

# TOWARDS GENDER RESPONSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIAN ELT PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** Gender-responsive education is crucial in addressing gender disparities. It allows students to be treated equally during teaching and learning. Therefore, gender-responsive teachers are needed. Scholars working in the field of gender in education have been debating and discussing the extent to which teachers have been responsive enough to gender issues both within the classroom and in the broader context. In Indonesia, however, not much discussion has been directed at the extent to which preparing pre-service teachers (PSTs) is important to produce gender-responsive teachers of the future. Therefore, this descriptive qualitative research aimed to examine PSTs' existing views on gender roles and the nuances of gender perspectives. For the sake of depth, four Indonesian ELT PSTs were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis of the interview data found that PSTs viewed gender roles from traditional and egalitarian perspectives. These perspectives were gained from their: (1) varied understandings of gender concepts, (2) responses to acceptance or rejection of common gender stereotypes, such as beliefs about subject preferences or leadership roles based on gender; (3) interpretations of gender roles influenced by sources such as media, family, and educational environments, and (4) awareness of gender bias. The findings imply that formal training in gender-responsive education is essential to creating generations that are aware of and responsive to gender issues and uphold gender equality.

**Keywords:** gender-responsive education, perspective on gender roles, pre-service teachers

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Gender-responsive teaching and learning has been a prominent topic of study at the intersection of education and gender. It emphasizes the need for educational systems to acknowledge and address gender disparities. Studies have demonstrated the benefits of integrating gender perspectives into educational practices to advance gender equality. Tarrayo et al. (2021) discovered that integrating gender perspectives in ELT offers several advantages, such as improving students' critical thinking abilities, fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom environment, and raising awareness about diversity. Thus, teachers are expected to be responsive to gender to create gender-responsive teaching and learning.

In recent years, research has examined the influence of gender in education. Studies have shown that certain gender categories outperform others in specific subjects, with women often stereotyped as less talented than men in science but excelling in social sciences and foreign languages (Leslie et al., 2015; Li et al., 2020; Kerkhoven et al., 2016). In the classroom context,

the imbalanced representations between women and men emerge in school textbooks. School textbooks often contain pro-male biases, as found in studies by Barton and Sakwa (2012), Islam and Asadullah (2018), and Swara (2024). These studies found a pronounced pro-male bias in these textbooks, where male characters were predominantly depicted in various professional and leadership roles. In contrast, female characters were often marginalized or shown in stereotypical domestic roles. Addressing stereotypes and biases is crucial for creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments that empower all students. Thus, the education system must produce gender-responsive teachers to help students reach their full potential, regardless of gender, and to ensure that education can produce generations that are not only aware of gender-based inequalities, exclusions, discriminations, and violence, but also responsive to these issues.

Teachers play a significant role in shaping students' educational experiences and fostering gender responsiveness. Teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and actions can promote a gender-responsive educational environment, ensuring a diverse and inclusive learning environment (Acar-Erdol et al., 2022; Esen, 2013a; Gómez et al., 2019; Keddie & Mills, 2009; Lee, 2006). In achieving an educational system that is responsive to gender issues, training in gender-responsive education is imperative. Globally, countries like Turkey (Acar-Erdol et al., 2022), Ghana (Ananga, 2021), Austria (Kollmayer et al., 2020), and several African nations (Mluma et al., 2005; FAWA, 2018) have implemented gender-responsive education training programs to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills. These programs have proven effective in providing equal opportunities for boys and girls and fostering students' understanding of gender differences and perceptions of fairness in the classroom. In Indonesia, the educational system has made progress toward gender equality through a robust legislative framework. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the Indonesian National Education System and Law No. 35 of 2014 on the Protection of Children address gender issues and children's protection in education. The then Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has also issued guidebooks on gender-responsive education and sexual violence prevention, such as *Gender Responsive Teaching Materials*, *Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting*, *Language and Gender*, and *Gender Mainstreaming in Education*—to help educators implement gender-responsive practices in schools. Henceforth, Indonesian scholars have explored gender-responsive training for teachers, curricula, and school programs (Eliyanah et al., 2023; Fitriyani et al., 2022; Novarin & Pattipeilhy, 2020; Sudrajat et al., 2022). However, not much discussion has been directed at the extent to which preparing PSTs is important to produce gender-responsive teachers of the future.

