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A Content Analysis of Sexism in 'English for Change' Textbook in a Senior High School under Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

This research aims to (1) identify the elements of sexism presented by Porreca (1984) in the Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks for senior high school students in the *Merdeka* Curriculum entitled English for Change, (2) to examine whether sexism appears in Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks for senior high school students in the *Merdeka* Curriculum entitled English for Change. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach paired with a content analysis technique. The main data source of this study is the English textbook entitled English for Change in Senior High School published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The research was started in Surakarta, Central Java, from December 2023 to July 2024. The study's data sources are documentation of an ELT textbook for grade XI. The data source is a document from the textbook. The content analysis method is used to collect data from documents. The English for Change textbook had a higher percentage of female on five out of six indicators. Therefore, it could be concluded that the textbook promotes sexism against males. Furthermore, it is important to of featuring balanced gender representations in textbooks. By showcasing diverse gender experiences, we can broaden students' understanding of human complexity and encourage respect for all individuals, reducing the possibility of sexism. Researchers recommend authors avoid harmful gender sexism, include diverse perspectives, and encourage teachers to review textbooks. Future studies should explore sexism indicators like gender roles, discourse, and visualization, integrating relevant theories for comprehensive analysis.

Keywords: Sexism, Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbook, *Merdeka* curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The issue of sexism in the Indonesian education system remains significant. Sexism refers to attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and practices at individual, organizational, institutional, and cultural levels that either show negative judgments of individuals based on their gender or promote unequal status between women and men (Swim et al., 2001). Gender disparities persist about access, support, and rewards in education. One of the main supporters is textbooks which play a key role in assisting education. These instructional materials are meticulously crafted to cater to the diverse needs of learners, aligning with the individual requirements of each student (Ronda & Adler, 2017, p.1). In the textbook component, one of the issues that has an indirect impact on students is sexism (Rong et al., 2021).

The study of sexism in textbooks is crucial due to the crucial role that textbooks play in the process of acquiring knowledge. Examining sexism in textbooks is crucial for promoting gender equality and preventing the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes (Agni, 2020; Anjarwati et al., 2023; Bataineh & Kayode, 2018; Irwansyah & Ardini, 2023; Norova, 2020; Tarrayo, 2014). This research focuses on examine sexism with indicators that have been proposed by (Porreca, 1984) and determine whether the textbook contains sexism or not. The English textbook entitled English for Change which is used in the *Merdeka* curriculum. However, the investigation into sexism within the curriculum remains relatively limited, highlighting a crucial gap in research. To address this gap, this study aims to examine whether the English textbook "English for Change" for Grade XI Senior High School, a component of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, perpetuates sexism. Following Porreca's (1984) criteria, the research will analyze six aspects—omissions, firstness, occasions, nouns, masculine generic constructions, and adjectives—to determine the presence of sexism.

The research questions guiding this analysis are:

1. What are the manifestations of sexism according to Porreca's theory within the textbook "English for Change"?
2. Does the "English for Change" textbook exhibit sexism according to Porreca's theory?

The significance of this study encompasses both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, it contributes valuable information and insights for future research endeavors focusing on sexism within English textbooks published by diverse entities in Indonesia. Practically, it serves as a resource for English educators, empowering them to integrate principles of gender equality into their teaching practices and make informed decisions when selecting educational materials. By equipping teachers with the knowledge to identify and address gender biases, this study aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Additionally, it encourages textbook writers to prioritize gender neutrality, ultimately leading to the reduction of materials containing gender bias in educational resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Textbook in English Language Teaching

The textbook, an indispensable instructional tool in education, serves as a vital aid for both educators and learners throughout the teaching and learning process. (Tomlinson, 2011.; Awasthi, 2006). It provides structured content and guidance, assisting teachers in delivering lessons effectively while aiding students in comprehending and assimilating information (Cunningsworth, 1995; Ronda & Adler, 2017). Moreover,

textbooks not only convey subject matter but also impart linguistic and cultural values inherent in the target language, influencing students' language acquisition and cultural understanding (Mukundan et al., 2011; Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Thus, the meticulous selection of textbooks is paramount as it significantly impacts students' academic performance and linguistic development.

