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*Prace z warsztatu*

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# Life Lessons in Polish Schools: Teachers' Attitudes Towards Girls and Boys[1]

**Abstract**

The aim of the study was to analyse teachers' interactions with students in order to track the differences in the messages given to pupils depending on their gender, and to study the opinions of students about the behaviour of their teachers. As part of the research, 34 hours of lessons (divided into 17 hours of mathematics and 17 hours of Polish language lessons) were observed. Additionally, the opinions of 68 students (34 girls and 34 boys) were analysed. The study employs mixed methods of data analysis (Stromquist 2007), combining a qualitative approach based on elements of grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss 2017) with quantitative comparisons of the frequency of the teacher's behavior, using $\chi^2$ tests. The results indicate the differing nature of teachers' interactions with girls and boys; the number of interactions and their quality are more favourable in the case of boys. Girls are more often overlooked, and their achievements and contributions are less frequently noticed. In addition, students are aware of the differences in how they are treated by their teachers, pointing out, inter alia, to the importance of providing equal treatment to all students.

**Keywords:** observation, dairy study, students' opinions, teachers' attitudes, gender differences.

## Lekcje życia w polskich szkołach: postawy nauczycieli wobec dziewcząt i chłopców

**Abstrakt**

Celem badania była analiza interakcji nauczycieli z uczniami w celu prześledzenia różnic w przekazywanych komunikatach w zależności od płci ucznia oraz analiza opinii uczniów

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na temat zachowania nauczycieli. Obserwowano 34 godziny lekcji, czyli 17 godzin matematyki i 17 godzin lekcji języka polskiego. Dodatkowo przeanalizowano opinie 68 uczniów, 34 dziewcząt i 34 chłopców. W badaniu wykorzystano mieszane metody analizy danych (Stromquist 2007), łącząc podejście jakościowe oparte na elementach teorii ugruntowanej (Glaser, Strauss 2017) oraz ilościowe porównania częstotliwości zachowań nauczyciela z wykorzystaniem testów $\chi^2$. Wyniki wskazują na różny charakter interakcji nauczycieli z dziewczętami i chłopcami; liczba interakcji i ich jakość są korzystniejsze w przypadku chłopców. Dziewczęta są częściej pomijane, a ich osiągnięcia i wkład są rzadziej dostrzegane. Ponadto uczniowie są świadomi różnic w sposobie traktowania przez nauczyciela, podkreślając m.in. znaczenie równego traktowania wszystkich uczniów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obserwacja, badanie dzienniczkowe, opinie uczniów, postawy nauczycieli, różnice płciowe.

## Introduction

Traditional roles attributed to gender are largely embedded, and this entanglement means that society treats girls and boys differently. Thus, sometimes unknowingly, we have a tendency to deepen gender polarisation and to reproduce gender stereotypes (Bem 1993: 53). We are also all immersed in culture, and our adult attitudes and behaviours are significantly influenced by cultural messages and upbringing. The question therefore arises: are social gender roles themselves a reason for concern? After all, the entire social order is built on them. It turns out that only when upbringing is based on stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity, it may lead to the widening of the gap between boys and girls, which has far-reaching consequences for their lives (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Whitmore 2006: 28). Different treatment of girls and boys, encouraging them to engage in stereotypically assigned gender activities, developing skills and supporting those abilities that characterise females and males, all in all has a significant impact on their later educational and career path choices (Knapp et al. 2001: 10).

Next to the family, school is an important environment for socialisation. It is a place where the basic principles of social organisation are recreated by establishing different communication principles for different students and maintaining typical awareness structures. Education takes place according to specific rules which organize the teaching content, the concept of education, and the system of assessment. It is a kind of educational code that defines who, what, and how to teach and evaluate; who are the teachers and students, and what are the relationships between them (Bernstein 2003: 32). In turn, every members of our contemporary culture comes into contact with educational institutions, and is thus influenced by the content of education which shows the principles, divisions, hierarchies, and definitions of social phenomena considered to be obvious (Bourdieu, Passeron 1990: 18–22). In this way, the stereotypical perception of social gender roles turns into a vicious circle. In addition to the content of school textbooks (i.e. Chmura-Rutkowska et al. 2016: 10–12; Gajda, Wołowicz 2022: 15–26),

one of the main sources of gender stereotypes are the attitudes and behaviours of teachers towards girls and boys (Kollmayer, Schober, Spiel 2018). The influence and authority of teachers places them in a position of power over students. This, in turn, can build students' awareness that the way they are treated by the teacher is the only proper and correct way of functioning in society (Schneider 2004). Therefore, teachers, by shaping the behaviour and functioning of male and female students, can imperceptibly duplicate socially-functioning gender stereotypes (Tiedemann 2002: 52).

Gender inequalities in the school setting have been studied extensively by researchers for over forty years, with research efforts focused mainly on such issues as the differences in teacher's attention to male and female students, and on teacher-student interactions differentiated by student's gender (Acker 1988: 307; Brophy 1985: 116). In the only existing meta-analysis of this issue published in the late 1980s, Alison Kelly (1988: 4) concludes that boys take over most of the interactions with teachers, while girls receive fewer critical messages, but also less instructions. Among Polish researchers, the subject related to gender issues and gender stereotypes in the classroom has a slightly shorter history, nevertheless, the authors point to important research and social issues. In their research report, Katarzyna Gawlicz, Paweł Rudnicki and Marcin Starnawski (2015: 37) review Polish scholarship on the problem of discrimination in school – including gender discrimination. Polish studies on this subject focus on three key areas: (1) research on educational materials (see: Chmura-Rutkowska et al. 2016: 10–12; Kalinowska 1995: 224; Morciniec 1995: 12;); (2) research with the participation of teachers (including Górnikowska-Zwolak 2004: 87–88; Kopciewicz 2004: 75–84; 2008a: 355; Szczepanik 2004: 93); and (3) experiences of male and female students in the educational environment (e.g. Dzierzgowska, Rutkowska 2008: 21; Konarzewski 2004: 63).

