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The Influence of Teachers' Language and Behavioral Expressions on Middle School Students' Gender Cognition and the Construction of Fixed Thinking

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Abstract. In recent years, the issue of gender stereotypes in education has attracted widespread attention worldwide. Although awareness has improved, the gender-biased language and behavior that persist in the interaction between teachers and students continue to reinforce teenagers' stereotyped thinking and affect the establishment of their own gender cognition. This study examined the influence of teachers' language and behavioral expressions on middle school students' gender cognition and fixed thinking construction. Through the analysis of the mechanism for establishing students' gender cognition and the influence of teachers' behaviors, this paper reveals that gendered teachers' behaviors have a significant impact on students' self-cognition, academic choices, and the internalization of gender roles. Furthermore, students often unconsciously replicate these stereotypes in social and learning environments. Based on these findings, this study puts forward targeted suggestions, including teaching strategies to promote gender equality, redesigning classroom practices, and teacher training programs aimed at fostering a more inclusive classroom environment.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Educational Equity, Gender Cognition, Teachers' Behavior

1. Introduction

In recent years, gender issues have received widespread attention around the world. Although some progress has generally been made in this field in terms of equity, gender stereotypes still have not been completely erased from people's minds. The field of gender education is also deeply influenced by this kind of stereotype. The process of teaching has a significant impact on the formation of students' gender cognition. Based on Social Constructivism by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, gender is biologically but socially constructed through social interaction, cultural symbols and institutional norms [1]. As a result, the behavior of teachers in the classroom and the language interaction they bring to students will significantly influence students' gender perception. Furthermore, the Social Cognitive Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura indicates that individuals form behavioral patterns through observing models [2]. Thus, the accessibility of role models and the social recognition of role models can significantly affect their learning outcomes. Teachers, as figures that students have regarded as highly authoritative and trustworthy since

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childhood, their actions and words in the classroom all influence students' cognition. Teachers usually consciously or unconsciously treat students differently based on their gender, from the students' dress of different genders to the requirements for students' academic performance. For instance, teachers often believe that male students are more capable of achieving higher grades in science subjects such as mathematics and physics, and unconsciously do not have the same expectations for female students' performance in these subjects. Apart from the action of treating students based on gender, the language expression of teachers in the classroom also profoundly influences the formation process of students' gender concepts and cognition. It needs to confirm whether the gender concepts that teachers convey to students every day really have social recognition and objectivity. For example, if teachers always convey to students the concepts such as "Girls should not like chasing others or playing football like boys. That is 'rude' and 'not a girly action' ", it will gradually make female students think that they are not allowed to like some activities or engage in some behaviors. Which influences their decision-making in the future [3].

Based on the above, this paper will focus on the influence of teachers' language and behavioral expressions on middle school students' gender cognition and the construction of fixed thinking. This article will research the confusion among middle school students regarding gender issues and stereotypes, and then analyze the reasons for students' gender stereotypes from the perspective of teachers' language and behavior in the classroom. Finally, the article will conclude how teachers' language and behavioral expressions influence students' understanding of gender, and provide future suggestions on how to improve classroom design and teachers' behaviors in the future, as well as the possible problems or difficulties that may be encountered in the process.

2. The manifestation of gender confusion and fixed thinking among middle school students

2.1. The confusion about gender from students under the influence of stereotypes

Middle school students often have self-doubt or confusion about gender due to exposure to gender stereotypes. This can be reflected in doubts about both academic performance and one's own personality, hobbies and activity choices. From the behaviour of students of different sexes, it can be seen that boys are more active and more involved in science lessons [4]. This is very likely influenced by the stereotypical behaviors of teachers in the classroom, such as repeatedly calling on male students to participate in interactions in science classes or frequently telling male students that they have great potential in science, while rarely telling female students. As a result, female and male students will begin to manifest the behaviour expected by the teacher [4]. This will have a significant impact on the gender cognition of both male and female students.

