

## **BIAS GENDER ON LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN EXPLORATION ON GENDER BASED ABILITY OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The process of language learning embraces inclusivity, including variations between male and female students in their intelligence towards English as a foreign language, which directly influences their language learning competence. This research investigates the gender-based bias in language learning, with a specific focus on the English language proficiency of secondary school students. It aims to address the gap in our understanding of the relationship between gender identity and English learning outcomes, thereby shedding light on the inclusivity of the language learning process. By analysing written text products of high school students, collected as part of a comprehensive data collection effort, the researchers utilize systemic functional linguistics and feminist stylistics approaches. Through this analysis, they explore the construction of texts and delve into the influence of gender on language structural choices. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of gender-based variations in language learning and offer insights for developing more equitable language education practices, fostering an inclusive learning environment for all students.

**Keywords:** *Language Learning, English as Foreign Language, Gender Bias, Systemic Functional Linguistic*

### **Introduction**

Many researchers in language education especially in the teaching English as foreign language are focusing on the second language acquisition which continually developed to understand how the students have its ability on learning English from the perspective of the linguistics competence. Which mean the recent research have its own limitation on how the linguistics take a role on the students` cognitive ability on learning language. From this case, the author has intension to develop on how the linguistic approach can break the limitation on the language learning by expanding the research to the social background and gender identity which reflect the students` ability on learning language and to understand how the gender affect the construction of the language by students with different social background especially in gender identity background. This research also designed as the development of previous study to help the future researcher on language education and the teachers to arrange and develop the language teaching strategies for better future of language education. To understand on how this research proofing the hypothesis, the researcher begins with the enrichment of the literatures review below.

In the field of language education, significant attention has been devoted to second language acquisition and understanding students' linguistic competence in learning English as a foreign language. However, recent research has primarily focused on the linguistic aspects, with limited exploration of how language learning relates to students' cognitive abilities. This narrow perspective has led to a gap in understanding the influence of social backgrounds, including gender identity, on language learning outcomes. To address this limitation, this study aims to expand the linguistic approach by investigating the role of social background and gender identity in students' language learning abilities and examining how gender impacts language construction. By exploring these dimensions, we seek to break the constraints of previous research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language learning. Furthermore, this research aims to serve as a valuable resource for future researchers in

language education and for teachers to develop effective language teaching strategies that promote improved language education outcomes. To support and demonstrate the hypothesis of this research, a comprehensive review of relevant literature is presented below.

The literature review holds a crucial position in academic writing and research, particularly in the context of a literature review itself. It provides various important purposes, including providing the important foundation for the research at hand and understanding the existing body of literature. Through the literature review, researchers can gain insights into the findings, concepts, and dynamics of previous studies, which are relevant to their own research. Additionally, the literature review enables researchers to critically evaluate and engage with prior research independently, offering a platform for constructive criticism and further advancements in the field (Abdhal, 2021). By conducting a comprehensive literature review, researchers can identify gaps in the existing research and contribute to the development of new knowledge. The literature review serves as a framework and guidelines for the researchers to formulate the research questions, define research aims, and shape the methodology of their study. It offers a measure of novelty and enables researchers to position their work within the broader scholarly discourse. Furthermore, the literature review serves as a valuable resource, providing researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge and serving as a point of reference throughout their research journey. In essence, literature review provides as an fundamental component in the research process, enabling researchers to situate their study within the existing body of knowledge, identify gaps, and contribute to the advancement of the field. By conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on gender bias in English language learning, this study aims to enrich our understanding of this phenomenon and provide valuable insights for future research and educational practices

The relationship between language and humans is indissoluble, as language provides as the primary means of communication, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal interactions. However, it is imperative to understand the existence of a gender gap within the realm of language learning, encompassing both Indonesian and other foreign languages, particularly in the context of women and men. Comprehending an article entitled *Language and Gender Inequality* by Muhammad Jaeni (2009) in the research he discover about the strategy on exploring the gap in the language learning. His exploration also recognize the dominant gender imbalance within the realm of language learning, including Indonesian, Arabic and English, principally in relation to the experiences of women and men. by looking at the existing grammatical side. This literature indirectly leads to a more recent gap research which analyses gender bias, but focuses on language acquisition as learning English at the junior high or high school level. Including looking at and exploring the factors that cause gender inequality from various sides (Jaeni, 2009).

Furthermore, Foley and Safran (1994) in their research which highlight the context of persons with disabilities entitled *Gender-biased Language in Learning Disability Textbooks* concerned on gender bias in the context of persons with disabilities. The analysis of this article is focused on the pronouns and "masculine and feminine" frequencies found in the book. which provides the gap between superior and inferior in the context of gender in the person with disabilities. The research found that there is a system and power relations between men and women in language learning.

