

# Effect of Social Factors on Female Teachers' Professional Preparation at the University of Dhaka: Exploring the Challenges

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## Abstract

Professional preparation is the dynamic and core element that prepares and develops teachers' professional practices. In Bangladesh, female integration into the high-status profession (like teaching at Dhaka University) has been seen as female empowerment and freedom of choice. Female teachers are a significant and indispensable part of education at the University of Dhaka; currently, thirty-two percent (32%) of its teachers are female. Literature shows that female professionals are not necessarily free from gender prejudice. This research explores by using the development of a qualitative case study how social factors can affect female teachers' professional preparation and the dynamics of the challenges. Data were collected from one (1) gender specialist and six (6) female faculty members of the University of Dhaka using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The analysis suggested that social factors have substantial effects on female teachers' professional preparation that limits their professional credibility and competency. The study also identified the challenges that influence social factors. The paper presents a critical observation about the emerging contemporary issues and will contribute to ameliorating cognition about female teachers' professional development at the University of Dhaka.

**Keywords:** Social factors, University of Dhaka, female teachers, professional preparation.

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## Introduction

Teaching is the specialized application of knowledge that provides absolute attention to the education goal. Teaching is a demanding profession (Naik, 1998). As a profession, it signifies that a professional teacher emerges as a publicly recognized expert group. Burrage, Jarausch and Siegrist (1990) define a profession as follows:

Profession means a largely non-manual, full-time occupation whose practice presupposes specialized, systematic... Based upon competence, professional ethics and the special importance of their work for society and commonweal,

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the professions claim specific material rewards and higher social prestige. (p. 205)

This definition is allied with the texture of the teaching profession in Bangladesh society and culture. In this country, teaching is seen as a full-time profession working for the betterment of society. Depending on the level of competence, professionals join different education sectors and start professional practices. Professional preparation prepares the teacher for professional practices, and professional development is a collection of career-long processes (Schwille & Dembele, 2007).

Articles 10, 19, and 28 of the constitution of Bangladesh have granted the rights of females to work in all professions. Article 10 includes: Steps that shall be taken to ensure the participation of females in all spheres of national life (Government of Bangladesh, 1972). Principles of gender policy get emphasized gender equity and equality, empowerment and working environment (Department of Environment, 2016). National Female Development Policy (2011) created the necessary environment to promote access of females to employment areas at an increasing rate, their position as such and continue their advancement (Ministry of Female and Children Affairs, 2011). National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) includes the notion of gender equality through the textbook for different grades of students. Dhaka University Act 1973 ensured the privilege of gender equality in education and profession. But in reality, applying the notion of gender equality is measurable.

From the establishment of the University of Dhaka, it followed a wise and far-sighted policy in acquiring qualified professionals and retaining the services of talented teachers (Rahim, 1981). The university's authorities adopted the policy of motivating its faculty members to higher studies to encourage research. "The development of research and advancement of Knowledge was the aim of the University of Dacca from the very time of its foundation" (ibid, 1981, p. 65). And today, it is the largest public research university in Bangladesh (University of Dhaka, 2021). The University of Dhaka stands out as a reliance of strength for female teachers without any segregation.

Section 5 of the Dacca University Act, 1973 stated that The University shall be open to all persons of either sex and whatever race, creed, or class..., yet, just as females have had to fight for many of the things men have taken for granted as their natural birthright. (Nayeem, 2021)

The University of Dhaka formally opened its spaces on July 1, 1921, without a female teacher. Table 1 presents the faculties, departments and teaching staff for 1921. There were three faculties (Arts, Science and Law) and 12 departments comprising 60 teaching staff, but all were male teachers. No female teachers were recruited at the beginning of the journey to the University of Dhaka.

**Table 1: The faculties, departments and teaching staff in 1921**

Faculties	Departments	Total Teaching Staff	Total Male Teacher	Total Female Teacher
Arts	1. English	60	60	00
Science	2. Sanscrit and Bengali			
	3. Arabic and Islamic Studies			
	4. Persian and Urdu			
	5. History			
Law	6. Economics and Politics			
	7. Philosophy			
	8 Mathematics			
	9. Physics			
	10. Chemistry			
	11. law and			
	12. Education			

**Source: (Rahim, 1981 p. 30)**

Later, Karunahana Gupta 1935 and Chrupama Bose 1937 appointed as Assistant lecturers, have their names forever written in the history of the University of Dhaka as the first two female teachers who contributed notably to the socio-cultural life of females on campus (Rahim, 1981). In this way, aspirant female students made their access to the teaching profession at Dhaka University. The number of female teachers gradually increased, which has contributed to building female dignity, where 32% of its faculty is female now (University of Dhaka, 2021). At present, they have enormous engagement in different departments of this University. Table 2 presents the teaching staff in 2019-2020.

