



International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Scholarly Publisher
RS Global Sp. z O.O.
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

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ARTICLE TITLE THE IMPACT OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TEACHER–STUDENT
RELATIONSHIPS ON EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT

DOI [https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.4\(48\).2025.4577](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.4(48).2025.4577)

RECEIVED 18 October 2025

ACCEPTED 21 December 2025

PUBLISHED 30 December 2025

LICENSE



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THE IMPACT OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TEACHER–STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ON EDUCATION QUALITY AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of gender differences in teacher–student relationships on the quality of education and learners’ personal development. Contemporary education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge and is shaped by social interaction, communication patterns, and pedagogical styles. Teachers’ expectations, communication approaches, and instructional decisions are often—consciously or unconsciously—influenced by gender-based assumptions. These factors affect students’ motivation, self-confidence, academic performance, and social adaptation. The theoretical framework draws on constructivism, Bloom’s Taxonomy, transformative learning theory, and the principles of gender pedagogy. The methodology includes classroom observations, a survey of 120 students, interviews with 20 teachers, and a literature review. The findings show that in gender-sensitive learning environments, student motivation increased by 20–25%, academic performance improved by 10–12%, and self-confidence indicators rose significantly. The study concludes that gender equality in teacher–student interactions is essential for enhancing educational quality. It recommends teacher training in gender-sensitive pedagogy, the adoption of gender-neutral assessment criteria, and the creation of inclusive learning environments.

KEYWORDS

Gender Differences, Teacher–Student Relationships, Educational Quality, Gender Equality, Personal Development

CITATION

Nigar Huseynova Chingiz (2025) The Impact of Gender Differences in Teacher–Student Relationships on Education Quality and Personal Development. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 4(48). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.4(48).2025.4577

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1. Introduction

Improving the quality of education in the modern world requires more than updated curricula or digital tools; it depends largely on the nature of teacher–student relationships. These relationships shape classroom climate, student motivation, participation, and academic achievement (Rudolph, 2018). Gender plays a particularly meaningful role in these interactions. Teachers’ expectations and communication styles may be influenced by gender stereotypes—sometimes consciously, often unconsciously—leading to unequal learning opportunities (Connell, 2002). Female students may be expected to behave calmly and follow rules, while male students are encouraged to be assertive and active. Such patterns restrict both groups from achieving balanced personal and academic growth. International organizations such as UNESCO emphasize that gender equality in education is both a fundamental human right and a key factor in improving learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2019). When gender bias persists in educational settings, students’ motivation and confidence decline, while long-term academic and career opportunities become restricted. This research focuses on identifying how gender differences in teacher–student relationships influence learning outcomes and personal development. Understanding these dynamics is essential for establishing a fair and effective educational environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

Improving the quality of the education system in the modern era remains one of the central directions of pedagogical and psychological sciences. Educational quality is not only connected with updated programs and methods but is closely linked to the nature of teacher–student relationships. Pedagogical interactions determine the psychological environment of the learning process, and the quality of this environment directly affects students’ academic performance, motivation, and personal development (Rudolph, 2018).

The gender factor holds particular importance in these relationships. As a social and cultural construct, gender directly influences the structuring of pedagogical interactions, teachers’ expectations, and their instructional styles. Connell (2002) emphasizes that educational institutions play a critical role in shaping gender relations, and the behavior patterns of participants in the learning process may be affected by gender stereotypes. This can lead teachers to form different expectations—consciously or unconsciously—for male and female students.

In a globalized world, gender equality is recognized not only as a guarantee of social justice but also as a strategic objective for improving educational quality. UNESCO’s 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report highlights that the lack of gender equality in educational environments reduces students’ motivation, weakens their self-confidence, and limits their social participation (UNESCO, 2019). Subrahmanian (2005) notes that properly implementing gender equality within learning environments is essential for supporting students’ personal development and social adaptation.

