

Iranian High-School Girls Perception and Evaluation of Male and Female English Teachers

¹Mohammad Aliakbari and Behrouz jamalvandi,

Ilam University, Iran

Abstract. Every aspect of teachers' personality and students' character can potentially affect the teaching and learning process. With reference to the controversial debates over the effect of the teachers' gender on learners' attitude and progress, and student priority for that matter, the present study aimed at eliciting Iranian high school girls' preference for male and female English teachers under the separate sex educational policy. This became realized through distributing a 15-item questionnaire among 380 students. The results of the statistical survey supported the assumption that students' preference is influenced by both teachers professional capabilities and students emotional satisfaction. Although the subjects did not undermine their positive evaluation and perception for male teachers' professional capabilities, the results undoubtedly approve the dominant role of the affective and emotional factors in gender preference. Therefore, the overall finding represents that Iranian high school girls preferred female English teachers for feeling comfort and rest and more secure in consulting their issues with female teachers.

Key words: SLA, teachers' gender, ELT in Iran, high school education

1. Introduction

Over the past years the role of gender in the realm of SLA has emerged as a hotly debated issue. A considerable body of research has been introduced to SLA taking a close look at the place of gender both on the part of teacher and learner. This social factor is believed to affect the process of SLA. Drawing on Ellis (1994, 1997), it is safe to express that social factors have a major impact on L₂ proficiency but they probably do not influence it explicitly. Another point to note is that social factors help to construct learners' attitudes towards learning and teaching. Motivated by theoretical implications on the role of gender in language learning and teaching, the ongoing research has attempted to probe this subject empirically in the atmosphere of Iranian high school girl students. Under the Iranian educational policy, high school girls and boys study in separate schools. However, due to the shortage of female English teachers, both male and female instructors teach in Iranian girl high schools. On the one hand with reference to the employed education policy, it is naturally presumed that female teachers are more acceptable and successful in girl schools and on the other hand, there have been controversial debates as to prove the extent to which gender of a teacher may influence students' attitude toward language learning, motivation, interest, and success. To verify this natural presumption objectively, throughout the present study, female students' preference for the gender of English teacher and their considerations for this matter in high school level have been put under investigation.

2. Statement of the problem

The main issue the present study dedicated to find out was whether female students in high schools prefer male or female English teacher. In so doing there will be an attempt to reach answers to the questions related to the choice for the gender of English teacher in Iranian girl high schools. Accordingly, the questions below represent the general purpose of the information poll put forth through the survey:

¹⁺ Corresponding author. Tel.: (+988412223399); fax: (+988412238528).
E-mail address: (maliakbari@hotmail.com).

- Who Do Iranian High school Girls Favor, a Female or a Male English Teacher?
- What factors affect students' preference for the gender of the English teacher?

3. Review of Literature

A general survey of the state of ELT in the past three decades indicates that numerous studies have been conducted on teacher gender and relevant issues. Bennett (1982) in a survey found that students did not have different standards of reference for male and female instructors but women were perceived to be less authoritarian and more charismatic. Basow and Silberg (1987) revealed the results of students' evaluations of their professors in terms of teaching effectiveness and sex-typed characteristics. Male students gave female professors significantly poorer rating than male professors. Female students evaluated female professors less favorably than male professors. Based on videotaped lectures, Winocur and Sirowatka (1989) revealed that students' perceptions of lecturers are dependent largely on lecturing style than the gender of the lecturers. Similarly, students rated male instructors higher than female ones in a study conducted by Fandt and Stevens (1991). Conducting an investigation to show the effect of gender of the teacher on students' participation or perceptions, Brady and Eisler (1999) stated that students did not differ in their classroom participation or perceptions. Further, Feldmark (1993) describes the interaction of gender, teacher characteristics / behaviors, and student perceptions and expectations as complex. "It did not follow a fixed trend. It sometimes showed no difference, and sometimes it did". Similarly, Brown (2000) note that preference for a male or female teacher may be detected with reference to sociocultural factors, affective domain and biological elements, including gender. In his term, affective factors play an influential part in learners' improvement or decline in learning a second or a foreign language.

Having these informative but controversial findings at hand, the researchers were motivated to investigate the issue in Iranian educational system in high school level with separate sex high schools.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The intended population included as many as 7600 high school girl students in the province of Ilam, Iran. Five percent of population, that is, three hundred and eighty female students took part in the study as the sample. The subjects were selected on the basis of random selection so that the participants be representatives of all kinds of schools like schools for the genius, schools affiliated to Ilam state and Azad university, technical high schools, schools in suburbs, and others.

