

The Representation of Gender Equality in The Illustration of English Textbooks for Senior High School

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Abstract. This research focuses on the representation of gender equality in two English textbooks for eleventh-grade students in senior high school. Textbooks are crucial educational resources that shape students' understanding, and illustrations play a significant role in engaging students and shaping their mindsets. The study analyzes English textbooks from the government (textbook K) and one private publisher (textbook P) to assess the representation of gender in their illustrations. The findings reveal that textbook K already promotes gender equality in the sense of a balanced representation of male and female illustrations and the use of both genders in illustrating leisure activities. However, gender bias persists in both books, highlighting the need to address this issue and strive for a balanced representation of gender. Further research is recommended to explore gender equality in illustrated figures across different grade levels and to investigate gender-related issues in a broader range of English textbooks.

Keywords: English textbooks, gender bias, gender equality, gender neutral, gender representation,

INTRODUCTION

Gender encompasses the differences in roles, duties, functions, and responsibilities, as well as the pursuit of equal opportunities between men and women in terms of social roles. The understanding of gender is influenced by social, psychological, and political contexts that shape the interests and behaviors of both men and women (Mills, 1995). While gender is rooted in biological differences in physical characteristics determined by nature, the concept of gender in this context refers to the recognition of two sexes, female and male, represented through illustrations in English textbooks.

Furthermore, gender is also associated with differences in the characteristics of men and women based on socio-cultural constructs, which are related to their inherent qualities, social status, positions, and roles in society. For instance, women are often associated with traits such as gentleness, beauty, emotionality, or nurturing, while men are perceived as strong, rational, moral, and powerful. However, these traits are not inherently fixed to a specific gender. Men can possess emotional, gentle, and nurturing qualities, while women can exhibit strength, rationality, and power (Mills, 1995; Torres, 2021). Gender plays a crucial role in personal lives, as well as in social and cultural relationships. It is a topic that sparks significant discussions and debates within communities. The values attached to gender can change over time and vary across different societies. This is because gender is not inherently tied to biological sex but

rather influenced by societal labels (Toçi & Aliu, 2013). In other words, gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles of men and women. It encompasses the teachings and expectations of how individuals should behave based on their assigned gender.

Gender bias refers to favoring a particular gender based on local norms and culture, often at the expense of the other gender (Marhumah, 2011). Gender bias takes various forms, depicting specific actions and attributes. In the context of textbooks, gender bias manifests through unequal representations of males and females. Males are often portrayed as individuals engaged in physical activities such as farming (Ariyanto, 2018) or actions that require thought and consideration, while females are depicted as passive or engaged in activities that require less energy (Emilia et al., 2017; Manalo, 2018; Sui, 2022).

Gender bias is closely linked to the analysis of how work is associated with men and women. Some textbooks still adhere to traditional values adopted by society, wherein men occupy prestigious and powerful positions such as judges, doctors, soldiers, bosses, and presidents and women's roles are often associated with lower-status jobs such as teachers, nurses, secretaries, and receptionists (Hall, 1997; Manalo, 2018) This patriarchal mindset must be dismantled because in modern times, both females and males hold equal positions. This shift is crucial for reducing social inequality, which impacts a country's development and exacerbates issues like poverty.

A good textbook should reflect gender equality. Therefore, illustrations in the textbooks must depict gender equality (Logsdon, 1985). For instance, the depiction of a teacher solely as a housewife while men are portrayed as breadwinners with job roles like fishermen perpetuates gender bias. However, previous studies have revealed gender bias issues in several textbooks. Gender bias within textbooks can reinforce patriarchal mindsets, perpetuate social inequalities, and hinder a country's development, exacerbating problems such as poverty. Therefore, gender roles depicted in illustrations within English textbooks should be presented in a balanced occurrence, fair and equitable way. Textbooks must depict gender neutrality in their illustration. Gender neutrality is an approach, strategy, or framework that avoids implying or distinguishing a specific gender. Neutral gender representation in textbooks can be achieved through the use of illustrations that do not depict gender-specific figures, instead utilizing animals or other objects.

