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## **A study of the impact of gender differences in teacher distribution in the Sri Lankan education sector**

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### **Abstract**

As used in sociology, feminism is the change in sex and gender roles within a community, organization, or group that emphasizes the feminine. It may also refer to accepting women into a profession or group that was previously predominately male. Sri Lanka has a high proportion of female teachers. In Sri Lanka, the number of female teachers working in government schools is three times that of male teachers. This gender imbalance in the education sector affects students in different ways. The main objective of this study was to find out the reasons for gender imbalance in teacher distribution and how gender imbalance in teacher distribution affects students' educational achievement. The data was collected from 75 female teachers' colleges, ten graduate female teachers, and ten graduate male teachers. In addition to the teachers, the data was collected from 20 female and 20 male students in grade 8. Five school principals were included in the sample. Questionnaires and interviews were the primary data collection tools. Qualitative data is analyzed thematically, and quantitative data is analyzed through percentages. Research found that most male and female teachers with degrees are unhappy with their profession. However, most females are happier with their careers than male teachers. Principals had more positive ideas about female teachers than male teachers about their work in the school, but they had some negatives because male teachers take some time off for personal reasons. The study reveals that gender inequalities in teacher roles do not affect student education, but students prefer female teachers for languages and male for math. The government should prioritize hiring male educators and improving working conditions and compensation.

**Keywords:** Feminization, gender difference, teacher distribution, female teachers

## Introduction

"Feminization" refers to a profession in which the proportion of women is rising (Drudy et al., 2005). Banks (2007) explains that when referring to an occupation, the word "feminized" usually refers to one in which women make up the majority. At the global level, high female teacher numbers are found in North America, Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia, and the Pacific. Early examples can be found in Commonwealth countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom (Kelleher, 2011). English-speaking countries like the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA have a long history of feminization (Cortina & Swan Roman, 2006). In the late 19th century, Catholic Latin American and Caribbean countries experienced a significant increase in female teacher training, influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors (Fischman, 2007).

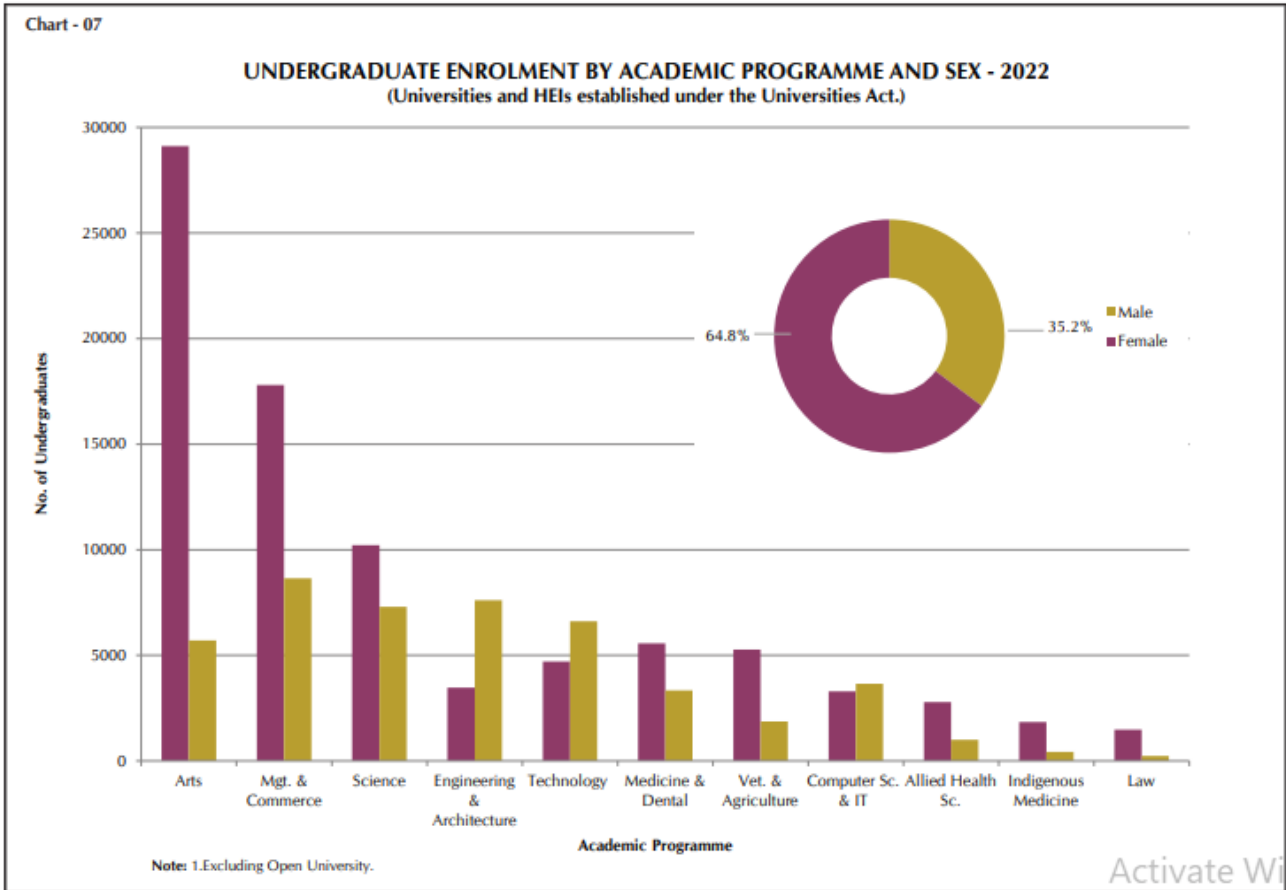
The central bank's 2022 major socioeconomic indicator estimates that approximately 22 million people live in Sri Lanka. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) HDI (Human et al.) 2021/22 report published on September 8, 2022, Sri Lanka has risen by two places in the rankings since 2020. Sri Lanka scored 0.782 points, placing it 73rd out of 191 nations. Males have a higher level of human development than females; the HDI value for men is 0.795, compared to 0.755 for women. Sri Lanka receives a score of 0.383 and is ranked 91st out of 191 nations in the Gender Inequality Index (GII). (<https://archives1.dailynews.lk/2022/09/14/local/287155/sri-lanka-ranks-73-out-191-countries-20-02-2023>). The literacy rate in Sri Lanka is 93.3% in 2021, and it shows that the male literacy rate is 94.3% and the female literacy rate is 92.3%. (<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticInformation/Education#gsc.tab=0>)m,12/03/2024 ). These data show no huge gap between the literacy rates of males and females. Sri Lanka's long history demonstrates that, early after independence, both males' and females'

