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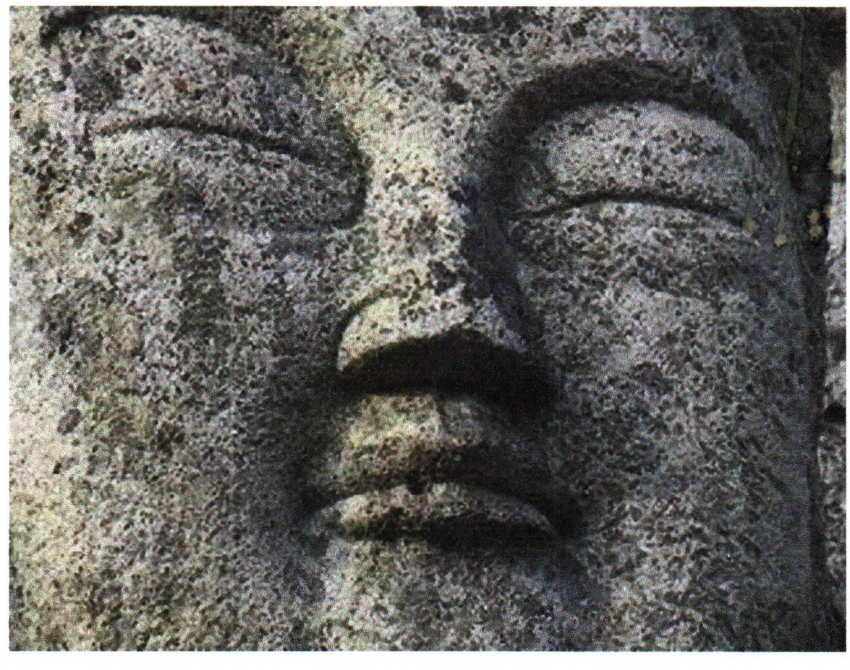

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Title

Gender Differences in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of sex-based grouping (female-sex group, male-sex group, and mixed-sex group) in teaching English subjects. The subject of this research is one class consisting of 30 students taken randomly in one Senior High School in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. To collect data, the teaching and learning process employing the sex-based grouping was observed. The study found that male and female students have different ways in learning English, which are influenced by gender differences. Male students preferred mixed-sex grouping whereas female students preferred the female-sex grouping.

Key words: *gender, sex-based grouping, English language teaching*

Introduction

Gender difference in communication has become important topics for discussion recently since the notion about 'women's language' was elaborated by Lakoff (1976) and followed by Tannen (1990). This notion emphasized that men and women have different styles

in communicating. Numerous studies on it then flourished (Keeler 1990; Kuipers 1990; Berman 1998; Itakuro and Tsui 2004).

This paper examined the issue of gender differences in teaching English by examining the use of sex-based grouping (female-sex group, male-sex group, and mixed-sex group) in teaching English subjects. Discussion in this paper becomes precious findings on the literature of English language teaching and literatures of language and gender.

Related Literature

Literatures had revealed differences of men and women in communication. Tannen (1990), for example, states that there is a tendency for men to use language to 'preserve their independence and maintain their position in the group'. Conversely, women use language to 'create connection and identity'. Biber & Burges (2000) also confirm that women's focus in conversation is on 'personal and interactional aspects of conversation', whereas men's focus is more on 'transferring information'. In addition, Stanton (2001) states that conversations for women are for the sake of 'developing and preserving intimacy', while for men, 'maintaining power' is more important than other aspects, such as intimacy.

Literature had also revealed the differences between men and women in terms of learning a language (Logan and Johnson, 2009; Mahmud, 2010). Logan and Johnston (2009) found that women 'have better reading comprehension' than men. Mahmud (2010, p. 182) mentions that some characteristics of female students such as being 'ashamed, nervous, not certain', can influence their English proficiency.

Research Method

This paper is based on the data taken in 2015. The subject of the research is the second year students of one Senior High School in Makassar. One class was taken randomly, consisting of 30 students. To collect data, the researcher conducted intensive observations in three meetings. In each meeting, students were divided into three groups: male single sex group, female single sex group, and mixed sex group of male and female. Each group was given a topic for discussion and was observed separately. The results of the observation was described and elaborated in relation to gender differences in English language teaching.

Findings

Table 1 Students' Performance in Sex Based Grouping

Group	*1st meeting*	*2nd meeting*	*3rd meeting*
Female	*Each member expressed opinions and work together to make good report; Some produced questions; In the reporting, some of the members are trying to answer the questions; Most members speak in turn*	*Each member expressed opinions and the topics All work together to make good report Some produced questions and others are trying to answer the questions Members tried to solve problems together*	*Each member expressed opinions n the topics All work together to make good report Some produced questions; others try to answer In the reporting, some of the members are trying to answer the questions*
Male	*Tended to be silent more rather than talking Only one or two try to talk on the topics Sometimes one member was asked to talk but no comments*	*Tended to be silent Members are expecting each other to talk No one from the group answered the questions in the reporting sessions*	*Tended to be silent Talking should be prompted Not a good report Only one of the members tried to write reports; others are just waiting*
Mixed	*Members try to express their opinions Questions and answers were lively Members were cheerful (laughing and yelling)*	*Members try to express their opinions Members spoke each other freely Some felt ashamed with her opinion*	*Members try to express their opinions One member who tried to express opinion will be supported by clapping hand*

Table 1 above shows differences in the way each member of the group participate in the group discussion. In each meeting, groups of the female single sex always performed good participation in the class. In the first meeting, each member try to express opinions about the given topics, some tried to probe questions which can make their discussion was directed to the main issue of the topics. They also show good order in talking. Last they worked together

to produce good reports. In the reporting session, members were actively asking questions. These phenomena can also be observed in the second and third meeting.

A different style of discussion can be seen in the male single sex setting where all of the members are male students. As observed for three meetings, members did not show cheerful discussion that can be seen from the high tendency to be passive and keep silent. Questions need to be prompted, and sometime only one or two tried to talk.

Another different case can be seen in mixed sex setting. From the three times of observation, members of this group tended to be very noisy as they were shouting and laughing each other when one of them was expressing their opinion. During the discussion, most members tried to be active and in fact they made a discussion into long debate. When a female member was expressing her opinion, other members were yelling and clapping hands However, they still can produce good report after long debate.

Therefore, it can be inferred that female and male students have different styles in communication. The female single sex group has more potential to show their good participation in English discussion, compared to the male single sex group. Mixing the group of men and women could also show active participation. This study proves the existence of 'women's language' that had been observed by Lakoff (1976) and Tannen (1990). Tannen (1990) indicates that the superior language-related communicative skills of females are related to their difference in communicative styles. As addition, Tannen (1990) characterizes male speech as conflictive and female speech as cooperative. This results in better communicative competency among female language learners since they are more active in listening and able to convey the message in a harmonious way.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that gender differences are important aspect in English language teaching. Students in the class are various and come from different background and therefore, they are different. Findings from this study prove that those differences can be caused by gender differences, particularly the notion of women's language (Lakoff 1976; Tannen, 1990). In order to accommodate students' differences in the class, English teachers need to create a great atmosphere for learning. The study shows that sex- based grouping can become an alternative way.

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