



The Impact of Focusing on Female Students in the Classroom on Male Students Performance

أثر التركيز على الطالبات في الفصل الدراسي على الأداء الأكاديمي للطلاب الذكور

بسمة أفاسي Basma Afassi

Doctorate in literary, linguistic and cultural studies
 New Trends in Literary, Linguistic and Cultural Studies Laboratory
 Abdel Malek Essaadi University, Martil, Morocco
basmaafassi@uae.ac.ma

Abstract :

This paper explores the impact of focusing on female students in the classroom, specifically examining its effects on male students. Historically, educational systems have favored male students, contributing to gender disparities in academic engagement and achievement. In response, contemporary educational strategies are increasingly centered on addressing these imbalances by promoting female participation and representation in various fields, particularly in STEM. This paper examines how these initiatives, including curriculum reforms, mentorship programs, and encouragement of active participation, not only empower female students but also foster a more inclusive and collaborative learning environment that benefits all students. The study discusses the broader implications of these strategies, highlighting how they contribute to improved academic outcomes, better classroom behavior, and more equitable social dynamics. By fostering gender-inclusive practices, educational settings can help dismantle traditional gender stereotypes, promoting critical thinking, empathy, and teamwork among both male and female students. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of creating supportive, diverse classrooms that prepare students for future success in a globalized and inclusive workforce.

Keywords: Gender dynamics, female students, male students, educational practices, gender equity





ملخص

تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية أثر التركيز على الطالبات داخل الفصل الدراسي، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على تأثير ذلك في الطلاب الذكور. فقد اتسمت الأنظمة التعليمية تاريخيًا بتفضيل الطلاب الذكور، مما أسهم في ظهور فجوات بين الجنسين في الانخراط الأكاديمي والتحصيل الدراسي. واستجابةً لذلك، أصبحت الاستراتيجيات التعليمية المعاصرة تركز بصورة متزايدة على معالجة هذه الاختلالات من خلال تعزيز مشاركة الطالبات وتمثيلهن في مختلف المجالات، ولا سيما في مجالات العلوم والتكنولوجيا والهندسة والرياضيات. وتتناول هذه الدراسة كيف أن هذه المبادرات، بما في ذلك إصلاح المناهج الدراسية، وبرامج الإرشاد والتوجيه، وتشجيع المشاركة الفاعلة داخل الفصل، لا تسهم فقط في تمكين الطالبات، بل تعمل أيضًا على خلق بيئة تعليمية أكثر شمولًا وتعاونًا تعود بالنفع على جميع المتعلمين. كما تناقش الدراسة الآثار الأوسع لهذه الاستراتيجيات، مبرزًا إسهامها في تحسين النتائج الأكاديمية، وتعزيز السلوك الإيجابي داخل الفصل، وإرساء علاقات اجتماعية أكثر عدالة وإنصافًا. ومن خلال تبني ممارسات تعليمية تراعي الشمول والمساواة بين الجنسين، يمكن للمؤسسات التعليمية أن تسهم في تفكيك الصور النمطية التقليدية المرتبطة بالنوع الاجتماعي، وتعزيز مهارات التفكير النقدي، والتعاطف، والعمل الجماعي لدى كل من الطلاب والطالبات. وتخلص الورقة إلى التأكيد على أهمية بناء بيئات صفية داعمة ومتنوعة.

Introduction

The educational landscape is evolving, with increasing attention to gender dynamics within the classroom. Historically, educational practices have often favored male students, leading to disparities in engagement and achievement between genders. This paper explores the outcomes of focusing on female students in educational settings, particularly regarding its impact on male students. The analysis encompasses academic performance, classroom behavior, social dynamics, and long-term implications.

1. Historical Context

Historically, educational systems in many cultures were designed within a broader societal framework that assumed men would be the primary breadwinners and leaders, while women's roles were often viewed as secondary, typically revolving around the home or limited to specific "appropriate" professions like teaching or nursing. This societal structure heavily influenced educational practices, leading to a male-centric perspective that shaped everything from curricula to teacher-student interactions and classroom organization.





