Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

A teacher like me: the role of teacher gender representation and gender stereotypes in education

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Citation
Doornkamp, L. (2023, June 7). *A teacher like me: the role of teacher gender representation and gender stereotypes in education*.

Version:	Publisher's Version
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

CHAPTER **TWO**

Student-teacher gender congruence and student performance: The role of context

Currently under review at an international peer-reviewed journal as:
Doornkamp, L., Doornkamp F., Van der Pol, L.D., Groeneveld, S., Mesman, J., & Groeneveld., M. 'Student-Teacher Gender Congruence and Student Performance: the Role of Context.'

ABSTRACT

Student-teacher gender congruence is suggested to be related to increased student performance, but little is known about the contexts in which these effects occur. Using administrative data of secondary schools in The Netherlands (N > 50,000), this study examined the relation between student-teacher gender congruence and student performance in four subjects and explored the role of educational level, religiousness, and location. We found that gender congruence was positively related to female students' performance in math and physics and to male students' performance in Dutch language and French language. The role of educational context differed for male and female students across subjects encouraging future research to use qualitative methods to examine how context influences the role of gender in education.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender gaps in students' performance are often linked to teacher characteristics such as teachers' gender. For instance, female students' math performance is found to be related to the presence of female math teachers (e.g., Marx & Roman, 2002), and the deteriorated relative performance of male students is suggested to be linked to the increasing feminization of the education system (Holmlund & Sund, 2008; Neugebauer et al., 2011). Congruence between teachers' gender and students' gender is assumed to be positively associated with student performance, but empirical evidence for the relation is ambiguous. Previous research showed positive effects of student-teacher gender congruence (e.g., Muralidharan & Sheth, 2016), negative effects (e.g., Lindahl, 2016), and null effects (e.g., Holmlund & Sund, 2008).

These ambiguous findings raise questions about the contexts under which positive effects of student-teacher gender congruence emerge (An et al., 2021). An important condition for positive effects of gender congruence to occur is 'gender salience', i.e., the extent to which gender is perceived as relevant to the context at hand (e.g., Keiser et al., 2002). When gender is perceived as salient, a gender-related self-concept is activated which allows gender to have an influence (Palan, 2001). In schools, gender may be salient in subjects such as math, physics, and languages because these are the subjects in which male and female students' performance is gender stereotyped as fundamentally different (men are stereotyped as naturally talented in math and physics, while women are stereotyped as naturally talented in languages). In these subjects, gender can become an important characteristic for students' identity, interactions, and performance (Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007; Shih et al., 1999). Nevertheless, the strength of gender stereotypes and the role gender stereotypes play in schools may differ in different contexts. Previous research indicates that gender stereotypes may be relatively strong among lower educational levels (Trusty et al., 2000; Turner et al., 2019), in religious schools (Schulze & Tomal, 2005), and in schools located in less-populated areas (Garcia-Retamero et al., 2011).

In this study we examine the relation between teachers' gender and male and female students' performance in four secondary school subjects in the Netherlands. We aim to answer the following research questions:

> **Research question 1:** *To what extent is student-teacher gender congruence associated with male and female students' performance in math, physics, Dutch language and French language?*

> **Research question 2:** *What is the role of students' educational level, schools' religiousness, and schools' location in the relation between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance?*

We retrieved student data from secondary schools' student administration systems in The Netherlands resulting in a unique dataset with over 50,000 students and their teachers nested in more than 70 schools. Answers to our research questions contribute to previous research on student-teacher gender congruence that mainly focused on female students' performance in math by extending the examination of effects of student-teacher gender congruence to both male and female students' performance in four secondary school subjects. Further, the exploration of the role of context in the relation student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance contributes to the understanding of where and when effects of student-teacher gender congruence may occur.

2.2 STUDENT-TEACHER GENDER CONGRUENCE AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

The relation between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance has been a topic of study in the fields of economics, education, and public administration for decades. Theories from these diverse fields of research suggest that the match between teachers' gender and students' gender can result in positive effects on students' performance. Positive effects of student-teacher gender congruence are suggested to be the result of three, possibly co-occurring, explanations: teachers' preferences, teachers' gender stereotypes, and students' role model perception (Aslam & Kingdon, 2011). The preference explanation implies that teachers reward students who have the same gender as them with higher grades (Aslam & Kingdon, 2011). In addition to grading, teachers are assumed to pay more attention and to give more positive feedback to students of the same gender (e.g., Grissom et al., 2015). In public administration, these intentional and active behaviors of teachers towards students they represent (student of the same gender) are referred to as active representation (Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017). The gender stereotype explanation is similar to the preference explanation but suggests that the favoring of students of the same gender happens implicitly and unconsciously based on teachers' gender stereotypes (Doornkamp et al., 2022). Gender stereotypes are socially constructed ideas that describe what men and women are like and should be like (Ellemers, 2018). Based on gender stereotypes, male students are described as being naturally talented in math while female students are described as being naturally talented in languages. As a result, teachers may have different expectations of and behaviors towards male and female students in different subjects. Lastly, the role-model explanation takes the perspective of the student and argues that students can perceive teachers with the same gender as a role model which stimulates behaviors that positively affect students' performance (Aslam & Kingdon, 2011). In public administration this mechanism is referred to as symbolic representation (Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017).

Although student-teacher gender congruence is expected to lead to positive effects,

empirical evidence for this association is mixed (for cross-national comparisons see An et al., 2021; Cho, 2012). Positive relations between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance were found for both females and males (Dee, 2005; Muralidharan & Sheth, 2016), and only for females and not for males (Lee et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). Negative relations between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance have also been found for both females and males (Lindahl, 2016), and only for males and not for females (Doornkamp et al., 2021). Finally, some studies did not find a relation between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance at all (Holmlund & Sund, 2008; Neugebauer et al., 2011).

2.2.1 THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

These ambiguous findings may imply that there are conditions under which positive as well as negative relations between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance emerge (An et al., 2021). To our knowledge, thus far the role of different educational contexts in effects of student-teacher gender congruence has not been explored. Although public administration scholars identified organizational (Dhillon & Meier, 2022; Song, 2018) and political conditions (An et al., 2021) for positive effects of student-teacher gender congruence to occur, still little is known about the educational contexts that are favorable for student-teacher gender congruence effects.

