

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER ROLES AND TOWARD DISCIPLINE

OKUL ÖNCESİ EĞİTİMCİLERİNİN CİNSİYET ROLLERİNE VE DİSİPLİNE KARŞI TUTUMLARI

Feyza ERDEN*

ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this study was to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes toward gender roles and toward discipline. The findings demonstrated that early childhood teachers had a tendency to hold egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles and discipline. In other words, these attitudes were found to be highly correlated.

Keywords: Attitudes, early childhood teachers, gender roles, discipline.

ÖZET: Bu çalışma, okulöncesi eğitimcilerinin cinsiyet rollerine ve disipline karşı tutumlarını araştırmak amacıyla planlanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular sonucunda, okulöncesi eğitimcilerinin cinsiyet rolleri ve disiplin tutumları açısından eşitlikçi eğilimlerinin yüksek oranda olduğu saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tutumlar, okulöncesi eğitimcileri, cinsiyet rolleri, disiplin.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discipline is a major component of education because if the teacher does not maintain the discipline in the classroom, the teaching and learning process cannot be accomplished. Moreover, as socialization agents, teachers have to teach their students which behaviors are expected in which situations. Hence, through their own actions and reactions, teachers transmit the messages to children about their expectations for proper behavior in particular situations (Peisner, 1991).

There have been few studies that investigate teachers' gender socialization practices with the emphasis on discipline in the classrooms. For instance, studies by McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang (1992); Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, and Tonick (1973); and Wooldridge and Richman (1985) documented that teachers handle the misbehaviors of boys and girls differently. While they are more gentle toward girls, they interact with boys in a more robust way. In most of the studies on the issue of gender socialization practices of teachers with or without an emphasis on classroom discipline, the behaviors of the teachers toward male and female students have been observed. These studies generally have focused on the behaviors of teachers without studying their attitudes toward gender roles and stereotypes. However, examining teachers' attitudes and beliefs may be of great importance in understanding their behaviors (Clark, 1988; Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Therefore, this study focused on the attitudes of teachers toward gender roles and toward discipline of male and female students.

Generally, teachers' attitudes toward gender roles may reflect their attitudes toward discipline of male and female students. For instance, teachers possessing the belief that females are more emotional than males are more likely to believe that girls should be disciplined more softly and gently than boys. Hence, the strength of a relationship between teachers' attitudes toward gender roles and their attitudes toward

* Assist. Prof. Dr., Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary Education-Ankara, tfeyza@metu.edu.tr

discipline may indicate whether teachers' attitudes toward a general concept mirror their attitudes toward an educational issue in a schooling environment.

The purpose of this study was to examine early childhood teachers' attitudes toward gender roles and toward discipline and whether there was a relation between these attitudes.

To this end, the research questions raised were as follows:

- 1) What are teachers' attitudes toward gender roles?
- 2) What are teachers' attitudes toward discipline of male and female students?
- 3) Is there a relationship between gender role attitudes of teachers and their attitudes toward discipline of male and female students?

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

The population sample for this study consisted of 130 female prekindergarten, kindergarten, K/1, and first grade teachers who are employed in the public schools located in a mid-sized southeastern city in the United States. A large group of the participants (46.2%) were in the 46-55 year old group. The racial distribution of the teachers was 80.8% (N=105) Caucasian, 17.7% (N=23) African-American, 0.8% (N=1) American Indian, and 0.8% (N=1) Asian American. The participants had been employed for varying lengths of time: 3.1% (N=4) had been employed for one year or less; 16.9% (N=22) for 2-6 years, 6.9% (N=9) for 7-11 years, and 73.1% (N=95) for more than 11 years. When grouped by the highest degree attained, 50.0% (N=65) of the teachers had completed a Bachelor's degree, 48.5% (N=63) had a Master's degree, and 1.5% (N=2) had a doctoral degree.

