

# Sex-based Learning Approach: Innovation in Teaching English Pragmatics in Single-sex Education

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**Abstract.** What approach is applied in teaching English in single-sex education (SSE) and Islamic boarding schools in particular? Some studies report that the language proficiency of Islamic Boarding School students remains unimproved. Although it is apparent that SSE makes teachers apply instructional strategies more readily and effectively than in mixed-sex groupings, the suitability of approaches or methods applied by English language teachers in Islamic Boarding Schools remains unanswered. The order of the male's factors affecting listening difficulties: *Speaker*, *Content*, and *Listener* (Potential for Men's Islamic Boarding Schools), and female; *Listener*, *Speaker*, and *Content* (Potential for Women's Islamic Boarding Schools) (Potential for Women's Islamic Boarding School), and mixed-sexes or co-education (*Speaker*, *Listener*, and *Content*) (Potential for Public Schools) potentially answers the phenomenon. Pedagogically, the orders of sex-based factors affecting listening difficulties are potentially applied as *an innovative approach* to the pragmatics of pedagogy in SSE, particularly in Islamic religious schools in which socio-cultural and religious content are the priority. Lack of direct communicative interactions with different sexes and limited exposure to the real situation of language use might lead to difficulty in pragmatic understanding. A preliminary prospective solution is available. The *santri* or *santriwati* need not visit hotels or tourist objects to improve their auditory pragmatic understanding. As another alternative, the students may read "Pragmatics-based Listening for the TOEFL: Innovation in Independent Learning." English teachers are suggested to try to apply a gender-based listening approach in English language teaching. Finally, a moral message, "Do not let Islamic boarding schools think alone!"

## 1 Background

It might be that not many community members ask, "How is English learning in Islamic boarding schools?" One interesting code that we can see in the boarding school area is the notice "English zone" or "Arabic zone ."Perhaps this is an approach to approach the *santri* 'Men's Boarding School students' or *santriwati* 'Women's Boarding School students' to the real situations or a means of 'exposure.' If this goes well, children or students can learn a foreign language at the same time in their boarding house schools. They need not go to other

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'places' to learn English, which places are believed to enhance learners' speaking and listening ability.

In an attempt to help students achieve high fluency and listening skills, "Do English teachers of Pondok Putra (Men's Boarding School) and Pondok Putri (Women's Boarding House Schools) apply different approaches or methods to teach listening?" If the research finding which indicates that a certain sex is superior to another one in language learning remains valid, then the achievement of learning English at women's boarding schools and men's boarding schools may be different because of the same-sex teacher-students and learning activities are carried out by the same sex. So far, psycholinguistic views suggest that sex or gender is one of the determinants of language acquisition, learning, and use.

Despite the success of teacher development projects, the ELTIS program, for example, supports the availability of qualified teachers, knowledge of psycholinguistics and learning theory, their memorization abilities, and the existence of English Zone, why are there still obstacles to achieving English competence? This is a *gap*. Does English language teaching in Islamic boarding schools take into account the students' and teachers' sexes? Should a "sex-based learning approach" be applied to "sex-based education?" It is important to discuss these questions.

## **2 Single Sex Education (hereafter SSE): Trends, Purposes, and Achievements**

The current debate about boys' education risks takes us back decades in terms of understanding the significance of gender in relation to education [1]. Empirically, girls achieved better results studying in single-sex schools, whereas boys achieved better in co-educational schools [2]. Therefore, in some countries, there is a tendency to implement an educational system primarily provided for a particular sex. For example, in England, the educational system was particularly designed for males [3]. This gender bias in educational programs also exists in Lebanese language teaching, though it is hidden [4]. A number of countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the United States, and Britain, continue to have an improved number of single-sex schools [5].

Plenty of studies focusing on the effectiveness of single-sex education in public schools, including in co-education schools, have been conducted [6,7], for example, a study on the impact of single sex-education and the school size on achievement [8], gender and mathematics achievement [9], although single-sex schooling ignores the complexity of sex, gender, and sexuality [10]. It was apparent that single-sex schooling makes teachers apply instructional strategies more readily and effectively than in mixed-sex groupings [11]. The analysis of data from a survey of 3355 young people carried out in 13 co-educational English secondary schools showed that the majority of girls would like some or all of their sex education to be delivered in single-sex groups, and more single-sex education for girls needs to be delivered in single-sex groups [12]. Besides, single-sex schooling reduced the *gender gap* in self-concept [13].

