



Gender Equality in Higher Education: A Path to Sustainability

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Abstract. Higher education is a place of learning that supports gender equality. One of them is by implementing gender responsive learning through differentiated learning. This article focuses on the implementation of gender-equal learning by implementing the principles of differentiation and measuring student perceptions of the content, process, and product aspects of differentiated learning based on gender equality implemented. This research uses a mixed method approach. The qualitative approach was utilised to explore more deeply the implementation of gender-equal learning by implementing the principles of differentiation. While the quantitative method with descriptive survey design was used to measure student perceptions of gender equality in differentiation of learning content, processes, and products. The research population was 521 students of the Bachelor of Social Science Education (IPS) Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The research sample of 226 people was taken randomly using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 5%, to ensure a good representation of the population. The results showed the implementation of differentiated learning in content, process and product. Students' perceptions of gender equality in content, process, and product differentiation were very positive, indicating the importance of differentiated learning as a gender-responsive design in classroom learning in higher education.

Keywords: learning; differentiated; gender; equity.

1 Introduction

Education for all asserts that everyone has the right to access education, without exception for men and women in equal measure and opportunities for marginalised groups [1]. Equal education for men and women is a necessity, as the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education is not a privilege, but everyone, both men and women, has the right to obtain the highest education possible. Gender equality in education has been achieved through three things, namely the right to education, the right in the education process in an environment that supports gender equality, and the right to educational outcomes that support the achievement of justice (rights through education) [2]. In the last decade, through policies and focus on education development, Indonesia has achieved many improvements in terms of equality in

access to education. Efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for universal primary education and gender parity have been made and achieved. The right to education is widely open to citizens through equitable education policies, free education programmes in primary and secondary education. Women who previously could not access education due to economic constraints can be facilitated by this policy to reduce discrimination against women. Society's belief that women have the right to education at all levels has created gender-equal education. Gender equality in education has the benefit of not only fulfilling equal rights between men and women, but also empowering women, promoting social empowerment and advancing a more inclusive society [3,4,5,6,7]. Through equitable education, women are no longer poor in knowledge and can improve their living standards and economy. Based on gender, the illiteracy rate in Indonesia shows that the number of men is greater than women, namely 6.32% compared to the female illiteracy rate of 4.92% [8] Indonesian women are considered to have been able to compete with men to access education.

The right to equal education has been realised, as evidenced by the high participation of women in education and the increase in the number of women attending higher education in the last decade. However, a joint commitment is still needed to fulfil the right to equal education. Disparities in access to education based on gender still exist, especially rights in access and participation in the learning process. There is still bias in the portrayal of women and men in learning [9]. Educators are often unaware of special needs that apply to both male and female learners. In the learning process in schools and universities, interactions in the learning process still tend to be gender biased. Discriminatory practices are also often unintentionally carried out by not providing equal opportunities for boys and girls. Gender stereotypes that perpetuate the gap between male and female learners due to socio-cultural norms still persist [10,11]. The implementation of education is reflected in the curriculum and learning system, which is organised to make it easier for all learners to participate in education. The curriculum is believed to be good if it is adaptive, making it easier for educators to organise learning according to the needs and development of learners, both male and female. The curriculum is designed to ensure that learners have equal opportunities to achieve success and enter higher education. However, gender bias in the curriculum and teaching and learning materials is still widely found in primary, secondary and higher education [12]. One of them is implemented in differentiated learning, which is an approach that provides space for the diversity of students in the classroom, namely differences in the needs, potential, and intelligence of students.

Differentiated learning is based on the principle that learning needs are mapped in the classroom based on the learning styles, learning readiness and interests of each learner based on prepared strategies and methods. Learners with all their unique talents, interests and learning styles can be developed in a differentiated learning approach [13] Differentiated learning is a strategy in the new paradigm of learning today. Its implementation is expected to be a way for educators to teach for all, without differentiating each learner in the classroom [14]. So far, the implementation of differentiated learning has been developed in primary to secondary education to improve the academic interaction between teachers and their students, the concept of differentiated learning can also be implemented in higher education. It enhances students' learning experience to

be more enjoyable, reducing the learning gap for each student so that they feel challenged and involved in the learning process. In the classroom, lecturers design learning content, products, as well as in the learning process according to the needs of students. So far, because they have considered students as adults, lecturers are accustomed to teaching according to the learning style they want, without paying attention to the learning style of students as learning subjects. As in the classroom, it indirectly dictates the learning style of students to match the teacher's learning style so that students tend to be passive and do not enjoy the learning process which makes learning less meaningful [15,16,17,18,19]. In fact, many things must be considered in learning, including willingness, ability, and certain intelligence, student readiness, and presentation methods. An equally important factor is the gender of the learners. This difference certainly causes physiological differences and affects psychological differences in learning.