2.2. Instruments

The researcher developed two instruments to be used in the study, which were *Attitudes Toward Gender Roles Scale (AGRS)* and *Attitudes Toward Discipline Scale (ADS)*. AGRS was designed to measure teachers' attitudes toward traditional vs. egalitarian gender roles, whereas ADS was designed to measure teachers' attitudes towards traditional vs. egalitarian disciplining of male and female students. Likert (1932) format was preferred for the presentation of the items in both scales.

Before sending the scales to the teachers, they were administered to 95 undergraduate and graduate students at Florida State University. Principal component analysis was performed. The results indicated that the first factor in AGRS emerged with an eigenvalue of 22.87 and accounted for the 50.8% of the variance. Hence, the AGRS consists of one primary factor that accounts for a large amount of variation, providing strong support for the validity of the instrument. Principal component analysis was performed for ADS, too, and one factor emerged with an eigenvalue of 21.23 that is accounted for the 53.09% of the variance. In other words, ADS consists of one main factor that explains a large amount of variation, which provides considerable support for the validity of the instrument. The coefficient alpha was computed to find out the internal consistency reliability of the scales and it was 0.9751 for AGRS and 0.9643 for ADS, demonstrating that the scales were reliable in terms of internal consistency.

2.3. Procedures

The principals of the schools were asked to distribute a packet that contained an informed consent form and the instrument to each prekindergarten, kindergarten and first grade teacher employed in their schools. From 25 principals, 19 of them accepted to distribute the packet whereas 6 of them rejected. The researcher handed a total of 205 instruments to the principals. Teachers were given a week to complete the

instruments. After they completed the instruments, they were asked to return them to their principals. The researcher individually picked up the instruments from the principals. From 205 instruments distributed to the teachers, 99 were returned. The researcher also went to a meeting of Leon County Schools and collected 12 instruments from the teachers that had not participated in the study before. This yielded a total of 111 completed instruments, which corresponded to 51.1 percent return rate. That was the first stage of the data gathering procedure. In an effort to address the question of possible nonresponse bias, the researcher randomly selected 30 teachers among those who received the questionnaires but did not return them and sent them an electronic mail to ask to participate in the study one more time in the second stage.

The reason for selecting 30 teachers was to reach the expected return rate of at least 60 percent. As a result, 19 teachers completed and returned their questionnaires. This enabled us to increase the return rate and to compare the responses gathered in the first stage with the ones collected in the second stage of the data gathering procedure. On the whole, of 217 instruments distributed, 130 were returned, producing a 59.9 percent return rate.

2.4. Data Analysis

First, each teacher's score on both the Attitudes Toward Gender Roles Scale and Attitudes Toward Discipline Scale was computed. A significance level of .05 was set. The Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (r) between the scores was calculated to find out whether a relationship existed between these two attitudes.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Gender Roles

Teachers' attitudes toward gender roles were measured via AGRS. The scale was indexed between 20 and 100 with 100 indicating the most egalitarian score. Therefore, the midpoint of the scale is 60. The minimum, maximum, mean and the standard deviation of the scores are presented in Table I.

Table I: Mean and Standard Deviation of Gender Roles Attitudes Scores

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Gender roles attitude score	43	100	74.68	14.46

The mean score obtained for gender role attitudes was 74.68, which was greater than the midpoint 60. This indicated a trend toward attitudes that can be described as more egalitarian than traditional. Teachers' responses to the scale items are presented in Table II.

The majority of the teachers disagreed with most of the statements reflecting traditional views. For example, 77.7% (101) rejected the statement that it is not appropriate for women to work at night. 76.1% (99) disagreed with the statement that it is a problem if the wife earns a larger salary than her husband. However, although teachers were found to have a tendency to hold egalitarian gender role attitudes, several traditional statements prompted frequent agreement from the teachers. For instance, 47.7% (62) of the teachers agreed with the statement that women are naturally sensitive. Similarly, 53.1% (69) of them accepted the statement that there are certain jobs that are more appropriate for men than women. There are also some traditional statements that although most of the teachers disagreed, the agreement rate still seems to be substantial. For instance, 26.2% (34) agreed with the statement that the husband should have the primary responsibility for the economic support of the family. Likewise, 28.2% (29) accepted the statement that men make better soldiers and police officers.

