

## **Jordanian EFL Students' Attitudes and Perspectives towards the Gender of their English Teacher**

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### **Abstract**

*The present study tried to shed some light on the importance of students' attitudes and perspectives towards their English teacher, and the gender of their English teacher in particular since it is very important to provide a relaxed atmosphere for the students to get better learning outcomes. The sample of this study consisted of (183) EFL university students who were asked to give their responses toward their English teachers by using a questionnaire that consisted of (10) statements which inquired about their perspectives towards their English teacher. Furthermore, there were two open-ended questions in which the students were asked to write frankly about the positive characteristics which they prefer to have in their English teacher, and the negative characteristics which they don't like to have, so that the teachers can benefit from this feedback when possible in adjusting their methods of teaching. Findings of the study proved that the gender of the students doesn't have a significant role in determining their attitudes towards their English teacher. However, the gender of the English language teacher has a significant effect on students since male students prefer to be taught by female teachers while female students prefer to be taught by male ones.*

**Keywords:** EFL, Gender, Attitudes, Perspectives, English, Teacher, Jordan

### **1. Introduction**

English is increasingly used as a mean for communication, transportation, banking, technology, scientific research, tourism and commerce among nonnative speakers. (Brown, 2001: 118) states that "over one half of the billion English speakers of the world learned English as a second or foreign language. More interestingly, most English language teachers across the globe are nonnative English speakers, which means that it is not monolingualism but bilingualism".

From here stems the importance of the present study which tries to spot some light on the effect of teachers' gender on students attitudes towards learning English, and it will also spot the light on the effect of students' gender on their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language.

It is well acknowledged that gender plays a significant role amongst many factors that affect the teaching / learning process. Studies in the field show that for example the gender of the teacher affects his/her attitude towards their profession, for instance, (Alghzo et al., 2003; Askar and Erden, 1986; Cakir, 2005) found that female teachers have more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession than male teachers. Moreover, it has been indicated in many studies that teachers' attitudes towards the teaching profession is a significant indicator of pupils' achievement as well as their attitudes. ( Chacko, 1981; Chidolue, 1986).

However, the literature reveals that little research has been conducted with regard to students' attitudes towards the gender differences of their English language teachers. Many factors affect teaching and some argue that the first year of teaching is normally marked by frustration, anxiety, anger, and withdrawal when people try to integrate their idealistic beliefs about teaching with classroom realities. (Sharbian and Tan, 2013: 1). Nevertheless, it is argued that these beliefs vary depending on some factors like the gender of the teacher.

For instance, male teachers tend to give more attention to classroom management and they prefer features like fairness and good communication. On the other hand, female teachers focus on student-centeredness, and they tend to be supportive and well-organized. (Ogden, 1994).

Attitudes towards learning have received a lot of attention as it is considered as an integral part of learning and thus it should be referred to as an important factor in second/foreign language learning pedagogy. (Ababneh, 2012: 46). Several studies have also examined the attitudes of teachers' towards their profession. Bradley (1995) mentioned many factors like the inadequate funding, insufficient salaries, and lack of community support. Gender is also found to play a significant role in drawing teachers' attitudes. Several studies show that female teachers have more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession than male teachers.

Many studies in the field of teaching English as a foreign language revealed that teachers tend to interact differently with male students than with female students in school. (Duffy, Warren and Walsh; 2002: 580) Moreover, other researchers found that male students receive more attention in classroom from teacher than do female students (Bailey, 1993). Furthermore, it is generalized that the interaction between teachers and students depend on the gender of the teacher (Hopf & Hatzichrisou, 1999; Omvig, 1989; Worrall & Tsarna, 1987). For instance, findings of an American study on the differences between male and female teachers and how they interact with their students show that male teachers tend to be more authoritative and instrumental whereas female teachers tend to be more supportive and expressive. (Meece, 1987)

On the other hand, it is claimed that teachers may interact more with male students than with female ones just because male students are more likely to initiate interaction with teachers than do female students. (Duffy, Warren and Walesh, 2002: 582)

An interesting finding from a Vietnamese study that looked at the different attention students received in the classroom revealed that male students are often praised by their teachers for speaking out, acting confidently and expressing opinions, whereas females are often praised for being quiet, studious, and polite. (Van, 2010)

From here stems the importance of studying the gender difference because it influences the design of the curriculum, the teaching methods and the learning process. Moreover, the present study will look at the effect of teacher's gender on student's attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language, as it has been widely recognized that language plays a significant role in learning it properly. Chamber (1999) claims that learning takes place more easily, when the learner has a positive attitudes towards the language and learning. Furthermore, Gardner and Lambert (1972) in their extensive studies give evidence that positive attitudes toward a language enhance proficiency as well.

