

An Exploration of the University Students' Experiences Regarding the Teachers' Gender Bias



Samera Jabeen *

Mohsin Asif †

Abid Ali ‡

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Abstract: *This qualitative study was a follow-up of quantitative research which was conducted to identify the male university teachers' gender bias in the classroom. In this qualitative exploration, there were 18 students who were sampled for the study conveniently. The researchers developed an interview protocol based on (Ali et al., 2021) and collected the data with the help of individual interviews. The interview protocol comprised nine open-ended questions. The data were analyzed with the help of the Thematic analysis. The qualitative results confirmed the quantitative results that the teachers' interaction was found biased against females. Similarly, their feedback was also found biased against males and the positive feedback and motivation are given more to the female students. Similarly, the teachers' expectations were found biased against females in that the challenging tasks are not assigned to them keeping in view their gender. The teachers also use male-oriented language while teaching.*

Key Words: Bias in Classroom, Teachers' Practices, Students' Experiences

Introduction

Societies cannot be developed and make progress unless the teachers of that societies play an active role in nation-building. They are the father figure of the societies they transfer the knowledge to the upcoming generations (Ali et al., 2021). They teach them how to survive and live. They also teach them the art of living along with the skills of sciences and technologies so that the new generation could compete in the world (Siddiqui et al., 2019). If any nation is to be assessed, there is no need to assess the whole nation. Rather just see its teachers and you would find no difficulty to judge the whole nation (Zulfqar et al., 2020).

Teaching aids in the maturation of immature people into the type of people who can successfully navigate society and resolve their own problems (Ali et al., 2021). In order for the intended students to get the most from the instruction, it is crucial that the teachers must participate in a proactive manner. Therefore, it could only be done in a setting where

every student has an equal chance to learn and achieve. The lesson might not be as effective if not (Sarfraz, 2020).

A study was conducted to find out how instructors felt about their performance in the classroom. According to the quantitative portion of the survey, teachers paid equal attention to male and female students (Ali et al., 2022). The qualitative component, however, provided insight into how students perceived that attention was given to both male and female pupils. Boys participated in classroom discussions, but mostly girls engaged in teacher-student interactions (Beaman, 2006).

Teachers that are sensitive to gender issues may unintentionally treat male and female students differently (Slater, 2003). The likelihood of a student succeeding is decreased when a teacher purposefully supports a particular gender of students, whether they are male or female (Mougharbel, 2010). Teachers ask male students more questions than female students

* PhD Scholar, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

† MPhil Scholar, Special Needs Education, Department of Education, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ MPhil Scholar (ELPS), Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

do, and they also give them more criticism when they don't get the questions correctly (Beaman, 2006). They are yet given harsher punishments and branded as difficult students (Myhill & Jones, 2006).

Christakis (2013) showed that males continuously obtained worse grades than females, even in math and science, in a study on gender inequalities in grades at the primary school level. However, women must seek education as well since it is mandated by law (Ali et al., 2023). They make up around 50% of the population in any nation, and progress would be very challenging without them. UNICEF has made it a goal to provide equal educational opportunities to all (UNICEF, 2019).

But historically, it has been noted that women have received less respect and opportunities for education than males. However, according to Wikipedia (2019), all genders are affected by these prejudices. When pursuing their education, men also encounter discrimination based on gender.

Buchmann (2008) claims that for more than ten years, it was thought that only women were denied equal access to education. It is clear that some men have encountered discrimination based on gender in the educational system (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Equal educational opportunities should be available to all children, and UNESCO is trying to make this a reality. On the other hand, one of the sustainable development goals is to give men and women equal access to education (GEM, 2019; UNESCO, 2019). Without providing all children, regardless of gender, with equal, unbiased, and fair educational opportunities, no nation can advance.

