Implication for English Language Teaching from Analysis of the Causes of Gender Discrimination in English Learning Among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Chinese scholars studying gender discrimination in English language learning focus more on the teacher's perspective. In this essay, the aim of my study is to analyze what the causes of gender discrimination in English learning among college students and examine the motivation behind it. Conjecture about the causes of gender discrimination in English language learning is social stereotypes, students' self-perceptions, and the attitudes of English teachers. A questionnaire is designed to investigate gender discrimination in English learning among college students, and the results of the investigation indicate that students reckon that the top three reasons for gender discrimination in English language learning are social stereotypes, self-effort, and conformity. The implication for English teaching is English teachers should not discriminate against students of any gender, and education and training methods should be implemented based on gender differences. Also, English teachers should notice the peers' influences in English learning and help them improve their English skills to meet the requirements of English-related positions in the recruitment market.

Keywords: *Gender discrimination, English learning, English teaching, College students*

1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, gender discrimination in English learning has been an issue of public interest and concern. Gender discrimination is the unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on gender [1]. Chinese scholars Jin Ming and Zhang Hua point that in the transformation of English teachers from the leading role in teaching to "the first seat in equality", there is obvious "gender discrimination" towards students [2]. This standpoint clearly stated that there is real gender discrimination in English language learning due to the gender bias of teachers. As a matter of fact, gender discrimination exists in the process of English learning among college students and it also affects students learning English in a subtle way.

However, much of the domestic research has focused on gender discrimination in English teaching from the perspective of teachers and less attention has been paid to the various causes of gender discrimination that college students encounter in their English language learning. Consequently, this essay will analyze the causes of gender discrimination in English learning among college students. Compared with the previous studies, this research is a new perspective about college students, which can obtain a holistic perspective about this study. This essay will identify the causes of gender discrimination in English language learning among college students and examine the motivations behind it. Hopefully, through this study, I could provide the implication for the English teaching field.

The data collection method used in the study is the quantitative research method. I will use questionnaires to investigate college students about if they have experienced gender discrimination in their English studies. Secondly, I will examine what the causes of gender discrimination in English language learning are. Thirdly I will tell what the effects are. Finally what methods can be used to cope with gender discrimination in English language learning. To achieve the objective, I will analyze the data of the questionnaires and review the strategies previously proposed by scholars to address gender discrimination in English language learning, combining the conclusions I have drawn with the

strategies proposed by scholars, this research will produce a more comprehensive solution.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As for gender discrimination in English learning, a series of studies have been conducted by researchers. Generally, their research perspective is usually more focused on English teachers' attitudes toward male and female students and the gender differences of students in learning.

Jin Ming and Zhang Hua conclude that teachers need to dive into English textbooks, arrange situational activities according to gender differences, and reasonably let boys and girls answer questions, and give girls more opportunities to participate [2]. Their study showed a very comprehensive strategy to English teachers to avoid sexism to students.

Liu Ting and FuMan point, male and female students in English classes only differ in oral participation, learning orientation, seeking help, and confidence [3]. Their research result is very helpful and suggested that teachers in English class should focus their attention on these four aspects and provide gender-specific teaching strategies to students.

Masoud Zoghi1, Seyyed Ali Kazemi2*, and Ali Kalani3 point that English as a foreign language (EFL) learning is to some extent related to gender and it has a significant effect on the achievement test. And he also mentioned that compared with male students, female students are better second language learners [4]. So these results from Masoud Zoghi demonstrate the possibility that girls are more gifted in English learning.

To investigate the relationship between gender differences and English learning, Lin Dan studies the differences between male and female students in English vocabulary, syntax, communication, reading, and oral English learning, and explored how to reduce the impact of gender differences on English learning [5]. The findings could provide some train of thoughts about English teachers how to revise the teaching content when they are faced with male and female students.

However, these studies did not comprehensively point out what discrimination college students face in English learning. In my research, I will use the perspective of students to explore the reasons behind discrimination in many aspects, not only from the simple process of English learning, so as to fill in the gaps in this aspect of research.