According to the European Gender Equality Index, Poland ranks 24th among the 27 member states of the European Union, which places it well below the average for the entire EU (European Institute for Gender Equality 2020). Education is one of the areas where gender inequalities are also visible, when i.e. offering girls and boys different tasks to perform (Konarzewski, 1991: 23–24), or encouraging them to undertake different activities and develop gender-specific interests (An, Kim 2007). In fact, there are official recommendations presented at the EU level which emphasize the important aspect of universality and accessibility of education for both genders (cf. Art. 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations 2006), but in Poland official documents do not really address the issue of gender equality in education. There are only unofficial reports and initiatives organized from the bottom-up by non-governmental organizations, aimed at promoting equality and eliminating gender stereotypes in education (Abramowicz 2011: 15; Jonczy-Adamska 2015: 5). Also, gender issues are not actually mentioned at any stage of teacher education (Jonczy-Adamska, 2015: 35). In turn, the lack of educators' knowledge on this subject may consequently lead to the strengthening of gender stereotypes during the teaching process (Gansen 2019: 399).

Numerous Polish and international studies of the interactions between teachers and female and male students confirm the reproduction of similar patterns of behaviour, indicating different attitudes towards boys and girls (Burton 1996: 139; Myhill, Jones 2006: 102; Szczepanik 2004: 93). To date, however, there have been few studies that address teachers' behaviour together with students' views on them (Pickering 1997: 51). Therefore, little is known whether students experiencing specific treatment by a teacher are aware of the differences in the teacher's interaction with them according to their gender. On the other hand, we do not know whether the views of the students are in line with the actual actions of teachers. In order to fill this gap in scholarship, we have decided to present data acquired during lesson observations that examines both the behaviour of teachers towards students, as well as students' opinions on their teachers' behaviour, with the intention to search for specific gender codes (Bernstein 2003: 25; Bourdieu, Passeron 1990: 24) and to compare students' opinions with an observation of the teachers' behaviour.

## Hidden gender curriculum

A school should be a place where all students are treated equally, therefore no one should be favoured, disparaged, or treated differently (Articles 32 and 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997). However, the declarations appearing in official documents are not always identical to the expectations and personal beliefs of educators. This phenomenon, called the hidden curriculum (Kohlberg 1970: 108), is a set of consequences of participating in the education process, in which students are equipped with knowledge in addition to the one derived from official curricula. It consists of an unplanned transfer of norms, values and beliefs in the classroom as well as the wider school environment (Giroux, Penna 1979: 27). Because the factors that make up the hidden curriculum are not planned or intended, they remain outside of the awareness of educators and are disclosed, among others, by strengthening the attitude of passive acceptance among pupils and rejecting active criticism, thus promoting, reproducing, and seeking only the right answers to questions and strengthening the important role of competition, while at the same time diminishing the role that cooperation plays in the learning process (Meighan, Harber 2007: 35). The hidden curriculum also includes skills or behaviours that most pupils and teachers usually take for granted (Myles, Simpson 2001: 281). Numerous studies have confirmed the occurrence of this phenomenon at every stage of education, from primary (Gatto 2002: 25; Myles, Simpson 2001: 283) and secondary schools (Gatto 2002: 25), to universities (Margolis 2001: 32). One of the elements of the hidden school curriculum that girls and boys learn is gender specificity and predestination to specific gender roles in society. Teachers' attitudes and different treatment of girls and boys are thus a perfect relay of this implicit knowledge (Younger, Warrington, Williams 1999: 331).

## Teachers' attitudes towards girls and boys

As it was already mentioned, numerous examples of both Polish and international scholarship confirms the occurrence of gender inequalities in schools. For many years, existing literature has emphasised the issue of the different treatment of boys and girls. Despite the assurances and beliefs of most teachers that they treat girls and boys equally, the opposite is true (Younger, Warrington, Williams 1999: 332). The differences can be seen from the quantitative observation of the number of interactions between the teacher and girls and boys, in favour of male students (Swinson, Harrop 2009: 519). For example, a study by Younger and colleagues (Younger, Warrington, Williams 1999: 336) found several differences in the frequency of interactions between the teacher and students, depending on whether they were girls or boys. Overall, teachers were more likely to interact with boys (54% of interactions) than with girls (46% of interactions). Also, questions were asked more often to boys (62% of questions) than to girls (38% of questions), and similarly more frequently answers were obtained from boys (56% of answers) than from girls (44% of answers). Boys are instructed far more often and receive more attention from teachers when compared to girls (Sadker 2000: 81–82). Female students are more frequently overlooked, ignored and unnoticed (Lee 1996: 145-150), while boys receive significantly more attention (Younger, Warrington, Williams 1999). According to Krzysztof Konarzewski (1991: 23), girls and boys, despite the assumptions about equal access to education, are offered different activities during lessons. Boys are more often presented with open tasks to be solved, while girls are more often presented with exercises that shape a specific set of skills. As a result, the behaviour of boys is characterised by greater freedom, a higher degree of nonconformity, and a consent to question teachers' authority, while girls are expected to reliably complete the tasks according to an established algorithm (Konarzewski 1991: 25). Based on the current research results, it can be concluded that not much has changed in this area.

