

## **Examining the gender identity of language teachers using a masculinity-femininity scale: A case from Iran**

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The present study pursued two goals: first, to construct and validate a masculinity/femininity scale (MFS); and second, to reveal and compare the dominant gender identity of English, Arabic, and Persian teachers. Regarding the first goal, a 30-item gender identity scale was designed and, using the data collected from 300 junior high school students, its construct validity was substantiated through Structural Equation Modeling. As for the second goal, an additional 623 students rated their 130 teachers. The whole data was then analysed using Chi-square testing. The findings were indicative of the dominant femininity of English teachers and masculinity of Arabic and Persian teachers. Also, based on the results, English teachers were found to be more feminine and less masculine than Arabic and Persian teachers. Finally, statistical results were discussed, and implications were provided for language teaching in the formal context of education.

### **Introduction**

Acknowledging the quality of teachers as the most important resource in educational systems (Ingvarson, Elliott, Kleinhenz & McKenzie, 2006) and the strongest predictor of students' learning (Galluzzo, 2005), researchers have been paying more attention to factors shaping that quality. These factors undoubtedly transcend the teacher's knowledge of and competence in the subject matter being taught. In the field of second/foreign language teaching, in particular, the bulk of studies examining teacher effectiveness (e.g., Black & Howard-Jones, 2000; Covino & Invanicki, 1996; Cheung, Cheng & Pang, 2008) have contributed to opening up various new horizons for teacher education, each emphasising distinct factors associated with teacher success. Some such influential factors are English language teacher multiple intelligences (Pishghadam & Moafian, 2008), emotional intelligence (Hashemi, 2008), the use of NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming) techniques (Pishghadam, Shayesteh, & Shapoori, 2011), competency (Pishghadam & Khosropanah, 2011), personality traits (Pishghadam, Baghaei & Shahriari, 2011), self-efficacy (Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011), narrative intelligence (Pishghadam, Golparvar & Khajavy, 2013), and stroke analysis (Irajzad, 2015; Pishghadam & Khajavy, 2014).

In the same vein, another factor which may impact the quality of teachers and hence make a contribution to a more efficient teacher education is the concept of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as gender identity, this concept forms one of the most basic and powerful components of personality (Bem, 1974) and is defined as the self-perception of maleness and femaleness given what it means to be a man or a woman in society (Stets & Burke, 2000). The common trend found among different societies considers men to be assertive, tough, and competitive and women to be modest, caring, and cooperative

(Hofstede, 1980). As for educational settings, it seems that teachers who are more corrective and concerned with the excellence of the students and foster competition in the class are regarded as masculine teachers, whereas those who are more permissive, promote cooperation and social skills, and value rapport with students are regarded as feminine ones. Examining this feature of teachers with respect to the subject matter they teach can lead to insightful educational implications. With regard to the potential of this concept in enriching teacher education especially for language teachers, this paper seeks first to construct a masculinity/femininity scale (MFS) for teachers and next to reveal the gender identity of language teachers as perceived by students.

## Theoretical background

### Masculinity and femininity

Gender identity, or one's sense of masculinity and femininity, refers to the person's perception of his/her own degree of maleness and femaleness regardless of his/her biological sex (Bem, 1974). Two points are worthy of attention regarding gender identity.

First, there is no theoretically straight-forward way to distinguish between typical male and female behaviours (Sternberg, 1993). In other words, rather than being innate or a function of biological differences, masculinity and femininity result from social and cultural conditions and are formed through gender role socialisation beginning in the family and continuing through religious and educational institutions, mass media, and peer networks (Katz, 1986; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Sifuna, Chege, & Oanda, 2006; Stromquist, 2007). This issue was first addressed by the anthropologist Margaret Mead in *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies* (1935). This early study illustrated that the self-meanings regarding one's gender are shaped by the cultural expectations held for each sex, and needless to say, these expectations differ from one society to other. In spite of the great deal of varieties across cultures on this issue, some universals can be found. Generally speaking, males tend to be more aggressive, dominant, active, competitive, and instrumental, whereas females are more likely to be warm, submissive, passive, cooperative, and expressive (Persson, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000). Seemingly, such stereotypical self-perceptions are less common among men and women in more socially and economically developed countries (Williams & Best, 1989).