The diversity on language learning has become interesting topic that should be discussed in the education realm. The diversity on the language learning points out the ability of the students on constructing their competence on learning language, which is associated with the gender identity, relevant research has revealed on how the gender identity and its bias affect the ability of learning.

The relationship between language acquisition and gender has been extensively investigated by researchers in the later decades of the twentieth century. Numerous studies have established a strong correlation between gender and language ability. This assertion is supported by the

claim that gender serves as a significant and traditional predictor in educational, psychological, and linguistic studies (Catalan, 2003). Additionally, Andreou et al. (2005) argues that gender is a key variable influencing foreign language learning. Research focusing on gender and classroom interaction reveals distinct behavioural patterns exhibited by each gender. Swan (1993) stated that boys tend to be more assertive, talkative, and outgoing than girls. Furthermore, boys receive more attention from teachers and occupy a larger physical space, as also found by Sommers and Lawrence (1992) and Redpath (1989). However, it is important to note that these outcomes should be understood as general trends, as boys' and girls' behaviours can vary depending on the specific situation, as highlighted by (Swann,1993). Perceptions towards gender are sometimes utilized to create gender roles, as pointed out by Blackstone (2003). However, it is crucial to view gender stereotypes as oversimplified perceptions that do not capture the full complexity and individuality of men and women. The relevant research contributes to our understanding of gender stereotypes and emphasizes the need to challenge and overcome such simplified perceptions in order to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments especially in the EFL class of secondary schools in Indonesia.

The relevant study examines the gender differences in the written English text production abilities of secondary school students. inspecting the relationship between gender and language learning, particularly in the context of written expression, provides valuable insights for teachers in terms of lesson planning, strategy development, and the design of appropriate in-class activities (Aslan, 2009). Meece et al. (2006). This research sought to learn more about the association between gender and secondary school students' proficiency in writing in English as a foreign language.

The differentiation between gender identity, which is addressed males and females are complex, it can be examined by understanding the morphology and the specific appearance the students` gender background. From the physical morphology, the most common differentiation between male and female students is on its volume of their physics. On the cognitive morphology, male and female students also have its specialty which is female students faster in understanding problem than male students. Although the female students have faster in developing their understanding of the problem than male students, male students also have more specialty on cognitive competence which is faster in develop their spatial ability than female students. Additionally, the male students sometime facing problem on the language learning process than the female students which affect the ability on learning language. According to Banks, T. L. (1988) female students sometimes consider to be bold in reinforce the points rather male students while male students are bold on abstractive context. Despite of the diversity between male and female students have its relation on their learning output and their achievements on learning language, according to Ochs (1992), the perspective on language learning based on the gender which affected the students` perspective on realize the function of understanding the language and the structure on language construction. In the other hand, the evidence above shows us that the gender background has its relation on how the students constructing the language which influence the students critical thinking, comprehension and the problem-solving orientation which is associated with the cognitive ability. The cognitive ability is related to the students` ability on how the students conceptualized the context and constructing the language in a critical way. To understand the diversity of ability on learning language based on the gender background, this paper begins with the data collection and data analysis using systemic functional linguistic to support the evidence on how the students are constructing their language.

Systemic functional linguistics are the linguistics theory which established in the 1960 by M.A.K Halliday, in this term systemic functional linguistics itself is a linguistics theory that is focuses on how the formation of the language have its function (Wiratno.,2018). In the other hands the functions of the language in systemic functional linguistics are addressed to the context on the language used as text, the contextuality of the language used can be various depend on the language are constructed, in this case the explorations are focuses on the language

used in the interpersonal communications of emotional expression in the social media. dealing with the language used to express the interpersonal experience of the perspective based on the gender background, the functions of language defined in systemic functional linguistics is known as three meta-functions of language. The three meta-functions of language are dependence each other; this is defined that the construction of the language should be comprehend from the three meta-functions to understand the context of language. The three meta-functions of language are constructed by three parts that defines different reality in the language construction, the one is ideational functions of the language which is to understand the relation of the physical/natural reality with the interpretations and representations of experience, and then followed interpersonal which to comprehend the relations of the utterances with the audiences in the social context, then followed by textual meaning which functionalized use to comprehend how the semiotics or reality related to the context of the texts (Wiratno, 2018).

