

Gender, Beliefs, and Cognition: Gender Backwash on Iranian EFL Teachers' and Students' Appraisals

By

¹Ali Rahimi, ²Ali Mohammad Fallahi & ³Gholamreza Samigorganroodi

¹Bahcesehir University (BAU), Istanbul, Turkey

²Department of English, Faculty of Literature & Foreign Languages, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran

Abstract

The present study delves deep into Iranian EFL teachers' and students' beliefs and cognition at the tertiary levels on the non/existence of gender partiality towards the opposite/same sex teachers and students. Conducting a survey method, two samples were singled out: 1) students (N=219); and 2) teachers (N= 30) who consented to fill in two separate piloted questionnaires. It was explored that both the teachers and the students believed in the existence of the gender partiality towards the opposite sex in Iranian EFL contexts at tertiary levels. The results of the study also evinced that most of the teachers believed in 'instinct tendency to opposite sex' as the reason behind the gender partiality on teachers' behavior towards the opposite-sex students while students believed that the reason for teachers' gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students is the students' appearance and behavior. The study demonstrated that 62.1 percent of the students consented that students have tendencies toward their opposite-sex teachers. It was also ascertained that teachers' cognition affects the way they behaved in their assessments and it has impacts on the way teachers make instructional decisions.

Keywords: Gender Partiality, Appraisal, EFL context, Beliefs, Cognition

1. Introduction

Gender plays a critical role in education. Although many efforts are made to construct a test as valid and reliable as possible and teachers try to be fair in their judgments, a whole host of researches (Einarsson & Granström, 2002; Siskind & Sharon, 1997; Van Houtte, 2007; Peterson, 1998; Stagg Peterson & Kennedy, 2006) shows that gender may affect test results, teachers' assessments, and students' appraisals in the teacher-student interactions. The beliefs and the cognition of both the students and the teachers are deemed to be considerably influenced by gender and consequently they manipulate the way teachers and students make instructional decisions. Throughout this paper the term *teacher* will be used for all academic teaching ranks (instructors, professors, etc.). The present study strives to investigate and answer the following research questions: (1) What are the teachers' beliefs and cognition about the influence of gender on their evaluation and behavior towards their students? Do the teachers, themselves, think there is any gender partiality in their evaluation and behavior? (2) What are the students' beliefs and cognition about the effect of gender in teachers' evaluation of their (opposite/same sex) students? What do the students think about their teachers' gender-partiality in EFL situations?

2. Review of Related Literature

Belief, cognition, attitude, and experience are factors which are deemed to be intertwined with each other. Beliefs are viewed as the personal constructs of teachers [or learners] that can help understand their decisions and teaching practices (Pajares, 1992 & Richardson, 1996, cited in Moini, 2009) while cognition is referred to as the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching/learning what teachers/students know, believe, and think (Borg, 2003). Beliefs and cognitions are difficult to measure and it is recognized that they are manifested mostly in the way people behave. The assumption is that, these factors have profound influence on the way teachers and students decide on their teaching-learning

processes and evaluations. Acikgoz (2005), for example, argues that such factors "influence students' evaluations of teachers" (p. 104). Acikgoz further asserts that, based on their attitudes, female students tend to evaluate their teachers significantly higher than male students. Similarly, the study conducted by Smith, et al. (1994) revealed that "female students were more sensitive to the interpersonal characteristics of their teachers"... while "male students were more sensitive to whether their professors were knowledgeable and had a good sense of humor" (cited in Acikgoz, 2005:108). Siebert (2003) reports that male and female students seem to differ significantly in their beliefs about different factors in their educational milieu. Bernart and Lloyd (2007) find that male and female students differ tenuously in their beliefs and they are significantly similar in their beliefs about many factors in educational climate. There is also a bunch of evidence to indicate that teachers are significantly influenced by their beliefs (Williams and Burden, 1997).

In relation to teachers' beliefs about their learners, Meighan and Meighan (1990) suggest that teachers may construe their learners as 'resisters', 'receptacles', 'raw materials', 'clients', 'partners', 'individual explorers', and/or 'democratic explorers'. Williams and Burden (1997) interpret Meighan's constructs "in terms of a continuum which reflects the nature of the teacher-learner power relationship" (p. 57).