Effects of student-teacher gender congruence are assumed to emerge in educational contexts in which gender is perceived as salient, i.e., important, by students and teachers (e.g., Keiser et al., 2002). Gender becomes a salient characteristic when a gender-related self-concept is activated (Palan, 2001). Gender-related self-concepts can be activated in contexts in which there is an observable differentiation between males and females, for instance by dress codes in which women have to wear skirts and males have to wear ties, or when differential language or labels are used to refer to males and females (Hilliard & Liben, 2010). Further, gender can become salient when a policy is directed to benefit women as a group (e.g., policies directed to improve female participation in STEM), when gender of the teacher changes the student-teacher relationship (e.g., in discussing contra-gender stereotypical decisions, students might want to talk to a teacher of the same gender), or when an issue is identified as a gender issue through the political process (e.g., the feminization of the education system) (Keiser et al., 2002).

The differentiation between males and females often happens on the basis of gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes describe what men and women are like, and what men and women should be like regarding their appearances, behaviors, and capabilities (Ellemers, 2018). In schools, the extent to which gender salience is perceived by teachers and/or students may vary for males and females across subjects with gender stereotypes connected to it. Males and females' capabilities in STEM and languages are gender stereotyped as different: males are gender stereotyped as good at STEM and bad at languages, while females are gender stereotyped as good at languages and bad at STEM.

Negative gender stereotypes (i.e., bad at) are generally easier to internalize and more resistant to change than positive gender stereotypes (Baumeister et al., 2001). Therefore, gender can become a salient characteristic for the group that is stereotypically known for its performance deficits (Beilock et al., 2010; Spencer et al., 2016). As a result, gender may be relatively salient for females in STEM and for males in languages. Accordingly, effects of student-teacher gender congruence are likely to benefit female students' performance in STEM and male students' performance in languages.

Student-teacher gender congruence positively affects students' performance through the behaviors of teachers and/or students. Female teachers in STEM subjects and male teachers in language subjects may have experienced social barriers as a result of gender stereotypes throughout the process of becoming a female teacher in STEM or a male teacher in languages. Because of these personal experiences, female STEM teachers and male language teachers may reward students of the same gender with more points for their answers or give students of the same gender more positive reinforcements (i.e., compliments) in order to reduce social barriers and encourage students of the same gender to participate in the subjects. Further, female role models in STEM fields (Herrmann et al., 2016), and perhaps also male role models in language fields (DUO, 2020), are limited. As a result, female STEM teachers and male language teachers may function as important role models for female students in STEM and male students in languages, which can positively affect students' attitudes, behaviors, and ultimately, their performance (Hermann et al., 2016; Solanki & Xu, 2018). Based on the above we hypothesize:

> **H1a:** Student-teacher gender congruence is positively related to female students' performance in math and physics.

> **H1b:** Student-teacher gender congruence is positively related to male students' Dutch language and French language performance.

Apart from the type of subject, the extent to which gender stereotypes connected to the subjects play a role in effects of student-teacher gender congruence may differ across educational contexts including students' educational levels, schools' religiousness, and schools' location. Previous studies on socioeconomic status (SES) showed that stereotypical gender roles and behaviors are more pronounced in segments of the population with lower SES compared to segments with higher SES (Trusty et al., 2000). In education, students from lower SES segments were found to perceive higher career barriers, including social barriers that stem from gender stereotypes, than students from higher SES segments (Turner et al., 2019). As SES and educational level are closely related concepts (educational attainment is an important indicator for SES and is often used as one of the measures for SES (e.g., Saifi & Mehmood, 2011), the same reasoning might apply to students' educational level. Students in lower educational levels might perceive gender as more salient. Students' educational

pathways in the Netherlands seem to support this idea. The educational pathways of Dutch students reveal gender stereotypic choices: male students tend to choose education in STEM and female students tend to choose education in (health)care (Onderwijsraad, 2019). These gendered choices are the largest among the lowest educational levels (Bügel et al., 2011), possibly implying that gender stereotypes play a more important role in lower educational levels. In this context in which gender stereotypes are assumed to be relatively strong, female teachers in STEM and male language teachers may feel a stronger need to reduce social barriers that stem from gender stereotypes and encourage students of the same gender to participate in the subject, reinforcing effects of student-teacher gender congruence. Further, access to contra-gender stereotypical role models may be even more limited among lower educational levels. The few contra-stereotypical role models in this context may be of greater importance, increasing student-teacher gender congruence effects. We therefore hypothesize:

> **H2:** The associations between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance are stronger at lower educational levels.

Similarly, gender stereotypes in religious schools might be stronger than gender stereotypes in non-religious schools. Religiousness is often associated with more traditional views on roles of men and women (De Vries et al., 2022). Traditional views on males and females may result in relatively strong gender stereotypes. Indeed, previous research showed that students on religious schools hold stronger gender stereotypical beliefs than students from non-religious schools (Schulze & Tomal, 2005). As a result, we expect effects of student-teacher gender congruence to be stronger in religious schools.

> **H3:** The associations between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance are stronger in religious schools.

Finally, effects of student-teacher gender congruence might be stronger in schools in less-populated areas compared to heavily populated areas. In general, residents in rural areas express more conservative attitudes and follow more traditional values compared to residents in urban areas (Istenič, 2007). As people in heavy populated areas generally tend to be more progressive and heterogenous, people living in heavy populated areas have a bigger chance of meeting contra-gender stereotypical role models than people living in less-populated areas. Similarly, because of larger population sizes in heavy populated areas, people living in these areas have a bigger chance of meeting contra-gender stereotypical role models. As a consequence, individuals in less-populated areas may hold stronger gender stereotypical beliefs than individuals in heavily populated areas. Indeed, population size and gender stereotypical beliefs were found to be negatively related (Garcia-Retamero et al., 2011). Therefore, effects of student-teacher gender congruence might be stronger in

less-populated areas (Dhillon & Meier, 2022). The research model is visualized in Figure 2.1.