4.2. Design and the instrument

To carry out the study a descriptive survey was designed. As an instrument to gather the data, a 15 item questionnaire in likert scale was administered. To design the questionnaire, a pilot study was first conducted in which open-ended questions were given to the students to elicit their ideas regarding their choice of the gender of English teachers as well as the reasons for their preference. Afterwards, on the basis of subjects' responses to the open-ended questionnaire, the final questionnaire with 15 items was developed. It deserves notice that the first item was expected to determine the subjects' choice for gender of the teacher and the 14 remaining items were to collect the reasons for their choice. It was distributed among the selected sample at different schools in Ilam province during spring, 1385 Solar year (May, 2006). To insure the participants' understanding of the items, the questioner was developed and administered in their native language; Persian. A copy of the questionnaire is provided as appendix.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

After gathering data, frequency and percentage for all the responses were computed. The data were then tabulated under each item of the questionnaire. Throughout this section the items will be explained in turn.

The first item of the survey was meant to collect participants' overall tendency on the choice of male or female English teacher. As it is shown in the table, most subjects (44.5 percent) preferred to have a female English teacher. 38.4 percent of participants stated that having a male or a female teacher would make no

difference for them, and only 17.1 percent expressed tendency to have a male English teacher. Therefore, it is quite convincing that participants were more interested and happy with female English teachers.

Table 1: Preference for English teacher

	Male	Female	No difference	Total
Frequency	65	169	149	380
Percent	17.1	44.5	38.4	100.0

The second item was to check out whether participants thought that female English teachers were stricter in their teaching. Subjects' response in Table 2 indicates that 36.3 percent of subjects believed that female teachers are stricter in teaching and 19.5 percent showed full agreement. 16.1 percent did not agree with the position put forward and 3.9 percent were totally disagreed with the view. The remaining 24.2 percent stated no idea. Combining "agree" and "fully agree" responses, all together 56 percent of the population agreed that, compared to males, female teachers are stricter in their job.

Table 2: Female teachers are stricter in teaching.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	74	138	92	61	15	380
Percent	19.5	36.5	24.2	16.1	3.9	100.0

The third question puts forth the idea that male teachers are more patient in their job. The table clarifies the 41.1 percent of subjects asserted that male teachers are more patient in their job and 22.1 percent totally agreed with the statement. 16.3 were against, 6.1 reacted fully negatively toward the idea, and, 14.5 percent expressed no idea. As far as the result is concerned, it can be noticed that the major group of participants, 63.2 percent, declared that male teachers are more patient in their job.

Table 3: Male teachers are more patient in teaching.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	84	156	55	62	23	380
Percent	22.1	41.1	14.5	16.3	6.1	100.0

To test the assumption that girl students do not ask their questions because they feel shy, item no. four was presented. Participants' response in table 4 shows that all together 30 percent admitted the assumption. The rest, 70 percent, were either disagreed or neutral. Therefore, the assumption is certainly rejected.

Table 4: Students avoid asking male teachers their questions due to embarrassment.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	48	66	43	112	111	380
Percent	12.6	17.4	11.3	29.5	29.2	100.0

The next item was to measure students' agreement with the assumption that female teachers are more punctual and disciplined. Responses to this item verify this position since 61.6 percent believe that female teachers are more punctual and disciplined. In other words, only 23.1 percent disagreed with the view.

Table 5: Female teachers are more punctual and disciplined.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	88	146	58	64	24	380
Percent	23.2	38.4	15.3	16.8	6.3	100.0

Item No. 6 proposes that female teachers' higher responsibility and involvement with family problems affects their teaching practice. Based on the data collected, it is observed that 27.3 percent of subjects showed agreement and 21.8 percent full agreement for the presented view. 27.4 percent disagreed with the idea, 10.8 percent reacted quite negatively, and, 19.7 percent stood on neutrality. With a narrow difference the table shows that a majority of the students rate males teachers higher in being less affected by out class responsibilities. Besides, the data clearly shows students awareness of the effect of family affairs on students' education.

