

## **Assessing Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Gender Responsive Pedagogy at Kotebe University of Education**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions and practices of gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) in the teaching and learning process. In light of this, this study used questionnaires for teachers and students, observations and interviews. The findings of teachers' quantitative responses indicated that teachers seemed to employ gender responsive pedagogy in all the domains assessed. However, teachers' responses differed slightly from those of students. The difference in response might be due to social desirability bias, since teachers wish to project themselves in a positive manner. The findings indicated that the socio-cultural and economic conditions had a significant influence in the determination of the educational attainment and participation of females. That is, females' performance is a function of the socio-cultural environment they live in.

Key words: Gender, Pedagogy, Perceptions

### **1. Introduction**

Girls' education in developing countries encounters numerous obstacles, including low retention rates, high dropout levels, and limited opportunities for skills development. In the Ethiopian context, gender inequality has deep historical roots, leaving women and girls, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, exposed to multiple social, economic, and educational disadvantages (UNICEF 2018). Girls face a number of problems in Ethiopia, of which economic hardship, early unintended pregnancy, psychological abuse, sexual violence, early marriage, and harmful gender stereotype are a few to mention. Particularly, in the country side, girls do not have the opportunity to go to school. Too often, even parents prefer to invest in their sons' education rather than in their daughters' because the heavy domestic works rest on the shoulders of girls at home. In this regard, Abraha (2012) stated that parents favored boys and they are also likely to engage girls in house chores and marry them off early, sending them to school only when they can afford it, but not prioritizing their education. Those girls who started education dropped out of school due to early pregnancies and early marriages, which were found to be prevalent. That is, parents did not give adequate attention or support to girls' education. Families often used children, especially girls, to generate income through trade, employment, or other labor (Mollaw *et al.*, 2023). All these indicated that girls, as opposed to boys, face

discrimination in education in most developing countries.

There are incidences of gender-based violence, including psychological abuse, physical and sexual violence in Ethiopia. UNICEF (2018) highlights that school-related gender-based violence remains a serious issue, including instances of corporal punishment, sexual harassment, and abuse by both peers and authority figures. Women who report such incidents often face social stigma or ridicule, and extreme cases such as acid attacks and public shootings have also been documented (Wright, 2020). Despite progressive constitutional protections, enforcement remains weak, and cultural and religious norms continue to perpetuate discrimination. Consequently, girls in Ethiopia are subjected to harmful social norms, including high rates of child marriage, which severely limit their opportunities to complete formal education (UNESCO, 2018).

Despite initiatives aimed at achieving gender parity in school enrollment, UNESCO (2000) reported that between 1990 and 1998, the gender gap, as reflected in gross enrollment ratios, actually widened in several Sub-Saharan African countries, including Ethiopia. Persistent challenges continue to affect girls' educational progression, completion rates, and learning outcomes (Tafere et al., 2022). Moreover, as students advance through higher levels of education, the disparity between the number of male and female students becomes increasingly pronounced (Nuru & Demeke, 2023).

Giving girls equal admission to education is not only their right, but it is also important in a practical sense to achieve significant social and economic benefits for the country (Mollaw *et al.*, 2023). Girls should not be seen as recipients of support from male counterparts rather they have to be considered as active participants in the development process. Thus, deep-seated bias against women and patriarchal norms which disregard the rights of women needs to be tackled. Thus, in the realm of education, this issue calls for a pedagogy that takes into account the needs of each gender in the learning environment.

Gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP) involves designing and implementing teaching and learning practices that address the distinct educational needs of both girls and boys (Mlama et al., 2005). This approach requires integrating gender considerations throughout lesson planning, classroom instruction, management, and assessment to ensure equitable learning opportunities (Mlama et al., 2005). In practice, GRP encourages teachers to attend to classroom arrangements, instructional materials, student interactions, language use, and lesson content in ways that support the engagement and success of all students. However, many educators continue to use

teaching methods and materials that reinforce gender stereotypes and fail to provide equal participation opportunities for girls and boys. Additionally, some teachers may be unaware of their implicit biases, which can unintentionally discourage female students from assuming leadership roles or pursuing subjects traditionally perceived as male-dominated (Chapin & Warne, 2020). As a result, teacher–student interactions often do not foster a supportive learning environment, making it difficult for students, particularly girls, to seek guidance or assistance for academic or personal challenges (Bekalu, 2017).

