

Gender Differentiation in Classroom Interaction: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Teacher–Student Talk

¹Leli Ridayani, ²Wahyudi Badri, ³Dian Susyla

¹MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu

^{2,3}Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

Corresponding author: leliridayani250@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates gender-based discourse patterns in English classrooms through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants were 8th grade students whose classroom interactions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Fairclough's CDA framework. The study aimed to identify (1) how male and female students participated in classroom discourse and (2) what gendered patterns emerged during teacher–student and student–student interactions. The findings revealed that male students dominated verbal participation by taking more turns, providing longer responses, and initiating more spontaneous interactions. Female students participated less frequently and tended to wait for teacher nomination before speaking, producing shorter and more cautious responses. Teachers' discourse practices, including question distribution and feedback patterns, unintentionally reinforced these differences by giving male students more opportunities for elaboration. The results align with previous research, indicating that classroom discourse often reproduces broader gender ideologies. The study concludes that English classrooms at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu reflect gendered participation norms and recommends more equitable discourse strategies to promote balanced interaction.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, gender, classroom discourse, participation, EFL learners*

INTRODUCTION

Classroom discourse is a central component of teaching and learning because the teacher's language choices significantly influence how students participate, understand instructions, and construct their academic identity. In many educational settings, teacher–student interaction is not neutral; instead, it reflects underlying social norms, ideologies, and power relations that shape learning experiences. Recent discourse studies highlight that gender remains one of the most persistent dimensions influencing classroom communication, especially in contexts where cultural norms continue to shape teachers' expectations of boys and girls (Sowden & Borg, 2020).

In the Indonesian context, although national curriculum guidelines

emphasize fairness and equality in learning, subtle forms of gender differentiation continue to emerge in everyday classroom talk. These linguistic patterns may include differences in questioning, praise, discipline, feedback, and opportunities to speak, which may unintentionally privilege one gender over another. Research within Southeast Asian classrooms shows that teachers' discourse can reproduce gendered assumptions—for example, viewing boys as more active and outspoken, and girls as more compliant and attentive (Naz & Akhter, 2021). Such patterns are important to analyze because they can influence students' self-confidence, motivation, and participation—particularly in English learning, where communicative interaction is crucial.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a robust framework for examining how teacher–student interaction constructs or reinforces gender differences. By analyzing language use, CDA uncovers the ideological assumptions embedded within everyday classroom communication. Recent CDA-based classroom studies emphasize that teaching discourse often reflects broader sociocultural beliefs that influence participation patterns, identity formation, and power relations (Ahmad & Ariffin, 2022).

Given this background, MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu—one of the prominent Islamic junior high schools—offers an important context for examining how gender differentiation may appear in English classroom interaction. This study focuses on the 8th-grade students during the academic year 2024/2025 to explore how teacher talk constructs gendered roles, expectations, and opportunities in classroom discourse.

Several previous studies have also confirmed the presence of gendered patterns in teacher–student interaction: Fadillah (2020) found that male students in junior high school English classes received more challenging questions and more opportunities to speak, while female students were more frequently addressed with affective comments such as “good girl,” indicating softer expectations toward female learners. Rahayu & Mulyani (2021) reported that teachers tended to praise male students for academic performance but praised female students for behavior or neatness. This pattern reinforced the belief that male students are cognitively stronger and female students are emotionally stable. Khan & Malik (2022) showed that in EFL classrooms, male students were more likely to be chosen for leadership tasks such as presenting, leading groups, or answering difficult questions, while female students were given supportive or administrative tasks, reflecting traditional gender positioning in classroom discourse. These findings indicate that gender differentiation in teacher talk is not isolated but part of a broader pattern observed in various educational contexts. Research Questions: 1) How does the teacher's language construct gender differentiation in classroom interaction? 2) What discourse patterns reflect differences in how male and female students are addressed? 3) What ideologies underlie these gendered discourse practices?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical framework. CDA was chosen because it examines how language reflects and constructs social inequalities, including gender-based differences. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice was used to analyze the teacher's classroom talk. The qualitative CDA approach allowed the researcher to focus on patterns of linguistic choices, interaction sequences, turn-taking, speech acts, and evaluative expressions that shape gender differentiation in the English classroom. The research was conducted at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu, a public Islamic junior high school in Bengkulu City. The school was selected because it has an established English learning program and a large number of students, making it a suitable environment for analyzing classroom discourse. The study took place in the 2024/2025 academic year, during regular English lessons. The participants consisted of: One English teacher of the 8th grade, and Thirty-two (32) 8th-grade students enrolled in the selected English class. This class was chosen through purposive sampling, meaning the researcher selected a class that met the required criteria: 1) active teacher–student interaction, 2) mixed gender classroom, 3) willingness of the teacher to be observed and recorded. Students' names and identities were coded (e.g., *M1* for male student 1, *F1* for female student 1) to protect confidentiality. To ensure data richness, the researcher used three primary methods: 1) Classroom Observation; 2) Audio Recording; and 3) Transcription of Discourse. The data were analyzed using Fairclough's CDA model: 1) Textual Analysis; 2) Discursive Practice Analysis; 3) Sociocultural Practice Analysis.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