Teachers’ gender-based approaches during the teaching process—especially those influenced by subconscious stereotypes—can lead to imbalances in educational quality. For example, believing that boys perform better in technical subjects while girls excel in humanities contradicts the principle of pedagogical fairness and restricts students’ potential (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009). Francis and Skelton (2005) also argue that differences in academic achievement associated with gender are shaped not only by biological factors but also by social and cultural influences.

The theoretical framework provides a deeper explanation of the scientific foundations of this issue. Vygotsky (1978), in his socio-cultural approach, states that learning is built upon social interactions, and teacher–student communication serves as a critical mechanism of development. Mezirow (1991), in his theory of transformative learning, emphasizes that pedagogical relationships shape students’ thinking, influencing their personal and social development. These theoretical perspectives demonstrate that gender differences in teacher–student relationships possess not only pedagogical but also socio-psychological significance.

Aikman and Unterhalter (2007), in their research on the implementation of gender equality in educational settings, highlight that gender-sensitive pedagogy is crucial for ensuring inclusivity and sustainability in education. The OECD’s 2020 report confirms that gender-equal educational policies and pedagogical practices positively affect academic achievement and future career opportunities.

Thus, studying gender differences in teacher–student relationships remains a significant direction in pedagogical psychology and social pedagogy. The theoretical foundations of this issue rely on several key frameworks, including gender theory (Connell, 2002), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), socio-cultural development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and approaches to social learning and equity. Empirical studies built upon these foundations show that gender-equal pedagogical environments positively contribute to students’ academic achievement, self-confidence, and social adaptation.

Abdullayeva (2021) emphasizes that the theoretical and practical integration of gender-based approaches into teacher preparation is essential for ensuring equity within the pedagogical process, and she argues that such integration has a direct influence on the professional competence and long-term effectiveness of future teachers.

2.1. Gender Pedagogy

Gender pedagogy is a field of study that examines the participation of different genders in the educational process and their positions within pedagogical relationships. This theory highlights the importance of gender sensitivity in education and demonstrates that male and female students may differ in their learning styles, motivational sources, communication patterns with teachers, and approaches to learning (Subrahmanian, 2005).

The main principles of gender pedagogy are:

- maintaining gender equality in learning environments;
- eliminating stereotypes in teaching;
- providing equal opportunities for every student;
- ensuring gender neutrality in teachers' pedagogical activities.

According to this theory, in pedagogical environments where gender balance is not preserved, students' personal development becomes unequal. Female students receive more support in humanities, while male students receive more support in technical subjects. This violates the principle of educational fairness and weakens social justice.

Mollayeva (2020) states that the creation of gender-sensitive pedagogical environments significantly increases students' motivation and classroom engagement, as a teacher's neutral and equitable approach expands learners' opportunities for self-expression and fosters balanced social interaction.

2.2. Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is one of the fundamental directions of learning theory in educational sciences. Vygotsky (1978), considered the founder of this theory, explains learning as a process closely tied to social interaction, communication, and cultural context. According to him, human knowledge and cognition do not emerge solely from isolated individual activity but are formed through social interactions and communication. His concept of the "zone of proximal development" plays a key role: a student may not independently acquire certain knowledge or skills but can master them with the support of a teacher or a more experienced peer.

Within this theoretical framework, teacher–student interactions are viewed not only as a pedagogical act but also as a form of social exchange. The role of gender differences in the learning process is explained from this social constructivist perspective. The gender norms and expectations present in society manifest themselves in teachers' approaches to students, in the evaluation of their abilities, and in how they engage learners in the educational process. For example, traditional gender norms may create expectations that male students should be more active, assertive, and inclined toward technical subjects, while female students should be more successful in humanities. Such subconscious expectations influence teachers' communication patterns: they may ask more questions to boys, expect leadership from them, and assign passive roles to girls. As a result, female students' academic development and self-confidence become restricted by these gender-based social expectations.

