

## Analysis of Gender Bias in Thematic Book for Elementary School Students

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**Abstract:** Up to now, social construction is still held by patriarchal views that result in the emergence of male domination in all fields, including in elementary education. Although the government has tried to suppress this bias, some practices still make one gender appears inferior. This study aims to determine if there is gender bias in elementary school students' thematic book questions. This research is a qualitative research in descriptive form. The research method used is the study of document content or content analysis, inferential type. The data source of this research is a document in the form of the 2013 Curriculum Second Grade Student Book. Based on the results of this study, researchers found that there is still gender bias in terms of the number of illustrations, professions, interests, and domestication of roles in one gender. Some suggestions were submitted to book authors as well as illustrators based on the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** Elementary school, Thematic book

## Introduction

School is a place to instil positive values and norms into students. The school is conditioned not only for science achievement, but this formal place is also expected to prepare students with the morals and ethics necessary to enter the next stage of life in a dignified and valuable manner. Wibowo (2013) stated that education is an excellent way to improve learners' attitude and mindset. An excellent education cannot be separated from character value's internalization because students should be good at academics and attitude (Junaidi, 2017). It means that a school is a place for learners to improve academic competence while building character.

Primary schools are considered a very 'strategic' level of education and a 'key determinant' for establishing a framework of thinking the domain of humanity of learners in forming attitudes, knowledge, and basic skills. Primary schools play an essential role in changing learners' mindset, including behaviours that are considered gender-biased. Therefore, it is necessary to realize a gender-oriented education unit from the elementary school level. It is in line with Pujiastuti's (2017) opinion that thematic learning is an effort to integrate knowledge comprehensively and integrated. As one of the integrated approaches naturally, thematic learning connects facts and ideas to understand the world.

The framework of learners' humanity domain is presumable will determine the quality of life in society. With the humanity domain framework, there forms learners' stereotype in looking at themselves concerning other human beings, whether they place themselves in the same position and equal to cooperate, or they will place in an unequal position, to be hostile to each other, harass or commit acts of discrimination.

Children's learning about gender equality must be provided early on. Otherwise, they have the potential to discriminate and have a false understanding of gender. Parents and teachers can contribute to this, especially in teaching, guiding, and providing knowledge about gender to children. However, no less important is the role of a very strategic teacher to instil a gender equality attitude. This is so that when they grow up, they can be responsive to gender discrimination. Once a teacher at school touches on a gender issue, children will continue to remember it until adulthood.

Education does not discriminate against all citizens by gender. The concept of gender equality is an important part, which is also explained in the State Direction Outline, which was implemented by the release of Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming (Abbas, 2018). Zaduqisti (2009) states that gender mainstreaming in education is one of the strategies so that all policies, programs, projects, or activities in education are directed to reduce or eliminate the gender gap.

Through education, the government launched an education for all program, meaning that education should be enjoyed equally for everyone, both male and female, and there is no discrimination. In line with that, through Presidential Decree No. 9 of 2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in all sectors, the education aspect is a strategic

aspect to instill the value of gender justice and equality, one of which can be done through the provision of teaching materials and gender-filled textbooks.

However, in reality, efforts to deliver gender equality early on are not implemented to the maximum. It can be seen from the number of Indonesian textbooks for the basic level that uses literary quotations and examples of sentences that are gender-biased. Gender bias is a term that refers to the difference in treatment that a man or woman receives based on gender. Reeves & Baden (2000:7) use the term gender discrimination to describe the systematic and unfavourable treatment of an individual based on gender, making them lose their rights, opportunities, or access to life-supporting resources.

Some education systems form behaviours and habits that create a distance between men and women in its implementation. The distance appears due to the imbalance of relationships between men and women in social construction. So far, social construction is still dominated by patriarchal views. As a result, men's dominance in various areas of society is included in the realm of formal education. It is in line with UNICEF's research, which shows that elementary school books highlight boys through various creative roles than women (Martono, 2012: 7).