Johnson (1994) states that "preservice ESL teachers' beliefs maybe based largely on images from their formal language learning experiences, and in all likelihood, will represent their dominant model of action during the practicum teaching experience" (p. 450). Borg (2003) states that "teachers' experiences as learners can inform cognition about teaching and learning which continue to exert an influence on teachers throughout their career" (p. 81). Moini (2009) asserts that the studies over cognition mostly deal with "the way teachers think about their own work, their mental processes in planning and carrying out their teachings, the kind of decisions made in the course of teaching, and how these beliefs may change over time" (p. 142).

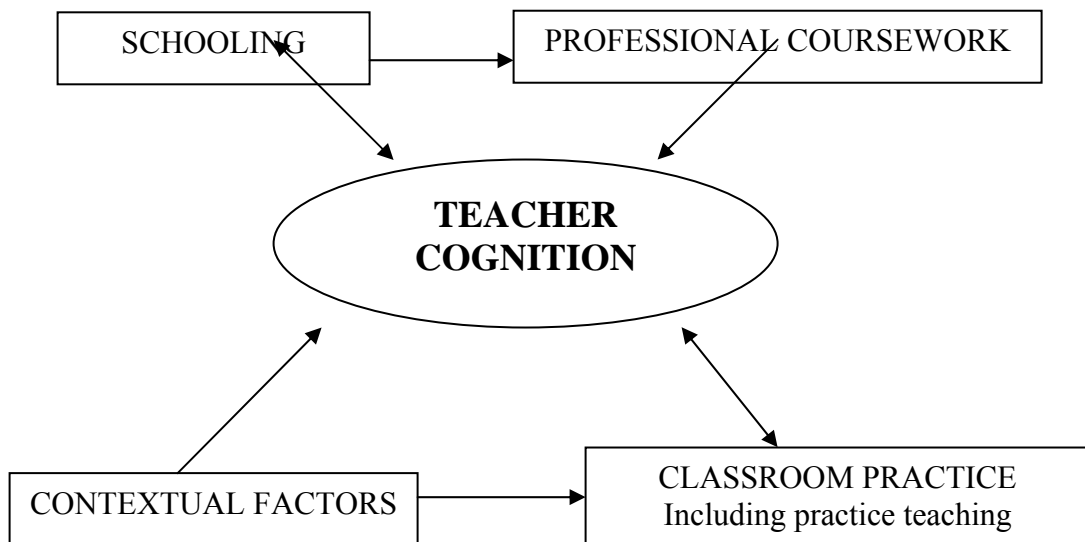


Figure 1: Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Borg 1997).

Figure 1 represents a schematic conceptualization of teaching within which teacher cognition plays a pivotal role in teachers' lives (Borg 2003:81). Teachers learn a lot about teaching through their vast experience as learners, what Lortie (1975) called their 'apprenticeship of observation' (quoted in Borg, 2003:86). Freeman (1992) highlights Lortie (1975) in asserting that 'the memories of instruction gained through their 'apprenticeship of observation' function as de facto guides for teachers as they approach what they do in the classroom' (quoted in Borg, 2003:88). It is generally pictured that "prior learning

experiences shape teachers' cognition and instructional decisions" (Borg, 2003:88). Kagan (1992) contradicts others and states that there are no significant relationships of teacher education on teacher cognition.

Zapata and Gallard (2007) report tensions between attitudes and beliefs and actual teacher practice. Feryok (2010) states that teacher cognitions can be "complex, ranging over a number of different subjects; dynamic, changing over time and under different influences, systems, forming unified and cohesive personal or practical theories" (p: 272). She cites different studies examining language teacher cognitions in various areas such as language as pedagogical content, prior learning experiences, language teaching practices, language learning processes, the role of context on teacher cognition and many other areas.

Stressing the dynamism of teacher cognition as a key feature, she continues alluding to other scholars:

Some early studies inferred that cognitions develop by comparing inexperienced and experienced teachers (Mok, 1994; Nunan, 1992; Richards et al., 1998), but there have also been studies using longitudinal data. Some focus on how pre-service and in-service programs contribute to the dynamics of teacher cognitions (e.g., Freeman, 1993), while others focus on the teacher in the classroom (e.g., Woods, 1996), thus highlighting how teacher cognitions arise form and include both principles and practices. Tudor (2003) describes the non-linear nature of 'pedagogical reality' which "arises dynamically from the interactions of participants with each other" (p. 9), revealed in "a kaleidoscope of detail which may often seem confusing, contradictory, and, at times, rather trivial" (p. 10). This reality is why inferred cognitions based on practices often appear at odds with stated cognitions. (pp. 272-273).

