

Bridging Secular and Religious Perspectives: Gender Awareness in Language Learning in Indonesian Higher Education

Abstract

Despite extensive exploration of gender dynamics in Western education, limited understanding exists regarding Indonesia's dual system, where secular and religious frameworks uniquely shape gender perceptions. This study compared undergraduate students' gender awareness, attitudes toward equality, perceived impacts on learning, and strategies for enhancing inclusivity in language education. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 60 students, equally divided between public and Islamic universities, through surveys and interviews. Quantitative analysis revealed no significant differences in gender awareness (public mean = 3.90, Islamic mean = 4.33, $t(58) = -1.56$, $p = 0.125$) or the perceived importance of equality (public mean = 4.00, Islamic mean = 4.23, $t(58) = -0.83$, $p = 0.412$), with small to medium effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 0.40, 0.21$). Chi-square tests showed medium practical differences but no statistical significance in perceptions of gender's impact ($\chi^2(2) = 5.93$, $p = 0.205$, Cramer's $V = 0.31$). Qualitative findings highlighted shared beliefs in the benefits of gender awareness, emphasizing reduced stereotypes, inclusive environments, and balanced representation in materials. These insights call for systemic reforms to promote gender inclusivity across institutional contexts.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, social constructivism, gender awareness, Islamic universities, Indonesian universities

Introduction

While the influence of gender dynamics on educational outcomes has been extensively studied in Western contexts (Campbell, 2021; Fleischmann et al., 2014), significant gaps persist in understanding these dynamics within non-Western settings like Indonesia, where secular and religious educational systems coexist (Fithriani, 2022; Nunu & Darul, 2022). This gap complicates efforts to comprehend how cultural and institutional frameworks shape gender perceptions differently in public universities, which follow secular curricula, and Islamic universities, which integrate religious doctrines. Studies from Romania, Japan, and Central Asia highlight the profound impact of such frameworks on gender equality perceptions (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2021; Columban et al., 2020; Yoshikawa et al., 2018), yet challenges remain, particularly in English language teaching (ELT), due to limited models, insufficient knowledge, and stakeholder resistance (Tarrayo & Salonga, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires extending critical pedagogy and social constructivism—frameworks that emphasize inclusivity and challenge power imbalances, as advocated by Freire (1970) and Vygotsky (1978)—to non-Western contexts such as Indonesia. Such an approach would facilitate the development of educational policies that harmonize global human rights standards with local cultural and religious values, thereby addressing the diverse needs of all students.

The integration of critical pedagogy and social constructivism into Indonesian education challenges traditional models by emphasizing dialogue, problem-solving, and the co-construction of knowledge, particularly in Islamic settings where these frameworks have promoted social justice and gender awareness (Raihani, 2020; Tahalele & Prihatini, 2024). Within Indonesia's dual educational system, public universities typically align with global human rights discourses

and secular principles, adopting a more progressive stance on gender equality compared to Islamic institutions, which situate gender issues within religious contexts (Sakhiyya & Locke, 2019). Public university students, especially in urban centers, demonstrate heightened awareness of gender equality and a greater willingness to challenge traditional roles, influenced by exposure to international norms and feminist ideologies (Columban et al., 2020). However, institutional barriers persist, including limited gender-sensitive curricula and entrenched patriarchal structures within university cultures (Sakhiyya & Locke, 2019). In Islamic universities, female educators have been instrumental in embedding gender perspectives and challenging patriarchal norms, yet female students, particularly those from pesantren backgrounds, often grapple with reconciling their gender identities in more liberal academic environments, highlighting the tension between Islamic traditions and contemporary gender discourses (Kull, 2009; Mustofa et al., 2023).

Thus, a comparative analysis of gender perceptions between public and Islamic university students offers critical insights into how educational settings either reinforce or challenge gender norms, with public university students demonstrating more open attitudes toward gender inclusivity, while Islamic university students engage with such issues within a religious framework. Grounded in critical pedagogy and social constructivism, this study addresses gaps in literature and provides actionable insights for developing inclusive policies that align global standards with local cultural and religious values. The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do public and Islamic university students compare in their awareness of gender-related issues and their perceptions of the importance of gender equality in the context of English language learning?
2. How do public and Islamic university students perceive the impact of gender on their experience or performance in English language learning, and how do they believe promoting gender equality can enhance their overall learning experience?
3. How do public and Islamic university students perceive the positive impact of gender awareness on English language learning?
4. How do public and Islamic university students perceive how English teaching and learning materials can better address gender equality and inclusivity?