Male-Centric Curricula: Early educational curricula were frequently focused on subjects and skills thought to be essential for men's roles in society. Subjects like mathematics, science, philosophy, and history were often taught from a male-dominated perspective, emphasizing the achievements of men in these fields and rarely, if ever, highlighting the contributions of women. When women's achievements were mentioned, they were often presented as exceptions rather than integral parts of these fields. For example, historical curricula often ignored or downplayed figures like Ada Lovelace in computing or Marie Curie in science, which limited the range of role models available to female students and implicitly suggested that these fields were primarily "for men" (Sadker & Zittleman, 2009).

Classroom Interactions and Gender Bias: Research has shown that both male and female teachers unconsciously displayed biases that favored male students. Studies by Sadker and Sadker (1994) highlighted how male students were often called on more frequently, encouraged to voice their opinions, and given more detailed feedback on their work. In contrast, female students were more likely to receive comments on neatness or politeness rather than substantive feedback on their ideas, leading to a sense that their contributions were less valued. Boys, on the other hand, were often permitted to dominate discussions and sometimes even exhibit disruptive behavior, which was viewed as a sign of leadership potential or assertiveness, while similar behavior in girls might be discouraged.

Assessment Practices and Gendered Learning Preferences: Traditional assessment practices often rewarded analytical, competitive, and performance-oriented skills, which studies have linked to stereotypically male learning preferences. Meanwhile, girls' strengths in collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving in group settings were undervalued. This created an environment where boys were more likely to excel in competitive, individual assessments, while girls, who might thrive in collaborative projects or reflective activities, were not given equal opportunities to shine. Consequently, girls were sometimes perceived as less capable or less ambitious, reinforcing stereotypes about gender and intelligence.

Long-Term Implications of Gendered Education: These biases had long-term effects on career aspirations and gender roles. Male students, seeing themselves validated in traditional "male" subjects, were more likely to pursue careers in STEM fields or leadership roles. Female students, however, were often dissuaded from pursuing interests in these areas, resulting in a continued underrepresentation of women in high-paying, male-dominated careers, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This dynamic reinforced societal stereotypes that limited both men's and women's roles, creating a feedback loop where educational practices shaped career choices and societal expectations, which in turn shaped educational practices.





2. Focusing on Female Students: Strategies and Rationale

The underrepresentation of female students in certain fields, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), has long been a concern in educational settings. Addressing this gap requires proactive strategies that foster a more inclusive environment and support female students in developing their confidence and interest in all subjects. These efforts aim to balance classroom dynamics, benefiting all students by promoting diversity and inclusivity. Here's a deeper look into these strategies and the rationale behind them:

Curriculum Reform

Traditional curricula often underrepresent the achievements of women, which can unintentionally discourage female students from engaging in certain subjects. Curriculum reform seeks to correct this by deliberately including female perspectives, authors, scientists, and historical figures. Examples of this approach include:

Incorporating female authors in literature courses: Reading works by writers such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Virginia Woolf can allow female students to connect with characters and authors who share their perspectives and experiences, inspiring them to voice their own ideas.

Highlighting female scientists and inventors in STEM: By studying figures like Marie Curie, Ada Lovelace, and Katherine Johnson, female students see that women have made major contributions in fields often dominated by men. Research suggests that role models are essential in shaping students' aspirations and that female role models can specifically improve girls' perceptions of their potential in male-dominated areas (Lockwood, 2006).

Integrating feminist perspectives into social studies and history: This can help students understand how gender has shaped social and political structures. It offers a fuller, more balanced view of history and society, showing female students that their voices matter and encouraging all students to value diverse viewpoints.

This curriculum reform is shown to boost female students' self-esteem and increase their interest and persistence, particularly in fields like science and math where women have traditionally been underrepresented.