## **2. Methodology**

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of English language teachers' gender on their students as well as studying the effect of the difference in students' gender on their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. To achieve these goals, the researchers developed a questionnaire using ideas from (Wharton & Race, 2000: 19-20). Moreover, the students were asked to specify the good characteristics that they would like to have in their English language teachers, and the bad or negative characteristics which they do not like to have in their English language teachers from their own point of view.

### **2.1. Hypotheses of the Study**

The present study will try to investigate the following hypotheses:

- There is no significant relationship between EFL students' gender and their perspectives towards their English language teacher.
- There is no significant relationship between EFL students' perspectives towards learning English and the gender of their English teacher.

### **2.2. Participants**

The participant of the study were (183) students both male and female. The study was held during the first semester of the academic year (2013/2014) at Al-Huson University College / Al-Balqa' Applied University. The students who participated in this study were purposefully chosen from four sections of English (102), a compulsory course of English taught at the college for all students. The researchers were two instructors of English. One of them is male and the other one is female. Each one of them taught two sections.

### 2.3. Data Collection Procedure

The researchers of this study were two English instructors at Al - Huson University College / Al – Balqa'a Applied University. They taught four sections of English ( 102 ). They distributed the questionnaire on their students and tried to translate any difficult statement and encouraged them to be frank in their answers because their answers will not affect their status in the course.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of ten statements on which the students were asked to choose from ( 1- 5 ). Number ( 1 ) refers to always , ( 2 ) to frequently, ( 3 ) to sometimes, ( 4 ) to seldom, and ( 5 ) to never.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of two open – ended questions. The students were asked in the first question to give their own opinions about the positive characteristics that they would like to have in their English teachers, while in the second one they were asked to state the negative characteristics which they don't like to have in their English teachers. Their answers were collected and classified under two categories. The first one presented the opinions of the female students and the second one presented the opinions of the male students.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The present study basically ought to investigate whether the gender of EFL student's has an effect on their perspectives towards their English language teachers, as well as investigating if the gender of their English teacher has an effect on their learning of the language. The data collected from students' responses on the questionnaire items was analyzed in terms of means and t- test, using the statistical Package for Social Science ( SPSS ). And percentages were also computed. Furthermore, the researchers did an analysis of variance to investigate the effect of students' gender on their attitudes towards the gender of their English teachers.

The next step includes analyzing and categorizing students answers on the two open-ended questions in which they were asked to write about the positive and the negative characteristics that they like or don't like to have in their English language teachers.

## 3. Finding and Discussion

### 3.1. Analysis of the Study Hypotheses

This section aimed at introducing the analysis of the data collected. It is divided into two main sub sections: the first part will cover the analysis of the two hypotheses of the study. While the second part will cover the analysis of the two open -ended questions.

The first hypothesis tried to inquire whether there is a significant relationship between students' gender and their responses on the questionnaire statements. In order to investigate this hypothesis the researchers computed the mean scores and the standard deviations of the students' responses on the questionnaire statements. Table 1 shows this.

