

## Language Teachers and Gender Role Attitudes: Sociocultural Perspective

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### **Abstract**

*Schools and universities have been well-known as one of the social institutions in charge of socializing norms and values in children in terms of how they construct the concept of gender roles in society. Sociocultural-bound attitudes of teachers play important roles in shaping or challenging the practices that highlight inequality. This study aims to investigate the influence of gender role attitudes on teacher behavior. Using the quantitative method, the data was collected by distributing questionnaires to 90 language teachers. From the F-test and T-test analysis results, it was found that there was a significant influence between variables ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), in that, teachers' gender role attitudes had an important impact on their teaching behavior. Then, the implication of this study is further drawn using Mead's symbolic interaction theory.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Role Attitudes, Sociocultural Perspective, Socialization, Teacher Behavior, Symbolic Interaction*

### **Abstrak**

*Sekolah dan universitas telah dikenal sebagai salah satu institusi sosial yang bertugas mensosialisasikan norma dan nilai pada anak-anak dalam hal bagaimana mereka membangun konsep peran gender di masyarakat. Sikap guru yang terikat secara sosiokultural memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk atau menentang praktik-praktik yang menyoroti ketidaksetaraan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pengaruh sikap peran gender terhadap perilaku guru. Dengan menggunakan metode kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dengan menyebarkan kuesioner kepada 90 guru bahasa. Dari hasil analisis uji F dan uji T, ditemukan bahwa terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan antar*

variabel ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), dalam hal ini, sikap peran gender guru memiliki dampak penting terhadap perilaku mengajar mereka. Kemudian, implikasi dari penelitian ini ditarik lebih lanjut dengan menggunakan teori interaksi simbolik Mead.

**Kata kunci:** Sikap Peran Gender, Perspektif Sosiokultural, Sosialisasi, Perilaku Guru, Interaksi Simbolik

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the discussion of gender equality in education has brought global consciousness to the importance of making education accessible for all, regardless their gender (Andrés et al., 2014; Gündoğan & Taşdere, 2021; Leu, 2005; Osman, 2021; Widodo & Elyas, 2020). However, the data shows that gender disparity was still found in educational field, in that, males gain more opportunities compared to their female counterparts (World Economic Forum, 2022). As one of the top prioritized issues in the Sustainable Development Goals mission, educational disparity based on gender has got worse due to COVID-19 pandemic with percentage of 39% worldwide (United Nations, 2022). This phenomenon indicates that there is an urgent need to make a revolutionary change in order to bring parity to the quality of education for all genders.

In this case, gender role attitudes (GRA) of the educational actors play an important role in determining the direction of and the acceleration toward quality education. GRA revolve around a set of belief owned by an individual regarding the roles of men and women in various social contexts, which are actualized in behavior toward different sexes (Bazik, 2010; Halimi et al., 2016). Being a complex and multifaceted concept, GRA are seen in the two broad continuum i.e. traditional and egalitarian. These terms are broadly used by many experts such as Bazik (2010), Kaufman (2000), Boehnke (2011), and Cohn-Schwartz & Schmitz (2024). They asserted that people with traditional GRA believe there should be gender division in aspects of life such as household labor, work and occupation, decision-making, relationship, etc (Düval, 2023). For instance, an individual with traditional GRA tends to consider that a man should work while a woman stays at home and take care of the family. Meanwhile, egalitarian GRA embrace the idea that there should be a balance between men and women's roles, in that the proponents of this viewpoint reject gender as a differential marker for dividing the roles of female and male in different contexts (Cohn-Schwartz & Schmitz, 2024). Despite terminology differences (for example, Osmond & Martin (1975) used the term modern referring to egalitarian substances), those experts agreed on the essential meaning behind the two continuums. In this study, the terms traditional and egalitarian were used to represent two distinctive sides of gender role attitudes.

As one of the main actors who become the spreadhead of education, teachers are responsible for facilitating quality learning for learners through their knowledge of subject matter, learning goals, variety of teaching approaches, learner differences, and learning environment (Cate et al., 2018; Leu, 2005); which are accompanied by enthusiasm, communications skills, compassion, discipline, and sense of responsibility (Leu, 2005). Hence their GRA, which are reflected in teaching behavior, are highly important to revisit to ensure education accessibility for all genders.

