

## The Effect of Teachers' Gender on EFL Learning in Secondary Education.

تأثير جنس المعلمين على تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم الثانوي

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### Abstract :

Gender, teaching and learning have gained a great interest in the field of education. In the scope of language teaching, the importance of teacher gender tends to be even more crucial. The purpose of this article is to highlight the significance of the influence of EFL teachers' gender on secondary school pupils' academic performance. The sample of this study consisted of (170) pupils who were asked to frankly answer the questionnaire's (17) questions about their teachers of English, so that the latter can benefit from this feedback when possible in adjusting their methods of teaching. Findings of the study have revealed that the gender of the English language teacher has a significant effect on pupils' achievements since pupils of both genders' answers have unveiled their preference to be taught by EFL female teachers.

**Keywords :** EFL teaching and learning, gender, influence, pupil, teacher.

### ملخص

لقد حظي نوع الجنس والتدريس والتعلم باهتمام كبير في مجال التعليم. في نطاق تدريس اللغة تميل أهمية نوع جنس الاستاذ إلى أن تكون ذات أكثر قيمة. الغرض من هذا المقال هو تسليط الضوء على أهمية تأثير جنس معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على الأداء الأكاديمي لتلاميذ المدارس الثانوية. تتألف عينة هذه الدراسة من (170) تلميذا حيث طُلب منهم أن يجيبوا بصراحة تامة على أسئلة الاستبيان (17) التي كانت متعلقة بمعلميهم للغة الإنجليزية حتى يتسنى لهذا الأخير الاستفادة من هذه الملاحظات عند الإمكان فيما يخص طرق تعديل أساليب التدريس الخاصة بهم. وقد كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة على أن نوع جنس أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية يخلف تأثيرا كبيرا على نتائج التلاميذ حيث أن اجابات كلا الجنسين كشفت بأنهم يفضلون أن يُدرّسوا من قِبل معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الجنس، المعلم، التلميذ، التأثير، تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Inside the classroom, students are eager to learn in a safe and an opportunistic atmosphere as most teachers are seeking to supply learners with this sort of environment. However, not all teachers pursue the same approach in their classrooms while teaching which are in a way or another influenced by some variables such as "gender". Throughout the years, many researchers have developed ideas, trying to relate the relationship between gender effects and teaching.

No matter what gender differences are mainly linguistically, culturally or biologically determined, educational research in the last several years has demonstrated that gender differences have noticeably influenced students' academic interests, needs, and achievements. Gender studies are turning into a focal attention in different colleges and research establishments all over the world as it importantly affects the procedures of learning and educating. Thus, the teacher's gender is a factor that is affecting the teaching/learning procedures with respect to teacher/student relationship in the classroom. Research on this area has widely acknowledged that the gender of the teacher not only influences both the quantity and quality of interactions in learning (Gray & Leith, 2004, pp3-17) but also students' motivation towards studying at whole.

The motivation of this study is to shed some light on the importance of the influence of EFL teachers' gender on secondary school pupils' academic achievements. Since it is very important to provide a relaxed atmosphere for the students to get better learning outcomes, it is well acknowledged that teachers' gender plays a significant role amongst many factors that affect both the teaching and learning processes.

**1. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

In the recent years, in the scope of language teaching and learning, gender in education is gaining an increasing attention, as it has become an interesting topic to be discussed among researchers and investigated by various studies so as to determine whether teaching and learning English as a foreign language can be influenced by the gender of both the teacher and the student. Teacher's gender, in particular, is a concern that has theoretical and pedagogical implications for EFL education, and has received a big attention in language learning strategy research. Broadly, according to some researches the selection of the teaching strategies is affected by certain attitudes, beliefs and cultural background (Oxford, 1996, p75) which, in turn, are going to have

an impact on students too, but the most influencing factor is gender (Kaylani, 1996, pp75-88).

Pajares also proposed that teachers' gender educational beliefs are strongly and directly related to their preparation, instructional decisions and the selection of activities. It is also commonly believed that teachers' gender affects their classroom management, content knowledge, teaching styles, the instructional effectiveness of teacher-student interaction including miscommunication, being fair toward male or female pupils, their motivation in the class and eventually their overall performance at school (1992, pp307-332).

Therefore, male and female teachers may not similarly perceive their pupils as they may otherwise behave in the classroom, so students may also interact in a different way with the behaviours of their teachers. Even if teaching is generally a group activity, learning is very individual and effective teachers need to be sensitive to these differences and take action so as to provide an optimal learning experience for each student.

