



Gender Representation in The Illustration of Indonesian 8th Grade EFL Textbook

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ABSTRAK

Seiring dengan meningkatnya kesadaran akan kesetaraan gender, pembelajaran bahasa harus mulai memperhatikan isu-isu kesetaraan gender selain berfokus pada pemerolehan bahasa. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif interaktif dari Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana yang dipadukan dengan semiotika Peirce, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggambaran peran gender yang ditampilkan dalam ilustrasi buku teks bahasa Inggris untuk siswa kelas delapan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat upaya untuk mendekonstruksi peran gender baik laki-laki maupun perempuan, meskipun stereotip gender masih umum terjadi. Stereotip yang muncul adalah penggambaran laki-laki dengan warna kulit lebih gelap dan karakter laki-laki yang melakukan aktivitas di luar ruangan. Selain itu, proporsi karakter perempuan lebih sedikit muncul dibandingkan karakter laki-laki. Sedangkan dekonstruksi yang diangkat adalah peran anak laki-laki dalam aktivitas rumah tangga seperti memasak, menyapu, membungkus kado, menata meja makan, dan menggunakan pakaian berwarna pastel sedangkan tokoh perempuan digambarkan dalam aktivitas di luar ruangan. Namun dekonstruksi yang disampaikan masih halus karena teridentifikasi pada karakter perempuan yang melakukan aktivitas luar ruangan cenderung mendapatkan setting yang lebih aman dibandingkan karakter laki-laki. Mengingat persepsi anak terhadap gender dipengaruhi oleh bahasa, maka penting bagi pihak-pihak yang terlibat dalam pembelajaran bahasa untuk mewaspadai hal-hal yang dapat memperluas kesenjangan peran gender yang terdapat dalam materi pembelajaran yang banyak diakses seperti buku teks dan mengatasi permasalahan tersebut saat melakukan pengajaran bahasa.

ABSTRACT

Along with the growing awareness of gender equality, language learning should start working on issues of gender equality besides focusing on language acquisition. Using interactive qualitative methods from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana combined with Peirce's semiotics, this study aimed to examine the depiction of gender roles displayed in illustrations of English textbooks for eighth grade students. The results showed that there were attempts to deconstruct the gender roles of both men and women, although gender stereotypes remained common. The emerging stereotypes were depictions of men with darker skin colour and male characters doing outdoor activities. In addition, the proportion of female characters appeared less frequent than male characters. Meanwhile, the deconstruction raised was the role of boys in household activities such as cooking, sweeping, wrapping gifts, setting up dining table, and using clothes in pastels while the female characters were depicted in outdoor activities. However, the delivered deconstruction was subtle as identified in female characters engaged in outdoor activities tended to get safer settings than male characters. Considering that children's perception on gender are affected by language, it is important for parties involved in language learning to be aware of things that may extend gender role disparities found in the widely accessed learning material such as textbooks and address these issues while conducting their language instruction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although the students nowadays are very familiar with digital technology, textbooks remain accessed highly as they are reliable to clarify concepts through its bit-by-bit presentation (Knight, 2015). Language textbooks, the created materials intended for instructional resources, serve many purposes in instruction such as ensuring a standardized lesson with maintained quality, effective and efficient, as well as fruitful in structuring the lesson (Knight, 2015; Richards, 2001). Besides its well-sequenced presentation, textbooks especially in English as second language (ESL)/English as Foreign Language (EFL) setting usually come up with tapes, CDs, videos and other additions that enrich the lesson (Dhamayanti, 2021; Wen-cheng et al., 2011). Further study highlight the

effectiveness of using textbooks in terms of cost, financial, and pedagogical. Thus, the excessive access towards language textbooks in language teaching becomes reasonable (Mukundan, 2016). Unfortunately, language textbooks seem to be focusing solely on facilitating language acquisition and neglecting social issues such as gender equality that are presented in the material. The unequal representation of gender in textbooks has been addressed by many in form of detailed analysis on texts and illustration (Blangsinga et al., 2021; Mihira et al., 2021; Suwastini et al., 2023; Wiraningsih et al., 2025; Yasamahadewi et al., 2023). Visual representation for women were found to be much less than men, where women were usually depicted as domestic worker or worker with lower salary compared to men (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Hall, 2014; Kholy, 2017; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Roohani & Zarei, 2013; Suhartono & Kristina, 2023; Svein, 2018). From linguistic side, male pronouns dominated the textbooks, with adjectives resonating activeness were mostly associated with men, thus women were still represented as weak and inferior (Agni et al., 2020; Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Lowe, 2013; Sadeghi & Maleki, 2016; Ullah & Skelton, 2013).