Textbooks connect curriculum policy and teachers, where they deliver educational information in a systematic manner. Textbooks are important in education because they reflect social and cultural characteristics while also bearing beliefs and ideology (Shin et al., 2011). Furthermore, textbooks not only influence the teaching process, but can also shape students' collective memory, affecting their values and ideology indirectly. As a result, textbook editors should exercise caution when selecting materials, and teachers should approach materials thoughtfully.

As a social product, textbooks contain cultural knowledge that reflects society's dominant culture, ideologies and values, including gender, prejudices, and

discrimination (Sui, 2022) through illustration, where it serves to enhance the visual appeal and clarify the intended message (Fithriani, 2022; Patria & Mutmainah, 2018).

Illustrations in textbooks have multiple roles, including enhancing students' understanding by clarifying complex concepts, visualizing abstract ideas, and supporting language learning. Illustrations engage students in their learning experiences since they demonstrate procedures or processes, promote critical thinking, foster cultural understanding, provide contextual examples, and facilitate memory recall. To make sure that students gain the most from the textbook's illustrations, illustrations should demonstrate qualities of visual appeal, clarity, accuracy, relevance, embrace authenticity and diversity, promote inclusivity and avoid perpetuation of stereotypes.

Visual appeal means that illustration is attractive enough for students to captivate their attention, spark their curiosity, and stimulate learning environment, such as in appropriate colors and sizes. *Clarity* means that the illustration is relevant to the book content, enable students to comprehend the relevant knowledge and concepts from the illustrations, hence enhancing their overall understanding of the subject matter. *Accuracy* refers to the illustration that must truthfully represent the content being conveyed, allowing no room for misinterpretation so the illustration can become a reliable source of information for students. The next quality is *relevance*, where illustration must relate to the text and support the concepts taught in the book (Kalestan & Kaptan, 2020).

Furthermore, illustrations must embrace *authenticity* and *diversity*. They should reflect a range of cultural perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences, so students can develop their sense of belonging and respect, as well as a broader understanding of the world around them. Moreover, illustrations should actively *avoid spreading stereotypes or biased generalizations* about a particular group of people based on attributes such as gender since they can shape students' perceptions and beliefs. If not, then textbook illustrations can reinforce existing biases and hence contribute to societal inequalities. If an illustration is bias-free, it will enable students can exercise their critical thinking and develop a more unbiased understanding of the world around them. Students are exposed to diverse perspectives and experiences, and even can be encouraged to question existing power structures, advocate for equality, and develop a broader and more inclusive worldview (Sui, 2022; Torres, 2021). Ultimately, by actively avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes through illustrations, textbooks can play a vital role in shaping students' attitudes, fostering critical thinking, and contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society.

Despite the importance of gender equality in education and the impact of textbooks illustrations on shaping students' understanding and perceptions, there is a research gap in exploring the extent of gender bias and the portrayal of gender roles in English textbooks used in Poso, Central Sulawesi. Existing studies have highlighted gender bias issues in textbooks, but specific research focusing on the English textbooks used in this region is lacking. Understanding the presence of gender bias and its impact on students' perceptions is essential for promoting gender equality in educational materials.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the English textbooks, specifically the K13 Curriculum English textbook for Senior High School Grade XI published by the government and the “Contextual English” Platinum series published by a private publisher, to examine the extent of gender bias in the illustrations and the portrayal of gender roles. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into the current state of gender representation in English textbooks and inform recommendations for English teachers in high schools in Poso, Central Sulawesi, in selecting educational materials that promote gender equality.

METHOD

This research utilized qualitative research method. The sources of data were Textbook Kemdikbud, a K13 Curriculum English textbook for Senior High School Grade XI published by the government through The Ministry of Education and Culture in 2017, and Textbook Platinum, a “Contextual English” Platinum series published in 2014 commercially by *Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri*, a renowned private publisher in Indonesia. Those books were selected as the sources of data since those books have been used as instructional materials for senior high school students at Poso, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The total number of illustrations in Textbook K is 64 illustrations, and in Textbook P is 193 illustrations (See Table 1).

