

Understanding Gender Education: An Analytical Study of Preschool Teachers' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT Gender often establishes roles and responsibilities among individuals based on perceived gender identity shaped by societal norms. Through various agents of socialisation, children internalise gender roles that make early childhood education a vital area for reassessing societal gender norms. The preschool years represent a significant period for children's cognitive and social growth, providing an optimal opportunity to introduce topics related to gender equality and diversity. This research used an exploratory research design to investigate the perceptions of preschool teachers from Assamese and English medium preschools regarding gender education in Jorhat district, Assam, India. The results indicate that gender stereotypes persist among the Assamese and English medium preschool teachers. Despite some progressive views of educators, there are persistent biases regarding behaviour, academics, and career expectations. This research emphasises the need for gender-sensitive teaching strategies and policies to promote inclusivity in early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a social construct shaped by cultural, social, and behavioural factors, defining roles and responsibilities based on perceived gender identity. Children begin to internalise gender roles early, influenced by family, media, and educational environments. As a result, early childhood education becomes a critical space to challenge and reshape gender perceptions. Krishna et al. (2024) revealed that children adopt strong gender-stereotyped beliefs from an early age, largely influenced by parental role modelling and teacher attitudes. Teachers have a significant impact on the way gender is perceived

and manifested. Their perceptions directly impact children's play activities, developmental outcomes, and learning experiences. Warin and Adriany (2017) argue that gendered behaviours in early childhood are shaped by teachers' underlying biases, which reflect broader socio-political discourses. For a gender-sensitive curriculum to succeed, educators must first develop a thorough understanding of gender and their own biases. Shutts et al. (2017) highlighted that teaching practices during early childhood impact how children perceive gender. Implementing gender-neutral practices can reduce gender in-group favouritism and stereotyping among children. Societal expectations and media representations also shape teachers' gender perceptions, influencing their teaching styles and interactions with children. Children between the ages of two and six develop gender cognition through observing their surroundings, which shapes their behaviour and decisions. Teachers' personal beliefs subtly affect how gender is perceived and enacted in the classroom. Female

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teachers, in particular, may reinforce traditional views, perceiving boys as active and assertive while viewing girls as passive and quiet (Pardhan and Pelletier 2017). These perceptions influence classroom dynamics, learning engagement and long-term outcomes. Children's literature further reinforces gender perceptions. Seitz et al. (2020) found that children associate new concepts with the gender of a story's protagonist, strengthening existing stereotypes. Similarly, Silman et al. (2019) observed that preschool teachers often view women as emotional and docile while men as autonomous and strong. Although some teachers attempt to address gender bias through interventions, their underlying perceptions often limit these efforts. Teacher bias extends beyond early childhood and has broader implications for educational and career outcomes. Rakshit and Sahoo (2023) found that biased teacher attitudes contribute to gender gaps in academic performance, limiting future educational and career opportunities. Educational materials often reinforce these biases by portraying men in professional roles and women in domestic settings, restricting girls' aspirations (Kuteesa et al. 2024; Nandi et al. 2024).

India's National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises the critical need for gender inclusion and sensitivity starting from early childhood. By advocating for holistic development, the policy aims to dismantle harmful gender stereotypes and cultivate an inclusive learning environment where every child can thrive. Creating gender-neutral spaces in school is not just important, it is essential for eradicating bias and ensuring equitable education for all. Moreover, since teachers significantly shape children's formative experiences, it is imperative to transform their perceptions and practices. By prioritising gender equity from the preschool stage onward, one can lay a strong foundation for a more just and equitable society.

Objective

The objective of this research is to study the perception of Assamese and English medium preschool teachers on gender education.

Literature Review

A study conducted was by Berekashvili (2012) on the role of gender-biased perceptions

in teacher-student interactions in Georgia, and the findings revealed that the gender-related differentiation that a significant group of teachers' practices tends to promote gender inequality in the classroom, undervalue girls' abilities, and build a basis for further gender differentiation.

Wolter et al. (2015) conducted a study on the negative impact of preschool teachers' traditional gender role attitudes on boys' reading-related motivation and skills in Berlin, Germany, and the findings revealed that boys with preschool teachers who endorsed traditional gender attitudes had lower motivation to learn to read, which impacted their future skill development. In comparison, girls' motivation was not linked to teachers' gender role attitudes. The study suggests preschool teachers can foster a gender-neutral educational setting by being aware of their perspectives on gender roles and avoiding reinforcing gender-typed attitudes and behaviors.