Social constructivism also shows that such gender differences are not merely the result of individual psychological characteristics but are produced and reproduced by societal norms and cultural contexts. Therefore, unequal educational outcomes rooted in gender-based approaches are seen as avoidable consequences of social constructs rather than natural differences. The practical conclusion of this theory is that teachers must recognize the influence of gender norms in their pedagogical practice, neutralize subconscious biases, and ensure equal learning opportunities for all students. Gender-equal pedagogical environments contribute not only to academic success but also to students' social adaptation, self-confidence, and personal development.

2.3. Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow (1991), is recognized as a new paradigm in educational sciences. The central idea of this theory is that learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it also involves changes in an individual's worldview, values, and personal structures. According to Mezirow, learning transforms a person's perspective, making them more critical, reflective, and sensitive to principles of social justice.

In this framework, teacher–student relationships hold particular significance. When pedagogical interactions are based on gender equality, students not only gain knowledge but also internalize fundamental values like equality, human rights, and cooperation. In such environments, communication between male and female students becomes balanced, and both genders are provided with opportunities to express their potential freely. This enhances self-confidence and broadens future opportunities.

Transformative learning theory places special emphasis on the development of critical reflection. This includes recognizing existing stereotypes—including gender stereotypes—questioning their origins, and adopting more equitable perspectives. If gender inequality exists in teacher–student relationships, transformative learning helps uncover these stereotypes and encourages students to challenge them. Hence, gender equality is not only an ethical principle but also a necessary condition for transformative learning.

Mezirow argues that “disorienting dilemmas” or moments of discomfort in the learning process can spark transformation in students' thinking. For example, when a student realizes that gender stereotypes limit their abilities, this may lead them to question and change their worldview. Teachers and learning environments must support such reflection by enabling students to replace restrictive beliefs with inclusive and fair perspectives.

Thus, transformative learning theory shows that ensuring gender equality in educational settings strengthens students' personal development, social justice awareness, and adaptation skills. It positions gender equality at the center of pedagogical theory and practice.

3. Gender Stereotypes and Educational Quality

The influence of gender stereotypes in the educational process has long been one of the main research directions in pedagogical psychology and social pedagogy. Studies show that gender-based expectations present within educational environments often form subconsciously and manifest in teachers' pedagogical practices. Connell (2002) notes that teachers' expectations for girls to behave more quietly, obediently, and according to rules, and for boys to be more active, assertive, and in leadership roles, lead to gender-based division of social roles within the learning process. Such an approach weakens pedagogical objectivity and causes imbalances in learning outcomes.

The influence of gender stereotypes appears in several forms:

Subject orientation:

The stereotype that girls are more successful in humanities and boys in technical and exact sciences affects their choices. As a result, female students' participation in engineering and information technologies becomes limited, while male students receive less support in artistic and social-humanitarian areas.

Assessment:

Teachers may sometimes assess boys' activeness positively while perceiving girls' passivity as “modesty.” This undermines objectivity in assessing academic performance.

Communication style:

Female students are often given more behavioural remarks, while male students are granted more freedom because their initiative and independence are encouraged.

Sadker and Zittleman (2009) highlight that such stereotypes remain widespread in schools and universities, negatively impacting educational quality. In such environments, girls cannot fully demonstrate their potential in technical fields, and boys face limited opportunities in humanities. Francis and Skelton (2005) emphasize that these tendencies contradict the principles of fairness and equality in education.

International reports indicate that reducing the influence of gender stereotypes helps increase educational quality, motivation, and students' self-confidence (UNESCO, 2019; OECD, 2020). Studies show that gender-neutral environments lead to more balanced academic achievements, broader social adaptation, and freer career choices for both genders.

Table 1. Teachers' Gender-Based Expectations and Their Effects on the Learning Process

Teachers' Expectations	Effect on Girls	Effect on Boys	Outcome
Calm/obedient behavior	Lower expression	More leadership	Unequal participation
Success in humanities expected	Limited STEM entry	Encouraged in STEM	Unequal development
Behavior-focused evaluation	Praised for neatness	Praised for creativity	Assessment bias

Source: UNESCO (2019), *Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report*.

