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29

## GENDER MATTERS?

Does it make any difference in education if you're male or female? Does gender matter, taking into account the fact that approximately 61% of active OUM learners and 36% of active tutors are female? There is no conclusive evidence pointing to a clear answer. Some studies have shown that gender does matter, and that it plays a key role in influencing or determining learners' academic performance and ability to follow their programme consistently till completion. It has been claimed, also, for instance, that, while male learners might like adversarial tutors, female learners tend to prefer a more supportive environment to share problems and achievements. Another study argues that more female than male learners suffer from the loneliness of ODL. Others, however, argue that these findings do not apply evenly to all contexts, and that, ultimately, what counts is not gender but intellectual ability and achievement motivation. TCX29 considers these gender issues in the general and OUM contexts.

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## ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexions) is a non-profit OUM e-newsletter that provides a dedicated link between the University and its tutors. It serves as a channel for news and updates on tutor-related events and as a platform for the sharing of views, experiences and tips on best practices in university teaching and learning.

TCX is published electronically twice every semester.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

We began conceiving this issue on gender with the hypothesis that some form of gender inequality must surely exist at the level of tertiary education, considering the amount of attention which gender inequality in society has been given by the media.



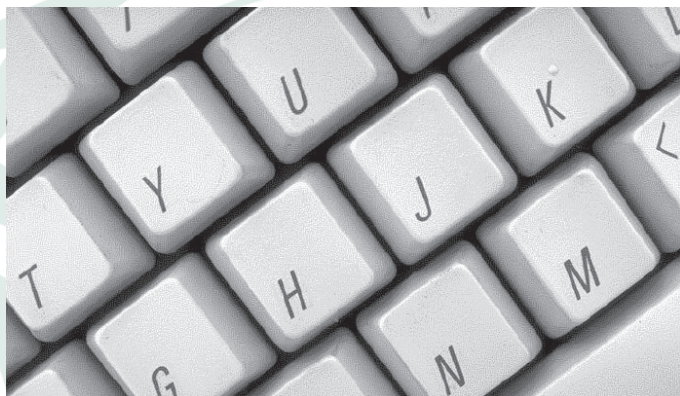
To our pleasant surprise, when the commissioned lead article came in from Dr Thirumeni, we found that our initial assumption proved to be a false one. Women, it appears, not only have more than equal access to education, they also have more or less equal opportunity in comparison to males when it comes to joining the workforce, at least where Malaysia is concerned.

This, in turn, brought us to the re-realisation that OUM has been and is playing a key role in ensuring that more Malaysian women (and men) get the chance to obtain higher education, which is key to personal emancipation and a skilled workforce. This alone, we feel, is reason for all of us – lecturers, tutors, and learners – to give ourselves a pat on the back, for we are all contributing to a more egalitarian Malaysian society, irrespective of whether we realise it or not.

As usual, we hope the features in TCX29 will serve as food for thought on the focal theme. Let us know if you agree or disagree with any of the findings and responses we managed to obtain from various stakeholders.

Best

Dr David Lim  
Chief Editor



### LEARNERS NEED TO CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDE

For this semester, I'm supervising about 10 learners for their *Kajian Berasaskan Sekolah*. It's been more than a month and until now I have yet to receive any feedback from them. I'm truly disappointed with their attitude. Considering that this is their final paper, they should show more concern and be enthusiastic about completing it.

However, I'm happy with the changes done to myLMS which allows learners to submit their assignments online. Prior to this, tutors had to "chase" them for their assignments. So this new development has helped us to ensure that assignments are submitted on time.

About plagiarism, we cannot deny that this is happening among our learners. Nevertheless, I believe that the online submission system helps to control plagiarism. From now on, learners have to be more original in their assignments.