Gender equality implemented in learning in higher education can minimise or eliminate gender discrimination and bias because differences in the roles of men and women are created through the learning process in the environment, not just from biological factors. Previous research has been conducted on the implementation of differentiated learning. This research focuses on the implementation of gender-equal learning by implementing the principles of differentiation and measuring students' perceptions of the content, process, and product aspects of differentiated learning based on gender equality. Hopefully, it can be known that the differentiated learning implemented gives access to male and female students, gives them the opportunity to participate, is open to potential and all controls, and brings benefits to them without exception.

2 Method

Implementation of gender-equal learning by implementing the principles of differentiation. While the quantitative method with descriptive survey design was used to measure students' perceptions of gender equality in differentiation of learning content, process, and product. The research population was 521 students from the Bachelor of Social Science Education Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The research sample of 226 people was randomly drawn using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 5%, to ensure good representation of the population.

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire consisting of three main parts: perception towards gender equality in differentiation of learning content, process, and product. The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree) to measure student responses. Data was collected through an online survey distributed through a survey platform that is easily accessible to students. The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency distribution and percentage of each item in the questionnaire. The analyses were conducted using statistical software such as SPSS or Excel. The analysis steps included the calculation of statistical descriptions for each item in the questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was tested through construct validity test by referring to relevant theories and literature, as well as content validity test by involving experts in the field of gender education to ensure that the

instrument covers all relevant aspects. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the internal consistency of the questionnaire, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 considered reliable.

3 Result

Differentiated learning plays an important role in promoting gender equality in education. With this approach, each student is treated as a unique individual, allowing all students regardless of gender to reach their full potential. By ensuring that every student, whether male or female, has a learning experience that is tailored to their needs, differentiated learning supports gender equality in education. It is an important step towards creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment, which is the basis for a more equal and sustainable society. This research focuses on differentiated learning in higher education. The research results are as follows:

3.1 Gender-equal Content Differentiation

Differentiated learning based on gender equity is implemented in the classroom based on the results of interviews with lecturers and students, classroom observations, and searches of lesson plan documents and teaching materials, several things are implemented as the implementation of content differentiation including; (1) lecturers pay attention to the learning styles of male and female students in class, adjusting the material presented according to their needs; (2) the use of diverse learning media, accessible to all students; (3) selection of learning topics that are not gender imbalanced; (4) avoidance of course materials that do not reflect gender marginalisation and stereotypes; (5) recognition of minorities in every material provided; (6) selection of gender responsive teaching materials. Meanwhile, student responses to the implementation of content differentiation in learning implementation are as follows.

Table 1. Gender equal conten differentiation

Gender Equality in Content Differentiation	Strongly Disagre	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Course content reflects gender diversity	0%	3%	5%	28%	64%
Curriculum supports gender equality in all topics taught	0%	0%	5%	78%	17%
The reading and reference materials used in lectures reflect the views of different genders	0%	0%	82%	16%	2%
Examples or case studies in course materials include the	0%	0%	4%	73%	23%

contributions of women and men in a balanced way					
Course materials avoid gender stereotypes	0%	0%	0%	14%	86%
Topics covered in course materials include a comprehensive gender perspective	0%	0%	0%	16%	84%
Minority gender views are represented in course materials	0%	0%	1%	77%	22%
Illustrations and examples in course materials reflect gender diversity	0%	0%	23%	37%	40%

Based on the data collected, student perceptions of gender equality in content differentiation show positive results, although there are some areas that still require attention. Most respondents, 64 per cent strongly agreed and 28 per cent agreed, felt that the course materials reflected gender diversity. This suggests that the curriculum has adopted a more inclusive approach and seeks to include a range of gender perspectives, as expressed by Smith (2019), who emphasises the importance of materials that reflect gender diversity to create an inclusive learning environment. A total of 78% of respondents agreed and 17% strongly agreed that the curriculum supports gender equality in all topics taught, with only 5% being neutral. This finding is in line with the UNESCO report (2021), which states that a curriculum that supports gender equality is key to reducing the gender gap in education. However, in terms of reading and reference materials used in lectures, 82% of respondents were neutral, with only 16% agreeing and 2% strongly agreeing that reading materials reflect the views of different genders. This suggests that there is still room for improvement in the diversification of reading materials, as expressed by Brown [20], who emphasises the importance of diversifying reading materials to cover a broader perspective and reduce gender bias.

