Exploring Indonesian EFL Students' Perception on Gender Equality Awareness Through Water Folklore as Learning Materials

Aurelia Putri Widodo[1], Ive Emaliana[2]

{aureliaping@student.ub.ac.id1, ive@ub.ac.id[2]}

Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia[12]

Abstract. Although the previous research pointed to the examination of EFL textbooks as regards their equal gender representation, it did not explain how EFL students perceive them. In order to fill that information gap, this study attempted to obtain senior high school students' level of gender awareness through water folklore storybooks as the EFL learning materials where gender equality is portrayed using narratives. The participants were six students of a reputable private school across different achievement levels and genders. This study used focus group interviews to investigate EFL students' awareness of gender equality from a folklore storybook. Interview data was compiled to reveal two dimensions of gender equality awareness: definition of genders and roles of genders in society. Results found that students' level awareness of gender equality was affected from their sources of learning. This research emphasizes the influence of selecting instructional resources containing gender-equal to take an egalitarian viewpoint..

Keywords: gender equality, EFL learner, storybook, learning materials

1 INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, gender bias has existed in our culture for centuries and it frequently results in oppression of women. Gender inequality is a social issue that arises from the belief that men are superior to women [1]. Men and women are intrinsically different in terms of perceptions and behavior patterns, gender differences continue to operate in social practices in all communities. For example, through the Indonesian "women empowerment" that inagurated by Raden Ajeng Kartini, (p. 144): "a national woman figure who campaigned for sexual equality (female education)" (p. 143) in all aspects of social activities"[2]. This means that men and women are intrinsically different in terms of both perceptions and behavior patterns, therefore despite the gender equality movement, gender inequalities remain in social-culture in all societies. These gender inequalities may, to some extent, lead to gender bias, which has a negative impact on people's perceptions of these gender equality issues.

Gender inequality, which is founded on feminism beliefs, is one of the most debatable and visible societal problems. There must be an involvement that literature may represent human beings in its whole, including its true values. Values or standards here are shaped by the beliefs of social populations in a specific location and time period. As a result, literary works can be utilized to investigate societal occurrences, social standards, and even human beliefs during specific periods of time or eras.Innovations in today's language instruction material are critical for foreign language teachers. The further claims that in the last two decades of the twentieth century, scholars have placed a high priority on evaluating the many expressions of sexism in foreign language materials especially in the textbooks, particularly for English Foreign Learner (EFL) [3]. What is often ignored is that these textbooks provide beliefs or ideologies based on a certain curriculum of any country, which teachers should recognize.

Teachers of foreign languages have a responsibility to portray gender equality for their students, and textbooks. It is the crucial foundation of education, even in the Indonesian setting. EFL textbooks are textually tend to put gender differences context in the field of language education because any texts and tasks in such textbooks there are always sexual preference context. This case may lead the students to create a stereotype. In other words, if gender differences between men and women may be portrayed properly in EFL textbooks, which may neglect the gender equality issues inside.
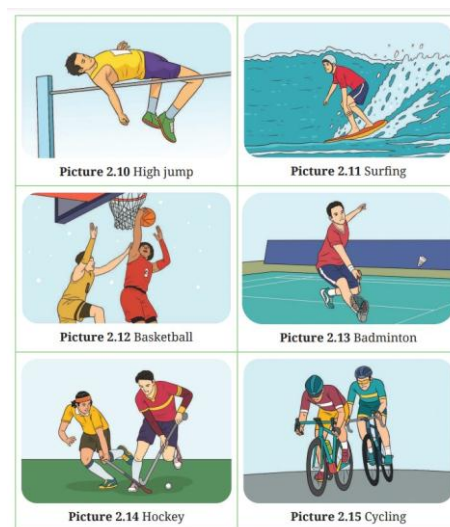

Figure I. Indonesian EFL Textbooks in the high school level

Cultural biases are always found in EFL textbooks [4]. It is undeniable that several of the illustrations in the student's book show females performing household chores like cleaning the floor, gardening, dishwashing, etc. While the boys play soccer, badminton, surf, watch a movie, others. Figure I shows that there is still a portrayal of gender bias in the EFL textbooks especially at the high school level. The portrayal of male as we can notice in the figure 1 are more dominant than females. The majority of visual artifacts reflect gender bias that is included in the textbook [5]. Additionally, he notes that "gender equality in the textbook does not critically transfer into curriculum resources, just like the textbooks". In some form (e.g.,