education was free and required. Girls have equal access to school as a result of free education. Thus, Sri Lanka has a higher percentage of literate women than other Asian nations (Wedikandage, 2021). However, the gap between gender and achievement is wider in the lower social classes (Herath & Wedikandage, 2021).

However, the Annual Labor Force Survey 2022 report shows that the male labor force participation rate is 78.2 percent, and the female labor force participation rate is 35.1 percent in Sri Lanka. The unemployment rates of males and females are 3.3% and 6.2%, respectively. This has been an unexpected result, considering the high degree of female education and the nation's expansion in human capital. Many research studies explain the high frequency of social constraints that make it difficult for women to find work to fill this gap.

As a result, Sri Lanka has a high proportion of female teachers. It is a sign of their academic success and capacity to enter a well-established field (Kelleher et al., 2011). Nonetheless, women experience higher rates of unemployment overall in Sri Lanka, and there is a gender gap in some sectors that favor men. Stereotypes about women in the workplace play a factor in this. More women are pursuing careers in traditionally male sectors, including finance, law, medicine, accounting, and commerce. Although more people are entering the engineering sector, men still hold a substantial majority. Both sexes have equal opportunities in the educational system, and coeducation has allowed them to compete in the same building (Kelleher et al., 2011).

The University Grant Commission's figures validated the points made by Kelleher et al. (2011). According to data released by the University Grants Commission, in 2022, more girls than boys enrolled in university programs (see Graph 1).



Adapted from data of the University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka (2022)

When considering the education sector in Sri Lanka, the ancient education system was handled by Buddhist monks, and all teachers were male. Then, it passed to the hands of clergymen in the church when the Portuguese, Dutch, and British ruled Sri Lanka. However, Jayaweera (2008) explains that Sri Lanka has a long tradition of providing services to more female teachers in the government school system. Further, Kelleher et al. (2011) summarized some data on female teacher recruitment in Sri Lanka from 1971 to 2005. He shows that in 1971, the female percentage in teaching was 53.4%. It gradually increased, passing 60% by 1985 and 70% by 2005. However, according to the School Senses Report 2017, more than 73% of female teachers were in the primary and secondary sub-sectors. This may be why the 1972 curriculum and teacher education reform created a new demand for teachers. The University of Colombo and the University of Vidyalankara started a bachelor of education degree program to meet the increasing demand for graduate teachers. Among the 1500 teacher students, over 70% were

female student teachers in their new batch at that time. There were 18 colleges of education introduced to meet the increasing demand for teachers. Over 70% of female student teachers entered to become teachers at these colleges (Kelleher et al., 2011).