Perception on gender is influenced by language being used as one of the social inputs, thus the underrepresentation of one of the genders in language textbooks becomes concerning (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012; Suhartono & Kristina, 2023). While previous study found that gender equality in the countries using genderless or natural gender in their language was higher than those using gendered language (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012). Gender fair language was proven to impact children's perception on gender. Other study found that children perception on stereotyped male jobs were changed after they are imposed to linguistic forms using pair forms. The studies confirm that gender cues and gender norms are transported through language (Rubegni et al., 2022). Although many stereotypes of gender representations were identified in previous research, some researchers have successfully identified deconstruction on gender representations in various English textbooks both from their visual and verbal portrayal. In Indonesia, other studies discovered that female characters having career on prestigious jobs were portrayed in the textbooks for junior high school students (Lestariyana et al., 2020; Setyono, 2018). English textbooks in other countries also began to portray women for being more involved in outdoor activities or use gender neutral pronouns in the texts (Abdelhay & Benhaddouche, 2015; Cook, 2015; Lee, 2014; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Yang, 2011). Recent observations on English textbooks inform some disagreement regarding gender representations in their visual and verbal portrayal.

Besides, according to previous study one of the principles of gender analysis pathways is understanding the factors and actors that perpetuate the discrimination upon women and girls through an analysis of the value existing in the community (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012). Considering that *When English Rings a Bell* for 8th grade students is one of the commonly accessed textbooks which serve the role of value agent for gender awareness, this research attempted to analyse representation and deconstruction of gender stereotypes found in the illustration of the textbook (Setyono, 2018). The analysis was done through cyclical process of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing following the research design from Miles et al. (2014) supported with Peirce's semiotics to support the data interpretation.

2. METHOD

This paper used qualitative research as the research model. They proposed that the process of data analysis happens simultaneously with the process of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 2007). The research was began with separating the books according to its chapter. The illustration containing the main characters in the textbook were taken as unit of data analysis. Then, they were analysed based on the action taken by the characters and the text supporting the illustration. After that, the identified action and text were classified according to deconstruction or stereotypes being presented. Data analysis was done by closely examining the illustration presented in the textbook mainly on the physical appearance, social attribution presented by the characters, and activities and action conducted by the characters. The analysis was mapped out in a data display, grouped into representation of gender stereotypes and gender deconstruction. This is followed by describing the representation of gender stereotypes and gender deconstruction of the textbook illustration and comparing the result of the present study with preliminary studies.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The representation and deconstruction of gender stereotypes existed in *When English Rings a Bell* for 8th grade Indonesian students are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Representation and Deconstruction of Gender Stereotypes Existed in When English Rings a Bell For 8th Grade Indonesian Students

No	Categories	Description			
		Stereotype	f	Deconstruction	f
1	Physical appearance	Female characters having longer hair than the male characters	17	-	-
		Female characters having brighter skin tone than the male characters	8	-	-
2	Attributes associated with certain gender	Female character wearing accessories and religious clothing	8	The use of variety of colour on both gender	7
3	Activities and action	Male characters having the role as leader	2	Equal ratio of female and male characters	4
		Male characters doing outdoor activities	4		
		Female characters doing house chores	2	Male characters doing house chores	5

Base on Table 1, the stereotypes found are in form physical stereotypes such as hair length and skin tone, attributes associated with certain gender such as the use of religious clothing and accessories, and in activities and action such as leading role and domestic role. From those identified stereotypes, the stereotypes in physical appearance were most frequently found. On the other hand, this study also has identified attempts of deconstruction on gender stereotypes such as the use of variety of colour range on the clothing of both male and female characters, composition of males and females, and the action of doing house chores by the male *characters*.

Gender Stereotypes in the Illustration of When English Rings a Bell for 8th Grade Indonesian Students

In the first chapter, six main characters in the textbook were introduced consisting of three male students namely Udin, Beni, and Edo and three female students namely Lina, Siti, and Dayu. On the introduction page, the identified stereotypes were female students as having long hair, brighter skin tone, and wearing religious clothing attribute. From the introduction page as shown in Figure 1.