Chapman (2016) conducted a case study of gendered play in preschools, and the findings revealed that early childhood educators' perceptions of gender have a significant influence on children's play activities in preschool settings. The findings highlight the need to break old gender conventions and provide children with a more varied and inclusive play environment that is unconstrained by societal expectations.

Filipovic (2018) studied gender representation in children's books in early childhood settings in Dublin, Ireland. The findings revealed clear gender trends in children's literature, showing a marked lack of female characters and the prevalence of gender stereotypes. Further, educators demonstrate a deficiency in recognising gender patterns and assign minimal significance to gender portrayal in children's literature. The study emphasises the need to adopt gender-sensitive approaches in early childhood educational settings.

A study on children's perceptions of gender identity and stereotype was conducted in public pre-primary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, by Muasya and Muasya (2020). The results indicated that the perceptions of gender identity and stereotypes among both boys and girls are notably shaped by the influences of their teachers and mothers. The existence of masculine and feminine characteristics, as well as the

variety of play materials and equipment accessible, all contribute to the formation of children's gender identities and stereotypes. To successfully reduce gender differences between boys and girls, it is critical to address issues of gender prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in early childhood.

In 2023, Padmanabha carried out a case study examining how prospective teachers in India perceive gender roles. The findings revealed that while many teachers demonstrated a shift toward gender-neutral attitudes, some stereotypical mindsets persist. This study emphasised the importance of the inclusion of gender education into teacher training programs that can lead to observable changes, fostering a more gender-neutral and gender-inclusive educational environment.

Wu (2023) conducted a literature review on the consideration of the role of gender in early childhood education. The findings indicated that the teacher's views on gender are shaped by societal norms and stereotypes, which affect their approaches to teaching and their engagements with students. Children acquire gender cognition between the ages of two and six years old by watching their immediate surroundings, which influences their behaviour and decisions. According to the study, boosting male participation in early childhood education can serve to challenge gender stereotypes, promote inclusion, and support children in developing a more diversified perspective of gender roles.

A study on preschool teachers' perceptions of gender in the classroom in Turkey was conducted by Yildiz and Erkan (2023), and the findings revealed that the perception of the teachers on gender roles in the classroom setting can significantly influence a child's developmental outcome and learning experience. The study also reveals several significant differences in teachers' perceptions of gender based on their professional seniority.

Wang (2024) investigated a study exploring early childhood educators' perceptions and practices towards gender differences in "STEM play: A multiple-case study in China". The research findings indicated that educators recognise and appreciate the equal involvement of children in STEM play, however, they did not effectively address entrenched gender stereotypes, resulting in conflicting beliefs and actions. Addition-

ally, Chinese early childhood teachers recognised external stereotypes and the considerable effect of peer influence as major barriers to attaining gender inclusivity in STEM play. Furthermore, the study explores a range of inclusive practices and highlights the diverse roles of early childhood educators in fostering gender-neutral settings for STEM activities.

Studies show that the views of early childhood educators about gender have a considerable impact on the learning experiences and development of children. Many preschool teachers hold traditional views on gender, which can reinforce stereotypes and contribute to gender-based discrimination. This affects how children engage in learning and play, as well as their self-perception. While some educators are actively working to challenge these biases, many still reflect the prevailing cultural and societal norms regarding gender. To create more inclusive classrooms, it is essential to implement gender-neutral practices and improve teacher training, which will help build a fairer and more nurturing educational atmosphere for all children.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted an exploratory research model to examine preschool teachers' perceptions of gender education. It involved 100 preschool teachers from Assamese and English medium private schools in the Jorhat educational block of Jorhat, Assam, during the 2023-2024 academic year. Using a mixed multi-stage sampling method and complete enumeration, 50 teachers were selected from each medium. A pilot study was conducted beforehand to ensure the availability of participants.

Data Collection Tool

Data was collected using a self-constructed scale, "Perception of preschool teachers on gender education". The scale is a three-point Likert-type with a total of 25 items (Appendix I). The scale has two parts. The first part includes the demographic profile that deals with the demographic information of the respondents, such as age, gender, religion, caste, birthplace, educational qualification, work experience, participation in training, monthly income, mother tongue,

and language medium used for instruction in the classroom. In the second part, scale items and options are presented. In the 3-point Likert scale, options numbered 1 to 3 are as follows, such that “agree” is 3 points, “undecided” is 2 points, and “disagree” is 1 point. There are four subdimensions in the scale. The “Gender beliefs and attitudes” sub-dimension has 6 items, the “Gender in traditional roles” sub-dimension has 6 items, the “Gender in play and literature” sub-dimension has 7 items, and the “Gender in society” sub-dimension has 6 items. Cronbach’s alpha value of this scale for reliability is 0.852. Since the items on the scale express negative perceptions, obtaining higher scores on this scale indicates that the teachers have more negative perceptions and stereotypical views towards gender education. On the other hand, lower scores indicate that teachers have a positive and androgenic perception of gender education and exhibit egalitarian views in this context.

