

A STUDY OF IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS GENDER ISSUES

Chinkey Agarwal
Dr Neetu M Shukla

Abstract

This research paper is based on the research study of the investigator on the attitude of in-service teachers towards gender issues, namely, gender stereotypes, gender roles and gender discrimination and to find the difference between male and female teachers' attitudes. The study was descriptive survey. The data was collected from 312 in-service teachers teaching in government and private schools at Delhi at secondary level comprising of equal number of female and male sample using an attitude scale. The data collected was systematically tabulated and was subjected to statistical treatment for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. The findings of the study revealed that the teachers hold traditional ways of thinking towards issues related to gender stereotypes and gender roles and there is no significant difference between attitude of male and female teachers towards gender issues.

Introduction

The issue of 'Gender Equality' remains one of the prime importance in present times. This has been highlighted by the 2015 Global Monitoring Report – Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges by UNESCO. It has cited that India has made significant progress in fulfilling the human development goals, specifically in universalization of primary education and gender parity in schools since 2000. However, the gender equality in schools still remains an issue to be focused upon.

Education is one of the important constituent units of the social system. Being a part of the social-system, it has multiple roles to play both for individuals, in specific and the society, in general. One of the important roles played by the education system for all is related to maintenance of the existing orders as well as to promote development oriented change. The importance of education system, in turn, highlights the importance of the teacher. The teacher is expected not only to impart information and skills, but lead and guide his students to supreme knowledge, free from any biases and prejudices. The role of the teacher in the educational process is very vital and crucial. He/she influences the students by what he/she says and does, and the

attitudes towards the pupils are important for pupil growth.

The students are influenced by the teacher's behavior, approaches and attitudes. Each and every word uttered by them or gesture they make gets absorbed by the students, who in turn apply them when they deal with others in society, for years to come.

'The education system does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Hierarchies of caste, economic status and gender relations that characterize Indian society also deeply influence access to education and participation of children in school.'(National Curriculum Framework-2005). One major hierarchy that is being perpetuated and reinforced in schools is of gender.

The terms, Sex and Gender, are often used interchangeably; however, the two connote different meanings. It is important to distinguish between the two terms before moving further. 'Sex' is a biologically determined term while 'Gender' is a socially determined term. 'Sex' is the biological difference between male and female. 'Gender' is used to describe all the socially determined aspects of our lives like the roles, behaviours and responsibilities of an individual in the society.

Gender functions as a category for organization of various activities in schools like segregation of boys and girls in assembly, formation of groups for co-curricular activities etc. Allocation of routine tasks by teachers differently to girls and boys also reinforces gender stereotypes.

The attitude of teachers is reflected in their behavior in the classroom too. In general, most teachers do not intentionally differentiate learning opportunities for their students by gender. Much of what constitute gender inequity in classroom practices and interactions is unintentional, subconscious and subtle. Studies have found that in many schools, girls are allotted the more 'light and decorative' tasks, such as tidying up and decorating the classroom or handling over a bouquet to visitors, while boys are allotted the tasks which are perceived as requiring 'strength', such as lifting furniture or 'technical skills' such as fixing lights and so on.

The teachers, who are not free from gender biases and stereotypes, will induce it, consciously or unconsciously, into the children of the new generation. The students at the secondary level decide about their future plans, careers and professions to enter and thus, mark a distinct stage in their lives. Gender biases or stereotypes of teachers would, in turn, inhibit students' understanding and they might limit themselves to fewer options based on gender.

Statement of the problem

These concerns motivated the researcher to conduct a study of in-service teachers' attitudes towards gender issues. The research questions of the study were:

1. What is the attitude of in-service teachers towards gender issues?

2. Is there any difference in attitude of male and female teachers towards gender issues?

Operational Definitions

Operational definitions of key terms are given below:

Attitude: Attitude can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, events, activities or ideas. It is an expression of favour or disfavor towards people, objects, events, activities or ideas.

Gender Issues: Gender is the socially-constructed identity of an individual, of being men and women. Gender issues are the issues related to gender and their problems. The present study will focus on the following gender issues:

- a. **Gender Stereotypes:** Gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs about characteristics which are deemed appropriate for males and females in a society. Stereotypes are generalized beliefs about certain groups of people based on their belonging to a certain gender, ethnic group, religion etc. Gender stereotypes are over simplified beliefs about appropriate behavior, roles and careers for women and men. For instance, stereotyping females as passive, home oriented, emotional, kind, gentle and devoted to others and males as active, leader, aggressive, adventurous, dominant, independent and rough.
- b. **Gender Roles:** Gender roles are the roles attached to male and female respectively. Gender roles differ according to cultural-historical context. Eg. Males are bread-winners and females are home-makers.
- c. **Gender Discrimination:** Gender discrimination refers to the practice whereby one sex is given preferential treatment over the other. The practice of giving social importance to the

biological differences between men and women is gender discrimination.