A social context in the language is associated with the structure of the semantic which is associate with the cultural that relate to the type of the situations (Halliday,1978). In the semantic context of systemic functional linguistic, language used as the variation from its resources that associated with the social context is known as register. The definition of register itself can be represented internally with the specific lingual appearance in the text and classified as field, tenor, and mode in systemic functional linguistic (Wiratno, 2018). According to Martin (1986;1992), field is a context of the activity in the language which refers to the universal institutional goals, while tenor is a relationship between the utterances. In the systemic functional linguistic context, tenor is associated with the interpersonal meaning of the utterance's communication. The association of the communications in tenor can be comprehend on how the realization of interpersonal meta-function of the language either written or verbal communication. The third part from register in systemic functional linguistic is mode. According to Wiratno (2018), to understand the text that are delivered in the written or spoken from, mode can be formatted to understand the textual meaning as well as to seek the realization from the textual meta-function to provides insight to the formation of the text. From the explanation above, to comprehend the relation of the three parts of the register within the semantic relation in systemic functional linguistic here is the structure of the relations between register and three meta-functions in systemic functional linguistic.

In the context of language learning, systemic functional linguistics provides valuable insight in understanding the meaning and social relations conveyed through texts. This linguistic approach emphasizes the association between language and its functions within a given context. Within systemic functional linguistics, there are three meta-functions of language: ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning. Following Halliday (1978), Ideational meaning pertains to the representation of concepts, ideas, and experiences expressed through language. It focuses on how language constructs and conveys meaning related to the world and our understanding of it. Interpersonal meaning, on the other hand, focuses on the social aspects of language. It examines how language is used to establish relationships, convey attitudes, and negotiate social interactions between individuals. In addition, according to Halliday (1978) textual meaning refers to how language is organized and structured to create cohesive and coherent texts. It explores the features and choices in language that enable effective communication and comprehension. By studying these three meta-functions, systemic functional linguistics provides insights into the contextual factors that shape language construction, the relationships between language use and social context, and the interplay between language and meaning within texts.

In conclusion the role of systemic functional linguistic in this research is concerned to analyze the construction of the language in the students' written product that are associated with the learning ability the theory will be used to understand the meaning making production and the social relations between the object, utterances and the things regarding with the



language learning ability that are portrayed in the written products. this approach is used to support the evidence from the data analysis which will elaborate with feminist stylistics approach and discussed within the theories on language learning ability which associated with the gender bias at hand.

After dealing with the SFL as fundamental concept of this study, researchers begin to comprehend the patterns of language use and its semiotic construction in the English written products of secondary school students, the researchers employs stylistic studies to analyse the language style used in the data. Stylistics provides a useful framework for understanding the expressive attitudes conveyed through written or spoken language (Baldick, 2001). Moreover, Gray (1984) suggests that stylistics focuses on the expressive character of language, particularly in literary works, by examining the choices made in language construction that hold meaning for the audience. Drawing from Thornborrow's review of Mills (1995), feminist stylistics involves textual criticism that contextualizes the feminist perspective on language construction. It seeks to understand how feminists formulate sentences, select vocabulary, and shape discourse in the language. This approach supports the research's evidence regarding the gender bias in language construction, particularly reflecting the feminist critique of phenomena observed in written products. Additionally, it allows for the differentiation of male and female students' criticism.

To understand the gender bias in the learning process, as portrayed in English written products, the research incorporates Cameron's hypothesis on language and identity. Cameron (1990) suggests that language reflects social identity and is influenced by social constructivist and dynamic factors. This approach highlights how gender identity influences the coding and encoding of language in relation to language learning abilities and achievements. In exploring the diversity of gender identities involved in the language learning process, the research also considers the association between language learners and the curriculum. The curriculum serves as a guide to mark the goals of language learning and assists educational practitioners in designing strategies to achieve these goals, taking into account gender identity (Peirce, 1995).

The gender variations in naturally occurring learning abilities will be the main topic of the research literature review that follows. Gender has been identified as an important affective component that serves a specific purpose and influences second language acquisition, according to Masoud Zoghi, Seyyed Ali Kazemi, and Ali Kalani in 2013. There are some distinctions between the language of men and women that cannot be eliminated by socialization or education. Males tend to be more left-hemisphere dominant than females, while males and females exhibit relatively varied patterns of lateralization (Banich, 1997, p. 306-312). Whether or not gender differences are largely influenced by culture or biology, educational research over the last few decades has shown that gender differences have a tangible impact on students' academic demands, interests, and accomplishments (Halpern, 1986; Collins, Kenway and McLeod, 2000; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2000). Results of numerous examinations of certain abilities reveal gender differences (Woolfolk, 2014). Since men's test results are frequently substantially more variable, there are more men than women with extraordinarily high and extremely low-test scores. The study also shows that more male students reported certain issues that may have hindered their ability to learn. But a lot of these studies minimize the significance of culture, race, and ethnicity (Woolfolk, 2014). Gender has a huge impact. Every country that took part in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) research study, boys outscored girls in the subject area "physical systems," which includes physics and chemistry. In addition, girls showed less interest in physics than boys did, and they viewed the subject to be less inspiring. Thus, when it comes to physics training, gender has a particularly negative influence on females' motivation and learning processes.