Some studies report incongruity and inconsistency between what teachers exert (on their behavior, action, etc.), and what they notice, and say (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Almarza, 1996). Feiman-Nemser and Floden, (1986) call "beliefs, insights, and habits that enable teachers to do their work in schools", or what Gholami and Husu (2010) refer to as 'practical knowledge', as "time bound and situation specific, personally compelling and oriented toward action" (p. 512).

The assumption here is that, factors, like cognition, belief, attitude, and experience have impacts on the way teachers make instructional decisions. These factors are deemed to influence teachers' professional lives too. As teachers' evaluation of their students is regarded as instructional decisions, it is believed that the abovementioned factors can affect teacher-student appraisals.

3. Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted on two groups of participants. The BA, EFL students at the English department at the University of Kashan formed the first group of participants (N= 219) who filled in the student questionnaire on gender. Among these students, aged between 18-27, 127 (58%) were male and 92 (42%) were female. Of these students, 120 (54/8%) were majoring in English literature and 99 (45/2%) were majoring in translation. The maximum and minimum of learning experience among this population were consecutively 1-11 years. The teachers of English as a foreign language also participated as the second group of participants in this study. These EFL teachers, who were male and female non-native speakers (N= 30), consented to fill in the teachers' questionnaire on gender too. Of these teachers who were aged between 22-42, 17 (56/66%) were male and 13 (43/33%) were female with at least 1 and at last 15 years of experience. These teachers were selected from four universities and different institutes by accidental sampling.

Instruments

To fulfill the aims of the study, two questionnaires were employed in the current study. The first questionnaire was used to glean data from teachers' attitude, beliefs, and cognition towards gender equality in EFL situations (See Appendix A). The second questionnaire was used to collect data from students' attitude, beliefs, and cognition towards gender equality in EFL situations (See Appendix B). The questionnaires were both the revised versions of the "Staff Gender Equality Questionnaire at the University of Stirling" (See Appendix C). The Teacher Gender Equality Questionnaire consisted of 11 items. Among these 11 items, 6 items were scored on a five-point Likert scale: 5= yes, I highly agree, 4= yes, I agree, 3= no idea, 2= no, I disagree, 1= no, I highly disagree; Cronbach's Alpha reliability for these six items was .55. The other five items had different response scales. Of these 11 items 4 items were added additional spaces to elicit the respondents' information and comments (if any) about some questions which were supposed to have more than limited answers. The first item asked about participants' gender (male, female, and transgender). The last item (11) contained 3 questions: 1. How old are you?, 2. As a teacher how long have you been teaching English as a foreign language?, and 3. What is your degree or present study-level? (BA, MA student, MA, PhD student, and PhD). These two items were used to provide the researcher with the data about the participants' demographic background. The second questionnaire, Student Gender Equality Questionnaire, contained 12 items. Among these 12 items, 7 items were scored on a five-point Likert scale: 5= yes, I highly agree, 4= yes, I agree, 3= no idea, 2= no, I disagree, 1= no, I highly disagree; Cronbach's Alpha reliability for these seven items was .62. The other 5 items had different response scales. Of these 12 items, 3 items were added additional spaces to elicit the respondents' information and comments (if any) about some questions which were supposed to have more than limited answers. The first item asked about participants' gender (male, female, and transgender) and the last item (12) consisted of 3 questions: 1. How old are you?, 2. As a student how long have you been learning English as a foreign language?, 3. Define your affiliation, your degree or present study-level, semester status and field of study?. These two items were used to provide the researcher with the data about the participants' demographic background.

The Student Gender Equality Questionnaire was piloted before distributing among the population (particulars discussed in next section).

