



Research Article

The Effect of Gender on the Perception of Pre-Service Teachers towards Their Instructors and Students

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Abstract

This study examines the attitude of pre-service teachers towards the gender of their instructors and students at schools during the practicum in the city of Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates. This study is motivated by the observation that gender is a salient factor influencing the communicative behaviour of the pre-service teachers during their practicum. For the purpose of this study, twenty pre-service teachers from Al Ain University were interviewed using a semi-structured format. The results reveal that female pre-service teachers prefer female instructors for religious and cultural reasons, and female school students because they are well-disciplined and polite. For male pre-service teachers, the majority had no preference for gender concerning their school students, and they believed they would gain more experience teaching both genders. With regard to the male pre-service teachers' instructors, the trainees preferred male instructors due to easier communication and convenience. It is recommended that pre-service teachers be allowed to choose their students and instructors based on gender if possible, and consequently they may be allocated on this basis. The study concludes with some recommendations for further research.

Keywords:

practicum, communication accommodation theory, pre-service teachers, gender, schools

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Introduction

The act of teaching others is a specific skill to be mastered by pre-service teachers, who are supervised and observed during what is called the practicum. This training plays a crucial role in developing teaching skills and techniques, and widening experience (Noah & Olusola, 2015), as well as in learning outcomes. Through training, teachers can practise being professional teachers before they achieve full qualification, and in so doing they become equipped with the required skills (Noah & Olusola, 2015). As these skills are still in the developmental stage, they can be modified according to the established requirements. During their training, trainees face many challenges, such as difficulty meeting student needs and fulfilling all the requirements of the job, based on various factors like the age and gender of the classroom teacher and students. In this regard, many studies have investigated the challenges and importance of training, but none have examined the factors that affect the performance of trainee teachers in the UAE. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap through investigating the attitude of pre-service teachers towards the gender of their instructors and students during the practicum in the United Arab Emirates. This study is of a great importance since it identifies some challenges countered by pre-service teachers in the United Arab Emirates.

This study is organised as follows: Section 2 explains pre-service teachers training, sheds light on the importance of pre-service teachers training and discusses previous studies on pre-service teachers training and gender. Section 3 explains the methodology of the study. Section 4 reports the results of the study. Section 5 discusses, concludes and summarises the main findings. Finally, Section 6 lists some recommendations for further research.

Literature Review

Pre-service Teachers Training

All undergraduate students at some stage have to transform and practise their acquired knowledge in work-based situations and classrooms. To prepare undergraduate students to achieve this, higher education institutions have compulsory programmes that improve trainees' self-worth and sense of accomplishment (Jaschinski & De Villiers, 2008). Moreover, students must be fully dedicated to implementing and developing the skills they learn (Fallows & Steven, 2000). It has been shown that after training and graduating students are more motivated to find work, being more competent and self-confident in their profession (Cook et al., 2004). Trained students are more marketable than those who have not been exposed to training (Petrillose & Montgomery 1998). Ju (1997) also stated that training greatly influences trainees' independence, and it makes them more ambitious. In another study, Herrick (1987) found that fully trained students rated their knowledge higher in self-efficacy and skills development, and were less nervous and anxious. These findings showed that work-related situations and training are effective forms of career development.