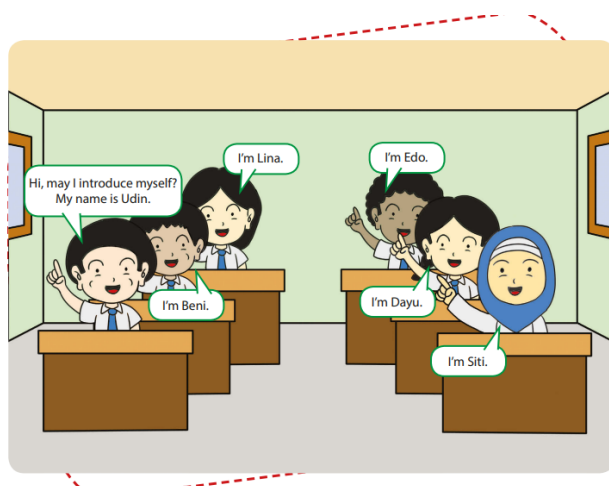


Figure 1. Illustration of Main Characters in the Textbook Introducing Themselves

Base on Figure 1, it was shown that Udin, Edo, and Beni have short hair ended at the nape of their necks while Lina and Dayu have long hair at the length of their shoulders Udin had straight hair, while Beni's hair was wavy, and Edo's hair was curly. Lina and Dayu had straight hair but Lina set her hair loose while Dayu appeared with braided hair. Siti's wore a head scarf covering her hair. The hair length of the students complies the stereotypes that long hair is always associated with female. The long shot captured six students in one frame revealing their different skin tone leading to an object that male and female have different skin tone. From the picture, the male students have darker skin tone compared to the female student. This representamen creates an idea that besides the difference on male's and female's skin tone, male also always has darker skin tone than female.

Furthermore, female characters were seen to be more expressive in their dressing. For example, Siti was depicted as a girl wearing head scarf in blue known that the clothing piece is a compulsory for certain religion. Thus, Siti delivered the message of women's obedience towards the religion. This is supported by the selection of the proper noun "Siti" which is related strongly with Islamic naming. Meanwhile, Dayu was described as a girl with braided hair. On the other hand, the male students did not wear anything on their head. This comparison follows the stereotypes that women are more feminine compared to men seen from their dressing preference. The third stereotype is related to male role as a leader. In Picture 2, it was shown that Edo invited his friends to go out of the classroom with him. The picture shown from long shot showed that Edo stood at the door calling Beni, Udin, and Lina who sat at their chairs. Udin, Beni, and Lina looked at Edo implying that the society put men as the center of the attention.



Figure 2. Illustration of Edo asking his Friends to Go Out of The Class

Base on Figure 2, Edo said his line while raising his right hand. This signalled that the male has the position as the leader who invite others. Further, this is strengthened by Udin who responded to Edo and made the decision for the other by saying, "Sure. Let's go." Udin replied Edo's invitation from his seating in the front implying him as an active character who voiced the decision for his friends who sat on the back. Meanwhile, Lina who was the only girl among the four of them was seen to sit in the back, signalling her position to follow the others. Similarly, in the second chapter, it was found that Beni was standing in front of the class holding a guitar as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Illustration of Beni Performing in Front of the Class

Base on Figure 3, the title of the chapter was “We will do it, we can do it”. The title combined with the illustration resulting in an idea that male is associated with being capable. The title also carries the message that the male student invitingg other to accomplish things. Thus, it strengthened the idea of male having leading role. Furthermore, the illustration also implied that Beni is going to perform in front of his friends shown from a glimpse of a student at the right side of the frame. Meanwhile, there was no female students identified in this picture. Seen from his face expression with a smile on it, it implies that boys have more chance to do things they enjoy in front of the public. The stereotype of female characters as passive is further noticed in the cover of chapter seven and eight as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Illustration of Activities Done by Girls and Boys in School

Both covers are similar, portraying four students outside the classroom. In Figure 4, Dayu and Lina stood near the building, while Beni and Udin stood farther from the building. Beni and Udin were playing football together, Lina was watering the plant, and Dayu was reading a book. Their position is a representamen creating an object that boys are normally found to do outdoor activities seen from their distance from the classroom building. Meanwhile, watering plant creating an object of domestic activity and reading a book creating and object of passive activity. The boys were depicted as active as they were seen to do sports i.e., playing football. The proximity of the female characters also strengthened the idea that female is more familiar with housing activity. On the illustration of cover for chapter eleven, Edo was narrated to make garden benches with his brother and his father as shown in Figure 5.