Objectives

The objectives of the research study were:

1. To study the attitude of teachers towards gender stereotypes.
2. To study the difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender stereotypes.
3. To study the attitude of teachers towards gender roles.
4. To study the difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender roles.
5. To study the attitude of teachers towards gender discrimination.
6. To study the difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender discrimination.

It was hypothesized in the research study that:

1. There is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender stereotypes.
2. There is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender roles.
3. There is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender discrimination.

Background of the study

Research Design

The research followed a descriptive survey design. A sample of 312 in-service teachers teaching in government and private schools in Delhi at secondary level was selected through multi stage sampling technique.

The researcher reviewed a number of studies done in the area of research all over the world. This section provides an overview of the studies that form the basic premise of the present study. The major highlights of the studies reviewed are that teachers relates attributes like gentleness, soft-spoken, more organized and superstitions specifically to girls and attributes like brave, strong, cruel, insensitive, head of the family and adventurous specifically to boys (Chugh, 2009; Garg, 2008; Agrawal, 1998; Ifegbesan, 2010; Kosmerl, 2003); teachers think that girls do well in subjects like Language and skills of Reading and Writing while boys do well in Science and Mathematics (Chugh, 2009; Garg, 2008; Agrawal, 1998; Ifegbesan, 2010; Kosmerl, 2003); boys are considered to have higher mathematical abilities than females (Tiedemann, 2002; Forgasz, 2000); teachers suggests that girls should go in the field of Education, Fashion Designing, Nursing while boys should go for Engineering, Defence, Sports, Marketing and IAS (Chugh, 2009; Agrawal, 1998); the interaction in classrooms is dominated by boys (Jones, Evans, Byrd and Campbell, 2000; Matthews, Binkley, Crisp and Gregg, 1997); student teachers ignore the gendered presuppositions in the texts (Kizilaslan, 2009; Equal opportunity commission of Hong Kong, 2003); boys are more biased in their thinking related to gender as compared to girls (Sharma, 1993; Christensen and Massey, 1989; Tatar and Emmanuel, 2001); stereotype threat prevents learning and has negative effect on learning pace (Rydell, Shiffrin, Boucher, Loo and Rydell, 2010); teachers' gender stereotypical expectations affect the math gender-gap (Robinson, Lubienski and Copur, 2011).

