



Exploration of EFL Teacher's Perception of Gender Awareness through Madurese Folktales with Critical Pedagogy Approach

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Abstract

Folktales often depict gender inequality, such as active and heroic male roles, while women are portrayed as passive. This representation has the potential to lead to unequal social treatment. By critiquing character portrayals, students can consider more equitable narratives. This study aims to reveal the perceptions of an EFL teacher in a vocational school in Pamekasan about gender awareness in Madurese folktales as a medium for critical pedagogy. Using the descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through interviews and analyzed using critical pedagogy theory. The results show that the teacher positively perceives folklore as a learning medium, especially in raising students' awareness of gender issues and improving critical thinking skills. Folktales are considered effective for improving students' learning motivation, language skills and cultural understanding. In addition, folklore has the potential as a critical pedagogy tool that helps students analyze gender roles, challenge stereotypes, and build awareness of injustice, especially in the context of gender equality.

Keywords: *Critical Pedagogy, Gender Awareness, Madurese Folktales*

Introduction

Education shapes individuals' views and attitudes toward social issues, including gender equality. Gender issues are critical, given that gender discrimination still occurs (Fatmawati et al., 2022). When gender discrimination is reinforced and propagated in the education system, it can limit individuals' equality. Education should be a powerful tool to promote gender equality and challenge discriminatory stereotypes and norms. To foster gender awareness, a teacher can lead students to be invited to analyze and critique stories through the lens of gender equality, and students can learn to recognize and challenge existing gender

stereotypes.

In line with the realization of gender awareness in learning media, critical pedagogy is an essential skill teachers and students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning must possess. Rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy encourages students to question and criticize ideologies and social norms (Harmat, 2020). Critical pedagogy initiated by Paulo Freire emphasizes dialogue, critical thinking, and the importance of context in education. This pedagogy challenges traditional methods, advocating for popular education beyond formal schooling to empower students and improve the teaching-learning process (Freire, 2020).

This learning approach emphasizes active participation, dialogue, and social awareness among students. The main principles of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy include equality, justice, acceptance of diverse issues, and the need to overcome stereotypes in education, emphasizing problem-oriented learning and the development of critical thinking and media literacy among students. Thus, critical pedagogy encourages teachers to focus on their position in and outside the classroom, so discussing gender-based issues related to teaching is important.

Widodo and Emaliana (2023) explored Indonesian EFL students' gender equality awareness through folklore books, emphasizing the influence of learning materials on students' perceptions (Widodo & Emaliana, 2023). The findings revealed that students' awareness of gender equality was influenced by learning resources, highlighting the importance of choosing gender-equitable learning resources to foster an egalitarian perspective (same/no difference). However, rather than discovering at students' understanding of gender equality was impacted by the choice of instructional materials or content at all achievement levels. This study focusses on EFL teachers' perspectives, classroom implementation, and perceived difficulties in utilizing Madurese folklore to raise students' gender awareness, this study aims to close this gap.

Furthermore, Nuvitasari et. al (2022) reveals gender inequality experienced by women in rural Indonesia and in the film *Mustang*, focusing on issues such as arranged marriages, restricted freedom, and society being blamed for sexual harassment. This study highlights the role of critical discourse and teacher framing in shaping students' understanding of gender inequality and calls for further research on the practical application of these insights. This study also investigates how Indonesian EFL students critique texts and reconstructs gender equality in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of critical discourse analysis and education in empowering students to discuss gender issues.

Although previous studies have investigated gender equality awareness among students in EFL contexts, there is a lack of research focusing on how culturally specific folktales can enrich or challenge these perspectives. While some studies have explored Indonesian folktales as a medium for promoting gender equality, limited attention has been paid to the unique potential of regional stories such as Madurese

folktales within a critical pedagogy framework. Furthermore, most of the existing literature focuses only on students' perspectives. In contrast, this study includes the views of EFL teachers, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of gender perceptions and awareness in learning environments.

One way to produce critically aware individuals is to integrate learning media based on local culture using critical pedagogy skills. Moreover, Madurese folklore, enriched with cultural stories, serves as an effective platform for this transformative method. For this reason, teachers can incorporate folklore into learning media to encourage critical discussion about gender representation in folktales. Teachers can develop a more comprehensive perspective among students about conventional gender stereotypes by asking reflective questions that encourage students to think critically, such as, "What are the roles of the female and male characters in this story?" or "Do these roles reflect the reality we see today?" In addition, teachers can use project-based learning methods where students are asked to rewrite or analyze folktales by changing traditional gender roles to see how the story changes. In this way, students can better understand that the depiction of gender in stories is not the only reality and that these roles can be more flexible.