through writing, storytelling, songs, dance, rituals, and ceremonies), stories embody fictional or actual characters and events portrayed in a coherent narrative and shared with others [6]. Stories assist us in addressing the complexities of life by fostering empathy for others and our general human experiences. Complex, challenging, and sensitive issues and ideas can also be conveyed to children through narratives, in which fictional people and settings are less threatening and distressing than real-life [7]. Children can begin to form their identities and sense of place in the world through the use of narratives in which they recognize themselves and their lives [8]. When teachers use tales to scaffold learning, children are more likely to extend their thoughts, ideas, and knowledge beyond that which they already understand and can conceive [7]. Stories can also convey advanced and complex thoughts, information, and knowledge that aid the student in problem-solving, decision-making, imagining possibilities for and re-imagining them by seeking alternative to the behaviors and assumptions that may dominate the contextual factors in which they reside [6]. Therefore, narratives can be used to reconstruct negative gender messages and promote new notions of what loving, caring, and equal-gender interactions may look like [9]. It is crucial for language learner in their learning and literacy development which are facilitated by stories [10].

In the present, there is still tradition that male is more dominant than females. Unfortunately, It still happens because of the influence of Indonesian culture. This case needs more attention from the government to promote gender equality in the field of education as the first step. The strong beliefs of a powerful patriarchal mentality has been carried down to the newest generation in all aspects of life. For example, assumptions concerning the capability disparity between male and female students within the science aspect, gender-biased learning resources, and extremely conventional extracurricular categorization [11].

Textbooks take a crucial role as cultural structures in the classroom activities and instructional tools that assist the students to engage in social activities in the target language (p. 132) [12]. There is "an instructional guide that allows the learners to engage with these beneficial texts in order to encourage them to learn the acceptable mindsets, behaviors, actions, appreciation, and living in the society". Textbooks assist the students to construct their perceptions especially related to gender-equality. The context inside the book may represent the teaching concepts in giving them new perspectives.

Local wisdom is made up of two words: wisdom (knowledge) and local (local). Local wisdom can be characterized as intelligent, valuable ideas, beliefs, and local perspectives developed and followed by locals [13]. Utilizing the local wisdom content in the present digital era is beneficial to preserve the cultural heritage. Indonesian EFL Learners may be able to enrich their knowledge especially related to their local culture in Indonesia, especially from the water folklore narratives.In the present, the implementation of the newest curriculum towards gender-equality issues gains more attention from the government. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture's policy regarding the national curriculum has concerns about implementing IKM (Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka) by the 2022-2024 period. This is a policy in the development of the Independent Curriculum in order to improve learning during the period. IKM is the newest curriculum by the year of 2022.

There is still unequal implementation of this new curriculum (IKM 2022) throughout Indonesia. It is suggested that some of the schools use the 2013 curriculum because they have not fulfilled all of the standards for implementing this curriculum (K13). The Indonesian

Ministry of Education and Culture also released an emergency curriculum named Kurikulum Darurat due to the pandemic situation. Kurikulum Darurat is generally a modification of the 2013 curriculum.If gender equality is successfully taught properly, it will be better to build a gender-equal society in the future [14]. The implementation of the newest curriculum in Indonesia has to be the agent of change in the material for education, especially in forming the content of gender equality. The fact that there are no professions specifically for women or men that implies both sexes have equal opportunities to perform anything. Gender equality has been legislated not only for Indonesia but for all other countries in the world.

2   RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher in this study chose to employ the descriptive qualitative study as the study's research design. The researcher will gain a solid comprehension through descriptive qualitative study using qualitative approach [15]. This research was conducted in a reputable private school across different achievement levels and genders (high, medium, and low achiever). Their levels of achievement were determined by considering their test score and active participation in the class. The researcher analyzed the data using some steps of data analysis. Firstly, organize and identify. In this step, the researcher organizes the data gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The second step involves coding and reduction. In this process, the researcher collects and classifies significant data from a set of data to the following. Here, the researcher demonstrates using a code, such as "Student 1A, 2A, 3B, 4B, 5C, 6C" for the participant responses. In addition, the researcher eliminated irrelevant data in order to interpret the next step.

