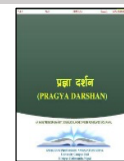




MALE AND FEMALE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER ROLES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEPAL



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Abstract

This study aimed to compare the perspectives of male and female teachers regarding gender biasness. It focused on special education teachers in Kathmandu, Nepal and it was conducted through a quantitative method with survey design. 70 participants were chosen through convenience sampling method from seven special education schools. The survey instrument consisted of a Likert-scale type questionnaire consisting of 20 statements in 4 main areas i.e. biological, mental, and emotional-behavioral and teacher's role regarding gender issues. The results displayed that teachers are gender biased in three main areas which are: biological, mental and emotional-behavioral aspects of gender.

Keywords: gender, special education, perspectives, gender stereotypes

Introduction

Gender inequality is a problem faced all over the world and Nepalese society has also been facing this problem due to the unfair treatment against girls and women by the society. According to a National Female's Commission Report on the Socio-Economic Status of Women in Nepal, girls and women have more restricted access to freedom, property, social security, education and health services, as well as decision making processes (Bhattarai, 2017). In this way, the social inequality is very blatant in the country.

Even among the female population in Nepal, there are major differences among ethnic groups, castes and geographical regions (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Obstacles like restricted access to education, fewer job opportunities women and girl trafficking; abuse and violence are some major gender issues in Nepal. Additionally, any kind of disability increases social stigma (Lamichhane, 2013) for such individuals due to gender bias coupled with disability bias which has been termed as "double discrimination" (Rousso, 2003). This paints the picture of how society perceives and treats males and females differently in the Nepalese society.

Gender issues are prevalent in all spheres of a person's life. In this context, it has been projected that even teachers treat girls and boys differently in the classroom due to gender bias in the teachers' perception of the educational ability of students (Shepardson & Pizzini, 1992). In the field of special education, one of the important issue that has been identified is that, there is teacher biasness in the referral process. In one study, the ratio for referral to special education services was 2:1 in which, male teachers identified 2 students with LD for every 1 student by female teachers (Georgios, Faye, & Padelidu, 2008). However, some studies conducted did not show any significant teachers biasness in the referral process (Bolden, 2009; Eyer, 2015). Another study found that gender greatly influences teacher referrals and, classroom behavior especially, disruptive behavior of boys, also influences teacher referrals (Anderson, 1997; Rai 2019). Therefore, there are mixed results regarding teacher biasness in the referral process of special education.

Even though, the gender issue has already been raised as a matter of discourse in general education field of Nepal, this issue has not gained attention in the special education sector of the country till date. Furthermore, the perspective of teachers should be studied through a gender lens as they are the ones who refer students to special education services. In this scenario, this current study can establish itself as a milestone and open up the door for more discussion and debate on such issues in the Nepalese education sector.

Objective and Research Question

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the male and female teacher's perspectives towards gender stereotypes regarding their students. For this purpose, this study tried to answer the question: "Is there a significant difference between male and female special education teacher's perspectives regarding gender

issues?"

Research Method

The study was conducted via a quantitative method (Creswell, 2012) with a survey design (Kaul, 2009). Participants were selected by means of convenience sampling method. It was carried out in special education schools of the Kathmandu valley comprising of the three districts of Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu. The total number of teachers taken as respondents were 70 (21 males, 49 females) from seven special education schools.

The survey instrument was taken from a previously developed questionnaire (Ifegbesan, 2010) and it was adapted into the Nepalese context. The questionnaire comprising of a two-part survey with the first part comprising of general information such as age, gender and years of teaching experience of the teachers and the second part consisted of 20 statements reflecting four main domains i.e. biological, mental, emotional and teacher's role; which the participants had to rate using a 5-point Likert scale of 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'not sure', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Concerning the survey instrument used in this study, the original questionnaire developed by A. Ifegbesan (2010) had already established internal consistency reliability. After the Likert Scale had been created with appropriate statements that reflected gender stereotypical views, next Professor and colleagues were consulted. As per their advice, the statements were corrected where necessary for more accuracy. Then after, a pilot-test was carried out on 10-15 persons. According to the results of the pre-test, further corrections were made. The sentences which were found to be unrelated were improved upon further. After this, the Chronbach's alpha was calculated and it stood at .701 which made sure the content validity of the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in the leisure time of teachers during their school hours. Each participant was given atleast 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The survey instrument was created in both Nepali and English languages because some of the respondents were unable to understand English. Lastly, the questionnaire was distributed to a large sample of 70 individuals to obtain the data for the research.

