



Analyzing Gender Inequality and Stereotypes in Foreign-Sourced ELT Textbooks at an Indonesian School: A Mixed-Methods Content Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates gender stereotypes in two ELT textbooks, "My Pals Are Here! English 1A" and "My Pals Are Here! English 2A," used at a school in Indonesia. Through content analysis, the study assesses the visual representations in these textbooks to identify gender stereotypes. A semi-structured interview was conducted with a teacher who uses these textbooks, focusing on her perceptions of gender-related issues. The findings reveal persistent gender inequality and stereotypes, with the textbooks frequently assigning unequal household roles and associating specific jobs with specific genders. Men are predominantly depicted in physically demanding roles, such as firefighters, farmers, astronauts, and pilots. In contrast, women are portrayed in roles that are suggested to require patience and perseverance, such as teachers, hairdressers, and nurses. The interview with the teacher indicated an awareness of gender equality issues; however, this awareness was not actively integrated into her teaching practices. This study highlights the need for more equitable gender representations in educational materials.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, ELT textbook, foreign publisher, content analysis

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender, which includes gender equality and gender stereotypes, is deeply embedded in various facets of daily life and highlights the urgent need for active discussions about the nature of gender discourse (Widodo & Elyas, 2020). Gender stereotypes, defined as the conventional roles and attributes assigned to individuals based on gender, and gender inequality, referring to the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, and responsibilities between genders, are closely linked elements of this issue. For instance, it is commonly assumed that women will handle household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and washing dishes. At the same time, men are expected to perform physically demanding tasks like gardening, car repairs, and bike maintenance. In Indonesia, a country with prevailing

patriarchal norms, women are often expected to excel in cooking to affirm their feminine identity (Wospakrik, 2019; Prajuli et al., 2021). Understanding gender varies across Indonesia's diverse cultural beliefs, social groups, education levels, and ethnic backgrounds (Mangundjaya, 2013; Firdaus et al., 2020; Ariyanto, 2018). However, there is hope as gender equality and women's rights are increasingly recognized and prioritized within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, which is dedicated to promoting gender equality (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016; Mambu, 2023). The pervasiveness of gender issues in everyday life underscores the necessity of engaging in meaningful discourse and taking decisive action to address these fundamental challenges (Widodo & Elyas, 2020).

Furthermore, gender-related issues are gaining prominence in both public and academic discussions, especially within the realm of global education and English Language Teaching (ELT) (Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Lee, 2019; Orfan, 2023; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016; Widodo & Elyas, 2020). In educational environments, these concerns often emerge in the classroom, influenced by teachers, peers, educational materials, and broader societal factors (Sánchez et al., 2022; Sunderland, 2004). Research in different educational contexts has shown varying levels of gender fairness. For instance, textbooks in Iran, despite its male-dominant Islamic culture, have demonstrated gender neutrality and balanced representation through language and depiction (Lee & Mahmoudi Gahrouei, 2020). Similarly, in Hong Kong, a territory-wide assessment found equal portrayal of males and females in both textual and visual content (Yang & Yan, 2020). Conversely, studies in the Philippines and Vietnam reveal persistent gender biases in widely used English textbooks, with male dominance and limited female representation and freedoms highlighted (Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Vu & Pham, 2023). In Indonesia, research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks indicates prevalent gender stereotypes and imbalances, with male characters often depicted more favorably than female characters in most educational materials (Ariyanto, 2018; Saputra, 2019; Setyono, 2018).

