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"I could say it's not in the curriculum, which is really true"

Investigating ELT Teachers' Perspectives on Teaching Gender in Germany

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Abstract: Within the context of schooling as a central institution of gender socialization, the English language classroom presents a critical opportunity for addressing and challenging narrow conceptions of gender. While curricular updates in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Germany, have codified gender as a topic within the core curricula for English, teachers, as the central actors in the implementation of teaching practice, and their perspectives on gender teaching remain underexplored. This study therefore investigates ELT teachers' perspectives on gender teaching. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study comprises semi-structured interviews with three ELT teachers at a secondary school in North-Rhine Westphalia that were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. All participants stressed the importance of gender teaching in ELT, yet showed varying perspectives on gender and their role in teaching gender. The participants also showed different levels of critical reflection of teaching materials, ranging from the supplementation of one-sided gender representations to the uncritical use of textbooks. The participants all acknowledged the importance of gender teaching in the English language classroom but showed varying perspectives on their own role within gender teaching. The findings of the study point to a need for increased attention to in-service teacher support and the need for fostering a critical consciousness regarding the use of teaching materials.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; gender; teacher perspectives; in-service teachers; expert interviews; qualitative content analysis

1 Introduction

Gender is a ubiquitous part of our social life; gender as a societal category is heavily determined by societal norm construction and reproduction and is thus deeply socio-political. This becomes evident when looking at the data from the 2015 study conducted by the Deutsche Jugendinstitut in connection with Krell and Oldemeier (2015) that investigated the life situations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* as well as non-binary youths and young adults in Germany. The study showed a significant discrepancy between the age of the participants' inner and outer coming out, both in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity. Seeking to explain this striking finding, one must inevitably consider the additional finding that LGBTQI* youths faced fears of disapproval within their core social groups of family and friends, but also within school contexts, anticipating rejection, belittlement and verbal abuse (Krell & Oldemeier, 2015, p. 13).

While LGBTQI* students fear negative reactions within school contexts, schooling further plays a central role in the reproduction of gender. Rieske (2011) finds that girls and boys show a rather similar distribution of interests and competences when they enter kindergarten (p. 15) but develop a vastly different and gender-dichotomized distribution of interests and competences until the end of secondary school (p. 34). The construction of gender within school settings thus bears a central relevance to explaining this development as gender construction and the normalization of gender relations take place within interaction (Budde, 2006, p. 45) and students are subjected to a plethora of different processes of doing gender within school contexts (Budde, 2006, p. 48). Additionally, the dramatization of gender within schools often involves reference to a gender dichotomy (Budde, 2006, p. 49; Schildhauer, 2023, pp. 70–72), thereby either reinforcing established gender stereotypes or even introducing them (Budde, 2006, pp. 50–51).

These findings clearly illustrate the challenge of accounting for gender within school contexts: First, educational practice must focus on challenging narrow conceptions of gender-related identities in order to create a welcoming atmosphere for students of non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities (see also the contribution of Schillings, pp. 230–256 in this issue), and second, educational practice must facilitate self-reflection on the (re-)production of gender stereotypes in school contexts and in explicitly gender-focused teaching. This task is not just relevant to the institutional setting of the school in general, but also implies the need for informed teaching practice. Here, the English language classroom provides a central opportunity to facilitate gender reflection processes (König, 2018; König et al., 2015, 2016; Merse, 2021; Volkmann, 2007) as teaching gender is connected to inter- and transcultural learning, an orientation to students' life realities, the development of discursive abilities, and teaching literature.

While the topic of gender has only recently been added to the North-Rhine Westphalian curricula for English Language Teaching, the theoretical disciplines of Gender Studies and Queer Studies, and more recently English Language Education research provide a benchmark on what critically informed gender teaching practice may look like. Despite the expansion of understanding of gender-related teaching, gender is nevertheless an underrepresented topic and consideration within ELT teaching practice (Merse, 2021). With the inclusion of gender into the curricula, ELT in North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) has undoubtedly taken an important step towards integrating gender into the English language classroom; however, the implementation of gender teaching ultimately lies within the hands of the teachers. The nature of the

implementation of gender-related topics in ELT is thus contingent on teachers' subjective understandings, values, perceptions and beliefs regarding gender and gender teaching and their individual conception of teaching practice.

This paper therefore investigates teachers' perspectives on teaching gender within ELT in order to understand their underlying subjective orientations and to highlight their voice as main actors in shaping gender discourse in the classroom. The study therefore focussed on qualitative ethnographic research by conducting qualitative interviews with English teachers at a secondary school in NRW, Germany, to explore the central research question:

How do teachers in Germany think, they deal with the topic of gender in English Language Teaching?

To this end, the paper will first provide an overview of relevant theoretical understandings and empirical research within the field of gender teaching in ELT. This is followed by a brief explication of the research methodology, the method of data collection and data analysis. The findings of the interview study will then be presented and discussed.

2 Gender in education and ELT

2.1 Gender conceptions in queer and gender studies

As the basis for the investigation of teacher perspectives on gender, some key understandings of the concept need to be briefly explicated. Gender as a category of social difference became a prominent aspect of the feminist movements of the 1960s (Degele, 2008, p. 10). These feminist movements led to the development of both Gender Studies and Queer Studies as independent schools of thought that, however, are closely related as they both deal with the destabilisation of social, cultural, and political structures that determine the dominant cultural consensus of what men and women are or should be (Degele, 2008, pp. 12–13) as well as the nature of the "relationship between variation and inequality, so between difference and hierarchy" (Degele, 2008, p. 13). The difference between these schools of thought lies in the nature of their lens: Gender Studies scrutinizes the impact of gender roles and identities in relation to societal structures. Queer Studies, in contrast, seeks to challenge and deconstruct normative frameworks of gender and sexuality, while criticizing binary categorizations and stressing fluidity. Despite this differentiation, both Gender Studies and Queer Studies build on three fundamental theoretical perspectives as Degele (2008) describes: gender as a social construct, the construction of gender through interaction, and the reproduction of gender

as a cultural category through discourse. This paper will draw on these theoretical perspectives to outline different dimensions of gender (Degele, 2008, pp. 16–19).