3. METHOD

In this section, I used the quantitative method and observation method to collect data and analyze the causes.

3.1. Research design

To investigate the causes of gender discrimination in English learning among college students, I used the questionnaires as my method and began a series of investigations.

3.2. Investigation Objects

In this research, there were 90 participants in this sample. All of the participants are full-time undergraduates (some of them study in the domestic and some of the study abroad) who have been receiving English teaching at college and their majors included: mathematics, computer science, Chinese language, accounting, finance, psychology, German, journalism, pedagogy and so on. To ensure equity, there are an averagely of 45male college students and 45female college students involved in this investigation.

3.3. Data collection

The questionnaire was conducted at the end of September 2021. I designed these questionnaires on the web page and distributed them randomly to students of different majors. There were 90 valid questionnaires. The questionnaires involved nine questions. The first seven questions were all single choice questions where the answer was a choice between yes and no and the concept of the seven questions included the gender of the respondents, their experiences about gender discrimination in English learning, and teachers' attitude towards different gender's students in class. The eighth question was a ranking question that contained five options that concluded the causes of gender discrimination in English learning and required them to rank in order. Finally, the ninth question was a multiple-choice question where five options were given and the participants should choose the top three measures to cope with gender discrimination in English learning.

4. RESULTS

In this phase, I examined each question by pie charts, single bar charts, a compound bar chart, and a table.
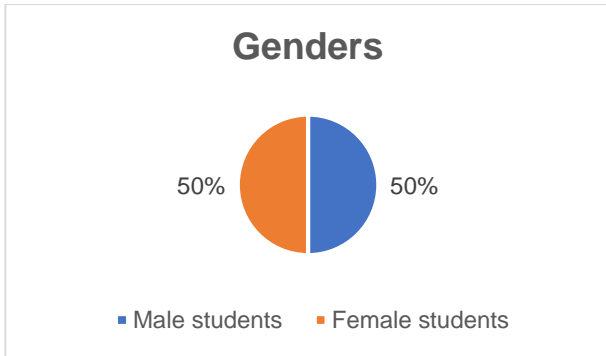
Genders

Figure 1. Genders

The first question was to identify the gender of the participants that 45 male students and 45 female students in the study, which accounted 50% and 50%.
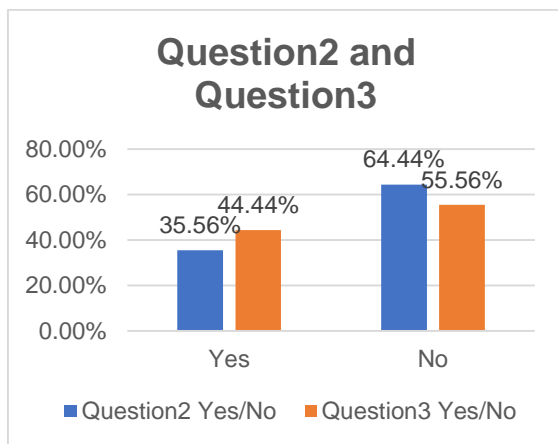
Question2 and Question3

Figure 2.   Question2 and Question3

The second question was that do you think there is gender discrimination in English language learning, among 90 people, 32 chose yes and 58 chose no, the former accounting for 35.56% and the latter accounting for 64.44%. And the third question was that have you experienced gender discrimination in your English learning, for example, you have heard the comment that boys or girls are born to learn English and that boys or girls are poor in English because they are not gifted at learning English. 40 chose yes and 50 chose no, which accounted for 44.44% and 55.56%.

