

A Study of In-service Teachers' Attitude Towards Gender Discrimination

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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 roles, gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. For the study, the researcher conducted a descriptive survey among 312 teachers teaching at secondary level in the schools of Delhi. Self-developed attitude scale and interview schedule were employed for the collection of the data. The data collected was systematically categorized, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted. The study revealed that none of the teachers has studied about 'gender' as a complete subject, however, majority of them were interested in knowing more about gender issues. Further, it was also found that the teachers discriminated among girls and boys when it came to assigning tasks or activities to them. Some positive trends in their attitude were also revealed.

Keywords: Attitude, gender, gender discrimination

Education of girls has always been an area of concern for the educationists. It is considered to be an important instrument for social change. The attitude of teachers towards any educational reform, educational programme or policy ultimately decides the success or failure of the programme or policy. Thus, the teachers, who are at the forefront of the education system, are expected to have a positive attitude towards promoting gender equality through their daily classroom practices and processes.

The survey of educational dropout among students indicates that the dropout of girls from education still exists at all levels of education. In 2013-14, the dropout rate of girls at the primary level was 4.14%, middle level was 4.49%, secondary level was 17.79% and senior secondary level was 1.61% (Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2016, p. 8). The dropout rate at the secondary level among all levels of school education has been the highest. An analysis of the possible causes behind the dropouts and subsequent suggestions as indicated by apex academic bodies in the country emphasize that the teachers play a very crucial role in promoting access, retention and

achievement levels of both boys and girls. "A gender sensitive teacher can initiate activities that would help boys and girls to grow up in a caring and sharing mode and not as adversaries." (Training Material for Teacher Educators on Gender Equality and Empowerment, Vol. II, 2013, p. 41).

In the context of gender, the physical and social organization of the classroom becomes very important. As has been highlighted by many studies on classroom management, the physical and social organization of classroom is generally not gender friendly. Boys and girls are often segregated and made to sit in separate groups. Girls are generally made to sit in the front while boys sit at the back. Girls hardly move within the classroom space, there movement is very restricted and for some purpose as directed by the teacher.

Several studies also indicate that the teachers allocate the routine tasks differently to girls and boys, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes (Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985; Tsouroufli, 2002; Smith, Hardman & Higgins 2007). In many schools, girls can be found doing the more 'light and decorative' tasks,

such as decorating the classroom or handing over a bouquet to a visitor, boys are found doing the tasks which require strength or technical skills, such as moving desks or fixing lights. Studies such as the one by Sadker and Sadker (1986) explore how the schools act as places where 'gender inequality' is strengthened. Girls are expected to be patient and boys are expected to take the lead in most of the activities.

The teachers' attitude towards each gender is a product of the socialization process of which the teachers have been a part. Hence, much of gender inequality in the classroom is at the subconscious level and unintentional. Teachers may devalue the work of female students relative to males and may encourage female helplessness by solving a problem posed by girls, while giving detailed instructions to boys on how to solve the problem (Sadker and Sadker, 1999). Baker (2005) found that boys were called more often than girls in middle school classrooms thus giving ample opportunities to them for more interaction.

Pardhan (2011) in the study on influence of teacher-student interactions on development of gender identity among kindergarten students found that the teachers felt that it is their responsibility to guide their students to take up socially approved gender codes in future and teachers gave significantly more academic learning directions to boys than to girls. Amruthraj (2013) found that gender segregation was visible in the classroom and school like in sitting arrangement in the classroom, grouping of peers during play, classroom practices, assembly as well as during breaks and after school with classroom space and playground space dominated by boys.

The secondary level of schooling forms the foundations of the future plans, careers and professional choices hence it accords an important stage in the education system. The teachers, who are bound by gender biases and stereotypes, often communicate them to the students and thus, limit and restrict the true potential of the girls as well as the boys.

This concern for the teachers' role in shaping the future of students at secondary stage motivated the investigator to undertake this research.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was:

1. To study the attitude of in-service teachers towards gender discrimination.

Operational Definition of the key terms

Attitude: Oxford Dictionary of English defines attitude as *a settled way of thinking or feeling about something*. It is 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: Gender is used to describe the socially determined aspects of our lives like the traits, roles, behaviours and responsibilities attached to an individual in the society on the basis of his/her sex.

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.