## Method

In this research, a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis methodology was employed. The qualitative method was chosen to explore how students with different gender backgrounds construct language in their written products, shedding light on the impact of gender background on language learning ability. Additionally, the use of qualitative research honours the subjective value and contextuality of the study. To analyse the linguistic features in the students' written products, the research incorporates the systemic functional linguistics and stylistics approaches, drawing on literature enrichments. The data for analysis was collected from written products of secondary school students in Purwokerto and Surabaya. Descriptive analysis was used as the data analysis method.

The data analysis process followed the four steps proposed by Spradley (1980) as discussed by E. Clara (2011). These steps include domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and discovering the motive. Domain analysis was employed to separate data that did not fit into the specified categories of the research. Taxonomic analysis was used to understand the role of language in relation to the psychological condition of the utterances, employing the systemic functional linguistics, language learning, and gender theories. Componential analysis aimed to identify the role of data classification.

The analysis process commenced with domain analysis, involving data collection from the students' written products and sample selection. Data collection focused on items that were relevant to the linguistic, language learning, and gender identity theories used in the research. After the data was analysed using domain analysis, taxonomic analysis was conducted to understand the meta-function of language in meaning-making production. The three meta-functions of language, as proposed by Halliday (1994), were employed to analyse the data. The focus on these meta-functions aimed to uncover the different styles of language construction between male and female students as reflected in their written products.

## Findings and Discussions

The focus of the analysis drive into the findings which addressed that the gender identity reflect its language learning ability, as it was formulated that gender has its linguistics competence which the competences used by the students with different background on how they constructing the understanding and their intelligence. The analysis also finds that, the pattern of meta-function of language in systemic functional linguistics analysis shows the pattern of the differentiation on the written product based on the gender background. This proofing that the gender background have its style on constructing the discourse on the language ability. In the other hand, gender background influence on its construction of the strategic learning process in language learning. As it was argued above the systemic functional linguistic also show the gap between the female and male students in constructing their understanding in case of the language learning ability, there are some different results in the data analysis which help to classify the output of the language learning in term of gender background. Based on the table below, the table show the percentage of three meta-function of language in the text based on gender identity. From the table, male students are dominated in constructing text with Ideational meaning or physical/biology relations on the text between the author and the readers with the ratio 12:3 from 58 data, while female students are mostly focus on interpersonal meaning with ratio 4:25 from 58 data. Interpersonal meaning indicate that the author have social relationship with the reader while constructing the text. Followed by Textual meaning which indicate the number of the male students are dominated rather than female students with the ratio 8:6 from 58 data, which mean male students also use semiosis construction rather than female students. Most of the male students are constructing the directive language and ideational process with the average presentation of mental process, this is relate on how the male students are more abstractive than female students Banks, T. L. (1988). In the other case the female students are frequently constructed mental process than male students which indicates the

bold constructivism on the phenomenon which served by language, mostly female students are critically in constructing the language (Thornborrow J, 1996).

### **Things That Affect the Occurrence of Gender Bias in Language Learning**

Actually it is very unique when discussing gender and all existing forms of discrimination, it even becomes something that cannot be denied and is real. Not only in the realm of social, legal, economic or even other authorities, but in education it is very visible. Especially on the subject of differences in language mastery and learning (read: English). So that gender bias or inequality is very prone to occur among the community and is considered quite detrimental, especially women. It can also be seen that there is a gender bias which correlates between men and women, especially in the concept of learning English, namely the curriculum or learning policies which are very discriminatory, especially for female students (Astina, 2016). In fact, what must be understood is the spirit and intention of learning a language, it is not valued more than men or women, but students have the same abilities and opportunities. More or less, there are several things that influence the occurrence of gender bias in language learning among students, namely as follows:

#### **Already Constructed in a Patriarchal Society**

The thing that influences the occurrence of gender bias in the world of education, especially the effectiveness of learning English is that which is included in the social construction area of a very patriarchal society. Due to the environment in our society, especially in Indonesia, there are many things that are patriarchal in nature and discrimination against one gender. Let's just take one example, in learning English for junior high or high school students, teachers often look more at the potential of men. Although there is, the participation of female students is still superior to the male students. Apart from that, in fact it has become a real social construction from the existing gender inequality, thus giving birth to some discrimination in it (Rohmaniyah, 2020). This is what causes the position of men and women to be very different from all aspects in the field of education (learning), even though they have the same intensity of abilities.