*Ishak Abdul Manaf*  
Kedah Learning Centre

*Thank you for your feedback. Based on our past experience, it helps if tutors can also try to keep communicating with their supervisees using more than one channel of communication (such as e-mail and SMS). Learners need a nudge every now and then. Yes, the online submission of assignments through the new VLE is meant to be a step forward. We hope you will help educate your learners on its benefits.*

*Prof Dr Zoraini Wati Abas*  
Director, Centre for Tutor Management and Development

### DIFFICULT TO ACCESS TCX THROUGH MYVLE

Occasionally, I've accessed TCX online for some reading material and find it useful. However, with the recent change in myVLE, the shortcut to the TCX newsletter is no longer available. Perhaps it will take some time for me to navigate around the new myVLE layout. I was told that I can access TCX as well as other newsletters like *OUM Today* by clicking on some of the buttons at the top page. Whatever it is, I feel that the new myVLE format is not as user-friendly as the previous one.

*Pusparajan a/l Perumal*  
Kedah Learning Centre

*You can easily access the most recent issue of TCX by going to <http://tcx.oum.edu.my>*

*TCX Editors*

### PLAGIARISM AND MASTERY OF LANGUAGE

I teach *Oral Communication* and in my experience, I find that some learners tend to plagiarise by surfing the Internet to cut and paste some information to pass off as their answers. However, the problem is not that widespread in OUM.

I can't really blame them because most of them do not have a strong command of the English language. Most students learn communicative English which does not necessarily guarantee that they will be academically proficient in English. Furthermore, as this is their very first semester, they have yet to be introduced to proper APA citing conventions.

Despite the above, I'm proud to say that the learners are rather positive in their studies. True, some may have poor command of spoken English but they still remain positive despite their shortcomings. This is one of the good qualities of mature working students.

*Lim Chin Tong*  
Sabah Learning Centre

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*We're delighted to know that OUM learners have a positive attitude towards their studies. Adult learners are hopeful that their dreams of having a scroll in their hands will become a reality. OUM is counting on tutors like you who we believe will do what is necessary to help learners improve their level of proficiency in the English language.*

*Prof Dr Zoraini Abas*

*Director, Centre for Tutor Management and Development*

## PLAGIARISM AMONG STUDENTS

The recent TCX issue on plagiarism is very interesting and appropriate for tutors and learners alike. The featured articles serve the purpose of reminding learners that plagiarism is academically wrong. I would like to request a hard copy of the most recent TCX issue to share with my learners.

As a tutor, I occasionally find elements of plagiarism in my learners' work (be it assignments or theses). I encourage my students to be original in their work by providing their own graphs and illustrations rather than sourcing them from the Internet.

In the coming issue, I hope that TCX can focus on continuous assessment as a tool to motivate learners. I'm a distant learner myself and I feel that continuous assessment helps learners to monitor their own progress.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the TCX team for a job well done.

*Dr Lai Choo Heng*  
*Penang Learning Centre*

*Yes, plagiarism among learners is a widespread issue in many, if not all, institutions of higher learning. As tutors, we're sure you will help educate them. Otherwise, it will be an unending story.*

*Prof Dr Zoraini Abas*

*Director, Centre for Tutor Management and Development*

*Thank you for the compliments. For every new issue of TCX, we will send a PDF version to your OUM e-mail which you can then print out for the hard copy.*

*As for continuous assessment, your suggestion is duly noted and will be put under consideration. Meanwhile, you can view Issue 19: Promoting Learning Through Exams which bears some relation to your query.*

*TCX Editors*

**DR LAI CHOO HENG is the winner of the current Best Letter competition. The prize is a free holiday voucher to Cinta Sayang Resort.**



**WIN A FREE HOLIDAY!**

**Do you feel strongly about a particular issue concerning OUM? Do you have brilliant ideas to share about learning at OUM? Write a letter to us at TCX expressing your views and you might just win yourself a Gift Voucher to Cinta Sayang Resort!**

**Rules of the competition are as follows:**

1. You must be currently working as an external tutor for OUM.
2. Only one letter submission is allowed per external tutor.
3. All entries must be received by 15th July 2010.

**Terms and conditions for use of the voucher:**

1. Please present the voucher upon check-in/arrival.
2. The voucher is not redeemable for cash.
3. Early reservation is required and subject to availability.
4. The voucher is not valid during eve/public holidays.
5. The management reserves the right to withdraw the privileges offered due to reasons it may deem fit.

