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Gender stereotyping and teacher collegiality: A lesson study approach

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Most novice teachers enter the schooling system lacking confidence, with low levels of pedagogical content knowledge and teaching competence, coupled with a lack of gender-inclusive school practices. This study is located within the interpretivism paradigm and used interviewing techniques to elicit data from twelve commerce teachers selected from three Limpopo secondary schools. The study utilizes their narratives to reflect on the views and lived experiences of novice commerce teachers on gender stereotyping and teacher collegiality using a Lesson Study Approach (LSA). Findings identified wrongful and harmful gender stereotypes, namely women discrimination based on 'woman inferiority to man in decision making;' and 'woman relegation to care work' that exert an impact on the attainment of value-added benefits of lesson study and teacher collegiality. It was further found that the LSA promotes teacher collegiality and teacher professional learning. LSA also improves teaching practice and skills. In conclusion, this study recommends that schools be encouraged to address gender equality by conscientizing teachers of cultural gender stereotypes. In that regard, schools could adopt LSA to further promote teacher collegiality and professional learning.

Key words: Lesson study approach, novice teacher, collaborative learning, teacher collegiality, teachers' professional learning.

INTRODUCTION

"In spite of advances in recognizing that girls and boys, and women and men, do not have to be bounded by traditional roles, gender stereotypes persist in education and beyond" (Brussino and McBrien, 2022).

The study investigated the problem of gender stereotyping and discrimination faced by novice commercial teachers when trying to build teacher collegiality, collaboration, and working relationships required for their professional learning and teacher development. The research findings of Simmonds (2017:16) show that "some teachers still experience their school contexts as pervaded with patriarchy and sexism, and often fear confronting these traditional discourses." Simmons's study identifies two problem areas, firstly, the prevalence of patriarchy and sexism indicates that gender stereotyping and discrimination exist in schools. Secondly, fear of confronting patriarchy and sexism is a problem area that women folk in schools encounter systemically.

A gap in the literature shows less concern for

advocating for parity and equality for women teachers than for promoting gender equity as a necessary condition for social justice and social change (Simmons, 2017; Kuteesa et al., 2024). Furthermore, a research gap was further identified by McQuillan and Leininger (2023:162), showing that "few educators receive training on gender-inclusive school practices." These patriarchal and sexist practices have career progression implications by providing girls and women "a thicker glass ceiling than boys and men and lower chances for career advancement (Van and Derks, 2022).

The primary objective of this paper is to reflect on gender stereotyping and teacher collegiality among novice commerce teachers using a Lesson Study Approach (LSA). Aimah et al. (2023) argue that LSA improves the quality of teaching and assessment by fostering teaching skills and enhancing pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The LSA offers collaborative and hands-on activities that engage curriculum, disciplinary content, and pedagogy, and showcase teaching-in-process. LSA can be used as an orientation for novice teachers and induction processes aimed at improving teaching.

Research shows that some public-school teachers lack teaching skills, content, and pedagogical knowledge (Venkat and Spaull, 2015). In support, Palaniandy (2017) identifies a lack of fundamental pedagogical skills among South African novice teachers, calling for intervention and professional attention. Research further shows that most novice teachers enter the schooling system lacking confidence, with low levels of pedagogical content knowledge and teaching competence (Amador et al., 2022).

Apart from teaching challenges and lack of PCK, novice teachers are also exposed to challenges that are beyond their control such as negative teacher attitudes (Makhananesa and Sepeng, 2022). They encounter challenges in the "continuity of the professional program, including the high cost of training" (Makoa and Segalo (2021:930) and "curriculum change, medium of instruction, overcrowded classrooms, discipline and lack of resources" (Du Plessis and Letshwene, 2020).

One study that examined South African novice teacher's resilience in coping with teaching challenges, discipline problems, and a lack of guidance and counseling were critical indicators of the hurdles teachers encounter (Moen et al., 2024). The LSA can effect change amongst South African teachers and improve their teaching skills and PCK. This approach can be used to perfect teachers' teaching skills that could resolve classroom discipline problems.