According to UKFIET (2019), when gender discrimination is eradicated, providing equal educational opportunities for boys and girls is not the duty of one stakeholder; rather, we are all responsible for accomplishing this. Our society as a whole, as well as the government, educational institutions, educators, and teachers, are all responsible for this (Ali et al., 2021). However, it is the duty of the school—more specifically, the teachers—to take steps to combat discrimination based on gender. While eradicating bias, teachers should use ideas and techniques that advance gender equality in the classroom. They should provide both males and females equal chances in terms of classroom discussion, questions, debates, and responsibility allocation (Beaman, 2006).

Despite this, schools intentionally encourage inequity between male and female students, according

to Obiunu (2013). They are prompted to select a single seat rather than a group seat because of this the students are treated differently by their teachers. In contrast, male and female students are evaluated differently based on their behaviour in the classroom and at school. Reay (2001) asserts that professors tolerate male students more than female students. When a female student misbehaves, it is seen as a sign of her character weakness; yet, when a male student participates in the same behaviour, it is seen as an attempt to get attention.

Obiunu (2013) asserts that teachers tend to compliment female students on their neatness, cleanliness, and calmness while complimenting male students on their independence and activity. In view of the literature indicating that bias among instructors does exist in the classroom, the purpose of this study was to examine prejudice among instructors in Pakistani universities. Because gender prejudice among teachers may hinder students' ability to learn and succeed, it is possible to assess the current situation and take the necessary remedial action to eliminate it (Frawley, 2005; Tourmaki, 2003). Research on the likelihood of gender-based teacher discrimination in senior schools was done by Einarsson and Granstrom in 2002. Information was acquired for this purpose by watching 40 classes in the classroom, and the results showed that teachers gave priority to kids of the opposite gender.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers may only properly instruct students if they carry out their duties impartially for each student in the class. When it comes to recreational and academic activities, male and female students must be treated equally and without bias. However, it appears that some students think their teachers don't treat them fairly. Therefore, this study was conducted to ascertain how gender bias is used in the classroom by university lecturers from the perspectives of the students.

Methodology

This qualitative study was a follow-up of quantitative research which was conducted to identify the male university teachers' gender bias in the classroom. In this qualitative exploration (Phenomenology study), there were 18 students who were sampled for the study conveniently. These participants were taken from four universities out of which two were from the private whereas the other were from the

public sector. The researcher(s) developed an interview protocol based on (Ali et al., 2021) and collected the data with the help of individual interviews. The interview protocol comprised nine open-ended questions. The data were tape-recorded and then transcribed for the analyses and were analyzed with the help of the Thematic analysis.

Results

The transcribed data have been analyzed by using the Thematic analysis. The themes which came out of the analyzed data included:

- Teachers' Interaction with Students
- Teachers' Feedback
- Teachers' Attention
- Expectations from Students
- Language Approach
- Students' Sitting Arrangement

Teachers' Interaction with Students

When the students were asked that "How do they feel about the teachers' interaction with the students based on gender orientation?" the majority of the students responded that the teachers' behaviour remains polite and sympathetic while dealing with the female students during the class however the same is not exhibited by the teachers for the male students. In fact, they deal strictly with male students as compared to female students. Similarly, the frequency of their interaction remains high with the female students and they interact with the male students less frequently. However, as far as the questioning during the class was concerned, the frequency of their questions was high for the male students and the female students were asked fewer questions by their teachers. Similarly, the interruption rate from the teachers was high for the female students. They were frequently interrupted by their teachers as compared to their male class fellows.

One of the participants reported that:

Our teachers remained very kind and polite with the female students. No matter, either it was about the assignment submission deadline or the feedback regarding that assignment. They dealt with the female students kindly. However, their dealing was different from the male students. They were somehow strict with them.

Another participant elaborated on the frequency of the teachers' interaction with the male as well as female students while saying:

The teachers were more welcoming for the interaction with the female students whereas their behavior was different with the male students. Their interaction was less with the male students. However, they used to interact with the female students more frequently than the male students.

Another participant stated that:

The teachers' interaction ratio with the female students was more than the male students. Their behaviour wasn't so welcoming for the male students. However, the teachers used to interrupt the female students more frequently than the male students in the classroom.

