

## Research Article

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# Gender Sensitivity of Teacher Education Curricula in the Republic of Croatia

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**Abstract:** The research aims to determine whether and to what extent teacher education curricula in Croatia are gender sensitive and to examine the status of courses dealing with gender-related topics. For this purpose, a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the seven teacher education curricula was conducted. The analysis was based on Bernstein's theory of classification and framing rules, which explains how control and power over knowledge and curriculum are exercised by selecting knowledge (from scientific disciplines) for the curriculum, design rules, and curriculum implementation. The findings indicate that gender-based knowledge is not given high status and significance as a teaching subject. Gender-related topics are included in teacher education curricula by weak framing and classification rules. While there are several advantages to such a curriculum design, weak classification and framing rules can lead to a lack of compliance in education on gender-related topics. A vague structure can interfere with students' understanding of basic concepts and their interconnectedness. Students can choose courses based on personal interest rather than necessity and importance. Recommendations are made to achieve a higher level of gender sensitivity in teacher education curricula, which would contribute to better preparation of teachers for the education of children on gender equality.

**Keywords:** classification and framing rules, Bernstein's theory, teacher education curricula in Croatia, gender equality, content analysis

## 1 Introduction

The main objectives of the European Union Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025) include stopping gender-based violence, breaking down gender stereotypes, abolishing gender disparities in the labour market, achieving equal participation in different sectors of the economy, combating gender pay and pension gaps, closing gender gaps in the field of care, and achieving gender balance in decision-making and policy (European Commission, 2020). The governments of the Member States of the European Union (EU) initiate the implementation of this strategy at the national and local levels. Education is considered one of the partnering sectors. Similarly, the chapter *Prevention* (Art. 14 of the Istanbul Convention (European Council, 2011) to which the Republic of Croatia (Croatia) is a signatory, refers to the education sector and emphasises the need to include gender topics in curricula at primary, secondary, and higher education levels while accentuating the importance of using teaching materials on issues of gender equality, non-stereotypical gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in personal relationships, and the right to personal integrity in a manner adapted to the developmental abilities of individuals at certain levels of education. Furthermore, UNESCO's vision of gender equality is in line with other relevant international documents, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which lists gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a separate goal – the sustainable development goal (SDG 5) and a prerequisite for achieving other sustainable development goals (Lucas-Palacios, García-Luque, & Delgado-Algarra, 2022). According to the National Plan for Gender Equality for the period up to 2027, gender-sensitive education is a priority; i.e. it is necessary to increase the sensitivity of the education system (early, pre-school, primary, and secondary school) to gender equality issues and non-stereotyped selection of education programmes at all levels.

Following these policies, gender equality plans for the forthcoming periods have been adopted at the level

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of universities and faculties in the Republic of Croatia. For example, the University of Rijeka Gender Equality Plan 2021–2025 represents “a strategic action document of the University and its constituents that provides mechanisms for achieving an institutional culture of gender equality and diversity, integrating the gender perspective into study programmes and transferring knowledge about gender equality to the community, for improving the quality of life and work at the University, but also for strengthening gender equality in career development – in scientific and artistic research (University of Rijeka, 2021).” Similarly, the goals of the Gender Equality Plan of the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb 2022–2027 indicate that the promotion of gender sensitivity in all faculty bodies is mandatory, which will be achieved by educating students and employees on issues of gender and gender discrimination (Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, 2022).

Accordingly, it is necessary to examine the alignment of the European and national policy of the Republic of Croatia on gender equality with the teacher education curricula, which will play a major role in teaching gender issues to students in schools. Since gender-sensitive curricula in different studies contribute to achieving gender balance in different segments of society and achieving gender equality, it is necessary to thoroughly analyse teacher education curricula to determine the relevant representation of courses, teaching units, and literature on gender issues. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the extent to which the teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia are designed in a manner that promotes gender equality, which is the main task of this article. *Teacher education curricula* refers to all course/subject curricula of teacher education at university institutions/faculties.

## 2 Theoretical Framework and Research Overview

The theoretical basis of research on gender sensitivity of the teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia is Bernstein’s theory of codes (1975) based on its application in the analysis of the curricula of sociology and related disciplines at English universities (Abbas, 2019). The analysis implemented a set of concepts related to codes in the field of education which provided the significance and status of gender topics in the teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia. These concepts include *codes*, *classification rules*, and rules of design and implementation of curricula (*framing rules*). According to Bernstein (2000, p. 109), codes are concepts that *explicitly or implicitly select and*

*integrate relevant meanings and translate power and control into communication*. This means that codes in the field of education represent meanings, i.e., attributed features of the corpus of knowledge (e.g. not/important) and its recontextualisation in the curricula through the design and implementation of curricula in different educational contexts. Codes that generate gender inequalities (in the curriculum) are constituted through *classification* rules that give them *power* and through *framing* rules that allow *control* over the curriculum. In other words, *classification* and *framing rules* allow the application of the concept of codes to analyse how control and power over knowledge and curriculum are exercised through the selection of knowledge (from scientific disciplines) for the curriculum and the rules of design and implementation of curricula.