Teachers often unconsciously exacerbate gender inequalities by adapting subject requirements to students, not because of their actual skills and cognitive abilities, but rather because of stereotypical gender differences. While, as it is pointed out by Sadker (2000: 81),it is true that boys and girls have different strengths and needs, they are equally limited by gender stereotypes. According to the concept of Rosenthal's (1991: 344) four factors, based on expectancy-value theory, teachers' expectations built on the basis of the stereotype of different competences of girls and boys result in different behavior towards children. As a result, teachers lower the requirements for boys in reading and art lessons, and for girls in science and sports (Zajączkowska 2008: 5). This, in turn, is associated with a reduction in self-esteem, self-confidence, and even in the potential achievements of girls and boys in areas stereotypically considered as assigned to the opposite gender (i.e. Bauer 2000: 22; Sadker 2000: 82; Retelsdorf, Schwartz, Asbrock 2015: 186).

The phenomenon of inequality during school activities also applies to behavioural issues. Once girls are noticed by teachers, higher demands are placed on them

in terms of both achievement and behaviour during lessons (Myhill, Jones 2006: 102), as opposed to demands on boys. Although teachers seem to send more critical messages to boys, with almost half of the criticism being directed at their behaviour (Kaplan 1990: 28), in the end nonconformist behaviour is generally ignored and explained as representing typically masculine traits of character (Jackson, Salisbury 1996: 107). At the same time nearly all critique of girls is related to the quality of their work (Kaplan 1990: 29). Moreover, positive reinforcements addressed to girls concern the diligence of their work, while boys are praised for the substantive value of the performed activity (Delamont 1980: 15). Importantly, both girls and boys are fully aware of their unequal treatment by teachers. Female students note that boys receive more reprimands and punishments (Pickering 1997: 50), which is also confirmed by the boys themselves, when they rebel against intense teacher criticism (Younger, Warrington, Williams 1999: 330).

## The present study

As indicated previously, one of the elements of the hidden gender curriculum are attitudes and behaviours towards girls and boys (Blusz 1993: 11; Muszyńska 2004: 47), and the fact that contrasting treatment of male and female students by teachers is not uncommon (Swinson, Harrop 2009: 519; Fennema et al. 1990: 61). For this reason, we decided to conduct an observational study, the aim of which was to trace teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards girls and boys, with the intention to search for specific, repetitive patterns of behaviour that are dependent on gender. In order to broaden the picture of these relations, the results of the observational study were compared with the analysis of students' opinions about teacher behaviour, collected during the online diary study. Despite the existence of research studies of students' opinions in extant literature (Carrington et al. 2007: 399–400; Myhill, Jones 2006: 110), there are few studies combining both of these aspects (Pickering 1997: 51). This is the key argument for presenting the results of the lesson observation and students' opinions in this article.

Therefore, the main aim of this study was to investigate the following:

- Gender stereotypical differences in the treatment of boys and girls by teachers and repeating patterns of these behaviours.
- Students' opinions on teachers' behaviour during lessons, focused on areas related to different treatment based on gender.

In order to achieve these goals, students' opinions about the teachers' behaviour were examined, whereas the behaviour of teachers was observed directly in the course of the lesson process.

## Method: Test procedure and research sample

The study lasted for one month and comprised two parallel stages, i.e., the lesson observation study and the diary study. The observational study involved 17 eighth grade classes from 17 randomly selected schools located in small (under 20,000 inhabitants), medium (between 20–100,000 inhabitants), and large towns (over 100,000 inhabitants) in Poland. In each class, one lesson of Polish language and one lesson of mathematics was observed, resulting in a total sum of 34 hours of observations. Lessons were conducted by 25 female teachers (no class was taught by a male teacher) whose mean age was M = 42.6; the youngest teacher was 31 years old, while the oldest was 47 years old. The average work experience of teachers was M = 16.8 years and ranged from 6 to 21 years. In each of the observed classes, the study was conducted by trained researchers, one of whom dealt with the initial coding of the behaviour of students and teachers, while the other supervised the general course of the study. The observations were recorded as audio and then transcribed verbatim. Simultaneously with the observational stage, a diary study was conducted. Four students (two girls and two boys) were randomly selected in each of the 17 observed classes (34 girls and 34 boys overall, the mean age of the students was M = 13.6 years). Every day, for one month, the students completed a diary regarding their opinion on teachers' behaviour during Polish language and math lessons. The survey was carried out remotely, with students posting their opinions on a custom-designed online platform. The students were asked to briefly answer two questions in writing:

> Think about how the Polish language/mathematics teacher behaved today. Is there anything you liked especially about their behaviour during the lesson? Is there anything you particularly disliked about their behaviour during the lesson?

Despite the gratuities provided for students who completed the study – in the form of gift cards for the bookstore – the response rate from the diary survey was approximately 80%.

