



DO WE TRAIN TEACHERS FOR A MORE GENDER-EQUAL SOCIETY? A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Teachers' gender perceptions influence their classroom behaviors and their attitudes to girls and boys in class respectively. As key factors in educational settings, teachers who have traditional gender role orientations, consciously or unconsciously, contribute to their students' acceptance of socially prescribed gender roles, which are rather dysfunctional. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers are trained to identify and counter gender stereotyping for a more gender-equal society. The present study aimed to investigate and compare the gender role perceptions of senior student teachers from two different departments, namely, English language teaching and Turkish language teaching. The sample for the study was obtained from the education faculty of a large state university in western Turkey. Gender role orientation was assessed with the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem 1974). Findings seem to have important implications for teacher education institutions in Turkey.

Key Words: student teachers, gender roles, teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the school as an important agency of socialization is accepted among social scientists and educators. When children begin school it is usually the first time that they come under the supervision of people who are not their relatives. It is likely that the school is the first agency that encourages children to develop loyalties and sentiments that go beyond the family and link them to a wider social order. The school is an agency through which individual personalities are trained to be adequate to the performance of adult roles (Ballantine & Spade, 2008). Consequently, schools are powerful sites for the construction of culturally patterned gender relations. In other words, children learn and evaluate values for their future adult behavior, of which their *gender regimes* are an important component (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992). Myhill and Jones (2006) suggest that "schools can either reproduce the dominant gender ideology of the wider society or be a potential site for developing non-traditional gender identities" (p.100).

Within the school atmosphere, the teacher plays an important role in the social development of the child. Therefore, as *change agents* and *facilitators of gender equality*, teachers are critical to the gender-development of students. As Chisholm and McKinney (2003) suggest, "teachers can provide role models, a sense of direction and encouragement to boys and girls or they can denigrate or marginalize them and so perpetuate stereotypes and particular ways of looking at and discriminating between boys and girls in the classroom". The roles played by male and female teachers, their attitudes towards male and female students, their expectations of male and female achievement and career paths, and the way they reward and discipline their students influence male and female students' gender role perceptions (Leach, 2000). It is also true that teachers have a propensity for unconsciously as well as consciously reproducing their own experiences, which prevents the success of gender initiatives taken by reformers (Sikes, 1991).

Given the strongly patriarchal nature of the Turkish society, role differentiation on the basis of gender is rather striking. Despite the numerous advancements made during the EU accession period, Turkey is still further behind the member states in terms of gender issues. Ger (2011), Chairwoman of TUSIAD Gender Equality



Working Group, describes the parameter for gender equality in Turkey as follows: “A man equals 0.56 woman. That is, two women are equal to one man, which is an unchanging fact of Turkey for the last ten years”. According to General Directorate on the Status of Women in Turkey (2009): (a) 57.2 % of women work in the agriculture sector and 50 % of the women in agriculture sector are part of family work force without pay; (b) One out of every three women is a victim of violence; (c) 63 % of women between the ages of 15 and 19 approve violence against women.

It is apparent that the current status of gender equality in Turkey requires more thinking and new attitudes. For a more gender-equal society, there is a strong need for improvements in teacher training and professional development, in addition to other initiatives taken. As Dee (2005) indicates, “teacher perceptions clearly influence student access to future educational opportunities and may also shape the learning environment in meaningful ways. However, “the impact of teachers in the questioning of conventional representations for women and in the creation of alternative environments for boys and girls” (Stromquist, 1995) is often ignored within the Turkish context. In fact, teachers with adequate gender sensitivity training “can impact on the school as a whole, empower other teachers, use texts to foster gender awareness and create relationships in the classroom that acknowledge and promote the participation and contribution of all learners” (Chisholm & McKinney, 2003).

Few studies on gender perceptions of Turkish university students demonstrate why gender and sexual politics must be explicitly addressed in teacher education programs. Karakitapoğlu Aygün and Imamoğlu (2002) explored the value domains of 101 students from different departments of a large state university. Findings related to gender differences in value domain suggest that, unlike women, Turkish men are still inclined to the traditional pathway as indicated by a normative frame of reference and tradition-religiosity domains. Another study by Vefikuluçay, Zeyneloğlu, Eroğlu and Taşkın (2007) investigated the gender role perceptions of 236 students from a smaller state university in Turkey. The authors found out that male students have more traditional views on gender roles related to marriage, family life and social life. Similarly, Baba (2007) qualitatively analyzed the gender role perceptions of elementary school teacher candidates from three universities. Results were congruent with the findings of the previous studies. Student teachers in the sample, particularly males, hold low transformative power to transform the inequalities in society.

