

Male and Female Students' Communication Styles in Academic Discussions at Batuta University Medan

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ABSTRACT

Communication styles play an important role in shaping students' participation during academic discussions. Gender is often considered a factor influencing communication behavior in educational settings. This study aimed to investigate the communication styles of male and female students in academic discussions within the Information Management Study Program at Batuta University Medan. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed involving 30 students, consisting of 15 male and 15 female students. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio-recorded discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify communication patterns and interactional features. The findings revealed notable differences in communication styles between male and female students. Male students tended to use more direct and assertive communication styles, frequently initiating discussion topics, presenting arguments, and expressing opinions confidently. In contrast, female students demonstrated more collaborative communication styles through clarification questions, supportive feedback, and cooperative interaction strategies. Despite these differences, both groups actively participated in discussions and contributed meaningful ideas to the learning process. The study concludes that communication styles are influenced not only by gender but also by classroom culture and educational context. These findings contribute to sociolinguistic research on gender and communication and provide pedagogical insights for promoting inclusive and effective classroom interaction in higher education.

Keywords: communication styles, gender, sociolinguistics, academic discussion, university students.

ABSTRAK

Gaya komunikasi memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk partisipasi dan interaksi mahasiswa selama diskusi akademik. Gender merupakan salah satu faktor sosial yang dapat memengaruhi perilaku komunikasi dalam lingkungan pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi gaya komunikasi mahasiswa laki-laki dan perempuan dalam diskusi akademik pada Program Studi Manajemen Informatika Universitas Batuta Medan. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan 30 mahasiswa, terdiri atas 15 mahasiswa laki-laki dan 15 mahasiswa perempuan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, rekaman diskusi akademik, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola komunikasi dan karakteristik interaksi yang muncul. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa laki-laki cenderung menggunakan gaya komunikasi yang lebih langsung, asertif, dan kompetitif, yang terlihat dari frekuensi yang lebih tinggi dalam memulai topik diskusi, menyampaikan argumen, dan melakukan interupsi. Sementara itu, mahasiswa perempuan menunjukkan gaya komunikasi yang lebih kolaboratif dan suportif melalui penggunaan pertanyaan klarifikasi, umpan balik positif, dan strategi interaksi yang kooperatif. Meskipun terdapat perbedaan tersebut, kedua kelompok berpartisipasi aktif dalam diskusi akademik dan memberikan kontribusi yang berarti.

Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa gaya komunikasi tidak hanya dipengaruhi oleh gender, tetapi juga oleh konteks pendidikan dan budaya kelas. Temuan penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sociolinguistik tentang gender dan komunikasi serta memberikan implikasi pedagogis untuk menciptakan interaksi kelas yang inklusif dan efektif di perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: gaya komunikasi, gender, sociolinguistik, diskusi akademik, mahasiswa

A. Introduction

Communication is an essential component of academic success in higher education. Through communication, students exchange knowledge, share perspectives, solve problems collaboratively, and develop critical thinking skills. In university classrooms, academic discussions serve as an important learning activity that enables students to articulate ideas, defend arguments, and engage in meaningful interactions with peers. The effectiveness of these discussions is often influenced by students' communication styles, which may vary according to social and individual factors, including gender.

Communication style refers to the characteristic ways individuals convey information, express opinions, and interact with others during communication. In academic settings, communication styles can influence students' participation, confidence, leadership, and collaborative learning experiences. Some students tend to communicate directly and assertively, while others prefer supportive, cooperative, and relationship-oriented interaction patterns. These differences become particularly visible during classroom discussions where students are expected to actively contribute ideas and respond to others' viewpoints.

Among the various social factors that influence communication, gender has received considerable attention in sociolinguistic research. Scholars such as Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (1990) have suggested that males and females often employ different linguistic and

communicative strategies. Male speakers are frequently associated with directness, competitiveness, and dominance in conversations, whereas female speakers tend to demonstrate politeness, cooperation, and interpersonal sensitivity. Although these characteristics may not apply to every individual, they provide a useful framework for understanding gender-related communication patterns in educational contexts.

In the context of higher education, communication styles play a particularly important role in discussion-based learning. Students are expected not only to understand course content but also to communicate ideas effectively, negotiate meanings, and collaborate with peers. This requirement is especially relevant for students enrolled in Information Systems programs, where teamwork, project management, business analysis, and problem-solving activities are integral components of the curriculum. Information Systems students frequently participate in project discussions, presentations, system design meetings, and collaborative tasks that require effective communication skills. Therefore, understanding how male and female students communicate during academic discussions is important for promoting productive learning environments.

The Information Systems Study Program at Batuta University Medan prepares students to develop competencies in information technology, business processes, systems analysis, and organizational problem-solving. The learning process often emphasizes

collaborative activities, group projects, presentations, and academic discussions that require active participation from students. These learning activities provide a valuable context for examining communication styles and interaction patterns among students.