# IMPORTANT DATES



## OMES Deadlines

PROGRAMME	ACTIVITY	DATE (2010)
Undergraduate	Key in marks for assignments and quizzes*	12-25 July
	Key in marks for online participation*	26 July – 1 August
<i>*Except for MCQ-format subjects</i>		
Postgraduate	Key in marks for Assignment 1	14-27 June
	Key in marks for Assignment 2	12-25 July
	Key in marks for online participation	26 July – 1 August

## Upcoming Activities

ACTIVITY	DATE (2010)	REMARKS
Monitoring of New/Senior Tutors and Facilitators	Tutorials/Seminars 1-5	Observation during tutorials/seminars will be conducted by Lead Tutors and OUM academic staff.

## WRITE FOR TCX AND WIN RM50!



Are you currently a tutor at OUM? Looking for an outlet to share your thoughts about any aspect of teaching and learning?

If so, we'd love to hear from you.

Send us your completed articles. Or, if you prefer, chat with the Editors about story ideas you're thinking of developing. E-mail us at [tcx@oum.edu.my](mailto:tcx@oum.edu.my).

If your article is published, you'll receive a token sum of RM50. (Internal and full-time staff are not eligible).

# THE WORKING WOMAN & ODL

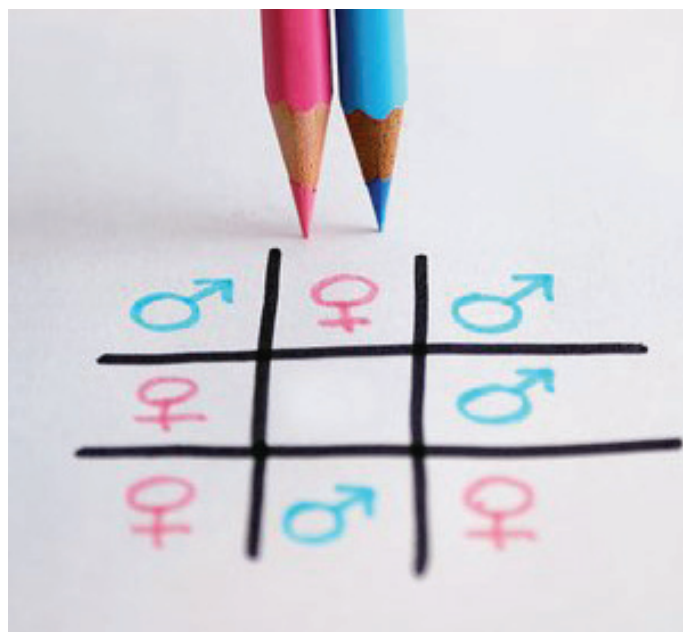
By Dr Thirumeni T Subramaniam (thirumeni@oum.edu.my)

In this modern day and age, both men and women have equal rights to education. This has not always been the case. In the 18th century, feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft championed women's right to an education through her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She and other feminists paved the way for women having access to education, which enables them to empower themselves in general and to achieve academically in particular, thus preparing them for entry into the job market.

It seems that their efforts have not been in vain. In the context of open and distance learning (ODL) locally, Open University Malaysia (OUM) pioneers the concept of education for all regardless of gender, social class, ethnicity or age. Today, we see more and more women making it to the university to further their education. OUM's method of delivery (ODL) is ideally suited for working women with families because it allows them to study at home while taking care of their other responsibilities.

Access to education for women is very important given that the gender ratio between male and female is 1:1 for the entire population of Malaysia. We are talking about 50% of the potential workforce which Malaysia can harness for its developmental goals. This ratio is also reflected in the net primary enrolment ratio. The net secondary enrolment ratio is higher at 1:1.14, while the gross tertiary enrolment ratio is even higher at 1:1.41 (www.genderandtrade.org). It appears that access to education is not an issue at all for women. If anything, it might be more of an issue for men now, seeing that the higher we go in education, the more we encounter male dropouts.