Separate (or single-sex) education is an innovative concept that proved to be effective in any training element, although not properly reflected in today's educational process. The main challenge is how to integrate this concept into the current non-gender-oriented educational process [14], indicated by the imbalances in relation to boys' and girls' participation during an interaction, made manifest by verbal and non-verbal attitudes and language learning.

Gender is a relevant category in the frame of English language teacher education, which leads to implications for teachers' practices with a gender perspective [15], and a number of factors that influence boys' English learning and their disengagement with English [16]. It is

suggested that gender perspective be incorporated into the teaching framework, the curricular contents of all subjects, and into all teachers' professional development [17].

It is widely acknowledged that females outperform males across the curriculum based on the final test in secondary education. However, the gap in performance between males and females in modern languages is obviously marked and needs to be adjusted with patterns of teaching and learning [18]. Every teacher should select methods that encourage discussion and reflection on gender situations, adapted to the cultural level and age of students [19]. Thus, methods and strategies for teaching gender-based classes or schools should be selectively applied. Above all, the effectiveness of single-sex education remains questionable when a variety of determining factors are taken into account [20], though it indicates that Muslim schools in Britain can provide both constructive support for the educational landscape and an effective method of integrating religious minorities into native British citizenship [21].

Research indicates that co-educational settings show lower performance levels of students by grade, group, and gender [22]. Parents tend to perceive single-sex schools as being superior to co-educational schools [23], and more than one-third of Americans support having single-sex public schooling options [33]. However, "How about in Indonesia, especially in NTB?" If such evidence is applicable in West Nusa Tenggara, in which boarding schools are the primary educational institution, insyaa Allah the literacy rate and human resources in NTB increase.

The belief is raised because, based on some studies reported by proponents of SSE, mostly African Americans, Hispanics, and females benefit most from this type of instructional setting because single-sex environments help to reduce gender stereotypes students encounter in co-educational settings. Meanwhile, opponents of single-sex instruction believe that accomplishments achieved in single-sex environments can be achieved in co-educational environments if the proper teaching strategies are in place [23]. It indicates that boys and girls need different teaching strategies [2].

The opponents also feel that not enough studies have been conducted to make a strong claim that single-sex environments are better than co-educational environments. This is also the basis of the importance of implementing a new 'approach' and conducting studies to ascertain whether the difference in achievement is caused by the difference in the type of class or because of a different approach or learning strategy?

It is assumed that the basis of SSE in Indonesia is not identical to the basis referred to in the implementation of SSE in other countries. This requires tracking the background of the implementation of SSE in Indonesia. "How is the language taught in the SSE system? Is the sex-based learning approach prospective to boost pragmatic ability in SSE, especially in Islamic boarding schools?"

### **3 English Language Teaching in Islamic Boarding Schools: An Observable and Empirical Glance**

It is reported that there are several obstacles to learning English in Islamic boarding schools, namely: 1) lack of learning facilities, lack of funds, and lack of awareness of some parents or guardians of students in motivating their children to take part in the development of English learning in Islamic boarding schools, lack of enthusiasm for learning, lack of teachers, and overloaded students' activities [24].

The results of the preliminary studies show that very few boarding school alumni were admitted into the English Department of Islamic Higher Education. Generally, learning English still focuses on language content, such as grammar and syntax, not on improving language skills, so the achievement of language competence is not optimal [25]. Furthermore,

Tarihoran [17] concluded that learning English in Pondok pesantren does not fully integrate socio-cultural, functional, and language structure aspects. In addition, it was reported that the students of Islamic boarding schools find it difficult to speak English, although they have studied English for many years [26], and Pondok also implements bilingual programs. Warohma et al. [19] also report that the students in a favorite Pondok Pesantren in South Sumatra have never had intensive language teaching.

In relation to assessment, "Why is the English test instrument designed for co-education (mixed-sex education) used to measure the English proficiency of students who apply the SSE system? Do we still remember the English national exam implemented a few years ago? One of the tests is used to measure the student's ability to understand the meaning of "speaker meaning" (pragmatic meaning). These pragmatic meanings are measured with short dialogues or conversations, which are similar to the TOEFL test; one of the determining factors for understanding meaning is who the speaker in the conversation is.

