

A Study on the Current Situation of Gender Inequality among Chinese High School Students

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Abstract:

Gender inequality is rife in both the society in which people live and on college campuses. The purpose of the article is to explore the factors which can be divided into three parts: family, textbooks & teachers. The way family members interact with one another, their educational orientation, the educational attainment of the parents, the gender stereotypes found in textbooks, and the prejudices held by teachers against women all may contribute to the existence and manifestation of inequalities between men and women in high school. The intention of this article is to lessen the incidence of gender disparity on campus by offering some recommendations regarding the causes of it. In addition to deliberately fostering a teaching and learning environment that is gender-equitable, teachers can assist their students in developing accurate gender perspectives. By sharing their stories of unfair treatment on social media, students, on the other hand, have the power to alter gender stereotypes and societal standards. Since secondary schools are students' primary locations of education, they have the power to actively adopt curriculum reforms and update instructors' perspectives on gender equality in the classroom. It is the responsibility of society to see to it that the government passes legislation safeguarding women's rights, enforces mandatory education, and suitably balances the number of male and female educators.

Keywords: Stereotype; Gender roles; Textbooks; Enrollment rate

1. Introduction

Although gender roles reflect societal norms and expectations of people, they shouldn't be used as a yardstick for evaluating a person's unique qualities and potential. Every person has a distinct personality and set of skills. But gender discrimination still exists today, and it also affects schools. This can have a negative impact on students. Studies over the past two decades have provided important information on gender stereotype. However, very few publications are available in the literature that address the issue of status of gender inequality in high school campuses. There is no doubt that everyone encounters unfair treatment to varied degrees, but the effect of the stereotypes high school children face in the classroom on their academic lives has received minimal consideration. In the school environment, inequality between men and women is manifested in the attitudes of teachers towards male and female students, in gender stereotypes in education and in the differentiated performance of male and female students in terms of their progression to higher education. The paper aimed to investigate the factors including three different levels: family, textbooks & teachers. Some use-

ful suggestions will also be provided. There are several reasons why selecting China as the study's subject makes sense. The Chinese government has placed a strong emphasis on education development in recent years and has been introducing new regulations to address issues that arise, like increasing teachers' understanding of gender issues and the idea of equality. However, due to historical and sociocultural considerations, there are still certain ingrained disparities in the Chinese educational system. There have been many traditional beliefs in China over its lengthy history, including the discriminatory notions that "men are superior to women" and "men are preferred to women." These ideas have a long history and continue to shape people's perspectives. They deny women their independence and treat them as inferior to males. Men typically make the decisions in the family, and women are frequently left out of this process. Strong prejudices continue to impact how society perceives gender roles, and this issue persists today. These gender stereotypes offer each gender distinct societal expectations and, in some cases, restrict how each gender expresses its character.

2. Gender Inequality in High School

2.1 Teachers Have Different Attitudes towards Male and Female Students

Frank & Kevin's study involved three interactive experiments with mixed-class pupils, observing 32 primary school teachers and 38 secondary school teachers [1]. The positive and negative teacher reactions (praise and condemnation) of each child each hour was analyzed using different instructor responses to male and female students [1]. The sample analysis of middle school teachers shows a significant difference in response rates between boys and girls, with boys receiving more overall positive and negative responses (praise and condemnation) from teachers [1]. Group and analyze the data to examine the different reactions of male and female teachers towards boys and girls [1]. The results indicate that compared to male teachers, female teachers tend to adopt more negative reactions towards the social behavior of boys [1]. In terms of academic behavior, male teachers showed more positive reactions [1]. Furthermore, it was noted that both boys and girls exhibited similar levels of task behavior, whether in classes of different genders or classes taught separately by male and female teachers [1].

2.2 Gender Stereotypes in Education

According to Caporrimo's study, boys and girls differ from one another in terms of group identity and ability level, with guys often scoring better on self-identity in the field of mathematics than girls [2]. However, there are no appreciable gender differences in learning motivation, academic self-identity, or self-worth. Pertinent research has demonstrated that, in contrast to the usual gender expectations in society, students with superior mathematical learning ability do not exhibit substantial gender-related disparities in their measurement of mathematical self-concept [3]. Because of the pervasive gender stereotypes, female students typically select language degrees like education and media and shun Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) courses like mathematics out of fear. Women only made up 19.9% of bachelor's degree holders in computer science and 22.2% of bachelor's degree holders in engineering in 2018 [4]. In the US, women earned 20.8% of degrees in physics and 42.3% of degrees in mathematics and statistics [4]. There is conjecture that the lack of female representation in advanced Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) fields of study will worsen.

