

ELT Professionals' Perceptions on Self-Image: A Comparison Between Gender

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The study is conducted to examine the differences of gender perception among educators who are teaching in local higher learning institutions in Malaysia, in viewing their roles as the “teacher”. Several higher learning institutions were randomly targeted. Several researchers were involved in the data collection by means of using questionnaires in the survey over a period of several weeks. The questionnaires were used to find out about their academic and professional backgrounds, requiring them to list their roles pertinent to their experiences in teaching, ranked them and provided the rationale behind the choices made. Twenty-five samples were collected to scrutinize the data by categorizing the information according to gender and teaching experiences and recording the frequencies of answers. From the study, it is found that regardless of gender and teaching experiences, most participants would consider themselves as “Provider of knowledge”, followed by “Nurturer”, especially those who are relatively new in teaching. There is also an indication that teacher’s experiences and gender might affect their perception in mirroring themselves. A larger scale of study is needed in validating the findings of this study for it to be empirical, thus promoting in-depth investigations in viewing whether gender and cultural background may be vital factors that has profound effects towards their professionalism. It is hoped that future studies will shed some light to this rather controversial claims.

Keywords: provider of knowledge, nurturer, hanging judge, innovator

Introduction

Being an educator requires variety of roles in educating and connecting with learners. Generally, in higher learning institutions, an educator entails multifaceted portrayal of their own self-image as an ELT (English Language Teaching) professional in which their own competence in thinking and flexibility of their emotions are being depicted. Educators are commonly projected as being noble in characteristics rather than considered as a job as one must be able provide the fundamentals of the learned knowledge before leading other human beings in any subject matter. An educator nurtures the growth of the learning process of a learner as well as the subject matter taught. They are able to inculcate concepts of the taught knowledge, instilling growth and learning processes as well as influencing their students to adapt changes by taking into account appropriate values, thus, bring changes in their lives. The job is definitely not meant for the faint-hearted, as being an educator requires

strong representation in the area of affect, for example, being compassion, persistence, patience and willing to contribute, as these are the integral aspects of being an ELT professional. In other words, being an educator does not only require intelligence, it also requires EQ (Emotional Quotient), because teaching is about dealing with people and this requires interpersonal skills.

Educator's role transcends language and cultural barriers. Often, society has an established set of virtues and vices, and it takes conscious and unconscious measures at various levels to promote the virtues in capturing the essence of teacher's images. Teachers' role has been personified in various metaphors, which indicate that teacher's role are always on-going, and it is difficult to segregate their individual personalities and their professional images.

Review of Literature

Hongboontri (2006) had conducted a study in Thailand in examining how teachers view their own self-images. The study was an impetus to the ideas of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in the study of metaphor as means of identifying how teachers perceived themselves and their profession, though the study was conducted in viewing how pre-service teachers emulate themselves as ELT professionals.

Traditionally, teachers are viewed as someone who dispenses knowledge: someone who lectures, tells facts, disseminates, covers material, and teaches the subject matter more than the students. The students sit passively while the teacher is on show. Desks in rows and a blackboard and podium up front are an arrangement designed for this role of a teacher. However, lectures are effective for giving short sets of instructions, background information, guidelines, or other information that is needed in a short time frame (e.g., before doing a class project, lab, or group activity).

Several research papers on teachers' self-images were mentioned by Hongboontri (2006) such as by Mahlios, Beijgaard, Verloop, and Vermund and Reynolds. According to Hongboontri, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theoretical concept of metaphor had examined the means of teachers' self-image following how teachers conceptualized themselves. Most of the research pertinent to the self-image study regards methodologies and revelations that characterize the concept of teaching. Shahreen (1992) proposed that creating a positive self-image is the key to creating happy lives for ourselves, in this case, educators.

However, little is done in examining the factors behind the selected images. This simple study is addressed at identifying whether gender contributes to how teachers view or portray themselves. Echoing the words of Ali Ahmad (2007):

The subordination of the woman correlated with various social, political and economic advantages to the man. when a successful woman in a patriarchal society gained status, she frequently adopted and adapted man's values as her own, hence, we have coined the term "iron maiden" to denote a very strong and ambitious woman.

