

Analysis of the Challenges and Solutions Faced by Chinese Female Teachers in the TESOL Field Based on the Questionnaire Method

Kelu Zou^{1*}

¹School of Chinese Studies, Zhejiang International Studies University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310000, China

Abstract. In recent years, numerous studies have emerged focusing on female-dominated fields, yet research specifically addressing the field of TESOL remains scarce. This study emphasizes exploring the challenges faced by female teachers in the TESOL domain through the distribution and analysis of questionnaires. Based on the survey results, the causes of these challenges are discussed. The findings indicate that women indeed encounter difficulties in the TESOL workplace, although some participants are uncertain whether they have experienced gender-based discrimination. These challenges encompass, but are not limited to, gender bias, salary disparities, and limited promotion opportunities. To address these issues, participants suggest effective solutions, including but not limited to more flexible work arrangements, providing more opportunities for professional development for women, and establishing a transparent salary system. The questionnaire and analysis reveal that the plight of women in the TESOL field has persisted for a long time, necessitating concerted efforts from all stakeholders to alter the current situation.

1 Introduction

Women TESOL teachers still face several obstacles despite advancements in gender equality, especially when it comes to institutional prejudice and cultural expectations surrounding gender roles [1]. Previous studies have discussed that due to racial and gender biases, female ESL instructors may encounter additional difficulties that impact their classroom dynamics and professional development, like social expectations and few job opportunities. To narrow it down, women TESOL teachers in Asia frequently face gendered expectations from students and institutions, which restricts their ability to teach independently and grow in their careers [2, 3]. As a result, women TESOL teachers frequently have to strike a balance between empathy and authority, which can occasionally lead to student biases undermining their authority [4]. In order to dig into this problem, this study focuses on the challenges that TESOL women face. And tries to explore the solutions to those challenges.

This study has certain research significance in academic, social practice, and practical applications. Although there have been studies on female teachers, systematic research on

* Corresponding author: Zy@zisu.edu.cn

the challenges faced by female teachers in the TESOL field and their solutions is still relatively scarce. This study will fill this gap, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by Chinese women. At the same time, this study will provide some inspiration for educators and policymakers, enabling more groups to better understand the special challenges faced by female TESOL teachers, thereby promoting policy formulation for gender equality and teacher career development. The author hopes that through this study, educational institutions such as schools can develop feasible solutions to the problems currently faced by female TESOL teachers and create a fairer and warmer working environment for them.

Therefore, the theme of this study is to explore the challenges faced by Chinese female teachers in the TESOL field and the corresponding solutions. This study can fill the literature gap in related fields and provide new insights for educators and policymakers on gender equality and teacher career development.

This research adopts the questionnaire survey method. In terms of research objectives, firstly, analyze the gender bias faced by female teachers in the TESOL field and explore the reasons for this situation, including sociocultural factors, occupational structure issues, cultural differences, and the international environment. Secondly, corresponding solutions are proposed to address the above three reasons, namely, reducing gender stereotypes and promoting equal education, eliminating systemic inequality at the occupational structure level, and addressing the dual marginalization problem in the context of cross-border work and cultural differences.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

This study used a questionnaire to understand the problems found by female teachers in English teaching and possible solutions. A questionnaire is defined as a document containing questions and other types of items designed to solicit information appropriate to analysis [5]. The main participants of the survey are English teachers from different educational fields. The author mainly determines the interviewees through online communication. The sample composition is shown in Figure 1.

