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### Gender Roles and Representations in the English E-Textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia

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#### Abstract

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# Gender Roles and Representations in the English E-Textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia

*by* Ena Ot

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## **Gender Roles and Representations in the English E-Textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Indonesia is a large country with diverse population. The diversity lies among others in gender aspect. Ideally, the diversity should be accommodated in the educational system, for example in teaching and learning materials for schools. However, the diversity seems to be ignored due to the enactment of a centralized policy in

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Indonesian educational system about the publication of the materials in the form of e-textbooks. This research investigated whether the English e-textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia which were published by the Ministry of Education addressed gender roles and representations impartially. There were respectively three e-textbooks for 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grades; thus, in total there were nine e-textbooks. Document analysis was used to analyze the visual images that were used as illustrations of the e-textbooks. Human images were the focus of the study. To observe whether gender issues had been addressed proportionately in the English e-textbook, an analysis on the roles of male and female images was conducted. The study showed that women were underrepresented in the English e-textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia. The illustrations mainly portrayed men as a more favorable gender. The study also depicted biased representations and some stereotyping of women's roles. Women were associated with certain types of jobs and roles, such as being a mother, sensitive, caring, weak. By contrast, men were associated with more powerful jobs and strong roles.

**Keywords:** gender roles, gender representation, English e-textbooks

## Introduction

Indonesia is a large country with diverse population. Ideally, the diversity should be accommodated in the educational system. However, the diversity seems to be ignored due to the enactment of a centralized policy in Indonesian educational system. Despite the fact that the Decentralization Law was ratified in 1999 (Tyson, 2010), the government still continues to adopt a centralized policy system. One example of the centralized policy is the publication of teaching and learning materials. The government controls and publishes the materials for schools. Centralization has the potential for creating imbalanced power relations between the central and local governments. There is a possibility that the publication of the materials does not include certain local interests and therefore marginalize these groups and prioritize other groups.

E-textbooks publication is one of the centralized publication policies. This policy has also been criticized as costly and marginalizing areas where the Internet facilities do not exist (Maryulis, 2008). Publishing school e-textbooks for a very diverse population of students like in Indonesia should be done with great cautions.

The e-textbooks should include all students' cultural traits so that they are inclusive and would increase students' learning motivation. Although the government stated that these e-textbooks had been reviewed and certified as qualified by the National Bureau of Education Standardization (Nuh, 2010), there have not been any research regarding whether these books are culturally representative of the diverse population of students.

The Ministry of Education had published 927 e-textbooks for all school levels up to January 2012. They are 291 e-textbooks for elementary school, 154 for junior high school, 276 for senior high school, and 204 for vocational school. There are three different titles for all levels of junior high school; therefore, there are nine e-textbooks in total.

Issuing centralistic policy for the whole nation should be done with great cautions especially in Indonesia. Indonesia with its 220 million populations, more than 700 languages, and around 1000 ethnic groups is probably the most diverse nation in the world. Indonesia is a large country covering an area of 5,193,250 square kilometers, out of which 2,027,087 square kilometers are land and the remainder is water. The Indonesian population is estimated to be 220,953,634 people. It is the fourth in the world for its population density. According to the data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of school children is 25,389,000 (*Biro Pusat Statistik* or The Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). These school children represent the diversity of the Indonesian population. The most notable diversity in Indonesia includes ethnicity, religion, gender, and social economic status. Centralistic curriculum with its centralistic textbooks could easily hamper students' motivation by not including their cultural traits in the textbooks (Ena, 2013). Publication of textbooks in Asia (Yen, 2000 Yi, 1997) and in Indonesia (Ena, 2013) often failed in including the cultural aspects that are important for the students such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion.

This study was a content analysis observing gender roles and representations in the English textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the visual images of the English textbooks. Qualitative visual content analysis was employed as the method of the research (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Rosengren, 1981; Willis, 2007). The analysis focused on whether the textbooks accommodate the gender roles of the students and represent them impartially. It sought to answer the question of whether gender role diversity

was represented in the visual images of the English textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia. This study was crucial to be conducted because the textbooks are intended for a very diverse students' population. The research was limited to studying one cultural aspect of the students, namely gender.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Curriculum and the English Textbooks for Junior High School**

