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# Disparities in Teacher Treatment towards High Achievers and Low Achievers: A Systematic Literature Review on Bias and Its Impact on Educational Equity

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## Abstract

In educational institutes and classrooms, teachers play a key role in facilitating the learning process of students while acting as a role model and influencing the attitude, aspiration, and self-belief of students. This review explores the impact of teacher biases on the differential treatment of high and low achievers, focusing on how such disparities influence educational equity. The study examines key forms of bias in teacher expectations, classroom interactions, and assessment practices, investigating their effects on academic outcomes, emotional well-being, and behavioral consequences for students. Drawing from 25 studies published between 2016 and 2025, the review highlights global patterns of unequal treatment and the broader implications for social stratification and systemic inequities in education. It underscores the importance of addressing teacher biases through professional development, equitable classroom management strategies, and policy interventions to ensure fair opportunities for all students. The findings suggest that without targeted interventions, disparities in teacher treatment can further entrench achievement gaps, limiting opportunities for upward mobility and reinforcing societal inequities. The review concludes with recommendations for future research and practical strategies for fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments.

**Keywords:** Educational equity; Teachers; Student's Abilities; Low Achievers; High Achievers; Biasness of Teachers

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## Introduction

Educational equity is the foundation of an inclusive and fair society, as it ensures that every student has access to same opportunities regardless to their abilities or background [1]. The concept of equity in education is not only limited to equal access, but it also emphasizes on catering the diverse needs of students [2]. In the educational journey of students, teachers play an important role in shaping their personal and academic outcome with their daily meaningful interaction [3].

In educational institutes and classrooms, teachers play a key role in facilitating the learning process of students while acting as a role model and influencing the attitude, aspiration, and self-belief of students [4]. The perception and expectations of a teacher's towards a student's abilities determine the treatment level received by the students. It has been observed that when teachers have higher expectations

for all students while ensuring equitable practices, it fosters an environment of growth, confidence, and resilience [5]. These environments allow students to develop critical life skills while also excelling in their academics.

However, there are many cases in which a teacher's behavior is affected by conscious or unconscious biases, this results in discriminated treatment towards students which ends up affecting their academics [6]. These biases occur in situations where high achievers often end up getting more praise, opportunities, and attention which allows them in reinforcing their academic accomplishments [7]. While, low achievers are often overlooked, discouraged and are given fewer challenging tasks leading to feelings of inadequacy and they get more inclined towards achieving less [8].

These differences are only limited to individual students but they are witnessed broadly in many educational institutes

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around the globe [9]. It has been observed that such a discriminatory approach by teachers not only affects the academics of students, but it also damages their self-esteem and motivation leading to long-term outcomes [10]. The biasness of teachers towards student has been discussed in a study which showed that teachers are more likely to call high achievers for answering complex questions, this provides those students with 60% more interaction time as compared to low achievers [9].

Disparity by teachers towards students is also evident in their feedback style, as high achievers tend to receive detailed and constructive feedback, while low achievers are bound to receive negative or generalized feedback, this hinders their way towards improvement [11]. A study has highlighted that low achievers are 50% more likely to receive negative expectations and criticism from teachers, resulting in reduced belief in their capabilities [12]. Another study revealed that high achievers received 10% higher grades as compared to their peers on even identical work, which reveals the biasness of teachers towards students [13].

Evidence of disparities towards students by teachers is evident around the globe, a study has revealed that in US teachers have higher expectancies towards intelligent and high achieving students, offering them encouragement while other students are left unseen which hinders their academic and emotional growth [14]. Similarly, a study from China also revealed that teachers are more likely to praise high achievers while low achievers are subjected to negative stereotypes [15]. Another study from South Africa has revealed that teachers in under-resourced schools

tend to provide the limited resources to high achievers to support their academic while low achievers are sidelined [16]. Such a bias treatment from teachers undermines the need to have an equitable education system; this involves providing strategies to mitigate biasness of teachers globally.

This study aims to investigate the impact of teacher biases towards high and low achievers and how these biases impact educational equity and classroom dynamics. This study also aims to explore the key forms of biases included in teacher treatment such as differences in feedback, expectations, resource allocation, and attention. By identifying these patterns of disparities this study aims to provide strategies for improving policies and fostering equitable teaching practices to ensure fairness in education.