The rules of classification, which are hierarchically established, attribute different meanings to certain types of knowledge and thus determine their position in the curriculum. For example, in the case of gender knowledge, they determine whether gender topics will be included in the curriculum and in what manner, whether they are a relevant subject of study, identify the creators of knowledge on gender topics and the prospective recipients of the knowledge on gender (in)equality. The concept of classification is used to examine power relations between categories by focusing on the degree of maintenance boundaries between different areas of knowledge (Bernstein, 1975), and they refer to the organisation of knowledge into formal categories or courses. If a strong classification is applied, there are strictly defined boundaries between disciplines or areas of knowledge resulting in a clear division of knowledge and associated topics. In this case, it is established which subject covers a particular topic or area and has its own strictly defined goals and content. In the context of gender topics, the classification determines whether this content will be integrated into pre-existing courses or whether separate courses dealing exclusively with gender issues will be offered. If the classification is weaker, the boundaries between disciplines are more flexible, and content and topics often overlap. This may occur in the curricula that promote an interdisciplinary approach, where content from different disciplines is integrated to provide a more comprehensive approach to gender issues. Strong and weak classifications should be seen as part of the spectrum because there are a few variations between these two extremes. In curricula, elements of both approaches can be combined, and the boundaries between disciplines or individual courses can be flexible, depending on the context and aims of education.

*Framing* refers to the rules of structuring/organisation and curriculum implementation which, within the university context, determine the time and pace of implementation

of the curriculum, teachers suitable for teaching the course, and the type of knowledge that can be taught, as well as the level of study (Abbas, 2019, pp. 70–71). In the case of strong framing, students have less flexibility in choosing the courses in certain semesters or years of study, while weak framing allows greater flexibility to students in adjusting their schedule and pace of study. Hence, if courses dealing entirely with gender topics or containing teaching units that include gender topics are compulsory, strong framing rules are applied. If such courses are elective and students can choose the year of study to attend these courses, this is an example of weak framing.

If framing is strong, only professionals specialised in Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies, who have knowledge of gender perspectives, history, social dynamics, and critical gender-related analyses, can teach courses and/or teaching units related to gender topics. In the Croatian Ordinance on Scientific and Artistic Areas, Fields, and Branches (National Council for Science in Croatia, 2009), Gender Studies are recognised as a separate field in the Interdisciplinary Area. Therefore, teachers who are predominantly engaged in gender issues are expected to publish scientific/professional articles and to advance (to higher scientific and teaching titles) in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies. These qualifications make these teachers the most competent for teaching gender topics. Conversely, in the case of weak framing rules, there may be more flexibility and cooperation between course holders (from different scientific fields and disciplines) in teaching gender topics.

ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits represent a standardised measure for quantifying the learning load and learning volume (lectures, seminars, exercises, independent work, exams, and similar activities) of students to successfully pass a particular course or enrol in a higher year of study (European Commission, 2015). Strong framing suggests that courses with a higher number of ECTS credits (e.g. with five or six credits) are usually selected in the lower years of study; i.e., they are oriented towards fundamental concepts that had usually been unknown to students until then. Therefore, the acquisition of such knowledge will take more time, and analogously, courses including such knowledge should have a higher learning load (i.e., more ECTS credits).

In addition, in the case of strong framing, the control is carried out by academic specialists who transfer knowledge to students (Abbas, 2019). Thus, in disciplines with strong classifications and framing, it will be more difficult to transform the curriculum. Where the framing is weak, the power of design is also vested in students who can introduce changes to existing curricula and challenge classifications. Abbas (2019, p. 69) states that *Bernstein's analytical*

*framework is a useful analytical tool for detecting biases in knowledge and practice and for identifying strategies for change and transformation, as well as an important resource that can help educators and researchers seeking to understand the role of their disciplines in producing dominance and in thinking through ways of transforming disciplines to more inclusive forms.*

