

GENDER IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Rahmi Rahmi

Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh

rahmi.zakaria@ar-raniry.ac.id

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the gender issue in English language teaching. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. All relevant information on occurrences or situations that align with the study's theme was collected. The information was gathered by reading and assessing books, journal articles, and student theses on gender concepts and gender in language and English Language Teaching. Three key points are shown by the study's findings. It first highlights the concept of gender. Second, it emphasizes how gender affects language use. Third, it discusses the gender-related subjects that scholars in the field of English Language Teaching have explored.

Keywords: *Gender; Language Use; English Language Teaching*

Introduction

In any community, gender is a significant dividing line. Humans place a great deal of importance on it. It has profound effects on a person, whether they are born male or female. It has an impact on both how we behave in public and how others view us. This covers both the language we employ and the language directed at us (Talbot, 2019). Gender and sex are sometimes used synonymously. Sex and gender are actually distinct concepts. According to Becker, McClellan, and Reed (2017, p. 136), sex is defined as “the characterization of an individual as female or male based on biological and morphological features,” while gender refers to “a system of social organization with a set of behavioral prescriptions that are believed to follow from biological sex characteristics.” LaFrance et al. (2004) noted that “authors who emphasize biological factors tend to use the term sex more frequently than gender, while authors who emphasize social factors and explanations tend to use gender more frequently than sex” (p. 335).

According to Mahmud (2010), one of the intriguing occurrences in modern society is the construction of gender differences through social and cultural factors. Their effects are not limited to the political sphere, where women struggle for their political rights, or the domestic sphere, where women seek to lessen domestic abuse. In fact, there is also discourse on gender variations in language use, emphasizing that men and women should be treated differently because of the differences in their communication styles.

Language is a tool for both reflecting and challenging the social roles of both men and women. Gender, social class, age, ethnicity, education, and other characteristics all contribute to social class, which is one of the elements that affects how people speak. Despite being viewed as a neutral tool for communication, language is a means of communicating a variety of attitudes, values, and norms. As a result, it is predictable that language plays a significant part in preserving or even creating the attitudes and values of a society (Amerian & Esmaili, 2015). The phrase "language and gender" refers to the interaction between male and female languages. Gender differences are reflected in both men's and women's speeches, as well as in how they live their lives and how they view the world (Gu, 2013).

Although some humanities disciplines broaden and deepen the understanding of gender issues, the field of English language teaching has been slow to incorporate diversity and gender issues into instruction in general, despite the fact that it has produced nearly 30 different approaches to teaching English since the 1960s (Thornbury, 2017). In the field of English language teaching in particular, Mahmud and Nur (2018) argue that gender issues must be addressed since men and women learn differently. For instance, gender disparities influence how learners choose their learning strategies. In order to underline the significance of gender in English language teaching, this article concentrates on discussing gender in relation to language teaching; it explores how gender is understood and what issues have been examined.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The purpose of descriptive research is to gather all relevant data on occurrences or circumstances in relation to the research issue. The process of collecting data sources involved creating a framework for the study topic and classifying all of the information gathered from books or the internet. Secondary data from a variety of books and journals articles were employed in this study. These sources of data were gathered and subsequently analyzed (Safina & Nugroho, 2023).

Findings and Discussions

Understanding Gender

Gender itself is a concept beyond its literally biological differences that a male and a female possess (Männynsalo, 2008, p. 7). It is believed that gender is a social construct. The relationships between men and women, both perceptual and material, are described as "gender" by FAO (1997). Sexual traits of either women or men do not determine gender naturally; rather, gender is established socially. Different societies construct gender and the meaning of the term in different ways. Due to societal growth and political implementation, gender perceptions may also evolve over time (Stock, 2013). Women and men are "socially defined" according to gender roles. They differ among various classes, ages, societies, and cultures, as well as during the course of history. Household structure, resource availability, special effects of the global economy, and other locally pertinent elements like ecological circumstances frequently influence the roles and obligations that are specific to gender (FAO, 1997).