Furthermore, this approach has implications for the development of educational policies. Educational institutions need to develop policies that support the implementation of critical pedagogy with a gender perspective, including the provision of resources, teacher training, and the creation of a supportive learning environment (Eliyanah & Zahro, 2021). This requires long-term commitment and systematic support from various stakeholders. Ultimately, gender analysis in critical pedagogy has implications for changing students' perspectives on gender. Through a critical and transformative learning process, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the complexity of gender and the importance of gender equality in social life can be built. This is an important step towards creating a more just and equal society.

In education, teachers play an important role in fostering awareness of gender equality. Therefore, it is very important to deeply explore the perspectives and understanding of teachers and students regarding gender awareness in Madurese folklore. This study seeks to contribute new insights into shaping awareness in EFL classrooms through this approach. Based on this background, this study aims to reveal, analyze, and find EFL teachers' perceptions of gender awareness in Madurese folklore as a medium for critical pedagogy learning. By exploring the language and cultural values embedded in Madurese folklore, this research seeks to promote gender awareness and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the richness of local culture.

Grounded in the statements discussed in the research background above, the focus of this research is outlined as follows.

1. What are the EFL teacher's perceptions of gender awareness in Madurese folklore?
2. How does the teacher implement Madurese folklore in the classroom to promote students' gender awareness?
3. What challenges do the teacher perceive in integrating Madurese folklore into gender-aware learning activities?

Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative research method to answer the problems formulated in the introductory chapter. This research aims to understand social phenomena in a natural way (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009), especially by describing or analyzing teachers' and students' perceptions of gender equality reflected in Madurese folklore. This research was conducted at SMKN 3 Pamekasan, located in Pamekasan Regency, with the objective of investigating the perceptions of EFL teachers. Additionally, this study employed two Madurese folktales as research instruments to explore teachers' perceptions of gender equality in Madurese folktales.

This study involved one participant, an English teacher at SMKN 3 Pamekasan, who was selected using purposive sampling. According to Hamied (2017), selecting research sites in qualitative research should be done purposively. The selection criteria included: (1) having more than ten years of teaching experience, (2) experience in integrating Madurese folktales into English language teaching, and (3) experience in facilitating classroom discussions on gender equality issues. The participant's extensive teaching background provided rich insights into both pedagogical practices and the integration of critical content in the EFL classroom. The teacher has been actively teaching English at the vocational secondary school level and is familiar with local cultural contexts, particularly Madurese oral traditions.

Merriam (2009) argues that qualitative research studies social phenomena and experiences in a natural way by involving researchers as the main instrument in the process of collecting and analyzing data. Therefore, the data collection process is not intended to draw general conclusions, but to explain and describe the phenomenon within the research context. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, which allowed flexibility for probing while maintaining alignment with the research objectives.

The interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with occasional use of English terms related to pedagogy and curriculum. The interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent to ensure data accuracy. Guiding questions focused on the teacher's perceptions, experiences, instructional strategies, challenges, and reflections on using Madurese folktales and discussing gender equality in the English classroom.

The data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach to ensure rigor and replicability. First, the recorded interview was transcribed. Second, the researcher conducted open coding by identifying meaningful units related to teaching practices, cultural integration, and gender-related discussions. Third, axial (close) coding was applied to refine and relate codes by identifying patterns and relationships among them. The codes were then grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions. Finally, the researcher conducted an interpretative analysis, contextualizing the themes within EFL pedagogy, local cultural relevance, and critical pedagogy. To strengthen analytical depth, the findings were compared and contrasted with previous relevant studies, highlighting similarities, differences, and the contribution of this study to existing literature.

Results

The Use of Madurese Folklore in the Learning Process

The interview results showed that the teacher used folklore as a medium to develop students' English skills, especially reading and speaking skills. The teacher said that folklore provides engaging, authentic text that encourages students' learning motivation. As the teacher revealed, the use of folklore in English learning enables students to experience meaningful learning, boosting their self-motivation.

"The use of folklore is a good way to connect students' world with learning materials. Besides, folklore provides chances to explore relevant values, such as cultural and moral values, which often affect students' daily lives. Students are also enthusiastic when they have role-play as an assignment, for example, about Malin Kundang, Cinderella, etc."

