

Students' Attitudes Towards Their Male and Female Teachers in Azzaytuna University

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ABSTRACT: The primary purpose of this study was to investigate undergraduates' attitudes towards their female teachers. Accordingly, the broad research enquiries suggested for this study involved students' reactive perspectives concerning their female teachers' pedagogical behaviours; including, teaching methods, psychological and cultural considerations. Such variables were accounted for because teachers and students are exposed to exactly the same curricula and belong to the same educational settings, but they still have some kind of trouble in coping with a set of psychological and cultural demands. Simply put, it is a big challenge for students and teachers to express themselves idiosyncratically within a multi-cultural environment. Amongst these cultural demands, there appear the gender constraints which may play an influential role in shaping and regulating classroom behaviours such as communicative interactions, willingness to teach or learn and schooling performance. Thus far, this qualitative study explored the multifaceted dimensions that affect undergraduates' attitudes to female teachers in classrooms. In-depth interviews were employed as a methodological instrument to generate the required data of this study. Ethical considerations were rigorously considered to avoid any type of harmful or dangerous effects on the interviewees either immediately or later.

Key words: gender; female teachers; male teachers; classroom behaviors; curricula; cultural constraints; social backgrounds.

المخلص : هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مواقف طلاب الجامعات تجاه أعضاء هيئة التدريس الاناث. وركزت الأسئلة البحثية على سير اغوار وجهات نظر الطلاب على مستوى الاستجابة لأساليبهم التربوية من حيث بطرق التدريس، والعوامل النفسية والثقافية المؤثرة فيها . تم إدراج هذه المتغيرات لما تمثله فرص التعبير عن الهوية الشخصية تحدياً كبيراً في بيئة تفرض القيود المرتبطة بالنوع الاجتماعي، والتي قد تلعب دوراً مؤثراً في تشكيل وتنظيم سلوكيات الصف مثل التفاعل التواصلي بين عضو هيئة التدريس و الطلاب . تمت الاستعانة بالمقابلات الشخصية المعمقة كأداة منهجية لجمع البيانات اللازمة لهذه الدراسة. كما تم الالتزام التام بالاعتبارات الأخلاقية، تفادياً لأي آثار ضارة أو خطرة على المشاركين سواء على المدى القصير أو الطويل. اسفرت نتائج البحث عن معدلات عالية من الاداء المهني لأعضاء هيئة التدريس الاناث , و بالمقابل وجود نوع من عدم الالتزام السلوكي من جانب الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النوع الاجتماعي؛ المعلمات؛ المدرسون الذكور؛ سلوكيات الصف؛ المناهج الدراسية؛ القيود الثقافية؛ الخلفيات الاجتماعية.

I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom behaviors (either academic or non-academic) occupy a fundamental place in any teaching-learning process. In that, learners' pro-actions as well as their reactions to the different pedagogical aspects reflect their interests and motivations to learning. The same thing can, also, be applicable to teaching practices. Indeed, there is a common belief that teachers interact with learners to explain syllabus entities, give instructions, disambiguate misunderstood items, ask questions, and/or answering them. Besides, they are continually to give feedbacks - either

positively or negatively- to remedy weaknesses and support progress. Learners, from the other side of the coin, are expected to comment on, or react to, teachers' instructions, deliver presentations, and/or asking and answering teachers' questions. This messy process of mutual interactions between teachers and learners is an essential perspective in the pedagogical theory.

Consequently, the core concern of the current study was to explore the learners' attitudes to their female teachers. Accordingly, much emphasis was shifted to consider the clues of teachers' behaviours during classes and to what extent such behaviours reinforce their students' positive or negative attitudes. In a more accurate sense, the researcher's essential objective was to probe how gendered practices of teachers at Tripoli University may shape and regulate their students' mind-sets.