The gender-based expectations of teachers weaken pedagogical objectivity. To prevent this, teachers must adopt gender-neutral approaches and evaluate students based on individual potential rather than gender norms.

Table 2. Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Student Motivation

Stereotype	Effect on Girls	Effect on Boys	Outcome
Girls emotional / boys rational	Lower confidence	Higher confidence	Leadership imbalance
Girls family-oriented	Lower career ambitions	Greater flexibility	Labor market gap
Girls passive / boys active	Lower participation	Higher participation	Unequal classroom roles

Source: UNESCO (2019), *Gender Report – Building Bridges for Gender Equality*.

These stereotypes undermine students' motivation and limit their potential. Maintaining gender balance in the learning process is vital for personal development.

4. International and National Context

Gender equality is recognized as one of the strategic directions of modern global education. UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women, and other international organizations repeatedly emphasize that gender equality in education is not only a social justice principle but also a fundamental human right (UNESCO, 2019). Ensuring gender balance within the education system—providing equal opportunities based on students' abilities and potential—is considered a key factor in improving academic achievement and personal development.

International experience shows that in countries where gender-sensitive educational environments have been implemented, students' academic results are more balanced, their career opportunities expand, and their social adaptation strengthens (OECD, 2020). For example, Scandinavian countries have successfully promoted girls' participation in STEM fields and boys' involvement in humanities by implementing gender-neutral curricula and targeted educational policies. This demonstrates that eliminating stereotypes helps improve educational quality and ensures social fairness.

Ensuring gender equality in education is one of the priority directions of state policy in Azerbaijan. The legal framework regulating this area consists of several key laws and strategic documents. The most fundamental document is the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Ensuring Gender Equality between Men and Women" (2006). This law affirms that men and women possess equal rights in all spheres, including education, and prohibits discrimination in teacher–student relations. Relevant provisions of the law require the elimination of gender stereotypes at all levels of education, ensuring balance in textbooks and learning materials, and enhancing teachers' awareness of gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches.

The legal basis for gender equality in education is also supported by the Law "On Education" (2009). The principle of "equality in education," stated in the law, emphasizes that no individual may be deprived of education on the basis of gender and that access to education must be guaranteed under equal conditions for both males and females. These principles, aligned with international gender standards, ensure equal opportunities throughout the entire educational process. The law also identifies the development of gender equality values as one of the essential functions of education in shaping learners as individuals.

Another important legal foundation is the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly Article 25, which specifies that men and women will enjoy equal rights and prohibits any form of gender-based discrimination. These constitutional provisions apply directly to the right to education and form the basis for integrating gender equality principles into educational policy.

A broader strategic framework is provided by the “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”. This document highlights goals such as strengthening gender equality in the education system, increasing girls’ participation in schooling—especially in STEM fields—and reducing gender stereotypes in school environments. This strategy guides the institutional development of gender-sensitive approaches within the education sector.

Furthermore, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs develops and implements programs aimed at promoting gender equality in educational settings. These initiatives include gender training for teachers, integrating gender components into professional development programs, and ensuring gender balance in educational resources. Such measures contribute to the practical implementation of gender equality policies, not only at the normative level but also in day-to-day educational practice.

5. Methodology

The methodology of the research is based on empirical observations, surveys, interviews, and the analysis of scientific literature. The main purpose of the methodological framework is to examine how gender differences in teacher–student relationships influence students’ academic performance, motivation, self-confidence, and social adaptation.

A mixed-methods approach was used in the study, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This allowed for a more comprehensive assessment of how gender stereotypes manifest in teacher–student interactions and how they affect the learning process.

5.1. Participants

The study involved two main groups: **120 students**, who participated in surveys designed to measure their perceptions of gender equality, teacher expectations, and pedagogical relationships and **20 teachers**, who took part in semi-structured interviews exploring their professional opinions on how gender differences influence teaching practices and educational outcomes.