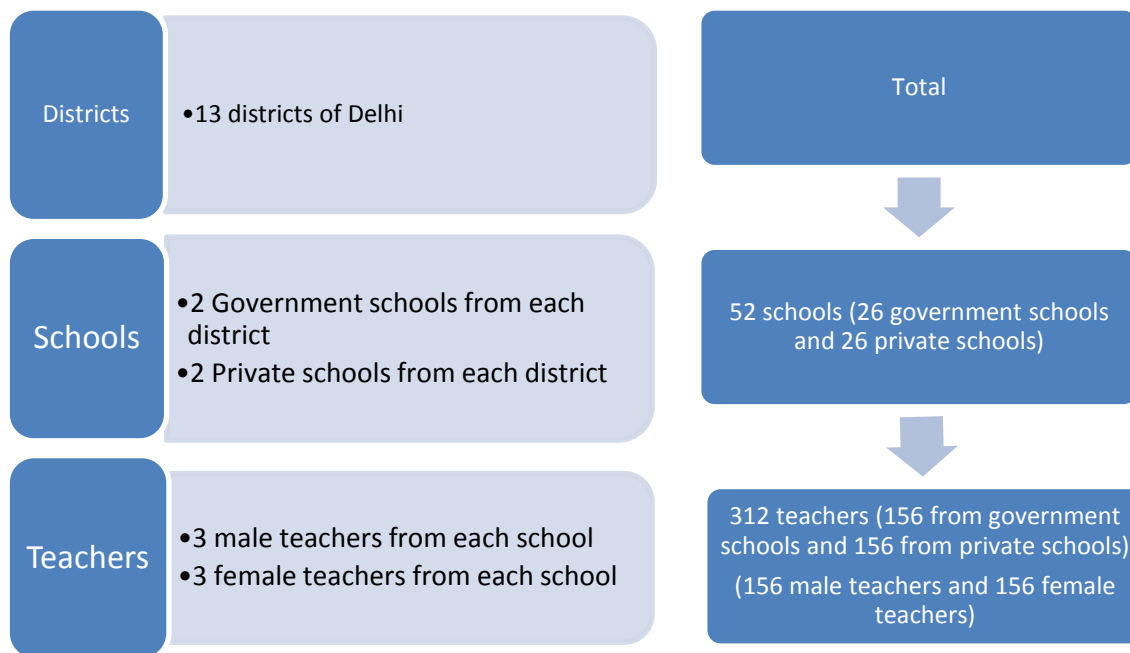


Figure 1: Selection of sample

Tools and Techniques

An attitude scale was developed based on the reviewed researches. The attitude scale was based on 5-point likert scale and consisted of 32 statements. The data collected was systematically tabulated and was subjected to statistical treatment for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. To test the research hypotheses and answer the research questions, quantitative data analysis techniques were used such as Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test.

Major Findings of the study

The analysis of data and application of statistical techniques revealed the following research findings:

- None of the respondents has studied about gender as a subject.
- A large number of teachers (42.31%) have not received any educational training regarding gender issues in in-service teacher education programme.
- However, majority of teachers (61.86%) do want to receive more educational training regarding gender issues to treat students equally in classroom.
- Majority of the teachers (60.90%) responded that there is no need for a mandatory course for teacher

certification on gender issues stating that it could be optional subject for curriculum developers, policy makers etc.

Attitude of teachers towards gender stereotypes

- Majority of teachers (51.29%) agreed to the statement – Women are more emotional as compared to men.
- Most of the teachers (46.48%) agreed to the statement – Boys are better suited than girls to do heavy chores in the classroom such as moving desks, carrying projectors.

Difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender stereotypes

- Majority of both male and female teachers agreed to the statements – Women are more emotional as compared to men (53.21% males and 49.36% females); Boys are better suited than girls to do heavy chores in the classroom such as moving desks, carrying projectors (48.72% males and 44.23% females); Girls should be dressed in pink while boys should be

dressed in blue (44.87% males and 37.82% females); Girls are naturally better than boys at reading (45.51% females and 37.82% males).

- There were certain statements that showed some difference between them. Majority of the male teachers showed disagreement (32.69%) and strong disagreement (30.13%) to the statement – Women are better cooks than men. However, female teachers showed a mixed response (28.21% agreed and 29.49% disagreed) to this statement.

Attitude of teachers towards gender roles

- Maximum number of teachers (41.03%) agreed to the statement – In a family, woman should be responsible for domestic work.
- Most of the teachers (36.86% and 36.54% respectively) agreed to the statements – The father should have the final say in family matters and Woman should be attached to jobs like teaching, nursing etc.

Difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender roles

- Majority of both male and female teachers agreed to the statements – The father should have the final say in family matters (37.18% males and 36.54% females); Men are not naturally suited for bringing up children (35.90% males and 35.26% females); A woman's basic task is motherhood (42.95% males and 32.69% females); In a family, woman should be responsible for domestic work (48.08% females and 33.97% males); Women should be attached to jobs like teaching, nursing etc. (38.46% males and 34.62% females).
- Towards the statements related to male roles in the society, male teachers did not show traditional ways of thinking. Majority of female teachers agreed to the statements - A man's main task in the house is breadwinning (34.62%);

Men should decide on how to use family income (35.90%). However, most of the male teachers disagreed (33.33% and 27.56% respectively) to these statements.

Attitude of teachers towards gender discrimination

- More than half of the teachers (50.96%) disagreed to the statement – Because 'boys will be boys', teachers should be more lenient towards boys than girls.
- Nearly half of the respondents (48.08%) agreed that women should select occupations where nature of work is flexible irrespective of remuneration. This is related to the response that a woman's basic task is motherhood. This may be the reason behind the response that working women should focus more on working hours than on remuneration so that she could work at home and take care of children.

Difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards gender discrimination

- Both female and male teachers agreed that men are more suitable for positions of responsibility than women (44.87% females and 34.62% males) and women should select occupations where nature of work is flexible irrespective of remuneration (51.92% males and 44.23% females).
- Both female and male teachers disagreed to the statements – Because 'boys will be boys', teachers should be more lenient towards boys than girls (51.92% females and 50% males); Woman should not work if the economical position of the man is adequate (42.95% males and 35.26% females); Men should get leadership roles in an organization as they are better leaders than women (44.87% females and 38.46% males) and Men should be paid more than women working at same level as men are more

responsible workers than women (53.85% males and 46.15% females).