Literature Review

Gender Awareness in English Education

Gender awareness in English language education encompasses recognizing gender differences, gender-based inequalities, and the sociocultural norms that shape gender roles (Martinez et al., 2010). Central to the educational experience, it influences curriculum design, classroom dynamics, and students' identity formation (Campbell, 2021). As a language reflects and constructs societal norms, integrating gender perspectives within English language teaching is crucial for fostering inclusive learning environments that challenge stereotypes and promote critical thinking. Research demonstrates that gender biases in teacher-student interactions can significantly impact student participation and achievement, with female students often outperforming males yet receiving less recognition for their success (Główka, 2014; Mahmud, 2010). Scholars argue for the incorporation of gender-fair language and queer perspectives in

ELT to cultivate inclusivity and analytical skills (Tarrayo, 2022). Nonetheless, resistance and limited teacher knowledge frequently obstruct the implementation of such approaches (Tarrayo & Salonga, 2023).

In Indonesia, where traditional gender norms are deeply entrenched within religious and cultural frameworks, the integration of gender awareness in education presents distinct challenges (Waluyo & Anita, 2024). Public and Islamic universities operate within divergent ideological frameworks, with Islamic institutions balancing religious doctrines against modern gender discourses, thereby creating differing approaches to gender equality (Raihani, 2020). Such institutional variations demand a thorough investigation into how gender awareness is perceived and practiced within these educational spaces, offering critical insights into the broader sociocultural dynamics shaping gender education in the country (Asrohah & Idayatni, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is imperative for devising strategies that effectively promote gender inclusivity and equality, thereby transforming higher education into platforms for societal progress.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy and Social Constructivism

Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy frames education as a transformative tool for social justice, empowering individuals to critically challenge oppressive structures (Freire, 1970). In English language education, this approach moves beyond linguistic skill acquisition to foster critical engagement with societal norms, particularly gender roles, enabling students to resist inequality and advocate for change (Granger & Gerlach, 2023). By integrating critical language awareness, educators can expose and dismantle embedded linguistic and social inequalities, promoting gender consciousness (Alim, 2005; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005). Given English's global influence, a critical ELT framework is vital to balance linguistic proficiency with cultural preservation and social responsibility (Bacon, 2017). In Indonesia, public universities, with greater flexibility, often adopt gender-inclusive policies, while Islamic institutions navigate the intersection of religious teachings and modern gender discourses, limiting progressive reforms (Hayati, 2015; Kull, 2012). Despite potential for curricular integration, incomplete implementation of critical pedagogical practices highlights the need for systemic reforms advancing gender inclusivity and social justice (Zein et al., 2020).

Social Constructivism, rooted in Vygotsky's theory, posits that learning is inherently a socially mediated process shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts, asserting that knowledge—including understandings of gender roles and norms—is constructed through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Within English language education, the classroom becomes a critical space where students actively negotiate and reshape their perceptions of gender. Social Constructivism emphasizes that gender roles are not biologically predetermined but are constructed through discourse and educational practices. The variation in how gender roles are addressed in Indonesian universities reflects their differing institutional environments: students in public universities are exposed to a broader spectrum of gender perspectives due to their secular nature, while students in Islamic universities often encounter more conservative views influenced by religious and cultural norms. Studies underline the importance of challenging the gender stereotypes frequently perpetuated in educational materials, such as English textbooks that traditionally depict men as active and women as passive (Emilia et al., 2017; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Scholars advocate for a fluid, context-sensitive approach to gender in language education, moving away from rigid categorizations to account for the evolving nature of gender identities (Schmenk, 2004; Waluyo & Anita, 2024). By engaging students in dialogues about

gender equality and encouraging them to question traditional norms, educators can foster an inclusive, equitable learning environment that empowers students to critically examine and redefine gender constructs (McKinley, 2015).

Studies on Students' Voices of Gender Awareness in Higher Education

Studies on gender awareness in higher education accentuate the profound influence of gender on student perceptions, participation, and academic performance, revealing critical disparities that necessitate attention. Głowska's (2014) comparative analysis in Poland demonstrates that female students consistently outperform their male counterparts in secondary and vocational education, with data from both achievement tests and surveys indicating that gender plays a pivotal role in shaping language learning experiences. Relatedly, Mahmud's (2010) research in Indonesia highlights how gender significantly affects learning styles and preferences, further emphasizing its impact on academic outcomes at the university level. Earlier studies, including Duran's (2006) qualitative case study in Colombia, and Hassaskhah and Roshan Zamir's (2013) mixed-method research in Iran, illustrate the persistent presence of gender biases and stereotypes in classroom interactions and teaching materials, which continue to erode student self-esteem and hinder academic potential. The ongoing presence of such biases stresses the pressing need for more equitable approaches in language education (Nagasundram et al., 2021).