Only images in both two textbooks were selected as the data and analyzed. After identifying the data, the next step was to categorize data under the following criteria: frequency of images including females only, males only, and females and males in one frame, and; frequency of occupational and leisure activities portrayed by females and males in one frame only. The data are displayed in Table 1.

After categorizing the data based on those criteria, they were interpreted under the theoretical framework to identify potential issues of gender bias, gender inequality, and gender neutrality (Emilia et al., 2017; Logsdon, 1985; Marhumah, 2011; Mills, 1995).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows how gender representation is depicted in the frequency of male and female illustrations in both textbooks.

Table 1. Gender Equality in EFL Textbooks Illustrations

	Category								
	Illustration			Roles or occupations			Leisure or free time		
	n	% of male	% of female	n	% of male	% of female	n	% of male	% of female
Textbook K	64	53.12	46.87	10	60	40	3	45.54	54.54
Textbook P	193	58.03	41.96	26	65.38	34.62	3	66.66	33.33

As seen in Table 1, it is evident that male illustrations are more predominant than female illustrations in terms of frequency, although female illustrations are not

completely absent. In terms of the portrayal of roles or occupations, the textbooks tend to be biased towards male-oriented representations, while female activities are depicted less frequently or confined to specific contexts. Interestingly, textbook K displays a relatively higher frequency of female illustrations in leisure activities compared to textbook P, where male illustrations still dominate in portraying leisure activities.

A total of 28 roles or occupations have been identified in the two textbooks. These include roles such as student, customer, minister, government office clerk, fisherman, hotel concierge, store attendant, housewife, scavenger, scientist, seller, farmer, soldier, patriot or hero, journalist, cameraman, doctor, dancer, theater performer, cleaning service, administrator of international agencies, puppeteer, driver, captain, company president, teacher, secretary, and housewife. Among these roles, textbook K features 10 roles, while textbook P includes 26 roles. This comparison indicates that textbook P offers a wider range and diversity of roles for representation.

Figures 1 and 2 show how roles are illustrated in the textbooks.



Figure 1. Role Division Illustrated with Male and Female in Textbook K

Figure 1 depicts traditional gender roles: a fisherman and a housewife. These roles are traditional, where the fisherman is typically portrayed in a male figure and female figure as the housewife. Fisherman and housewife are also sex-specific roles, since the word “man” and “wife” are used as affixes in “fisher” and “house”, suggesting that fisherman is exclusively associated with males and the responsibilities of a housewife is primarily associated with females (Mills, 1995).

In Figure 2, the image features three female figures and one male figure. Notably, the portrayal of scientists is predominantly represented by women, contrasting Salamah’s findings (Salamah, 2014). Salamah’s research suggests that men are often depicted as mechanics, engineers, and scientists, while women are predominantly depicted as secretaries, nurses, and teachers. However, in Figure 2, women predominantly illustrate the roles of scientists. This observation suggests a depiction of gender equality within the image, and a broader range of roles being portrayed by females.