Table 6: Students prefer to have male teachers since female teachers are less patient for their involvement in family issues and responsibilities.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	83	77	75	104	41	380
Percent	21.8	20.3	19.7	27.4	10.8	100.0

Information shown in following table is based on the notion that female teachers are more serious with oral and written evaluation. With reference to the data presented in the table below, 37.9 percent agreed with the idea of female teacher serious evaluation plan and 25 percent showed total agreement. 14.5 percent were against the idea, 9 percent were fully disagreed with the proposed statement, and 13.4 percent expressed no idea. It can undoubtedly be understood from the table that the highest percent, 62.9, agreed that female teachers are more punctual and serious in regular evaluation.

Table 7: Female teachers are more serious in regular oral and written evaluation.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	95	144	51	55	35	380
Percent	25.0	37.9	13.4	14.5	9.2	100.0

Item No. 8 puts into question the assumption that male teachers are more good-tempered and patient to criticism. The data shown below indicates that 35.8 percent of participants believed in the above idea and 24.5 showed total agreement on that. 15 percent marked disagreement, 8.4 voted total disagreement, and 16.3 marked no idea. It is thus clear to observe that subjects were mostly agreed that male teachers are more good-tempered and open to criticism. Moreover, response to this item approves and strengthens the data collected for item no. 3.

Table 8: Male teachers are more good-tempered and open to criticism

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	93	136	62	57	32	380
Percent	24.5	35.8	16.3	15.0	8.4	100.0

A good number of the participants in pilot study expressed their priority for female teachers for higher level of comfort in class. Item no.9 intended to check this assumption. The table specifies that 30.5 percent of subjects agreed with the statement and 17.9 expressed total agreement with idea. 17.9 showed disagreement, 11.1 were fully disagreed and 22.6 had no idea. As it is clear from the table, the top percentage belongs to those who preferred to have female teachers in order to be more comfortable in class.

Table 9: Students are more comfortable in class with female teachers.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	68	116	86	68	42	380
Percent	17.9	30.5	22.6	17.9	11.1	100.0

The item that follows represents participants' reaction to the assumption that male teachers are more capable in correct pronunciation and speech. Data presented in table 10 shows that 21.3 percent of subjects marked agreement and 23.7 total agreement on the idea. 22.6 showed their disagreement, 13.2 full disagreement, and 19.2 percent had no idea. Adding up the percentage for "agree" and "fully agree", one may directly come to the understanding that a great majority of the participants (45 percent) think that male teachers are more concerned with and better of in pronunciation and speech abilities.

Table 10: Male teachers are more able in correct pronunciation and speech

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	90	81	73	86	50	380
Percent	23.7	21.3	19.2	22.6	13.2	100.0

The rationale behind item no. 11 was an attempt to reexamine the suggestion that male teachers' final evaluation is on the basis of students' expected level and knowledge not unrealistic ambitious expectancy. Based on the data presented in the following table, 25 percent answered positively and 21.3 percent were

fully agreed with the idea. 22.1 percent marked disagreement and 13.7 total disagreement regarding the issue. And, 17.9 percent took no for or against position. Although the difference between the rate of agreement and disagreement may not be eye-catching (46.3 and 35.8 percent), still the data simply signify that teachers overall approach and plan for evaluation affects students perception.

Table 11: Male teachers base final evaluation on students' expected level and knowledge.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	81	65	68	84	52	380
Percent	21.3	25.0	17.9	22.1	13.7	100.0

The finding of the following item is a response to the idea that since human beings are more affected by the opposite sex, girl students tend to have a male teacher. Table 12 shows that 19.5 percent of participants marked their agreement and 13.7 full agreement on the idea. 20 percent were against and 17.1 were fully disagreed regarding the proposed issue. And, 29.7 percent were neutral. As it is seen from the table, the frequency for agreement and disagreement with the proposed assumption were almost similar (36.6 for 37.2) and a great number of respondents, 29.7 percent, were neither for nor against the above statement. Therefore, the issue is not resolved yet and we cannot draw a major position from the result. It can be the subject of further research.

Table 12: Girl students prefer to have male teachers because they are more affected by opposite sex.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	65	74	113	76	65	380
Percent	17.1	19.5	29.7	20.0	17.1	100.0

Table 13 reveals the findings related to the assumption that if girl students happen to face a problem, they would feel more relaxed to consult a female teacher. It can be realized that 38.7 percent of subjects agreed with the idea and 20 percent showed full agreement. 17.9 were against the idea, 9.7 were totally disagreed regarding the stated issue, and, 3.2 percent had no idea. As a conclusion, greater percent of girl students, 59.2 percent, showed their satisfaction on the idea stated. The responses are convincing enough to make one agree that the priority for female teacher is due to sociocultural and emotional comfort factors not professional capability.

