

Developing Gender-Responsive Best Practices: A Qualitative Inquiry into Secondary Students' Literacy Profiles

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Abstract

This study investigates students' perceptions toward gender-based literacy habits and performance within the Malaysian secondary school context to inform the development of best practices in Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP). Adopting a qualitative exploratory design, the research utilised Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students from various institutional backgrounds, including all-boys' and all-girls' residential schools, as well as coeducational schools. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to determine how students view the intersection of gender and literacy competency. Findings reveal a distinct dichotomy in literacy acquisition: female students are perceived to dominate 'formal literacy', characterised by rule-compliant, print-based tasks and prose consumption. Conversely, male students are seen to engage in 'authentic literacy', characterised by the incidental acquisition of complex vocabulary through multimodal digital media and online gaming. Furthermore, the study identifies significant socio-environmental barriers in coeducational settings, where peer judgment and the stigma of English as an 'alien' language often discourage male participation. In contrast, single-sex environments are perceived to provide a safer psychological space for language practice. The paper argues for a paradigm shift toward expanded Literacy Competency Profiling (LCP) that credits digital competencies and advocates for gender-responsive instructional strategies, such as game-based learning and interactive peer support, to bridge the perceived achievement gap.

Keywords: Gender-Responsive Pedagogy; Literacy Competency Profiling; Multimodal Literacy; Secondary Education; Student Perceptions