#### **Unequal Language Learning Teaching Materials**

More often the influence of gender bias occurs because of the material in English books, which are considered to dominate men rather than women. It can be seen clearly when in the grammatical and structural terms of the English language pronouns, where the use of pronouns he is male (he/him/his) and she is female (she/her) takes precedence over males first. On the other hand, learning English for students is also very familiar with gender when looking at the curriculum offered, namely in the form of basic theoretical or practical education that is given and everything that is given in the form of activities or practice. Where, from this phenomenon alone it is very well understood, the gender bias for students in their ability to learn English is very disturbing and should be addressed quickly in order to balance one another. Another illustration that is commonly found is in texts or readings in English books which clearly categorize or compartmentalize where the world between men and women is very different. Where in these readings the realm of men can be free as well as going on vacation out of town, doing business with fathers, or having the theme of ideals. Meanwhile, women in English reading texts are very low, which revolves around kitchen problems and other activities at home such as helping their mothers cook, shopping at the market, etc. So that this continues to influence the presence of gender bias in learning English for students among junior high and high schools (Hardiningsih, 2006).

#### **The Concept of Wrong Language Learning Role Model**

Then the last one is the error as a role model in learning English, especially for second-grade students (Junior and Senior High School). Where, teachers or other instructors still prioritize pilot models as part of learning English for men rather than women. So, this phenomenon greatly influences English learning which makes students attribute their role models to men. When in fact, there are many female role models who are proficient in English and are free to be emulated by anyone, both male and female. The fact is again, in terms of

learning and mastering foreign languages (especially English), girls are actually faster and develop with their language skills. Because biologically and intellectually, women's brains are very different from men's, but still, masculine authority (men) is very strong, and can easily override it. Therefore, this one influence is able to have a very gender biased effect in the existing language learning process and the solution certainly does not determine who the role model is, it is highly permissible for men or women. With the aim that the process of foreign language skills (read: English) develops and is equal, aka not discriminating against one another.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the language learning process on learning English as second language is biased by the gender identity. The exploration show that, students with different background have its own style in constructing their understanding toward the problem which portrayed in the English written text product. the exploration shows that the male students are more bold on its abstractive thinking rather than female students, while the female students are more constructive on taking the perspective in learning language. The distinctions between gender identities for men and women are complicated. The study showed that one's gender identity affects their capacity to acquire languages, since it has been established that each gender possesses a set of linguistic skills that students from various backgrounds utilize to develop their knowledge and level of intellect. In systemic functional linguistics analysis, the pattern of meta-function of language reveals the pattern of difference on the written product based on gender background. According to the research, learning chances that are already built into a patriarchal society, uneven language learning teaching materials, and the idea of the improper language learning role model are some of the factors that influence the incidence of gender bias in the field of education. This fact demonstrates how the gender background affects how linguistic ability discourse is constructed. To further theory and organize language learning practices for a better future of language education, these findings are directed to future scholars and language teachers. The phenomenon of gender bias in the world of education, especially in learning English, is very real. Between male and female students, they often receive input in the form of things that smell of gender inequality. This matter greatly affects their learning world in improving their foreign language skills (English), with the existence of gender inequality that is currently being faced by society. So more or less, it is very detrimental where the dominance of the masculine (male) greatly suppresses the existence of feminine in the learning process. Some things that really happen and really affect gender balance, especially in the world of learning English for junior and senior high school students, include being confined to patriarchal constructions that are naturally formed in society, inequality of language learning material which is considered gender bias, and finally, the conception of roles. a gender-biased model of learning English. More or less like that there is a real gender bias in the world of education in learning English, which sounds like it needs to be followed up immediately so it doesn't have a more negative impact, especially on women. The next step that must be taken in the future is to improve the learning concept that is far more inclusive and equal, starting with paying attention to the learning curriculum and matters relating to students' mastery of English. Coupled with the provision or implementation of theories and activities that uphold gender equality. These things are able to create learning English that is more gender inclusive and basically both male and female students have the same opportunity and enthusiasm for learning, and there are no gaps to be unfair or discriminatory.

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