RESULTS

Perception of Assamese Medium Preschool Teachers on Gender Education

The findings reveal a complex perception of the respondents as illustrated in Table 1. It shows that teachers of Assamese medium preschools exhibit a higher negative perception on gender education in the dimension “Gender in play and literature” with the highest mean score of 16.36 and standard deviation of 2.36, followed by the dimension “Gender in society” (mean=15.22, SD=2.05). Both mean scores for “Gender in play and literature” and “Gender in society” exceed the neutral score. These findings align with a study by Wu (2023), who found that teachers’ gender perceptions are heavily shaped by societal influences, affecting how they structure

children’s learning environments. Additionally, the mean score for “Gender in traditional roles” stands at 12.4 (SD=1.80), above the neutral score, showing moderate gender-biased perceptions. Conversely, the lowest mean is observed in the dimension “Gender beliefs and attitudes” (mean=9.86, SD=1.73), falling below the neutral score, indicating a positive perception towards it. Yildiz and Erkan (2023) similarly observed that younger teachers often hold less traditional views than their senior counterparts, reinforcing that shifting perceptions may be linked to generational changes in gender understanding.

Perception of English Medium Preschool Teachers on Gender Education

The perceptions of respondents on gender education within English medium preschools across various dimensions are presented in Table 2. The data indicates that English medium preschool teachers have a higher perception of gender education in the dimension “Gender in play and literature” with the highest mean score of 16.08 and a standard deviation of 2.48. This is followed by the dimension “Gender in society” (mean=14.34, SD=2.56). The mean scores for both “Gender in play and literature” and “Gender in society” were higher than the neutral score. Results also revealed that preschool teachers’ mean score for “Gender in traditional roles” was 12.28 (SD=2.11), above the neutral score. Conversely, the lowest mean is in the dimension “Gender beliefs and attitudes” (mean=10.6, SD=2.23) and was found to be less than the neutral score. It supports Padmanabha (2023), who found that progressive attitudes are becoming more common in teacher training programs. Additionally, the perceptions of gender roles in education were particularly evident in STEM-related beliefs, where teachers expressed mixed views.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents of Assamese medium preschools according to their perception on gender education

	<i>Dimensions Number of respondents of Assamese medium preschools (n=50)</i>				
	<i>No. of items</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Neutral score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Gender beliefs and attitudes	6	18	12	9.86	1.738
Gender in traditional roles	6	18	12	12.4	1.807
Gender in play and literature	7	21	14	16.36	2.363
Gender in society	6	18	12	15.22	2.053

Table 2: Distribution of respondents of English medium preschools according to their perception on gender education

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Number of respondents of English medium preschools (n=50)</i>				
	<i>No. of items</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Neutral score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Gender beliefs and attitudes	6	18	12	10.6	2.231
Gender in traditional roles	6	18	12	12.28	2.110
Gender in play and literature	7	21	14	16.08	2.481
Gender in society	6	18	12	14.34	2.560

Preschool teachers across both mediums of instruction exhibited a pronounced reinforcement of gender norms within the classroom, influencing areas such as literature, play, and societal roles, shaped by their traditional perceptions. However, they also demonstrated some progressive attitudes toward gender beliefs, indicating an awareness that these norms are socially constructed, and sought to foster a more gender-neutral environment. A study by Stoppa et al. (2025) reveals that while counter-stereotypes and non-stereotypes are present, the overall influence of traditional gender stereotypes remains significant, making it difficult for the educators to fully deconstruct these biases.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals striking similarities regarding the perception of gender education across the sub-dimension of both Assamese and English-medium preschool teachers, as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. The findings reveal a compelling picture of gender education among preschool teachers in both Assamese and English mediums. Notably, these educators show a pronounced perception of gender roles, particularly in “Gender in play and literature”. Across both mediums, educators demonstrated implicit reinforcement of gender norms, particularly in play activities, career expectations, and classroom interactions. However, a growing awareness of gender equity was also evident, suggesting shifts in teaching practices. This highlights a significant tendency to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes through play and storytelling, pointing to a more conservative and less progressive outlook on gender roles. For example, boys are encouraged to engage in activities that promote physical strength and risk-taking. This continuation of stereotypes aligns with