The first standardized curriculum applied nationally was developed and implemented in 1975. The national curriculum of English was revised in 1984, 1994, 2000, and 2003 (Mistar, 2005; Sadtono, 1997; Yuwono, 2005). According to the 1975 curriculum, the purpose of English teaching in high school was to facilitate the development of advance science, technology, culture, and arts, and to enhance international relations. The four language skills, namely reading, writing, listening, and speaking, were taught discretely. In 1984 the Ministry of Education revised the national curriculum and therefore it was known as the 1984 Curriculum. The teaching method adopted in this curriculum was known as the Communicative Approach. Another curriculum was introduced in 1994. There were not many changes in English language teaching. However, there was a change of priority of language skills in the 1994 curriculum. The most important language skill was reading, followed by listening, speaking, and writing. In 2004 a competency-based curriculum was adopted. There were not any significant changes in terms of learning materials. In 2006, in line with the implementation of the Regional Autonomy Law, the Ministry of Education promoted school-based management and school-based curriculum. Schools were expected to develop their own curriculum and be independent financially. The adoption of a school based management system had only benefited schools in the cities and in the well-developed areas.

In 2013 a centralistic curriculum was implemented. It is centralistic in nature because it was developed by the central government and was implemented throughout the country. The curriculum documents, syllabuses, students' textbooks, and teachers' books were produced by the central government in this case by the Ministry of Education. All the learning objectives named as core competence and basic competence were set by the government. Teachers were only allowed to develop the lesson plans based on the syllabuses given (Nuh, 2013).

### **English E-textbooks in Indonesia**

The publication of e-textbooks in Indonesia was based on the assumption that technology enhances learning. The e-textbook policy instituted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education was meant to provide inexpensive textbooks for schools therefore increasing access to resources. It was introduced for the first time by the Decree of the Ministry of Education No. 46/2007. The Ministry of Education bought the copyrights from textbook writers and made the textbooks accessible for free on the Internet. The e-textbook publications continue under the new minister of education with the Decree of Minister of Education No. 41/2008. The Ministry of Education has published 927 E-textbooks for all school levels up to January 2012. The e-textbooks are accessible and downloadable from <http://bse.kemdiknas.go.id/>. According to the government, these e-textbooks have been reviewed and certified as qualified by the National Bureau of Education Standardization (Nuh, 2010).

The main advantages of e-textbooks are ease of use, low cost, and fast content delivery. However, it also has limitations due to such issues as slow Internet connections and access to computers. The implementation of the e-textbook policy needs to be evaluated to make sure that it is beneficial for all intended users. Critical education theory is suitable to evaluate whether the policy provides better access to learning resources for all students or if it offers benefits only to certain groups and therefore marginalizes other groups.

### **Critical Education**

Critical education refers to a philosophy of education as well as a process of critique towards the practices of education with the emphasis on the power relations of different parties involved in it. McLaren (1998, cited in Wink, 2000) defines critical pedagogy as a way of thinking, while Giroux (2001) characterizes critical education as theoretical work as well as a conscious practice of education. McLaren claims that

“Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the intuitional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation state (McLaren, 1998, cited in Wink, 2000, p. 31).”



Critical education is an application of critical theory in education. According to Giroux (2001), critical theory refers to the theoretical work developed by certain members of the Frankfurt School as well as to the nature of self-conscious critique and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions. It refers to both a school of thought and also a process of critique. Critical theory focuses on analyzing the contemporary power interests between groups and individuals within society – identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. The central focus of critical research is the dynamics of how privileged groups support the status quo to maintain their privileges (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281).

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), “critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (p. 281). Therefore, critical education is concerned with issues of power and justice within the realm of education. These issues of power relations and justice exist because of different economic status, race, class, gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social factors embedded in the education system. These issues are often very subtle that people do not notice and are considered to be normal. Critical education is a way of analyzing imbalances in power relations within education as well as a conscious practice to attempt to bring about changes toward a more just education system.

Critical education is suitable as the theoretical framework for the study because it is concerned with issues of power and justice within the realm of education. The objective of the study is to observe whether the learning materials provided by the government privileges certain groups of students and thereby marginalizing other groups. Critical theory in education will be employed to study the unfair dynamics between marginalized and privileged groups. Critical education focuses on analyzing the contemporary power interests between groups and individuals within schools, identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. Critical theory will be the framework of this study in an examination of the English e-textbooks for grades 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> published by the government.



