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Secondary School Teachers on Gender Sensitive Attitudes: A Glimpse

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' attitudes are influenced by societal biases and affect their interactions with students, but a majority express a desire for more training. While some studies find no gender difference in attitudes, others reveal disparities based on factors like teacher background or institution type. Gender sensitivity refers to the awareness and consideration of the socially constructed differences between males and females, and the conscious effort to treat them equitably in all aspects of life. In the context of secondary education, where students undergo critical physical, emotional, and cognitive development, gender-sensitive teaching practices help foster equality, respect, and inclusiveness. Teachers with gender-sensitive attitudes are more likely to encourage participation of both boys and girls in academic and extracurricular activities, challenge stereotypes, and create a classroom climate that values fairness. The findings often emphasize the need for improved professional development and institutional support to foster gender-equitable learning environments. In this article, secondary school teachers on gender sensitive attitudes: a glimpse has been discussed.

Keywords: School, Teachers, Gender, Sensitive, Attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary school teachers can cultivate gender-sensitive attitudes by fostering an inclusive classroom environment, providing equal opportunities for all students, challenging gender stereotypes in teaching materials and daily interactions, and ensuring that both male and female students receive balanced attention and encouragement from their teachers. While some teachers demonstrate strong gender awareness, others may hold unconscious biases or traditional views, highlighting the need for comprehensive training and ongoing professional development to equip educators with the skills and motivation to promote gender equality and social justice. (Agarwal, C. & Shukla, N.M., 2017).

Secondary school teachers' attitudes toward gender sensitivity are a mix of awareness and unconscious biases, manifesting as differential treatment in discipline, task assignment, and expectations for academic achievement, often reflecting societal gender stereotypes. While the education system aims to foster gender-neutral perspectives and promote inclusivity, teachers may



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struggle to consistently challenge patriarchal mind-sets or apply a truly gender-sensitive approach due to a lack of adequate training, leading to practices that reinforce rather than dismantle gender biases.

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the values, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals in society. Schools, as formal institutions of learning, are not only spaces for imparting knowledge but also environments where social norms and cultural practices are transmitted. Within this framework, teachers act as role models and agents of change, significantly influencing the perspectives of young learners. One of the crucial areas where teachers' influence becomes highly relevant is the promotion of gender-sensitive attitudes. (Yuden, Y., Chuki, S., Dorji, T., 2020).

However, despite policy interventions and advocacy for gender equality in education, stereotypes and biases often persist in classrooms. Teachers may, knowingly or unknowingly, reinforce traditional gender roles, which in turn affects the confidence, aspirations, and achievements of students. Therefore, examining the attitudes of secondary school teachers toward gender sensitivity becomes essential in understanding how far educational institutions are progressing towards inclusive and equitable learning environments.

The study on secondary school teachers' gender-sensitive attitudes is thus relevant for highlighting existing practices, identifying gaps, and recommending strategies for professional development. By promoting gender sensitivity in schools, teachers not only empower students but also contribute to building a more just and equitable society. (Sewani, A. & Kabra, A., 2019).

SCHOOL TEACHERS ON GENDER SENSITIVE ATTITUDES

Gender sensitivity refers to the promotion of gender empowerment and the elimination of existing imbalances and disadvantages related to gender in society. Gender sensitivity pertains to enhancing awareness of the ramifications of gender inequality and recognizing the issues associated with gender discrimination. Gender sensitivity transcends gender sensitization, encompassing the modification of behaviors among all societal members to achieve gender equality. Gender sensitization is the process of altering the stereotypical thinking of individuals who firmly believe in the inherent inequality between men and women. Consequently, it is posited that they must operate within distinct socio-economic domains. Gender sensitization refers to the understanding and inclination to act in a manner that is attuned to issues of gender justice and equality. It pertains to modifying behavior and instilling empathy into one's perceptions of oneself and the opposite gender. It is a mechanism that can be utilized to eliminate gender disparities and discrimination, so promoting and establishing gender equality and equitable opportunities for both men and women. This effort aims to improve awareness, knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to the advancement of gender equality.



