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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that investigated whether male and female professors teach differently within English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) university classrooms in Taiwan. It was hypothesized that female teachers would be more likely to employ feminist teaching practices in their composition classes and be rated as competent and favorable by students. Six male and female university composition teachers and their students were invited to participate in the study. Classes were observed, and teachers completed interviews. T-test was used to detect gender differences in professors' teaching practices, competency, and likability. Interviews with students were conducted to cross-validate and support t-test results. Results revealed that female teachers made more attempts to involve students in peer collaboration and that male teachers had a greater tendency to employ personalizations in their classes. There were no differences regarding teachers' gender in the pedagogical practice of reflection. Overall, female teachers were more likely to be perceived as competent and favorable than were male teachers. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/SM)

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A Study of Teacher's Gender at EFL University Composition Classrooms**

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# **Feminization in Writing Pedagogy-- A Study of Teacher's Gender at EFL University Composition Classrooms**

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This paper reports a study that investigated whether male and female professors teach differently at EFL university writing classrooms. It was hypothesized that female teachers are more likely to employ feminist teaching practices in their composition classes and be rated as competent and favorable by students. Six university composition teachers (3 male and 3 female) and their students (N=109) were invited to participate in this study. T-test was used to detect gender differences in professors' teaching practices, competency, and likability. Interviews with students were conducted to cross-validate and support t-test results. The results of the study revealed that female teachers made more attempts to involve students in peer collaboration and that male teachers had a greater tendency to employ personalizations in their classes. No difference regarding teacher's gender was found in the pedagogical practice of reflection. But overall, female teachers were more likely perceived as competent and favorable than male teachers.

## **Introduction**

Feminism, one of the new world views in postmodern times, honors women's ways of knowing and grants a plurality of perspectives. It tends to reject the unitary "official knowledge" and male-dominated authority. Tisdell (1998) states that feminism emphasizes the importance of connection, relationship, and the role of affectivity in learning. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) argue that women come to voice, see themselves as constructors of knowledge, and appreciate their learning experiences as women in a psychologically "safe" environment that highlights connection and relationship.

Feminist scholars (e.g. Atkinson, 1997; Belenky et al., 1986; Maher, 1985; Rich, 1979) have called for a pedagogy that minimizes the power instructors have over students, creates an atmosphere of support, and gets students involved as active partners in the teaching process. They strive to be student-centered and make education relevant to students' lives by creating an interactive classroom that encourages students to take responsibility for their learning, make connections with each other, and discover knowledge directly applicable to their lives. Maher and Tetreault (1994) claim four interrelated themes of the feminist classroom: mastery (individual students seeking knowledge on their own terms as well as in concert with others), voice (students speaking for themselves, bringing their own questions and perspectives to the learning material), authority (teachers giving up certain aspects of their authority to make students responsible for their own learning), and positionality (a position defined by gender, race, and class shaping knowledge construction and power relationship inside and outside the classroom). A feminist classroom offers a collaborative, cooperative, and interactive stance that "involves a conceptualization of knowledge as a comparison of multiple perspectives leading toward a complex and evolving view of reality" (Maher, 1985, p. 33). Feminist pedagogy intends to alter power relationships in the classroom and enhance student voices and authority.

EFL classroom practices in current years also reflect the philosophy of feminist pedagogy. Literature of language education abounds in classroom research based on the assumptions of communicative approach, whole language approach, and process approach (see Chen, 1998b). These approaches, though varied in theoretical bases, all indicate the importance of integrating affective and cognitive learning, encouraging learning responsibility and students' input in the

classroom, and developing a community of learners. A typical example is the implementation of cooperative learning into EFL curriculum of varied levels in Taiwan (see Luo, 1998). EFL teachers have been attempting to move away from whole-class learning toward student-centered small group learning so that students are involved in more communication and interaction in the classroom, and assume more of a role in their learning. The teachers play multiple roles as facilitator, collaborator, lecturer, monitor, and evaluator. By helping students achieve learning autonomy and self-efficacy, they value students' opinions and share power with students in the classroom. According to Swann & Graddol (1995), "The set of interactional norms that have emerged from the oracy movement, and that have become enshrined in curriculum guidance, seem to encourage and value features associated with feminine rather than masculine speaking styles" (p. 140). Feminized teaching practices are catching and riding the wave of student-centered curriculum.