> **H4:** The associations between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance are stronger in schools located in less populated areas.

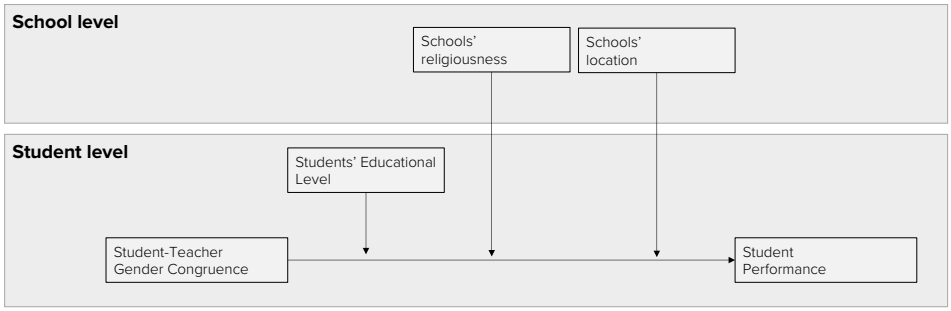


Figure 2.1. Research Model

2.3 METHOD

2.3.1 PROCEDURE

This study is part of the research project Girls in Science running from 2017 until 2022 in the Netherlands which examines gender socialization in the family and school context. The data for this study were collected between December 2019 and February 2021 through secondary schools' student administration systems. In collaboration with The Implementation Group (TIG) we were able to subtract relevant data from these systems. TIG is an organization that develops administrative tools for secondary schools to inform schools about patterns in their student data. Approximately half of all secondary schools in the Netherlands are affiliated with TIG. Through this affiliation TIG has access to a great amount of secondary school data.

The affiliated schools were asked to participate in the research. Participation involved giving consent to TIG to transfer a selection of anonymized administrative data to the researchers for research purposes. The data included students' gender, educational level per year, subject choice per year, student performances (grades) per year in four subjects (math, physics, Dutch language, and French language), and corresponding teachers' gender for the subjects per year over the period 2011 until 2021. Additionally, school characteristics including school denomination, school structure, and level of urbanity were collected based on open access data. Participating schools received the results of the study and an invitation to a symposium on the role of gender in education. Seventeen percent of schools affiliated with TIG participated in the research resulting in an unique dataset with 403.984

students nested in 195 secondary schools.

2.3.2 SAMPLE

This study focused on the last year of lower secondary education when all students still participate in all subjects. In this year, students choose the subjects they want to participate in higher secondary education and ultimately want to graduate in. The year in which Dutch students choose their subjects and transfer from lower to higher secondary education is dependent on the educational level they are in. Students in the educational level that prepares for vocational education (vocational track) have four years of secondary education and choose their subjects in their second year. Students in the educational level that prepares for applied universities (higher vocational track) as well as students in the educational level that prepares for university (scientific track) have respectively five and six years of secondary education and choose their subjects in their third year. As a result, this study examines students' data from students in year 2 (vocational track) and year 3 (higher vocational track and scientific track).

Some Dutch secondary schools provide combinations of educational levels in lower secondary education. In this study we excluded students who combined or switched educational level. We included students' that started secondary education in 2011 until 2021. We include only those students with scores on all relevant variables per subject, resulting in N = 83,271 for math (51% male), N = 65,902 for physics (49% male), N = 87,293 for Dutch language (49% male), and N = 58,242 for French language (48% male).

2.3.3 MEASURES

Student-Teacher Gender Congruence

The independent variable refers to student and teacher having the same gender (0 = no gender congruence, 1= gender congruence). Students' and teachers' gender were administrated in the secondary school administration system as male, female, or neutral. Students' (N = 2) and teachers' (N = 133) that were administrated as neutral were regarded as missing data.

The distribution of male and female teachers across the subjects is skewed but similar for male and female students (see Table 2.1). The percentages of students with a female teacher for the subjects are: math 37%, physics 26%, Dutch language 69%, and French language 79%. The distribution of male and female teachers over the subject in our sample is comparable with the distribution in the Netherlands (math 45% female, physics 21% female, Dutch language 74% female, and French language 82% female (DUO, 2020)). The skewed distribution is not expected to introduce bias, because teachers do not select their students (or vice versa).

Student Performance

The dependent variable refers to students' grades for math, physics, Dutch language, and

French language. Students' grades were obtained from the calculated averages ranging from 1.0 to 10.0 administrated in the secondary school administration systems. Grades between 0.0 and 1.0 were regarded as missing data (N = 9).

Students' Educational Level

The first moderating variable, educational level, was obtained from students' 'ILT-code' (Integral Student Count) that was administrated in the secondary school administration systems. The ILT-code is a governmental code that includes students' educational level. The ILT-code variable was recoded into the educational variable with 1= vocational track, 2= higher vocational track, and 3= scientific track.

Schools' Religiousness

The second moderating variable, schools' religiousness, was deduced from schools' websites. Schools with an open character not referring to any religion or explicitly stating not to be a religious school were coded as 0 = not religious. Schools with religious roots referring to religious values but explicitly stating to be open to students from any (non) religious background were coded as 1 = religious roots. Schools that explicitly stated that they practice religion in their education were coded as 2 = practicing religious. Students on schools whose degree of religiousness could not be coded based on the information provided on their website were regarded as missing data (N = 14719).

Schools' location

The third moderating variable refers to the address density per squared kilometer of the schools' location. We obtained data on address density in the postal code of the participating schools using open governmental data. We recoded level of urbanity variable in 0= suburban, less-populated area (less than 1500 addresses), and 1= urban, heavy populated area (more than 1500 addresses), based on the breaking point between 'moderate' and 'strong urban' governmental classification (CBS, 2022).

