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Editorial: Exploring implicit biases in the educational landscape

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Exploring implicit biases in the educational landscape

Implicit biases operate at a subconscious level and affect minority and/or marginalized groups the most. Such long-standing biases also affect underrepresented groups in education systems, such as women or racial minorities. Through a Research Topic of six articles from 38 authors reviewing data obtained from China, Israel, the UAE, Australia, and the U.S.A, this Research Topic aimed to raise awareness regarding biases and stimulate critical reflections. A particular focus is placed on understanding how biases influence decision-making in areas such as faculty evaluations, student learning environments, and diversity initiatives. Given the popularity of technology-mediated education, we encouraged submissions within the realm of online learning and articles with varied methodological frameworks in the field. Research work employed surveys and interviews, and samples varied in terms of age and role in the educational sample as well. We summarize findings from each of the articles to explain how the Research Topic advances our understanding of this complex area.

In the first study, [Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak](#) conducted semi-structured interviews to understand how Israeli teachers teaching English as a foreign language refrain from certain sensitive classroom discussions. They found that teachers avoided taboo topics and felt that certain discussions may alienate Arab or Jewish children in the classroom. The authors highlighted how societal negative attitudes, moral panic, and school's norms and cultural beliefs must be internalized before conversations around controversial topics happen. Teachers expressed being careful not to insult anyone, feeling the need to control their own beliefs, or feeling morally less inclined to make children engage in political debates in the classroom. Overall, it complicates their role in creating inclusive learning environments. The article may help educators who struggle in similar roles or regions.

The second article explored biases in higher education systems in the UAE. In this research, authors [Lamba et al.](#) created videos of four virtual instructors (male-South Asian, female-South Asian, male-White, and female-White) teaching social psychology to 318 students. Using a between-group design, authors manipulated only gender and race in the videos presented to participants. They found that male and South Asian lecturers scored higher on interpersonal variables such as approachability, sensitivity, enthusiasm for the subject, and respect shown to participants. Authors highlighted that lecturers did not vary in knowledge and presentation skills.

Observing actual student data, Kim et al. surveyed free-text comments made by students in a public university in Australia over a period of 7 years. It included 68,020 comments from the “improvement sections” and 119,665 comments from the “best features sections” of the student evaluations teachings. Using a topic model analysis, their study reveals how students critique female lecturers differently from their male counterparts. Students critiqued female lecturers more for improving structural aspects of the course, time management, and control of the learning environment. Male lecturers were critiqued less and, when critiqued, it pertained to aspects specific to lecture delivery. This finding highlights the deeply ingrained gendered expectations where women are often held to higher standards of nurturing behavior, while men are judged on their professional competence.

Svetkey et al., explored evidence-based techniques to build curriculums to increase awareness regarding potential biases against marginalized communities in clinical facilities in the U.S. In addition to raising awareness, authors were able to show that participants were able to practice communication behavior and reduce stereotyping. Participants also displayed greater self-efficacy after the training sessions. This research is one of the few studies in the field that has built an intervention and shown its clear impact.

Fu and Liu studied conceptions of learning English and approaches to learning English amongst learners in urban and rural high school settings in China. Similar to the study by Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak, the study aimed to understand challenges of both learners and teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds and develop a reflection of more inclusive teaching and learning practices. Authors found that students from Beijing showed a stronger inclination toward intrinsic motivation and commitment to applying knowledge. Rural students from Guizhou opted for extrinsic motivations such as passing exams and fulfilling school requirements. They argued that such learning approaches make it harder for rural students to compete academically on equal footing to urban peers.

Moore et al., investigated approaches to increase diversity in STEM professions. Similar to Svetkey et al., they also delivered a training program to students in high school and universities as well as to faculty and trainees who served as mentors at health science centers in the U.S. The rationale was grounded in the recognition of systemic barriers, such as inadequate access to resources in disadvantaged schools, limited mentor support, and implicit bias within institutions, that hinder the participation of underrepresented groups in STEM fields. The program successfully increased engagement and academic achievement among students from underrepresented backgrounds. They highlighted the importance of early exposure and self-awareness to decrease implicit biases.

The articles in this Research Topic highlight the persistent and complex nature of implicit bias in educational contexts, revealing how biases influence student evaluations, faculty progression, and institutional practices. What makes this Research Topic

especially impactful is the diversity of research samples. It is encouraging to see studies that draw on underrepresented samples, extending beyond traditional, Western-centric research. This global perspective is essential as implicit biases are not confined to any one region, and the insights drawn from diverse contexts contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of these Research Topics.

Future research should continue to expand on these findings by including more underrepresented samples and focusing on how intersectional identities, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, interact to shape bias in education. There is also a growing need to document the experiences of marginalized faculty and students in underrepresented regions to ensure a truly global understanding of bias in education. As technology-mediated education continues to grow, particularly in asynchronous and virtual settings, it will be critical to explore how these platforms can either exacerbate or mitigate biases. By continuing to explore these dimensions, educational institutions can make meaningful progress toward creating more inclusive, equitable environments that empower both faculty and students across the globe.

Author contributions

NL: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. SK: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. EF-V: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

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Conflict of interest

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