If the *santri* (Men's Boarding Schools students) only hear the voices of a male English teacher or a cassette/video recording of a male speaker, and the female students (Women's Boarding Schools students) just hear Ustadzah's English voice every day, and may rarely listen to the radios or watch videos presenting male English speakers, "Is it possible that the English competence of male and female students be relatively the same?" This is a challenge for English lecturers and teachers, not only relying on the completeness of materials and the sophistication of teaching methods that ignore 'psycholinguistic aspects,' cognitive, sociolinguistic, and gender (this context is sexes). I haven't got a complete picture of whether the 'neurobiological' and 'psycholinguistic' (sex- or biological basis) aspects are the bases of the separation of male and female boarding schools, including the learning approach. It might be more on a religious basis.

Such an SSE learning system requires an approach or learning method that is relevant to the learners. In terms of attaining listening competence, several years ago in the school's national exam, listening skills were tested with short conversations, which is similar to the TOEFL test, whose main purpose was to measure the understanding of the meaning of context or pragmatic meaning. In the Community Service activity with the theme "Dissemination of Pragmatics-based Listening for the TOEFL" at SMK Taruna Bangsa Sakra, East Lombok, held on August 6, 2022, an English teacher said that he also found difficulties in answering listening questions in the form of "Short Dialogues or Short Conversations" tested in the National Examination. This becomes a 'big gap'; even the teacher finds it difficult in listening.

Several questions arise:

- 1) "Does learning English at Islamic boarding schools accommodate the learning needs and demands of English proficiency as tested in the UN?" Is exposure, one of the features of the Communicative Approach, generally applied in teaching English in Islamic boarding schools?
- 2) Do teachers in Islamic boarding schools teach examples of such tests? How to teach it?
- 3) Regarding gender (meaning sex), "Do English teachers use different types of listening tests for the students from the men's boarding schools and from the women's boarding schools?"
- 4) Do the English teachers apply the same approach or method to the men's and women's boarding schools?
- 5) In terms of religiosity, "Are female students allowed to practice English directly in tourist objects or hotels, as a form of 'exposure' which may be seen as inappropriate with the principles of learning in Islamic boarding schools?"

There is a principle of learning language from a social-based point of view of language, the importance of exposure to language in a socially meaningful situation

or setting, which requires a "here and now" approach. This is the "social interactionist" approach, interaction with other people, especially native speakers or foreigners [34]. Are the students allowed to practice using the English language at tourist destinations or hotels, for example? Meanwhile, pragmatic understanding, the meaning of language according to the context of use, is supported by direct exposure. This is a challenge for Islamic boarding schools to create learning strategies or choose learning approaches that can be implemented in Islamic boarding schools. By so doing, the students need not be in the setting or contexts of direct language use, such as at tourist attractions or hotels. This is relevant to Lado's [27] suggestion, which explicitly states that learning a foreign language must be done through exposure and directly communicate with native speakers in real communication settings. Based on a study conducted by [25], it is hoped that modern boarding schools allow students to access knowledge from the outside world. This idea seems debatable.

- 6) In addition, "Are students who have been educated and conditioned as religious people interested in practicing English in tourist objects or hotels?"

Such questions need to be answered so that the students at the men's and women's boarding schools have relatively the same abilities, even though they are taught by teachers of different sexes. They have the same right to be equally competent or proficient. Different genders and different communities, but they are expected to have relatively the same language ability. This is a challenge for boarding school English teachers, most of whom, if not all, are co-educational (mixed-sexes) English Education graduates.

Some examples of students' expressions dealing with listening difficulties:

"Tadi pas *listening*, ada dua yang membacakan soal, satu perempuan dan satu laki-laki. Kalau yang perempuan *sih* jelas. Tapi pas yang baca laki-laki, suaranya terlalu cepat dan tidak jelas," ungkap **Eko Lutfi Ardiyanto** sesuai mengikuti tes. Dari 15 soal yang diujikan, siswa kelas XII IPS-1 itu mengaku hanya dapat mengerjakan hanya separuhnya. Selebihnya, ia terpaksa menjawab sekenanya. "Yang bisa hanya pada *Part I*, *Part II*, dan satu-dua dari *Part IV*. Yang lain cuma mengandalkan *feeling*," terang Eko.