The pervasive gender disparity goes to the level of verbal abuse and insulting. Researchers in the area noted that both male and female students experience high levels of verbal abuse within the school setting. Bekalu (2017) found out that teachers insulted their students and did not show respect to their students although giving respect for fellow human beings is the ABC of formal education. This behavior is predominantly exhibited by some, though not all, male teachers, and it has a detrimental effect on students’ educational outcomes, as well as their overall health and wellbeing (Tafere *et al.*, 2022). With regard to its effect, Tafere *et al.* (2022) further stated that gender-based violence at school level could reduce girls’ class participation, lower their school performance and increase their grade repetition and dropout rates.

Thus, to alleviate the problem from its deep-seated position at least in the school setting, teachers need to get proper awareness about gender responsive pedagogy. This is because most teachers may not have adequate understanding about GRP, and the topic remains largely unaddressed. Research indicates that many teachers possess only a limited understanding of gender-responsive pedagogy (Mhewa *et al.*, 2020 cited in Mukagiahana *et al.*, 2024). Furthering the discussion, Mollaw *et al.* (2023) recommend that teachers should receive short-term and long-term training regarding GRP concepts and practices. Based on these concerns, Mollaw *et al.* (2023) reported that teachers often struggle to design gender-sensitive lesson plans and instructional materials, and they show limited effectiveness in addressing topics related to sexual maturation. In response to these challenges, the present study aimed to assess teachers’ knowledge of and ability to implement gender-responsive pedagogy in classroom teaching. Accordingly, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- assess the perceptions of teachers about GRP at KUE; and
- explore the GRP practices among teachers at KUE.

## **2. Methodology**

The researchers employed mixed method research so that we would be able to verify one set of findings against the other, for the sake of triangulation and to achieve a full understanding of the variables. Dornyei (2007) stated that this design uses the two research approaches, quantitative and qualitative, in a separate and parallel manner. The two methods do not influence the operationalization of each other and the results are integrated in the interpretation phase. In this study, both the quantitative and the qualitative instruments were administered in parallel. This design was selected to get a fuller understanding of the practice. By using the quantitative tool, a wide spectrum of data was gathered regarding GRP but the data could reveal little about the potential challenges of gender-based personal interaction. To remedy this weakness, at the micro-level, qualitative instruments that involved explanations were employed.

The researchers adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of the participants. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological research seeks to describe the shared experiences of individuals encountering a particular phenomenon, providing an in-depth understanding of it. Among the two main approaches, hermeneutic phenomenology and empirical/transcendental (psychological) phenomenology, the study employed the empirical/transcendental approach, as the focus was on capturing the actual experiences of the participants themselves.

As per the information obtained from the Personnel Office the total number of teachers at KUE was about four hundred three and we took twenty percent of the total population, about eighty two teachers. According to the information obtained from KUE Registrar and Alumini Directorate, the total number of students was five thousand four hundred, and from these, twenty percent, which was one thousand eighty students, was selected by using simple random sampling. In terms of qualitative sampling, Dornyei (2007) emphasizes that the primary aim in qualitative research is to identify individuals who can provide rich and diverse insights into the phenomenon, thereby maximizing the depth of understanding. This objective is most effectively achieved through purposive sampling. Accordingly, purposive sampling was employed to select participants for interviews and observations, specifically targeting students who were extroverted and outspoken. Flick (2002) further notes that in qualitative research, the suitability of a sample is not measured by generalizability, which is not always the goal, but rather by its ability to produce rich, detailed data from a relatively small number of participants that adequately

illuminates the phenomenon under study.

Questionnaires adapted from Mluma *et al.* (2005) on 'Gender-responsive pedagogy', were used to map teachers' and students' perceptions of gender responsive pedagogy. The questionnaires were refined through pilot testing. Each item contained five-point Likert-format choices such as 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2= disagree and 1=strongly disagree. The items in the questionnaires were both positively and negatively worded items, and all positively worded items were reversed before the analysis. Regarding the observation analysis, we used a checklist indicating the presence or absence of the variables observed. The checklist had „yes“ and „no“ responses, carrying one and zero points respectively. In addition to this, interview was used with teachers and students. The interviews were carried out with eight participants. The interview participants were selected based on gender so that a representative sample of participants could be surveyed. In the semi-structured interview, the participants were asked about the practices of gender-responsive pedagogy and their engagements in teaching learning. The interviews were used to triangulate the data obtained through other instruments and to provide further insights. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in Amharic, and then translated into English.