Information revealed by the latest data report of the school system prepared by the Ministry of Education for 2022 shows that the number of female teachers working in government schools on the island is three times the number of male teachers. There are 396 national and 9730 provincial schools across the island, totaling 10,126. The total number of teachers working in them is 236,738. Fifty-six thousand eight hundred seventeen are male teachers, and 179,921 are female teachers, 76 percent of the total number of teachers.

Male educators bring a distinct perspective to the educational setting. They serve as role models, particularly for students lacking male figures. Their presence helps present diverse viewpoints and problem-solving approaches, which is crucial in an educational system that thrives on variety and inclusivity. (<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/gender-equality-and-through-teaching-profession>, 12/03/2024)

The gender imbalance in the education sector will affect students in different ways. Therefore, the main goal of this study was to identify the impact of gender differences in teacher distribution in the Sri Lankan education sector.

### **Literature review**

The teaching profession is characterized by inconsistent status, with teachers fulfilling important social roles but needing to be more consistent in salaries and social status. Aelterman et al. (2022). According to the findings of their study, the public did not believe that the increasing number of female teachers would hurt the quality of education. Driessen (2007) explained that since the mid-1990s, concerns have been raised about the feminization of education, arguing that increasing female teachers may lead to a lack of male role models, potentially negatively impacting boys' education. It was determined from their extensive study of Dutch primary schools, which included 5181 eighth-grade students, 251 teachers, and 163 schools, that teacher sex has no bearing at all on students' academic performance, attitudes, or behavior.

Singers' (2002) study on Belgian secondary education found that female teachers' percentage did not affect boys' or girls' pupil achievement or math attitudes. However, female teachers' percentage

did affect pupils' work attitudes to some extent for boys, but no relationship was found for girls. The study highlights the importance of gender in education. Low teacher salaries are a significant factor in men's reluctance to join the profession, influenced by societal gender roles and family expectations. The perception of teacher pay and its relationship with the profession's status is mixed.

Research indicates that whereas female teachers are typically more communicative and encouraging, male teachers are typically more authoritative (Meece, 1987). According to a survey of 20 teachers, male teachers are more inclined than female teachers to use a more aggressive disciplinary approach when dealing with boys. However, teachers of both genders overlook boys' disruptive behavior more often than girls' when the behavior is not confrontational (Einarsson & Granström, 2002). Further, they explained that the data indicates that student and instructor gender differences exist in disciplinary policies and the likelihood of disciplinary action. Similarly, there seems to be a systematic difference in teachers' assessments of students' traits and skills based on gender. According to other studies, male students have more and better interactions with teachers of both genders than female students. How these variations in discipline, views of students' aptitude, and interactions between students and teachers affect student results assessed by standardized tests is yet unknown.

### **Research Methodology**

Research indicates that whereas female teachers are typically more communicative and encouraging, male teachers are typically more authoritative (Meece, 1987). According to a survey of 20 teachers, male teachers are more inclined than female teachers to use a more aggressive disciplinary approach when dealing with boys. However, teachers of both genders overlook boys' disruptive behavior more often than girls' when the behavior is not confrontational (Einarsson & Granström, 2002). Further, they explained that the data indicates that student and instructor gender differences exist in disciplinary policies and the likelihood of disciplinary action. Similarly, there seems to be a systematic difference in teachers' assessments of students' traits and skills based on gender. According to other studies, male students have more and better interactions with teachers of both genders than female students. How these variations in discipline, views of students' aptitude, and interactions between students and teachers affect student results assessed by standardized tests is yet unknown.

## Data analysis and discussion

### Reasons for gender imbalance in teacher distribution

Table No. 1 shows the reasons for selecting teaching as the job of female teachers at the National College of Education.

Reason	Number of responses	Percentages
Teaching is my favorite job	20	27
Parental influence	35	46
There were no other options	13	17
The teaching profession has more freedom.	02	3
The teaching job has more holidays	00	00
Teaching is a respectable job	5	7
Total	75	100

Table No. 1 shows that 46% of female teachers in the college of education selected the teaching profession because of their parental influence. Nearly 30% and 17% of female teachers also selected teaching as their profession.

