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## Gender Sensitivity In Pre-Service Teachers: An Exploratory Study

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### Abstract

Education is a powerful tool that shapes societal values, beliefs, and behaviors. Among the many aspects of education, gender sensitization plays a critical role in fostering equality and inclusivity. Gender sensitivity in education refers to the awareness, recognition, and integration of gender-equitable practices in teaching and learning environments. This study explores the gender sensitivity of pre-service teachers by assessing their awareness, attitudes, and preparedness to address gender-related issues in classrooms. Conducted through a survey of 30 pre-service teachers, this research analyzes their perspectives on gender equality and their readiness to implement inclusive teaching methodologies. The findings suggest that while many pre-service teachers exhibit a high level of gender sensitivity, there remain areas that require further development, particularly in handling gender biases and designing gender-inclusive curricula. The study underscores the importance of integrating structured gender sensitization training within teacher education programs to ensure that future educators have the necessary tools to promote gender equity in education.

### Introduction

Gender sensitivity in education is a fundamental pillar in the journey toward social justice and equality. Teachers play a transformative role in shaping young minds, influencing their perspectives on gender roles, stereotypes, and social norms. Schools and classrooms serve as primary spaces where children learn societal values, including equality and respect. Despite increasing awareness of gender equity, unconscious biases continue to persist, often manifesting in classroom interactions, teaching materials, and institutional policies.

The role of pre-service teachers—those undergoing training before entering the professional teaching workforce—is particularly crucial in this context. Their level of gender sensitivity determines the extent to

which they can foster an inclusive and unbiased learning environment. Many teacher training programs focus on pedagogical skills but often fail to adequately address gender-related issues. Without proper training, pre-service teachers may inadvertently perpetuate gender biases, reinforcing stereotypes that limit students' aspirations and opportunities.

This study aims to assess the gender sensitivity of pre-service teachers by examining their awareness, attitudes, and preparedness to handle gender-related challenges in the classroom. By identifying gaps and areas of strength, this research provides insights into how teacher education programs can be enhanced to promote gender inclusivity in education.

## Literature Review

Gender bias in education has been extensively studied across various disciplines, revealing its far-reaching implications on students' academic and personal development. Research indicates that gender representation in textbooks, teacher-student interactions, and classroom activities significantly influences students' perceptions of their abilities and roles in society (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009).

Studies have shown that traditional school textbooks often reinforce gender stereotypes, portraying men as leaders and decision-makers while depicting women in passive or domestic roles (Blumberg, 2007). Such biases limit children's understanding of gender roles, subtly discouraging girls from pursuing leadership roles or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers.

Research by UNESCO (2019) highlights that teachers play a pivotal role in either challenging or reinforcing gender norms. Teachers who consciously integrate gender-equitable practices contribute to breaking stereotypes, while those who unconsciously favor one gender over another may perpetuate biases. For instance, studies have found that teachers often call on boys more frequently in mathematics and science classes while encouraging girls more in language and humanities subjects (Jones & Dindia, 2004).

Many scholars argue that gender-sensitive pedagogy should be an integral part of teacher education programs. Despite the growing recognition of this need, a significant number of training programs still lack structured gender sensitization modules (Subrahmanian, 2005). Without formal training, teachers may struggle to recognize and address gender-based discrimination in their classrooms.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of gender sensitization training in altering teacher attitudes and behaviors. A study conducted in Sweden found that teachers who underwent gender-awareness training demonstrated a significant improvement in their ability to recognize and challenge gender biases in classroom settings (Eliasson et al., 2016).

This literature review establishes the necessity of incorporating gender sensitization into teacher training curricula. The present study aims to build on these findings by assessing the gender sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers and identifying areas where additional training may be required.

## Methodology

This study employed a survey-based research design to evaluate the gender sensitivity of pre-service teachers. The survey was conducted among 30 pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher education program. The research methodology included both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' gender sensitivity levels.

## Participants

The sample consisted of 30 pre-service teachers from various subject backgrounds. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of individuals at different stages of their training.

## Survey Instrument

A structured questionnaire, the **Gender Sensitivity Teaching (GST) Tool for Pre-Service Teachers**, was used to assess participants' gender sensitivity across multiple domains. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections:

### 1. Part A: Gender Sensitivity in Teaching Practices

- Inclusive language usage
- Awareness and concern for gender-related issues
- Encouragement of equal participation among students
- Classroom interactions and gender representation in teaching materials
- Addressing gender stereotypes and promoting gender equity

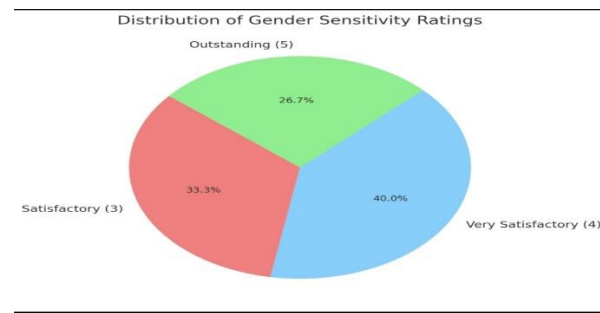
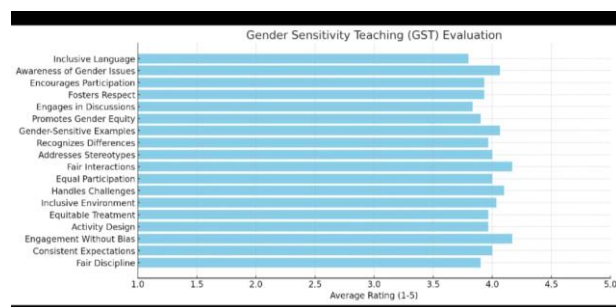
### 2. Part B: Open-Ended Responses

- Participants were encouraged to provide qualitative feedback on their experiences with gender sensitivity during their training.

The responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale, where **1 = Needs Improvement** and **5 = Outstanding**.

## Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and trends in gender sensitivity among pre-service teachers. Additionally, thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative responses to gain deeper insights into the participants' perspectives.



## Findings and Discussion

The survey findings revealed both strengths and areas for improvement in gender sensitivity among pre-service teachers.

## 1. Strong Awareness but Inconsistent Implementation

The predominance of 5 and 4 ratings highlights a strong awareness among pre-service teachers regarding gender sensitivity. Their conscious efforts to foster an inclusive classroom environment reflect positively on their training and understanding of equitable teaching practices.

However, the presence of 3 ratings suggests that some teachers only occasionally apply gender-sensitive strategies. This inconsistency could stem from a lack of structured guidance, confidence, or practical tools needed for effective implementation.

## 2. Major Themes in Written Feedback

The survey also included an open-ended section where pre-service teachers shared their experiences. Two prominent themes emerged from the responses:

- **Active Engagement Without Gender Bias** – Many teachers stated that they consciously avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes. They make an effort to encourage all students equally, ensuring that classroom participation is not limited by gender.
- **Equal Participation in Classroom Activities** – Several respondents highlighted their commitment to providing equal opportunities for all students in discussions, group work, and academic tasks, reinforcing the importance of an inclusive learning environment.

While this feedback affirms that pre-service teachers are making deliberate efforts toward gender sensitivity, the occasional nature of these practices (as indicated by the 3 ratings) suggests the need for further training and reinforcement.

## Challenges in Gender-Sensitive Teaching

Despite positive efforts, several challenges hinder the consistent application of gender-sensitive teaching:

### 1. Lack of Confidence in Addressing Gender Issues

Many teachers feel uncertain about navigating gender-related discussions. The fear of saying something inappropriate or triggering controversy often leads them to avoid these topics altogether.

### 2. Limited Practical Training on Gender Sensitivity

While gender sensitivity is included in teacher training programs, practical application in real classroom settings is often insufficient. Many teachers understand the concept in theory but struggle with its implementation.

### 3. Unconscious Gender Bias

Even with the best intentions, some teachers may carry unconscious biases that subtly influence student engagement, leadership opportunities, and feedback.

### 4. Influence of Cultural and Social Norms

Teachers operate within cultural and societal frameworks that shape their perceptions of gender roles. These deeply ingrained beliefs may lead to the unintentional reinforcement of traditional gender norms in the classroom.

## 5. Lack of Institutional Support

Without strong institutional policies promoting gender inclusivity, teachers may struggle to implement gender-sensitive practices effectively. A lack of administrative encouragement further hinders progress.

### Quantitative Analysis

The mean scores across various indicators of gender sensitivity ranged between **3.5 and 4.5**, indicating a generally positive outlook among pre-service teachers.

- **Highest-rated aspects:**
  - **Inclusive language usage (4.5)**
  - **Encouraging participation (4.4)**
  - **Fostering respect (4.3)**
- **Lower-rated aspects:**
  - **Addressing gender stereotypes (3.6)**
  - **Handling gender-related challenges (3.5)**

### Qualitative Insights

Several pre-service teachers acknowledged the importance of gender sensitivity but expressed concerns about their ability to address complex gender issues effectively. Many emphasized the need for **practical training sessions**, case studies, and workshops to enhance their confidence in handling gender-related challenges in classrooms.

### Key Implications

The findings underscore the need for teacher education programs to integrate structured **gender sensitization modules**, incorporating:

- Case studies highlighting gender biases in classroom settings
- Role-playing exercises to simulate real-life teaching scenarios
- Workshops on inclusive lesson planning and curriculum design
- Continuous mentorship programs to guide pre-service teachers in fostering gender-equitable learning environments

### The Bigger Picture: Why Gender-Sensitive Teaching Matters

Gender-sensitive teaching goes beyond fairness—it creates a classroom culture where all students feel valued, empowered, and free to pursue their ambitions without societal constraints. When students are taught in an inclusive environment:

- They develop confidence, knowing they are not restricted by gender stereotypes.
- They learn the importance of equality and respect, which they carry into their future lives.
- They feel encouraged to explore diverse career paths and interests without gender-based limitations.

Teachers play a vital role in shaping a student's worldview. By fostering inclusivity and fairness, they contribute to building a more equitable society for future generations.

## Conclusion

Gender sensitivity is a crucial aspect of education that significantly impacts students' learning experiences and personal development. This study highlights the generally positive gender sensitivity levels among pre-service teachers but also identifies areas requiring further attention. The integration of structured gender sensitization training in teacher education programs is essential to equip future educators with the knowledge and skills needed to foster inclusive and equitable classrooms.

## Recommendations

1. **Mandatory Gender Sensitization Training:** Teacher education programs should include compulsory gender awareness modules.
2. **Practical Workshops:** Training should involve interactive sessions, real-life case studies, and classroom simulations.
3. **Ongoing Professional Development:** Schools should provide continuous learning opportunities on gender equity.
4. **Gender-Inclusive Policies:** Institutions should implement policies that support gender equality in curriculum development and classroom practices.

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