The next issue to be considered then is the academic performance of female learners at tertiary level. This invites us to consider the nature of intelligence and how it differs between men and women. Although there is a substantial body of research that confirms gender differences in terms of the various intelligences (visual, linguistic, mathematical, etc.), the specific nature of these differences varies by age, specific measure, magnitude, and variability within the groups. Reanalysis proves that gender differences does not account for more than 1% to 5% of the group variance (Vogel, 1990). In most cases, the gender gap is considerably



*While gender equity is taken for granted now in education, it will be some more years before gender inequalities in the arena of employment begin to level out.*

smaller than other forms of inequalities, and there are several external factors that influence gender differences such as cultural expectations. In other words, gender is not the single overriding factor which should be considered here; other factors also contribute to intellectual differences and could possibly have more weight than gender.

One other interesting factor that we can look into here is learning style. Research suggests that males and females tend to have different learning styles, but there is a big overlap (Tinklin et al., 2001 and Barrett, E. and Lally, V., 1999).

Although there are gender differences in learning style, one cannot associate gender with specific learning styles. A study by Busato et al. suggests that learning styles have no positive correlation with academic performance. All these

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mean that there is no direct connection between gender and educational achievement. If anything, only two factors (intellectual ability and achievement motivation) appear to have any real connection to academic success. These two factors pertain to the learner as an individual, not so much to the learner as a member of a certain gender.

Gender then becomes a non-issue when it comes to access to education and academic performance. As far as entry to the workforce is concerned, gender is still more or less a non-issue. Female economic activity in Malaysia (as a percentage of male rates) is lower by only 4% than the expected value based on the gross tertiary enrolment. In other words, the numerical difference between men and women who enter the workforce is rather negligible.

What is a concern, though, is the fact that the ratio of female to male estimated earned income is 0.36. That is to say, for every RM100 that a male earns, a female earns only RM36. Why is this so? Do “glass ceilings” exist at the workplace? Perhaps this is true in some industries. This is probably due to cultural expectations which prescribe maternal and domestic roles to women in Asian countries.

So in short, the issue of gender only comes into play as far as financial remuneration is concerned. While gender equity is taken for granted now in education, it will be some more years before gender inequalities in the arena of employment begin to level out. **TCX**

## FEATURE

# LEARNERS' VIEWS: GENDER & TUTORING

Compiled by Lamjin Atoh (lamjin@oum.edu.my)

*Is there a difference between male and female tutors as far as learners are concerned? Is one more empathetic or more structured than the other? Here are some views from our learners.*

## GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

God created men and women with their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, when it comes to the sort of service that is expected in the education sector, equal opportunity should be given to both men and women to prove their worth.

In the early days of Malaysian education, female educators were preferred due to their “motherly” and caring nature. However, my experience makes me believe that gender is immaterial when it comes to tutoring.

Some tutors may be physically attractive to the opposite sex, but surely learners should know better than to base their preference on such shallow criteria. When it comes to study, learners look for tutors who are flexible and attentive to learners' needs.

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*The best would be to have a tutor who is attractive, entertaining and at the same time proficient in his or her subject.*

Tutors have to make themselves available to the learners to have any kind of impact on their learning. Being workers and family people, learners will naturally have very tight schedules. Whatever little time they have left will be spent participating in tutorials and online learning. Speedy response from tutors in online forums is encouraging to learners. This is surely something that can be expected from any tutor regardless of gender.

*Feliza Gabertan  
Bachelor of Business Administration  
Sabah Learning Centre*

## LOOKS ALSO COUNT

Ideally, the tutor's gender shouldn't matter. What I look for in a tutor is substance; he or she must be knowledgeable about the subject in order to teach well.

Having said that, I do know that usually learners will prefer attractive tutors of the opposite sex. This is human nature: if we are attracted by the physical appearance of someone, we tend to pay more attention to that person. It doesn't matter if the person is not making any sense at all in front of the classroom, so long as he or she is pleasing to look at. I'm not saying that this is right, I'm just saying it as it is.

The best would be to have a tutor who is attractive, entertaining and at the same time proficient in his or her subject. Learners tend to get put off by tutors who are dull and uninspiring, even if they know their stuff.

