

# Differences Among Students

Moving beyond gender distinction, humans vary with individuality; not all girls fit within a certain criteria and not all boys fit within another criteria. Sometimes people overlap, a girl's behavior similar to a boy's and a boy's similar to a girl's. With that, it is important to be aware that some students may not be like the other students of their gender. To accomplish this, gender biases must be discarded, and new practices must be adopted:

1. Refrain from using language that denies a gender of participation (i.e. "he" or "she" only, "workmen").
2. Inspect book for gender-biased content.
3. Do not ridicule nor allow students to ridicule each other based on gender and encourage inclusion of both sexes in all activities.



#### References:

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# Islamic Perspective

Education is a very important topic within the Islamic religion. When the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) peace be upon him, ascended to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) for the first time, Jibreel revealed the first verses of the Quran:

"Read. Read in the name of thy Lord who created; [He] created the human being from blood clot. Read in the name of thy Lord who taught by the pen: [He] taught the human being what he did not know." (96: 1-5)

Additionally, Allah (glory be to the Almighty) has stressed that knowledge makes a large difference between those who seek it and those who do not, as stated in the Quran, "Are those who have knowledge equal to those who do not have knowledge?"(39:9). From this, God has shown the importance of education, Muhammed (peace and blessings be upon him) displays this as well through his sunnah. As recorded in Sunan ibn Majah:

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet said:

"Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim"

Here the Prophet Muhammad makes it evident that Muslims should pursue education no matter what, implying that education is an obligation on a person regardless of gender.

He (peace and blessings be upon him) also has taught Muslims through his actions that knowledge should be available to all and to never discriminate, as recorded in Sahih Al-Bukhari:

Abu Said Al-Khudri narrated:

"Some women requested the Prophet to fix a day for them as the men were taking all his time. On that he promised them one day for religious lessons and commandments."

Boys and girls generally learn differently, and by that, it is a duty for Muslim communities to accommodate these differences to help each person fulfill the commands of Allah and His Prophet.

# Gender Matters in Education

Noor

Michigan Islamic Academy



And Say: My lord,  
Increase me  
in knowledge

Quran 20:114

# The Issue

In a world filled with gender stereotypes, it is often forgotten that men and women share an equal level of intelligence; however, gender does play a key role in the learning process of a person due to social constructs, biology, and the senses of hearing and sight.

It is an ongoing debate as to whether or not these gender learning difference are caused by biology, social construct, or both. Regardless, gender differences do exist and must be accommodated. Today, classrooms tailor subjects to suit only one gender. To create the most effective learning environment, educators should remove the gender bias. Islam also holds education to high standard, making educational differentiation vital in the teaching of Muslim youth.



# Implications for Teaching Girls

In the 19th century, science, math, and astronomy were subjects for young women. Over the years, these subjects were stripped away and became “masculine”. Today, there is more encouragement for women to enter such fields and although there are more women pursuing math and sciences numbers are still low.

The difference between girls and boys choosing to study math, science, and astronomy lies within the approach girls and boys take in studying the content. Girls often question ideas rather than just taking them as they are presented, for example, “Why do the planets all rotate around the sun? How can that be possible? What is the purpose of this?”. However, most traditional textbooks do not present the information this way and many teachers are more focused on just giving the information with a “that is just how it is” approach. Furthermore, math and science topics use analogies and scenarios that are tailored to be most relatable to boys. For example, questions provided by textbooks and teachers often use storylines that involve baseball players or the idea of blowing up a car. Some girls may relate to these, but many do not, and using such ideas may contribute to women losing interest in such subjects. The best method to teaching math and science to both genders, is to use examples that are not gender biased.

Girls and women should be encouraged to pursue math and science fields, that there are no “boy jobs” nor “girl jobs” and that they can achieve any career. Girls need encouragement from both women and men, teachers should try introduce their student to women role models that have succeed in the “masculine” fields. An example, Mariam al-Asturlabi, a famous Muslim woman who is known for developing astrolabes. In addition to this, showing them the movie *Hidden Figures* (PG), a movie about 3 African American women mathematicians at NASA who were responsible for the successful launch of John Glenn into space.



# Implications for Teaching Boys

Boys are naturally less sensitive to sound than girls. In order to help boys pay better attention in class, teachers should raise his/her voice louder so that the male students’ attention take notice. It is also recommended to place the boys at the front of the class if possible, which can help them hear the teacher better and be more focused.

Boys tend to associate art and literature with femininity and treat these subjects with indifference as they are discouraged from enjoying them. Research indicates that girls often draw “pretty” and life-like drawings while boys often draw action-based scenes. In response to these drawings, teachers may become concerned and disapprove of the boys’ drawings. The teacher may criticize the boys’ art and encourage the boys to draw like girls; “Look at what Maria is drawing! Isn’t it pretty? Why don’t you try to draw something like that?” This discourages boys, making them feel that in order to be considered real artists they need to draw like girls, forming the misconception that art is “girly”. This also appears in writing. Teachers may disapprove when boys produce a somewhat “violent” piece of writing. Instead, teachers should encourage boys to improve creations by suggesting things such as adding detail or color. Violence in writing is permissible as long as the work does not represent the boy himself or somebody else. These pieces of work must not be threatening to anyone.

In addition to this, try to encourage boys to be more creative; engage in art projects, and present to them male role models that succeed in these “feminine” fields. A good role model would be Ibrahim el-Salahi, one of the most influential modern African artists whose work is featured in the Museum of Modern Art, or Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler), famous for his work of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