Table 13: Girls are more relaxed to consult female teachers on their problems.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	78	147	50	68	37	380
Percent	20.5	38.7	3.2	17.9	9.7	100.0

Item 14 considers the statement that male teachers have an effective role in female learners' improvement and progress. According to the table, 26.6 percent of subjects showed agreement and 16.6 full agreement on the idea. 18.7 did not agree with the idea, 8.9 percent showed full disagreement, and, 29.2 percent marked no idea. As it can be seen from the table, the greatest number of respondents, 43.2 percent, expressed agreement regarding the assumption, acknowledging male teachers special role in student's future.

Table 14: Male teachers play an influential and effective role in students' progress and improvement.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	63	101	111	71	34	380
Percent	16.6	26.6	29.2	18.7	8.9	100.0

The final item of the questionnaire had to do with students' response concerning the employment of various teaching methods. The data indicate that 31.8 percent of subjects supported the idea and 26.3 percent showed total agreement. 13.7 percent were disagreed, 8.4 were fully disagreed, and, 19.7 marked no idea. As a result, it is right to claim that good majority of participants believe that male teachers make more use of more various teaching methods.

Table 15: Male teachers more often apply more various teaching methods.

	Fully agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Frequency	100	121	75	52	32	380

Percent	26.3	31.8	19.7	13.7	8.4	100.0
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6. Discussion

As it was specified earlier, Item no. 1 was the key item for representing the total frequency of male and female choice of teacher and the successive items were to screen the subjects' reasons for gender preference. It can be understood from the data that the frequency for satisfaction with female teachers is over two times as much as that observed for male teachers. Only less than 20 percent preferred male teachers. As far as the justification for this preference is concerned, the review of the responses to the rest of items provides further informative findings. 56 percent think that female teachers are stricter in teaching. Over 63 percent believe that male teachers are more patient in their teaching. Over 58 percent do not feel shy to ask question from their male teachers. Over 61 percent characterize female teachers as punctual and disciplined. Over 42 percent prefer male teachers because female teachers are more affected by family involvement issues and out class responsibilities. Over 62 percent think that female teachers are more serious in their oral and written evaluations. Over 59 percent specified that male teachers are good tempered and open to criticism. Over 48 percent feel more comfortable in a class with a female teacher. 45 percent believe that male teachers more often have superior pronunciation and speech abilities. More than 46 percent think that male teachers adjust evaluations to students' level. Only a minor percentage think male teachers can be affected by female students. Over 59 percent think that girls are more relaxed to consult female teachers. More than 43 percent believe that male teachers play effective and influential role in students' progress. And over 68 percent agree that male teachers apply various teaching techniques.

7. Conclusion

From the participants response to the questionnaire it can be claimed that students' preference is influenced by both teachers' professional capabilities and students sociocultural attitudes and emotional satisfaction. As far as the professional aspects of teaching is concerned , the participants decisively characterized male teachers as people who are more patient in teaching , do not make students feel embarrassed to ask questions, do not take family affairs and out class responsibilities to class, are good tempered and open to criticism, are better in correct pronunciation and speech, are more realistic in students' evaluation, play substantial role in students learning and progress, are less affected by opposite sex and apply variety of teaching methods and techniques. They also thought that female teachers are stricter in teaching, more punctual and disciplined and more serious in evaluation. Yet, the data leaves no doubt that sociocultural ideology and personal attitudes direct the participants to a greater favorite for female teachers. This can be concluded from the response given to item 9 and 13 where a great percentage asserted their preference for female teachers.

Having noticed the students' admittance of male teachers' professional capability on the one hand and the obvious priority for female teachers on the other, one can understand that Iranian female students preferred female teachers not because of their professional capabilities but for a feeling of comfort and rest in a female teacher class. Therefore at least in this particular level and educational system gender does matter though not so critically

To improve the present situation, the findings of this investigation inspire a number of suggestions. The results convincingly support the educational policy of assigning female teachers in girl high schools and therefore encourage officials to plan for training more female teachers. The study also implies the need to notify the female teachers develop the personality traits approved by students so that greater majority of high school girl students would be satisfied with them. As long as there is a need for the practice of male teachers in girl high schools, another suggestion supported by the findings of the study is the need to inform them about the students' criteria and justification for gender preference. In so doing, male teachers can improve their teaching career by considering the approved standards.

8. References

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