*Adam Ariffin  
Executive Diploma in Business Management  
Kuala Lumpur Learning Centre*

## GENDER NOT AN INDICATOR OF TUTOR'S EFFECTIVENESS

For the past five semesters, I have been tutored by both male and female tutors. In my experience, tutors will do their best to help their learners irrespective of their gender. It is very encouraging to see tutors who are very accommodating when it comes to answering questions from fellow learners, even though the questions are sometimes not related to the topics or subjects.

To me, gender should not be used as an index of a tutor's effectiveness. I would be happy to have a female tutor who is effective, knowledgeable and helpful rather than a male tutor who is not committed.

*Peter Galun  
Bachelor in Management  
Sabah Learning Centre*

## SUBJECTIVE VIEWS

Does gender play a role in education? Does it determine students' performance and achievements? Does the tutors' gender affect learning? This is a rather controversial topic and is open to a great deal of debate. There are many perspectives to consider and one's opinion on this issue is rather subjective, I think.

I won't absolutely agree that gender determines the performance of a learner but it may influence learner's attitudes to a certain degree. Somehow or rather, it may become a contributing factor depending on the learner's age and education level.

When I was young, I had always preferred female teachers because I thought they were more lenient. Now it doesn't really matter what gender my tutors are. The most important criteria to consider is whether or not they are able to hold my interest and how effective they are in sharing or imparting their knowledge.

Having said that, it would be nice to have a good-looking male tutor from time to time. At least there is something extra to look forward to besides the class!

*Suria Jihen  
Bachelor of Psychology  
Sabah Learning Centre*



# INTERVIEW WITH ASSOC PROF CHE'AN BINTI AHMAD

By Jimmy Teo Hui Thian (jteo@oum.edu.my)



**A**SSOC PROF CHE'AN BINTI AHMAD has been in OUM for almost two years now as Head of the School of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences (SONAHS). Previously, she was with University Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC) for many years assuming many different roles there, particularly in the training of nurses.

**Jimmy:** To many people, nursing is considered a “feminine” vocation. What is your opinion on this?

**Che'an:** I think this is old thinking (laughs). I think people are beginning to accept that nursing is no longer reserved for women. Modern society is more open and we do have men enrolling in our diploma and degree courses now. In fact, male nurses are common in developed countries like England, United States, Canada, Australia and others.

*People usually take for granted all the good that you have done, but make one mistake and it would make headlines right away.*

**Jimmy:** Why would someone choose to be a nurse? Is there a career path in nursing?

**Che'an:** Nursing as a profession has progressed tremendously in our country. Previously, there wasn't much prospect for nurses to advance in their career, but now it is a different story. Nurses are now in demand and there are plenty of career opportunities for them. As they say: the sky is the limit. You can even do PhD in Nursing nowadays. In fact, OUM is planning on offering a doctorate-level programme in Nursing and will be the first private institution in Malaysia to do so.

**Jimmy:** Many have remarked that nurses are becoming more mechanical nowadays. Any comments?

**Che'an:** (Laughs) That is not a fair comment. These remarks are not peculiar to nursing alone. I think doctors and teachers get a lot of these as well. As I see it, there are still many committed, good and caring nurses around but they are not highlighted. People usually take for granted all the good that you have done, but make one mistake and it would make headlines right away. I guess this is human nature. Caring is one of the most important requirements for becoming a nurse. This is why caring is incorporated into all the subjects that we offer here in OUM.

**Jimmy:** What are the courses offered under your school?

**Che'an:** Currently, we offer three courses: (1) Diploma in Pre-Hospital Emergency Care, (2) Bachelor of Nursing Science with Honours, and (3) Master of Nursing. As I mentioned earlier, we are now preparing to launch our PhD in Nursing soon.

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**Jimmy:** How are your programmes different from others?

**Che'an:** Anyone who views our curriculum will notice that though we offer online courses, we also have what we call the clinical component. This consists of actual clinical practices that learners have to go through at our partner hospitals. This will provide our learners with real challenges which will prove invaluable to them.