Finally, interpretation and representation. This is the final step of the fundamental qualitative interpretative analysis. In this step, the researcher analyzed the questionnaire and interview data by explaining the perceptions of the senior high school students. The participants were six students from the early grades of senior high school that already had the interview and filled some questionnaires. There are two dimensions that were used in this research. The first dimension was a questionnaire to examine the students' awareness about the definition of gender and the second was about the role of men and women in the society. The interview was used as the next instrument to clarify the students' answer from the first instrument in detail. In order to collect the interview data, audio recordings were used to record their response regarding the questionnaire. Then the researcher combined the first and second instruments to do some analysis.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The This investigation has a single research question. It is "Have the different levels of achievement affected the students' awareness of gender equality?" The data needed to address the research question that was collected by questionnaire from six students, who were then categorized into high, medium, and low achievement based on the results of the survey. The researcher evaluates the academic performance of the students based on their activeness and cognitive points. By conducting more interviews, each category gets a more in-depth

conversation about the reasons and revelations for why they have such a natural way of thinking. After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed and examined the information. By interviewing these six students, the study expects to have a more comprehensive and in-depth dialogue with them regarding additional questions. The male students described with the odd numbers (1,3,5) and the even numbers (2,4,6) belong to the female students. High achiever students will be as described as "A", medium in "B", and low achiever students will be in "C", as stated in the table below.

Table 1. The description of the students

Name	Description
Student 1A	High Achiever
Student 2A	
Student 3B	Medium
Student 4B	Achiever
Student 5C	Low Achiever
Student 6C	

3.1 The definition of man and woman

There are some sub-dimensions of the definition of man and woman that were discussed between the researcher and the participants.

3.1.1 Man and woman are identified by a strong binary opposition between masculine and feminine, with particular stereotypical aspects.

Figure II. Men and women helping each other

The first question was about whether the portrayal of gender in figure II is natural and there is no problem in the depiction of men and women there. Gender perspective is a viewpoint that examines the impact of one's gender qualities on possibilities, social roles, and their relationships with different gender attributes [16]; gender disparities are differences generated by social construction [17]. The six students agreed that the portrayal of men and women in figure II are equal. They do not consider gender as a barrier to assisting others.

> Student 1A:"Yes, I agreed, It is natural. Everyone can be hand in hand with others. Gender does not matter."
> Student 3B: "Agreed. In my opinion, there is no problem for women in this picture, men are depicted as strong and helping each other in this picture. And those who

help do not have to be men, because all genders can lean towards masculinity and femininity."
Student 5C: "Agreed, because we as fellow human beings must help each other. Does not discriminate"
Student 6C: "Agreed, because everyone helps each other. We ignore gender."

Question number two was talking about how females should behave better (attitude and speech) than male students. Here there are some students that agree and disagree with the statement. The high achiever men and the low achiever women tend to show their agreed view point, while the other students showed their disagreement against the statement. The high achiever man believes that women should behave better than men. This is different from the other students that showed their opinion regarding the statement. Most of the students tend to have their awareness in this question.

Student 2A: "I don't agree, speaking good words do not look at the gender. The degrees are identical because it is the basic manner. Not just for women."
Student 4B: "I disagree, because it is not only girls who must be good, but also boys."
Student 5C: "I disagree, because everything must be excellent. It is not because she is female that she must say anything nice."
Student 1A: "Agreed, because women should not use bad words and they should behave better than males."

Generalizations in assessing certain genders are reasonable (example: women tend to be sensitive and cry easily, men are stronger). In short, most of the participants across their gender and achievement showed their positive attitude by stating their disagreement on the statement. The man from lower achievement mentioned that *"....it can be seen from various aspects."* This indicates that he is aware of gender equality in this question. Different with student 5C, a male from the high achiever has shown a different attitude among them. He agrees that women are more sensitive and men are strong.

Student 1A: "I agree, because the majority of women are more sensitive. If men are stronger
Student 2A: "I don't think it's appropriate to generalize because according to my experience meeting people with various characteristics, it doesn't have to be sensitive women or strong men. Sometimes there are boys who are more feminine and there is female who are more masculine."
Student 3B: "agree, because women have a feminine side that cries easily, men are stronger"
Student 5C: "I disagree, my experience is that the statement that men are strong is not valid because we see that being strong can be physical, mental, spiritual. But, sometimes even women are also strong mentally and spiritually. it can be seen from various aspects."

The next question was about men being superior than women. From the interviews, the researcher can decide the outcome that the male student for high achiever agrees on the statement and he believes that men are superior than women by stating as shown below. While the others have different points of view. They disagree that men are superior than women because everybody has their own capabilities.