## Methodology

### Search Strategy

This review includes studies from the past ten years which were published in peer-reviewed journals. Google Scholar, Web of Science, Springer, and Scopus were used for collecting data for this review paper. After collecting the data from these databases the time frame filter was applied to further enhance the findings in forming the review. Moreover, for conducting this systematic literature review on disparities in teacher treatment towards high achievers and low achievers past papers from 2016-2025 were considered. This timeframe was selected because this review aimed to discuss bias and its impact on educational equity in the past decade. Table 1 below indicates the search strategy used by the author for collecting data. Data

**Table 1- Search Strategy**

S.No	Search Strategy
1.	("High achievers") AND ("Low achievers") AND ("bias") AND ("educational equity")
2.	("Teacher's treatment") AND ("Student achievement")

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Table 2 represents the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in this review while focusing on analyzing the disparities in teacher treatment towards high achievers

and low achievers and the impact of bias on educational equity.

**Table 2- Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English.	Studies not published in peer-reviewed journals in English.
Studies focusing on forms of bias in teacher treatment towards high and low achievers	Studies irrelevant to teacher treatment towards high and low achievers
Studies published between 2016 and 2025.	Studies published before 2016.
Full-text studies accessible publicly.	Studies unavailable in full-text format.

### Extraction and Synthesis

A total number of 20 studies were selected for this review based on their titles, abstracts, publishers, and their aim which matches the rationale of the current study. Thematic analysis was used for conducting an analysis of the data obtained from the selected 15 studies. Recurrent keywords were used for collecting data in the first phase which included “Educational Equity”, “Inclusive”, “Teachers”, “Student’s Abilities”, “Low Achievers”, “High Achievers”, “Negative Stereotypes”, “Biasness of Teachers”, “Classroom Dynamics”, and “Teacher

Treatment”. The next phase involved categorizing related codes to derive larger categories that would reflect the interaction and connection between the codes in various studies. When these categories developed, they were defined into specific themes that gave the essence of analyzing the disparities in teacher treatment towards high achievers and low achievers and the impact of bias on educational equity. The use of such a thematic approach allowed for the systematic organization of the analysis and a close adherence to the objectives of the review. Table 3 shows the themes generated for the review.

No.	Themes Identified
Theme no1	Differential Expectations
Theme no 2	Classroom Interactions
Theme no 3	Assessment Practices
Theme no 4	Impact on Students
Theme no 5	Patterns Across Contexts
Theme no 6	Achievement Gaps and Perpetuates Inequities
Theme no 7	Practical Implications