The second point is that, contrary to the traditional view, gender identity is not restricted to a dichotomy. Constantinople (1973) was the pioneer in challenging the mutually exclusive view of gender. She argued that rather than representing two opposite ends of a single scale, masculinity and femininity are in fact two distinct dimensions on which individuals could be measured. That is, a person could, at the same time, be high or low in both masculinity and femininity. Such a two-dimensional concept of gender resulted in the coinage of the term androgyny (from 'andro' meaning male, and 'gyn' referring to female) by Bem (1974) to encompass the gender identity of those who possess both masculine and feminine qualities, depending on which behaviours best suit a particular situation. In addition, while the common view labelled those who did not fit within the

masculine-feminine divide as deviant and ostracised (Chege & Sifuna, 2006), Bem (1974) boldly presented androgyny as an advantage due to offering greater behavioural flexibility.

This debate over the single or two dimensional view of gender identity was also embraced by Geert Hofstede (1980), one of the key figures in intercultural studies, who presented masculinity/femininity as one of the dimensions constituting his four-dimensional cultural model. Hofstede used the term masculinity to capture certain propensities like the degree to which dominant values in a society tend to be assertive, competitive, ego-oriented, tough, aggressive, and non-emotional. He also used the term feminine for cultures whose dominant values were modest, nurturing, passive, emotional, submissive, cooperative, and receptive. Regarding the question of whether masculinity/femininity is one dimension or two, he argued that an individual can be both masculine and feminine at the same time; however, a country culture is usually predominantly one or the other.

### **Masculinity and femininity in teaching**

Teaching has traditionally been viewed as a combination of masculine and feminine qualities (Hedlin, 2013). It embraces the stereotypical masculinity of an intellectual work along with the stereotypical femininity of a nurturing role. Some other common features rendering gender identity to this profession could be the age of the learners involved (children vs. adults) and the subject matter being taught (hard sciences vs. social sciences).

Hofstede et al. (2010) discussed important manifestations of femininity and masculinity in teaching and education. According to them, feminine teachers tend to be more tender, modest, and caring, and put a higher premium on their relationship with the students through building rapport with them. That is, teachers' friendliness and social skills are appreciated in feminine education. In the same vein, students' social adaptation is emphasised through utilising methods that foster solidarity and cooperation among students. Moreover, this type of education is permissive in the sense that mistakes are generally treated as an integral part of learning, there is not just one right answer and relativism has a special place, the average student is considered the norm, and teachers will rather praise weaker students to encourage them. In masculine education, on the other hand, teachers are more likely to be tough, assertive, and ego-oriented. The characteristic that is most admired in a teacher is his or her brilliance and academic reputation. Masculine teachers tend to promote a competitive atmosphere in the class in which students' academic performance and excellence is stressed. Finally, masculine education is corrective, meaning that accuracy is highly valued in it, there is only one right answer, and the best student is considered the norm and is commonly praised.

There is ample empirical literature investigating gender identity in the educational context. A cursory look into this body of research reveals such major themes as gendered curriculum, i.e. associating different subject matters with femininity and masculinity (e.g., Francis, 2000; Chapman, 2000; Paechter, 2001), the role of educational institutions in gender role socialisation (Bigler, Hayes & Hamilton, 2013; Kangethe, Lyria & Nyamanga, 2014; Stromquist, 2007), gender stereotyping in subject choices and educational opportunities (Favara, 2012; Killgore & Yurgelun-Todd, 2004; Kimura, 2000), the

relationship between gender identity and academic performance (e.g. Marrs, Sigler & Brammer, 2012; Paver & Gammie, 2005; Wheelless & Potorti, 1989), and the impact of gender orientation on reading and writing motivations (Pajares & Valiante, 2001; McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson & Wright, 2012).