A research conducted by Fabio Lorenzi Cioldi (1990) published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* had examined the effects of sex membership and its salience on individuals' self-stereotyping and the motivation to define oneself positively (self-enhancement). According to Cioldi (1990), Bem's (1981) gender-schema and Markus' (1977) self-schema theories were interpreted within the framework of inter-group relations, which emphasized their respective bipolar and unipolar structures. The differences between how men and women think are made of these cognitive schemas, as well as of self-enhancement, were tested by examining

latencies in self-descriptions on the BSRI (Bem Sex Role Inventory) attributes (Bem, 1974). Subjects described themselves and rated the stereotypicality and the positiveness of these attributes in one of two situations. A situation stressed a personal level of categorization (the individual setting) and another social level (the group setting). The first hypothesis was that the situations influence individuals' selection of specific self-defining strategies. Results supported this expectation when considering the motivational strategy and the gender-schema. Self-enhancement is slightly used more in the individual than the group setting, and the gender-schema was salient only in the group setting. The second hypothesis was that distinct self-stereotyping processes occur as a function of the sex of the subjects. Support for this hypothesis was again found only for the gender-schema, with women displaying this schema more than men. Sex differences in schematic thinking were interpreted as ensuing from status positions of women and men in the social structure.

Another research that support thinking and gender is done in the Republic of China by ZHANG Li-fang (2001) of Hong Kong University. Results showed that thinking styles and personality traits statistically overlap. However, this overlap is limited. Two major arguments are made. First, thinking styles make a unique contribution to the understanding of human individual differences. Second, the necessity for measuring thinking styles apart from measuring personality traits depends on who uses the inventories and for what purposes.

In coming out with their choices, lecturers are required to think about their roles and make decisions in ranking those roles. Hence, they need to apply thinking strategies in making those decisions. The way they exercise their schematic thinking is supposedly be reflected through their choices and their justifications on the ranking of their choices on self-images whether the lecturers of different gender would exhibit significant evident in validating the dichotomy of thinking (whether they are critical or innovative). Abdullah and Ainon (2001) strongly believe that "our psychology has tremendously affected the way we think and behave". Williams and Burden (1997) argued that "Because our beliefs are difficult to measure, we usually have to infer people's beliefs from the ways in which they behave rather than from what they say they believe". Teachers' beliefs about what learning is will affect everything they do in the classroom.

In the thinking perspective, Edward De Bono is considered by many to be the leading authority in the world on the direct teaching of thinking as a skill. He has coined the term "lateral" and "parallel" thinking. Therefore, the study is aimed at looking whether gender has strong influence in how the teachers view or think upon their roles, especially when addressed to ELT professionals. De Bono (1992) put forward that "lateral" thinking is both attitude of mind and also a number of defined methods. The attitude of mind involves an appreciation that any way of looking at things is only amongst many possible ways.

Methodology

The samples taken are ELT educators who are teaching in local higher learning institutions within the federal territory of Malaysia. Several higher learning institutions were randomly targeted University of Tenaga National (UNITEN), International Islamic University of Malaysia (UIAM), National University of Malaysia (UKM), and Islamic and Science University of Malaysia (USIM). The ELT educators were asked to give their responses and views on their roles as "teachers". Several researchers were involved in the data collection by means of using questionnaires in the survey over a period of several weeks. The questionnaires were used to find out about their academic and professional backgrounds, requiring them to list their roles pertinent to their

experiences in teaching, ranked them and provide the rationale behind the choices made. Twenty-five samples were collected and the data was scrutinized by categorizing the information according to gender and teaching experiences and recording the frequencies of answers. Refer to Table 1 for number of samples.

Table 1

Gender Random Sampling According to Gender

Categories	Data	
Gender	Male	Female
Total	6	19
Percentage (%)	24	76

In this descriptive study, the researchers had decided to use survey form questionnaires as an instrument to carry out the survey. The survey was carried out over a period of several weeks. The questionnaires were used to find out about their academic and professional backgrounds, requiring them to list their roles pertinent to their experiences in teaching, ranked them and provide the rationale behind the choices made.

Data was collected through compilation of the answers from the questionnaires. The first part of the questionnaires collected data concerning the number of years of teaching experience followed by the highest academic and professional qualification of each respondent. In the later section of the questionnaire, items or self-description of own image are listed. The respondents were then required to rank themselves according to their own perception of themselves. The ranking is in a scale of 1 to 5 using the Likert-scale. The frequencies were then recorded according to gender.

