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## The Gender Portrayal in English Textbooks for Junior High School Students in Indonesia: Is It Equal?

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### Abstract

Gender equity is vital for the realization of human rights in society. Gender should be portrayed with careful attention in all forms of information and communication media, including textbooks, to avoid gender stereotypes or the superiority of one gender over the other. Textbooks can be the most effective media for promoting and raising awareness of gender equality. Therefore, this research was to investigate gender portrayal in English textbooks for Junior High School students in Indonesia. The pattern of this research was content analysis research. Three series of English textbooks with characters and images as the research data were scrutinized by identifying, classifying, and coding into a male and female division. The results showed that the representation of males and females was equal in quantitative data but not in qualitative analysis. These imply that textbook developers and publishers must provide equal representation for both genders in their future textbooks. Also, educators should have materials selection, evaluation, and adaptation in teaching to promote gender equality awareness among their students.

### Keywords

English textbooks, equality, human right, gender portrayal

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## Introduction

Education is a progressive process that will be tied to human life and is considered paramount in shaping the paradigm in society (Hidayat et al., 2021; Marzulina et al., 2021; Mukminin, 2021). Education is a bridge for people to face the future (Johan & Harlan, 2014). It might lift people's knowledge, manner, and intelligence for improvement. Thus, education should be designed to reach an academic purpose and social impact. Substantially, it should be well-formulated by giving equal rights to everyone without considering the economic background, race, gender, speech, belief, political view, and nation or origin (Fredriksson, 2004; Muazza et al., 2019; Mukminin et al., 2019). In short, education is part of human rights because everyone deserves to acquire it.

One of the aspects of human rights is gender equality. Thenceforth, education should be projected to prepare for gender equality. Gender equality means giving equal rights to both genders by treating the same without any difference (Wanner & Wadham, 2015; Mukminin et al., 2019). Gender equality is also defined as giving the same value to both males and females in society (Rolleri, 2013). Therefore, gender equality is important because it would lead to the development of the community by enhancing productivity and outcome for both genders for the future generation (World Bank, 2011). Thus, promoting gender equality for students is highly fundamental.

Upholding gender equality started with the presentation of males and females in the material given to the students. Material is paramount in shaping mindset, including gender equality. Richard (2001) revealed that materials are crucial elements as sources. Pardo and Téllez (2009) assumed that materials form a key aspect in creating effective teaching and learning environments. Even more, teaching materials impacted dominant on the activity (Nguyen, 2014). Therefore, the material given to the students would be paramount in addressing gender equality.

However, the imbalanced arrangement of gender in the materials given could be an imperceptible barrier to equality in the educational framework (Ebadi et al., 2015). Learning materials that are free from gender biases and promote gender equality are good practices for education and may contribute to more inclusive and cohesive societies in the long run (Load et al., 2010). Hence, arranging the material given with the equal gender presentation is a good scheme for admitting gender equality for the students.

The material in the learning process can be presented in many formats. Nunan and Carter (2001) revealed what can ease learning. The most well-known instructional materials exist in the form of textbooks. A textbook is a primary source in the learning process (Cheng & Hung, 2011). Furthermore, textbooks might be the best tools that might support the completion of gender equality in society (Nofal & Qawar, 2015). It is also a potential vehicle for gender equality (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). Furthermore, textbooks are a great teaching medium for endorsing gender equality to students. It can be an effective medium for promoting and raising awareness of gender equality among students.

However, some researchers in Indonesia found that gender is not equally presented in textbooks. Yansyah (2018) found that the textbooks for senior high schools in Indonesia could not promote gender equality for both males and females. Additionally, Darni and

Abidah (2017) also analyzed that textbooks for elementary school students in Indonesia cannot show balance proportions for both genders. Those studies open people's eyes to some textbooks in Indonesia that presented unequal gender representation. Then, it triggered the researchers to do more investigation in the context of English language teaching in Indonesia. This research would like to analyze gender portrayal in quantitative and qualitative representation in English textbooks for junior high schools in Indonesia. The English textbooks entitled *When English Rings A Bell VII* and *VIII* and *Think Globally Act Locally IX* from Curriculum 2013 became the research subject.

