

TOWARD GENDER-RESPONSIVE LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION: A TEXTBOOK DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract: Gender-responsive education has gained increasing attention, particularly in developing countries where gender disparities persist in schools. Despite UNESCO's (2005) advocacy for gender-inclusive curricula, many textbooks still reinforce biases through language, illustrations, and stereotypical role portrayals. Studies in Indonesia and globally reveal persistent imbalances, with masculine pronouns, male-dominated occupations, and passive female depictions prevalent in textbooks. This paper proposes a framework for developing gender-responsive, life skills-based English textbooks, aligning with UNESCO's guidelines to counteract bias and promote equity. Key considerations include balanced language use, equitable character representation, and inclusive illustrations. The framework emphasizes Research and Development (R&D) phases—needs analysis, literature review, design, validation, and revision—to ensure textbooks foster critical thinking, self-awareness, and gender equality. While this study offers a theoretical model, empirical validation is needed to assess its practical application. The findings underscore the urgency of integrating gender-responsive principles into textbook design to support equitable education and empower students as agents of social change.

Keywords: *gender responsive, life skills-based education, textbook*

Efforts to integrate gender equality in education have gained momentum in recent years, particularly in developing countries where gender disparity persists in schools. UNESCO (2005) has long advocated for a gender-responsive approach to teaching and learning, which includes curriculum materials that reflect the diverse experiences and contributions of both males and females. However, there remains a lack of concrete, instructional-level tools that translate gender-responsive ideals into classroom realities. Previous studies, such as Zittleman (2007) state that 80-95% classroom activities are focused on the use of the textbook, and the teacher makes instructional decisions based on the textbook. This notion is strengthened by the fact that the textbook provides complete exercises in the language components, like grammar, vocabulary, and language practice.

In addition, textbooks not only become instructional media to develop language skills, but also transmit society's cultural capital (UNESCO, 2005). Indeed, textbooks become the basis for introducing particular cultures and values. The texts, pictures, and exercises in the textbook directly or indirectly transmit a model of social behaviours, cultural thoughts, norms, and values, or known as "hidden curriculum". UNESCO (2005) states that textbooks become "vehicles" for socialization through the chosen materials and activities; they can maintain social cohesion and harmonious relationships among students as part of society. For that reason, teachers should be able to choose an appropriate textbook.

According to UNESCO (2005), a good textbook should present quality learning materials to engage students in their learning, comprehensively provide media to learn knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which become the capital to be sensible people of their community and of the world. It should encourage the students to have agency both in their lives and in society. They must become an agent of change and contribute to society to make it better. Therefore, when authors design textbooks, they must choose and select texts, pictures, and exercises very carefully because they are in the process of transmitting norms, values, and triggering the students to be agents. Thus, it must be free from bias, discrimination, and stereotyping.

Even though a textbook has great roles in teaching and culture transmission, the quality of the textbook itself is sometimes still low. There are still some weaknesses, like biases, discrimination, or stereotypes. Many textbook designers make light of the depiction of gender equity in their textbooks. They do not equally present the number of male and female visibility, the language use (the number of masculine and feminine pronouns, the sequence of the pronoun appearance), pictures/images/illustrations (female and male appearance), and topic domination. Many textbooks depict females as secretaries and observers in the laboratory, while males are the ones who experiment. In another case, the females are presented sitting in the front row and fully engaged in the classroom activities, like raising their hands to ask questions, while males sit in the back row.

Within the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Education and Culture has shown increasing commitment to gender equality through curriculum reforms and school policies. However, there remains a lack of concrete, instructional-level tools that translate gender-responsive ideals into classroom realities. One critical gap lies in the availability of textbooks that promote life skills education while simultaneously being gender-responsive. Many studies in textbook analysis report that gender biases and gender stereotypes exist in English textbooks sold in Indonesia. Nurani (2017) conducts a textbook analysis in *Bahasa Inggris* SMK Revised Edition Textbook for the First Year Students, published by the government and widely used in Indonesia as a primary book in secondary level schools. This research focuses on the analysis of the use of language items in monolog texts and pictures. The result of the study presents that the textbook tends to use masculine pronouns than feminine pronouns, estimated 189 and 109 pronouns respectively. It also reports that there are more male pictures than female.

Maharani (2017) also conducted the same textbook analysis in Bright English Textbook for the First Year of Junior High School, published by Erlangga publisher. The results show that there is a gender imbalance in language use and picture in which masculine language is more dominant than the feminine, while the picture use is more emphasized in presenting females than males. Pradana (2017) also conducted another textbook analysis, Bright an English Course for Second-Year Students of Junior High School. The results are consistently the same. There is gender bias in the number of male and female pictures, the number of male and female characters, and topic domination.

