

## The Impact of Age and Gender Stereotypes on Teachers' Performance: Case Study of High School Teachers in Tiaret Province

تأثير الأفكار النمطية عن الجنس والعمر على مردودية الأساتذة: دراسة حالة أساتذة التعليم الثانوي لولاية تيارت

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**Abstract :** This paper probes the injustice caused by the sociolinguistic variables of age and gender. Differences do not amount solely to numbers or physiques but to the groups having divergent behaviours and values. Such discrepancies are due to being raised in different environments where each cohort is steeped in a set of beliefs that it naturalizes and embraces while rejecting and condemning those opposing its own. In order for this sociological investigation to be conducted, we opted for the survey method to examine teachers' attribution of negative adjectives to four different cohorts. This study demonstrates how high school teachers surveyed make are gender/age insensitive which results the perpetuation of stereotypes and thus of biased practices.

**Keywords:** Age; Gender; Stereotypes; Education; Awareness

**ملخص:** يركز هذا المقال على الإجحاف الذي يسببه المتغيرين الاجتماعيان العمر والجنس. الفرق ليس فقط في أرقام عمرية أو مظاهر جسدية ولكن في خلق مجموعات بأفكار وقيم متباينة، هاته التناقضات تعود إلى كل مجموعة ترعرعت في محيط مختلف أين كل جيل يستسيغ مجموعة من الأفكار التي تصبح بعد ذلك عبارة عن قواعد لا يجوز إختراقها. من الظاهر أنكل جيل في المجتمع يميل إلى رفض الأفكار والممارسات التي تختلف عنه. من أجل القيام بهذا الاستقصاء الاجتماعي إختارنا منهجية الاستبيان لفحص إلى أي المجموعات الأربعة يسبغ الأساتذة هاته الصفات السلبية. تبين الدراسة مدى إنعدام الوعي لدى الأساتذة بالمتغيران الاجتماعيان الجنس والعمر والذي يسبب دوام سيطرة الأحكام المسبقة والممارسات المجحفة كنتيجة حتمية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العمر، الجنس، النمطية، التعليم، النوعية.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social interactions and relationships are often governed by a set of conceptions or representations that are not necessarily true. The beliefs individuals have about the other may seem insignificant because they remain mere standpoints, but in fact, they drastically influence our thinking and consequently our behaviours and choices. The impact of either believing in stereotypes about age and gender is probably more critical to educators whose job is to transfer not only the knowledge but also the values; these often interfere with personal opinions and judgments. The interference of stereotypes in the teaching setting influences students' understanding of themselves and others. They may either underestimate or cherish cohorts or genders based on the attributed descriptions to young/old, male/female individuals. The survey below aims at uncovering teachers' sensitivity or awareness about age and gender differences

## 2. Survey About “Positive and Negative” Adjectives’ Attribution Among Teachers

Attributes	Young Men 20-30	Old Men 50-60	Young Women 20-30	Old Women 50-60
Passive	4	2	3	1
Talkative	3	4	1	2
Lazy	3	1	4	2
Pessimistic	3	1	4	2
Agressive	1	2	3	4
Irrational	4	3	2	1
Hesitant	4	3	1	2
Gossipy	3	4	1	2
Rude	1	3	2	4
Fearful	3	4	1	2
Lack discipline	1	4	2	3
Naggy	2	4	1	3
Impatient	2	4	1	3
Submissive	3	4	2	1
Arrogant	1	4	2	3
Stubborn	1	3	2	4
Delicate	3	4	1	2
Indecisive	3	4	1	2
Reliant	3	4	1	2
Negligent	1	3	2	4

## **2.1 Variables**

The survey considers the intersection of the two social variables age and gender, and how these are perceived by teachers in secondary schools. Both gender and age were divided to two groups; old males, young males, old females, young females.

## **2.2 Hypothesis**

The two surveys handed to teachers include a set of 20 adjectives in each. Teachers were asked to attribute positive or negative adjectives to the group that applies most to them. The survey's hypothesis is to put into question teachers understanding of stereotypical adjectives and if they classify generically conforming the dominating perceptions laymen adopt.

## **2.3 Reliability**

In order for the study to be reliable, we propose two opposing surveys, one with 20 positive adjectives and another 20 negative ones. Teachers will assign the adjectives to a particular group either positively or negatively. This allowed us to have a grasp of the most stereotyped or privileged group.

