

## PAKISTANI EFL TEACHERS' VIEWS ON GENDER-INCLUSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE

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### Abstract

*This study aimed to explore English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' views on gender-inclusive English language use in Pakistani context. A quantitative, descriptive research design was used to conduct the study. Data were collected from sample of 50 EFL teachers of five universities through questionnaire. Teachers' attitude and perception towards gender-inclusive and gender-exclusive language was examined besides their readiness to observe inclusive practices in classrooms. Results reveal that though EFL teachers realize the significance of gender-inclusive language but their understandings and practices differ due to personal attitude and exposure to paradigm shift. The study emphasizes the need for training of teachers, revision of curriculum and policy support for promotion of gender inclusive language practices. The study contributes to improve language teaching practices and encourages adopting gender inclusive English in Pakistani EFL contexts.*

**Keywords:** Gender Inclusive Language, Gender Exclusive Language, EFL Teachers, Attitude

### Introduction

Language is used to convey the messages among community members for not only transmitting information from one corner to the other, rather it is used to establish healthy interaction among groups and individuals. Through a healthy interaction, social relationships as well as social functions are performed smoothly. Linguistic variation is said to be noticed across varied groups of community, where the concept of gender-inclusive English language is a prominent concern of linguistics and research. In case of English language also, Pauwels (1998) described how gender inequality faces varying linguistic properties. This gender inequality has also been addressed through research, for example Menegatti and Rubini (2017) asserted that societal irregular status of symmetry has been evidenced in favor of men where the idea denotes that the term women comes from the term men. Another example declares that in case of addressing common masses or people, English gender in-equality is observed to denote individuals with the generic pronoun "he" representing masculine or feminine both genders (Sensales & Areni, 2017).

All the languages evolve over time (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993). This phenomenon of language change can be observed as a paradigm shift from gender exclusion to gender inclusion

in English language from 1970s to onwards. Gender inclusive language denotes that nouns and pronouns should not be separately used for females rather those should represent both the genders e.g. by addressing everyone instead of excluding females or using male pronoun dominantly. Several research and policy references have been found relevant denoting human beings as mortal beings.

In 1972, US publishers, McGraw-Hill and Scott, Foresman introduced gender inclusive English guidelines (Nilsen 1987). The paradigm shift of language inclusion evolved in the inner circle countries driven by socio-political and economic changes. The effect of gender-inclusive language was spread out beyond inner circle countries due to the international language status of English. English language is commonly used internationally across the globe so people are more likely inclined to adapt to the emerging changes in English language across the spectrum of inner circle countries only.

Much of the responsibility comes on the teachers to rightly impart the emerging trends in teaching English particularly of its status of English as Foreign Language (EFL). Teachers are said to be the agents to play mediating role in transferring the linguistic change among students. The level of awareness, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers about gender inclusive language shape the mindsets, as well as practices of students' language usage. The current study targets to explore the perceptions and views of Pakistani EFL teachers about the gender-inclusive English language use. It will contribute to not only understand the global changes in linguistics but also comprehend the perceptions applicable in local educational background

### **Statement of the Problem**

Language that involves one gender by reducing the visibility of other is referred to as sexist. English language is considered as a gender-biased language because of its use of masculine forms as generics. It marginalizes women. Although the shift from gender exclusive to gender inclusive language over the last few decades has encouraged the fair representation of both the genders in language but such practices remained inconsistent in EFL context. In Pakistan, where English has a pivotal role in education, little attention has been paid to identify EFL teachers' perception towards gender-inclusive English. It is significant to explore their views as classroom practices are influenced by them. Therefore, this study has been designed to investigate Pakistani EFL teachers' views on the use of gender-inclusive English language.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study was aimed to:

- i. Analyze views of teachers on gender inclusive English language.
- ii. Find out difference in the views of English Language teachers on the basis of gender.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What the views of Foreign Language Teachers are towards gender inclusive English Language?
- ii. Are female Foreign Language Teachers more inclined towards gender inclusive language than male?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides understanding of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive language. It emphasizes the significance of equal representation of gender in language and gives insight of how gender-biased expressions may effect learners' perceptions. The findings of the study will be helpful for EFL teachers to understand issues associated with gender-exclusive language that may arise from their attitudes, or psychosocial factors. Moreover, the study will be beneficial for

textbook writers, curriculum developers and policymakers promoting more inclusive and gender-sensitive language practices in English language education.

### Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to five universities of Lahore i.e., University of Education, Punjab University and Lahore College University, University of Management and Technology, national University of Modern Languages.

Keeping in view the limit of time and resources, fifty English language teachers were selected as sample.

### Methodology

#### Nature of Research

A quantitative, descriptive research design was used to conduct the study. It was designed to find out Pakistani Foreign Language Teachers' views on gender inclusive English language

#### Population

The population of the study consisted of the EFL teachers from five universities of Lahore, i.e., University of Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, University of Management and Technology Lahore and National University of Modern Languages Lahore.

#### Sample

Sample of the study was based on 50 English Language teachers from five universities, i.e., University of Education Lahore, University of the Punjab, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, University of Management and Technology Lahore and National University of Modern Languages Lahore.

#### Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants of the present study.

#### Sample size of EFL Teachers

University	male	female
Punjab University		10
Lahore College Women university	10	
National University of Modern Languages		5
5		
University of Management & Technology		
10		
University of Education Lahore	10	
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>

#### Tool of Research

Researcher used close ended questionnaire to collect required data from English Language Teachers from five universities. The questionnaire comprised over 25 question items. It had two sections. First section was prepared to elicit views of participants on gender inclusive English language and section two was based on the statements based on the gender inclusive language expressions in order to see the participants 'preference for language expression.

## Procedure

The researcher administered the questionnaire personally in all universities. Participants were made clear about the issue and asked for honest responses. Questionnaires were collected after they were filled by the respondents.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Statistical tests like t-test and ANOVA were used wherever they required and support the results.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the results derived from the analysis of data obtained through questionnaire.

- A considerable number of teachers(60%) agreed to the statement that they use gender inclusive language in the classroom. The Mean score ( $M=3.3$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ) also showed that Educationists agreed with the statement.
- EFL Teachers had no clear opinion about the statement that they use gender inclusive language even outside the classroom. Mean score ( $M=3.1$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ) showed that educationists were un-decisive about the idea.
- A considerable number of the teachers (60%) used gender inclusive language because it is emerging world standard. The mean score ( $M=3.5$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ) showed that teachers agreed with the statement.
- A considerable number of the teachers(62%) support gender inclusive language because it reflects equal state of society. The mean score ( $M=3.5$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ) reflected that educationists supported the gender inclusive because of the above mentioned reason.
- Educationists did not have any knowledge about their colleagues' awareness of the issue. The mean score ( $M=3.0$ ,  $SD=1.0$ ) reflected that they had no clear opinion regarding the statement.
- A considerable number of the EFL teachers agreed that use of gender inclusive language may change our social attitude towards gender discrimination. The mean score ( $M=3.8$ ,  $SD=1.0$ ) showed the educationists' agreement to the statement.
- EFL teachers(68%) agreed that gender inclusive language can be implemented with the help of context. The mean score ( $M=3.6$ ,  $SD=0.8$ ) showed that educationists agreed to the idea.
- The teachers(46%) did not have solid opinion regarding the statement that English Language is gender biased and gives priority to one gender on another. The mean score ( $M=3.1$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ) indicated that respondents were not clear about the issue.
- EFL teachers (42%) did not have clear knowledge that use of gender inclusive language limits the right of free expression. The mean score ( $M=3.2$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ) also showed that they had no clear opinion.
- A considerable number of the teachers(66%) agreed to the statement that use of gender specific language often implies male superiority. The mean score ( $M=3.7$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ) indicated that educationists supported the statement.
- EFL teachers(52%) agreed that Gender biased language arouses feelings of social rejection among women. The mean score ( $M=3.3$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ) also showed that participants agreed to the statement