Teachers' Feedback

When the participants were asked that "What are your experiences regarding the teachers' feedback?" The majority of the participants elaborated on their experiences while stating that the teachers' positive views were given to both the male as well as female students while students' participation and presentation during the class. However, the teachers' motivation was available more for the female students as compared to the male students. They used to motivate the female students more with their encouraging feedback. Similarly, the female students received more appreciation from their teachers regarding the appearance and relevance of the work as compared to their male class fellows.

One of the participants said that:

"The teachers were very justified about their views to both the male and the female students. Both of the genders were given positive views by the teachers."

Another participant shared the experience while saying:

I have seen the teachers giving positive views for male and female students equally but they usually motivate female students instead of male students. Always when the presentation was given by any female student, she was praised by the teachers for the presentation. However, the same was not available mostly for male students.

When the participants were asked that "How do you elaborate on the teachers' critics regarding the students' assignments and presentations?" The majority of the students responded that the male students were criticized more by their teachers for their assignments and presentations. Whereas the female students were given positive views by their teachers for their assignments and the presentations as compared to

their male fellows. Similarly, they were less criticized for their done work and assignments.

One of the participants said that:
Being a female, my experience was good that the teachers always guided me. Their focus was on our betterment. Teachers mostly give the female students a positive view of their work so that they could be encouraged to do more good work. However, I felt that the teachers' critics were more towards our male class fellows.

Another participant shared the experience while saying:
The teachers were inclined toward female students that they used to admire their work and assignments more than the boys. The boys also were criticized more and appreciated less than the girls in the classrooms. They were also less appreciated than the female students.

Teachers' Attention

When the participants were asked that *"How do you feel any difference in teachers' paid attention for the male and female students?"* The majority of the students shared their experiences that more attention was given to the female students as compared to their male class fellows by their male teachers. The females were given more attention regarding their demonstration. That's not it, the preference was given to the female students during the classroom discussion. They were welcomed more than the male students to get into the discussion. Even the females were encouraged by their teachers to remain dominant over the male students during the discussion.

One of the participants reported that:
I felt strongly that the teachers were more attentive towards the female students and they were less attentive towards the male students. The female students were intensively attended to by the teachers whenever it was time to demonstrate. However, the same attention wasn't given to the male students by their teachers during their demonstrations or presentations.

Another participant gave similar views:
Yes, I felt the difference in the treatment given by the teachers to the male and the female students. The female students were treated more attentively by the teachers. They were also welcomed for the discussion. They were given the motivation to take an active part in the discussion during the classroom activities.

However, one of the people gave a different view:

I don't think that the teachers treated us differently. Rather, they treated us both equally. I believe that teachers consider both male and female students equally because the students are just students for them instead of being male or female.

Teachers' Response

When the participants were asked that *"How do you see the difference in teachers' responses for the male and female students?"* The majority of the students shared their experiences that the positive response was given to the female students more than their male class fellows by the teachers. They welcome more female students than male students whenever the hands were raised by the students against a question. However, whenever there was the turn of the in-depth questions, the male students were preferred by the teachers as compared to their female class fellows. The students also gave their views that the teachers were more open-hearted towards the female students as compared to the male students.

One of the participants said that:
"The females benefitted from the teachers' responses and especially the positive responses. The teachers make no delay to welcome the female students with raised hands."

Another participant responded that:
As per my experience, the teachers used to motivate the female students by welcoming their raised hands so that the female students could also be included in the discussion. However, the females were not preferred by the teachers regarding the in-depth questions. At this time, the male students were given the preference and were warmly welcomed by the teachers.

A similar view was given by another participant:
"The teachers were preferring the girls for starting and carrying the discussion out during the class but they usually welcomed the boys for asking the in-depth questions."

