

Integrating gender awareness into EFL pedagogy: Insights from Indonesia's Islamic universities

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The significance of gender awareness in education has been acknowledged, yet insights into the conceptions of gender awareness among students and lecturers at religiously affiliated higher education institutions remain sparse. To bridge this knowledge gap, the present research adopted a phenomenological approach, investigating the experiences related to English language teaching and learning of 42 students and 18 lecturers at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia, utilising a combination of surveys and written interviews as research methods. Analysis of the survey data indicated a pronounced recognition among participants of the role of gender dynamics within educational settings. Further, thematic examination of interview responses unveiled a unified dedication to creating learning environments that are both inclusive and fair, underlining the critical role of gender equality in the context of English language education. While students called for a curriculum that features inclusive content, language, and resources, lecturers highlighted the necessity of broadening representation, ensuring equality of opportunity, and embedding gender awareness within both professional development endeavours and teaching methodologies. Common across both participant groups was the articulation of the need to remove gender biases and stereotypes from educational content and to weave real-world scenarios into the educational narrative, enhancing the relevance and impact of gender awareness initiatives.

Introduction

The importance of gender awareness across various sectors, including economics (Elson, 1995), healthcare (Standing, 1997), and education (Sikes, 1991), has been well-established, gaining further prominence considering the global push towards achieving the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) (Leal Filho et al., 2023; Morais et al., 2022). Goal 5 of the SDGs explicitly aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, n.d.), underscoring the necessity of gender awareness in advancing social equality and justice. This heightened focus accentuates the role of gender awareness as fundamental in enhancing understanding of how gender norms influence societal structures and contribute to the perpetuation of discrimination and exclusion (Fernandez, 2023). Adopting gender-aware practices facilitates the promotion of diversity, inclusivity, and empowerment, significantly impacting policy development, increasing self-awareness, and aiding in violence prevention.

Within the field of education, the integration of gender perspectives not only nurtures an inclusive atmosphere but also challenges entrenched biases, encourages critical thought, promotes principles of equality, and prepares students to champion equitable causes, which foster a more inclusive and empowering educational framework (Tariq, 2024). In

the specific context of English language teaching and learning, the application of gender awareness is crucial for addressing and dismantling stereotypes present in literature, promoting the critical examination of language and its inherent biases, diversifying educational content, and creating environments that welcome all learners, thus empowering them to actively participate in discussions surrounding gender equality and social justice (Nengyanti et al., 2023; Savitz et al., 2023). In instilling gender awareness in education meaningfully, a cross-sectoral understanding is required in shaping curriculum and pedagogy (Morris et al., 2022; Moharami, 2024).

Despite the considerable attention that previous research has devoted to understanding the impact of gender awareness on educational outcomes (Verdugo-Castro et al., 2022), there remains a notable scarcity of studies focusing on Islamic-based higher education institutions in Indonesia. Our study aims to fill this gap by examining two types of Islamic universities: UIN (*Universitas Islam Negeri/ State Islamic University*) and IAIN (*Institute Agama Islam Negeri/ State Islamic Institute*). UIN offers a broad array of programs across Islamic studies and general disciplines such as science, technology, social sciences, and humanities, striving for a comprehensive educational approach. In contrast, IAIN primarily focuses on Islamic studies, with programs in *sharia*, *dakwah*, *tarbiyah* and *ushuluddin*. These institutions provide a unique context due to their distinct cultural and religious frameworks, presenting an ideal setting for investigating how gender awareness influences pedagogical practices and learner engagement in English language learning. While the influence of gender awareness on educational practices in various non-religious contexts has been extensively documented (Li, 2023; Mercan Küçükakın & Engin-Demir, 2022), its impact within Islamic-based educational settings, particularly concerning English education, is under-explored. This oversight highlights an urgent need for in-depth research that elucidates the conceptions of gender awareness in these distinctive educational environments, particularly in relation to English teaching and learning.

Literature review

Conceptualisation of gender awareness

Gender awareness entails a critical analysis of societal gender norms and biases, highlighting equity, roles, and bias as central themes (Elson, 1995). This awareness extends into the fields of education, where conventional gender roles often result in unequal educational opportunities and outcomes. Poststructuralist perspectives illuminate how educational discourse perpetuates these norms, shaping teaching methods and curriculum content (Delfin, 2018). Relational theory underlines the importance of addressing systemic inequalities within educational institutions to advance gender equity (Hodgins et al., 2022). Gender awareness in education involves a thorough examination and contestation of these norms and biases to foster inclusive learning environments that embrace diverse gender identities (Lodi et al., 2021). This necessitates reforming educational policies, practices, and curricula to promote gender equality and empower all students, regardless of gender. Thus, gender awareness emerges as a crucial framework for comprehending

and addressing gender dynamics in educational contexts and broader society, facilitating progress towards gender equity and social justice.