In Indonesia, where English teachers heavily rely on textbooks for instructional purposes, conducting comprehensive assessments of textbook content becomes particularly crucial (Kinasih, 2014; Salamah, 2014; Pahamzah et al., 2020). This entails scrutinizing various aspects of the content, including instructional materials, exercises, and illustrations, to determine their appropriateness for the intended audience. Such scrutiny is essential to ascertain that the selected textbooks adequately meet educational goals and cater to the diverse learning styles and abilities of students. Through diligent evaluation, educators can ensure that the textbooks chosen not only facilitate the acquisition of subject matter but also promote critical thinking, cultural awareness, and language proficiency among students. Thus, by making informed decisions regarding textbook selection, educators can optimize learning outcomes and contribute to the holistic development of their students.

Sexism: Blatant, Covert and Subtle Forms

Sexism, defined by Cameron (1985) denotes a system where women and men are unequal, encompassing attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and practices across different levels that either convey negative judgments based on gender or perpetuate unequal status between genders (Swim et al., 2001). It manifests in three forms: blatant, covert, and subtle. Blatant sexism involves observable disrespect towards women (Swim & Cohen, 1997), while covert sexism includes concealed unequal treatment like wage discrimination (Swim et al., 2004; Humardhiana & Hidayah, 2020). Subtle sexism, often unnoticed due to its normative nature, perpetuates unequal treatment, such as favoring boys over girls in educational settings (Swim et al., 2004; Humardhiana & Hidayah, 2020).

Understanding the multifaceted nature of sexism is crucial in addressing and combating its detrimental effects on gender equality. By recognizing its different forms - blatant, covert, and subtle - society can better navigate and challenge discriminatory practices and attitudes. This entails not only raising awareness of overt acts of sexism but also uncovering and addressing the subtler, normalized biases that perpetuate unequal treatment. Through concerted efforts to dismantle these systemic inequalities, including advocating for policies that promote gender equity and fostering inclusive environments, societies can strive towards a more just and equitable future for all genders.

Merdeka Curriculum as a Comprehensive Approach for Innovative Learning

The significance of education lies in its relevance to societal needs, with curriculum serving as the cornerstone of educational change (Findikoğlu & İlhan, 2016). Education and curriculum plans are closely intertwined, mutually benefiting each other and fostering growth (Campbel, 2020). Curriculum paradigms guide design, implementation, and evaluation, impacting various educational contexts (Lee, 2020). The *Merdeka Curriculum*, mandated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, focuses on learning recovery and promotes imaginative, creative critical thinking, cooperation, and communication skills (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020). Additionally, it prioritizes character development, competency in students' interests, and essential

materials (Wiguna & Tristaningrat, 2022). Structured around intracurricular learning and projects enhancing the Pancasila Student Profile, the *Merdeka Curriculum* aims to accelerate innovative learning patterns.

Previous Studies on Sexism in EFL Textbook

Sexism has been strongly opposed by some EFL textbook authors in recent years (Goyal & Rose, 2020; Pérez-Sabater, 2020). However, textbook authors aim to include diverse characteristics like age, ethnicity, gender, and educational goals but often overlook ensuring an impartial portrayal of gender (Ulum & Köksal, 2019). Despite efforts to balance gender representation, sexism persists throughout the majority of EFL textbooks (Caturla, 2023). Research on sexism revealed that numerous English textbooks or materials depict males and females in stereotypical ways. The research indicates that women are at a disadvantage in textbooks, as shown by various studies (e.g. Agni, 2020; Anjarwati et al., 2023; Bataineh & Kayode 2018; Irwansyah & Ardini, 2023; Norova, 2020; Tarrayo, 2014). In contrast, Nagatomo (2010) found no evidence of sexism within textbooks. In conclusion, the enduring presence of sexism in EFL textbooks highlights the ongoing struggle for gender equality in educational materials.