- A considerable number of the teachers (62%) agreed to the statement that gender exclusive language is still considered to be the correct form of expression. The mean score ( $M=3.5, SD=1.0$ ) also reflected that respondents agreed to the statement.
- Teachers (50%) disagreed and 24% remained neutral to the statement that mostly teachers discourage students to use gender inclusive language in classroom. The mean score ( $M=2.8, SD=1.1$ ) indicated that respondents did not support the statement.
- A considerable number of the EFL teachers (66%) agreed to the statement that females are more likely than males to use gender inclusive language. The mean score ( $M=3.5, SD=1.1$ ) also showed teachers' agreement to the statement
- Most of the teachers (72%) agreed that male (masculine) expressions are more dominant in gender exclusive English. The mean score ( $M=3.8, SD=1.0$ ) reflected that a considerable number of respondents agreed to the statement.
- Most of the teachers (70%) agreed that male (masculine) expressions are interpreted as generic (referring to both male and female). The mean score ( $M=3.7, SD=1.0$ ) indicated that a considerable number of the teachers supported the statement.
- Most of the teachers (74%) agreed to the statement that preference for gender inclusive or exclusive language depends upon cultural values. The mean score ( $M=3.8, SD=1.1$ ) showed that most of the teachers agreed the idea
- Most of the teachers (76%) agreed that language shapes our thought. The mean score ( $M=3.9, SD=1.1$ ) also indicated that most of the educationists agreed to the statement.
- EFL teachers agreed (54%) and some (22%) remained neutral to the statement that teachers formulate students language pattern. The mean score ( $M=3.4, SD=1.1$ ) reflected the educationists 'support to the statement.
- Most of the teachers (44%) disagreed and some (14%) remained neutral to the statement that making students aware of two choices (gender exclusive or gender inclusive) may confuse them. The mean score ( $M=3.0, SD=1.2$ ) indicated that respondents were undecided about the statement.
- Among expressions having statement based on two categories: gender inclusive and gender exclusive language, a large majority of the teachers (84% , 84%, 72 %, 70%, 68%, respectively ) preferred gender inclusive expressions to gender exclusive expressions.

Results showed that gender inclusive language was widely favoured by teachers. Some of them were not aware of the issue of gender inclusive language and its effects on teaching. But a considerable number of the teachers used it in the classrooms and were aware of its impact on culture, society and thought of people. Half of the teachers encourage students to use gender inclusive language. This view is in line with Whorfian Hypothesis (Whorf, 1956) that language influences people's perception of the world. So far as the demographic variables were concerned, no difference was found in teachers' views on the basis of gender, age, qualification and experience. No gender disparity in the use and views of gender inclusive language in this study is supported by the study conducted in Singapore on the topic 'Ripple effects: The case of gender-inclusive'



Like previous researches, this research also supported the idea that male expressions are more dominant in gender exclusive English language than female expression. The idea that gender biased language arouses feelings of social rejection among women is in line with the study made on the topic "WHEN HE DOES NOT MEAN YOU: 'GENDER EXCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AS A FORM OF SUBTLE OSTRACISM'" Results supported the idea that gender inclusive language reflects equal state of society. The preference for gender inclusive language found among educationists in this study is in line with the study made by Jacob et al on the topic "Asian Educationists' Views on Gender inclusive Language" and is in contrast with the findings of an informal study done in 1987 with lecturers of the English Language Proficiency unit Of the National University of Singapore (Ferryman, 1995). In that study, the majority of the lecturers expressed their opinion against gender inclusive language. Results showed the trend towards the greater use of gender inclusive language than gender exclusive language.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, following conclusions were drawn:

First objective of my study was to analyze views of EFL educationists on gender inclusive English language. After the analysis of their views, it was concluded that most of the teachers are aware of the issue and favour gender inclusive language because it is emerging world standard and reflects equal state of society. On the contrary, gender exclusive language reflects biased approach towards women. This is what is happening in male dominant society like ours. Male expressions are considered as generic expression.