In Croatia, and at the global level, there is a relatively small amount of analysis of curricula of higher education institutions and content within the mentioned curricula that include gender topics. The analysis of the representation of women/gender topics in the curricula of the selected university institutions in the Republic of Croatia was conducted by Barada in 2016 and indicated the complete neglect of gender topics in the curricula of some study programmes (Barada, 2017). The results of the research (Barada, 2017) show that Croatian higher education institutions insufficiently promote gender equality, which is considered their important role as highlighted by national and European policies. The findings showed that in the academic year 2015/2016, in 26 study programmes and study groups, 20 courses explicitly stated women/gender topics in the title, with prevalently elective courses (19) and only one compulsory course (Barada, 2017). There are a total of 17 lecturers who teach women/gender topics, while only two male lecturers, according to these data, conduct complete courses on women/gender topics (Barada, 2017). Although the results confirm the evident lack of compulsory courses in this field, only one out of seven teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia was included in the research (Barada, 2017), so the results cannot be generally applied to all teacher faculties in Croatia. A similar study was conducted in Sweden, but only lower secondary school teacher education curricula (von Brömssen & Risenfors, 2021) was analysed. Based on the results, the authors concluded that gender topics do not seem to be a significant area of knowledge at teacher faculties, but they also indicate that there are significant differences between the universities involved in the research in terms of the attention attributed to these topics (von Brömssen & Risenfors, 2021). In Sweden, it has been observed in the past that perspectives related to gender and sexuality are severely neglected in the field of teacher education (Rosenberg & Jakobsen, 2008). Other studies show that teachers employed at the faculties for teacher education have different views and often show a lack of knowledge about the concept of gender as well as about gender equality (Arreman & Weiner, 2007; Gannerud, 2009). Research conducted in Spain has shown that students of teacher education faculties do not have enough knowledge on gender topics, and it has been recommended that courses on gender and gender

equality issues should be included in the curricula as compulsory rather than elective, which is commonly the case (Lucas-Palacios et al., 2022). In addition, it has been stated that each university should organise complementary gender training activities for students, teaching staff, and administrative and service staff at colleges (Lucas-Palacios et al., 2022). It has been recommended that gender perspective should be introduced as a transversal content of teacher education curricula or the content of separate courses and that quality feminist education should be offered at universities to encourage teachers to include this perspective in teaching, regardless of whether it is a specific topic within a particular course or a transversal topic (Lucas-Palacios et al., 2022). Similar recommendations were proposed in the Gender Equality Plans at the level of universities and faculties in the Republic of Croatia, most of which emphasise the need for educating students and employees on these topics. Research conducted in Finland shows that in a situation where universities are under pressure due to a lack of financial resources and teachers are under pressure due to a lack of time, education on gender topics is the first to be abolished, which is partly due to adopting neoliberal values at universities (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). In the EU countries, there are many problems related to the lack of gender topics in the teacher education curricula, and these problems are even more pronounced in traditional societies. The findings of a survey conducted in Turkey showed that future teachers mostly have stereotypical perceptions (Gündoğani & Taşdere, 2021). According to the authors, this may be associated with the fact that gender issues are underrepresented in the education of teachers in Turkey. As a result, future teachers do not develop an awareness of gender differences (Gündoğani & Taşdere, 2021). In this context, the authors propose that teacher education curricula include education on gender issues, which will affect the change of perception of the roles of women and men in society and emphasise that education is the main driver of social change in terms of gender equality (Gündoğani & Taşdere, 2021). Indian studies (e.g. Naqvi, 2022) indicate that teacher education curricula only rarely provide an opportunity to learn about practical skills that would contribute to reducing gender inequalities in the classroom. They point to the need to include gender-conscious politics in the university curricula and to the necessity of incorporating critical feminist pedagogy into teacher education to make it more gender-sensitive and to promote gender sensitisation (Naqvi, 2022). A survey conducted in the African state of Eswatini (which included students of teacher studies, university teachers, employees of the Ministry of Education and analysed official documents of educational institutions) showed that teacher education institutions reinforce the dominant patriarchal culture, while

the curricula express male narratives and discourses of male knowledge (Lumadi & Shongwe, 2010). Although women are not entirely neglected in teaching materials, their presence and narratives are reduced to inferior roles (Lumadi & Shongwe, 2010). There is a gap between theory and practice regarding the gender sensitivity of teachers at the faculties for teacher education (Lumadi & Shongwe, 2010). Similarly, insufficient awareness of gender issues and gender equality in Taiwan is partly due to university education, which ignores the importance of these topics (Shih & Wang, 2022).