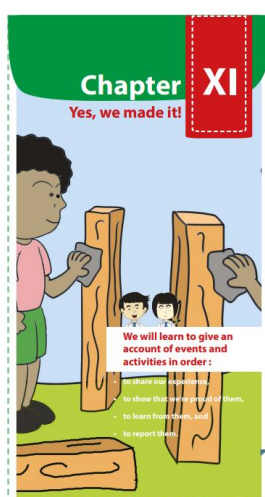


Figure 5. Illustration of Edo Making a Bench From Some Logs

As shown in Figure 5, the wood blocks were as tall as Edo and his father implying that the male characters were conducting a heavy duty. In contrast, Lina was illustrated as a girl watering the flowers. The wood blocks are the representamen creating an object that boy should do masculine activity, while the flowers are the

representamen creating an object that girls should take feminine activity. Those two objects became the second representamen leading to the second object that is feminine and masculine activities are depicted to be gender specific. Stereotyping of gender specific colour were identified in the cover of two different chapters. Chapter four is shown in Figure 6, illustrating Lina having a pink birthday cake before her with a banner written with “Happy Birthday Lina” as the background.



Figure 6. Illustration of Lina Having a Birthday Party

While chapter 10 was illustrated by Dayu showing a picture of a baby in front of the class as shown in Figure 7. The phrase “When I was a child” as the chapter title combined with the illustration of a bald baby wearing only a pink diaper is the representamen creating an object that the baby was Dayu.



Figure 7. Illustration of Dayu Presenting the Photograph of her When She was Little

Both chapters showed that female characters remained to be illustrated with traditionally ascribed colour such as pink for girls. This finding found that gender stereotypes were represented subtly in colours used in characters illustration.

Deconstruction of Gender Stereotypes in the Illustration of When English Rings a Bell for 8th Grade Indonesian Students

In the introduction page found in the first chapter, the six students were illustrated from a long shot, they were all raising their hand and introducing their names. This point of view allows the reader to see their seating arrangement. The seating shown was Udin and Siti in the front row, followed by Beni and Dayu in the second row, and Lina and Edo in the last row. This arrangement is the representation creating an object that the male and female characters have equal position, none of them are more favoured to sit in the front or in the back row. The representation of equal chance is also shown in chapter thirteen. It was illustrated by Beni, Lina, Edo, and Dayu singing together. They were holding hands with their bodies facing to the front. Furthermore, seen from the setting, the students were sitting in their classroom which became the representamen leading to an object that male and female students were attending their class. Further, this object led to another interpretant resulting in the second object that both genders are receiving the same chance for education.

The textbook also contains deconstruction for gender roles in form of male characters doing house chores that are found in five illustrations. However, the chores being illustrated are limited to cleaning the house and preparing food at home. In one of the illustrations, Beni was sweeping the classroom floor while his teachers complimented him. Further, this object leads to the second interpretation which in turn creates the second object that cleaning the room can be done by boys. In another illustration, Edo was helping her mother to cook as shown in [Figure 8](#).



Figure 8. Illustration of Edo Helping his Mother in the Kitchen

Base on [Figure 8](#), the positioning showed that Edo only assisting his mom seen from him passing the salt to his mother who held the frying pan. The dialogue is a representamen creating an object that Edo would finish the cooking since his mother had something else to do. Another illustration also showed Beni helping her mother to prepare the meal. From a long shot, it is shown that Beni and his mother stood in front of the table while Beni took a plate from the stack. The involvement of Edo and Beni in preparing the meal is the representamen creating an object that the house works such as sweeping and cooking is not limited for female characters. However, in those illustration, it is also revealed that woman still played a central role in doing the house chores. As in Edo and his mother, it is seen that Edo only assisted his mother. The request of Edo's mother to finish the cooking also signalled that she held the responsibility to prepare the meal for her family. Meanwhile, Beni's mother was seen to supervise Beni in preparing the table for their meal as shown in [Figure 9](#).



Figure 9. Illustration of Beni Preparing Meal under his Mother's Supervision

Base on [Figure 9](#), this illustration created an object that female has more experience in domestic chores. The involvement of male characters in domestic activities as the attempt to deconstruct the stereotypes seem to be subtle considering that the illustration emphasized that female characters are mostly in charge for cooking the meal and keeping the house clean.

Although gender specific colour is common such as pink for girls and blue for boys, the textbook had presented the deconstruction of the perception by assigning various colours for the characters. All the students in the textbook were seen to wear the same uniform. Yet, their casual clothing was more colourful as shown in [Figure 10](#).