Furthermore, gender awareness encompasses an array of opinions and perspectives, ranging from radical critiques of patriarchal societal structures to more moderate advocacies for incremental reform and sensitivity in language and practice (Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2021). A critical opinion in this discourse is the imperative to deconstruct and reconstruct traditional gender narratives, which fosters an environment where all individuals, irrespective of gender, can thrive. This involves challenging stereotypes, encouraging gender-neutral language, and promoting inclusive practices that recognise and value diversity for both teachers and students (Deutschmann et al., 2021). The academic discussion around gender awareness also emphasises the significance of intersectionality, acknowledging that individuals' experiences of gender are intricately interwoven with other aspects of identity such as race, class, and sexuality (Bhatti & Ali, 2021; Salvador-García, 2023). This multifaceted approach accentuates the complexity of gender issues and the necessity for thorough understanding and interventions.

Gender awareness studies in English teaching and learning

Investigations into gender awareness within the field of English language teaching (ELT) and learning have unveiled significant findings regarding the influence of gender on linguistic usage, educational experiences, and academic outcomes. These insights accentuate the imperative for embedding gender-conscious perspectives within language education frameworks to foster learning spaces that are both inclusive and equitable. It has been documented that language instructional resources frequently perpetuate gender biases, so reinforcing stereotypes and constraining the portrayal of varied gender identities and narratives, as observed in diverse contexts including Iran (Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020), Vietnam (Vu & Pham, 2022), the Philippines (Tarrayo et al., 2021), and Indonesia (Suwarno et al., 2021). This revelation prompts a call to action for educators to critically assess and broaden the spectrum of reading materials to encapsulate a wider array of voices and viewpoints. Furthermore, scholarly work has stressed the criticality of confronting linguistic biases and championing gender-neutral language within educational settings to challenge entrenched societal norms and cultivate an environment of respect for gender diversity (Fabes et al., 2019; Waluyo & Rofiah, 2021).

Moreover, the adoption of gender-conscious pedagogical strategies is evidenced to bolster students' critical thinking capabilities, foster empathy, and enhance comprehension of social justice dimensions pertinent to gender equity. By weaving gender awareness into the fabric of English language instruction, educators equip learners with the tools to critically engage with language and societal conventions and also advocate for a culture of inclusivity, empathy and respect across gender spectra. An insightful qualitative exploration by Tarrayo et al. (2021) delineated the manifold advantages of integrating a gender perspective into English language teaching, notably augmenting learners' analytical acumen, cultivating a supportive educational milieu, and heightening awareness regarding the pivotal role of language in acknowledging and celebrating diversity. Additionally, Khan's (2020) investigation into the inclusion of a course on women, gender, and

sexuality within a bilingual education program in Bogota, Colombia, affirmed that such curricular integration assists students in challenging stereotypes, nurturing empathy, and shaping their professional identities as educators. Similar findings were revealed by Widodo (2018) and AbuOaf (2020). Despite these advances, the path toward fully actualising gender-aware practices in education is fraught with challenges, accentuating the necessity for continuous research and professional development endeavours aimed at equipping teachers with the resources to navigate and implement genuinely gender-inclusive pedagogical approaches (Hossain, 2024; Waluyo & Tuan, 2021).

EFL students and teachers' voices on gender awareness

Prior research has illuminated the awareness among EFL students and teachers of the gender-based language differences and societal norms introduced to language usage, classroom interactions, and the broader educational landscape. There is a noted eagerness among educators to integrate gender conceptions into their teaching methodologies. Yet, the actual incorporation of such viewpoints hinges on the existence of solid frameworks, enriched curriculum materials, targeted teacher education initiatives, and substantial institutional backing, intricately linked to the ethical complexities entailed in navigating gender topics within educational settings (Tarrayo, 2023; Ulla & Paiz, 2023). The work of Vu and Pham (2022) further exposed a significant gap in classroom dialogues regarding gender, pointing out a general tendency to prioritise linguistic knowledge over fostering critical thought and reflection on gender matters among students. This gap is exacerbated by teacher biases that inadvertently shape instructional methods and interactions, though there remains an openness to future pedagogical revisions, suggesting an evolving readiness to integrate gender consciousness more profoundly into EFL teaching.

Investigations into the incorporation of gender conceptions in foreign language education, such as the ecological study by Banegas et al. (2020), which examined the impact of a gender-focused teaching module on 30 student-teachers in Argentina, have demonstrated substantial benefits for both personal and professional growth, heightened gender awareness, and the creation of engaging language activities that champion gender equality and diversity. Research in varied cultural settings, like the studies by Javid et al. (2017) in Saudi Arabia and Hassaskhah and Roshan Zamir (2013) in Iran, has highlighted diverse perceptions and practices regarding gender in EFL learning contexts. Javid et al. (2017) observed a generally positive disposition towards the English language and its associated culture among Saudi EFL learners, implying that societal endorsement plays a pivotal role in language learning. In contrast, the study by Hassaskhah and Roshan Zamir (2013) in Iran emphasised significant gender-based disparities in the quality and quantity of teacher-student interactions, pointing to the deep-seated effects of gender biases on educational processes and the urgent need for measures that counteract these biases, to cultivate fairer learning environments.