The quantitative analysis employed the statistical software SPSS, version 23.00. The qualitative data were transcribed and translated, and the accounts were thematically analyzed. Central themes which were highly connected with the objectives of the research were identified and interpreted. The processed data that passed through systematic and detailed procedures were analyzed qualitatively and then interpreted. Regarding the observation analysis, the presence or absence of each domain was observed using the checklist rating scale, one and zero, and each teacher was observed four times. The scores of each teacher observed were divided by the frequency of observations. The range of the responses became from zero to four with the mean of two.

**Quotes in Writing:** Creswell further argued that brief, striking quotations are easy to read, occupy minimal space, and visually stand out from the main narrative, often being indented to highlight a distinct perspective. Drawing on this recommendation, the study incorporated short, attention-grabbing quotations throughout the analysis to emphasize participants' viewpoints.

**Ethical Issues:** All participants willingly consented to be part of the study. In line with

qualitative research ethics, safeguarding participants' identities and protecting the confidentiality of their responses was prioritized. All full interview transcripts were coded using pseudonyms and remain securely held by the researchers. During the interviews, participants were informed about the anonymity measures, and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure their identities were not disclosed.

Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) noted the two contexts to think about validity and reliability in qualitative study. Instrument validity and reliability in this study were considered from two perspectives. The first concerned evidence from previous uses of the instruments, including whether earlier scores were valid and reliable. The second focused on assessing the validity and reliability of data collected in the current study. For the first perspective, the researchers reviewed prior studies and reports on the instruments' performance, examining indicators such as content validity (judges' evaluation of whether items adequately represent the domain), criterion-related validity (the extent to which scores correlate with external standards or similar instruments), and construct validity (whether the instrument consistently measures the intended concept). Prior research, including studies like Mollaw et al. (2023), was consulted to confirm the instruments' validity before use in this study.

Reliability of scores from past uses is assessed in terms of reliability coefficients; and instruments' test-retest results need to be addressed. For this, the reliability coefficient of the instruments is examined. For the current study too, we checked for the reliability of scores. For the instrument used, Cronbach's alpha item reliability of the scale was calculated to find out inter-item consistency, which became 0.78. With regard to the validation of the qualitative data, we used some of the most important validation strategies such as public scrutiny or external audits, member checking, triangulation, peer debriefings. Concerning reliability, we employed inter-coder agreement.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### **Teachers' perception**

The items assessing gender responsive pedagogy (adapted from Mloma *et al.*2005) are grouped into five domains and the average scores for each domain are presented below. The mean score thresholds are interpreted as follows 1:00-1.80 is strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60 is disagree; 2.61-3.40 is neutral; 3.41-4.20 is agree and 4.21-5.00 is strongly agree. This is also true for the analysis of students' perceptions of GRP and scores in the subsequent tables.

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions of gender responsive pedagogy

No	GRP domain	GRP item	Mean	SD
1	Teaching learning	Giving equal chance for girls and boys to answer questions	4.66	0.72
		Working groups are mixed (both males and females).	4.12	0.10
		Acknowledging the equal ability of girls and boys	4.14	0.10
		Creating a supportive environment for girls	4.00	0.10
		Adapting teaching methods to meet the needs of both genders	4.03	0.12
2	Classroom interaction	Groups having equal gender representations	4.30	0.10
3	Language use	Using gender neutral languages	3.96	0.11
		Employing friendly languages to both genders	4.35	0.81
4	Classroom set up	Gender sensitive sitting arrangements	3.17	0.14
5	Assessment	Languages in assessment are gender neutral.	4.12	0.10

As it can be seen from the table above, teacher informants of the present study stated that they gave equal chance for boys and girls to answer questions ( $M=4.66$ ;  $SD=0.72$ ), and that the groups were mixed ( $M=4.12$ ;  $SD=0.10$ ). Moreover, teachers acknowledged the equal ability of girls and boys ( $M=4.14$ ;  $SD=0.10$ ). Furthermore, teachers stated that they created a supportive environment for girls ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=0.10$ ) and adapted teaching methods to meet the needs of both genders ( $M=4.03$ ;  $SD=0.12$ ). During group formations, as teachers reported, an equal number of participants from each gender were included ( $M=4.30$ ;  $SD=0.10$ ). Regarding language use, teachers stated that they used gender neutral languages ( $M=3.96$ ;  $SD=0.11$ ) and employed friendly languages to both genders ( $M=4.35$ ;  $SD=0.81$ ). In relation to sitting arrangements, teachers noted that they made sitting arrangements based on gender ( $M=3.17$ ;  $SD=0.14$ ). Pertaining to assessment, teachers noted that they used gender neutral languages in assessment ( $M=4.12$ ;  $SD=0.10$ ).