PSTs have been reported entering the professional education system with unawareness of gender equality. Globally, it is evident that PSTs generally are unable to differentiate the concepts of gender and sex, believe in patriarchal gender roles and gender stereotypes (Acar-Erdol et al., 2022; Osman, 2021; Gündoğan & Taşdere, 2021). Equipping PSTs with gender-responsive education knowledge and skills is thus crucial. Teacher education is where PSTs, who are future teachers, gain knowledge and develop gender values for student teachers (Ananga, 2021). Banegas et al. (2019) state an urgent need to equip teachers as change agents for diversity, inclusiveness, and social justice. Comprehensive gender-responsive training for future teachers must dismantle the long-standing stereotypes and foster true gender equality in

education. Investing in PSTs' education is thus investing in the future generation of teachers. However, whether we have adequately prepared our future teachers to be aware of gender issues and become gender-responsive remains a major concern. To address this issue, we need to examine the educational systems that prepare future teachers.

However, before examining whether PSTs have received gender-responsive teaching and learning, a more fundamental inquiry is whether they genuinely understand gender and comprehend the nuances of gender perspectives. Understanding the concepts of gender and gender perspectives is essential for educators. As noted by FAWE (2018), teachers who comprehend gender dynamics in classroom are better equipped to respect differences and promote safe learning environments for all students. Although gender-responsive teaching and learning has gained attention, research shows that many PSTs still hold stereotypical or limited views of gender (Acar-Erdol et al., 2022; Gündoğan & Taşdere, 2021; Osman, 2021), suggesting the need for a deeper investigation into their gender understanding.

While often used interchangeably, 'sex' and 'gender' refer to distinct concepts. Gender refers to men's and women's behavioral, social, and psychological characteristics (Pryzgodna & Chrisler, 2000). In terms of the roles, gender roles are social expectations of someone's sex. Society assumes every human dress, acts, and speaks based on assigned sex. Unlike permanent sex roles, gender roles are changeable. Men are expected to wear suits and speak loudly while women are expected to wear dresses or skirts and speak slowly (Mlana, et. al., 2005). These expectations widen to career and academic major choices. Then, gender perspective is an outlook based on beliefs and experiences regarding gender. Gender perspective integrates external factors (social, political, economic phenomena) which are influenced by cultural characteristics such as gender egalitarianism and societal gender roles to form a comprehensive perspective (Hunter et al., 2004; Lyness and Judiesch, 2013; Schellenberg et al., 2022; Wang & Lin, 2017). PSTs must recognize how understanding gender perspectives will inevitably influence their teaching practices. This gap is critical to studying gender in language teaching because it allows a more nuanced understanding of how teaching practice intersects with PSTs' gender experiences.

This research explores how Indonesian pre-service teachers in English Language Teaching (ELT) perceived the values and perspectives regarding gender roles. ELT PSTs are chosen because they are the future English teachers, who will most likely develop learning materials and be models of attitudes and behavior regarding gender for their future students. The results of this research will be able to inform whether or not PSTs, especially in Indonesia, have adequate knowledge and skills about gender and gender responsive education. As a consequence of this research, we can then devise a policy on PST training to prepare PSTs to be teachers who are aware and responsive of issues of gender. In other words, the outcome of this research will be able to inform higher education institutions and the relevant government bodies that investment should be made to ensure PST training should not be mere corrective –equipping PSTs in addressing gender-based violations, but more fundamental - developmental, enhancing PSTs' awareness and responsiveness of gender issues.

## METHOD

Our study employed a descriptive qualitative design, which suited the research aim of exploring PSTs' perspectives on gender roles. The design helped to get closer to the PSTs' thoughts and ideas. The study focused on student-teachers from a leading Indonesian university in education, focusing on the Department of English. The PSTs practiced their teaching under the *Asistensi Mengajar* (AM) and *Kampus Mengajar* (KM) programs, which essentially provide students with opportunities to practice teaching for a semester (about sixteen weeks). This practice is convertible to twenty credits in Indonesian higher-education credit system. The Department of English takes gender equality quite seriously. It can be seen partly through the spread of its elective courses. Gender and ELT is offered for students undertaking a Bachelor's degree in English Language Education (BA in ELT). This course mainly develops students' theoretical knowledge and practical skills on gender-sensitive issues in ELT practices to help them choose materials and classroom practices that promote gender equality.

Furthermore, teaching practice is the chance for PSTs to apply the knowledge they have gained from their university study. Teaching practice provides not only a space to observe potential challenges related to gender but also a platform for actively implementing gender-responsive teaching strategies in real classroom settings. In this context, the university's roles are not just corrective (not only addressing any violations of gender insensitivity that may arise) but also developmental (enhancing gender awareness and responsiveness) by providing continuous training and guidance to enhance PSTs' gender awareness and help them grow into gender-responsive professional educators. Teaching practice could also be the parameter to see whether PSTs have had adequate knowledge and skills on gender responsive education had gender violations. As previously mentioned, by doing so, universities shall play a key role, not only in addressing gender-based discriminations, inequalities and violence when such have already happened, but also in preventing them from happening by cultivating teachers who are aware and responsive of gender issues.