Notwithstanding these insights, research on the integration of gender-aware pedagogies within Islamic-based higher education in Indonesia remains limited, marking an essential area for scholarly inquiry. Delving into the gender dynamics at these institutions requires a thorough understanding of how religious beliefs, cultural norms, and gender roles

intersect and influence educational practices. It is vital to evaluate the current strategies employed to tackle gender issues, examining their capacity to reflect gender diversity and foster inclusivity effectively. Identifying obstacles, such as institutional limitations and educators' perceptions, forms a critical component of this exploration. Furthermore, assessing the broader impact of gender-aware education on students' critical thinking skills, personal growth, and academic achievements is indispensable. Additionally, understanding the professional development needs of teachers for successful gender-aware pedagogical integration is paramount. Through addressing these multifaceted questions, the aim is to devise strategies that cultivate more inclusive, empowering educational experiences within Islamic-based higher education settings, thereby advancing gender equality and championing social justice.

Therefore, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of students and lecturers at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia regarding the influence of gender awareness on students' English language learning outcomes?
2. In what ways can instructional materials be optimised to enhance gender equality and inclusivity in English language learning, as viewed by students and lecturers at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia?

Method

Our study adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions of students and lecturers regarding gender awareness in English education at Islamic-based higher institutions in Indonesia. Phenomenology, which focuses on the essence of unmediated human experiences, contrasts sharply with textual analysis in that it prioritises direct encounters with phenomena over the interpretation of underlying meanings. This method enables an in-depth exploration of what individuals genuinely perceive before these perceptions are molded by societal categories or theoretical frameworks. By conducting surveys and detailed interviews, the research captured the immediate experiences of participants engaged in English education, particularly examining the role of gender awareness and its influence on teaching materials and practices. The aim was to understand how these experiences could promote gender equality and inclusivity within the educational framework, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of English language teaching in these unique contexts.

Research context and participants

Conducted at Islamic-based higher education institutions in Indonesia, this research involved English major students and lecturers found by a convenience sampling method (Etikan et al., 2016).

The student participants comprised 42 individuals, with a majority being female (31 participants, 73.8%) and the remaining 11 participants being male (26.2%). Ages ranged

from 18 to 25 years old, with the majority falling within the 18-20 age bracket (39, 92.9%). In terms of semester enrollment, most participants were in Semester 4 (32, 76.2%), while a smaller group was in Semester 8 or beyond (10/23.8%). The participants represented a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, including *Serawai* (9/21.4%), *Melayu* (8/19%), *Rejang* (4/9.5%), *Java* (4/9.5%), and others such as *Palembang*, *Kaur*, *Lembak*, *Pasemah*, *Bengkulu*, *Jawa-minang*, *Batak*, *Pasma* and *Kaitora*. This diverse representation ensured a comprehensive understanding of perspectives and experiences related to gender awareness in the context of English learning at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia.

The lecturer participants comprised 18 individuals, with an even distribution of gender, including 9 males (50%) and 9 females (50%). The majority had been teaching for 6 to 15 years, with 8 participants falling within this range (44.4%), while 3 participants had over 21 years of experience (16.7%). Affiliation-wise, most participants were affiliated with UIN (State Islamic University) institutions, with 14 participants (77.8%) associated with various UIN campuses across different regions. Additionally, 3 participants (16.7%) were affiliated with other Islamic institutions, such as IAIN (State Islamic Institute) and 1 participant (5.6%) with UIN SUSKA Riau. Regarding tertiary education, all participants had completed postgraduate studies, with the majority holding a masters degree (16, 88.9%), and the remaining 2 participants (11.1%) having attained doctoral degrees. This diverse representation of experienced educators from different Islamic-based tertiary institutions with varying teaching backgrounds and educational levels provides a comprehensive insight into the perceptions and experiences regarding gender awareness in English learning at such institutions in Indonesia.

Research instruments and data collection

The research methodology employed both surveys and written interviews, methodically developed based on existing literature on gender awareness, as the principal instruments for data collection. These tools underwent a validation process by experts in English language teaching, each with a minimum of five years of instructional experience and a track record of publications in international, peer-reviewed journals. This process ensured the instruments' relevance and reliability in capturing the nuances of gender awareness in English language education.