Nevertheless, this rich literature has seemingly ignored a promising research area, namely, teachers' gender identity. That is, researchers have hardly ever probed into the perceived notions and implications of masculinity and femininity associated with teachers and many scholars have criticised teacher education for failing to bridge this gap yet (Åberg, 2008; Braun, 2011; Meyenn & Parker, 2001; Younger & Warrington, 2008; Weiner, 2005).

Investigation of this issue for language teachers could be of particular significance in the Iranian educational context. In this country, there are three languages taught in the formal system of education: Persian, as the formal and the native language of the country; Arabic, as the language of religion (Islam); and English, as the language of international communication. The distinct and somehow divergent role of each in the curriculum has prompted researchers to compare corresponding teachers in different respects including status (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2014) and stroke (Irajzad, 2015). The former study revealed that English teachers had the highest status among language teachers in the students' perception and the latter showed that English teachers got the second rank, after Arabic teachers, in providing students with strokes (namely, every action to acknowledge other's presence; Berne, 1988). In the same vein and with regard to the paucity of research on teachers' gender identity, the present study aims to construct a MFS for teachers and investigate the masculinity and femininity of the teachers of these three languages as perceived by the students.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study was conducted with 923 junior high school students who rated their language teachers in three cities in Iran (Mashhad, Yazd, and Gonabad). They were 522 girls and 401 boys aged 12 to 15 with different Grade Point Average levels. The 130 teachers who were rated by our participants included 58 men and 72 women aged between 20 to 50 years ( $M=25$ ) with a range of between 2 to 27 ( $M=12.5$ ) years of teaching experience and who taught one of the three languages English, Arabic, and Persian. In the Iranian school system these are the only languages included in the curriculum. Furthermore, in order for the data to be as representative as possible, it was collected from three educational districts representing low, middle and high social classes.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument applied in the present study was the MFS constructed and validated by the researchers. Like the two most used inventories in gender identity research, namely the *Bem Sex Role Inventory* (BSRI, Bem, 1974) and the *Personal Attributes Questionnaire* (PAQ, Spence & Helmreich, 1978), MFS was designed to measure masculinity and femininity on

separate independent dimensions. Unlike the two, however, it was designed as an emic scale (i.e. a scale developed for the study of a particular culture, usually from within, and by the members of the culture; Berry, 1969, as cited in Keith, 2011) for the Persian culture and included attributes particularly appropriate for the educational context.

The scale included 30 adjectives pertaining to the three components of gender identity, i.e. masculinity, femininity, and androgyny (10 to each), to be marked for the teachers of the three languages, Persian, Arabic and English. The scale was in Persian, the mother tongue of the participants (See Appendix for the English translation). Masculinity was represented by adjectives such as kind, intelligent, friendly, etc.; Androgyny by open-minded, high-class, well-dressed, etc.; and Femininity by knowledgeable, well-educated, consultable, etc.

Three reasons prompted the researchers to construct the scale rather than simply using the most known scale on gender identity, i.e. the BSRI (Bem, 1974). Firstly, it is evident that understanding of gender identity and behaviour is not the same across different cultures (Persson, 1999). Hence, the results obtained by the BSRI, which has been originally developed for the American culture, might not be as valid for a culture such as the Persian. Secondly, as this research was to be conducted in the educational context and on school students, the instrument needed to include the psychometric properties which are acceptable for this context, hold true for teachers, and are at the same time easily intelligible for students. Thirdly, the format of the BSRI (consisting of 60 adjectives to be numbered on a scale from 1 to 7) did not suit the target participants of this study.

## **Procedure**

The data collection took place in the last months of school year 2015. It took an average of 10 minutes for each person to complete the scale. Before starting to answer, and in order to unveil what they truly thought of their teachers, the students were assured that their answers were confidential and that none of the school staff would get to see them. The instruction asked the students to mark the adjectives that were more prominent for each teacher. There was no limitation in marking so that students could mark all or none of the adjectives for each teacher.