(Ryans, 1963) analogized teachers as a system that embodies a complex information processing, which is teacher behavior. While the system (teacher) has an ultimate goal in assisting learners acquire appropriate behavior repertoire, the information processing (teacher behavior) affects the direction of teacher's decision making. Teacher behavior is primarily connected to the two elements, i.e. particular contexts influencing the teacher (input) and the observable teacher response toward certain conditions (Ryans, 1963). It is believed that teacher behavior patterns influence the extent of student learning success (Jackson, 2018; Ryans, 1963; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Given this significant fact, it is suggested that there should be serious response made by teacher education institutions to help shaping more supportive behavior style of future teachers (Serdenciuc, 2015).

Pössel et al. (2013) categorize three broad components constructing teacher behavior: instructional, organizational, and socio-emotional behaviors. The former is in place during the instructional activities which aims to develop students' skills in understanding and exploring conceptual knowledge (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Organizational behavior is related to teacher efforts in managing the class in order to make instructional process more conducive and lessen disruptive student behaviors. The last category, then, focuses on building psychological attachment with learners by showing empathy, emotional feedback, responsiveness, etc.

In this case, language teacher behaviors hold a very prominent role in shaping students' picture on gender representation (Glock & Kleen, 2017). The later question might be, why language? Language is one of the subjects students learn through which they embrace different elements of culture (Tomak, 2022). Through language learning, students learn not only the linguistic components but also the socio-cultural aspects transmitted during language encounters. During the process of language learning, students explore cultural components that develop within particular social contexts from which language are originated. Such components include beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts (art, food, fashion style, etc) (Guryanov et al., 2019; Tomak, 2022). In foreign language learning context, language can also be taught through the local cultural perspective of the learners and/or teachers as what have been practiced in Indonesia (Mahmud, 2019; Muharom Albantani & Madkur, 2018). Contextualizing language learning components enables learners to effectively connect the language to the real world (Eun & Lim, 2009). During this process, learners interpret the world based on their understanding of the context given by teachers. In this case, teachers are believed to have roles in instilling meaning in the context of situations given (Guryanov et al., 2019; Solak, 2020; Tomak, 2022). In other words, the exposure to socio-cultural aspects through language, which is situated by teachers, will influence the way learners interpret a particular situation.

This discussion is an effort to reflect the intertwined connection between language and society. Language is believed to be the means to share meaning between individuals who interact with each other within society (Tannen, 2013). This concept is affirmed through symbolic interaction theory. According to this paradigm, which was first theorized by George Herbert Mead, humans assign meaning to their social world through interaction with other people (Carter & Fuller, 2015). In their interaction,

people exchange meaning conveyed through symbols (Aksan et al., 2009). Hence, meaning is not an intrinsic element of an object, phenomenon, event, etc. Instead, it is the result of how people interpret the object. This interpretation is heavily influenced by the interactional experience they have with other people (Blumer, 1986). Further, it is believed that the accuracy of interpretation depends on personal perspectives and may change over time (Carter & Fuller, 2015). According to Blumer (1986), there are 3 basic principles underlying the construction of symbolic interaction theory: (1) humans express their attitude toward things around them based on the meaning attached to those things; (2) the meaning attached to a thing is the result of interaction with people; (3) the meaning of a thing can change depending on the interpretative process in a particular circumstance.

The way humans give meaning to an issue around them not only influences the way they react to it but also establishes an identity for them (Carter & Fuller, 2015). It implies that the social construct functions based on what people perceive to be true or false, and appropriate or inappropriate. Through this identity lens, people classify themselves and other people based on their interpretations of the social world.

Many studies have been conducted in the field of gender discourse in relation to language education (Akhavan Masoumi & Sadeghi, 2020; Alnasser, 2022; Andrés et al., 2014; Chan, 2018; Fattahi & Nushi, 2021; Mahdavy, 2013; Mashhadlou & Izadpanah, 2021). However, they focused broadly on how languages are used by different gender categories; how gender influences language learning and teaching; and gender and language policy. Meanwhile, the studies which examine gender elements, especially GRA, at the micro level are not yet well-elaborated. Abundant studies on GRA were conducted in non-educational areas such as socio-economy (Düval, 2023; Qing, 2020; Seddig & Lomazzi, 2019), forms of social relationship and structure (Barth & Trübner, 2018; Cohn-Schwartz & Schmitz, 2024; Giani et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2021), and socio-psychology such as the studies by Bazik (2010) and Fan & Marini (2000). GRE studies in language educational contexts are relatively smaller in terms of quantity for example (Akbar et al., 2019; Ara, 2019; Foote et al., 2003a).

In spite of this, there is no adequate study conducted to scrutinize how GRE influence teacher behavior in language classrooms. Whereas, this issue is very crucial as teacher behavior is proven to influence students' perspective about learned language (Getie, 2020) and their language learning success (Bhai, 2021). Most importantly, such experiences will be likely to give colors to their worldview about social world, as what emphasized in Symbolic Interaction theory (Blumer, 1986).