**Table 2: The faculties, institutes, departments and teaching staff in 2019-2020**

Faculties	Institutes	Departments	Total Teaching Staff	Total Male Teacher	Total Female Teacher
10 Faculties	11 Institutes	83	1992	1,354 (67.51%)	638 (32.49%)

**Source: University of Dhaka, 2021**

The above scenario of the University of Dhaka clearly shows the female's mentionable participation in Dhaka University's teaching profession. Compared to table one (1), the above table highlights that in 100 years, the percentage rose 33% in terms of female teacher enrollment at the University of Dhaka.

Rahim (1981) mentioned that the infamous Dacca University Ordinance of 1961 was overturned by the Government of Bangladesh in 1973 and replaced by the Dacca University Order of 1973. This new law created a liberal and democratic constitution for the independent University, allowing it to operate effectively. Dhaka University Act 1973 provides a liberated space that strengthens female empowerment.

The term women empowerment is as conceptually ambiguous as it is multi-dimensional in its ideological connotations regarding questions of gender equality; gender relations, gender identity and gender issues because society has internalized the patriarchal power structure through religious beliefs, social practices and cultural norms. (Nayeem, 2021)

Though the status and position of females have changed, the traditional gender bias social factors are still decisive (Franco & Winquist, 2002), which restricting female teachers' professional competency and efficiency. Multiple activities at home used to be managed by females, and at the same time, they also became responsible professional people (Chopur, 2011).

Hence this study will be a significant way of finding how female teachers at the University of Dhaka continue their professional preparation despite balancing home and professional place. This research particularly focused on how social factors can affect Dhaka University female teachers' professional preparation and identified the significant issues that influence social factors and challenge female teachers' professional development. For this purpose, I developed a research question on what are the effects of social factors on female teachers' professional preparation at the University of Dhaka.

## **Gender and Social Factors**

According to gender role theory, family and professional roles have traditionally been gender-specific, where males are socialized to be work-oriented and females to be family-oriented (Gutek, Searle & Kelpa, 1991). Most studies that analyse possible causes of inequality are the consequences of gender-related inequalities and traditional notions about male and females. The society of Bangladesh can be seen as a typical example of patriarchy (Mawa, 2020). Still, the primary responsibilities of household labour are maintained by the female. For that, they have to balance the demands arising from family and profession. Female teachers' integration into Dhaka University has been seen as female empowerment. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that they have been liberated from conventional gender and social variables,

which limit their opportunities to succeed in their professional life. This paper mainly explores gender and family issues as social factors that can affect Dhaka university female teachers' professional preparation.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential impact of social factors on the professional preparation of female teachers at the University of Dhaka and to identify the key issues that influence social factors and cause professional development challenges for these teachers.

To conduct this study, I adopted the qualitative research method. A qualitative study looks at 'how' and 'why' questions rather than how many questions (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative research aims to understand the meanings of human action and interaction attributed to social or human problems (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). While this study aimed to analyze in depth the professional preparation of female teachers at Dhaka University and the influence of social factors on that preparation, a case study methodology was employed. Patton implies that the sample depends on the nature and purpose of the qualitative study. "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples" (Patton, 2002, p.230). He argues that deliberate tactics, not scientific norms, should be used to choose qualitative samples.

Six female teachers were selected purposively from six different faculty from the University of Dhaka. The participants included the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Business, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Faculty of Biological Sciences. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data. Then, thematic analysis was utilized to categorize the data using codes (Glesne, 2016). The key purpose of using the thematic analysis was to identify the data patterns that provided answers to the specific research questions. I applied codes to represent the selected faculty members when I presented their opinions and actual dialogues to protect their personal and professional identities and to address ethical considerations. For example, FT 1 means one of the female teachers identified as serial number one. I also purposefully selected a faculty member specialising in gender to gather gender-related challenges and issues and expert opinions about this particular research context.

## **Analysis**

I now analyse the data gathered from the field to explore how social factors affect the professional lives of female teachers at the University of Dhaka.