In the process of collecting the data, first, the designed MFS was subject to pilot-testing in order to disambiguate the items and ensure the content validity of the scale. Next, the revised version of the scale was administered to 300 participants and the data was used to substantiate the construct validity of the scale. Finally, an additional 623 students completed the MFS.

The data analysis entailed two phases. In the first phase, structural equation modeling (SEM) via *AMOS* version 18 was utilised to substantiate the construct validity of the MFS. Next, the internal consistency of the whole scale as well as the reliability of each factor constructing the validated scale was assessed using the Cronbach alpha reliability estimate. In the second phase, Chi-square (using *SPSS* version 19) was employed to see whether the differences between the gender identities of the teachers were significant.

## Results

### Validation

Based on Bem's (1974) theory of gender identity, a three-factor model of MF scale with 30 items was specified (Figure 1). To confirm the factor structure of the proposed model, SEM was utilised. Compared to the other multivariate procedures, SEM is a powerful technique which takes a confirmatory rather than an exploratory approach to data analysis consequently allowing hypothesis testing (Byrne, 2001; Kline, 2011).

The goodness of fit measures in AMOS were used to examine the viability of the hypothesised model for the CDS. Chi-square/degree of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were the goodness of fit indices utilised in this study. To have an acceptable fit model,  $\chi^2/df$  should be less than 3, AGFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI should be above .90, and RMSEA should be less than .08 (MacCallum, Browne & Sugawara, 1996). Results of the CFA indicated that all the goodness-of-fit indices were above the cutoff points (see Table 4). Therefore, the CFA confirmed the factor structure of CDS. The Cronbach alpha estimated the reliability of all the items as .92. All of the three factors yielded good reliability estimates ranging from .88 to .91. None of the items were removed after examining the outcome of the factor rotation.

Table 1: Goodness of fit indices

Fit index	$\chi^2/df$	AGFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable range	< 3	> 90				< 0.08
	2.47	0.97	0.90	0.93	0.94	0.05

### Comparison of language teachers

As for the second phase of the analysis, the results of the MFS were examined to reveal first, the dominant gender identity in each language teacher, next, the possible differences between the three language teachers in each of the three types of gender identity, and finally, the relative importance of each language teacher in students' eyes. To do so, a number of Chi-square tests were run on the data.