The gender of the EFL teacher also affects his/her attitude towards his/her profession. Specialists found that EFL female teachers have more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession than male ones. Moreover, it is indicated in many studies that teachers' attitudes towards the teaching profession is a significant indicator of pupils' achievement as well as their behaviours. According to Dee, the gender of the teacher is also a vital factor in depicting the teacher as a 'gender-specific role model' (2006, pp68-75). He argued that teacher's gender differentially impacts the teacher's relationship with male and female students, as well as their treatments to their students which also systematically vary by gender. Dee added that when the gender of the teacher matches that of the students, they are more likely to actively participate in the class, be on their best behaviour and well performance; and the high test marks can prove this theory (Dee, 2006, pp68-75). On the other hand, he claimed that there is an extra point, concerning the interactions between the teachers and their pupils, that plays an important role in the process of gendered relations, which is while explaining the lessons, the teachers differently pay attention to their male and female students where they spend their time disproportionately while interacting with them.

As well as, other researchers claimed that teachers of both genders incline to interact with males more than with females in the classroom. The researches published in the 60's and the 90's confirmed this bias treatment which extended from primary till secondary schools and even universities (Kelly, 1988, pp1-23). In addition, by taking into account the results of several studies, there is a strong relationship among pupils' academic attainment, their desire toward learning English language and the gender of their EFL teacher (Dee, 2006, pp68-75).

Another study proved that the communication that occurs in the classroom is strongly linked either to the gender of the teacher or of the students. Another proof was that male teachers don't work in the same way like their female peers do, for instance, male teachers used clearer questions while female teachers asked many questions that were in relation to the previous lesson. Another example showed that female teachers were in a more contact with their students; be it either in single-gender or mixed-gender classes (Rashidi and Naderi, 2012, pp30-36).

Another claim was that teachers of different genders had classes with different characteristics, such as, the overall characteristics of the class taught by a male teacher were more teacher-centred classroom, as much excessive time was devoted to the teacher only, the subjects were abruptly shifted and students acted and took turns shortly but for more frequent time. On the other hand, female teachers were reported to make the communications smoother and easier. Besides, female teachers were seen to be very powerful in selecting the themes and asking a lot of questions mainly in order to facilitate and sustain the conversational flow (Chavez, 2000, pp1019-1058).

To put teaching skills and student academic performance aside for an instance, Lawrenz noticed that the students' perceptions of their preference for their teachers demonstrated attraction to the opposite gender (1987, pp251-258). Dee also indicated that students link effective teaching with gender characteristics or stereotypes of their teachers (2006, pp68-75). For example, most studies, whether being conducted in the distant past such as Meece (1987,pp57-73) or recently conducted such as Francis (2004,pp3-19), showed that female students often gave more attention to the creativity of their teachers in presenting the lessons, their passionate and enthusiastic attitude towards the subject, as well as being well organized.

Chavez, too, found that female students were less likely to be humorous than males. They were more interested in satisfying the teacher or meeting expectations. They preferred to take shorter and partial turns but were more likely to be addressed in full sentences by the teacher. He also said that teachers and female students appeared to work in a strong and cooperative way: teachers were reported to more likely deal with female students who liked to interact with their teachers and pay attention to their presentations by taking notes more than their male peers did (2000, pp1019-1058).

On the other hand, it seems that male learners concentrate on other judgment areas, such as whether teachers are fair, responsible and humorous. In fact, it was said that even teachers may find themselves getting engaged in discussions with male students because the latter responded and initiated communication with their teachers more than female students did (Meece, 1987,pp57-73). In other words, the classroom atmosphere is not only influenced by the gender of the teachers but also by that of the pupils since

boys get involved in classroom interaction more than girls (Canada and Pringle, 1995, pp161-186; Hopf and Hatzichristoo, 1999, pp1-18; Duffy, et.al. 2001, pp579-593).

For this reason, various researchers investigated students' perspectives towards the gender of their teachers of English. Yet, it is claimed that these beliefs differ according to some factors such as the gender of the teacher. Students perceive their relationship with their teachers as a very significant one; on this basis they measure their teachers. If learners build a strong, warm, honest and close connections with their teachers, they will do their best to achieve greatest results; in other words if they feel that their teacher is fair, patient, caring and willing to satisfy their needs, pupils will foster their motivation for learning and subsequent gains in academic achievement in order to please their teacher and to prove that they are competent and trustworthy. Conversely, if there is a conflict between students and their teacher, the former will discord and mistrust the latter which, in turn, will eventually hinder and may demolish their success during their learning process. As a result, several studies discovered differences in school achievement between male and female students, as various authors documented theoretical clarifications about it.