Tarrayo (2014) examined sexism in ELT textbooks in the Philippines. The analysis of local preschool English language textbooks uncovered sexist linguistic features and symbols, depicting gender bias that favors males over females. Males are portrayed as more dominant, appearing more frequently in illustrations and being associated with higher-paying and high-status jobs, while females are often relegated to passive roles and valued for their appearance. This highlights the need for teachers to play a crucial role in preventing gender discrimination in the classroom. By reviewing and revising lesson materials to avoid reinforcing sexist attitudes, teachers can foster a more inclusive learning environment, ensuring that both boys and girls feel valued and represented.

One indicator of sexism, namely firstness, has been examined in a study titled "Analysis of Gender Firstness in Sixteen Omani English Language School Textbooks." In the research, Bataineh & Kayode (2018) found that males have a higher percentage. The results of the study align with previous research on gender-firstness in both educational and non-educational textbooks. Examination of gender representation, including third-person singular pronouns, proper names, and titles, in Omani EFL school textbooks revealed persistent gender bias favoring males over females. Statistical analysis further confirmed significant gender bias against females in terms of gender firstness. In summary, males are predominantly represented, while females' presence remains marginalized and subordinate to males.

In addition, Norova (2020) analyzed sexism within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. The analysis reveals a gender imbalance, where males are predominantly depicted compared to females. The underrepresentation of females indicates the presence of a sexist ideology in the textbook "Kids' English," indirectly reinforcing patriarchal values and impeding efforts towards gender equality. This research underscores the significance of critically evaluating textbooks to ensure fair and inclusive gender representation, advocating for improvements in existing learning materials. Furthermore, it contributes significantly to the educational literature as the first study to evaluate elementary-level English textbooks in the country.

In the Indonesian EFL textbook, Anjarwati et al., (2023) revealed gender imbalances, particularly regarding the portrayal of males and females in terms of priority, occupation, nouns, masculine generics, and adjectives. Males were depicted

more frequently and in a broader range of roles compared to females. Furthermore, stereotypes persist, such as associating cooking with females and breadwinning with males, reinforcing traditional social gender norms. To foster respect for diversity and gender equality, language educators should mitigate stereotypical messages and images, ensure a balanced representation of men and women across various roles, and promote equal participation in societal spheres. Although this study focuses on the public primary education sector, further research, particularly involving detailed analysis of visual representations, is recommended to enhance the understanding of gender representation in EFL textbooks for primary school students.

Moreover, Irwansyah & Ardini (2023) revealed sexism in the 7th grade textbook. The findings exposed a notable contrast in the portrayal of male and female characters. Males were consistently depicted as healthy figures, often engaged in outdoor occupations, with a broad range of job choices. In contrast, females were predominantly depicted in domestic roles, such as household chores. Additionally, male characters were associated with traits of masculinity, reflected in nouns emphasizing strength, strength, and vitality, while female characters were characterized by typical nouns connoting beauty and passivity. This dichotomy underscores the textbook's reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Additionally, Agni (2020) found the biased representation of genders in the ELT textbook for tenth-grade Senior High School students. Both textual and visual elements exhibit a significant disparity in the portrayal of males and females. Males dominate in frequency, quality, and variety of representations, indicating higher status and influence. Activities, roles, and occupations are limited for females, primarily confined to domestic and social spheres, while males are depicted in diverse educational and professional roles. The textual structure further reinforces bias through the sequence of gender mentions and the prevalence of positive descriptors for males and negative ones for females, perpetuating stereotypes regarding behavior and attributes.