2.3 Educational Opportunities - Enrollment Rate

In human culture, seeking equal chances has long been

a recurring subject. In their writings, numerous classical philosophers—including Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle—extended the concept of educational equality. Confucius, the greatest philosopher and teacher in China, for instance, articulated an egalitarian educational philosophy more than 2000 years ago in his well-known dictum that “teaching should not be divided into classes”. Survey statistics from 2001 show that more than twice as many Chinese women as males were illiterate or semi-literate. Furthermore, in 2000, the average length of schooling for Chinese women was 6.5 years, 1.5 years shorter than that of men [5, 6]. Now, there is much less gender imbalance in elementary and secondary school. However, the likelihood of gender inequity for girls will rise as kids step out of the compulsory education stage. According to a study on gender disparity in high school, girls are 27.68% more likely than girls in the primary school age group to experience gender inequality when it comes to obtaining educational opportunities [7]. This problem worsens when girls enroll in postsecondary institutions. Studies have indicated that women are 32.42% more likely than males to experience statistically significant gender inequalities because of educational constraints [7]. We can deduct from the data above that gender inequality is still a severe problem that goes beyond the purview of mandatory schooling.

3. Factor

3.1 Family Factor

Previous studies have confirmed that various aspects of parental occupation, family involvement, and related domains (including occupational gender typicality, hours of work, and division of household tasks) are associated with children's attitudes toward future occupation and family involvement [8-11]. Children's gender stereotypes are influenced by parental expectation effects, according to Eccles-Parsons & Jacobs [12,13]. They opine that gender stereotypes based on categories could impact gender disparities in parental confidence in their children's talents as well as attributional inequalities. Due to presumptions that one gender is more gifted in some areas, parents may have a gender bias regarding their children's talents. Mothers' perceptions of their children's talents in particular subjects may be influenced by the widespread idea that women possess greater talent in those domains. In fact, people contend that parents' opinions on their kids' aptitude in some areas may rely in part on how they view gender role stereotypes in those areas. This implies that, even after adjusting for parents' actual level of skill in that area, the impact of parents' views of gender role stereotypes will still be rather significant. Girls' educational chances have long been a focus of emphasis in China's disadvantaged

rural areas. Nonetheless, there are still specific characteristics of females' disadvantageous status in comparison to men that need to be clarified in this setting. Since the 1980s, scholars have generally pointed to differing family expectations for schooling and traditional views regarding females' responsibilities and skills as potential causes of girls' disadvantage [14,15]. Due to gender disparities in the advantages of education, families with lower educational attainment may have different expectations for their children. They may expect sons rather than women to take care of the elderly [16,17]. In conclusion, different combinations of these variables may cause males to differ in their educational attainment to differ in different ways.

3.2 Textbooks

Textbooks still contain gender prejudices, especially when it comes to the conventional allocation of gender roles. Presenting a more balanced perspective on gender roles is crucial to prevent the perpetuation of these prejudices. Girls are supposed to have long hair, wear dresses, and project a shy and reserved persona, whereas boys are typically shown as having short hair and dressing in athletic attire. Textbooks typically portray masculinity as brave and socialized (e.g., Justice-minded attorneys, police officers, and soldiers usually make up this group.), whereas femininity is mainly connected to the home. The conventional gender notion of "male domination of the outside world and female domination of the inside world" is reflected in this division of labor. It is significant to emphasize that, especially in situations where both men and women are present, this representation frequently reinforces derogatory preconceptions of women as weak or uneducated. The claim that women participate 100% of the time in domestic work and males participate 0% is accurate statistically [18]. Of the 49 women in language textbooks, 32 are portrayed as being in domestic duties [18]. Children tend to prefer pictures over words, so guidance through illustrations may lead to biased perceptions. Gender stereotypes were found to exist in a variety of ways in primary school language teaching materials for Hong Kong that were published between 1995 and 2000. The purpose of the research and analytical study was to examine how these stereotypes manifested in these materials. The study concentrated on the drawings found in 108 textbooks [19]. It thoroughly assessed and examined several aspects, including the ratio of male to female roles, the way situations are portrayed, the placement of domestic and non-domestic roles, the kinds of occupations represented, and so forth. The research discovered that there was a lot of gender stereotyping in the textbook pictures.

3.3 Teachers Factor

Children's education shapes their gender beliefs, and the classroom is a vital place for them to engage with peers and teachers. Teachers, as role models, have considerable influence on kids' education. Teachers and peer groups in this environment immediately impart sociocultural experiences to children. Human cognitive processes, according to Vygotsky, are not intrinsic; instead, they emerge by interaction with the outside world and other people [20]. This implies that for children to become objective, their perception of the world needs to be socially accepted. On the other hand, prejudice and discrimination may continue because of this. However, it can also result in the maintenance of preexisting prejudice and discrimination. Gender differences in teaching styles are also reflected in the preferences of teachers. Male teachers place more of an emphasis on fostering aggression and inventiveness in the classroom than do female teachers, who typically require silence and discipline throughout. This may have distinct effects on students' academic performance and character development. Furthermore, it was shown that male educators exhibited a preference for creative solutions, whereas female educators favored a systematic approach. Furthermore, female professors tended to favor quieter, more well-behaved children, whereas male teachers were more understanding of naughty kids. Thus, pupils' academic achievement, excitement for learning, and character development may be impacted by the disparate preferences of male and female teachers.