This result indicates that respondents generally agree with the items assessing gender responsive pedagogy. The SD suggests low variability in the responses, indicating that the responses are not scattered across the options. These statements which were rated above the mean indicated that a considerable proportion of teachers seemed to have good perceptions about gender responsive pedagogy in all the domains assessed. This finding is in line with the findings of Abrahaet *al.* (2023). Abrahaet *al.* (2023) found out that teachers increasingly used gender-responsive pedagogy for teaching the core subjects such as biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics. The context of the present study was an education university with teachers who usually have an adequate understanding of gender-responsive pedagogical issues. Adopting gender-inclusiveness and sensitive teaching techniques in early teacher education and in-service teacher training is

crucial to teacher development by alleviating gender disparity (Mollaw et al., 2023; Núñez-Román et al.2023).

### Students' perception

Items showing the responses of students have been categorized by domain, and the aggregated mean for each domain is outlined as follows.

Table 2: Students „perceptions of gender responsive pedagogy

No	GRPdomain	GRPitem	Mean	SD
1	Teaching learning	Giving equal chance to male and female students	3.45	1.31
		Engaging both males and females in the lessons	3.64	1.47
		Adapting teaching methods to meet the needs of eachgender	3.00	1.31
		Acknowledging the equal ability of girls and boys	3.48	1.23
		Creating a supportive environment for girls	3.16	1.31
2	Classroom interaction	Groups having equal gender representations	2.93	1.26
3	Language use	Languages are friendly to both male & female students.	2.87	1.17
		Using gender neutral languages	3.06	1.09
4	Classroom set up	Creating gender sensitive sitting arrangements	2.77	1.35
5	Assessment	Languages in assessment are gender neutral.	2.96	1.01

As noted in the table above, students were reported that teachers gave equal chance for boys and girls to answer questions ( $M=3.45$ ;  $SD=1.31$ ), and that teachers engaged both male and female students in the lessons ( $M=3.64$ ;  $SD=1.47$ ). Moreover, it was reported that teachers adapted teaching methods to meet the needs of each gender ( $M=3.00$ ;  $SD=1.31$ ), and they acknowledged the equal ability of girls and boys ( $M=3.48$ ;  $SD =1.23$ ). Furthermore, the sample students stated that teachers created a supportive environment for girls ( $M=3.16$ ;  $SD=1.31$ ). During group formations, as students indicated, teachers distributed participants equally across genders ( $M=2.93$ ;  $SD=1.26$ ). According to students, languages used by teachers were friendly to both male and female students ( $M=2.87$ ;  $SD=1.17$ ), and they used gender neutral languages ( $M=3.06$ ;  $SD=1.09$ ). In addition to this, teachers were reported to have created gender sensitive sitting arrangements ( $M=2.77$ ;  $SD=1.35$ ). On the matter of assessment, the students reported that teachers used gender neutral languages in assessment ( $M=2.96$ ;  $SD=1.01$ ). This result indicates that the respondents nearly disagreed with the items assessing gender responsive pedagogy. The SD suggests moderate variability in the responses, indicating that the responses were scattered across the alternatives suggesting some diversity in the responses among the student population.

In all the domains, the responses of teachers became above the mean score; whereas some of the

mean scores of the students’ responses were found to be below three. Thus, the finding of the study showed that there was a slight difference between the responses of teachers and those of students. Although perception gaps would create a difference in giving responses between teachers and students, the responses of teachers endorsed more favorable responses in order to enhance their own self-presentation. In other words, they might give answers they considered to be socially desirable in order to project a favorable image of them, or to avoid being perceived negatively. The following table shows the line of deviation.

Table 3: The following table shows the summary of the above two tables reflecting the domains of departure between the responses of teachers and of students.