The theoretical perspective of "structure-oriented social criticism"[1] identifies gender as a central marker of difference within structures of inequality and is inherently interested in the critique and dismantling of these inequal structures; however, the focus lies on the oppression of women (Degele, 2008, pp. 16–17; König, 2018, pp. 89–90). This theoretical perspective aims to criticize societal inequality by differentiating between gender and sex. König (2018) follows Simone de Beauvoir and defines sex as the "biological, anatomic gender" (p. 89)[2] while gender is tied much more closely to interaction, i.e. "social gender" (p. 89)[3] that is created by reference to "societal expectations and references" (p. 89)[4]. Gender thus becomes a more transient concept that is constructed in interaction rather than being a fixed concept.

The second theoretical perspective of "interactionist constructivism"[5] highlights the social construction of gender by *doing* gender (König, 2018; see West & Zimmermann, 1987). The notion of *doing* gender denotes that societal expectations and references associated with gender need to be constructed within specific "social situations and stagings" (König, 2018, p. 103)[6]. Gender is thus "not an essential individual characteristic [but rather] something that is constantly done in interaction with others" (p. 104)[7]. Furthermore, the

[1] Own translation of the original German term "strukturorientierte Gesellschaftskritik" (König, 2018, p. 89).

[2] Own translation of the original German description "biologisches, anatomisches Geschlecht" (König, 2018, p. 89).

[3] Own translation of the original German description "soziales Geschlecht" (König, 2018, p. 89).

[4] Own translation of the original German description "gesellschaftliche Erwartungen und Zuschreibungen" (König, 2018, p. 89).

[5] Own translation of the original German term "interaktionistischer Konstruktivismus" (König, 2018, p. 103).

[6] Own translation of the original German description "spezifische soziale Situationen und Inszenierungen" (König, 2018, p. 103).

[7] Own translation of the original German description "nicht als essentielle individuelle Eigenschaft beschrieben, sondern als etwas, das ständig und in Interaktionen mit anderen getan wird" (König, 2018, p. 104).

constant production and reception of gender makes gender a fundamental social category that is ascribed to individuals (König, 2018, p. 105) and thus leads to the creation of gender roles that underlie the expectations within social situations (König, 2018, p. 105).

Lastly, the "discourse-theoretical deconstructivism"[8] focuses on the entanglement of gender, language, and discourse (König, 2018, p. 113). Here, gender constitutes a governing principle within processes of subjectivization and associated disenfranchisement which must be criticized (Degele, 2008, pp. 18–19; König, 2018, pp. 112–113).

2.2 Gender in educational contexts

These theoretical understandings are relevant for gender within educational contexts in general, but also specifically for ELT. Educational contexts slot into a larger list of relevant contexts for the formation of gender conception for children and adolescents, wherein school, in particular, constitutes a central space of socialisation in children's formative years as they spend a significant time within educational contexts (Flaake, 2006, p. 29). König et al. (2016, p. 20) further identify the centrality of this period for the development of gender conceptions as youths develop gender and sexual identities. The empirical findings on gender-related socialisation and educational contexts as identified by Rieske (2011) have already been explicated, but König et al. (2016) go further and frame school as "both an agent of socialisation and an agent of education" (p. 20). Schooling must therefore also deal (self-)reflectively with the topic of gender so that a "focus on one-sided perspectives"[9] (Flaake, 2006, p. 28) through the reproduction of gender stereotypes and expectations does not occur.

2.3 ELT and gender reflection

Here, ELT provides a unique opportunity to facilitate gender education. König et al. (2015, pp. 3–4) argue that the development of a basic ethical understanding that is characterized by respect, justice, tolerance, and the striving towards gender equity is an essential goal of institutionalized schooling in

[8] Own translation of the original German term "diskurstheoretischer Dekonstuktivismus" (König, 2018, p. 113).

[9] Own translation of the original German term "Vereinseitigung der Perspektiven" (Flaake, 2006, p 28).

Germany. At the same time, the topic of gender is often highly politicized, meaning that certain terms, ideas or topics are emotionally or normatively charged within a certain language context and divergence from hegemonic gender norms may therefore lead to denigration (König et al., 2015, p. 4). The immanently personal nature of gender can create a fear of contact or defensive attitudes because of the associated denigration based on predominant gender norms of a cultural context (König et al., 2015, p. 4). In this context, ELT can act as a third space outside of one's own normatively charged cultural sphere by transferring gender negotiation processes into a foreign language context. These gender negotiation processes within a different cultural context can further be tied to the students' own personal experiences as gender bears a central relevance to the living reality of students (König et al., 2015, p. 4). ELT practice with a focus on gender can further contribute to the development of a "specific gender-discourse competence"[10] (König et al., 2015, p. 5), that provides students with both the fundamental vocabulary and the communicative competence to deal with practices of gender enactment, gender norms and stereotypes, and social mechanisms (König et al., 2015, p. 5). Additionally, explicitly focusing on the connection of language and gender allows students "to identify the societal relevance and impact of language" (König et al., 2015, p. 5)[11] to foster the students' language awareness.

Teaching practice is therefore relevant to gender reflection as teachers are central actors not just for the reproduction of gender stereotypes but also for equipping students with a critical lens on gender stereotypes and for the creation of positive attitudes towards diverse gender identities. Looking at the introductory findings of Krell and Oldemeier (2015, p. 31) again, they propose taking certain steps to create a more inclusive school space by making realistic role models or role expectations visible, including diverse representations of gender identity and sexual orientation within teaching materials, and creating a hospitable environment for LGBTQI* students. Moreover, teachers are central players in influencing gender attitudes within their schools as these attitudes are determined by the *Schulkultur*, which can be influenced by individual teachers (Budde, 2006, p. 51). Teachers are further central actors as the facilitation of gender reflection requires adequate lesson planning. Regarding the use of materials, König (2018, p. 76) and Alter et al.

[10] Own translation of the original German term "spezifische Genderdiskursfähigkeit".

[11] Own translation of the German description "sich der gesellschaftlichen Bedeutung und Wirkung von Sprache bewusst zu werden" (König et al., 2015, p. 5).

(2021) find that current schoolbooks display a lack of diverse representations. In general, the inclusion of gender into German school curricula has not been mirrored by teaching materials (König, 2018, p. 75). König (2018, p. 161), however, identifies literary texts as a valid alternative to the use of schoolbooks, as they find that all literary texts can be used for teaching about gender. Additionally, teachers can create better learning opportunities by working with students' preconceptions and experiences as a starting point (Timmermanns, 2008, p. 64) while also seeking to expand students' initial understanding of gender to include both identity and attraction (Timmermanns, 2008, p. 65). This would also entail to refrain from categorical sanctioning of negative statements, such as the rejection of topics that relate to homosexuality and instead using these as an impetus for critical reflection and discussion of gender-related issues (Timmermanns, 2008, p. 63).