To address these disparities, innovative approaches in English language education have emerged, integrating feminist perspectives and addressing gender sensitivities within pedagogical practices. As examples, Granger and Gerlach's (2023) action research in Germany and Dewi et al.'s (2023) initiative to embed gender issues into English language materials for Indonesian students demonstrate the positive effects of gender-sensitive content. These approaches not only raise awareness of social inequalities but also foster critical thinking, helping to create inclusive learning environments that support students of all genders. Recent studies by Mahmood et al. (2024) and Dewi et al. (2023) further feature broad support from both students and teachers for incorporating themes of gender equality and human rights into educational content. Nevertheless, critical analyses by Pellicer Ortín and Asín Abad (2018) reveal persistent challenges, including gender stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women in educational materials, which continue to shape student perceptions and perpetuate outdated stereotypes.

While some research, such as Bernat and Lloyd's (2007) study on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Australia and Nikitina and Furuoka's study of Russian learners in Malaysia, suggests no significant differences in beliefs between male and female students, a systematic review by Nagasundram et al. (2021) argues that gender differences in language learning beliefs stem from societal, biological, and psychological factors. More recent findings challenge the notion of minimal gender influence, with Bai and Wang's (2023) research on primary students in Hong Kong confirming gender's significant role in shaping growth mindset, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation in self-regulated learning. Moreover, gender awareness has been shown to positively influence language acquisition, as Jindapitak et al. (2022) demonstrate through the impact of Global Englishes exposure on student confidence and language perceptions. Teacher feedback and motivational strategies also exhibit gender-specific effects, as Wardana (2023) and Ali et al. (2020) suggest, further emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Incorporating a gender-sensitive framework in English Language

Teaching (ELT) can therefore lead to more effective, inclusive education, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes and fostering greater educational equity.

Recent studies on gender perceptions in Indonesian public universities emphasize persistent disparities despite increased female participation in higher education (Yuspiani et al., 2023). Male students consistently exhibit lower acceptance of gender equity compared to females, perpetuating inequalities (Apriani et al., 2022). Entrenched stereotypes portray women as diligent yet hesitant to embrace challenges, reflecting traditional expectations (Chusniatun et al., 2022), and extend to professional aspirations, where neo-traditional ideals reinforce men as primary breadwinners and women as secondary earners (Utomo, 2012). However, female students often demonstrate more progressive attitudes toward gender roles, signaling a gradual shift toward equity (Puspitawati, 2010; Utomo, 2012). These findings underscore the urgent need for gender-responsive education and policies to address enduring inequalities and promote inclusivity in academic settings (Indriyany et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, research on gender perceptions at Indonesian Islamic universities reveals diverse interpretations of Islamic texts, ranging from conservative to progressive (Qibtiyah, 2018). Despite some awareness, deeper understanding based on Islamic sources remains limited (Fauziyyah et al., 2022), allowing stereotypes to persist, such as viewing female students as diligent but less assertive (Chusniatun et al., 2022). Social media often reinforces traditional gender roles (Mayasari et al., 2019), and male students exhibit lower acceptance of gender equity, exacerbating disparities (Apriani et al., 2022). Although women's higher education participation has risen, significant gender gaps remain (Yuspiani et al., 2023), emphasizing the need for enhanced gender awareness and targeted efforts to address stereotypes.

Methods

Research Design, Context, and Participants

The research utilized a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to examine gender awareness among undergraduates in Indonesian higher education institutions. Combining numerical data with personal reflections created an effective framework for exploring gender-specific perceptions in language education, which remains strongly influenced by sociocultural and institutional factors (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009; Waluyo & Anita, 2024).

Research Context and Participants

The study took place within Indonesia's higher education system, which includes public institutions along with private and religiously affiliated schools. Indonesian public universities operate as secular institutions funded by the state while remaining under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Public universities offer diverse academic programs that emphasize scientific research and technology development while promoting national progress. State Islamic Universities operate under the Ministry of Religious Affairs supervision. Islamic teachings combine with modern academic disciplines in these institutions, creating an educational environment where religious values and cultural norms become integral parts of daily academic activities. Public universities and Islamic universities both provide similar academic degrees and adhere to national accreditation standards, but they

maintain distinct institutional missions and curricular focuses along with differing sociocultural orientations that affect gender roles, moral standards, and language practices.

