

What Will The Future Bring? Students' Gender-Based Participation During Online Classes

Zakky Yavani¹, Haira Rizka², Muhsiyana Nurul Aisyiah³, Nizar Ibnu⁴

IAIN Syekh Nurjati

ABSTRACT. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced education to switch from a face-to-face method to an online one. To date, many studies have been dedicated to investigating how education adapts to this new situation, but only a few focuses on gender-based participation, particularly within the Indonesian context. This study aimed to investigate (1) how students perform gender-based participation in the online English class during the Covid-19 pandemic; and (2) how students will perform gender-based participation in the online English class in a post-Covid-19 pandemic. This study employed the theory of gender and participation in education (Aguillon et al., 2020). This qualitative research involved 10 participants enrolling in an Islamic university. The data were collected through observations and interviews. The phenomenological perspective analyzed the collected data. This research revealed two major findings. First, male students participated more than female students in the language learning process. Moreover, male students offered more voluntary responses during the lecture. Second, based on the students' performance, it is predicted that students' future participation in post-Covid learning will be influenced by their preference for discussion topics and learning strategies.

Keywords: Gender; Participation; Online Language Learning; Post-Covid-19 Themes; Gender and Sexuality Issues In Post Covid-19

1 Introduction

The covid-19 pandemic has disrupted every facet of life, including education. This education disruption is considered the most severe throughout history (UN, 2020). In early 2020, higher education institutions across the globe chose to close their campuses, resulting in young people continuing their education online (Aguilera, 2020; Ali, 2020; Murphy, 2020; Rohman, Marji, Sugandi, & Nurhadi, 2020). Now that the pandemic is in its second year, the development of treatments for covid-19 and preventive care such as vaccines has made progress. Many countries have gradually reopened educational institutions with firm Covid-19 transmission preventive measures taking place. Indonesia is among countries that close colleges and universities for more than one year in most parts.

The sudden yet imperative transition from the in-person teaching method into the online one in the early stage of the Covid-19 outbreak caught many faculty members unprepared (Hodges

et al., 2020). There is also a matter of unequal accessibility: not all students have the means to access reliable internet, devices, and technical supports all the time (Giatman, Siswati, & Basri, 2020; and Aguilera, 2020), especially those in developing countries (Oyedotun, 2020). Online learning presents challenges and risks for all students, particularly those that might be “disadvantaged” in online classes (Korlat et al., 2021), and female students are perceived to be more at risk in this situation (IIEP UNESCO, 2020).

There is also a call to recognize the gender dimensions of the closures of education institutions (Nefesh-Clarke, Orser, & Thomas, 2020). Studies suggest that gender differences in information technology (IT) use and skills persist (Ono & Zavodny, 2005; Adamus, 2009; and Martinez-Cantos, 2017). Gender stereotypes might be one of the reasons why the digital gender gap occurs. Parents and teachers might raise children with the stereotype that technology is a male domain (Young, 2000). They provide boys with toys related to technology and girls with toys related to cooking, medicals, and other domestic staff (Kollmeyer et al., 2018); even what the children watch on television also often depicts gender stereotypes. Diego of the *Go Diego Go* animated series mainly talk about science and technology, while Dora of the *Dora the Explorer* series talks more about domestic stories and neighborhood (Rizka, 2018). Research suggests that male students may have more advantages over female students in a virtual learning environment because boys are perceived to have higher ability, engagement, and comfort with computers (Ashong and Commander, 2012).

Therefore, we consider that gender differences in online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic need to be examined. However, considerable research has been devoted to investigating online learning in higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Indonesian context (e.g., practices, challenges, and opportunities of online learning (Simora, Purba, & Pasaribu, 2020), online learning quality control (Giatman, Siswati, & Basri, 2020), successful online learning factors (Yudiawan & Sunarso, 2021), very few addressed the gender differences in online learning in Indonesian context particularly (Hidayah & Indriani, 2021).

We attempted to address the gender dimensions in online learning during the pandemic. We focus on whether there are differences in female and male students’ participation in virtual EFL classes. Participation is a factor of student engagement and students’ skills, emotion, and performance (Rocca, 2010), all of which are considered important in higher education (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005). Instructors and scholars use the term ‘participation with slightly various interpretations, and in this study, we refer to ‘participation’ as student’s interaction during the learning process in classrooms (Rocca, 2010). Student’s participation in the classroom may encompass unprompted responses, various types of voluntary and nonvoluntary prompted responses, and group work (Aguillon, 2020). Below is the description of the participation adapted from Aguillon (2020).