These requirements on teaching practice and the central role of teachers point to the need for adequate teacher training for positive gender teaching practices. In order to teach about gender and to enable gender reflection, teachers themselves need to be self-reflective, open to re-evaluating their own conceptions of what is normal and ready to face their fears and resistances regarding gender teaching (König et al., 2015, p. 7). Additionally, teachers often draw on fossilized subjective theories when acting in stress situations, so it is important teachers have an objectified knowledge about gender to be able to navigate spontaneous classroom discourses on gender (Rendtorff, 2015, pp. 43–44). This objectified knowledge is further important as recent trends within school gender equality discourses point to anti-feminist positions taking hold (Rendtorff, 2015, p. 41). Gender equality now often revolves around male perspectives and is seen as a threat to boys' learning processes at school (Rendtorff, 2015, p. 41). Teachers therefore need to be able to push back against such reactionary attitudes (Rendtorff, 2015, p. 41).

2.4 Existing research on teachers' perspectives on gender in ELT

Looking at existing research on teachers' perspectives on gender within ELT in Germany, it seems that teachers have so far been underexamined. While German ELT research has given rise to different conceptions of how gender could be integrated into the classroom, Carolyn Blume (2021) notes that

> "it appears that incorporating issues of gender remains a novelty in German teacher education, with an even greater paucity of empirical studies regarding the impact at either the teacher preparation or classroom level" (p. 194).

Among the brevity of research in Germany, a recent action research study by Granger and Gerlach (2024) investigated the introduction of feminist issues into the ELT classroom and concluded that a "majority of learners welcome an exploration of feminist matters in the ELT classrooms" (p. 954). While this would point to an openness and interest of the students, the question remains of how teachers view the inclusion of issues of gender or feminism, and how their attitudes and knowledges shape their understandings of their gender teaching.

Given the identified paucity of empirical investigation of teachers' perspectives on their practice, it is fruitful to turn to research outside of the German ELT context where scholars have investigated the attitudes of pre-service ELT teachers, teachers of ELT at higher education institutions, and in-service ELT teachers' perspectives on gender teaching. Banegas et al. (2020) conducted a study within teacher education in Argentina that points to a connection between the inclusion of gender teaching approaches in teacher education and student-teachers seeing the inclusion of gender issues as important and as an issue of social justice that is connected to citizenship.

Looking at in-service teachers, Tarrayo and colleagues (2021) conducted an interview study with higher education instructors in the Philippines on the incorporation of gender perspectives into ELT practice. The study found that higher education instructors connect the inclusion of gender perspectives into ELT to critical thinking skills, the creation of "an inclusive and supportive learning environment" (Tarrayo et al., 2021, p. 1634) and the formation of critical language awareness, while viewing student rejection of the topic, the increased effort needed to incorporate gender perspectives into practice, curricular and resource constraints, and conservative or religious beliefs as challenges to the implementation of gender perspectives into ELT practice.

Within the Polish context, Pakuła et al. (2015) employed focus-group interviews with ELT teachers to explore teachers' perspectives regarding gender topics in ELT. The study concludes that teacher ascribe a general importance to gender issues but show varying understandings of how this should translate into teaching practice. Some teachers perceive gender stereotypes as a resource for grammar learning while other see the subversion of gender roles as beneficial to learning grammar. Similarly, some teachers see students as incapable of critical reflection and thus exclude gender topics from their teaching while other stress their students' agency in connecting to issues and challenging texts. However, all teachers see maturity as an important factor for the inclusion of gender perspectives and see gender as a topic for older

learners. All teachers perceive institutional and socio-political impediments for dealing with topics that lie outside of or challenge hegemonic norms or values.

In Thailand, Ulla and Paiz (2023) investigated ELT teachers' perspectives on queer pedagogy. The study's findings point to a feeling of lacking knowledge regarding queer pedagogy, a "lack of teaching strategies that would 'queer' [the participants'] language classrooms" (Ulla & Paiz, 2023, p. 9), and a feeling that the textbooks do not provide diverse representations. Moreover, the study also pointed to a general interest in integrating queer issues into the ELT classroom, even if the teachers do not specifically refer to their practice as queer pedagogy. It should, however, be noted that only 6 out of 23 possible participants were open to participating in the study, which could indicate more reserved attitudes among the cohort.

Finally, studies investigating teacher perspectives on gender and teaching materials, such as those by Vu and Pham (2022) and Sunderland et al. (2001), have highlighted a lack of teacher awareness regarding gender bias in textbooks. Vu and Pham find that the participants in Vietnam were oblivious to "the hidden curricula of gender" (Vu & Pham, 2022, p. 1) and were thus uncritical of gendered materials. Furthermore, Vu and Pham posit that the participants' "teaching design and interaction were found to be affected by their own bias – consciously and unconsciously" (2022, p. 1). Similarly, Sunderland and others (2001) found that the participants of the cross-national study showed a "gender blindness" (p. 252) regarding issues of gender and disregarded "traditional biases" (p. 252) within teaching materials.

These studies identify key themes in relation to teachers' understandings, values, perceptions and beliefs regarding gender teaching: Firstly, the diversity of teachers' attitudes toward gender, as seen in the studies by Pakuła et al. (2015) and Tarrayo et al. (2021), points to the need for a better understanding of how individual beliefs shape pedagogical practice as teachers may have varying views on its relevance or on suitable approaches, potentially leading to inconsistent practices across classrooms. This is especially relevant as these studies investigated non-German contexts, making it difficult to apply these findings to German ELT teachers. Moreover, while studies from the Philippines (Tarrayo et al., 2021) and Thailand (Ulla & Paiz, 2023) identify institutional and curricular constraints, such as rigid curricula, lack of resources, and teacher discomfort with gender topics, these findings may not be directly applicable to the German context as the institutional contexts vary.