2.3.4 DATA ANALYSES

The data inspection and further analyses were conducted using R statistical software. To check for normal distributions Q-Q plots were inspected. The normality checks indicated that some variables had heavy tails, however this type of minor divergence from normality is unlikely to cause any major problems given the large sample sizes. After checking the assumptions, which were not violated, no clear signs of outliers were observed. This in combination with the large sample sizes and the scales of the variables, outliers are assumed not to be influential.

To test our hypotheses, we performed multilevel ANOVA's using the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015). Additional post hoc tests were conducted to examine whether the mean scores of students with gender congruent teachers were significantly different from students

with gender incongruent teachers (hypothesis 1). To test the robustness of our results for hypothesis one, we conducted the analyses on the largest possible sample size per subject (results reported in Appendix A). Further, post hoc analyses were performed to test whether differences in mean scores for student-teacher gender congruence were observed for different educational levels (hypothesis 2), for schools' religiousness (hypothesis 3), and for schools' location (hypothesis 4).

Table 2.1. Range, Means, Standard Deviations, and Distributions of Central Variables

			Mean (SD) and Distribution		
		Range	**Full Sample N = 83,271**	**Male Students N = 41,223**	**Female Students N = 42,048**
Math	1 Grade	1 – 10	6.51 (1.11)	6.42 (1.08)	6.59 (1.13)
	2 Gender Congruence	0, 1	50/50	37/63	63/37
	3 Educational Level	1, 2, 3	46/27/27	48/27/25	44/27/29
	4 Schools' Religiousness	0, 1, 2	26/61/13	25/61/13	26/60/13
	5 Schools' Location	0, 1	39/61	39/61	39/61
		Range	**Full Sample N = 65,902**	**Male Students N = 32,289**	**Female Students N = 33,613**
Physics	1 Grade	1 – 10	6.50 (0.96)	6.52 (0.94)	6.48 (0.97)
	2 Gender Congruence	0, 1	50/50	25/75	74/26
	3 Educational Level	1, 2, 3	34/33/33	37/33/31	32/33/35
	4 Schools' Religiousness	0, 1, 2	25/60/15	25/60/15	25/59/16
	5 Schools' Location	0, 1	34/66	35/65	34/66
		Range	**Full Sample N = 87,293**	**Male Students N = 43,157**	**Female Students N = 44,136**
Dutch	1 Grade	1 – 9.8	6.55 (0.74)	6.33 (0.70)	6.77 (0.70)
	2 Gender Congruence	0, 1	50/50	69/31	31/69
	3 Educational Level	1, 2, 3	45/27/28	47/27/26	42/27/30
	4 Schools' Religiousness	0, 1, 2	26/61/13	26/61/13	26/61/13
	5 Schools' Location	0, 1	38/62	38/62	38/62
		Range	**Full Sample N = 58,242**	**Male Students N = 27,808**	**Female Students N = 30,434**
French	1 Grade	1 – 10	6.53 (1.11)	6.21 (1.08)	6.83 (1.06)
	2 Gender Congruence	0, 1	49/51	79/21	21/79
	3 Educational Level	1, 2, 3	24/37/39	25/38/38	23/36/41
	4 Schools' Religiousness	0, 1, 2	26/59/15	27/58/15	26/60/14
	5 Schools' Location	0, 1	32/68	32/68	32/68

Note: Distributions are presented in percentages. Gender congruence 0= no congruence, 1= congruence; Educational level 1= vocational track, 2= higher vocational track, 3= scientific track; Schools' religiousness 0= not religious, 1= religious roots, 2= practicing religious; Schools' location 0= suburban, 1= urban.

2.4 RESULTS

2.4.1 STUDENT-TEACHER GENDER CONGRUENCE AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

Table 2.1 presents the range, means, standard deviations, and distributions for student-teacher gender congruence, students' performance, and the contextual variables in math, physics, Dutch language, and French language. Table 2.2 presents the means for the different student-teacher gender combinations. Both Table 2.1 and 2.2 show that female students had higher average grades than male students in math, Dutch language, and French language, but not in physics.

Table 2.2. Student-Teacher Gender Congruence and Student Performance

	Male Student		Female Student	
	Male Teacher	Female Teacher	Male Teacher	Female Teacher
Math N = 83,271	6.36[a]	6.36[a]	6.51[b]	6.56[c]
Physics N = 65,902	6.46[a]	6.45[a]	6.39[b]	6.47[a]
Dutch N = 87,293	6.35[a]	6.28[b]	6.75[c]	6.73[c]
French N = 58,242	6.22[a]	6.12[b]	6.78[c]	6.77[c]

Note: Means with different superscripts in rows are significantly different from each other on p< 0.001, Standard Errors range from 0.03 to 0.04.

Further, Table 2.2 shows that in math female students with female teachers had significantly higher grades than female students with male teachers. Male students' math performance did not differ for the gender of their teachers. In physics, male students with male teachers, male students with female teachers, and female students with female teachers had (approximately) the same average grades, only female students with male teachers had significantly lower grades. In Dutch language and French language, female students' performance did not differ for the gender of their teacher. However, male students with male teachers had significantly higher grades than male students with female teachers in both Dutch language and French language. Based on these results, hypothesis 1 should be accepted: student-teacher gender congruence was positively related to performance in math and physics for female students (H1a) and performance in Dutch language and French language for male students (H1b). Robustness checks on the largest possible samples confirmed the results (see Appendix A).

2.4.2 THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

In the next step we tested whether students' educational level, schools' religiousness, and schools' location moderated the relation between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance. Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 present the results of the moderation analyses for male (Table 2.3) and female (Table 2.4) students' performance.

As expected, student-teacher gender congruence explained variance in student

performance for females in math and physics and for males in Dutch language and French language. Additionally, Table 2.4 shows that student-teacher gender congruence explained variance in female students' Dutch language performance. Based on our hypotheses we expected student-teacher gender congruence to matter in particular in the lowest educational level (vocational track), in religious schools, and in suburban located schools. We therefore expected (the largest) negative significant difference between the incongruent and congruent condition in the bottom half of Table 2.3 and 2.4 for the vocational track, religious schools, and suburban located schools. We will discuss the results for each contextual factor separately.

