

## Benefits of Rainbow School Programmes: Students' and Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Gender-Fair Language in Gender-Inclusive Schools

**Authors :** Teresa Naves, Katy Pallas, Carme Florit, Cristina Anton, Joan Collado, Diana Millan

**Abstract :** Although gender-fair language is relatively novel in Spain, in Catalonia, the Department of Education, as well as LGBT Associations, have been promoting several innovative programmes aimed at implementing gender-inclusive schools. These Rainbow School communities are ideal for looking at how these programmes affect the use of gender-fair language and the balanced representation of gender. The students' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes have been compared to those analysed in schools that have never implemented such programmes in primary or secondary education. Spanish and Catalan, unlike English, are gendered languages in which masculine forms have traditionally been used as the unmarked gender and have been claimed to be inclusive of all genders. While the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) rejects the use of inclusive language and thus deems all variables of inclusion of double gender as unnecessary, the vast majority of universities are promoting not only inclusive language but also gender-inclusive curricula. Adopting gender-fair language policies and including gender perspective in the curricula is an innovative trend at university level and in primary and secondary school education. Inclusion in education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. Educators can facilitate the process of welcoming by ensuring handbooks, forms, and other communications are inclusive of all family structures and gender identities. Using gendered language such as 'girls and boys' can be alienating for gender non-conforming and gender diverse students; on the other hand, non-gendered words like 'students' are regarded as inclusive of all identities. The paper discusses the results of mixed method research (survey, interviews, and experiment) conducted in Rainbow and non-Rainbow schools in Alacant and Barcelona (Spain). The experiment aimed at checking the role of gender-fair language in learners' perception of gender balance. It was conducted in Spanish, Catalan, and English. Students aged 10 to 16 ( $N > 600$ ) were asked to draw pictures of people using specific prompts. The prompts in Spanish and Catalan were written using the generic masculine, 'los presidentes' 'els presidents' (presidents); using double gendered language such as 'ninos y ninas', 'nens i nenes' (boys and girls); and using non-gendered words like 'alumnado' 'alumnat' (students). The prompts were subdivided into people in school contexts participants could identify with, such as students and teachers; occupations mostly associated with men, such as pilots and firefighters; and occupations associated with women, such as ballet dancers and nurses. As could be expected, the participants only drew approximately the same percentage of female and male characters when double-gendered language or non-gendered words such as 'students' or 'teachers' were used, regardless of the language used in the experiment. When they were asked to draw people using the so-called generic masculine in Spanish or Catalan, 'los estudiantes' 'els estudiants' (students), less than 35% of the drawings contained female characters. The differences between the results for Rainbow and Non-Rainbow schools will be discussed in the light of the innovative coeducation programmes and learners' perceptions on gender-fair language gathered in the surveys and interviews.

**Keywords :** gender-fair language, gender-inclusive schools, learners' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes, rainbow coeducation programmes

**Conference Title :** ICIE 2021 : International Conference on Innovation in Education

**Conference Location :** Oslo, Norway

**Conference Dates :** June 24-25, 2021