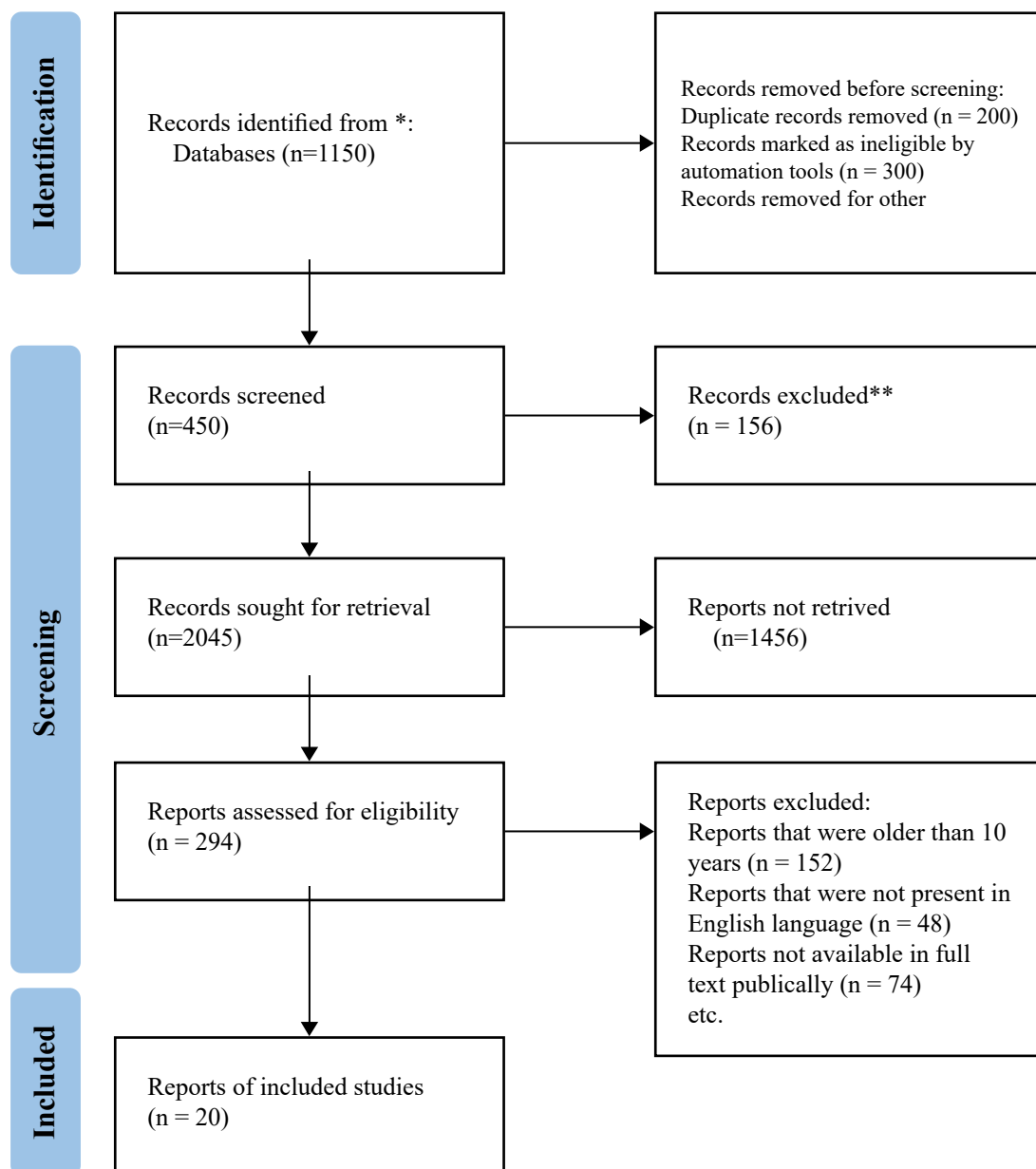
### Results

A total number of 1150 articles were identified from Google Scholar, Scopus, web of Science, and Springer. Only a number of 20 studies were included in this review

as shown in Figure 1. These databases were selected due to their comprehensiveness of peer-reviewed literature across all fields of study to ensure a sufficient number of articles on analyzing the disparities in teacher treatment towards

high achievers and low achievers and the impact of bias on educational equity. After obtaining the preliminary list of articles, the eligibility criteria were applied to the studies based on their publication date and relevance to the current study's objectives, and if the articles included in the current review were published between 2016 and

2025. This approach in a way made sure that only the most relevant and quality research works were chosen for the review.



*Figure 1: PRISMA Flow chart for article selection.*

## Discussion

### *Differential Expectations*

A study has discussed that teacher's expectations from students commonly presents the beliefs teachers hold about the academic and achievement capabilities of their students [17]. The expectations of teachers are majorly influenced by the prior achievements of students. Typically, high achievers are seen as more capable, self-motivated, and responsible [18]. This often makes teachers give high achievers tougher tasks, better learning experiences, and a lot of independence. On the other hand, low achievers are usually perceived with a deficit view, with teachers unintentionally reducing the level of academic demand, simplifying content, and over-supporting, to the extent that it becomes intellectually restrictive [19].

However, a study has discussed that within these more apparent patterns, new insights come along with the expectations bias self-enhancing cycle where teachers' expectation can bring along a Pygmalion effect, whereby "higher expectations induce better performance through enhanced effort" [20]. Conversely, teachers' lower expectancies will curb potential". Research reveals that more micro-level exchanges, for instance, the more subtle changes between body language tones or even teacher's response rate to a students' question is what is increasing these disparities further [21]. Low achievers get more corrective than encouraging feedback to reinforce a message of inadequacy [22].

The solution for differential expectation is the transformation from achievement treatment to growth-scaffolding to challenge every learner within their zone of proximal development [23]. Consciously creating bias-driven disruptions in expectations of differential expectations encourages educators to take steps toward establishing a more inclusive and dynamic environment for every student [12].

