

# Should the Presence of Male Teachers in Classroom Be Increased?

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## Abstract

The percentage of male primary school teachers participating in the classroom has been a very small fraction. Only about 30% of primary school teachers are male compared to female teachers. In fact, the over-reliance on female teachers in primary schools has led to some psychological problems among some students. These include stereotypes of male teachers as “hard” and unapproachable. From the perspective of male students, they are more likely to be labelled as “feminine”. As more and more primary schools have increased their emphasis on the participation of male teachers in the classroom, student achievement has not only improved, but their perceptions of gender identity have also become more holistic. In addition to this, a reasonable ratio of male to female teachers will also have a more positive impact on the composition and behaviour of parents in the family. Therefore, the lack of male teachers in primary schools can be effectively balanced through reasonable training methods and fair recruitment channels. It will also contribute to the more comprehensive development of students.

**Keywords:** male teacher, primary school, feminine, stereotype, gender identity

## 1. Introduction

In the field of education, teaching seems to have always been seen as a predominantly female profession. Especially at the primary level, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021) shows that about 66% of teachers worldwide are female by 2019, and the number is on the rise. The low proportion of male teachers in primary school classes has been a situation that can not be ignored. The proportion of male primary school teachers in China is about 30% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Notably, the phenomenon is even more pronounced in Europe. By 2019, about 13 percent of primary

school teachers in Germany were male; About 17% in France; In the UK it is about 14% (The World Bank, 2021). Although there are a few exceptions, such as Comoros, Papua New Guinea, and Pakistan, where male-primary and primary teachers account for 50% or more of the workforce (Petersen, 2014), the proportion of female primary school teachers was higher in almost all of the countries studied. As a result, more attention has been paid to the gender ratio of primary school teachers. At the same time, many scholars also believe that the lack of male primary school teachers who teach in classroom will have a certain negative impact on students based on some research outcomes. On the

contrary, appropriately increasing the presence of male teachers in classroom will bring some advantages to students. Hence, I recommended that the number of male teachers should be raised in primary school classroom. This article discusses viewpoints from three aspects. It begins by that it is true that there are fewer male teachers and there are various factors contributing to this result. Although some people think that the disadvantages brought by the lack of male teachers can be ignored, in fact, this can be argued. It then examines the reasons for the increase in male teachers. Although some scholars hold that the increase of male teachers has brought some disadvantages, it will be argued that the increase of male teachers does benefit the physical and mental development of students. Finally, although there are some challenges to increasing the number of male teachers, it is feasible to increase the number of male teachers based on existing policies and actual conditions.

## **2. Male Teachers Are Rarely Seen in Primary School Classrooms**

Male elementary school instructors are in short supply in the United States (Meader & Larwin, 2021). Similarly, Male teacher shortages are resonating throughout English-speaking countries' education systems (Mills et al, 2004). And the gender imbalance among primary and secondary school teachers is also quite severe in china (Cheng, 2018). Hence, the projected demand for additional male elementary school teachers has become a global issue, and the projected demand for additional male elementary school teachers has become a global issue which has become the focus of discussion and debate.

### *2.1 Reasons of Male Primary School Teachers Rarely Presenting in Classroom*

The profession of teaching, especially in primary schools, has long been dominated by women. According to a study by Browne (as cited in Mistry & Sood, 2015), females are more compassionate, empathetic and inventive than males. And beyond that, males are still seen suspiciously in primary school environment, discouraging some males from pursuing the field (Mistry & Sood, 2015; Davis & Hay, 2018). To be specific, most people have a negative impression of male primary school teachers. This is because there are concerns over male teachers' career motivation and sexual safety