Last, a textbook analysis in *Buku Bahasa Inggris* Kelas X of Curriculum 2013 Revised Edition conducted by Pradana (2017) also presents the same result. Gender bias is found in language use. Males are mentioned more than females, estimated by 281 and 177 respectively. He also reported that masculine pronouns are more common than female.

Gender bias in textbooks has been found not only in Indonesia but also worldwide. For example, in a Hong Kong textbook, the pronoun "he" is mentioned than "she" and the use of "he and she" is abundant than "she and he". In the Iranian context, it is found that the EFL textbooks created by the Textbook Curriculum Development and Planning Department of the Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran present gender bias. It is reported that 80% male characters exist in the textbook (81.2% in language use and 80% in illustrations); 85.7% mentions are referred to male; 17 of 19 occupations (like engineers, bus drivers, police officers, doctors and bosses) are occupied by male, while female is served as teachers or dressmakers. Moreover, Blumberg (2008, cited in Blumberg and Kenan, 2015) lists the results of textbook evaluation around the world, and he highlights that the most common gender bias found in the textbooks is:

- a. Female is significantly underrepresented.
- b. In the text and illustration, females are frequently depicted and stereotyped taking a role in the home.
- c. Female is rarely depicted as involved in non-domestic occupations.
- d. Girls are usually depicted as passive participants.

Based on the results, some implications can be made. The first, the language used, and the pictures in the textbook become the main causes of gender bias. The second, the needs of gender responsive textbooks are not fulfilled yet, although the government has required the curriculum to teach this value, as stated in *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia*, number 81A, year 2013, states that the curriculum is designed to foster equitable attitudes and behaviours, emphasizing gender equality. Last, textbook concerning in gender responsive is demanded because: 1) gender bias in textbook does matter, 2) gender bias in the textbook become the most covered obstacle and hardest to budgeted aspect in mainstreaming gender responsive, 3) gender bias in textbook is rarely discussed compared to other gender mainstreaming discussion, 4) gender bias is rooted and subconsciously exist in formal curriculum in the schools (Blumberg, 2007).

To this end, this paper attempts to give a model to develop a gender responsive life skills-based textbook for Junior High School; however, it can be adapted to develop a textbook for another level of education. This paper also presents a gender-responsive life skills-based framework from UNESCO as one framework to develop the textbook.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN DESIGNING GENDER-RESPONSIVE LIFE SKILLS-BASED TEXTBOOKS

Gender-responsive refers to acknowledging the differences between males and females and their special needs in class activities, so all males and females get the same access to the learning process. According to Mlama et al. (2005) gender responsiveness is the action to diminish gender bias and discrimination, so that males and females get the same portion of involvement, which later creates gender equality and equity. Gender equality refers to the action that is free from discrimination because of gender, while gender equity can be understood as giving equal treatment to males and females to access resources and opportunities. For example, in the education field, the government gives an equal number of female students to enter engineering and male students to study fashion design.

Recently, gender issues are correlated with education because it equips students with life skills, or called as life skills-based education (LSBE). The life skills cover psycho-social skills that can be learned and practiced like self-awareness, problem solving, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills, which are needed and closely correlated to daily life (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008). LSBE is introduced as an approach in education that assists the progress of gender responsive education and contributes to gender equity in teaching and learning. This approach can be understood as a way to actively introduce students to balance their knowledge, attitude, and skills and positively change their behaviour toward gender responsiveness.

There are some underlying reasons for the LSBE approach related to gender responsiveness. According to UNESCO Bangkok (2008), the LSBE approach enables students, both male and female, to receive equal opportunities to discuss, give opinions, and contribute their critical thinking on the gender issues within the learning context. Their critical thinking encourages the possibility of inclusiveness and empowerment of gender responsibility. The second reason is that by giving gender responsive textbooks as part of LSBE, the students promote gender responsiveness through the assignments and homework that sometimes require students and their families' engagement to finish the tasks. The last reason is that the textbooks promote the attitudes and practices relating to gender responsiveness. Therefore, the LSBE textbook as an instrumental medium can bring significant benefits in enhancing access and empowerment of gender responsive, developing family and community involvement on gender issues, and enhancing overall quality of education. Accordingly, UNESCO, as the umbrella organization of education, provides frameworks to create gender-responsive life skills-based textbooks. The framework consists of some considerations in designing a gender-responsive life skills-based textbook.