3.2. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Discipline

Teachers' attitudes toward discipline were measured using ADS. The scale was indexed between 20 and 100 with 100 indicating the most egalitarian score. Thus the midpoint of the scale is 60. Table III displays the minimum, maximum, mean and the standard deviation of the discipline attitude scores.

Table II: Teachers' Responses to Attitudes Toward Gender Roles Scale

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Variable	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)
The husband should have the primary responsibility for the economic support of the family.	10(7.7)	24(18.5)	26(20)	42(32.3)	28(21.5)
Teachers should encourage female students to be active in any academic area.	87(66.9)	15(11.5)	11(8.5)	10(7.7)	7(5.4)
Women should be more concerned about their physical appearances than men.	6(4.6)	15(11.5)	13(10.0)	30(23.1)	66(50.8)
Getting drunk is worse for a woman than a man.	7(5.4)	22(16.9)	19(14.6)	23(17.7)	59(45.5)
Most women prefer not to work if they do not have to support their families.	7(5.4)	24(18.5)	26(20.0)	32(24.6)	41(31.5)
Women are naturally sensitive.	14(10.8)	48(36.9)	34(26.2)	25(19.2)	9(6.9)
Women can play rough sports like football or hockey as well as men.	18(13.2)	34(26.2)	34(26.2)	37(28.5)	7(5.4)
A woman should not go to a bar alone.	16(12.3)	36(27.7)	28(21.5)	29(22.3)	21(16.2)
There is nothing wrong with the wife working and the husband staying home with children.	48(36.9)	44(33.8)	19(14.6)	13(10.0)	6(4.6)
It is not appropriate for women to work at night.	1(0.8)	8(6.2)	20(15.4)	42(32.3)	59(45.4)
Part time jobs are better than full time jobs for women.	5(3.8)	19(14.6)	23(17.7)	30(23.1)	53(40.8)
There are certain jobs that are more appropriate for men.	14(10.8)	55(42.3)	19(14.6)	21(16.2)	21(16.2)
Men are more adventurous than women.	2(1.5)	15(11.5)	18(13.8)	50(38.5)	45(34.6)
It is a problem if the wife earns a larger salary than the husband	1(0.8)	16(12.3)	14(10.8)	42(32.3)	57(43.8)
Men have better sense of humor than women.	2(1.5)	6(4.6)	17(13.1)	29(22.3)	76(58.5)
There is nothing wrong with a man who cries in front of other people.	66(50.8)	38(29.2)	10(7.7)	13(10.0)	3(2.3)
Men make better soldiers and police officers.	6(4.6)	32(24.6)	32(24.6)	31(23.8)	29(22.3)
Women are as successful as men in any job they perform.	56(43.1)	37(28.5)	19(14.6)	14(10.8)	4(3.1)
It is more appropriate for women to wear skirts or dresses instead of pants.	1(0.8)	12(9.2)	16(12.3)	21(16.2)	80(61.5)
Male students are not smarter than female students in science and math.	56(43.1)	27(20.8)	26(20.0)	15(11.5)	6(4.6)

Table III: Means and Standard Deviation of Discipline Attitude Scores

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Discipline attitude score	37	100	73.48	17.32

As seen from the table, the mean score obtained for discipline attitudes was 73.48, which was above the midpoint 60, demonstrating that early childhood teachers have a tendency to be egalitarian rather than traditional in terms of discipline attitudes. Table IV provides the teachers' responses to the scale items.

The majority of the teachers rejected most of the statements reflecting traditional views. For example, 78.5% (102) of the teachers disagreed with the statement that girls should be tidier than boys. Likewise, 74.6% (97) rejected the statement that boys need competitive skills more than girls. However, although the findings revealed that teachers had a tendency to hold egalitarian discipline attitudes rather than traditional ones, several traditional statements received agreement from the teachers. For instance, 47.7% (62) of the teachers agreed with the statement that boys are more physically active than girls. Similarly, 49.3% (64) accepted the statement that boys are more aggressive than girls. However, there are also some traditional statements that although most of the teachers disagreed, the agreement rate is considerably high. For instance, 22.3% (29) agreed the statement that aggressiveness, to some extent, may be tolerated in boys. Similarly, 20.0% (26) accepted with the statement that boys may be physically punished. Another interesting finding is that although only 8.4% (11) of the teachers agreed with the statement that teachers should be concerned about tomboyish behaviors of girls, 23.1% (30) of them accepted the statement that teachers should be concerned about effeminate behaviors of boys. That finding may indicate that teachers have different behavioral expectations from male and female students.