Further, the teacher explained that folklore can boost students' creativity through storytelling activities or drama. The teacher gave examples of the group assignments, such as role-playing the folklore being discussed. According to her, the students become more challenged to perform best by preparing well before the show. Through this activity, students will deeply understand the values discussed in the folklore. Having folklore role-play in small groups is an effective way to improve their speaking skills because they have to repeat the English dialogue.

Teacher's Perception of the Use of Madurese Folklore in Building Students' Gender Awareness

When asked about the integration of folktales and gender issues in folklore, the teacher revealed that folklore was appropriate material to discuss gender stereotyping and conflicts related to gender roles. The teacher mentioned that folklore like Timun Mas and Cinderella provide opportunities to discuss how women and men are portrayed in traditional texts.

"I believe that gender issues are a crucial topic, especially for young generations. They should realize how stories, both from our culture and others, often contain gender bias. Through discussion, students can learn to think critically and promote gender equity as the result of reflective learning. Plenty of folklore portrays women as passive characters, like waiting to be rescued, while men are portrayed as heroes. Thus, I think it is essential to discuss this with students so they can have multiple perspectives and not only consider a single truth."

The teacher had a positive perspective on the use of folklore to promote gender equity, although they felt that they needed more training and workshops to address this issue more effectively during the teaching and learning process. In line with this, the teacher believes that having critical discussions with students can improve their learning participation in reflective learning. The critical discussion invites students to explore social issues in the stories and actively voice their opinions to have a positive impact on the people surrounding them.

The Implementation of Madurese Folklore in Building Students' Gender Awareness with Critical Pedagogy Approach

During the interview, the teacher mentioned various ways to implement folklore to discuss gender issues. The teacher asked students to analyze folktale characters and discuss the gender roles portrayed in the stories. The teacher reported that she often used project-based learning methods, such as asking students to rewrite the folktales with a more gender-inclusive perspective. In addition, role play and storytelling were used to explore different perspectives related to gender.

"I usually ask students to read folktales in English, such as The Legend of Roro Jongrang, Dewi Samboja, or Malin Kundang. After that, We discussed the characters in the stories. I asked them thought-provoking questions to train their critical thinking such as What is the main role of the female character in this story? What is the role of the male character? Do these roles feel fair, or are there stereotypes that emerge?"

The teacher mentioned using English folktales, such as The Legend of Roro Jonggrang, Dewi Samboja, and Malin Kundang, as teaching materials to integrate language learning with critical discussion. After reading the stories, the teacher facilitated class discussions by asking prompting questions and open-ended questions that focused on the roles of the characters in the story, such as, "What is the main role of the female character in this story? What about the role of the male character? Do these roles feel fair or are there stereotypes that emerge?" these

questions aim to encourage students to identify gender stereotypes, analyze the roles given to the characters, and connect English learning with social awareness of gender equality issues.

The teacher observed the positive impact of critical learning through folklore on students' way of thinking. She described that critical analysis in the classroom has shaped students' high language awareness that can be utilized to analyze, criticize, and evaluate stories and other language products or even news they consume outside the classroom. Other than that, students have shown improvement in the importance of having critical eyes in consuming language products in their daily lives.

Teacher's Barriers in the Implementation of Madurese Folklore in Building Students' Gender Awareness with Critical Pedagogy Approach

In implementing folklore to discuss gender roles with a critical pedagogy approach, teachers experienced various barriers or obstacles. During the interview, the teacher described the barriers that she experienced were time constraints, students' various levels of understanding, teacher competency development, and limited sources of learning materials.

“The main obstacles I face are time limitations and source limitations. The school curriculum is very heavy and it is difficult to find extra time for deeper discussions with the students. In addition, not all students easily understand the concept of gender stereotyping. I also feel that I need to learn more about how to integrate folklore and gender issues into critical pedagogy without neglecting the discussion about linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, etc.”

The teacher explained that time constraints are the biggest challenge for her in conducting gender issues discussions with the use of folklore, making it difficult to allocate time for further and deeper discussion with students. In addition, students' varying levels of understanding of the concept of gender bias and stereotypes were also a challenge in the learning process. Teachers also recognized the need to improve their understanding of how to connect gender analysis with English learning objectives, such as grammar and speaking skills, so that the material could be delivered effectively without sacrificing the main aspects of language learning.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the interview responses, it was found that teachers have a positive perspective towards the use of folklore in discussions of gender issues, adopting a critical pedagogy approach due to the various benefits that students gain during their learning. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Seguí and Rukmana, who reported that teachers view folklore as a crucial cultural tool in EFL

teaching, thereby increasing student engagement and motivation (París Seguí, 2018; Rukmana, 2019). This connects language learning with cultural understanding, making language more relevant and useful for students' socio-communicative competence.