Procedures

In the survey method, EFL teachers and students were both polled by questionnaires on their beliefs and attitudes about the non/existence of gender-biased behavior in EFL environment. The participants in this part were: I) 30 teachers from four universities and II) 219 EFL students at the University of Kashan. These two groups were administered two different questionnaires. Of these thirty teachers, 26 filled in the questionnaires and sent them back to the researcher on paper or by email. Among the 219 EFL students all filled in and handed back the questionnaires on paper. As mentioned earlier in the data collection instrument section, the Student Gender Equality Questionnaire was piloted before distributing among the population. To pilot the study, a sample of 75 EFL learners of both translation and literature majors at the University of Kashan was selected by convenience sampling. The students received the version of "Staff Gender Equality Questionnaire at the University of Stirling" revised for EFL situations containing 12 open-ended questions. The EFL learners' answers to these questions were analyzed and the most frequent responses were used as options in the final draft of the teacher/student Equality Questionnaires. It hoped that both the teachers and the students had the assurance to express honest answers.

Data Collection Analysis

In analyzing the questionnaires, 9 and 10 questions were analyzed respectively in teacher gender questionnaire and student gender questionnaire to find out teachers' and students' attitudes towards the role of gender in EFL situations. The data gathered by these questionnaires were put in SPSS (version 16) for statistical indexes.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Two questionnaires were polled on the teachers' and the students' beliefs, cognition, and attitudes on the non/existence of gender partiality in EFL situations.

The Analysis of Findings for the Student Questionnaire

Appendix D presents the 10 non-demographic items applied in the Student Questionnaire which aimed to elicit responses based on students' beliefs, attitudes and cognitions. The first seven items were constructed on five-point Likert scales. Table 1 shows the deep analysis of these seven items. Item 8 aimed at eliciting responses on students' experiences on gender discrimination; this item was provided with yes/no options and a space for comments as an open-ended response. Table 2 clarifies the results for this item. The last two items, 9 and 10, were constructed to elicit the students' beliefs, attitudes, and cognition on the possible reasons for the second and the third items. For these two items, six options were introduced as possible responses. A space for comments as an open-ended response was also provided. All the options used in these items had been derived from the most frequent answers by the EFL learners in the pilot study. Tables 3 and 4 will respectively recapitulate the results for the last two items.

Table 1 represents the frequencies, percents and the valid percents for the seven items constructed on the five-point Likert scales. The number of missing items (or items with no response) has been calculated in the percents while the valid percents show the percents of the responses disregarding the missing items.

Table 1: Items analyses for Likert-scale Questions of Student Questionnaire

Items	Options	Missing	No, I highly disagree			No, I disagree			No idea			Yes, I agree			Yes, I highly agree		
			Fre.*	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.
1	9	3	1.3	1.4	17	7.6	7.9	34	15.1	15.7	110	48.9	50.9	52	23.1	24.1	
2	6	5	2.2	2.3	17	7.6	7.8	43	19.1	19.6	102	45.3	46.6	52	23.1	23.7	
3	15	14	6.2	6.7	42	18.7	20.0	73	32.4	34.8	57	25.3	27.1	24	10.7	11.4	
4	14	6	2.7	2.8	28	12.4	13.3	46	20.4	21.8	61	27.1	28.9	70	31.1	33.2	
5	15	17	7.6	8.1	53	23.6	25.2	64	28.4	30.5	62	27.6	29.5	14	6.2	6.7	
6	12	4	1.8	1.9	28	12.4	13.1	38	16.9	17.8	93	41.3	43.7	50	22.2	23.5	
7	0	1	.4	.5	10	4.4	4.7	52	23.1	24.3	87	38.7	40.7	64	28.4	29.8	

*Fre.: Frequency; Per.: Percent; V. per.: Valid Percent

The results evinced that 75 percent of the students (N= 219) believed that the English department, at which they were studying English, had a gender inclusive culture. 15.7 percent expressed no idea and 9.3 disagreed with the idea. 70.3 percent of the students believed that teachers show gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students, 10.1 percent disagreed with this idea and 19.6 expressed no idea. 38.5 percent of the students agreed that teachers show gender partiality toward their same-sex students, 34.8 percent exchanged no idea, and 26.6 expostulated with the idea. 62.1 percent of the students consented that students have tendencies toward their opposite-sex teachers, 21.8 percent put no idea forward, and 16.1 percent expressed disagreement. 36.2 percent of these EFL learners believed that students have tendencies toward their same-sex teachers, 30.5 percent came up with no idea, and 33/3 percent rejected the idea. The students had been asked to express their beliefs or ideas about this sentence "Teachers have

tendencies toward their opposite-sex students and this affects their performance, evaluations etc.", 67.2 percent of the students agreed with the sentence and endorsed the idea, 17.8 percent proposed no idea, and 15 percent disagreed with the sentence. 70.5 percent of the students agreed that the discussion over 'gender partiality' in EFL situations is necessary while 5.2 percent disagreed. 24.3 percent advanced no idea. Figure 2, demonstrates the valid percents for these seven items.