Combining two questions into one compound chart, my aim was to do a comparison. Compared the data collected from the second question with the third question, the data revealed that nearly half of the college students believed there truly exists the phenomenon of the gender problem in English learning, and almost half of them had experienced gender discrimination in English learning. The number of people experiencing this phenomenon was greater than the number of people who perceive it, suggesting that college students may be less aware or more ambiguous about the manifestations of gender discrimination in English language learning.
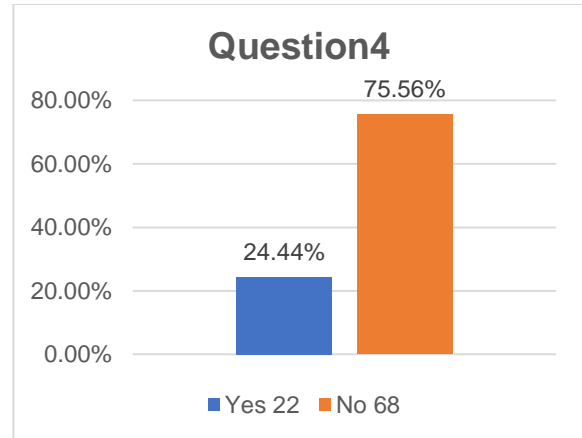
Question4

Figure 3.   Question4

The fourth question was that do you agree that there is a different complexity to master the English language because of gender differences. In this question, 22 chose yes and 68 chose no, the former accounting for 24.44% and the latter accounting for 75.56%.

The data showed that the vast majority agreed that the complexity of English is not determined by the different genders of the learners. In this survey, I found that from the perspective of college students, they rarely carry a sexist perspective to learn English, which is a positive phenomenon.
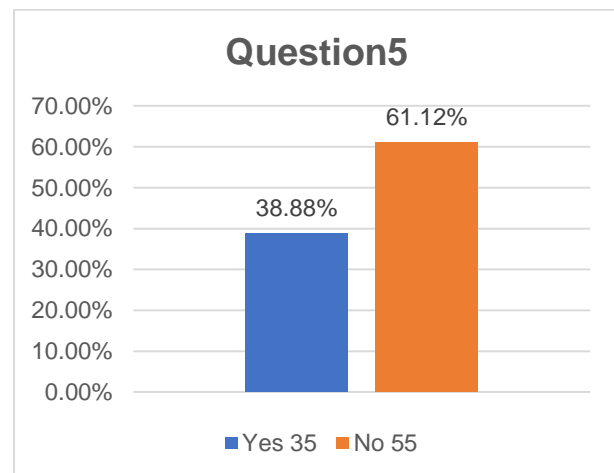
Question5

Figure 4.   Question5

The fifth question was does gender differences in English language learning affect you. 35 chose yes and 55 chose no, which accounted for 38.88% and 61.12%. More than one- third college students believe that gender differences have an impact on English language learning, which indicated gender discrimination still has a negative influence on learners and affects their learning process.
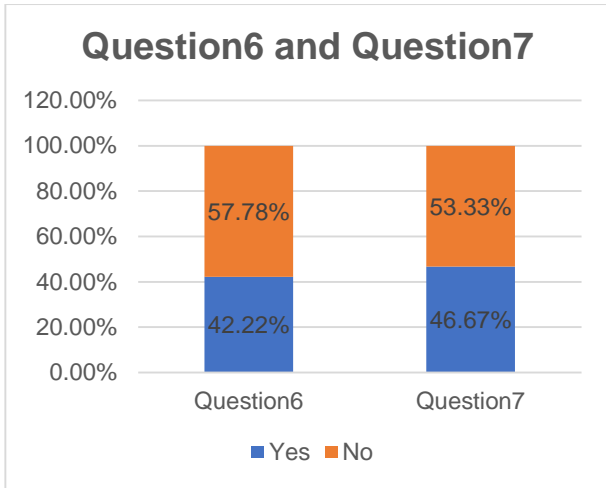
Figure 5. Question6 and Question7

The sixth question was that in English learning, whether teachers have different requirements for male and female students due to gender differences. 38 chose yes and 52chose no, which accounted for 42.22% and 57.78%. The seventh question was that do you think that in English learning teachers prefer boys or girls to interact in class and ignore boys or girls. 42 chose yes and 48 chose no, which accounted for 46.67% and 53.33%.