***Female teachers are burdened with typical roles within the family impacted their professional preparation***

In the analysis of data, it has shown that participants identified professional preparation as a mandatory aspect of their teaching. They shared different preparation tools to make learning satisfying for the students, , including reference books, journals, websites, newspapers etc. The participants indicated updating their handouts and PowerPoint slides to reflect the most recent information and conducting further research as necessary. FT 5 highlighted the importance of preparation by saying that-

Classroom knowledge must be linked with the outer world. Students must know how they can relate their gathered knowledge to apply it in everyday life. If they cannot, this will be just a waste of time. Professional preparation helps me plan how I can show them the relation between the topic and application and further development.

However, participants stated that both family and gender-related factors disrupted their professional preparation. In explaining how these two factors affect their professional development, they mentioned a list of family-related activities they needed to do daily. For example,

- 1) The mother has to take care of her children along with doing all the household chores, i.e. cooking, washing, cleaning, and in some cases buying things for everyday life as there is no daycare in the department;
- 2) After doing the whole day job, unlike their male counterpart, they have to go home to take responsibility for preparing dinner and make food for tomorrow even after having helping hands; and
- 3) Since no resting time is available due to the hectic load, they get less time to prepare professionally and adequately.

This has directly impacted female teachers' professional preparation, ultimately hampers their professional life. One participant, FT 2, stated that females had social obligations to perform a certain job, whereas another participant, FT 4, suggested that this gender role is constructed socially . FT 6 said,

We are not machines and cannot perfect everything, but the expectation is always that much. People say females need to learn how to balance work and family life, but our society does not encourage male partners to learn that. No matter how the education level of the family members, females are not supported enough to do their job.

Inhere, Gender Specialist (GS) mentioned that we say many things about gender equality, but we are not practising such measures and keep living in the same injustice. However, one of the participants, (FT 1) mentioned that her husband helps her out, but as the time came for his profession, he leaves all behind for her to manage.

Moreover, most of the top administrative posts are occupied by male teachers' counterparts, who always consider these crises personal issues. GS described that "female teachers' involvement in family responsibilities is a major social issue. But the fact is that it is always considered as personal and imposed on females to perform within the family, making unequal family and professional workload".

### ***Unequal workload causes stress effects on professional life***

In analysing the data, participants argued that university teaching is a much broader concept that not only shares knowledge but also creates knowledge through teaching activities. They regarded teaching as a noble and respectable profession but expanded their views beyond the classroom as there were opportunities for research and other administrative responsibilities. For that, they need a significant amount of time to get involved in teaching-related activities. Participant FT 1 identified creating knowledge as one of the key teaching purposes as she mentioned, "University teaching is about creating knowledge, updating it over time and sharing with fellow students."

Participants, however, felt that they are falling behind due to social forces dragging them down. As FT 2 mentioned, "Unequal workload takes a heavy toll on me causes stress which ultimately impacts on professional life." Another participant (FT 6) said, "I could work tension-free if my children's safety were ensured." Since females have to take care of all the domestic activities and leave their children home to someone other than family- it causes stress and leads to a lack of concentration.

The participants contended that because female teachers have less opportunity to advance to leadership positions, they are less satisfied with their jobs. Moreover, sometimes these obstacles lead to professional growth as delay in post-graduate degrees takes time to achieve. In this regard, GS shared her experience:

I have to get involved in PhD research with my 15 years of juniors only because of my family life responsibility, especially my children. Even I could not receive my scholarship from abroad because of the gender-biased approach, which ultimately hampered my professional career. However, since a male teacher has more leeway to engage in activities anyplace, he has more freedom to make decisions.

### ***Gender bias professional environment: challenges for female teachers' professional development***

Professional environment and colleagues' attitudes are key factors that can significantly impact the preparation level of female faculty members. One of the participants (FT 4) spoke about how jealousy worked when it was for a female teacher and used 'seniority' as a strategy to discriminate against female teachers in the teaching activity. As she mentioned-

Even though I have a PhD in that subject, I cannot get that as a senior male teacher wants to have that. I get depressed because I am unable to provide my students with the benefit of my associated prior knowledge and expertise. Instead, I have to continually spend my time in order to acquire something new to deliver in the classroom.

This participant also mentioned that female teachers often were not asked about administrative matters despite having more capabilities and skills. Participants indicated that many male teachers still believe that female teachers would not have the same capabilities compared to them. For example, FT 1 and FT 3 felt that the work environment is not still female-friendly, rather, it seems fear. On a positive note, FT 3 asserted that couples who work together experience less stress because they share responsibilities than when they do so separately.