To test whether there is a relationship between gender role and discipline attitudes of teachers, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was calculated. The correlation coefficient was found to be considerably high and statistically significant ($r = .84$, $p < .001$) indicating that teachers' attitudes toward gender roles were strongly related with their attitudes toward discipline. That is, teachers who expressed egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles also adopted egalitarian attitudes toward discipline.

4. DISCUSSION

In the study, it was found that early childhood teachers have a tendency to hold egalitarian gender role attitudes. This finding was consistent with the previous finding of the study by Cahill and Adams (1997). Because the profession itself can be viewed as a traditional female occupation, one may intuitively predict that early childhood teachers hold traditional gender role attitudes. The rationale behind this resides in the notion that women who have chosen a traditional profession would have more traditional attitudes toward gender roles relative to the others. Furthermore, the analyses by Brooks-Gunn and Matthews (1979), and Lindley and Keithley (1991) indicated that most societies still continue to hold definite beliefs about how males and females should behave. Accordingly, since teachers are a product of their societies, the argument that might arise is that teachers would possibly not be fully convinced by the gender egalitarian arguments in all of its social, political, and economic aspects. Thus, at first glance, this result appears to be counter-intuitive.

However, the finding of an egalitarian tendency might be supported by several factors. Perhaps the most compelling argument for this result was raised by Cahill (1995), suggesting that early childhood teachers might have nontraditional gender role attitudes when they first entered into the profession. More specifically, one of the underlying reasons for choosing the early childhood teaching as an occupation may be to raise future adults who do not have gender stereotyped beliefs and prejudices, and thus to make a better and equal world for both males and females. Moreover, it would not be surprising that early childhood teachers, who were totally women, were more likely to have egalitarian gender role attitudes because women generally have more egalitarian gender role attitudes than men (Fan and Marini, 2000; Massey and Christensen, 1990; and McKinney, 1987).

Table IV: Teachers' Responses to the Attitudes Toward Discipline Scale

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Variable	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)
Boys are more physically active than girls.	15(11.5)	47(36.2)	22(16.9)	33(25.4)	13(10)
Girls are more emotional than boys.	16(12.3)	38(29.2)	25(19.2)	33(25.4)	18(13.8)
Teachers should be concerned about tomboyish behaviors of girls.	2(1.5)	9(6.9)	18(13.8)	30(23.1)	71(54.6)
Boys may be physically punished.	5(3.8)	21(16.2)	21(16.2)	18(13.8)	65(50.0)
Girls should be tidier.	1(0.8)	13(10.0)	14(10.8)	34(26.2)	68(52.3)
Teachers should be more gentle to girls in a misbehaving situation.	1(0.8)	17(13.1)	8(6.2)	35(26.9)	69(53.1)
Boys misbehave more than girls.	6(4.6)	35(26.9)	19(14.6)	29(22.3)	41(31.5)
Boys demand more attention than girls.	3(2.3)	21(16.2)	17(13.1)	43(33.1)	46(35.4)
Boys call out more when the teacher asks a question.	4(3.1)	30(23.1)	15(11.5)	38(29.2)	43(33.1)
Girls are more likely to obey the rules.	7 (5.4)	45(34.6)	18(13.8)	30(23.1)	30(23.1)
Boys and girls, in a similar misbehavior, should be punished equally.	87(66.9)	22(16.9)	13(10.0)	7(5.4)	1(0.8)
Boys are more aggressive than girls.	8(6.2)	56(43.1)	24(18.5)	23(17.7)	19(14.6)
Boys need competitive skills more than girls.	0	21(16.2)	12(9.2)	43(33.1)	54(41.5)
Boys should be tougher than girls.	2(1.5)	21(16.2)	20(15.4)	39(30.0)	48(36.9)
Aggressiveness may be tolerated in boys.	1(0.8)	28(21.5)	19(14.6)	32(24.6)	50(38.5)
Girls are more dependent than boys.	1(0.8)	27(20.8)	21(16.2)	37(28.5)	44(33.8)
Boys dominate the classroom interactions more.	0	26(20.0)	20(15.4)	43(33.1)	41(31.5)
Teachers should be concerned about effeminate behaviors of boys.	6(4.6)	24(18.5)	30(23.1)	35(26.9)	35(26.9)
Girls are more submissive.	3(2.3)	33(25.4)	21(16.2)	40(30.8)	33(25.4)
Boys are more likely to damage toys and classroom materials.	6(4.6)	35(26.9)	22(16.9)	38(29.2)	29(22.3)