Men are typically thought of and expected to be agentic (i.e., dominant, aggressive, and goal-oriented), whereas women are typically thought of and expected to be communal (i.e., warm, friendly, and other-oriented); the behaviors that are thought to be proper for each gender to exhibit are determined by these dispositional ascriptions. Furthermore, what is viewed as appropriate behavior for one gender is viewed as unacceptable for the other. For instance, men are expected to appear self-assured and proud of their successes, while women are expected to appear modest and downplay their own strengths and accomplishments. When an individual deviates from these socially accepted norms, they are likely to experience a variety of unfavorable consequences (Wilmuth, 2016).

From a structural and/or institutional standpoint, gender has also been commonly defined. In this context, gender is typically viewed as a collection of macro-level arrangements that favor men and disadvantage women (McCall, 2001). It is believed that gender plays a role in the inequality that exists between men and women. These perspectives aim to explain the widespread and enduring superiority of masculinity and inferiority of femininity by examining how gender, as a structural arrangement and individual reality,

creates a gender hierarchy in the majority of social contexts, if not all of them (England, 2010).

Language and Gender

Gender, as used in linguistics, refers to the grammatical categories that index sex in human language structures. Some terms are used in a language to directly represent men and women, including grammatical gender, lexical gender, referential gender, and social gender. There are three gender classes in certain languages, such as feminine, masculine, and neuter. An article, adjective, verb, numeral, or preposition might follow a noun depending on its grammatical gender, which is a fundamental aspect of the word. In the English language, for instance, the pronoun of an animal can be altered to "he or she," as in person's pronoun, when the sex of the animal is known, even though it is commonly referred to as "it". Lexical gender is a key factor in determining the form of terminology, address terms, and certain personal pronouns in all languages. For example, in Bahasa, "bibi and ibu" are used to refer to mother and aunt, respectively; they are comparable to "paman and bapak," where the former denotes father and the latter, uncle (Hellinger & Bussmann, 2001; Rahmi, 2015).

Furthermore, the language terms used to describe non-linguistic reality might be regarded as referential gender. It means that when idiomatic expressions are used, a word might change its core purpose grammatically and lexically to be feminine, masculine, or neuter. The pronoun "he" is frequently used in English to refer to ambiguous third-person singular. For instance, an Indonesian can spend many hours riding a motorcycle. Additionally, the social division between masculine and feminine roles and characteristics is known as social gender. When there is no distinction between feminine and masculine terms when analyzed grammatically or lexically, it indicates that personal nouns are produced specially socially. For instance, the male-specific pronoun "he" is typically used in English to refer to a number of higher-status occupational titles, such as lawyer, surgeon, or scientist. Conversely, low-status job titles like secretary, nurse, or teacher are referred to with the female-specific pronoun "she" (Hellinger & Bussmann, 2001; Rahmi, 2015).

Gender and language are closely related, although they are two separate ideas. Social positions have an impact on how men and women use language. Weatherall (2002) states that gender has an impact on linguistic variety, which encompasses vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication style. For example, Weatherall (2002) notes that while most men dislike color adjectives like lavender, khaki, turquoise, violet, and fuchsia, women

enjoy them. She further claims that while men very rarely use the words "darling", "charming", "*fantastic*", "*gorgeous*", and "*sweet*", women routinely do.

According to Gu (2013), Robin Lakoff pioneered the study of gender differences in the field of linguistics. Lakoff highlights a number of characteristics of female language:

- **Specialized vocabulary**
Women frequently prefer to use more specific color adjectives, such as mauve, yellow, azure, beige, and lavender, in comparison to men.
- **Milder expletives**
When using expletives, women tend to do it in a more subdued manner than men do.
- **Empty adjectives**
When expressing their emotions, females frequently utilize adjectives like charming, divine, and cute.
- **Tag questions**
Although both men and women utilize tag questions in specific situations, women use tag questions specifically to communicate their thoughts. In other words, even when they are certain of what they want to say, tag questions are their preferred method of speaking. They do this to demonstrate their desire to be noticed by others.
- **Intonation**
Even in declarative sentences, females favor a rising tone; thus, this reveals their doubt and indecision.
- **Superpolite forms**
Compared to men, women are more courteous. They frequently communicate more subtly than others.
- **Hypercorrect grammar**
In terms of both grammar and pronunciation, females typically speak in a formal way.
- **Joke-telling and humor**
Female speech lacks comedy; they use less humor than men. Humor-creating and humor-understanding skills are inherently poor in females (Gu, 2013).