As for the Likert scale, the scale points were recorded into numbers (e.g., strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, neutral = 3, disagree = 4, strongly disagree = 5). All of the items the same way, for instance, 0 was the not gender biased end of the scale and 5 was the gender biased end. Next, the data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, and an independent sample t-test was carried out to analyze the perspectives of male in comparison to female special education teachers.

Table III-1: Demographic Information of Respondents (N=70)

Item		N	%
Gender	Male	21	30.0
	Female	49	70.0
Age	Less than 30	24	34.3
	Above 30	46	65.7
Years of Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	26	37.1
	5 years and more	43	61.4
	No response	1	1.4

Results

The issues of gender stereotyping were reflected with through 20 statements in a Likert-scale type questionnaire. As per the analysis, the following results were gained which are depicted in detail in the following tables. It was seen that there are differences in the perspectives of male and female teachers in three main areas i.e.; biological, mental and emotional-behavioral aspects of gender.

Area	Item	Male Teachers (n=21)	Female Teachers (n=49)	t-value	p-value
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Biological	During puberty girls become less active than boys.	3.76 (.995)	2.96 (.912)	3.284	.002
	Boys perform better than girls on tasks related to motor skills.	4.05 (.669)	3.06 (1.1444)	3.681	.000
	Males are stronger than females.	3.43 (1.121)	3.20 (1.224)	.720	.474
	Boys can tolerate more pain than girls.	3.24 (.995)	2.49 (1.139)	2.612	.011
	Boys are naturally better at most sports.	2.90 (.995)	3.04 (1.098)	-.488	.627

Table IV-1 portrays the differences in perspectives between male and female teachers in the biological aspect of gender such as adolescence, motor skills, strength, pain tolerance and strength.

Table IV-1: Differences of male and female teacher's perspectives on the biological aspect of gender

It is clearly seen that there is a major difference in perspectives of male and female teachers in statement no. 1 which states that girls are less active than boys during puberty. For this statement, the mean value of male teachers is 3.76 and female teachers is 2.96. Additionally, the p-value obtained was $[t(68) = 3.284, p < .01]$. This means that male teachers agreed more with this statement than the females.

Likewise, statement no. 2 regarding motor skills showed a difference in teachers' perspectives of the two genders. Particularly, male teachers, with a mean value of 4.05, agreed more as compared to female teacher's mean value of 3.06. The p-value was $[t(68) = 3.681, p < .001]$.

Yet again, major differences in perspectives were seen in statement no. 4, regarding pain tolerance level. In this case, again male teachers have a higher mean value of 3.24 as compared to female teachers' mean value of 2.49, which that male teacher agreed more than female teachers. Also, the p-value is $[t(68) = 2.612, p < .05]$.

Conversely, there weren't any differences in male and female teachers in items nos. 3 and 5.

Table IV-2: Differences of male and female teacher's perspectives on the mental aspect of gender

Area	Item	Male Teachers (n=21)	Female Teachers (n=49)	t-value	p-value
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Mental	There are differences in learning rates between boys and girls.	2.52 (1.209)	2.67 (1.008)	-.536	.594
	Boys perform better at mathematics than girls.	2.52 (1.289)	2.41 (1.039)	.396	.693
	Girls learn better than boys.	2.57 (1.028)	3.24 (1.109)	-2.378	.020
	Girls can handle stressful situation better than boys.	3.05 (.865)	3.57 (.890)	-2.276	.026
	Girls are more creative than boys.	2.95 (.973)	3.06 (1.049)	-.406	.686

In table IV-2, the mental aspect comprised of learning rate, math performance, stress management and creativity. In item no. 3 that says "girls learn better than boys" female teachers displayed more agreement with a mean value of 3.24, while male teachers' mean value was 2.57. The p-value here is $[t(68) = -2.378, p < .05]$. Next, in item no. 4, regarding handling of stress, there was quite a difference in perspectives of male and female teachers, where, the mean value of female teachers is 3.24, and the mean value of male teachers i.e. 2.57. Here, the p-value was $[t(68) = -2.276, p < .05]$. Thus, overall, female teachers agreed more than male teachers that girls are better at handling stress. Conversely, item nos. 1, 2 and 5 did not show any differences in perspectives of male and female teachers.