### *Classroom Interactions*

A study has discussed that classroom interactions play a key role in academic self-confidence and academic motivation among teachers and students but it also impact a student's whole learning experience in class [24]. However, a study has discussed that most of the time spent by teacher's interaction is towards the high achieving students rather than low achievers. Moreover, study reveal that high achievers' often get positive feedback like "Good job of insightful answer with argument that uses supporting

evidence" [25]. On the other hand, many low-achieving students received much corrective, not always challenging feedback from the same instructors-for instance: "That is wrong. Have a try at it again."

Teachers usually involve high achievers in more advanced discussions to get them thinking deeply about difficult concepts [26]. For example, a high-achieving student in a literature class may be required to discuss the themes and connections with other disciplines, while the low achievers may be presented with simple comprehension questions [27]. This gap restricts lower-achieving students' opportunities for thinking critically.

According to research, teachers, unconsciously, spend more time, interest, and tolerance with high achievers because they expect them to be meaningful contributors [28]. For instance, in a mathematics class, the teacher might spend more time discussing advanced problem-solving strategies with a high achiever while hurrying through the explanations for the low achievers [11]. Moreover, more eye contact, nods, and affirmations from the teacher further enhance a high achiever's sense of belonging and competence [29].

Teachers in Finland, which is famous for their just education system, give individualized feedback to all the students [30]. Both high and low achievers are given growth-oriented guidance instead of ability-based treatment. Studies conducted in the U.S. indicate that the encouragement and open-ended questions were often given to the high achievers, while low achievers were given directive feedback, thus restricting critical thinking [13, 31]. High performers are frequently appointed as group activity leaders, whereas low achievers are merely followers, minimizing involvement. The situation is no better in India as teachers there give minimum attention to underperforming students, reinforcing differential participation and class confidence [32].

### *Assessment Practices*

Assessment would never be complete without education, yet many grading and evaluation practices, research has shown, reflect implicit biases favoring the high achievers at the expense of the lower-achieving students [33]. Such biases are embedded in subjective grading, differential expectations in terms of performance, and inconsistencies in feedback, further perpetuating educational inequities [34].

The fact is that high-achieving students may tend to be

graded more leniently because they are perceived as understanding the content, whereas lower achievers get scrutinized to a higher level [35]. Studies from the U.S. show how teachers tend to overrate prior performance for their high achievers and underwrite struggling students as a self-fulfilling academic disparity [36, 37]. Similarly, a study shows that in Japan, a rigid system has a tendency to favor students who memorize much more than others and fails those with test anxiety or an alternative assessment method [38].

A study shows that in South Africa, more detailed feedback is given to high achievers, which eventually helps them in improving their results. However in the case of low achievers, they are only provided with general remarks, such as “needs more effort,” which does not lead to improvement [39]. Some teachers in Brazil, unaware, give easy chances for re-examination to the high achievers and are strict with low-achieving students, lessening their opportunity for improvement [40].

### ***Impact on Students***

The treatment of teachers towards achievers and low achievers significantly affects students’ emotional well-being, academic performance, and behavior and determines the shape of their long-term educational trajectory [41]. Low achievers tend to internalize feelings of inadequacy and learned helplessness when constantly subjected to lower expectations and corrective feedback [41]. They develop low self-esteem and anxiety about failure in school. High achievers, although encouraged, suffer from performance anxiety and fear of failure, being pressured to maintain their status [42]. As a study discusses a case in South Korea, excessive pressures and high academic expectations instigated in South Korea lead a child to break into burst outs as well as suffer from mental instability problems [43].

If a teacher lowers his or her expectations for struggling students, it then denies them opportunities to access the more challenging content and intellectual stimulation that can really bridge the gap [44]. In the UK, a study has discussed that students placed in lower tracks receive less challenging instruction, with fewer long-term educational opportunities as a result [45]. Meanwhile, the high achievers are denied some of the more valuable learning opportunities through collaborative activity because they often are placed in independent or leadership roles, preventing them from learning from others’ perspectives

[46].

Low achievers feeling estranged in class tend to respond with disruptive acts, disengagement, or avoidance strategies [47]. For instance, in Nigeria, students termed as “weak” tend to disengage or refuse to participate because of negative attitudes from teachers towards them [48]. High achievers may develop over-competitiveness, find it hard with perfectionism, and get affected psychologically by failure when they meet their fiercest opponents in the future [49]. To create equitable learning environments, educators must ensure balance in expectations placed on students as well as encouraging inclusive participation along with differentiated support for all kinds of students across the achievement continuum.