3 Research methodology

Recent research has pointed to diverse understandings of gender in school contexts and has been unable to explain how these translate into ELT practice. Furthermore, international research identifies institutional and curricular influences on teachers' gender teaching in ELT, yet it remains unexplored how ELT teachers in Germany navigate these contexts. Research within the German ELT contexts has instead identified the rise of reactionary attitudes on gender equity discourses and a lagging transition towards the inclusion of gender issues within teaching materials. This led me to investigate in-service teachers' perspectives on teaching gender within ELT in order to explore how teachers understand their own practices as related to gender. This study therefore investigated the research question:

How do in-service teachers think, they deal with the topic of gender in ELT?

To investigate this research question, the study employed qualitative interviews as the main data collection method. This method seemed particularly fitting to the study's research question as "practitioners often have an extensive implicit knowledge about their practices with specific issues or target groups, which can be made explicit" (Flick, 2018, p. 206). The qualitative interview involves open-ended "theory-driven, hypothesis-directed questions" (Flick, 2018, p. 227) that a participant "[may answer] on the basis of the knowledge that [they have] immediately at hand" (Flick, 2018, p. 227) and thus specifically allows "for reconstructing subjective theories" (Flick, 2018, p. 226).

The interviews were conducted[12] at a secondary school in NRW, Germany. Gaining access to the field did not constitute a challenge for me as the research project was situated within the context of the mandatory school placement within the teacher education framework of NRW, the *Praxissemester*. The participants were chosen, firstly, based on their willingness to discuss the politicized topic of gender, and secondly, to represent the English department's demographic constitution in terms of age distribution and perceived gender. I initially perceived the school culture to be rather conservative and anticipated possible intervention by the school administration or difficulty finding participants willing to share their ideas on the topic of gender within

[12] The interviews were conducted in English. However, the participants were instructed that they could always switch to German or any other languages that they spoke to express their thoughts.

their English teaching. Despite these concerns, the English teachers I came into contact with at the school were willing to take part in the interviews and did not voice any reservations regarding the topic. Nonetheless, I judged the participants' willingness to talk about the topic of gender to be related to the relationship I had built with them as I had already accompanied each of the participants several times and therefore refrained from asking teachers that I had not come into direct contact with to partake in the interviews.

Participant Dirk[13] was the youngest and only male participant and stated that they had spent about 10 years at the school after also completing their teacher training there. Participant Sandra was approaching the last third of their teaching career and Participant Claudia stated that they only had two years remaining until their retirement. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2023.

The data collected within the interviews was transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA constitutes a "highly systematic" (Schreier, 2014, p. 172) qualitative-interpretative approach to text analysis that seeks to make implicit meaning constructions explicit (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, p. 633). To achieve this, QCA follows a fixed procedure of assigning individual passages to categories and thus building a coding frame. The process of building a coding frame is "strictly governed by rules" (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, p. 633)[14] and requires, firstly, that main categories relate only to one element of meaning, secondly, that main categories are mutually exclusive, and lastly, that the analysis confronts all relevant aspects of meaning (Schreier, 2014, p. 175). The categorization and building of the coding frame can be both "concept-driven and data-driven" (Schreier, 2014, p. 171). For the analysis of the interviews, this study used QCA to build a coding frame on the basis of categories and sub-categories developed both deductively from the theoretical and empirical literature, and inductively from the data generated by the interviews. On the basis of this reduction of material, the individual passages are interpreted through paraphrasing and generalisation, contextualisation, and the application of theory-derived concepts to the data (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, pp. 637–638).

[13] The names of all participants were anonymized for this article.

[14] Own translation of the original German description "streng regelgeleitet" (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, p. 633).

4 Results

The interviews showed that the participants had varying understandings of the definition of gender, its relevance for their teaching practice and its actual implementation in the classroom. Based on the analysis of the interview data, a coding frame was created that aligns with the following reduced overview.

Table 1: Reduced Coding Frame

Main Code	*Categories*
Defining gender	Gender as 'biologically given to people' Gender as 'how they want to live' Personal distance to gender biases
Teaching about gender	'It's not in the curriculum' Primacy of the textbook Trying to have one political item that is also connected to women 'Textbooks tend to be more open'
Attitudes towards teaching about gender	Gender as a topic in society 'Students that are part of that community' 'You just speak about people' Creating diversity of thought 'It is the most personal thing that we could ever teach'
Challenges	Personal attitudes Controversial discussions Staying up to date
Teacher training	'It was simply not there on a daily basis' Including gender in future teacher training

4.1 Theme I: Defining gender

During the interviews, the participants showed varying perspectives on gender, ranging from a reduction to only the biological dimension of gender to seeing gender as a social concept connected with social expectations. When asked how they would define gender, Claudia stated that for them gender is *"in the first place, something biologically given to people"* (P1: 62). Here, Claudia clearly references the primacy of the biological aspect of gender, but also alludes to the possibility of gender being different from biological sex. Additionally, Claudia states that *"I have students of both sexes, plus, plus, plus, plus"* (P1: 40), *"we have cases here at school that students of several*

ages, different ages, can't cope with their biological gender" (P1: 46–47) and that *"they were planning to change their gender, their sex"* (P1: 52–53) and thus also appears to reference the social construction of gender in which other gender identities are possible while simultaneously distancing themselves from this idea. Here, Claudia seems to further centre a biological essentialist perspective that sees male and female as the standard, by distancing themselves from the constructivist ideas of the social embeddedness of gender.

Sandra's definition of gender also involves reference to the biological interpretation of gender, but they use this to define gender more broadly:

> *It is not just sex. […] [I]t has got to do with many aspects connected to orientation, living together in terms of being or feeling more connected or totally connected or whatever to a specific sex.* (P2: 65–70)

Here, Sandra connects gender to *"living something freely"* (P2: 58), thereby pointing to a gender definition that sees gender as something performative and thus referencing the idea of gender expression. Sandra further references both the idea of sexual orientation and gender identity as different concepts that are, however, also included in their understanding of gender (P2: 52–53, 55).

Dirk also addresses the biological interpretation of gender while including various other elements within their definition as well. During the interview, Dirk was asked about their opinion regarding the inclusion of gender into the English curricula and responded with a counter question: *"Let me ask what is meant by gender in this case. So just the fact that there are different types of gender and that gender as a topic is more relevant or is it just about the sex?"* (P3: 34–35). In their question it becomes apparent that Dirk differentiates between the concepts of sex and gender. Dirk also seems to point to the existence of different gender identities that lie outside of the traditional gender dichotomy by referencing *"a different perspective of somebody else if it is the other sex or if it is maybe somebody with a totally different perspective on that"* (P3: 42–43). Dirk thus points to the entanglement of the biological dimension of sex and the social dimension of gender while using "perspectives" to reference diverse gender identities. Within the interview, Dirk additionally references the idea that gender is performative by connecting gender identity to peoples' behaviour (P3: 51–53) and noting that gender is about *"how they want others to see themselves and how they want to live"* (P3: 54). Dirk thus shows an understanding of gender that aligns closely to constructivist ideas of gender performance (König, 2018, pp. 103–105).