In fact, EFL classroom has been undergoing a process of feminization. The English language has long been regarded as a feminine subject, with more female majors in university. As classified by Statham, Richardson, and Cook (1991), English department is one of the non-male-dominated departments in universities. Women's strong participation in the English department and higher education reflects their increasingly important role in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. Not only have they been the major teaching workforces at the primary and secondary levels, but also compose a big ratio of faculty at the college level nowadays. In addition, the high proportion of female presenters and participants at TEFL conferences and symposiums in Taiwan, for example, also reveals female teachers' great devotion to the career of English teaching. Obviously women seem to surpass men and play a greater part in the whole EFL population.

Feminization is derived from the experience of being female, but previous research has showed conflicting results about women professors' teaching behaviors and ratings. With regard to teachers' approaches to classroom interaction, Canada and Pringle (1995) maintained that male and female teachers negotiate their authority in different ways in a mixed-sex classroom, but behave quite similarly in a single-sex class. They observed that "female-led, mixed-sex classes were more professor driven and were less student driven than were male-led, mixed-sex classes," (p. 177) and in all-female classes, "the female professors behave more male-like and the male professors behave more femalelike" (p. 178). However, in a study of gender and university teaching on faculty members from male-dominated and non-male-dominated departments, Statham and her colleagues (1991) discovered that women professors "were more likely than men to encourage students' input, particularly in ways that allow for a more independent student role" (p. 64). They claimed that male teachers use their authority at the cost of involvement by students, but females shared authority and maintained control in the classroom in a way that keeps their relationships with students intact. Similarly, Milem and Astin (1992) also found that female science teachers were shown to use student-centered pedagogical practices more frequently than male teachers. Nevertheless, Brady and Eisler (1999) detected no significant difference in terms of how instructors interact with male and female students in a study of faculty-student interactions in a university.

As to students' perceptions of teaching effectiveness regarding teacher's gender, there have been mixed findings concluded from previous studies too. Some claimed that female professors received lower ratings than their male counterparts because they might not fit the female stereotype for entering a male occupation (Bruschke & Gartner, 1991; Sandler, 1991). Others discovered that female instructors received higher teacher and course ratings than their male counterparts (Rowden & Carlson, 1996). Some even reported no significant difference in the ratings of female and male professors (Elmore and Lapointe, 1975).

The conflicting results are perhaps caused by the gender role expected for college teachers

and the type of course taught. For example, some investigators who focused on teacher's gender role instead of teacher's gender found that both female and male students prefer teachers who are androgynous, that is, possessing both feminine and masculine characteristics (Basow & Howe, 1987; Freeman, 1994). An androgynous teacher should have instrumental masculine traits (assertive and forceful) and expressive feminine traits (affectionate and sensitive). Freeman (1994) also explained further that androgyny is important for instructors of natural science in particular, but not for instructors of humanities and art course. In other words, professors' gender role may be shaped by the nature of the courses they teach as well.

Teaching writing and thinking at the same time can specially get feminized. According to Flynn (1988), the field of composition studies has been shaped greatly by women because of their great contributions, though some male researchers and practitioners also had a hand in the field. She claimed that the image presented in the work of composition researchers and specialists is a nurturing mother instead of an authoritarian father. It is "the ideal of a committed teacher concerned about the growth and maturity of her students, who provides feedback on ungraded drafts, read journals, and attempts to tease out meaning from the seeming incoherence of student language" (p. 424). In addition to reading and responding to students' draft as a caring mother, composition teachers adopted different strategies to help students grow in writing. For example, in Taiwan many teachers have implemented peer reviewing and conferencing activities into their writing classes (e.g. Chen, 1998c; Chou, 1998; Min, 1998; Wei, 1995). They seek to empower students' writing abilities by involving students in thinking of their learning and writing process, revising their own writing with the help of multiple perspectives from peer and teacher readers, and valuing students as published writers. The activities they designed in the classrooms, perhaps varied in the interactional patterns, indicated the collaborative, reflective, and personal nature of feminized teaching.