Hence, this study aims to fill the research gap by examining the gender role attitudes of language teachers in Indonesia. It focuses on to what extent gender role attitudes influence teacher behavior. The hypothesis of this study is that language teachers' gender role attitudes affect the way they teach their students. This study is expected to contribute to giving empirical supportive data for the improvement of language teaching and learning which enable students to have equal opportunities toward language exposure regardless of their gender and to learn languages with a gender-equality perspective.

This study was conducted using a quantitative method by distributing questionnaires to the participants, which was adapted from Zeyneloglu & Terzlu (2011) for measuring variable X or teachers' GRA, and Kansas Competency-Based Curriculum Center (1999) for measuring variable Y. Preliminary statistic tests were performed to examine the validity and reliability of the research instrument. From the tests, it was found that the questionnaire items were valid ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ). The reliability test, then, showed that the value is 0.796. In other words, it proves that when distributed for collection data purpose, the questionnaire is able to result in consistent data (Cronbach's Alpha  $> 0.6$ ).

The subject of this study was language teachers who teach Bahasa Indonesia, English, and Arabic in Indonesia. These languages were chosen under some consideration. As the official language, Bahasa Indonesia becomes the mandatory subject to be taught until university level (Sujiono et al., 2022). English, on the other hand, is the most preferred to be learnt at most educational institution levels (Lauder, 2008). Meanwhile, Arabic becomes the favored language as it indicates the identity of the majority of Indonesian population, which is Muslim (Yahya et al., 2021). Hence, instead of seeing language items as a partial entity by separating one language from the other, we deliberately examined the three most prominent languages in Indonesia to get a clear measurement of the extent of teachers' GRA on their teaching behavior. Seventy-one language teachers contributed to this research involving 25 male and 46 female professionals. The data was analyzed using simple linear regression method which included F and T test. The result of the analysis was then interpreted and discussed further under the umbrella of symbolic interaction theory.

## 2. Discussion

The results of the data analysis process are presented in three stages to display the influence of variable X (teachers' GRA) toward variable Y (teacher behavior), to examine the degree of influence, and the percentage of influence of variable X has on variable Y.

### a. F & T Test

This test was used to determine the influence of teachers' GRA (X) on their teaching behavior (Y). Table I provides the result of the F-test while Table II presents the output of the T-test.

#### The Result of F-Test

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	316.907	1	316.907	27.048	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1031.048	88	11.716		

Total	1347.956	89			
a. Dependent Variable: Y					
b. Predictors: (Constant), X					

Table 1: The simple linear regression method was used in this F-test

### The Result of T-Test

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	24.504	3.273		7.487	.000
	X	.340	.065	.485	5.201	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Table 2: The simple linear regression method was used in this T-test

From both results, it can be seen that the sig. value was 0.000, which is less than 0.05 (sig. < 0.05). It means that there was a significant influence of teachers' GRA (X) on teaching behavior (Y).

#### b. Regression Model

In order to verify the result on the previous test, the regression model was operated to examine the degree of change of the Y value based on the X value.

Regression model obtained is  $Y = 24.504 + 0.34 X$

It indicates that the increase of X value as much as 1 point would raise the Y value as much as 0.34 point.

#### c. Determination Coefficient (R-Square)

R-Square test is part of the simple linear regression analysis which aims to scrutinize the influence percentage of X value on Y value.

### The Result of R-Square

<b>Model Summary<sup>b</sup></b>
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Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.485 <sup>a</sup>	.235	.226	3.42293
a. Predictors: (Constant), X				
b. Dependent Variable: Y				

Table 3: The simple linear regression method was used in this R-Square test

From the table above, the R-Square value shows a value of 0.485 (48.5 %). It can be interpreted that the influence of X on Y was 48.5%, while the remaining 51.5% was influenced by other factors outside the variables in this study.

This research showed that language teachers' GRA weighed on how students perceived their social world concerning gender roles in many aspects of life. Having a more traditional view of gender roles, a language teacher tended to treat their female and male students differently. The data showed that they gave different learning activities to male and female students. They also gave different punishments for male and female students who broke the rules. Meanwhile, a language teacher who embraced more egalitarian perspective was likely to be alert about how they deal with gender differences on their students. The data showed that they preferred to use gender-neutral vocabularies to represent particular roles in society (such as chairperson instead of chairman in English context; *طالبة* instead of *طالب* or *طالبة* in Arabic context; and *cendekiawan*, *ilmuwan* in Indonesian context).