In the first semester of the academic year of 2023/2024, fifteen female PSTs joined the teaching practice program, starting from the 10th of August 2023 to the 5th of December 2023 (16 weeks). While the study initially targeted a larger sample size - fifteen, but as participation was voluntary, only four agreed to take part (see Table 1). Despite the small sample size, this study can still offer meaningful insights as qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth. In-depth and rich data was gathered from the four participants because PSTs in this study had diverse experiences during their teaching practices. They also came from different teaching backgrounds and school settings in both Malang and Batu Municipalities, which brought a range of perspectives on gender roles in education. Their teaching placements were intentionally considered to reflect varied school environments, like elementary and vocational high schools, that could shape their awareness and understanding of gender issues in different ways.

The four PSTs did not receive formal training on gender and gender responsive education before signing up to the teaching practice. Although none of the four PSTs took the Gender and ELT course, it is important to note that their gender awareness may have been influenced by other aspects of their education, such as general pedagogy courses, personal experiences, and societal real life.

Ethical principles were upheld through informed consent, voluntary participation, and the protection of participants' privacy. PSTs completed a consent form before data collection and were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time prior to publication. To ensure confidentiality, participants' identities were not revealed in the data analysis.

As a disclaimer, this study acknowledges the intersectionality of identity but does not consider differences such as gender, religion, ethnicity, race, and age. The participants, PSTs, are educated in the same academic environment. They follow the same curriculum and complete the teaching practice within the same batch. Because of these shared experiences, the study treats them as a relatively uniform group in order to focus more closely on how they understand gender in the context of education.

**Table 1.** Research Participants

<b>Pre-service Teachers (PSTs)</b>	<b>Teaching Location</b>
PST1	Malang Municipality, East Java
PST2	Malang Municipality, East Java
PST3	Batu Municipality, East Java
PST4	Malang Municipality, East Java

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The interviews were guided by an interview guideline (see Table 2) comprising three indicators: PSTs' knowledge on concepts of gender, experiences, and awareness. Each participant was interviewed once. However, to ensure the richness and comprehensiveness of the data, probing questions were employed during the interviews to encourage deeper reflection and elaboration. Interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached. It indicated that no new significant information emerged. Additionally, the interview duration ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The duration allowed sufficient time for participants to fully show their perspectives. These strategies were used to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings.

The interview process was recorded and transcribed. The interviews were done in Indonesian. They were transcribed verbatim, but presented in this article in its English translation. The two co-researchers, who are senior academics in an English Department, validated the English translation of the data made by the principal investigator. An interview guaranteed a potentially high response rate since respondents answered directly in person (Duff, 2008).

**Table 2.** Blueprint of Interview Guidelines

No	Indicator	Type of Questions	Questions
1.	PSTs' Knowledge of Gender Concepts	Open-ended Question	1. The differences between gender and sex 2. The differences between gender roles and sex roles 3. The attitudes on gender stereotyping
2.	PSTs' Experiences	Open-ended Question	4. Experiences of gender discrimination; the way pre-service teachers deal with discriminations, the possibility of discriminations experience influences their current life 5. Experiences on gender-related issues during university study and university life
3.	PSTs' Awareness	Open-ended Question	6. Awareness of the pre-service teachers' own gender biases
<b>Total Questions for Interview</b>			6

The data was analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used data analysis techniques in qualitative descriptive research (Doyle et al., 2020). It provides a richer and more complete qualitative explanation of the data. Further, inductive analysis was used in this research. Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

**Table 3.** Sample Coding from Interview Data

Interview Excerpt (Sample Data)	Initial Code	Sub-theme	Main Theme
"Gender is shaped by social construction, and sex is shaped biologically." (PST1)	Clear distinction between gender and sex	Conceptual understanding of gender	PSTs' varied understandings of gender concepts
"The role of men and the role of women, where women do more emotionally related things, while for men, it is more about knowledge and physical things." (PST2)	Traditional roles of men and women	Traditional view of gender roles	PSTs' varied understandings of gender concepts
"The role of a man is to be a leader, the role of a woman is to be a mother, which is called nurturing." (PST3)	Leadership–nurturing gender roles	Traditional gender role beliefs	PSTs' varied understandings of gender concepts
"Gender roles thus represent equality in improving quality within a field." (PST4)	Gender role equality in professions	Egalitarian perspective of gender roles	PSTs' varied understandings of gender concepts