awareness. Male teachers appeared to intentionally isolate themselves from children, purportedly to safeguard themselves against paedophilia claims (Haase, 2010). As de Salis et al (2019), Mistry & Sood (2013) and Haase (2010) states, there are stereotypes about male primary school teachers. On one hand, although male and female teachers have different qualities, both sides believe that female teachers have maternal attributes (de Salis et al., 2019). On the other hand, both male and female primary school teachers agree with the quality of male leadership (de Salis et al., 2019). As Moloi (2007) and Moorosi (2007) mentioned (as cited in Petersen, 2014), according to research conducted in South Africa, male managers or principals are often more prevalent in primary schools than female managers or principals. Although this may be because women make up less than 50% of primary school teachers in many African countries, such as the proportion of female primary school teachers in Ghana in 2020 was 47% and 41% in the Gambia (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020), in fact, people always think that this is because of the hegemonic masculinity of male teachers (Haase, 2010). It is a natural attribute of male, and it's something they should show.

Furthermore, the social status of the job also affects men's choices. Compared with other professions, the status of primary school teachers is low (Mistry & Sood, 2015; Petersen, 2014; Trent, 2014; Cushman, 2005). In other words, a primary school teacher is one of the few choices a boy has to make. At the same time, primary school teachers have lower salaries and benefits (Cushman, 2005; Liu, 2018). In China, this lack of material possessions challenges males' deeply held belief that men are the breadwinners of families. And it turns out that school management positions suitable for males also command higher salaries than entry-level positions (classroom teaching) (Cushman, 2005). Although male primary school teachers have more opportunities for promotion and are promoted at a faster rate than female teachers (Mills et al., 2004), the number of male primary school practitioners may influence this ratio. Cl Williams (1992) calls it glass escalator theory. These unhealthy stereotypes have driven more men into administrative positions than into classroom teaching. All in all, people's negative impression and strong distrust of male primary school teachers make the gender imbalance of

primary school teachers more and more serious.

## *2.2 Issues Arising from the Lack of Male Primary School Classroom Teachers*

As the number of male primary school teachers continues to decline, the resulting gender imbalance has become a point of controversy and debate (Cushman, 2005). It poses serious problems for both student and the education industry. It was firstly argued that some students would be affected psychologically in a negative way (Liu, 2018). Despite the stereotype that females are even born to be teachers because of their gentle, maternal characteristics, there is a problem that the excessive participation of female teachers in classroom teaching can make some boys develop femininity (Zhang, 2020). Since primary education is regarded as a formation stage for children, during which they would be easily affected by the environment; therefore, it is notable that teachers would also greatly influence students' personal development (Wang et al., 2021). For example, this issue has been manifested in the context of British primary schools. So the British government increased the number of male teachers to counter this feminisation (Skelton, 2003). Nevertheless, this situation seemed not significantly changed, and the tendency of feminisation among boys still existed (Skelton, 2012). According to a further investigation, a probable explanation for the situation was that the male teachers were found to intentionally behave in the way that was extremely similar to their female colleagues. In other words, these new recruited male teachers did not show their unique characters as expected to be masculine and charismatic (Skelton, 2012).

In addition, the shortage of male primary school teachers reinforces the stereotype of male teachers and this phenomenon will further imbalance the gender proportion of teachers. For example, pre-existing stereotypes of men being 'hard' and unapproachable can terrify students (Haase, 2010). But in fact, many parents, especially those of girl students, think that girls should see that men have a tender side and that males are capable of doing 'everything' as well (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). And girls interact with male teachers will make themselves understand men better, so that they can get know how to deal with males better in the future (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). Hence, there is a real demand for male teachers in this

industry.

From the perspective of schools, gender imbalance of primary school teachers will disrupt the normal education and teaching order of schools (Liu, 2018). Multiple female teachers on maternity leave or pregnant at the same time can make school scheduling difficult (Wang et al., 2021). Especially in China, the two-child policy has made the situation worse. Therefore, this problem can be easily avoided by the balanced gender ratio of the teacher group.

## **3. Rationales for Increasing Male Teachers in Primary School Classroom**

The desire for more males to work with children throughout their formative years continues to be a recurring theme in global education discourse (Brownhill et al., 2021). Petersen (2014) found that in the context of the foundation phase, where women typically predominate, the increasing number of male students enrolling in teaching programmes during this phase of study has elicited both acclaim and criticism. Actually, the critical nature of a balanced workforce in primary schools for the success of the school and its students is being increasingly recognised (Mistry & Sood, 2014).

