Inclusive Practices to Counter Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

This review synthesizes research on gender stereotypes in early childhood and basic education, highlighting their detrimental impacts on children's activity choices, self perception, confidence, and future opportunities. Studies consistently show that these stereotypes influence classroom practices, teacher expectations, and academic/ professional aspirations, with persistent gaps between policy intent and implementation particularly evident in Philippine public schools where gender and development (GAD) principles are inconsistently integrated into curricula and materials.

Research across diverse contexts (including the Philippine, Colombia, China and Portugal) identifies sources of stereotypes such as socialization, cultural norms, media, and educational materials like children's books. While gender inclusive programs, integrative learning approaches, and gender neutral resources have been shown to foster empathy, critical thinking, and peer acceptance, challenges remain: deep tooted, teacher perceptions do not always align with their practices,, and there is a lack of context- specific, theory integrated intervention models.

Notable Philippine studies include analyses of Palanca Award winning short stories for gender stereotypes, investigation of Maguindanaoan student's experiences in physical education, and assessment of educator perspectives on gender and culture. A proposed study in San Fernando, La Union aims to address existing gaps by evaluating the prevalence and impact of gender stereotypes, examining current initiatives, and developing targeted interventions to create equitable, inclusive learning environment that empower students to challenge traditional biases and promote mutual respect.

Keywords: Biological, Cognitive, Early Childhood Education, Gender Stereotypes, Inclusive Practices, Linguistic, Socio-emotional

INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes significantly impact young children's development, restricting their activities, shaping self-perception and confidence, and narrowing future opportunities. In classrooms, these preconceived notions influence teacher expectations, interactions, and assignments, leading to unequal access to subjects and activities and limiting academic and career aspirations over time. Global research confirms these harms: studies in Bogota show integrating gender inclusivity in language lessons boosts empathy and critical thinking (Rueda & Rojas, 2025); preschoolers already link spatial ability to boys (Ebert, Jost & Petra, 2024); and Spanish early childhood students display traditional biases perpetuated by patriarchal norms (Gonzalez & Rodriguez, 2020). Children's picture books often reinforce rigid roles, though diverse representations can foster inclusion (Zhang & Soo, 2024).

While research underscores the need for gender-inclusive programs (Brussino & McBrien, 2022 Moura & Goncalves, 2023) and highlights teachers' critical role in mitigating stereotypes (Kiran et al., 2024; Garcia et al., 2022), biases persist even with legal equality. For example, the University of Madeira found deep-rooted female dominance in early childhood education, rendering gender quotas ineffective (Nascimento et al., 2019).

Addressing these issues aligns with global Sustainable Development Goals, as studies across Colombia and China reveal connections between teacher beliefs, practices, and the perpetuation or challenge of stereotypes (Garcia et al., 2022; Zhou, 2023). Ultimately, stereotypes limit children's exploration and expression, wasting individual talent and societal potential.

The following theories served as the researchers' served as the theoretical foundation of the study, these are Cognitive Development Theory, Gender Schema Theory, and Social Learning Theory, moreover every Theory was used by recent related studies which is discussed below. Jean Piaget Cognitive Development Theory explains how children's understanding of the world evolves through distinct stages. During the pre- operational stage (ages 2-7), children develop a sense of self and begin forming stereotypes related to gender roles. By understanding the importance of the Cognitive Foundation (Piaget) for children, educators and parents can take steps to promote more flexible and inclusive gender norms. This can involve challenging stereotypes, providing diverse role models, and encouraging children to explore their interest regardless of gender.

Another theory is the Gender Schema Theory developed by Sandra Bem which explains how individuals become gender in society and how sex-typing is upheld in society. Gender Schema Theory suggests that children develop mental frameworks (schemas) for organizing information about gender, which significantly influences how they perceive, interpret, and remember information related to gender stereotypes, ultimately shaping their attitudes, behaviors, and expectations in ways that can either reinforce or challenge those very stereotypes. Another fundamental theory is the theory of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides another perspective on how children develop their understanding of gender roles and stereotypes. Bandura emphasized the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in children's behavior. Children learn gender roles by observing and imitating the behaviors of same- gender models, such as parents, peers, and media figures.

