

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

*Bekalu Atnafu Taye\* and Melkamu Yazachew Mebrat*

Kotebe University of Education

\*Corresponding author: [bekaluatnafutaye@gmail.com](mailto:bekaluatnafutaye@gmail.com)

### **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 the developing countries faces several challenges, such as low retention, high dropout, and lack of skills development. In the Ethiopia context, there is a long history of gender inequality, with poor women and girls especially facing multiple 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. In this regard, UNICEF (2018) noted that there are cases of school-related gender-based violence, including corporal punishment and sexual abuse, from peers and authorities. Being a victim, a woman who goes to the police and reports the case of physical assault and sexual harassment will surely become the subject of mockery. To the worst, women are victims of acid attacks and daylight shooting (Wright 2020). At this juncture, one may ask about the realization of the country's legal system. Though the constitution seems progressive in nature, the women's oppression is still in place for lack of enforcing capacity by the government as well as religious values within the country (Wright 2020). It is unfortunate that the society has accepted the discrimination against them as being a norm. Girls face harmful social norms and child marriage rates in the country are some of the highest in the world, impeding girls' chances of completing school (UNESCO, 2018).

Despite efforts to reach gender equality in enrolment, UNESCO (2000) narrates that, between 1990 and 1998, the gender gap, as measured by the gross enrolment ratio, has grown in Sub-Saharan African countries such as Ethiopia. However, many challenges remain, particularly in terms of girls' education progression, completion and learning outcomes (Tafere *et al.*, 2022). In addition, as students move up the educational ladder, the gap between the number of males and that of females significantly rises (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 refers to teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys (Mlama *et al.*, 2005). Gender responsive pedagogy embraces an all-encompassing gender approach in the processes of lesson planning, teaching, classroom management and performance evaluation (Mlama *et al.*, 2005). In the context of gender responsive pedagogy, teachers have to consider a set of issues (such as classroom setups,

teaching learning materials, classroom interactions, language use and lesson plans) that could satisfy the needs of both girls and boys in the school setting. However, many teachers apply teaching methodologies that do not give girls and boys equal opportunities to participate and they also use teaching and learning materials that perpetuate gender stereotypes (Mlamaet *et al.*, 2005). Some teaching staff may also be unaware of their subconscious positive or negative biases toward male and female students, to the extent of unintentionally discouraging female students from taking a leadership role within the classroom, or from progressing in what may be perceived as male subjects (Chapin & Warne, 2020). Owing to this, most teacher-student relationships are not favorable to effective learning which makes it difficult for students, especially girls, to seek guidance and assistance from teachers for either academic or personal problems (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. In a study conducted at Addis Ababa University, 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 is primarily from some, but not all, male teachers, and it negatively impacts students' education, 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. Literature shows that teachers have 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. Mollaw *et al.* (2023) further stated that teachers were ineffective in creating gender-sensitive lesson plans and teaching materials, and they were also weak in treating the subject of sexual maturation. In view of the above, this study tried to examine

teachers' understanding and implementation levels of gender-responsive pedagogy in the teaching learning process. In light of the above points, 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 chose a qualitative phenomenological research to study the lived experiences of the participants. In explaining phenomenological research, Creswell (2007) noted that phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. This approach gives a deep understanding of the phenomenon. From the two approaches of phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology and empirical/transcendental or psychological phenomenology, the research team used the second type of phenomenological research because it was the experiences of the participants that would count most for the study.

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. With regard to the qualitative sampling, Dornyei, (2007) noted that in qualitative research, the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied

insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn, and this goal is best achieved by means of purposive sampling. Thus, in selecting samples for the interviews and observations, purposive sampling technique was used. That is, students who were extrovert and outspoken were purposely identified. With regard to the sampling techniques in qualitative approach, Flick (2002) stated that the appropriateness of the selected sample could be assessed in terms of the degree of generalizability which is striven for; and generalizability is not in every case the goal of a qualitative research. Rather, a well-designed qualitative study requires a relatively small number of respondents to yield rich data needed to understand the phenomenon under study.

Questionnaires adapted from Mlama *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 (2007) noted that there are three ways of quotes; these are short eye-catching quotations, embedded quotes and longer quotations. Creswell further stated that short eye-catching quotations are easy to read, take up little space and stand out from the narrator's text and are indented to signify different perspective. Influenced by Creswell's argument, we used short eye-catching quotations throughout the analysis.

**Ethical Issues:** All the participants were willing to take part in the study. Another important issue in qualitative research is concealing the participants' identity and maintaining the security of their views. The full transcriptions which were coded with anonymous names remain the researchers' documents. Even during the sessions, the interviewees were informed about the anonymity of the participants and we assigned pseudo names for this purpose.

Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) noted that in quantitative research, there are two contexts to think about validity and reliability. The first pertains to scores from past uses of the instruments and whether the scores are valid and reliable, and the second relates to an assessment of the validity and reliability of data collected in the current study. For the past uses of instruments, researchers examine reviews of instruments or reports on the validity and reliability of scores taken earlier from the instruments. For the content validity (how judges assess whether the items or questions are representative of possible items) criterion-related validity (whether the scores relate to some external standards, such as scores on a similar instrument) and construct validity (whether the scores are consistent or measure what they intend to measure), prior research works (such as Mollaw *et al.* 2023) were consulted, and the validity of the instruments used was checked.

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 Mlama *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 Abraha *et al.* (2023). Abraha *et 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-Románet *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 each gender	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-graphic 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 shyer 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 *et 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 objective of this study was to examine teachers' understanding and implementation levels of gender-responsive pedagogy in the teaching learning process. In light of this, this study used questionnaires for teachers and students, observations and 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.