Feminized writing pedagogy has been appreciated and rated highly by students at EFL classrooms in Taiwan. Current research has shown that students have positive reactions toward this kind of pedagogy (see Chen, 1998c; Chou, 1998; Luo, 1998; Min, 1998; Wei, 1995). Similar to what Flynn observed, a great number of female teachers in Taiwan also have devoted themselves to writing instruction as well. The field is undergoing the process of feminization in terms of teacher's gender and teaching practices. However, Wakai (1994) concluded from her study that investigated the barriers to and facilitators of feminist university teaching, claiming that the strongest predictor of teacher's using feminist pedagogical practice is being committed to student development regardless of teacher's gender. She seemed to suggest that employing feminized teaching is more likely related to the caring "feminine" role a teacher plays than teacher's gender. But teaching a feminine subject like composition, do professors of both genders behave similarly? Do they both reveal an image of a nurturing mother to students as Flynn described? Does the stereotypic gender characteristics have an impact on their teaching? What is the gender role of a composition teacher perceived by students?

With little knowledge of what male and female teachers do in their EFL composition classrooms and how their students evaluate their teaching, it is imprudent to claim superiority of female teachers and regard their teaching practices as feminized writing pedagogy.

### **Definition of Feminized Teaching**

According to Atkinson (1997), feminist pedagogy include the following features: (1) honoring multiple ways of knowing and viewing the world; (2) valuing independence and critical thinking; (3) empowering all members of the community; (4) engaging the community members in reflection; (5) demanding that the community members work together to get beyond sexism and other biases.

Feminized teaching behaviors in this study bear a strong similarity to the features of



feminist pedagogy. In general, feminized teaching includes three basic qualities: collaboration, personalization, and reflection. Collaboration mainly refers to teachers' teaching strategies, that is, designs for the classroom activities. How teachers design and conduct the classroom activities will show their teaching beliefs. Feminists seek to share power with students by building a collaborative relationship with students. Feminized teaching is collaborative, cooperative, and interactive in nature. Personalization is about how teachers interact with students inside and outside the classroom. A personalized teaching style is more approachable to students. Statham and her colleagues (1991) claimed "personalizing behaviors are not only more comfortable for women and/or in greater demand by students and colleagues" (p. 88). Personalizing behaviors include sharing personal experiences, or private lives. Feminized teachers tend to reveal themselves and so do their students. Reflection indicates how the teachers evaluate or refine their own teaching during or after their classes. As Thompson (1987) stated, "every woman is a potential theorist" (p. 81). Feminized teachers tend to analyze their own and students' experiences so as to refine their teaching. They also ask students to learn as women, reflecting and theorizing their own learning so that they may achieve learning autonomy and self-efficacy.

Although feminized teaching is based on the experience of being female in the society, it is not confined to females. Males may be feminized while teaching, and female teachers may be malelike in classrooms.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to investigate whether male and female professors teach differently in university composition classes and in what way their teaching behaviors are similar and different.

The questions addressed in the study are as follows:

- (1) What do male and female professors request their students to do in their composition classes? Do female teachers employ more feminized teaching practices than male teachers?
- (2) How do students think of their teachers' competency? Is there any difference between male and female teachers?
- (3) How do students feel about being taught by male and female teachers? Is there any difference in teacher's gender?

### **Hypotheses**

In this study, it was hypothesized that gender would influence teaching practice. The hypotheses generated for this study are as follows:

- H1: Female professors are more likely to employ the feminized teaching practices in composition classes than male professors.
- H2: Female professors are more likely perceived as competent in teaching than male professors.
- H3: Female professors are more likely preferred in teaching than male professors.