The survey, conducted from 10 January to 10 February 2024, used a purposive sampling method to quantitatively assess participants' perceptions of gender issues in English language education. Administered online through *Google Forms* and distributed via *WhatsApp* to both lecturers and students, the survey was designed to evaluate four key dimensions: awareness of gender-related issues (rated on a 5-point scale), perceived impact of gender on English learning (3-point scale), importance attributed to gender equality in English learning (5-point scale), and endorsement of initiatives promoting gender equality in the learning environment (3-point scale), constructed based on the findings of previous studies outlined in the literature review section (e.g., Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2021; Tarrayo, 2023; Ulla & Paiz, 2023). The 5-point scales, applied to assess awareness of gender-related issues and the importance of gender equality in English learning, allowed for a nuanced capture of attitudes, offering options from strong

agreement to strong disagreement. This granularity was essential for dimensions where a spectrum of opinions could exist, providing detailed insights into participants' levels of awareness and their valuation of gender equality. The 3-point scale items were simplified to facilitate quicker decision-making and enhance clarity in responses, which was particularly beneficial for capturing clear, decisive attitudes toward the practical impacts of gender and the actions proposed for promoting equality.

In addition to the survey, written interviews provided qualitative insights into the ways gender awareness affects English language acquisition and the refinement of educational resources to promote inclusivity. Choosing written interviews allowed participants the flexibility to articulate their thoughts comprehensively and at their convenience, mitigating the immediacy and potential biases associated with face-to-face interactions. This methodological approach enabled a deeper exploration of individual perspectives on the intersection of gender and language education, thus complementing the quantitative data from the surveys. Both the survey items and interview questions, available in English and Indonesian, are detailed in Appendix 1, providing a thorough basis for understanding and analysing the influence of gender awareness on language learning.

Data analysis

The analysis of survey data used statistical measures such as means and standard deviations, facilitating a descriptive and comparative evaluation of the perspectives held by students and lecturers. For the five-point scale items, the means were categorised into low (0 to 1.7), moderate (1.8 to 2.4), and high (2.5 to 5). For the three-point scale items, categorisations were low (0 to 1), moderate (1.1 to 2), and high (2.1 to 3). This quantification enabled the structured assessment of responses, providing a clear framework to interpret the distribution and intensity of perspectives regarding gender awareness in English education.

Subsequently, the qualitative dataset was analysed through a thematic approach, adhering to the framework by Clarke and Braun (2017) and Terry et al. (2017), recognised for its robustness in qualitative research. This process began with an in-depth familiarisation with the data, followed by the generation of initial codes to categorise significant elements. The analysis evolved into identifying broad themes, which were continuously reviewed and refined, ensuring they accurately reflected the core substance of the data. This process culminated in a detailed presentation of thematic findings, illuminating the complex impact of gender awareness on English language learning. Insights revealed nuanced gender-related challenges and opportunities, with participants uniquely identified as students (S1, S2, etc.) and lecturers (L1, L2, etc.), facilitating clarity and confidentiality in data presentation.

Results

Descriptive comparisons

The comparative analysis of students' and lecturers' perceptions concerning gender-related issues within the context of English language learning yielded insightful revelations, elucidating their respective experiences and awareness levels. Both cohorts demonstrated notable awareness, with students showing marginally higher average scores ($M = 4.31$) than lecturers ($M = 3.94$), suggesting a broad acknowledgment of gender dynamics' significance in educational environments. However, the observed variability in understanding, as indicated by the standard deviations (students $SD = .897$; lecturers $SD = .998$), hinted at varying depths of awareness within each group. This disparity suggests that while there is a general recognition of gender issues, the extent and depth of this awareness differ among individuals, potentially due to variations in exposure to relevant discussions or differences in the acquisition of knowledge related to gender dynamics.

Further analysis into perceptions of gender impact on learning experiences revealed nuanced views. Both students and lecturers acknowledged gender's influence on learning, albeit with varying degrees of perceived impact. Students reported a moderate perception of gender impact ($M = 1.71$), indicating an awareness, yet minimal perceived effect, whereas lecturers noted a more significant influence ($M = 2.33$), suggesting a deeper understanding of how gender shapes learning environments. This difference may stem from diverse personal experiences or interpretations of gender among the two groups. Additionally, the standard deviations (students $SD = .918$; lecturers $SD = .970$) accentuated the wide range of perceptions within each demographic, illustrating the complexity of views regarding gender's role in education. Despite these individual variations, both groups concurred strongly on the importance of gender equality in English language learning (students $M = 3.98$; lecturers $M = 3.83$) and its positive impact on enhancing learning outcomes (students $M = 2.60$; lecturers $M = 2.50$), highlighting a collective commitment to fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. This consensus reflects a broader societal shift towards valuing gender equality, emphasising the critical role of gender considerations in promoting educational equity and social justice within English language education. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive comparisons between students and lecturers' gender conceptions

	Students			Lecturers		
	M	SD	Level	M	SD	Level
Awareness of gender-related issues in English learning	4.31/5	.897	High	3.94/5	.998	High
Impact of gender on English learning	1.71/3	.918	Moderate	2.33/3	.970	High
Importance of gender equality in English learning	3.98/5	1.115	High	3.83/5	1.200	High
Belief in promoting gender equality in English learning	2.60/3	.627	High	2.50/3	.618	High

Impact of gender awareness on English learning

Students' voices

The qualitative analysis of data regarding the impact of gender awareness on students' English language learning has uncovered four salient themes, each highlighting perspectives on how gender dynamics influence educational experiences.