A lack of teaching skills, content, and pedagogical skills is a blemish leveled on novice teachers. In circumventing this blame, Bertram (2023:11) proposes that the curriculum in teacher education should develop and inculcate "teachers'' ethical commitment, professional identity, competencies, and professional knowledge and

in providing practical teaching experiences in different schools."

Damons and Cherrington (2020) suggest that schools and communities need to adopt holistic development of schools and teacher professional learning as recommended in organizational theory. The lesson study approach has the capacity to influence school and well-being as it exerts an impact on teaching practice and student outcomes (Damons and Cherrington, 2020).

This study reiterates and augments the research question raised by Mateo-Orcajada et al. (2021) on whether teacher education curriculum succeeds in overcoming gender stereotypes, developing teacher professional learning spaces, teacher collegiality, and collaboration. The study was driven by the main research question, '*What gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping need to be addressed for the effectiveness of a lesson study approach?*' The secondary research question was, '*What are the novice Commerce teachers' views and reflections on their lived experiences of using LSA in teaching?*'

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping

Exploring the questions on the meanings of stereotypes, gender stereotypes, and gender stereotyping. Mateo-Orcajada et al. (2021) define stereotypes as shared beliefs regarding personal characteristics, usually personal traits, behaviors, or group behaviors. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2013:21) gender stereotyping can be defined as "the practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of their membership in the social group of women or men." In the same report, gender stereotype is defined as a "generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women" (OHCHR, 2013:21).

For example, 'care work' such as teaching and nursing are sex-role stereotypes and stereotyping (Teresa-Morales et al., 2022) that limit girls' and women's capacity to enter into hard science and law jobs. There is a need for society and education systems to address and eliminate gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping in favor of gender equality.

Gender stereotyping is shaped by the possession of certain stereotypes that consequently have an impact on teacher interaction and the success of school projects. Gender stereotypes can affect teacher collegiality which also ultimately impedes the success of the lesson study. Research shows the prevalence of socio-economic gender stereotyping and discrimination, with husbands as breadwinners expecting wives to remain home doing

housework as primary caretakers despite wives having tertiary education degrees (Mulumeoderhwa, 2022). To address the challenges associated with gender stereotyping and discrimination and carve spaces for gender equality and social justice, Omojemite et al. (2024:77) suggest holistic approaches that are derived from "the broad intersection of power, ideology, and social" transformation.

Gender stereotyping that is entrenched through patriarchal practices, influenced by societal, cultural, and religious stereotypes remains a worrying concern as women are still referred to as caregivers in workplaces (Mulumeoderhwa, 2022). Akinola and Naidoo's (2024) study exposes this gender stereotyping further, by showing that appointments to educational leadership posts are gender discriminatory. Gender bias, disrespect, family-related challenges, and inequality persist within the workplace, affecting interactions with colleagues and school governing bodies. An integrated approach that generates gender-equitable behaviors is needed to eliminate gender stereotyping in society (Mhlanga and Goronga, 2024; Farnworth et al., 2023).

Teacher collegiality

The origin of the word collegiality dates to 1885, and it refers to the cooperative interaction between colleagues (Random House Kleinerman Webster's College Dictionary, 2010). Teacher collegiality entails an academic collaborative relationship that exists among teachers, and it has the capacity to create professional learning and socialize novices into the teaching profession. Research shows that teacher collegiality facilitates the sharing of specialized content knowledge and ideas, thereby contributing to teacher's professional learning (Zulu and Bertram, 2019).

Sürmeli et al. (2024:1) aver that teacher collegiality and collaboration "foster teachers' professional identity and social belonging through improving teaching practice, teacher job satisfaction and a nurturing school culture. "In addition, Owusu-Agyeman (2024:1) identifies a link between teacher collegiality and "career advising on research, teaching and learning and the intentions of novice teachers to stay in the academic profession."