Previous research on gender representation in ELT textbooks, particularly in Indonesia, has primarily focused on materials published by domestic entities, including government and non-governmental publishers (Aini et al., 2021; Saputra, 2019; Setyono, 2018). However, a notable gap exists in analyzing ELT textbooks from foreign publishers used within the country. This study addresses this gap by exploring how gender stereotypes are portrayed in "My Pals are Here! English 1A" and "My Pals are Here! English 2A," published by Marshall Cavendish Education. Using content analysis, the study examines visual representations of household chores and occupational roles in these textbooks to identify instances of gender stereotyping. Additionally, it includes an interview with a teacher, referred to here as T1, to understand how educators tackle gender stereotypes in ELT materials. This study aims to enhance the discourse on gender within educational settings and encourage proactive efforts to combat gender inequality and stereotypes in teaching resources.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-method approach to examine gender inequality and stereotypes in two ELT textbooks. Content analysis is the primary method used, enhanced by a small set of quantitative data to characterize and quantify the portrayal of gender roles. This technique allows for a systematic and objective examination of verbal, visual, and

written data, enabling reliable conclusions (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted to delve deeper into the perspectives of a teacher on addressing gender stereotypes within these textbooks. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective for exploring participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about specific issues, providing rich, qualitative insights (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The choice of ELT textbooks as the focus reflects their role in shaping teaching and learning contexts, the target language, the cultures represented, and the worldview of their producers (Tomlinson, 2012).

This research was conducted within an Indonesian international school context, where English is taught as a foreign language. The study was based at a school that adopted the Cambridge curriculum in Semarang and has an administration in Jakarta. The researcher's connections with its teachers influenced this particular school's choice. The subjects of this study were two ELT textbooks, "My Pals are Here! English 1A" and "My Pals are Here! English 2A," authored by Judy Ling and Anne Smith (Ling et al., 2001a) and (Ling et al., A, 2001b). Each textbook consists of eight units, with the first spanning 94 pages and the second 96 pages. These textbooks, part of the revised edition published by Marshall Cavendish Education based in Singapore, were selected for use in the school's primary education curriculum, which follows the Singaporean framework rather than the Indonesian government's curriculum.

In this study, the data collection involved a meticulous selection of images from each unit of the ELT textbooks to identify the presence of gender stereotypes. The research team manually counted the images representing specific genders in each lesson unit. The focus was on images depicting household and occupational roles, areas where gender-related issues are most likely to be evident. Due to copyright restrictions, these images are described verbally in this document rather than being reproduced. Additionally, the research included an interview with a teacher who frequently uses the textbooks. This interview was conducted via a 15-minute Zoom meeting on November 12, 2023, and was recorded to ensure accuracy. It was carried out in Bahasa Indonesia and later translated into English for analysis, with details in the findings section.

To maintain the interviewee's confidentiality, a pseudonym, 'T1' was used. During the interview, researchers focused on analyzing four specific images selected from the textbooks because they exemplify gender inequality and stereotypes. T1 was asked four key questions: her initial thoughts on the first and fourth images; whether the second and third images perpetuate stereotypes about women's roles in the kitchen and childcare; if the fifth image contains gender stereotypes; and how she integrates these materials into her teaching. This structured approach, limiting the discussion to four images, was chosen to maintain clarity and prevent confusion. The descriptions of these images are detailed in Table 1 of the research document.

Table 1. Selected images depicting gender inequality and stereotypes in textbooks

No.	Book Title	Page Number	Description
1	My Pals are Here! English 1A	22	Three pictures portray a woman engaged in household chores.