Additionally, middle school students may also be confused due to the constraints of gender stereotypes regarding appearance, behavior and interests [5]. If girls choose to have short hair or enjoy football, these activities, which are traditionally regarded as "masculine", are often labeled as "not girlish" and may even be excluded by their peers or criticized by teachers. This kind of external pressure can cause them to fall into self-doubt and even worsen middle school students' identity with their own gender, intensifying gender stereotype behavior. Similarly, if a male shows emotional sensitivity, a fondness for literature and art, or an unwillingness to participate in intense sports (e.g., basketball, football) may also be ridiculed and questioned, leading them to hide their true emotions or interests and further solidifying the boundaries of gender roles.

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2.2. The gender stereotypes displayed by students

Middle school students often unconsciously reproduce and reinforce gender stereotypes in their daily interactions and imagination of the future. In classroom collaboration, students generally believe that boys are more suitable for leadership or technical roles, while girls are more often assigned tasks such as record-keeping, organizing or assisting. This role division is not based on the differences in students' real abilities, but comes from the presupposition of gender abilities [6]. In addition, in classroom speeches and debates, boys are usually more courageous in expressing their objections and speaking up voluntarily, while girls tend to agree or remain silent. This difference in communication methods to some extent reflects the shaping of the "male-dominated and female-passive" role in the process of gender socialization.

Outside the classroom, students' career expectations also reflect deeply rooted gender stereotypes. Boys are more likely to envision themselves as pursuing careers in engineering, computer science or leadership roles, while girls tend to prefer teaching, nursing or creative arts, which are traditionally related to nurturing or aesthetic labor. These choices are seldom purely out of personal interest; On the contrary, they are formed through the gender stereotypes they are constantly exposed to in the media, family and school environments. As an important intervening medium, teachers may unintentionally reinforce these trends by using stereotyped assumptions about gender examples in career guidance [6]. Therefore, the reproduction of gender roles not only limits individual potential but also perpetuates structural inequality in the labor market and the broader society.

3. Analysis of the reasons from the perspective of teachers' language and behavior

3.1. The gender cognition establishment mode of students

The gender cognition of students is not constructed biologically, but socially. It is gradually constructed in the process of continuous social interaction and development. From the perspective of Social Construction Theory by Berger and Luckmann, gender, as a concept of social reality, is constantly shaped and strengthened through real experiences, symbolic systems, and institutional frameworks [1]. Within this framework, students actively interpret and absorb gender norms and behaviors they encounter in various social Settings, including family, peers, media and school.

When students engage in these interactions, they internalize and reproduce social expectations related to gender. When exposed to rules with gender stereotypes (e.g., labeling boys as smart and sensitive, while girls as serious and introverted), students will unconsciously accept and internalize these stereotypical characteristics into their cognition and daily behaviors. The Social Cognitive Learning Theory further explains this process of meaning creation [2]. This theory emphasizes that individuals learn social roles through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Therefore, students are not merely passively accepting gender norms. They actively participate in their gender socialization by interpreting cues from the environment and adjusting their self-concepts and behaviors accordingly.

3.2. Teachers' adaptive teaching methods

Many teachers unconsciously adopt gendering strategies in classroom teaching and management. Although these practices often come from habit or unconsciousness, they have a profound impact on middle school students' gender cognition. For instance, in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses, teachers may be more inclined to encourage boys to

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participate in hands-on operations or difficult challenges, while lowering expectations or providing excessive assistance to girls [7]. This, in turn, conveys the signal that "boys are more suitable for technical practice". Similarly, in terms of language usage, teachers may employ gendering metaphors or cases (e.g., comparing football to boys or makeup to girls), thereby reinforcing the false connection between gender and specific fields. These subtle teaching behaviors accumulate together to form a hidden curriculum. Hidden Curriculum Theory indicates that in addition to explicit courses (e.g., mathematics and physics) in schools, there are also implicit courses, including campus culture, teacher-student interaction, value norms not explicitly stated in textbooks, etc [8]. These influences on students' thoughts are often more profound than those of explicit courses. They constantly convey implicit information to students about gender roles, abilities and values. If teachers do not have a good awareness of gender stereotypes, it will be very difficult for them to correctly guide students to establish correct gender awareness in these hidden curricula. Most teachers lack guidance for students in establishing critical thinking and simply follow the content in textbooks or syllabus. In fact, these seemingly authoritative resources can also have both explicit and implicit gender stereotypes [9].

