

## Gender Representation in EFL/ESL Textbooks in Indonesia: A Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

*Gender studies on language education have been a concerning topic among scholars. It has been encouraged through some interest in international organizations and Indonesia's government regulation on gender equality. However, few studies have investigated the review of gender representation in English textbooks in Indonesia. To fill this gap, the present study aims to review and discuss the studies of gender representation in learning materials, mainly English textbooks in Indonesia, and the possible future direction of the studies related to be conducted. The study was conducted through the literature analysis that was published within the last five years. The literature analysis involved gender representation in English textbooks in Indonesia, both junior and senior high school level textbooks. The first part of the paper presents an illustration of gender history in Indonesia. The second part discusses the current studies of gender representation in English textbooks in Indonesia. The third part attempts to explain the possible future of the studies related to be conducted. The study concludes that textbook plays an important role as a media that constructs both students' and teachers' perspectives on gender value and awareness in society and culture. Suggestions for further studies are made to bring other directions in conducting gender studies in English textbooks in Indonesia.*

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Published December 4<sup>th</sup> 2023



### KEYWORDS

English textbooks; gender; language education; review.

### ARTICLE LICENCE

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### 1. Introduction

For more than decades, studies on gender have been a concerning topic among scholars (Dalle et al., 2023; Lestariyana et al., 2020; Setyono, 2018; Suwarno et al., 2021; Tyarakanita et al., 2021). There has been some interest in international organizations, such as the United Nations, declaring gender equality in education both for male and female citizens as a part of human rights. Indonesia has also been implementing and improving gender equity in education access through The Law on National Education (No. 20/2003), which clearly states all Indonesian citizens have the right to education. It means every male and female citizen, from seven to fifteen years old, has the right to education, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, etc. Another reason is there has been growing interest in the feminist movement. Mustapha (2013) states that feminist scholars of language teaching demand to conduct studies through a pedagogical approach as a part of reflection and exposure to the gender inequality practices in communities, schools, or society.

In teaching and learning, textbooks play a pivotal role in socializing (e.g., constructing social behavior, norms, and values) and transmitting knowledge and skill (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Arief et al., 2021; Hanafiah et al., 2022). Textbooks may encourage gender bias through how males and females are illustrated in the text or picture books. Specific gender may be strengthened or weakened through ignoring or focusing on one or particular gender, such as females being described to be caring and emotional, while males are strong and independent. Gender equality in learning materials may also encourage equal treatment, opportunities, and representation of both genders, male and female if it represents equality. It means that both roles are part of, and complement each other and contribute to society.

In contrast with the voice of the United Nations and the regulation of the Indonesia government on gender equality, a common belief among scholars is that they believe that learning materials, mainly textbooks, are biased-

gender. The results of numerous studies show gender inequality in lexical items used was male-dominated, and the roles of females mainly illustrate the household sphere. Moreover, the majority of the studies only focus on the amount of gender lexical items in the textbooks. There were only a few previous studies analyzed gender representation in English textbooks in Indonesia through various approaches to find out comprehensive illustration of gender representation in the textbooks (Mihira et al., 2021; Suwarno et al., 2021; Tyarakanita et al., 2021; Widodo & Elyas, 2020). To fill this gap, the present study aims to conduct a comprehensive review and discussion on gender representation studies in learning materials, mainly English textbooks in Indonesia, and the possible future of the studies related to be conducted. The review of the studies is expected to give a comprehensive illustration of gender studies in English textbooks in Indonesia as a direction for future studies.

## **2. Methodology**

The study was conducted through the literature analysis that was published within the last five years. The literature analysis involved gender representation in English textbooks in Indonesia, both junior and senior high school level textbooks. The review is divided into three sections. The first part of the paper presents an illustration of gender history in Indonesia. The second part discusses the current studies of gender representation in English textbooks in Indonesia. The third part attempts to explain the possible future of the studies related to be conducted.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **3.1. Gender History in Indonesia**

Gender equality has been voiced out since the colonial era. R.A. Kartini is one of the most heard through her letters "Door Duisternis tot Licht" (Ningrum, 2018). Through her letters, she conveyed her thoughts regarding family, customs, women's backwardness, and the future of Indonesia. She stated in her letter, "Our hands and feet are still shackled; still bound by the laws and customs of our country." Kartini's ideas were that women get an equal education and reform the marriage system that rejected polygamy (Mustikawati, 2015). Her letter encouraged other female figures to speak out for women's equality, such as Raden Dewi Sartika in 1915, who emphasized equality for women's rights (Kusdiana, 2011). Since then, more voices have spoken out to fight for women's rights in many sectors, such as the right to be involved in politics in 1938.

