Gender Stereotype in Education

P.M. Arjun Sekhar
Department of Psychology, Periyar University, Salem, Tamilnadu, India
arjunsekar001@gmailcom

J Parameswari
Department of Psychology, Periyar University, Salem, Tamilnadu, India
paramj25@gmail.com

Abstract

Gender stereotype shapes individuals’ perception and attitude. It also influences students’ classroom experience, choice of subject and academic performance. In an educational setting, the gender bias has far reaching effect. The biases regarding gender are in fact the result of gender stereotype that exist in the society. This paper discusses the role of gender stereotype in the education. The discussion focuses on the gender stereotypes in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field, gender gap, the role of parents in education, influence of teachers’ gender stereotypes in education and the gender misconceptions in education.

Keywords: Gender stereotype, Gender biases, Gender gap, STEM field, Gender misconceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for every aspect of people’s development of individuals including their socioemotional wellbeing and economic development. Education is considered to be the third eye which empowers people, facilitates innovative and creative thinking and inspires individuals to dream. Education not only provides reliable information about the external world but it also helps individuals to think and analyze their self. Educated people learn to be systematic and practical in day-to-day life. They are able to realize their potentials and become more productive. However, basic education essentially begins at home and the first teacher of a child is always his/her parents and other family members. Initially, toddlers listen and learn to utter words not from school, rather from home or from where they spend their first few years of life. Home is the place where children learn to walk, talk and learn basic ideas about society. Then the next level of education begins at school. Children’s learning from school enable them to become more knowledgeable, rationale and skilled.

Education facilitates individuals in learning their rights in the society. It helps people deal with and solve social issues and social problems in efficient ways. Further, through education people understand their personal and social responsibilities, construct and maintain an orderly society. However, educational institutions fail to impart the real and useful knowledge apart from subject knowledge. The knowledge they provide is more job oriented than life oriented.

Though education is one of the most important factors for the development of people and society, there are people who are not able to get basic or higher level education. Many social constrains prevent people from getting the education. Gender stereotype is one of the social constraints that make education a dream for many individuals. Gender stereotype is the over generalization about the characteristics and behaviour of individuals based on gender. Stereotypes help people to categorize things and simplify day-to-day activities and cognitive process. Society differentiates the characteristics of males and females with clear boundaries. Therefore, individuals are expected to behave in a particular way that is appropriate for their gender. The gender bias in society sometimes restricts people in achieving their dreams because as per societal norms certain positions are not apt for every gender. It is unfair that certain individuals are restricted from education because of gender biases shared in the society. This paper focuses on the disparity in education based on gender concepts in the society.
Aim

To understand the role of gender stereotype in education.

Objectives

1. To understand the gender stereotype in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field
2. To understand the gender gap in education
3. To understand the role of parents in education
4. To understand the role of teacher in nurturing gender stereotype
5. To understand misconceptions about gender in education
6. To understand the role of socialization in education.

STEM and gender

Historically, women had very less participation in STEM field as these fields were handled predominantly by males (Sanders, 2005). The STEM field was considered a high-status profession where females were not encouraged to aspire while males were forced to aspire (Beed et al. 2011). This orientation is built purely on the basis of people’s gender stereotype. Females are considered as caring, loving, physically weak and less intelligent whereas, males are considered strong, intelligent, responsible, and breadwinners of the family (Wang & Degol 2013). Parents, family members, teachers, peers and the society encourage males to choose STEM field and females to choose arts and nursing (Gunderson et al. 2012). As a result, students tend to think that science is a masculine field. Therefore, females show less interest towards science and males become more passionate towards science field (Archer, DeWitt, Osborne, Dillon, Willis & Wong, 2010). Though this notion has changed to lesser extend in recent years, in most families especially in rural areas still gender place a role in choosing the course of study.