## **3. Teachers' Attribution of "Negative" Adjectives**

This survey is for assessing Algerian Secondary School Teachers' attribution of "negative" adjectives. Please order your answers from most to least using number 1,2,3,4

### **3.1 Description of the survey**

Teachers in 4 High Schools are handed this survey which uncovers to which group they ascribe or associate negative adjectives. People in the survey are divided up to 4 groups. The survey is distributed randomly to 80 teachers in High Schools. The main purpose of this survey is to find out to which gender or cohort teachers ascribe negative attributes.

**Group 1:** Young Men between the ages of 20 and 28

**Group 2:** Old Men between the ages of 55 and 60

**Group 3:** Young Women between the ages of 20 and 28

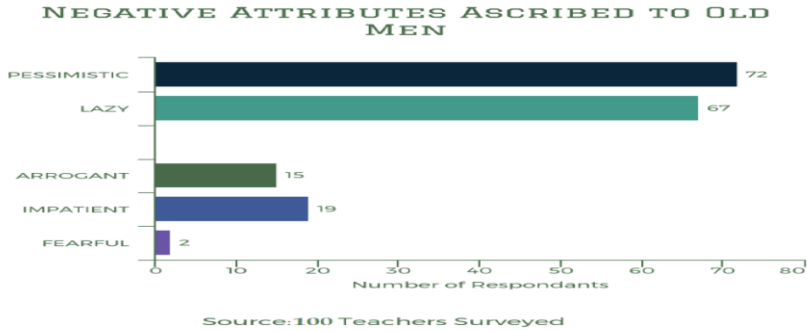
**Group 4:** Old Women between the ages of 55 and 60

## **4. Negative Attributes Survey**

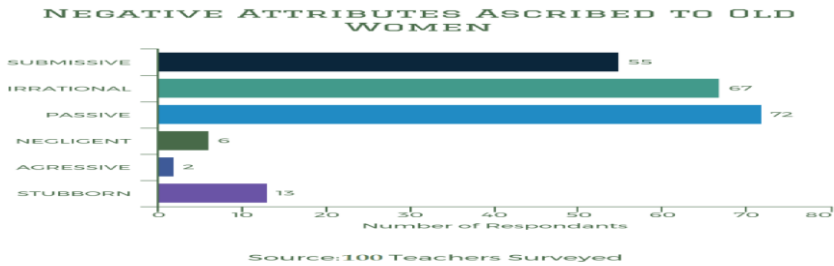
The first survey includes a set of 20 positive adjectives along with the above mentioned 4 groups. Teachers are questioned to fill in the table with numbers from 1 to 4. Number 1 is given to the group which applies most to the adjective and number 4 is given to the group with least appliance to the adjective.

#### 4.1 Results Analysis

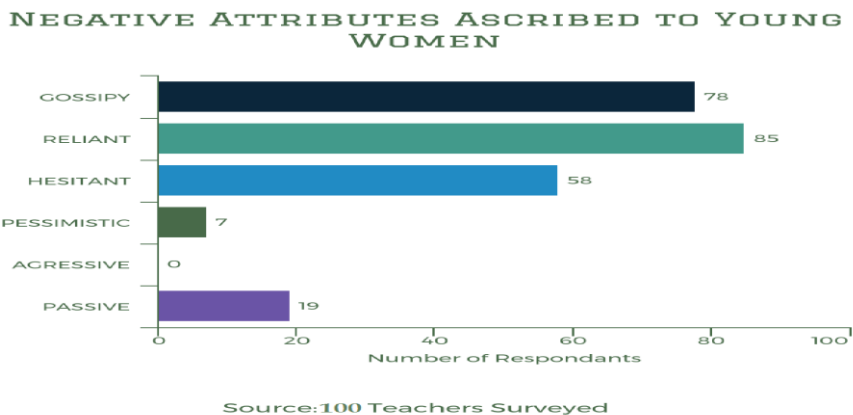
The survey consists of 20 negative stereotypes, as it was given to 100 high school teachers. It aims at uncovering which group is the most stereotyped. Young women were the most stereotyped due to the intersection of young age and female gender, teachers answered that **Talkative, Hesitant, Gossipy, Fearful, Naggy, Impatient, Delicate, Indecisive** and **Reliant** all apply to young women. These stereotypes believed to be mainly as characters of young women demonstrates how teachers surveyed are influenced by prejudice and preconceived notions just like the society does. What is alarming is that most of the attributions chosen fall under the umbrella gender stereotypes. Unlike men, young women were described as weak and all they master is being talkative, naggy and gossipy; these three adjectives demonstrate how women's language is considered as deviant from the so called norm "men language". In addition, describing them as hesitant, fearful, indecisive and reliant imply that women are unable to make decisions or to confront obstacles on their own. Thus, we may say that even teachers contribute to the reinforcement and invisibility of women. Per contra, young men were stereotyped differently in the sense that adjectives such as; **Aggressive, Rude, Lack discipline, Arrogant, Stubborn** and **Negligent** were ascribed to them which contributes to the idea of men are superior to women because men are physically stronger. In similar vein, we noticed that despite the 20 negative adjectives, teachers chose the dominant perceptions about youth in Algeria. i.e. even young men are stereotyped particularly by elders, for instance: it is common to hear an old men or women complaining the behaviours of their young son lacking discipline, being stubborn and rude with his parents. Youth in Algeria are also accused of being negligent and not committed compared to the older generation. Older women were also stereotyped as **Passive, Irrational** and **Submissive** which is an obvious perpetuation of traditional gender roles. Older men were the least stereotyped group but still described as **Lazy** and **Pessimistic**, this implies that old age is associated with being inactive and feeble. Pessimistic reinforces also the belief that elders are frustrated as they are in last phase of their lives which coincides with a different lifestyle of youth that causes the generational misunderstand and conflict.