- Unlike male teachers, most of the female teachers (30.77%) agreed that women should be less concerned with equality and more about being good wives and mothers and unlike female teachers, most of the male teachers (32.05%) agreed to the statement – Boys make better classroom leaders than girls.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that the in-service teachers have not studied gender as a subject however, have shown their interest in studying gender issues. This could be seen as a positive perception among the teachers. The teachers agreed to most of the statements regarding gender stereotypes and gender roles and thus showed traditional way of thinking towards these gender issues.

However, no significant difference was found in the attitude of male and female teachers consistent with the findings of Sharma, 2012 and inconsistent with the findings of Christensen and Massey, 1989. The study highlights that some changes are required to be made in the education system. The teacher education system must ensure that the teachers themselves are aware about gender issues and are motivated regarding providing equal opportunities to boys and girls in curricular as well as co-curricular activities to maintain gender equity. The teachers may discuss various gender issues with the students. Teachers may be able to analyze textbooks to determine whether or not there are appropriate examples, illustrations and pictures in the text books depicting men and women, instead of their stereotypical roles and characteristics. The teacher educator may hold discussions about how to reduce the impact of stereotypical images or texts, discussions on learners.

Bibliography

- Agrawal, R. (1998). *A study of Male and Female Teachers' Perceptions in relation to Male and Female Students' Attributes*. (Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation), Jamia Millia Islamia
- Bank, J. Barbara (Ed.) (2007). *Gender and Education: An Encyclopedia*, Westport Connecticut
- Best, John W. and Kahn, James V. (2001). *Research in Education (7th edition)*. Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
- Christensen, A. Carol and Massey, David (1989). Perpetuating gender inequity: Attitudes of Teacher Education Students. *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 33, No. 3
- Chugh, B. (2009). *A Comparative study of Single-Sex and Co-Educational Schooling with reference to Gender Roles and Stereotypes*. (Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation), Jamia Millia Islamia
- Equal Opportunity Commission of Hong Kong (2003). *Stereotypes in Textbooks and Teaching Materials in Hong Kong*. Human Rights Education in Asian schools. Volume-6
- Forgasz, Helen J. (2000). *The gender stereotyping of Mathematics: Pre-service teachers' views*. Proceedings of annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), Sydney, retrieved from www.education.monash.edu.au
- Garg, S. (2008). *A study of reflections of Male and Female Teachers' Gender based Expectations in the Classroom*. (Unpublished M.Ed. (Ele.) Dissertation), Jamia Millia Islamia
- Ifegbesan, Ayodeji (2010). Gender Stereotypes Belief and Practices in the Classroom: The Nigerian Post-Primary School Teachers. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, Volume-10
- Jones, K., Evans, C., Byrd, R. and Campbell, K (2000). Gender Equity Training and Teacher Behavior. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Sept. 2000
- Kizilaslan, I (2009). Student Teachers' Perceptions of Gendered texts in English language textbooks, *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Volume-2, Issue-2
- Kosmerl, Katherine M. (2003). *Teachers' Perceptions of Gender Bias in the Classroom*, Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment for Education Specialist Degree, University of Wisconsin-Stout, retrieved from www2.uwstout.edu
- Marini, M (1990). Sex and Gender: What do we know? *Sociological Forum*, volume 5
- Matthews, E. Catherine., Binkley, W., Crisp, A. and Gregg, K. (1997). Challenging Gender Bias in Fifth Grade. *Educational Leadership*, Volume-55
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (2005). *National Curriculum Framework 2005*, NCERT
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (2006). *Position Paper National Focus Group on Gender Issues in Education*, NCERT
- Robinson, Joseph P., Lubienski, Sarah T. and Copur, Y. (2011), *The Effects of Teachers' Gender-Stereotypical Expectations on the Development of the Math Gender-Gap*. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED528920> (downloaded on 15.03.2014)
- Rydell, Robert J., Shiffrin, Richard M., Boucher, Kathryn L., Loo, K. and Rydell, Michael T. (2010), Stereotype Threat Prevents Perceptual Learning. *PNAS*, Vol. 107, No. 32, Aug. 10, 2010
- Sharma, A. (2012), *Attitude of Faculty of Colleges of Education towards Gender Issues in Relation to Some Selected Demographic Variables*. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Kurukshetra University
- Sharma, Deepti (1993). *A study of prevailing gender biases among university students*. (Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation), Jamia Millia Islamia
- Tatar, M. and Emmanuel, G. (2001). Teachers' Perceptions of their Students' Gender Roles. *The Journal of Educational Research*, Volume-94
- Tiedemann, J. (2002). Teachers' Gender Stereotypes as determinants of Teacher Perceptions in Elementary School Mathematics. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, Volume-50
- UNESCO (2015). *2015 Global Monitoring Report – Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. UNESCO, France