It is further emphasized that teacher collegiality creates space for the sharing of pedagogic content knowledge, information, and resources required for effective teaching (Lucenario et al., 2016). Research identifies teacher collegiality and collaborative learning as powerful tools to foster improvement in teaching (Teledahl et al., 2024).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is located within the interpretivist phenomenology paradigm by capturing the lived experiences of participants on gender stereotyping,

teacher collegiality, and lesson study phenomena from the "perspective of how people interpret and attribute meanings to their existence" (Frechette et al., 2020:1). Furthermore, interpretive phenomenological research offers methodological and philosophical underpinnings to understand social reality through participants' subjective experiences (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022). This study adopted a qualitative case study methodology wherein four schools were conveniently sampled from secondary schools in Limpopo Province. Three commerce teachers were purposively selected from each school to make a sample size of twelve. This sample of commerce teachers comprised twelve males and twelve females.

One-to-one interviews were conducted to elicit qualitative data on the participants' lived experiences within their school context. Data was analyzed using thematic and narrative analysis. Three themes were identified, and in the main, the findings are presented through thick descriptions. The narrative analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the "meanings of stories as an expression of participants' lived experiences" (Pino and Adu, 2022:1). Ethical clearance was sought from the university, as the study was a part of my doctoral study, license TREC/56/2016: PG.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Two main themes emerged from the data collected using interviews, namely, the prevalence of gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping, and how LSA generates teacher professional learning.

The prevalence of gender stereotyping

The study identified the prevalence of workplace gender stereotyping and discrimination, wherein female teachers' suggestions and decisions are surpassed by those of male counterparts. It was unfortunate to find some female teachers promote it, instead of uprooting its root causes and seeking strategies for its elimination. A lack of confidence and willpower to contest and address these gender stereotyping and discrimination practices actually promotes and perpetuates their occurrence.

The narratives that capture lived experiences verbatim were derived from the research question, "What are gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping that need to be addressed for the effectiveness of a lesson study approach?" The significance of using the teller-informant view lies in its capacity to reveal the "complexity of human experience and to understand how people make sense of their lives within social, cultural, and historical contexts" (Sharp et al., 2019:861).

The narrative from some teachers illustrates the prevalence of gender stereotyping that reflects African cultural, social, and religious gender stereotypes, that are also entrenched within patriarchal systems.

Female teacher 6 explains '*I was very annoyed and angry when I volunteered to be a chairperson for a lesson study group in the school and was turned off and a male teacher was suggested. The reason is that I am a woman. I am [seen as] inferior, and my place is child-rearing and cooking in the kitchen. Female teachers experience a lot of such gender discrimination that is caused by two main gender stereotypes which my principal always reminds us about'.*

Female teacher 9 highlights that '*Male Teacher Y suggests that keeping records and follow-up of students with behavior or discipline issues should be assigned to female teachers because they are good caregivers. I raised my concern, that we need to be assigned duties equally without looking at gender. One of my female colleagues Ms A just brushed off my case; and said, are you anti-African in culture? I quote, "I will do it as this is a woman's duty, not a man's duty." It seemed everybody was content, or those who were not, did not raise their concerns. From this point, I realized that the majority of the group members were ignorant or were not enlightened on issues of gender stereotypes and gender equality'.*

The prevalence of this gender stereotyping is caused by cultural and societal gender stereotyping that ascribes inferior status to women. On the whole, female teachers are categorized as inferior to men, and their roles are child-rearing and cooking in the kitchen. This study corroborates Cadinu et al. (2013) who identified gender inequality as a phenomenon that pervasively perceives a woman as a low-status gender. African culture, religion, and patriarchy promote cultural practices that hinder women from participating fully in economic and political affairs.

This harmful gender stereotyping is caused by the gender stereotype that women are made for care work. This 'care work' stereotype has cost women dearly as they generally fall into the trap of poverty and gender violence. Data identified a high level of ignorance and negative inclinations on addressing gender inequality. Gender stereotyping is prevalent in education spaces; and men and women need to initiate processes that bring social transformation by uprooting cultural, societal, and religious gender stereotypes.

Unfortunately, a lesson study group that offers teacher professional development spaces is marred by gender stereotyping and discrimination that privileges male teachers at the expense of female teachers. Therefore, a good lesson study venture with positive intentions fails to take root because, by its design, it requires teacher collegiality and collaboration.

