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Teaching Competency among Prospective Teachers: Examining Gender and Locale Differences

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Abstract

Teaching competency plays an important role in preparing prospective teachers to plan lessons, facilitate learning, manage classrooms, and address the diverse needs of students. The present study examined teaching competency among prospective teachers of Jammu division, Jammu and Kashmir, India, with particular reference to gender and locale. A descriptive survey method was adopted. The sample included 400 prospective teachers (334 female and 66 male prospective teachers; 236 belonged to rural and 164 to urban areas) from seven colleges of education were selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the 13-item Teaching Competency Scale for Prospective Teachers developed by Heer and Mittu (2026). The findings revealed that female prospective teachers scored higher (M = 44.00, SD = 11.98) than male prospective teachers (M = 39.65, SD = 11.05), and the difference was statistically significant (z = 2.73, p = .007 < .01); and Rural prospective teachers also obtained a slightly higher mean score (M = 43.74, SD = 11.81) than their urban counterparts (M = 42.63, SD = 12.10), although the difference was not statistically significant (z = 0.91, p = .364 > .05). The findings highlight a gender difference in the sampled group, while no significant difference was observed with respect to locale. The study underscores the need for inclusive teacher education program that recognize individual learning needs and provide all prospective teachers with meaningful opportunities to strengthen their professional competencies.

Keywords: *Teaching competency, prospective teachers, gender, and locale.*

Introduction

Teaching is a profession that calls for much more than subject knowledge. An effective teacher needs to explain ideas clearly, plan meaningful learning activities, manage the classroom, assess students' progress, and respond sensitively to the different needs of learners. These abilities collectively contribute to teaching competency, which is an important part of a teacher's professional development.

The development of teaching competency begins during pre-service teacher education, when prospective teachers gradually learn to translate educational theories into classroom practice. Through lesson planning, microteaching, school internships, classroom observation, and feedback from teacher educators, prospective teachers begin to develop the skills and confidence needed for their future profession. The quality of these experiences can influence how well they prepare themselves for the responsibilities of teaching.

Research has consistently highlighted the multidimensional nature of teachers' professional competence. Tigelaar et al. (2004) viewed teaching competence as a combination of the teacher's professional qualities, subject knowledge, ability to facilitate learning, organizational skills, and commitment to lifelong learning. Similarly, Kunter et al. (2013) emphasized that aspects of teachers' professional competence are associated with instructional quality and student development. These perspectives suggest that teaching competency develops through the interaction of knowledge, professional attitudes, motivation, and opportunities to practise teaching.

The expectations placed on teachers have also changed considerably in recent years. Classrooms increasingly require teachers to encourage critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, digital learning, and inclusive participation. Prospective teachers must therefore be prepared not only to deliver subject content but also to create learning environments in which students feel supported, engaged, and motivated to learn. In this context, teacher education institutions have an important responsibility to assess trainees' developing competencies and provide appropriate opportunities for improvement.

An important question is whether prospective teachers demonstrate similar levels of teaching competency regardless of their background. Gender and locale are two characteristics that have been examined in earlier research, although the findings have not always been consistent. Some studies have reported no significant gender differences, whereas others have identified differences favouring one group. Research on locale has also produced varying results. Such inconsistencies indicate that teaching competency needs to be examined within specific educational settings rather than understood through general assumptions about particular groups.

In the Indian context, teacher education programs prepare prospective teachers for a profession that requires both sound pedagogical understanding and practical classroom skills. Examining their teaching competency can help teacher education institutions identify areas in which training may need to be strengthened. It can also provide insights into whether trainees from different backgrounds experience similar opportunities to develop their professional abilities.

Against this background, the present study examines the teaching competency of prospective teachers in Jammu division of Jammu and Kashmir, India, focusing on differences related to gender and locale. By exploring these two dimensions, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of prospective teachers' professional preparedness and the importance of responsive, inclusive, and competency-based teacher education.

