



The Investigation of Indonesian EFL Learners' Perception and Understanding on Equality Values in "Jane Eyre" Novel: A Gender Perspective

Rahman Hakim^a, Siti Suharsih^a, Rosmania Rima^{a*}, Dhafid Wahyu Utomo^a, Dina Rachmawati^a

^aEnglish Department, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Indonesia

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*Correspondence Address:

rosmania@untirta.ac.id

Abstract

This research investigated the Indonesian EFL Learners' perception and understanding of gender equality values in one of the greatest novels, Jane Eyre, written by Charlotte Bronte in 1847 as the picture of women emancipation at the time. To this aim, 100 Indonesian pre-intermediate EFL learners were selected from among 125 students at one of the public universities in Banten. They were given a questionnaire and it was analyzed descriptively to explore the content of the story, equality values and the connection with the value of life. The analysis of the data revealed that first, there is still gender inequality between men and women. Second, self-expression, employment, and education were dominant themes found in the issues of gender inequality in the novel. Third, the gender values in the novel "Jane Eyre" are still related to the current reality or the environment. Moreover, extensive reading activities were impactful in rising students' interest in reading and awareness of social issues. Therefore, this study suggests that the values of gender equality can be brought to be a good discussion in the class through extensive reading activities.

INTRODUCTION

The study of gender in higher education context has become a spotlight for some researchers in the last few decades (e.g., Chisamy, et. al. 2012; Loots & Walker, 2015; Szirom, 2017; Burke, 2017). In the context of language learning, gender is believed to have an influence on language ability and mastery. As stated by Jinyu (2014) that gender differences in language have occupied a special space in language and gender studies. Consequently, this leads to gender learning at schools and universities.

One way to teach gender at school and college is by utilizing literary works as a medium in transferring the issues (Kraver, 2007; Ruterana, 2017). Particularly for English student's department in Indonesia, concept and the issues of gender equality can be found in some courses, they are prose and extensive reading. By having those courses, students had a lot of time to explore and to dig the meaning of stories, in which some of the stories talk much and reveal about gender equality topic. Thus, these literary works, especially novels, considered as a good medium in understanding gender equality. Novels are not only writings that have a storyline, but also contain the values adopted by the author which cannot be separated from the cultural influences and values.

In Indonesian higher education curriculum, introducing and learning about the issue of gender equality is not given directly in specific course. Therefore, the activity in extensive reading can be the alternative in encouraging constructive thinking toward the issues in gender equality. By giving an authentic text, it facilitates the students to understand the content easily (Amalia, 2016; Septiarini & Rahmat, 2018). One of the sources is a novel. By reading a novel, students can also portray how those issues related in their own life and their surroundings.

However, the question of how is student's perception and understanding equality values in novel remains, as of yet, relatively unexplored. Studies have been conducted in the past regarding novel as learning medium (Oda and Dhahir, 2009; Chih-hsin, 2012; Arif, 2015), as well as observations of teachers' and students' activities in the classroom using novel cited in Koutsompou (2017) but qualitative studies regarding students' perceptions and understanding gender equality values in novel remain scarce.

Focusing in gender equality, this study tries to investigate student's perception and understanding in gender equality values in one of the greatest novels, Jane Eyre ". Jane Eyre "is written by Charlotte Bronte in 1847 as the picture of women emancipation at the time. For the reason, students 'perception and understanding in gender equality revealed the relevancy of the equality values in the novel with the reality of students environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applied qualitative approach with descriptive method. Descriptive method produces descriptive data represented by words or behavior

