

Attitude and Knowledge on the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language in Writing: A Quantitative Study among College Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the university students' attitudes and knowledge on the use of gender-inclusive language in academic writing, with specific attention to differences based on age, gender, academic program, and year level. Employing a quantitative-descriptive and correlational research design, the data were gathered from 130 randomly selected students at a public higher education institution through a validated, researcher-made questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and Spearman's rho were utilized to analyze the data. Findings revealed that students generally held positive attitudes and demonstrated adequate knowledge of gender-inclusive language, with older students and those enrolled in Education programs showing the most favorable attitudes and highest knowledge scores. Statistically significant differences in attitude were found only across academic programs ($p = .046$), while significant differences in knowledge were identified based on academic program and year level ($p = .000$). These findings suggest that disciplinary exposure and academic maturity contribute significantly to students' understanding and acceptance of inclusive language practices. Additionally, a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .201$, $p = .022$) was observed between students' attitudes and knowledge, indicating that as students become more knowledgeable, their attitudes tend to be more favorable. However, no significant differences were observed in attitude or knowledge based on gender or age alone. The study highlights the importance of embedding gender-inclusive language education across various disciplines and year levels to foster inclusive communication practices. Educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness and deepening knowledge are essential for promoting acceptance and implementation of gender-inclusive language in academic settings.

Keywords: Gender-Inclusive Language; Knowledge; Gender Sensitivity

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in communication and strengthening social norms into promoting equity. Gender-Inclusive Language is a recent development pedagogy focusing on utilizing language which avoids biases towards a particular sex group. Attitude towards this development creates diverse reactions and interpretations from students. The study about Gender-Inclusive Language use is influenced by gender-role orientation and writing tasks, not just gender. The use of inclusive language, gender-fair materials, and student-centered teaching methods makes learning more accessible and meaningful, regardless of gender, race, or ability. (William et al., 2025).

Most students held a positive view of gender-inclusive language; further, the lack of significant differences in attitudes indicated a neutral opinion across sexes (Remigio & Talosa, 2021). However, these results cannot be considered representative of a wider population due to the limited sample size distributed primarily among international university-students. The study on the potential impact of gender-inclusive language within international university students also highlighted the tenacity of status quo bias, emphasizing that people are often resistant to change before fully accepting new perspectives; let alone before society as a whole can achieve a broader shift in the mind-set and attitude (Ratanaphithayaporn and Rodrigo, 2022).

This study aimed to explore the college students' attitudes and knowledge on the use of gender-inclusive language in academic writing. This study fills a knowledge gap in previous international-focused research by examining the ways in which tasks for writing and gender-role orientation impact university students' knowledge and attitudes toward gender-inclusive language in academic writing. In contrast to the previous research that concentrated on international university students, this study on the other hand will provide insights within a specific educational context consisting of a more diverse student population. It will examine how various factors, such as writing tasks and gender-role orientation impact students' attitude, extending beyond a simple gender-based analysis. Through the use of a quantitative approach, this study will provide significant data that will improve the understanding on how inclusive language is viewed in academic writing. The findings will enlighten future discussions on the development of curriculum and language policies, as a result providing support to the promotion of inclusivity in higher education.

2. Review of Related Literature

The rise of gender-inclusive language, which originated from academic and feminist discussions in the late 20th century, has gained widespread acceptance in the 21st century. This shift has contributed to changes in societal norms and heightened recognition of gender diversity. The LGBTQ+ rights movement, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, led to a growing recognition that gender cannot be limited to a simple male/female binary. This has sparked a renewed focus on language that includes non-binary and gender-nonconforming individuals (Vizcarra-Garcia, 2021; Krařoviřov et al., 2024; Tarrayo, 2022).

Gender refers to the position, roles, and responsibilities of both men and women in society as well as how they are viewed in social organizations. Additionally, it highlights how social class, patriarchy, and forms of production are used to generate gender distinctions (Marshall, 1999, as cited in Altiok et. al., 2023). Whereas, according to the University of Queensland (n.d.), inclusive language "avoids using words, phrases, or tones that belittle, offend, exclude, stereotype, infantilize, or downplay people based on their group membership or a specific characteristic" (p. 2). This is done to demonstrate respect and promote acceptance for all members

of society (Ratanaphithayaporn & Russell Rodrigo, 2020). Gender-inclusive language has received increasing attention in academic and professional settings as communities move toward more equitable communication and free from discrimination. Various studies have explored students' attitudes toward gender-inclusive language, focusing on its acceptance, challenges, and implications in academic writing (Regimio & Talosa, 2021).