Review of Related Literature

Teaching competency is best understood as a combination of professional knowledge, practical skills, and personal qualities that enable teachers to support student learning. Tigelaar et al. (2004) developed a framework that included teachers' subject expertise, ability to facilitate learning, organisational skills, professional identity, and commitment to continued learning. It highlights that effective teaching involves several interconnected responsibilities rather than a single set of classroom techniques.

Kunter et al. (2013) further examined the relationship between teachers' professional competence, instructional quality, and student development. The findings indicated that relevant aspects of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, motivation, and self-regulation were associated with the quality of instruction. These studies provide a useful foundation for understanding teaching competency as a developing professional capacity.

Teacher education programs provide prospective teachers with opportunities to develop the skills required for effective classroom practice. However, acquiring theoretical knowledge does not automatically mean that a prospective teacher can apply it confidently in a real classroom. Practical teaching experiences, constructive feedback, mentoring, and reflection are important in helping prospective teachers bridge this gap.

Afalla and Fabelico (2020) examined pedagogical competence and teaching efficiency among pre-service teachers, drawing attention to the importance of professional preparation. It supports the need to provide prospective teachers with meaningful opportunities to apply their knowledge and develop their instructional skills.

Jadhav and Pathan (2016) reported no significant difference in teaching competency between male and female prospective teachers, although they found differences associated with locality and medium of instruction; higher teaching competency among urban prospective teachers than their rural counterparts but does not establish that urban trainees are generally more competent; the experiences of prospective teachers may differ across institutions and regions, making it important to examine differences w.r.t. locale within particular educational contexts.

Srinivasan and Pugalenthi (2020) similarly reported no significant gender difference among prospective teachers in Tamil Nadu. In contrast, Sahoo et al. (2021) identified gender-related differences in teaching competence and metacognitive awareness among secondary prospective teachers in Odisha.

These findings indicate that the relationship between gender and teaching competency is not uniform across studies. Differences in the participants, educational settings, measurement instruments, and learning experiences may contribute to the variation in results.

The place where prospective teachers grow up or receive their education may shape their learning experiences, but it should not be treated as a direct measure of their professional ability. Differences in access to educational resources, mentoring, digital facilities, and opportunities for classroom practice may be relevant, although their influence needs to be examined rather than assumed.

Contemporary teacher education increasingly emphasizes reflective practice, inclusive teaching, professional development, and the effective use of technology. The European Commission's DigCompEdu framework (2017), for example, outlines the digital competencies educators need to support teaching, learning, assessment, and student engagement. In India, the National Professional Standards for Teachers provide a framework for strengthening teachers' professional practice and continuing development.

These developments suggest that the preparation of prospective teachers should extend beyond basic instructional skills. Teacher education programs need to help trainees become reflective practitioners who can respond to learners' needs, evaluate their own teaching, and continue developing their professional abilities.

Research gap

The studies reviewed present mixed findings regarding gender and locale differences in teaching competency. While some researchers have reported significant differences, others have found little evidence of variation. Moreover, the findings of studies conducted in other regions cannot automatically be applied to prospective teachers in Jammu division of Jammu and Kashmir, India,

The present study addresses this contextual gap by examining teaching competency among prospective teachers from seven colleges of education, focusing specifically on gender and locale. It provides regional evidence that may help inform discussions about prospective teachers' professional preparation.

Statement of Problem

Teaching Competency among Prospective Teachers: Examining Gender and Locale Differences

Objectives

- To compare the teaching competency of prospective teachers with respect to gender and locale.

Hypotheses

- There exists no significant difference in teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers.
- There exists no significant difference in teaching competency of rural and urban prospective teachers.

Design of the Study

In the present study, descriptive survey method was used to collect the data. A sample of 400 prospective teachers studying in final semester of B.Ed. program, comprised of 334 females (141 urban and 193 rural) and 66 males (23 urban and 43 rural), was drawn from seven colleges of education of Jammu division, Jammu and Kashmir, India, through stratified random sampling technique.