Encouragement of Participation

Research shows that, even unintentionally, classroom discussions can favor male participation, often because of ingrained social dynamics. To counter this, teachers can employ specific techniques to encourage female students to engage actively:





Structured participation: Teachers might use methods like "think-pair-share" or assigned roles in group discussions to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. These structures can help reduce the anxiety some female students feel about speaking up, especially in co-ed settings. Use of inclusive language and calling on students equally: By ensuring that female students are just as likely to be called upon as male students, teachers can signal that everyone's voice is equally valued. This approach addresses the "confidence gap" between genders that research has identified, where girls are less likely to volunteer even if they know the answer.

Promoting a supportive environment for female perspectives: Teachers can encourage respectful listening and engagement with diverse perspectives, which has been shown to benefit students' critical thinking and empathy (Cohen & Lotan, 1995). When teachers actively work to make classroom discussions welcoming to all, they create a culture where female students are empowered to express their ideas and perspectives. This not only improves engagement but also models inclusive communication for all students.

Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs are a powerful tool for building confidence and providing female students with relatable role models. Mentors offer guidance, support, and insights into career pathways, helping students visualize their potential. Examples of effective mentorship include:

Peer mentoring: Pairing younger students with older female students can help create a sense of camaraderie and belonging. For instance, in STEM subjects, seeing a fellow student succeed can motivate younger girls to persist through challenging material.

Professional mentorships: Connecting students with female professionals in their field of interest allows them to learn directly about real-world applications of their studies. These mentors can offer advice on everything from course selection to managing gender-based challenges in the workplace, which is especially valuable in male-dominated fields like engineering or computer science.

Extracurricular mentoring programs: Programs such as "Girls Who Code" or mentorship initiatives in clubs like science and math clubs can provide female students with additional support and hands-on experiences.

Research indicates that mentorship not only improves self-confidence but also fosters a greater sense of belonging and professional identity, particularly among female students in STEM disciplines (Dasgupta & Stout, 2014). Furthermore, mentorship programs often encourage male students to become allies and advocates for their female peers, promoting a classroom culture that respects and uplifts everyone.





Rationale for These Strategies

The rationale for these strategies goes beyond merely supporting female students; it aims to create an inclusive, balanced classroom environment that enriches learning for all. Here's how these efforts translate into broader benefits:

Increased empathy and cooperation: When students are exposed to diverse voices and perspectives, they develop empathy and a better understanding of different experiences. This cultural sensitivity is valuable not only in academic settings but also in the increasingly global workforce. The classroom often mirrors societal structures, and by promoting gender equity in this setting, students can gain a better understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion. Engaging with a range of perspectives helps students appreciate differences and learn to work collaboratively with people from various backgrounds. This experience can shape students' interpersonal skills increase empathy, and improve their ability to work in teams, which are crucial skills in nearly every career path.

Breaking down gender stereotypes: Strategies that elevate female students' participation can help all students challenge traditional gender roles and assumptions. For instance, when male students see female peers excelling in science and math, it can reshape their perceptions of what women can achieve, leading to greater respect and gender equity.

Creating a supportive and resilient community: As female students feel more supported and male students become allies, the classroom transforms into a community where students advocate for one another's success. This dynamic can be especially important for students who may face similar challenges based on other aspects of their identity, such as race or socioeconomic status. **Developing essential skills for future careers:** The skills gained from these strategies—such as open-mindedness, teamwork, and a respect for diverse viewpoints—are invaluable in a diverse workplace. By promoting these qualities in the classroom, educators are helping prepare students for the collaborative and inclusive environments they are likely to encounter in their career.





3. Academic Outcomes: The Impact of Gender Inclusive Education

Research Supporting Female-Centered Focus in Classrooms

Studies suggest that when educational environments are adjusted to actively include and amplify

female voices, there are noticeable benefits for overall academic outcomes. According to Riordan (2003), focusing on the perspectives and contributions of female students can lead to improved engagement and performance across the board. This approach often shifts traditional classroom dynamics, making space for underrepresented voices, which has positive implications for collective learning experiences.