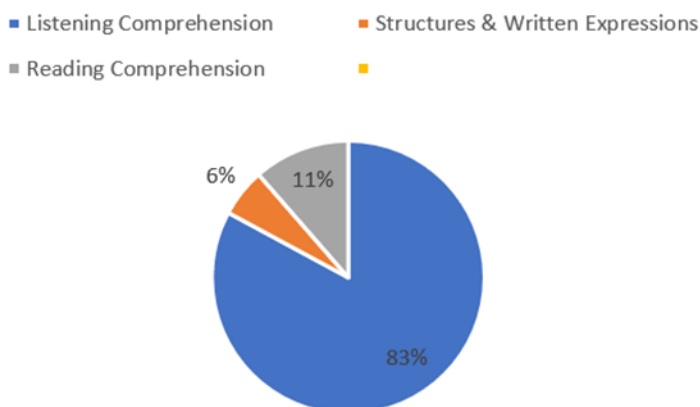
[In the Listening test, two speakers conversed, one female and the other is male. The female's voice is clear, but the male's sound is so fast and less clearer, said Eko Lutfi Ardiyanto. The students of Class XII Social Department-1 could only answer half of the 15 test items. And the rest of the questions could not be answered confidently, and simply based on their feeling.]

Eko tidak sendirian. Beberapa siswi yang ditemui *MAMHTROSO.com* sesuai tes juga mengungkapkan hal serupa. Menurut mereka, kualitas suara, khususnya yang laki-laki terdengar tidak nyaring sehingga cenderung susah untuk dipahami. "*Announcer* yang cowok suaranya setengah *kemresek*," ungkap **Dita Anindya Sari**, salah seorang siswi dari kelas XII IPA-1. Dita juga menyayangkan waktu jeda antarsoal yang

[Not only did Eko find the problem. Some students also expressed the same experience. They said that the quality of the voice, particularly males' voice was not clear, so that it's difficult to understand, said Dita Anindya Sari, a student of Class XII Science Department-1.]

She said that female voices and male voices are "not the same." "Is it right? Do men easily understand male or female voices?"

In terms of proficiency, it is not only Islamic boarding schools that experience obstacles in their achievement. Arifuddin et al. [22] also report that "Senior Public Schools" (*SMAN*) and "Senior Vocational Schools" (*SMKN*) English language teachers, even some lecturers, show insufficient English proficiency, especially listening ability.



**Fig. 1.** Difficulty level of TOEFL sections

The results of the pre-test as a triangulation given to teachers, even lecturers, of English in this research activity [26] show that the listening ability of English teachers has not changed, still 'low.'

By referring to the reality of learning English, as revealed through some of the research results above, learning English, including listening, still needs attention and ensures an approach or method that better facilitates the listening ability of both students and even some teachers. Basically, cognitive aspects related to biological aspects of language learning, brain, and gender assumed to be related to pragmatic competence should be taken into account. And more importantly, their practicality in application to learning English at Islamic boarding schools is expected to facilitate English language learning in the SSE.

## 4 Gender and Hemispheric-Based Pragmatic Understanding

Learning activities are influenced by various factors, one of which is gender, which is related to a neuro-psycholinguistic perspective. If we reflect and examine based on our understanding from the point of view of biology, neurology, cognition, and neurosciences disciplines, then we should not ignore the contribution of sex (or biological gender) in learning.

Based on the following empirical evidence, women are superior to men, for example, in multi-modality vocabulary memory capacity [28], consistency in hemispheric accuracy in language processing [29], hemisphere accuracy in identifying word groups [29], pragmatic understanding [24] and English proficiency [30,31]. Some of these findings reinforce previous theories and findings. For example, women outperform men in language acquisition and use [18].

In addition, from a biological perspective, sex is a determining factor in language processing and cognitive activities such as learning and thinking. In Indonesia, for example, Islamic boarding schools have long implemented a sex-based education system, SSE. As stated earlier, many studies have proven that men and women have different language capacities, including understanding and using pragmatics.

Theoretically and empirically, the biological basis of language is related to the social basis of language in sociolinguistic areas and to language proficiency. In terms of communication interaction, perhaps, the men's class will be much more active and lively because they tend to be "confrontational" and highly competitive, while the women's class tends to be cooperative or accepting. This particularity is relevant to the theory proposed by Swann in [19] that cooperative speaking styles are associated with female speakers, and competitive speaking styles are male speaker-specific. Tannen [20] also reported that in several interviews, debates, general discussions, or discussions in class, patterns of speech dominance, aggressive interruptions, competitive preferences, and confrontational discourse characterize men as masculine, which contradicts the feminine nature of women. With reference to this theory, "Is discussion or debate appropriate to be applied in women's boarding school classes or schools?"

In relation to the effect of the sexes on proficiency, ETS reports the mean scores obtained by male and female test-takers annually [31]. This is in line with Arifuddin and Sujana's [32] report that women's accuracy in inferring speakers' meanings in Prediction TOEFL conversations is higher than men's.