(Surahmad, 1986:21). This research was conducted from July 2020 to October 2020 at one of the public universities in Banten Province. The respondents were 100 from 125 students who took Extensive Reading course. To collect the data, the researchers used questionnaire. This questionnaire was consisted three main questions. In first question list, it covered respondents understanding on novel, the second questions list discussed about respondent's perception about equality values, and the third list of questions were about interconnection between respondents understanding with their real life. In analyzing the data, the respondents' answers were divided into (1) category A is a group which can find the values of gender equality and they can connect them with the reality in Indonesia and their surroundings; (2) category B is a group which can find the values of gender equality in novel and they can connect them with the reality in Indonesia. This group can tell their spirit to be equal one to another; (3) category C is a group which cannot find the values of gender equality in novel but the discrimination. However, this group has already realized about the equality gender in the novel; and (4) category D is a group which cannot show their enthusiasm in responding the questions. The respondents tend to be negative toward the content of novel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Source This part presents the findings and discussion of this study. Data analysis firstly revealed that students' understanding on Jane Eyre novel focused on the representation of a strong character of the main character i.e., Jane Eyre. Secondly, the students perceived equality values cover equality in terms of self-expression, employment, and education. Thirdly, relevancy of gender equality issue was found in the participants' real life. Further elaborations are presented in the following sub sections.

Students' understanding of Jane Eyre novel

Representation of a strong personality of the main character was the main point learnt by the participants from this novel. Based on the participants' responses the main character "Jane Eyre" was a representation of a smart, strong, and independent woman. It derived from three emerging themes presented in the data analysis students' understanding of Jane Eyre novel i.e. a pioneer of women right movement (Theme 1), strong character (Theme 2), a woman struggle for

equality and independence (Theme 3). As illustrated in the following Figure 1.

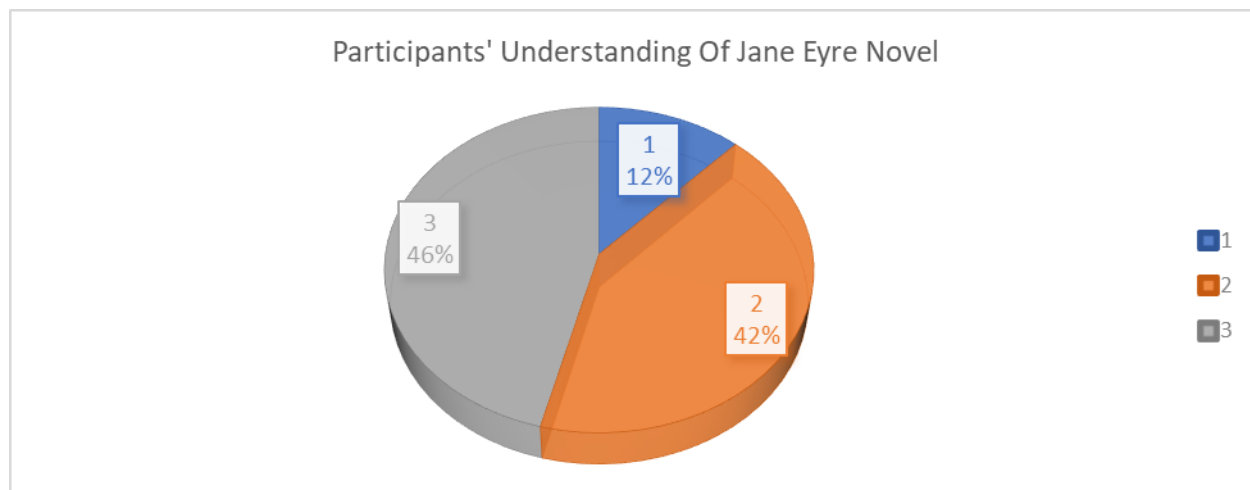


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that theme 3 about a woman struggle for equality and independence was the dominant theme gained from the students' response. It gained 46 responses out of 100 participants. Theme 2 which was about strong character/personality of a woman was the second most dominant theme with 42% responses. Theme 1 that was about a pioneer of women right movement was the third dominant theme acquired from the participants of the study. It acquired 12% responses out of the total responses. The excerpts of the participants' responses are presented in the following data:

R1: **She was before her time in her nation** that **women should be at liberty** to feel what they want and work at what they are enjoy.

R2: She's very **smart**, and **really likes to observe people** and **figure out her personalities**.

R3: Jane Eyre was a young woman, **intelligent, discrete** and **strongly principled...** with its realistic portrayal of the inner life of a woman, nothing her **struggles with her natural desires and social condition**.