No	GRP domain	GRP item	Students’ Mean	Teachers’ Mean
1	Classroom interaction	Groups having equal gender representations	2.93	4.30
2	Language use	Languages are friendly to both male & female students.	2.87	4.35
3	Classroom set up	Creating gender sensitive seating/sitting arrangements	2.77	3.17
4	Assessment	Languages in assessment are gender neutral.	2.96	4.12

As it can be seen from the table above, the responses of teacher and student respondents differed slightly. Students and teachers respectively reported that groups formed by teachers had equal gender representations (M = 2.93 and M = 4.30). Furthermore, students and teachers respectively stated that languages used by teachers in the classroom were friendly to both male and female students (M= 2.87 and M = 4.35). In a similar manner, students and teachers respectively noted that teachers created gender sensitive seating arrangements (M = 2.77 and M = 3.17). Regarding language use, teachers stated that they used gender neutral languages in assessments (M=4.12), and the mean of the students’ responses became 2.96. In those four domains, the responses of the teachers and the students did not show a strong consensus. Response variability might be due to social desirability bias, where participants gave answers that would reflect on them positively as opposed to what they actually felt or did. The qualitative results supported the initial points of departure observed in the quantitative section.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The observation items having „yes“ and „no“ responses are organized into distinct domains, with the mean scores of „yes“ responses for each domain summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4: Qualitative Analysis**

No	GRP domain	GRP item	Teachers' average scores					
			T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
1	Teaching learning	Giving equal chance to male and female students	3.7	2.7	2.9	2.8	3.3	3.4
		Engaging both male and females in the lessons	2.0	2.4	2.2	2.5	2.9	3.2
		Adapting teaching methods to meet the needs of each gender	2.6	2.0	3.8	2.5	3.3	2.8
		Giving equal constructive feedback	3.6	2.5	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.1
		Creating a supportive environment for both genders	1.5	0.8	0.9	1.3	1.0	1.5
2	Classroom interaction	Groups having equal gender representations	3.2	3.5	3.8	3.2	3.1	3.0
3	Language use	Languages are friendly to both male & female students.	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.3	2.0	1.5
		Using gender neutral languages	3.0	2.9	3.2	3.4	2.8	2.6
4	Classroom set up	Creating gender sensitive seating/sitting arrangements	1.9	2.8	2.6	3.8	2.5	2.3

As it was stated earlier, the presence or absence of each domain was observed using the checklist, ranging from one to zero, and each teacher was observed four times. The scores of each teacher were divided by the frequency of the observations. The range of the responses became from zero to four with the mean of two, and a higher mean would indicate a more frequently practiced domain. As noted in Table 4 above, teachers were observed whether or not they were able to use gender sensitive pedagogy or not. As it can be seen from Table 4 above, the score of each domain became above the mean, indicating that teachers appeared to practice gender responsive pedagogy.

However, the mean scores for „creating a supportive environment“ and „using friendly languages“ were below the average. This shows that the observed teachers seemed to be a bit far from practicing these items. The quantitative finding from students' responses has confirmed this issue. According to the response of the students, languages used by teachers were friendly to both male and female students ( $M=2.87$ ;  $SD=1.17$ ), where the mean score appeared below the average, suggesting that the languages used by teachers were not friendly. The qualitative section of the study roughly confirmed this finding, particularly in terms of language use. In the quantitative section of the study, teachers stated that they used gender neutral languages. However, the qualitative section of the study disclosed that teachers might not employ gender neutral languages; the following representative sample could show the case clearly. Interviewee Three had the following to say.

*Honestly, I never actually paid much attention to the usage of gendered pronouns in the academic world, but yes, it is not equitable to use predominantly male words.*

In a similar manner, Interviewee One added the points below.

*The use of the pronoun "he" by teachers is cultural and habitual, which leads to the use of male-biased words in classroom discussions and exams.*

Moreover, Interviewee Four noted the following.

*I never consciously thought the usage of gendered pronouns to be problematic in the academic community. However, I recognize that the use of predominantly male pronouns can be exclusionary and discriminatory.*

Furthermore, Interviewee Five forwarded the idea below.

*Gender-sensitive pronoun use is increasingly used in English. At times, I use the pronoun "he" and I later realize the possible gender bias it could encompass. It is now a norm to use gender-insensitive pronouns in English. I tend to realize the gender aspect only after I have already employed the use of "he."*

As it can be seen from the excerpts above, some teachers might not use gender neutral languages in the classroom. For example, as per the words of Interviewee Four, he never consciously thought the usage of gendered pronouns. This finding is in consistent with the findings of the quantitative study. The mean value ( $M = 2.96$ ) of the students' questionnaire showed that the mean score is below the average indicating that teachers did not use gender neutral languages. Some teaching staff might be unaware of their subconscious positive or negative biases about male and female students (Chapin & Warne 2020). When teachers use gender sensitive pronouns in the classroom, girls may feel less discriminated against and more respected; when teachers use inclusive language, the learning environment will be more comfortable and inviting. In this regard, FAWE (2006) stated that language use in the classroom, that is gender responsive treatment of boys and girls as equal partners, provides a learning environment conducive to both genders. Thus, equitable and engaging learning environment could be established when female students are less likely to notice bias in terms of pronoun usage.