2	My Pals are Here! English 2A	7	A mother tending to her messy baby in the kitchen.
3	My Pals are Here! English 1A	40	Illustrations of a grandfather setting the table, a young boy eager to help, and a daughter assisting her father with dishwashing.
4	My Pals are Here! English 2A	69	A boy in an orange t-shirt is helping his family mop the floor at home.
5	My Pals are Here! English 1A	59	Five illustrations depict different professions. Four men represent the roles of astronauts, firefighters, doctors, and police officers. A woman represents the profession of a teacher.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, we adopted the validation approach, as [Wilson and Landon-Hays \(2016\)](#) recommended. This method involved cross-verifying the content analysis conducted by the researchers with that of an experienced English teacher from a junior high school in Salatiga. Initially, the researchers carried out an independent analysis of the ELT textbooks. Subsequently, the researchers presented their findings to the teacher for a comparative assessment. A notable difference emerged: the teacher identified 13 images of women performing household chores in the first textbook, while the researchers noted only 10. After discussion, both parties reconciled their findings to reach a consensus. The teacher's and researchers' assessments aligned with other aspects of the analysis. An essential practice in enhancing the credibility of qualitative research is member checking, which involves participants verifying the accuracy of the data and interpretations ([Creswell & Miller, 2000](#)). Accordingly, member checking was conducted with an interviewee to ensure the authenticity of the transcripts and the reflective accuracy of her perspectives.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Content analysis in this study involves organizing and summarizing specific phenomena or events to enable more effective analysis and interpretation ([Harwood & Garry, 2003](#)). This included activities traditionally associated with domesticity, like cooking and cleaning, and occupations such as teaching, zookeeping, and policing, with an eye toward the gender representation of characters. These themes, informed by the work of experts including [Liu et al. \(2013\)](#), [Norlock \(2019\)](#), [Doucet \(1995\)](#), and [Rohmawati and Putra \(2022\)](#), were selected for their significance in feminist discourse, reflecting key areas of concern such as the division of labor in the home and employment equality.

Gender representations in household chores

The content analysis of "My Pals Are Here English 1A" and "My Pals Are Here English 2A" indicates a significant gender disparity in depicting household chores. In the first textbook, women are predominantly shown in 13 instances engaging in domestic tasks. For instance, on page 22, a sequence of three images portrays a woman in various household activities: preparing food, washing dishes, and grocery shopping with her children. Contrastingly, men are depicted in such roles in only six instances, with page 40 offering an example where a grandfather sets the table, and a girl assists her father with dishwashing.

Similarly, the second textbook continues this trend, with women featured in six images related to domestic chores. A notable example on page seven shows a mother cleaning up after her baby's meal. In comparison, there are merely four representations of men performing household tasks, such as the image on page 69, where a boy helps his family with mopping. The detailed analysis of gender representation in domestic chores across both textbooks is systematically organized in Table 2.

Table 2. Gender Representation in Household Chores in ELT Textbooks

	Role	Men	Women
Textbook 1	Playing with pets	-	4
	Washing dishes	1	1
	Preparing food	1	1
	Shopping	-	1
	Baby-sitting	1	-
	Watering the flowers	1	1
	Sweeping the floor	-	1
	Feeding pet(s)	1	-
	Making the bed	1	-
	Tidying the room	-	1
	Taking care of children who are sick	-	1
Textbook 2	Baby-sitting	-	1
	Washing dishes	1	2
	Cleaning the room	1	-
	Cleaning the car	1	-
	Folding the clothes	-	1
	Tidying the room	-	2
Mopping the floor	1	-	

From the data in Textbook 1, it is evident that women are shown in stereotypical roles more frequently than men, particularly in domestic tasks and caregiving, with 13 instances of women versus 6 for men. Men are in these roles to a lesser degree, suggesting an unequal representation. In Textbook 2, although the total instances are less, the pattern of representation is similar, with women again depicted more often in traditional domestic roles, totaling 6 instances compared to men's 4.

This imbalance in representation can be indicative of gender stereotypes in these textbooks, where women are predominantly associated with domestic and nurturing roles, while men are less frequently depicted and are shown in a slightly more varied set of tasks. These findings would contribute to the discussion on how educational materials might perpetuate traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which is particularly pertinent in the context of foreign-sourced ELT textbooks used in an Indonesian educational setting. The study would argue for revising these materials to ensure a more balanced and equitable representation of genders, aligning with contemporary global understandings of gender equality.

Gender representations in occupational roles

This study confirms a gender imbalance in the depiction of occupational roles in ELT textbooks, a trend that aligns with findings from prior research (Aini et al., 2021; Ariyanto,

2018; Rohmawati & Putra, 2022; Setyono, 2018). For instance, "My Pals are Here English 1A" contains 40 images of men in various professional roles, compared to 19 women. The disparity is starkly illustrated on page 59, where a single page portrays five professional figures: four men depicted as astronauts, firefighters, doctors, and police officers, and one woman as a teacher. Additionally, there is an image of a boy, not in a professional role but as a student.