The current research findings most closely related to the topic of this presentation are summarized as follows. The order of the male factors affecting listening difficulties: *Speaker*, *Content*, and *Listener* (Potential for Men's Islamic Boarding Schools), and female: *Listener*, *Speaker*, and *Content* (Potential for Women's Islamic Boarding Schools), which is the same as the one proposed by van Duzer's [11] (Potential for Women's Islamic Boarding School), and mixed-sexes (*Speaker*, *Listener*, and *Content*) (Potential for Public Schools) [21]. These findings are likely to be tried out and considered in *Teaching English Pragmatics to SSE*.

## 5 SSE and English Language Learning

Why are the differences in abilities and characteristics in processing language used as the basis for applying the ranking of factors that affect listening difficulties in auditory pragmatic learning in SSE? How is the implementation of the SSE system in learning languages and other subjects around the world? Why is gender-based pragmatic ability in listening predicted to be suitable for SSE, especially Islamic boarding schools?

The role of gender in education is very important [1]. In some countries, there is a tendency to adopt an SSE system. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom, there is an increase in the promotion of schools with the SSE system [5]. In the UK, it was initiated by developing a special SSE for men [33]. Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland were not left behind. These countries have increased the number of schools with the SSE system.

The existence of such a tendency encourages various parties to accommodate a gender perspective into the teaching framework, curriculum content of all subjects, and the professional development of teachers [34]. This policy is based on various findings that SSE is an innovative concept that has proven to be effective in education and training [23,35,36]. In addition, it is widely found that girls outperform boys based on high school final tests [18]. It was also found that in public secondary schools that implemented co-education or mixed-sex classes from English subjects, it was found that the majority (2/3) of girls and 1/3 of boys wanted their classes to be separated by SSE or a class with one sex [12]. Male students

show inconsistency when learning English in the joining class [35]. Even based on the teacher's perspective, learning English is easier if it is carried out in SSE [37].

However, learning English in SSE is also influenced by approaches, methods, or strategies. Every teacher should choose an approach or method that associates gender relations with the characteristics of the subject, culture, and age of students [36]. It proved that in SSE, teachers implement strategies that are more prepared and more effective than in co-educational schools [10]. Therefore, the main challenge is how to integrate this concept of learning English into the current non-gender-oriented educational process [38], which ignores the differences in the intensity and opportunities for participation of boys and girls in verbal and nonverbal interactions in learning. Language.

Based on the description above, it implies that there is harmony between gender and navigation, gender and language capacity, and gender and pragmatic learning of English in SSE. Nevertheless, if there is a difference in learning achievement in single-sex schools or single-sex classrooms, it is not solely due to such a separation, but how the mechanisms and approaches to learning are applied in these schools are decisive [39]. That is, it is important to find and apply appropriate approaches, methods, materials, or other things based on the characteristics of students in these different schools. One of the learning principles is to consider the student's background, including student sex (or gender), expecting that it will improve students' English learning achievement. This is a potential innovation in language teaching and learning in single-sex education (SSE).

## 6 Conclusion

Based on an intensive and comprehensive study shows that 'The order of the males' factors affecting listening difficulties': *Speaker*, *Content*, and *Listener* (Potential for Men's Islamic Boarding School), and females': *Listener*, *Speaker*, and *Content* (Potential for Women's Islamic Boarding School) which is the same as the one proposed by van Duzer's [20] (Potential for Women's Islamic Boarding School), and Mixed-sexes or co-education (*Speaker*, *Listener*, and *Content*) (Potential for Public Schools) [40].

The sequence of factors that influence sex-based listening skills can be applied as a new approach to teaching auditory pragmatics in SSE classes. Therefore, English teachers must be familiar with the sequence of factors that affect listening difficulties, be responsible for diagnosing listening difficulties, introduce pragmatic content in the TOEFL, and consider students' gender. Besides, currently, the students have another alternative. They need not visit hotels or tourist attractions to improve their Listening Skills about pragmatics; use the book "Pragmatics-based Listening for the TOEFL: Innovation in Independent Learning."

Pedagogically, the orders of sex-based factors affecting listening difficulties are potentially applied as *an innovative approach* to the pragmatics pedagogy in single-sex education, particularly in Islamic religious schools in which socio-cultural and religious content are the priority. In addition, the application of this approach potentially boosts the EFL effectiveness in single-sex schools and universities. Further studies on the single-sex students' perception of co-education (or mixed-sexes) education, schools, and universities with more participants, are worth studying.

The moral message is, "Don't let Islamic Boarding Schools think alone!"

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