The number of the students who participated in this study was one hundred and eighty - three. There were one hundred male students and eighty – three female ones. In this table the researchers computed the mean scores and the standard deviations of students' responses on each question. From this table it is clear that the eighth question was about *whether the teacher shares the rationale for what the student doing* with a mean score of (4.00) and it has the highest mean score followed by question one which was about *if the teacher promotes self-esteem of the students*, it got a mean score of (3.8). Questions three and nine came next with the same score of ( 3.7 ). Question ( 3 ) dealt with *the feeling of security provided by the teacher* and question ( 9 ) inquired *if the teacher discusses learning strategies in the classroom*. Next came question two which was about *providing a cognitive challenge from the teacher* with a mean score of ( 3.6). Question ten which was about *whether the teacher involves the student in decision making* came next with a mean score of ( 3.4 ). Question seven in which the students were asked *whether the teacher bears in his / her mind the learners' other educational experiences* with a mean score of ( 3.3 ). Questions four and five came next with the same score of ( 3.0 ) where the students were asked *whether their teacher allows personal expression , does he / she use their learners' area of interest*. The least mean score was scored by question six in which the students were asked *if their teacher helps them to develop links with native English speaker*, with a mean score of ( 2.6).

In order to find out if there are any significant differences between students' responses that could be attributed to the difference in their gender, the researchers did a t-test of equality to the mean scores of the students' responses according to their gender. No significant differences at ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ) between the mean scores of the students' responses on all the questionnaire questions were found. Table (2) summarizes the results.

To investigate the second hypothesis which was designed to see if there is any significant relationship between students' responses on the questionnaire statements and the gender of their English teacher, the researchers computed the mean scores and did a t-test of equality on the questionnaire statements according to the gender of their English teacher. Table(3) illustrates this.

To see if there are any significant differences between the mean scores of the students' responses to the questionnaire statements that could be attributed to the difference in the gender of their English teacher, the researchers did a test of covariance between the means of the students' responses.. Table (4) presents the result.

As data in Table (4) show, questions (2, 3, 7, 9.) go in line with the hypothesis, in other words, there are no significant relationship between students' gender and the gender of their teacher at ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, the analysis of the data also show that questions (Q.1, Q.4, Q.5, Q.6, Q.8, Q.10) don't go in the same line with the hypothesis, which means that there are statically significant differences at ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ) on the effect of student's gender on those questions.

### **3.2. Students Responses on the Two Open-ended Questions**

This section will present the results obtained from the students' responses on the two open-ended questions. The students in the first question were asked to write about what they believe to be good or positive characteristics in their English teacher. While in the second question they were asked to write about the negative or bad characteristics which they don't like to have in their English teacher. The researchers classified the responses under two categories. Table (5) presents them.

The researchers also found some personal suggestions from students that seem inappropriate such as they wanted their teachers to miss classes or have more off days, they need teachers to give higher marks to the students in order to graduate. More interestingly, they don't like their teachers to take the absence every class, so that they can miss the classes and avoid being punished. Those comments go in the same vein with what Açıkgöz, (2005:111) found in his study about the characteristics of teachers and their effects on students attitudes.

### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

A number of conclusions could be drawn from the findings of this study. First, students' gender doesn't play any significant role in determining their perspectives towards their English teacher. Both male and female students have the same beliefs in relation to their needs in the classroom. Second, from the student's point of view, the gender of their English teacher has a significant role on their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language since the responses of female students reflect their preference to be taught by a male teacher, while the male students prefer to be taught by a female teacher. Third, both male and female students share the same ideas or perspectives about the characteristics which they like to have in their English teacher. For example, they all prefer their English teacher to be one who is funny, helps them to feel relaxed, friendly and respects them. Moreover, both male and female students agree on some negative characteristics which they do not like to have in their English teacher such as being noisy, keeps shouting, loses his/her temper easily, or the teacher who lacks the skill of good classroom management.

To sum up the present study gives clear evidence that a language classroom is not mainly created to help students improve their language, it could also be about trying to establish a rich, supportive, memorable and life-enhancing learning experience. (Wharton and Race,2000: 19). Furthermore, teachers should bear in mind the needs of their students as it is important to create an appropriate learning atmosphere by simply adjusting or improving the teaching approaches to suit the needs of the students when possible.

From the above conclusions the researchers recommended to repeat this study using a larger sample of participants of both teachers and students since this would be more representative and therefore, make results more reliable.