Administrative work was mentioned by one of the female teachers who seemed odd compared to the teaching and research work. Although it was not said as a factor that hampers teaching or research, the participant seemed unhappy with the additional burden. Moreover, the teachers mentioned various ways of preparation but should have mentioned the state of the availability of these resources. Thus, it cannot be identified whether there is any link between social factors and resource availability from their perspective.

In this regard, GS mentioned,

Female empowerment and professional development not just depend on quantitative but qualitative changes as well. As a female, it is tough for her to overcome all obstructions. But the hope is that females are leaving all obstacles behind and constantly moving forward.

### ***Social practices, and teachings as a gender-biased profession and denial of professional development***

The participants mentioned teaching as a respectable profession. Still, it was unclear whether they felt respected by others as female teachers or if this was just a mere thing to say as a collocation. GS argued that society inspired females to take teaching as a profession because



of the understanding that females can easily manage family and professional responsibilities, a male-dominated society-infused idea. Even society never cares about gender equality, professional responsibilities and professional ethics, even the law. She added, “Here, we see a female mainly as a housewife and her profession is her secondary role.” And as a part of society, Dhaka University female teachers also faced this crisis. She mentioned that living in such a society, females also like the idea of the teaching profession, but when reality checks, they face a hard time managing both. Moreover, they argued that society still portrays teaching as a male profession and females are mostly counted for their reproduction role.

Moreover, teachers stated that there is no quota system for female teachers at the University of Dhaka. They have to fight equally according to merit. But unfavourable professional environments and unequal family life activities decreased female teachers’ professional efficiency and professional position.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Empowerment is “purely economic terms” (World Bank, 2012). Souplet-Wilson (2014) implied female empowerment as self-efficacy for females to improve their place within the social framework, not just to enter the profession and improve their situation. The male-dominated society of Bangladesh restricts males and females to their own spheres. Weber (1947) defined patriarchy as a system in which male family heads govern society. It promotes male authority and control above female empowerment. Females have to perform “double shifts” due to employment and family (Pearson, 2004; Hossain, 2012, p. 57)

It is evident from their sharing that female teachers with children mainly fall in a loop where they have to work both on the job site and at home with limited time for rest and stress issues. Due to home management stress and lack of time, female teachers get stressed, which may hamper their professional responsibilities. In job site scenarios, female teachers rarely get a positive vibe for their motherhood and family life responsibilities.

This indicates that the environment needs reforming to suit better for female teachers to achieve their satisfaction which ultimately leads to better service. Even with the same type of job, GS indicated that male teachers earn more money than female partners because of male teachers’ professional and academic involvement. She further argued that since females have the reproductive role in the family, they are biologically on the back foot. So, to support them properly, a male partner needs to be stepped in so they can share equal responsibilities to live a stress-free life for both.

The University of Dhaka is the nerve centre of all significant national movements and a witness to the history of Bangladesh. July 1, 2021, marked the 100th anniversary of the pride inauguration of the University of Dhaka. At this historic stage, questions may arise in mind: What is the achievement of the University of Dhaka during this time? There is no doubt that phenomenal development has occurred, but many more will have to walk in front. The University needs to ensure an equal professional environment for male and female teachers and take the initiative in female teachers' professional development. The University must play a cohesive role in improving this circumstance.

The study contributes to the current literature by adding examples of contributions and challenges of female teachers in the teaching profession. Steps should be taken to enhance the professional development of the female teachers at the University of Dhaka.

- There should be ensuring the implementation of female-friendly laws. Masculine and feminine ideologies have to be conscious so that the perception of females acknowledges their intellectual integrity. Social factors are social issues, and this issue needs to be dealt with socially; for that need to believe in gender equality.
- In this scenario, the University of Dhaka has an opportunity to play a vital role that is expected by the teachers to minimise the factors that are related to the university. It can provide a quality daycare facility for children up to age 10. Help to build a cooperative attitude to honour as a professional, not only like as a 'female teacher' colleague. Building awareness campaign on female empowerment and equality. Make ensure the involvement in decision-making based on skills and competencies.

The outcome of this qualitative study cannot be generalized. However, how such initiatives would help familial issues that remain unknown from this study. Nonetheless, teachers seemed optimistic while sharing their thoughts on future initiatives. GS also mentioned building more awareness programs on gender empowerment and equality to solve the issue.

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