Although, teachers, either males or females, are supposed to play an important role in the teaching-learning process, their actual performances are likely to be affected by certain factors. First, there are the syllabus' requirements and the schooling systems and regularities. These issues are said to adjust teachers' aptitudes to act well during classes. The nature of the syllabus entities and the school demands can be either helpful or helpless dynamics for teaching properly and sufficiently. Secondly, the psychological and social issues may stand as vital influences in the process of teaching as a whole. For instance, the teacher's self-confidence, willingness in addition to his/her desires to teach are seen as advantageous features in the favour of him/her. The cultural background of the teacher also occupies a central position in regulating his/her keenness to teach. By and large, a teacher is not a machine. Rather, he/she is a human being who is likely to behave in such a way that reflects his/her pedagogical and cultural environments.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS RELATED WORKS

The study of the relationships that link pedagogical issues with cultural prospective has been a matter of concern for many scholars. A big body of research, has consequently, been introduced so far. However, when gender is highlighted as an effective and persuasive issue in the pedagogical environments, there have been a number of controversies which showed the consequences of gender on teaching and learning processes. For instance, (Skelton et. al, 2006; Blumburg, 2008; Eddy et al, 2014) thought that curricula has, somehow, been gendered masculine. In other words, females are most often presented as powerless and less dominant individuals in societies. Therefore, they are mostly presented as needy people and victims who need much help, care, and protection. This stereotypical picture has been attributed to certain patriarchal and cultural constraints because a classroom mirrors a society (Rust, et. al, 2000; Anderson, 2011). The very expected result, then, is that female students are likely to behave timidly during classes.

Furthermore, it has been argued that textbooks in schools are gendered biased in the favour of males. The females in those textbooks are frequently depicted to perform soft tasks such as villagers, flower sellers or nurses while males are shown to perform hard tasks such as policemen, soldiers, or physicians. Such gendered diversity in portrayals of males and females in curricula triggers and motivates male learners' tendencies to dominate schooling culture.

Split, et. al. (2012). moreover, pointed out that female students opt to avoid provocative challenges with their male colleagues. Hence, the author added, they keep their heads down.

Concerning schooling performance, research has demonstrated that girls, by and the large, outperform their male counterparts in almost all educational stages. Simply put, a copious body of research (Brophy, & Good, 1974; Banks, & Banks, 2010; Wardhaugh, 1998; Bamora, 2010; Rashidi, & Naderi, 2012) has concluded that because female learners miss their teachers' attention during classes, they spend much effort to prove themselves during exam sessions. On the other side of the coin, teachers have been found to construct and reinforce gender roles outside schools.

Therefore, male learners are positively rewarded for their knowledge and female learners for their obedience. Surprisingly, however, female learners have been found to receive less courageous feedbacks from their teachers despite their endeavours to prove themselves (Kelly, 1988).

The previous considerable amount of research indicated that gender cannot be taken for granted in the field of education, because it implies certain genetic, psychological and socio-cultural perspectives. The previous review of the literature overview may raise the question of how male and female teacher behave during classes. Do they adopt different practices based on their gender dichotomy? And if they do, how do students perceive their teachers' different behaviours?

Importantly, it has, so far, been distinguished between two prospects of learners' oral participations during classes; namely, 'polyphony' and 'cacophony'. 'Polyphony' is a term used to describe school girls' tendencies to reform some kind of rapport and collaborative relationships that enable them to build congruent links with their audiences. In an accurate sense, it has been assumed that feminine polyphonic interactions are more co-operative compared to masculine monologic (cacophonous) interactions. That is to say that school boys apt to have gender involved within their speaking turns – they are eager to express their masculine characters - (I can ... , we think ..., etc). Nonetheless, their counterparts (school girls) do not have such a tendency. It is thought that school girls found to avoid gender-based linguistic forms. Instead, they are likely to resort to neutral forms – (one can ... , some people think..., etc).

Cacophony, on the other hand, is a term used to describe school boys' linguistic patterns. As aforementioned above, school boys have been found to use linguistic forms that match their tendencies to build up full masculine characters. Unlike their counterparts, school boys' masculine linguistic features appear in their communicative interactions. They, for instance, are found to use street language – slang and dirty language. They, too, are marked as impolite users of language, because most often they tend to embarrass their classmates by giving them bad epithets.

Research has, also, offered certain evidently topics with regard to the gender of teachers. For example, it is thought that teachers' proficiency and capabilities are much influenced by the subjects they are asked to teach. For instance, it has been proposed that male teachers do better than do female ones in mathematics classes. Conversely, language and science classes have been found to rather fit female teachers than their male counterparts (Beilock, et.al, 2010; Rehnman, & Herlitz, 2007). Interestingly, in an exceptional study, Islahi et al (2013) concluded that the material status of teachers can have a crucial impact on their readiness to perform well during classes. In that, the authors presume that marriage negatively affect the teacher's flexibility and considerateness.