Data analysis of R1 denotes that the main character of the novel exceeded the portrayal of a woman in her time. The character of Jane Eyre who had liberate thinking, and was expressive toward she felt, wanted and liked to do, outstrip an image woman in general in that era. Cameron (1989) argued that women in the late 18s were generally considered less knowledgeable than men and less articulate to men. In responding to the issue, thus the portrait of Jane Eyre,

presented a breakthrough of a woman depiction. This is in line with Patoding (2018) who stated that Jane Eyre was one of women depicted in the novel who had the ability in making solution for the problems in their society. Thus, Jane Eyre represented and was identified as independent woman. From this finding, it can be assumed that the students/participants could grasp the moral value of the story. Furthermore, data analysis of R2 and R3 revealed that being smart, observant, curious, and distinct were not general traits of woman at that time. From this finding it can be inferred that the activity of Extensive Reading could make students enjoyed reading activity and at the same time learned about gender issues carried by the novel. Thus, it suggests that teachers' assistance is required to guide students to be more aware of the cultural values and issues which implicitly conveyed in any reading resources.

Students' Perception about Equality Values

This part discusses how the participants perceived the values of women's right equality in the novel. Data analysis revealed that three themes for equality values were found in this study i.e. self-expression (Theme 1), employment (Theme 2), and education (Theme 3). As depicted in the following Figure 2.

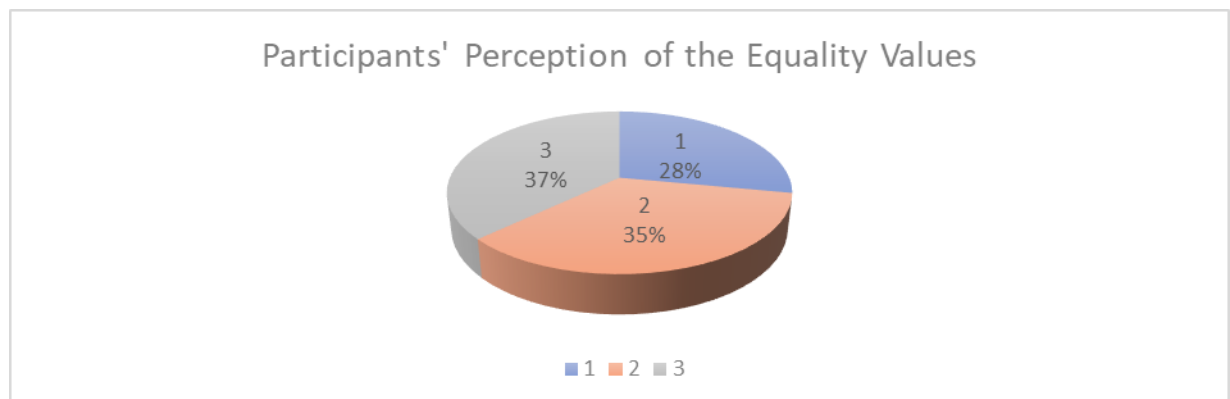


Figure 2

Figure 2 demonstrates that the prevailing theme of the equality values was education which got 37% of the responses. The second theme was equality of the employment which gained 35% of the total responses. The third theme was equality of self-expression which acquired 28% of the overall participants' responses. These findings were in lined with the issues of gender Inequality. It is predominant in many extents of life, including employment, education, employment, medical care, laws and violence (Brandt, 2011; Ponthieux & Meurs, 2015). Furthermore, illustration of the data is presented in the following section:

D1: Jane Eyre thinks that **woman needs an autonomy for her life**, women need to **make their own decision**, such **the woman's claim to control their own bodies**, or the protest against inequality.

D2: Jane in an exception in this topic, she is trying **her best to make her own financial by working as a governess** which in that time, **the occupation of governess itself could raising Jane's position in society**.

D3: This story embodies the ideology of equality between men and women in society. **Women can be equal** with man in the aspects of **education and earn money on her own**.