The lesson study approach improves teacher collegiality and teachers' professional learning

This segment of the study sought to answer the question,

"*What are novice Commerce teachers' views and reflections on their lived experiences of using the lesson study approach to teaching''?* The research participants indicated that the lesson study approach could be used as a strategy to improve their professional learning, teacher collegiality, and collaboration. The case schools show how a lesson study can be used to address challenges related to low educational output due to a lack of effective teachers' professional learning. The study by Elkomy and Elkhaial (2022) that focused on the use of the lesson study approach in promoting teacher professional development found that LSA provides "a rich context for experiential learning and assisted in teachers' collegiality and collaboration''. This study supports Elkomy and Elkhaial (2022) about lesson study in promoting teacher collegiality and collaboration.

Teacher participant 3 highlights "*I did not know of a lesson study approach until it was introduced by a group of university students who were doing 'work integrated learning' (WIL) in the school. Since then, I know and understand what is expected of me, when I engage in a lesson study approach. I derive benefits such as improved teaching competencies and practice and socialization skills. I learned new methodologies from pre-service teachers through the LSA.*"

Teacher participant 12 explains "*I like to engage in a lesson study because I learn much from these exercises. I find it improves my relationship with other teachers. I am positive that a LSA can transform my teaching practice and our schools to do better. It has the capacity to promote the three cornerstones of student success, namely teaching, learning, and assessment.*"

Teacher 10 submitted *that "I have since changed my perception and attitude towards teaching, from the time the school introduced a lesson study. There was work stress mounting every day when at school and in the classroom before I was exposed to lesson study. I planned to quit teaching because I felt like I was getting frustrated and confused every day of my teaching career. The introduction of lesson study changed how I teach, assess, and relate to learners and other teachers. Truly, LSA changed my weaknesses caused by my negative perceptions and attitudes; and these were transformed into breakthroughs in the prospects of becoming a great teacher. Indeed, lesson study promotes teachers' collaboration and collegiality.*"

Frustration and confusion that novice teachers face every day in their workplaces, specifically in lesson planning and presentation, addressing classroom management issues require the intervention of an LSA, rather than staffroom gossip, staff or SGB meetings, workshops, or seminars. Lesson study encourages teacher collaboration and collegiality. This study is in line with Chichibu et al. (2019) who also found that lesson study promotes teacher collegiality and collaborative learning. It is an approach that reflects one's ability to overcome challenges related to classroom management

and effective teaching and assessment. LSA alleviates teachers' situation of stress, and they begin to notice new opportunities to become great teachers. Negative perceptions and attitudes are changed into enjoyable moments of daily encounters with learners and commerce subject content. The four schools in this study promote the lesson study approach because of its power to promote teachers' professional learning through peer mentoring and offering opportunities for communities of practice (Elkomy and Elkhaial, 2022). Instead of offering a 'one-size fits all' approach that is not responsive to teachers' needs, LSA generates spaces for productive conversations.

In summary, this study contributes to the scholarship of teaching and learning, teacher professional learning, and teacher collegiality. Furthermore, the field of education benefits through the exploration of gender stereotypes and the use of lesson study to mitigate this challenge in Limpopo schools. Lesson study serves as the answer to the research question asked by Cerbin and Kopp (2006:250) which is "How can teachers improve teaching practice and skill in their fields and, in the process, contribute to the formation of a professional knowledge base?"

The prevalence of gender stereotyping impedes the effectiveness of the LSA, and its value-added benefits in teacher professional learning. The prevalence of gender stereotypes is caused by cultural, societal, and religious stereotypes that compromise the positive effects of the lesson study approach and the belief that women are inferior to men and that their roles are child-rearing and cooking in the kitchen (Marusic, 2016).

A discourse on gender stereotypes and discrimination has been a focus of African scholars; and scholars from elsewhere who "portray the struggles, resilience, and agency of women in navigating societal and workplace expectations, patriarchal structures, and cultural barriers preventing empowerment" (Munyangeyo, 2023).