These theories help researchers understand how gender stereotypes are learned and reinforced through children's cognitive development, mental frameworks (schemas), and social observations. This understanding is crucial for the study's goal of identifying how these stereotypes impact students and for developing effective interventions to challenge them. In the Research Paradigm, it contains the Proposed Original Model (POM). Strategies for reducing gender stereotyping in early childhood education are overarching goals and interventions designed to minimize gender stereotypes. These theories provide a framework for understanding how gender stereotypes are formed and maintained: (**1**) Cognitive Development Theory, (**2**) Gender Schema Theory, (**3**) Social Learning Theory. The second aspects involves the individuals and entities that directly impact children's understanding and attitudes towards gender: (**1**) Administrations, (**2**) Teachers, (**3**) Parents. The inherent and developmental aspects of the children themselves: (**1**) Biological, (**2**) Linguistic, (**3**) Cognitive and (**4**) Socio-emotional. Then, the methods started with interviewing the participants using semi-structured interview, data analysis using thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke, and analyzing the results to determine Inclusive Practices to Counter Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to understand the impact of gender stereotypes in early childhood education in the City Schools Division.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What specific gender stereotypes were most prevalent in the early childhood education settings?

2. What were the effects of these stereotypes to children in terms of biological, linguistic, cognitive, and socio- emotional domains?

3. What inclusive practices were employed by the City Schools Division to counter gender stereotypes in early childhood education?

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used the multiple case studies design. Multiple case studies research design is a qualitative approach that aims to examine and understand experiences, views, and practices. It is useful in answering the questions how and why because it gives a deeper understanding of a situation or problem.

Therefore, a qualitative research design was used to study how early childhood teachers use inclusive practices to counter gender stereotypes in their classroom. It examined the ways teachers promote equality to their students, the strategies they use to avoid reinforcing gender roles, and the challenges they face in doing so. It also looked at the support teachers need to strengthen inclusive practices. Furthermore, the goal of this research and how these practices help children develop free from gender stereotypes. In this way, the qualitative design focuses on the real experiences of the teachers and the meaning they give to their practices in teaching young children.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

This study utilized a semi structured interview as the primary data collection tool to investigate the implementation of gender stereotypes in selected public schools in San Fernando City, La Union. The semi- structured interview consisted of both structured and unstructured questions, allowing in depth exploration and clarification of participants' responses.

To ensure the effectiveness, simplicity and clarity of the semi- structured interview questions, a test study was carried out. A pilot test of interview guide will be carries out at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University before to the actual data collection. Especially to **(1)** principal and **(6)** grade three teachers. The findings showed that while some participants were able to respond to both the main questions and others did not finish all of the questions, offering helpful data to improve the interviewing procedure in order to collect actual data.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that gender stereotypes create significant challenges for students, impacting their academic, social lives, and self perception. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering equitable and supportive learning environment.

1. When society dictates how boys and girls "should" act, dress, or behave, this is known as gender specific stereotyping. These generalizations can discourage children from pursuing their passions or make them feel criticized because they are not universal facts.

2. Gender stereotypes have far reaching effects on social-emotional, well being, academic confidence, linguistic and emotional expression, and the development of physical skills.

3. Through course adaptation, the provision of support resources, the encouragement of different knowledge demonstration, and the development of respectful communities, inclusive school practices seek to guarantee that all students feel accepted and have equal access to education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. Tackle gender stereotypes in advanced educational institutions should incorporate teachings that confront gender norms into their curriculum, showcasing diverse role models from all genders in different sectors such as the arts, sciences, and athletics.

2. Provide workshops to help teachers, parents, and community members recognize and avoid reinforcing

gender stereotypes, and teach strategies to encourage children to explore their interests freely.

3. Expand access to assistive tools and flexible assessments methods in all schools, and establish anti bullying programs that specifically address bias related to gender, abilities, and backgrounds.

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