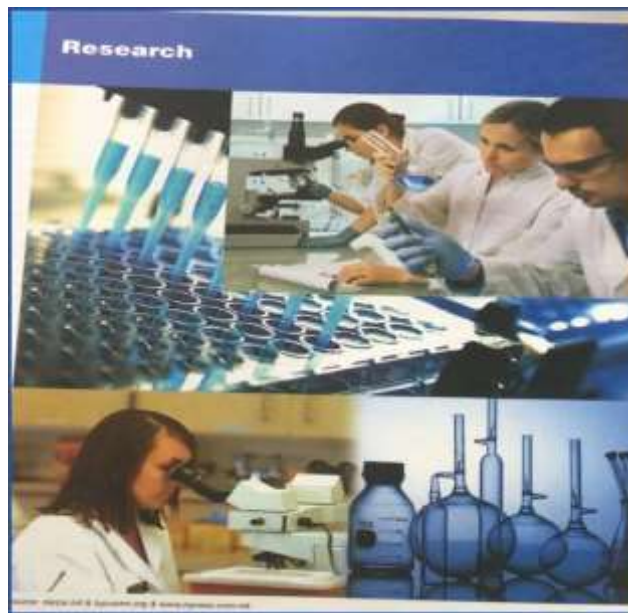


Figure 2. Role Division Illustrated with Male and Female in Textbook K

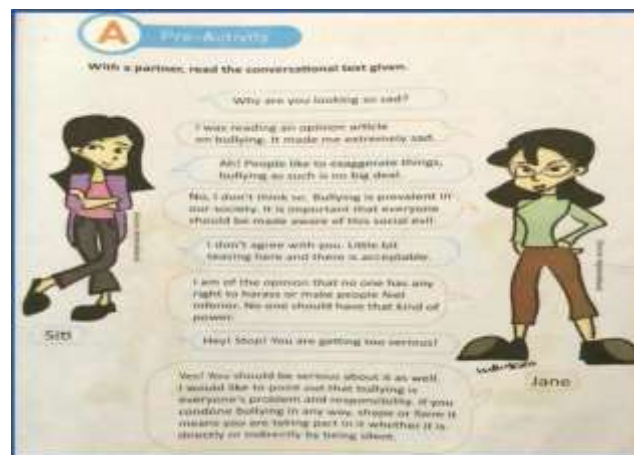


Figure 3. Leisure Time illustrated with Female in Textbook K

Figures 3 and 4 depict how males and females spend their leisure or free time. In Figure 3, two female characters engage in a dialogue, discussing the text they read, the illustration. Meanwhile, Figure 4 shows a male and a female character making plans to enjoy their free time watching a *wayang kulit* show together. These illustrations highlight that activities such as reading and attending art performance are pastimes that can be done by individuals of any gender to make the most of their leisure or free time.



Figure 4. Leisure Time illustrated with Male and Female in Textbook P

Figure 5 depicts how males and a female are being involved in an outdoor activity called *gotong royong*. *Gotong royong* is a term used in Textbook P that refers to Indonesian spirit of communal cooperation and mutual assistance within a community. It embodies the idea of people coming together to work collectively towards a common goal or to solve a shared problem (Kurniasih et al., 2021; Yumarnamto et al., 2020). The practice involves voluntary participation and the sharing of tasks and resources for the betterment of the community. *Gotong royong* manifest in various forms such as community clean-up activities, neighborhood gatherings, or collaborative projects aimed at improving the welfare of the community.



Figure 5. Leisure/Free Time illustrated with Male in Textbook P

However, in Figure 6, these activities are primarily portrayed with male participants. This is consistent with Salamah's findings on games and leisure activities, which also found a prevalence of male-dominated representations (Salamah, 2014).

Activities depicted by females in Figures 3 to 5 are indoor activities, include reading and watching an art performance, while outdoor activities are mostly depicted by males such as in Figure 6. This aligns with the previous findings (Nunun et al., 2020), which suggests that activities that require outdoor space and physical strength are often associated with males. The unequal division of activities, which favors male dominance, reinforces gender stereotypes, and leads to a gender bias.



Figure 6. Leisure/Free Time illustrated with Male in Textbook P

The findings show that, compared to textbook P, textbook K shows a more equitable portrayal of using both genders as illustrations as well as to illustrate leisure activities. As seen in Table 1, upon closer examination of the difference in percentage between male and female illustrations in textbook K, the difference is 6.25%, which indicates a relatively equitable portrayal of both genders. However, upon closer analysis of images depicting gender-specific roles or occupations, a notable difference of 20% becomes apparent. This indicates a significant association between certain societal roles, occupations, and specific genders. This finding implies the possible perpetuation of gender role stereotypes in these illustrations. Furthermore, there is a 9% difference in the portrayal of females and males in leisure activities, indicating a subtle bias to identify specific leisure activities more with females than with males. This finding also implies a strengthening of gender stereotypes regarding preferences for leisure activities.