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Gender sensitivity is the capacity to see issues and challenges in societal perceptions of gender. Gender sensitivity enhances individuals' awareness of women's issues and challenges. It encompasses the influence of preconceptions on gender equality, which likely adversely affects individuals both historically and presently. It specifically examines women's behavior, their treatment, and the various interpretations they have of their roles. Gender sensitivity is characterized by an awareness of societal perceptions on gender, enabling individuals to minimize reliance on assumptions rooted in old and antiquated notions of male and female roles. Gender sensitivity refers to the capacity to identify gender-related difficulties & distinct views and interests of women that stem from their varying social positions and gender roles. Gender sensitivity entails being attuned to gender issues, demonstrating empathy towards individuals of all genders, and opposing injustices between men and women in all contexts. Gender sensitization is a gradual process of altering both individual attitudes and behavioral patterns on gender justice in all aspects of life. (Kalra, D. & Sharma, A., 2020).

Gender sensitivity refers to the understanding and respect of the necessity to uphold gender equality to appropriately illustrate the distinctions between males and females. To a certain degree, it is accurate that a woman can perform tasks equivalent to those of a male. However, it is imprudent to compel women to replicate all the endeavors of males, even at the cost of nature's designated duties of wifehood and motherhood. It emphasizes that the entire rural context embodies an archaic male chauvinistic ethos of domination, necessitating the eradication of oppression and marginalization. Conversely, if gender distinction is entirely eradicated, gender sensitivity will likewise vanish. This will result in a degree of unnaturalness. To maintain gender sensitivity, we must concentrate on gender-specific nuances within realistic boundaries. Gender sensitization is a proactive approach to gender awareness and alertness to issues that impede the attainment of gender equality. The objectives of gender sensitization include equality, human rights, justice, and a profound transformation of power dynamics between men and women. Gender sensitivity denotes the understanding and recognition of the necessity to uphold a suitable degree of gender distinction between males and females. Gender sensitization refers to the modification of behavior through the enhancement of awareness regarding gender equality issues and the cultivation of empathy towards one's own and the opposite gender. (Kohri, N., 2019).

Gender sensitivity does not involve antagonizing women and men against one another. It assists individuals in discerning which gender-related assumptions are true and which are mere stereotypes. Gender awareness necessitates both academic engagement and the cultivation of empathy and open-mindedness. It expands the most extensive array of life choices for all genders. Gender sensitivity can be defined as a theory grounded in the belief that men and women possess equal opportunities and face identical limits for participation in all aspects of life.



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Key Aspects of Gender Sensitivity

Inclusivity in the Classroom: A gender-sensitive classroom promotes active participation from all students, ensuring that both boys and girls have equal opportunities to speak, write on the board, present their work, and take on leadership roles.

Challenging Stereotypes: Teachers should use teaching materials, examples, and assignments that portray both genders in diverse and equal roles to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

Fair Distribution of Duties: Assigning classroom duties, such as cleaning or moving furniture, should be done without bias to avoid gender-based assumptions about capabilities.

Equal Expectations: Teachers should hold the same high expectations for academic achievement and behavior for both boys and girls.

Safe and Respectful Environment: The classroom should be a safe space where all students feel respected and valued, fostering a sense of equality and belonging regardless of their gender.

Desire for Training: Teachers often express a strong desire for ongoing professional development and structured training programs to gain knowledge and skills in gender sensitivity.

Varied Attitudes: Attitudes towards gender sensitivity are not uniformly positive, with some studies indicating a need for significant changes in the education system to address traditional thinking and biases.

Institutional Influence: The type of school (government, private, etc.) and even regional policies can influence teachers' attitudes toward gender equality.

Role of Teacher Education: Teacher education programs play a crucial role in sensitizing future educators, positioning them as key agents of change for fostering gender equality in classrooms.

Bridging the Gap: There's a recognized gap in gender awareness and efforts to address inequality in pedagogical practices, suggesting a need for more active engagement from teachers.

Beyond Stereotypes: The goal is to equip teachers with the tools to analyze educational materials for gender bias and promote a more equitable distribution of opportunities for both girls and boys.