To sum up, gender of the teacher occupies an important position in the whole teaching-learning process. In fact, it is an influential factor to which a big deal of classroom's behaviours can be attributed. Such gendered practices during classes might shape certain students' attitudes to their teachers. However, teachers' gender diversity is not the only issue in forming students' attitudes. Rather, the schooling regularities, and syllabus demands are expected to have some kind of interventions. Thus far, the teaching-learning process is a messy network of unlimited influences. As mentioned earlier, this study was carried out to gain as a deep understanding of the students' attitudes to their female teachers in particular.

Having such preliminary concepts in mind, this pilot study was primarily conducted find answers to the following research questions;

- **Do students in Azzaytuna University prefer female teachers to male ones? and,**
- **What makes them prefer/reject their female teachers?**

The conceptual framework was based upon gender dichotomy as a cultural perspective, which was thought of to trigger a set of learners' preferences and fondness towards classes delivered by female teachers in Azzaytuna University. A big deal of consideration, therefore, has been shifted to seek the essence of students' attitudes towards their female teachers. With regard, and based on the vast body of literature on the subject, the researchers dealt with the topic in two main levels. First, it was to discover whether students' attitudes towards classroom interactions with their female teachers are positive or negative. Secondly, it was to find out about factors that trigger such attitudes.

The Constructionism Paradigm was considered the theoretical framework in this study. Thus far,, the epistemology (i.e., the nature of knowledge) is held in the social constructed realities which would be observed from the interviewees' authentic outlooks. According to (Bryman 2012) the meanings are created through interactions between the interviewer (in this case the researcher) and the interviewees (a number of undergraduates at Azzaytuna University). The role of a researcher, then, is to probe certain systematic social practices and to establish some kind of understanding for them. Resultantly, as stated by Mertens (2005) "[T]he inquirer and the inquired-into are interlocked in an interpretive process; each influences the other" (p. 14).

III. METHODOLOGY

Methodology occupies a central position in academic research, because it determines the boundaries of the researching processes and guides the researcher(s) to best address the research inquiries. Having such an academic preliminary accounted, the researchers in this study selected the qualitative approach to mirror the purposes behind conducting it. Mertens (2005, p. 231) stated that the qualitative approach contributes to make an understanding of constructed behaviours of people involved in a context. This basic pillar in selecting the qualitative research approach in this study, simply because the aim of it is to establish some kind of explanatory clues that rationalize the varied attitudes to female teachers at high education institutions in Libya.

IV. DATA GENERATING INSTRUMENTS

In-depth interviews were used a phenomenological qualitative technique in generating the required data for this study. Twenty interviewees, namely; ten male and ten female undergraduates were involved voluntarily in these interviews. Importantly, however, the interviewees were guaranteed that participating in the study would have nothing to do with their schooling performances. Rather, their names and personal information would not be made available by any means. Thus far, the fundamental ethical issues were strictly considered by the researcher.

The interviews questions were made open to obtain as much textual data as possible. In other words, the interview questions were formulated in a way that mirror the research inquiries suggested for this study. In that, the interviewees were asked to why or why not they prefer female teachers. Additionally, the interviews were conducted during interviewees' free times and in a quiet venue to avoid any type of disturbance that may result in obtaining impure data.

V. SAMPLING

Purposive sampling strategy was selected to generate the required information for this study. Two groups of twenty subjects were interviewed; namely, ten males and ten females. The interviewees showed much interest in participating in this study, therefore the researcher did not face any kind of inconvenience during the interviews' sessions. Moreover, due to the interviewees' helpfulness, the researcher was able to expand the questions which contributed to deepen the arguments regarding the main theme of the study.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

It is commonplace of observation that teachers' genders occupy a central position in the process of teaching and learning. In one way or another, due to gender diversity, teachers do not behave equally during classes. Such gender based behaviours can easily be noticed in treating learners. As a result, there was an obvious sign that there exist differences between the attitudes expressed by male and female interviewees towards their female teachers. By way of illustration, the interviewed undergraduates offered dual practices to satisfy their teachers. On one hand, they [learners] show much of obedient and studiousness to their male teachers. This behaviour could be attributed to male teachers' toughness and seriousness which enforce learners to respect classroom regularities. Though, learners, On the other hand, are likely to practice evasion with their female teachers based on the latter satisfying and pleasant treatments with the former.