Because these two questions were both about English teachers, based on the sixth

question and seventh question, the data showed that nearly half of the students in English learning experienced gender discrimination from their teachers and the main manifestations of discrimination are classroom requirements and class participation.
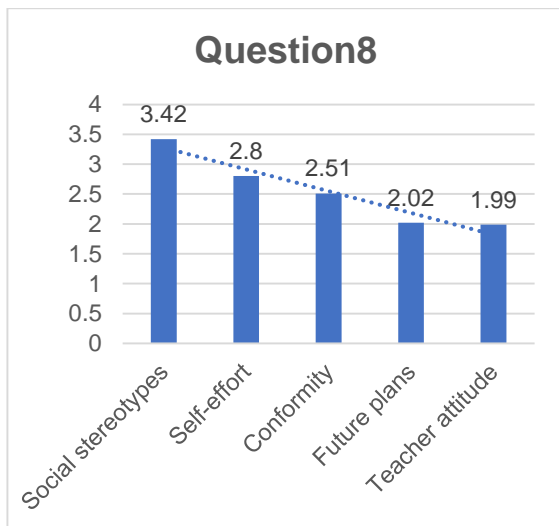

Figure 6. Question8

The bar chart was used to present question eight, which asked what do you think are the causes of gender discrimination in English learning, and it was a ranked

question. Five options were provided, the first being self-effort (male and female students have different self-efforts in English learning), the second being social stereotypes (boys or girls should be good at English), the third being future plans (English learning has different effects on employment after graduation), the fourth being teacher attitudes (teachers have different attitudes toward boys or girls in the class), and the fifth being conformity (boys' and girls' respective peers' attitudes towards English will have an impact on them). From this chart, we can see that the top three options are social stereotypes, self-effort, and conformity, which is a little different from my conjecture because conformity took third place [6].

Table1. OPTION.SUBTOTAL and PATIO

OPTION	SUBTOTAL	RATIO
College students should focus on themselves, changing the limited cognitive towards English learning due to gender differences	68	75.56%
College students want the public to reduce this gender bias against male and female students performing differently in English language learning	64	71.11%
College students advocate English-related positions in employment should be less biased in terms of gender discrimination	41	45.56%
English teachers should treat male and female students equally in the class	40	44.44%
The Ministry of Education should popularize the concept of gender equality in English learning	22	24.44%
HEADCOUNT	90	

The last question was presented in a table and the question is that which of the following do you think is most effective in addressing gender discrimination in English language learning. It was a multiple-choice question and five choices were provided. The top three most popular strategies were that college students should focus on themselves, changing the limited cognitive towards English learning due to gender differences. Secondly, they want the public to reduce this gender bias against male and female students performing differently in English language learning, and finally, they advocate English-related positions in employment should be less biased in terms of gender discrimination.

5. DISCUSSION

Overall, my study investigated the causes of gender discrimination in English learning among college students and examined the motivation behind it. Although these causes are a little discrepant from my conjecture, they are still crucial.

Firstly, stereotypical perceptions from society occupied the first position of the causes, therefore such an idea may have been deeply entrenched in this society for a long time and it brought a general prejudice due to genders to arbitrarily assess male and female students ability of English learning. Even worse, in the Chinese campus, tell male students who are good at English that English should be a subject that female students are good at, or tell female students who are good at English that female students should have a talent for speaking English. It may cause confusion for English learners because such comments may discourage them. Therefore, as WuBiYu pointed that we must treat the socialization process of male and female gender roles correctly and try to overcome the stereotype of gender roles [7].

Secondly, interactions between male and female peers have an impact on the process of learning, especially the conformity can easily drive students to follow the trend of the learning habits of peers. Peers means that members of social groups with similar ages, interests, experiences, or social status. Members of a peer group are more likely to influence a person's beliefs and behavior [8]. In this place, it refers to male and female students or friends of similar ages who are learning English together are in a class. An experiment concluded by Carl Ransom Rogers through experiment that peer mutual aid and peer learning are effective ways to promote learning, and are beneficial to both students. From his conclusion, clearly proved that positive peer influence could facilitate learning [9]. Judy Harris's experiment showed that peers have more influence than most people think [10]. If the male or female peers like to learn English, then it is possible to motivate the boy or girl to learn English, which is a positive influence. However, if the peers are not interested in learning English and add their subjective feelings of indifference to English learning, correspondingly, male or female students will also be influenced by their peers and not be interested in English. Therefore, this explains why conformity could take second place, and the influence of peers cannot be ignored either.