### **Level of participation**

Regarding the participation of girls, the respondents of the study forwarded the points below. For example, Interviewee Two addressed the following points.

*Girls are more participative in language classes. They prefer to take a dominant role while doing group works and, to a large extent, behave as group leaders very frequently.*

In addition to this, Interviewee Four pointed out the points below.

*Observations in the language classroom also portray girls as more active and participative.*

Similarly, Interviewee Six said,

*They prefer playing a central role while doing group works and behaving very frequently as group leaders.*

Contrary to the findings stated above, there were some female students who did not take part in classroom discussions. In this regard, participants addressed the points below. Interviewee Five said the following.

*In terms of participation, it's still, you see, because I don't know the culture or because of what, uh, I see there is a reservation from the girls' side.*

In a similar manner, Interviewee Two added the points.

*Though female learners learn language concepts quickly, female students are less vocal in class participation.*

The findings stated above presented contradictory findings. The participants also had different observations: some assumed girls were actually engaging in class activities while others assumed girls were only limited in their participation. Although we do not in any way claim to draw justifications for the discrepancy directly from our study, we can still mention legitimate reasons based on intuition and projection. First, this discrepancy might arise due to background difference. Girls who were brought up in urban areas tend to participate actively in class discussions, whereas girls from rural areas are likely to remain shy and reserved. This in turn may mean that the level of participation among girls could be dependent on their geo-geographic or socio-cultural locations. Chapin & Warne (2020) further noted that gender blind teaching practices reinforce gender inequalities in the classroom, leading to the concept of a „hidden curriculum“ in which male students are permitted to dominate discussions and classroom space. The self-concept of girls might be another factor for the low participation of girls in the classroom. In most cases, girls were found to be shy and lacked confidence and belief in their capabilities, which had a negative impact on their learning (Mollaw *et al.*, 2023). This could be caused by religious and cultural beliefs that make girls continue to lag behind their male counterparts in terms of classroom participation. Breaking down the cultural taboo by supporting women is the primary responsibility of educators.

### **Texts and assessment**

In relation to the representation of gender in exam booklets and in the teaching materials, the

participants addressed the following points. For example, Interviewee One addressed the points below.

*Earlier textbooks were not gender-sensitive, but recent textbooks are more gender-sensitive and inclusive.*

In a similar manner, Interviewee Six forwarded the following.

*Recent textbooks are more gender-conscious and sensitive as opposed to earlier ones which tended to overlook them.*

Furthermore, Interviewee Three added the points below.

*Earlier study materials did not reflect gender equality, but recent textbooks are more gender-sensitive and balanced.*

As it can be seen from the findings of the study, earlier textbooks were not gender-sensitive, whereas recent ones are more inclusive of and sensitive to gender issues. This suggested that there has been some improvement in textbook preparations. More recent texts are more gender-sensitive, with balanced male and female representations. This reflects awareness creation among textbook designers regarding gender sensitivity.

## **Performance**

Regarding performance difference in terms of gender, the participants addressed the following points. For example, Interviewee Four stated the points below.

*The girls are performing better than boys now in terms of production.*

Interviewee Three added the following.

*Girls excel in social science subjects, whereas boys excel in science-related subjects. These patterns may be the outcome of a combination of social, cultural, and educational reasons (student participant).*

Interviewee Two noted the points below.

*Previously, male students generally outperformed females; however, in recent times, female students have demonstrated greater intelligence and academic competence.*

Interviewee Five forwarded the following.

