Gender Inclination in English and Arabic Teaching Professions

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Abstract: Gender stereotyping in society may influence career aspirations. This research seeks to determine if this is true for language teaching profession. The study focuses on the distribution of English and Arabic teachers according to their gender. For this purpose, the number of English and Arabic instructors or academic staff at the public universities in Malaysia was surveyed. The results were compared and the study revealed that there was a higher number of female English instructors/academic than Arabic. On the other hand, males generally outnumbered females in the area of Arabic language teaching. Some possible explanations for the findings are discussed.

Key words: Arabic Teacher • English Teacher • Gender Stereotyping

INTRODUCTION

[1] claims that early decisions concerning career are influenced by people's cultural beliefs. Gender stereotyping contributes to gender segregation in the labour market [2]. The occupational segregation by gender is commonly due to gender association with certain job tasks, which are considered as more appropriate for males or females by the society. Teaching is one of the professions where males are under-represented [3, 4]. Various reasons have been given for male under-representation in education. Among them are: unattractive salary [5], low social status [6] and motherly nature of women [7]. However, many of the studies done were on primary and secondary schools and there is hardly any study that focuses on which gender tends to teach a particular language. In this study, we compared the number of male and female teachers teaching English and Arabic at the tertiary level to determine if both are dominated by females.

Literature Review: Certain job involves "stereotypical" male or "stereotypical" female tasks or characteristics and this influences one’s choice of career [8, 9]. According to [10: 71], “Women and men tend to hold different occupations and to work in different industries, firms and jobs. Furthermore, men outearn women, hold more complex jobs and are more likely to supervise workers of the other sex and to dominate the top positions in their organization”.

However, women are showing a significant academic and professional progress. In Canada for example, more women than men enroll in college and university programs and they leave these programs with a diploma or degree. This is also observed in other countries throughout the world. In Malaysia, at the tertiary level, 68.1% female and 31.9% female were offered to do the undergraduate programmes in the 2013/2014 academic session [11]. In another meta-analysis incorporating data from 1914 through 2011 covering more than 30 countries by [12], it was found that the differences in grades between girls and boys were largest for language courses and smallest for math and science.

With this development, women with higher and better qualifications than men overtake men’s positions in various job sectors. Among teachers especially, female are dominating male teachers in term of number at both primary and secondary schools [13]. The statistics of language teachers at universities also indicates that there was a higher number of female than male lecturers [13]. The number of students at the public universities in Malaysia also shows that there was a higher percentage of female students at most of the universities [14].
Background to the Study: Other than Malay, English is one of the compulsory subjects taught in schools. Arabic is considered a third language in Malaysia. It is normally taught in the religious schools. Arabic is also taught to selected students in the public schools or offered as an option to the students.

Religious school students normally sit for their Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination first before they sit for the Religious Education Certificate a year later. This means that good students may have obtained a scholarship earlier to pursue a course identified by their sponsor. This includes the English language. More emphasis is given to this language by the Malaysian Ministry of Education compared to the others (including the native language, Malay).

A meta-analysis study by [15], who utilized a secondary data based on a five-year primary and secondary school public examination results from 1996 to 2000, reveals that female students outperformed male students in almost all subjects. This may have a bearing on the scenario of language teaching in higher education in Malaysia since a higher number of female students obtained a scholarship to pursue their studies in the English language overseas. Added to that, the number of places for Arabic at the local universities is also less than those allocated for English language. [16] who studied the language preferred by the Malaysian undergraduates found that, compared to Mandarin and French, students chose Arabic when they were left with little choice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the number of teachers teaching a particular language is gender related. Our research question is:

- Are Arabic and English language teaching professions dominated by females?

For this purpose, a survey was conducted in 2014 to determine the number of English and Arabic language teachers teaching at public universities in Malaysia. A total of 20 universities were involved in this study. These teachers/academics could be teaching in either the language centre or the faculty. Where they are not placed under the same roof, the department/faculty selected for the study will be mentioned.

RESULTS

Fig. 1 displays the number of English and Arabic teachers who were serving the university at the time of the study. The figure changes from time to time as new staff are appointed and senior staff retire.

Fig. 1 shows that nearly 81% of the English instructors/academics were females whereas only 35% of them taught Arabic at the university.

As to the distribution of teachers, Table 1 reflects that they were more female than male English instructors or academics in all the public universities in Malaysia. The situation is different with Arabic. The number is much smaller than English and there were more male than female Arabic teachers in almost all the universities. Two of the universities have a much higher number of language teachers than the others. UiTM has the highest number of students in Malaysia and thus more staff are required to teach the students, particularly to teach them English. Arabic is only an elective at this university. Another university with a large percentage of language instructors is the International Islamic University Malaysia. At this university English is the medium of instruction.
Students are required to have a minimum of Band 6 for all courses in English and thus, more English teachers are employed to assist students in obtaining the required level of proficiency. Arabic is the second language of instruction, hence a smaller number of Arabic teachers is recruited by the university.

DISCUSSION

Where the two languages were concerned, the results revealed that women dominated the English language teaching profession at the tertiary level. This is in line with the claim made by [3] and [4] that males were underrepresented in Education. Though the salary and social status of the profession were the same, Arabic teaching profession attracted more males than females. This contradicts the findings made by [5] and [6]. The fact that male religious teachers play an important role in the society may have made Arabic more popular to the men. This is due to the fact that Arabic is the language of Islam. It supports [1] statement that the culture serves to influence men’s and women’s decision concerning career early in their life. Female students’ better performance at school may also result in the big imbalance in the number of male and female in the two teaching professions [15].

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there was a bigger number of female English instructors/academics at the Malaysian public universities than males. On the other hand, there were more males teaching Arabic compared to females. Cultural background and policies pertaining to examination results as well as access to scholarship could be among the factors that contributed to this unequal distribution in the male to female ratio. Apart from that, the society’s perception or gender stereotyping may also be part of the reasons for the difference. Unless these deep-rooted factors change, the ratio of male to female language teachers in the teaching of English and Arabic may remain the same.
REFERENCES