The Importance of Pre-service Teachers Training

Many researchers (e.g. Holyoak, 2013) studied the importance of internship programs, suggesting that those internships help interns in adjusting to the work environment enough time in advance. Holyoak (2013) believed that having professional mentors help interns to contribute and add benefits to the work place. In addition, internship enriches technical, communication, team working, creativity, and solving-problems skills (Galloway et al., 2014). Skills such as Confidence, self-efficacy, and self-awareness can be strongly strengthening through the period of internship (Elarde & Chong, 2012). Another importance of training programs is that it increases the earnings of employers (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010). Moreover, the pricy expenses of training periods in companies and organizations can be shortened through employing the interns, and it also contributes to the trainees by increasing their ambition and job satisfaction and stability (Dobratz, Singh, & Abbey, 2014). During the internship period, trainees are provided with beneficial feedback which might help in their employability (Shoenfelt et al., 2013). Herrick (1987) believed that upon completion of the internship, students will view themselves with high self-efficacy and skill development and less anxiety. According to (Cook, Parker & Pettijohn, 2004; Downs, Harper & Hunt, 1976) internship programs are considered to be the pedagogical instruments and are very important to develop the educational experiences of interns. Therefore, (Fallows & Steven, 2000) believed that curriculum must focus on internship programs where teaching the skills that are needed for fruitful careers and that cognitive skills should be practiced to serve students' career improvements. Internship experiences contribute to better student autonomy as students are equipped with real-life experiences rather abstractly knowing them (Hursh & Borzak, 1979). Students, according to Basow and Byrne (1993), were found to appreciate internship programs, for they can practice what they have learned as well as gaining new skills. It is proven that internship programs are sufficient, for such programs help students in bridging their academic skills to their chosen profession (Kiser & Partlow, 1999). Therefore, students usually accept unpaid internship because they know how these programs are beneficial to their skills and future career (Leonard, Halford, and Bruce, 2016).

Previous Studies on Pre-service Teachers Training and Gender

Reviewing the relevant literature, some studies (e.g. Surujlal & Singh, 2010) have addressed the value of teacher training, especially since it has been capturing attention in both the public and private sectors. It is agreed that training fills the gap between theoretical knowledge, abstract ideas, and practice (Surujlal & Singh, 2010). Such programmes have been established to bridge possible gaps between needs and expectations (Donina & Luka, 2014). In this regard, a study was conducted by Baek and Ham (2009) which suggested that training plays a significant role in developing teachers' teaching competence and maturity, and paves the way for trainees to master practical situations. Harvey and Bowers-Brown (2003) believe that training is viewed

as a springboard for better learning, experience, and knowledge. Training also enhances the ability to perform better in interviews, as it provides trainees with more experiences to share (Cook et al., 2004). During their training, trainees work with experts in their field, which expands their teaching strategies and skills for their future careers (Cook et al., 2004). Other benefits of training programmes have been highlighted by researchers such as Holyoak (2013), who suggested that training prepares graduates to adjust to the work environment and its requirements, because knowledge is more likely to be acquired by sharing ideas and experience with experts. In the same vein, Galloway et al. (2014) also believe that training develops useful communication skills, team-working, and creativity.

As far as gender studies in the UAE are concerned, Altakhaineh, Al-Tkhayneh and Rahrouh (2019: 42–43) noted that gender differences in the UAE can cause communication problems, especially for females wearing a veil. For instance, female IELTS examinees who wear a veil showed a preference for a female examiner, since they felt shy talking to a male examiner, especially since the female examinee meets the examiner for the first time during the test. The female examinees explained that “their nervousness affected their answers in a negative way and they believed that if the examiner had been a female, their oral performance would have been better (Altakhaineh et al., 2019: 43). Another study by Birnbaum et al. (2005) posited that boys at schools make rude comments around girls, and their behaviour is very difficult to control. The study noted that PE teachers seem to like girls because they are more disciplined and polite.

Research Problem

On the basis of the above-mentioned studies, it is clear that most studies have examined the challenges that pre-service teachers face during the practicum in general, and gender barriers in particular, namely, their instructors at schools and the gender of the classes. To the best of our knowledge, no study has examined pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards the gender of their instructors and students in UAE schools during the practicum. In addition, it has been observed through our experience and students’ feedback that the gender of the instructors can have an effect on the quality of skills and experience pre-service teachers obtain during essential stage of their academic achievement. This type of investigation can provide insights into the impact of gender during practicum and provide solutions to help pre-service teachers acquire the necessary skills they need at this stage of their academic life and later in their future career. Therefore, the current study aims to bridge this gap through the following research questions:

- To what extent does the gender of pre-service trainee teachers’ students in schools affect their performance? If yes, why?
- To what extent does the gender of pre-service trainee teachers’ instructors in schools affect their performance? If yes, why?