In the study conducted by Talosa and Temporal [n.d.] on how often sexist language especially generic masculine terms occurs in students' writing, the results revealed that there are instances of sexist language use in students' conversations. This may result in a habit if not addressed during their learning process. Additionally, the findings of the study revealed that the students who depended more on the usage of the phrase "husband and wife" than "man and wife" received higher average scores, indicating a strong inclination toward using either symmetrical or hierarchical expressions. This suggests that the respondents demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding the importance of parallel construction (Remigio & Talosa, 2021). Additionally, Ganaa et al. (2019) have found that despite having a positive attitude towards gender stereotypes, most male respondents and the majority of the female respondents viewed gender-inclusive language as offensive and degrading to their identity as a woman.

Despite the negative findings found in other researches, Kuhn and Gabriel (2014) and Sczesny et al. (2015), referenced by Luck (2020), state that only a small average of speakers use inclusive language spontaneously. Although, the authors also found that educating people about the significance of inclusive language can make a tangible difference, readers encountering texts that aim to be more sensitive, helps them become more aware and use it more often during discourse. Further, the use of gender-neutral pronouns puts a pedestal on the use of male generics, therefore training or subconsciousness from defaulting to male-oriented terms. This aids to promote awareness and gives space for marginalized genders to feel valued and empowered (Ratanaphithayaporn and Rodrigo, 2022). Moreover, Farrelly and Seoane (2012, p.393) as cited by Bosch, 2021. People change the way they use language in response to the shifts in society, and at the same time, the way they use language can drive social change. This means that to create a more inclusive understanding, we can intentionally include all the other genders in professions that are typically seen as male-dominated to help change people's perception. Even so, the use of gender inclusive language may not be the solution to solve all issues on gender inequality in society, however, it still reflects a growing commitment toward the progress of social change. This change will not only open doors to the promotion of positive attitude towards gender identities through the process of intentional change. Moreover, it will lead to the cultivation of respect and recognition for all identities, making them feel a sense of belonging and being valued (Ratanaphithayaporn and Rodrigo, 2022).

Cognitive psychologists propose that language plays a significant role in shaping human thought. If the way people use language influences their thinking, then the way gender is incorporated into language—such as assigning masculine or feminine forms to objects—may contribute to differing perspectives on gender equality (Perez & Tavits, 2019). Additionally, the study by Lenhart and Heckel (2024) suggests that adopting gender-fair language impacts how girls perceive women in traditionally masculine professions, which gives them a more positive outlook on being able to succeed in male-dominated jobs. Despite the cognitive use of language, stereotypical professions particularly those traditionally associated with women remained fixed in our cognitive understanding of language even those linked with men (Bosch, 2021). The word "Chairman" typically refers to male, leading to the exclusion of female presence and implies that only males possess the ability to lead a committee. As a result, a more inclusive term "chairperson," is preferred (Borito, 2023). Further, the evidence indicates that the use of gender-fair pronouns resulted in the decreased mental

prominence of men. This change is connected to less bias toward traditional gender roles and greater support for women and LGBT individuals in public spaces. The use of feminine pronoun effects widely occurred automatically rather than controlled (Travis et al., 2019). The issue of gender inclusive language remains, however, it has been positively accepted especially by the new generations (Leon & Jarrin, 2023).

Gender bias is woven into the fabric of language – not only into the cultural perceptions tied to gender but also gender-inclusive language models (LLMs). The very terms “mankind” and “manhood” alienate numerous individuals beyond the binary of male and female (Aparicio et al., 2018, as cited by Bosch, 2021). Bosche (2021) notes other domains where this bias is prevalent is in the perception-based language professions, where female-biased occupations tend to be mentally more accessible than male-biased occupations. These examples demonstrate the influence of language tilted towards a fixed binary notion of gender hierarchy. Words like “man-cave” and “show-girl” do much more than just turn girls into products of objectification, they cement rigid gender stereotypes (Bartl & Leavy, 2024). Using both male and feminine forms of nouns bounds effortlessly widen the representations of woman to broad-spectrum inclusivity (Waldendorf, 2024, p. 358), something which combats gender stereotypes at the source. This demonstrates that improving and adapting how language is framed in the training data of LLMs could perhaps increase positive mentorship with eradicating gender bias within these models.