Table 2.3. Multilevel ANOVA of Male Student-Teacher Gender Congruence on Students' Performance, Moderated by Students' Educational Level, Schools' Religiousness, and Schools' Location with Post Hoc Test.

	Math		Physics		Dutch		French	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender Congruence	0.34	1.65	0.35	0.06	85.77***	71.77***	20.13***	2.17
Educational Level	285.67***	227.08***	638.34***	567.64***	462.64***	439.81***	426.79***	303.81***
Religiousness	1.29	1.34	2.20	2.77	2.05	2.17	0.23	0.50
Location	0.20	0.19	0.31	0.41	2.28	0.88	0.40	1.09
GCxEduLevel		1.94		49.50***		2.12		1.59
GCxReligiousness		6.26**		8.14***		1.72		3.45*
GCxLocation		0.00		1.49		12.88***		8.70**
Conditional R2	0.08	0.08	0.14	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.14
	Mean	Difference	Mean	Difference	Mean	Difference	Mean	Difference
GC0x EduLevel1	6.32		6.48		6.26		5.90	
GC1x EduLevel1	6.35	-0.03	6.37	0.11***	6.34	-0.08***	5.98	-0.08*
GC0xEduLevel2	6.26		6.16		6.17		6.04	
GC1xEduLevel2	6.24	0.01	6.34	-0.18***	6.23	-0.06***	6.05	-0.01
GC0x EduLevel3	6.56		6.84		6.44		6.43	
GC1x EduLevel3	6.61	-0.04	6.76	0.08**	6.54	-0.10***	6.44	-0.01
GC0xReligiousness0	6.29		6.42		6.21		6.11	
GC1xReligiousness0	6.36	-0.07**	6.40	0.02	6.27	-0.06***	6.19	-0.08*
GC0xReligiousness1	6.40		6.40		6.31		6.15	
GC1xReligiousness1	6.37	0.03	6.48	-0.08***	6.39	-0.08***	6.23	-0.08***
GC0xReligiousness2	6.46		6.66		6.34		6.10	
GC1xReligiousness2	6.47	-0.01	6.58	0.08*	6.46	-0.11***	6.05	0.05
GC0xLocation0	6.37		6.46		6.25		6.10	
GC1xLocation0	6.39	-0.02	6.48	-0.01	6.36	-0.11***	6.08	0.03
GC0xLocation1	6.39		6.53		6.33		6.14	
GC1xLocation1	6.41	-0.02	6.50	0.02	6.38	-0.05***	6.23	-0.09***

Note: In the top half, F-Values of the Multilevel ANOVA are reported, in the bottom half the gender congruent condition was post hoc tested against the gender incongruent condition (i.e., second row vs first row), ***p<0.001, **p < 0.01, *p< 0.05

Table 2.4. Multilevel ANOVA of Female Student-Teacher Gender Congruence on Students' Performance, Moderated by Students' Educational Level, Schools' Religiousness, and Schools' Location with Post Hoc Test.

	Math		Physics		Dutch		French	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender Congruence	6.95**	2.54	14.12***	4.78*	17.89***	8.09**	1.05	0.26
Educational Level	427.95***	377.66***	948.43***	760.20***	711.17***	626.73***	548.62***	380.29***
Religiousness	1.18	1.07	3.95*	3.93*	2.39	2.43	0.97	0.92
Location	0.96	1.40	0.16	0.08	0.01	0.01	1.58	0.86
GCxEduLevel		0.88		36.96***		2.09		1.98
GCxReligiousness		1.35		0.76		1.12		0.28
GCxLocation		12.38***		1.45		0.00		4.76*
Conditional R2	0.09	0.09	0.16	0.16	0.19	0.19	0.13	0.13
	Mean	Difference	Mean	Difference	Mean	Difference	Mean	Difference
GC0x EduLevel1	6.51		6.38		6.72		6.63	
GC1x EduLevel1	6.55	-0.04*	6.54	-0.16***	6.72	0.01	6.57	0.06
GC0xEduLevel2	6.34		6.23		6.62		6.63	
GC1xEduLevel2	6.37	-0.03	6.12	0.11***	6.58	0.04**	6.63	-0.00
GC0x EduLevel3	6.79		6.75		6.95		7.05	
GC1x EduLevel3	6.79	-0.00	6.81	-0.07**	6.91	0.03*	7.07	-0.02
GC0xReligiousness0	6.48		6.33		6.66		6.75	
GC1xReligiousness0	6.51	-0.03	6.39	-0.06	6.64	0.02	6.76	-0.01
GC0xReligiousness1	6.52		6.42		6.80		6.84	
GC1xReligiousness1	6.58	-0.05***	6.43	-0.01	6.76	0.04***	6.83	0.01
GC0xReligiousness2	6.63		6.60		6.83		6.71	
GC1xReligiousness2	6.63	0.01	6.65	-0.04	6.81	0.02	6.68	0.03
GC0xLocation0	6.56		6.47		6.77		6.79	
GC1xLocation0	6.63	-0.07**	6.49	-0.02	6.74	0.03	6.82	-0.03
GC0xLocation1	6.53		6.43		6.76		6.75	
GC1xLocation1	6.51	0.02	6.49	-0.06**	6.73	0.03**	6.70	0.05*

Note: In the top half, F-Values of the Multilevel ANOVA are reported, in the bottom half the gender congruent condition was post hoc tested against the gender incongruent condition (i.e., second row vs first row), ***p<0.001, **p < 0.01, *p< 0.05

Students' educational level

The interaction between student-teacher gender congruence and educational level was not significant in math, Dutch language, and French language indicating that the relation between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance did not differ for students' educational level in these subjects. However, in physics, the interaction between gender congruence and educational level explained variance in both males' and females' physics performance. For males, the post hoc analyses revealed that gender congruence was related to higher grades in the higher vocational track while gender congruence was related to lower grades in the vocational track and the scientific track. For females, gender congruence was related to higher grades in the vocational and scientific track, whereas gender congruence was related to lower grades in the higher vocational track. These findings are visualized in Figure 2.2. In all, hypothesis 2 can only be accepted in the subject

physics for female students in the vocational and scientific track and for male students in the higher vocational track, in all other contexts the hypothesis should be rejected.

