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## **Women in Computer Science: No Shortage Here!**

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The author obtained a bachelor degree in Computer Science from a university in Malaysia and later read for postgraduate degrees in the UK. While studying in UK, we could not help noticing that female students were outnumbered by male students, unlike in Malaysia. At first, this observation did not concern us much until we learnt from friends that, generally, females are not interested to pursue a degree in computer science. This was, to us, very odd for when we were reading for a BSc in Computer Science in Malaysia, 2/3 of the class were females.

A literature survey led us to articles, most of which are based on studies carried out in Europe and USA, discussing why Computer Science is not attractive to young females. Kvande and Ramussen [1] found that women choose not to continue with computer subjects as often as men do. Pearl et al [2] quoted studies that show that women in computer science programs in U.S. universities terminate their training earlier than men do. In Australia, less women are employed as IT professionals and it is estimated that the ratio of female to male in IT is 1:9 [3]. Camp [4] states that the ratio of women involved in computer science from high school to graduate school has been dwindling at a startling pace over the last decade. She pointed out that as women progress from high school to graduate school, they become of a smaller and smaller proportion of students. The percentage of bachelor degree awarded in computer science to women has consistently decreased. Even though more women are awarded bachelor degrees, and even though the percentages of bachelor degrees awarded to women in disciplines similar to CS increased, the percentage of bachelor degrees awarded in CS to women decreased.

Generally, the studies found that young females perceive Computer Science as a masculine field – a perception that we feel is not shared by their Malaysian counterpart. This study is our attempt to determine if there is indeed a difference in the way that Malaysian males and females perceive Computer Science. Our hypothesis is that Computer Science is not perceived as a masculine field by young Malaysians, and this is why we do not encounter the problem of too few young females interested in reading for a degree in Computer Science or Information Technology.

We have distributed about 250 questionnaires to undergraduate students reading for a bachelor degree in computer science and information technology at University of Malaya and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Our preliminary findings support our hypothesis that, unlike in the West, young Malaysians do not perceive computer science or IT as a masculine field. We also found that the academic performance of female students are at least comparable to their male counterpart. At the moment, data analysis on the data gathered are being carried out.

### **References**

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