Challenges for Teachers

Unconscious Biases: Many teachers, despite increased awareness, may still hold unconscious biases related to gender roles, which can manifest in their interactions with students and the broader school environment.



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Traditional Views: Some teachers may hold traditional views on gender roles, believing that women are responsible for domestic work or that certain careers are more suited for a particular gender.

Varying Levels of Sensitivity: There can be significant differences in gender sensitivity among teachers, sometimes correlating with the type of school (e.g., government, government-aided, or private).

Strategies for Improvement

Teacher Education: Gender sensitivity should be a core component of teacher training, providing pre-service and in-service teachers with the awareness, skills, and motivation to be gender-transformative educators.

Professional Development: Ongoing professional development programs can help teachers recognize and address their own biases and learn effective strategies for creating a gender-sensitive classroom.

Awareness and Empathy: Fostering empathy and encouraging teachers to examine their personal attitudes and beliefs about gender can lead to positive behavioral changes.

Institutional Support: Schools and educational institutions need to provide support and resources to help teachers implement gender-sensitive practices consistently.

Manifestations of Gender-Sensitive Attitudes (and Lack Thereof)

Disciplinary Practices: Teachers may use different methods for disciplining boys and girls, for example, through emotional appeal with girls versus public scolding for boys.

Task Assignment: Creative or decorative tasks are often given to girls, while physically demanding chores go to boys, reflecting traditional gender roles.

Perceptions of Academic Achievement: Some teachers perceive girls as superior academically, especially in the initial years of secondary school, while others notice more frequent school failure among boys.

Curriculum and Stereotypes: Teachers may assign tasks based on gender stereotypes and sometimes struggle to identify or address gender bias within the curriculum or in textbooks.

Awareness and Training: Many prospective and in-service teachers are not fully aware of their own potential gender biases, highlighting the need for improved teacher education and awareness programs to foster gender neutrality.



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Factors Influencing Attitudes

Societal Context: Teachers' perceptions are heavily influenced by the immediate social context, including family, peer groups, and mass media.

Teacher Awareness: A lack of awareness of gender-neutral principles can lead to prejudiced or unfair practices that undermine gender equity.

Teacher Education: Future teachers need robust training that instills a gender-neutral perspective to challenge patriarchal mind-sets and promote inclusive education.

Impact on Students

Reinforcement of Stereotypes: Unconscious biases can lead to reinforcing gender stereotypes and limiting students' potential by influencing their career choices or opportunities.

Need for Progressive Thinking: Teachers play a crucial role in developing students into progressive thinkers and responsible citizens, which requires a gender-sensitive approach to education.

CONCLUSION

Secondary school teachers' attitudes toward gender sensitivity is that there's a significant desire for more training and resources, a generally positive but uneven attitude, and the need for structured programs to address persisting gender biases within teacher education and school environments to foster true equity. While some studies find positive outcomes, others highlight a lack of awareness, the influence of traditional stereotypes, and gender differences in the overall receptiveness to inclusive practices.

Gender-sensitive attitudes among secondary school teachers play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive classrooms and nurturing equitable learning environments. Teachers are not only knowledge facilitators but also role models who influence students' perceptions of gender roles and social responsibilities. A gender-sensitive teacher demonstrates awareness of biases, avoids stereotypical remarks, and ensures equal opportunities for both boys and girls in academic as well as co-curricular activities. (Erdamar, G. et al. (2016).

This glimpse into secondary school teachers' attitudes reveals that while many educators acknowledge the importance of gender equity, challenges persist due to cultural norms, unconscious bias, and inadequate training. Positive practices include encouraging both boys and girls in subjects traditionally considered "gendered," promoting respectful classroom interactions, and sensitizing students towards equality. However, gaps often arise when teachers unintentionally reinforce stereotypes through language, expectations, or differentiated treatment.



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Overall, fostering gender-sensitive attitudes requires ongoing professional development, institutional support, and policy initiatives. Empowering teachers with training on gender perspectives, inclusive pedagogy, and reflective practices can significantly strengthen their ability to create classrooms that uphold dignity, equality, and fairness for every learner.

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