In addition, several research claimed that folklore is a learning media that is rich in linguistic features, making it an effective learning medium to master vocabulary, cultural awareness, and language competence while allowing students to focus on the meaning-making process rather than solemnly focusing on the grammatical structure (Mishra & Satpathy, 2020; Rochmiyati et al., 2020; Yumnam, 2021). Integrating folklore can enhance students' confidence, cultural understanding, and moral values, making it an effective teaching material for English while preserving national character values.

Teachers' perspectives suggest that folklore has significant potential as a tool for discussing gender issues and challenging gender equity in society. Folklore reinforces gender differentiation by promoting stereotypes that portray women as weak and inferior figures, thus challenging gender equality (Kinyua, 2020; Masoga et al., 2021; Batubara, Nurgiyantoro, & Purbani, 2023; Nahdi et al., 2024; Chingiz, 2024). Teachers believe in the potential implications for educational contexts regarding gender socialization. Thus, through folklore, students can engage in critical discussions to build awareness of gender equality, and in their development, they can be trained as social agents in advocating for justice, particularly in cases related to gender equality.

According to the teacher, with the right approach, folklore can become a medium to encourage students to think critically about gender roles and voice injustices that still commonly occur in society. In line with this, folklore promotes critical pedagogy and builds students' ability to think critically in addressing what happens to characters in stories and their relationship with developing social realities in society (Bradford, 2020; Kinyua, 2020; Masoga et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2022; Sankaran et al., 2024; Vučković, 2023). Critical discussion supported by reflective questions helps students question societal norms and values. By deconstructing these patterns, students can significantly improve their critical thinking abilities.

The implementation of folklore does not occur without any obstacles. To overcome the challenges faced by teachers, several solutions can be considered to optimize learning. Regarding time constraints, the teacher can conduct the Flipped Classroom method. The teacher may assign students to read the stories at home as their homework before an in-depth classroom discussion. This method encourages student collaboration and interaction, effectively addressing time constraints by maximizing class time for discussion and active learning (Soufiane et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, a gradual approach to understanding can address the challenge of students' varying levels of competency. Staged and guided discussions help overcome different student comprehension levels by creating a comfortable

atmosphere, encouraging participation, and allowing students to express their thoughts without fear. This method enhances communication skills and promotes critical thinking, which ultimately can effectively overcome learning barriers (Abiltayeva & Anarbekkyzy, 2021).

The teacher can use images, videos, or graphics to support students' understanding of gender themes in stories. The challenge of personal competency development can be addressed by attending more training and collaborating with fellow teachers both within the same school and from other schools. Concerning limited learning resources, teachers can utilize existing local folk stories. Teachers can modify these resources by translating them into English if they are only available in Indonesian (Fithriani, 2022). Besides, teachers can leverage resources from digital platforms, such as digital folk stories, educational videos, or learning applications, to help deliver materials in an engaging and efficient manner.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis results, teachers have a positive perspective on using folklore in English learning because of the many benefits students get during learning. One of the benefits mentioned is that using folklore learning media can increase students' learning motivation. Teachers' perceptions show the great potential of folklore as a tool to discuss gender issues and challenge gender equality issues that are developing in society. Folklore in English classes is useful for improving language skills and discussing important issues such as gender. Teachers believe that through folklore, students can be invited to think critically to build awareness of gender equality and, in its development, can train them as social agents in welfare, especially in cases of gender equality. With the right strategy and adequate support, folklore can be an effective learning medium for developing cultural and gender awareness among students. Despite the challenges, teacher creativity and institutional support can help overcome these obstacles.

This study provides recommendations for teachers and education stakeholders to implement gender-responsive education, namely education that is responsive to gender equality issues. Integrating folklore-based learning into the curriculum that supports character education, critical literacy, and gender equality is necessary. The selection of relevant stories, both those that reflect stereotypes and those that challenge them, is important to encourage critical discussions in the classroom. Teachers also need training and learning modules to facilitate interactive activities such as group analysis and debate. In addition, research on the impact of using folklore in improving students' gender understanding and critical thinking skills can provide strategic guidance. The involvement of local cultural figures in restructuring folklore to keep it relevant to modern values is very necessary, as is the development of supporting media, such as digitizing folklore and interactive applications. Through this collaboration, folklore can become an interesting learning tool that builds students' critical awareness of social issues.

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