The findings of research conducted in the EU and beyond suggest that most countries do not have quality education on gender issues within the framework of university training of primary and secondary school teachers, that university teachers are not sufficiently trained to teach these topics and that most of the offered courses are elective. It is evident that there is still scarce research on the gender sensitivity of curricula and that it covers different aspects of gender sensitivity depending on the country or educational context within which it is conducted. In this context, it derives that research on the gender sensitivity of curricula in higher education is extremely rare. To the best of the authors' knowledge, only one research (Barada, 2017) that examined the gender sensitivity of curricula at different faculties of the University of Zagreb was conducted. Bearing in mind the importance of gender education of students trained to teach pupils in primary/compulsory education, this research is focused on teacher education throughout the Republic of Croatia, and it includes curricula analysis of seven universities. In this sense, it is one of the first, if not the very first research on this subject in Croatia.

### 3 Research Objective and Questions

The main goal of this research was to determine the significance and status attributed to gender topics in the curricula of faculties for primary teacher education in the Republic of Croatia. Research of the knowledge structure that is transferred through curricula is relevant because the content of transferred knowledge affects student awareness, including the formation of their awareness of gender (in)equality in society. In terms of teacher education curricula, their content structure and organisation are even more important because the future students from these faculties will transfer acquired knowledge to school pupils; hence, they should develop sensitivity to gender issues.



In line with this objective, this research attempted to answer the following questions:

- (1) How many gender courses/teaching units are represented in the teacher education curricula?
- (2) To which areas of knowledge do gender topics in the curricula belong?
- (3) Which courses mention gender topics?
- (4) What kind of teaching status have courses (compulsory or elective) where gender topics are mentioned?
- (5) What is the teaching load of courses involving gender topics and how many ECTS credits do they have?
- (6) How often is gender-related literature (compulsory or elective) cited in the curricula?
- (7) How often are women authors of gender-related papers or books cited in the curricula?
- (8) How often are course holders women and do they have qualifications i.e., publish dominantly in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies?

Surveys of gender (in)equality in higher education curricula in Croatia (Barada, 2017) and other countries (Abbas, 2019; von Brömssen & Risenfors, 2021) point to the underrepresentation of gender topics. This study assumes that gender topics will also be underrepresented in the curricula of teacher education faculties in Croatia.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Research Procedures

The applied research method is content analysis where a quantitative and qualitative approach was combined. Official documents of teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia for the academic year 2022/2023 were collected and analysed (Supplements 1–7). The analysis included official documents of teacher education curricula at the following faculties: the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split, the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka, the Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, the Department of Teacher and Preschool Teacher Education of the University of Zadar, the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Slavonski Brod, and the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula. It should be noted that the documents contained a list of compulsory and elective courses for the academic year 2022/2023, the teaching load of courses, the number of ECTS credits, the study year in which the course was offered, a

brief description of the course, and a literature list of each course and the course holder name. The documents were mainly available on the websites of higher education institutions (Supplements 1–7) where these curricula are delivered, and for documents which were not available, the relevant faculty administrations were asked to provide the necessary data for the purpose of conducting this research. The Croatian Research Information System (CroRIS) also contains data on the extent to which the course holders published scientific and professional articles in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies, which is an indicator of the extent to which they are qualified to teach gender topics.

### 4.2 Operationalisation of Concepts and Analytical Procedures

Considering that the concept of codes works through *classification* and *framing* rules, these concepts were operationalised in the research as follows.

*The initial* step was to examine *classification rules* by analysing how many courses dealing with gender-related topics in the teacher education curricula are represented and whether gender topics are interdisciplinary or a separate area in the curricula. In addition, the analysis attempted to identify the dominant social groups (women or men) in creating knowledge on gender topics, i.e. authoring gender-related publications (in the list of literature for students) and identifying course holders.

*The framing rules* were examined by analysing the level of studies at which gender topics are taught, the status of the gender-related courses (compulsory or elective), suitable teachers of gender topics (whether teachers dominantly publish their articles in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies or not), the teaching load, and the number of ECTS credits related to these courses.

The data were collected on the number of courses whose curricula deal entirely with gender topics or include teaching units related to these topics. Furthermore, the collected data indicate to what extent gender issues are represented in the teacher education curricula, which courses are included, and which topics and literature are covered.