Table IV-3: Differences of male and female teacher's perspectives on the emotional-behavioral aspect of gender

Area	Item	Male Teachers (n=21)	Female Teachers (n=49)	t-value	p-value
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Emotional & Behavioral	Boys are more active and outspoken than girls	3.14 (.854)	2.80 (1.172)	1.222	.226
	Girls are more disciplined and easier to manage than boys.	3.52 (.981)	3.33 (1.214)	.657	.513
	Boys are more expressive than girls	3.57 (.811)	2.90 (.941)	2.855	.006
	Girls are more attention seeking than boys.	3.71 (.854)	3.04 (.978)	2.744	.008
	Boys create more trouble in the classroom than girls	3.43 (1.121)	3.39 (.975)	.153	.879

Table IV-3 was about the emotional-behavioral domain of gender, including comprising of discipline issues, expression and attention seeking behavior.

In item no. 3, i.e. there was a noticeable difference in perspectives of male and female teachers. Male teachers displayed a higher mean value of 3.57 while, female teachers were 2.90. The p-value was $[t(68) = 2.855, p < .05]$. Therefore, we can say that male teachers agreed more than female teachers that "boys are more expressive than girls".

Additionally, in item no. 4, again male teachers displayed a higher mean value of 3.71 than female teachers mean value of 3.04. The p-value was $[t(68) = 2.744, p < .05]$. It shows that, male teachers agreed more than female teachers that girls are more attention seeking than boys.

Conversely, item nos. 1, 2 and 5 did not show any noteworthy differences between the male and female teachers' perspectives.

Table IV-4: Differences of male and female teacher's perspectives on teacher's role

Area	Item	Male Teachers (n=21)	Female Teachers (n=49)	t-value	p-value
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Teacher's Role	Teachers should be involved in shaping their student's perception about gender roles.	3.76 (.889)	3.69 (.983)	.273	.786
	I try to discourage gender stereotyped behavior in my class.	3.76 (1.136)	3.55 (1.119)	.719	.474
	Teachers should devote more time to encouraging girls than boys.	2.95 (1.203)	2.76 (1.071)	.680	.499
	My classroom practices encourage students to respect each gender equally.	4.05 (1.024)	4.16 (.850)	-.490	.626
	The educational curriculum focuses on gender equality.	4.05 (.865)	3.94 (.988)	.438	.663

Table IV-4 regarding teachers' role, it comprised of items about teachers' influence in forming their student' gender role perspectives, discouraging stereotyping, promoting gender equality etc. There weren't any remarkable differences between the perspectives of male and female teachers. Here, both male and female teachers gave similar responses in all items of the questionnaire. On the whole, regardless of their gender, teachers believed that they discourage gender stereotyping in their classrooms and that they teach their students to respect each gender equally.

Discussion

Firstly, in the biological aspect, other studies show that adolescent girls with disabilities face cleanliness problems and issues of physical pain during menstruation. (Grover, 2011). Therefore, girls could be less active during those times. From this current study, it could be seen that female teachers tried to show more favorable results for their own gender by hiding the menstruation problem of girls.

Secondly, studies on gender differences in learning motor skills show that boys did better at ball skills related tasks, while girls did better on manual dexterity tasks (Junaid & Fellowes, 2006). Similarly, in another research, boys showed better performance at ball throw tasks while girls were better at jump rope and ball bouncing (Ikeda & Aoyagi, 2009). However, another research on children with mild learning disabilities, showed poor overall motor performance; particularly on locomotor skills (Nonis & Jernice, 2014). The results of this present study show that male and female teachers mainly answered in favor of their own gender, most likely due to gender biasness in the teacher's personal beliefs systems and perceptions regarding acquisition of motor skills.