### *3.1 The Advantages of Having More Male Teachers in Primary Schools Classroom*

Male teachers as role models have a positive effect on students. Brownhill and his colleagues (2021) has learned through their research that male teachers were critical in instilling favourable attitudes toward education in males and were required as 'role models. As a result, the UK government has recruited more male teachers to support the idea that male teachers acting as role models can improve the academic performance of male students (Francis et al, 2008). Nonetheless, this idea is not founded on scientific evidence (Carrington & Skelton, 2003). In contrast, a study at a US university showed that student performance did not improve significantly as a result of male teacher role models (Winkelmann, 2016). However, the main weakness with these research is that the understanding of role models is rather one-dimensional and does not provide a comprehensive multi-dimensional analysis. In other words, male teachers as positive role models not only influence achievement and boys but also improve certain negative behaviours and perceptions of boys and girls. Male primary school teachers are credited with

assisting boys in ‘improving their school behaviour and reaffirming their gender identity’ (Faustich-Wieland, 2013). And in fact, it is widely expected among most of parents and schools that male teachers can play a role of model, and even like a father (Wood & Brownhill, 2018; Cushman, 2005). And male teachers as replacement fathers play a positive role in social, emotional and behavioral skill development of students (Wood & Brownhill, 2018). Besides, Australian researchers have come to similar conclusions that there is a need for a balance of male and female teachers in schools to show the balance at home, and this is especially true for children who do not have a father figure in their lives (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). In addition, the model role has the potential to diversify children’s perceptions of men at school, which may be especially beneficial for students who lack exposure to positive and diverse male gender representations in other contexts (McGrath et al, 2020). For instance, the females in the class will also benefit from having a male teacher since it demonstrates men’s commitment to education and demonstrates that men can accomplish and enjoy this job just as much as any other (Garcia, 2014). And the presence of men in schools may provide children with positive examples of men who are caring and nonviolent, and who interact positively with women (Bhana, 2009).

From a social point of view, primary schools in England appeal that more male instructors to ‘balance’ the educational workforce and better represent a diverse society (Mistry & Sood, 2016). However, some perceptions of prejudice against male teachers may prevent the development of gender equality in the education industry. It is proved that male teachers, in some reports, have been associated with rape and child molestation, causing parents to feel uneasy about male teachers teaching (Petersen, 2014). At the same time, an experiment at a US university found that male primary school teachers were not the first choice for parents, even though parents gave both genders a positive assessment of their abilities (Kim & Weseley, 2017). Although gender inequality in primary school teachers also exists in some countries in Africa, particularly in West and Central Africa, it is due to a shortage of female teachers (Lee et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Lee and researchers (2019) know from their research that adding women teachers can reduce gender inequality in student

education. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that increasing the number of disadvantaged gender teachers in the education industry will enable equality to be reflected in both educators and students. Above all, both boys and girls gain emotionally and academically from being exposed to a balanced representation of the sexes in primary school (Davis & Hay, 2018). Furthermore, Diversification of the workforce (by age, gender, ethnic origin, and religion) is frequently pursued in order to foster an inclusive work environment (McCuiston et al, 2004). This coincides with Education Queensland (2002)’s strategy to recruit more male primary school teachers.

### *3.2 Ways to Increase the Number of Male Primary School Teachers in the Classroom*

Recognizing the importance of male teachers, many countries are taking active measures to recruit and retain more male primary school teachers. In China, some scholars have given several suggestions for optimising the gender structure of primary school teachers.