## 6. Acknowledgements

The research team is grateful for the grant support given by Kotebe University of Education.

## 7. Conflicts of Interest:

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

## References

Abraha Asfaw(2012). Gender Inequalities in Tertiary Education in Ethiopia: Mediating the Transition to University through the Development of Adaptive Competencies. Global Scholars Program Working Paper Series.

Alemayehu, B. A. (2020) Gender inclusive training challenges in higher education institutions in Ethiopia: Implications for reforming training for gender equality. *International Journal of Didactical Studies*, 1(1).

Barakat, B., Bengtsson, S., Muttarak, R., Kebede, E. B., Cuaresma, J. C., Samir, K.C. &Striessnig, E. (2016) Education and the Sustainable Development Goals. 22 Background Paper prepared for the 2016 *Global Education Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO.

Bekalu Atnafu Taye(2017). Verbal Behaviors of Teachers and Student Anxiety in Language Classes. *Bahir Dar University Journal of education*. 17(1) January 2017.<http://bdu.edu.et/page/bahir-dar-journal-education>

Bramberger, A. (2015). *Gender inclusion*. Wien, Austria: New Academic Press.

Chapin, J. and Warne, V. (2020).*Gender Responsive Pedagogy in Higher Education*: A framework. [www.inasp.info](http://www.inasp.info)

Devonald, M., Jones, N. &Yadete, W. (2021) Addressing educational attainment inequities in rural Ethiopia: Leave no adolescent behind. *Development Policy Review*, 39(5): 740-756,

Keogh S, Stillman M, Awusabo-Asare K, et al. (2018). Challenges to implementing national comprehensive sexuality education curricula in low- and middle-income countries: case studies of Ghana, Kenya, Peru and Guatemala. *PLoS ONE*, 13(7):e0200513.

Lloyd, C. B. (2013) Education for Girls: Alternative Pathways to Girls' Empowerment. *Integrated Approaches to Improving the Lives of Adolescent Girls Issue Paper Series*.GirlEffect.org.

Ministry of Education (MoE) (2023) *Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2022/2023*. Addis Ababa: Government of Ethiopia.

Mlama, P.; Dioum, M.; Makoye, H.; Murage, L.; Wagah, M.; Washika, R. (2005) *Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher's Handbook*. Nairobi: Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). <https://www.wikigender.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/GRP-Booklet.pdf>.

Mollaw Abrha, Asrat Dagnew; and Amera Seifu, (2023) Gender Responsive Pedagogy Practices: Secondary School Science Teachers in Ethiopia, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(1). Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss1/20>.

Mollaw Abrha, Asrat Dagnew&Amara Seifu (2019). Gender Responsive Pedagogy: Practices, Challenges & Opportunities - A Case of Secondary Schools of North Wollo Zone, Ethiopia. *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioral Science*, 30(3): 1-17, 2019.

Mukagiahana, J., Sibomana, A., &Ndiritu, J. (2024). Teachers' understanding of gender responsive pedagogy and its application in teaching process: Case after teacher training program interventions in Rwanda. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 8(1), 280-293.

Nuru Mohammed and Demeke Lakew (2023). Multilevel analysis of women's education in Ethiopia. 23:197. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02380-6>

Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Mensch, B., Woyczynski, L., & Chuang, E. (2022). Policies and interventions to remove gender-related barriers to girls' school participation and learning in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of the evidence. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 18(1), e1207. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1207>

Sperling, G. B., & Winthrop, R. (2015). *What works in girls' education: Evidence for the world's best investment*. Brookings Institute Press. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What%20Works-in-Girls-Education%20Lowres.pdf>

Snilstveit, B., Stevenson, J., Menon, R., Phillips, D., Vojtкова, M., Gallagher, E., Schmidt, T., Jobse, H., Geleen, M., & Pastorello, M. G. (2015). *The impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low- and middle-income countries*. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). <https://doi.org/10.23846/SRS007>

Stavroupolou, M. and Gupta-Archer, N. (2017) Adolescent girls' capabilities in Ethiopia. London: Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE).

Tafere, Y., Yorke, L., Rose, P. and Pankhurst, A. 2022. Understanding the Influences on Girls' Primary Education in Ethiopia from the Perspectives of Girls and Their Caregivers. *RISE Working Paper Series*.22/097. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2022/097](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2022/097)

Tsegaye Gezahegn (2025). Gender and Performance: Investigating Performance Gaps in Speaking Skills in English Language Classes Among Grades 11 And 12 Students at Diamond Academy. Unpublished MA submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kotebe University of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Masters of Education in English Language Education:

UNESCO(2015). *A guide for gender equality in teacher education policy and practices*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002316/231646e.pdf>

UNESCO (2018). UNICEF Fact Sheet – Girl's Education

Wright A. (2020). Closing the Gender Gap: Women's Rights in Ethiopia and Mexico Global Majority E-Journal, 11(1), 47–60.

Yorke, L. Rose, P. and Pankhurst, A. (2021) The influence of politics on girls' education in Ethiopia. In: Rose, P., Arnot, M., Jeffrey, R. and Singhal, N. (Eds). *Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts: Research and policy in international development*. London: Routledge DOI: 10.4324/9780429293467-6.

Wudu Melese & Getahun Fenta. (2009). Trend and causes of female students dropout from teacher education institutions of Ethiopia: The case of Jimma University. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences*, 5(1).