## **Gender**

Gender is a combination of nature and culture, biological traits as well as learned behaviors (Ryan, 2010). The Indonesian government applies a heteronormative standard where there are only two genders, male and female; however, homosexuality and transgender exist in public life and are not criminalized. Transgendered people are accepted as part of the society although they often become victims of discrimination. They generally can only work in certain fields, such as fashion, beauty salons, entertainment, and some work as street singers or prostitutes. Apart from a male-dominated society in general, some communities adopt matrilineal systems in which women are in charge of the household and men take their wife's surnames, such as in Minangkabau and West Timor (World Trade Press, 2010).

According to the 2010 Indonesian government census, the populations of women and men in Indonesia were 118,010,413 and 119,630,913 respectively. Indonesia is basically a patriarchal society, where women are expected to play traditional subordinate roles as daughters, wives, and mothers; however, Indonesian women have come a long way in their majority Islamic and male-dominated society. They have become more economically independent over the last few years. Women gained the right to vote at the same time as Indonesia's independence in 1945. Women can legally engage in any social and economic activities. They can inherit equally with men in spite of customary Islamic inheritance laws, which are unfavorable to women (World Trade Press, 2010).

Gender roles are among other cultural identities that play an important role in learning. Sheets (2005) identifies how they develop:

“Gender roles develop through a socialization process in the family and community. These roles are screened through specific cultural norm. Other family characteristics such as race, culture, socioeconomic level, class, and religion can also significantly shape children's gender learning (p. 43).”

Although gender inequality still exists, the situation is changing. Indonesian law mandates that political parties should include at least 20% women as their candidates for the House of Representatives and the local senate (World Trade Press, 2010).

In education, women are often marginalized. In rural areas and under-developed areas where resources are scarce when a choice has to be made, parents often discourage girls from continuing their education. Therefore, boys outnumber girls in enrollment in elementary schools and only 12.8% of girls finish high school. The literacy rate of women from all age groups is as low as 42% (Biro Pusat Statistik, 2010).

### **Learning Materials**

Learning materials play an important role in teaching and learning activities in the classrooms. Textbooks are often the only if not the main sources of learning in Indonesia. Indonesia with a population of more than 200 million is a diverse country in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and socio-economic status (SES). Publishing any learning materials for schools should take diversity into account in order that the materials cater to the learning needs of students with different ethnic, language, religion, and socio-economic backgrounds.

In order to promote learning, materials should be culturally relevant and inclusive, accommodating the many cultural differences of the students. Culturally relevant teaching materials should include students' culture in order to maintain it and to avoid misinterpretations of other cultures (Ladson-Billing, 2009). Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum on their own right (Ladson-Billing, 2009).

Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (2010) recommend some criteria for evaluating and selecting culturally relevant learning materials for school and classroom libraries. These criteria include authentic depiction of the cultural experience from the perspective of that group, accuracy of cultural details in text and illustrations, positive images of minority characters, balance between historic and contemporary views of groups, and adequate representation of any group. Similarly, Campbell (2010) puts forward fifteen minimum qualitative criteria to align or choose textbooks to make sure that they are culturally relevant to the students. The first criterion is that the learning materials are unbiased and non-stereotypical. Secondly, they should have a comprehensive, complete, and inclusive view of society and its history. They should

also have diverse viewpoints. They should not only represent the culture of the majority group. Good learning materials should build on and extend students' experiences. Finally, they should help students analyze and comprehend how real-life situations are. The literature on critical education and instructional material development help the researchers to develop the criteria to evaluate whether the learning materials which are culturally appropriate reside in both the written texts as well as the visual images. Both of them could be used to study whether certain learning materials or textbooks have balanced representation (Sheets, 2005).

Based on what has been presented above, the research aimed at evaluating the visual images of the English e-textbooks designated for the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in Indonesia. The analysis focused on whether and to what extent these e-textbooks accommodated gender diversity of the students.

### **Research Question**

The research question was formulated as follows.

To what extent is gender role diversity represented in the visual images of the English e-textbooks for Junior High School (7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grades) in Indonesia?

### **Research Methods**

#### **Research Subjects**

There were nine (9) English e-textbooks for grades 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> of Junior High Schools which became the subjects of investigation. Three e-books were published for each grade. The purpose of the study was to provide descriptions of visual images incorporated in those nine English textbooks and critically observed how they represented the cultural diversity of the students. The study also provided interpretations as to how these visual images marginalized or prioritized certain group of students.

The following was the description of the e-textbooks which were studied.