### **Methods**

#### **Subjects**

Six university composition teachers (three male and three female) and their students were invited to participate in this study. These teachers, all Chinese, with postgraduate degrees in literature, language teaching, or applied linguistics, had taught English composition for at least a couple of years. Three of them taught Freshman Composition and three, Sophomore Composition when the study was conducted. They all revealed enthusiasm and confidence in teaching. They believed that English majors should have knowledge of stylistic conventions of

academic discourse and there's no other way to improve writing ability except writing and reading as much as possible. Their course requirements included compositions and personal writings. They intended to help students make a transition from personal writing with little concern about forms and formats toward more distanced, formal writings which combine the practice of academic rhetorical patterns with grammatical knowledge. The detailed information of each teacher is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher's gender, specialty, and course requirements

Teacher's gender	Teacher's code	Level of the course	Specialty	Course requirements
Female	TF1	Freshman	Applied Linguistics	Formal writing projects, journal entries, grammar test, reading logs
Female	TF2	Freshman	Language Education	Compositions, peer reviews, journals, e-mails, grammar test, portfolio project
Female	TF3	Sophomore	Comparative Lit.	Compositions, free writing, exercises of academic discourse
Male	TM1	Freshman	Literature	Formal writings, journals, journal responding, grammar test
Male	TM2	Sophomore	Literature & Translation	Compositions, translation exercises, portfolio
Male	TM3	Sophomore	Applied Linguistics	Compositions, peer reviews, journals, e-mails

Of all the 109 participating students, there are 82 (75%) female and 27 (25%) male students, and 61(56%) taught by female teachers and 48 (44%) by male teachers. They are students from two universities, majoring in foreign languages and literature. The average time of their English learning is 10.04 years and the average time of their English composition learning is 4.19 years. Almost eighty percent of the students stated that more than half of their English teachers in junior and senior high schools were female; seventy percent of them claimed that more than half of their English teachers in university are women. As to the teacher's gender of English composition in university, sixty-six percent of the students declared that more than half of the teachers are female. With regard to students' learning attitude toward the composition course, thirty-nine percent of the students considered themselves very serious or serious, fifty-two percent evaluated themselves as common, and nine percent regarded themselves as not serious or not very serious.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data of this study were mainly collected by a questionnaire survey and interviews. The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first part focuses on students' background information such as gender, previous English learning experiences, and experiences specifically with female teachers; the second part inquires students of their composition instructors' teaching practices and their preferences over teachers' gender. The second part of the questionnaire contains 24 items presented in a five-point scale, ranging from 5 "strongly agree" to 1 "strongly disagree," with a midpoint 3 "neutral." The questionnaire was pretested in a different English class and then revised. The survey was administered with the help of the participating teachers by the end of the second semester. A t-test was performed to detect whether there were gender differences in teaching behaviors perceived by students. The statistic significance value was set at .05.

As to interviews, they were conducted in the second semester. The interviews with participating teachers mostly originated in casual, informal conversations so that they would not feel they were "evaluated" or "reviewed" in the study. The topics of the interviews included the course requirements, teachers' beliefs in writing instruction, and their perceptions

of their students' needs and attitudes. To verify how these professors actually practiced teaching in their classes, three assistant researchers (1 male and 2 female) interviewed students randomly selected from the observed classes (at least 1 male and 1 female from each class). These assistants were trained how to interview people with the guided questions before they started interviewing procedures. The interview data were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher and an EFL colleague, using the method of content analysis. The code for each interviewed student was given as the combination of the teacher's and the student's genders. For example, TF1SF1 indicates that the student was female and taught by the first female teacher.

### Results and Discussions

Results of the t-test were summarized and shown in Table 2 by descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and t-values. In general, students gave high ratings to both female and male teachers. The average rating on most items fell between 4 "agree" and 3 "neutral," except items 16, 22, and 23. The means of item 24 for both male and female teachers were 3.85 and 3.81, no significant difference found, suggesting that students enjoyed teaching by their instructors, female or male. However, closer looks at the results of individual items and the interviews data detected some differences between female and male teachers in their teaching practices, competency, and likability.