To achieve better organisation and clarity of data, we used the QDA Miner program for qualitative data analysis. Before the analysis itself, categories, subcategories, and codes were defined, based on the theoretical framework and the operationalisation of concepts. There was a total of two categories and eight subcategories, and the

**Table 1:** Qualitative data analysis: categories, subcategories, and codes

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Classification rules	Presence of gender topics in the curricula for teacher education	As a separated subject area (0) As a cross-curricular subject (33)
	Course holders of gender-related courses	Male course holders (11) Female course holders (22)
Framing rules	Authors of gender-related publications	Male authors (0) Female authors (12)
	Teachers of gender-related topics	Teachers who publish papers dominantly in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies (0) Teachers who publish papers dominantly in the other areas of study (33)
	Status of gender-related courses	Compulsory (17) Electoral (16)
	Course/teaching load	15 lectures and 15 seminars/or 30 lectures (16) Less than 15 lecturers and 15 seminars/or 30 lectures (6) More than 15 lecturers and 15 seminars/or 30 lectures (11)
	Course/ECTS	– 1 ECTS (3) – 2 ECTS (8) – 3 ECTS (12) – 4 ECTS (8) – 5 ECTS (1) – 7 ECTS (1)
	Course/level of study	First to third year of study (22) Fourth to fifth year of study (9) All years of study (2)

analysis resulted in 243 corresponding codes as presented in Table 1.

The findings should be the indicators of inclusion/exclusion of teacher faculties in the network of partners that contribute to the implementation of the gender equality strategy in the Republic of Croatia. In addition, the analysis of *classification* and *framing* rules has provided insight into how codes function in the curriculum design, knowledge structure, and planned implementation of curricula related to gender topics.

## 5 Findings

Table 2 illustrates all compulsory and elective gender-related courses in teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia, including teaching units with gender topics and courses encompassing literature with gender-related topics. The table also presents the data on these courses including ECTS credits, teaching load, course status, and the academic year in which they are offered.

The findings indicate that there are no courses entirely devoted to gender topics. In teacher education curricula in Croatia, there are a total of 33 courses with teaching units (content) including gender topics or gender-related literature.

There are a total of 17 compulsory and 16 electoral courses. Women are course holders in 22 courses, while men are in 11 courses. None of the holders of the presented courses have been found to publish dominantly in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies. The analysis identified a total of 10 scientific and professional papers authored by course holders which are related to Gender Studies in the Croatian Research Information System (CroRIS). In addition, there are 34 teaching units related to gender topics within the courses. These topics are included in a total of 18 courses in the field of social sciences, 10 courses in the field of humanities and five courses in the field of natural sciences. Some of the covered topics include feminist theory, gender roles, gender stereotypes, healthy relationships between the sexes, sexual violence, gender inequalities in education, sex education content, sexuality and morality, women, and work. The total number of publications, which are cited as literature for students, includes 12 gender-related titles, and women are the authors of all of these publications. Courses containing teaching units or literature related to gender topics in most cases have 3 ECTS credits (12 courses), 8 courses have 2 ECTS credits, 8 courses have 4 ECTS credits, 3 courses have 1 ECTS credit, one course has 5 ECTS credits, one course has 7 ECTS credits. The largest number of courses (a total of 16) has a teaching load of 15 lectures and 15 seminars (or 30 lectures). The largest number of gender-related courses are offered in

Table 2: Gender topics in the curriculum of teacher studies

Faculty	Course and literature	Teaching unit	Course status	ECTS credits/ teaching load	Study year
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split	Ethics	1. Feminism on morality 2. Sexuality and morality 3. Abortion	Elective	2 ECTS/30 L	3 (M)
	Sociology	1. Gender and sexuality (gender differences, gender inequalities, gender socialisation, homosexuality, prostitution) 2. Labour and economic life (paid and unpaid work, division of labour and economic dependence, transformation of work, women and work, unemployment) 3. Family (history of family, theoretical perspectives, marriage and divorce, alternatives to marriage, family life, violence and abuse in the family) Ecofeminism 1. Sexual harassment – What's wrong with telling a coworker that she has nice legs? 2. Abortion – Are you pro-life or pro-choice? 3. Old enough to be her grandfather? 4. Gay families – What is a normal family these days? New ecological paradigms (deep ecology, ecofeminism.)	Compulsory	3 ECTS/30 L	1 (F)
Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb	Philosophy and Sustainable Development Language Exercises 3 (Eng.)		Elective Compulsory	2 ECTS/30 L 2 ECTS/30E	4 (M) 4 (M)
	Social Ecology Literature: Buzov, I. (2007). <i>Social Perspective of Ecofeminism, Social Ecology, Journal of Ecological Thought and Sociological Research of the Environment</i> , 16(1):1–16. (Fa)		Elective	2 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	2 (F)
	Psychology of Learning and Teaching	Gender and education: what does school achievement depend on? gender-important differences for school achievement and school adjustment; reducing sex discrimination in class Education and gender differentiation in Croatia	Compulsory	3 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	1 (F)
	Sociology of Education Literature: Baranović, B. (2011). Gender (non)equality and discrimination in education. In Z. Kamenov and B. Galić (your.) <i>Gender equality and discrimination in Croatia</i> (str. 38–49). Zagreb: Office for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Croatia (Fa) Croatian History 2 Literature: Feldman, A. (2004). <i>Women in Croatia: Women's and Cultural History</i> . Ženska infoteka. (Fa) Women's History – Public History – Cultural History		Compulsory	2 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	3 (F) 1 (F)
		Elective	4 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	All years of study (F)	