The first consideration is the major source of gender biases and stereotypes. Based on the findings of textbook analyses, language use and pictures become the main sources of gender bias and stereotype; therefore, in designing the textbook, the textbook designer should really be concerned with these aspects. According to Brugeilles and Cromer (2009), the textbook designer should be concerned with 1) the visibility, including the number of appearances, 2) the characters and actions representing the male and female, and 3) the connection between text and illustration, which reinforce each other and strengthen meaning, not conflicting and weakening the meaning.

In other words, designing gender-responsive textbooks requires a careful and critical approach that addresses both content and representation. One of the most fundamental considerations is the representation of male and female characters in the text. Research has consistently shown that many textbooks depict men more frequently than women, often in more active, public, and professional roles, while women are portrayed in domestic or subordinate contexts (Sunderland, 2000; Lee & Collins, 2009). These imbalances, if unaddressed, risk reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes among students. Therefore, gender-responsive textbooks should strive to provide balanced visibility and active agency for all genders, presenting diverse and equitable character roles across various social and professional domains.

The second consideration is choosing the characters in the textbook. The textbook designer can use gendered or ungendered characters. In terms of ungendered characters, the designer can use the name that refers to both gender like "pupil, child, or person," or ungendered group characters like "the class" and "the family" (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). However, in choosing the characters, gendered or ungendered, two main principles should be considered. First, the number of representations can strengthen the position of males and females. If the representation of the characters does not lower their role, the representation should be added to show the roles of both genders. The representation should reflect an equal role of both genders; for example, males can also be depicted doing housework, and females can be depicted to have an occupation. The second, the representation can be used for local or other countries' activities and cultures, but the depiction should be carefully selected to avoid gender bias and stereotypes.

That is to say, another essential consideration is the use of gender-fair language. Textbooks often contain language that implicitly favors one gender over another, particularly through generic masculine forms or gender-exclusive terms (Pauwels, 1998). To promote inclusivity, authors must use language that acknowledges both male and female learners, such as using plural nouns (e.g., "students" instead of "he or she") and avoiding occupational terms with gender bias (e.g., "fireman" versus "firefighter"). Language plays a powerful role in shaping perceptions, and adopting gender-inclusive expressions contributes to cultivating an environment of respect and equality.

The third consideration is choosing a word that indicates gender, like a pronoun, a proper noun, or a common noun. According to Brugeilles and Cromer (2009), the researcher can consider and count the use of 1) pronoun (he/she), first name (male, female, unisex), surname, family relationship, another relationship (friend, neighbour, colleague), profession or occupation, 2) proper noun which has no proper masculine equivalent like "housewife" must be replaced using "mother" or "father", 3) designation of male and female should be various in terms of roles and social functions, 4) the alternation of using female as the first noun, instead of male character if the text consisting both gender. Moreover, the sexist language, like "spokesman or spokeswoman", should be avoided and changed by "spokesperson".

To put it differently, language itself, particularly grammar and word choice, plays a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of gender. Textbook designers must monitor their use of pronouns, titles, occupational terms, and the ordering of words. This includes alternating between "he" and "she," using unisex names when possible, and replacing gender-exclusive titles such as "housewife" with more inclusive terms like "homemaker" or "parent." Similarly, roles and occupations should be distributed equitably across genders to show that all careers and social functions are accessible to everyone. Designers should also be conscious of word order—alternating terms like "girls and boys" with "boys and girls"—and replacing sexist language with neutral alternatives such as "chairperson" or "spokesperson".

The fourth consideration is choosing the illustration in the textbook. The presence of illustration can be the source of gender bias and stereotype; however, the presence of the illustration can engage students' attention and convey meaning that sometimes cannot be expressed using verbal input. Therefore, the textbook designer should carefully choose the appropriate illustration. The textbook designer can 1) represent the equal number of male and female in illustration and text, 2) represent "hero" characters and minor figures appropriately, 3) consider appropriate position and size of the illustrations, and 4) consider the equal number of male and female of well-known figures in politics, science,

literature, sports, etc. To clarify, visual content contributes powerfully to the way gender norms are communicated. Therefore, illustrations must be designed to reflect gender inclusivity and challenge traditional stereotypes. Designers should ensure that both male and female figures are given equal visibility and that roles—main or supporting—are shared equitably between them. The positioning and sizing of illustrations should not favor one gender over another, and both boys and girls, as well as men and women, should be shown engaging in diverse domains such as science, politics, literature, and sports. In this way, illustrations do not merely support written content but actively affirm the principles of gender equality through non-verbal cues.