In "My Pals are Here English 2A," the pattern persists with 13 images of men in professional roles versus 11 of women. Analyzing specific professions in the first textbook reveals a preponderance of men in roles such as firefighters (four images) and farmers (eight images). At the same time, women are primarily shown as teachers, hairdressers, and farmers (three images for each profession). The second textbook continues this trend, with male characters frequently depicted as astronauts and pilots (three images for each profession) and women most commonly appearing as teachers (five images).

Detailed figures on the representation of occupational roles by gender are compiled in Table 3, which provides an extensive overview of these trends.

Table 3. The frequency representation of gender occupation

	Profession	Men	Women
Textbook 1	Teacher	1	3
	Scientist	3	-
	Police	3	1
	Astronaut	1	-
	Firefighter	4	-
	Doctor	1	1
	Baker	2	-
	Florist	1	1
	Postman	1	-
	Chef	1	2
	Food vendor	1	-
	Sweeper	1	-
	Nurse	-	1
	Dentist	2	-
	Electrician	1	-
	Hairdresser	1	3
	Driver	2	-
	Solider	2	-
	Librarian	-	2
	Gardener	2	2
Lamp repairman	1	-	
Shopkeeper	1	-	
Farmer	8	3	
Textbook 2	Firefighter	2	-
	Police	1	2
	Astronaut	3	-
	Pilot	3	-
	Chef	1	-

Doctor	-	1
Actor	1	-
The cook	1	-
Maid	-	1
Teacher	-	5
Air stewardess	1	1
Librarian	-	1

In the first textbook, men are more frequently represented in many professions, notably outnumbering women in traditionally male-dominated roles such as scientists, police officers, astronauts, firefighters, and soldiers. Conversely, women, such as teachers and hairdressers, are often shown in nurturing or service-oriented roles. There are also a few professions, like gardening and floristry, where men and women are depicted equally. In the second textbook, the pattern of representation shows a similar bias. Men are exclusively represented in high-status jobs like astronauts and pilots, while women are more likely shown as teachers, a profession with a higher female presence in real life. There are some roles, such as police officers and librarians, where women appear more than men or equally.

Overall, both textbooks display a tendency to associate specific genders with certain professions, which can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. For example, men are often depicted in action-oriented or high-status jobs, while women are either in caretaking roles or less represented. These findings indicate an imbalance that could influence learners' perceptions of gender roles and occupational opportunities.

The response and utilization of books containing gender stereotypes by an English teacher

This study not only analyzes the portrayal of gender in two ELT textbooks but also directly engages with a teacher, referred to as T1, to explore their role in addressing gender stereotypes present in such educational materials. Initially, the researchers presented T1 with the first and fourth images from the textbooks—images indicative of gender stereotypes associated with household chores. This approach was deliberately chosen to elicit T1's spontaneous perceptions of the images without immediately framing the discussion around gender equality or stereotypes. The objective was to capture T1's unprompted insights, which could reveal her level of awareness about gender roles as depicted in the textbooks.

Upon reviewing the images, T1 did not express awareness of the gender stereotypes. Instead, her interpretation of the first image was related to familial learning and vocabulary enhancement, noting the various words presented on the page as beneficial for expanding children's lexicon. Regarding the fourth image, T1 focused on language usage, particularly the teaching opportunity it presented to explain the difference between 'May I' and 'Can I.' She noted the importance of context in determining the appropriateness of the response, 'Yes, you may,' versus 'Yes, you can.' Additionally, she mentioned that the adjacent image might emphasize attitudes, possibly by applying the modal verb 'should.'