All in all, so many studies provided significant substantiation that strong and positive relationships between teachers and students are essential constituents to academic improvement of all students. The researchers covered various genres of studies that were conducted over the past three decades examining the interactions between the teachers and their students and which influence these interactions have on learning. There is a trustworthy proof that the nature and quality of teachers' interactions with students has a significant impact on their learning process. From here stems the significance of the gender differences' study, since it has a direct impact on both the teaching and the learning processes through the design of the curriculum, the teaching methods and pupils' attitudes towards learning English.

## **2. METHODOLOGY:**

In the review of the prior studies, the significance of studying the influence of EFL teachers' gender seems as a subject matter that doesn't only affect teaching but also the pupils' learning assumptions. This article will examine the effect of teachers' gender on secondary school pupils' willing to learn English as a foreign language and which perceptions they have for their teachers of a certain gender. Gardner and Lambert proved that positive attitudes toward learning a language improved proficiency (1972, pp119-216). It is claimed that learning is better achieved when learners hold a positive approach towards the language, the teachers and the learning process.

The point of discussion is examined through the use of a questionnaire that was designed and distributed to 200 male and female students studying

English as a Foreign Language at six state high schools as part of the school curriculum. However, only 170 questionnaires, 84 of these were males and 86 were females, were fully answered, found reliable and eligible to be used in the study.

The participants were randomly selected. They were teenage learners ranging in age from 14 to 20 whose level of English was intermediate. All the three grades pupils were taught by either male or female teachers of English because by moving to another grade, the teachers of English might be changed depending on their preferences or the school administration. So, pupils may not have the same teacher from the first to the third year. As, they may not always have a teacher of the same gender, and this has helped the researcher because when pupils were previously taught by both genders, they could have a clear image about how each of the male and female teachers of English behaved, taught and treated their pupils.

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher aiming at having a deep understanding of whether the secondary school pupils' results are influenced by the gender of their teacher of English or not. The learners were requested to answer seventeen (17) questions which included their demographic information, their attitudes toward their EFL teachers where they were asked to choose "yes" or "no" and by the end there were (2) open-ended questions on pupils' perception about their teachers. For the last question, pupils would give their own opinions about their teachers of English.

### **3. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE:**

The data collection procedure was carried out in a single session during the pupils' English class. The questionnaire was applied in April 2017 at the secondary schools as it was aforementioned. Before applying the material, the researcher gave brief information about the study and the aims needed to be achieved. The researcher was regularly in the class during the procedure in order to answer the pupils whenever they faced an ambiguity about the statements or the procedure that they could not accurately understand. The researcher explained some statements for some participants. The questionnaires took about 30 minutes for each grade to be fully completed by the pupils. The data collection instrument and procedure were applied the same at all schools and classes.

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS:**

The data collected from students' responses on the questionnaire items were computed and converted to percentages. The following step includes analyzing and classifying high school students' answers on the open-ended questions on which they were asked to write about the differences between male and female teachers of English and to explain why they wanted to be taught by a male or a female teacher of English. The additional information that the pupils wrote at the end of the questionnaire were grouped and content

analyses were similarly carried out. It was determined that "Yes" would be evaluated as positive responses, but "No" would negatively be evaluated. Pupils' answers were evaluated with regard to those who were taught by a female teacher and the ones by a male teacher. Additional evaluation was done according to the informants' gender.

**Table 1.** Pupils' answers to the close ended statements and questions

Pupils' Gender	Female : 86=50,58%		Male: 84=49,41%		Total: 170=100%
Teacher' Gender	Females and males taught by female teachers: 50,58%		Female and males taught by male teachers: 49,41%		100%
Answers	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Statement 3	95,34%	4,65%	91,66%	8,33%	100%
Statement 4	23,25%	76,74%	89,28%	10,71%	100%
Statement 5	88,37%	11,62%	94,04%	5,95%	100%
Statement 6	86,04%	13,95%	34,52%	65,47%	100%
Statement 7	89,53%	10,46%	52,38%	47,61%	100%
Statement 8	81,39%	18,60%	21,42%	78,57%	100%
Statement 9	100%	00%	92,85%	7,14%	100%
Statement 10	F: 94,18%	M: 05,81%	F: 70,23%	M: 29,76%	100%
Statement 11	F: 22,09%	M: 77,90%	F: 17,85%	M: 82,14%	100%
Statement 12	80,23%	19,76%	26,19%	73,80%	100%
Statement 13	38,37%	61,62%	63,09%	36,90%	100%
Statement 14	54,65%	45,34%	76,19%	23,80%	100%