Second objective of the study was to find out gender disparity in use of language in classroom. Data showed that there is no difference in views of male and female educationists regarding gender inclusive language. It was concluded that both of the genders are equally exposed and aware of the new trend.

### Recommendations

1. Refresher courses should be arranged for the in service teachers of English to give them awareness about new trends in language.
2. Teachers should encourage students to use gender inclusive language in their speech and writing so that their knowledge of language may conform to the social changes in society.
3. Gender inclusive language should be made the part of instructional material.
4. Dictionaries should be revised according to the new trends in language (e.g. gender inclusive language)
5. Government should make policies to equalize the societal role of both the genders so that gender biasness in language may be avoided.
6. Electronic and print media should play its role to make mass aware of the gender inclusive language and its importance in society.

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## Appendix-A Questionnaire

**Dear Teachers,**

I am conducting research on topic “**Pakistani EFL Teachers’ Views and their use of Gender Inclusive English Language**”. Your valuable responses will be great asset to complete my Thesis. I assure you that your expert views will not be disclosed. Thanks for co-operation.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_Female\_\_\_\_\_  
Qualification \_\_\_\_\_ Designation \_\_\_\_\_ Teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_ years

**1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree**

**Gender-exclusive** language is a language in which masculine words are used to include both males and females, e.g., policeman, he/his. (A student should be paid for his work.) **Gender-inclusive** refers to language which includes both men and women, e.g., police officer, chairperson, he/she or there. (A student should be paid for his/her or their work.)

## Section 1

Please tick against the column which reflects your opinion.

S.No	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1.	English Language is very much gender biased.					
2.	I use gender inclusive language in classroom.					
3.	I am very sensitive to the use of gender inclusive English language even outside the classroom.					
4.	I use gender inclusive language because it is emerging world standard.					
5.	I support gender inclusive English language because it reflects equal state of society.					
6.	Most of my colleagues are aware of the issue of gender inclusive language.					
7.	Preference for gender inclusive or exclusive language depends upon cultural values.					
8.	Use of gender inclusive language may change our social attitude towards gender discrimination.					
9.	I can implement my views on gender inclusive English language due to situational context.					
10.	Emphasis on the use of gender inclusive language limits the right of free expression.					
11.	Our choices of language have a significant impact on how we think of men and women.					
12.	Use of gender specific language often implies male superiority.					
13.	Gender biased language arouses feelings of social rejection among women					
14.	Gender exclusive language is still considered to be the correct form of expression					
15.	Mostly teachers discourage students to use gender inclusive language in classroom.					
16.	Teachers formulate students language pattern by making them use gender inclusive language/gender exclusive language					
17.	Making students aware of two choices (gender exclusive or gender inclusive) may confuse them.					
18.	Females are more likely than males to use gender inclusive language.					
19.	Male (masculine) expressions are more dominant in gender exclusive English language than female expressions.					
20.	Male (masculine) expressions are interpreted as generic (referring to both male and female).					



## Section 2

**Tick the expression which you would most likely to use in your own writing and speaking.**

1. ☐ Congressional representative urged the president to find the right man for the job.  
☐ Congressional representative urged the president to find the right person for the job.
2. ☐ The family grocery shopper wants to get all her shopping done in one stop.  
☐ The family grocery shopper wants to get all shopping done in one stop
3. ☐ The good administrator, who is satisfied with the performance of his members of staff, appreciates them.  
☐ The good administrator, who is satisfied with the performance of members of staff, appreciates them.
4. ☐ If the student is dissatisfied with his grade, can appeal to the instructor.  
☐ If the student is dissatisfied with his or her grade, he can appeal to the instructor.
5. ☐ The intelligent student is more concerned about his grades.  
☐ The intelligent student is more concerned about grades.