

GENDER ASYMMETRY IN KAZAKHSTAN'S EDUCATION: STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP TEACHERS' DESIGN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to identify the manifestations of gender inequality in the participation of teachers in the research and project activities of educational institutions in Kazakhstan and to develop strategies for increasing professional participation in a gender-sensitive way. The main idea of the study is to understand how institutional and individual factors influence the participation of male and female faculty members in research and project initiatives, and to identify effective mechanisms for equal opportunity. The scientific significance of the study lies in clarifying methodological approaches to the analysis of gender policy in education and identifying barriers that limit the professional development of teachers. The practical importance lies in the development of specific tools and support strategies to help teachers engage in research and achieve gender balance. In this methodology, quantitative data analysis using SPSS (78 teachers from three regions of Kazakhstan) and qualitative interview analysis using NVivo are carried out, which makes it possible to identify both statistical patterns and the main factors affecting teacher participation.

The study included self-assessment of teachers' research competencies, motivations, and institutional barriers. The main results showed minimal quantitative differences in the participation and skills of male and female teachers. However, qualitative data revealed persistent gender-related issues, particularly work-life balance, access to resources, and administrative support. Teachers with extensive work experience and those who work in city schools participated actively.

Identified motivation, support and resource availability as key factors influencing engagement. The study provided practical recommendations for educational institutions aimed at improving the professional capacity of teachers and ensuring equal participation of men and women in research activities. Its practical value includes the implementation of mentoring programs, gender-sensitive professional development and flexible organizational structures.

Keywords: gender asymmetry, teachers' engagement, research activities, project-based activities, professional development, educational policy, Kazakhstan, motivation, institutional support.

Introduction

Many changes are taking place in the education system in Kazakhstan. One of them is the training of teachers, the improvement of their professional development remains relevant. According to the 2024 annual report of the Ministry of Science and higher education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, women in the secondary education system make up more than 70 % of the total number of teachers, while men are most often appointed to administrative positions. This is the basis for considering inequality not only as cultural and social stereotypes, but also as the main institutional factor, reducing the interest of the individual in professional growth and participation in scientific activities [1].

“The problem of gender imbalance in the teaching profession is the all-rounder and manifests itself in the structure of human resources, access to research resources, and engagement in project-based learning. Studies conducted by the UNDP and UNESCO demonstrate that systemic barriers stand out in Kazakhstan, hindering equal participation of teachers of different genders in scientific and innovative projects. Similar patterns are watched across other post-Soviet countries, where gender stereotypes continue to shape teachers' professional identity and academic behavior” [2].

Research and foreign studies, considered by the Association of Berikhanova and other authors [3], indicate in the works of the OECD [4] that the development of research and design services for teachers will overcome key institutional barriers and contribute to strengthening gender inclusion in education. Research and design activities, as a basis for professional growth and gender equality, increase the ability of the individual to be creative, independent and accessible to academic resources.

Gender inequality in education and professional paths remains a constant problem in Kazakhstan, despite significant progress in increasing women's access to schools and higher education. In recent decades, the country has achieved gender parity in enrollment at most levels of education, and in some fields, women even make up the majority of students, including at the graduate level. However, numerous studies show that this quantitative equality does not lead to real equality in academic and professional outcomes. Researchers point out that women continue to face structural barriers to career advancement, scientific leadership, and high-status professional positions, despite higher educational attainment. According to empirical analysis, gender inequality is still an institution in the scientific and educational management system of Kazakhstan, there is a formal mechanism for promoting gender equality, but it replicates male-dominated structures and works poorly [5].

Previous studies have also pointed out that the roots of modern gender inequality lie in persistent cultural stereotypes that affect attitudes towards “female” and “male” professions. These stereotypes are reinforced at the school level through the content of the curriculum, hidden messages of class interaction, teacher expectations. As a result, Labor isolation becomes noticeable already in adolescence. For example, girls often choose the humanities and teaching professions, while boys are too inclined to the technical sphere, which creates unequal opportunities in the future [6].

The main goal of the study is to show the conditions of gender asymmetry in the educational space of Kazakhstan, to propose strategies aimed at achieving gender equality through the development of design and research activities of teachers.

The main relevance of the study is determined by the principles of “gender equality and leading women and girls to greater opportunities”, the fifth direction corresponding to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, and priorities in the education system of modern Kazakhstan [7].