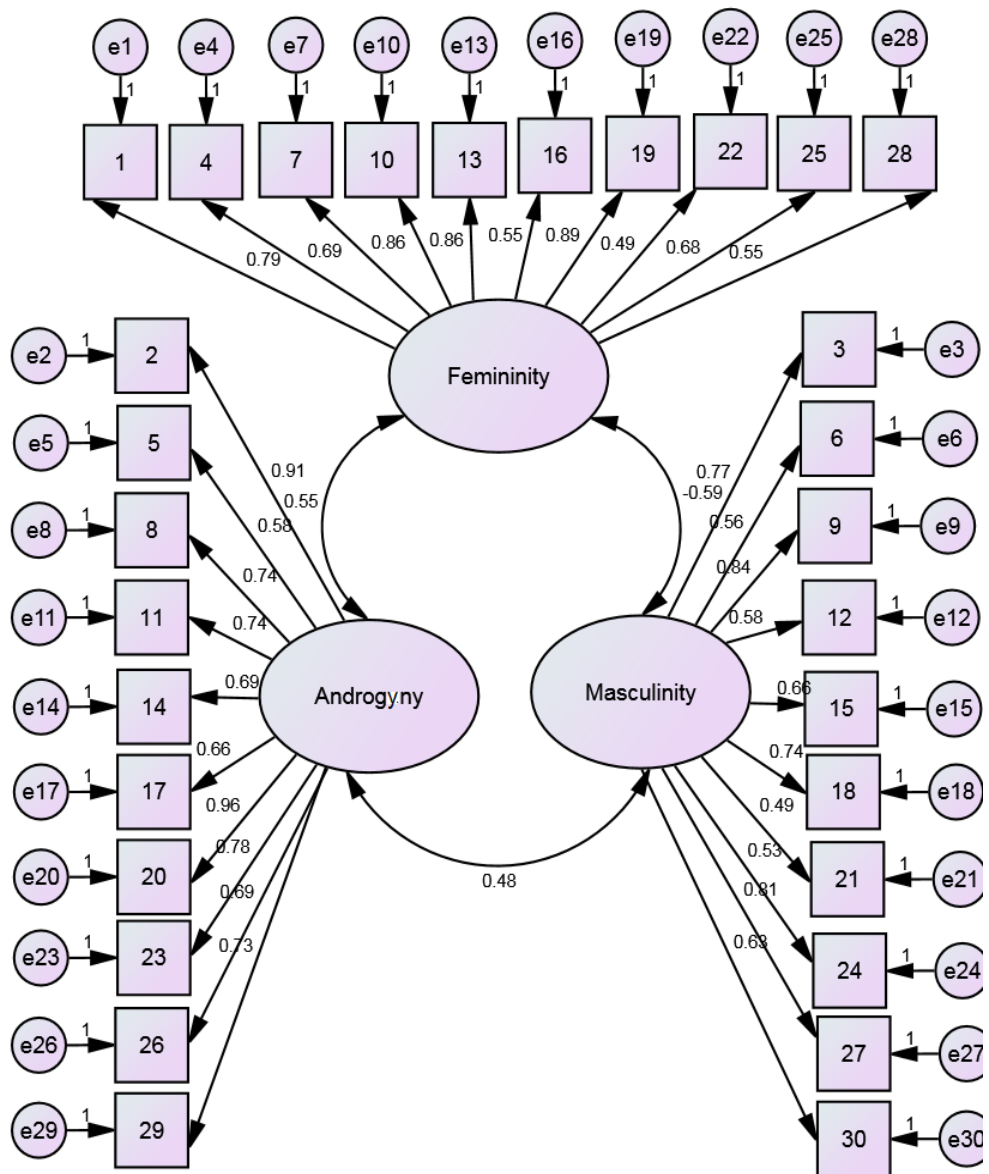


Figure 1: The result of the SEM

Table 2: The dominant gender identity of each language teacher

	English		Arabic		Persian	
	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N
Masculinity	2687	2800.7	3019	2684.3	2797	2670.0
Androgyny	2757	2800.7	2599	2684.3	2614	2670.0
Femininity	2958	2800.7	2435	2684.3	2599	2670.0
Chi-square	14.133		67.596		9.103	
Asymp. Sig.	.001		.000		.011	

Table 2 indicates the dominant factor in each teacher. While there was no significant difference between English teachers' masculinity and androgyny, the difference between these two and their femininity turned out to be significant. In other words, students considered English teachers to be significantly ( $\chi^2=14.133$ ,  $p<.05$ ) more feminine than masculine or androgynous (Femininity > Masculinity / Androgyny).

Arabic teachers, in contrast, turned out to have dominant masculinity. That is, the significant difference occurred between masculinity and the combination of androgyny and femininity. They were accordingly perceived by the students to be significantly ( $\chi^2=67.596$ ,  $p<.05$ ) more masculine than feminine or androgynous (Masculinity > Androgyny / Femininity).

For Persian teachers, the dominant factor was again found to be masculinity. As Table 2 suggests, the difference between femininity and androgyny was not significant but there was a significant difference between these two and masculinity. Hence, similar to Arabic teachers, Persian teachers were significantly ( $\chi^2=9.103$ ,  $p<.05$ ) considered to be more masculine than androgynous or feminine (Masculinity > Androgyny / Femininity).