Findings

Teaching Experiences

In figuring their teaching experiences according to gender composition, it was found that the majority 64% (16) of the respondents for both genders have teaching experiences of between 0-5 years. Twenty-four percent (6) of the respondents have 6-10 years of experience. Four percent (1) of male educator has between 11-15 years of experience, and eight percent (2) of female educators have between 16-20 years of teaching experience (see Table 2).

Table 2

Number of Years Teaching

Number of years teaching	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (%)
0-5	4	12	16	64
6-10	1	5	6	24
11-15	1	0	1	4
16-20	0	2	2	8

Comparison on Academic Qualifications Between Male and Female Samples

The ELT professionals were found to have obtained various levels of academic qualifications. Two female members have obtained their academic diploma qualifications. Two male and 10 females have graduated in the same field (Bachelor of Education). This make up the most population. A total of six ELT professionals have conferred the master's degree for the academic qualifications (see Table 3).

Table 3

Academic Qualifications

Academic qualification	Male	Female	Total
SPM/MCE O Level			0
STPM/MCE A Level			0
Certificate			0
Diploma		2	2
Degree (B.Ed)	2	10	12
Degree (B.A.)	0	2	2
Degree (B.Sc)			
Masters (M.Ed)	3	2	5
Masters (M.A.)		1	1
Masters (M.Sc)			
Not related			1

Comparison on Professional Qualifications Between Male and Female Samples

In terms of professional qualification, only two female educators have a certificate and a diploma in education, while the rest do not have any professional qualifications. Only one male educator in particular holds a master's degree as his professional qualification (see Table 4).

Table 4

Professional Qualifications

Professional qualification	Male	Female	Total
Certificate		1	1
Diploma		1	1
Degree (B.Ed)			
Degree (B.A.)			
Degree (B.Sc)			7
Masters (M.Ed)	1		
Masters (M.A.)		5	
Masters (M.Sc)			7

Ranking of Self-Image According to Working Experience (Female)

In the 0-5 years experience group, 10 female educationists ranked themselves as in the scale of 1 in terms of as providers of knowledge. This rather traditional view coincides with the literature discussed (see Table 5).

Table 5

Working Experience: 0-5 Years

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Provider of knowledge	10				1
Nurturer		4	2	1	2
Hanging judge		1			
Innovator				1	
Artist			2	1	1

(Table 5 continued)

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Co-operative leader			3		
Doctor				1	
Repairer			1	2	1
Provider of tool		2	2	2	2
Comedian		1			
Counselor/Advisor/Mentor					1
Motivator		1		1	
Educator/Teacher		2			
Guide	1				
Friend/Helper			1	1	
Story teller					1

For those in the 6-10 years experienced group, the female educators do not seem to see themselves as co-operative leaders nor as providers of tool. About a third, sees themselves as agents of change. This group also seems to exhibit lack humour in their teaching (see Table 6).

Table 6

Working Experience: 6-10 Years

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Provider of knowledge	2			1	
Nurturer	2	1	2	1	
Innovator	1	1	1	1	
Co-operative leader				1	
Provider of tool		1			
Challenger/Agent of change		1	2	1	1
Clown		1		1	

In the 16-20 years of category, it seems that the female counterparts still believe in the fact that the role of “rovider of knowledge” never cease to function. However, the perception has gradually shifted and has becoming less teacher-dominated. This may be relevant as the teachers’ experiences are expanding; the teachers would realize that there would be more factors that may assist teaching (see Table 7).

Table 7

Working Experience: 16-20 Years

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Provider of knowledge	2	1			
Nurturer		1	1		
Innovator			1	1	
Artist				1	
Co-operative leader				1	
Challenger/Agent of change	1	1	1		
Counselor/Advisor/Mentor				1	

Ranking of Self-Image According to Working Experience (Male)

In the 0-5 years experience group, three male educationists ranked themselves as being in the first ranking as the providers of knowledge. This rather traditional view coincides with the literature discussed and parallel to the female ELT professionals (see Tables 8-10).