3.3. Internalization

After being treated with such gender stereotypes brought about by teachers for a long time, an inevitable outcome for students is internalization. Students gradually transform external gender norms into internal self-identity through long-term exposure to teachers' gender-differentiated language and behavior. This internalization process often goes through three stages: recognition, acceptance, and reproduction. First of all, students can identify the different treatments that teachers have for different genders, as mentioned above in the paper. Subsequently, they accept this difference as "supposed" or "reasonable" in the social reward and punishment mechanism. Finally, they reproduce these gender stereotypes through self-force, peer interaction, and even future teaching behaviors. For instance, a girl might give up taking advanced mathematics courses because she was repeatedly hinted at by her teacher that "mathematics is not suitable for girls", which in turn affects her choice of university major. A boy might hide his love for literature out of fear of being ridiculed and instead cater to the image of a rational and calm man. This internalization not only restricts the free development of individuals but also enables the reproduction of gender inequality structures.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Potential problems & difficulties for changing the mindset of gender stereotypes

The promotion of gender equality education faces multiple obstacles. The challenges come not only from the individual level but also from broader structural and cultural contexts. First of all, many teachers lack systematic gender training and find it difficult to identify the biases hidden in their words and behaviors. Some even believe that "gender neutrality" will disrupt the traditional teaching order. There may be implicit support for traditional gender roles in school culture, such as conveying signals of gender binary opposition through campus activities, textbook content, and even school rules and regulations. Furthermore, parents and social concepts may also pose resistance to educational reform, especially when equal education is regarded as a challenge to traditional values, as what is called "cultural reproduction" [10]. The gender concepts that students have internalized also require long-term and patient guidance to be transformed, rather than being achieved overnight.

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Therefore, promoting change must be driven by systematic thinking, taking into account multiple dimensions such as teacher development, curriculum reform and cultural creation.

4.2. Redesign of class patterns

To break the reproduction of gender stereotypes, classroom teaching needs to be consciously reconstructed. First of all, at the language level, teachers should use inclusive expressions and avoid gender-specific metaphors, titles or evaluations. For instance, male scientists or female nurses should instead adopt the normal language of scientists, nurses, etc. Secondly, in terms of interactive design, teachers can adopt mechanisms such as random grouping and role rotation during activities to ensure that each student has the opportunity to try different types of learning tasks such as leadership, technology, and creativity. The course content should also proactively incorporate diverse gender role models, such as female mathematicians and male preschool teachers, to broaden students' future career imagination and self-possibilities.

4.3. Guidance for mindset from teachers

During the teaching process, the teacher's verbal guidance for students' thoughts is of vital importance. Schools should organize regular gender education and training to help teachers identify unconscious biases and learn Gender-Responsive Pedagogy [11]. More importantly, teachers should proactively create a safe environment that allows students to explore multiple identities and clearly support students' development choices that break through gender limitations. When gender stereotypes appear in authoritative resources such as textbooks or syllabus, teachers should be able to guide students to conduct critical thinking on such content. For instance, when textbooks consistently portray women as nurses and teachers while men are portrayed as engineers, teachers can prompt students to question whether only certain genders are suitable for certain jobs, and can encourage students of different genders to pursue any hobbies or career directions they like. Only through continuous educational practice and reflection can teachers truly become promoters of gender equality rather than replicators.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the influence of teachers' language and behavioral expressions on middle school students' gender cognition and the formation of stereotypical thinking. The research results show that teachers usually consciously or unconsciously intensify gender stereotype behaviors through differentiated feedback, gender expectation differences and classroom interactions. This, in turn, profoundly shapes students' own gender perception, academic direction choices and social behaviors. These influences promote the internalization and reproduction of gender stereotypes among teenagers, limit their development opportunities, and reinforce unfair social norms.

By looking forward, it is necessary to increase gender awareness training for teachers to better shape an inclusive teaching environment. Meanwhile, future research can focus on exploring the long-term impact of teachers' behaviors on the development of gender cognition, as well as testing the effectiveness of some intervention methods aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes in schools. By fostering an educational culture that values diversity and critical self-reflection, it can encourage a more open and equal society for future generations.

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