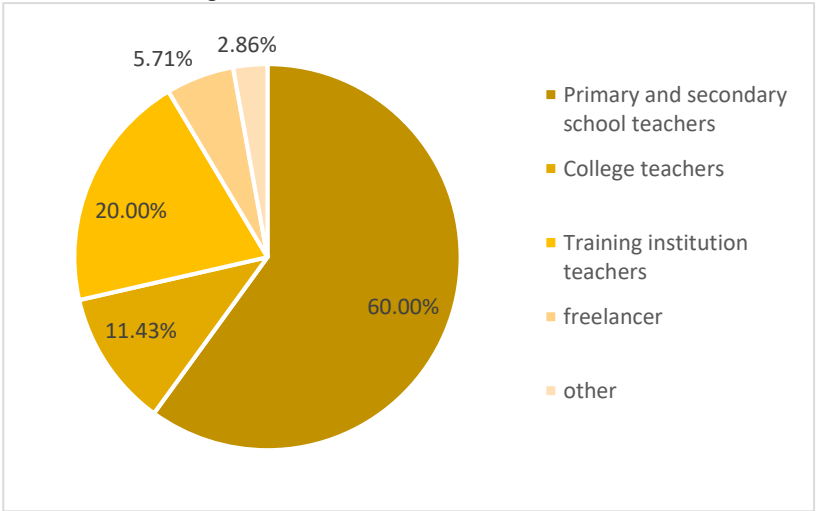


Fig. 1. Sample composition

2.2 Questionnaire design

The survey designed by the author comprises five parts: basic information, work experience, challenges, solutions, and support. There are a total of 15 questions in Table 1.

Table 1. The survey questions.

I. Basic Information	
1. Age	A. 22-30 B.31-40 C.41-50 D.51 or more
2. Educational background	A. Undergraduate B. Master C. Doctor D. Others
3. Location / district:	
II. Working Experience	
4. Current years of experience at TESOL	A. Less than 1 year B. One to three years C. Three to five years D. 5 years or more
5. Current professional identity	A. Elementary and junior high school teachers B. College professor C. Training institution teachers D. Freelance (online lessons, etc) E. Others
6. The main teaching content of your work in the TESOL field:	A. English for academic purposes B. Business English C. Daily English D. Others
III. Challenges	
7. What do you think is the biggest challenge that women face in the TESOL field? (Multiple choices)	A. Gender diversity and discrimination B. Inequality of wage C. Employment opportunities decrease D. Harmonize work and family life difficulties E. Stress in society and culture F. Lack of opportunity for career development G. Others
8. Have you ever encountered sex discrimination and Prejudice in your career?	A. Yes B. No C. Uncertainty
9. What gender related factors do you think affect women's career development in the TESOL field? (Please briefly describe)	
IV. Solutions and Support	
10. What do you think are the measures to help women overcome TESOL difficulties? (Multiple choices)	A. More flexible work arrangements (remote work, flex time, etc) B. Construction of transparency and fair reward mechanism C. Increasing career development opportunities for women D. Implement a childcare leave system to support female workers E. Gender problem training F. Encourage women to take their leadership G. Others
11. Do you think there are some effective steps to promote women's career	A. Yes B. No C. Uncertainty

development in your workplace environment?	
12. If you have any improvements, what would you like to see in TESOL's field? (briefly explain.)	
13. Do you think your institution / school offers sufficient support to solve the problem of female teachers?	A. Yes B. No C. Uncertainty
V. Others	
14. What do you think is the key factor for women to succeed in TESOL? (Multiple choices)	A. Ability of individual B. Experience C. Working environment support D. Contact social network E. Others
15. What do you think about TESOL women's future?	

2.3 Questionnaire distribution

The questionnaire is designed through the questionnaire star and distributed to the target object with the help of WeChat moments and friends around. The total number of questionnaires returned is 35, and the number of valid copies is 35. The effective rate is 100%.

3 Result

A total of 35 people participated in the questionnaire response. Based on the age of the participants, young teachers make up the majority. Among them, participants aged 22-30 accounted for 31.43% (11 people), and those aged 31-40 accounted for 34.29% (12 people). Teachers aged 41-50 account for 25.71% (9 people), while participants aged 51 and above only account for 8.57% (3 people). According to statistics, the majority of participants have a bachelor's degree, accounting for 68.57% of the total number. The remaining 31.43% have a master's degree. Most participants have been engaged in TESOL for more than 5 years, accounting for 71.43%. In terms of teaching content, the proportion of students engaged in daily English and academic English is relatively high, at 40% and 37.14%, respectively.

Figure 2 shows the biggest challenges faced by women in the TESOL field. Participants were allowed to choose multiple options. The chart shows that difficulty balancing work and family is the most popular option, with 27 people choosing (77.14%). This further indicates that women still bear most household affairs, which also poses certain obstacles to their career development. Secondly, there are few opportunities for job promotion and insufficient opportunities for professional development, with 19 people choosing (54.29%). It means that most of the time, male and female teachers with the same level of ability and work experience face different development opportunities, and female teachers are often the slower-developing ones.