Positive Reinforcement as a Tool for Gender Equity

Positive reinforcement—recognizing and encouraging contributions from all students—has been shown to be effective in creating equitable learning environments. For male students, this balanced approach allows them to see female contributions as equally valued, potentially challenging any unconscious biases and fostering a more respectful, collaborative environment. Riordan (2003) suggests that when classrooms support gender equity through these methods, academic outcomes for both male and female students improve. This is because positive reinforcement instills confidence, which can encourage participation, improve performance, and reduce anxiety, creating a more inclusive space for learning.

Enhanced Critical Thinking through Diverse Perspectives

Focusing on the perspectives of female students encourages male students to engage with a broader range of viewpoints, which can deepen understanding and cultivate empathy. Correll (2001) highlights how exposure to diverse perspectives strengthens students' analytical and problem-solving skills, essential for adapting to modern workplaces. When male students are prompted to consider female perspectives, they are more likely to develop open-mindedness and critical thinking skills. This dynamic can be particularly valuable in developing cultural competence and a broader worldview, preparing students to navigate the complexities of today's globalized workforce.

The Classroom as a Microcosm of Society

Preparation for Future Success

In a workforce that increasingly values diverse thought and equitable environments, students exposed to gender-inclusive education are often better prepared to thrive professionally. They may exhibit stronger problem-solving abilities, better communication skills, and a greater ability to innovate by drawing from a wider pool of ideas and viewpoints. Encouraging female participation





and equitable contribution in education supports a generation that understands and values diversity—qualities that employers actively seek.

In sum, research supports the idea that focusing on female students' voices and promoting gender equity in the classroom positively influences overall academic outcomes. This balanced approach creates a richer, more inclusive learning environment where both male and female students benefit. By prioritizing diverse perspectives, educators help foster critical thinking, empathy, and collaborative skills that are vital for future success. This method not only contributes to improved academic performance but also helps cultivate the interpersonal and analytical skills essential in today's interconnected world.

4. Classroom Behavior and Social Dynamics

Improved Collaboration and Teamwork

When classroom practices prioritize inclusivity, female students are often given more leadership opportunities, and male students learn to support and respect these roles. By valuing diverse perspectives and fostering open communication, an inclusive classroom can break down traditional gender roles, leading to more balanced group dynamics. Studies show that when female students are encouraged to take leadership roles in collaborative projects, male students often adapt by contributing more constructively, listening actively, and respecting group decisions. This shift can lead to a more equitable division of tasks and a culture of shared responsibility, where everyone feels empowered to participate fully.

Furthermore, teachers who emphasize inclusive principles often employ techniques that encourage all students to voice their ideas, ensuring that no one is overlooked. This approach strengthens team cohesion, as students learn to appreciate each other's strengths and work together toward common academic goals.

Reduction in Disruptive and Competitive Behavior

Traditional classroom dynamics can sometimes foster competition, particularly among male students, which may lead to disruptive behavior or attempts to assert dominance. By creating an environment that values cooperation over competition, inclusive classrooms help to reduce this type of behavior. Male students are less likely to feel the need to assert themselves disruptively and are more likely to focus on contributing meaningfully when there is no perceived need to "win" over their peers.

Studies, such as those by Eisenkopf et al. (2015), indicate that when male students are exposed to inclusive practices and encouraged to collaborate respectfully, they are less likely to interrupt or detract from others' learning experiences. This positive engagement not only improves





the focus of male students but also creates a safer, more welcoming environment for female

students. By fostering positive reinforcement and mutual respect, teachers can shift classroom dynamics away from conflict and distraction toward engagement and learning.