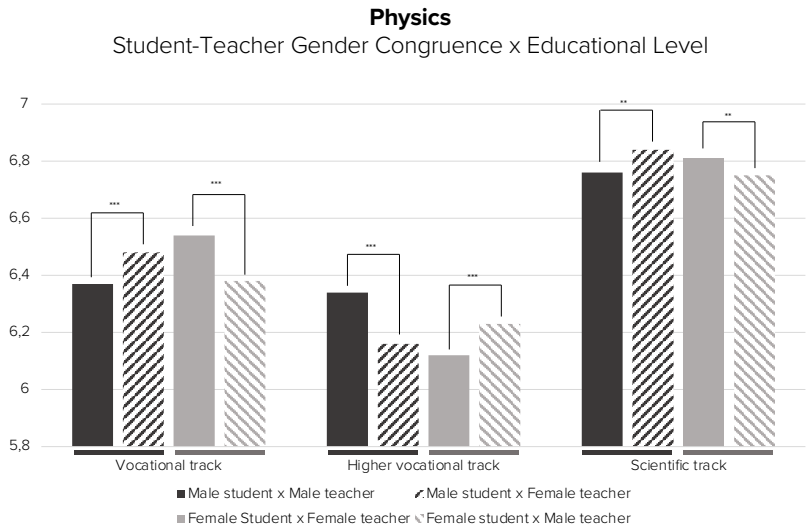


Figure 2.2. Student-Teacher Gender Congruence and Educational Level on Students' Physics Performance

Schools' religiousness

The interaction between student-teacher gender congruence and schools' religiousness was significant for males in math, physics, and French language. The interaction between gender congruence and religiousness was not significant for male students in Dutch language, nor for female students in any of the subjects. For males in math, the post hoc analyses revealed that in non-religious schools, male students with male teachers had slightly higher average grades than male students with a female teacher. In schools with religious roots and in schools that practice religion, gender congruence was not associated with male students' math performance. In physics, gender congruence was associated with higher grades for males in schools with religious roots whereas gender congruence was associated with lower grades in schools that practice religion. In non-religious schools gender congruence did not affect male students' physics grades. In French language, gender congruence was related to higher grades for males in non-religious schools and in schools with religious roots. Gender congruence was not related to male students' performance in religious schools. The findings are visualized in Figure 2.3. In all, hypothesis 3 should be rejected as student-teacher gender congruence was not associated with higher average grades in any of the subjects for neither male students nor female students.

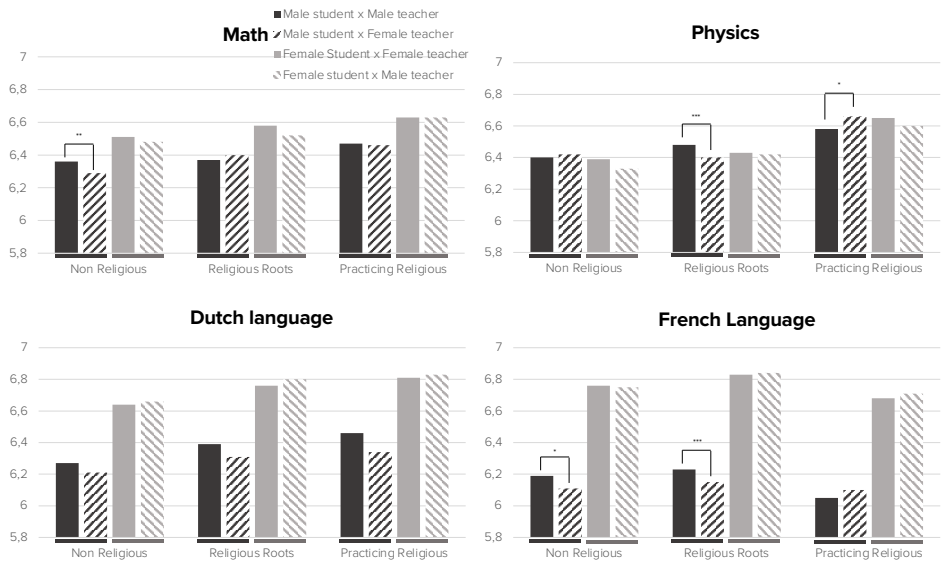


Figure 2.3. Student-Teacher Gender Congruence and Schools' Religiousness on Students' Performance by Subject

Schools' location

The interaction between student-teacher gender congruence and schools' location was significant for male students in Dutch language and French language and for females in math and French language. For males in Dutch language, the post hoc analyses showed that gender congruence was related to higher grades in suburban-located schools. Gender congruence was not related to male students' Dutch language performance in schools that are located in urban areas. In French language, gender congruence was related to higher grades in schools located in urban areas, and not in schools located in suburban areas. For females in math, student-teacher gender congruence was related to higher grades in schools located in suburban areas and not in schools located in urban areas. In French language, gender congruence in schools in urban areas was related to lower grades. Gender congruence was not related to female students' performance in schools in suburban areas. The findings are visualized in Figure 2.4. In all, hypothesis 4 should only be accepted for male students in Dutch language and female students in math.