Initially, T1 was unaware of any gender implications in the images presented, so the researchers subtly introduced the concept of gender in the second step of the interview. They showed T1 two additional images: one depicting a mother managing a messy baby in the kitchen and another featuring a grandfather setting the table with a boy, alongside a third

image of a daughter helping her father with the dishes. The researchers asked T1, 'Does this image portray the stereotype that women belong in the kitchen and should take care of children?' referring to the second image. T1 replied, 'In my opinion, not all mothers need to be in the kitchen or dining table. It could just be a coincidence.' When shown the third image, T1 observed, 'It is perfectly fine because everyone does it. It does not have to be women always in the kitchen, cooking and caring for the house. Men can do that too, as shown in these images.'

The interview progressed to a third step, similar to the second, but focused on occupational gender stereotypes. The researchers presented a fifth image containing five illustrations of different professions: four men depicted as astronauts, firefighters, doctors, police officers, and one woman as a teacher. They asked T1, 'Does this image contain gender stereotypes?' T1 responded, 'Looking at this picture, I agree that it does because it predominantly features men in these roles, reinforcing the stereotype that teachers are usually women, while more physically demanding or high-status roles like firefighters, astronauts, and police officers are men's roles, even though women also work in these professions. Thus, this image does highlight gender stereotypes.'

In the final step of the interview, researchers inquired about how T1 incorporates the textbook into her classroom lessons. T1 explained that, for instance, in a scenario in the textbook where a mother is cooking with a child's help, she encourages her students to view cooking as a skill anyone can learn and help with, regardless of gender. She emphasized, 'If they see their sister or mom cooking, they are welcome to help. It is simple, without any implication that only women should cook.' When asked again if she strictly adheres to the textbook material, T1 confirmed, 'Yes, when discussing professions, for example, it's about providing examples like if someone is sick, they should see a doctor, regardless of whether the doctor is male or female. I don't focus on gender differences.'

The interview revealed that T1 understands gender equality; she recognizes that household chores are not exclusive to any gender, and both men and women can perform them. However, she admitted that while she does not consciously focus on gender equality in her teaching, she inadvertently encourages both male and female students to help their mothers with tasks such as cooking. This suggests that although she does not actively teach about gender roles, her approach still reinforces certain traditional gender norms.

Despite her understanding, T1 was initially unaware of the gender stereotypes and inequalities in the textbooks she used. It was only when confronted with specific images during the interview that she recognized the stereotypes portrayed, particularly in the context of professional roles. This lack of awareness could perpetuate traditional gender roles among students, as Tomlinson (2012) suggests, because textbook content profoundly influences students' perceptions of jobs and behaviors, embedding cultural and educational biases that view physically demanding jobs as male-specific and roles requiring patience as typically female. Students may internalize such stereotypes as usual if these biases are not challenged in educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the prevalence of gender inequality and stereotypes in the ELT textbooks 'My Pals Are Here English 1A' and 'My Pals Are Here English 2A.' It also examines the role of teachers in using materials that depict these issues. The research reveals that

issues of gender inequality and stereotypes are not exclusive to textbooks published by Indonesian companies; foreign publishers also demonstrate a lack of awareness of gender equality, particularly in portraying imbalanced household roles and associating specific professions with certain genders. An interview with a teacher who uses these textbooks indicated that although the teacher was aware of gender equality, this awareness was not actively incorporated into her teaching practices.

The findings suggest that teachers' awareness and proactive involvement are critical in mitigating the negative influences of textbooks containing gender biases. It is essential for educators to critically examine such textbooks and employ them in a manner that does not reinforce outdated gender norms. Teachers should encourage students to critically engage with textbook content, prompting them to question its accuracy and identify potential stereotypes. Moreover, there is a need for increased educational initiatives, such as seminars or webinars on gender equality, social media campaigns, and specialized training for teachers on handling gender issues in educational materials. Further research is recommended to explore teachers' beliefs and methodologies in utilizing textbooks containing gender biases to understand better how these beliefs influence classroom dynamics and student perceptions.

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