The three e-textbooks provided for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade were:

1. *Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Pertama Kelas VII: Contextual Teaching and Learning* by Th. Kumalarini, Achmad Munir, and Slamet Setiawan (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080724125512>

2. *English in Focus* for Grade VII Junior High School by Artono Wardiman, Masduki B. Jahur, and M. Sukiman (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080723130147>
3. *Scaffolding: English* for Junior High School Students Grade VII by Joko Priyana, Riandi, and Anita P. Mumpuni (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080723130258>

The three e-textbooks for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade were:

1. *Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Pertama Kelas VIII: Contextual Teaching and Learning* by Utami Widiati, Gunadi H Sulisty, and Nunung Suryati (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080724125512>
2. *English in Focus* for Grade VIII Junior High School by Artono Wardiman, Masduki B. Jahur, and M. Sukiman (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080723130408>
3. *Scaffolding: English* for Junior High School Students Grade VIII by Joko Priyana, Arnis Rahayu Irjayani, and Virga R. (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080723130534>

The three e-textbooks for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade were:

1. *Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Pertama Kelas IX: Contextual Teaching and Learning* by Gunarso Susilohadi, Suharso and Dwi Anggani (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080724125129>
2. *English in Focus* for Grade VIII Junior High School by Artono Wardiman, Masduki B. Jahur, and M. Sukiman (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080723130625>
3. *Scaffolding: English* for Junior High School Students Grade VIII by Joko Priyana, Riandi, and Anita P. Mumpuni (2008), retrievable from <http://bse.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/buku/details/20080726124625>

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The study employed document analysis. The analysis focused on whether the visual images of the e-textbooks accommodated the gender roles of the students and represented them impartially. It sought to answer the question of whether gender role diversity was represented in the visual images of the English textbooks for Junior

High School in Indonesia. This study was crucial to be conducted considering that the textbooks are intended for a very diverse students' population.

Visual images were used as the sources of data to observe the representation of gender roles in the English e-textbooks because of their richness in providing cultural information. They did not merely accompany the text, because they often provided much more important cultural information than the texts. They often provided the subconscious beliefs of the writers. What images included was as important as what images which were absent from the textbooks because they revealed the writers' reasons behind the choice (Taylor, 2002). Banks (2007) states that there are two main reasons for using visual images in research. First, visual images are easy to find and to access. The second reason for incorporating them is that "they might be able to reveal some insight that was not accessible by any other means" (p.4).

Human images were used in the study. It was divided into male and female. The binary category of male and female was used to correspond to the official category adopted by the Indonesian government although transgender individuals were found in popular media such as televisions and newspapers. Frequency of occurrence was assigned to the subcategory to enable the researchers to interpret the frequency data of the visual images. Descriptions were given when the visual images signified certain roles. An undetermined category was assigned when the visual image did not belong to any category or there was not enough information to classify the visual image. A data collection form was used to record each visual image. A summary of the frequency of occurrences was given. A summary of the description of each variable for the books was also made when all images were described.

To maintain consistency and to obtain validity, multiple coding was employed. To observe whether gender issues had been addressed proportionately in the English textbooks, an analysis on the roles of male and female images was conducted. A careful observation on the roles they were depicting and whether they were trivial or important was conducted.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **I. Visual Images Representing Gender**

The study was concerned with whether the English e-textbooks designated for Junior High School in Indonesia represented gender equally in their illustrations. The representativeness of gender was examined by comparing the roles and number of

male and female characters in the visual images used as illustrations in the e-textbooks. The categories of female, male, and undetermined were used to classify the visual images examined. Three types of visual images, namely images of people, animals, and objects were examined to determine gender representations. The data showed that the visual images of both animals and objects did not contain information about gender. Therefore, the representation of gender was observed mainly through the images of people found in the nine English e-textbooks for grades 7, 8, and 9.

The total number of images of human beings in the nine e-textbooks studied was 1619 as shown in Table 1. The number of images depicting male characters was 884 or 54.60 %. The female group was represented by 687 images or 42.43 % in the e-textbooks. Therefore, there was an imbalanced representation in terms of number between male and female groups in the textbooks. In terms of number, the images of men were more dominant than the images of women as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The number of human images representing gender

Grade	7				8				9				Total
Textbook	a	b	c	Total	D	e	f	Total	g	h	i	Total	
Female	66	138	97	301	96	43	103	242	47	46	51	144	687 (42.43%)
Male	138	148	64	350	131	116	105	352	50	41	91	182	884 (54.60%)
Undetermined	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	36	0	7	43	48 (2.96%)
Total	204	286	161	651	228	159	212	599	133	87	149	369	1619

Gender role comparison between females and males was examined to determine the fairness of the representations. Gender role was defined as a set of social and behavioral norms that were generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in the society (Ryan, 2010; Sheets, 2005). The English e-textbooks for grades 7, 8, and 9 represented both females and males as having different roles and social status. However, they also depicted the existing presumptions about males and females. These presumptions were often in the form of gender role stereotypes.