Most respondents agreed (73%) and strongly agreed (23%) that the examples or case studies in the course materials included the contributions of women and men in a balanced way. In terms of avoiding gender stereotypes, 86% of respondents strongly agreed and 14% agreed that the course materials avoided gender stereotypes. This reflects success in creating bias-free materials, as highlighted by Jones & Clark [21], who emphasise that avoiding gender stereotypes in education can help reduce unconscious bias and increase participation of all genders. A total of 84 per cent of respondents strongly agreed and 16 per cent agreed that the topics in the course materials thoroughly cover gender perspectives. This indicates that course topics are considered highly inclusive of various gender perspectives, in line with research by Lee [22], which emphasises the importance of including gender perspectives in course topics to provide a comprehensive understanding of social and cultural issues. In addition, 77% of respondents agreed and 22% strongly agreed that minority gender views are represented in course materials, with only 1% being neutral. These findings are in line with Martinez [23],

who pointed out that the representation of gender minorities in education can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

Overall, data analysis showed that students' perceptions of gender equality in content differentiation were positive. However, there are some areas for improvement, such as diversification of reading and reference materials and wider representation in illustrations and examples. These findings are in line with existing literature, which emphasises the importance of inclusivity and representation in education to reduce gender bias and support equality.

3.2 Gender Equal Process Differentiation

The implementation of learning, showing process differentiation in the classroom, as follows; (1) lecturers utilise gender responsive literacy in the classroom; (2) implementation of learning methods and models accessible to all students; (3) participation of all students in the class that is considered; (4) implementation of discussions and other interactions in learning that respect all students; (5) recognition of minorities in learning. Meanwhile, students' responses to the implementation of process differentiation in learning implementation are as follows.

Table 2. Gender equal process differentiation

Gender Equal Process Differentiation	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
How often do your lecturers provide equal opportunities for all students to participate in class discussions?	0%	0%	0%	13%	87%
Do you feel discriminated against or ignored in class discussions or learning activities because of your gender?	97%	3%	0%	0%	0%
How often do you get constructive and equal feedback from lecturers regardless of your gender?	0%	0%	0%	8%	92%
Do you feel that your lecturer uses teaching methods that take gender differences into account?	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
Do your lecturers give equal attention to male and female students in providing academic help or guidance?	0%	0%	0%	24%	76%
Do you feel that your lecturers encourage all students, regardless of their gender, to achieve high academic performance?	0%	0%	5%	14%	81%

Gender Equal Process Differentiation	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Do you feel that your lecturers are biased towards a particular gender in providing explanations or extra help?	72%	27%	1%	0%	0%
How often do your lecturers discuss gender equality issues in the context of the topics taught?	0%	0%	2%	26%	72%
Do all genders get equal opportunities to lead group projects?	0%	0%	0%	13%	87%
How fairly do you feel internship or research project opportunities are given to students regardless of gender?	0%	0%	0%	12%	88%
Do you feel that your classes create an inclusive environment for all genders to actively participate?	0%	0%	0%	12%	88%

Based on the data collected regarding students' perceptions of gender equality in process differentiation, the analysis shows very positive results and supports the existence of inclusive and equitable teaching practices. Most respondents (87%) always felt that their lecturers provided equal opportunities to all students to participate in class discussions, with 13% feeling this was often the case. This suggests that lecturers are committed to creating an inclusive learning environment, which is in line with Smith's [20] findings emphasising the importance of active participation from all students to create an equitable learning environment. In contrast, 97% of respondents stated that they never felt discriminated against or ignored in class discussions or learning activities because of their gender, with 3% rarely feeling such discrimination. This data suggests that almost all respondents feel accepted and valued regardless of their gender. Brown [23] notes that reducing discrimination and bias in the classroom is key to creating an equitable learning experience for all learners. In terms of feedback from lecturers, 92% of respondents always felt they received constructive and equal feedback regardless of their gender, with 8% feeling this was often the case. This reflects that lecturers are successful in providing fair feedback and supporting each student's academic development. Davis & Johnson [24] assert that fair and constructive feedback is important to support students' academic development regardless of gender. Furthermore, 78% of respondents always feel that their lecturers use teaching methods that consider gender differences, with 22% feeling this often. This suggests that lecturers have adopted teaching approaches that are inclusive and sensitive to gender differences. Most respondents (76%) always feel that lecturers give equal attention to male and female students in providing academic help or guidance, with 24% feeling this often. This suggests that lecturers are fair in providing academic assistance, supporting Lee's [22] assertion of the importance of providing equal attention to all students to support equity in education.