Table 3: Comparing the three language teachers in each type of gender identity

	Masculinity		Androgyny		Femininity	
	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N
English	2687	2834.3	2757	2656.7	2958	2664.0
Arabic	3019	2834.3	2599	2656.7	2435	2664.0
Persian	2797	2834.3	2614	2656.7	2599	2664.0
Chi-square	20.182		5.726		53.595	
Asymp. Sig.	.000		.057		.000	

As for the second line of analysis, namely, the comparison of the language teachers in each factor, Table 3 shows the results of the Chi-square test for Masculinity as the first factor. Based on the table, a significant difference existed between the three teachers in this factor ( $\chi^2=20.182$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Moreover, Arabic and Persian teachers were found to be the more masculine than English teachers (Arabic / Persian > English).



Regarding androgyny, however, the results presented in this table revealed no significant difference ( $\chi^2=5.726$ ,  $p>.05$ ) between the three groups (English / Arabic / Persian).

With respect to femininity, as the third factor, the difference between English teachers and the other two groups turned out to be significant ( $\chi^2=53.595$ ,  $p<.05$ ). It follows that, English teachers were, in students' eyes, significantly more feminine than Arabic or Persian teachers (English > Arabic / Persian).

Table 4: Results of the Chi-square test for the total numbers

	Masculinity	
	Observed N	Expected N
English	8402	8155.0
Arabic	8053	8155.0
Persian	8010	8155.0
Chi-square	11.335	
Asymp. Sig.	.003	

Finally, Table 4 illustrates the results of the overall evaluation of the teachers – all three factors combined – by the students. Once more, the results suggested a significant difference between the English teachers and the other two groups of teachers ( $\chi^2=11.335$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Simply put, English teachers received significantly more attention from the students as compared with Arabic and Persian teachers (English > Arabic / Persian).

## Discussion

This study had two goals: first, to construct and validate a masculinity/femininity scale for measuring the gender identity of teachers; and next, to reveal the masculinity and femininity of teachers of three languages (English, Arabic, and Persian) from the point of view of the students.

With respect to the first goal, a three-factor model of MFS with 30 items was designed based on Bem's (1974) theory of gender identity. SEM was applied to substantiate the construct validity and reliability of the scale in the context of Iranian schools. The results of the goodness-of-fit indices showed a sufficient fit to the data confirming the factor structure of MFS. On such grounds, it can be claimed that MFS can be considered as an efficient scale for measuring the gender identity of Iranian teachers.

Regarding the second goal, the results of the Chi-square tests denoted the femininity of the English teachers and masculinity of the Arabic and Persian teachers in the students' perceptions. These results were also indicative of the higher femininity and lower masculinity of the English teachers as compared to the Arabic and Persian teachers.

There are some lines of explanation for these findings. First off, an overview of the English teaching practice in Iran would highlight the prevalence of communicative

methods in English classes with a premium on teacher's rapport and relationship with, and care for learners (Pishghadam, 2011). The activities common in these classes such as pairing or group work, and discussions in which learners get to express themselves freely, foster social skills and underscore fluency at the expense of accuracy (Pishghadam, Zabihi, & Shayesth, 2013). Clearly, all these features accord with a feminine role's permissiveness, solidarity, and emphasis on the relationship with others.

Secondly, Arabic has a distinct status in this country; it is taught as the language of the religion. With an eye toward the acknowledged masculinity of the religion it represents, i.e. Islam and of the culture it is interwoven with (Hofstede, 1980), it would not be surprising to infer the masculinity of the language itself. This can be further justified by the corrective mood prevalent in Arabic classes in Iranian schools (Irajzad, 2015). Some other masculine features common in these classes include strict teachers' emphasis on accuracy and the existence of just one right answer.

