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Women Share and Men Compete: Instructors’ Perception of Differences in Teaching and Learning Technical Subject Areas

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Introduction

Over the years, expectations of employers have changed. New graduates are expected to arm themselves with extensive computer/technology skills and abilities to understand and manage business machinery such as accessing the Internet, conference calling or broadcast faxing. Some training may be provided to improve basic computer “survival” skills.

In the Malaysian workforce, there is a major concentration of women in administration and clerical segments—two areas where computer use continues to grow (Ministry of Women, Family and Development, 2003). An examination of enrolment in part-time computer courses/subjects reveals concentrations of women and men in certain technical subject areas (Bil). Where there is no clear gender trend, there lies an opportunity to investigate whether there is a difference in how men and women learn computer skills.

Teaching in Adult Learning Situations

Shulman and Grossman (1994) first defined “Pedagogical Content Knowledge” as the way in which knowledge about teaching is intricately connected to the content being taught. In their study, they divided this into four areas: what content is most important to know (focus on subject matter), students’ prior knowledge and misunderstandings (focus on students), the order in which to present the subject matter (focus on curriculum), and useful instructional strategies (focus on pedagogy). They reported that some of the actions that helped students overcome difficulties included practice, reading materials before and after class, coming up with examples, listening rather than taking notes, and doing homework problems. However, the issue of gender differences was not addressed.
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