This table shows the percentages of the results the researcher obtained from the secondary school pupils' questionnaires. As it is clear in the table, the researcher put all her efforts to make both the number and the gender of the pupils equal to that of their teachers of English so as to have reliable and fair results.

#### **5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS:**

Most of the pupils agreed upon that their male and female EFL teachers presented the lessons in a comprehensible style. Depending on the results, the participants proved the known statement that male teachers easily lose their temper and get angry in comparison to their female counterparts who are patient with their pupils. Due to the difficult temper of the male teachers, pupils were more disciplined and avoided making any problem in the class. On the other hand, some female teachers faced some behavioural issues. That indicated that pupils took into consideration their teachers' gender into consideration before thinking of committing any problem inside the classroom.

Giving positive feedback and supporting pupils' success is one of the most important duties teachers are asked to do, but some didn't, don't and unfortunately will not do it. According to the pupils' answers, EFL female teachers more cared about their achievements, while some male ones were neither supportive nor giving them positive feedback which meant that they didn't care about them. When it comes to participation, which is a very important element in the learning process. The results showed that pupils, whose teachers were females, were more comfortable to express themselves and to answer the questions comparing them to those who, were taught by males, apparently didn't feel relaxed and faced more difficulty while sharing their answers. Thus, teachers' gender affected pupils' answers because these findings generally suggest that female classes were are enjoyable compared to those of their male colleagues.

The effect of teachers' gender on their pupils was strongly obvious when the majority of pupils preferred their female teachers to share with them their problems that were out of the class since they might consider them as their mothers. They seemed to be more comfortable when their teachers of English were female ones according to their answers. This usually becomes to be more visible that most pupils tend to be affected by the gender of their EFL teachers. As a result, the great portion of the pupils whether being taught by female or male teachers of English, declared that the former generally taught English better than male ones.

Another point was that, the male teachers' pupils' answers indicated that they had some concerns related to the gender of the EFL teacher, because they said that most male teachers were the ones who made discriminations between male and female pupils. This was, for sure, due to something they



witnessed in the classroom; for instance when they compared how their school works were evaluated and the grades they obtained with other classmates of the other gender, they discovered that there was no fairness. On the contrary, female teachers' pupils' answers showed that all pupils were treated the same and that their works were assessed all the same so they didn't find a need to make any comparison between each other. Consequently, most of the pupils agreed on studying with their same gender classmates and on being taught by their same gender teacher too so as to have better learning outcomes.

In the last part of the questionnaire, pupils' answers revealed that they were aware about the differences between their EFL male and female teachers. They said that female teachers were open minded, patient, helpful, explicative, and gave pieces of advice about any problem whether being it inside or outside the classroom. However, they declared that male teachers were more nervous, strict, careless about their pupils' problems, unsympathetic and unfair in dealing with them.

The informants' answers also confirmed, even if in an indirect way, that the gender of their teachers influenced their learning process, since most of them wanted to be taught by an EFL female teacher for some reasons such as being tender like their mothers, kind, respectful, having good pronunciation, hard worker, being motivated with them, feeling comfortable in communicating with them and for being fair in treating all the pupils. On the other hand, the few pupils who preferred to be taught by EFL male teachers said that for being responsible, serious, controller and for having a curiosity to see them how they taught.

When pupils were asked to add extra information about their EFL teachers, all the pupils described their female teachers of English as being a model of successful women, attractive, friendly, helpful, patient, and as having a good method of teaching. Whereas, pupils taught by male teachers of English said that their teachers were respectful, serious, angry, and very difficult.

According to the results obtained during this study, it is revealed that there is a significant influence of teachers' gender on students' academic achievement in learning English as a foreign language since pupils tend to be closer to the female teachers; hence the latter has positive effect on the performance of the students which is really clear in each response.

In addition, the ideas that female teachers are more interactive with students (Rashidi and Naderi, 2012, pp30-36), and that more feedback is shared in female teachers' classes are supported by the results of the statements numbered 15, 16, 17 in this study. Moreover, the data obtained from the statements numbered 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 support the results of some previous studies which suggested that there are considerable effects of teacher gender.