Various studies have examined the attitudes of students and educators toward gender-inclusive learning and language. In establishing gender inclusive learning, students would not be silent and avoidant, however they will feel confident and self-assured enough to refer to people who might identify as non-binary and be themselves, Carter, (2024). Similarly, in the study conducted by Casas, et. al., 2024, highlighted the importance of gender sensitivity training in bridging gender inequality and promoting equality. The study evaluated students' awareness and their attitude toward the practice of gender rights in their daily life following the training. Results from both the survey and focus group discussion confirmed the positive impact of the training program, concluding that gender sensitivity training is an impactful approach to enhance gender awareness and foster a positive attitude toward gender equality. In addition, by Mondragon et al., 2022, although the usage of gender-inclusive language is not widely accepted, there is a positive response from the participants towards inclusive language, and it is acknowledged as a way to lessen inequality on gender. Further, participants have given support to the use of non-sexist language in the classroom and teach their pupils of its proper application in the near future.

On the other hand, according to Ganaa's (2019) research, the use of stereotypical language has an emotional and psychological impact on the audience or target, making them feel dehumanized, abused, and overall insulted as a woman. Likewise, one significant finding from Sendén's (2021) research is that, despite potential hostility and opposition, gender-neutral language initiatives, like the adoption of a gender-inclusive pronoun, can result in a shift in attitudes over as little as three years. While, if it is related to gender-neutral/IL in modern English, the findings showed that students were "unsure about the usage of language that is considered inclusive" (Kalajdzisalihović, 2021, p. 86). After Bosch (2021) conducted their study, to discover whether the students knew about the use of this language or not, research results indicate that they hardly knew anything about it.

It is clear that while the students expressed a positive view of gender inclusive language, they still demonstrated significant hesitation in employing it, Gong (2024). However, according to Bosch (2021), we often speak in a way that may exclude those who do not fall into the usual categories, like man and woman, without even realizing it. The total number of pupils undertaking gender transition in schools is continuously

rising, and meeting these children's needs is an issue that cannot be overlooked. Teaching professionals now have to deal with new language barriers brought about by the rise of transgender, non-binary, and other gender or sexual identity groups.

3. Research Questions

1. What is the students' attitude towards the use of gender-inclusive language in writing when they are grouped according to age, gender, academic program, and year level?
2. What is the students' knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language in writing when they are grouped according to gender, year level, and age?
3. Are there significant differences in the students' attitude towards the use of gender-inclusive language in writing when they are grouped according to age, gender, academic program, and year level?
4. Are there significant differences in the students' knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language in writing when they are grouped according to age, gender, academic program, and year level?
5. Are there significant relationships between the students' attitude and knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language in writing?

4. Research Methodology

Research Design

To examine the attitude and students of students in the university regarding the use of gender-inclusive language in academic writing, it is best that quantitative-descriptive research was applied. In this case, this method assisted in discerning the gaps within students' attitudes towards inclusive gender roles concerning the different writing tasks and their knowledge towards expressive language usage. Conclusively, a quantitative descriptive design was used to collect data regarding students' perceptions, awareness, and intent to employ gender-neutral language in academic settings (Remigio & Talosa, 2021). Furthermore correlational research was also utilized to determine if there was a significant relationship between college students' attitudes and knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language in academic writing.

Respondents

These are university students from a higher learning institution, a public state institution, which provides a variety of undergraduate programs and encourages inclusive, student-centered learning in a multicultural classroom. The participants were selected using simple random sampling to capture various gender identities, courses, and year levels. The calculated sample size was 130 students from whom usable results were extrapolated for the institution and for the results of the study.

Instruments

The primary method for data collection was a validated researcher-made survey questionnaire, administered through Google Forms, specifically designed for this study. The questionnaire captured the following:

Demographic profile. The first part of the instrument contains the information needed for age, gender, academic program, and year level of the students.

Attitude Scale: The second part of the instrument is consist of 20 test items designed for measuring agreement with statements agreeing or opposing on the use of gender-inclusive language in their academic writing.

Writing Task on the use of gender-inclusive language: The third part is a 20-item validated researcher-made writing task on the use of gender-inclusive language.

The study's instruments contain asking the right types of information while making sure the questions are specific, understandable and aligns with the research objectives. Additionally, to ensure reliable results considerations have been made, such as keeping the survey questionnaires short, straight to the point and engaging to avoid rushed answers (Market research Guy, 2017; Ikart, 2018 as cited by Ikart, 2019).