To explore gender awareness in English language learning within this broader institutional context, the study involved 60 undergraduates from public and Islamic universities in Indonesia who had completed at least one year of English language courses. The study selected its sample to ensure representation across institutional types and demographic aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, and academic status. The study enrolled 30 participants from six public universities, with Universitas Bengkulu and Semarang State University contributing the most students. The group consisted of 66.7% females and 33.3% males, while most participants fell in the 18-20 age range at 66.7%, followed by ages 21-25 at 30%, with only one participant aged between 31-35, representing 3.3%. The distribution of students spanned multiple academic semesters: Semester 2 accounted for 20%, Semester 4 for 30%, Semester 6 for 40%, and Semester 8 for 10%. The participants self-identified as belonging to the Rejang, Serawai, and Jawa ethnicities at equal rates of 16.7%, while other ethnicities included Melayu at 13.3% and Batak and Sunda both at 6.7%, along with various minority groups each at 3.3%.

The remaining thirty participants were students from UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, an Islamic university in Sumatra. This cohort showed a pronounced gender imbalance, with 93.3% female and only 6.7% male participants. Similar to their counterparts in public institutions, most of these students were aged 18 to 20 (66.7%), with the rest in the 21 to 25 age range (33.3%). Most were in Semester 4 (76.7%), while a smaller portion were in Semester 8 (23.3%). The group exhibited significant ethnic diversity, including Serawai (30%), Melayu (20%), Rejang and Jawa (16.7% each), and smaller representations from Palembang, Kaur, Pasemah, Bengkulu, and Minang backgrounds (3.3% each).

Institutional Context as a Phenomenological Horizon

To explore students' lived experiences and the influence of their institutional contexts, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach complemented by a phenomenological perspective (Martiny et al., 2021). By conceptualizing public and Islamic universities in Indonesia as distinct phenomenological horizons, the research examined how these environments shape students' perceptions of gender awareness. In phenomenology, the term "horizon" denotes the contextual backdrop that shapes individuals' understanding of specific phenomena. Public universities, characterized by largely secular environments, provide a progressive platform exposing students to liberal discourses on gender equality, enabling critical engagement with gender roles and stereotypes while challenging traditional norms. Conversely, Islamic universities operate within religiously influenced frameworks, where students interpret gender through the lens of Islamic teachings (Mustofa et al., 2023). This religious horizon often creates a complex interplay between modern gender discourses and traditional values, either supporting or constraining perceptions of gender equality (Mayasari et al., 2019).

The exploration of gender awareness across public and Islamic universities reveals both shared challenges and distinct experiences. Public university students, situated within secular environments, often feel empowered to challenge traditional gender norms and actively engage in discussions and initiatives promoting inclusivity and equity. Conversely, students at Islamic universities navigate gender issues within a framework shaped by religious doctrines, where the pursuit of gender equality is frequently mediated by conservative standards (Chusniatun et al., 2022; Qibtiyah, 2018). Despite these differing contexts, students from both institutions encounter common obstacles, such as confronting entrenched stereotypes and advocating for greater equity.

Their experiences are profoundly influenced by the sociocultural and institutional horizons of their respective settings, accentuating how secular and religious educational contexts shape approaches to and understandings of gender-related issues.

Research instruments and data collection

The research employed a structured survey as part of the quantitative data collection to measure four key constructs related to gender awareness in English language learning: awareness of gender-related issues, the importance attributed to gender equality, the perceived impact of gender on English learning, and the belief that promoting gender equality can enhance the overall learning experience. Each construct was evaluated using a combination of 5-point and 3-point Likert scales. For example, participants were asked to rate their awareness of gender-related issues with questions like, "How aware are you of gender-related issues in the context of learning English?" and the importance of gender equality with, "On a scale of 1 to 5, how important do you think gender equality is in the context of learning English?" The perceived impact of gender was assessed with a 3-point scale, using items such as, "Have you ever felt that your gender affects your experience or performance in English language learning?" Similarly, the belief that gender equality enhances learning was measured with, "Do you believe that promoting gender equality in English language learning can enhance the overall learning experience?" The development of these items was informed by prior research (Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2021; Tarrayo, 2023; Ulla & Paiz, 2023) to ensure theoretical alignment and relevance to the research questions. The survey was distributed online via Google Forms, primarily through WhatsApp, targeting students in Indonesian universities. After data collection, responses were translated from Indonesian to English for analysis, and the items were validated by educational experts to ensure content accuracy and reliability.

In addition to the quantitative survey, written interviews were conducted to capture qualitative insights into how gender awareness influences English language acquisition and how educational materials can be refined to promote greater inclusivity. The decision to use written interviews allowed participants to reflect more deeply on their responses, providing them with the flexibility to articulate their views without the immediacy and potential bias that might arise in face-to-face interviews. This approach enabled a richer, more nuanced exploration of personal experiences and perceptions related to the intersection of gender and language learning, complementing the quantitative data gathered from the surveys. Key interview questions included, "How can gender awareness positively impact English language learning?" and "How can learning materials better address gender equality and inclusivity?" These questions, made available in both English and Indonesian, facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives on how gender dynamics shape their educational experiences and offered insights into potential improvements in curriculum design.