Despite extensive studies on gender and language, research focusing on communication styles among Information Systems students in Indonesian universities remains limited. Most previous studies have examined gender differences in general classroom interactions, while little attention has been given to students in technology-related disciplines. Furthermore, the rapid development of digital technology and collaborative learning approaches may have transformed traditional gendered communication patterns, making further investigation necessary.

Preliminary observations conducted during classroom discussions in the Information Systems Study Program at Batuta University Medan indicated variations in participation patterns between male and female students. Male students appeared more likely to initiate discussions, express opinions directly, and challenge opposing viewpoints, whereas female students often demonstrated supportive responses, active listening behaviors, and collaborative interaction strategies. However, these observations require systematic investigation to determine whether such differences consistently occur and how they influence academic discussions.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the communication styles employed by male and female students during academic discussions in the Information Systems Study Program at Batuta University Medan. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the communication characteristics

demonstrated by male and female students and explore the similarities and differences between their interaction patterns. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies while providing practical implications for improving classroom interaction and collaborative learning in higher education.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to investigate the communication styles of male and female students during academic discussions in the Information Systems Study Program at Batuta University Medan. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore and understand communication behaviors, interaction patterns, and language use within a natural educational setting. The case study design enabled the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of how gender influences communication styles during classroom discussions.

The study was conducted at Batuta University Medan, specifically within the Information Systems Study Program. The participants consisted of undergraduate students who actively engaged in academic discussions as part of their learning activities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met the criteria of being enrolled in the Information Systems Study Program and regularly participating in classroom discussions. A total of thirty students participated in the study, comprising fifteen male students and fifteen female students.

Data were collected through classroom observations, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were

conducted during discussion-based learning activities to capture students' natural communication behaviors. During the observations, the researcher focused on various aspects of communication, including participation patterns, turn-taking practices, questioning strategies, responses to peers' opinions, interruptions, expressions of agreement and disagreement, and other interactional features that emerged during discussions. Field notes were used to document significant events and contextual information that could not be fully captured through recordings.

To obtain authentic linguistic data, discussion sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate detailed analysis of communication patterns. The transcriptions allowed the researcher to examine linguistic features associated with gendered communication, such as directness, politeness strategies, hedging expressions, supportive feedback, and conversational dominance. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of academic discussions and the factors influencing their communication styles. The interviews also provided opportunities for participants to explain their communication preferences and experiences during classroom interactions.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis began with familiarization through repeated reading of observation notes, interview transcripts, and discussion transcripts. The researcher then generated initial codes representing recurring communication behaviors and

linguistic patterns. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and themes related to male and female communication styles. The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and relevance to the research objectives. Finally, the findings were interpreted using sociolinguistic perspectives on gender and communication to explain similarities and differences between male and female students' interactional practices during academic discussions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by combining observations, recordings, and interviews. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research process, while confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in the collected data. Ethical considerations were also addressed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and voluntarily agreed to participate. Their identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and research reports.

C. Result and Discussion

The findings of this study were obtained through classroom observations, audio-recorded academic discussions, and semi-structured interviews involving 30 Information Systems students at Batuta University Medan, consisting of 15 male students and 15 female students. The analysis focused on identifying gender-related communication styles during academic discussions. Five major communication features emerged from

the data, namely participation frequency, questioning behavior, directness of communication, interruption patterns, and supportive interaction.

1. Participation Frequency

One of the most noticeable differences between male and female students was the frequency of participation during classroom discussions. Male students tended to initiate discussion topics and provide arguments more frequently than female students. Meanwhile, female students were more active in asking clarification questions and responding to their peers' ideas.

Table 1 presents the frequency of communication behaviors observed during the discussion sessions.

Table 1. Communication Behaviors during Academic Discussions

Communication Behaviour	Male Students	Female Students
Initiating Discussion Topics	41	27
Asking Questions	34	38
Providing Arguments	55	40
Responding to Peer's Opinion	37	51
Supportive Responses	21	47
Interuptions	18	6

The findings indicate that male students contributed more frequently through argumentation and topic initiation, whereas female students demonstrated stronger engagement through supportive interaction and responses to peers' contributions.

2. Directness and Indirectness in Communication

Analysis of the discussion transcripts revealed differences in the linguistic strategies used by male and female students. Male students frequently

employed direct statements when presenting opinions, criticizing ideas, or proposing solutions.

For example:

“The application design is inefficient and should be modified.”

“I disagree because the proposed system cannot solve the problem.”

These expressions demonstrate a direct communication style characterized by confidence and assertiveness.

In contrast, female students often employed mitigating expressions, hedging devices, and indirect suggestions.

For example:

“Maybe we could consider another alternative design.”

“I think it might be useful if we add another feature.”

Such expressions indicate a tendency to soften disagreement and maintain interpersonal harmony during discussions.

3. Interruption and Turn-Taking Patterns

The observation data showed that male students interrupted ongoing conversations more frequently than female students. Interruptions generally occurred when students attempted to challenge opinions, clarify arguments, or introduce new perspectives.