*Though female students are faster in terms of developing language skills, they seem shy in class participation.*

As pointed out above, female students outperformed boys academically and showed higher levels of academic excellence. As Interviewee Three clearly indicated, girls depicted better academic performance in social science subjects. This is particularly observable in language

classes. In addition, it has been argued that girls may perform better with more collaborative, learner-centered pedagogies in contrast to traditional teacher-dominated “chalk and talk” teaching practices that prevail in many low- and middle-income settings (Psakiet *al.*2015). In addition to this, Stavropoulou & Gupta-Archer (2017) stated that students from poor backgrounds and those from rural areas have the lowest learning achievements and rural boys consistently outperform their girl counterparts in primary school. This suggests that both the traditional teacher-dominated teaching-learning practice and impoverished rural areas are the major factors deterring girls’ performance. A good learning environment in the urban areas can result in better academic achievement in girls. On the other hand, girls in the rural areas, where the learning environment is not as favorable, perform poorly. This shows that the academic achievement of girls is influenced by the kind of socio-cultural environment they are subjected to. In a study conducted in a private school at Addis Ababa, it was found out that there is a clear and statistically significant performance gap in English speaking skills between male and female students (Tsegaye, 2025). The study further noted that females’ performance was most pronounced in the areas of fluency, coherence, pronunciation and communicative competence. The disparity was narrowest in grammatical range and accuracy, suggesting that both genders possessed similar levels of formal grammatical knowledge, but differed in their ability to apply this knowledge effectively in dynamic, communicative contexts (Tsegaye, 2025). This indicates that enabling socio-cultural and economic conditions can improve the academic performance of girls.

### **Sitting/seating arrangements**

Concerning sitting arrangements, the participants noted the following points. For example,

Interviewee Four stated the points below.

*I use a variety of seating arrangements in the classroom, including V-shape, U-shape, and conventional layouts, to enhance student engagement and interaction.*

Interviewee Six added the points below.

*I take the present sitting arrangements without any discrimination, based on gender. My only reservation regarding seating comes into play when it is a matter of tests and exams to ensure proper exam conditions. I do not usually interfere with the sitting arrangements of boys and girls, accepting its face-value. Exceptions are made when unavoidable, such as in the case of tests.*

Interviewee Three noted the following.

*I usually keep the sitting arrangements as it is without segregating boys and girls,*

*except when it comes to sitting arrangements for tests or exams. I usually accommodate the students' sitting arrangements as it is and do not provide special arrangements based on gender. The only exception I make is for tests or exams.*

The excerpts stated above show that teachers did not alter the sitting arrangements of the students; they let them take the seats of their own choice. The sitting arrangements of the students could be changed during exams. This finding was consistent with the findings of the quantitative study. In the quantitative section of the study, the mean value of the score ( $M = 2.77$ ) is below the average indicating that teachers did not create gender sensitive sitting arrangements in the classroom.

### **Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' comprehension and application of gender-responsive pedagogy within the teaching and learning process. To achieve this, the researchers employed a combination of data collection methods, including questionnaires administered to teachers and students, classroom observations, and in-depth interviews.

The findings from teachers' quantitative responses indicated that teachers seemed to employ gender responsive pedagogy in all the domains assessed. However, teachers' responses differed slightly from those of students. There was a noticeable difference in four of the domains investigated; namely, creating seating/sitting arrangements, using friendly languages in the classroom, having equal gender representations in group works and employing gender neutral languages in assessments. The difference in the responses might be due to social desirability bias, since teachers wish to project themselves in a positive manner. The findings of the study depicted that there was an improvement in textbook preparations, with materials becoming gender-sensitive and including both genders. This is a reflection of increased sensitivity to gender among textbook developers.

Some of the respondents explained that the girls were actively participative in class discussions, while others said that they did not participate actively. The findings of the study revealed that city-bred girls would most likely be more active in class participation, whereas rural-bred girls were quiet and shy. This shows that where they were from affected how they interacted in class. In addition to this, availability of a supportive school climate in urban regions appeared to enhance the academic performance of females. The findings indicate that socio-cultural and

economic conditions had a significant influence in the determination of the educational attainment of females. That is, females' performance was a function of the socio-cultural environments they came from. With regard to sitting arrangements, teachers did not intervene in students' sitting preferences, instead choosing to respect their will as to where to sit on.

## 5. Implications

It was noted that girls who came from urban areas were more vocal and participative in class, while those from rural backgrounds were generally quiet and reserved. This indicates that the students' origins influenced their classroom interactions. In addition, it would appear that a favorable school environment in the urban added to the good performance of girls. Overall, and from these various responses, there is evidence to suggest that socio-cultural and economic factors were very influential in determining females' attainment, implying that performance was closely related to the social and cultural backgrounds where the females were raised.

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## 7. Conflicts of Interest:

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

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