Data analysis of D1 data implied that women in the era of the novel still faced problem with self-expression. They were constrained to voice their mind and ideas since women in the 18s were second class group which did not have right to express their opinion (Patoding, 2018) and were suppressed by the domestic-conformity to social convention (Bosshe, 2005). Furthermore, D2 denotes that the issue of employment of women was the value promoted in the novel. As supported by argued by Japp (2016) that occupational position of men and women has become a critical issue for centuries. In line with this Ponthieux & Meurs (2015) contended that it is unquestionable and it is still well documented that the economic status of men and women is still not equal: on average women get lower employment salaries than men. Data D3 signifies the participant's view of the value of the equality upheld in the novel is related with the right in education. It is in lined with Bossche (2005) who stated that the issues of ideology in Jane Eyre novel moves towards social class identity, social exclusion, economic depended, and equality in education. In responding to the issue of equality in education, addition, Bose (2015) explicated that educational level of men and women is one indicators of gender input measures. The statement implied that education is still one factor that signifies disparity of men and women.

Portrayal of Gender Equality Values

Data analysis of research question three revealed that most of the participants stated that the portrait of issues of gender equality depicted in Jane Eyre novel was found to be relevant with current condition. In other words, the issues of inequality of gender are still relevant with today's situation. Gap or disparity of women's right to men's are still found in aspect of daily life such as in access to education, law,

employment. As illustrated in the following data:

R1: "Yes (it is still relevant), **because patriarchy still exists in my life**. I've seen many people around me said "if you are **a woman**, you **should** be able **to cook**" but cooking is a basic thing we need for life, it's not something that based on your gender so not only women should be able to cook but men too"

R2: '**There are still many people who use patriarchal culture in my own life**. For example, **woman shouldn't have too high education** and have **high-paid job**, because later there won't be a man who wants to be with her

R3: the situation is similar, I guess. I think **not all people around me treat women as equal as men**, especially when talking **about education**. **In my village**, men get more privilege to go study **compared to women**.

From the responses of gender equality in novel "Jane Eyre". It can be confirmed that the majority of women feel that the values of equality are still relevant with current situations. This finding is supported by Cruea (2005) who stated that "at this time, women were the recurrent victims of social and economic discrimination. Choices of women from the upper- and middle-class were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood. Both choices stemmed in domestic dependency." Moreover, the participants found that the equality is still bias, since they still found that some women have been given righter but still under some restrictions. As narrated by Cruea (2005) that women are allowed to work for an income and be financially more independent. While a career seems to be not an optional choice because it would distract women from domestic responsibilities...women were demanded to be employed in domestic and charitable works since it taught the woman self-reliance and at the same time doing their domestic roles. Furthermore, this condition strengthens by the patriarchy in social system, that it indicates that women are still depend on men and the women are still considered as subordinate position under the men (Japp, 2016; Webster, 2009; West, 2005). In other words, they are being in a subordinate position under the men, the women are very limited in having right to choose and having a choice.

Those findings imply that gender is still influential factor in treating men and women. Women are treated as a person who is responsibility in managing house, as a mother, a wife and doing some domestic affairs. From the novel, it can be seen that the position of women is under the men. That's one of the reasons why women should have survived and struggling to have a move. Gender bias can make women aware to the right of their body and their life. Novel "Jane Eyre" gives many

lessons of how the right between men and women should be equal. This novel tries to capture on how the women fight in defending their identity under the power of men.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on analysis on the participants' outlook about novel "Jane Eyre", some findings can be drawn. First, the perception and understanding toward novel "Jane Eyre" indicate that there is still gender inequality between men and women. Second, self-expression, employment, and education were dominant themes found in the issues of gender inequality in the novel. Third, the gender values in novel "Jane Eyre" are still related with the current reality or the environment. From the findings it can be concluded that extensive reading activities were impactful in rising students' interest in reading and awareness to social issues. Therefore, this study suggests that the values of gender equality can be brought to be a good discussion in the class by extensive reading activities. Additionally, designing more interactive method in giving gender equality issues, the teacher can also put culture as a part of gender discussion.

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