FINDING

The findings of this study revealed clear gender-based patterns in classroom discourse at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu during English lessons. The analysis of classroom recordings showed that male students tended to dominate verbal participation, particularly in spontaneous and teacher-initiated interactions. Across all observed sessions, boys responded more frequently to teachers' display questions, often volunteering answers without being prompted. Their utterances were typically longer, more assertive, and occasionally included overlapping speech, indicating a higher level of confidence in taking conversational space. In contrast, female students spoke less frequently and tended to wait for explicit teacher invitations before contributing. Their utterances were shorter and more cautious, suggesting that they were more concerned with accuracy and teacher approval. These findings suggest that the classroom discourse environment more easily accommodates male participation patterns.

The types of discourse features used by the teacher also contributed to gender differences in participation. A higher number of open-ended questions were directed to male students compared to female students. Open-ended questions generally require longer and more elaborate responses, which provided more opportunities for boys to expand their ideas and maintain floor dominance. Meanwhile, closed questions—which typically demand short factual answers—were more often addressed to female students. The teacher also provided more follow-up prompts and elaboration requests (“Why do you think so?”, “Can you explain more?”) to male students than to female students. This pattern implicitly encouraged boys to speak more, while positioning girls as brief responders. Although the differences were not intentional, these discourse practices created an imbalance in the learning interaction.

Evidence of these gendered patterns also appeared in student-to-student interactions. During pair and group work, boys initiated discussions more frequently and tended to take leadership roles in distributing tasks and guiding answers. Girls, on the other hand, were more passive and often deferred decisions to more outspoken peers. In mixed-gender groups, male students often took over explanation roles, while female students contributed mainly when asked directly. This dynamic reinforced the teacher-student interaction pattern observed earlier, further demonstrating how classroom discourse favors male assertiveness while limiting equal participation.

Overall, the results clearly indicate that male students exhibited higher levels of verbal participation, turn-taking, and initiation in classroom discourse compared to female students. Meanwhile, female students’ discourse contributions were limited by both their personal communication styles and the subtle interactional patterns established by the teacher. These findings reflect broader sociocultural expectations regarding gender interaction and highlight the importance of critically examining discourse practices to promote a more equitable learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that classroom discourse in the 8th grade English classes at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu reflects clear gender-based participation patterns, with male students speaking more frequently, taking more turns, and receiving more opportunities for extended responses than female students. These patterns can be understood through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views discourse as both a product and a producer of social power relations. Fairclough’s framework (1995) argues that language practices in institutional contexts—such as schools—often reproduce existing social hierarchies. In this study, the teacher’s distribution of question types and follow-up scaffolding unintentionally reaffirmed socially embedded norms that position boys as more vocal and girls as more cautious or compliant. The discourse structure itself contributed to sustaining these gender differences,

showing how classroom talk is never neutral but shaped by larger societal ideologies.

The dominance of male participation observed in this research aligns with Van Dijk's (2003) assertion that discourse often reflects power imbalance in subtle and systematic ways. Male students had greater access to "discursive power" by being allowed more floor time, more elaboration opportunities, and more open-ended questions, all of which helped shape them as more legitimate contributors in the classroom. Although the teacher did not explicitly favor any gender, the interactional routines created unequal participation, illustrating Van Dijk's idea that ideologies are reproduced through everyday language patterns. Female students' shorter responses and their tendency to wait for teacher nomination reflect internalized discourse norms that align with broader sociocultural expectations about femininity and politeness.