Table 1. Interaction between students and instructors is described using the following categories by Aguillon (2020)

Category	Interaction type	Explanation
Unprompted comments and questions	Comments and questions	The student makes an unprompted comment and asks questions.
Prompted comments and question	Comments and questions	The instructor poses a question and a student volunteers.
Voluntary presentation	Presentation	The instructor poses a question/ gives a task, allows for peer/group discussion, and a student volunteers to present the result.
Group random call	Group random call	The instructor poses a question, allows for peer discussion/group discussion, and

Category	Interaction type	Explanation
Group work	Group work	randomly calls on a group to present their discussion result. The student talks directly with the instructor during peer discussion or activity.

This study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) how did students perform gender-based participation in the online English class during the Covid-19 pandemic; and (2) how will students perform gender-based participation in the online English class in a post-Covid-19 pandemic? To do so, this study employs a phenomenology approach, using the following data: an open-ended questionnaire, in-depth interviews with students and the Instructor teacher, and observation in an online EFL class. Using Purposive sampling, the instructor chose five males and five females to represent the lower, average, and higher achievers. Before generating the outcome finding, the researcher evaluates the data using Atlas ti7 by codifying some information.

2 Results and Discussion

This research revealed two major findings: 1) the students' strategies to perform gender-based participation in the online English class during the pandemic, and 2) the students' strategies to conduct gender-based participation in the online English class considering post-the pandemic.

How do students perform gender-based participation in the online English class during the Covid-19 pandemic?

This investigation discovered five manners of students' gender-based participation when they learn English in an online class during the pandemic.

a) Unprompted comments and questions

The first most commonly occurring type of gender-based participation is unprompted comments and questions. Most students do not participate actively in giving comments toward the material or the explanation given by their lecturer. This finding aligns with (Rocca, 2010) stating that biological sexes do not influence them to deliver comments during the learning process. Meanwhile, five female students and one male student choose not to participate by giving comments when unprompted. They are mostly considered impolite if no order is given to them. Therefore, they remain silent. Interestingly, most females do not like to give unprompted comments.

Female 6: I don't give comments; to me it is impolite to comments without an order from the lecturer.

Female student 6, for example, argued that interrupting their lecturing while explaining the class is considered rude. Her culture is strongly rooted and influences her behavior. Thus, when she has any perplexing ideas, she will prefer waiting to ask when it is allowed, rather than confronting the lecturer in the middle of the explanation. This condition agrees with Rizka (2020), who deploys that behavior, feeling, and culture will influence an individual's language used.

Meanwhile, male student 1 and male student 4 considered giving comments, although their comments are typically about the technical issues, such as unclear voice or invisible pictures displayed, or unclear tasks.

Male 1: Yes, I give comments, but this is technical, like low volume or unclear pictures.

Male 4: Yes, for example, if the lecturer assigned the task, and it is unclear. I made a confirmation.

When students were asked their preferences in showing their written or oral comments, most male students prefer oral over written (four males). In contrast, the other six students (five females and one male) preferred the written format. They clarify that when conveying orally, it is easy to be understood by others. This finding agrees with Aguillon et al. (2020), who discovered that oral comments are preferable because an oral technique allows students to easily and effectively deliver their arguments, especially when their comments are quite long. Moreover, oral language enables students to express their thoughts, share their ideas, and quickly respond to more comments.

This research revealed that both genders equally participated in giving unprompted comments and questions in the class. These findings align with Rocca (2010) and Egbo et al. (2010), stating that biological sexes do not influence students to ask questions or deliver comments during the learning process.

b) Prompted voluntary comments and questions

Another strategy of students' gender-based participation is unprompted voluntary comments and questions. This type deals with commenting and questioning the topics explained voluntarily, without teachers' pointing. Most students are involved in the class by delivering prompted and voluntary comments and questions. It indicates that when students were prompted to participate by actively commenting on the lecture, they were eager to respond actively. However, some students claimed that they rarely give comments. However, some students delivered their comments on the class for a couple of reasons. First, They thought that it was necessary to confirm their understanding to their lecturers. Second, it was their chance to learn how to convey their thoughts.

Female 7 : Yes, I voluntarily give responses to lectures. At the same time, I also learn whether I have delivered the response appropriately or vice versa.

Male 5 : Quite often, especially when the lecture has been understood. Some comments invite a confirmation from the lecturer.