Considering the importance of teachers in bringing up a more gender-aware generation, the present study aimed to investigate and compare the gender role perceptions of senior student teachers from two different departments, namely, English language teaching (ELT) and Turkish language teaching (TLT). It was hypothesized senior student teachers from the ELT department would have a more modern attitude towards gender roles as a result of the four years of foreign language education and culture they had at university.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for the present study was obtained from the education faculty of a large state university in western Turkey. Senior student teachers (138 females, 91 males) from the Departments of English Language Teaching and Turkish Language Teaching participated in the study. Table 1 describes the age distribution of participants and Table 2 describes the number of participants

Table 1: Age Distribution of participants

Age	n	%
20-22	200	87,3
23-25	27	11,8
26 and over	2	,9
Total	229	100,0

Table 2: Number of participants

Department	Sex		Total
	Female	Male	
ELT	68 71,6%	27 28,4%	95
TLT	70 52,2%	64 47,8%	134
Total	138	91	229

Instrument

Gender role orientation was assessed with the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem 1974). The BSRI is a widely used instrument that measures masculine and feminine gender roles and yields a measure of androgyny. Four common typologies are used to classify people based on scores on the BSRI: masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated. As Bem (1975) suggests, a masculine sex role represents not only the endorsement of masculine attributes, but also the rejection of feminine attributes. Similarly, a feminine sex role represents not only the endorsement of feminine attributes, but also the rejection of masculine attributes. On the other hand, an androgynous sex role allows an individual to engage freely in both masculine and feminine behaviors. It is accepted that individuals should be encouraged to be androgynous. That is, they should be encouraged to be both instrumental and expressive, both assertive and yielding, both masculine and feminine, depending upon the situational appropriateness of these various behaviors" (Bem, 1975, p. 634). Research has supported the benefits of psychological androgyny, including its positive relationship with creativity, life satisfaction and achievement motivation (e.g. Jönsson & Carlsson, 2000; Erol Öngen, 2007; Keller, Lavish, & Brown, 2007).

The BSRI consists of 60 adjectives, (20 masculine, 20 feminine, and 20 gender neutral), which are rated by respondents on a seven-point scale that ranges from 1 (never and almost never) to 7 (always or almost always true). The BSRI was adapted into Turkish by Kavuncu (1987), and its validity and reliability was determined by her as well: Cronbach alpha coefficients were .73 for Femininity scale and .75 for Masculinity Scale. Later in 1999, Dökmen tested the reliability and validity of the Turkish version of the BSRI. For the present study, the median-split procedure described by Bem (1977) was used to divide the subjects in high and low groups. Participants classified as masculine scored high on masculine items and low on feminine items. Participants who scored high on feminine items and low on masculine items were classified as feminine. Participant classified as androgynous scored high on both masculine and feminine items. Finally, participants classified as undifferentiated scored low on both masculine and feminine items.

FINDINGS

Table 3: Women and men subdivided into the different gender role categories

Group	Class	Count/ %	Feminine	Masculine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated	Total
Females	ELT	Count	18	10	18	22	68
		%of Total	26.47	14.70	26.47	32.36	100
	TLT	Count	25	6	16	23	70
		%of Total	35.71	8.5	22.85	32.85	100
	Total	Count	43	16	34	55	148
		%of Total	29.05	10.81	22.97	37.16	100
Males	ELT	Count	3	9	5	10	27
		%of Total	11.11	33.33	18.51	37.05	100
	TLT	Count	5	23	14	22	64
		%of Total	7.81	35.93	21.87	34.37	100
	Total	Count	8	32	19	32	91
		%of Total	8.8	35.16	20.87	35.16	100

Examination of gender role classification for female ELT student teachers in the sample yielded the following group membership: feminine (n=25, 26.47%), masculine (n=10, 14.70%), psychologically androgynous (18, 26.47%), and undifferentiated (22, 32.36%). For female TLT student teachers, the distribution was as follows: feminine (n=15, 35.71%), masculine (n=6, 8.5%), androgynous (n=16, 22.85%), and undifferentiated (n=23, 32.85%).