In addition to verbal communication, women and men differ in nonverbal communication. The use of nonverbal communication, including eye contact, gestures, smiles, personal space, touch, and the interpretation of nonverbal cues, was examined in one study by Griffin et al. (1999), which discovered that 67.5 percent of females make more eye contact than men do; females often utilize more gestures and grin more frequently than males do (75.5% vs. 83.7%, respectively). This finding demonstrates that women feel more at ease communicating sensitively using nonverbal means than spoken means (Mahmud, 2010).

According to Mahmud (2010, p. 174), the differences of male and female can also be seen in the following classification:

| Male Style | Female Style |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Focus on information</i> | <i>Focus on relationship</i> |
| <i>Report style of speaking</i> | <i>Rapport style of speaking</i> |
| <i>Goal driven</i> | <i>Process oriented</i> |
| <i>Single-task approach</i> | <i>Multi-task approach</i> |
| <i>Succinct language</i> | <i>Storytelling style of speech</i> |
| <i>Working towards a destination</i> | <i>On a journey</i> |
| <i>Need to know the answers</i> | <i>Want to ask the right questions</i> |

(Adapted from Tymson, 1998, p. 8)

Gender in ELT

In the field of English Language Teaching, researchers have investigated research on gender-related issues. They link gender with students' learning strategies, teachers' perceptions, and textbooks. In terms of students' learning strategies, Mahmud (2010) argues that male and female students talk in English with one another; however, due to the differences in language usage between men and women, this contact may present difficulties. For instance, based on Severiens and Dam's (2005) study on the close association between gender differences and learning styles, men were shown to favor the abstract conceptualization way of learning more frequently than women. Another example is the study by Logan and Johnston (2009), which demonstrates that girls read more frequently, with more understanding, and with a more positive outlook on reading and school. This demonstrates how language usage disparities between male and female learners can have an

impact on learning patterns, as explored in the discourse on language and gender (Mahmud, 2010).

Concerning teachers' perceptions on gender, Wright (2024) examined how EFL male teachers viewed gender imbalance in the field of teaching English and gender roles in their professions. The findings reveal that how their sense of fulfillment and self-worth are impacted by the feminization of the ELT setting, which in turn influences their decision to continue working in the field. EFL student-teachers' gender perspectives were investigated in the Argentinian context (Banegas, Jacovkis, & Romiti, 2019). This study aims to analyze the effects of a gender-focused foreign language teaching module on the education of thirty student-teachers enrolled in an online introductory English language teacher education program in Argentina. The student-teachers felt that the experience helped them grow personally as citizens and as aspiring educators, both in terms of their heightened awareness of gender issues and their capacity to create inspiring language exercises rooted in broader social norms that support diversity and gender equality.

The issue of gender in ELT materials has also attracted scholars. Ariyanto (2018) examined the representation of men and women in the Ministry of National Education's required Indonesian ELT textbook. This result suggests that the textbook's gendered texts and discourses do a poor job of illustrating gender equality. Additionally, the textbooks present gender disparities that are stereotyped. Amerian and Esmaili (2015) investigated how gender was portrayed in an international ELT series. The study showed that the series exhibits both overt and covert forms of sexism; the former uses women as a prop for advertising to increase sales, while the latter discriminates against them in a graphic manner.

Scholars were also interested in the relationship of gender, language, identity, and power in English Language Teaching field. Naz and Asif's (2016) study emphasizes the idea of symbolic capital for identity building for both male and female learners in Pakistani society, where low investment in daughters' education is a result of gender inequality. The results indicate that the female students demonstrated a commitment to developing their identities notwithstanding the modest investment in their daughters' physical capital. Foomani (2024) investigated how female Iranian English teachers' experiences learning and teaching English have influenced their identities. The results challenge accepted discourses by stressing the intricate interactions among language, identity, and social factors. It emphasizes how women's identities are changing, especially in light of recent Iranian feminist upheavals.