Claudia and Sandra also note that certain expectations are based on gender. While Sandra notes the limiting effect that gender expectations and bias may have on adolescents, Claudia reflects on bias within her own biography. During the interview, Claudia notes that *"more than 40 years ago, the plans were laid out quite determined by parents and teachers"* (P1: 11–12) and adds that *"it was obligatory for me to start English"* (P1: 13). Claudia does, however, not connect their own experience explicitly to gendered expectations. When faced with a textual prompt[15], Claudia, however, notes the connection of societal expectations and gender:

> *Since this definition goes beyond the biological dimension, I could agree, if I understand it correctly, that there is a cultural and social dimension and that individuals are faced with social expectations and norms and stereotypes based on their gender. Absolutely. How could I disagree coming from the 1960s, being educated in the 60s and 70s? Education and social expectations were, I might even say, exclusively based on gender. Everything beyond these gender expectations was considered unnormal.* (P1: 65–71)

Claudia additionally also does not see a connection between the societal expectations and norms on gender and their own teaching practice. When asked how they see gender represented in their teaching, Claudia states, *"I think it doesn't play a role in my teaching"* (P1: 74). However, later in the interview, Claudia reflects on their own gender bias and their teaching:

> *I know that there is or there are moments when, and also this bias thing, there are moments when giving marks for any kind of, I don't know, test, exam or whatever, there are moments where I would at least say that my bias, how could I say that I'm not biased, is confirmed when I see the results of test papers in English. Particularly, when I see that the girls are better in English than the boys. Which I think is scientifically confirmed and proven, but I see that there is a lot of truth in that here in my (pause). I see that every day. I've just corrected my last class test and again the girls are better than the boys. I think that. I cannot say that this has nothing to do with being biased.* (P1: 160–168)

Claudia here notes that in her experiences, girls perform better in English exam formats than boys and states that they believe this to be scientifically proven. However, Claudia believes that this could be attributed, at least in part, to their own gender bias. This would point towards Claudia's perspective

[15] The prompt involved a short text that provided a constructivist definition of gender and referenced that stereotypes and social expectations can be based on gender.

shifting throughout the interview, at first not connecting gender to the structural impediments in their own biography and the hinderance to their own agency in determining their future, then noting the importance of gender as a social category during their youth but rejecting the idea that gender bears a relevance to their own teaching, to finally conclude that the divergence in test scores between girls and boys could be a result of their own bias. This raises the question in what way the rejection of social gender and the distancing from non-hegemonic gender identities are part of their own interactionist identity construction or a result of the politicization of gender.

4.2 Theme II: Teaching about gender

In addition to varying understandings of gender, the participants also showed varying perspectives on the implementation of gender teaching. During the interview, Claudia stated that they had not dealt with gender in their teaching, citing their belief that the curriculum does not necessitate the inclusion of gender within ELT: *"I haven't done this. It has not been a topic in my lessons so far. Of course, as an excuse I could say it's not in the curriculum, which is really true"* (P1: 81–82). In contrast, Dirk seems unfamiliar with the wording of the curriculum regarding gender (P3: 34) but the stated goals for their teaching align with the requirements of the curriculum, among which Dirk references teaching focuses of *"rethinking"* (P3: 91) and of facilitating discussions about stereotypes (P3: 91–93). Similarly, Sandra does not directly refer to the curriculum but connects their teaching to *"maintaining a different way of thinking"* (P2: 45), *"critical reflection"* (P2: 190), and *"reflecting [students'] ways or some peoples' ways and maybe also their ways of thinking"* (P2: 191–192). These goals closely align with the exact wording used in the Kernlehrplan NRW (MSW NRW, 2014, p. 41). In summary, while Claudia denied that teaching gender is a curricular requirement, Dirk shows an uncertainty about the role or interpretation of gender within the curriculum and Sandra states teaching goals that align with curricular requirements but without reference to the curriculum. The participants' understanding of the curricular requirements would point to a partial irrelevance of the curriculum to their teaching practice.

Regarding their choice of materials to teach gender, the participants all note that the textbook is of central relevance for their teaching. For Claudia, their teaching is centred around existing materials and the textbook. When asked about the role of gender in their English teaching, they seem to cite this as the reason why gender bears no relevance within their teaching practice: *"I try to teach in accordance with my materials, with our schoolbooks, which still only*

make differences between two sexes and two genders" (P1: 75–76). While Claudia states that gender plays no role within their teaching, they do not reflect on this gendered representation within the textbook and instead seem to see it as the standard. Dirk seems to show a similar approach to teaching materials and states that their material choices revolve around the book and existing materials that they have: *"If I'm pleased with the material I have, then I mean, why not? It's usable. You have somebody that thought about putting it into a book, so I believe it is usable."* (P3: 129–132) The choice of material does not seem to include the critical reflection of the material for Dirk; instead they view materials as usable as they were specifically designed by a schoolbook publisher for the purpose of being used within the English language classroom and are thus viable to be used. Dirk also describes a feeling of being *"bound to a textbook"* (P3: 57) that could suggest that institutional factors may have an effect on the role of the textbook in teachers' material choices.

Sandra takes a more critical perspective on the textbook and states that they look to add different perspectives to existing materials:

> *And if I do so, maybe that's a connection now to where gender sometimes comes in, for example, if you work on the American Dream, it's basically men's speeches about the world and what it was like or is like going back to the past. If you have a Kennedy speech, maybe you have a Barack Obama speech and somewhat in between you have a whatever speech, Bush or Trump or whoever. And then of course I also try to have one political item that's also connected to women. I for example chose Obama, Michelle Obama talking to students, giving a speech as one example.* (P2: 150–156)

Sandra notes that some materials may be problematic from a gender perspective as they involve only male perspectives. Sandra thus seeks to use additional materials so that at least one female perspective is dealt with. Sandra's statements point to the primacy of a traditional gender dichotomy as a standard upon which gender teaching is oriented and Sandra does not explicitly mention that they would also seek to include diverse gender identities within their material. The sentiment of a lack of diverse representations within English textbooks is also shared by Claudia, who states that the textbooks *"still make differences only between two sexes and two gender"* (P1: 76–77). Yet the teachers seem to show two differing approaches to gendered representations within the textbook: Firstly, an approach of gender-blindness (cf. Sunderland et al., 2001) in which the teachers take gendered representation within the material as given, and secondly, an approach of critical questioning and modification in which existing material is supported with additional materials to counteract biases in representation.