A total of 81% of respondents always feel that lecturers encourage all students, regardless of their gender, to achieve high academic performance, with 14% feeling this often. This suggests that lecturers are committed to encouraging all students to reach their full academic potential. Martinez [23] emphasises that encouraging all students to achieve high is important for reducing the gender gap in academic outcomes. In terms of gender bias, 72% of respondents never felt that lecturers were biased towards a particular gender in providing explanations or extra help, with 27% who rarely felt this. This suggests that lecturers have avoided gender bias in their interactions with students. Anderson [26] points out that avoiding gender bias in explanations and additional help is important for creating an equitable learning environment. Furthermore, 72% of respondents always felt that their lecturers discussed gender equality issues in the context of the topics taught, with 26% feeling this often. This suggests that lecturers consider it important to include gender equality issues in their course materials. Smith (2019) emphasises the importance of discussing gender equality issues in an academic context to increase awareness and understanding among learners. In terms of opportunities to lead group projects, 87% of respondents always feel that all genders get equal opportunities, with 13% feeling this often. This suggests that lecturers support equality in leadership roles in the classroom. Brown [25] states that providing equal opportunities to lead group projects is important for developing leadership skills among all genders.

Finally, 88% of respondents always feel that internship or research project opportunities are provided to students regardless of gender, with 12% feeling this often. This suggests that lecturers and institutions support gender equality in academic opportunities. Davis & Johnson [25] emphasise the importance of providing equal opportunities in internships and research projects to support gender equality in academic and professional careers. Overall, this data shows that students' perceptions of gender equality in process differentiation are very positive. Most respondents felt that their lecturers were fair, inclusive and supportive of gender equality in various aspects of the learning process.

3.3 Gender Equal Product Differentiation

Product differentiation carried out by lecturers in the classroom, shows data, that; (1) lecturers utilise tasks that can be accessed and done by all students because they are in accordance with their basic needs and learning styles; (2) provision of tasks that are non-stereotypical, non-marginalised and accessible to all students; (3) participation of all students in contributing to the product being considered; (4) implementation of learning assessments that value all students, both men and women; (5) assessment of all, and attention to all students in learning; (6) rewards and punishments for students fairly. Meanwhile, students' responses to the implementation of product differentiation in learning implementation are as follows.

Table 3. Gender Equal Product Differentiation

Gender Equal Product Differentiation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutra	Agree	Strongly Agree
Do you feel that the assignments and projects allow for equal contributions from all genders?	0%	0%	2%	82%	14%
Do you feel that lecturers assess your assignments and projects fairly regardless of gender?	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
Are there equal opportunities for all students to demonstrate their abilities and work in class?	0%	0%	0%	8%	92%
Do you feel that the assignments consider a gender perspective?	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
Do your lecturers provide objective and fair assessment of student work regardless of gender?	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
Do you feel that your work is assessed based on your individual qualities and contributions, rather than your gender?	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Do you feel that group work is fairly assessed based on individual contributions rather than gender?	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
Do you feel that task assessment criteria reflect gender equality?	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
Do you feel that the opportunity to display the results of your research or final project is given to all students fairly?	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
Do your lecturers reward or recognise academic achievement regardless of gender?	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Do you feel that all students have equal access to academic resources, such as tutoring or laboratory facilities, regardless of gender?	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Based on the data regarding student perceptions of gender equality in product differentiation, it was found that student perceptions were very positive. A total of 82% of respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed that the assignments and projects provided allow for equal contributions from all genders. This shows that most students feel that

the assignments and projects are designed in a way that allows for equal contributions from all genders. According to Brown [25], inclusive assignments are essential in creating an equitable learning environment, as they allow all students to demonstrate their abilities without being constrained by gender bias. The assessment of assignments and projects by lecturers is also considered fair, with 90% of respondents strongly agreeing and 10% agreeing that the assessment is done regardless of gender. This indicates that students have high confidence in the fairness of the assessment process carried out by lecturers. Davis & Johnson [24] assert that objective and fair assessment is essential to support learners' academic development, ensuring that achievements are assessed based on the quality of work, not gender.