Data analysis

The quantitative analysis employed means, standard deviations, and independent t-tests to assess student attitudes from public and Islamic universities, addressing the initial research question on gender awareness and its importance. Chi-square tests examined categorical differences for the second question regarding the perceived impact of gender on English learning and its educational benefits. Effect sizes, including Cohen's *d* and Cramer's *V*, were calculated to evaluate practical significance, enhancing the study's analytical depth.

The qualitative data for the third and fourth research questions on gender awareness in English language learning were analyzed using Clarke and Braun's (2017) thematic approach. After an intensive familiarization phase, initial codes were generated to identify key patterns, which were synthesized into refined themes to authentically capture participants' perspectives. The analysis revealed specific gender-related challenges and opportunities, with anonymized identifiers (e.g., PS1, PS2 for public university students; IS1, IS2 for Islamic university students) ensuring confidentiality while highlighting institutional distinctions.

Results

RQ 1: Gender Awareness and Equality Perceptions in English Learning: Public vs. Islamic University Students

A comparison of gender awareness and the perceived importance of gender equality in English language learning between public and Islamic university students revealed subtle differences. Public university students had a mean score of 3.90 (SD = 1.16) for gender awareness, compared to 4.33 (SD = 0.99) for Islamic university students. Similarly, public university students reported a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 1.17) for the importance of gender equality, while Islamic university students scored slightly higher at 4.23 (SD = 1.01). Despite these small variations, independent samples t-tests for both measures showed no statistically significant differences between the groups, with $t(58) = -1.56$, $p = 0.125$ for gender awareness and $t(58) = -0.83$, $p = 0.412$ for the importance of gender equality. The effect sizes, Cohen's $d = 0.40$ for gender awareness and Cohen's $d = 0.21$ for the importance of gender equality, suggested small to medium practical differences. The results indicated that though Islamic university students were marginally more aware of gender-related issues and placed slightly more importance on gender equality, the differences were not substantial, and both groups demonstrated similar attitudes towards gender in English language learning.

RQ 2: Impact of Gender on English Learning: Perceptions of Public vs. Islamic University Students

A comparison of public and Islamic university students' perceptions regarding the impact of gender on their learning experiences and the potential benefits of promoting gender equality revealed subtle differences. When asked whether gender affected their learning, 60% (18) of public university students responded negatively, 20% (6) indicated uncertainty, and 20% (6) affirmed an impact, while Islamic university students reported 60% (18) negative responses, 30% (9) uncertainty, and 10% (3) affirmative responses. Although the chi-square test revealed no statistically significant difference, $\chi^2(2) = 5.93$, $p = 0.205$, Cramer's $V = 0.31$ indicated a medium practical difference, suggesting a marginally higher likelihood among Islamic university students to perceive gender as influencing their learning. Regarding the belief that promoting gender equality enhances learning, 43.3% (13) of public university students responded affirmatively, 33.3% (10) negatively, and 23.3% (7) were uncertain, compared to 83.3% (25), 13.3% (4), and 3.3% (1), respectively, for Islamic university students. Despite the higher proportion of positive responses from Islamic university students, the chi-square test did not reveal significant differences between the groups, $\chi^2(2) = 1.63$, $p = 0.442$, though Cramer's $V = 0.23$ suggested a small practical difference. The findings indicate that Islamic university students

were somewhat more inclined to perceive both gender's impact on learning and the benefits of gender equality, although the statistical differences were not significant.

RQ 3: Perceived Impact of Gender Awareness on English Learning: Public vs. Islamic University Students

Table 1

The emergent themes of the positive impact of gender awareness

Theme	Keywords	Sample Statements
Inclusivity and Supportive Learning	Inclusivity, inclusive, safe learning space, valued, supported	"Gender awareness can create an inclusive environment, supporting the empowerment of all students regardless of gender" (IS4).
Reduction of Gender Stereotypes	Reduce stereotypes, gender bias, equality	"Gender awareness can have a positive impact on English learning by reducing gender bias or stereotypes in learning materials" (IS3).
Impact on Learning Outcomes	Learning improvement, motivation, confidence	"With gender awareness, it will make us more confident because there is no differentiation" (PIS20).
Broadened Perspectives	Broaden perspectives, critical analysis	"Gender awareness can broaden understanding of perspectives and experiences" (IS7).
Equal Opportunities in Learning	Equal access, equal opportunities, gender equality	"Awareness or gender equality will have a positive impact on English learning if the teacher considers everything to be equal" (IS19).