The participants were selected from different faculties to ensure a more objective and diversified assessment.

5.2. Research Instruments

The following instruments were used in the research:

- **Survey questionnaires**
 - These questionnaires included both closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions assessed students’ perceptions of gender equality numerically, while the open-ended questions allowed them to express their thoughts more freely.
- **Observation protocols**
 - Classroom observations were conducted to identify how teachers treat male and female students, how they distribute roles during lessons, how they assess performance, and how gender stereotypes are reflected in pedagogical interactions.
- **Semi-structured interviews**
 - Interviews with teachers explored how gender affects academic achievement, subject selection, assessment, and student motivation.

5.3. Research Procedure

The research was conducted in three stages:

1. Initial diagnostic stage

Teacher–student communication patterns were examined through classroom observations. Attention was given to whether male and female students participated equally, how teachers interacted with them, and whether different expectations were expressed.

2. Survey and interview stage

Students completed surveys, and teachers participated in interviews. Through this, indicators such as motivation, academic achievement, self-confidence, and social adaptation were compared between students who studied in gender-neutral environments and those who experienced gender-biased approaches.

3. Analytical stage

The data collected from the surveys, interviews, and observations were compared and analyzed. The results were evaluated in connection with the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier, including transformative learning theory, social constructivism, and gender pedagogy.

5.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical methods. Percentages and comparative indicators were calculated to identify differences between students taught in gender-sensitive versus gender-biased environments.

Qualitative data obtained from teacher interviews and open-ended survey responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurring themes included:

- teachers' subconscious expectations based on gender,
- differentiated assessment practices,
- unequal distribution of classroom roles,
- gender-based differences in motivation and participation.

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a comprehensive understanding of how gender differences influence educational quality and student development.

6. Research Results

The findings of the research demonstrate that gender differences in teacher–student relationships significantly influence students' academic performance, motivation, and self-confidence.

6.1. Academic Achievement

According to the survey results, students studying in gender-neutral learning environments exhibited higher academic achievement. In particular:

- Academic indicators in groups where gender equality was preserved were **10–12% higher**.
- Female students achieved higher results in subjects traditionally associated with male students when gender stereotypes were not present.
- Male students demonstrated improved performance in humanities when gender-neutral instructional methods were used.

These results show that eliminating gender stereotypes contributes positively to academic performance for both genders.

6.2. Motivation and Self-Confidence

Table 3 below presents the differences in motivation and self-confidence between students in gender-biased and gender-neutral environments.

Table 3. The Impact of Gender Equality on Motivation and Self-Confidence

Indicator	Biased Environment	Gender-Neutral Environment	Difference
Motivation	54%	78%	+24%
Self-confidence	61%	82%	+21%
Social adaptation	57%	79%	+22%

The data indicate that gender-neutral environments:

- strengthen students' self-confidence,
- increase their interest in the learning process,
- improve social adaptation skills,
- and positively influence classroom participation.

6.3. Classroom Participation

Classroom participation rates were significantly higher in gender-sensitive groups. Male and female students participated equally in discussions and group activities, and teachers adopted more balanced communication strategies.

In gender-biased groups, participation was uneven:

- Boys dominated discussions and leadership roles,
- Girls participated less frequently and often hesitated due to fear of judgement or lack of encouragement.

6.4. Influence on Career Orientation

The research also examined how gender stereotypes influence students' future career choices.

Table 4. The Influence of Gender Equality on Career Interests

Field	Girls (Traditional)	Boys (Traditional)	Change with Equality
Humanities	61%	24%	Girls enter STEM
Technical fields	19%	58%	Gap decreases
Social sciences	14%	9%	Boys' interest grows
IT & Engineering	6%	39%	Girls' participation increases

These findings reveal that when gender balance is maintained in schools and universities:

- Girls freely participate in technical and engineering fields,
- Boys show increased interest in humanities and social sciences,
- Career choices become more flexible and less restricted by stereotypes.