Method

Research Model

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach in which both quantitative and qualitative data elicitation tools were employed. This method was utilized by several researchers (e.g. Jarrah & Almarashdi, 2019) due to its validity. The quantitative part included some questions that elicited some numbers related to the research questions and the qualitative part consisted of a semi-structured interviews that aimed at supporting the quantitative part in a process referred to as triangulation (Creswell, 2018). Both approaches complement each other as the quantitative technique helps in determining the attitudes of respondents while the qualitative approach assists in a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018).

Participants

This study consisted of 20 tertiary student participants, eight males and 12 females, of Al Ain University, in their final semester of 2018/2019. Participants were randomly selected from different from the College of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences; three participants were from English teacher education, three from psychology, five each from special education and Arabic teacher education, and four from sociology.

Table 1.

Distribution of Participants according to Gender and Number

Variables	Categories	Number of participants	Percentage
Gender	Male	8	40%
	Female	12	60%
Total		20	100%

Semi-structured Interviews

Brinkmann (2014: 286) states that semi-structured interviews are commonly used in the social sciences, as they allow the flexibility to follow up questions, and thus more knowledge can be gathered. Furthermore, the interviewer is at the forefront, rather than hiding behind a written interview script, to focus on the angles of the issue being researched, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018: 188). The authors believe this instrument gives participants with more freedom to express opinions. Therefore, such data are more reliable, effective, valid, and clear (cf. Altakhaineh and Alnamer, 2018). For these reasons, the current study employed face-to-face interviews to attain more insight into the challenges that pre-service teachers face during their practicum. Some examples of the questions used in the semi-structured interviews are:

- Do you prefer working with male/female instructors while doing the practicum? Explain your choice.

- Do you prefer working with male/female students while doing the practicum? Explain your choice.
- Does your culture play a role in your preference regarding the gender of the instructors/students?
- What challenges do you encounter due to the gender of the instructors/students?

It is worth pointing out that other questions were developed to address the themes that evolved during the interviews.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, the impact of student gender on pre-service teachers’ performance during the practicum was measured using simple statistics. For the semi-structured interview, we analysed the data through highlighting and coding using a computer. Data were analysed by “identifying text segments, placing brackets around them, and assigning a code word or phrase that accurately describes the meaning of the text segment” (Creswell, 2012: 245). Participants’ answers and reasons were categorised according to the gender of the participants. Similar responses were grouped to calculate percentages, while different responses were separated (Creswell, 2012).

Results

The results for the first question on whether and/or why the gender of the pre-service teachers’ students in schools affected the trainees’ performance are highlighted in Table 2. The data reveal their attitudes to their students’ gender.

Theme 1. Flexibility and Culture

Table 2.

The Impact of Student Gender on Pre-service Teachers’ Performance During the Practicum

Variables	Categori es	Number of participa nts	Effec t	Percent age	No effect	Percenta ge
Gender	Male	8	2	25%	6	75%
	Female	12	8	67%	4	33%

Table 2 shows that the male pre-service teachers were less affected by student gender than the females, as only 25% of the males felt that student gender was a barrier to their performance. This barrier was due to the idea that female students are more flexible and easier to deal with regard to following instructions compared to males. Another reason is that culture plays a crucial role in affecting the female students’ performance, according to traditions in the society. However, the percentage of males that felt no effect on performance was 75%, and this may be

ascribed to the variance in the behavioural characteristics of both the males and females. The pre-service teachers' exposure to a mixed group of students helped them to acquire the necessary skills to deal with both genders, and to invent new ways to reduce the problems encountered, as illustrated in Table 3.

Theme 2. Obedience and Organisation

Table 3.

Examples of Quotations by Male Participants

Effect	“I cannot deal with girls because they are really sensitive and shy while boys are more masculine. I think boys can receive serious comments without any complaints.”
No Effect	“Umm, I think dealing with both genders will help me get used to both genders and when I get a job I will not have any problems.”