(Continued)

Table 2: Continued

Faculty	Course and literature	Teaching unit	Course status	ECTS credits/ teaching load	Study year
Department of Teacher and Preschool Teacher Education, University of Zadar	Literature: Feldman, A. (2004) Women in Croatia: Women's and Cultural History. Ženska infoteka. (Fa) Sociology through Film	Gender, sex, and sexuality	Elective	4 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	All years of study (F)
	Psychology of Learning	Gender differences and gender stereotypes in education	Compulsory	4 ECTS/30 L + 15 S	2 (F)
	Selected Chapters in the Philosophy of Education Literature: Milena Radovan-Burja (2013): M. Wollstonecraft educating women as part of the contribution of feminist understandings to the philosophy of education, Magistra Iadercina, God/Vol (8), University of Zadar, Zadar. (Fa)	Philosophy of education and issues of feminism	Elective	3 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	2 (M)
Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka	Basic Concepts of Literary Theory	Feminist theory	Compulsory	3 ECTS/30 L + 15 S	2 (F)
	Croatian Children's Novel	Gender stereotypes in Croatian children's novels. Children's characters with an identity	Elective	3 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	4 (F)
	Developmental Psychology	Emotional, social, and moral development (Erikson, Kohlberg, Parents and Attachment, Peers; Socialisation and social cognition; Game; Sex roles; Moral development; Development of self-perception; Identity development; Emotional development; Development of temperament and personality)	Compulsory	7 ECTS/45 L + 30 S	1 (M)
	Sociology of Education	Gender, ethnicity, and educational achievement	Elective	4 ECTS/30 L + 15 S	2 (M)
	Education for a Democratic Citizenship	Respecting diversity, gender equality, non-profit organisations, or civic society organisations	Elective	4 ECTS/30 L + 15 S	3 (F)
Family Pedagogy Literature: 1. Maleš D. (1988). <i>Family and the role of the sexes</i> . The school paper. Zagreb. (Fa) 2. Renk, K. (2003). <i>Mothers, Fathers, Gender Role, and the Time Parents Spend with Their Children</i> , In Sexual Roles: Journal for Research. (Fa) Methodology of Nature and Society 2 Socio-Emotional Learning in Inclusion Literature:	Health (sexual/gender) education topics;	Compulsory Elective	4 ECTS/30 L + 15E 4 ECTS/30 L + 15 S	4 (F) 4 (F)	

(Continued)



Table 2: Continued

Faculty	Course and literature	Teaching unit	Course status	ECTS credits/ teaching load	Study year
Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek	Malkić Aličković, A. (2017). Examination of social skills of primary school pupils in relation to age and gender. <i>Školski vjesnik</i> , 66(3), 379–400. (Fa) School Management	Women in (educational) management: statistics, barriers, and possible changes	Elective	4 ECTS/15 L + 15 S + 15E	5 (F)
	Parenthood	Value system of parents (attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about the child, childhood, relationships between the sexes, parental role, values, and effectiveness of educational procedures)	Elective	2 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	3 (F)
	School Hygiene	Health education and education for a healthy relationship between the sexes	Elective	1 ECTS/15 L	3 (M)
	Natural Science II	Healthy relationship between the sexes	Compulsory	3 ECTS/15 L + 15E	2 (F)
	Abused and Neglected Children Literature:	Introduction to different types of abuse and neglect (emotional, physical, educational, and sexual)	Elective	1 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	2 (F)
	1. Mamula, M. (2004). Sexual violence in schools. Zagreb: Center for Prevention, Research and Suppression of Sexual Violence and Female Sexuality. (Fa)				
	2. May-Chahal, C., Herczog, M. (2004). Sexual abuse of children in Europe. Zagreb: Ibis graphics. (Fa)				
	Professional-Pedagogical Practice III	Students performing professional practice should observe: are groups heterogeneous by competencies and gender?	Compulsory	3 ECTS/45E	4 (F)
	School Hygiene	Health education and education for a healthy relationship between the sexes	Elective	1 ECTS/15 L	3 (F)
	Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Slavonski Brod				
Faculty of Educational Sciences, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula	Natural Science II	Healthy relationship between the sexes	Compulsory	3 ECTS/15 L + 15E	2 (M)
	Professional Pedagogical Practice III	Students performing professional practice should observe: are groups heterogeneous by competencies and gender?	Compulsory	3 ECTS/45E	4 (M)
	Sociology of Education	Gender and education: education as an essential social and class category: Gender inequalities in education	Compulsory	3 ECTS/30 L + 15 S	1 (M)
	Family Pedagogy	Family and the adoption of gender roles	Compulsory	3 ECTS/15 L + 15 S	2 (F)
	Research in Croatian Phraseology Literature: Hrnjak, A. (2017). <i>Phraseology in gender: gender elements in Croatian and Russian phraseology</i> . Zagreb: Book. (Fa)				
	Philosophy of Education Literature: Wollstonecraft, M. (1999). <i>Defending women's rights</i> . Zagreb: Women's Infotheque (Fa)				