### ***Achievement Gaps and Perpetuates Inequities***

Differential treatment actually widens the gap of achievements between high and low achievers. High performers, with further rich learning opportunities, keep achieving higher, whereas low achievers, with remedial or simplified instructions, remain on the same low level [50]. For example, tracking systems in the U.S put students early on certain learning streams often across marginalized communities [51]. As a result, there is social stratification because low-track students have limited access to advanced course work reducing their chances of higher education and upward mobility [52].

In India, the low-SES students who are considered weak performers get lower teacher interaction and motivation, hence further entrenching their weak access to good education [53]. Richer students attending private schools, on the other hand, have more attention, high expectations, and therefore retain their competitive advantage [54]. This keeps economic inequality alive in the guise of educational inequality and professional inequality, which do not allow opportunities for social mobility.

The low achievers are quite more likely to disinvest from education itself when repeatedly presented with low expectations, the lack of engagement, and biased appraisals [55]. In South Africa, inequitable practice in teaching has led to higher dropout rates for disadvantaged students and innumerable cycles of poverty [56]. On the other hand, high achievers, who are reinforced with positive messages all along, may experience disillusion in higher levels of learning or employment [57]. These inequities must be addressed through teacher training programs, equitable classroom strategies, and policy interventions to



guarantee that students at all levels of achievement get fair opportunities to succeed.

### ***Practical Implications***

Addressing teacher's unequal treatment towards students should take a multi-layered approach that incorporates targeted teacher training, unbiased classroom management, and broad policy changes [58]. This fosters equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of achievement levels. Many disparities are unthought-of biases that affect instructors' behavior towards students [59]. Professional development programs must include training on implicit bias, which develops educators' skills in self-awareness of such preferential behaviors and helps counter them. For instance, Finnish professional training focuses on growth mindset approaches to ensure that educators ascribe improvement capacity to all their students instead of being fixed and unchangeable [60]. Another illustration is video-based self-reflection when the instructor has the opportunity to analyze interactions and alter strategies appropriately.

To avoid biased interactions in a classroom, equitable engagement strategies by the teacher, such as randomized participation methods (for example, name drawing instead of raising responses), can be ensured to include both high and low achievers actively participating [61]. Further differentiated instruction could be a means to promote learning with different needs. In Canada, for instance, many schools employ Universal Design for Learning (UDL), where lesson plans are disposed to provide multiple ways for students to engage, demonstrate knowledge, and receive support so that all students receive equal intellectual stimulation [62].

Governments and school boards need to implement policies that standardize the assessment process while promoting inclusion [63]. In Singapore, national policies place emphasis on competency-based education and reduce the stigma of lower achievement by giving preference to skill building over grades. Similarly, in Germany, continuous assessment is ensured for teachers with fair treatment for all achievement levels, and instructional equity is monitored through school inspections [64]. By bringing together teacher awareness, structured classroom strategies, and systemic policy support, education systems can promote a more equitable learning environment in which every student, regardless of achievement level, can succeed.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite such comprehensive analysis, this review has some limitations. It has a publication bias as more studies which portray inequality are published rather than the ones showing equality. Further, it concentrates on the teacher's bias but other perceptions from the student side, influence of parents, and other systemic issues contribute their bit to decide the level of educational inequalities. The systematic and multi-dimensional review of teacher bias, the paper draws on global research and a variety of educational contexts. Moreover, its concrete implications for pragmatic changes in teacher training, classroom management, and policy interventions make it useful to educators and policymakers. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to trace the long-term impacts of teacher biases. More than that, the student's view and coping strategies also have to be studied.

### **Conclusion**

This review concludes that a significant differential treatment of high and low achievers by teachers actually extends to perpetuating systemic inequality in education, differences in teacher expectations, biased class interactions, and unequal assessment practices all contribute to the gap. They do not only influence students' achievement but also determine emotional wellbeing and behavioral outcomes linked to their long-term educational pathways. Therefore, these biases would require a holistic effort, like pre-service and in service preparation of teachers with the aim to reduce subconscious bias, and in classroom-level management strategies that tend towards fairness in the classroom; policy interventions geared towards fairness of testing and measures of participation. While there does exist a worldwide perspective, however, more remains to be seen in terms of long-term outcome and the after-effects of any intervention for education equity purposes. The way to ensure that educators and policymakers move towards a more just and effective education system is by giving all students the equal opportunity for intellectual and personal development regardless of achievement level.

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