The difference in the percentage of illustrations between male and female in Textbook P reaches 16.07%. Despite not being extremely high, the 16.07% difference suggests an imbalance where one gender is noticeably more prevalent in the illustrations. This finding thus suggests perceptions of representation and reinforcing certain gender norms. Meanwhile, although textbook P depicts 26 different roles, there is a significant difference of 30.76% between male and female illustrations, signifying an idea that a specific gender depicts certain role or occupations. This finding might indicate a perpetuation of gender stereotypes or biases within the portrayal of societal roles which can influence perceptions about career preferences choices or societal contributions based on gender. Moreover, in contrast with textbook K, textbook P shows a considerable difference of 33.3% in the portrayal of leisure activities between male and female illustrations indicates a notable bias in the depiction of leisure pursuits associated with different genders.

Although the gender equality is more evident in textbook K, both textbooks still exhibit gender bias, with a predominance of male illustrations. These research findings align with previous studies (Ariyanto, 2018; Emilia et al., 2017; Fithriani, 2022; Manalo, 2018; Sui, 2022), which highlight the need to translate the concept of gender

equality properly and consistently into textbook illustrations as curriculum materials. These findings shed light on gender-biased representations and stereotypes within the textbooks. English textbooks, integral to educational materials used in Indonesian schools, are designed and published by the government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. The government must address gender equality issues and actively foster societal change in this regard.

Despite differences in design, chapter count, content, and illustration quality between the two textbooks, the prevalence of gender inequality remains more pronounced in the commercial publisher's book (textbook P). Interestingly, textbook P boasts a larger number of chapters, a broader range of roles, and more illustrations than the Ministry's textbook (textbook K), implying that the mere quantity of chapters, roles, and illustrations does not directly contribute to gender equality in textbook representation. It calls for a comprehensive content evaluation, attention to stereotypes, and conscious efforts to promote balanced gender portrayals.

In light of these findings, it is imperative for teachers who utilize these textbooks to be cognizant of potential gender bias within the content. They should actively address any instances of gender inequality found in the textbooks and provide necessary explanations to their students. Teachers can play a vital role in promoting gender equality by supplementing the textbooks with additional resources that offer a more balanced representation of gender and challenge prevailing stereotypes. This approach will foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where students can develop a broader understanding of gender roles and norms.

This present study has two limitations. Firstly, since the number of textbooks being examined is very limited, the data might not capture the entire landscape of English textbooks used as learning materials in the classroom, therefore the findings made regarding gender equality as represented through male and female illustrations might not be applicable to all textbooks, since other materials may exhibit different patterns of gender equality. Secondly, due to the data richness and time limitation, the analysis primarily relies on the numerical differences in the representation of genders as illustrated within the textbook. A qualitative examination is required to dig deep into the context, content, and other possible underlying aspects for the observed gender equality, in order to provide more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing gender representation in English textbooks.

Furthermore, the government, curriculum developers, and publishers should collaborate to revise and enhance English textbooks, ensuring they adhere to the principles of gender equality. By actively engaging with the content and taking proactive steps to mitigate gender bias, educational stakeholders can create a more equitable educational system that empowers all students, regardless of gender, and prepares them for a more inclusive and diverse society.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality in English textbooks published by the government is shown by a more balanced representation of gender as illustration and the use of both genders in illustrating leisure activities, while the private publisher's textbook revealed a significant presence of male dominance in the total number of illustrations, in depicting roles or occupations, and in portraying leisure activities. However, both books exhibited gender bias, leading to an imbalance in the portrayal of genders. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to further investigate gender equality in illustrated figures across English textbooks for different grade levels, taking into account various aspects such as roles, occupations, and leisure activities. Exploring gender-related issues in a broader range of English textbooks would provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender representation in educational materials. This would contribute to ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity, diversity, and gender equality in the educational system.

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