Bandura’s Social Learning Theory which suggests that children acquire knowledge by observing the behaviors in their surroundings that can significantly impact the children understanding of gender roles (Saka 2025). It indicates the potential for children to adopt societal gender norms as modelled by their teachers. Studies also claimed that although Bandura’s theory emphasises the possibility of positive learning through observation, it may also anticipate the transmission of negative behaviors including violence and aggression (Bastan and Dölek 2023). Moreover, the perception of gender within educational curricula remains an important issue. Wang (2024) examined early childhood educators’ engagement with STEM play and found that while educators valued equal participation, they failed to actively challenge ingrained gender stereotypes. This mirrors the results from this study, where Assamese and English medium teachers broadly rejected gender biases in STEM subjects but still expressed implicit stereotypes regarding boys’ natural inclination toward science and technology. Furthermore, both groups exhibit similarly high scores in the sub-dimensions of “Gender in society” and “Gender in traditional roles”. This suggests that their understanding of gender is deeply rooted in conventional social norms, which may hinder the advancement of equality. In contrast, the sub-dimension of “Gender beliefs and attitudes” reflects the lowest perception among teachers. This indicates a more progressive view, showcasing a readiness to challenge and redefine outdated gender norms. Studies revealed that educational initiatives incorporating gender studies into the curricula are crucial in promoting understanding of gender equity and engaging in gender transformative dialogue enable in recognition of unconscious biases leading to social change (Tamunomiegbam and Arin-

ze 2024; Dunson 2024). It outlines the opportunity to promote a more inclusive framework for gender education through the implementation of structured training on gender-sensitive teaching practices, thereby contributing to a more equitable future. Filipovic (2018) previously emphasized the impact of gender patterns in early childhood education, further highlighting how biases in media shape children's worldviews. To gain deeper insights, further analysis of the statements within each sub-dimension was conducted, and the discussion was done critically with recent studies.

First Sub-dimension: Gender Beliefs and Attitudes

Statement 1: Girls are nurturing and empathetic

The majority of the respondents from both Assamese medium preschools (94%) and English medium preschools (96%) agreed with this statement, with a minimal disagreement of 2 percent in each medium. The strong agreement indicates adherence to traditional gender stereotypes, portraying girls as naturally nurturing and empathetic. As noted by Löffler and Greitemeyer (2023), such stereotypes motivate women to exhibit themselves as more empathetic than men, reflecting societal expectations rather than innate traits. This further highlights the need for sensitisation to challenge these perceptions.

Statement 2: Boys are independent and adventurous

The majority of the respondents from both Assamese medium preschools (82%) and English medium preschools (80%) agreed with this statement, reflecting a belief that boys are naturally independent and adventurous. A higher percentage of Assamese medium respondents (16%) were undecided compared to English medium respondents (12%). This agreement highlights stereotypical views that impose gender-based expectations, underscoring the need for nuanced approaches in early childhood education to challenge such biases.

Statement 3: Boys are expected to be the primary breadwinners in a family

Most of the respondents from Assamese medium preschools (70%) agreed with this state-

ment. A study found that many societies, like India, promote the male breadwinner paradigm, restricting women's employment opportunities and reinforcing patriarchal systems (Appalla and Pellissery 2020). The disagreement percentage of English medium respondents (54%) is higher, compared to 26 percent of Assamese medium respondents. The higher disagreement among English medium respondents indicates a more progressive view that challenges the traditional notion of boys as primary breadwinners.

Statement 4: Girls should learn to take care of others than to be assertive

Most of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (78%) and English medium preschools (84%) disagreed with this statement. The agreement percentage is higher among Assamese medium respondents (18%), compared to 12 percent of English medium respondents. The widespread disagreement reflects a positive perception, challenging the traditional belief that girls should prioritise caregiving over assertiveness. This finding indicates progress toward fostering more equitable gender attitudes among the respondents.

Statement 5: Girls easily tend to express their emotions and seek help

In this statement, agreement percentage is higher among the English medium respondents (58%) than Assamese medium respondents (42%), with disagreement more prevalent among Assamese medium respondents (46%) compared to English medium respondents (32%). Agreement with this statement reinforces the stereotype that girls are naturally more expressive and help-seeking, while disagreement reflects a more balanced perspective. The differences between both mediums of instruction suggest varying exposure to discussions on emotional expression and its association with gender.