Physical strength also greatly contributes to people's perception of the gender-appropriate educational field. People tend to think that jobs related to STEM field require more physical and cognitive effort compared to the arts field. Since males are considered physically stronger, it is assumed that technical jobs that require physical strength are apt for males than females. Because of the social perception regarding gender, the students are forced to choose a particular educational field even if they do not prefer (Wang & Degol 2013). Since India follows patriarchal norms, the influence of patriarchy is clearly visible in educational field. Indian society expects the husbands to be more educated than their wives. This concept also influences people's attitude about hierarchy in educational qualification based on gender. As, men are considered as the breadwinners of a family and STEM field assures high salaried jobs than arts fields (Beede, Julian, Langdon, McKittrick, Khan & Doms, 2011), males are encouraged to choose STEM field. Due to the challenging nature of STEM related jobs females are encouraged to choose arts or nursing field (Reinking & Martin, 2018). This is reflected in the research on gender pay gap in STEM field by Makarova, Aeschlimann, and Herzog (2019).

The gender gap in education

In India, the gender gap in education is still high. According to Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD, 2016) the gender gap in India is 19.6%. Males have better privileges compared to the other gender because the society follows patriarchal concept (Sahin 2013). However, one problem faced by the males in education is that they are not encouraged to choose arts subjects even if they are passionate about the subject. The situation is totally different for the transgender since most of the people do not consider transgender as a gender. Most of the people consider transgender people as a sin of God. Therefore, it is difficult for transgenders to access even basic education. Only a smaller number of transgender people overcome all the obstacles and achieve higher education. Even though education is envisaged as a fundamental right by the Indian constitution, the transgenders are not able to access education because of the social constrains.

People believe that females are incapable and less competent compared to males (Eagly & Mladinic, 2011) and hence they are not treated as independent individuals. One of the key hurdles of females’ education is the stereotypes held in the society (Sarkar, Karim and Suffiun, 2017). Similarly, the customs and traditions in India also influence the education of females. In the patrilocal residence system in India, preference for sons is very strong especially in poor families (Gupta et al. 2003). According to patrilocal residence, after marriage males remain in their home while females leave their family and move to the husband's family. Therefore, the poor families either
not send the girl child for education or they spend less resources to educate their girl child (Altinok & Aydemir, 2015). As a result, in most cases girls are prevented from going to school or have less educational access. This is one of the main factors why males get more advantages in education in India. In most of rural areas, parents assign household tasks to girls after primary education (Sahin 2013).

**Role of parents in education**

Parents are the first teachers and best source of information for a child. Parents guide their children to adapt with their environment (Ceka & Murati 2016). Gender appropriate information from parents help children learn gender appropriate behaviors. As children are not mature enough to make decisions on their own, parents plan the future for their children. Therefore, the decision about the children's education is purely their parents’ choice. Parents choose school and courses for their children which they think are best suited for their children. Parent’s attitude towards education and gender greatly determine their decisions (Hade 2004).

Many parents are not willing to permit their girl child to go for higher education due to some misconceptions regarding education. Iqbal, Mohyuddin, Ali and Saeed (2013) argue that the educational attainment of girls is lower if the head of the household entrenched traditional cultural values. Sarkar, Karim and Suffuun (2017) found in their study that parents with high traditional gender role attitude and gender biases hold positive and favorable attitude towards boys’ education, however, their attitude towards girl’s education decreases significantly. Hence rural girls especially fail to receive higher education. So, to overcome these hazards, parents need to understand the importance of education for all the genders and be free from social biases regarding gender in education.

**Teachers and Gender Stereotypes**

Teachers take the place of parents away from homes at schools. Next to parents teachers have major influence on children. Students usually consider teachers as perfect persons in the world who have lot of knowledge. Therefore, students follow each and every instruction of teachers without a second thought. The ideas and conceptions of teachers are easily observed by students. A common stereotype in education is about mathematical ability (Keller 2010). People think that males are better in mathematics than females. If math teachers have this belief, they become biased toward students’ ability. This may be one of the reasons why boys pay more attention in mathematics than girls. Even though girls perform equally well in mathematics, they do not get equal attention from their teachers (Tiedmann 2002). However, teachers encourage female students in arts subjects. The encouragements from teachers have an impact on the choice of the subject the student make.

As second guardians, teachers play an important role in students’ decisions about their higher education and career. When teachers themselves are stereotyped, they tend to be biased and might cause gender injustice in education (Bigler 2013). Beyond the academic performance, teachers expect students to behave according to their gender denomination in non-academic activities. As teachers are considered perfect role models in the society, they are expected to be socially responsible. They in turn teach students to behave in socially appropriate ways. Therefore, teachers train students to develop skills and ideologies according to student’s gender. Teachers encourage students to play games which are appropriate to their gender. When teachers fall prey to social biases, especially regarding gender, it will be reflected in their attitude and behavior towards the student (Stromquist, 2007). The discrepancy in treating students based on their gender reflects on students’ understanding of gender.