The thematic analysis, as summarized in Table 1, revealed five key themes related to the impact of gender awareness on English language learning. The first theme, *Inclusivity and Supportive Learning*, emerged as a central focus for both public and Islamic university students, who frequently highlighted how gender awareness fostered a more inclusive and supportive environment. Students across both institutions believed that promoting gender awareness created a space where all learners, regardless of gender, felt valued, respected, and empowered to participate. For example, IS1 noted that "gender awareness can create a learning environment that is more inclusive, equality-oriented, and sensitive to diversity in English language learning." Similarly, PS18 shared that "gender awareness in English language learning can increase inclusivity, broaden understanding of gender roles in language, and encourage more socially sensitive language use, all of which can create a more supportive and responsive learning environment for all students." Across both groups, students recognized that this sense of belonging positively impacted their engagement with the content and increased participation, reinforcing the belief that inclusivity was crucial for effective learning.

A second theme that emerged was the *Reduction of Gender Stereotypes*. Students from both public and Islamic universities viewed gender awareness as instrumental in reducing harmful gender stereotypes within educational materials and practices. Islamic university students particularly emphasized the importance of eliminating gender bias in learning materials to create a more equitable learning experience. IS3 remarked, "Gender awareness can have a positive impact on English learning by reducing gender bias or stereotypes in learning materials," while IS8 echoed this sentiment by emphasizing the need for an inclusive environment that provides equal opportunities for all learners. Public university students similarly supported this view, with PS9 explaining that "teaching materials and methods should not perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, as doing so ensures all students, regardless of gender, feel valued and supported in developing their English language skills." The students' recognition that reducing stereotypes would lead to more relevant and fair learning materials draws attention to the broader view that gender awareness plays a vital role in fostering an inclusive learning space where all students can thrive.

The third major theme, *Impact on Learning Outcomes*, demonstrated that students from both public and Islamic universities believed gender awareness positively influenced learning outcomes by increasing their confidence, motivation, and engagement. Public university students, in particular, expressed that gender awareness helped create an environment where they felt more confident in their participation, as PS20 noted, "With gender awareness, it will make us more confident because there is no differentiation." Islamic university students also saw a strong connection between gender awareness and enhanced learning outcomes. IS10 observed that gender awareness allowed educators to better accommodate different learning styles and communication preferences, thus creating an environment that promoted active participation and improved the overall effectiveness of English language learning. This theme highlighted students' belief that gender awareness not only made the classroom more inclusive but also enriched their personal learning experiences by fostering greater participation and boosting their self-confidence.

Another significant theme, *Broadened Perspectives*, was particularly valued by Islamic university students for its capacity to expand critical thinking and enhance students' understanding of diverse viewpoints. Students from Islamic universities noted that gender awareness contributed to a broader understanding of perspectives and helped students challenge gender stereotypes in learning materials. IS7 explained that gender awareness "broadens understanding of perspectives and experiences, and avoids gender stereotypes in learning materials," leading to more inclusive language use and richer classroom discussions. Public university students, though less vocal on this issue, also acknowledged the value of gender awareness in expanding their horizons. PS7 mentioned how discussions on gender-related issues provided new knowledge, saying, "from that discussion, we learned that there is a lot of knowledge that we didn't know, and after learning, we knew it." Both groups saw gender awareness as a tool that allowed for more diverse discussions and deeper engagement with complex topics, thereby enhancing the educational experience.

Lastly, the theme of *Equal Opportunities in Learning* was recurrent in students' responses, with many emphasizing that gender awareness promoted equality by ensuring equal access to educational resources and opportunities for all learners, regardless of gender. IS19 articulated this clearly by stating, "awareness or gender equality will have a positive impact on English learning if the teacher considers everything to be equal and the same, not comparing each other." IS26 added that gender equality "indicates that everyone has the same rights, so that

in the context of learning English, everyone is freer to learn, express opinions, and be more confident in speaking." Public university students shared similar views, with PS24 pointing out that gender awareness helps make English language learning more inclusive by providing materials that reflect diverse gender roles. Students across both institutions recognized the necessity of equal opportunities, viewing them as a fundamental aspect of a supportive and fair learning environment.

RQ 4: Perceptions of Gender Equality and Inclusivity in English Teaching Materials: Public vs. Islamic University Students

Table 2

The emergent themes of the positive impact of how English teaching and learning materials can better address gender equality and inclusivity

Theme	Keywords	Sample Statements
Balanced Representation	"balanced representation," "equal"	IS1: "The representation should be balanced, the use of language inclusive, the emphasis on gender equity."
Gender Stereotype-Free	"gender stereotypes," "fair"	PS3: "Gender stereotype-free learning."
Inclusivity	"inclusive," "diverse roles"	IS3: "Learning materials can address gender inequality by paying attention to gender representation in textbooks."