5. Data Analysis

To determine the students' attitude towards the use of gender inclusive language in writing when they are grouped according to gender, year level, and age the percentages, mean and standard deviations were used. Descriptive statistics are widely accepted for summarizing data patterns in educational and social research (Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

To determine the significant differences in the students' attitude and knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language in writing when they are grouped according to age, gender, academic program, and year level the Kruskal Wallis Test was used. This non-parametric test is suitable for attitude studies in the social sciences and education since it can be used to analyze ordinal data or when the assumptions of normalcy are not met (Field, 2021; Laerd Statistics, 2020).

To determine the significant relation between the college students' attitudes and knowledge on the use of gender-inclusive language in academic writing, Spearman's rho was used.

6. Ethical Considerations

The research observed ethical standards in conducting research. In this case, respondents were provided with informed consent as well as notice about the confidential nature of the study. They were not asked for any identifying information. It was explained to them that they reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without repercussions.

7. Results

Table 1. College Students' Attitude on the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language when grouped According to Age, Gender, Academic Program, and Year Level

AGE	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
Young	45	3.16	Positive	0.06447
Average	70	3.16	Positive	0.06995
Older	15	3.38	Highly Positive	0.11365
GENDER	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
Man	24	3.19	Positive	0.11462
Woman	95	3.20	Positive	0.05022
Prefer Not to Say	8	3.21	Positive	0.24978
Others	2	2.25	Negative	0.25
Non-Binary	1	Constant	Constant	Constant
ACADEMIC PROGRAM	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
Education	78	3.2667	Highly Positive	0.05562
BPED	9	2.85	Positive	0.23467
BSHM	33	3.097	Positive	0.08613
BSIT	10	3.185	Positive	0.185
YEAR LEVEL	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
First Year	51	3.1353	Positive	0.06562
Second Year	35	3.3157	Highly Positive	0.05829
Third Year	41	3.1793	Positive	0.10462
Fourth Year	3	2.7333	Positive	0.39405

Note: 3.26-4.00 "Highly Positive", 2.51-3.25 "Positive", 1.76-2.50 "Negative", 1.00-1.75 "Highly Negative"

The data indicate that respondents from all age groups have a generally positive perception of gender-inclusive language, with the older group expressing the most positivity ($M=3.38$). At the same time, both the young and average-aged groups demonstrated a consistent level of positivity, as evidenced by the shared mean score ($M=3.16$). On the basis of gender, responses were positive across the majority of identities, apart from "Others" ($M=2.25$), which exhibited a negative attitude. Overall, attitude by academic program was also mostly positive, with the exception of Education majors who had a disproportionately higher attitude ($M=3.27$) than BPED, BSHM, and BSIT. In particular, Second Year students appeared to be more highly positive ($M=3.32$) among other levels, although all indicated positive attitudes. These findings reveal that, while the general attitude is positive, older students and those in education programs appear to accept gender-inclusive language in writing with more enthusiasm.

Table 2. College Students' Knowledge on the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language when grouped According to Age, Gender, Academic Program, and Year Level

AGE	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
Young	45	13.28	Knowledgeable	0.55105
Average	70	14.44	Knowledgeable	0.37224
Older	15	14.53	Knowledgeable	0.66093
GENDER	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
Man	24	13.45	Knowledgeable	0.83618
Woman	95	14.18	Knowledgeable	0.32003
Non-Binary	1	Constant		Constant
Prefer Not to Say	8	14.37	Knowledgeable	0.99888
Others	2	13.0	Knowledgeable	4.0
ACADEMIC PROGRAM	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
Education	78	15.15	Knowledgeable	0.29429
BPED	9	12.11	Knowledgeable	1.48553
BSHM	33	11.96	Knowledgeable	0.57978
BSIT	10	14.1	Knowledgeable	1.03763
YEAR LEVEL	N	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Error
First Year	51	12.78	Knowledgeable	0.51435
Second Year	35	14.17	Knowledgeable	0.53685
Third Year	41	15.73	Knowledgeable	0.30847
Fourth Year	3	11.33	Knowledgeable	1.20185

All demographic groups of students, regardless of age category, were found to have obtained knowledge regarding gender-inclusive language. The older age group outperformed in scoring above the young group ($M=14.53$) along with the average-aged and young group ($M=14.44$) and average-aged group ($M=14.44$). On the basis of gender, all groups displayed knowledge ability with women ($M=14.18$) and those selecting 'prefer not to say' ($M=14.37$) outperforming slightly.