Research Instrument

Self-developed 13 items Teaching Competency Scale for Prospective Teachers (TCS-PTs) by Ms. Pratibha Heer and Prof. (Dr.) Harish Mittu (2026) was used to measure the Teaching Competency Scale for Prospective Teachers.

Delimitation

The present study was delimited to colleges of education of Jammu division, Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Statistical Technique

The objectives and hypotheses of the study have been tested by using z'-test.

Result and Discussion

Analysis of data, result and interpretation of findings has been done keeping in view the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

Result Pertaining to Teaching Competency of Prospective Teachers with respect to Gender

The objective was to compare the teaching competency of prospective teachers with respect to gender. After administering the teaching competency scale for prospective teachers; mean, standard deviation, standard error of difference and z'-value for teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers were computed and the result have been presented in table 1.

H_0: There exists no significant difference in teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers.

Table 1

Significance of Difference between Teaching Competency of Female and Male Prospective Teachers

Group	N	M	SD	SE_D	z-value	p-value	Remarks
Female	334	44.00	11.98	1.59	2.73	.007	$p < .01$
Male	66	39.65	11.05				

Table values of z' (df = 398) at 0.05 and 0.01 level of confidence are 1.96 and 2.58 respectively.

Interpretation

Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, standard error of difference and z'-value for teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers. The table 1 reveals that the mean teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers are 44.00 and 39.65 respectively. It may be concluded that female prospective teachers have better teaching competency as compared to male prospective teachers. The value of standard deviation in case of female and male prospective teachers is 11.98 and 11.05 respectively. The z'-value for mean teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers comes out to be 2.73, which is statistically significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It shows that female and male prospective teachers differ significantly from one another with respect to their teaching competency.

Hence, the stated hypothesis that there exists no significant difference in teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers is rejected at 0.01 level of confidence.

This finding suggests that, within the present sample, female prospective teachers reported or demonstrated higher teaching competency scores than male prospective teachers. The result is noteworthy because prospective teachers enter B.Ed. program with different educational experiences, expectations, and opportunities to develop professional skills.

The finding differs from the results reported by Jadhav and Pathan (2016) and Srinivasan and Pugalenthi (2020), who found no significant gender differences in their respective samples. In contrast, Sahoo et al. (2021) reported gender-related differences in teaching competence among prospective teachers in Odisha. Taken together, these findings suggest that gender-related patterns may vary across educational settings and should not be generalized without further evidence.

The practical significance of the present finding lies in the need to understand how prospective teachers develop their competencies. Teacher education institutions may benefit from examining trainees' experiences of microteaching, school internships, mentoring, classroom participation, and feedback. Such an approach would help identify the factors associated with professional development without relying on gender-based assumptions.

Result Pertaining to Teaching Competency of Prospective Teachers with respect to Locale

The objective was to compare the teaching competency of prospective teachers with respect to locale. After administering the teaching competency scale for prospective teachers; mean, standard deviation, standard error of difference and z'-value for teaching competency of female and male prospective teachers were computed and the result have been presented in table 1.

H_0: There exists no significant difference in teaching competency of rural and urban prospective teachers.

Table 2

Significance of Difference between Teaching Competency of Rural and Urban Prospective Teachers

Group	N	M	SD	SE_D	z-value	p-value	Remarks
Rural	236	43.74	11.81	1.213	.91	.364	p > .05
Urban	164	42.63	12.10				

Table values of z' (df = 398) at 0.05 and 0.01 level of confidence are 1.96 and 2.58 respectively.