Sandra, however, also states that they have perceived changes in the textbooks' gender representations. They believe that the textbook in general *"tends to be more open or opening up in some ways"* (P2: 86), stating two different perceived changes. Firstly, while Sandra notes the necessity to add female perspectives to male-dominated textbook materials, they also note that more female perspectives are being included (P2: 159–160). Secondly, Sandra also believes that the representation of *"gender-specific or […] sex-specific items"* within the textbook is changing, referencing that gender roles are now sometimes inverted (P2: 89–97) and, thus, differ from an orthodox distribution of skills and interests in favour of more egalitarian ascriptions.

4.3 Theme III: Attitudes towards teaching about gender

The attitudes shown by the participants vary to some degree; however, all participants see teaching gender as important while showing different reasoning for this sentiment. Claudia states that they have *"slowly become aware of the fact that [gender] is a topic in our society and also in this microcosm of this school"* (P1: 37–38) and from this rising relevance to the student body, Claudia seems to derive the need for teachers at the school to be open to the topic of gender. Dirk similarly appears to regard gender as an important issue because they state that *"at our school, we have a handful of students that are part of that community because they are affected by thoughts about gender"* (P3: 157–159). Dirk thus derives the need for dealing with gender from the personal relevance of gender to the students at their school. Additionally, Claudia also references the personal nature of gender as a reason for its importance and they state that

> *school is a microcosm which is so important for these, for the kids from their younger ages until they are teenagers or adolescents. So, in this very important time of growing up, school has to do something with this* (P1: 104–106).

Here, Claudia notes the importance of the *"microcosm"* of the school for students. This could be interpreted as a consciousness of the importance of school as an "agent of socialisation" (König et al., 2016, p. 20) and the central role of school within children's and adolescents' formative years (Flaake, 2006, p. 29). However, Claudia does not explicitly connect this to gender. Claudia further seems to reference a shift within political discourse that has resulted in an increased political presence of gender-related topics, from which Claudia seems to derive an importance of teaching gender.

Sandra sees teaching about gender as *"an important step forward to really maintain a different way of thinking"* (P2: 45). Gender teaching is thus beneficial to diversity of thought and possibly the acceptance of different perspectives and identities. Sandra seems to also see gender teaching as a possible method of overcoming gender as a category of difference: *"I think one day, one shouldn't talk about gender and gendering and that it is no longer really necessary. You just speak about people"* (P2: 73–75). Sandra's perspective on the importance of gender teaching could thus be interpreted as seeing gender as a tool to create an inclusive space in which a variety of ideas and identities are viable and in which gender is ultimately not used as a marker of social difference. Sandra further states that they are sometimes confronted with *"anachronistic points of view"* (P2: 131). These statements could point towards a conception of positive societal development in regard to gender and could show that they regard teaching gender as part of and contribution to a larger societal development that allows for the empowerment of women and LGBTQI* individuals. Considering Sandra's perspective of possibly seeing gender teaching as a method of empowerment, the importance of teaching gender for Sandra could thus be derived from its contribution to the discursive battle with the goal of shifting the discourse. Yet, while Sandra stresses the importance of gender teaching for the empowerment of women, they also mirror one of the anti-feminist positions identified by Rendtorff (2015, p. 40) as they state that they believe that today girls are sometimes afforded more chances than boys (P2: 116–118).

Dirk's perspective goes into a similar direction as they believe teaching about gender should work towards creating acceptance of difference and noting the curricular anchoring of gender as positive because, as they state, *"you are forced to take in a different perspective"* (P3: 39–40). Here, Dirk's statement has some similarity with Sandra's idea of creating a diversity of thought.

Despite all participants noting the importance of teaching gender, Claudia appears to show personal reservations about teaching gender. During the interview, Claudia talks about a case in which a student transitioned, stating that they had trouble dealing with this situation and framing this as something that they needed to process while also accepting the student's decision to transition: *"this is not my business to understand, but and also of course I accept, but to, to take it for granted that suddenly the girl had changed into a boy"* (P1: 50–60). Claudia's description seems to indicate a conflict between their personal attitudes regarding gender and gender identity conceptions of their students. This distancing of gender from themselves becomes even more apparent when considering Claudia's statements on gender within their English

teaching. When asked about the role of gender in their teaching, Claudia states, *"I think it doesn't play a role in my teaching"* (P1: 74). Claudia further explains this reservation:

> *As I said, an important topic, but we have to deal with it very, very carefully because our clients are young kids, adolescents and it is so personal, it is something so very, very personal. It is the most personal thing that we could ever teach. What should we teach about it?! It is no subject, but it is a very, very, very personal and I might even say an intimate thing.* (P1: 81–88)

As a reason for their reservation, Claudia cites the personal nature of gender and their fear of invading the privacy or intimacy of their students by dealing with gender in their teaching. Considering these statements, Claudia states that they generally perceive teaching gender as very important, yet reject dealing with gender in their own teaching, citing the danger of invading students' intimacy and exemplifying a conflict between their own gender conceptions and those of their students.

4.4 Theme IV: Challenges

For Claudia, the reservations regarding gender teaching also translate into a perceived challenge, for example, when it comes to negotiating their own narrower gender conception with their students' diverse gender identities or navigating the perceived intimate sphere of gender with their students. The personal nature of gender is also perceived as a challenge by Dirk. While Dirk does not appear to perceive dealing with the topic of gender as an invasion of students' intimacy, they state that focusing on gender could lead to *"a very controversial discussion"* (P3: 124–125). The challenge that appears to be perceived here could thus be a result of the emotionality derived from the personal nature of gender issues or the need to deal with problematic statements that arise from the personal experiences and knowledges of the students. These discussions could be additionally challenging as Dirk seems to perceive discourses on gender to be complex and dynamic: *"it is such a wide field and an ongoing developing field that you really have to be up to date"* (P3: 163–164). For Dirk, this need of staying up to date is seemingly derived from the danger of potentially offending or insulting students (P3: 166–177). This again alludes to the perceived challenge of the personal nature of gender because not being *"up to date"* could mean insulting someone, implying a highly emotional nature of gender discourse and personal views. This could connect to the idea that gender is highly politicized and thus leads to heightened awareness and sensitivity in discussions, as individuals must navigate

the normatively charged gender discourses; however, Dirk does not explicitly portray the English language classroom as a space that alleviates this heightened awareness and sensitivity (König et al., 2015, pp. 3–4).