The study was planned and conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of social research (Neuman, Robson, 2014: 47–66). The consent for the participation of students in both the observational and the diary study had to be expressed by their parents or legal guardians. Students from each observed class were selected for the diary study, and in the absence of consent, another person was selected. For the observational study, after explaining the design of the study, consent was obtained from all parents and guardians, which allowed to conduct observation with entire classes. Teachers participating in the observational study gave their oral consent to participate.

## Analysis of the results of the diary study

During the diary survey, a total of 639 statements about teachers' behaviour during mathematics lessons and 539 statements about Polish language lessons were collected. The students' statements were analysed on the basis of elements of grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss 2017), and data coding was dealt with by two independent coders, both of whom were graduate students with training pertinent to the research subject. In the first stage, all of the students' statements were read and the initial categories of statements were formulated on the basis thereof. Subsequently, during multiple comparative analyses of the statements, each coder independently assigned them to particular categories. In the last stage, all of the students' statements were re-read in order to confirm their classification into the categories. At this stage, the categories were also analysed, combining those that turned out to be too narrow and dividing those that turned out to be too broad. Any discrepancies between the coders were discussed on a regular basis. Ultimately, a list of 12 categories was formulated. Examples of students' statements and their assigned categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of categories of students' statements about teachers' behaviour during the lesson

| | Categories of statements | Sample statements |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | encouraging independence | I liked the fact that the teacher gave many independent assignments during the lessons [12-7A-05-F]<br>I liked the fact that I had to do the work by myself [05-7A-16-M] |
| 2. | equal treatment of girls and boys | The teacher treated everyone the same [13-7A-19-F]<br>What I liked about [the] maths lesson was that the teacher did not pick out the best people, but asked everyone one by one [17-8A-08-M] |
| 3. | willingness to provide assistance | The teacher explained to me a task with which I had a problem for a long time [04-8C-09-F]<br>It was nice in the math class. We did tasks with percentages. The teacher helped the whole class and me with assignments [01-7B-08-M] |
| 4. | giving positive reinforcements | In the math lesson, we [completed] tasks using a calculator, in accordance with the topic of the lesson (What percentage is the calculator). The teacher praised us for our work and commitment [01-7B-08-M]<br>I liked that the teacher asked me about the reading we are discussing and praised me for the good answer [09-7A-08-M] |
| 5. | cooperation between the teacher and students | I liked that we learned to write meaningful essays together [09-7A-07-F]<br>I liked that together with the teacher we discussed how to write a better essay [09-7A-10-M] |
| 6. | good relations with students | It was ok, this teacher understands our problems and whenever we have a problem with something, not only with learning, she will always help us and that's great [15-7B-22-M]<br>We can talk to the teacher normally if we need to [15-8C-02-F] |

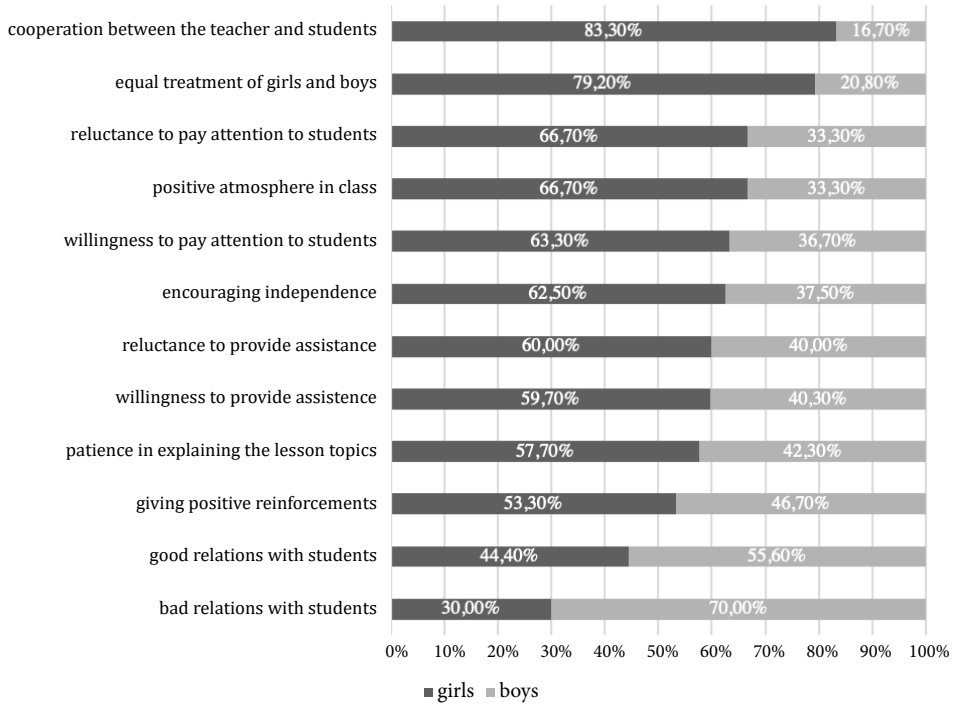
| | Categories of statements | Sample statements |
|---|---|---|
| 7. | willingness to pay attention to students | I really liked the attention given during the lesson to me and to people who did not understand this topic [05-7A-05-F]<br>I liked that the teacher focused more on people who do not cope with mathematics [09-7A-10-M] |
| 8. | patience in explaining the lesson topics | The teacher was patient and calm. She kept explaining and helping the whole class and me [02-7A-16-F]<br>I liked it when we could think calmly, and when we didn't know something, the teacher explained it to us [02-7A-06-F] |
| 9. | positive atmosphere in class | I liked the way the teacher conducted the lesson because she was in a good mood and the atmosphere was better [04-7C-08-F]<br>Generally, I like math, and today we were joking with the teacher aside, so I liked everything [04-7C-17-F] |
| 10. | reluctance to pay attention to students | The teacher didn't pay us enough attention [12-7A-09-M]<br>I didn't like the teacher paying less attention to boys [03-8B-20-F] |
| 11. | reluctance to provide assistance | I did not like the fact that the teacher did not help with the tasks [04-7C-04-F]<br>I didn't like the fact that the teacher didn't help us understand the topic [04-7C-04-M] |
| 12. | bad relations with students | The Polish language teacher told me inappropriate[ly] „just don't piss in your pants" [17-8A-13-F]<br>During the Polish language lesson, I did not like the critical approach to students – comparing my class to other classes [15-7B-07-M] |