With regard to the results of the female participants, Table 2 illustrates that 67% of the female participants were affected by the gender of their students. According to their feedback, the Arab female pre-service teachers tended to prefer female students because they are more obedient, as the female students may consider their female teacher to be like a mother to them. Another reason was that male students are not well organised and it is very hard to control them, so they can create a sense of chaos which definitely affected the trainees' performance. In contrast, 33% felt that a student's gender did not affect their performance due to their preference of having different abilities in their class, in order to enhance their experience of dealing with both genders' characteristics. Other female pre-service teachers assumed that working with male students would be more challenging.

Table 4.

Examples of Quotations by Female Participants

Effect	“It is impossible to work with males, for they are sometimes rude and cannot be controlled. I prefer female pupils since they are more disciplined.”
No Effect	“It is challenging working with the opposite gender but this will enhance my ability to learn more about the different characteristics of both genders.”

The main results of the second question on whether and/or why the gender of the pre-service teachers' instructors in schools affected their performance are shown in Table 5.

Theme 3. Ease of Communication

Table 5.

The Impact of Instructors' Gender on Pre-service Teachers Performance During the Practicum

Variables	Categori es	Number of participa nts	Effe ct	Percent age	No effect	Percentag e
Gender	Male	8	5	62.5%	3	37.5%
	Female	12	10	86%	2	14%

Beginning with the males' results, 62.5% were affected by the gender of the instructor because they believed that they felt free to communicate with instructors of the same gender, as meeting outside the working place was convenient and possible. One participant believed that working with females would be better as they are more committed to their work and abide by rules more than men. The participant also thought that females are more considerate regarding understanding certain situations such as excuses about work, sick leave, and family and personal situations. However, the other male participants (37.5%) believed that the instructors' gender did not affect their performance as they were practising in the field and working for an academic purpose (Table 6).

Table 6.

Examples of Quotations Male Participants' Answers

Effect	“For me working with females would be hard as meeting them outside the workplace will be a big obstacle. It is more convenient if I have a male instructor. Also, communication with females is better and I do not feel shy to discuss anything with them.”
No Effect	“Gender is not a big deal because my main focus is on improving my skills and gaining better experience. I prefer a highly qualified teacher regardless of his/her gender.”

In contrast, female participants felt more affected by their instructors' gender (86%), perhaps for various reasons, as some believed that it is better to work with an instructor of the same gender because of communication, culture, and religion. That is, in most Arab societies, mixing with the opposite gender outside of the immediate family is still debated. Another factor that the females felt affected their performance was shyness; it may be that these females did not feel comfortable dealing with males, which affected their body language and eye contact, and subsequently their teaching performance.

Table 7.*Examples of Quotations Female Participants' Answers*

Effect	“Working with males is not allowed by our families due to our religion, traditions, and culture. I do not feel comfortable when a male instructor is watching me. Frankly, I feel shy.”
No Effect	“I believe working with male instructors would add more to my experience as I truly see that they are wiser. I think it is good to have experience from both male and female instructors.”

Taking all these points into consideration, the gender of both students and instructors had an impact on the pre-service teachers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Since Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) offers a strong theoretical framework for analysing how different genders behave during interactions and their impact on the communicative behaviour of the participants (Giles and Ogay 2007), this study relies on it to interpret the results of the present study. In particular, the results showed that the female participants prefer to communicate with a female interviewer, while male participants do not mind either genders. It was also observed that former group tended to accommodate to the speech style of their female interviewers, while the latter group did not. Based on CAT, gender is regarded as a salient group membership which can have a powerful impact on communication (Glies and Ogay 2007). Specifically, it has been observed that males and females do not exhibit the same communicative behaviour either in mixed-sex situations or same sex-situations. This may suggest that they do accommodate their communicative style to that of their interlocutor's gender. In fact, studies (e.g. Fitzpatrick, Mulac and Dindia 1995) demonstrated that when both genders follow traditional sex roles, females are more likely to accommodate than men due to the former's concern for societal power, connectedness and solidarity. From another perspective, it has been argued that people do not accommodate to their interlocutor's actual gender, rather to their speech style, namely, more woman-like or more men-like (Hannah and Murachver 1999).