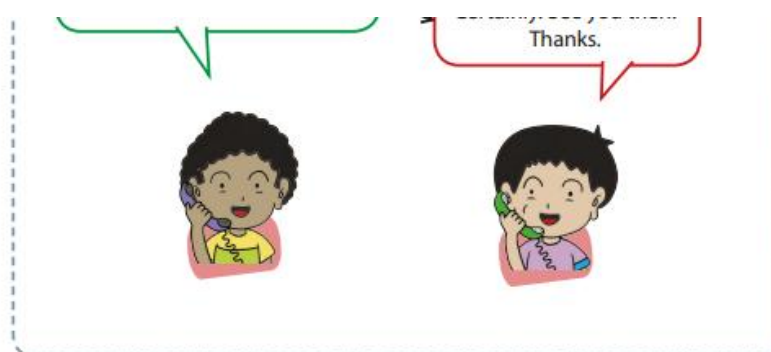


Figure 10. Variation of Color Use on Characters

Base on [Figure 10](#), Edo was seen to wear yellow t-shirt and blue pants, while Beni wore t-shirt in pink shade. Edo and Beni were also discussing about the dress code to attend Lina's birthday party. The illustration and the dialogue presented above became the representamen creating an object that colour are not limited to certain gender. Furthermore, the topic of the dialogue also implied that discussing about colour is not limited for female characters. Therefore, this textbook has inserted the attempt to deconstruct gender specified colour through the colour selection found in the illustrations.

Discussion

This research attempted to analyse representation and deconstruction of gender stereotypes found in the illustration of the textbook. The findings shows gender stereotype in physical appearance, attributes, and activities. Deconstruction towards physical appearance such as hair length and skin tone is not identified in the textbook. While gendered physical representations in textbook illustrations may appear to reinforce stereotypes, they are often used as a tool to provide visual clarity, despite their reinforcement of societal gender norms ([Ade-Ojo et al., 2022](#); [Carlisle et al., 2015](#)). Hence, gender norms reinforcement and textbook clarity can be difficult to maintain, as clear gender visual markers may deliver unintentional stereotypical gender roles. These choices further perpetuate gendered expectation that limits students' understanding of gender diversity ([Diamond, 2020](#); [Ishizuka, 2019](#)).

Meanwhile the deconstruction towards gender stereotype has been done through characters' attribute and their activities and action. Traditionally, males are often associated roles implying active, leading, and technical roles while females are often associated with nurturing and passive. As visual representation may challenge the societal expectation, the analyzed textbook present it through variety of color on both gender, equal ratio of character for both gender and male characters doing traditional female roles (Rice, 2021; Sovič & Hus, 2015). By varying the colors for both characters, the textbook move beyond color confinement for male and female which delivers the idea that gender is not defined by color. In addition, the balanced approach in representing the male and female characters also empower what is possible for both gender (Agni et al., 2020; Lee, 2014). By representing males in nurturing activities such as doing house chores, it encourages the view that male and female characters are not limited to explore diverse roles. However, it is worth to note that the deconstruction remains subtle because the representation of male characters doing nurturing roles are done by assisting another female character. Hence, the idea is that male characters are not expected to take on the role entirely. This clear division of labor rely on women being the central figure for domestic chores.

The results of this research have important implications for the development of English language teaching materials at the junior high school level in Indonesia. The findings regarding gender representation in grade 8 EFL textbook illustrations can be a basis for writers and publishers in creating more inclusive and gender-balanced materials. In addition, teachers and policy makers can use the results of this research to evaluate and revise textbooks used in schools to ensure that the material presented does not reinforce certain gender stereotypes, but instead supports gender equality in education. Thus, this research contributes to improving the quality of English education in Indonesia through the perspective of gender equality in visual representation.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be noted. First, this research only focuses on one grade 8 EFL textbook, so the generalization of the findings to other textbooks or different educational levels is limited. Second, the analysis of this research only focuses on the visual aspects of illustrations without considering text elements that might also contribute to gender representation. Additionally, this study did not examine the direct impact of gender representation in illustrations on students' perceptions and attitudes, which can be an important aspect in understanding how teaching materials influence their gender awareness. Therefore, further research that covers more textbooks, combines text and image analysis, and explores their impact on students is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to identify the gender representation in Indonesian EFL textbook for secondary education. This study reveal that the textbook illustration contained gender stereotypes in form of skin tone difference, the use of accessories, activities difference, and colour stereotypes. While male students are depicted to have darker skin tone, more active roles, the female students are associated with the use of accessories, brighter skin tone, more passive activities, and colour stereotypes. Attempts to deconstruct the stereotypes were identified in form equal representation of male and female students in the illustration, male students involved in domestic activities, and varied use of colour in the students' casual clothing. However, this highlight the ambivalence in the illustration in which no female students were found to be involved in active or outdoor activities and males participating roles in traditional nurturing activity. As the illustration convey a mixed message between challenging traditional gender norms and tethering the traditional notion of women, this highlights the complex gender representation in educational materials. Reflecting on the needs to provide gender balance learning material, it is advisable to accompany the textbook with illustration that defy the gender stereotypes.

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