Some other studies also state that books as teaching materials still contain texts and illustrations that are gender-biased. Ng Yun Jin et al. show that English and literary books in Malaysia highlight men rather than women through illustrations, vocabulary, work roles, character values, involvement in activities, and decision making (Jin, 2013). H. Wu and W. L. Liu show that women's positions lag far behind men through their superiority and higher social status (Wu, 2015). Similarly, French comics tend to contain stereotypes and gender biases through differences in public and domestic roles, social roles, technological mastery, and the presence of sexual harassment (Sastriyani, 2004). Titien Diah points out that 21st-century child writers are still inseparable from patriarchal ideology on traditional gender roles because the stories presented lead to stereotypes that favour men rather than women (Soelistyarini, 2013).

With so many questions found in the thematic books of the 2013 curriculum that cover gender bias, it will impact children's attitudes and behaviours that will eventually increase gender inequality. Also, there are no excellent values of justice and gender equality in activities that can support learning quality and make it necessary.

The existence of gender bias is contrary to Presidential Decree No. 9 of 2000 related to gender mainstreaming. This instruction contains integrating gender into one dimension with national development policies and programs to embody planning, drafting, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating national development policies and programs with gender-perspective to embody gender equality in various fields. Through instructions since 2009, the climate of gender equality should have been running, but it turns out that in education still found such gender inequality.

Research on gender bias has previously been conducted. Setiawan et al. in 2013 studied gender bias found in Indonesian and European folklore. Setiawan et al. (2013) state that there is gender bias in the story structure and discourse structure of Indonesian and European folklore discourse, especially gender bias regarding the action and character of the two stories studied. Rasyidin (2010) states that gender bias attitudes are often carried out by society. For example, they often give different treatment between males and females. It often happens in formal educational institutions/schools, primarily based on their findings, namely gender bias in Islamic Education textbooks for elementary school students.

The above case is in line with the research results conducted by Djamila Lasaiba on gender bias in English textbooks for elementary school students. Lasaiba (2016) states that the illustrations presented in elementary school students' English books prioritize a particular gender and harm the other gender. Gender-biased images and illustrations in grade IV books include Numbers, Things at Home, and Family themes. Meanwhile, in grade V books, there are some themes; Hobby, Daily Activities, Toys and Games, Mathematics, and Profession. Meanwhile, Gender Neutral analysis means that the images and illustrations shown do not reflect partiality in either gender. It can be seen in class IV books on the themes; Numbers, Parts of the Body, Family, and Calendar. Subrahmanian (2005) states that achieving gender parity is just one step towards gender equality in and through education. Research conducted by Billah Nurlalili Zulmi and Refti Handini Lisytani also shows gender bias in elementary school students' textbooks. Zulmki and Refti (2017) explain that first-grader students' thematic books in curriculum 2013 with the theme of My Activities still contain gender bias. This form of gender bias includes gender bias in work, nature, social status, and penchant.

Based on some of the findings above, research on gender bias against the questions in the Thematic Book Curriculum 2013 becomes essential to disclose and describe the insertion of gender bias on the questions contained in the books. Hopefully, the implementation of education based on gender equality can be realized so that there is no more discrimination against women, especially in education, which is a significant factor in empowering women. This is in line with a worldwide women's conference calling to eliminate discrimination in education and the abolition of gender-sensitive education. Thus, gender inequality in student book questions can be minimized to hack the gender bias that has occurred. To realize this, the researchers considered it necessary to do this research.

## Method

This study focuses on examining gender bias on the questions contained in the thematic books of elementary school students, especially books intended for second graders published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2017. This research is qualitative research using content analysis methods to reveal gender bias in the textbook. Shkedi (2019) states that language is the medium of qualitative research. Human is a research instrument in qualitative research. Furthermore, it is also stated that doing qualitative research involved two actions. First, the researcher needs to set boundaries to define aspects of his/her cases that she/he can study

within the limit of her/his time and means. Second, at the same time, the researcher needs to create conceptual frames to help her/him uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes or constructs that undergird her/his study (Miles et al., 2014).