4. Suggestions

4.1 Teacher

The idea of gender equality has gained widespread acceptance in today's educational curriculum. To achieve gender equality in education, gender equality concepts must be popularized and promoted among educators. Teachers should see themselves as the "transforming social intellectuals," actively engage in the acknowledgment of novel concepts and the application of gender equality principles, take on the role of gender equality advocates in the advancement of teaching practices and educational reform, and seize the chance to expand knowledge and drive change. When it comes to curricular instruction, teachers can take on a leadership role and advance gender equality as a democratic goal. To become teachers who guide pupils in the curriculum and uphold the democratic ideas of gender equality, they must do in-depth analyses of curriculum content and school regulations, as well as adopt a broad and comprehensive viewpoint [7]. Fair reward and punishment policies, as well as evaluation criteria, must

be implemented in the classroom to deal with teens of different genders and lessen gender discrepancies, hence fostering a more positive gender education and learning environment. Gender stereotypes can be successfully eliminated by acknowledging and valuing the physiological and psychological distinctions between male and female students, as well as their gender specificity and areas of strength.

4.2 Students

Nowadays, in China, self-media has taken center stage as the primary vehicle for popular feminism's dissemination. Because of its excellent accessibility, digital media and its associated supporting technologies have been essential in the development and spread of popular feminism [21]. Additionally, women can express their resistance to various forms of gender oppression, such as misogyny, sexual violence, and gender discrimination. They can continuously develop their autonomy through various tools provided by social media platforms. These tools give women a prominent and collective action-oriented networked platform [22]. It should be highlighted, although, that contemporary feminist inclinations on social media display neoliberal traits, focusing on women's control over their bodies, relationships with others, careers, and self-beliefs rather than acknowledging and challenging the current uneven gender structure.

4.3 School

The absence of gender equality curricula in elementary and secondary education will cause the next generation to lack knowledge about gender equality and personality development, which will negatively affect how well they balance marriage and family life. It has become an essential step to carry out the national gender equality policy, fully support gender equality education in elementary and secondary schools and raise a new generation of gender equality advocates. The Ministry of Education stresses that departments should work together to support family-school collaboration and to enhance high-quality gender education programs. To raise the cultural bar for gender equality education, the idea of gender equality needs to be thoroughly ingrained in primary and secondary school campus cultures, managerial styles, instructional strategies, and group projects. With the establishment of pertinent policies and initiatives by the government, much progress has been made in supporting gender equality education in secondary schools between 1984 and 2022 throughout China's 38-year social and historical development process.

4.4 Society

Due to the poor standing of women in society and the

impact of gender characteristics such as masculinization in culture, women have traditionally held most positions in early childhood education. Officials and media personalities in some countries have voiced concerns regarding the feminization of the teaching profession. Academics have examined and evaluated this circumstance, as well as critically assessed global trends of gender disparities in teaching and investigated the causes behind these trends. Developing more male instructors is one of the strategies the Chinese government has announced to address the gender disparity in early childhood education. As a result of the circumstances mentioned above, Jiangsu Province has initiated a plan to meet the target of having at least one male teacher in each kindergarten within three to five years; 300 male students must be recruited each year for free into kindergarten teacher training programs [23]. In addition, the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education policy has a significant effect on improving the enrollment rate while also promoting the realization of educational equality. Research by Wu and Zhang, Wang, and Liu indicate that there has been a decrease in gender inequality in the field of education [3]. However, even with so much material to back them up, opinions among academics over gender disparity in China's education system in the early 21st century are still complicated. Researchers like Cao & Lei, Davis et al., Hannum, Wang & Adams, and Hong have all noted that there are still notable disparities in the educational options available to men and women [3]. For instance, utilizing micro sample data from the 2000 Chinese Census, Hannum et al. discovered a declining trend in the enrollment rate of girls in compulsory schooling [3].

5. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study is to examine the factors why high school students experience gender inequality. The investigation has shown that gender stereotypes can be formed by a variety of factors, including close family relationships, parenting styles, educational attainment, textbook stereotypes of women, and teacher-held gender stereotypes. These factors can then influence students' perceptions of equitable treatment in the educational setting. This paper will offer recommendations to teachers, students, schools, and society to lessen this phenomenon. Teachers must develop gender concepts for their students and actively foster a gender-equal learning environment. Students cannot actively alter the ingrained gender bias of the public, but they can influence social norms and gender awareness through extensive discussions on social media. Schools must actively update their teaching staff's awareness of gender equality and reform their curricula. The so-

cial environment is one of the most important factors. The government must enact laws to defend women's rights, guarantee the implementation of compulsory education, and expeditiously implement changes aimed at balancing the gender composition of teaching staff.

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