Table 3. Significant Differences in Attitude on the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language Based on Grouping Variables (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

	Category	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis	Df	Sig (2-tailed)
Age	Young	3.16	5.756	2	.056
	Average	3.16			
	Older	3.38			
Gender	Man	3.19	5.285	4	.259
	Woman	3.20			
	Non-Binary	Constant			
	Prefer Not to Say	3.21			
	Others	2.25			
	Education	3.26			
Academic Program	BPED	2.85	7.999	3	.046
	BSHM	3.09			
	BSIT	3.18			
	First Year	3.13			
Year Level	Second Year	3.31	5.725	3	.126

Third Year	3.17
Fourth Year	2.73

The significance level is .050.

Statistical analysis indicates that academic program was the only grouping that had a marked difference in attitudes regarding the use of gender-inclusive language ($H=7.999$, $p=.046$). In other words, students' academic major impacts their attitudes with those from Education programs possessing more favourable attitudes. There were no noteworthy differences for other factors such as gender, year level, or age which means that attitudes towards gender-inclusive language are largely consistent across those demographics except for the educational background.

Table 4. Significant Differences in Knowledge on the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language Based on Grouping Variables (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

	Category	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis	Df	Sig (2-tailed)
Age	Young	13.28	2.677	2	.262
	Average	14.44			
	Older	14.53			
	Man	13.45			
Gender	Woman	14.18	.949	4	.917
	Non-Binary	Constant			
	Prefer Not to Say	14.37			
	Others	13.0			
Academic Program	Education	15.15	26.711	3	.000
	BPEd	12.11			
	BSHM	11.96			
	BSIT	14.1			
Year Level	First Year	12.78	20.510	3	.000
	Second Year	14.17			
	Third Year	15.73			
	Fourth Year	11.33			

There were significant differences in knowledge scores when grouped by academic program ($H=26.711$, $p=.000$) and year level ($H=20.510$, $p=.000$). This suggests that a student's field of study, and their academic standing directly impacts their knowledge of gender-inclusive language. No differences in knowledge were found related to gender ($p=.917$) or age ($p=.262$), which suggests that these categories hold a similar level of understanding about gender-inclusive language. This highlights the importance of academic content and experience in shaping students' knowledge levels.

Table 5. Relationship Between Attitude and Knowledge (Spearman's rho)

		Attitude on Gender-Inclusive Language	Knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language
Spearman's rho	Attitude on Gender-Inclusive Language	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.201
	Knowledge towards the use of gender-inclusive language	Correlation Coefficient	.201
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.022

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Students' attitudes and knowledge towards gender inclusive language tended to influence each other in a moderately positive manner, indicated by Spearman's rho of .201 and p-value of .022, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This implies students who utilize gender inclusive language tend to have more favorable attitudes towards it. Even if the correlation is weak, it still supports that knowledge is likely to influence perception and acceptance of gender inclusivity.

8. Discussion and/or Conclusion

The outcomes of the study show that in this context, learners have a favorable attitude towards gender-inclusive language in writing and are generally knowledgeable about it. When respondents are divided by age, gender, academic program, and year level, most subgroups tend to fall into the "positive" and "knowledgeable" areas of the data matrix.

Older respondents, those in the second and third years showed more favorable attitudes and higher knowledge scores. This suggests that greater social interaction and academic exposure help in molding inclusive attitudes. In particular, education students emerged as the most positive, with the highest knowledge scores-likely due to the explicit focus on gender sensitivity in teacher training programs, a finding supported by Remigio and Talosa (2021), who found strong positive attitudes among teacher education students towards gender-inclusive language.

Significant differences in attitudes were found across academic modules (Kruskal-Wallis test, $p = .046$), indicating that a student's academic background influences their perspectives on inclusive language. This points to the potential value of integrating inclusive language instruction more holistically across disciplines. Though differences in attitude by gender, age, and year level were not statistically significant, trends suggest older and more advanced students viewed the issue more favorably, while respondents who identified as "Others" scored lower-possibly due to the small sample size.

For knowledge, important differences were clear according to educational program and year level ($p = .000$ for both), signaling how these considerations influence students' grasp. Education and third-year students had the highest levels of knowledge; however, BSHM and BPED students as well as first and fourth-year students scored lower which suggests these groups require more precise teaching.

Lastly, statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .201$, $p = .022$) was found between attitudes and knowledge. This implies that while greater knowledge may promote more favorable attitudes, other personal and social factors likely play a substantial role. Nevertheless, educational efforts aimed at improving knowledge are likely to foster more inclusive attitudes.

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