Similarly, most female teachers from the sample of teachers at the College of Education said through the focus group interviews that they selected teaching because of their parent's influence. It was stated that since the teacher is a child's substitute mother and will show them more excellent care, this is what parents and society demand. Additionally, the overwhelming female focus group of teachers in the college of education indicated that their parents had influenced their decision to become teachers as it was considered family-friendly employment, allowing them to get back home early and be there when their children were returning from school. Further discussion highlighted concerns regarding higher instances of divorce among females who were involved in other professions, such as this, which led to long hours and neglect of the family. Overall, the focus groups were of the view that teaching was a job that cared for a particular morality and helped to stabilize the family unit, providing a well-respected and more culturally acceptable job for girls within society. Another factor that came through was the perceived benefits for children of having a mother as a teacher, as she will be able to support their learning outcomes effectively.

A focus group discussion of the male teachers with an arts degree highlighted that they had no option other than teaching. One teacher explained, "actually, I tried to become a civil servant.

Unfortunately, I couldn't pass the examination. Anyway, now I have some free time to do my own business, and my income is not bad." Further discussion highlighted that most male teachers with arts and science degrees are conducting tuition classes as extra income. More male and female teachers in the sample were unhappy with being teachers. They said that Sri Lankan society respects them as teachers.

However, they were unhappy with their salaries. Male teachers felt that if they could find a job with a good salary, they would like to quit their jobs. One commerce graduate male teacher said, "I have a commerce degree, and now I am working as a primary teacher in the school. I do not have any experience. I am suffering with my education now." Focus group interviews reveal that most male teachers had less interest in their jobs when compared with female teachers. Some female teachers have done executive-type jobs in the private sector before joining the teaching profession. The school's principal also thought that female teachers were more motivated. However, they also said that female teachers tended to take more extended leave because of their domestic duties. Most of the male and female teachers mentioned through the focus group interview that there was a lack of opportunity for promotion within the teaching profession.

### **Gender imbalance teacher distribution effect to the student educational achievement**

Most male students felt that female teachers were better than male teachers. However, most female students like to learn from male teachers. Some female students explained that most of their tuition teachers are male teachers. They teach them well. Therefore, they expect the same thing from their schools. The study found from the school document that male teachers were significantly more absent than female teachers. Male teachers who are more educated and experienced are the highest among them.

Most students like to learn mathematics from male teachers and languages from females. Most of the female teachers tried to use different teaching methods to teach lessons compared to the male teachers. The research found that the classroom management skills shown by male and female teachers were quite similar. Male students said that having a male dance teacher would help them develop their skills more than learning from a female teacher. Some male students inquire that they do not have enough male teacher personality to develop their personalities. One student added that we had a male English teacher last year, and he was my hero then. I tried to imitate his speaking

style. It was beautiful. Unfortunately, now he is not with us.” However, most of the male students said that male teachers punished them physically.

The group discussions with principals showed negative perceptions regarding high female teacher numbers and educational outcomes. Parents in the primary section said that most of the female teachers in the primary section get maternity leave, and it will badly affect their children’s education. Male teachers indicated that school principals had been known to specifically ask male teachers to carry out school functions, including sports, after-school activities, field trips, etc.

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

Women in Sri Lanka have significantly contributed to meeting the demand for teachers in the school system. Current research has found some reasons for gender imbalance in teacher distribution and how gender imbalance affects student education. In the Sri Lankan education system, 76% of the female teachers are represented. The presence of educated women in professional, salaried fields signifies their shift from economic dependence to empowerment, demonstrating their visible and established role in a country's economic and social setup (Kelleher et al., 2011).

The study's conclusions make it abundantly evident that there is an essential connection between teaching as a profession and traditional gender roles, which are closely related to women's long-standing domestic responsibilities and significantly impact their public role. Many female teachers responded that they chose teaching because of their parents. Women seek employment that aligns with their responsibilities as wives and mothers, requiring flexible working hours and being available for their children. Socio-cultural expectations make teaching a popular choice, and women in time-demanding professions are less likely to have successful marriages.

Most male and female teachers with degrees are unhappy with their profession. They selected teaching because they did not have any other options. Most of the teachers suffered because they had no chance to teach the subjects they studied at the university. However, most females are happier with their careers than male teachers. There were very few opportunities for them to do their promotions. Principals had more positive ideas about female teachers than male teachers about their work in the school, but they had some negatives because male teachers take some time off for personal reasons.

The education of pupils is unaffected by the gender inequalities among the teachers. Nonetheless, most pupils study languages with female teachers and math with male ones. In order to shape their own identities, every student in the sample prefers to interact with male role models at school. According to the study, female educators need to assume leadership roles. Male educators need to adopt new perspectives and employ various instructional strategies when educating. The government should focus more on hiring male educators and providing them better working conditions and compensation.

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