Of these students 44.9 percent (Table 2) believed that they were treated less favorably or discriminated against due to their gender at the English department, at which they were studying English. 55.1 percent (Table 2) of these students refuted this idea and stated that they were not treated partially due to their gender.

Table 2: Analysis for Item 8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Options				
	yes	96	42.7	44.9	44.9
	no	118	52.4	55.1	100.0
	Total	214	95.1	100.0	
Missing	System	11	4.9		
	Total	225	100.0		

As it was mentioned earlier, 70.3 percent of the students believed that teachers had shown gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students. 24.1 percent of these students believed that the reason for such behavior was instinct tendency towards opposite sex, 1.5 percent regarded the teachers' marital status as the influential factor on the issue, 51.3 percent mentioned that students' appearance and behavior were the reasons, 7.2 agreed with cultural issues and 1 percent stated other reasons. Among these students 14.9 percents exchanged no idea. Table 3 summarizes the results for the item 9.

Table 3: Analysis for Item 9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Options				
	instinct tendency to opposite sex	47	20.9	24.1	24.1
	teachers' marital status	3	1.3	1.5	25.6
	students' appearance and behavior	100	44.4	51.3	76.9
	cultural issues	14	6.2	7.2	84.1
	no idea	29	12.9	14.9	99.0
	Other	2	.9	1.0	100.0
	Total	195	86.7	100.0	
Missing	System	30	13.3		
	Total	225	100.0		

To discuss reasons for the 10th item, 38.5 percent of the students believed that teachers would show gender partiality toward their same-sex students. 27.4 percent of the students deemed the reason to be an instinct tendency to same sex, .8 percent believed that teachers' marital status could be a reason. As further comments some students had written down that 'feeling lonely' was a reason for single teachers to make friendly relations to their same-sex students. 4 percent stated that teachers are influenced by their same-sex students' appearance and behavior. 23.4 found cultural issues influencing the teachers' behavior toward their same-sex students and 1.6 percent mentioned other reasons. Of these students, 42.7 put forward no idea. Table 4 exhibits the details for item 10.

Table 4: Analysis for Item 10

Options		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	instinct tendency to same-sex	34	15.1	27.4	27.4
	teachers' marital status	1	.4	.8	28.2
	students' appearance and behavior	5	2.2	4.0	32.3
	cultural issues	29	12.9	23.4	55.6
	no idea	53	23.6	42.7	98.4
	Other	2	.9	1.6	100.0
	Total	124	55.1	100.0	
Missing	System	101	44.9		
	Total	225	100.0		

As it is seen, more than half of the respondents believe that the reason for teachers' gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students is the students' appearance and behavior. The instinct tendency to the same sex (27.4%) is the more frequent reason for teachers' gender partiality to the same-sex students. In this regard most of the respondents, albeit, chose 'no idea' (42.7%) as their best option.

The Analysis of Findings for the Teacher Questionnaire

Table 5 demonstrates the 9 items used in the Teacher Questionnaire which aimed at eliciting responses based on teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and cognition. The first six items were constructed on five-point Likert scales. Table 6 presents the detailed analysis of these six items. Item 7 aimed at eliciting responses on teachers' experiences of gender discrimination as a student; this item was provided with yes/no options and a space for comments as an open-ended response. Table 7 sheds light on the results for this item. The last two items, 8 and 9, were constructed to elicit the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and cognition on the possible reasons for the second and the third items. For these two items, six options were introduced as possible responses. A space for comments as an open-ended response was also provided. Tables 8 and 9 encapsulate the results for the last two items.

Table 6 displays the frequencies, percents, and the valid percents for the six items built on the five-point Likert scales. There was no missing item for these six items- in other words, all the respondents have answered all of the questions. So the amount of the percents and the valid percents are the same.