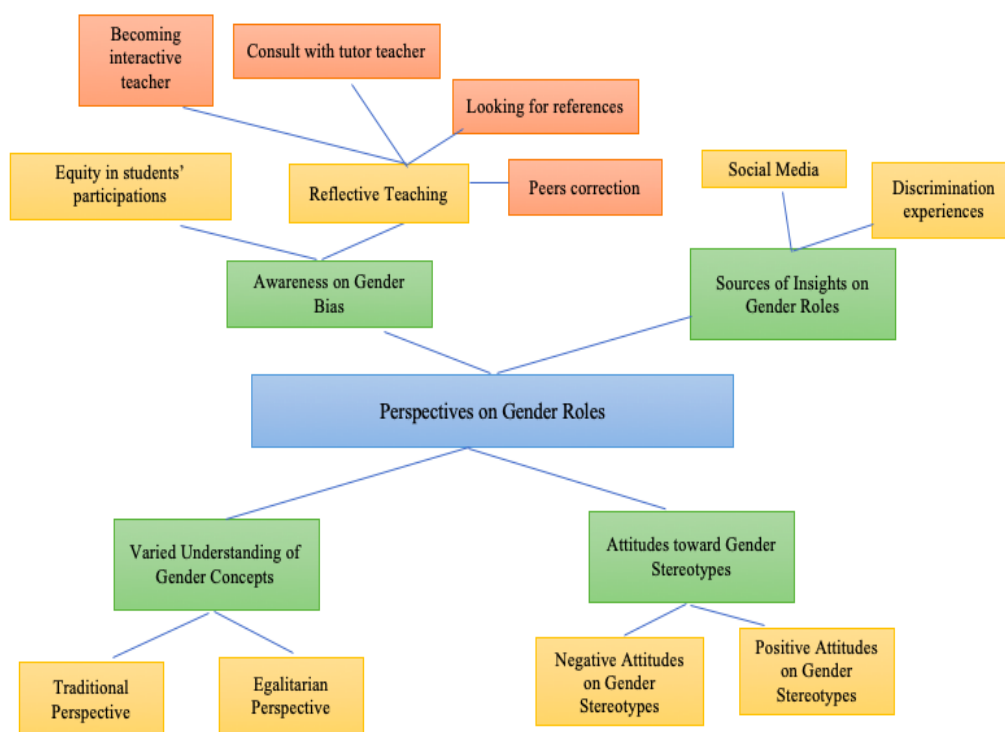
<b>Interview Excerpt (Sample Data)</b>	<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Main Theme</b>
“I don’t like and don’t support gender stereotypes because nowadays, there are men whose hobby is cooking... many women can become CEOs.” (PST3)	Rejection of gender stereotypes	Opposition to gender stereotyping	PSTs’ attitudes toward gender stereotypes
“I think stereotyping is fine as long as they don't underestimate someone’s sexual orientation or gender.” (PST2)	Conditional acceptance of stereotypes	Conditional views on gender stereotypes	PSTs’ attitudes toward gender stereotypes
“The students tend to underestimate us as their teachers because we are women.” (PST2)	Gender-based discrimination in the classroom	Classroom gender discrimination	PSTs’ sources of insights into gender roles
“Since I started interacting with my teaching mates... I am fairer to my students.” (PST1)	Reflective change in teaching practice	Reflective effort to reduce bias	PSTs’ awareness of gender bias
“To avoid bias, I try to be fair to the students... I will focus on the girls first... then the boys.” (PST3)	Efforts to treat students fairly	Fair classroom treatment	PSTs’ awareness of gender bias
“I am aware of my own gender biases... thinking that girls are easier to manage than boys.” (PST2)	Recognition of personal gender bias	Awareness through reflection	PSTs’ awareness of gender bias

Table 3 presents representative excerpts from the interview data to illustrate the initial coding process. The table demonstrates how raw data were systematically coded and organized into sub-themes and main themes during the thematic analysis. The data were analyzed following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The relationships among the themes were subsequently mapped, as presented in Figure 1.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The thematic analysis resulted in one master theme, four main themes, and several sub-themes (see Figure 1). As discussed in the background of the study, understanding gender concepts is essential for valuing diversity and fostering secure learning environments for all students. Therefore, examining the extent to which PSTs understand the concepts of gender was important. The findings of this study indicate that PSTs perceived gender roles through both traditional and egalitarian perspectives. These perceptions emerged across four major themes: (1) PSTs’ varied understandings of gender concepts, (2) PSTs’ attitudes toward gender stereotypes, (3) PSTs’ sources of insights into gender roles, and (4) PSTs’ awareness of gender bias.