> *Student 1A: "Yes, because men are portrayed as stronger and most leaders are men so they are superior."*
> *Student 2A: "I don't agree, human beings have their own skills. Now there are many career women who have skills that are almost on par with men"*
> *Student 6C: "I don't agree, because women and men are different and they have their own abilities."*

From this discussion of the definition of men and women, we can know that All of the students from the high, medium, and low achievement have the same perception of question 1. But, not all of the students agreed with the statement of "Girls should behave better (attitude and speech) than male students" in question number 2 and others. The last question from the definition of men and women is a statement about Men should show masculinity and women should show femininity. All of the participants do not agree with the statement that Men should show masculinity and women should show femininity. A female high achiever stated that it is their choices and this is not a must to show the masculinity of femininity among others.

> *Student 2A: "I don't think so, even though men can also have a feminism side and women tend to be predominately masculine. This will cause the failure if it is, if they force themself."*
> *Student 6C: ""I agree, in essence, men are created masculine and women are feminism. Man have to be masculine because they will be the potential leaders."*
> *Student 3B:"Disagree, women are shown as kind, there is a feminine aspect, and there are also masculine character."*

3.2 How are the role of man and woman in the society

3.2.1 The role of men and women should match with the notion of masculinity and femininity

It is natural that male characters have a greater number of utterances than female characters in the Storybook. From this, we can infer that a female student from the low achiever tends to show her opinion regarding the statement of "It is natural that male characters have a greater number of utterances than female characters in Coban Putri's Storybook". The female student has her view that men are mostly the main character of folklore stories, then she can conclude that the utterances of man in narrative should be more than women.

> *Student 3B: "I disagree since in our narrative we don't only describe man; there are also acceptable female characters. It is determined by the story's context. Not just guys."*
> *Student 4B: "Do not agree, because everything must be equal and dialogue is not exclusively male."*
> *Student 5C: "I disagree; typically, it depends on the book's setting. The story's plot is also significantly influenced by women. For instance, a love narrative in which the female protagonist is also the plot's driving force. Not always a man"*
> *Student 6C: "Agreed, man may be role models since they can lead more."*

The position of men and women should be described in textbooks in accordance with their natural stereotypes (example: women are teachers and nurses because women tend to be patient and caring, while men are entrepreneurs or bank employees because they tend to be competitive and logical). More than 50 percent of the students disagree on the statement above. They believed that everyone is able to work by knowing their capabilities.

> *Student 1A: "Agreed, because women do not have too much work, men tend to do heavy physical work"*
> *Student 2A: "I don't agree, because every human being has different capabilities. And it is possible that there are men who, for example, become make-up artists and are usually more talented. I think the job has no gender, so everyone can choose."*
> *Student 5C: "I do not agree, because it is possible that the woman is working on the male job desk."*
> *Student 6C: "did not agree, because the characteristics of men and women are different even though women are seen as gentle figures. But women and men can make their own choices."*

A man is better suited for more significant roles such as class president, debate leader, and group representative for presentations, among others. Almost 80% of the students disagree with the statement. However, there is a male student among the high achievers who believes that women do not have as much work as males by giving his statement, "*women do not have too much work, men tend to do heavy physical work*". He believes that men should be stronger than women in doing some physical work. This is different with the male student-5C, he argues that women are able to work on the man occupation too. They both showed different attitudes in the different achievement scores in class.

> *Student 1A: "Agreed, because women do not have too much work, men tend to do heavy physical work"*

> *Student 2A: "I don't agree, because every human being has different capabilities. And it is possible that there are men who, for example, become make-up artists and are usually more talented. I think the job has no gender, so everyone can choose."*
> *Student 4B: "I don't agree, because there are also many women who have a lack of sense of taste. Likewise with men. While the work can actually be done by both genders. So don't get hung up on nature."*
> *Student 5C: "I do not agree, because it is possible that the woman is working on the male job desk."*

To follow up more, In the academic environment, the division of tasks between men and women is based on "typical gender roles' " (for example, men handle heavy objects while women handle finances/administrative concerns). Here we can conclude that two different achievers of men have different attitudes. The medium achiever tends to show his view on disagreement. He believes that everyone can do their job. While students with high achievement were contrasted with the medium achiever. He stated that a man is more suitable for physical work than women.

> *Student 1A: "Agreed, as men tend to perform more physical work than women."*
> *Student 3B: "I disagree because the work may be performed by both men and women."*
> *Student 6C: " I disagree, even though the man is strong and the woman is gentle. But women can also be strong and make their own decisions."*

The last aspect is about men and women stereotypes continue to exist and play an essential role in the academic lives of students. In this statement everyone disagrees that men and women stereotypes continue to exist and play an essential role in the academic lives of students. Men and women are able to decide their own choices especially in the academic aspect.