Source: own study; code letters "F" and "M" stand for female and male student, respectively.

The obtained categories were analysed in terms of the frequency of their selection by girls and boys. Students' opinions about the positive or negative behaviour of the teacher during mathematics lessons are illustrated in Graph 1. The graph shows the percentage comparisons of the categories to which the statements of boys and girls belong to. The largest differences in percentages were observed in the following categories: "cooperation between the teacher and students" (83.3% of the responses of girls and 16.7% of the responses of boys), "equal treatment of girls and boys" (79.2% of the responses of girls and 20.8% of the responses of boys) and "bad relations with students" (30% of girls' statements and 70% of boys' statements). Moreover, boys emphasised "good relations with students" slightly more often than girls (44.4% of girls' statements and 55.6% of boys' statements). In the remaining categories of statements about teachers' behaviour, a slight predominance of girls' statements was observed: "encouraging independence" (62.5% of the responses of girls and 37.5% of the responses of boys), "willingness to provide assistance" (59.7% of the responses of girls and 40.3% of the responses of boys), "giving positive reinforcements" (53.3% of the responses of girls and 46.7% of the responses of boys), "willingness to pay attention to students" (63.3% of the responses of

girls and 36.7% of the responses of boys), "patience in explaining the lesson topics" (57.7% of the responses of girls and 42.3% of the responses of boys), "positive atmosphere in class" (66.7% of the responses of girls and 33.3% of the responses of boys), "reluctance to pay attention to students" (66.7% of the responses of girls and 33.3% of the responses of boys), "reluctance to provide assistance" (60% of the responses of girls and 40% of the responses of boys). The differences, although noticeable, are at the threshold of statistical significance: $\chi^2 = 18.58$; $p = 0.069$; Kramer V = 0.069.

Graph 1. Students' opinions about positive or negative teacher behaviour during math lessons

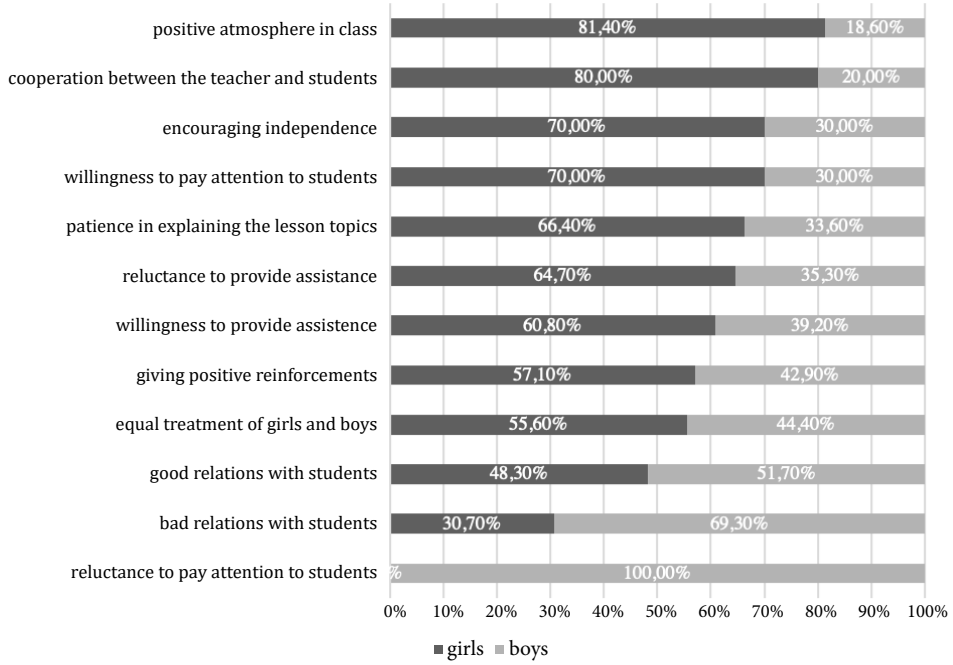



Source: own study.