Statement 6: Boys are expected to express a full range of emotions

The agreement percentage with this statement is limited among Assamese medium respondents (16%) and English medium respondents

(22%), while disagreement is notably high in both Assamese medium preschools (76%) and English medium preschools (78%). As the statement measures a positive perspective, the agreement reflects a progressive view. The high percentages of disagreement indicate restrictive emotional norms for boys, suggesting they are not encouraged to express a full range of emotions. Plutov (2023) also noted that social stigma deters boys from seeking help, emphasising gender disparities in emotional openness. The results highlight the importance of implementing strategies to encourage emotional expression among boys in early childhood.

Second Sub-dimension: Gender Traditional Roles

Statement 7: Girls excel in literary subjects more than boys

In this statement, agreement is higher among English medium respondents (62%) compared to Assamese medium respondents (56%), reflecting a stereotypical belief that girls perform better in literary subjects. Disagreement is more pronounced among Assamese medium respondents (34%) than English medium respondents (24%), indicating a relatively stronger rejection of this perception. Higher negative perception highlights the need for sensitisation to promote a gender-neutral perspective on academic capabilities.

Statement 8: Boys excel in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects more than girls

Most of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (74%) and English medium preschools (60%) disagreed with this statement, suggesting a gender-neutral perception in subject selection. Agreement is higher among English medium respondents (28%) compared to Assamese medium respondents (18%), indicating that the stereotype is more prevalent in English medium settings. Research shows that despite girls' comparable or superior performance to boys in science, they remain underrepresented in certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields due to masculine cultural norms, limited early exposure, and

gender disparities in self-efficacy (Cheryan et al. 2017; Stoet and Geary 2018). These findings emphasise the importance of challenging gendered expectations in academic subjects.

Statement 9: Girls should be empowered to pursue non-traditional career paths

As a positive statement, the majority of respondents from both Assamese medium preschools (86%) and English medium preschools (74%) exhibit high agreement, reflecting a positive perception and strong advocacy for girls' empowerment. The disagreement percentage is higher among English medium respondents (14%) than Assamese medium respondents (12%). The higher agreement indicates progressive thinking and support for breaking traditional barriers, and disagreement could point to varying cultural and societal attitudes.

Statement 10: Boys should be taught to be assertive and take charge in social situations

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (90%) and English medium respondents (76%) agreed with this statement, reflecting adherence to traditional views of masculinity. Higher disagreement among English medium respondents (20%) than among Assamese medium respondents (6%) suggests a greater openness to alternative views on masculinity.

Statement 11: Girls should conform to traditional feminine norms, such as being shy, and sensitive

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (84%) and English medium preschools (80%) disagreed with this statement, reflecting rejection of traditional feminine norms. Vibal et al. (2024) found that the existence of stereotypes embodying feminine traits like modesty and relational involvement could hinder a girl's personal growth and self-expression. A higher agreement among English medium respondents (20%) than among Assamese medium respondents (10%) indicates that traditional views persist more strongly in this group. The findings show progress in challeng-

ing outdated norms, but more work is needed to address residual biases.

Statement 12: Children who do not conform to traditional gender roles are confused and need to be corrected

Most of the respondents agreed with this statement, with higher agreement among Assamese medium respondents (66%) than English medium respondents (54%), reflecting stronger adherence to traditional gender roles in the Assamese medium respondents. 28 percent of Assamese medium respondents and 22 percent of English medium respondents show indecisiveness towards the statement. The data underscores the need for education to normalise non-conformity and promote inclusivity. Perry et al. (2019) revealed that children may experience considerable distress due to pressure to conform to gender norms, as gender contentment strongly influences the adoption of gender-typed behavior among children.

Third Sub-dimension: Gender in Play and Literature

Statement 13: All superheroes in stories should be male characters

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (96%) and English medium preschools (88%) disagreed with this statement, reflecting a strong rejection of portraying only males as superheroes. However, undecided responses with 2 percent of Assamese medium respondents and 8 percent of English medium respondents suggest that some ambiguity persists. This indicates progress in recognising the importance of representing gender diversity in literature. Ismail (2023) found that fairy tales often portray male characters as active heroes and females as passive and dependent. To counter this, preschool teachers may use diverse stories with balanced gender roles, challenging the traditional narratives.