## Literature Review

### *Education and gender equality*

Education should be designed to reach the purpose of society in academic and social impact. Substantially, it should be well-formulated by giving equal rights to everyone without considering someone's economic background, race, gender, speech, belief, political view, and nation or origin (Fredriksson, 2004; Mukminin, & Habibi, 2019). Therefore, education must be free from gender-based stereotypes, bias, and discrimination. However, ensuring gender equity within schools is a challenge for policymakers, curriculum planners, and teachers around the world. In many countries, education systems provide examples of curricula and teaching materials that reinforce stereotypes of teachers with biased expectations and other different means that contribute to gender inequity promoted through the teaching and learning processes (Bursuc, 2013; Mukminin et al., 2019).

Gender equality is a crucial facet of social justice, inclusiveness, and social cohesion based on the values and practices of Human Rights, such as the fundamental respect for human dignity and the right to equal and fair treatment regardless of differences among people. Furthermore, equality of rights between men and women, especially as it applies to access to education, has contributed to the concept development of the right to Education for All. As a result, the education sector's greater openness to girls has made it possible to re-examine the issue of social justice and promote egalitarian gender relations (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). To sum up, education could be a vehicle for promoting gender equality.

### *Textbooks in a language learning program*

In language learning programs, teaching materials are one of the components for teaching materials that serve as the basis for language input received by students and practice the use of language in the classroom (Richards, 2001). Materials contain the content that students will use to achieve learning objectives (Dick et al., 2009). These opinions are under several research publications in various countries that demonstrate the power of teaching materials in facilitating the process of language learning (Erlina et al., 2016; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010). Therefore, teachers should use appropriate instructional materials in teaching the students the skills and contents needed to be successful language learners. Then, language teaching materials refer to everything that is used by teachers and students to facilitate the language learning process (Tomlinson, 2011). Teaching materials can be in the

form of a textbook, video, dictionaries, grammar books, workbooks, photocopying materials, newspapers, photographs, direct conversations with native speakers, or something that is used to improve the knowledge and experience of students of the language. In addition, teaching materials also refer to the systematic description of the techniques and exercises used in the learning process in the classroom. The experts' statements above clearly emphasize the importance of instructional materials like textbooks or others in language learning.

### *Gender equality and textbooks*

The textbook is the presented material of an educational program (Yansyah, 2018). Information presented in textbooks plays a fundamental function in shaping the progression of classroom teaching and learning, designing the assessment system and evaluation with students' remembering and creating the information presented in textbooks (Mahmood, 2011). The textbooks offer the establishment for the content of lessons, the balance of the capabilities taught, and the kinds of language, carry out the students connect during class activities (Cheng & Hung, 2011; Erlina et al., 2018). Therefore, textbooks are fundamental to the learning of gender roles. Representations of males and females are legitimized here by a high-status medium. The textbook is a potential vehicle for gender equality (Brugelies & Cromer, 2009). Learning materials, such as textbooks and learning processes that are free from gender biases and promote gender equality, are good practices and may contribute to more inclusive and cohesive societies in the long run of education (Load et al., 2010). In conclusion, textbooks might be media in acknowledging gender equality for the students in the educational process.

### **Methodology**

#### *Research design, site, and participants*

In conducting this research, the researchers applied content analysis towards gender representation in English textbooks for Junior High Schools from the curriculum 2013 in Indonesia. This research aimed to examine gender portrayal in English textbooks and whether they presented an equal proportion of gender representation. This research used both quantitative and qualitative data. A mixed method was applied for the practical data collection using numerical and verbal data to gather reliable data (Cohen et al., 2007).