Female student 7 and female student 5 argued that direct responses were pivotal to ensure their understanding of the class. This proves that the students wanted to ensure that they correctly caught up with the class and did not misunderstand the class. This finding is supported by Aguillon et al. (2020), who discovers that the students prefer using spoken language to talk to their instructors directly. This type is preferable because the students can consult their comprehension of the material with the instructors. However, some students preferred not to give comments and did not provide sufficient explanation on their actions. Only one student said that his passive participation was due to his confidence in commenting.

Male 4: No, because hesitation fills me.

Male student 4 explained that he preferred remaining silent and did not respond to the lecturer's class because he was hesitant with his comprehension. It probably happened due to a lack of confidence, and thus, he restrained himself from responding to the lecturers' questions. Lopez and Bui (2014) explain that students' self-esteem in participating in a foreign language class is caused by acculturation and linguistic factors. Male student 4 was not confident with

his English proficiency, and thus, he did not respond to his lecture comments or questions.

Students' less confidence determines their strategies to participate in the class. When asking whether to prefer written or spoken comments, most students prefer written format due to two reasons. First, writing gives a chance to choose appropriate words. Second, it is easy to see the sentences when something is inappropriate. Interestingly, this study discovered that some students preferred written responses because they perceive that it does not offend the lecturer.

Male 1 : Written, it is easy when I want to fix something. Because I can see the sentences

Female 6 : Written comments. Because I can choose sentences which do not offend my lecturer.

Male student 1 and Female student 6 argue that they preferred written responses. A written form is preferable because it effectively delivers arguments, enables students to revise the sentences, and encourages them to express their thoughts. However, they are doubtful (Rashtchi and Bakar, 2019).

c) Voluntary presentation

This activity occurs when students present certain topics in a group. Their participation is prompted, but the arrangement of speakers and topics is based on the group decision. All students, particularly females, value this activity.

Male 9 : As a male in a group, we must be pointed to be the first speaker to present the materials. It gives more tension and non-comfort, particularly in the arrangement or order of presentation.

Female 2 : Presentation is a chance to prove that we can show our capability and capacity.

Female 7 : As a female, I felt heard.

They argued that this activity enabled them to voice their ideas and receive gender-based equality. Therefore, female students preferred this activity. On the contrary, male students felt more tension because they were mostly viewed as leaders when working in a group. Consequently, they had more responsibilities and were appointed as the first speaker to present. This is probably caused by society's perceptions that a male is a leader. Thus he must initiate an action (Martin & Bender, 2014).

d) Group random call

After presenting the materials, the lecturers posed questions to the group and asked them to answer. Students were asked to participate in two ways: a teacher-to-student way and a student-to-student way. In this activity, the problems occur in terms of forming the discussion in a synchronous online class. However, some students said that they applied social media to form a group discussion within the process.

Male 5 : We discuss first with our group members before answering. Mainly, we ask for a backup answer from other members.

Female 6 : We use WhatsApp. It is simpler.

Female students 5 and 6 denote that they actively discuss their answers or responses before submitting or delivering their ideas to the lecturers. In other words, the students build a positive atmosphere of learning although they do not conduct face-to-face learning. Moreover, they anticipated improper answers by discussing with peers before submission. Besides, Female student 6 explained that they used WhatsApp to discuss the course. This is common because both students and lecturers cannot meet to communicate and conduct the education during the

pandemic. Therefore, they use WhatsApp to conduct academic discussions because this platform is commonly installed and simple. This phenomenon agrees with Egbo et al. (2011), who confirmed that online e-learning could escalate students' active involvement during the class, eagerness to learn more and improve their creativity.

e) Written peer discussion

Another participation conducted in the online class was a peer discussion conducted on GCR (Google Classroom). This participation refers to posing questions and giving comments which both are conducted in written format.

Female 2 : Yes, we discuss GCR (Google classroom). It is after class.

Female 8 : Allow me to answer... usually, in this activity, many of my classmates actively ask questions and give comments.

During the pandemic, the students have utilized online platforms to learn, and one of the most popular platforms is Google Classroom. This platform enables students to interact in written comments. Students can respond to the lecturers or their friends directly. The written form allows students to compose a correct answer because they can compose and revise their comments (Rashtchi and Bakar, 2019).

How will students perform gender-based participation post-pandemic?