The opportunity to showcase skills and work in class was also rated positively, with 92% of respondents strongly agreeing and 8% agreeing that all students have the same opportunity. This suggests that educational institutions have succeeded in creating an environment that allows equal participation from all students. Jones & Clark [21] underline the importance of providing equal opportunities to all students to ensure that no one group feels neglected or discriminated against. In terms of the assignments given, 78% of respondents strongly agreed and 22% agreed that the assignments consider a gender perspective. This shows that lecturers have shown awareness and sensitivity to gender issues in designing academic assignments. Lee [22] emphasises that assignments that consider gender perspectives can help reduce bias and increase awareness of the importance of gender equality among students. Objectivity and fairness in assessment were also rated highly, with 98% of respondents strongly agreeing and 2% agreeing that lecturers provide objective and fair assessment of student work regardless of gender. This reflects that lecturers have successfully implemented an assessment system that is free from gender bias. Martinez (2020) points out that fair assessment is essential to ensure that all students are assessed based on the quality of their work, thus encouraging more active and competitive participation.

Furthermore, 99% of respondents strongly agreed and 1% agreed that their work was assessed based on individual quality and contribution, rather than gender. This indicates that assessment is done in a meritocracy, which is very important in an academic environment. Anderson [25] states that individual quality-based assessment is key to creating a fair and inclusive academic environment. The assessment of group work was also rated as fair by 98% of respondents strongly agreeing and 2% agreeing that the assessment was based on individual contributions. This shows that lecturers pay attention to the contribution of each group member, ensuring that the assessment is unbiased. Brown [23] emphasises the importance of fair assessment in group work to ensure that each member feels valued and recognised for their contribution.

A total of 98% of respondents strongly agreed and 2% agreed that the assignment assessment criteria reflect gender equality. This shows that the assessment criteria used by lecturers already include aspects of gender equality, which is important for creating an inclusive and fair academic environment. Smith [20] states that inclusive assessment criteria can help reduce bias and ensure that all students are assessed fairly. In terms of the opportunity to showcase research results or final projects, 85% of respondents strongly agreed and 15% agreed that this opportunity is provided fairly to all students.

This suggests that the institution provides equal opportunities for all students to showcase their work, which is important for encouraging participation and academic achievement.

Davis & Johnson [24] assert that providing equal opportunities to display research results is essential to support gender equality in academia. A total of 99% of respondents strongly agreed and 1% agreed that lecturers give awards or recognition for academic achievement regardless of gender. This suggests that rewards and recognition are given based on merit, which is important for maintaining motivation and academic achievement. Lee [22] emphasises that fair rewards can boost student motivation and ensure that all achievements are rewarded regardless of gender. Finally, 100% of respondents strongly agreed that all students have equal access to academic resources, such as tutoring or laboratory facilities, regardless of gender. This indicates that the institution has successfully created an environment that supports equal access to academic resources. Smith [20] states that equal access to academic resources is key to supporting the academic development of all learners regardless of gender.

3.4 Conclusions and Suggestions

Gender-responsive learning has been implemented in higher education through differentiated learning design in the classroom by lecturers. This is investigated from the content, process and products produced in learning. Students' perceptions of gender equality in content, process and product differentiation were very positive, indicating the importance of differentiated learning as a gender-responsive design in classroom learning in higher education. Educational institutions seem to have succeeded in creating inclusive and equitable academic environments that reflect gender diversity and avoid bias. However, some areas such as diversification of reading materials still require further attention to ensure a wider representation of various gender perspectives. These findings are in line with existing literature, which emphasises the importance of inclusivity and representation in education to reduce gender bias and support the active participation of all students. By maintaining and enhancing these efforts, institutions can continue to support equitable and inclusive academic development for all students, regardless of gender. One step needs to be taken when the curriculum, and gender-responsive learning design has been established, it is better to have a social action approach, where students are trained, directed, instilled in them a gender-sensitive mindset. Where they are then capable of making gender-sensitive decisions and actions in their life activities, which can be done by discussing the concepts, roles and gender relations in society. With this approach, it is intended that students can carry out social criticism and even make social changes.

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