The thematic analysis presented in Table 2 identifies three key themes concerning how English teaching and learning materials can better address gender equality and inclusivity. The first theme, *Balanced Representation*, emerged strongly among Islamic university students, who emphasized the necessity of fair and equal gender representation in both the roles and language used within educational materials. One student stressed the importance of “*balanced representation, the use of inclusive language, and an emphasis on gender equity*” (IS1). This call for balance extended beyond materials to classroom dynamics, where students emphasized the need for equal opportunities for all genders in participation and engagement. Public university students echoed this sentiment, with one student advocating for materials that “*open up new perspectives on gender equality*” (PS4). Both groups agreed that balanced representation is essential for cultivating an educational environment where all students feel equally represented and valued, irrespective of gender.

The second key theme, *Gender Stereotype-Free Learning*, was another central focus for both public and Islamic university students. Public university students highlighted the importance of removing gender stereotypes from learning materials, which they believed should offer a neutral and inclusive approach. One student described the need for “*gender stereotype-free learning*” as a foundation for equitable education (PS3). Islamic university students echoed this viewpoint, emphasizing that learning materials should be carefully designed to prevent the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. One Islamic university student noted that “*learning materials can address gender inequality by paying attention to gender representation in textbooks*” (IS3). Another student elaborated that stereotypes could hinder inclusivity,

advocating for content that actively promotes equality and challenges traditional gender roles (IS4). This theme accentuated the shared belief that achieving gender equality in educational content requires the elimination of biases and stereotypes to foster a more inclusive learning atmosphere.

The third theme, *Inclusivity and Diverse Roles*, focused on the students' recognition of the need for inclusive content that represents a broad spectrum of gender identities and roles. Islamic university students frequently highlighted the importance of incorporating diverse gender perspectives in learning materials to challenge stereotypes and promote equality. One student remarked that educational content should provide *"inclusive and supportive content, avoiding gender stereotypes, promoting equality, and providing diverse role models for all genders"* (IS8). Public university students also advocated for inclusivity, with one student suggesting that discussions on gender roles within materials could foster deeper understanding and inclusivity in the classroom (PS7). Another student emphasized the need for materials to represent a range of gender identities, which could help break down barriers and expand students' views on gender (PS9). Both groups believed that by incorporating diverse gender perspectives and roles, learning materials could transcend traditional norms and contribute to a more inclusive and expansive understanding of gender.

Discussion and Implications

Gender Awareness Across Public and Islamic Universities

The study's findings reveal subtle yet non-significant differences in gender awareness and perceptions of equality between Islamic and public university students, highlighting the complex interplay of institutional and societal factors shaping these attitudes. Although Islamic university students demonstrated marginally higher awareness, potentially driven by the efforts of female educators and reformers advocating for gender equity within religious frameworks (Mustofa et al., 2023; Tahalele & Prihatini, 2024), both types of institutions face significant challenges in embedding gender awareness into their curricula. Public universities, aligned with global human rights discourses, and Islamic universities, striving to reconcile religious teachings with modern gender perspectives (Raihani, 2020; Kull, 2009), remain constrained by pervasive patriarchal structures that similarly affect secular educational systems worldwide (Campbell, 2021; Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2021). The minimal variance, indicated by Cohen's d values, underscores the limited impact of institutional policies alone, emphasizing the need for robust pedagogical frameworks such as critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) to foster deeper engagement with gender issues. Furthermore, the lack of statistically significant differences may reflect the overarching influence of broader societal norms that permeate both secular and religious educational contexts (Nunu & Darul, 2022). These insights suggest that advancing gender awareness and achieving meaningful integration of gender equality in education require systemic reforms that transcend policy adjustments, necessitating innovative pedagogical approaches to challenge entrenched societal and institutional norms.

Impact of Gender on Learning Experiences

Most public university students believe gender does not affect their education, while Islamic university students demonstrate a deeper understanding of gender-related educational

inequalities by recognizing its influence. Islamic educational institutions, traditionally conservative in nature, now show a growing critical engagement with social justice themes, including gender (Raihani, 2020; Waluyo & Anita, 2024). The recognition of these issues originates from how current Islamic academic leaders apply religious justice principles to promote fair treatment in their teachings (Kull, 2012; Tahalele & Prihatini, 2024). The minor and statistically insignificant variations between student groups at both public and Islamic universities show that these institutions have yet to fully develop effective gender-inclusive teaching methods. Research by Mahmud (2010) and Główska (2014) confirms that people understand gender disparities in performance and participation but remain unaware of structural inequalities. Although Islamic students show marginally greater awareness of gender-related issues, deep-rooted institutional obstacles still prevent achieving gender parity in both educational settings. The research findings highlight an immediate requirement for expanded institutional backing and curriculum changes together with improved teacher education as a foundation for gender equality, which critical pedagogy and social constructivism theories advocate for (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Growing recognition of gender inclusivity benefits strengthens the push for educational transformations that aim to build awareness and fairness, according to Tarrayo & Salonga (2023) and Waluyo & Anita (2024).