Background of the study

The investigator reviewed various studies conducted on gender and education. Major highlights of the studies reviewed are provided in this section. Teachers accepted most of the gender-stereotyped views (Gul, Khan, Mughal, Rehman and Saif, 2012; Ifegbesan, 2010). Teachers have different behaviours towards male and female in class (Gul, Khan, Mughal, Rehman and Saif, 2012; Sultana, 2011; Pardhan, 2011; Allana, Asad and Sherali; 2010). Teachers behaved similarly towards boys and girls in classroom (Moskofoglou and Lekka, 2008; Patel, 2006; Slater, 2003). Typical behavioral patterns among females are hard worker, dependent and academically inclined (Khan, Sultana, Bughio and Naz, 2014; Pardhan, 2011; Kobia, 2009; Kosmerl, 2003; Vidya, 2002). Typical behavioral patterns among males are active, aggressive and more indisciplined than girls (Khan, Sultana, Bughio and Naz, 2014; Amruthraj, 2013; Pardhan, 2011; Kosmerl, 2003; Slater, 2003; Hyun and Tyler, 2000). Household responsibilities like cooking, looking after family etc. are associated with females (Khan, Sultana, Bughio and Naz, 2014; Mustapha, 2014; Amini and Birjandi,

2012; Utomo, Utomo, Reimondos and McDonald, 2012; Pardhan, 2011; Lee and Collins, 2010; Mattu and Hussain, 2004; Vidya, 2002).

Research Design

The study followed a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 312 in-service teachers (156 female and 156 male) teaching at secondary level in co-ed schools (government as well as private) in Delhi was selected through multi stage sampling technique.

Tools and Techniques

The following tools were used to collect the data for the study:

1. **Attitude scale:** An attitude scale was developed by the researcher on the basis of the researches reviewed. The scale was based on 5-point likert scale wherein the respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement towards a series of statements. The categories for responses were 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'can't say', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.

2. **Interview schedule:** Semi-structured interviews were held with the teachers to explore their attitudes in depth. Discussions on the responses were held for further inquiry.

The data was collected in two phases. The first phase involved distribution of attitude scale to the sample. The second phase involved interviews of the teachers. The data thus collected was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The items on the attitude scale were scored from 1 to 5 for Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree respectively. The interviews not only helped the researcher to gain deeper understanding of the attitude of the respondents towards gender issues, but also helped the researcher to achieve higher degree of validity and reliability in the data collected.

Major Findings of the study

The analysis of data revealed the following major findings:

- ♦ None of the respondents has studied about gender as a complete subject in their pre-service teacher education programme. Some of the

Table 1: Percentage of teachers' responses towards gender discrimination

| Sl. No. | Statement | SA (%) | A (%) | CS (%) | D (%) | SD (%) |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| 1 | Men are more suitable for positions of responsibility than women. | 3.85 | 39.75 | 23.72 | 17.95 | 14.74 |
| 2 | Women should be less concerned with equality and more about being good wives and mothers. | 9.30 | 25.00 | 17.63 | 29.81 | 18.27 |
| 3 | Because 'boys will be boys', teachers should be more lenient towards boys than girls. | 2.89 | 2.25 | 9.94 | 50.96 | 33.98 |
| 4 | Woman should not work if the economical position of the man is adequate. | 2.24 | 14.75 | 8.02 | 39.11 | 35.90 |
| 5 | Women should select occupations where nature of work is flexible irrespective of remuneration. | 15.39 | 48.08 | 17.95 | 10.58 | 8.01 |
| 6 | Women are not easily promoted from lower positions to top positions. | 8.02 | 19.23 | 24.36 | 38.46 | 9.94 |
| 7 | Men should be preferred in top positions in employment because of women's fertility issues. | 4.17 | 25.97 | 21.80 | 23.40 | 24.68 |
| 8 | Boys make better classroom leaders than girls. | 1.28 | 30.13 | 20.52 | 16.67 | 31.41 |
| 9 | Men should get leadership roles in an organization as they are better leaders than women. | 1.93 | 18.59 | 14.74 | 41.67 | 23.08 |
| 10 | Men should be paid more than women working at same level as men are more responsible workers than women. | 1.93 | 12.50 | 7.69 | 34.30 | 43.59 |
| 11 | Women should be less concerned with their desires for professional or business careers and should be more concerned with their duties of childbearing and house tending. | 13.46 | 27.89 | 16.67 | 24.68 | 17.31 |

teachers have a little exposure to gender issues in education through workshops, conferences, projects and seminar

- ♦ Majority of the female respondents (28.85%) are teaching social science in their schools while majority of the male respondents (28.21%) are teaching Science in their schools.
- ♦ Majority of teachers (61.86%) want to receive more educational training regarding gender issues. The major reasons cited by them included to know gender equitable practices, to become efficient teacher and to understand needs and interests of girls and boys.
- ♦ Majority of the teachers (60.90%) responded negatively about the need for a mandatory course for teacher certification on gender issues. The major reason cited by them included lack of time and that it could be optional subject for curriculum developers and policy makers.

The percentage responses of the teachers towards the attitude scale are tabulated below:

- ♦ As is clear from the table, more than half of the teachers (50.96%) disagreed and strongly disagreed (33.98%) 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.
- ♦ Most of the teachers (39.75%) agreed to the statement – Men are more suitable for positions of responsibility than women. This is related to the gender stereotype that men are better decision makers than women.
- ♦ 39.11% teachers disagreed and 35.90% teachers strongly disagreed to the statement – Women should not work if the economical position of the man is adequate.
- ♦ Most of the teachers (30.13%) agreed that boys make better classroom leaders than girls; however, more number of teachers (41.67%) disagreed to the statement – Men should get leadership roles in an organization as they are better leaders than women.
- ♦ 43.59% teachers showed strong disagreement to the statement – Men should be paid more than

women working at same level as men are more responsible workers than women.