Statement 14: Fairy tales with male heroes and females being helpless, like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, should be excluded

The equal agreement of 50 percent each among both Assamese and English medium re-

spondents reflects a shared recognition of the need to challenge gendered narratives in literature. Higher disagreement among English medium respondents (36%) than among Assamese medium respondents (24%) suggests resistance to excluding traditional stories, possibly due to cultural attachment. The findings highlight the need for balanced storytelling including different perspectives on gender. Mardani and Christanti (2024) found that portraying female characters as weak might contribute to the “Cinderella Complex”, where women fear independence and seek out masculine figures for validation.

Statement 15: Music and dramatic games are suitable for girls

In this statement, agreement is higher among Assamese medium respondents (60%) compared to English medium respondents (44%), reflecting a stronger belief in traditional gender roles in play. Disagreement is more prominent in English medium preschools (48%) than in Assamese medium preschools (32%), indicating greater openness to challenging stereotypes. These findings emphasise the importance of promoting gender-neutral play. To address this, teachers should equip themselves with a more gender-sensitised teaching process.

Statement 16: Boys are encouraged to play with toys and engage in activities that promote risk-taking, physical strength, and competitiveness

Most of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (80%) and English medium preschools (70%) agreed with the statement. The disagreement percentage is higher among English medium respondents (22%), compared to Assamese medium respondents (20%). Soviè and Hus (2015) reveal that male characters in texts are frequently portrayed as active participants in activities such as playing and exploring, while female characters are often depicted in nurturing roles, such as caring for dolls or cooking. The findings reflect the reinforcement of traditional masculine traits and highlight the need to redefine gender expectations in childhood activities.

Statement 17: Girls should be given the roles of ‘teacher’ or ‘nurse’ and boys should be given the roles of ‘soldier’ or ‘engineer’ in distribution of roles in activities

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium respondents (86%) and English medium respondents (74%) disagreed with this statement, reflecting the rejection of rigid gender roles. The agreement percentage is higher among English medium respondents (16%) than among Assamese medium respondents (12%), suggesting greater persistence of such stereotypes. This indicates progress but calls for continued efforts to dismantle occupational gender norms. The exposure to counter stereotypical role models can help buffer the impact of gender stereotypes, encouraging both genders to pursue a broader range of professions (Olsson and Martiny 2018).

Statement 18: Boys who play with dolls or pretend to cook should be treated negatively

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (94%) and English medium preschools (88%) show disagreement, reflecting a positive shift in attitudes. A slightly higher agreement in the English medium preschools (6%) than in the Assamese medium preschools (2%) suggests residual bias that needs to be addressed. The findings show progress in challenging gendered expectations in play. Lynch (2015) found that teachers may inadvertently reinforce gender biases by encouraging boys to participate in exclusively male play, inhibiting their emotional and social development.

Statement 19: Girls are encouraged to play with dolls and engage in activities centered around caregiving and domestic roles

The high disagreement among Assamese medium respondents (66%) compared to English medium respondents (48%) reflects a stronger rejection of this perception in the Assamese medium preschools. Respondents in favour of this statement are higher in English medium preschools (34%) than in Assamese medium preschools (28%), reflecting the presence of gendered play. This underscores the importance of

promoting diverse play experiences for all children. Hodgins (2014) reveals that dolls are historically associated with gender discourses of care, reinforcing societal expectations for girls to adopt nurturing roles.

Fourth Sub-dimension: Gender in Society

Statement 20: There should be no distinction between the girls’ and the boys’ behaviour

Most of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (70%) and English medium preschools (74%) agreed with this positive statement, reflecting a progressive attitude towards gender equality. However, 20 percent of respondents in both Assamese and English medium preschools disagree with the statement, possibly due to cultural or traditional beliefs that endorse differentiated behaviours for boys and girls.

Statement 21: Boys should conform to traditional masculine norms, such as being tough, aggressive, and dominant

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (96%) and English medium preschools (76%) disagreed with this statement, indicating widespread rejection of traditional masculine stereotypes. However, a small percentage of English medium respondents (18%) agree with the statement, compared to Assamese medium respondents (2%). This discrepancy may reflect differences in cultural influences or exposure to evolving gender norms between the groups. Caraballo (2023) revealed that conventional masculinity is connected to poor mental health outcomes, with boys enduring mockery for nonconformity, resulting in higher anxiety and depression.