Female students, on the other hand, tended to wait until speakers completed their turns before contributing to the discussion. Their participation reflected a greater adherence to cooperative turn-taking norms.

4. Supportive Interaction

Supportive communication was another important feature identified in the data. Female students frequently provided

verbal encouragement, agreement markers, and positive feedback.

Examples include:

“I agree with your point.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“Your explanation is very clear.”

Male students also provided supportive responses; however, their comments were more likely to focus on evaluating ideas rather than encouraging speakers.

Summary of Communication Styles

Table 2 summarizes the dominant communication characteristics observed among male and female students.

Table 2. Dominant Communication Characteristics

Communication Features	Male Students (%)	Female Students (%)
Direct Communication	67	41
Indirect Communication	31	57
Competitive Interaction	60	34
Collaborative Interaction	38	64
Supportive responses	30	68
Conversational Dominance	63	37

The findings indicate that male students tended to employ direct and competitive communication styles, whereas female students demonstrated more collaborative and supportive communication patterns.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that gender plays an important role in shaping communication styles during academic discussions among Information Systems students at Batuta University Medan. Male students generally demonstrated more direct communication strategies, frequently

initiated discussion topics, and contributed a higher number of arguments. These findings support Lakoff's (1975) proposition that male speakers tend to use language in a more assertive and authoritative manner. The tendency of male students to interrupt discussions and challenge opinions also reflects a competitive interaction style that emphasizes information exchange and problem solving.

The results are also consistent with Tannen's (1990) Genderlect Theory, which argues that men often use communication to establish status, independence, and expertise. In the context of Information Systems discussions, male students appeared to prioritize efficiency, logical reasoning, and solution-oriented communication. This tendency may be influenced by the technical and analytical nature of their academic discipline, which encourages direct problem-solving approaches.

In contrast, female students demonstrated communication styles characterized by cooperation, support, and interpersonal sensitivity. Their frequent use of hedging expressions, clarification questions, and supportive responses suggests an effort to maintain positive relationships and encourage collaborative learning. These findings align with Holmes' (2013) argument that female speakers often employ language to create solidarity and strengthen social relationships. Rather than directly challenging others' opinions, female students tended to negotiate meaning through collaborative dialogue and consensus-building strategies.

Another notable finding concerns interruption behavior. Male students interrupted more frequently than female students, indicating a stronger tendency toward conversational dominance. This finding supports previous sociolinguistic studies suggesting that men are generally

more likely to control conversational topics and speaking turns. Female students, meanwhile, demonstrated greater adherence to cooperative turn-taking practices, which contributed to a more supportive discussion environment.

Despite these differences, the study also revealed several similarities between male and female students. Both groups actively participated in discussions, expressed opinions, asked questions, and contributed ideas related to Information Systems topics. These similarities indicate that communication styles are not solely determined by gender. Educational background, classroom culture, personality, and academic expectations may also influence how students interact during discussions.

The findings further suggest that the collaborative nature of higher education, particularly within Information Systems programs, may encourage students to develop communication competencies that transcend traditional gender stereotypes. Project-based assignments, group discussions, and technology-oriented problem-solving activities require both male and female students to engage in collaborative communication regardless of gender differences. Consequently, communication styles should be viewed as dynamic and context-dependent rather than fixed characteristics associated exclusively with males or females.

Overall, the study demonstrates that while gender-related differences in communication styles remain evident, academic context and educational practices significantly shape students' interactional behavior. These findings highlight the importance of creating inclusive classroom environments that encourage equal participation, mutual respect, and effective communication among all students.

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study investigated the communication styles of male and female students during academic discussions in the Information Systems Study Program at Batuta University Medan. The findings revealed that both male and female students actively participated in classroom discussions; however, they demonstrated different communication patterns. Male students tended to employ more direct, assertive, and competitive communication styles, as reflected in their higher frequency of initiating discussion topics, presenting arguments, and interrupting conversations. Female students, on the other hand, exhibited more collaborative and supportive communication styles through the use of clarification questions, supportive feedback, and cooperative interaction strategies.

The findings indicate that gender influences communication behavior in academic discussions. Nevertheless, communication styles should not be viewed as being solely determined by gender. Other factors, such as educational background, classroom culture, individual personality, and learning experiences, may also contribute to the development of students' communication practices. The study further demonstrates that both male and female students possess valuable communication competencies that support effective academic interaction and collaborative learning.

The results of this study contribute to the field of sociolinguistics by providing insights into gender-based communication styles in the context of higher education. The findings also offer practical implications for lecturers and educators. Understanding students' communication characteristics may help lecturers design more inclusive

discussion activities that encourage balanced participation, promote mutual respect, and facilitate meaningful interaction among students regardless of gender.

Finally, future research is recommended to involve larger samples from different academic disciplines and universities to obtain a broader understanding of gender and communication in higher education. Future studies may also employ mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to examine the relationship between communication styles, academic performance, and collaborative learning outcomes.

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