Table 2. T-test results of writing teachers' practices between both genders.

Teaching practices	Mean		SD		T-value
	Female (n=61)	Male (n=48)	Female (n=61)	Male (n=48)	
1. The instructor gave students freedom to choose what to write.	3.66	3.56	0.66	0.91	0.71
2. The instructor valued and respected students' opinions and experiences.	3.87	3.85	0.34	0.36	0.22
3. The instructor was enthusiastic to help and guide students to learn writing.	3.92	3.85	0.28	0.46	0.90
4. The instructor read my composition carefully and gave me feedback.	3.80	3.69	0.44	0.59	1.17
5. The instructor talked with me individually about my writing.	3.39	3.33	0.76	0.78	0.41
6. The instructor created opportunities for students to work together.	3.92	3.48	0.33	0.80	3.89*
7. The instructor asked us to read our classmates' drafts and give feedback to them.	3.85	3.66	0.46	0.68	1.73
8. The instructor asked us to go back to examine what we had written and to revise our compositions.	3.81	3.79	0.45	0.45	0.30
9. The instructor was well prepared for class.	3.80	3.58	0.44	0.68	2.04*
10. The instructor had a thorough knowledge of the subject.	3.93	3.69	0.25	0.55	3.12*
11. The instructor communicated the subject matter well.	3.82	3.67	0.47	0.48	1.69
12. The instructor stimulated interest in the course subject	3.72	3.54	0.49	0.58	1.75
13. The instructor is one of the best teachers I have known at this university.	3.77	3.50	0.46	0.62	2.61*
14. The instructor presented the material in a logical manner.	3.72	3.56	0.46	0.65	1.46
15. The instructor was responsive to student input.	3.77	3.69	0.46	0.51	0.89
16. Sometimes, the instructor seems to be too authoritarian.	2.66	2.54	0.73	0.65	0.85
17. The instructor was generally very considerate of students.	3.87	3.77	0.34	0.47	1.56
18. The instructor talked about personal stories and experiences as examples and illustrations in class.	3.64	3.85	0.61	0.36	-2.17*
19. I was willing to share my personal life and experience with the instructor.	3.79	3.54	0.45	0.65	2.32*
20. I was willing to chat with the instructor after class.	3.59	3.40	0.67	0.71	1.47
21. Compared with most other same-sex instructors, this one is among the best.	3.59	3.33	0.53	0.63	2.31*
22. In general, I would rather have male than female instructors.	2.51	2.83	0.62	0.66	-2.63*
23. For composition, I would rather have male than female instructors.	2.56	2.90	0.67	0.75	-2.48*
24. I enjoyed being taught by the instructor.	3.85	3.81	0.41	0.46	0.23

\*P<. 05, N (total number of students) =109

A look at the first eight items, which focused on feminized teaching practices in writing, showed the only difference found between teachers of both genders was item 6, indicating female teachers were more likely to create opportunities for students to work together. In composition classes, the tasks that require students working together are often peer reviews and brainstorming. In support of this result, the interview data revealed that the female teachers in the study either made peer reviews routines of the classroom activities or asked students to have



group discussions about questions brought up by themselves, or issues related to the topics they were about to write. Male teachers also asked their students to review each other's drafts, but their students stated that they did not do so regularly. They were asked to review other classmates' papers for only a couple of times, and not assigned other tasks which demand peer collaboration. Most of the time in class it was the teacher that talked about their mistakes in logic thinking, topic development, and grammar. In fact, the interviewed students from the male teachers' classes stated they preferred teachers' comments to peer reviews. They regarded the teacher as authority and did not seem to trust much their peers' ability to provide constructive suggestions for revision. Therefore, in terms of feminized teaching, female teachers valued collaboration among students and made stronger attempts than their male counterparts to involve students in peer interactions and received more student input. The result was in confirmation with what Statham and her colleagues (1991) found.