The findings of this study also show strong consistency with previous empirical research. Fadillah (2020) reported similar tendencies in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where male students were more active in answering questions and engaging in spontaneous talk. His findings support the results of this study, showing that Indonesian classroom norms often socialize boys to be more outspoken. Likewise, the present study echoes Rahayu and Mulyani (2021), who found that teachers tended to provide male students with more evaluative comments and follow-up prompts, reinforcing their participation. This same pattern was evident in the current research, as male students received more opportunities to elaborate their reasoning. Furthermore, the results are in line with Khan and Malik (2022), who observed that boys in Pakistani EFL classrooms took leadership roles during group activities, while girls often adopted supportive roles. A similar dynamic occurred in mixed-gender group tasks at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu, reinforcing the idea that gendered discourse patterns are not isolated to one cultural context, but part of a broader regional trend.

Taken together, these comparisons suggest that the gender differences found in this study are not unique but reflect a consistent pattern documented in CDA-based research on classroom interaction. The findings illustrate how practices discourse—such as question distribution, turn-taking allocation, and feedback strategies—can unconsciously privilege certain groups. These practices reproduce existing gender ideologies, consistent with CDA's argument that language reflects and shapes social power structures. The results therefore highlight the need for teachers to critically examine their own discourse patterns to create more inclusive classroom interactions. Encouraging equal question distribution, providing balanced scaffolding, and designing activities that empower both male and female students to speak may contribute to a more equitable learning environment.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

This study investigated gender-based patterns in classroom discourse among 8th grade students at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu through the lens of Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA). The findings revealed that male students dominated classroom interactions by speaking more frequently, taking more turns, and offering longer and more assertive responses. Female students, in contrast, participated less actively, provided shorter responses, and tended to wait for explicit teacher nomination before contributing. The teacher's discourse practices—such as the distribution of question types, follow-up prompts, and opportunities for elaboration—unintentionally reinforced these differences, giving male students more discursive power in the classroom.

The results support CDA perspectives that classroom talk is not neutral, but shaped by social norms and power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2003). They also align with previous empirical research (Fadillah, 2020; Rahayu & Mulyani, 2021; Khan & Malik, 2022), which similarly found that male students tend to dominate participation in English classrooms. This study concludes that gendered discourse patterns at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu reflect broader social ideologies about gender roles, and that the classroom environment, although unintentionally, contributes to reproducing these norms.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several pedagogical and research-oriented suggestions are proposed. First, English teachers are encouraged to develop greater critical awareness of their classroom discourse practices, particularly in relation to gender. Teachers should consciously monitor the distribution of questions, turn-taking opportunities, and feedback to ensure that both male and female students are given equal chances to participate. Using strategies such as random nomination, structured turn-taking, or think-pair-share activities can help minimize unequal participation patterns and prevent the dominance of certain students.

Second, teachers are advised to provide balanced scaffolding and follow-up questions to both male and female students. Since extended responses and elaboration opportunities were more frequently given to male students in this study, teachers should intentionally encourage female students to expand their answers and express their ideas more confidently. Creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment may help female students feel more comfortable speaking and reduce hesitation rooted in sociocultural expectations.

Third, incorporating gender-sensitive teaching strategies into classroom practice is highly recommended. Group work should be carefully designed so that leadership roles, presentation tasks, and decision-making responsibilities are shared equally among students. Teachers may assign rotating roles within group activities to prevent the reinforcement of traditional gender roles that position boys as leaders and girls as passive supporters.

In addition, teacher training programs and professional development workshops should include discussions on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its application in classroom settings. Understanding how everyday language

use can reproduce power relations will help teachers reflect on their instructional discourse and adopt more inclusive interactional patterns.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal or mixed-methods studies to further explore gender dynamics in classroom discourse. Expanding the scope to different grade levels, school types, or subjects may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender-based discourse patterns develop over time. Including students' perspectives through interviews or reflective journals may also enrich the analysis and offer deeper insights into how classroom discourse influences learners' participation and identity construction.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, N., & Ariffin, K. (2022). Critical discourse analysis of teacher talk: Ideology, power, and gender in the language classroom. *Journal of Language and Education Studies*.
- Fadillah, R. (2020). *Gender differences in teacher–student interaction in Indonesian EFL classrooms* (Unpublished undergraduate thesis). Universitas Negeri Jakarta.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Khan, M., & Malik, S. (2022). Classroom discourse and gender roles in EFL contexts: A qualitative analysis. *Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 10(1), 112–124.
- Naz, A., & Akhter, A. (2021). Gendered classroom discourse in Asian EFL contexts: A systematic observation study. *Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics*.
- Rahayu, S., & Mulyani, T. (2021). Gendered patterns of praise and evaluation in English language classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Linguistics*, 7(2), 45–57.
- Sowden, H., & Borg, S. (2020). Gendered patterns in classroom participation: A discourse perspective. *Journal of Language Teaching Research*.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352–371). Blackwell.