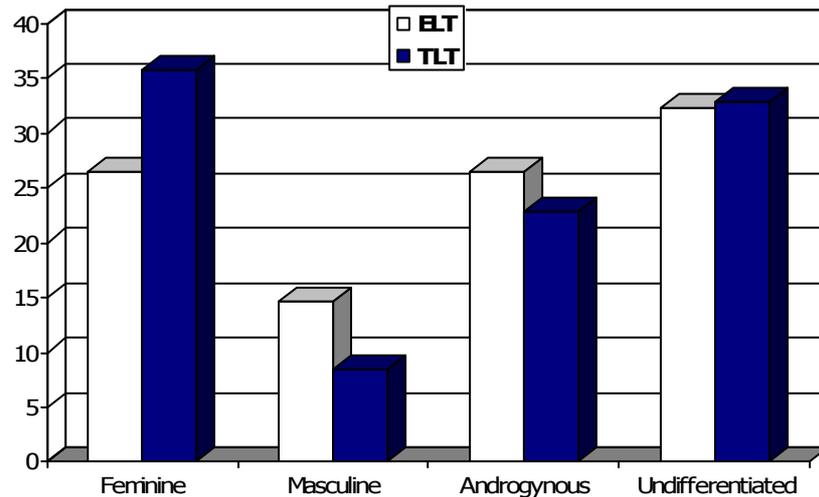


Figure 1: Gender role classification for female student teachers

The gender role classification for male ELT student teachers was as follows: feminine (n=3, 11.11%), masculine (n=9, 33.33%), psychologically androgynous (n=5, 18.51%), and undifferentiated (n=10, 37.05%). For male TLT student teachers: feminine (n=5, 7.81%), masculine (n=23, 35.93%), psychologically androgynous (n=14, 21.87%), and undifferentiated (n=22, 34.37%).

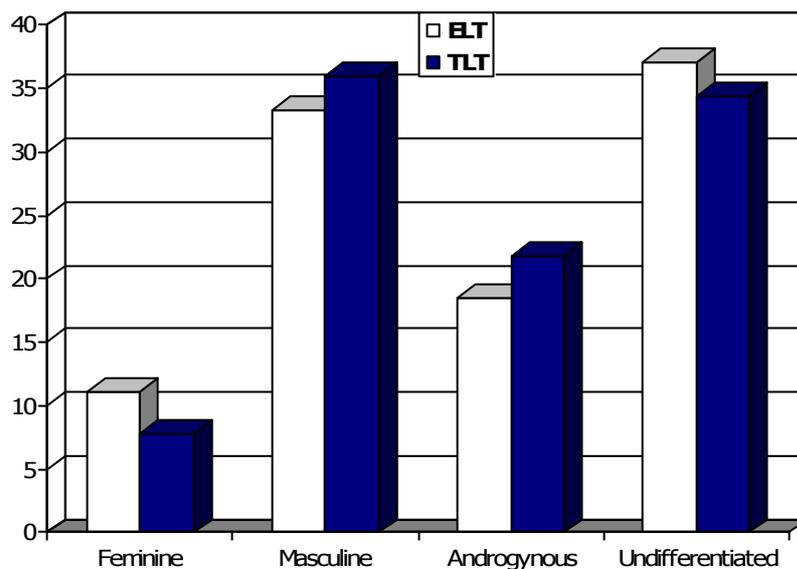


Figure 2. Gender role classification for male student teachers

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the femininity, masculinity and neutrality scores of the two groups. The femininity mean rank of ELT student teachers (M=112,07) is significantly higher than TLT student teachers' mean rank (M=106,86). However, the masculinity mean rank of ELT student teachers (M = 104,13) is lower than TLT student teachers' mean rank (M = 106,40). On the other hand, the neutrality mean rank of ELT student teachers is higher than TLT student teachers (Mean for the neutral = 113,33, TLT students = 105,12,), as Table 4 illustrates:

Table 4: The Mann-Whitney U test results

Variables	Year	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Feminine	ELT	89	112,07	9974,50	5422,500	,548
	TLT	128	106,86	13678,50		
Masculine	ELT	83	104,13	8642,50	5156,500	,791
	TLT	127	106,40	13512,50		
Neutral	ELT	89	113,33	10086,00	5222,000	,342
	TLT	127	105,12	13350,00		

The T-test was used to compare femininity, masculinity and neutrality variables with the sex of the student teachers. The results show that while there is a significant difference between two sexes in the femininity variable (the score for female = 98,3793, for male = 93,9431), there is also a significant difference between males and females in the masculinity (the score for female = 99,2644, for male =108,1308) and neutral variables (the score for female = 90,9242, for male = 89,5000). With the higher femininity score, the females are more feminine than the males and the males are more masculine than the females.