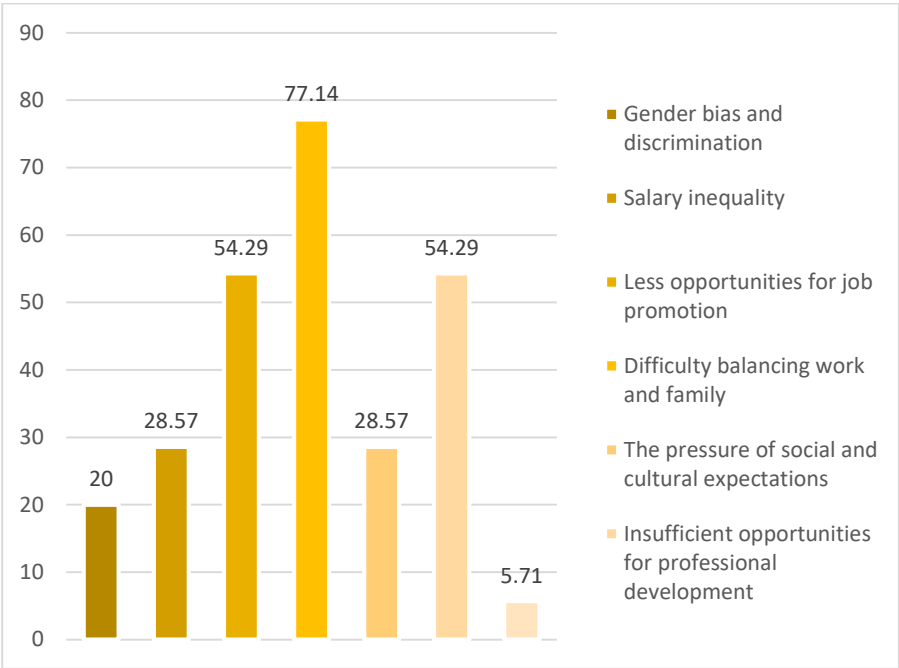


Fig. 2. The biggest challenges faced by women in the TESOL field.

Figure 3 conveys the proportion of participants who have experienced gender discrimination in their careers. Among them, 10 people (28.57%) explicitly stated that they had experienced gender discrimination, while 14 people (40%) stated that they had not. However, it is worth mentioning that 11 people (31.43%) are unsure whether they have experienced gender discrimination, indicating that some women are currently unable to accurately assess their own situation.

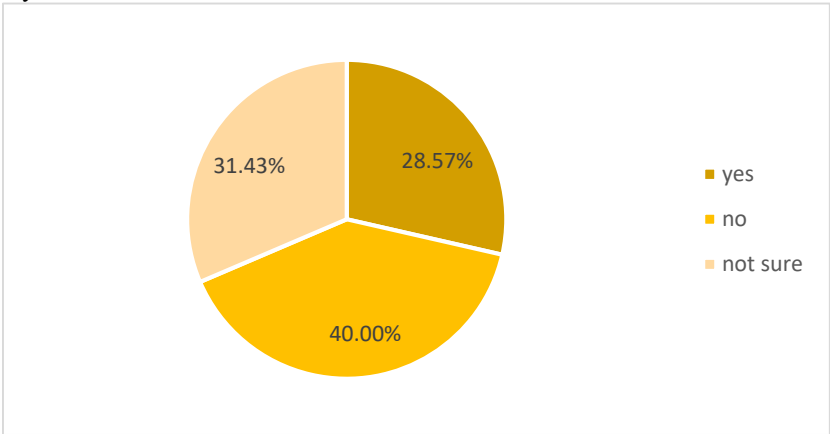


Fig. 3. The proportion of participants who have experienced gender discrimination.