Material and methods

The study consisted of a combination of mixed methods (mixed-methods approach). In other words, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to deeply consider the manifestations of gender asymmetry in the space of the education system of Kazakhstan and determine strategies for the development of research and design activities of teachers.

Materials. Participant: 78 teachers of secondary school and universities from three regions of Kazakhstan, namely Almaty, Astana and Karaganda, took part in the study. Of these, 53 female teachers make up 68 % of all participants and 25 male teachers 32 %. The result coincides with the gender combination proposed by the Ministry of Science and higher education of the Republic of Kazakhstan [8]. Participants in the experiment were selected by random selection method, regardless of subject orientation and professional experience.

Research tools. – A survey was conducted to assess views on gender balance in education and determine the participation of teachers in research and project activities. The survey used 20 Liker scales and 10 open questions;

A deep interview was conducted, consisting of 20 teachers (13 women, 7 men). The basis of the survey is aimed at analyzing professional development experience and strategies.

Equipment and software:

Surveys both interview were conducted through the Google Forms (Google LLC, USA) and Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, USA) platform. For statistical analysis, quantitative methods were used by SPSS Statistics 28 (IBM, USA), and qualitative methods were used by NVivo 13 for coding and subject analysis.

Methods. According to quantitative analysis: the characteristics of teachers' research and design characteristics and indicators related to research activities are determined by frequency, percentage, average value and standard deviation.

The relationship between gender differences and participation in research activities was determined using the chi-square (Chi-square) test. The significance level is set to $p < 0.05$.

According to qualitative analysis: thematic analysis was developed in accordance with the approach of Brown and Clark. Interview were literally transcribed and encoded in a special NVivo 13 program. In each direction, motivational directions and institutional strategies were developed that affect the research activity of teachers.

Research progress. The study consisted of three main stages.

Stage1 – the questionnaires were distributed, and the respondents were distributed online. The data was collected. Responses – 92 percent.

Stage 2 – qualitative interviews were conducted. The main feature was to identify the difficulties and experiences of teachers related to their gender identity.

Stage 3 – combine all collected data and check the forecasts. Quantitative and qualitative results were analyzed in combination with the triangulation method. The forecasts here were as follows:

- There will be gender asymmetry in the research and design activities of teachers;
- Institutional support and the potential for professional development increase the research activity of teachers, regardless of gender.

Ethical issues. All participants were given information about the experiment in full. The results obtained were kept in secrecy. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of universities and the norms of the Helsinki Declaration for research involving people [9].

The methods and materials used in this study made it possible to understand more deeply the nature of gender inequality in the Kazakh educational system, to identify strategies for the development of the design and research activities of teachers. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches as methodological support made it possible to comprehensively consider the object of research. Quantitative data was collected through structured surveys between teachers and representatives of educational institutions, while qualitative material was obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The integration of these methods has increased the objectivity and reliability of the results obtained.

The materials used-regulatory documents, Educational Statistics, content of professional development programs, official gender policy reports-made it possible to contextualize the research issue. For example, the analysis of changes in the educational reform and teacher training system over the past 10 years has helped to identify the institutional factors that contribute to the emergence of gender inequality.

In addition, the results of experimental training for the development of design and research skills of teachers made it possible to assess the effectiveness of the methods. Teaching materials and practical tasks have become important resources for teachers to develop reflexive thinking, research skills, and gender-based skills in inclusive learning. Analysis of the material shows that an increase in gender sensitivity in the professional consciousness of teachers directly affects the quality of design and research activities.

In general, the methods and materials used not only ensured the scientific validity of the study, but also determined its practical significance. They provided an important empirical basis for the development of strategies for the development of teachers' research competencies and the development of recommendations aimed at reducing gender inequality in the educational space. Thus, the methodological approach and the mutual continuity of the research material made it possible to fully achieve the research goals.

The results and discussion

Several studies confirm that despite the high educational achievement of women, the gender pay gap and unequal access to leadership positions still exist in the national labor market. These differences show that educational progress alone is not enough to eliminate gender inequality unless educational institutions themselves accompany systemic change. Thus, schools and teachers play a key role in overcoming established stereotypes and creating a fair learning environment that affects not only academic performance, but also long-term professional aspirations of students [10].

This study was aimed at identifying teachers in three regions of Kazakhstan, their gender balance and design and research work. A total of 78 teachers took part in the study. Of these, 68 percent were women (53 women) and 32 percent were 25 men. Digital data was analyzed using the NVivo program. By combining these two approaches, it was possible to identify the features of deep social gender asymmetry of teachers and the influence of teacher participation in design and research work.