1. Inclusive learning environment and empowerment

Gender awareness fosters an inclusive learning environment that supports the empowerment of all students, regardless of gender. Students emphasised the importance of creating a safe space where they feel valued and respected, irrespective of their gender identity or expression. This inclusive environment encourages collaboration among students and ensures equal opportunities for learning and development. Gender awareness reduces stereotypes and biases, providing individuals with the chance to express themselves freely and engage actively in the learning process.

Gender awareness in English language learning can create an inclusive environment, supporting the empowerment of all students regardless of gender. (S5)

In my opinion, gender awareness can positively impact English language learning by helping create a more inclusive and safe learning space for all students, where they feel valued and respected regardless of their gender identity or expression. (S11)

Efforts to create an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students are crucial. (S17)

2. Impact on learning quality and motivation

Students recognise the positive impact of gender awareness on learning quality and motivation. They believe that gender awareness can increase student motivation and involvement, enrich learning materials, strengthen gender equality, and improve communication skills. Additionally, gender equality in learning environments can lead to happier learning experiences and enhance the meaningfulness of acquired knowledge.

In my opinion, gender awareness can positively impact English language learning by increasing student motivation and involvement, enriching learning materials, strengthening gender equality, and improving communication skills. (S21)

Awareness of gender equality will have a positive impact on English learning if teachers consider everything to be equal... This will make students feel happier while learning, and the knowledge they gain will feel more meaningful. (S24)

3. Influence on perspective and communication skills

Gender awareness broadens students' perspectives and enhances their communication skills. It encourages students to accept explanations from both genders and facilitates the expression of ideas freely. Moreover, gender awareness enables students to recognise and

appreciate diverse perspectives and experiences, leading to more inclusive discussions and a supportive learning environment.

Gender awareness can positively impact English language learning by creating an inclusive environment, broadening students' perspectives, and avoiding gender stereotypes in learning materials. (S22)

It allows individuals to express themselves freely using English without worrying about others' views. (S34)

4. Equality and diversity in learning materials

Students emphasise the importance of integrating gender awareness into learning materials to promote equality and diversity. They advocate for the use of diverse and relevant materials that reflect various perspectives and experiences. Gender awareness ensures equality in participation and evaluation in the classroom, creating a friendlier and more supportive learning environment for all students.

Gender awareness can have a positive impact on English language learning by increasing inclusion and appreciation for diverse perspectives and experiences. (S38)

Gender awareness can enable English language learning to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of individuals from various gender backgrounds, creating a more supportive environment where each student feels valued and supported in developing their English skills. (S39)

Lecturers' voices

Based on the lecturers' qualitative responses, the thematic analysis on the impact of gender awareness on students' English learning yields four dominant themes.

1. Gender representation in learning materials

Gender awareness affects the selection of learning materials to ensure balanced representation and equitable opportunities for all students. Lecturers emphasise the importance of exposing students to diverse voice models in pronunciation courses, reflecting both male and female voices. This ensures that learners can train themselves to comprehend and replicate a variety of English sounds effectively. Additionally, gender-aware teaching involves selecting materials that reflect diverse gender perspectives, thus promoting cultural understanding and appreciation. Lecturers underline the need to avoid stereotypes in teaching and create an inclusive learning context where students feel supported and valued, regardless of gender.

Students should be exposed to both male and female voice models in a balanced manner so that English language learners can digest and train themselves to listen to a variety of English sounds. (L1)

Gender awareness can have a positive impact on English language learning and learning other languages... through selecting learning materials reflecting diverse gender

perspectives and promoting open dialogue about gender issues while avoiding stereotypes in teaching. (L4)

2. Equal opportunities and inclusive environment

Gender awareness ensures equal opportunities for all students, fostering an inclusive learning environment where individuals can express themselves freely without gender bias. Lecturers stress the importance of consciousness of gender equality in minimising discrimination or bias, particularly in language learning. By integrating gender awareness, educators provide space for students to have equal opportunities in learning English, empowering them to nurture their potential without prioritising a particular gender. Moreover, lecturers highlight the significance of gender awareness in creating a supportive educational environment that values diversity and promotes gender equality.

