



RESEARCH PAPER

Gender Sensitive Communication in ELT Classroom: Practices and Prevention

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the practices of gender sensitive communication by the teachers in English language teaching and learning classrooms with the focus on knowing the concept, the level of gender sensitive communication and the possible prevention to avoid its negative impacts on the learners and the learning environment. Teachers consciously or unconsciously as a social practice use gender sensitive language during the classroom interactions. The data for the present study has been collected through questionnaire from 305 students studying at undergraduate level in Multan. The findings of the study reveal that the teachers use gender sensitive language in English teaching classrooms. It shows that our classrooms are operating as gender operative. This practice creates a negative environment of learning. Consequently, it affects the learning abilities of the students. It is suggested that our classroom should not be operative as gender sensitive. The teachers should use a neutral discourse rather than gendered.

KEYWORDS Communication, ELT, Gender, Practice, Prevention, Sensitive

Introduction

Gender sensitive language for academic communication purposes in ELT gendered classroom at university level has been noted and researched during last few decades. There have been varieties of expressions used in this context such as gender sensitive, gender discrimination, gender equality, gender representation and gender inclusive language. According to Rosa, Drew, and Canavan (2020) universities remain both gendered and gendering organizations. Teacher-student communication in classroom is an ever-present and integral part of academic world at university level with students of male and female gender in one classroom. It is assumed that the choice and use of gender sensitive language by the teachers may become biased in ELT gendered classrooms. The existence of gender bias in the context of “teacher-talk to students” and “student to student talk” in the classroom was analyzed by Cheng and Ghajarieh (2009).

The present study has its significance in current academic scenario at university level in Pakistan. The following points can highlight the significance:

- Reviewing the existing use of teachers' gender sensitive communication during their interaction with male and female students
- Examining the actual states of gender sensitive communication by teachers in coeducation classrooms

- Analyzing various instructional communication expressions of teachers, such as interaction with students, selection of words, phrases and sentences for male and female students, through classroom observation
- Examining teachers' awareness of gender differences and possible causes, and their attitudes toward gender equality practices
- Enhancing teachers' abilities to reduce and avoid gender sensitive communication in ELT classrooms

The present study aimed at exploring the current teaching practices regarding gender sensitive communication in university gendered ELT classrooms in Pakistan. The main purpose of the study was based on the common observation that during language teaching practices in ELT gendered classroom teachers use gender sensitive language for communication that needs to be reduced and eliminated for better teaching and learning practices.

The usages of gender discourse by the teachers for teaching practices are unavoidable. This point raises the possibility of the language becoming gender sensitive. Viewed in this regard, the gender sensitive communication that may develop gender discrimination in the class needs to be checked, reduced and eliminated from the teaching practices. The aim and target can be achieved by conducting the researches like the present research. Since communication is key factor it has to be devoid of any possible negativities and sensitivities. The present study is an effort to reconstruct the gender sensitive communication to be bias free.

Generally speaking and according to the commonly agreed concept, gender refers to the social roles and status difference between women and men in a society. These roles are determined by the social, cultural and economic organizations of a society and the prevailing religious, moral and legal norms. 'Sex' is a biological term while "gender" a psychological and socio-cultural one (Anderson 1988).

According to the EIGE: Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus, the following are the different types of languages in light of genders.

Gender-sensitive language is based on gender equality that is evident through language. Gender equality in language is achieved when both women and men are addressed as persons of equal value, dignity and respect.

Gender-biased language prefers one gender over another. It is a form of gender-discriminatory language.

Gender-neutral language is not gender-specific. It considers people in general. It has no reference to women or men.

Researches on ELT classroom interactions communication between the teachers and the students with regards to the gender sensitive language have proved that the language used by the teachers in ELT classrooms is not devoid of gender sensitive elements with a notable negative impact on the learners and the learning environment. Here are the example sentences that show the use of gender sensitive language use by the teachers in the universities ELT gendered classrooms. Many more may be found and explored through other researches.