## **6. Conclusion :**

In conclusion, the current study investigated the impact of EFL teachers' gender on their secondary school pupils' academic achievement. The results show that there are interesting differences between male and female teachers in English language teaching along some dimensions. According to the students' point of view, the gender of their teachers played a significant role on their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language, due to the answers of most of the pupils which reflected their preference to be taught by a female teacher of English for several reasons which they have considered to be important for them and which are already mentioned above.

Throughout this study, the researcher is not interpreting the data that she obtained from the pupils' questionnaires to mean that female pupils should have female teachers of English and that they ought to be taught by more female teachers or the vice versa, but instead the researcher wants to highlight the importance of gender influence on the pupils to all the teachers of English who are going to read her article and to make them as much as possible aware of their own patterns of interaction with male and female pupils and how these would impact them.

Another point is that pupils should also learn how to cope at school, since the latter is the first step to prepare them to be integrated in life and to cope with people of different genders. As well as, they should build their relationships with their teachers based on high levels of reciprocal trust. However, according to students' responses female teachers of English succeeded, to a big extent, to build such a relation with both their male and female pupils, which in turn would contribute to a better practice of English. In other words, this aspect too, in a way or another, varies with the teacher's gender.

All in all, the research findings indicate that the teachers' gender is not only a significant factor in EFL learning in secondary education but also an important and reasonable point of research and discussion as suggested by previous studies in this area. Furthermore, an interesting avenue for future research can be to conduct the same topic with longitudinal designs to better understand the influence of experience of teachers teaching other subjects at the level of both primary and middle schools as well as at the level of university.

## **7. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS:**

The limitations the researcher encountered in conducting the current study were first, the data were gathered at one point in time so she didn't have enough data of pupils' exposure to a specific teacher over a specific period of time. Second, the number of the participants was rather limited because the information was obtained from pupils in one city and from a limited number

of schools, so the results may only be generalized to similar contexts. Third, only high school pupils participated in this research, different results might be observed as a result of involving the other levels of education. Fourth, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may cause concerns about biases. Fifth, this research mainly focused on one variable which was “gender” and didn’t take into account any other confusing variables that might influence our results simply because they were not part of the objectives of the study.

Therefore, the researcher strongly emphasizes that the discoveries she presented here ought to be followed up for improvement in future research, so that she can better understand the significance of a teacher’s gender. The number of the population should be wider and to include other participants from different cities to ensure a more representative sample so as to generalize the findings. Such a study is needed to be conducted at different levels and to other subjects like mathematic, physics, science et cetera. Finally, the variables which were not taken into account can be included in further studies such as teachers' teaching experience, place of teaching and class size.

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**APPENDICES:****Appendix 1: The questionnaire****1<sup>st</sup> Section: Participants' Background**

1. What is your gender? Female  Male
2. What is your EFL teacher gender? Female  Male

**2<sup>nd</sup> Section: Learners' Attitudes toward their EFL Teachers.**

3. My teacher of English teaches the lesson in a comprehensible style.  
Yes  No
4. My teacher of English easily gets angry. Yes  No
5. I seriously consider the warnings of my teacher and I correct myself.  
Yes  No
6. My teacher is supportive of my success and gives positive feedback.  
Yes  No
7. I can comfortably express myself and I answer the questions.  
Yes  No
8. I don't hesitate and I talk with my teacher about any problem out of class.  
Yes  No
9. I like my teacher of English and I enjoy his/her classes.  Yes   
No
10. In my point of view, the teacher of English who teaches better is:  
Male  Female
11. The teacher of English who discriminates between male and female pupils is:  
Male  Female
12. Do you think that girls' and boys' school works are graded equally/fairly?  
Yes  No
13. Do you ever compare your grades to a female/male classmate so that to check if you are graded as fairly as your female/male classmate?  
Yes  No
14. Would you like to have the opportunity to learn in a classroom with just male/ female classmates, and a male/female teacher of English?  
Yes  No

**3<sup>rd</sup> Section: Learners' Perception of the Influence of EFL Teachers' Gender on their Learning Process.**

15. Do you think that there are differences between male and female teachers of English? Why? Why not? Explain more what are these differences?

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16. Do you want to be taught by a male or female teacher of English? Explain why.

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17. You can add extra information to describe your teacher of English.

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