The content analysis used in this study is a type of inferential content analysis. Analysis of inferential content is a meaningful analysis that requires inference (Zuzhdi, 1993:19). In other words, analysis to uncover meaning find the message or the impact of the message on the reader, listener, observer, or connoisseur of the object being studied. The qualitative content analysis seeks to develop carefully specified categories that are revised and refined in a text or communication (Drisko and Maschi, 2016). This study's data sources are the questions contained in the thematic books in grade 1 elementary school. These questions are limited to questions that have illustrations with the human object.

## Results and Discussion

### The Number of Illustrations with Human Object in the Questions

The inclusion of illustrations in a textbook is indispensable. It is presented to help students understand the text and draw their attention (Levie & Lentz, 1982). The illustrations included must also correspond to the text so that there is no confusion among the reader. Also, illustrations accompanying a text must be able to facilitate gender equality.

Based on the calculation results, researchers found 285 illustrations with human object side by side with the question. From these, 143 illustrations depicted male students, while 142 depicted female students. Besides illustrations depicting male and female students, there were also teachers, fathers, mothers, and sellers. This significantly not different number shows that the illustration on the question already holds the principle of equality, giving equal opportunities to both genders to perform. However, some records need to be added based on these findings.

The total number of illustrations, as described above, is the result of calculation in each illustration on the question. The illustrations recorded are limited to illustrations with the human object. In its inclusion, the human object in illustrations always appeared in groups, as shown in the image below.



Figure 1. Illustration of a Group of Students

However, if the question had only one illustration with the human object, male students' illustrations had more numbers than female students. Based on the calculation results, it was found 15 illustrations that had one type of gender. From these numbers, 13 illustrations contained male students, and the rest were female students. It suggests that while the results of the calculations show a difference that did not differ much in terms of the total number, male students got a greater spotlight than female students. Examples of illustrations that show one gender as illustrations can be seen in the following image.



Figure 2a. Illustration of a Male Student



Figure 2b. Illustration of a Male Students

The inclusion of a male-gendered student figure is closely related to the impression and influence that the author of a book wants to appear. Eagly (1983) argues that gender has a significant impact on influencing others in which men are considered more influential, whereas women are more easily affected. Carli (2001) also notes that men could influence others more than women when they communicate. The decision to include illustrations of male students is also closely related to the information's effectiveness. Proop (1995) finds that information

conveyed by a man is more likely to be used by listeners than information conveyed by women.

### Gender and Teacher's Profession

In the thematic book of grade 1 theme 1, five illustrations depicted the class teacher's figure. From this number, the number of female-gendered classroom teachers was four while the rest were male. The inclusion of female-gendered elementary school teachers may seem more in line with the growing assumption that women are a figure who must take care of children (Francis, 2001).

This fact is reinforced by research conducted by Unal et al. (2018). The research conducted on 250 prospective teachers used qualitative methods to find out the perception of the prospective teachers on gender and profession. The results show that teachers were a profession more attached to women compared to men. This assumption could arise from the existence of social construction that forms the dominance of men over women. Men are closely related to strong, aggressive, and powerful traits. On the contrary, women are attached to the obligation to educate children like a teacher.

Meanwhile, the data findings show that two illustrations of the question depicted a male teacher's figure as a sports teacher. Male gendered sports teachers are unconsciously seen as more suited to the sport because the sports activities are identical with strength and speed. This finding is in line with Dewiki & Mutiara's research (2008), which found that illustrations of male figures appeared more in the printed teaching materials of sports courses. An example of a problem illustration with a sports teacher figure can be seen in the picture below.



Picture 3. Male Sport Teacher

### Gender and Interests

There are many opinions on how a gender role can appear in social constructs. One of them was initiated in the Theory of Gender Schema. According to Bem (1981), a child learns about his gender role in society through the



awards he receives when performing actions under the gender stereotype in society. On the contrary, they will also learn that there are actions that do not conform to gender stereotypes in a society in which there is a punishment if they commit such acts.