Table 6: Items analyses for Likert-scale Questions of Teacher Questionnaire

Items	Missing	No, I highly disagree			No, I disagree			No idea			Yes, I agree			Yes, I highly agree		
		Fre.*	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.	Fre.	Per.	V. per.
1	0	1	3.8	3.8	4	15.4	15.4	3	11.5	11.5	10	38.5	38.5	8	30.8	30.8
2	0	0	0	0	2	7.7	7.7	4	15.4	15.4	11	42.3	42.3	9	34.6	34.6
3	0	7	26.9	26.9	6	23.1	23.1	6	23.1	23.1	2	7.7	7.7	5	19.2	19.2
4	0	0	0	0	3	11.5	11.5	5	19.2	19.2	11	42.3	42.3	7	26.9	26.9
5	0	0	0	0	3	11.5	11.5	9	34.6	34.6	9	34.6	34.6	5	19.2	19.2
6	0	0	0	0	1	3.8	3.8	4	15.4	15.4	13	50.0	50.0	8	30.8	30.8

*Fre.: Frequency; Per.: Percent; V. per.: Valid Percent

According to Table 6, the results indicate that 69.3 percent of the teachers who agreed to participate in the poll (N= 26) believed that the English department, at which they were teaching English, had a gender inclusive culture. 11.5 percent expressed no idea and 19.2 disagreed with the idea. 76.9 percent of the teachers agreed that teachers show gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students, 7.7 percent disagreed with this idea and 15.4 had no idea. 26.9 percent of the teachers consented that teachers show gender partiality toward their same-sex students, 23.1 percent exchanged no idea, and 50 expostulated with the idea. 69.2 percent of the teachers believed that students had tendencies toward their opposite-sex teachers, 19.2 percent put no idea forward, and 11.5 percent expressed disagreement. 53.8 percent of teachers expressed that gender had influence on their evaluation and behavior toward their opposite/same-sex students, 34.6 percent came up with no idea, and 11/5 percent rejected the idea. 88.8 percent of the teachers agreed that the discussion over 'gender partiality' in EFL situations was necessary while 3.8 percent disagreed and 24.3 percent advanced no idea.

Among the teachers, 57.7 percent (Table 7) believed that they were treated less favorably or discriminated against due to their gender at the English department, wherein they had been studying English as a student. 42.3 percent of these teachers (Table 7), on the other hand, disbelieved this idea and stated that they were not treated partially due to their gender as a student.

Table 7: Analysis for Item 7

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	15	57.7	57.7	57.7
	No	11	42.3	42.3	100.0
	Total	26	100.0	100.0	

Tables 8 and 9 present the detailed analysis for the second and the third items of teachers' questionnaire. According to Table 8, disregarding the missing responses (n=6), 70 percent of the respondents, who believed that teachers showed gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students, proposed the idea that the instinct tendency to opposite sex was the reason for teachers' gender-based behavior. 20 percent believed that students' appearance and behavior were the reasons on the issue. 5 percent agreed with the cultural issues and 5 percent viewed teachers' marital status as the reason behind the teachers' gender partiality towards their opposite-sex students. Among the options provided in the teacher questionnaire, 'no idea' and 'other' options were not chosen by the respondents at all.

Table 8: Analysis for Item 8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	instinct tendency	14	53.8	70.0	70.0
	teachers' marital status	1	3.8	5.0	75.0
	student appearance and behavior	4	15.4	20.0	95.0
	cultural issues	1	3.8	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	76.9	100.0	
Missing	System	6	23.1		
Total		26	100.0		

Table 9 demonstrates the percent of the respondents' chosen reasons for the teachers' gender partiality toward their same-sex students. The missing responses (n=13) to this item indicated that half of the teachers had no tendency to answer this item. Disregarding the missing responses, 30.8 percent of the teachers believed that students' appearance or behavior could be the reasons for the teachers' gender partiality towards their same-sex students. 23.1 percents of the teachers regarded the cultural issues as the

convincing reason and 38.5 proposed no idea. 7.7 percent of these teachers cited other reasons. Among the options provided, 'Instinct tendency to same sex' and 'teachers' martial status' had no advocates.

Table 9: Analysis for Item 9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	appearance and behavior	4	15.4	30.8	30.8
	cultural issues	3	11.5	23.1	53.8
	No idea	5	19.2	38.5	92.3
	Other	1	3.8	7.7	100.0
	Total	13	50.0	100.0	
Missing	System	13	50.0		
Total		26	100.0		

As it is observed, most of the teachers believed in 'instinct tendency to opposite sex' as the reason behind the gender partiality on teachers' behavior toward the opposite-sex students. For item 9, the assumption is that teachers did not believe in gender partiality towards the same-sex students, however, 'students' appearance and behavior' were regarded as the possible reasons.