The results of the second research formulation signify that the students will perform gender-based participation in the future English learning post-pandemic by considering their preferences. They argued that future learning must employ group presentation, consider the preferable topics based on gender, and implement a developed learning model.

a) Group Presentation

The study revealed that most students preferred collaboration and discussion activities. At the same time, both female and male students argue that they like individual and equal learning. Therefore, a group presentation will facilitate participation in two directions: 1) the group member discussion, and 2) equally individual presentations.

Male : I value presentation more. We get a little chance to speak English, and this activity provides more chances.

Female : As a female, group presentation gives me a chance to express ideas and try to be heard.

Female : In a group, there are always different opinions and perceptions. It is more enjoyable to find an idea or the core and solve the problem together.

Male : During the discussion, we talk and discuss with many friends, and it is enjoyable. It also calls a competition nuance.

Male students responded that a group presentation could give them more chances to practice English speaking skills in a classroom. It indicates that their participation could increase by having them do a presentation. Participation is the paramount issue in successful learning. It has been evidenced that the more students participate in a classroom, the more they are likely to improve their communication skills. (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005 as cited in Rocca, 2010). Meanwhile, one of the female students found a presentation preferable because it could help her voice be heard in the classroom as a female. This finding aligns with Aguillon et al. (2020), stating that women in a classroom tend to be more aware of their gender identity than men. Moreover, female students are more likely to undergo negative stereotypes (Beasley and Fischer, 2012).

b) Topics

Additionally, the student's topic falls into social issues and culture, which is happening. The data from the interview reveal that both male and female students consider social media as sources of information that keep them up to date with the real situation. Interestingly, issues around gender equality interest them. It also indicates that keeping them in touch with technology is something undeniable.

Female : I like social issues and the process of how language is formed, like code-switching.

Male : I like to discuss culture like language and cultural influence.

Female Male : I prefer a topic about gender equality. For example, in reality I prefer technology topics because they are related to the current situation. Especially technology for language teaching and learning.

The above responses show how learning topic preferences are varied among students. Both male and female students are keen on social issues related to language, culture, and gender equality. However, technology relating to language teaching and learning interests female students more. This finding corroborates Young's (2000) study stating that technology is perceived as boys' domain rather than girls'. This stereotype started in early childhood when boys' toys were usually technology-based while girls' toys tended to be related to the domestic domain (Kollmayer et al., 2018). This gap is even portrayed in television series. *Go Diego Go's* themes are mostly about science, while *Dora the Explorer* contains more neighborhood and domestic stories (Rizka, 2018).

Learning topic selection should never be taken for granted. The need to accommodate students' interest in the teaching and learning process becomes increasingly important. Students will tend to be more involved in class when they are interested in the topic and relate to it (Rocca, 2010). Topics about technology and social issues are favored to use by students in the post-pandemic. It is something to bear in any teacher and language instructor's mind to make learning activities more engaging.

c) Learning model

Despite the strengths found in online classes believed by the teacher and the student in this pandemic situation, both think that the offline class is necessary to be conducted. Both agreed that both online and offline need to be conducted. Therefore, the blended learning model will be the first choice learning model in the post-pandemic.

Female : I prefer to study online because I like to work alone. However, I miss the situation in the class.

Male : Technology is interesting to me. And online learning facilitates me more.

Female : Both have their strengths and weaknesses. When online, I can access the class everywhere. However, sometimes the internet connection is unstable. Offline gives us a more personal connection with my classmates when interacting.

Lecturer : I think I will use both. I notice that online learning provides more chances for students to study independently. However, a situation inside a class gives more human social interaction nuance. So, I probably will blend the teaching and learning process in my class.

The students and the lecturer in the interview share the same view about online and offline learning. They believe both have their benefits and drawbacks. Online learning benefits students with convenience, such as accessibility and independence. However, it challenges them with

technical and pedagogical issues, such as students' readiness and interaction (Gilbert, 2015). Offline learning, on the other hand, could complement it with its in-person interaction. Hence, combining online and offline learning is a reasonable decision to take as both instructor and students could benefit from them.

3 Conclusion

This study concluded two primary points. First, there are two types of students' gender-based participation in the online English class during the Covid-19 pandemic: unprompted comments and questions and prompted voluntary comments and questions. This finding denoted that both male and female students had equal participation during the online class. Second, English classes post-pandemic must employ group presentation, consider the preferable topics based on gender, and implement a developed learning model. This study suggests that blended online learning with offline learning will be a new model that can improve English learning.

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