Positive Impacts of Gender Awareness

The qualitative findings reveal that students from both public and Islamic universities strongly believe gender awareness enhances inclusivity, reduces stereotypes, and improves learning outcomes, supporting prior research on the importance of gender-sensitive educational practices in fostering equitable learning environments (Tarrayo, 2023; Główska, 2014; Mahmud, 2015). The theme of inclusivity emerged prominently, with students acknowledging that gender awareness cultivates respectful and empowering classroom dynamics, consistent with Freire's (1970) notion of education as a liberatory practice challenging traditional power structures. Islamic university students' emphasis on reducing stereotypes reflects ongoing efforts to address entrenched gender norms within religious frameworks (Mustofa et al., 2023), signaling a growing openness to inclusive practices, as noted in studies on Islamic education (Raihani, 2020; Kull, 2009). Similarly, public university students highlighted how addressing gender biases in teaching materials and interactions enhances learning outcomes, aligning with research demonstrating the adverse effects of gendered content on student engagement and achievement (Martinez et al., 2010; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). The theme of improved learning outcomes further underscores the value of inclusive classrooms where students feel confident to participate, echoing findings linking gender-sensitive pedagogies to enhanced academic performance (Główska, 2014; Campbell, 2021). Students' recognition that gender awareness boosts confidence and motivation aligns with calls to integrate such awareness into English language teaching to promote critical thinking and challenge stereotypes (Tarrayo & Salonga, 2023).

Enhancing Gender Equality in Educational Materials

Students from both public and Islamic universities stressed the need for balanced representation and gender stereotype removal in educational content, which mirrors scholarly insights about the necessity of challenging conventional gender norms for inclusivity (Zein et al.,

2020; Schmenk, 2004). Through their push for inclusive language and diverse representation, Islamic university students demonstrate how religious education can become a platform for addressing gender issues while challenging the notion that these educational spaces lack diversity (Waluyo & Anita, 2024; Tahalele & Prihatini, 2024). The focus on "Gender Stereotype-Free Learning" holds particular importance because research shows how gendered stereotypes in educational resources negatively affect learning environments in non-Western regions (Emilia et al., 2017; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Research findings show how gender portrayals influence students' identities and perceptions, which supports students' demands for gender diversity in representation (Główka, 2014; Campbell, 2021). Their support for diverse role models demonstrates how inclusive material can create powerful educational spaces, and scholars agree that employing multiple gender perspectives helps break down stereotypes and promotes equality (Tarrayo, 2022; Dewi et al., 2023). Both public and Islamic universities hold crucial positions in educational reform through the inclusion of diverse gender perspectives in their curricula, which is now widely recommended in both secular and religious academic settings (Raihani, 2020; Waluyo & Anita, 2024).

Conclusion, Limitation, and Recommendation

The investigation reveals complex gender awareness dynamics within public and Islamic educational institutions by mapping their evolution towards gender equality and identifying ongoing obstacles. Though the student groups did not show statistically significant differences in gender awareness and equality perceptions, their results suggest complex interactions between cultural, institutional, and pedagogical elements. The results reveal an urgent requirement for extensive reforms that surpass simple policy changes. The document recommends system-wide adoption of educational methods, including critical pedagogy and social constructivism, to enhance understanding and engagement with gender-related topics. Although institutions of both types have made attempts to advance gender equity, persistent patriarchal norms together with widespread unawareness about structural inequalities still obstruct complete gender equality achievement. The generalizability of the study's findings might be affected by individual response variability, which stems from personal experiences instead of systematic evaluation. Future gender equality initiatives at institutions can become more effective through targeted curriculum changes and better teacher education while showing greater institutional dedication to gender inclusivity. Institutions need to develop educational settings that identify gender biases and dismantle them to improve learning results for everyone. The current approach matches the increasing understanding that education has transformative power for social justice and equality, which demands focused efforts to connect theory and practice in gender educational settings.

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The author confirms that artificial intelligence tools were only employed to improve both grammar and clarity in the manuscript. QuillBot assisted in enhancing the manuscript language

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Data availability statement

The corresponding author will provide access to the study's supporting data when requested reasonably. Requests will undergo consideration following established ethical guidelines and institutional policies.

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