Graph 2 presents students' opinions on positive or negative teacher behaviour during Polish lessons. The greatest differences are observed in the case of the following statements: the "reluctance to pay attention to students" category, in which 100% of the statements belong to boys; the "positive atmosphere in class" category, which is more often appreciated and noticed by girls (81.4% of girls' statements, 18.6% of boys' statements); the "cooperation between the teacher and students" category is also more often emphasised by girls (80% of girls' statements and 20% of boys' statements); the "encouraging independence" and "willingness to pay attention to students" category (70% for girls' statements and 30% for boys' statements). Moreover, boys often emphasised the perceived "bad relations with students" (30.7% of girls' statements and 69.3% of boys' statements). In the remaining categories, the differ-

ences in the frequency of boys' and girls' statements are lower, with girls' statements dominating: "encouraging independence" (70% of the responses of girls and 30% of the responses of boys), "equal treatment of girls and boys" (55.6% of the responses of girls and 44.4% of the responses of boys), "willingness to provide assistance" (60.8% of the responses of girls and 39.2% of the responses of boys), "giving positive reinforcements" (57.1% of the responses of girls and 42.9% of the responses of boys), "patience in explaining the lesson topics" (66.4% of the responses of girls and 33.6% of the responses of boys). In "good relations with students" category (48.3% of the responses of girls and 51.7% of the responses of boys) there is a slight advantage of the boys. The identified differences in the frequency of statements reached the threshold of statistical significance: $\chi^2 = 64.26$; $p<0.0001$; Kramer V = 0.346.

Graph 2. Students' opinions on positive or negative teacher behaviour during Polish language lessons




Source: own study.

## Analysis of the results of the observational study

Based on the categories of teacher behaviours identified in students' statements, an analysis of the transcripts of lesson observations was made. During the analysis, as in the case of examining students' statements, procedures based on ground-

ed theory were used. The objective was to collect and analyse data based on the indicative-interpretative paradigm. Thanks to this, it is possible to understand the theory and potential patterns of human behaviour in the social context, without formulating a previous theory (Glaser Strauss 2017: 48). Elements of grounded theory were used to study teacher-student interactions during the lesson in search of specific, repetitive patterns of behaviour. During the analyses, similarly as in the case of the diary study, the constant comparison method was used. Themes appearing in the lesson transcripts were compared to the point where data saturation was obtained; at this stage, no new themes were identified. Data coding was completed by two coders, who had previously coded the data from the diary survey. In the first stage, all transcripts of the lessons were analysed and the relevant parts were given appropriate codes. Then, the transcripts were analysed once again, with a focus on a comparison of the descriptions of previously created codes in order to either combine or divide them. In the last stage, the author of the article, as the third independent coder, reanalysed the transmitted codes in order to finally obtain a list of six main categories. Among these, four concern the relationship between the teacher and boys, while the two remaining concern the relationship of the teacher with girls.

**Teachers' behaviour towards boys: Favouritism**

The favouring of boys is manifested, among other factors, by giving positive feedback only when good responses come from both girls and boys:

> Teacher: Yeah… and pigs might fly… Jack?
> Girl: Radek
> Teacher: Who?
> Boy: Andrzej Radek.
> Girl: Andrzej Radek.
> Teacher: Andrzej Radek, of course it is.
> Boy: Oh, because I got confused. I made a mistake.
> Teacher: All right, Jack. But, of course, because of an excess of knowledge, people sometimes get all this mixed up in their heads. But of course, Jack, I know you know because you are a very smart boy [09_8A_PL5]

Teachers often allow boys to continue taking to each other on topics unrelated to the topic of the lesson. They also seem eager to continue these conversations:

> Boy: I have a question, is it normal for a 15-year-old to go bald?
> Teacher: But this is probably not a question for me, I am not a competent person, but it seems that it is some kind of an irregularity in the organism.
> Boy: But Simon has no hair here, he is getting bald just like an old man
> Teacher: What's going on here (…)
> Boy: Oh! Yuck [12_7A_M3]

Another example of a similar type of behaviour is playfully referring to non-classroom information previously obtained from the student. This indicates that teachers favour boys over girls, and more often build closer relationships with them. While such dialogues often happened with boys, they hardly every occur in conversations with girls.

### Appreciating boys' individual achievements

Boys' skills are appreciated without giving any context or comparing them with the opposite gender. They are appreciated and praised individually.

> Boy: Because if a triangle is rectangular then the sum of squares of the length of the hypotenuse is equal to … the square of the hypotenuse.
> Teacher: Okay. You made a mistake in one, because you said at the beginning that the sum of the squares of the hypotenuses … We only have one hypotenuse, but I understand that you meant the two shorter sides, the hypotenuse (…). Well Kacper, bravo. You saved the entire class. They are all grateful to you, maybe some applause will be heard in a moment? [02_7_M5]

### Indulgence to nonconformist behaviours of boys

Generally, male students are treated indulgently by teachers during classes, as teachers seem to ignore their nonconformist attitudes, expressing their tacit consent to them: 'Teacher: As usual, you don't have a notebook?; Boy: Well, I don't have…; Teacher: Same thing'. [11_8_M5]. Boys are allowed more freedom, they seem not to bear any consequences for the lack of materials needed during the lessons, they can express their opinions, even those that oppose their teachers' opinions. Moreover, teachers do not seem to expect them to explain why they are late, their disruptive conversations are ignored, and if they break the rules, they are not meet with significant consequences:

> Teacher: Wisława Szymborska. What do you remember about Wisława Szymborska?
> Boy: That she was born in 1923 and died in 2012.
> Teacher: Did you really remember that?
> Boy: Yes.
> Teacher: Congratulations.
> Girl 1: He read it in a book.
> Boy: Not true.
> Teacher: Great. Why don't you believe him? Are you jealous?
> Girl 1: I saw it.
> Girl 2: Because we have seen it.
> Teacher: You could have a look at the textbook and you would know, too. [07_8C_M5]

During the remote lesson, the male student persistently disturbed the female student when she was asked to read, and this behaviour was also ignored by the teacher.