Gender ideology significantly influences the development of religion, particularly religious interpretation, and tradition constructed in society. The ideology is transferred hereditarily from generation to generation through rituals and narratives. It causes society to find it difficult to differentiate between God's command and society's construction. The ideology creates a patriarchal culture in society, creating male domination in life. Male dominates over life while women become the minority (Henslin, 2006). In a religious interpretation, a society-constructed belief is male-centered, where the male's role is a leader and decision maker. Thus, the image of women becomes invisible and weaker.

Indonesia's society connects women in two roles: in domestic spheres and the public. They are considered feminine, diligent, and hardworking. Thus, they are suitable for household work. Meanwhile, men are seen as masculine, strong, and rational. Thus, they are suitable for the heads of the family, breadwinners, and decision-makers. If women work outside to contribute to the family economy, they also have to do household work, which becomes a double burden. While women have to play two roles in society, men's roles do not shift in the public sphere. Changing women's roles without changing society's perspective on gender equality will create an unequal burden. Umar (2001) states that biological factors and gender do not influence the high-level quality of human beings but choices. The social construction is continuously created and attached to women, influencing how they view themselves as individuals and in society. Although women have achieved the right to education, society still demands them to attach to their traditional roles as mothers and wives (Ningrum, 2018).

The issue of gender inequality continues, though the efforts to uphold the equality of women's rights in education and social construction continue to be voiced out (Sulistiyowati, 2020). Indonesia's government provides freedom for every citizen of Indonesia to get an equal education through the regulation of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, particularly Article 5, which mentions every citizen has the equal right to get an education. However, the solid patriarchal culture in Indonesia affects the inequality of women's rights in family, household, education, and other sectors. Indonesia's society construction tends to view women as weak human beings. Thus, though women get higher education, society still considers their roles to end as a wife and mothers who manage a household. The decision maker tends to be decided by a man.

Nyi Sri Mangoensarkoro is one of the initiators of the idea of equality in the household. She states that not only women be active in the political, social, economic, and cultural sectors that dominantly involve men, but also men must be involved in the domestic sphere. It is one way that society does not downgrade the roles of women in the domestic realm, such as nursery and other tasks (Ningrum, 2018). Since then, the voice of women's rights and equality has been voiced out.

### **3.2. Current Studies of Gender Representation in English Textbooks in Indonesia**

Through the development of Indonesia's regulation on inclusive education, this section reports the numerous scholars concerned about gender representation in Indonesia, particularly in English textbooks (Rahman & Rahman, 2019; Mokoginta et al., 2021; Abbas et al., 2022). This section features several articles written by Indonesian scholars for the past 8 to 10 years. The issues' findings shed some light on gender representation in Indonesian English textbooks. Some articles highlight the lexical percentage of how gender is portrayed. Some cases underscore the construction of gender in society context and how it builds the student's perceptions. Some articles also highlight the approach to gender issues in textbooks that should be studied.

To begin with, Dalle et al. (2023) analyzed the lexical items on gender representation of males and females (such as she, he, Mrs., Mr., etc.) in three books; the majority used in junior high school levels VII, VIII, and IX. The result shows that lexical items representing males were used dominantly in the books. The lexical representation is related to the history and root culture of Indonesia, in which the male role is dominant in the majority aspects of society in Indonesia. As Henslin (2006) states, males dominate life while women become the minority. The current study may not illustrate how the lexical percentage could construct the students' perception of gender in a social context perspective.

Setyono (2018) examined English textbooks X, XI, and XII by MONEC to find out how women are portrayed in English textbooks and how textbooks help students construct their understanding of gender conception. By implementing Discourse Analysis, the study shows gender stereotypes for women, such as social domestic expressed in verbal text and expressive expression in visual data (how women like to compliment each other, women who wear bright colours, etc.). However, the textbook still shows equal opportunity in getting a job. The illustration of findings implies good progress of textbook content on gender since there has been a light on equal gender treatment in women's job opportunities. Equal gender treatment will help to promote gender awareness and conception. Widodo and Elyas (2020) state that textbooks may promote teachers' and students' particular ideologies, values, and understanding of gender.

Tyarakanita et al. (2021) analyzed the junior high school textbook, *When English Rings a Bell*, to find out the representation of gender stereotypes in Indonesia textbooks. They applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by examining it through visual and textual forms of textbooks by reflecting on social contexts. The study found that male roles are still more dominant than girls in the textbooks, particularly in grades 7 and 8. The female students are still portrayed as passive girls. Meanwhile, the lexical choice represents 8 grade, showing gender fairness by using the non-heteronormative language of him or her, but the use of Mrs. and Miss still exists, instead of Ms.