Statement 22: Independent girls tend to be rebellious and difficult to control

The disagreement with this statement is higher among Assamese medium respondents (78%) compared to English medium respondents (58%), indicating a more positive perception. The agreement percentage is higher among English medium respondents (30%) compared to Assa-

mese medium respondents (16%). The findings suggest that while both groups recognise the value of independence in girls, cultural biases might still influence perceptions of a few of their behaviours.

Statement 23: Boys need more nutritious food since they tend to be more physically active than girls

The majority of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (80%) and English medium preschools (76%) disagreed with this statement, reflecting an awareness of the importance of equal nutritional needs regardless of gender. However, agreement among the respondents of English medium preschools (20%) and Assamese medium preschools (18%), hints at lingering biases about boys' physical activity and dietary requirements.

Statement 24: It is easier for girls to adapt to the rules than boys

Most of the respondents of both Assamese medium preschools (60%) and English medium respondents (64%) agreed with this statement. It might be because of their own traditional belief in the feminine qualities of adapting rules. However, a substantial proportion of respondents in both Assamese medium respondents (34%) and English medium respondents (24%) disagree, indicating that a considerable number of respondents recognise that adaptability is not inherently gendered. The data reflects nuanced views about behavioural expectations for boys and girls.

Statement 25: Girls cannot make good decisions

The majority of the respondents in both Assamese medium preschools (88%) and English medium preschools (86%) disagree with this statement, indicating strong support for girls' decision-making abilities. Agreement with this statement is minimal, with 8 percent of respondents in both the Assamese and English medium respondents, demonstrating a positive shift in attitudes toward gender competence and capabilities. Tsehay (2020) found that girls are fre-

quently seen as incapable owing to socio-cultural beliefs, yet women in decision-making responsibilities display logic and dedication.

The findings reveal that preschool teachers of both Assamese and English medium showed a mixed adherence to traditional stereotypes alongside some progressive shifts. The respondents of both the mediums of instruction reject restrictive feminine stereotypes and support girls' empowerment in non-traditional careers, yet some disparities remain in the perception of boys' emotional expression. This aligns with Plutov (2023) on societal stigma deterring boys' emotional openness and extends Caraballo's (2023) findings linking conventional masculinity to poor mental health. Perry et al. (2019) discuss children's distress caused by the pressure to conform to gender norms, while Lynch (2015) pointed out that teachers' perpetuating stereotypes could limit emotional development, which aligns with the results of respondents' agreement of boys should be taught assertiveness. Another finding reveals that while most respondents rejected rigid occupational stereotypes, some residual biases persist, consistent with Hodgins' (2014) findings on toys reinforcing societal expectations. English medium respondents showed greater opposition to boys as primary breadwinners, aligning with Nugroho et al. (2022) research emphasizing gender-responsive curricula in early childhood development, and with Rozario's (2024) findings that English-medium teachers have more progressive attitudes toward gender disparities. This study underscores the need for continuous sensitization programs to ensure that gender education dismantles stereotypes rather than perpetuates it.

CONCLUSION

Gender education in the early childhood period is essential in shaping children's perceptions regarding gender and creating an inclusive and equitable society. This study's findings reveal that Assamese and English medium preschool teachers hold varying degrees of gender-stereotyped beliefs across several areas, including gender beliefs and attitudes, gender in traditional roles, gender in play and literature, and gender in society. While some teachers ex-

press progressive views, many still reinforce traditional stereotypes, such as the belief that boys excel in STEM while girls are better at literary studies. These results emphasise the importance of implementing gender-sensitive policies and inclusive teaching methods to confront biases, as children may continue to hold these negative views if they are not adequately addressed. Encouraging teachers to adopt gender-responsive methods can help reduce discrimination and create equitable learning environments. Equipping young learners with a gender-neutral education is crucial for promoting gender equality and social equity in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative to encourage the male demographic to pursue careers in preschool education to integrate diverse perspectives on gender education. Furthermore, additional research is necessary to investigate gender education concerning other areas of gender bias, including sports and nutrition. By focusing on these domains, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender-related issues and promote equitable practices across various sectors.

LIMITATIONS

The respondents in this study were only female, as only female teachers were allotted at the preschool level. It limits the diversity of the sample in terms of male and third gender. The lack of perspectives of other gender categories may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings on gender education in preschool settings.