Teacher: Well, someone else who hasn't read yet?
Girl: I can.
Boy: You can't.
Teacher: I, that is ...?
Girl: Amelia
Teacher: Amelia, you can go, we're listening.
Boy: No, you can't because you have a dirty room.
Teacher: We're listening, Amelia. [04_8C_M5]

**Providing boys with reprimands**

One of few consequences of boys' difficult behaviour for teachers is that they are taken to answer as a punishment: 'You have too much to say. You will do this task' [09_8a_M5]. More often, however, teachers ignore or lightly rebuke boys whose behaviour makes it difficult for other male and female students to focus on the lesson: 'Boys, I am not going to rebuke them every time. Eighth grade knows how to behave' [09_8A_M5]. They also struggle to cope with boys' non--stereotypical behaviour, considering it rather as a desire to disrupt their work than an actual, valuable statement:

Boy: Ma'am, it should be plump or chubby there, not fat.
Teacher: Please take care of the text, please.
Boy: But why …
Teacher: You would have to check. Does this have anything to do with the topic?
Boy: Yes
Teacher: What?
Boy: A lot
Teacher: Marek, I think I will have to complain.
Boy: But the author wrote fat instead of chubby.
Teacher: I am asking you to focus on the class, stop talking. [07_7_PL3]

The teachers also try to argue with boys, threatening to send them to the office of the tutor, or offering to change places with them, in order to further conduct the classes. Other types of punishments can also be, for example, changing their seat to another place, which, in the teacher's opinion, is worse from the perspective of the disciplined student. Penalties imposed as a consequence of misbehaviour are either neglected or not viewed too seriously by male students:

Girl: Ma'am, did you hear?
Teacher: What?
Girl: He cursed using the „f" word.
Teacher: (Sigh). Okay, we're now having a Polish lesson, and later Kamil will stay for the break, okay?

Boy: Second time today (laughs).
Teacher: You stay on a break without talking…
Boy: OK.
Teacher: OK.
Boy: Day two…
Teacher: Silence! [01_7B_PL3]

### Teachers' behaviour towards girls: ignoring and omitting

The main conclusion from the analysis of the observed lessons is that there are fewer statements directed at girls than those directed at boys. If the teacher is already speaking to the girls and engaging in dialogue with them, they feel either ignored or omitted:

Teacher: Russophile, that is who?
Girl: So, it's like a Pole who let[s] himself be Russified.
Teacher: Of course. So, a Pole who let himself be Russified. So, a sympathiser of Russians.
Boy: Exactly.
Teacher: Of course, thank you very much for confirming the rightness of my position, John. Yes. Yes, just as John explained concretely and to the point, he was a lover of Russians, literally, right? [09_8A_PL5]

Despite the seemingly witty tone of the entire statement, the girls may get the impression that their answer, although correct, does not provoke the teacher's enthusiasm, contrary to boys' responses. This can therefore magnify girls' withdrawal and strengthen their conformist attitudes:

Teacher: And there is also Sophie. Sophie, probably you would like to sit with the other girls? Or would you like to sit with boys?
Girl: With boys.
Teacher: Because you are sitting alone, you have a choice. Pick a group for yourself.
[a group of girls sits closer]
Girl: Well, I can sit with the girls.
Teacher: You can sit with the girls. Well … the girls will slide off and Sophie … take a chair and you will get to them… [12_8_PL5]

The girls' conformist attitudes in response to the teacher's statements addressed to them may frequently appear during lessons, e.g., in the case of choosing the tasks to be solved; this is apparent because the final decision rests with the teacher. Another example is the conformist attitude of girls, which contrasts the resisting attitude of boys; this is fundamentally the rule in any conversation between students and teachers.

### Appreciating the achievements of girls compared to boys

Naturally, girls are praised for their knowledge and skills. However, the vast majority of this takes place during Polish language lessons, and often in combination with a lack of similar skills represented by boys:

> Boy: Hate. What does it do, what is it characterised by?
> Teacher: Very good. Please tell me your feelings. It's not talking about making things up or some serious answers, it's about how you feel. Someone creates poetry to evoke feeling. I cannot believe that this poem does not evoke any feelings in you. You can do it. You know, you know, you know. You just have to …
> Boy: No…
> Teacher: You are listening like that. Girls back there, Kasia?
> Girl: The hate is always in our world; the author describes hate here. That it still is and always will be.
> Teacher: Great. Thank you for what you said. This is the best summary of the content of this poem, the shortest. That's what I should say. Since Kasia said what she said, I am asking you all to look at the content of the poem. Marek too. Make an effort, please make an effort. [01_8B_PL2]

Teachers often use a method of motivating students that is based on identifying shortcomings in opposition to a job well done: 'Boy: I don't know; Teacher: I don't know, but Jula is already trying' [02_8A_M5]. Thus, girls' performance is usually appreciated, as opposed to boys' underperformance: 'Yes, but how nicely written. Look at Maja's writ[ing] here; you can see everything. One under the other. And with you Mateusz, a little here, a little there, you can't see anything' [01_8A_M5].

## Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the repeating patterns of gender--stereotypical treatment of boys and girls by teachers. The results of the diary study reveal that different teacher behaviour towards girls and boys does not escape the attention of the students themselves. For girls, it is particularly important that all students are being treated equally, which may mean that they are highly sensitive to experiencing inequalities in school. Moreover, it turns out that they more often appreciate that students are treated equally during mathematics lessons than in Polish lessons. This could be one reason why male students are favoured in math (Berekashvili 2012: 43). Moreover, during both mathematics and language classes, the girls emphasise the cooperation between the teacher and the class as positive. The predominance of these responses, combined with their appreciation of a positive atmosphere in the classroom, could be read as a stronger need for providing good quality general working conditions for girls. On the other hand, among boys, relations between teachers and students, both good and bad, were noticed significantly more often than among girls. As identified by the results of both previous research

(i.e., Swinson, Harrop 2009: 519; Younger, Warrington, Williams 1999: 336) and the research presented in this article, teachers establish conversations with boys more often, both positive and negative, hence the advantage of noticing these relations in the group of boys. As silent observers, girls evaluate a broader picture – the entirety of work done during classes. More often than boys, girls appreciate teachers who encourage students to be independent, as well as notice teachers' lack of attention during mathematics lessons. In turn, the overwhelming majority of boys emphasise the lack of attention paid to students by the Polish language teacher. Such a division of fields reflects the hidden beliefs of teachers who evaluate students' predisposition for science and language subjects based on their gender (Berekashvili 2012: 45; Riegle-Crumb, Humphries 2012: 298).

The observational study confirms students' earlier expressed views. Teachers more often direct their speech to boys and establish a dialogue with them, both on the topic of the lesson as well as on other subjects. Boys are visibly more favoured – as evidenced both by the frequency of their relationships with the teacher, and the character of these interactions. The feedback and praise given by teachers to boys are formulated as independent messages, without the requirement to compare the male recipient to the contrasting behaviour of the girl. Boys are also allowed to slip through; indeed, they are more often forgiven for reprehensible behaviour, with teacher sturning them into jokes, or simply ignoring them. Even if boys get reprimanded, it is not severe enough to prevent them from acting in a similar way in the future. As a result, through reprehensible behaviour during lessons boys have a chance to develop a sense of nonconformity and independent thinking, and quickly learn that their behaviour can be forgotten, if they properly arrange a conversation with the teacher (Jackson, Salisbury 1996: 112). Male students are also credited with the right to interrupt the other boys and girls in the classroom, they use jokes more often, and their statements are also ironic. In response to such activity, teachers more often react verbally, while also trying to discipline them (Grzechnik 2015: 41). Boys generally have greater freedom of behaviour, while weaknesses in their skills are treated with leniency (Chmura-Rutkowska, Ostruch 2007: 24). A willingness to attract attention, gaining a high position, or solving problems in an aggressive way is perceived as normal behaviour (Kopciewicz 2007: 23). In contrast, teachers' messages to girls are noticeably less frequent, and when there is a dialogue between the teacher and the female student, it usually concerns the topic of the lesson. The omission of girls was a noticeable pattern that was repeated many times during the observational stage of the study. This behaviour was manifested both by ignoring girls' willingness to answer and selecting boys more often, as well as by giving positive reinforcements only to boys even if girls also provided correct answers. If female students have already been praised for their responses, then in most cases boys serve the role of a benchmark against which they are compared when it comes to assessing their activities during class. Therefore, it seems that in the eyes of teachers, girls do not seem to function independently.

There are some limitations of this study to bear in mind. The first is the limited number of observed school hours, with the risk of teachers controlling their behaviour towards students. When designing similar research studies in the future, it is worth taking into account a larger number of lesson observations to be conducted in each class. One should also pay attention to the prevailing qualitative nature of the research, which makes it impossible to generalize the results to the entire population of Polish teachers. Naturally, the results indicate the existence of certain noticeable and repetitive patterns of behavior during interaction with students in class, also confirmed by past scholarship. Nevertheless, designing similar studies on a large scale would, on the one hand, present a challenge, but on the other hand, it would offer even more reliable data in this area of research. Such attempts were made in Polish literature, for example, during the preparation of a report on anti-discrimination education (Abramowicz, 2011: 28), although it is still a drop in the ocean when considering the necessity to properly evaluate the current state of affairs.

The lessons that boys and girls receive at school prepare them for their future role as adult citizens in society. Unfortunately, even today, in the 21st century, children are still learning to essentially reproduce the social order that has been present since the dawn of time. Here they receive a series of signals confirming only certain gender-dependent social roles and deepening gender differences. It happens implicitly, but even these hidden messages from the teacher are enough to establish a belief in how a man should behave and what behaviour is expected from a woman. This may have consequences not only regarding the stage of education, but also for their later lives. When it comes to girls, the attitude of passivity, dependence, and doubt in their own abilities increases in time, nourished by inappropriate attitudes exemplified by teachers. In the case of boys, the belief in a sense of superiority and unlimited possibilities is dominant and often visible in adulthood (see Solnit 2014: 9). Girls and boys develop personality traits and adopt models of future social roles, as well as systems of values and needs that function in various socialization environments. One of them is school where, as it turns out, different character traits, needs and values that shape historically formed social roles are expected (Firkowska-Mankiewicz 1995: 43). Children in school undergo specific socialization training, experiencing interactions with their peers (Kopciewicz 2008b: 131) and with teachers (Jankowska 2009: 19), who, as confirmed by the results of this study, give them a picture of their social role by treating them differently according to their gender.

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