The focus data of this research were characters and images in the English textbooks for Indonesia Junior High Schools from the curriculum 2013. This research measured gender representation contents in three series of English textbooks from curriculum 2013 which was published by the Indonesian government, the Ministry of Education and Culture Affairs. The following table 1 shows the textbooks which were analyzed in this research.

**Table 1.** *Data of English textbooks for junior high schools in Indonesia*

Title	Publisher
When English Rings A Bell VII	The Ministry of Education and Culture Affairs
When English Rings A Bell VIII	The Ministry of Education and Culture Affairs
Think Globally Act Locally IX	The Ministry of Education and Culture Affairs

### ***Data collection and analysis***

In collecting the data, the researchers identified and classified the characters and images in the three series of English textbooks under this research. The researchers made two main divisions, male (M) and female (F) categories, and six subcategories based on six aspects promoted by Brugeilles and Cromer (2009), namely (1) category, sex, and age of the character, (2) designations, (3) activities, (4) attributes, (5) interactions, and (6) locations.

In doing the analysis, the researchers identified, classified, and coded the data of the characters in the textbooks into a male or female category according to six gender representation aspects of Brugeilles and Cromer (2009). The researchers also coded the data of the images or pictures under the male or female division. The researchers displayed the data in the form of percentages. Therefore, the number of male and female representations quantitatively was discovered. Afterward, the researchers used these quantitative data for further discussion and interpretation of how gender was described in the English textbooks. Then, the researchers analyzed the data qualitatively to see the quality of male and female representation in the textbooks. These qualitative data were analyzed descriptively. The discussion of the data would draw inferences based on the analysis results, related theories, and previous studies. Overall, the representation of males and females would be seen quantitatively and qualitatively in presenting gender equality. Finally, the researchers summarized and made some recommendations by considering all our analysis results.

### **Findings**

The findings of this research were presented in the form of percentages for quantitative data (characters and pictures) and obtained from the English textbooks in descriptions form for qualitative analysis results.

### ***Characters analysis***

Three English textbooks were analyzed in this research. They were published by the Indonesian government for junior high school students. Overall, there were 5218 characters from those three textbooks. The textbook entitled *When English Rings A Bell VII* presented the domination of male characters. Meanwhile, the textbooks entitled *When English Rings A*

*Bell VIII* and *Think Globally, Act Locally IX* mostly presented female characters. The complete data analysis is in Table 2 below:

**Table 2.** Results of characters analysis

Textbooks	Characters			
	Male		Female	
When English Rings A Bell VII	979	53%	869	47%
When English Rings A Bell VIII	726	49%	762	51%
Think Globally, Act Locally IX	854	45%	1028	55%

### *Pictures analysis*

There were 1408 pictures taken as research data in this research. The data showed that all the textbooks entitled *When English Rings A Bell VII*, *When English Rings A Bell VIII*, and *Think Globally, Act Locally* which were analyzed, presented more male characters than female characters. The comprehensive data analysis is in Table 3 below:

**Table 3.** Results of pictures analysis

Textbooks	Characters			
	Male		Female	
When English Rings A Bell VII	261	54%	215	46%
When English Rings A Bell VIII	304	54%	263	46%
Think Globally, Act Locally IX	189	52%	176	48%

### *Qualitative analysis*

The qualitative analysis focused on how both genders are treated in the activities or representations in the English textbooks. Then, the researchers described the analysis results. Some of the results of the analysis are as follows.

**Picture 1.** How both genders are treated in the activities



Source: *When English Rings A Bell VII*, p. 4.

The pictures showed two activities from how the parent treated their son and daughter. The activity is waking up in the morning. The first picture shows a father who has just greeted his son in the bedroom in the morning. The second picture displayed a girl who greeted her mom in the kitchen in the morning while cooking.

**Picture 2.** *How the parent treated their son and daughter*



Source: *When English Rings A Bell VIII*, p. 25.

Both pictures showed each statement from boys and girls for break time. The statement from a boy to invite his friend, "Udin, let's go out. Don't be lazy. Get up and have some exercise outside." Besides, a girl invites her friend to have break time with the statement, "Lina, it is break time, stop working. Let's go out for some fresh air."