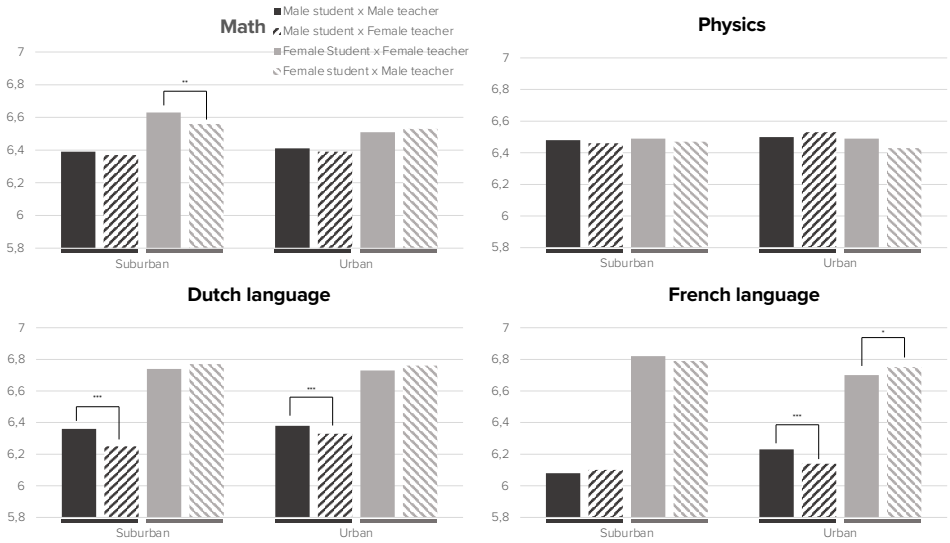


Figure 2.4. Student-Teacher Gender Congruence and Schools' Location on Students' Performance by subject

2.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study tested the relation between student-teacher gender congruence and students' performance and examined the role of students' educational level, schools' religiousness, and schools' location. We found that student-teacher gender congruence was positively related to female students' performance in math and physics and to male students' performance in Dutch language and French language. Further, we found differential roles for different educational contexts for males and females and across subjects.

2.5.1 GENDER CONGRUENCE AND PERFORMANCE

Our results support previous research in the fields of economics, education, and public administration that found positive effects of student-teacher gender congruence for both males and females (e.g., Dee, 2005), but adds to this literature that positive effects of student-teacher gender congruence emerge in different subjects for male and female students. We found that female students benefited from female teachers in math and physics but not in Dutch language and French language, and that male students benefited from male teachers in Dutch language and French language but not in math and physics. We argued that this differential role of student-teacher gender congruence for males and females could be the result of differences in the extent to which males and females perceived gender salience in given subjects (Doornkamp et al., 2021; Keiser et al., 2002). We suggested that gender was salient for female teachers and students in STEM and for male teachers and students in

languages because these are the contexts in which these groups are stereotypically thought to have performance deficits (e.g., Spencer et al., 2016). In these contexts, effects of student-teacher gender congruence may have emerged through teachers' and/or students' attitudes and behaviors. From a teacher perspective, female teachers in STEM and male teachers in languages might have tried to (intentionally or unintentionally) reduce social barriers that stem from gender stereotypes by rewarding students of the same gender with higher grades or by giving more positive feedback to them (Aslam & Kingdon, 2011, Grissom et al., 2015). From a student perspective, female teachers in STEM and male teachers in languages might have functioned as important contra-gender stereotypical role models affecting students' attitudes, behaviors, and ultimately performance (e.g., Solanki & Xu, 2018).

An additional remark with regard to these findings should be made. In physics, female student-teacher gender congruence and performance was not *positively* related as female students with a female teacher did not perform better than average. Instead, female students with a female teacher performed as well as male students with both male and female teachers. Female students with a male teacher performed worse than the average (worse than all other groups) indicating that student-teacher gender *incongruence* had a negative effect on female students' physics performance. Negative effects of student-teacher gender incongruence have been found in previous research (Dee, 2005; Solanki & Xu, 2018). However, it should be noted that in contrast to our finding, these studies found that the negative effects of gender incongruence occurred simultaneously with positive effects of gender congruence (Dee, 2005; Solanki & Xu, 2018). Negative effects of gender incongruence could have stemmed from male teachers' differential treatment of male and female students or from negative attitudes or self-beliefs in physics in female students as a result of having a male physics teacher. Perhaps, male physics teachers had strong associations between physics and masculinity (Doornkamp et al., 2022). Therefore, male physics teachers might have underestimated female students' capabilities in physics which could have led to stricter grading or generating less positive reinforcements for female students (Denessen et al., 2022). From a student perspective, female students' performance might have been weakened by having a male physics teacher through the mechanism of stereotype threat (Kapitanoff & Pandey, 2017). Female students' physics performance could have been suppressed by the stereotypical belief that women are bad at physics. Whereas female physics teachers could have reduced effects of stereotype threat on female students' performance by being a role model, male physics teachers could not (Kapitanoff & Pandey, 2017).

2.5.2 THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

We expected gender stereotypes to be relatively strong and therefore effects of student-teacher gender congruence to occur in lower educational levels (Trusty et al., 2000; Turner et al., 2019), in religious schools (Schulze & Tomal, 2005), and in schools located in less-populated areas (Garcia-Retamero et al., 2011). However, our results did not support the

hypotheses. We found differential patterns for educational context for male and female students and across the subjects.

Evidence for the role of students' educational level was only found in the subject physics and the role was opposite for male and female students. In the vocational and scientific track, gender congruence led to positive effects for female students' performance while gender congruence led to negative effects for male students' performance. In the higher vocational track our findings were opposite: gender congruence was related to better performance for male students and worse performance for female students. The contradictory findings across educational levels raise questions about the dissimilarities in students and teachers in different educational levels. To gain more insight in these dissimilarities, future research could use qualitative research methods to systematically compare students and teachers in different educational levels.

We found no role of schools' religiousness for female students and the role of schools' religiousness for male students was contrary to what we expected. Gender congruence was associated with better performance of male students in non-religious schools for the subjects math and French language, and in schools with religious roots for the subject physics. Only for male students in physics we found an effect in religious schools, but this effect was negative: gender congruence was associated with lower grades for male students. Perhaps, specific student characteristics that are related to school religiosity could have acted as a buffer against the role of gender stereotypes and student-teacher gender congruence effects. For instance, students in religious schools generally perform better than students in non-religious schools (Jeynes, 2002). Relatively good performance is associated with having more self-perceived ability (Marsh et al., 2005), and students with more self-perceived ability are found to be less susceptible for effects of student-teacher gender congruence (Eble & Hu, 2019).

