

# Horizontal Gender Segregation: A Reflection from Taiwanese Preschools

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**Abstract:** Horizontal gender segregation in Taiwanese preschools is an important area of inquiry because it shapes young children's perceptions of gender from a young age. This segregation is often subtle but pervasive, reinforcing traditional gender norms through structured activities, toy preferences, and peer interactions. This article explores some strategies to reduce horizontal gender segregation in Taiwanese preschools. Some practical strategies are as follows: (1) Gender-neutral teaching activity design; (2) Diverse teaching materials; (3) Cooperative learning; (4) Open and flexible play areas; (5) Gender-neutral toys and materials; (5) Mixed seating arrangements; (6) Use inclusive language; (7) Encourage young children to explore new interests; (8) Reflect and adjust teaching behaviors; (9) Family and community collaboration; (9) Engage in conversations with parents; (10) Invite diverse role models; (11) Gender-inclusive curriculum guidelines; (12) Teacher training; (13) Evaluation and improvement. By implementing these strategies, early childhood education can move toward a more inclusive environment where young children learn and grow together in diverse settings.

**Keywords:** horizontal gender segregation, early childhood educators, learning experiences, young children

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## 1. Introduction

Horizontal gender segregation in Taiwanese preschools is an important topic to explore, as it reflects broader societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles from an early age. This horizontal gender segregation often manifests in how activities, toys, and interactions are structured in preschools, subtly reinforcing gender distinctions that can have long-term effects on children's development and socialization (Charles, 2003). Indeed, that's a crucial issue to investigate, as early childhood settings significantly shape young children's understanding of gender roles. In Taiwanese preschools, horizontal gender segregation can be observed in various aspects, such as: (1) activity structuring: certain activities may be implicitly or explicitly designated as "for boys" or "for girls" (e.g., building blocks vs. arts and crafts); (2) toy selection: toys are often gender-coded, with boys encouraged to play with vehicles and construction sets, while girls are directed toward dolls and domestic playsets; (3) peer interactions: teachers and caregivers may unconsciously reinforce same-gender play, discouraging mixed-gender interactions that could foster more diverse social skills. This segregation can influence young children's cognitive and social development by limiting their exposure to a wide range of skills and experiences. It also reinforces societal expectations regarding masculinity and femininity, which can have long-term implications for career choices, self-perception, and gender equity (Blatt et al, 2024; Bosak & Brueckner, 2021; Pološki Vokić, Obadić, Sinčić Ćorić, 2019). This article explores some strategies to reduce horizontal gender segregation in Taiwanese preschools.

## 2. Strategies to Reduce Horizontal Gender Segregation in Taiwanese Preschools

Reducing horizontal gender segregation in Taiwanese preschools can be approached through curriculum design, learning environments, teacher-student interactions, and family and community collaboration. Some practical strategies are as follows:

## **2.1 Curriculum and Teaching Strategies**

### **2.1.1 Gender-neutral Teaching Activity Design**

As society progresses, fostering a diverse array of abilities in children has become increasingly important. In early childhood education, the unique developmental needs of young children must be considered during curriculum planning (Shih, 2024). Avoid categorizing activities as “for boys” or “for girls.” Encourage all young children to participate in diverse activities such as construction play, role-playing, and scientific exploration. Preschool teachers should foster a supportive classroom culture, and encourage young children to respect each other’s choices and interests. Create classroom norms that value diversity and self-expression.

### **2.1.2 Diverse Teaching Materials**

The picture book originates from Japan. It is a book with pictures that are supplemented by words. The picture emphasizes the story content and enriches the story in a visual form. Picture books are used as a teaching material. Preschool teachers can use picture books about gender issues for horizontal gender segregation. The authors believe that this stimulates children's interest, improves learning outcomes and enhances children's care for the horizontal gender segregation. Reading good books together is a wonderful way to defy stereotypes of all kinds. In the classroom, there's no such thing as a “girl book” or a “boy book.” Preschool teachers also talk about how there are more than two genders. My kiddo knows that some folks ask us to use they/them pronouns because that best expresses who they are (Everyday stories, 2025; Ye & Shih, 2020). Use picture books that challenge gender stereotypes, featuring female scientists, male preschool teachers, and other non-traditional roles to help young children develop a more open perspective on gender.

### **2.1.3 Cooperative learning**

Design group activities where boys and girls work together to complete tasks, such as building structures, co-writing stories, or conducting science experiments, to foster collaboration and mutual understanding.