**Figure 1.** Thematic Map on PSTs' Perspectives on Gender Roles

### *PSTs' Varied Understandings of Gender Concepts*

Findings from the semi-structured interviews reveal that PSTs had varied understandings of gender concepts. Only one of the four PSTs was able to clearly distinguish between gender and sex.

PST1 was able to differentiate between gender and sex. She viewed gender as a societal construct while sex was influenced by biology and believes gender roles differ due to inherent gender differences. In contrast, PST2, PST3, and PST4 could not describe a clear distinction between gender and sex. This lack of knowledge in gender roles leads to gender stereotypes among PSTs. PST2 defines gender as being male or female and sex as sexual orientation, describing gender roles as responsibilities assigned based on gender, asserting,

The role of men and the role of women, where women do more emotionally related things, while for men, it is more about knowledge and physical things. (PST2)

Similarly, PST3 said she did not know the formal concepts of gender and sex. Yet, she gained insights into gender concepts from movies and media. Through the influence of media,

PST3 started to recognize diverse gender identities beyond male and female. However, PST3 maintained a binary understanding of gender. Based on her understanding, gender was only two, feminine and masculine. PST3 adhered to traditional gender roles, seeing men as leaders and women as nurturers.

I don't know much about gender and sex, but my understanding has broadened as an English education student. I frequently watch films and listen to interviews on TikTok; I realized that gender is not limited to males and females. Many people identify as non-binary, transgender, and other identities. There are only two genders, but others might see them differently and recognize them more. The role of a man is to be a leader, the role of a woman is to be a mother, which is called nurturing. (PST3)

PST4 distinguished sex as a natural, divinely assigned difference between males and females, whereas gender pertains to roles and fields. She emphasized that gender equality is achievable, but sex cannot be mixed. She further illustrated sex roles with traditional tasks (e.g., men cleaning, women cooking) and gender roles as equal tasks for both sexes in professional fields, such as teaching, noting:

Regarding gender, for example, male and female teachers share the same roles and responsibilities without differentiation based on gender. Gender roles thus represent equality in improving quality within a field. However, sex roles are distinct and inherent to each gender and should not be confused with gender roles. (PST4)

### ***PSTs' Attitudes toward Gender Stereotypes***

PSTs' perspectives on gender stereotypes were varied. PST1, PST3, and PST4 challenged gender stereotypes. They emphasized equal opportunities for men and women in career choices. PST3 highlighted the changing dynamics, stating,

I don't like and don't support gender stereotypes because nowadays, there are men whose hobby is cooking and are better at being chefs than women. Also, many of women can become CEOs. (PST3)

Similarly, PST1 rejected gender stereotypes, particularly those undermining women's capabilities. She stated, "I don't like it when someone stereotypes someone's gender... Our differences (men and women) are only in physical appearance, not brain capacity. So we can do whatever we want." On the other side, PST4 recognized the complexity of stereotypes, attributing them to cultural and environmental influences, but refrained from assigning blame outright, acknowledging various factors contributing to stereotyping. PST4 stated,

I think those who are stereotyped as someone's gender are problematic. It might be influenced by culture and environment. However, we cannot immediately blame this because there are many reasons why people are gender stereotyped, even though it is not the time in this day and age to do stereotypes. (PST4)

Conversely, PST2 displayed a more tolerant attitude towards stereotypes, deeming them acceptable if they did not harm or diminish individuals based on gender or sexual orientation. She remarked, "I think stereotyping is fine as long as they don't underestimate someone's sexual orientation or gender..." These contrasting views underscore the nuanced perspectives on gender stereotypes among PSTs, ranging from outright rejection to conditional acceptance, reflecting broader societal debates on gender equality and discrimination.

### ***PSTs' Sources of Insights into Gender Roles***

Most of the PSTs gained insights into gender roles from their experiences with discrimination. Only PST3 never received discrimination. She shared that in her environment, women are viewed to be more assertive than men. For this reason, she never experienced discrimination. These findings showed that sometimes a gender viewed as superior to others in their environment tends to have a safe place. The long-term of these conditions was discriminating against less superior genders, as reflected in the other three PSTs.

PST1, PST2, and PST4 experienced gender discrimination at different stages of their education and teaching practice. PST1 and PST4 had the same experiences of discrimination. Their experiences were in women's representation in leading an organization. It was not because men were superior to women in leadership roles, yet there was no chance for women to lead an organization. In their organizations, the leadership roles were not selected formally, yet people with higher organizational positions mostly chose them.