Consciousness of gender equality can minimise gender discrimination or bias, especially in English language learning, where children learn about various cultures. (L3)

Gender awareness provides space for students to have equal opportunities in learning, especially English. (L11)

3. Enhanced communication and social skills

Gender awareness contributes to the development of students' social and communication skills, fostering effective interaction and understanding among individuals of different genders. Lecturers emphasise that paying attention to gender awareness influences the willingness to communicate (WTC) of students. By adopting a gender approach in communication, lecturers can trigger the WTC of both male and female students, enhancing their proficiency in spoken English. Additionally, gender-aware teaching enables students to develop empathy and respect for individual differences in speaking and writing, which promotes effective communication and fosters cultural sensitivity.

Gender awareness becomes a determinant for willingness to communicate (WTC)... the lecturer's language style can trigger the WTC of both male and female students in speaking English. (L15)

By paying attention to gender awareness in English language learning, lecturers can create a learning environment that is inclusive, sensitive, and enhances a comprehensive learning experience. (L18)

4. Professional development and classroom practices

Gender awareness influences lecturers' professionalism and instructional practices, shaping classroom management and language teaching methodologies. Lecturers acknowledge the direct and indirect impacts of gender on teaching, including intonation, pronunciation, choice of words, and teaching styles. Moreover, gender-aware teaching involves selecting class activities, motivating students, and adopting approaches that accommodate diverse learning needs and preferences. By integrating gender awareness into classroom practices, lecturers create an inclusive and responsive learning environment that enhances students' English language learning experience.

The improvement of teachers' professionalism, particularly in the areas of classroom management and language and gender in the classroom, is affected by gender awareness. (L16)

As lecturers, there are several aspects, both direct and indirect, influenced by gender that affect the success of learning. (L17)

Roles of learning materials in addressing gender equality and inclusivity

Students' voices

For students, the following are the roles of English learning materials in addressing gender equality and inclusivity:

1. Inclusive representation and language usage

Emphasising balanced representation and inclusive language in learning materials to foster gender equity is paramount. Students highlight the importance of avoiding gender differentiation and ensuring equal opportunities for all genders. However, executing this mandate effectively necessitates a nuanced understanding of what constitutes "balanced representation" and "inclusive language." Mere avoidance of gendered pronouns may not suffice if underlying gender norms persist in the material's content.

The representation should be balanced, the use of language inclusive, the emphasis on gender equity. (S1)

By not differentiating between female and male students. (S3)

Using inclusive and gender-neutral language... (S14)

Use inclusive language, present role models, engage in inclusive discussions, etc. (S22)

2. Promotion of gender equality and diversity

Advocating for strategies within learning materials to actively promote gender equality and diversity is crucial. Students emphasise the need for selecting inclusive materials, presenting diverse role models, and engaging in critical discussions on gender issues. Yet, achieving genuine gender equality requires more than superficial representation; it demands a deep-seated reevaluation of societal norms and power structures. Moreover, critical analysis of media and cultural influences should extend beyond gender to encompass intersecting identities such as race, class, and sexuality.

Learning materials can address gender inequality in the following ways... (S9)

Learning materials can address gender inequality by presenting inclusive and supportive content... (S10)

Avoid rigid gender stereotypes and narrow gender roles... (S11)

Integrating critical gender analyses into learning materials... (S18)

3. Elimination of gender discrimination and stereotypes

Students emphasise the urgency of eliminating gender discrimination and stereotypes from learning materials. They stress the need for inclusive representation and positive portrayal of gender roles. However, this requires a critical interrogation of existing power dynamics and biases inherent in educational systems. Additionally, addressing gender inequality goes beyond content; it necessitates systemic changes in curriculum development, teacher training, and educational policies.

Learning materials that are inclusive and portray gender roles positively... (S13)

By not providing materials that lead to gender inequality... (S24)

By educating that all genders are treated equally... (S34)

4. Equal treatment and opportunities

Demand for equal treatment and opportunities for all genders in learning materials is evident. Students advocate for fair learning rights and normalised materials. However, achieving true equality requires addressing systemic barriers that perpetuate gender disparities in education. This includes tackling implicit biases in assessment practices, promoting inclusive pedagogies, and creating safe spaces for gender-nonconforming individuals.

By equalising without comparing. (S25)

By providing equal/fair learning rights. (S28)

Equalised between men and women. (S40)

Lecturers' voices

Lecturers have the following insights concerning the roles of English learning materials in addressing gender equality and inclusivity:

1. Diversification of representation

Lecturers emphasise the importance of ensuring that learning materials represent a diverse range of genders, including women, men, non-binary, and transgender individuals, across various roles and contexts. By doing so, stereotypes can be challenged, and the richness of human experiences can be demonstrated.

Ensuring that materials cover a diverse representation of genders... helps challenge stereotypes and demonstrates the diversity of human experiences. (L1)

Ensure that learning materials reflect diverse gender and cultural perspectives... including diverse genders, sexual orientations, and gender identities. (L4)

2. Promotion of inclusive language use and awareness

Lecturers highlight the significance of using inclusive and gender-neutral language in learning materials to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or rigid gender roles. Additionally, they emphasise the importance of raising awareness about gender equality issues through educational content.