This demonstrates that gender equality in teaching promotes broader development opportunities for both genders.

7. Discussion

The results of the research show that gender differences in teacher–student relationships significantly influence the quality of the educational process. In learning environments where gender stereotypes are not present and gender equality is ensured, students demonstrate higher levels of motivation, improved academic achievement, stronger self-confidence, and better-developed social adaptation skills. These findings align with the perspectives of UNESCO (2019), OECD (2020), and other international organizations, which emphasize that gender equality is a critical factor in improving educational quality and supporting students' personal development.

One of the most important findings of the research is that gender stereotypes manifest themselves in teachers' expectations. In some cases, teachers expect boys to be more active and assertive, while they expect girls to be more disciplined and obedient. Such expectations create restrictions for both genders. Female students hesitate to express their thoughts freely, and male students experience pressure to conform to stereotypical “leadership roles.” As a result, students' self-confidence is weakened, and learning outcomes become uneven.

Another significant finding relates to assessment practices. Teachers may consciously or unconsciously apply softer evaluation criteria to female students and hold higher expectations for male students. This pattern undermines objectivity and weakens fairness in the learning process.

In gender-neutral environments, however, the situation is completely different. Students become more willing to participate in lessons, more confident in sharing their opinions, and more independent in decision-making. Balanced participation between boys and girls contributes not only to academic success but also to social justice and balanced personal development.

The research also confirms that gender stereotypes significantly influence students' career choices. When gender equality is ensured in the learning process, girls show increased interest in engineering, IT, and technical fields, while boys participate more actively in humanities and social sciences. This expands their opportunities for future professional development and helps eliminate gender gaps in the labor market.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research demonstrated that gender differences in teacher–student relationships have a direct and significant impact on the quality of the educational process, academic achievement, motivation, and students' personal development. The presence of gender stereotypes in the learning environment leads to unequal distribution of roles, imbalances in participation, decreased self-confidence, and limitations in students' future career choices.

Main conclusions of the study include the following:

1. Gender stereotypes negatively affect academic achievement.
2. Gender-biased instructional and assessment practices lead to restrictions on students' learning opportunities. The data show that academic performance in gender-neutral groups is 10–12% higher.
3. Gender equality increases motivation.
4. In gender-sensitive classrooms, students' interest in the learning process and their self-confidence rise considerably. Motivation levels in such environments were 20–25% higher than in gender-biased groups.
5. Gender equality strengthens self-confidence and social adaptation.
6. Students in gender-neutral environments express themselves more freely, participate more actively, and demonstrate stronger social skills.
7. Gender stereotypes restrict career choices.
8. Girls tend to avoid technical fields, while boys show less interest in humanities. Gender equality eliminates these limitations and creates broader opportunities.
9. Teacher–student relationships play a central role.
10. Teachers' expectations, communication styles, and assessment approaches significantly influence students' development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthen teacher training in gender-sensitive pedagogy.

Teacher preparation programs should include modules that teach gender equality, eliminate stereotypes, and promote objectivity in pedagogical practice.

- Use gender-neutral assessment criteria.

Evaluation should be based solely on students' knowledge and skills, not on gender expectations. Teachers must apply the same criteria to both male and female students.

- Promote balanced participation in classroom activities.

Teachers should ensure equal engagement of boys and girls in discussions, leadership tasks, and group work.

- Encourage critical reflection about stereotypes.

Students should be given opportunities to identify and challenge gender stereotypes. This strengthens critical thinking and supports transformative learning.

- Establish monitoring mechanisms to support gender equality.

Educational institutions should regularly monitor teacher–student relationships, assessment fairness, and classroom participation.

- Create gender-sensitive learning environments.

Classrooms should be inclusive, supportive, and free from gender-based restrictions. This strengthens students' self-confidence and contributes to their personal development.

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