PST1 shared that during a club election, a teacher insisted the leader should be a boy because he was seen as more competent, which angered PST1: "I was angry with the reality that my teacher said those statements directly. She is a senior and already has many years of experience in teaching." Similarly, PST4 experienced discrimination during her university life. She shared her experience within a student organization that was predominantly led by men. PST4 shared, "Most of the positions on the committee are led by men. The organization's members tend to discriminate based on gender." Despite believing in gender equality in leadership abilities, PST4 accepted the discrimination to avoid conflict. PST2 encountered discrimination both in high school and during her teaching practice. Her students underestimated her because she was a woman, often ignoring her and subjecting her to sexual insults.

I do experience discrimination. It happens when I do teaching practice. It can be said right now. The students tend to underestimate us as their teachers because we are women. At some point, the students do not hear us. I even got indirect sexual insults, such as body shaming. (PST2)

Based on their experiences, PST1 decided not to emulate her discriminatory teachers in her teaching, stating, "Before I did the teaching practice, I thought I should not do such a thing as my teacher did." Conversely, PST4 chose not to let her past discrimination experiences limit her teaching approach, saying, "I do not influence my experience related to discrimination as my limitation when I am teaching right now. I choose to explore further besides the limitations."

### ***PSTs' Awareness of Gender Bias***

During their teaching practice, PSTs became increasingly aware of their gender biases and took steps to become more gender-responsive in their classrooms. PST1 and PST3, in particular, were determined to create a fair learning environment for all their students. PST1 found that interacting with her male and female peers helped her recognize and address her biases. She reported that she initially tended to avoid male students during teaching; however, over time, she learned to treat all students more fairly. She noted,

Since I started interacting with my teaching mates, both men and women, how I act toward the students has also changed. I am fairer to my students. (PST1)

PST3 consciously tried to create a conducive classroom environment by focusing on gender equality. Rather than focusing on a specific gender, she tried to treat the students equally. This method ensured that both girls and boys received equal attention and assistance. She explained her approach, saying,

To avoid bias, I try to be fair to the students. For example, I will focus on the girls first to make the class conducive. After the girls are seated, I will focus on the boys. (PST3)

On the other hand, at first, PST2's and PST4's experiences on gender discrimination made them biased against men. PST2 began her teaching practice with the stereotype that girls were easier to manage than boys. This stereotype led her to neglect the more challenging boys in her class. However, she soon reflected on her practices and recognized the need to be fairer. PST2 had a reflective discussion with the tutor teacher and her mates after teaching practice. This reflection helped her recognize her initial bias and adopt a fairer approach toward all students. She admitted,

Yes, I am aware of my own gender biases because I have my stereotype, thinking that girls are easier to manage than boys, so I'm more interactive with girls during this teaching. So, if the boys are busy, just leave it alone. (PST2)

PST4's personal experiences shaped her gender biases, leading her to encourage women to take leading roles. Nevertheless, she remained committed to treating all her students fairly. She expressed both her awareness of these biases and her desire for improvement, stating, "I am quite biased because of what I have experienced. I desire to encourage women to be at the forefront." Over time, she also encouraged male students to participate actively in the teaching and learning process.

Through their experiences and reflections, these PSTs took significant steps toward becoming more gender-responsive educators, ensuring a more equitable learning environment for all their students. This finding underscores the importance of developing gender awareness in teacher education to support inclusive and equitable classroom practices.

## **Discussion**

It was found that the PSTs in this study generally lacked the ability to distinguish between gender and sex, tended to hold traditional views of gender roles, and demonstrated endorsement of gender stereotypes. This finding is consistent with previous international studies by Acar-Erdol et al. (2022), Osman (2021), and Gündoğan and Taşdere (2021) which similarly reported that PSTs often struggle to understand gender concepts and tended to maintain traditional perspectives.

However, this study also uncovered a nuanced finding. Alongside their traditional perspectives, some PSTs expressed egalitarian perspectives on gender. This seeming contradiction may reflect a transitional phase in their understanding, which may be influenced by exposure to gender-inclusive ideas from outside the formal education system—such as social media, digital content, and peer interactions. Yet, it does not mean that formal training on gender and gender responsive education is not needed. The fact that only one out of four participants understood the difference between gender and sex speaks volume of the lack of understanding, let alone skills, in incorporating perspectives of gender equality and responsiveness of gender issues in PST education and training.