Suwarno et al. (2021) examined junior high school textbook grade IX. They analyze the gender lexical representative through combining corpus linguistic and critical micro-semiotic approach. Combining the approach helps the analysis of gender representative comprehensively, not only on the lexical percentage, but also to illustrate the context. The textbook analyzation involved verbal, text, and visual context on the textbook. The findings illustrate that the percentage of gender lexical representative was equal. However, through a critical micro-semiotic approach, the textbook shows the gender stereotypes. Male are illustrated as having more power than female. Meanwhile female are described to do a feminine activities, such as domestic cores.

Lestariyana et al. (2020) analyzed two EFL textbooks in grades VII and VIII, both visual and verbal texts, to find out the representation of female characters from a social context perspective in the textbooks. To analyze the representation, the scholars applied Discourse Analysis. The study found that the textbook promotes awareness of gender equality, but inequality still exists. The textbook shows domestic roles still dominated by female characters, but a male character also plays it. It shows that man can also be involved in domestic chores. The illustration in the textbook may reinforce the awareness of male roles to be involved in home activities. The textbook also shows the positive image of female characters in getting the job. Females are illustrated as having an equal opportunity in having a job, not only in domestic chores, such as a surgeon. However, in school participants and achievement context, females are portrayed as more diligent and successful academically than males. The description is also shown in interest activities, where females tend to like feminine activities like singing, music, etc.

All the studies above imply that it is essential to develop gender studies from an educational perspective since it can reinforce particular values. Textbook becomes the media that not only transfer knowledge and skill but also impose particular ideologies to be applied in the students' society. Curriculum designers, textbook authors, and teachers must be aware of and understand both language and gender to minimize misconceptions and impose gender equality (Suwarno et al., 2021). For example, the domestic chores that the majority found in the textbooks may reinforce the students to construct household activities that are only for females. Furthermore, gender conception cannot also be separated from culture, such as Indonesia society holds some values on career women are responsible also for domestic chores, such as cooking, nursery, dishes, laundry, etc. Such values may bring to the thoughts that women do not have a huge opportunity choice in career since they are responsible for their work, yet when they return home, they also have to do household activities. It will limit their time in professional work, and they will look for more flexible jobs (working hours). Thus, gender equality in textbooks may play an essential role as a media that constructs awareness of gender in society.

### **3.3. Possible Future Direction of Gender Representation in English Textbooks in Indonesia Studies**

This section limits gender studies in English textbooks. It is essential to encourage more studies in this area since it may help to construct awareness and values of gender equality both for teachers and students. Studies on gender lexical percentage have been widely studied by scholars (Dalle et al., 2023). However, analysis of gender lexical percentage is not enough to see a broader perspective, such as in a social context. Thus, some scholars have also been conducting some studies on the social context aspect of gender equality in textbooks by using the Critical Discourse Analysis approach (Lestariyana et al., 2020; Setyono, 2018; Suwarno et al., 2021; Tyarakanita et al., 2021; Widodo & Elyas, 2020). We encourage future studies to investigate the analysis by combining Corpus Linguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis since the combination can analyze both the quantity of gender lexicalization and how gender in textbooks is analyzed in a social context in both textual and visual textbooks. As Suwarno et al. (2021) state, both approaches are suitable for analyzing text and visual content in textbooks.

The further researchers are also encouraged to conduct a classroom-based studies such as how students and teachers discuss gender values in textbooks, how students construct their thoughts or catch the gender values in textbooks, and their perspective of gender equality or inequality. More gender studies that should be undertaken are in the textbook evaluation. We also encourage a study from the curriculum makers' perspective. The curriculum makers may establish equal gender textual and visual in textbooks to minimize gender misconception. Although it is still a long journey to reform school textbooks, we expect there will be a reformation to achieve such gender equality in textbooks to build and enhance the students' and teachers' critical awareness of gender issues, such as designing institutional tasks or activities that can promote gender awareness.

## **4. Conclusion**

Gender conception in Indonesia cannot be separated from social and cultural context, such as Indonesia women plays double role, both as a career woman and responsible for domestic chores. Such values held by society or cultural may reinforce gender inequality. Textbooks play an essential role as a media that constructs awareness of gender in society. Textbooks have become the media that not only transfer knowledge and skill but also construct particular ideologies, such as students' and teachers' perspectives on gender value and awareness in society and culture. Thus, it is vital to provide curriculum makers and textbook authors to be aware and understand both language and gender to minimize misconceptions and reinforce gender equality. The article is expected to bring other directions in studying gender in English textbooks in Indonesia.

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