The results of the study showed that the frequency of participation of teachers in scientific research or design is higher in men and lower in women. However, females have been found to be highly resistant to pedagogical innovation and adaptation. Regional differences were also reflected: for example, teachers of city schools were more inclined to design and research work.

In this sense, the development of faculty design and research activities is of strategic importance. Project and research work allows teachers to critically analyze the curriculum, assess the school experience and identify hidden gender biases. However, the current research of the Kazakh educational system shows that, although research and design methods are increasingly used in teaching, they are limited in achieving tangible results rather than eliminating structural inequalities. Few empirical studies examine how teacher-led research can purposefully address gender inequality or promote evidence-based interventions in schools. This difference in the scientific literature indicates the need for a more systematic approach to gender-based areas in the professional development of teachers and daily teaching practice [11].

Based on qualitative data, several obstacles were identified that hinder research activity. These are: a large workload, the financial limit of research projects, and a low level of development of the scientific leadership system.

Thus, the results of the study revealed the need to develop a professional development program to develop the design and research potential of teachers in Kazakhstan and eliminate gender asymmetry. Such a program will stimulate the interest of design and research and will allow women teachers to take an active part in scientific activities.

Digital results. Table 1 shows the participation of teachers in design and research activities taking into account their gender characteristics.

Table 1 – Teachers' engagement in research and project activities by gender

Gender	Frequently Participate	Occasionally Participate	Rarely/Do Not Participate	Total
Female	20 (38%)	25 (47%)	8 (15%)	53
Male	8 (32%)	12 (48%)	5 (20%)	25
Total	28 (36%)	37 (47%)	13 (17%)	78

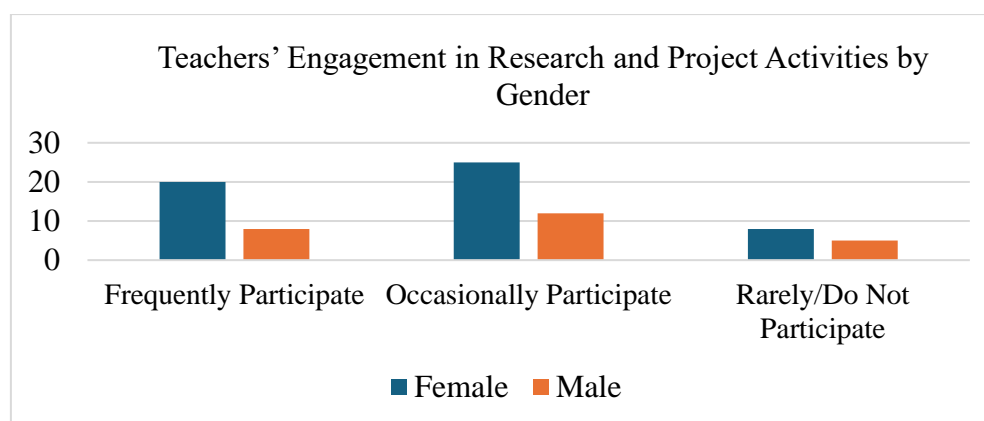


Figure 1 – Teachers' engagement in research and project activities by gender

Chi-square test based on the actual gender difference statistics did not identify the frequency of teachers' participation in research activities. ($\chi^2=0.47$, $p=0.79$). This result indicates that in the research sample, the gender factor does not directly affect teachers' level of participation in scientific research activities.

Further analysis results showed that there is a correlation in participation in research and design activities among teachers with over 10 years of work experience, accounting for 45 %, while among teachers with 1-5 years of experience, research and design activity accounted for only 22 %. This data indicates that professional experience directly affects participation in research and design activities.

It can be observed that urban school teachers have an advantage in project-research activities compared to rural school. This is because infrastructure and institutional support are higher in urban schools for research or project work. In rural areas, teachers often point out the lack of funding and mentorship support. These are the main obstacles.

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the evaluation results of teachers' project-based research activities from a gender perspective.

