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Timeline

2017-2019

Sample Size

209 head teachers, 671 teachers, 5,893 students

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

Gender Bias in Assessments of Teacher Performance in Ghana

Abstract

Professional advancement often depends on subjective performance reviews, especially in developing countries where objective data on performance may not be available. But subjective reviews may be susceptible to personal biases based on characteristics like gender. To better understand this in the education sector in Ghana, researchers compared both principals' reviews and teacher self-assessments of effectiveness to an objective measure: increases in student test scores. Female teachers were objectively more effective based on increases in student test scores. However, principals were 11 percentage points less likely to rate a female teacher as effective compared to a male teacher. These findings contribute to the evidence on gender biases in subjective assessments and related barriers faced by women in labor markets in developing countries.

Policy Issue

Identifying and promoting effective teachers is crucial to improving student learning and school quality. As in other sectors, professional advancement in education for teachers often depends on the performance reviews of managers and self-assessments of effectiveness. But subjective reviews may be susceptible to personal biases based on characteristics like gender. This type of bias in assessment can negatively affect both the career trajectory of female teachers and student learning.

Improvements in student test scores can serve as an objective measure of teacher effectiveness and shed light on discrepancies between perceived and actual teaching effectiveness. However, a lack of data on student test scores in developing countries limits both managers' and teachers' ability to objectively measure and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Beyond the education sector, data on gender-based biases in performance evaluations contributes to a better understanding of barriers in the labor market for women in developing countries.

Context of the Evaluation

Gender bias is more prevalent in male-dominated fields.^[1] In Ghana, most teachers and principals are male, with fewer women found at higher levels of teaching and management: women are 22 percent of teachers, 15 percent of principals, but only 8 percent of school supervisors. Gender bias in the sector is not just detrimental to the professional advancement of female teachers, but to students as well. It can result in increased turnover, a lack of female role models, and lower student test scores.

In collaboration with the Ghana Education Services (GES), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), and the National Inspectorate Board (NIB), the Strengthening Teaching Accountability to Reach All Students (STARS) project trained teachers on differentiated instruction and improved managerial support for those teachers. Using STARS data, this research sought to understand whether subjective bias, specifically bias based on gender, existed in the education sector.

Ghana provides an apt context to test bias in the education sector for several reasons. Because there is no standardized testing of primary school students, principals lack objective data on teaching performance. Additionally, principals do not hire or fire teachers, but play a major role in creating a positive work environment for teachers. Finally, teachers are assigned to a classroom and teach all subjects, so principals have little influence in assigning students to teachers.

Details of the Intervention

Note: This is not a randomized controlled trial except for the randomization of male and

female names in the hypothetical scenarios.

Researchers used STARS data from principals, teachers, and students in grades 5 and 6, the end of primary school, to compare subjective measures of teaching performance with student learning outcomes. The subjective measures used were principals' assessments of the effectiveness of the teachers in their school and teachers' perceptions of their own effectiveness. These two measures were compared to increases in student test scores, an objective measure of teaching capacity. Researchers used these comparisons to understand whether there were systematic differences in performance evaluations of teachers that could be due to gender bias rather than teaching ability.

To complement this comparison, researchers interviewed school principals and teachers using hypothetical teaching scenarios. These stories featured male or female fictional teachers, principals, or school supervisors performing their duties with varying degrees of effectiveness. The teachers and principals were asked how effective they thought the person in the scenario was compared to others in a similar position.

Results and Policy Lessons

In self-assessments, both female and male teachers equally rated themselves as more effective than other teachers at similar schools. However, gender differences became apparent at the managerial level. While student test scores demonstrated that female teachers were objectively more effective at increasing student test scores, the principals' performance evaluations did not match this reality. Although there is a possibility that differences in female teachers' effectiveness could be due to teaching in more effective schools, this is unlikely for two reasons. The first is that teachers do not have the ability to easily choose the schools where they teach. Second, principals rated more effective teachers more highly which is unlikely to be the case if improved test scores were due to the school rather than teacher. Principals were 11 percentage points less likely to rate a female teacher as effective compared to a male teacher. Strikingly, the least effective male teacher was assessed by principals as more effective than the most effective female teacher. Gender bias on the part of principals persisted in the hypothetical scenarios, as well. While teachers were likely to rate hypothetical men and women in teaching scenarios similarly, principals again rated those with female names as less effective.

Identifying and promoting effective teachers is crucial to improving student learning and school quality. Relying on subjective reviews can negatively affect both the career trajectory of female teachers and student learning by perpetuating bias. Objective measures, such as student test scores, offer a means for a more fair and transparent education sector. However, a lack of data in Ghana and other developing countries limits this potential. Beyond the education sector, data on gender-based biases in performance evaluations contributes to a better understanding of related barriers in labor market entry and advancement for women in developing countries.

Sources

^[1] Blau, F.D. and Kahn, L.M., 2017. "The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), pp.789-865.

March 09, 2021