the second year of study (nine courses), seven courses are offered in the third year, seven courses in the fourth year of study, six in the first year, and two courses are offered in the fifth year of study. Two elective courses can be selected for all years of study.

## 6 Discussion

It should be noted that the analysis only included the courses whose curricula (in teaching plan information), explicitly indicated gender-related topics. This does not imply that gender issues are not mentioned within broader topics (e.g. social inequalities) or other courses (e.g. in Civic Education). However, this research was focused on courses that are entirely dedicated to these topics or their curricula containing teaching units/literature related to these topics.

Findings related to Bernstein's concepts of *classification* and *framing* rules indicate that gender-related knowledge in the teacher education curriculum is not given high status and significance as a teaching subject; there are no courses in teacher education curricula that deal exclusively with gender-related topics. At the university level, out of a total of 26 studies in Croatia (in the academic year 2015/2016), 20 courses explicitly included women/gender topics in the title and 26 teaching units related to such topics (Barada, 2017). Therefore, it can be noted that in the curricula of other studies, such topics are significantly more represented compared to teacher education curricula. However, in teacher education, these topics are not completely neglected. A total of 33 courses were found to include gender topics and/or gender-related literature, 17 of which are compulsory. There are substantial differences between the analysed universities. For example, the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka offers three compulsory courses and four elective courses with gender-related teaching units, while other teacher education curricula in most cases include two compulsory courses within which these topics are presented.

The findings show that weak *classification rules* apply in the case of the inclusion of gender topics in the teacher education curricula because not a single course was found that entirely covers these topics. An interdisciplinary approach has been applied in all analysed curricula; hence, gender issues are discussed within the framework of various courses, ranging from the natural science courses (e.g. Natural Science II) to humanities-related courses (e.g. Philosophy of Education).

The content regarding gender topics and their contextualisation in the curricula is extremely feminised. The authors of books and scientific studies on gender topics

are in 100% cases women, and in most cases, women are holders of the presented courses. These data confirm that women are creators of gender-related knowledge and they, in most cases, transfer gender-related knowledge to students. However, some of the topics are rarely explicitly mentioned, such as the topics related to the LGBTQ+ community, which may indicate the avoidance of such topics because of the ensuing controversies. In addition, the application of *framing rules* is mostly weak because experts who teach lessons related to gender issues do not publish most of their scientific and professional articles or books in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies, and in most cases, students may or may not select these courses. In addition, courses with a higher number of ECTS credits (e.g. with four to seven credits) are not necessarily taught in the lower years of study and are not necessarily compulsory courses; hence, it is confirmed that gender-related topics were included in the curricula of teacher studies predominantly following weak *framing rules*.

Bernstein has attributed the term *integrated* to the areas in the curriculum to which weak *classification* and *framing rules* have been applied and which show little or no resemblance to the areas of knowledge based on a particular discipline (Chien, 2004). Accordingly, gender topics belong to those areas of the teacher education curricula in the Republic of Croatia to which we can attribute *the integrated code*. When incorporating gender topics into the curricula of teacher education studies, *the integrated code* enables the abolition of traditional disciplinary barriers and emphasises the wider context and interconnections between different fields of knowledge. Weak framing rules allow for greater flexibility in adapting curricula to different social changes and trends, and students can choose courses that suit their goals and interests. However, weak *framing* and *classification rules* have shortcomings, as well. For example, weak *classification rules* can lead to a lack of coherence in education on gender topics, and a vague structure can hinder the students' understanding of basic concepts and their interrelations. Similarly, students can choose courses according to their interests, and not necessarily based on importance or necessity, which is one of the essential disadvantages of a curriculum thus designed. Many authors exploring these issues believe that discipline-based curricula inherently have more powerful knowledge structures that give them a higher status compared to integrated curricula (Jacobs, 2014). Furthermore, according to (Pavičić Vukičević, 2018) emphasises that Bernstein divides the classification of knowledge into a *strong classification* that results in separate subjects and a *weak classification* that leads to an integrated curriculum, which contributes to reduced power and control of certain societal groups.