The images that depicted female stereotypes in traditional gender roles were the pictures of women cooking or preparing meals and doing household chores. There was no male depicted as cooking in the e-textbooks, while the female characters depicted as cooking or preparing food were abundant. Similarly, only very few males were depicted as doing household chores and there were many females doing them.

Other images that showed male and female role stereotypes were the pictures that showed emotions. Sadness and compassion were mainly shown by females in the English textbooks examined. There were girls shown crying, girls holding dolls and flowers which might be interpreted as showing care or tenderness. The e-textbooks also showed pictures of different women planting flowers and taking care of children or babies. No such activities were depicted done by males. The male role stereotypes were depicted by men as being assertive and having power or control. These were shown in e-textbooks where boys were playing soccer, painting, and working outdoors.

Most occupations in the e-textbooks were represented by males and females. In terms of number, the profession such as teacher was almost equally represented. However, some professions were only represented by men. All doctors, politicians, and soldiers in the e-textbooks were men.

## **II. Gender Role Stereotypes and Biases**

Gender is not a mere biological trait but it is also learned behavior (Ryan, 2010). Gender roles are learned in the family and through education. Gender stereotypes exist in the society where males and females are often overly expected to behave in certain manner based on the societal beliefs and norms. These expectations often limit the opportunities of women and girls to perform certain tasks or assume certain jobs. In education, stereotyping could limit students' future decisions regarding various aspects of their lives, including choice of profession and career development. Stereotypes keep both sexes in traditional professions and are incoherent with the various kinds of existing opportunities (Mills & Mills, 1996).

The study showed that the English e-textbooks for Junior High School grades 7, 8, and 9 in Indonesia depicted some stereotypes of women roles. It may have negative impacts on female students because it might limit them from performing certain tasks or assuming certain jobs or taking certain opportunities.

The findings of the study were found to be similar to those revealed in an earlier study conducted by Ena (2013). His focus of analysis was on e-textbooks for Senior High School in Indonesia.



## **Conclusion**

The research question was concerned with how the English e-textbooks for Junior High School in Indonesia represented gender through the use of visual images in their illustrations. First, in terms of numbers, women were underrepresented in the overall English textbooks examined. There were 687 images of women and girls compared to 884 images of men and boys. Secondly, men were depicted as having wider range of roles as shown by their occupations and tasks they performed. Certain professions such as politicians, doctors and soldiers were only depicted by men. Other occupations such as teachers and police officers were illustrated by both men and women. The visual images used as illustrations in the English e-textbooks also contained gender stereotypes related to emotions and feelings. Women were depicted as caring, sympathetic, and passionate, while men were depicted as having power and kept their emotions in control.

The visual images of males and females in the textbook did not represent the reality that exists in the society. In reality, the number of women is more than the number of men according to 2000 population census (Biro Pusat Statistik, 2010). Women play important roles in the society. Women own about sixty percent of micro, small, and medium scale business enterprises. Women also hold more than 11 percent of the seats in the parliament and represent about 11 percent of government ministers. More than sixteen percent of judges and about fifteen percent of Supreme Court Judges are women (World Trade Press, 2010). Women are increasingly playing more important roles in the society. This fact should be better represented in all textbooks used in schools.

Publishing school e-textbooks for a very diverse population of students like in Indonesia should be done with great cautions. The e-textbooks should include all students' cultural traits so that they are inclusive and would increase students' learning motivation. Textbook writers and publishers should create balanced representations of males and females so that the English textbooks would be motivating and engaging for both male and female students. Balanced and accurate depictions of both genders in instructional materials would make students aware of the inequalities that have been experienced by women in Indonesian culture and encourage students to take corrective actions (Mills & Mills, 1996). The balanced representations should not only be in equal numbers of both genders but also they should be depicted as having the same roles. Gender role stereotypes that limit men

and women to perform certain tasks should be avoided. Showing egalitarian roles might lead students to have broader views on the choices of professions.

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