The responses of the teachers towards attitude scale are interpreted in Fig. 1 and 2.

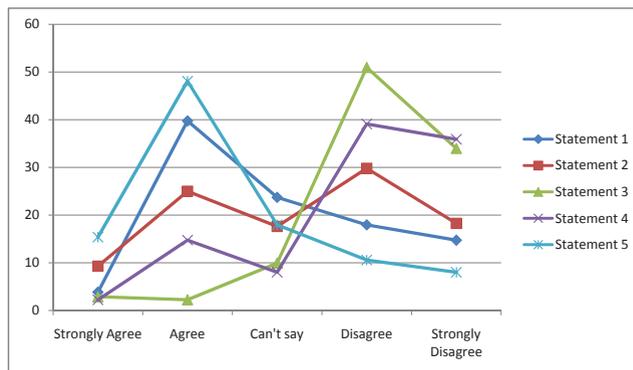


Fig. 1: Percentage of teachers' responses towards gender discrimination (Statement 1 to 5)

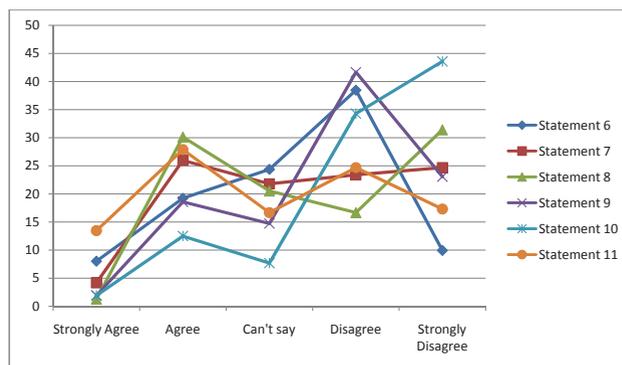


Fig. 2: Percentage of teachers' responses towards gender discrimination (Statement 6 to 11)

- ♦ Interviews with the teachers revealed that the methods they employ to discipline girls and boys are different. For instance, to maintain discipline among girls they personally have a talk with them instead of scolding them in front of other students while the boys are made to stand out of the classroom to discipline them. With girls, disciplining is more at the emotional level whereas with boys, disciplining is more at the physical level.
- ♦ Majority of the teachers do assign different tasks to girls and boys in the classroom.
- ♦ The activities/tasks which are assigned specifically to girls by most of the teachers include creative/decoration tasks such as decorating the classroom, decoration of stage during functions, art and craft activities etc. (28.53%), tasks like welcoming guest, presenting

bouquets to guests etc. (23.72%) and dancing and singing performances and competitions (11.86%).

- ♦ Tasks/activities which are assigned specifically to boys include tasks which require high physical activity and strength like moving desks, tables etc. (29.49%) and sports competitions like cricket, football etc. (14.74%).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that the teachers have not studied gender as a subject however, owing to little exposure to gender issues through workshops, seminars etc., they showed interest in studying gender issues further. This could be a positive attitude among the teachers.

The teachers' attitude showed another positive trend when they disagreed to the statement "Because 'boys will be boys', teachers should be more lenient towards boys than girls". This is because when different behaviors are tolerated for boys and girls, schools, and more specifically teachers, perpetuate the oppression of females as girls' misbehavior is seen as a character defect and boys' misbehavior is seen as a way to assert themselves.

However, the when teachers responded that working women should focus more on working hours than on remuneration so that she could work at home and take care of children, they adhere to the stereotype that a woman's basic task is motherhood and earning is major responsibility of men. The stereotype is further strengthened with the response that women should go out and work only if the men's economical position is inadequate.

Further, the stereotypical beliefs that girls are more creative than boys and boys are stronger than girls do play a major role in assigning of activities among boys and girls in the school and thus, restricting learning opportunities for both the sexes. This kind of differentiation in assigning separate activities to girls and boys may reinforce the gender socialization. Teachers need to be aware of their gender-related tendencies.

Educational Implications

The study highlights the need of changes in the education system, in general and teacher education system, in particular. To encourage equal

participation of both the sexes in the classroom processes, first of all, the teachers need to be made aware and conscious of the gender inequitable processes in the classroom. For this, the teacher education system must ensure that the prospective teachers are able to develop critical analysis and self-reflection qualities. Discussion around gender issues may be made a part of the daily classroom interactions in the teacher preparation programmes. In the school education system, the teachers must strive to provide equal opportunities to girls and boys in curricular as well as co-curricular activities like distributing questions equally to girls and boys, motivating students of both sexes to participate in classroom activities, giving equal importance to opinions of all the students, sharing of duties by both sexes in the classroom and outside it.

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