Items 9 through 16 explored how students perceived female and male teachers' general teaching behaviors and attitudes in light of class preparation, presentation, and interaction with students. Significant differences were found in items 9, 10, and 13, indicating that female teachers were more likely to be well prepared for class, have a thorough knowledge of the subject, and be considered one of the best teachers students have met in the university than male teachers. In other words, female teachers were more likely to be perceived as competent in teaching than male teachers. The results certainly did not imply that male teachers did not demonstrate successful teaching, but simply reflected that their female counterpart fulfilled more of students' criteria for good teaching. Class preparation and thorough knowledge of the subject are the premises to ensure good teaching. Since "university teaching is a historically male activity" (Statham et al., 1991, p. 23), it is understandable that female teachers would make much more efforts to change the stereotypic concept and present their teaching competence. As one female interviewed student remarked, "To my knowledge, most female teachers are very earnest and devoted to their jobs, either at high school or in university. It seems to be part of their nature" (TM3SF1). In addition, students' previous positive learning experiences with female teachers perhaps also added up their ratings of female professors' teaching.

Items 17 through 20 inquired how much personalization was interwoven into teaching practices. Personalizing represents teachers' attempts to "create or preserve the personal, caring, human elements in their interactions and relationship with students" (Statham et al., 1991, p. 88). It is a pedagogical technique to reduce authority and shorten the distance between teachers and students. The results showed significant difference that male teachers were more likely to share their personal stories and experiences with students, but it was with female teachers that students were more willing to talk about their private lives. The results were not consistent with what Statham and her colleagues (1991) observed. They found that in the classroom women professors were more likely than men to use personal information as examples and that students did more personalizing in women's classes than in men's.

The interview data revealed that female and male teachers' approaches to presenting personal information to their classes were different. Male teachers tended to demonstrate themselves as models or authority when they shared their personal experiences with students. They initiated the talking while waiting for late students or noticing the fatigue or boredom among students. As the interviewed students pointed out, the male teachers all explained to them how poor their English used to be and how they made efforts to learn and write better English. In addition, they mentioned their family, their kids, and their reflections on some current events, such as election campaign and political scandals. Mostly their students listened and did not argue or give opinions. Female teachers, however, related their experiences to students' learning or questions. They used examples relevant to students' lives and encouraged

students to relate their own experiences to the classes or the projects required for the courses. One female teacher, for instance, shared her struggles, failures and successes in writing and helped her students see that it takes time and efforts in drafting and revising to get a paper done. The other female teacher used students' experiences she learned from their journals to exemplify a point she was presenting. The interviewed students also reported that female teachers gave students much more freedom to talk in class. They welcomed different voices and did not give students direct answers to the questions they brought up in class. They often asked students to brainstorm and formulate their own answers first. In other words, female teachers personalized their teaching by using their experiences or stories to elicit students' voices.

As to students' preference of whom to share private life with, female teachers were found more favorable than male teachers. One explanation of the result is that students had had more contacts with female teachers before and might feel more familiar with female audience. Another possibility is also concerned about the issue of comfort. Since more female students participated in the study, they might feel more comfortable sharing thoughts with the same-sex teachers. For example, in their journals, many students were relating to the teacher in a more personal way, saying things that they would not say in class. In female teachers' classes, students of both genders felt less concerned or hesitant to write about themselves. One interviewed male student described that their relationships with female teachers were "somewhat motherly" (TF1SM1). However, between male teachers and female students, self-revelations after class became more awkward and intriguing. For instance, one of the male teachers talked about personal life in class, but wanted to avoid getting involved in too much of students' personal private affairs. His students reported that he ever declared in class that he would open his door whenever a female student came to his office, and that students had better not reveal too personal information to him in journals. Apparently, male teachers might attempt to overcome students' hesitation in classroom participation by sharing personal views or histories, but they also tried to keep a safe and transparent distance from female students. Male teachers having intimate relationships with female students is forbidden and condemned in Chinese culture. The intricate student-teacher relationship explained why students preferred sharing their private life with female teachers more than male teachers.