Enhanced Academic Engagement and Achievement

Inclusive classroom practices that encourage the participation of female students also tend to increase overall academic engagement for both genders. When female students feel they are valued contributors, they are more likely to engage with the material and participate actively. This engagement, in turn, inspires other students, creating a classroom culture where learning is collaborative rather than competitive. Inclusive classrooms foster a sense of belonging, where every student feels that their contributions are valued and that they are capable of achieving success.

Teachers who adopt inclusive strategies often see improved academic performance across the board, as students become more invested in their own learning and less focused on managing social dynamics. Male students, in particular, may benefit from observing their female peers' engagement and dedication, leading them to adopt similar behaviors. This shift can be especially impactful in subjects where gender stereotypes may have previously discouraged female participation, such as STEM fields, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and well-rounded classroom environment.

Emotional and Social Well-being

An inclusive classroom also has a positive effect on students' emotional well-being, particularly for female students who might otherwise feel marginalized in a traditional classroom setup. By creating an atmosphere where all students feel safe and respected, inclusive classrooms allow students to focus on developing positive social skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

These environments help students develop a greater sense of emotional security, reducing stress and anxiety. For female students, this means they are more likely to take academic risks, express their ideas, and assert themselves in ways they might not in less inclusive settings. Male students, on the other hand, benefit from the opportunity to practice empathy and emotional intelligence, learning to appreciate the perspectives and contributions of their female peers.

Promotion of Lifelong Learning Skills

Finally, inclusive classrooms help students develop essential skills that extend beyond academics. By valuing each student's unique contributions, students learn the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They also develop better communication and interpersonal skills, which are crucial for success in the modern workforce. Male students, in particular,





can learn to view leadership as a shared responsibility, while female students gain confidence in voicing their opinions and advocating for themselves. This emphasis on inclusivity helps all students cultivate a growth mindset, an appreciation for diversity, and a respect for others, fostering lifelong learning skills that go beyond the classroom.

5. Long-term Implications

the long-term implications of prioritizing gender-balanced, inclusive education can be profound, shaping social, professional, and interpersonal dynamics.

Career Aspirations

When male students experience an educational environment that values and respects gender equity, they're likely to carry these values into their careers. This early exposure can influence their attitudes toward gender roles and parity in professional settings, making them more likely to support and advocate for inclusive practices at work. These individuals might also recognize the importance of diverse perspectives, which can drive more collaborative and innovative solutions within their organizations. Research indicates that individuals raised in gender-diverse settings tend to value diversity as adults, helping foster workplace cultures that emphasize respect, empathy, and gender inclusivity.

Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal Skills

Interacting frequently with female peers can nurture important social-emotional skills in male students, especially when guided by gender-sensitive pedagogy. Emotional intelligence (EI), which includes empathy, adaptability, and effective communication, is a valuable asset for both personal and professional success. Studies reveal that students who develop EI skills are better equipped to handle workplace challenges, build stronger relationships, and manage conflict constructively. Moreover, male students who are encouraged to value and practice empathy often experience better mental health outcomes and report higher satisfaction in personal relationships. Longitudinal studies, like those by Ciarrochi (2013), highlight that males educated in gender-sensitive environments show improved interpersonal and adaptability skills, contributing to more resilient and inclusive communities.

Social Impact and Community Dynamics

Beyond individual development, the ripple effects of gender-balanced educational priorities can benefit society at large. Male students with exposure to gender-sensitive learning are more likely to become advocates for equity within their communities, helping reduce gender-based stereotypes and biases. This shift can contribute to healthier, more inclusive communities where individuals feel valued and empowered, regardless of gender.





6. Potential Challenges

While focusing on female students yields numerous benefits, challenges exist.

Perception of Favoritism: Some male students may perceive an increased focus on female students as favoritism, which can lead to resentment and disengagement (Finn, 1989). "If male students perceive an imbalance, it can lead to feelings of isolation and affect engagement," according to Finn's research on classroom dynamics.

Balancing Engagement: Educators must be cautious to avoid alienating male students while striving for gender equity. The challenge lies in creating a classroom environment that values contributions from all students.