Expectations from Students

When the participants were asked that *"How do teachers expect from the students based on their gender?"* the majority of the participants shared their experiences that better work was expected by the teachers from the male students as compared to their female class fellows. As far as discipline was concerned,

it was also expected more from the male students to be disciplined as compared to the female students. Similarly, the clerical work was also assigned to the male students thinking that they can do it better than the female students.

One of the participants gave the stance that:

"The teachers' expectations were high for the boys so that they may submit better and quality work. They were required by the teachers to show more effort and seriousness to bring refinement in their work."

A similar experience was shared by another participant:

"The teachers used to demand better work from the boys. They always use to say that focus on the quality of the work and submit the better work."

Another participant responded that the teachers mostly give clerical work to the boys. They give them work and also direct them to produce better work bearing the good quality. They also were directed to discipline themselves and get serious about the tasks and the study so they could get good marks in the assignments and the exams too.

When the participants were asked that *"How do the teachers distribute the tasks to students?"* the majority of the participants shared their experiences that the managerial tasks were given to the male students as compared to the female students. Similarly, the challenging and difficult tasks were also assigned to the male students by the teachers as compared to the female students. However, the females were given a more positive response by their teachers as compared to the male students.

One of the participants said that:

The teachers were choosy about the task distribution among students. Whenever they had to allot the managerial tasks, they call the boys and assign them these tasks. Only a few managerial tasks were assigned to the females. Otherwise, they were out of the game. Similarly, the difficult tasks were also not given to the females. Rather the male students were asked to accomplish them.

A similar stance was given by another participant:

"Yes, I felt the difference that the male class fellows of ours were given the challenging and difficult tasks. The females were not assigned any challenging or managerial task by the teachers."

Language Approach

When the participants were asked that *"What are your experiences regarding the teachers' exemplifications and language orientation?"* the majority of the participants shared their experiences that during the teaching activities, the teachers used to deploy the male-oriented approach. The examples were also used by the teachers depicting the male-oriented approach. Similarly, the selected content for the teaching was also reflective of the male-oriented approach regarding the language.

One of the participants responded that:

"Mostly the examples given by our male teachers were manly or man-oriented. They usually shared their own experiences which were obviously man-oriented."

Another participant stated that:

The teachers were fluent in the examples and situations showing the males. They usually used "he/his" during talking to the students. So, basically, they were using the male-oriented approach to speak and exemplify the concepts. The female-oriented approach was seldom used by them.

Students' Sitting Arrangement

When the participants were asked that *"What was the strategy used by your teacher regarding the students' sitting arrangements?"* the majority of the participants shared their experiences that there were no bindings by the teachers regarding the students' grouping based on their genders. In fact, the students were allowed by the teachers to make groups including both genders for their presentations and other assigned tasks. Even there was no hindrance from the teachers' side regarding the co-sitting arrangements of both the male and the female students. Even the students were permitted to interact beyond gender during the classroom discussion.

One of the participants said:

The teachers were mainly concerned with the teaching and learning. The seating arrangement was not a big deal for them. They had no issue of the male or female students sitting together or separately. They never bothered it all. They always honoured the students' choices for their sitting arrangements. They used to change the seating arrangement only when it was the demand of the lesson. For example, if they had to conduct any discussion on a topic, then they bothered and changed the seating arrangement. Otherwise, they never changed it.

A similar stance was given by another student:

There was no issue about how the students sat in the classroom. They were just asked to follow the discipline and that's it. Either they sit separately based on their gender or while being mixed up, it was upon them.

Conclusion

The qualitative results confirmed the quantitative results that the teachers' interaction was found biased against females. Similarly, their feedback was also found biased against males and the positive feedback and motivation are given more to the female students.

Similarly, the teachers' expectations were found biased against females in that the challenging tasks are not assigned to them keeping in view their gender. The teachers also use male-oriented language while teaching. However, they do not object to the co-sitting of both male and female students.

Recommendations

Based on the results, it is recommended that the teachers should be directed by the universities to minimize their gender bias and treat both male and female students equally.

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