Conclusions

Language is an essential tool for communication in human life. When analyzing language use, gender has a significant role. Understanding gender is essential to understanding the speech patterns of men and women. Since the communication styles of male and female students and teachers, as well as their social positions, might affect the teaching and learning process, gender differences should be considered in the subject of English Language Teaching.

References

- Amerian, M., & Esmaili, F. (2015). A brief overview of critical discourse analysis in relation to gender studies in English language textbooks. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(5), 1033.
- Banegas, D. L., Jacovkis, L. G., & Romiti, A. (2020). A gender perspective in initial English language teacher education: An Argentinian experience. *Sexuality & Culture*, 24(1), 1-22.
- Becker, J. B., McClellan, M. L., & Reed, B. G. (2017). Sex differences, gender and addiction. *Journal of neuroscience research*, 95(1-2), 136-147.
- Griffin, M. A., McGahee, D., & Slate, J. (1999). *Gender differences in nonverbal communication*. Valdosta State University.
- England, P. (2010). The gender revolution: Uneven and stalled. *Gender & society*, 24(2), 149-166.
- FAO. (1997). *What is Gender?* Available from <https://www.fao.org/3/y5608e/y5608e01.htm#:~:text=Gender%20is%20defined%20by%20FAO,men%2C%20but%20is%20constructed%2>
- Foomani, E. M. (2024). Language, gender and empowerment: A qualitative study of self-identities of women English teachers in Iran. *Issues in Educational Research*, 34(3), 1016-1032.

- Gu, L. (2013, December). Language and gender: Differences and similarities. In *2013 International Conference on Advances in Social Science, Humanities, and Management (ASSHM-13)* (pp. 247-250). Atlantis Press.
- Hellinger, M., & Bussmann, H. *Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- LaFrance, M., Paluck, E., & Brescol, V. (2004). Sex changes: A current perspective on the psychology of gender. In A. Beall, A. Eagly, & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *The psychology of gender* (2nd ed.). (pp. 328-344). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Logan, S., & Johnston, R. (2009). Gender differences in reading ability and attitudes: Examining where these differences lie. *Journal of research in reading*, 32(2), 199-214.
- Mahmud, M., & Nur, S. (2018). Exploring Students' Learning Strategies and Gender Differences in English Language Teaching. *International Journal of Language Education*, 2(1), 51-64.
- Mahmud, M. (2015). Language and gender in English language teaching. *TEFLIN journal*, 21(2), 172-185.
- Männynsalo, A. (2008). *Gender in the EFL classroom: Differences in the teacher's reactions to boys' and girls' responses*. Finland: University of Jyväskylä.
- McCall, L. (2002). *Complex inequality: Gender, class and race in the new economy*. Routledge.
- Naz, S., & Asif, S. I. (2016). Gender inequality and construction of identity in ELT scenario. *The Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 24(1).
- Rahmi, R. (2015). Gender and language use. *Intelektualita*, 3(1).
- Safina, F., & Nugroho, A. A. (2023). Empowering women for reducing radicalization in Indonesia. *Gender equality: international journal of child and gender studies*, 9(2), 157-170.
- Severiens, S & Dam, G. 2005. 'Speer, S.A. 2002. Sexist Talk: gender Categories, Participant' Orientations and Irony. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 6(3): 347-377.
- Stock, R. (2013). *Africa south of the Sahara : A geographical interpretation* (3rd ed., Texts in regional geography). New York: Guilford Press.
- Talbot, M. (2019). *Language and gender*. Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons.

- Thornbury, S. (2017). *Scott Thornbury's 30 language teaching methods Google EBook: Cambridge handbooks for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tymson, C. 1998. *Gender Games: Doing Business with the Opposite Sex*. Australia: Tymson Communication.
- Weatherall, A. (2002). *Gender, Language and Discourse*, New York: Routledge.
- Wilmuth, C. A. (2016). *Gender differences in professional advancement: The role of goals, perceptions, and behaviors* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Wright, N. (2024). Let's Hear it from Them: An Interview-Based Exploration of Male Teachers' Perceptions of Gender Imbalance in the English Language Teaching Profession. *TESOL Quarterly*,