**Jimmy:** As the Head of SONAHS, what is your greatest challenge?

**Che'an:** My greatest challenge now is to get more qualified and experienced staff to join us. Many qualified people have applied, but not many with the relevant experience.

**Jimmy:** How do you ensure that your learners are in touch with current trends and practices in their respective fields?

**Che'an:** To begin with, we ourselves have to keep touch with current trends, especially when it relates to new technologies. The lecturers or tutors should then share their experiences and observations with the learners. We are now working on what we call “e-clinical” which is actually a web portal to provide learners with additional resources to complement their learning.

**Jimmy:** In your mind, what is the way forward for your school?

**Che'an:** As you can see, there is a lot of demand for nurses at the moment, judging by the number of colleges offering nursing programmes. I think it is high time for us to grow into a full-fledged faculty.

**Jimmy:** What is your advice to all the aspiring nurses out there?



**Che'an:** I think they should just apply and not have any doubt in their mind. As I said earlier, the sky is the limit. This is a good profession to take up and the future is bright. My advice is for them to visit <http://sonahs.oum.edu.my/> and sign up. **TCX**

## ONLINE POLL

Gender equality can be promoted in the classroom by:

1. making sure that both genders have equal opportunities to contribute in the classroom by giving feedback and so on.
2. refraining from cracking gender-insensitive jokes or statements.
3. explaining materials by taking into consideration the sensitivities of both genders.
4. ensuring that there is no gender bias during the teaching and learning process.



# SENSE & SENSITIVITY

Adapted by Azahar bin Ahmad Nizar (azahar\_ahmad@oum.edu.my)

In these modern times, women are often put in the unenviable position of having to simultaneously shoulder a professional and domestic burden. Should she decide to also pursue her studies at tertiary level, that burden is easily tripled. It is for this reason that open and distance learning (ODL) is ideal for the working woman as she is able to study from home. Given that more and more women are interested in improving themselves academically, ODL institutions must also demonstrate gender sensitivity, be it in learning materials, face-to-face interactions or online forums.

Beware of the following errors when interacting with your learners:

## 1. Masculine Pronouns

Traditional educational practice tends to assume that the world revolves around men. This is reflected in the custom of using the masculine pronoun (he, him, his) to refer to both genders in English. Female learners tend to feel excluded when they are addressed in terms that linguistically privilege men over women. Nor does it help to use combinations (he or she, he/she, s/he) because they tend to look or sound inelegant.

The obvious way of circumventing this problem is to apply gender-neutral pronouns. For example, instead of:

*This e-module has been developed especially with the learner in mind so that he can process learning better.*

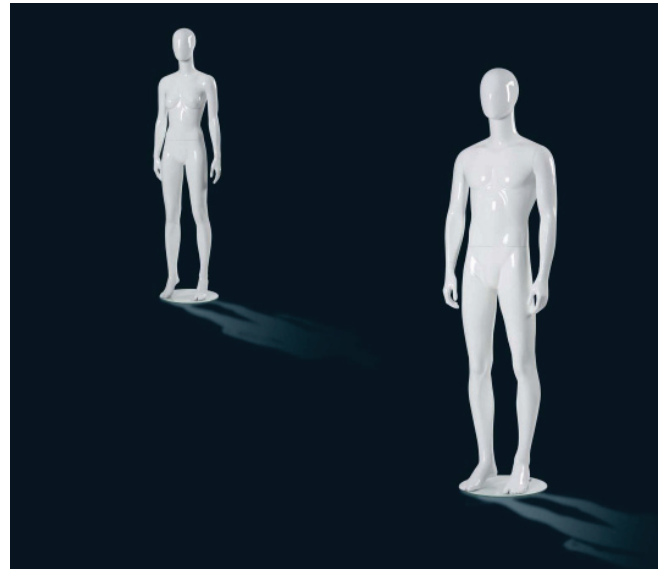
the sentence should be rephrased as follows:

*This e-module has been developed especially with the learner in mind so that you can process learning better.*

## 2. Gender-biased Vocabulary

Language indirectly reflects certain assumptions and expectations about gender roles. This is so deeply entrenched in the way we speak and think that we hardly give it a thought when gender-biased vocabulary is used.