Figure 4 presents the measures that participants consider to be effective in addressing the dilemma faced by female teachers in the TESOL field. 80% of participants (28 people) believe that providing more flexible work arrangements (such as remote work, flexible working hours, etc.) is the most efficient way to solve present situation. 27 of them (77.14%) suggest establishing a parental leave policy to support female employees, which gives female

more time and space to balance family and work. 60% of participants hope schools provide more professional development opportunities for women (training, seminars, etc.) to improve personal ability. The proportions of people who support the implementation of salary transparency and fairness mechanisms and encourage more women to hold leadership positions are both 48.57% (17 people). These are also ways that many women find helpful. Also, there 28.57% (10 people) of participants think gender equality awareness training is necessary.

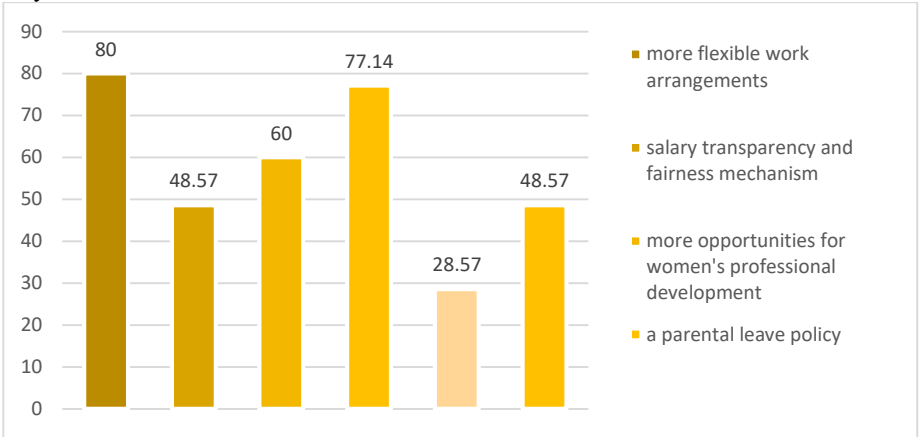


Fig. 4. The measures that are considered to be effective

Figure 5 indicates the factors that women currently consider to be the key to success in the TESOL field in the face of the challenges and possible solutions. Among them, individual ability accounts for the highest proportion, reaching 94.29% (33 people). This indicates that women currently place great emphasis on self-development and self-improvement. 77.14% of participants find a supportive working environment important. There are also many participants who choose "professional background" and "social network", accounting for 71.43% (25 people) and 60% (21 people), respectively.

However, in the question of Do you think that effective measures have been taken to support women's career development in your work environment, 20% of participants still believe that the workplace has not taken certain measures to solve the dilemma. Additionally, 34.29% of participants are unsure whether their workplace helps. This indicates that the current social environment's support for TESOL women is not strong enough, or in other words, it has not been seen by women in need.