With regard to likability, the results of items 21 through 24 revealed that significantly female teachers were more likely than male teachers to be considered the best among all the same-sex teachers, and more favored for general subjects and composition courses. The results added support to the study of Rowden and Carlson (1996), claiming the result that female teachers received higher scores in teaching evaluation than male counterparts. Compared with other same-sex teachers, the female teachers of the study seemed to demonstrate not only more competence in teaching but also meet students' expectations of the role that female professors should play, presenting authority in a style, "more interactive and encouraging" (TF2SF1), as an interviewed student characterized. Other female teachers, however, might display behavior traditionally deemed as "masculine," being authoritarian and/or very critical about students' opinions. A female student stated, "I don't like some female teachers. They are so serious and 'strong.'...Once a classmate said she would like to be a housewife after graduation. The teacher seemed unsatisfied with her remark and responded solemnly that college graduates should have more ambitious plans for careers" (TF1SF1). Perhaps in different courses female teachers might display varied approaches to interacting with students and asserting their authority. But in a composition class, a female teacher's maternal instincts and caring teaching style might be evoked more than in other courses for she has chances to read students' personal stories and thoughts.

As to the result that students preferred being taught by female teachers to male teachers, it

might not be an issue of legitimacy or authority, but more likely an issue of comfort and experience. Most of the students in the study were accustomed to the females' teaching styles because of previous learning experiences. They had the impression that female teachers were more cautious and attentive to their needs, which is especially important to develop their writing skills. As the interviewed students explained, female teachers were "more sensitive" (TF3SF1), "more humanistic" (TF1SM1), and "more delicate in thinking" (TM2SF1). Students claimed that female teachers understood them more in thinking and writing. Because of the greater proportion of female students in the classes, male teachers might be in a less favorable situation than female teachers. As one female student stated, "It's safer to have female teachers" (TM1SF1). She might imply that with a female teacher as audience she would feel freer to write about things in her mind.

The interview data also revealed that a couple of students initially emphasized that a teacher's gender did not matter so much in teaching and learning, but later they tended to talk more of the comfort they enjoyed in female teachers' classes. A male student and a female student who were both taught by one male and one female teachers of the study in different classes claimed at first during the interview that a teacher's enthusiasm and teaching competency mattered more than the teacher's gender. But, when asked to describe the feelings in classes of the female and male teachers, the female student stated, "Prof. J is very nice. He talks about his child, his family, and his views of the election campaign; he's like a professor.... Prof. M is very kind; enthusiastic... She's like a friend. We can talk about anything" (TM1SF1). Her male classmate then agreed, nodding, "Yes. I feel the same, too" (TF2SM1). They then explained that the male teacher was "knowledgeable" in literature, and "insightful" in politics, or current events, but they did not think they were able to join the talks with the teacher. The female student added, "The teacher knows more and better. We just listen" (TM1SF1). In the female teacher's class, however, they felt empowered to talk and write. The teacher welcomed any opinion or suggestion. This result suggested that the teachers' images or roles students expected or defined in university might cause different degrees of affinity and comfort between teachers and students in the classroom.

With respect to hypotheses testing, the results of this study did not provide enough evidence to support H<sub>1</sub> that female professors are more likely to employ the feminized teaching practices in composition classes than male professors. In other words, the participating teachers of the study, female and male, did not show differences in their employing feminized teaching strategies. Male teachers in this study tended to reveal themselves in their teaching more than female teachers, which might explain why their students enjoyed their classes too. As to H<sub>2</sub> that female professors are more likely perceived as competent in teaching than male professors, female teachers were significantly more well-prepared and more likely to have a thorough knowledge of the subject, and be considered the best teachers students had known in the university, which warrants its acceptance. Regarding H<sub>3</sub> that female professors are more likely preferred in teaching than male professors, the hypothesis was accepted as well because significantly students liked being taught by female teachers more than by male teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Several findings may be concluded from this study. First, both male and female teachers of the study were rated high in their teaching quality and competence. Students claimed to enjoy their classes. Second, teachers of both genders did not differ in employing feminized teaching practices in terms of reflection. But female teachers significantly emphasized more peer collaboration and created more chances for students to work together; male teachers had a greater tendency to share their personal stories or experiences in their classes. Students however were more likely to share their private life with female teachers than with male