Of course, such aforesaid dual practices are generally found. Nonetheless, the gender of learners is expected to yield another dimension that shapes or regulates their behaviours. However, there are a set of fundamental functions which involve the teaching process despite the gender of the teachers. In other words, the teaching process implies a set of issues thoroughly regardless of the teacher's biological sex. Instruction can be a good example of classroom teaching issues. It [instruction] indicates the formal actions taken by a teacher to demonstrate conducting learning activities and to make an overall supervision on classroom works. Besides, there is 'classroom management' which refers to the physical procedures taken to bring about the learners' attention and enthusiasm to accept, yet to react positively to, the lessons. The disciplinary and socialization interventions are also of great significance. They, more or less, have to go parallel to each other during classes. Otherwise, learners will not be able to conform to the scientific and communicative expectations. The disciplinary and social intervention, hence, indicated that a teacher has to take the necessary actions which reinforce and stimulate learners' abilities, attitudes, aptitudes, and desires to adjust their scientific as well as social behaviours (Brophy, 1996, p. 5).

Additionally, the interviewees asserted that male learners react differently from their female classmates. In that, male learners, unlike female learners, showed less extents of obedient to their teachers' instructions. Such practices have been highlighted by psychologists who pointed out that school boys (under certain societal and cultural demands) are predisposed to assertiveness, competitiveness and relatively to aggressiveness, meanwhile school girls are predisposed to uncertainty, and suppression. Such binary criteria rationalize logically the binary reactions thereafter. The binary reactions thus emerge apparently in school communicative interactions among boys and girls. Yet, this psychological hypothesis reinforces the claim that segregated sex-based activities in schools are attributed to external variables (society and culture) rather than to innate desires.

By and large, the final conclusion of this pilot study seemed to concur with the previous literature on the relationship between gender and teaching process. In that, it has affirmed a number of qualities that attached to teachers on the subject of their gender dichotomy. It has been argued that female teachers, for instance, are more supportive and expressive than male teachers are (Warwick, and Jatoi, 1994). In that, they [female teachers] have been found to employ a variety of teaching methods (Margriet, et. al, 2017). In a more explicit sense, research has concluded that female teachers allow more students' participations, ask them more questions, and give them more courageous feedbacks (Kelly, 1988; Martin, & Marsh, 2005; Ghazvinia, and Khajepoura, 2011; Rashidi, et al 2012). In contrast, male teachers' tendencies have been recorded in the favour of exactness and integrity (Clarck, and Trafford, 1995; Wood 2012). Male teachers have also been to prefer group work and short interactional turns with students, although they keep them frequent

(Woolfolk, 2004; Rashidi et al 2012). Such findings can, very well, fit Chisamya, et. al, 2012) assumption that men tend to 'take charge' meanwhile, women tend to 'take care'.

Conclusively, the interviews revealed that gender has a strong effect on both teaching and learning attitudes. Therefore, it would be worth to mention that such a conclusion articulates the finding of a recently conducted study (Lee, 2014) in which the researcher stated that female teachers are more interested and motivated to involve in teaching occupation. This statement can primarily be attributed to female teachers' abilities; firstly, to control temper during classes, and secondly, to perform multi tasks in a time (Apple, 1985/1988; Livingstone, 2003; Moreno, and Flowerday, 2006).

VII. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, students' learning attitudes are not only systemized by schooling regularities but also by certain demographic variables. These variables include teachers' gender, age, cultural backgrounds which play influential roles in determining classrooms' practices. In this study much emphasis was forwarded to seek how students react to classroom instructions thrown up by male and female teachers. The findings showed evidently that students under certain psychological and socio-cultural demands adopt dual opposite reactions to these instructions. In a more accurate sense, it was found that students' behaviours are changeable based on the gender of their teachers. Consequently, the show much obedience with their male teachers compared with much carelessness and disobedience with their female teachers.

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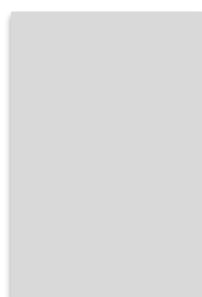
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