For males in Dutch language and females in math, gender congruence led to better performance in less-populated areas and not in heavily populated areas which supported our hypothesis. These findings are similar to those of Dhillon and Meier (2020) who found positive gender congruence effects for females in math in rural areas. It should be noted that this finding was more complex as math performance of female students decreased when the female teacher percentage increased (Dhillon & Meier, 2020). In addition, in French language, gender congruence was associated with higher grades for males and lower grades for females in heavily populated areas. Further, schools' location did not affect the relation between student-teacher gender congruence and performance in physics. These findings, and the other findings regarding the role of context, emphasize that effects of student-teacher gender congruence can differ in magnitude and direction in different contexts, but a clear pattern in these differential findings was not observed in this study.

2.5.3 LIMITATIONS

Our findings should be interpreted within this study's limitations. First, as a result of our large

dataset very small differences in means can become statistically significant (Khalilzadeh & Tasci, 2017). Statistically significant effects smaller than 0.05 (on the 95% confidence interval) could be considered as practically insignificant. The results of our moderation analyses showed statistically significant mean differences smaller than 0.05 indicating that students with gender congruent teachers achieved less than 0.05 higher average grades than students with gender incongruent teachers. This difference is very small and dissolves when average grades are round to 1 decimal, which is the case in most of Dutch secondary schools. Further, these effects might become statistically insignificant when student-teacher gender congruence effects are controlled for by predictors such as academic self-concept and student IQ which have been found to be important predictors of students' performance (e.g., Wach et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the small differences in average grades for male and female students with a teacher of the same gender compared to a teacher of the other gender can have important consequences. In an education system in which calculated end averages are the basis for decisions with regard to students' educational pathways (which is the case in the Netherlands), 0.1 can make the difference for passing a grade, moving up an educational level, or admission to further education.

Second, multicollinearity was introduced in some of our models and, as a consequence, variances were inflated. The models without interaction terms showed no signs of multicollinearity indicating that variance inflation was caused by the introduction of the interaction terms which does not create a multicollinearity problem (Disatnik & Sivan, 2016; Shieh, 2010).

Finally, our dataset relied on administrative data of secondary schools. The secondary schools' administration systems were sometimes inconsistent in their registration. For instance, students' grades can be registered under different columns with different terminology. Because of these inconsistencies in the administration of grades, several schools provided incomplete datasets. We asked participating schools to improve their registration and offered specific instructions and help for these improvements. Although some schools were able to improve their data for this study, not all schools were able to do so. Nevertheless, because we used registration data we still were able to collect a large amount of data without bias and/or systematic missings.

2.5.4 CONCLUSION

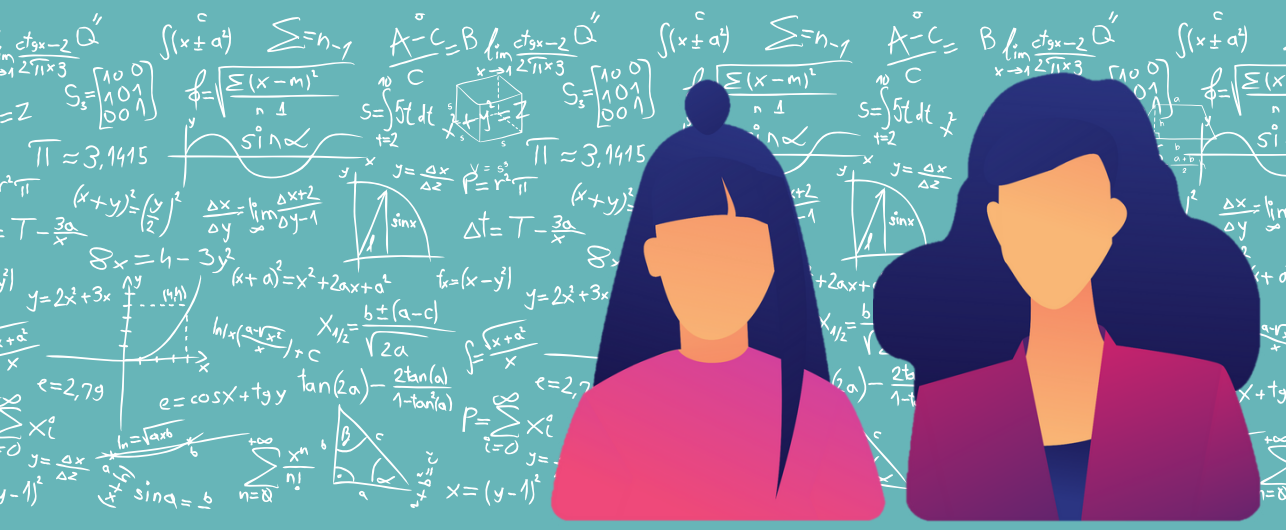
In all, our study showed that student-teacher gender congruence not necessarily leads to better performance of male and female students. Our findings indicated that having a teacher of the same gender led to positive effects in performance in secondary school subjects for the group of students that was confronted with a negative gender stereotype connected to that subject. We theorized that these effects of student-teacher gender congruence could differ across educational contexts because of differences in the extent to which gender stereotypes play a role. Indeed, our results showed differential effects of student-teacher gender congruence in different contexts encouraging future research to

further explore the role of context including factors such as socioeconomic status, schools' size, and schools' structure. Nevertheless, the differential effects of student-teacher gender congruence were not always consistent raising questions about *how* context influences student-teacher gender congruence effects. Future research might want to use qualitative designs to explore the mechanisms that explain how context affects the role of gender in education.

2.6 APPENDIX

2.6.1 APPENDIX A – ROBUSTNESS CHECK

Table Robustness check Student-Teacher Gender Congruence and Student Performance

	Male Student		Female Student	
	Male Teacher	Female Teacher	Male Teacher	Female Teacher
Math N = 97082	6.35[a]	6.35[a]	6.50[b]	6.54[c]
Physics N = 76286	6.44[a]	6.46[a]	6.38[b]	6.47[a]
Dutch N = 102267	6.36[a]	6.28[b]	6.75[c]	6.74[c]
French N = 68097	6.25[a]	6.15[b]	6.81[c]	6.79[c]

Note: Means with different superscripts in rows are significantly different from each other on p< 0.001. Standard Errors range from 0.02 to 0.03.