In the current study, and in line with CAT, it can be argued that given the conservative nature of the Emirati society, female participants would rather work with female instructors because the former would actually feel more comfortable with the actual gender of the interviewer and thus, accommodate to her speech style possibly out of desire to establish solidarity. This result is in line with AltaKhaineh et al. (2019: 43), who suggested that Emirati females encounter some difficulties when communicating with males. However, some of the female participants in the present study preferred working with male instructors because they considered them wiser and more experienced in the field than females; as a result, they felt they would have

a better experience with male instructors. Conversely, since male participants are given more freedom than females, their communicative style did not get affected by that of their interlocutors and hence, they communicated similarly with both genders. Based on CAT, males are more concerned with establishing power and controlling the topic of conversation rather than establishing solidarity (Giles and Ogay 2007). This may explain the communicative behaviour of male participants during the practicum as explained under Themes 1 and 3 in the results section.

As far as the students' behaviour is concerned, several researches (e.g. Tatum et al. 2013; Caspi et al. 2005 among others) have indicated that there are noticeable differences in students' behaviour based on their gender. For example, Tatum et al. (2013: 761) noted that classrooms that have a mixture of both genders demonstrated differences in students' behaviour. To put differently, female students tend to be more polite and obedient than male students inside classrooms. It has been established that female students are quieter and respect the rules of the class and their teachers more than their male counterparts (Cornelius et al. 1990). This is in agreement with Birnbaum et al. (2005), who noted that boys are very difficult to deal with and they tend to make rude comments. In this regard, researches have also shown that girls show more motivation in life than boys (e.g., Sadker & Sadker, 1994) and this might lead to better performance and attitude in school. Boys are more likely to interfere with class discussion and speak even if they have little knowledge pertaining to the topics under discussion and without their teachers' permission (Sadker, 2002), and this will more likely lead to disturbance among students and often wastes teachers and students' time. In addition, when working collaboratively in groups, male students ignore female students' comments and contributions trying to control their female classmates and neglect their answers (Tannen, 2001). Moreover, Weerakkody & Ediriweera (2008) found out that female students academically achieve and perform better at university examinations than male students. Espelage & Swearer (2004) stated that boys outperform girls physically and do not like to be placed at their seats for long time, and they heavily rely on physical aggression, and this evidently affects the teachers' ability to manage the class effectively. In other words, boys show more physical aggression than their peer girls counterparts in addition to bullying other students more than girls do, which could be ascribed to the higher level of self-confidence that boys own (Agam et al. 2015). This has been reported in the results section under "Theme 2. Obedience and Organisation".

To sum up, this study investigated pre-service teacher attitudes towards their instructors' and students' gender in UAE society. To this end, twenty participants from the College of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences at Al Ain University were interviewed. The results showed that both students' and instructors' gender played a significant role in the pre-service teachers' perception of their performance. Most of the female participants recorded a higher degree of effect from student and

instructor gender for cultural and religious reasons. They also favoured female students, who they felt were more obedient than male students. In contrast, the male participants reported less effect regarding student gender, possibly due to their eagerness to gain wider experience.

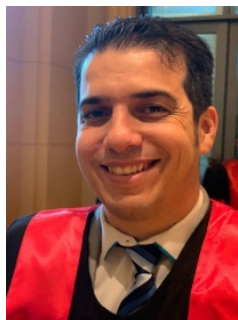
Recommendations

On the basis of the previous results and discussion, it is recommended that more studies are conducted on issues related to the student learning and teaching process, especially in the Arab world. It is also recommended that pre-service teachers should be allowed to choose their students and instructors based on their gender, if possible (cf. Altakhaine; Al-Tkhayneh and Rahrouh, 2019: 48).

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