Things are positively changing for the better, though. Once upon a time, nobody would bat an eyelid if you were to address a woman who chairs a meeting as “the chairman”. It is assumed that the term applies to both men and women. Using “chairwoman” sounds slightly better, except that it gives the impression that this is a derivative



*Language indirectly reflects certain assumptions and expectations about gender roles.*

version of the original term. Preferably, use gender-neutral terms like “chairperson” (or simply “chair”).

## 3. Gender Stereotypes

Certain gender stereotypes have become so much a part of our psyche that we unconsciously imagine a certain gender in relation to certain professions or roles. For example, when the term “nurse” is used in a clinical context, most of us would assume that the nurse in question is female. This is certainly not true in all cases as more and more men are beginning to seriously pursue nursing as a career.

ODL learning materials should reflect these changing realities. For example, illustrations of nurses should portray both genders at work. Images have the power to leave indelible impressions in the human mind; therefore, it is crucial to sensitise learners to gender-neutral visuals. **TCX**

**Adapted from:** Producing gender-sensitive materials for open and distance learning. *Commonwealth of learning*. Retrieved June 28, 2010, from <http://www.col.org/resources/publications/trainingresources/knowledge/Pages/genderSensitive.aspx>



# TUTORS' VIEWS: GENDER & LEARNING

Compiled by Norazlina Mohamad (norazlina\_mohamad@oum.edu.my)

**O**ver the years, there seems to be no end to debates regarding gender and learning. Admittedly, there are differences between how men and women learn. Our tutors have some views about gender and the learning process.

## MALE LEARNERS PREFER AN INFORMAL STYLE

Based on my experience, male learners prefer an informal, more visual learning style. They also thrive in a learning environment which allows them the flexibility to move around and discuss in groups. However, they seem to have trouble focusing on the lesson for extended periods of time.

Usually, you will find that it is the female learners who outperform the male learners. How can we narrow the gap between the two? We need to diversify our teaching methods and come up with innovative approaches to cater to differences between both genders.

*Dr Hu Laey Nee  
Sarawak Learning Centre*

## INDEPENDENT LEARNING FOR TESL

I have been an OUM tutor for the TESL programme for the past eight years. This programme involves classroom communication activities such as discussions, forums and presentations as a major aspect of the teaching and learning process.

From my observation, I find no difference in terms of communicative and analytical learning styles between male and female learners. This is perhaps due to the nature of the TESL programme which requires the learners, regardless of gender, to do research and read widely. This means that they have to be independent learners to a certain extent.

*Puan Noor Adlina Gooi Abdullah  
Kelantan Learning Centre*

## NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE ADULT LEARNERS


In my opinion, I believe that there is no difference between male and female adult learners when it comes to acquiring knowledge. Regardless of gender, any learner



*Regardless of gender, any learner has the potential to cope and adapt reasonably well to their learning environment.*

has the potential to cope and adapt reasonably well to their learning environment.

Prior to the commencement of tutorials, OUM learners are required to attend workshops which expose them to the blended mode of learning. This is to ensure that they are able to function as independent learners.

At the same time, it is also important that learners remain highly motivated throughout the duration of their studies. They should also communicate and interact effectively with peers, tutors and administrators. All these things can be developed by anyone regardless of gender. 

*Segar Raja M  
Kedah Learning Centre*

# YIN AND YANG

Interview with Kok Ah Moy

By Azahar Ahmad Nizar (azahar\_ahmad@oum.edu.my)

**K**OK AH MOY has served OUM for nearly ten years as a tutor for the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences.

**Azahar:** Please describe your educational background.

**Mrs Kok:** I obtained my BA (Honours) from USM, majoring in History and minoring in Sociology and Anthropology. I did my Master's degree in Sociology in UM.