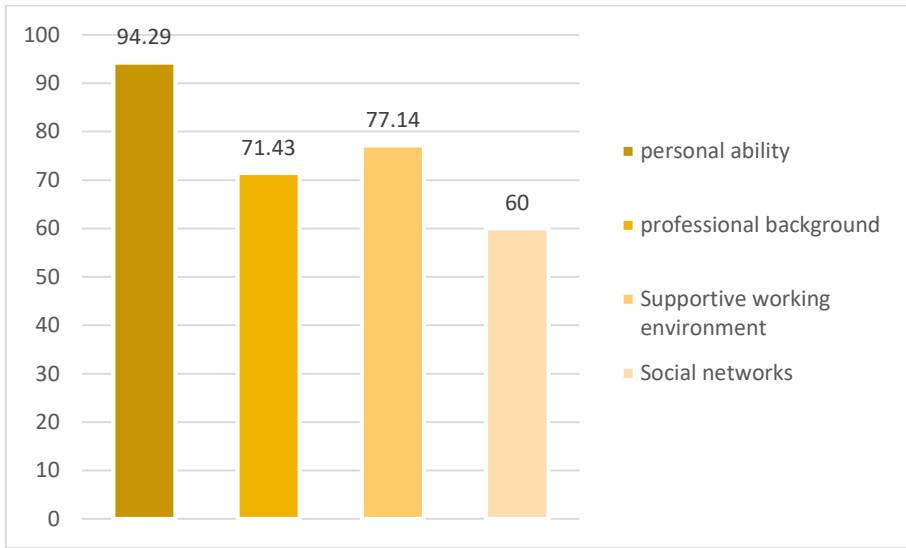


Fig. 5. The factors that are considered to be the key to success

4 Discussion

4.1 Reasons for the results

The purpose of this experiment is to identify the problems currently faced by women in the TESOL field through a questionnaire survey. According to the "2019 National Education Development Statistical Bulletin" released by the Ministry of Education, female teachers in high school accounted for 54.73%, female teachers in junior high school accounted for 57.80%, female teachers in ordinary primary schools accounted for 70.02%, female teachers in special education accounted for 74.25%, and the proportion of female teachers in preschool education was the highest, reaching 97.79% [6]. From the above data, currently, female teachers make up the majority in China's education sector, while only a small portion are male teachers. However, despite this, an increasing number of female educators now report facing discrimination and unequal treatment based on gender in the workplace. The underlying reasons can be roughly divided into three parts.

Firstly, there are social and cultural factors. Above all, it manifests itself in the consolidation of gender roles and the balance of family and work. The traditional view is that women perform better in "nursing" occupations such as basic education, while men dominate in "relevant" areas such as academic research or university management. This bias means that while women have advantages in TESOL, they are often limited to basic educational positions and are unlikely to advance to academic leadership positions such as department heads and journal editors. Sunderland pointed out that there is an "unclear gender division of labor" in language teaching, in which women are often perceived as teaching tasks rather than scientific research [7]. At the same time, TESOL teachers usually participate in international conferences, projects abroad, or flexible working hours, while women are more likely to face a "two-shift system" as family obligations such as childcare and homework are associated, which impairs the continuity of professional development. In the above survey results, most respondents also stated that reconciling work and family life is the biggest challenge they currently face.

Secondly, there are problems with the occupational structure. The main manifestations are the uneven distribution of academic resources and the gap between salary and promotion. Male teachers are more likely to participate in large research projects or international cooperation opportunities.

Female publications are less likely than male articles to be accepted by scientific journals due to latent gender prejudice [8]. In TESOL, the average salary of female teachers is 10% to 15% lower than that of male teachers, and less than 40% of women hold senior positions such as professors. The evaluation and appointment criteria of some universities often favor administrative leadership or international influence, while women are often disadvantaged due to restrictions on social networks.

Thirdly, cultural differences and the international environment. Teachers working in TESOL roles overseas may experience two types of discrimination: harassment at work or concerns about authority based on gender, as well as difficulties arising from non-native speakers' professional abilities [9].

Moreover, women account for less than 30% of leadership in international academic organizations such as TESOL International, and the lack of a gender perspective in high-level decision-making makes it difficult to promote systemic reform.

4.2 Unexpected result

There were two unexpected answers in the survey results. The question is: "Have you experienced gender discrimination or prejudice in your career?" 34.41% of participants expressed uncertainty. When asked "Do you believe that effective measures have been taken in your work environment to promote women's professional development?" 34.29% of participants also expressed uncertainty. This suggests that many women are unable to define "gender discrimination and bias", and this concept is vague. There may be experiences of feeling uncomfortable or receiving unequal treatment, but these are not considered serious sexual problems or habits of being treated differently. This also reflects the fact that the self-confidence of TESOL teachers still needs to be improved, which is the basis for solving this dilemma.

4.3 Solutions

There are several ways to solve the above problems.

Firstly, at socio-cultural level, it is necessary to reduce gender stereotypes and promote equality education.

Inclusion of equality content in primary and secondary school curricula and teacher training, and criticism of the stereotypical notion that "women are better suited to educating children". It is equally important to reorganize the division of family responsibilities and promote "shared parental leave" to reduce the costs for women who interrupt their careers due to childbirth. In addition, universities or language institutions provide grants for day-care centers and school day-care centers to reduce the pressure of home care for teachers.

Secondly, systemic inequalities at occupational structure level must be eliminated. This is mainly reflected in transparent resource allocation mechanisms. Promoting equal opportunities in scientific research, e.g. introducing a gender-blind review procedure for applications for scientific research projects in order to avoid subjective prejudice by peer review committees. Support the dissemination of data and encourage universities to disclose gender distribution rates for research funds and international exchange rates. It is also necessary to reform the rating system for job titles, develop diversified rating standards and include "implicit contributions" such as teaching innovation, student guidance and non-profit work in the evaluation of promotion. Flexible working arrangements such as long-distance

academic participation, which allow teachers to participate in international conferences or online cooperation projects and reduce the burden of cross-border travel.