The research data shows a common pattern where men are depicted as more dominating than women, both visually and in the text of textbooks. Gender bias and an imbalance in the portrayal of men and women exist in ELT textbooks. This underscores a major issue with the continuation of gender preconceptions of unequal gender dynamics in educational materials. From several studies that have been conducted previously, there are few studies related to the *Merdeka* Curriculum. To address this gap, the current study will examine the sexist aspects in Indonesian ELT textbooks for senior high school students in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. In this study, the researcher analyzed sexism using the framework by Porreca (1984): omissions, firstness, occasions, nouns, masculine generic constructions, and adjectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a descriptive qualitative study conducted using the content analysis method. Qualitative research is research that does not use the procedure of statistics analysis or other quantification (Moleong, 2006 p.6) . The writer utilized descriptive data extracted from written or text-based sources like textbooks and journals. Content analysis is a method used to systematically study and interpret the content of various forms of communication, ranging from newspapers and speeches to digital media like websites and online repositories (Liau, 2022; Nosenko, 2022). To conduct content analysis, the researcher gathers data from various materials such as written, visual, or oral sources including books, films, and interviews. Textbook analysis with a qualitative

descriptive approach provides an in-depth understanding of implied messages, motives, and language structures.

The main data source of this study is the English textbook entitled "English for Change" for grade XI in senior high school. The English textbook was produced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) in 2022. The research data for this study were analyzed utilizing the Miles and Huberman technique of analysis, which consists of three primary components, as described by (Sugiyono, 2007 p. 204). The components include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction involves the process of choosing, concentrating, simplifying, summarizing, and converting the data found in written field notes or transcriptions. Furthermore, Data presentation is the structured and clear arrangement of information that serves as the foundation for drawing conclusions and making decisions. Finally, the conclusion must not only be drawn during data gathering but also confirmed for accuracy.

FINDINGS

The indicators of sexism by Porreca (1984) in the English for Change textbook.

The analysis of omission in texts and illustrations reveals a notable gender bias, with more female representations than male counterparts across all units. This bias is particularly evident in the source texts, where female figures dominate, showcasing a disproportionate focus on female experiences and achievements. Moreover, illustrations tend to reinforce stereotypical gender roles, portraying females in traditional domestic settings while depicting males as students or teachers. Despite efforts to balance genders within individual illustrations, the overall imbalance persists, indicating a systemic inclination towards showcasing female narratives and experiences.

Conversely, the examination of firstness indicators uncovers a similar pattern of gender disparity, with females overwhelmingly depicted as the primary subjects in exercises and examples. The consistent trend of female firstness across units suggests a deliberate editorial choice rather than a random occurrence. While some units show a slight deviation from this trend, the overall imbalance remains stark, reflecting a pervasive bias towards prioritizing female perspectives and experiences throughout the textbook. This imbalance in firstness underscores the need for greater awareness and sensitivity towards gender representation in educational materials to promote gender equality and inclusivity.

The presence or absence of sexism in the textbook English for Change

This textbook presents various indicators revealing gender disparities. While omissions total 108 females and 103 males, firstness shows a significant gap with 46 instances of female firstness compared to 13 male instances. Occupations similarly reflect inequality, with 29 female positions compared to 22 male roles. The predominance of female nouns, totaling 15 instances, contrasts with only 10 occurrences of male nouns, and no masculine generic structures are identified. Additionally, the analysis identifies 18 female adjectives and 10 male adjectives. The data highlights a consistent trend of females outnumbering males across indicators, indicating systemic gender bias. Notably, certain units exhibit particularly high levels of bias, notably in omissions and firstness indicators. While the occupation indicator shows diversity, the representation remains disproportionate. Nouns reveal a minor difference, yet adjectives portray a clear pattern

favoring positivity for females and a mix of positive and negative attributes for males, suggesting inherent sexism within the textbook's content.

DISCUSSION

The indicators of sexism by Porreca (1984) in the English for Change textbook.