The prevalence of wrongful and harmful gender stereotypes influences the activities of the lesson study, and teacher collegiality in the main. Wrongful gender stereotypes of 'woman is inferior to man' manifested itself as gender discrimination and violation of the affected teacher's human rights (OHCHR, 2013). This wrongful gender stereotype and women discrimination reduce the chances of attaining the value-added benefits of using an LSA, such as improving teacher collegiality, improving teaching practice through experimenting with the best teaching methods, and improving teacher professional learning (Zulu and Bertram, 2019). The prevalence of gender stereotypes, teachers' experiences, and reflection on lesson study had effects on novice teachers who had excellent encounters with the lesson study approach leading to teacher professional learning among themselves if it is continuously used. The LSA is regarded as a strategy that improves teaching practice and skills, socialization skills, and teacher professional learning (Zulu and Bertram, 2019).

In order to uproot gender stereotyping, there is a need for the education system, and teacher education in particular, to formulate a well-thought curriculum that addresses cultural, societal, and religious gender stereotypes that perpetuate male domination and patriarchy in workplaces and schools in particular. It is the responsibility of males and females to develop the courage to stop gender stereotyping that prevails in their workplaces. The uprooting of gender stereotyping and discrimination could cease to exist if teachers of all sexes change their negative attitude toward its prevalence.

The problem starts with humanity's understanding that women are a low-status gender that cannot be granted space to showcase their caring, compassion, and leadership characteristics, in their society and workplaces *(Cadinu et al., 2013:582).*

Although there is a prevalence of gender stereotyping, teachers were positive about LSA and identified value-added benefits of its use. The LSA could be used as a strategy to improve teacher collegiality and collaboration, improve teaching and assessment competencies and practice, upgrade teaching and social skills, for teacher professional learning, and offer novice teachers opportunities to become great teachers.

Educational implications of gender stereotyping and discrimination

Differential treatment

Teachers who hold traditional gender role attitudes may treat male and female pupils differently, giving boys more attention and support while discounting or undervaluing the contributions of girls. Students' performance may suffer as a result, particularly for girls in Mathematics and Science classes, and stereotypes may be strengthened. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022) advocates for teacher education that offers gender-neutral engagement strategies to address traditional gender roles. On the other hand, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2021) promotes equitable teacher-student interaction that positively impacts that promote girls' confidence and interest in school subjects (UNESCO, 2021).

Stereotype threat

Female teachers and female learners experience a high level of anxiety and fear in exploring their aptitudes and potential in their subjects due to unfavorable preconceptions and gender stereotyping. And the situation can be worsened by classroom dynamics and teachers' prejudices. This finding supports Peniel and

Zólyomi (2022:173) findings that identified "a tendency for females to experience higher foreign language anxiety, gender-related differences are not statistically significant". This study is in line with Andrews et al. (2022:1) who identified two main stereotype threats, firstly, that "boys and men are often considered to be more competent in the domains of mathematics and science than girls and women." and secondly, that women are schoolteachers and males are school superintendents.

Lack of awareness

It is possible that many educators are unaware of their own prejudices or how their behavior affects how pupils view gender roles. Despite admitting that preconceptions exist, they frequently do not put effective countermeasures into practice, therefore perpetuating the cycle of bias. Research shows that teachers often hold unconscious gender biases that affect their interactions with students (UNESCO, 2021). As a result, the OECD (2022) 'Strengthen through Diversity Project' found that teacher professional learning that focuses on bias awareness has the potential to help teachers create more equitable classroom environments.

Inconsistent colleague practices

An uneven learning environment might result from differences in teachers' attitudes and behaviors about gender roles. Students may become confused about appropriate behaviors and goals because of teachers who actively combat stereotypes while others promote them. This study is in line with McQuillan and Leininger (2023) who identified teachers who are convinced that the professional development training they received on gender issues and diversity has an impact on their increased capacity to create a safe educational environment.