Sentences about Girls	Girls are more study conscious
	Girls are more hard working serious and committed
	Girls are more regular and punctual
	Girls are mannered
	Girls are more obedient
	Girls are more marks and results sensitive
	Girls are shy.

Sentences about Boys	Boys are careless and lazy
	Boys are non-serious
	Boys waste time
	Boys are not disciplined and well mannered
	Boys do not care about marks and results
	Boys are trouble creators
	Boys do not pay attention

Gender-Biased	Bias Free
Man	Person
Delivery boy	Courier
Alumni	Graduate
Spokesman	Representative
Mankind	Humanity
Manpower	Human Resource
Motherly	Affectionate

Literature Review

Communication is a fundamental source and tool of teachers for classroom interactions and teaching practices. Teachers communicate to students for various academic purpose of teaching, student participation in class activities and assessment. The research of Cheng and Ghajarieh (2009) on tracing gender bias in language used in classroom provided the examples of classroom discourses that contained gender bias. They presented a number of suggestions to reduce the effect of gendered discourses in classroom settings. As Lomotey (2017) stated, gender fair language becomes successful because there are legal measures to support and implement it. It is important to mention that the ELT gendered class teachers should be very conscious about their language use. They must choose the words, phrases and sentence that are not gender sensitive. This point has been explained by the researchers teachers and teacher educators not only teach language knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but they also build students' critical awareness of particular values, such as moral values, cultural values, and gender-related values (Widodo et al. 2018). The above point elaborates the role of teachers in ELT gendered classrooms. According to Lucas S. (2017) the teacher does take note of gender sensitivity in the use of language. There are any guidelines or suggestions to the teachers in developing their lesson plans keeping gender issues in mind. The use of gender sensitive communication on the part of the teachers must be paid due attention to avoid any possible negative impacts. Gender in language education has been a field of critical interdisciplinary inquiry. Many English-speaking authors have dealt with this issue and come to the conclusion that the question of the usage of female forms is an important question of overall language usage (Cameron, 2003). This question is defined as the usage of gender-sensitive language. Gender sensitivity is generally defined as the way in which male and female are treated differently therefore, this difference is eternal and

unavoidable. The use of language is totally the choice of the teachers. They are independent in this regard. Proper planning is required for the gender sensitivity free language use by the teachers. This might become possible by developing a list of words and sentences that are not gender sensitive rather they are neutral with no negative impact on the students of any gender. Over the past few decades, there has been a steadily growing body of research on gender and language education (Rowlett and King 2017). In recent linguistic studies on gender and language Olivera, Sacristan, & Fernandez (2003) highlighted four gender categories in a language: grammatical gender, lexical gender, referential gender and social gender.

Gender Sensitive Communication can be indicated with the help of many indicators. In the present study a number of indicators are enlisted below to give the readers an idea of the areas that lead to gender sensitive communication in ELT classrooms. There are many such indicators but here some most important have been mentioned. These indicators reflect that the learners on the basis of gender feel some kind of bias or discrimination. The indicators like language use in the form of word choice, the behaviours of the teachers varying in case of genders, the grant of marks and grades affecting the results on the basis of gender and the attachments with one gender by ignoring the other have a negative impact on the learners and the learning environment that needs to be improved by reducing and avoiding such expressions. The diagram given below shows the main indicators of gender sensitive communication. These indicators are very useful in understanding the facets of how gender sensitive communication takes place in classroom practices.



Ariyanto 2018; Sulaimani and Elyas 2018; maintain that schools and universities are regarded as educational spaces that canalize or instill particular gender-related values. This proves the point that academia has a dominant role in imparting instructions as well as sharing gender-related values.