Thirdly, the question of double marginalization in the context of cross-border jobs and cultural differences. Regarding cultural sensitivity training, institutions should provide intercultural communication training for English teachers seconded abroad, in strategies to combat gender discrimination and challenge linguistic authority. The Peace Corps provided volunteers with a "Handbook on Combating Harassment and Prejudice." We must also establish anti-discrimination mechanisms. Establish anonymous complaint channels in international academic organizations such as the TESOL Association to severely punish sexual harassment or racial discrimination in the workplace. Encourage the creation of "special conferences for non-native speakers" at academic conferences to counter accusations of the mother tongue's predominance and raise the academic profile of educators in non-English-speaking nations [10]. In addition, language decentralization recognizes the legitimacy of multilingual English and reduces the blind promotion of "native-language standards". Supporting teachers from non-English-speaking countries in developing international textbooks or formulating curriculum standards.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by female teachers in the TESOL field and propose solutions to address the identified issues. The research findings indicate that although women make up a significant proportion in the TESOL field, they are still limited by institutional biases, societal gender role expectations, and career advancement barriers. Among them, most participants reported that balancing work and life is the biggest challenge, indicating that the relevant departments have not provided sufficient support systems for female workers who also assume the role of mothers. Therefore, among the solutions, the proportion of people choosing more flexible work arrangements and parental policies ranks among the top two. In the future, relevant departments need to develop corresponding policies and systems based on the difficulties faced by female teachers in the TESOL field, to improve the working environment for female teachers.

5.2 Limitations

The limitation of this study is the small sample size, the limited scope and the lack of participants from different fields. In addition, the survey period was relatively short, and all participants were TESOL Chinese teachers with the same cultural background. Therefore, the results are not applicable to other cultural backgrounds. During the questionnaire survey process, participants can be influenced by social expectations or self-confidence when answering questions, which leads to distortions in the data.

5.3 Future research

Future related experiments may collect larger data samples, including more respondents from different cultural backgrounds, and comparative experiments may be conducted to investigate the differences and correlations between the challenges faced by TESOL women in different regions. It is also possible to analyze in detail the causes of difficulties and propose specific solutions for various reasons.

References

1. W. Zhang, & Q. Liu, Gender and Language in TESOL: Challenges for Women Teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, **54**(2), 354-373 (2020).
2. S. Lee, & L. Tan, The Intersectionality of Gender and TESOL: Experiences of Female ESL Teachers. *JLGender*, **13**(1), 45-62 (2019).
3. J. Chen, & M. Lin, Teaching and Gender: The Experiences of Women Teachers in TESOL in Asia. *Asian English*, **20**(2), 134-148 (2018).
4. J. P. Smith, & M. O'Rourke, Navigating Gender and Authority in TESOL: Female Teachers' Voices. *LE*, **36**(1), 78-95 (2022).
5. A. Febrian, & M. Fadly, The Impact of Customer Satisfaction with EWOM and Brand Equity on E-Commerce Purchase Intention in Indonesia Moderated by Cultur. *BBR*, **12**(1), 41–51 (2021).
6. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2020, May 20). 2019 National Education Development Statistical Bulletin. Ministry of Education of China. https://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_fztjgb/202005/t20200520_456751.html
7. J. Sunderland, Gendered discourses (p. 191). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (2004).
8. L. Holman, D. Stuart-Fox, & C. E. Hauser, The gender gap in science: How long until women are equally represented? *PLoS biology*, **16**(4), e2004956 (2018)
9. R. Kubota, English in Japan. In *Routledge handbook of Japanese sociolinguistics* (pp. 110-126). Routledge (2019).
10. A. Mahboob, Understanding language variation: Implications of the NNEST lens for TESOL teacher education programs. *Native and non-native teachers in English language classrooms: Professional challenges and teacher education*, **26**, 13-32 (2017). Springer.