**Picture 3.** *Each statement from boys and girls for break time*



Source: *Think Globally, Act Locally*, p. 11.

The picture presented a conversation between a mother and her daughter. The daughter reported to the mom that she had cleaned up her room, and her mother replied happily to the daughter by praising, "Good girl! It looks tidy now, isn't it? I love it."

## Discussion

The discussion of the research findings displayed the inferences data in quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results were related to theories and correlated to the previous studies to find similarities and differences. Based on the results for quantitative data both under characters and pictures analysis, all the textbooks showed the same presentation for both male and female portrayals because the peripheries of the percentages were not so far different. The textbook entitled *When English Rings A Bell VII* showed 53% for male representation and 47% for female representation under character analysis, 54% for male characters, and 46% for female characters from the picture analysis. Then, the textbook entitled *When English Rings A Bell VIII* showed 49% male presentation and 51% female presentation for character analysis. Meanwhile, 54% of the male character and 46% of the female characters are under the picture analysis. After that, for the textbook under the title *Think Globally, Act Locally IX* got 45% for male performance and 55% for female performance for character analysis and 52% for males, and 48% for females under the picture analysis.

The findings of our research above were contrary to some previous studies on gender representation in English textbooks. For example, in the context of senior high school, [Yansyah \(2018\)](#) analyzed English textbooks in Indonesia by calculating the presentation of males and females. The results showed that both genders were not equally presented in those textbooks. Furthermore, [Darni and Abidah \(2015\)](#) measured gender bias in nine textbooks for elementary school students used in East and Central Java, Indonesia. The results also showed that gender bias was found in the textbooks that they analyzed. To sum up, the results of the quantitative analysis of our research were different from [Yansyah \(2018\)](#) and [Darni and Abidah \(2015\)](#). This research showed genders are quantitatively equal.

However, qualitatively, the representation of male and female characters in those textbooks was not the same. The first pictures showed that the male was treated with treatment by the parent in the morning. Meanwhile, a girl was shown as unequal, because in the morning, a girl should be in the kitchen with her mother. Another example was given in the second picture and third picture. In the second picture, it presents that usually, boys would be lazy, and girls would be diligent. The last picture shows that a girl should clean up as the routine. It was also in line with several previous studies which examine the presentation of males and females in the textbooks for Indonesian students. They reported that males and females were not equally presented in the textbooks. They often portrayed male characters as superior to female characters. Male characters were assigned typical masculine traits, and female characters were assigned feminine traits ([Ariyanto, 2018](#); [Emilia et al., 2017](#); [Suhartono & Kristina, 2018](#)).

All in all, the results of quantitative data analysis in this research were in line with the principle of education that gender representation should be displayed equally. It supports the idea from [Brugeilles and Cromer \(2009\)](#), [Bursuc \(2013\)](#), and [Frederiksson \(2004\)](#), which emphasized that education should give equal rights to anyone without considering someone's economic background, nation, race, and gender. Education must be free of

gender-based stereotypes, bias, and discrimination. On the contrary, the results of qualitative data analysis of this research revealed that the representation of male and female characters was not equal in the English textbooks. It was not under the principle of education. It showed that ensuring gender equity within schools is still challenging for teachers, material developers, publishers, and policymakers.

### Conclusion

This research was to find out the gender portrayal for both quantitative and qualitative data in English textbooks for junior high school students from Curriculum 2013 in Indonesia. Three English textbooks were analyzed by using a mixed-method study. The results revealed that the representation of males and females was equal in quantitative data but not in qualitative analysis. These research results suggest the researchers or materials developers and publishers produce textbooks that possibly give equal representation for both genders. Then, to address this inequality issue, teachers who utilize these textbooks can make some adaptations or adjustments to the materials to provide equal representation for both genders to their students in the classrooms. The last is for the government and policymakers to design further textbooks to be equal in presenting males and females.

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