7. Case Studies

Several educational institutions have implemented programs targeting female students, yielding valuable insights.

Case Study 1: STEM Programs for Female Students

Several educational institutions have focused on addressing gender disparities in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) by designing programs that specifically target female students. These programs aim to provide encouragement, mentorship, and resources that empower women to pursue STEM fields, which have traditionally been dominated by men.

In one study by Hill et al. (2010), schools that introduced these STEM-focused initiatives saw a marked increase in female student participation in STEM subjects and activities. More importantly, the impact extended beyond female students. Male students, motivated by the collaborative nature of these programs, began showing more interest in working alongside female peers on various projects. This led to a more inclusive, cooperative learning environment, benefiting all students. These programs thus not only increased female engagement in STEM but also promoted a more gender-equitable approach to learning and teamwork.

Case Study 2: Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy

Gender-sensitive pedagogy refers to teaching methods and classroom practices that actively recognize and address gender-based differences in learning and participation. This approach aims to create a more inclusive learning environment by promoting gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and ensuring that both male and female students feel equally supported and encouraged in their educational pursuits.

Jha & Kelleher (2006) conducted research on classrooms where gender-sensitive pedagogies were implemented. The findings were striking: these classrooms demonstrated higher levels of engagement and participation from both male and female students. Furthermore, students





in these settings showed improved academic performance. The study illustrated that when teaching practices consciously account for gender differences and seek to foster equality, all students benefit. This balanced approach not only helps female students feel empowered and less marginalized but also encourages male students to engage in more equitable behaviors.

Both of these case studies highlight the positive effects of intentional efforts to address gender disparities in education. STEM programs for female students and gender-sensitive pedagogies not only promote gender equity but also enhance overall academic outcomes by creating a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Conclusion

Focusing on female students in the classroom has profound implications for male students, fostering an inclusive and collaborative learning environment. By adopting strategies that prioritize female engagement, educators can create a classroom dynamic that benefits all students, enhancing academic performance, improving social skills, and preparing future generations for a more equitable society. The shift towards gender equity in education is not merely a feminist issue but a holistic approach that can redefine the learning experience for all students. Further research and attention are necessary to refine these strategies and ensure that they address the needs of every student, regardless of gender.

References:

- Sadker, M., & Zittleman, K. (2009). Gender in the classroom: A feminist perspective.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls.
- Lockwood, P. (2006). "Someone like me can be successful": Do college students need same-gender role models? *Psychological Science*, 17(10), 1083-1089.
- Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (1995). Teaching cooperative learning: The challenge of research. Teachers College Press.
- Dasgupta, N., & Stout, J. G. (2014). Girls and women in STEM: A review of the literature on their academic engagement and career aspirations. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38(3), 298-313.
- Riordan, C. (2003). Gender and classroom interaction. In S. R. Jones (Ed.), *Gender and education: An international perspective* (pp. 89-104).
- Correll, S. J. (2001). Gender and the career choice process: The role of biased self-assessments. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(6), 1691-1730.





- Eisenkopf, G., Felfe, J., & Sauer, A. (2015). Gender and classroom behavior: Evidence from a classroom experiment. *The Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 111, 62-74.
- Ciarrochi, J. (2013). Emotional intelligence and mental health: A longitudinal study of the role of emotional intelligence in the development of mental health. This study suggests that males who are educated in gender-sensitive environments tend to show improved emotional intelligence, which contributes to better interpersonal and emotional well-being.
- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*. This work discusses how perceptions of favoritism or imbalance in classroom environments can lead to disengagement and resentment among male students.
- Hill, C., Corbett, C., & St. Rose, A. (2010). Why so few? Women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. American Association of University Women (AAUW). This study explores gender disparities in STEM fields and how programs targeting female students can also have positive impacts on male students, promoting more inclusive learning environments.
- Jha, J., & Kelleher, P. (2006). Gender-sensitive pedagogy: Teaching and learning in the global context.