Table 2 – Self-Assessment of Research Competencies by Gender (Mean \pm SD)

Gender	Research Design Skills	Data Analysis Skills	Academic Writing Skills
Female	3.8 \pm 0.6	3.5 \pm 0.7	3.7 \pm 0.6
Male	3.6 \pm 0.7	3.4 \pm 0.8	3.5 \pm 0.7

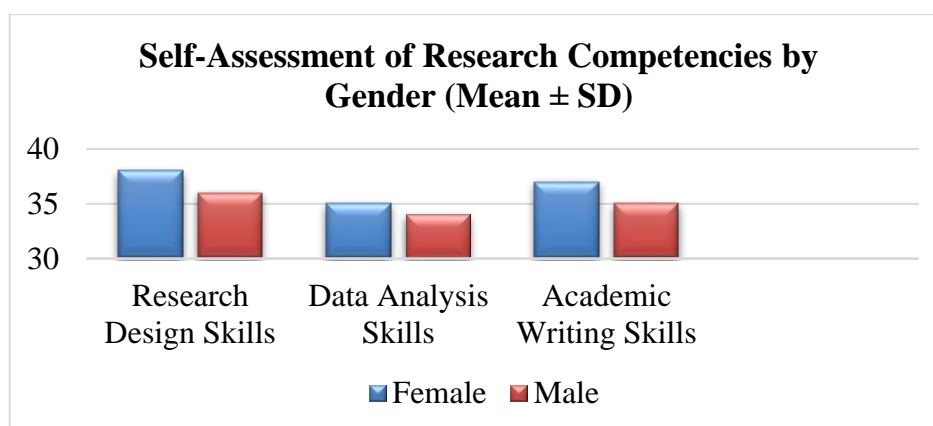


Figure 2 – Self-Assessment of Research Competencies by Gender (Mean \pm SD)

Analysis and discussion results

An analysis using Maa-Maa showed that the gender differences in the three main competencies of the study were not statistically significant ($Maa > 0.05$). This means that attitudes towards the assessment of research skills of male and female teachers are balanced.

In terms of regional and subject specialization, the analysis shows that urban school teachers who have more resources are more likely to participate in projects in the field (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), in particular. He also noted that humanities teachers rarely participate in research due to insufficient institutional support and lack of time.

Quality results

1. Organizational barriers. Teachers noted limited finances and resources for the research project. One of the main problems faced by female teachers was the combination of professional responsibilities and family responsibilities. One participant said, "I want to participate in research projects, but working hard at school and at home does not give time for scientific initiatives." Male teachers also often cited bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of scientific guidance (MAGA).

2. Motivating factors. The main driving force for participation in the study was identified by the school administration as internal motivation, professional growth and support. Highly motivated teachers actively cooperate with colleagues, attend online courses, independently develop student-oriented projects. One teacher expressed this opinion: “Seeing and feeling the real results of my work, supported by the administration, encourages me to further develop my research skills.”

3. Promotion strategy. Participants emphasized the importance of corporate support, mentoring programs, and gender-sensitive professional development. They proposed to introduce certain rules, reduce administrative burdens and provide targeted funding, especially for women with family responsibilities.

Reviews In quantitative analysis, the gender gap is insignificant, but qualitative data indicate the presence of persistent gender problems in the field of organizational support and workload management. These results are consistent with studies in post-Soviet countries, where it is clear that gender stereotypes affect the professional characteristics of teachers [9]. The integration of research and project activities has been identified as an important strategy to enhance the professional development of teachers and enhance gender integration. Teachers who actively participated in such activities noted an increase in their confidence, creativity and ability to cooperate. This is in line with recommendations for gender equality in global education [12].

Organizational culture also plays an important role. In schools where academic activities are encouraged, mentored, and achievements recognized, participation rates are more balanced between male and female teachers. Conversely, in the absence of support and clear guidelines, women's participation, especially those with family responsibilities, decreases.

Therefore, the importance of the proposed research topic lies in the fact that it focuses on the important intersection of gender inequality as a structural problem and faculty research as a strategic tool for change. The study of this relationship may lead to the formation of new theoretical conclusions, the proposal of practical School solutions, and the implementation of national policies aimed at ensuring equality and quality of Education [13].

Flexible work schedules and policies that allow collaborative project work and co-financing are essential to improve gender balance. In addition, research design, data analysis, and systematic Course Commissioning courses should be incorporated into the professional development program. In general, studies show that gender inequality is more related to inequality of access to resources and opportunities than to skill differences. The elimination of such inequalities must be done through targeted professional development, counseling, and administrative support. These results are mutually consistent with Kazakhstan's education policy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals 5 – Principles of gender equality and women empowerment (5, 2020).