The ideas of gender-sensitive language first came from feminist language reformers during the 1970s as maintained by the contemporary feminist theories. The role of teachers as communicators and sharer of information through the medium of language in the classrooms has an undeniable importance and impact on the learners and the learning environment. Bengoechea (2011) stressed the role of teachers by expressing his views that “teachers’ way of thinking is crucial. This view also proves the point that especially in Pakistani academia that majority of classrooms are teachers-centered. The use of language by the teachers for academic purposes is teacher-dominant and teacher dependent. The perceptions from teachers can support Sunderland’s (2000) suggestion that teachers and pre-service teachers be mobilized to develop ways of dealing with bias found in materials like engaging in analyzing works and reversing traditional gendered language. Gendered classrooms are bound to have gender-based communication,

however, the adaptation and level of gender sensitive language is individual teachers dependent that might vary among individual teachers.

Material and Methods

The present study was anchored on quantitative research method to determine teachers' use of gender sensitive language for communication purposes in the classroom.

305 male and female students of Undergrad programs of different subjects and Public and Private Universities of Multan City were the participants in this study.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The data for gender sensitive communication was collected through a survey questionnaire. A questionnaire consisting of 12 questions was developed covering all the major areas of the study and the intended objectives of the study. The procedure of data collection was to get responses from 305 male and female students of different public and private universities of Multan city. The three main dimensions of the study were: the gender sensitive language use practice, the level of gender sensitive communication and the impact on male and female students and the learning environment. The survey questionnaire was distributed among the participant of the study. The researcher proceeded in the collection of the survey questionnaire with willing participants. Clear instructions and suitable time were provided to the participants to respond.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Concept of gender bias

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	87.5%	9.5%	3%

The above data shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the concept of gender bias. The results confirm that 87.5% respondents know the concept of gender bias whereas only 9.5% respondents are unable to know this concept. The high percentage of the 'Yes' responses is a positive indicator of maturity of the respondents with regards to the concept of gender bias.

Table 2
Gender biased practice is classroom

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	45.2%	47.5%	7.2%

The above data of table 2 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the practice of gender bias in classroom. The results confirm that 45.2% respondents respond with yes option that gender bias is practiced in class whereas 47.5% respondents negate the practice of gender bias. The 7.2% respondents respond that they do not know that gender bias is practiced in class.

Table 3
Equal Treatment of Girls and Boys in Class

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	68.2%	30.2%	1.6%

The above table No 3 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the equal treatment of boys and girls in the class. The results confirm that 68.2% respondents responded with yes whereas 30.2% respondents were of the opinion that the girls and boys were not equally treated in the class. The high percentage of the 'Yes' responses indicates the low percentage of gender bias.

Table 4
Use of Gender Biased Language in Class

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	40.3%	50.2%	9.5%

The above data of table.4 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the use of gender biased language in the class. The results show that 40.3% respondents responded with yes whereas 50.2% respondents were of the opinion that the gender biased language was not used in the class. The results indicate the use of gender biased language in classroom.

Table 5
Gender biased jokes in Class

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	39%	55.7%	6.3%

The above data of table.5 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the sharing or the use of gender biased jokes or quotes in the class. The results show that 39.0% respondents responded with yes whereas 55.7% respondents were of the opinion that the gender biased jokes or quotes were not shared or used in the class. The results indicate the sharing and use of gender biased jokes or quotes in classroom.

Table 6
Teacher's behavior as Gendered in Class

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	37.7%	55.4%	6.9%

The above table 6 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the gender bias behavior of the teachers in classroom. The results confirm that 37.7% respondents respond with yes option that gender bias behavior is practiced in classroom by the teachers whereas 55.4% respondents negate the practice of gender biased behaviours by the teachers. The results confirm the practice of gender biased behaviours of the teachers in classrooms.

Table 7
Gender Biasness affects the Learning Environment

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	45.9%	44.9%	9.2%

The above table.7 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the effect of gender bias on classroom environment. The results confirm that 45.9% respondents respond with yes option that gender bias affects the classroom environment whereas 44.9% respondents negate the practice of gender bias affecting the classroom environment. The results confirm that gender bias affects the classroom environment.