This diversity of perspectives may have emerged because younger generations are increasingly exposed to ideas about gender equality and inclusion through various sources, such as social media and interactions outside the classroom. According to research by Renold (2017), young people (13–19 years old) are beginning to think and speak about gender in new ways. They are becoming more aware of non-traditional gender identities and view support for gender diversity and the rights of sexual minorities as an important part of who they are. However, even though they express these egalitarian values, their everyday lives are still shaped by strict gender norms and the idea of a fixed gender binary. This means that while some things are changing, many traditional perspectives about gender remain. Furthermore, media representations significantly impacted societal perceptions and attitudes towards gender equality, with research indicating that portrayals could either reflect and perpetuate gender-role stereotypes or challenge traditional norms and advocate for egalitarian ideals (Barthwal, 2023; Matthes et al., 2016). The results of this study and other studies indicate that PSTs had little knowledge or comprehension of gender-related issues when they began their professional education, yet in their daily lives, they often practiced gender equality in accordance with current social norms.

Furthermore, PSTs provided varied answers regarding the concepts of gender, which largely reflected traditional perspectives on gender roles. Their views of men's roles emphasized physical activities, knowledge-oriented tasks, and leadership, while women's roles were associated with emotional attributes and maternal nurturing. These findings align with previous research showing that women were expected to be “warm and nurturing,” assessed primarily based on personality and appearance, and perceived as less credible than their male coworkers (Carli et al., 2016; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; McKinnon & O'Connell, 2020; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). These conceptions of gender roles stated by the PSTs in this study indicate gender stereotypes (Ellemers, 2018).

At the same time, PSTs in this study generally rejected gender stereotypes. They said they felt irritated or uncomfortable when someone made assumptions based on gender. However,

although they did not consciously endorse gender-stereotyped behaviors or attitudes, some acknowledged that such thoughts occasionally crossed their minds. This tension reflects and internal conflict, in which the PSTs believed in gender equality but sometimes unconsciously held onto stereotypes. This is similar to what Osman (2021) found—PTSs often spoke positively about gender equality but still carried some stereotypical beliefs. A previous study by Gündoğan & Taşdere (2021) has shown a similar pattern, where PSTs express support for equal treatment while unconsciously acting in accordance with traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, PSTs emphasized that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities across all areas of life. They pointed out that while there are physical differences between the sexes, they did not believe men and women differ in intelligence. Some also mentioned that, as future teachers, they try to treat boys and girls fairly and equally in learning situations (Kulik, 2018).

According to this study, those who think their gender identity as socially privileged felt more comfortable and accepted. On the other side, individuals who think their gender identity is marginalized or underprivileged may feel uncomfortable or excluded. These feelings shape people's sense of belonging and emotional safety in academic and social situations. Studies in organizational and educational environments by Laar et al. (2024) and Yang et al. (2025) show that women frequently face bias, a lack of fit, and less welcoming social climates, resulting in a lower sense of belonging and higher discomfort when compared to males, who tend to hold more privileged positions. These dynamics are related to larger social structures which privilege some gender identities over others. This influences people's feelings of safety and inclusion.

In addition, the PSTs in this study experienced situations involving discrimination and stereotyping during their educational journey, such as boys being competent and girls being talkative. They also faced stereotypes and disrespect from their teachers during school, such as women could not lead a student organization. Schools frequently become discrimination settings (Esen, 2013; Bell & Juvonen, 2020), whereas schools should serve as secure educational environments (Frei & Leowinata, 2014). Discrimination in the education setting impacted students' experiences and hindered their academic success (Esen, 2013). The short-term effect was associated with more depressive symptoms and shorter sleep durations among students (Bell & Juvonen, 2020). The PSTs' discrimination experiences in this study were also found when leadership roles only represented men. At the same time, leadership roles should be equally represented to all students, regardless of gender. FAWE (2018) stated that equal leadership opportunities create student inclusion and collaboration. Although PSTs had negative experiences with discrimination, this study found that they did not show any attitude that reminded them of their past experiences in situations where their gender identities were validated or challenged. They treated the students fairly and did not say discriminatory words, stereotypes, and biases to their students. Nevertheless, their teaching practices were shaped by their broader school experiences, including the influence of former teachers and past learning environments, which informed their professional awareness rather than resulting in discriminatory behavior (Debleri, 2012; Yunus, 2020).