Moreover, increasing faculty research capacity is in line with national education priorities, which place particular emphasis on providing an inclusive, student-centered and equitable environment. Improving the analytical and research skills of teachers contributes to systematic monitoring of gender dynamics, support for data-driven decision-making, and strengthening organizational accountability. This approach is consistent with the international principle of gender equality in education, which emphasizes the importance of empowering teachers as agents of social change, rather than just seeing them as distributors of the curriculum [14].

Given the knowledge-based economy of Kazakhstan and the global competitiveness of human capital, the elimination of gender inequality in the education system is not only a social problem, but also an economic necessity. Differences in professional development, limited representation of women in BA leadership, and the wage gap indicate underutilization of human potential. Strengthening the design and research activities of Teachers offers practical and sustainable mechanisms for solving these problems within the educational system [15].

Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of gender inequality in the participation of teachers in research and project activities in Kazakhstan using a mixed approach. Research results and interviews were combined to identify structural and motivational factors affecting participation rates.

Basic results:

1. Quantitative analysis found no significant differences in the frequency of participation and evaluation of their competencies, depending on the gender of teachers.
2. Qualitative analysis shows that institutional barriers (lack of funding, resources and advice) remain. Female teachers face additional challenges due to work-family balance.
3. Motivating factors-professional growth, recognition, internal interest-are identified as the main driving forces for participation in research activities.
4. Counseling programs, gender-sensitive professional development, flexible working hours, and targeted funding were offered as supportive strategies.

The results of the study prove that gender inequality is caused not by the abilities of teachers, but by the availability of resources and institutional support. To solve this problem, systemic measures are needed at the political and institutional level to expand training programs and counseling opportunities and reduce administrative burdens.

This study deepens the understanding of gender dynamics in education and provides practical recommendations aimed at developing the design and research competencies of teachers. Therefore, promoting gender equality among teachers in research and project activities is essential for innovation, professional growth and the development of an inclusive educational environment.

The introduction of a unified policy and practice in this area will fully open up the possibilities of all teachers and make it possible to modernize the education system in Kazakhstan.

The study is aimed at a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted nature of gender inequality in the education system of Kazakhstan and the strategic importance of teachers' design research activities in overcoming it. According to the results of the analysis, gender inequality arises not only under the influence of institutional and socio-cultural factors, but also due to the lack of experience and reflective skills of teachers. In this regard, the strengthening of the research competencies of teachers, especially the systematic participation in the methodology of design and research activities, is an effective way to create a balanced and inclusive educational space.

The proposed strategic direction within the study-increasing the ability of teachers to develop pedagogical solutions based on gender sensitivity, reorganizing the learning environment based on the principle of equal opportunity, as well as continuously improving gender fair practices based on the design research cycle-has been identified as the most important mechanisms for improving the quality of education. Such an approach takes the role of a teacher to the level of a professional actor who changes education, turning them into professionals who rely on empirical evidence and create innovative solutions.

At the same time, the need for strengthening institutional support from educational organizations, the formation of a scientific and methodological ecosystem connecting gender policy and pedagogical innovation has been identified. This requires the modernization of professional development programs, the deepening of the research culture in schools and universities, and the systematization of pedagogical interventions based on design research.

In general, overcoming gender asymmetry is not only a task of social justice, but also a strategic factor in the development of human capital in Kazakhstan. Strengthening the design and research activities of teachers is proposed as a scientifically based, sustainable and innovative mechanism for achieving this goal.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ БІЛІМ БЕРУ САЛАСЫНДАҒЫ ГЕНДЕРЛІК АСИММЕТРИЯ: МҰҒАЛІМДЕРДІҢ ЖОБАЛАУ-ЗЕРТТЕУ ҚЫЗМЕТІН ДАМУ СТРАТЕГИЯЛАРЫ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – мұғалімдердің Қазақстандағы оқу орындарының ғылыми-зерттеу және жобалық қызметіне қатысуындағы гендерлік теңсіздіктің көріністерін анықтау және гендерлік тұрғыдан кәсіби қатысуды арттыру стратегияларын әзірлеу. Зерттеудің негізгі идеясы-институционалды және жеке факторлардың ерлер мен әйелдердің ғылыми-зерттеу және жобалық бастамаларға қатысуына қалай әсер ететінін түсіну және тең мүмкіндіктердің тиімді тетіктерін анықтау. Зерттеудің ғылыми маңыздылығы білім берудегі гендерлік саясатты талдаудың әдіснамалық тәсілдерін нақтылауда және мұғалімдердің кәсіби дамуын шектейтін кедергілерді анықтауда жатыр. Практикалық маңыздылығы мұғалімдерге ғылыми зерттеулермен айналысуға және гендерлік тепе-теңдікке қол жеткізуге көмектесетін нақты құралдар мен қолдау стратегияларын әзірлеуде жатыр. Бұл әдістемеді SPSS көмегімен деректерді сандық талдау (Қазақстанның үш аймағынан 78 мұғалім) және NVivo көмегімен сұхбатты сапалы талдау жүргізіледі, бұл статистикалық заңдылықтарды да, мұғалімдердің қатысуына әсер ететін негізгі факторларды да анықтауға мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеуге мұғалімдердің ғылыми-зерттеу құзыреттіліктерін, мотивацияларын және институционалдық кедергілерін өзін-өзі бағалау кірді. Негізгі нәтижелер ерлер мен әйелдер мұғалімдерінің қатысуы мен дағдыларындағы минималды сандық айырмашылықтарды көрсетті.