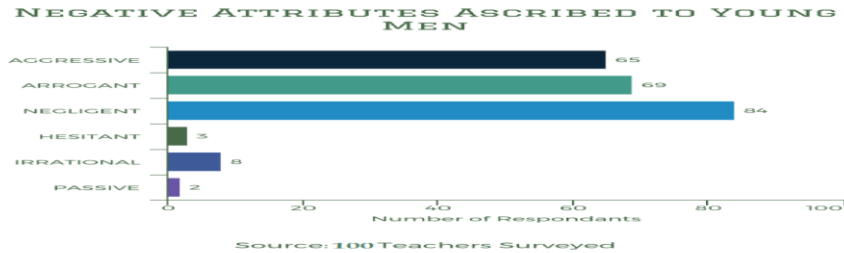
**Fig.1: Negative attributes ascribed to old men**



**Fig.2: Negative attributes ascribed to old women**



**Fig.3: Negative attributes ascribed to young women**



**Fig.4: Negative attributes ascribed to young men**

### 5. Algerian Teachers' Understanding of Age Differences

Tensions between generations may be universal issue, however in Algeria and particularly among teachers, the results have shown how the situation is much more complex than in other countries. The elder generation seems to be conforming to the social traditional roles and perceptions about notions of ageing and youthfulness. For instance, they some elders have some preconceived judgments about youngsters such as: the expression of "youth of today" which has various negative connotations, it means that youth nowadays are not "strong, committed and even respectful" the way their ancestors did. Youth nowadays are accused of being negatively absorbed by technology, while technology is used by many youngsters in a good manner. On the other hand, we have a younger generation accusing elders of doubting their capacities and thus, excluding them to be active citizens contributing to the building of their countries. Since ours ample was teachers, it was noticeable that youth were divided to two groups; one that is confident about his achievements and future career, and another that is frustrated by that feeling of inferiority and inexperience. The former group when questioned or interviewed demonstrated their understanding of ageing stereotypes, and how a teacher should think beyond prejudice and stereotypes in order for him to teach values of tolerance and acceptance of the other. Still, some other teachers were affected by comments directed to them or treatments which they considered as unfair. Young and novice teachers especially complained being rejected by some older teachers. For instance, a teacher of English questioned about this problem answered as follows:

I strongly believe that there a real generational gap in schools and even outside schools, I was told many times that my master's degree is not worth a BA decades ago, despite being an excellent student in university, I was told that I can never teach like an experienced old teacher does,

even people in general do not hesitate to show their disapproval of what is known as " nowadays teachers". For this, I want to confirm that there is indeed a generational clash depicted in scornful treatments of the younger generation or at least the belittling of their accomplishments"

The above mentioned quote reveals significantly how some teachers are affected by stereotypes and prejudices. These, will in no way help the sector of education to foster but merely hinders the two generations to work in a collaborative environment. Teachers regardless of their age need to accept the other and create an appropriate atmosphere of mutual respect and exchange of expertise. Bowen stresses that Baby Boomers should not look at a new generation worker as a threat but look at this opportunity to learn new concepts from them. (Bowen 2011). Looking at a new generation either as deficient or a threat to elders' positions and status will only reinforce divergence which affects productivity in the workplace and since education's product or outcome is educated future generations, this is more insidious because we all need to work together to raise a generation that thinks beyond stereotypes and understand that age is a fluid social variable that we are all affected by, i.e. no one remains young or old forever.