teachers because of the issue of comfort. Third, female teachers were found significantly more competent in teaching for better preparation and thorough knowledge of the subject matter. Fourth, students liked to have female teachers for general courses and composition more than male teachers.

The limitations of the study need to be noted before we attempt to generalize the findings to other populations. First, the subjects of the study were not balanced in gender ( $F=61$ ,  $M=48$ ) and the sample size ( $N=109$ ) was not big enough. A positive gender-match effect on instruction ratings should not be overlooked with more female students participated in the study. Second, the teachers involved in the study were all eager to see changes in their students' learning. Some of them were colleagues. They exchanged teaching strategies and techniques after classes. Their mutual support and influence might lessen the differences in their teaching practices. Third, data collected for this study were mainly students' perceptions. Students might lack sufficient expertise to judge a professor's knowledge of the subject matter or might misinterpret an instructor's purpose of a course activity or requirement. Checking with the teachers or observing the actual classroom practices will ensure the reliability of the data. Fourth, the design of the study did not lend itself to determining "cause-and-effect" relationship between teacher's gender and the practice of feminist writing pedagogy, though students perceived a motherly and caring role of a composition teacher favorable.

Some pedagogical implications can be drawn from the results of the study. First, the high ratings of feminized teaching practices in writing suggested that composition teachers, of both genders, with different specialties, might be implementing them into their classes. Since students claimed to enjoy the classes, it might imply the excellence of feminized teaching strategies in the composition course. Second, the result of the study indicated that a collaborative and caring classroom atmosphere empowered students to talk and express their opinions. To involve students in classroom participation, the teacher may solicit student input by creating more chances for peer interaction, or at least stop giving opinions/lecturing for the whole class period. Third, personalization can improve student-teacher relationship. Relationships are at the essence of teaching and learning. Forging caring and nurturing connections with students is one way to promote students' desire to learn. Students are fond of teachers who reveal themselves as examples in class and chatting with these teachers. There is no other better way for university teachers to demonstrate good teaching than listening to students and helping them learn and grow. The impact of relationship may extend far beyond the classroom and school. Male teachers may adopt this strategy to enhance their academic professional roles in university, but should note that their female students may also feel uncomfortable when they overemphasized making the relationship within a certain distance. Fourth, students preferred female teachers using feminized styles, that is, nurturing and interactive, to present their authority. Female teachers who demonstrate masculine manners in teaching may irritate students and be rated as less favorable. Finally, feminized teaching characteristics perceived favorable in the study could be used as screening criteria for the enrollment of teacher training program.

Three speculations emerging from the study bear further investigation. First, the gender-match effect on instruction ratings needs more research to understand whether female students have pro-female tendency in teaching evaluation. Second, classroom observations are needed to add up the generalizability of the findings in this study. Since most of the teachers did not feel comfortable being observed in the study, classroom observations were not conducted in the study. Perhaps team-teaching would be a better design for an observational study. Two teachers observe and help each other. They may not feel threatened for being evaluated as a subject in a study. Third, the interaction pattern between teachers and students could be the male teachers' concern in a non-male-dominant department. It is speculated that



those favored male teachers possess androgynous or feminine characteristics, such as revealing personal to students and developing a “safe” and non-threatening learning community in class. Since journal writing is a feminine and private matter, but argumentative writing is more public and masculine, more research into how male teachers demand writing assignments and respond to female students’ thoughts is needed.

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