The first point is to further develop the active role of in-service male teachers (Wang, 2021). Since the gender imbalance of male and female primary school teachers cannot be solved in a short time, the active influence of serving male primary school teachers can be fully utilized to solve the problem. However, some obstacles have arisen. A study of primary schools in Ireland found that male teachers worried that positive and intimate interactions with children would lead to suspicion and other negative thoughts from parents and the school (O’Keeffe, 2016). Similar issues also can be found in the primary education sector in Australia and Britain (Mistry & Sood, 2013; Davis & Hay, 2018). But in the long run, increased interaction with male primary school teachers can reduce fear of male teachers and eliminate bias of male teachers (Haase, 2010). Meanwhile, Education Queensland (2002) states, “develop mechanisms to support teachers who are being investigated as a result of student complaints and link strategies to existing mechanisms in the *Child Protection Act 1999*” (p. 4). So the move to recruit more male primary school teachers is largely feasible.

The second point is to improve the professional identity of primary school teachers (Wang, 2021). Mistry & Sood (2016) pointed that both male and female teachers see each other as equals in the school and have their own strengths and

weaknesses, but it is important that both give priority to caring for their students. In addition to improving their own quality, external praise can also encourage more men to enter the primary education profession. For example, people need to work harder in schools and teacher education institutions to convey the message that learning is a pleasurable and appropriate male activity (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). In Italy, during the master's degree in education, a university prepared different courses for graduate students of different ages, so that students fully realize the attitudes and concepts necessary for the teaching profession, thus increasing the enrollment rate of male graduate students in this specialty (Zanniello, 2019). Because normal university students are one of the origin of primary school teachers, raising the gender ratio of normal university students can improve the problem of gender imbalance of primary school teachers from the source (Wang et al, 2021).

In addition, many other countries have developed different schemes to recruit more male primary school teachers. In the United States, universities prepare scholarships and some related advertisements for graduate students; In Norway, the government created a website for educators to encourage more men to participate in more educational practice programs; in the Netherlands, the government has made teaching more attractive, with pay rises and other measures and at the same time, Germany also uses the public media and advertising effect to promote the teaching profession (Zanniello, 2019). It is worth noting that in continental Europe, policies have been in place for years and have helped increase the number of male primary school teachers (Zanniello, 2019). Likewise, the leaders of Britain's primary schools also think that a generational change is important for current primary school industry for recruiting more male teachers (Gibbons, 2020).

Finally, schools can provide a more inclusive environment and atmosphere for male teachers. For example, male school teachers find the staffroom intimidating and lonely in a primary school in Ireland, according to interview findings (O'Keeffe, 2016). Therefore, the atmosphere for male teachers to work in primary schools needs to be improved to attract more male primary school teachers.

In short, recruiting more male teachers is not

just about the appearance of gender equality and fighting female-dominated industries. Mills and his colleagues (2004) also pointed that very few attempts to recruit men to teaching emphasise these characteristics as necessary components of effective pedagogy.

#### 4. Conclusion

Focus on more male teachers should present in primary school classroom, this essay has addressed three questions, including the lack of male primary school teachers; The advantages of more male teachers and ways to recruit more male teacher.

The dearth of male primary school teachers has long been a concern for the education industry. According to the research of many scholars, negative public stereotypes of male teachers and the low social status of the teaching profession prevent a large number of male teachers from working in primary schools. Meanwhile, these reasons enhance us to further understand that the lack of male teachers will increase the femininity of the school and people's negative stereotype of male teachers will further deepen, thus creating a vicious circle. Therefore, we need to add more male primary school teachers into the classroom. Many studies have shown that more male teachers can serve as role models for both male and female students, especially in regulating student behavior. For girls, they can have a more comprehensive understanding of men and have a positive impact on their later life. Finally, although some prejudices against male teachers are hindering the recruitment and retention of more male teachers, the education industry should increase male teachers' identity through training and encourage positive interaction between male teachers and students. In addition, gender diversity and active promotion of the teaching profession are also necessary ways to increase the number of normal university students.

However, the major limitation of this paper is that while the shortage of male primary school teachers is a well-documented problem, the causes of the shortage and the means of increasing it need to be judged in the context of different countries. Hence, whether some measures and views in this paper can be used in practice remains to be investigated. In future work, investigating practical application results of measures might prove important.

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