## **2.2 Learning Environment and Space Arrangement**

### **2.2.1 Open and Flexible Play Areas**

Reduce gender-segregated play areas by making spaces like the block area, doll area, and sports area inclusive for all young children. Creating an inclusive environment where young children feel free to explore interests beyond traditional gender roles requires a thoughtful approach that fosters curiosity, self-expression, and respect for diversity.

### **2.2.2 Gender-neutral Toys and Materials**

Provide diverse and non-gendered toys, such as blocks in various colors (not just blue and pink) and dolls representing different professions. Furthermore, the problem with this is that all children – girls and boys – are created with the potential to be creative and the need to be expressive. If we don't equip our sons as we equip our daughters – with positive tools to give voice to their innate, human needs in healthy, productive directions – these needs will be expressed in counterproductive, and sometimes even violent, ways (Hyatt, 2025).

### **2.2.3 Mixed Seating Arrangements**

Over the past few years, there has been a growing awareness in the education community about the importance of the school physical environment. Indeed, by the possibility that students have to interact with the physical school environment through movement, exploration, and social interaction, it would strengthen the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development of students based on the principle that a well thought-out school physical environment promotes the global development of students, promotes academic wellbeing and inclusion (Bluteau, Aubenas & Dufour, 2017). Instead of allowing young children to choose seats, which may lead to gender grouping, implement mixed seating to encourage cross-gender interactions. This is a thoughtful strategy to promote inclusivity and social interaction among young children. Mixed seating arrangements can help break down gender-based social barriers, encourage diverse friendships, and foster collaboration. It aligns with the idea of creating an inclusive learning environment where children learn to interact with peers of all genders naturally (Bluteau, Aubenas & Dufour, 2017; Halidane, Bluteau, Pillarella & Kirakoya, 2023).

## **2.3 Teacher's Role and Interaction Methods**

### **2.3.1 Use Inclusive Language**

Avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes through language. For example, instead of saying, “Boys should be strong” or “Girls are gentle,” emphasize personal qualities like “You are brave” or “You are caring.”

### **2.3.2 Encourage Young Children to Explore New Interests**

Support young children in pursuing activities they enjoy, regardless of gender, such as encouraging boys to join art activities or girls to take on physical challenges. Competitive team sport is predominantly segregated by gender in many western countries, despite concerns that gender segregation in sport can perpetuate sexism and gender inequality. While policies and activities seek to challenge sexism and gender inequality, the use of gender collaboration within a gender-segregated system as a method to achieve this has received little attention (Ogilvie & McCormack, 2021).

### **2.3.3 Reflect and Adjust Teaching Behaviors**

How preschool teachers manage and express their feelings across school-based interactions (e.g., teacher-child, teacher-family, and teacher-colleague) has implications for their professional success and the developmental and academic outcomes of their relational counterparts. Preschool teachers should observe their interactions and ensure they are not unintentionally reinforcing gender roles. Indeed, the way preschool teachers manage and express their emotions in different interactions significantly impacts their professional effectiveness and the experiences of children, families, and colleagues. Emotional regulation, empathy, and responsiveness help create positive learning environments and strengthen relationships. At the same time, teachers should be mindful of how their interactions may unintentionally reinforce gender roles. This includes being aware of: (1) language use: avoiding phrases like “boys don’t cry” or “girls should be gentle” and instead encouraging all children to express emotions freely; (2) activity choices: providing equal opportunities for all children to engage in diverse activities, from building blocks to dramatic play, without gender-based assumptions; (3) expectations for behavior: ensuring discipline and encouragement are applied equally, avoiding biases such as expecting boys to be more active and girls to be more compliant; (4) storytelling and curriculum: selecting books and learning materials that challenge stereotypes and represent diverse roles for all genders (Levine Brown, Vesely, Mehta et al., 2023).

## **2.4 Family and Community Collaboration**

### **2.4.1 Engage in Conversations with Parents**

Many studies on children’s participation in housework have focused on children of school age or above and are based on developmental theory and socialization perspectives. Preschool children’s involvement in chores is often overlooked as their contributions are viewed as unable to provide substantial help with household tasks, and may even increase parents’ workload during the process. Moreover, in Chinese societies, the cultural emphasis on academic achievement over housework training results in fewer opportunities for children to learn chores, which indirectly reduces attention to this issue (Lee & Tang, 2024). Hold parent workshops on reducing gender stereotypes at home, such as involving young children in diverse household tasks or reading books with various gender representations.

### **2.4.2 Invite Diverse Role Models**

Many people still stick to traditional ideas that men and women should behave in ways that fall into specific categories determined solely on their gender. However, male or female gender-specific identities are irrelevant in modern, civilized society. Gender roles are social constructs developed over time and are not based on natural human behavior (Nash, 2025). Invite guest speakers or showcase historical and contemporary figures who have broken gender norms. Share stories of individuals from different cultures who challenge gender expectations. In other words, bring in professionals of different genders to share their experiences, such as female engineers or male nurses, to help young children understand that careers are not gender-specific.