> *Student 2A:"I don't agree, that girl also has capabilities that sometimes even their abilities are the same."*
> *Student 3B: "did not agree, because all genders can choose their academic goals."*
> *Student 6C: "did not agree, because they can make their own choices. Not gendered."*

3.3 Men are related to outside world while women deal with domestic worlds

The students have given further questions related to their gender awareness. The following question about it is natural that the textbooks and materials used accommodate stories, experiences and perspectives of men because in history, men have always held important positions (kings, presidents, inventors, theorists, artists) that are worthy of discussion. Here, the researcher has shown the answer from male and female students in the high achiever. Both are showing different views of gender awareness. The male student agreed and he believed that men have important positions because a man talk less and acts more than women. Student 2A argued that not only men's view, but it is possible for women to have the crucial positions in a narrative.

> *Student 1A: "It's natural, because most of the men take action right away."*

Student 2A: "I disagree, most textbooks take a male point of view, but it would be better if there is a book that presents stories from a female point of view. If possible, both of them as a comparison. If only one point of view might even create a new stereotype."

Scene 5	Scene 7

Table II. Scene 5 and 7

The researcher showed them two scenes of gender portrayal from the narrative book. The questions related to the figures in table II above are natural and there is no problem in the depiction of men and women there. From the question there, all of them are showing a good attitude by expressing their opinion. Students from various genders and achievements are agree to the question.

Student 3B: "It's natural because when helping people, we aren't allowed to be picky. Especially in helping others!"
Student 4B: "Agreed, this is only natural because they help each other. Regardless of gender."
Student 5C: "It's natural to agree, whether it's a boy or a girl, it's okay to help the important thing is to bring a positive side."

Fig III. A Female looking for grass to feed her cattle

The statement of "It is natural that the textbooks and materials used accommodate stories, experiences and perspectives of men because in history, men have always held important

positions (kings, presidents, inventors, theorists, artists) that are worthy of discussion" Refers to the answer from student 1A, he agreed that materials accommodate the men's perspective. This indicates that the exposure of men's perspective in materials used for the EFL learners are dominant. In contrast, the narrative book used in this study is trying to put the perspective of women in order to enrich their knowledge of gender equality. From question number 12 and 13, all of the students agree about the portrayal of men and women.

> *Student 2A: "no problem, because yes it's their life choice. We cannot judge*
> *someone's dream. Anyone can be anything they want to."*
> *Student 3B: "It is natural for women to become workers. There's no problem*
> *with the portrayal of the characters."*
> *Student 4B: "Agreed, boys and girls can also do this activity. It doesn't have*
> *to be a boy or a girl, but both are reliable."*

Referring to all of the participants' answers above, we can know that the highest achiever of two students (male and female) are showing significant differences. The females from the high achiever tend to be more aware of gender equality rather than the male student. This is also the same with medium and low achievers from different genders. It indicates that the achievement of different students has no relevance to their awareness of gender equality. Here, the researcher provides a summary of gender awareness. The very low level received between one and three points, the low level received between four and six points, the medium level was seven points, the high level received between eight and ten points, and the very high level received between eleven and thirteen points.

Table III. Awareness Points

Student Achievement Across Different Level	Student	Points	Gender Equality Awareness Level
High Achiever	Student 1A:	5	Low Level
	Student 2A:	13	Very High Level
Medium Achiever	Student 3B:	7	Medium Level
	Student 4B:	12	Very High Level
Low Achiever	Student 5C:	10	High Level
	Student 6C:	9	High Level

4 CONCLUSION

There has been a lot of discussion on gender equality awareness in terms of EFL students' linguistic development. Gender equality has been proposed as one of the storybook's aims by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. The most common type of marginalization was underrepresentation, whereas stereotyping was largely the outcome of discourse marginalization. The tale is noted as a source of water folklore. The implicit message sent by the marginalization of discourse in the chosen textbooks, especially narratives, is that women are unworthy of first place. Thus, the goal of this study is to present a case study that investigates students' views of gender equality awareness in EFL classrooms and their conduct

after reading a water folklore narrative book at the high school level. The students were chosen from a group consisting of six male and female students who completed the questionnaire and attended the interview to participate in this study. Data is gathered through questionnaire-based interviews with students. Students' perceptions of gender equality in EFL classrooms were exposed through data analysis. This study found that the selection of instructional content or sources influenced students' knowledge of gender equality across different levels of achievement.

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