Дегенмен, сапалы деректер тұрақты гендерлік мәселелерді, әсіресе, жұмыс пен өмірдің тепе-теңдігін, ресурстарға қол жетімділікті және әкімшілік қолдауды анықтады. Үлкен жұмыс тәжірибесі бар мұғалімдер мен қала мектептерінде жұмыс істейтіндер белсенді қатысты.

Мотивацияны, қолдауды және ресурстардың қолжетімділігін өзара әрекеттесуге әсер ететін негізгі факторлар ретінде анықтады. Зерттеу барысында оқу орындарына мұғалімдердің кәсіби әлеуетін арттыруға және ерлер мен әйелдердің ғылыми-зерттеу жұмыстарына тең қатысуын қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған практикалық ұсыныстар берілді. Оның практикалық құндылығына тәлімгерлік бағдарламаларын іске асыру, гендерлік сезімтал біліктілікті арттыру және икемді ұйымдық құрылымдар кіреді.

Кілт сөздер: гендерлік асимметрия, мұғалімдерді тарту, ғылыми-зерттеу қызметі, жобалық қызмет, біліктілікті арттыру, білім беру саясаты, Қазақстан, мотивация, институционалдық қолдау.

ГЕНДЕРНАЯ АСИММЕТРИЯ В СИСТЕМЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ КАЗАХСТАНА: СТРАТЕГИЯ РАЗВИТИЯ ПРОЕКТНО-ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ

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Аннотация. Целью данного исследования является выявление проявлений гендерного неравенства в участии преподавателей в исследовательской и проектной деятельности образовательных учреждений Казахстана и разработка стратегий расширения профессионального участия с учетом гендерных факторов. Основная идея исследования состоит в том, чтобы понять, как институциональные и индивидуальные факторы влияют на участие профессорско-преподавательского состава мужского и женского пола в исследовательских и проектных инициативах, и определить эффективные механизмы обеспечения равных возможностей. Научная значимость исследования заключается в уточнении методологических подходов к анализу гендерной политики в образовании и выявлении барьеров, ограничивающих профессиональное развитие учителей. Практическая значимость заключается в разработке конкретных инструментов и стратегий поддержки, которые помогут учителям заниматься исследованиями и достигать гендерного баланса. В рамках данной методики проводится количественный анализ данных с использованием SPSS (78 учителей из трех регионов Казахстана) и качественный анализ интервью с использованием NVivo, что позволяет выявить как статистические закономерности, так и основные факторы, влияющие на участие учителей. Исследование включало самооценку исследовательской компетентности учителей, их мотивации и институциональных барьеров. Основные результаты показали минимальные количественные различия в участии и навыках учителей-мужчин и женщин.

Однако качественные данные выявили сохраняющиеся гендерные проблемы, в частности, связанные с балансом между работой и личной жизнью, доступом к ресурсам и административной поддержкой. Активное участие приняли учителя с большим опытом работы и те, кто работает в городских школах.

В качестве ключевых факторов, влияющих на вовлеченность, были определены мотивация, поддержка и доступность ресурсов. В исследовании были даны практические рекомендации для образовательных учреждений, направленные на повышение профессионального уровня преподавателей и обеспечение равного участия мужчин и женщин в исследовательской деятельности. Его практическая ценность включает в себя реализацию программ наставничества, повышение квалификации с учетом гендерных факторов и гибкие организационные структуры.

Ключевые слова: гендерная асимметрия, вовлеченность преподавателей, исследовательская деятельность, проектная деятельность, повышение квалификации, образовательная политика, Казахстан, мотивация, институциональная поддержка.