In social environments, children are sometimes boxed in with interests labelled "male" and "female". In the box labelled "men," there are hobbies of playing car toys, football, basketball, and various other hobbies closely related to strength. On the other hand, the box labelled "women" contains cooking activities, playing dolls, dressing up, and various other activities that fit women's stereotypes in society. The discrepancy in selecting this "box" will give rise to the punishment that is the negative perception of the surrounding environment. Therefore, the child will tend to choose a "box" that corresponds to the stereotype that develops in the society where he/she lives. The negative effect of the presence of this "box" is unbalanced and limited cognitive abilities (Blakemore & Centers, 2005)

Pomerleau et al. (in Busset & Bandura, 2004) state that parents stereotypically give their boys educational things, car toys, and sports equipment, while their daughters are given dolls, cooking utensils, and equipment with a touch of flowers. These various games direct children to behave according to their gender role in society (Etaugh & Liss, 1992). Parents' expectations of how a child should behave in society will also affect the toys that parents will give to their children (Orr, 2011; Wood, Desmarais, & Gugula, 2002).

This boxed choice seems to appear also in elementary school thematic books. Based on the data sources, female students were still seen as more suitable with illustrations related to objects such as flowers, birds, butterflies, and so on. On the other hand. Illustrations of male students accompanied hobbies that required strength such as playing football, basketball, and kites. Examples of such illustrations can be seen in the image below.



Figure 4a. Interests by Gender





Figure 4b. Interests by Gender

### Gender and Role Domestication

Chodorow (in Bell, 2004) reveals that parenting patterns play an essential role in forming the perception that women are the party that should take care of children and men are the working party and have less role in child care. The parenting process eventually makes a difference in the structure of the characters in girls and boys. In the process of growing up, girls see their mother as a role model. On the other hand, the boy will "separate" himself from his mother when he begins to recognize the gender differences in society. Therefore, it can be explained that women have a motherly nature that grows from observing their mother.

Unfortunately, as described above, perception creates limited opportunities for women to have higher careers. It happens because women are considered only to need to take care of children rather than pursue careers. Men also often show a desire to maintain high employment status while women have to settle for jobs at low levels (Durkin, 1985, in Bussey & Bandura, 2004)

A perception that women are the party that takes care of children also appeared accidentally in the illustration of the question in the thematic book elementary school. Various occupations that show that women are better suited to take care of children and other domestic work can be seen in some illustrations.



Figure 5a. Roles by Gender



Figure 5b. Roles by Gender

Figure 5a is a question in which students are required to try to read poetry. The poem tells about the affection between Udin and Mutiara to his mother. The use of illustrations of a mother who embraces her two children is in accordance with the poem's content. Noteworthy is the choice of poetry writers to describe parents' affection to children using the mother figure. Meanwhile, in picture 5b, a mother is seen cleaning her child's ear. This domestic role may be considered more suitable for women, so the book illustrator chooses to include the mother figure.

One thing to appreciate is the inclusion of illustrations of boys washing clothes. These Illustrations can reduce gender bias by showing that men also do domestic activities such as washing clothes. However, the author still stuck with the bias because of said that the boy was washing clothes to help his mother. The illustration can be seen in the image below.



Figure 6. Washing Activities by Boys

## Conclusion

Although some revisions have been made to elementary school thematic books, some texts and illustrations still contain gender bias. It can be seen in the illustration/picture that accompanies the question. Gender bias is seen in the distinction between the number of illustrations, professions, interests, and domestication of roles in one gender. Women are often described as a weak party, so it is not suitable to be sports teachers or play ball in which both are activities that require energy and strength. Women are also often referred to as figures who have to take care of children so that the inclusion of female illustrations is felt more in line with the question of nuanced affection. However, this thematic book needs to be appreciated for successfully reducing the gender gap when compared to elementary school textbooks in the previous curriculum. This research implies an improvement in the next thematic book's questions, namely that the book will pay more attention to gender equality in all aspects.

To produce thematic books in the absence of gender bias, both the author of the book and the illustrator should have the same understanding. The author of the book needs to put forward the same opportunities for both genders to appear, especially in texts and questions that tell the human figure. Meanwhile, illustrators also play an essential role because the illustration is an integral part of a thematic book. The lack of understanding from these two parties on the gender gap will impact the resulting book.

## Acknowledgement

We thanks to Indonesia *Endowment Fund* for Education (LPDP) scholarship to fund this research. Thanks for giving such a great support to do this research.

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