This need for staying *"up to date"* is also relevant for Dirk because they appear to perceive situations of giving advice to students who are struggling with gender-related issues as a challenge. Dirk states:

> *[...] also when you somehow have the belief that maybe a student is unsure maybe about gender or I don't know, has maybe changed, to talk with him or her about that and maybe to, I don't know, offer help or discuss with him or her about that. Yeah, I think it's a very sensitive topic and you really have to be careful. Also, in what you can advise or not advise. I mean we are teaching experts, but we are not psychologists or therapists or something like that and also not well educated or maybe even not at all educated on this topic, so it's basically our responsibility to be updated or to keep us updated.* (P3: 167–174)

Dirk thus perceives the need to help students struggling with gender-related issues while also not feeling adequately qualified. For Dirk, teachers appear to be conceived as experts for teaching practice who, however, also need to navigate situations where they need to take on certain aspects of the role of a psychologist or a therapist without being trained to do so.

4.5 Theme V: Teacher training

The participants also reflected on their teacher training experience in connection to gender teaching. Claudia states that gender did not play a role within their teacher training, relating this to the socio-political context:

> *It is maybe against the background of my upbringing, of my education, of my school years and of course I'm really coming from the German province, I'm not coming from a big city, very conservative education in every respect and so it has never been a topic.* (P1: 93–96)

While Claudia states that they did not deal with gender in their teacher training, they believe that this should now be included. Claudia appears to connect this to their previously mentioned perspective on the importance of gender teaching, noting that gender *"has now become a topic because today there are young people, kids, teenagers, adolescents which reflect a lot more about sex and gender than my generation has done"* (P1: 102–104). The inclusion of gender into teacher training thus seems to be justified by the importance of gender to the current student body.

Dirk also states that gender was not part of their teacher training, stating that *"the whole topic about gender wasn't topical at that time and therefore it simply wasn't part of it"* (P3: 204–205) and that *"it was simply not there on a daily basis"* (P3: 205–206). Dirk then cites *"the whole Me-Too-Movement"* (P3: 207) as a central impetus for the rising relevance of gender within ELT. Additionally, Dirk states that they believe gender should be included in teacher training:

> *[…] we will be faced with more aspects and issues and problems and difficulties in the future so therefore, I think the whole field of, I don't know, communication and maybe also gender and current developments in society should also be a part of the curriculum at the universities for teachers.* (P3: 222–226)

Dirk's reasoning thus appears to stem from a perception of societal relevance of gender and a rising relevance of gender discourses in the future for which teachers need to be prepared.

When Sandra reflects on their teacher training, they note that they focused on gender within a literary studies context, but that gender was not part of the didactic elements of their teacher training (P2: 238–239). Sandra, however, appears to believe that this has prepared them for teaching gender *"to some degree"* (P2: 245), as it helped them *"in the way of thinking about starting to teach texts in general but it's more like overall abilities"* (P2: 245–246). Sandra does not explicitly mention how teacher training should be conducted differently.

5 Discussion

This study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on teaching gender in the ELT classroom. The findings revealed a wide spectrum of understandings of gender, ranging from biological essentialism to more socially constructed perspectives, varying levels of material reflection as well as varying perceptions regarding gender teaching and related challenges. In the following section, these findings are interpreted in the context of previous research on gender in ELT.

5.1 How teachers understand gender

Looking at the participants' conceptions of gender, the results suggest that the participants have varying understandings of gender. Claudia relied heavily on an equation of gender with biology; however, Claudia also showed a consciousness of the social nature of gender but distanced themselves from non-

hegemonic gender conceptions. In contrast, Sandra and Dirk stress the social relevance of gender as Sandra connects gender to identity and orientation and Dirk sees gender as something performative that is connected to people's behavior. This aligns with the findings of Pakuła et al. (2015) and Tarrayo et al. (2021) that teachers' perspectives on gender are largely heterogenous. While Dirk and Sandra both appear to understand gender in a more progressive sense, though still not homogenously, Claudia's reduction of gender to biological factors mirrors orthodox gender conceptions. This diversity of gender conceptions also seems to be present with regard to gender expectations and bias. While Dirk and Sandra connect gender to gendered expectations and Sandra notes the limiting effects of expectations, Claudia largely negates that she could be biased. Within the interview, Claudia, however, seems to reflect on whether their teaching may not have been biased, but ultimately argues for a naturality of differences and thus negates the idea of gender bias in their teaching. This could be seen as what Sunderland et al. (2001) refer to as "gender blindness" (p. 252) and "traditional biases" (p. 252) that allow for the negation of constructivist perspectives on gender. Alternatively, this could also be interpreted as an act of distancing themselves from the politicized topic of gender (cf. König et al., 2015) by denying the influence of gender expectations on Claudia's own teaching.

5.2 How teachers reflect teaching materials

The teachers' varying approaches to reflecting the use of teaching materials aligns in part with Sunderland et al.'s (2001) finding that ELT teachers may show a gender blindness in regard to teaching materials and Vu and Pham's (2022) understanding that ELT teachers are unaware of a hidden gender curriculum in textbooks. It must, however, be noted that this does not ring true for all participants as Sandra appears to be aware of gender representations within her teaching materials and thus looks to supplement existing materials that are predominantly male with female perspectives. Tying in with Alter et al.'s (2021) and König's (2018) notion that gender representations in German ELT textbooks do not show a diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations, it seems that Sandra has, in part, also come to the same conclusion and has reacted to this with a supplementation of the teaching materials. While Claudia also states that gender representations within the textbook represent a male-female dichotomy, it is unclear if they also exemplify a gender blindness (Sunderland et al., 2001), have naturalised this gender representation and are thus unaware of it or if they are aware of it and refrain from challenging these representations as they align with their own positions and

beliefs regarding gender. The role that the participants seem to ascribe to the curriculum could support a notion of teachers' reflection of gendered materials being contingent on their own positionality regarding gender topics, as identified by Pakuła et al. (2015) and Tarrayo et al. (2021). As Dirk appears to believe that a reflection of materials is not necessary as the materials were intentionally designed by someone and that he is bound to use the textbook, this could also point to institutional factors – specifically, the trust in publishing companies, time constraints, and pressure from the school – as contributors to a lack of reflection on materials. This would mirror Tarrayo et al.'s (2021) findings that institutional factors limit the implementation of queer pedagogies.