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Appendix I: Perception on gender education

		Assamese medium respondents		English medium respondents		
S. No.	Statements	Category	f	%	f	%
Sub-dimension 1: Gender Beliefs and Attitudes						
1.	Girls are nurturing and empathetic.	Disagree	1	2	1	2
		Undecided	2	4	1	2
		Agree	47	94	48	96
2.	Boys are independent and adventurous.	Disagree	1	2	4	8
		Undecided	8	16	6	12
		Agree	41	82	40	80
3.	Boys are expected to be the primary breadwinners in a family.	Disagree	13	26	27	54
		Undecided	3	6	3	6
		Agree	35	70	20	40
4.	Girls should learn to take care of others than to be assertive.	Disagree	39	78	42	84
		Undecided	2	4	2	4
		Agree	9	18	6	12
5.	Girls easily tend to express their emotions and seek help.	Disagree	23	46	16	32
		Undecided	6	12	5	10
		Agree	21	42	29	58
6.	Boys are expected to express a full range of emotions.	Disagree	38	76	28	56
		Undecided	4	8	11	22
		Agree	8	16	11	22
Sub-dimension 2: Gender Traditional Roles						
7.	Girls excel in literary subjects more than boys.	Disagree	17	34	12	24
		Undecided	5	10	7	14
		Agree	28	56	31	62
8.	Boys excel in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects more than girls.	Disagree	37	74	30	60
		Undecided	4	8	6	12
		Agree	9	18	14	28
9.	Girls should be empowered to pursue non-traditional career paths.	Disagree	6	12	7	14
		Undecided	1	2	6	12
		Agree	43	86	37	74
10.	Boys should be taught to be assertive and take charge in social situations.	Disagree	3	6	10	20
		Undecided	2	4	2	4
		Agree	45	90	38	76
11.	Girls should conform to traditional feminine norms, such as being shy, and sensitive.	Disagree	42	84	40	80
		Undecided	3	6	0	0
		Agree	5	10	10	20
12.	Children who do not conform to traditional gender roles are confused and need to be corrected.	Disagree	4	8	12	24
		Undecided	14	28	11	22
		Agree	33	66	27	54
Sub-dimension 3: Gender in Play and Literature						
13.	All superheroes in stories should be male characters.	Disagree	48	96	44	88
		Undecided	1	2	4	8
		Agree	1	2	2	4
14.	Fairy tales with male heroes and females being helpless, like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, should be excluded.	Disagree	12	24	18	36
		Undecided	13	26	7	14
		Agree	25	50	25	50
15.	Music and dramatic games are suitable for girls.	Disagree	16	32	24	48
		Undecided	4	8	4	8
		Agree	30	60	22	44
16.	Boys are encouraged to play with toys and engage in activities that promote risk-taking, physical strength, and competitiveness.	Disagree	10	20	11	22
		Undecided	0	0	4	8
		Agree	40	80	35	70
17.	Girls should be given the roles of ‘teacher’ or ‘nurse’ and boys should be given the roles of ‘soldier’ or ‘engineer’ in distribution of roles in activities.	Disagree	43	86	37	74
		Undecided	1	2	5	10
		Agree	6	12	8	16

Appendix I: Contd...

S. No.	Statements	Category	Assamese medium respondents		English medium respondents	
			f	%	f	%
18.	Boys who play with dolls or pretend to cook should be treated negatively.	Disagree	47	94	44	88
		Undecided	2	4	3	6
		Agree	1	2	3	6
19.	Girls are encouraged to play with dolls and engage in activities centered around caregiving and domestic roles.	Disagree	33	66	24	48
		Undecided	3	6	9	18
		Agree	14	28	17	34
<i>Sub-dimension 4: Gender in Society</i>						
20.	There should be no distinction between the girls' and the boys' behaviour.	Disagree	10	20	10	20
		Undecided	5	10	3	6
		Agree	35	70	37	74
21.	Boys should conform to traditional masculine norms, such as being tough, aggressive and dominant.	Disagree	48	96	38	76
		Undecided	1	2	3	6
		Agree	1	2	9	18
22.	Independent girls tend to be rebellious and difficult to control.	Disagree	39	78	29	58
		Undecided	3	6	6	12
		Agree	8	16	15	30
23.	Boys need more nutritious food since they tend to be more physically active than girls.	Disagree	40	80	38	76
		Undecided	1	2	2	4
		Agree	9	18	10	20
24.	It is easier for girls to adapt to the rules than boys.	Disagree	17	34	12	24
		Undecided	3	6	6	12
		Agree	30	60	32	64
25.	Girls cannot make good decisions.	Disagree	44	88	43	86
		Undecided	2	4	3	6
		Agree	4	8	4	8