Because of the view that gender equality in the society may benefit women more than men (Geffner & McClure, 1990), female teachers may tend to possess more egalitarian attitudes. Finally, as Tatar and Emmanuel (2001) pointed out, conscious teacher attitudes were usually egalitarian since teachers were more likely to avoid sexist responses especially when self-assessment techniques were used. Thus, it is possible that teachers gave more egalitarian answers not to appear as sexist. Overall, the finding indicated the presence of neither extreme stereotyped attitudes nor extreme egalitarian attitudes.

In the study, teachers were found to be more likely to have egalitarian attitudes toward discipline, which included their beliefs and feelings about inherited traits and misbehaviors of male and female students. This finding seems contradictory with the study of Robinson (1992) reporting that teachers hold stereotyped beliefs about the discipline of male and female students. Once again, the data revealed neither

extreme stereotyped responses nor extreme egalitarian responses. In addition, a significant amount of teachers agreed with several traditional statements. For example, almost half of the teachers agreed that boys were more physically active and aggressive than girls. One fourth of the teachers accepted that aggressiveness might be tolerated in boys. Approximately 40 percent of the teachers accepted that girls were more emotional than boys and they were more likely to obey the rules. These may imply that although there was a trend toward egalitarian discipline attitudes, the responses were not overwhelmingly egalitarian.

Moreover, it was found that teachers who expressed more egalitarian gender role attitudes also espoused more egalitarian discipline attitudes and vice versa. This finding is not surprising because a teacher's standpoint of the norms and expectations about what behaviors are appropriate for males and females would be likely to coincide with her standpoint of the behavioral characteristics of male and female students and the necessary discipline actions when any misbehavior is exposed by a male or female student. For instance, if a teacher rejects that women should be more concerned about their physical appearances more than men, then probably she will also reject that girls should be tidier than boys. Similarly, if a teacher accepts that women are naturally sensitive, then she will be more likely to accept that girls are more emotional than boys.

5. IMPLICATIONS

This study has a unique characteristic because it investigates gender role attitudes of early childhood teachers with the emphasis on discipline. Therefore, this study attempts to contribute to the area of teacher attitudes in general and the area of gender role and discipline attitudes in particular.

In the present study early childhood teachers were found to have a tendency to hold egalitarian discipline and gender role attitudes. Yet, when scrutinized in detail, their responses to attitude scales demonstrated that a considerable amount of teachers had stereotyped beliefs in terms of gender roles and discipline of boys and girls. Accordingly, the most significant implication of this study is the need for the reevaluation of teacher training and education programs. Previous studies have demonstrated that teachers develop and change their attitudes and beliefs during pre-service education and on the job training (Jacko et al., 1981; Jordan & Folman, 1993). Therefore, it may be suggested that courses and seminars concerning gender issues be provided to pre-service and in-service teachers. These courses should help teachers be aware of their own gender-stereotyped beliefs, and should provide ways to prevent these beliefs from guiding their teaching practices. Because teacher awareness about gender issues is thought of as the most important step to provide male and female students an equal learning environment (Owens & Cooney, 1998; Tatar & Emmanuel, 2001), the teacher education and training programs should aim at raising teachers' awareness about gender issues.

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