The representation of females in the textbook analyzed by Tarrayo (2014) reveals a significant gender imbalance, with men being predominantly featured. On the contrary, this textbook demonstrates a significant gender imbalance in its content, with a greater omission of women compared to men. The textbook predominantly features female biographies and narratives, with less representation of men. Moreover, on indicator Firstness, females had four times more than males. Women are referenced more frequently than men. This finding contradicts Bataineh & Kayode's (2018) discovery that men are more dominant than women. This indicates that women are more respected. People who are mentioned first are typically thought to be more valuable (Ahmad & Shah, 2019).

Female occupations somewhat outweigh male occupations. Norova (2020) stated that occupations other than household chores are not exemplified, leading to sexist views on women and stereotyping them, which is not in line with this study which found that women are portrayed in professional roles rather than domestic roles. Furthermore, on noun indicator, Anjarwati et al., (2023) proved that the number of male nouns is greater than females depicted. However, the findings of this textbook research are inconsistent with that, because the number of female nouns is significantly greater than males. In addition, Anjarwati et al., (2023) discovered masculine generic structures in their study contradicted the findings of the researcher. This investigation did not identify any sort of masculine generic structure. No words are assigned masculine generic. In the final indicator, Agni (2020) stated the usage of adjectives referring to women tends to have a lower percentage compared to those referring to men and often carries negative connotations. In contrast, in this study, women are associated with positive and constructive connotations whereas men are associated with both negative and positive connotations.

The presence or absence of sexism in the textbook English for Change

English for Change textbook promotes sexism against men. In the analysis of English for Change textbooks, there is a striking gender imbalance, with women outnumbering men in most indicators. Women consistently outnumbered men in five out of six categories, showing a clear imbalance. The distribution skewed towards women creates an environment where women are featured more prominently, potentially reinforcing biases and stereotypes. The presence of female-related terms, coupled with the lack of masculine representation, implies a subtle form of sexism that disadvantages men. Furthermore, Amare (2007) contends that sexism, although usually directed towards women, is equally harmful when directed towards men.

It can be concluded that the percentage of women is higher than men and this causes sexism towards men. Sexism against men is often called reverse sexism or second sexism. Reverse sexism is the belief that men are presently the targets of sexism and anti-male bias (Morando et al., 2023). These study contradicts previous studies (e.g. Agni, 2020; Anjarwati et al., 2023; Bataineh & Kayode, 2018; Norova, 2020; Tarrayo, 2014)

which showed male dominance in those indicators. This research offers a new perspective that sexism is not solely experienced by women but can also be directed towards men. This underscores the importance of comprehensively examining gender presentation to address sexism.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

First, the English for Change had higher percentage of women over men. Omission analysis demonstrates a significant bias towards female representation, both in illustrations and text. Firstness indicators underscore a prevalent tendency to prioritize female references. Occupations exhibit a higher prevalence of female-dominated roles, challenging traditional gender norms. Noun analysis reveals a higher frequency of female nouns. The absence of masculine generic constructions indicates a conscious effort to avoid gender ambiguity. Adjectives predominantly portray women in a positive light, contrasting with more varied descriptions for men. Overall, the textbook favoring female representation across various indicators.

Second, the English for Change textbook promote sexism towards men. It were detected in five of the six indicators that concentrated on women. The number of females surpassed every indicator mentioned in the textbook. Because the preponderance of prior research has documented discrimination against women, this discovery was quite unexpected. This offers researchers a new perspective on the possibility that textbooks may be sexist towards men. However, it is equally important to underline the fact that sexism, regardless of the gender of the target, is unacceptable behavior. It is important to emphasize the importance of overcoming bias to advance gender equality.

Researcher suggested for textbook author to refrain harmful gender stereotypes and incorporate diverse gender perspectives in examples and stories to promote inclusivity and equality. In addition, the researcher also suggested teachers to check the textbook before teaching and learning process. Finally, for further researcher, could to conduct in-depth research on sexism by considering the use of indicators such as gender roles, discourse, and visualization. In addition, it is also recommended to adopt and integrate relevant theories from other researchers in analyzing sexism.

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