Actively working towards reducing bias in education to establish a supportive and inclusive learning environment where every student could thrive and realize their full potential is crucial. Our research has highlighted that PSTs acknowledge their biases, but consistently treating all

students equally proved challenging. This study found biases toward specific genders, such as disproportionately focusing on girls and encouraging them to assume leadership roles. On the other hand, Frei & Leowinata (2014) found that male or female teachers tended to show favoritism towards boys. This indicates that teachers' favoritism toward a particular gender is not fixed, yet varies depending on the context, such as specific classroom situations or their own experiences and perceptions.

Moreover, the PSTs in this study noted being more interactive with the girls, thinking that girls are easier to manage. However, managing disruptive behavior from boys sometimes led PSTs to exclude them. This action reflected a perception of masculinity versus femininity in classroom behavior, as Francis (2000) outlined. Boys are frequently perceived as less compliant and more disruptive, which can affect their academic achievement and the way teachers treat them. Beaman et al. (2006) suggested using classroom strategies to build positive teacher-student relationships and replacing reactive responses to disruptive behaviors with constructive approaches. These strategies can help break down harmful gender stereotypes and promote equal respect and opportunities for all students. Based on this finding, our study implied that training should be boosted to fully and equally engage students, boys and girls. PSTs in this study were open to adjusting their teaching methods to reduce gender bias through peer discussions and continuous self-reflection, demonstrating a commitment to gender-responsive education.

In sum, PSTs in this study might struggle to differentiate between gender and sex due to misconceptions and misunderstandings that persist within their educational training (Acar-Erdol et al., 2022) as a result of not getting enough training on gender concepts. Gender-responsive education training is critical because training PSTs on gender equality has been highlighted as a more feasible option than a one-time professional meeting (FitzGerald et al., 2019). Looking at the teaching practice program, *Asistensi Mengajar* (AM) and *Kampus Mengajar* (KM) programs are beneficial for developing PSTs' skills because they allow PSTs to integrate academic theories with real-world classroom experiences and receive insightful feedback from mentor teachers (Genç, 2016; Kennedy-Clark, 2018; Suyatno et al., 2023; Zeichner, 2010). As AM and KM policy allowed, the credits for the semester were converted. However, the results of credit conversion sometimes led to a lack of knowledge in some courses. One of them was Gender and ELT. As the course was elective, PSTs could choose to take it or not. If they took the course when it was converted, PSTs would have no chance to attend the class. It showed that the institutional policies compromised this crucial course, which was less than optimal during implementation. This finding implies two things: the course needs to be compulsory, or gender aspects should be integrated into courses.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this study, PSTs understanding of gender concepts and their experiences, attitudes, and awareness of gender violations showed that they perceived gender roles from traditional and egalitarian perspectives. They held traditional perspectives on gender roles and struggled to differentiate between gender and sex; they also demonstrated egalitarian attitudes toward gender equality. These two perspectives appear as a result from the influence of longstanding societal norms, which tend to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, alongside

growing exposure to modern ideals that promote gender equality and challenge these stereotypes. As a result, PSTs often hold conflicting perspectives. They support equality in principle but remain influenced by traditional practices.

Furthermore, these findings point a gap in teacher education programs. The contradictory perspectives suggest that PSTs have not received enough training to critically examine and address gender issues in education. Therefore, this research suggests the need for comprehensive gender equity training in teacher education programs to ensure that future educators can address gender biases and promote inclusive learning environments. The programs can be done through three level of change: macro, meso, and micro (Eliyanah et al., 2023). For the macro-level, this study suggests the government, in this case the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology to develop curriculum and guidebook on gender-responsive teaching. Further, for the meso-level, this study suggests the education institution (the university and the study program) to change the Gender in ELT course into a compulsory course and put the course in the semester before PSTs do their teaching practice. Otherwise, this study suggests the study program to integrate gender studies into the teacher education curriculum. Next, for the micro-level, PSTs need to examine students' previous assessment data to compare the performance of female and male students across grammar, vocabulary, and language skills. This practice can serve as a means of responding to classroom dynamics and supporting the implementation of gender-responsive teaching and learning.

Further, as one of the multiple factors that shape PSTs perspective, integrating gender-responsive education into teacher training is important, so that PSTs could foster a culture of equality, inclusion, and respect. The integration benefits students' learning motivation as they feel acknowledged and supported regardless of gender. Integration also encourages students to explore career choices that are free from gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the integration contributes to societal change by promoting values of equality and inclusivity, which students may carry within families, communities, and workplaces.

Regarding its limitations, this study only involved female PSTs. Therefore, it is highly recommended for further research to include male PSTs to capture a broader range of perspectives. In addition, future studies should consider employing a larger sample size and utilizing multiple data collection techniques apart from interviews to enhance the depth and richness of the findings.

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