Consequently, it derives that the position of gender topics in the curricula of teacher education studies in the Republic of Croatia indicates a low status of this type of knowledge, which can contribute to maintaining the *status quo*, i.e., the reproduction of existing power relations associated with gender inequalities. In addition, it should be noted that higher education curricula in Croatia are first adopted at the faculty level, where university teachers decide on their adoption, while students do not influence the type and content of the curriculum to be adopted. Once it has been adopted at the faculty level, the curriculum must be adopted by the university bodies. Thus, control and power in creating curricula are exclusively conferred to academic professionals. In Croatia, there is a strong hierarchy in terms of deciding on the curriculum, and according to Abbas (2019), it is more difficult to introduce significant changes in the curricula in such situations, which is the only feature of the Croatian curriculum on gender topics where stronger *framing rules* have been applied.

Most of the research conducted in Europe and the world (Naqvi, 2022; Rosenberg & Jakobsen, 2008; Shih & Wang, 2022), including this research, shows that university-level teacher education lacks gender-related content. However, a large number of foreign studies (e.g. Lucas-Palacios et al., 2022) indicate that the main issue is that courses entirely devoted to gender topics are in most cases elective, which means that weak *framing rules* apply. Compared to these findings, the problem in Croatia is more complex because there is not a single course (compulsory or elective) in teacher education studies entirely dedicated to gender topics. Although the interdisciplinary approach and the application of weak *classification* and *framing rules* have their advantages, it is necessary to include at least one compulsory course that deals exclusively with gender issues in the teacher education curricula. In this case, students would have the opportunity to learn basic perspectives on gender and later expand their knowledge by choosing courses dealing with more specific areas entirely or only partly related to gender issues. Furthermore, in the above-mentioned case (which refers to introducing a compulsory course dealing exclusively with gender issues), course holders should have scientific and professional articles published in the Interdisciplinary Area, the field of Gender Studies, which qualifies them for delivering and designing gender-related courses. The inclusion of such courses in teacher education curricula should be a priority since students studying education will teach the younger generations about social conditioning of gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender-based violence, and other related issues.

## 7 Conclusion

The findings point to the shortcomings of teacher education studies in Croatia in terms of education on gender issues. Due to the underrepresentation of gender-related topics in teacher education curricula and the application of weak *classification* and *framing rules*, it is possible that students will not completely understand the basic theoretical perspectives and concepts related to gender issues, which indicates that they will not be adequately prepared for teaching and educating primary school pupils on gender topics. This situation is inconsistent with the aims of national and European policies and may contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities in society. Therefore, it is necessary to change the way gender topics are included in the curricula of teacher studies and apply moderate *framing* and *classification* rules. As we have already emphasised, this could be, for example, the inclusion of at least one compulsory course dealing exclusively with gender issues in the curriculum of teacher education. This would allow students of teacher education studies to take compulsory courses that would be exclusively oriented towards concepts and theories about gender, and in addition, students could choose other courses that provide a more detailed analysis of the relation of gender inequalities with certain social subsystems (e.g. education, labour market, etc.). To introduce adequate changes in the curricula, students should have more influence on the type and content of the curriculum to be adopted. Therefore, before introducing curricular changes (related to gender topics), it is important to examine the opinions of students and involve them in such processes.

Although the teacher education curricula have been analysed in detail, it is necessary to conduct qualitative research (interviews or focus groups) to examine students' and university professors' opinions on the status and significance of gender topics in teacher education curricula, problems they encounter when designing and implementing the curriculum, suggestions for improving the gender sensitivity of curricula and the gender dimension of education of students at primary teacher education faculties in the Republic of Croatia. Given that subject teachers in lower and upper secondary schools in Croatia are often educated at different faculties (that are not included in this study), it is also important to analyse the curricula for subject teachers.

As this study is focused on the education of classroom teachers in primary education, further research would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the inclusion of gender-related themes in the teaching of school-teachers at Croatian universities. The findings of such studies would enable the acquisition of deeper insights

into how gender-related knowledge is presented to students and would facilitate the identification of strategies for changing and transforming the curricula of teacher education studies.

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