Relational issues that affect teacher collegiality and collaboration

This study identified the impact of gender stereotyping and discrimination on building teacher relationships needed for teacher collegiality, collaboration, and professional learning. A lack of collegial relationships among teachers has a great bearing on student learning and success. The study by the OECD (2022) shows a positive impact of collegial relations and inclusivity on the attainment of shared professional goals, such as improving teaching practice, student learning, and success. In the same breath, UNESCO (2021) supports the use of teacher-professional learning on gender equity to strengthen teacher unity and consistency in applying inclusive practices.

Limited professional development

This study shows that gender stereotypes are frequently not sufficiently addressed in teacher preparation programs, leaving teachers unprepared to identify and successfully address these biases in the classroom. Teacher training, in-service teachers' training, and teacher professional development programs were not successful in addressing in preparing teachers to address gender stereotyping in schools as workplaces and as educational settings.

Conclusion

The study examined the views and lived experiences of pre-service commerce teachers on gender stereotyping and teacher collegiality using a lesson study approach. The study was driven by the main research question, 'What are gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping that need to be addressed for the effectiveness of a lesson study approach?' The study was underpinned by the interpretivism paradigm and used interviews as qualitative methods that collected data from twelve teachers sampled from three Limpopo secondary schools. The study emerged with two main research findings, namely, the prevalence of gender stereotypes in schools, and that the lesson study approach improves teacher collegiality and collaboration, and teacher professional learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To uproot gender stereotyping there is a need for South Africa's education system, and teacher education in particular, to formulate a well-thought curriculum that addresses cultural, societal, and religious gender stereotypes that perpetuate male domination and patriarchy in workplaces and schools in particular. This study recommends the eradication of gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping. This could be achieved through informed decision-making through capacity training of teachers on gender equality and stereotypes. This study encourages adopting a lesson study approach that promotes teacher collegiality in creating spaces for teacher professional learning through sharing pedagogic knowledge in commerce studies. In addition, the following recommendations are made.

To curb the problem of differential treatment among learners, the study recommends professional development programs that focus on educating teachers about implicit bias, gender stereotypes, and stereotyping and how they influence student learning and success.

Teachers' reflection exercises and workshops are needed to conscientize teachers of their actions and try to alter patterns that give preferential treatment to certain

students. Video analysis of classroom interactions can be used as the reflective practice technique, for teachers' awareness and their unconscious actions (Gilliam, 2016). The use of the "wait time" technique after questions can prevent boys from dominating discussions, giving everyone a fair opportunity to contribute (OECD, 2022). The study further recommends the promotion of gender-neutral instructional strategies, such as randomized questioning or group-based tasks to offer all students equal preferential treatment (Sadker and Zittleman, 2009).

On stereotypes, the study reiterates research that promotes role modeling and positive affirmations to empower girls and females in schooling and workplaces (The International Bureau of Education-IBE, 2018), as a way to augment participation and resilience against stereotype threats. The study further recommends the cultivation of inclusive classrooms and schooling environments that explicitly challenge stereotypes. Teachers can implement positive affirmations and highlight diverse role models in fields where certain genders are underrepresented, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Growth mindset strategies that stress effort over innate ability can be used to curb anxiety related to stereotype threats and reduce the pressure to conform to stereotyped expectations.

Lack of awareness exists despite the South African policy 'the Gender Policy Framework (Department of Environmental Affairs) as well as the OECD project on the "Strength through Diversity" project (OECD, 2022). This study, therefore, recommends that educational institutions and schools, in particular, should formulate policies aligned with their local and international prescripts.

On the issue of inconsistent collegial practices, the study recommends the development of policies in schools to support the Gender Policy Framework that "establishes guidelines for South Africa as a nation to take action to remedy the historical legacy" related to gender issues, violence, and policy (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2010). The educational institutions as workplaces and educational spaces should develop policies in relation to the gender policy to alleviate gender-related problems.

According to the OECD (2022), when schools create consistent practices and policies around gender inclusivity, it reduces student confusion and fosters a positive learning environment. This is further supported by UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes policy development at the school level to align teacher behavior focused on gender equity objectives.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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