The findings of this study reflects the micro-sociological process as explained in the symbolic interactionism. Capturing phenomena of human interaction within socio-educational contexts, this study affirmed at least three key concepts in symbolic interactionist perspective i.e. meaning, thinking, and language (Husin et al., 2021).

In terms of meaning, teacher behavior – which are seen through the input respondents gave – reflected how they attached meaning to different gender roles. It means that the meaning assigned to things around them, especially about how males and females should be portrayed, determines their attitudes (GRA) which then directs their behavior toward both genders. It was proved from the quantitative data that egalitarian teachers who believed men and women should have equal opportunity in professional work tended to treat their students of both genders equally. They provided the same discipline rules and avoided making comparisons between their female and male students in terms of achievements or behaviors. Meanwhile, more traditional teachers who perceived that male education should be a priority tended to choose males to participate in competitions. It shows that language teachers' GRA heavily influenced their teaching behavior and it is well-explained through symbolic interactionist perspective by the concept of meaning.

Thought, on the other hand, reflects the interpretation of symbols. Based on the data, the respondents who strongly believed that a husband was allowed to hit his wife whenever he saw fit and viewed that the basic responsibility of women was to nurture their children indicated that they portrayed

women and males roles more traditionally (Amah & Ogah, 2021; Osmond & Martin, 1975); and (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021). People who have traditional view about gender roles are likely to image males as authoritative, powerful, and more intellectual while females are viewed as weak and obedient (Bian et al., 2017; Carnes et al., 2015; Eaton et al., 2017; Yun, 2023). In contrast, the participants who perceived that in family daughters and sons should get equal opportunity for self-development would portray the image of gender roles in more egalitarian manner. This empirical data shows that the thought individual constructs influences the direction of their behavior. More specifically, it can be drawn that the behavior of language teachers who chose male over female students to be involved in competition; or the behavior of language teachers who gave more balanced overview of their students regardless their gender are likely due to their image of gender roles.

The next principle is language. Language teachers' GRA tended to direct them to use particular symbols to different genders. Based on the data, more egalitarian language teachers would use gender-neutral vocabularies to represent particular roles in society (such as chairperson instead of chairman in English context) or using both gender-based vocabularies to represent the role (chairman or chairwoman). On the other hand, the data showed that more traditional language teachers, in their input, consistently manifested their GRA in terms of language choice by using male-dominated vocabularies for particular roles in society such as policeman and fireman. This confirmed the importance of language within the framework of symbolic interaction. The language that language teachers used constitutes the meaning (how they perceive different gender roles) and the thought (what image they have toward different gender roles). They gave meaning to given case based on how they interpreted the worlds through symbols. These symbols were created within society or culture in that they acquired and kept revisiting the meaning over their lifetime due to social interactions they experienced. Such a system of symbols used by language teachers in or out of classroom contexts are called language (Suryanto, 2014). Language plays a very significant role in social interaction because it translates the world into reality that can be understood, interpreted, integrated, or even tested. That is why, (Redmond, 2015) said that symbols, which is generated into language, are at the heart of symbolic interactionism.

Based on the discussion above, these three components are, by Mead (1934), considered as the catalyst of socialization. In the perspective of symbolic interaction, socialization is the process by which an individual adopt values and standards of particular community in order to be able to function well in society (Potts, 2015). In this case, human beings are continually influenced and influence society through interaction they have made. This pattern, then, forms a particular social structure which are acknowledged and accepted among people in that community. That is why, what is true in one society might be not the same case in another (Baghranian & Coliva, 2020; Velasquez et al., 1992).

Socialization process contributes in defining social roles among members of society. The roles assigned to them unconsciously through daily occurrences are attached and become a set of behavior they believe to be true. Therefore, it makes sense for what Richerson & Boyd (2005) highlighted in their cultural evolution theory that cultural transmission shapes human values, belief, norms, practices,



and behavior and it can happen when socialization process is in place. In addition, they equally mention about the importance of social learning in that an individual will learn from others through various means of social interactions, such as observation, imitation, collaboration, instruction. Such an intersection of perspectives between theories proves the significance of socialization amidst the process of human behavior formation (Maria & Pescaru, 2019).

On the other hand, educational field is as one of social institutions having crucial position in shaping individual's social role (Meyer et al., 2017). It has immense power to transform society and influence the dynamics of many aspects of life such as economy, politics, culture, religion, etc (Altan, 2020). In the context of language education, socialization occurs when students internalize the concepts offered by their teachers and discuss their adversity, work on the tasks assigned to them, collaborate with their peers to hone their language skills, simulate particular situation to enable language practices, explore the cultural aspects of the language they learn, observe their learning environment, and many more.