Stereotypes tend to put an entire community or group of people sharing same interests and objectives in one basket, while people from any generation in workplace need to know people as individual and show respect to each other (Murphy and Raines 2007). This respect can be embodied in communication with the other which allows one to infer how differences between generations are that obstacle but judgments are. Chad Nelson (2009), emphasizes how it is important to understand each other's personality in order for one to have a quality communication. When teachers communicate without being influenced by prejudices, this will decrease the severity of divergence and allows them to make use of each generation's competences. In fact, it's undeniable that an older generation holds considerable experience in the workplace which may benefit the younger one. Per contra, the younger generation holds control of ICT's and technology in general. The fusion of elders' experience along with youth's innovation will create a productive environment rather than void accusations.

Scholars and specialists suggested various solutions to the problem of generational gap; among them the model introduced by Wood and Stefanie (2005), where generation gap is replaced by "generation united". According to them uniting generations should undergo four phases. The first step is that employees have to be able to do self-criticism and spot

the mistakes they have done. This way they develop their wisdom which should be consequently shared with their colleagues. The next step is that the older generation ought to be committed as mentors to future generations. That is elders need to play a positive role of transferring values and knowledge to the younger generation whose duty is to accept being followers of their elders and try to demonstrate their skills and flexibility modestly and without any negative preconceived judgments of the other. The last step is about tolerance that is generations need to accept the fact that each cohort has certain competences that if shared with the opposing generation will generate fruitful insights for self-development. Houlihan and Anne, (2007) argue that each generation carry loads of valid values that might be motivating to the other.

Baby Boomers generation is decreasing in the workplace due to getting retired, but generation X is witnessing an increase. Thus, it will be rewarding to bridge *Old* teachers with *younger* ones in order not to lose the expertise and help new teachers to make use of a heritage of experience that will smooth the performance of their job. On the other hand, the newer generation is known for its manipulation of ICTs, internet and technology in general, these skills can be useful if integrated with the experience and wisdom elders have. Still, sharing same beliefs, standpoints and thoughts among one generation is not a must or a reality, it may also to happen and frequently that we find members of the same generation believing in different or even opposing ideas. For instance, it is a fact that there are many old teachers who are adequate with ICTs control and maybe better than a young can do. The same goes with the younger generation which may have conforming ideas and beliefs with members of the older generation. These all depend on a person's personality and socialization. Ergo, it is immature to judge or prejudice an entire community or cohort just because they were born in the same year or they belong to a certain era.

Indulging in conversations and dealings with the opposite generation without any negative preconceived notions results a sense of integration and tolerance. The latter allows employees for instance to create an atmosphere of cooperation and productivity. The exchange of expertise among generations is in itself a force for a better workplace, while weaknesses can be compensated through the complementary strengths of each generation.

Algerian teachers should understand the issue of age gaps and work on sensitizing their students on how generations may differ only in experiences and values which necessarily results different strengths and



weakness. For example, elders in Algeria speak French eloquently and probably better than most youth, this was due to the colonial era when they were taught by native speakers and French was used in administrations and even everyday life. This has forced elders at that time to master the language. Algerian youth nowadays are keen on learning English also for certain reasons, one is globalization and the position English is having worldwide. Algerian youth are fond of English because it is a language that allows them to communicate with foreigners both native and non-native ones. Thence, looking at differences as diversity enables generations to integrate in an exchange of expertise that will decrease the tension and give reign to rewarding collaboration.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The hypothesis suggesting teachers' stereotypical understanding of age and gender is significantly demonstrated in the answers provided. The attribution of certain attributes whether positive or negative to a certain cohort or gender shows how teachers are not in isolation of the trending traditional and stereotypical adjectives influencing laymen. Thus, it would not have been possible for feminist schools to be without a beforehand set agenda addressing injustices caused by stereotypes. Ergo, one may point out that it is high time for the ministry of education to consider organizing workshops and trainings for teachers, who will adopt gender pedagogy methods for schools advocating mutual understanding and respect, regardless of the biased categorization which served none but divergence and alienation.

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