**Azahar:** What is your tutoring experience like in OUM?

**Mrs Kok:** As a tutor, I teach the following courses: *Malaysian Studies*, *Introduction to Social Science* and *Man, Society and Culture*. I was once involved in marking and setting examination questions for *Malaysian Studies*. I have been appointed as an e-tutor and FAQ developer for *Introduction to Social Science*.

**Azahar:** Do you feel that gender makes a difference in education? How so?

**Mrs Kok:** A few decades back, women had to give way to their male siblings where education is concerned. A Chinese saying goes: "Woman without knowledge is woman with grace." This was meant to console women who missed out on education and to cover up the gender discrimination in education which still happens in poor Eastern societies. Despite their academic achievements, women are considered to be unsuited for certain courses such as civil engineering which are highly technical and require handling of machinery. Culture influences gender differences in education.

**Azahar:** Females are outnumbering males in universities nowadays. Do you have anything to say about this?

**Mrs Kok:** In Chinese medicine, an imbalance of "yin" and "yang" in our bodies will make us fall sick. Likewise, the disproportionate ratio of male to female learners suggests an imbalance in society. It means that along the way, males are dropping out while their female counterparts remain committed to their long-term education.

**Azahar:** It has been claimed, for instance, that, while male learners might like adversarial tutors, female learners tend to prefer a more supportive environment to share problems and achievements. Is this true in your experience of tutoring?



*In Chinese medicine, an imbalance of "yin" and "yang" in our bodies will make us fall sick. Likewise, the disproportionate ratio of male to female learners suggests an imbalance in society.*

**Mrs Kok:** This is not always true for adult learners. Both male and female learners need a supportive and lively learning environment given their work commitments. But generally speaking, female learners tend to have more domestic responsibilities. For example, a learner of mine brings her children to a cybercafé in order to participate in myVLE forums because she does not have internet service at home. This rarely happens to a male learner.

**Azahar:** Do you believe that men and women are equal? Or are they created for different roles and functions?

**Mrs Kok:** I am not a feminist. I believe that God created men and women for different roles. Having said that, I am fully aware that aside from biological differences such as childbearing and breastfeeding, gender differences are often the cultural product of socialisation and social norms. We should strive to reduce the gender divide in our efforts to develop a more egalitarian society in the near future.<sup>TCX</sup>

# ARE YOU A CARROT, AN EGG OR A COFFEE BEAN?

Adapted by Azeezah Jameelah Mohamed Mohideen (azeezah@oum.edu.my)

Alice was troubled. She had a family, a full-time job and a degree to pursue on a part-time basis. Juggling all these responsibilities was making her tired, frustrated and depressed. What could she do? Seeking wise counsel, she went to her mother.

Alice's mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed them on the stove. When the water began to boil, she put carrots in the first pot, eggs in the second and ground coffee beans in the third. She then let the pots boil for a while. After 20 minutes, she turned off the stove. She took out the carrots, eggs and coffee and placed them in three separate bowls.

"Feel the carrots," she told Alice. She did and noted that they were soft. Next, Alice's mother asked her to break an egg. She couldn't, as the egg was hard. Finally, her mother asked her to sip the coffee. Alice smiled as she tasted its rich flavour. She asked, "What does this mean, mother?"

Alice's mother explained that each of the objects had faced the same adversity: boiling water. However, each had reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting, but after being subjected to boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile and its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. However, after being immersed in boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans reacted differently. After these were mixed with boiling water, an aromatic and flavourful drink was produced.

"Which are you?" Alice's mother asked her. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?"

Think of this: Which are you?

Are you a carrot that starts out strong but is weakened by pain and adversity?

Are you an egg that begins softly but hardens after landing in hot water?

Or are you a coffee bean, transforming into something better when faced with a challenge?



*When the hour is darkest and trials are at their greatest, do you elevate yourself to another level? How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?*

If you are like the coffee beans, when things are at their worst, you will improve yourself and even change the situation around you for the better. When the hour is darkest and trials are at their greatest, do you elevate yourself to another level? How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean? **TCX**

**Adapted from:** Sullivan, M. (2009). Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean? *HelpOthers.org*. Retrieved June 14, 2010, from <http://www.helpothers.org>





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