Finally, no matter male and female students, they both have a very clear understanding of themselves and think that they should solve problems by themselves and whether they have worked hard enough in English learning. Because gender discrimination is a phenomenon that any differential treatment due to gender, the correct perception of gender roles and the

reduction of the negative impact of gender stereotypes by college students will help them to improve their self-efficacy in learning and in career decision-making. Yang Peng, Shi Kan, Guo Han, and Liu Xia studied the motivation of learning English, they also found that self-effort has a positive impact on learning results [11]. It is a very positive phenomenon that both male and female students still value their efforts very much, although the first two are external factors. It is also beneficial to improve the social stereotype of men and women's Cognition of English ability by reducing the discrimination caused by their lack of ability through their own efforts.

As for the measures to cope with gender discrimination in English learning, coincidentally and interestingly, the top two popular strategies for improving discrimination: self-effort and improving public perception coincide with the top two causes. Male and female students believe that they should not define themselves as being able to learn the language because of their gender. Then because students have received sexist comments in English learning, these kinds of comments came from parenting style, the strengthening of gender awareness in school education, gender culture, and overall social cognition [7]. They believe that the public has to make an effort to adjust this perception. However, the increase of public awareness requires them to improve their own cognition and literacy, the popularization of the relevant education departments, and the improvement of the general environment of society, I think it is a long and hard process.

And considering the future plans, students advocated the future job market related to English should be less gender discriminatory, not just recruiting female or male employees, but both men and women as long as they are sufficiently competent, so gender cannot be the only threshold for measuring English learners and their ability. Male and female students hope that the recruitment market can treat English learners equally and not discriminate against them based on gender. If the recruitment market can be improved, it may promote the confidence of both men and women in learning English.

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, through the investigation, this paper argued that the main causes of gender discrimination in English learning among college students are social stereotypes, self-effort, and conformity, which are a little different from the conjecture at the beginning, but the above section has given an explanation. The public should improve and enhance self-cognition in society, and conformity psychology can be thoroughly explored in the following research related to gender discrimination in English learning. And the three most

popular strategies for dealing with gender discrimination in English are: first, college students should focus on themselves, changing the limited cognition towards English learning due to gender differences. Second, the public to reduce this gender bias against male and female students performing differently in English language learning, and finally, English-related positions in employment should be less biased in terms of gender discrimination. These measures give teachers and students a hint about how to deal with gender discrimination in English learning.

From this research, I arrived at some implications with regard to English teaching. For English teachers, the data showed that some English teachers still discriminate between male and female students. Firstly, English teachers should not discriminate no matter male students or female students. And their education and training methods should be implemented based on the gender differences of male and female students, rather than favoring or discriminating against students of gender due to teachers' gender bias. Then, when English teachers find that male and female students ignore learning English due to conformity in the teaching process, they can choose to communicate with students and explain that their learning objectives and the process should not be determined by their peers. They should learn English according to their own learning needs and should not define the complexity of the subject because of their gender. In addition, English teachers can help both male and female students who are interested in English to give full play to their abilities in English learning according to gender differences, so as to meet the demand for English talents in the future recruitment market. Consequently, it is easy to see that as one of the main participants in English language education, the side of the English teachers still has a great responsibility for the process of English learning.

However, there still are some limitations in my study. For example, the scale of the questionnaire survey is relatively small and time is very limited to do the research and I lack the corresponding psychology knowledge. what I should pay attention to in future research is that in the future I will expand the size of the survey to produce more accurate data with a reasonable amount of time, and secondly, I should learn psychological knowledge related to pedagogical English studies to help the study run more smoothly.

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