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**Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire Statements**

Question	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Q.1	183	3.8	1.1	.08
Q.2	183	3.6	1.1	.08
Q.3	183	3.7	1.4	.10
Q.4	183	3.0	1.4	.10
Q.5	183	3.0	1.4	.10
Q.6	183	2.6	1.4	.10
Q.7	183	3.3	1.3	.10
Q.8	183	4.0	1.1	.08
Q.9	183	3.7	1.2	.09
Q.10	183	3.4	1.3	.09

**Table 2: Mean scores and t-test of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire Statements According to their Gender**

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Gender Q1	-2.3	1.2	.09	-2.5	-2.1	-26.9	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q2	-2.1	1.2	.09	-2.3	-1.1	-23.3	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q3	-2.2	1.5	.11	-2.4	-1.1	-19.1	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q4	-1.5	1.5	.11	-1.7	-1.3	-13.4	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q5	-1.5	1.5	.11	-1.7	-1.3	-13.2	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender . Q6	-1.1	1.5	.11	-1.3	-.9	-9.7	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q7	-1.8	1.4	.10	-2.0	-1.6	-17.8	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender . Q8	-2.5	1.1	.09	-2.7	-2.3	-29.9	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender . Q9	-2.2	1.2	.09	-2.4	-2.1	-24.3	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q10	-1.9	1.4	.10	-2.1	-1.7	-18.5	182	.000

**Table 3: Mean Scores and T-Test of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire According to the Gender of their English Language Teacher**

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Gender. Q1	2.0	1.3	.096	2.2	2.5	24.6	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q2	2.0	1.4	.08	2.0	2.3	26.0	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q3	2.2	1.4	.10	2.0	2.4	21.1	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q4	1.6	1.4	.10	1.3	1.1	15.0	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q5	1.6	1.6	.11	1.3	1.8	13.5	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q6	1.7	1.4	.10	.10	1.3	11.2	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q7	1.1	1.3	.10	1.7	2.1	19.4	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q8	2.5	1.3	.10	2.3	2.7	27.0	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q9	2.3	1.2	.09	2.1	2.5	25.2	182	.000
Pair 1 Gender. Q10	1.1	1.5	.10	1.7	2.1	18.0	182	.000

**Table 4: Results of ANOVA Analysis of the Means of Students' Responses on the Questionnaire Statements According to the Gender of their English Language Teacher**

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	
Q.1	Between Groups Within Groups Total	7.6 217.6 225.2	1 181 182	7.6 1.2	6.3	.013
Q2	Between Groups Within Groups Total	1.4 206.2 207.7	1 181 182	1.4 1.1	1.2	.268
Q3	Between Groups Within Groups Total	6.7 361.1 368.6	1 181 182	6.8 1.1	3.9	.068
Q4	Between Groups Within Groups Total	10.9 359.1 370.	1 181 182	10.9 1.1	5.5	.020
Q5	Between Groups Within Groups Total	19.1 326.9 345.1	1 181 182	19.1 1.8	10.6	.001
Q6	Between Groups Within Groups Total	8.1 342.5 350.6	1 181 182	8.1 1.9	4.3	.040
Q7	Between Groups Within Groups Total	5.4 302.5 307.1	1 181 182	5.4 1.6	3.2	.074
Q8	Between Groups Within Groups Total	7.2 209.6 216.8	1 181 182	7.2 1.1	6.2	.013
Q9	Between Groups Within Groups Total	3.4 258.4 261.9	1 181 182	3.4 1.4	2.4	.123
Q10	Between Groups Within Groups Total	14.3 280.4 294.7	1 181 182	14.3 1.5	9.2	.003

**Table 5: Positive and Negative Characteristics of English Language Teachers from Students' Perspectives**

Gender	Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
Male	Explaining the course material clearly. Teacher provides help for all the students equally. Attractive and sociable teacher. Female teacher	Teacher who doesn't help or treat all the students equally.(biased) Teacher who discusses students' personal problems. Male teacher. Helps the females only.
Female	Good dressed/looking teacher. friendly. Strict. Humbleness and good personality. Active.	Teacher who speaks about him/ herself and discusses personal issues in class. Teacher who uses various methods and strategies in teaching.
Both ( male & female )	Respect the students. Quiet and calm. Fun and Humorous. Interesting. Friendly.	Noisy teacher. A grumpy teacher. Teacher who can't control the class. Fun and Humorous. Nervous. Teacher who doesn't explain grammar appropriately.