Table 5: The T-test results for femininity, masculinity and neutrality

Variables	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Feminine	Female	123	98,3793	10,74923	,96923
	Male	87	93,9431	11,52373	1,23547
Masculine	Female	130	99,2644	12,31649	1,08023
	Male	87	108,1308	12,67983	1,35942
Neutral	Female	132	90,9242	7,84645	,68295
	Male	84	89,5000	9,39302	1,02486

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to compare and contrast the gender role orientations of ELT and TLT senior student teachers. As we expected, female student teachers from the ELT department scored higher on masculinity and androgyny and lower on femininity. This difference can be explained by the fact that learning a foreign language has helped female ELT student teachers step out of their traditional gender roles and develop a more androgynous personality. This is an important change since a masculine or androgynous gender role may be more desirable in academic and work settings because of their demands for action and assertiveness. Female student teachers from the TLT department seem to hold traditional gender stereotypes, which might suggest that their education encourages a more traditional view of gender.

However, male student teachers' scores were incongruent with our expectations. Although male ELT student teachers scored higher on femininity and a little lower on masculinity, their scores on androgyny were lower than their peers from the TLT department. Moreover, there were more individuals with an undifferentiated gender role orientation among the male ELT student teachers. This finding might suggest that traditional gender roles still have great influence on male ELT student teachers, unlike their female peers.



Another important finding of the present study is that the number of student teachers with an undifferentiated gender role orientation is rather high in both departments. Research has shown that individuals who are undifferentiated in terms of gender role (low on both masculinity and femininity) tend to be less adaptable (as cited in Holt & Ellis, 1998). Bem's (1977) study on the distinctions between those individuals who score high on both masculinity and femininity and those individuals who score low on both showed that low-low scorers were significantly lower in self-esteem and self-disclosure. This finding might be related to student teachers' future time perspectives. It was found by Kim (1991) that identity achieved students were more likely to see their future as certain and optimistic, and had an androgynous gender role attitude. On the other hand, identity diffused subjects were not sure about their future and indicated undifferentiated gender role attitude. It is highly possible that this uncertainty in our sample results from the Civil Servant Selection Exam (KPSS) that negatively influences the participants' self-esteem and morale.

On the whole, findings point to the fact that females in the sample scored significantly higher on femininity than did their male peers. Similarly, males in the sample scored significantly higher on masculinity than did their female peers. This finding is congruent with previous studies (e.g. Baba, 2007; Vefikuluçay, Zeyneloğlu, Eroğlu, & Taşkın, 2007) which found out that student teachers still have a traditional perspective on gender roles and that a university education does not generally enable student teachers to question prescribed gender roles. Given the fact that the problem of unconscious sexism in teacher attitudes and classroom behavior are a result of their gender perceptions, this finding has serious implications for teacher training institutions in Turkey. Naturally, teachers trained to identify and counter gender-bias would not be gender-blind in the future, which would help create a gender-equitable atmosphere in the classroom. Therefore, it is essential that teacher education period give enough attention to the issue of changing the traditional gender role perceptions of prospective teachers. Creation of a gender-aware climate seems to be an urgent need for all departments of education faculties. (Baba, 2007; Blumberg, 2008). To that end, the following recommendations could be taken into consideration:

1. Teacher training plays a major but unrecognized role in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Therefore, incorporating gender awareness to teacher education programs seems to an important step to be taken (Baba, 2007). As Sikes (1991) rightly states, "such an awareness is essential if, when they become teachers, they are to be in a position to recognize and work to combat the differentiation, discrimination and bias which are characteristics of schools" (p.145).
2. It is important that teacher educators review and examine the content and structure of teacher education courses. They must avoid using textbooks or other materials that may unwittingly reinforce gender stereotyping and demolish any equalitarian views that student teachers may have. They should also encourage student teachers to examine critically and sociologically their experiences, attitudes and behaviors in terms to gender stereotypes (Sikes, 1991).
3. Participatory, interactive courses on gender mainstreaming should be included in the curricula of teacher education institutions and in-service courses should be designed for teachers who have not taken this course at school (Göğüş Tan, 2007). As indicated in the AAUW Report (1992), such compulsory courses should focus on gender issues, including new research on women, bias in classroom-interaction patterns, and the ways in which schools can develop and implement gender-fair multicultural curricula. The courses should also include teacher self-awareness seminars to provide insight into personal attitudes and world view. However, a single training session is not generally enough to change teaching practice and behavior. Thus, monitoring and follow-up support is needed for a better impact (Tatar & Emmanuel, 2001; Aikman, Underhalter, & Challender, 2005).

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