Interpretation

Table 2 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, standard error of difference and z'-value for teaching competency of rural and urban prospective teachers. The table 2 reveals that the mean teaching competency of rural and urban prospective teachers are 43.74 and 42.63 respectively. It may be concluded that rural prospective teachers have better teaching competency as compared to urban prospective teachers. The value of standard deviation in case of rural and urban prospective teachers is 11.81 and 12.10 respectively. The z'-value for mean teaching competency of rural and urban prospective teachers comes out to be .91, which is statistically not significant at 0.05 level of confidence. It shows that rural and urban prospective teachers do not differ significantly from one another with respect to their teaching competency.

Hence, the stated hypothesis that there exists no significant difference in teaching competency of rural and urban prospective teachers is accepted at 0.05 level of confidence.

This finding suggests that the study did not identify sufficient statistical evidence of a difference in teaching competency between rural and urban prospective teachers. The slightly higher mean among rural participants should not be interpreted as proof that rural trainees are more competent. Similarly, the non-significant result does not establish that the two groups are exactly equivalent.

The result differs from Jadhav and Pathan (2016), who reported higher teaching competency among urban prospective teachers in their sample. Such differences underline the importance of examining the educational conditions in which prospective teachers learn. Access to quality teaching practice, mentoring, learning resources, and institutional support may be more informative than rural–urban classification alone.

For teacher education institutions, the finding offers a useful reminder that prospective teachers should be assessed according to their actual learning needs and professional performance rather than assumptions about their geographical background.

Conclusions

- Female prospective teachers obtained higher teaching competency scores than male prospective teachers, and the reported difference was statistically significant. This result draws attention to the need to understand the educational experiences and opportunities that may shape prospective teachers' professional development. It should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that one gender is inherently more capable of teaching than another.
- In comparison, rural prospective teachers obtained slightly higher mean scores than urban prospective teachers, but the difference was not statistically significant. The findings, therefore, provide insufficient evidence of a systematic rural–urban difference in the sampled group. They also caution against using geographical background as a substitute for assessing individual teaching competency.
- Overall, the study reinforces the importance of preparing prospective teachers through meaningful teaching practice, constructive mentoring, reflective learning, and systematic assessment. Teacher education institutions should focus on helping every prospective teacher develop the knowledge, confidence, and professional skills required for effective classroom teaching. Further, research using diverse samples and direct assessments of teaching practice would help determine whether the observed patterns extend to other teacher education settings.

Educational Implications

- B.Ed. program should provide regular opportunities for prospective teachers to develop lesson planning, communication, classroom management, assessment, and inclusive teaching skills. These competencies should be practised, observed, and strengthened throughout the program.
- The gender difference observed in the study highlights the value of understanding prospective teachers' individual strengths and learning needs. Microteaching, peer learning, constructive feedback, and mentoring can help prospective teachers build confidence and address areas requiring improvement. Such support should be offered equitably and without reinforcing gender stereotypes.
- School internships should be treated as an essential part of professional learning. Prospective teachers need opportunities to teach real lessons, engage with students, assess learning, and receive meaningful feedback from school mentors and teacher educators.
- Since the study found no statistically significant rural and urban difference, teacher education institutions should avoid making assumptions about trainees' competence based on locale. Instead, they should ensure fair access to learning resources, quality mentoring, classroom practice, and digital facilities.
- Prospective teachers should learn to reflect on their teaching, use educational technologies purposefully, and adapt instruction to different learning needs. Professional frameworks such as DigCompEdu and the National Professional Standards for Teachers can help institutions organise these learning opportunities.
- Regular assessment through validated scales, classroom observations, teaching portfolios, and mentor feedback can help institutions understand trainees' progress and plan appropriate support. Teaching competency should be viewed as a capacity that can be developed over time, rather than as a fixed personal characteristic.

Further research could explore how teaching competency relates to teaching self-efficacy, metacognitive awareness, digital competence, internship quality, mentoring, and prior academic experiences. Studies involving multiple regions, larger and more balanced samples, and longitudinal assessments could provide a clearer picture of how professional competence develops throughout teacher education.

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