5.3 How teachers position themselves to gender teaching in ELT

The participants share sentiments on the importance of gender teaching, stressing its necessity and citing both the societal, political, and private relevance to the students. Yet the stressed importance does not seem to necessitate that the participants see teaching gender as one of their tasks and the participants seem to show varying approaches to integrating gender teaching into their practice. The case of Claudia is striking as they state the importance of teaching gender but seem to distance themselves from all gender-related issues and their integration into their ELT teaching practice. This could perhaps be understood by considering the participants' perspective on the challenges associated with gender teaching. Dirk notes the personal nature of gender, and it seems that they believe that this translates into a teaching challenge as it requires linguistic accuracy, constant learning and the ability to handle a potentially emotionally charged classroom environment. Claudia perceives the personal nature of gender not as a challenge for teaching practice but as an impediment to deal with gender in a classroom setting as for them this would constitute an invasion of the students' intimacy. The translation of ascription of importance to actual teaching practice again seems to rely on teachers' personal attitudes towards gender. These findings on the participants' attitudes on gender teaching seem to partially contradict Pakuła et al. (2015): In the study by Pakuła et al. (2015), the participants can generally be grouped into two attitude groups – the teachers that see gender and stereotypes as a resource and are not interested in including critical perspectives on gender and gender issues into their classroom, and the teachers that stress the importance of gender and look to challenge hegemonic gender norms in their teaching. The participants of this study seem to resist a similar categorization

as they either see gender as an important issue that should be dealt with critically within ELT, or they see gender as a non-category that bears no relevance to their teaching. Moreover, while teachers in the study by Pakuła et al. (2015) seem to negate their students' agency and involvement, the participants of this study appear to see the agency of their students, and do not necessarily identify gender topics as topics that require maturity as the participants seem to believe that the students are already inherently invested in these topics. This perception of interest in gender issues by the students would also align with Granger and Gerlach's (2024) finding that students are generally interested in issues of feminism. However, despite a general consensus among the participants that teaching gender is important and necessary and that the students are generally interested in gender topics, the implementation of gender issues into teaching seems to be contingent on the participants' own perspectives on gender, as Tarrayo et al. (2021) also argue.

5.4 Teacher training and gender teaching

As all participants note that gender teaching played no role within their teacher training, an evaluation of current teacher training processes is not viable. The participants' insecurities regarding gender teaching could, however, warrant an increased interest into in-service teacher training to help bridge the gap between teaching practice and didactic research.

5.5 Implications of the findings

Having interpreted the findings in light of existing research, it is now essential to consider the implications of these results for teacher education, the wider field of ELT, and teaching practice. Given the findings of this study, it seems that the academic understandings of how to facilitate gender teaching have so far not reached the classrooms of teachers that have completed their teacher training before the implementation of gender into the NRW ELT curricula. Teacher training here, of course, plays a central role in giving future teachers the toolsets that are necessary for successful gender teaching. Yet, teacher training in Germany is positioned at the beginning of teachers' teaching careers with no long-term teacher training processes. ELT must therefore find new avenues of dissemination of academic understandings of gender teaching to reach in-service teachers, especially those that are not inherently interested in gender topics and would not seek to explore gender teaching approaches on their own. The study has also identified that the participants believe that they strongly rely on their textbook as a teaching resource and do not necessarily reflect on the textbook materials in connection with gender or reflect

on their own naturalized assumptions regarding gender. ELT and teacher training should therefore seek to explore how to instill teachers with a critical awareness regarding their teaching materials and their own teaching practice. It should, however, be noted that this process is not exclusively dependent on teachers themselves as they are always embedded into specific institutional contexts and institutional factors may also inhibit such critical reflection processes.

6 Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the research question: *How do in-service teachers think they deal with the topic of gender in ELT?* The study explored teachers' perspectives on gender teaching in the ELT classroom, revealing a wide spectrum of perspectives. The findings showed that participants had varied understandings of gender, ranging from biological essentialism to more socially constructed viewpoints. This diversity extended to the participants' views on gender biases in teaching materials and the necessity of reflecting on them, with the participants actively supplementing male-dominant teaching materials with female perspectives, trusting the textbook without further reflection, or either accepting or being unaware of gender biases. Though all participants acknowledged the importance of gender teaching, their approaches varied, with one participant refraining from teaching gender due to their personal beliefs, while another participant saw the personal nature of gender as a challenge due to volatility of classroom discussions. These variations suggest that teachers' understandings of gender strongly influence how or if they integrate it into their teaching. The study has also found that none of the participants believe that they had received formal training on teaching gender in their teacher education.

The study has highlighted several key implications for teacher education and the field of ELT. First, academic discourses on gender still point to an inadequate representation of gender matters in in-service teaching, specifically relating to teachers that were trained before the inclusion of the term in the official curriculum guidelines of the state (MSW NRW, 2014). Teacher education plays a crucial role in equipping future educators with the tools for gender-sensitive teaching, but there are no long-term training programs in place. Therefore, new methods are needed to disseminate academic research on gender to practicing teachers, particularly those who may not (yet) have an inherent interest in the topic, as teachers without an interest in gender issues will not proactively seek additional professional development that focuses on gender topics in ELT. Additionally, the study reveals that teachers

often rely heavily on textbooks without critically reflecting on the gender representations they contain or without examining their own assumptions. ELT and teacher training programs should focus on fostering critical awareness of teaching materials and personal biases. However, this responsibility does not rest solely on teachers, as institutional factors, such as school policies and time constraints, can hinder their ability to engage in critical reflection. Consequently, both teacher training and institutional support need to be addressed to ensure the successful integration of gender teaching in ELT classrooms. These implications may help us make ELT practice in Germany more just by contributing to allowing students to understand and negotiate gender discourses. This could allow us to, as Sandra puts it, take *"an important step forward to really maintain a different way of thinking."*

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