Table 8
Reflection of in Award of Marks and Positions

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	39.3%	52.5%	8.2%

The above data of table 8 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the reflection of gender bias in awarding marks, grades and positions or distinctions to the students on the basis of gender. The results confirm that 39.3% respondents respond with yes option that gender bias is reflected in awarding marks, grades and positions or distinctions to the students on the basis of gender whereas 52.5% respondents negated the role of gender bias in awarding marks, grades and positions or distinctions to the students. The results confirm that gender bias is reflected in awarding marks, grades and positions or distinctions to the students.

Table 9
Students Facing Problems Regarding Gender Biasness in Class

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	33.4%	60%	6.6%

The above table 9 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding facing gender bias by the students. The results confirm that 33.4% respondents respond with yes option that they face gender bias whereas 60.0% respondents negated that they did not face gender bias in classroom. The results confirm that the students face gender bias in classroom on the basis of gender.

Table 10
Complaints of Gender Biasness in Classroom

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	23.9%	66.2%	9.8%

The above table 10 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the registering complaints or raising voices against gender basis by the students. The results confirm that 23.9% respondents respond with yes option that means they faced gender bias in the classroom and they complained against gender bias and some raised their voices against gender bias in classroom whereas 66.2% respondents negated that they neither complained nor raised voices against gender bias. The results confirm that complaints are registered and voices are raised against gender bias by the students.

Table 11
Complaints cell against Gender Biasness in Academic Institution

Sr. No	Yes	No	Do not Know
1	25.9%	52.8%	21.3%

The above table 11 shows the results of the 305 responses in response to the above question statement regarding the availability of complaint cells for eradication of gender bias in the departments or the institutions. The results confirm that only 25.9% respondents respond with yes option that complaint cells regarding gender bias complaints are available in the departments or the institutions whereas 52.8% respondents negated the availability of complaint cells for eradication of gender bias in the departments or the institutions. The results confirm that the number of complaints cells available for eradication of gender bias in the departments or the institutions is very low. It also raises

the need to increase the number of complaints cells for effective eradication of gender bias in the departments or the institutions.

The systematic analysis of questionnaire was done and proper discussion was provided for each research question asked in the survey questionnaire to explain the results based on the responses from the respondents. The results gathered in light of the result analysis and discussions confirmed that gender sensitive communication is used in ELT gendered classrooms by the teachers and that it needs to be eliminated by reducing and avoiding the use of gender sensitive communication is used by the teachers in ELT gendered classrooms.

Findings

On the basis of the results obtained from the survey questionnaire responses of 305 respondents, the following findings are made:

1. Gender sensitive language is used by the teachers in ELT gendered classrooms at university level.
2. The teachers use language that differs on the basis of gender and give rise to gender sensitive communication in ELT classrooms.
3. Gender sensitive sentences have been traced in the language used by the teachers in ELT gendered classrooms at university level.
4. The use of gender sensitive language by the teachers in ELT gendered classrooms has negative impact of both the learners and the learning environment.
5. Effective eradication of gender sensitive language use by the teachers in ELT gendered classrooms is needed.

Conclusion

This research explored the use of gender sensitive language in ELT gendered classroom with the purpose to investigate the nature, level and the impact of gender sensitive language on the learners and the learning environment. From the findings, it was concluded that ELT teachers' consciously or unconsciously use gender sensitive language in communicating instruction in the gendered classroom. The sentences they used during classroom activities for various purposes such sharing of information, classroom discussions and assessment. It is maintained that gender sensitive language should not be used in classroom. Gender-sensitivity free language is necessary for the learners and the learning environment as on the other hand, gender biased language is neither desired nor useful.

Recommendations

On the basis of findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Use of gender sensitive communication by the teachers is a sensitive academic issue.
2. Reduction as well as complete elimination of gender sensitive communication by the teachers in ELT classrooms is highly important and direly needed.
3. Establishment of active complaint cells and proper actions against such issues are highly recommended.

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