestions. From the survey, it is observed that the respondents have different opinions about the importance of literature and the key role of literature to create awareness about gender sensitivity among students in the class rooms. The detailed analysis provides the information that literature links various dimensions of life of people and stretches its hands to build up skills and emotions from the childhood level. In order to construct personality development and gender sensitivity, the class room activities and learning styles have pivotal roles in the academic level. People believe that literature could help to understand the key issues of both personal and private realms of the society. Class room is a platform to raise consciousness about gender sensitivity among the youngsters.

4.DISCUSSION

Literature has the potential to engage people in emotional contexts and help them drive better rational conclusions. It is essential to plan a lecture and involve learners with the target emotional refinement. In this way, gender sensitivity needs a structural approach for the involvement of the students and for probing deeply into gender related literary contexts. The possible ways have been presented in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Contextualisation of Literature

Author of a literary text presents his literary work with situations conceived of the past, present, or even future. The author also determines the roles of the characters based on the historical pieces of evidence or at times, they could determine themselves, the roles as per the requirement of the work conceived, revealing them beforehand to the readers. It is an agreement established with the readers, and the rest is determined by it. The duties and responsibilities of the characters may very well be as per the historical pieces of evidence or as per the author's

characterisation. While dealing with literary works and characters, it is essential for a teacher to help the students understand the factors that determine the characterisation and the roles of the characters as male or female. The enlightenment of individuals through education enhances the perceptions of the needs of society “there is also a high regard for the personality, responsibility and autonomy of individual” (Kraus, 2019.). These characters based on the past or the present could be fictional and based on historical evidence. Characters could also be conceived because of the author's vision about the future. In this way, literary characters need to be analysed beyond the context, keeping in mind that their roles may be real, fictional, or even futuristic. This type of contextual analysis will help the students be aware of the facts involved in characterisation and not give too much importance to it and be biased.

4.2. Culturalising the Content

Priorities in the lives of human beings vary according to the influence of the culture, which, “includes all means of human survival” (Abraham, 1973), that they belong to. It is also possible that a reader is culturalised while reading and at times they pick up only what is culturally relevant to them. Therefore, the teacher needs to help the students be aware of their cultural priorities that they carry along. It is also essential for students to learn to keep the cultural elements completely away while reading a text, especially while learning about gender roles and keeping personal prejudices away. Another fact is that presentation of the elements of culture in the text is so complex that the authenticity is very hard to determine and it is, in fact, created by the author more often than not. In this way, aligning with the roles of gender because of the cultural similarities and dissimilarities can be made known to the students. The students can thus be facilitated to handle the text and evolve as potential scholars.

4.3. Moving away from Emotion to Reason

Passion is the base for any literary creation, and it requires a lot of emotional investment in the creation of literary content. The character created by the author and the plots appeal to the emotions of the people. While reading or watching a drama, individuals undergo related emotional experiences in their imagination. It is also possible for the readers to get emotionally attracted to the characters especially, gender roles, mostly because of their personal experiences and expectations. Any kind of role other than that of the normal practice is enjoyed as something additional for people's amusement. At times this extra characterization gives pleasure to the readers because of the variety. While teaching literature, it is essential to make this fact known by the students, which will help them know about the emotions at work in literary content. In other words, students should be made to experience and learn that they could emotionally take sides with the characters and roles. It is important for them to reason out as individuals capable of keeping away from emotions for better judgment.

5. CONCLUSION

The role of education plays a pivotal role in promoting gender equality among youngsters and demolishing gender-based discrimination in society. Literature offers the best platform to discuss the issues related to gender among the students. Taking the literary content appropriate to students and following it up with thought-provoking discussions, as mentioned above, will re-establish the role of literature among the youth and help them grow with a broad outlook over the society in particular and the world in general. Conclusions related to the study throw light on the area of class room where students can attain the ground information about gender sensitivity through literature. Apart from the knowledge acquisition, literature study widens the path of students to grasp the knowledge of personality development, understanding the life and emotions of others and skill development from the childhood stage. Literature prompts children to interrogate long-held impartial attitude and unequal treatment of human beings. Thus, education is a crucial determinant and institutional support that can effectively inculcate gender sensitivity that will guide a wide range of profits in human society. The present study is a leading one to impart modern academic levels to uphold the remedies of social issues and gender inequalities. As a local and international issue, gender sensitivity should be brought into public observation through proper education system and teaching methods. Literature study will help students to visualise gender impartiality through better reasoning and deliberation.

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