Having these facts, hence, teachers have important positions in influencing the direction of gender ideology of students in their stages of learning languages. That is because during their process of learning languages, students go through socialization in which they adopt the standards, values, and norms of society (in case their learning environment) in order to function well in social interactions (Potts, 2015). Further, during this process, they negotiate between the I and me self concept within their mind and this process will keep continuing as they interact each other (Woźniak, 2018). This cycle shows the stages from which they form their identity and express it through the means of language.

Further, language teachers play role as an image of generalized others that embraces expectation and attitudes of society toward learners (Reeves, 2009). This role is crucially significant because learners construct their social world and construct their reality by interpreting symbols around them, such as words, gestures, signs, objects, etc (Chandler, 2002). Language teachers are a strategic agent acting as role maker who sets and gives input on how different gender roles are perceived. Students, on the other hand, act as role taker who learn from a range of events they witness through learning activities. Such learning processes students experience will shape the way they interpret their social world, including how they perceive different gender roles in society.

This discussion proves that language teachers have more responsibilities rather than simply transferring their knowledge or facilitating the students to learn the language (Ogawa, 2017). Deep down below the surface, they are expected to be able to design a learning environment that enables learners to gain broader perspectives on how they should perceive the roles between males and females, not only in educational contexts but also in more extensive spheres, such as friendship, family, including their future projection of occupations, or any kinds of existing social relationships. It was expected that they could provide a comparable representation of different gender roles which are more egalitarian.

Hence, being a more egalitarian teacher means that their perspective directs their teaching behavior instructionally, organizationally, and socio-emotionally (Pössel et al., 2013) as what was

captured in this study. In the instructional aspect, the egalitarian-view language teacher should give the same instruction and use more gender-neutral vocabulary to get the equal participation for both male and female students during the learning process. In the organizational aspect, they would the same activities, the same pattern and value to evaluate the students' performance, and give the same punishments for those who break the rules during the learning process. Lastly, in the socio-emotional aspect, they should show more equal empathy between male and female students by avoiding any behavior that may lead to comparing male and female in terms of attitudes or even achievements. Similarly, they should give the same attention to both genders and encourage their students to give the same respect for both males and females. This action would be in line with the previous study by Rivera-Garrido (2022) who asserted that education has incredible power to reduce the probability of agreeing with traditional gender norms.

This study, then, strengthens the previous studies from Akbar et al. (2019); Ara (2019); Erden (2009); Foote et al. (2003); Kleen & Glock (2018) about the importance of revisiting language teachers' gender perspective to create an equal learning opportunity for learners. Having empirical evidence that GRA significantly matters, there should be a comprehensive teacher education support system which allows them to be exposed with richer perspectives and more egalitarian points of view regarding different gender roles (Erden, 2009). It is really crucial to be integrated as the previous studies found that experiences obtained in different social structural features and sociocultural contexts are influential in forming an individual attitude toward perceived gender roles (Boehnke, 2011). Such gender role attitudes, then, will reflect on how they treat different sexes (Ryans, 1963), particularly in this case, their language students. On the other hand, by making the concept of GRA appear at a conscious level through various teacher development programs, the effort of creating a more balanced gender worldview would be possible to realize.

### **3. Conclusion**

This research proves that language teachers' GRA significantly influences their teaching behavior. As both aspects are really crucial in the process of facilitating learners' socialization process in reflecting and constructing gender representation in society, this finding accommodates at least 3 implications for language teaching and learning environment. First, language teachers have greater responsibilities rather than only teaching the languages themselves because they are the role makers who give experiences to learners in their process of interpreting their social world in regard to gender roles. Second, to be able to prove a gender-responsive learning experience for learners, language teachers should embrace an egalitarian worldview in their teaching by carefully considering three prominent aspects that reflect teaching behaviors i.e. instructional, organizational, and socio-emotional behaviors. Third, a comprehensive teacher education support system will help accelerate the effort to disseminate a more balanced gender paradigm. From this study, it is hoped that there will be more awareness to challenge any disparity-leading sociocultural perspectives toward gender roles in society.

Concerning the limitation of the study, as this research was conducted by focusing only on three popular languages taught in Indonesia, namely Indonesian, English, and Arabic, the findings might be different when carried out in other language learning contexts. Besides, the sample of this study is relatively small so that generalization for other cases should be avoided. Instead, this study could be an insight for the readers, which provides evidence of the connection between language teachers' GRA and their teaching behavior.

Therefore, future research could be conducted by expanding the number of samples or by specifically focusing on one language to obtain a more detailed depiction of the given phenomenon.

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