Learning materials should use inclusive and gender-neutral language...replacing 'men and women' with 'individuals' or 'everyone.' (L4)

Learning materials can be improved... by avoiding language that refers to a specific gender and tends to be exclusive. (L9)

3. Integration of real-world contexts and discussions

Lecturers stress the value of connecting gender issues discussed in learning materials with real-world situations and encouraging open discussions and reflections among students. By contextualising gender equality topics, students can better understand their relevance in daily life.

Connect gender issues with real-world situations and social, economic, and political contexts... to demonstrate the relevance of gender issues in daily life. (L4)

Encourage open discussions about gender issues and provide space for personal reflection. (L7)

4. Balanced representation and approach

Lecturers accentuate the need for balanced representation of genders in learning materials and the adoption of an inclusive approach that avoids favouring any specific gender. It also emphasises the importance of maintaining a balanced position and status for male and female students in educational content.

Select or develop materials that encompass various contributions and experiences from all genders...to ensure equitable learning interactions. (L9)

"Provide balance in all aspects... without favoring any specific gender, emphasising cooperation and group discussions without bias. (L17)

Discussion

This study conducted an in-depth exploration of the integration of gender-aware perspectives within English curricula and pedagogy, specifically focusing on the perceptions of students and lecturers at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia. It aimed to ascertain how gender awareness influences English language learning outcomes among students and sought to identify strategies through which instructional materials could be optimised to promote gender equality and inclusivity within the learning process. The investigation uncovered three pivotal themes that merit detailed discussion.

Gender awareness levels

The investigation into gender awareness levels among both students and lecturers at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia revealed a notable consciousness regarding the significance of gender dynamics within the educational domain, with students displaying marginally higher awareness scores than their lecturers. This finding aligns with global observations across various educational contexts, including the Philippines (Tarrayo, 2023; Ulla & Paiz, 2023), Vietnam (Vu & Pham, 2022), Argentina (Banegas et al., 2020), Saudi Arabia (Javid et al., 2017), and Iran (Hassaskhah & Roshan Zamir, 2013), underscoring the pervasive recognition of gender issues in education. Despite this awareness, inconsistencies emerge between the levels of awareness and its practical application in pedagogical settings, as highlighted by previous research (Hassaskhah & Roshan Zamir, 2013; Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2023; Vu & Pham, 2022). This discrepancy suggests a gap between acknowledging gender's importance and effectively integrating gender-aware strategies into classroom practices, revealing a critical area for further development within educational methodologies.

Our study also delved into the perceived impact of gender on learning experiences, uncovering nuanced perspectives between students and lecturers. While both groups recognised gender influences on educational outcomes, students reported a moderate impact, in contrast to lecturers who perceived its effects as more profound. This divergence possibly arises from the lecturers' broader experience and deeper insights into how gender norms and awareness shape educational environments and learning processes. Such an understanding is vital for fostering social equality and justice, as documented in literature emphasising the role of gender awareness in creating inclusive educational settings that challenge biases, promote critical thinking, and support equality (Fernandez, 2023; Tariq, 2024; Savitz et al., 2023). The findings illuminate the complexity of gender awareness in educational contexts, suggesting that lecturers, by virtue of their experiences, possess a more nuanced comprehension of gender's impact on English language learning. Despite varying degrees of awareness and perceived impacts, there is a unanimous endorsement among both students and lecturers of the necessity for gender equality within English language education, advocating for a collective movement towards more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Gender awareness influences

Students highlighted the critical need for an inclusive learning atmosphere, noting the beneficial effects of gender awareness on motivation and communication skills, alongside a call for greater equality and diversity in educational resources. Lecturers, on the other hand, focused on the importance of gender representation in learning materials, the promotion of equal opportunities, the fostering of an inclusive environment, and the necessity of incorporating gender awareness into professional development and pedagogical practices. Despite these differences, both groups concurred on the urgency of addressing linguistic biases and promoting gender-neutral language in educational contexts, aligning with the findings of Fabes et al. (2019) that advocated for the integration of gender perspectives in language education, as echoed in the works of

AbuOaf (2020), Khan (2020), Tarrayo et al. (2021), and Widodo (2018). However, while the benefits of such integration are acknowledged, the journey toward the full realisation of gender-aware practices in ELT remains complex and fraught with challenges, a sentiment accentuated by Hossain (2024) and reflected in our study's focus on the conceptual level of gender awareness, pointing towards a nuanced understanding and the need for strategic approaches to actualise these practices effectively.