Regarding threshold of pain, studies show that culturally, men are taught to hide their pain or not talk about it, while women are taught to be more sensitive and thus, willing to report the pain (Samulowitz, Grenmyr, Eriksson, & Hensing, 2018). In another study it was seen that for the same severity of pain, different reactions were garnered from males and females (S. Rovner, et al., 2017; Bartley & Fillingim, 2013). Even in this current study, male and female teachers' gender role perceptions influenced their responses that they gave in the questionnaire.

Coming to the mental aspect, studies have shown that there is a "gender gap" in academic achievement and that usually, girls perform better than boys (Coates & Draves, 2006; Smith, 2015; Terrier, 2016). Girls have a longer attention span than boys which helps them to perform better in the classroom setting. Conversely, boys are more motivated to move around, which disturbs the classroom and attracts undue attention from teachers and classmates (Ponitz, Rimm-

Kauffman Brock & Nathanson, 2009). These studies clearly show that there are gender differences in academic performance and display of behavior. In this setting, the male and female teachers' responses regarding this topic clearly indicates gender biasness.

As for handling stress research in this field shows that girls, especially academically poor performers are more prone to internal distress are more vulnerable than boys, but even girls who perform well academically are more prone to distress in school than boys (Pomerantz, Altermatt & Saxon, 2002). Another study showed that both genders perceive stress in the same way but girls reported greater levels (Östberg, Almquist, Folkesson, Låftman, Modin & Lindfors, 2014). In this present research however, responses given by male and female teachers in this present study were largely gender biased.

Concerning the emotional and behavioral aspect of gender, research showed that males consider themselves as more assertive and outspoken than females while dealing with superiors and bosses, whereas, women consider themselves as more assertive in expressing love, affection, compliments, or anger towards parents (Hollandsworth & Wall, 1977). Another study on gender differences in learning jazz music showed that females were less confident, more anxious and had fewer efficacies towards learning jazz music as compared to males (Wehr-FlowersE., 2006). However, another study showed that self-confidence is not gender specific but that self-confidence decreases for both boys and girls with age (Fitzsimmons, Yates, & Callan, 2018). In this current study gender biasness on the part of male and female teachers is clearly seen in the results.

Similarly, in the statement about girls being more attention seeking than boys, studies show that generally, girls are viewed as meeting behavior expectations of adults more easily (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2006). Plus, it has also been found that boys are more engrossed with materials or subjects of their interest while girls are more concerned with pleasing adults (Pomerantz, Altermatt & Saxon, 2002). Yet more studies show that more males are prone to being referred to special education services for behavioral problems and that they also show academic underachievement as compared to females (Smith, 2015; Kvande, Belsky & Wichstrom, 2018; Greenblatt, 1994; Root & Resnick, 2003). Therefore, teachers should consider their biasness while handling behavioral issues of their students. This can help in lessening the risk of mis-diagnosing any student, particularly.

On the whole, male and female teachers both displayed gender biasness in this study by responding to statements in the survey instrument in a way that supports the image of their own gender. The concept of gender indubitably guides people's thoughts, words, actions, behavior, emotions etc. (Jung & Rai, 2018). Moreover, cultures, social norms, values and beliefs greatly influence how girls and boys are brought up which consequently influences their personal and academic life greatly. Thus, it would be highly effective if all teachers in Nepal including special education teachers are required to undergo gender sensitization training, through which they can be more careful while dealing with gender related issues in classrooms and schools.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that teachers displayed gender biasness in three main areas i.e. biological, mental and emotional-behavioral aspects of their student's gender as per the findings of this study. However, almost all the teachers hold the view that they are not gender biased and that they are imparting knowledge to their students through gender-friendly teaching-learning practices. On the contrary, this study showed that regardless of their knowledge and beliefs, they did display gender biased behavior and attitudes even if unintentionally. To deal with this issue, it is highly crucial to provide them with gender sensitization training even during their teacher training course, to promote gender-friendly teaching-learning practices by diminishing gender biasness in classrooms.

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