Table 8

Working Experience: 0-5 Years (Male)

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Provider of knowledge	3	1			
Nurturer		2	1		
Innovator			1		
Artist			1		
Doctor			1		
Provider of tool				1	
Challenger/Agent of change		1	2	1	
Educator/Teacher				1	
Big brother					1
Friend/Helper					1
Facilitator					1

Table 9

Working Experience: 6-10 Years (Male)

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Provider of knowledge	1				
Nurturer				1	
Co-operative leader			1		
Repairer					1
Provider of tool		1			

The male counterpart has different priorities as this is evident in their choices. It seems that male ELT professionals are more diverse in their concept of self-images. This may explain why they tend to be more creative and innovative, as they have different concepts of how male educators should carry their role. Perhaps it is due to experiences gained and men are able to grasp work systems and have the ability in compartmentalizing their minds; they are able to have a paradigm shift in their roles as well.

Table 10

Working Experience: 11-15 Years (Male)

Self-description	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Provider of knowledge	1				
Nurturer			1		
Hanging judge					1
Co-operative leader				1	
Challenger/Agent of change		1			

Discussion

With reference to the findings of the study, the role as “Provider of knowledge” seems to be the choice of both genders, in ranking the role as the reigning supremacy. Among the reasons behind this popular choice are teachers are providing and transferring information to students. Three (3) individuals wrote that teacher is the provider of knowledge, simply because they cannot escape the role that he/she is the one with knowledge. Another rationale for this is teachers function to disseminate information on a particular subject matter while two (2) educators stated that teacher’s primary function is to disseminate knowledge. More of the rationale provided is the fact that teacher needs to provide knowledge students need for their future.

Female educationists ranked themselves higher as being a nurturer, regardless of their teaching experiences. This provides a strong indication that female educationists are strict and less innovative. In the area of thinking these views are considered as “Vertical”, because the majority of the female counterpart has tendency to be more “parallel” in thinking. They also rarely see themselves as a comedian, a doctor, a counselor, a motivator, an educator, a guide, a friend, or a story teller, unlike their male counterparts. The male educators seem to exhibit “lateral” and innovative thinking in projecting their self-images. It is interesting to view how participants encapsulate the role of the “nurturer”. The reasons for this choice, among others are the fact that female counterparts perceive that teachers must draw out the best from the students and improve their knowledge and skills. The nurturer also acts in enhancing what is good and available for students. The role of the nurturer is crucial in creating environment and motivation by showing students that it is fine to make mistakes. A participant wrote that teachers do not only teaching the subject but also values in life. Apart from that, the role of the nurturer helps in teaching the students to find out more knowledge. The nurturer also needs to nurture the knowledge in them so that it will last long. Besides that, another function is to nurture a child towards achieving the plans. It also interesting that teachers function is to attend to the students in a gentle way, much like a mother’s touch. This is especially important, because the role of the nurturer is also viewed as to nourish students’ language ability, to give moral supports, and to motivate them along the way. The nurturer is said to nurture students’ talents and discover hidden potentials as well as providing support to students to grow mentally and emotionally. One female in particular wrote metaphorically the role of the “nurturer” is to ensure that they bloom into beautiful flowers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be concluded that female educators have a higher image of themselves though they tend to be more critical and analytical of their self-images at times. Only three of the male educators put themselves in the higher scale for certain items as compared to female who rated themselves quite highly for certain items. The findings confirm the literature discussed in the earlier section. Due to modernizations and transformation in technology advancement, knowledge may be obtained accessibly through wide range of sources.

From the simple study, it is found that regardless of gender and teaching experiences, most participants would consider themselves as “Provider of knowledge”, followed by “Nurturer” especially those who are relatively new in teaching. The result may not shed any significant evidence due to the small scale research and may need a proper instrument if the results are to be quantified. There is also an indication that teacher’s experiences and gender might affect their perception in mirroring themselves (self-belief).

A larger scale of study is needed in validating the findings of this study for it to be empirical, thus promoting in-depth investigations in viewing whether gender and cultural backgrounds may be vital factors that has profound effects towards their thinking strategies. Perhaps, a quantitative study can be done is measuring the approximate tabulations on thinking schema of both gender to ensure validity of such data. It is hoped that future studies will shed some light to this rather controversial claims.

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