**Gender Misconceptions in Education**

Female students in India are restrained from attaining higher education. Parents’ unwillingness to educate girl children is one of the major factors. The financial status of family, early marriage, and education misconceptions are some the additional factors that determine the prospects of the education of children. Chintham and Guite (2017) found that the cultural influence is still a barrier to girls’ education even in this modern era. As a result, parents from rural India are not yet ready to educate girls. Kamaldeen, Buhari and Parakoyi (2012) pointed that the primary school dropout percentage of females is 8.2% compared to 2.7% of males. This is mainly due to the misconception about girl child education. Only when the family face financial crisis, the male child is forced to drop education and look for job in order to support the family. However, in most cases females are restricted in attaining higher education compared to males. The unavailability of educational institutions close to the homes is another factor that prevents girls from attaining higher education. Further a number of people are apprehensive about sending girls to
faraway places for education on grounds of morality and character. People think that it would be difficult to find apt alliance for girls if they are educated.

Socialization and Education

Socialization is one of the core factors that contribute to gender discrepancy in education. Socialization in the context of interaction with parents, peer, teachers and others in educational setting makes children perceive gender difference and a perceived differential compacity based on gender for various tasks (Bigler, Hayes & Hamilton, 2013). Thus children believe in themselves in doing a task not based on their real capabilities rather on the task related gender appropriateness they learned from the society. Socialization with parents makes the child to develop attitude and behavior regarding gender appropriate education (Molla, 2016). This gender appropriate educational attitude and behavior is then reinforced when they interact with peers and teachers.

Classroom socialization takes place through classroom interactions, classroom and school activities and participation in the educational chores (Kangetha, Lyria & Nyamanga, 2014). Through socialization, children understand that there are some fields which are appropriate for their gender. Thus, children begin to focus on some particular educational areas and skills which they think are gender appropriate. Beyond the influence of teachers and school environment, the educational materials also have a significant role in promoting gender disparity in education. Most of the educational materials create gender biases through photos, activities and words. The portrayed characteristics of gender in the educational materials reinforce the stereotypical gender roles and thus students connect these with their gender identity. The female occupation portrayed in the educational textbooks are housewives and the characteristics portrayed are introvert and passive (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). These misrepresentation of females in the educational textbooks reflect males’ attitude towards females and females’ self-evaluation on the other hand. The portrayed gender roles in the educational textbooks in turn influence students’ aspirations of career. Further it makes the girls feel that they are inferior and subordinate (Mishra, Behera & 2012).

Conceptual framework

Culture and tradition in a patriarchal country gives an unequal representation of gender to the society. As a result, it develops negative gender stereotype towards women and positive stereotype towards men. Therefore men are getting all the advantages and women are disadvantaged in the patriarchal society. Gender disparity develops as a consequence of gender stereotype that has a significant role in creating gender disparity in education. This is reflected in the academic achievement, career aspiration, and academic involvement of students. Gender stereotype regarding education is spread through socialization agents like parents, peer, teachers and books. This is represented as a flow chart below (fig. 1).

![Conceptual Framework](image_url)

Figure 1. conceptual framework of influence of gender stereotype on academic outcome
Conclusion:
This paper summarizes the role of gender stereotype in education. Based on the previous studies and related concepts, 6 important areas have been identified, namely, STEM field, gender gap in education, teachers’ gender stereotype, parents’ role in education, misconceptions in education and the importance of socialization in education. This paper proposes that there is gender disparity in education. Gender stereotype, patriarchal systems, and the culture, in this regard, play a crucial role in promoting gender disparity in education. The gender stereotype influences academic achievement, career aspiration, and academic involvement through some socialization agents like parents, teachers, peer group, and books. At the same time, the gender stereotype prevailing in society restricts female education. There are number of misconceptions about women’s education that further restrict women attaining higher education. Patriarchal systems in the society encourage people to provide better education to their sons than daughters. This study concludes with the recommendation of fostering egalitarian concept that could greatly reduce gender disparity in education.

REFERENCES