5. Discussion

The current study posed two research questions which are consecutively discussed. *The first research question:* What are the teachers' beliefs and cognition about the effect of gender on their evaluation and behavior toward their students? Do the teachers, themselves, think there is any gender partiality in their evaluation and behavior?

Beliefs were viewed as the personal constructs of teachers [or learners] that can help understand their decisions and teaching practices (Pajares, 1992 & Richardson, 1996, cited in Moini, 2009). Cognition, on the other hand, was referred to as the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching or learning what teachers or students know, believe, and think (Borg, 2003). Moini (2009) asserts that the studies over cognition mostly deal with "the way teachers think about their own work, their mental processes in planning and carrying out their teachings, the kind of decisions made in the course of teaching, and how these beliefs may change over time" (p. 142). It is believed that teachers are significantly influenced by their beliefs and cognition (Williams and Burden, 1997). Johnson (1994) states that "preservice ESL teachers' beliefs maybe based largely on images from their formal language learning experiences, and in all likelihood, will represent their dominant model of action during the practicum teaching experience" (p. 450). Borg (2003) states that "teachers' experiences as learners can inform cognition about teaching and learning which continue to exert an influence on teachers throughout their career" (p. 81) Borg continues that "Prior learning experiences shape teachers' cognitions and instructional decisions" (p. 88)

The results of the study on teachers' beliefs on teacher gender partiality revealed that 76.9 percent of the teachers agreed that teachers show gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students and 50 percent disagreed with the idea that teachers are gender-biased towards their same-sex students. The results in this study also disclosed that among the teachers, 57.7 percent believed that they were treated less favorably or discriminated against due to their gender at the English department, at which they had been studying English as a student. So the assumption is that the teachers' background or cognition had affected the way teachers behaved in their assessments and it had impacts on the way teachers make instructional decisions. The findings of this study are in agreement with Borg's ideologies. The current study also demonstrated that 53.8 percent of teachers believed that gender had influence on their evaluation and behavior toward their opposite/same-sex students.

The second research question: What are the students' beliefs and cognition about the influence of gender on teachers' evaluation of their (opposite/same sex) students? What do the students think about their teachers' gender-partiality in EFL situations?

Acikgoz (2005) believes that beliefs and cognitions "influence students' evaluations of teachers" (p. 104). Acikgoz further asserts that, based on their attitudes, female students tend to evaluate their teachers significantly higher than male students. Ahanchian (2003) opposes the idea and states that gender does not affect the students' appraisals of their teachers. Myhill and Jones (2006) reported that students regard female teachers to be more fair and impartial. Einarsom and Granstrom (2002) reveal that the gender of the teacher does not have any effect on teacher-student interaction.

The results of the survey method polled on students came to the conclusion that 70.3 percent of the students believed that teachers show gender partiality toward their opposite-sex students. Similarly, 67.2 percent of the students agreed with the idea that "*Teachers have tendencies toward their opposite-sex students and this affects their performance, evaluations etc.*". 62.1 percent of the students consented that students had tendencies toward their opposite-sex teachers. 38.5 percent of the students agreed that teachers showed gender partiality toward their same-sex students. 36.2 percent of these EFL learners believed that students had tendencies toward their same-sex teachers. The results of the present study are not compatible with Ahanchian's (2003) findings which countered the biased-effect of the students' appraisals of their teachers.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed at delving deep into teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and cognition vis-à-vis gender and its possible influence on educational trends. It was realized that most of the Iranian EFL teachers and learners believe in the existence of gender bias towards the opposite sex at the tertiary levels. The findings also revealed that teachers' and students' beliefs and cognition played a leading role to the behavior and feedback they exert on their evaluations. Ultimately, it was disclosed that teachers' reason behind such gender partialities towards their opposite sex students was mainly instinct tendency towards the opposite sex while students believed that students' appearance and behavior played the leading role. All in all, the study manifested the existence of gender inequality among Iranian EFL teachers and learners which may cause detrimental effects in EFL situations and unfairly affects their appraisals.

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