Learning material roles in fostering gender awareness

The discourse surrounding the roles of learning materials in fostering gender awareness reveals a consensus on the need for inclusive representation and the use of language that promotes gender equality and diversity, with nuanced differences in emphasis between students and lecturers. Students advocate for immediate action towards the elimination of gender discrimination and stereotypes in educational content, emphasising the necessity for strategies that actively champion gender equality and diversity. Lecturers, while also recognising the need for diversity in representation and inclusive language to counteract stereotypes, place a greater focus on raising awareness around gender equality issues and the importance of integrating real-world contexts into learning materials to effectively address these topics. They further highlight the importance of balanced gender representation and an inclusive pedagogical approach that ensures equitable treatment for all students, differing from students' emphasis on demanding equal treatment and opportunities. These perspectives complement existing research on the impact of gender awareness in education (Li, 2023; Mercan Küçükakın & Engin-Demir, 2022) and suggest a move towards more comprehensive approaches that amalgamate both student and lecturer viewpoints in the development of gender-aware English curricula and pedagogy. This aligns with the recommendations of Deutschmann et al. (2021), Salvador-Garcia (2023), and Mojica and Castañeda-Peña (2021), who advocated for educational practices that acknowledge and incorporate the diverse experiences and expectations of students and lecturers, aiming to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Implications of the findings

The findings of this study underline the necessity for actionable strategies to enhance gender awareness in educational contexts, notably through organising workshops, seminars, and professional development sessions. These initiatives are designed to reconcile varying levels of awareness and promote deeper understanding and open discussions about gender dynamics in education. Central to this endeavour is the development of courses that challenge stereotypes and combat gender discrimination by ensuring that the language in learning materials is inclusive and gender neutral. The integration of real-world scenarios into course content not only situates gender equality issues within a practical framework but also fosters critical thinking and enhances the overall learning experience.

Furthermore, the importance of teacher training programs is highlighted as essential in equipping educators with the skills and knowledge to incorporate gender-aware perspectives into their teaching methodologies. This enables the creation of learning

environments that are inclusive, challenge existing biases, and promote gender equality. By prioritising inclusivity, equality, and diversity in curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, and educator training, educational institutions—particularly those in Islamic-based contexts in Indonesia and around the world—can foster transformative learning experiences. These initiatives empower students and contribute significantly to advancing social justice within English language education.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the integration of gender-aware perspectives into English curricula and pedagogy at Islamic-based universities in Indonesia, capturing insights from both students and lecturers. The findings indicate a robust awareness of gender dynamics in educational settings, with both groups committed to fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. Students and lecturers alike emphasise the elimination of gender discrimination and the integration of real-world contexts to enhance English language learning. While students highlight the need for inclusive language and materials, lecturers focus on diversifying representation and incorporating gender awareness into professional development. Despite nuanced differences, there is a unanimous recognition of the importance of gender equality in shaping effective English learning experiences, underscoring the necessity for ongoing research and the broader application of gender-aware strategies in education. Nevertheless, the study's scope, limited to Islamic-based institutions in Indonesia and reliant on self-reported data, suggests the need for future research in more varied contexts. Employing longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches could yield deeper insights into the long-term effects of such integrations on learning outcomes and attitudes, while exploring the intersectionality of gender with other identity markers could refine educational practices and policies.

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Appendix 1: Survey items for students and lecturers

Part 1: Demographic information

We made the items relevant to the backgrounds of the students and lecturers.

Part 2: Gender awareness in English language learning

How aware are you of gender-related issues in the context of learning English?

Very aware Somewhat aware Neutral Not very aware Not aware at all

Have you ever felt that your gender affects your experience or performance in English language learning?

Yes No Not sure

Part 3: Importance of gender equality in English language learning

On a scale of 1 to 5, how important do you think gender equality is in the context of learning English?

1 (Not important at all) 2 3 4 5 (Very important)

Do you believe that promoting gender equality in English language learning can enhance the overall learning experience?

Yes No Unsure

Part 4: Understanding of gender concerns or discrimination in learning materials

Have you ever noticed any gender-related concerns or discrimination in the learning materials used in your English courses?

Yes No Not sure

Part 5: Understanding of gender inequality in English texts/materials:

Do you think gender inequality is present in the English texts or materials you have encountered during your studies?

Yes No Not sure

Part 6: Reflection on material policies that reflect gender diversity:

Are you aware of any material policies in your English study program that reflect gender diversity?

Yes No Not sure

Written interview questions:

1. In your opinion, how can gender awareness positively impact English language learning?
2. Could you provide an example or describe the situation any gender-related concerns or discrimination in the learning materials used in your English courses?
3. How would you describe or define gender inequality in the context of English texts or materials?
4. In your opinion, how can learning materials better address gender equality and inclusivity?
5. How do you think these or any other material policies in your English study program contribute to a more inclusive learning environment?
6. What recommendations do you have for incorporating gender awareness and equality in English language learning?
7. What are your expectations regarding the role of educators and institutions in promoting gender equality in English language education?

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