As for the Persian classes, it should be remembered that, unlike the previous two, language is not taught in its totality in these classes. This is because Persian is the mother tongue of the students and they already know it well. But what is actually taught is some newly coined vocabularies to replace 'loan' vocabularies and, more importantly, prescriptive grammar to promote the 'correct' way of speaking. The high stress on the accuracy is in part due to the fact that the Persian language represents and enhances the national identity of the students. This issue is of particular importance with regard to these students' belief in the superiority of English over Persian and Arabic and their more powerful western identities compared with their national and religious identities (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2014). Hence, considering the close link between language learning and identity construction (Norton, 2000), and in order to enhance national identity and resist western linguistic imperialism, Persian teachers are obliged to put a high premium on the instruction and use of the correct grammar and purely Persian words in these classes. Not surprisingly, then, this prescriptive approach comes along with masculinity.

Still another noteworthy point indicated by the results was that, in the students' perception, the teachers were either masculine or feminine and none was found to be androgynous. Nor was there any significant difference among the teachers in their androgyny. This finding could allude to the persistence of the dichotomous view of gender among these students. This could in turn result from the prevalence of a non-relative (black and white) view among Iranian students (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011) endorsing, in part, Pishghadam and Mirzaee's (2009) claim that Iran's educational system still lives in the modernist era.

Also, the last finding of this study revealed that students have paid greater attention in evaluating their English teachers than their Arabic and Persian teachers. This could imply the greater importance attached to the English language than to the Arabic and Persian languages from the point of view of the students. This is in line with Pishghadam and Saboori (2014) illustrating that English teachers have a higher status than Persian and Arabic teachers in the students' perception.

All in all, our findings seem to contradict Bense (2014) in which the first part of the title is *Languages aren't as important here*, where 'here' is Australia. While Bense indicates that, from a German teachers' perspective, languages and language education are undervalued in the Australian context, this paper illustrates the unique significance of each language taught in the Iranian context with regard to its gender identity. This could, in turn, imply the role and contribution of a cultural context in highlighting languages.

To conclude, the present study revealed and compared the dominant gender identity of English, Arabic, and Persian school teachers. This can be affected in part by the teachers' idiosyncrasies but more importantly by the subject matter and the approach taken in teaching it. Accordingly, the findings can contribute to the current literature on teacher education. Furthermore, these findings should be infused in teacher pre- and in-service training courses which address the practical needs of language teachers. It may be beneficial to raise their awareness of the dominant gender identities and their manifestations and implications in teaching languages. Moreover, putting this information in access for applicants to language teacher preparation programs and for those who recruit teachers may help attract, in the first place, candidates who possess the corresponding gender identity.

The other attainment of this study was the construction of the MFS for the measurement of teachers' gender identity. To our best knowledge, this is the first gender identity scale specifically designed for an educational context and appropriate for the Persian culture. Future research can utilise this scale in exploring the masculinity and femininity of teachers of other subjects at different levels of education. This scale can also be utilised in comparing the dominant gender identity of language teachers in the formal and informal contexts of education. Moreover, further research could enrich teacher education by examining the relationship between teachers' gender identity and their efficacy. Finally, in order to conduct a more comprehensive examination of teachers' gender identity, other methods such as interview and observation should also be employed. Finally, this study was confined to measuring and comparing the gender identity of the language teachers. Future studies are recommended to delve into each type of gender identity (masculinity, femininity, and androgyny) separately, investigating its significant manifestations and implications for the context of language education.

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**Appendix: English translation of the masculinity-femininity scale**

	Teacher	English	Arabic	Persian
1	Kind			
2	Happy			
3	Strict			
4	Good-tempered			
5	Honest			
6	Harsh			
7	Emotional			
8	Active			
9	Bad-tempered			
10	Soft-spoken			
11	Likeable			
12	Self-confident			
13	Sympathetic			
14	Unpredictable			
15	Daring			
16	Friendly			
17	Unsystematic			
18	Athletic			
19	Sensitive			
20	Secretive			
21	Reasonable			
22	Timid			
23	Reliable			
24	Direct			
25	Shy			
26	Funny			
27	Assertive			
28	Patient			
29	Passive			
30	Masterful			

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