## **2.5 Policy and Systemic Support**

### **2.5.1 Gender-inclusive Curriculum Guidelines**

Schools or educational institutions should develop guidelines to ensure that early childhood curricula do not reinforce gender segregation. Young children must feel welcome in a safe and secure learning environment. Governments, preschools and preschool teachers all have a part to play in ensuring that schools are free of violence and discrimination and provide a gender-sensitive, good-quality education, and develop gender-inclusive curriculum guidelines (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2025).

### **2.5.2 Teacher Training**

When teachers hold gender-biased expectations, it results in disparate stimuli, teaching approaches, and interactions directed towards boys and girls. Teachers’ personal perceptions of their students’ cognitive abilities carry significant implications for classroom dynamics, children’s access to learning opportunities, and broader educational equity. When teachers hold gender-biased expectations, it results in disparate stimuli, teaching

approaches, and interactions directed towards boys and girls (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2025). Furthermore, provide professional development to help educators recognize and challenge gender biases in classroom interactions, and so that teachers can better identify and challenge gender biases.

### 2.5.3 Evaluation and Improvement

Observing, documenting, and assessing each child's development and learning are essential processes for educators and programs to plan, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of the experiences they provide to children. Assessment includes both formal and informal measures as tools for monitoring children's progress toward a program's desired goals. Educators can be intentional about helping children to progress when they know where each child is with respect to learning goals (NAEYC, 2025). Regularly assess classroom and play environments, monitor children's participation patterns, and make necessary adjustments to achieve gender equity goals. Indeed, observation, documentation, and assessment are fundamental in early childhood education, as they help educators make informed decisions about instructional strategies and learning environments. To ensure gender equity, educators can track children's participation in different activities to identify any gender-based patterns. Analyze whether certain activities appeal more to one gender and adjust accordingly, and ensure classroom discussions and teacher-student interactions are equitable, and encourage all children to explore a variety of roles, play styles, and activities.

## 3. Reflections and Conclusions

Education seeks to cultivate moral individuals who live a lives of value and meaning and who have spiritual values. Young children are at a key stage of life development. Good life education practices can enhance children's self-awareness and potential. This kind of education teaches children how to have good interpersonal relationships and to develop a sense of responsibility for nature and increases their sense of the value of life. In early childhood, basic knowledge, behaviors and attitudes are established (Shih, 2020). Horizontal sex segregation in Taiwanese preschools is an important area of inquiry because it shapes young children's perceptions of gender from a young age. This segregation is often subtle but pervasive, reinforcing traditional gender norms through structured activities, toy preferences, and peer interactions. One key factor to consider is the role of educators in either maintaining or challenging these gendered patterns. Related studies suggest that preschool teachers may unintentionally reinforce segregation by encouraging young children to engage in gender-stereotypical play or by organizing activities in ways that emphasize gender distinctions. Educating preschool educators to recognize and counteract these tendencies could be an effective strategy in promoting gender-inclusive learning environments. Additionally, the influence of parental expectations and cultural values must be acknowledged. Taiwanese society, like many others, has deeply ingrained beliefs about appropriate behaviors for boys and girls. These expectations shape not only how young children are socialized at home but also how they experience preschool education. Exploring how parental attitudes interact with preschool practices could provide further insight into how gender roles are reinforced or challenged in the future. Furthermore, while Taiwanese preschools may not explicitly enforce gender segregation, subtle structures and expectations shape young children's experiences in ways that align with traditional gender roles. Addressing these patterns requires a reflective approach from educators, parents, and policymakers to ensure that early childhood education fosters equality, inclusivity, and diverse opportunities for all young children (Wang & Shih, 2022; Wu, 2022, 2023). This article explores some strategies to reduce horizontal gender segregation in Taiwanese preschools. Some practical strategies are as follows: (1) Gender-neutral teaching activity design; (2) Diverse teaching materials; (3) Cooperative learning; (4) Open and flexible play areas; (5) Gender-neutral toys and materials; (5) Mixed seating arrangements; (6) Use inclusive language; (7) Encourage young children to explore new interests; (8) Reflect and adjust teaching behaviors; (9) Family and community collaboration; (9) Engage in conversations with parents; (10) Invite diverse role models; (11) Gender-inclusive curriculum guidelines; (12) Teacher training; (13) Evaluation and improvement. By implementing these strategies, early childhood education can move toward a more inclusive environment where young children learn and grow together in diverse settings.

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