The last consideration is depicting the appropriate role of the characters. The roles of both genders should be equally depicted in the textbook to avoid gender bias and stereotypes. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) mention some ways to depict the role equally: 1) choose the role that can be done by male and female, 2) use interchangeable role, than complementary role, 3) introduce character in more than one role, like a mother who is doctor or father who is teacher, 4) attribute encounter gender-specific psychological features, defects, or qualities, like boy who are diligent and sits nicely in the classroom, 5) show male and female who have similar occupation and involve female in non-domestic jobs, 6) show mutual relation between man and woman. Do not show male as the major character and female as the minor character, and 7) avoid comparing male and female, especially in biological discussions. After the textbook designer creates the textbook, the designer can use a grid to inventory characters to check and count the number of aspects involved in the textbook, so that the result of the textbook shows an equal number of male and female visibility (see Appendix 1).

In essence, the representation of roles and activities is equally critical. Textbooks must reflect gender-equal responsibilities and opportunities, avoiding traditional assignments that link certain tasks or professions with one gender. Roles should be interchangeable, allowing, for instance, both girls and boys to participate in household chores or aspire to careers in engineering. Characters should be portrayed as multidimensional, like a mother who is also a doctor, to reflect the complexities of real life. Qualities such as courage, diligence, or empathy should be attributed to both genders, and both males and females should be depicted in nurturing and professional roles. The relationships shown between characters should be respectful and reciprocal, free from biologically deterministic assumptions about intelligence, behavior, or emotional capacity.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING GENDER-RESPONSIVE LIFE SKILLS-BASED TEXTBOOKS

While designing a gender-responsive life skills-based textbook, the designer should first consider some aspects that may increase the possibility of gender bias. Here is a list of considerations in designing a textbook, which is mentioned by Universidad de Chile (cited in Blumberg and Kenan, 2015):

- a. Discussion related to a biological topic should be avoided because it triggers the appearance of gender bias.
- b. The language used, including “firstness”, mentions, and pronouns, should be thoroughly selected.
- c. Females’ contributions should be mentioned, including some professions, to avoid stereotyping of gender in particular jobs.
- d. The pictures or illustrations used, including the visibility of male and female pictures, should be carefully chosen and consistently avoid gender bias.

In short, it is clearly stated that the “inclusive language use” and “the iconography” (pictures and illustrations) must become the top priority concern while designing textbook gender responsive. In addition, Blumberg (2007) mentions that the designer should 1) measure the proportion of named characters, mentions in titles, and citations instead of counting the number of lines in the text, and 2) lower the number of gender stereotypes by making in balance the occupational division of labours, actions, attitudes, and traits.

Generally, the gender responsive life skills-based development is involved in Research and Development. There are six phases to conduct this research: needs analysis, literature review, designing a textbook, validation, revision, and final product; however, those procedures can be adapted (added or omitted) to develop another textbook, depending on the needs. The following is a brief explanation of the phases in a gender-responsive life skills-based textbook.

a. Needs analysis

A needs analysis is conducted to know the “gap” of needs that are not yet fulfilled. In this phase, the designer can conduct document analysis or review journals on textbook analysis to know the need for a gender-responsive life skills-based textbook. Another way to conduct needs analysis is to distribute an online or offline questionnaire to see the needs and check the existence of gender responsive life skills-based textbooks in the education field.

b. Literature review

There are some concerns in the literature review. The first is selecting materials that reflect the syllabus of the Junior High School. The second is reviewing journals on textbook analysis to know the main cause of gender bias and stereotypes. After knowing the main cause, the designer can avoid these problems in the present textbook. Lastly, the researcher can enrich the activities by reviewing other textbooks.

c. Designing the textbook (topic selection)

In designing the textbook, the researcher should focus on the gender-responsive aspect and the activities reflecting students’ real lives. In this phase, the designer is required to give authentic materials to the students so that the students can simulate the real use of the language, enhance creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. In order

to give authentic materials, the designer can present daily activities or local activities as stated by Aksornkool (2003). The designer can use various activities to engage students' attention, such as song, dance, games, storytelling, and drawing. The researcher can also develop students' writing skills by asking students to do journalism, write captions for their photographs, and creative writing (Aksornkool, 2003). In speaking activities, the researcher can use small group discussion, plenary presentation, and reporting personal experience (Aksornkool, 2003). All these activities can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

d. Validations (theoretical and empirical)

Before conducting expert validation, the designer can do a self-assessment to make sure that the textbook is free from gender bias seen in the contents, visuals, language, and activities, and the textbook is in accordance with the syllabus (See Appendix 1).

Textbook validation can be conducted using two types of validation: theoretical validation and empirical validation. Theoretical validation is conducted by giving the textbook to experts to get feedback on which parts should be revised and developed. This validation is an obligatory validation for the textbook development. Since this textbook emphasizes gender responsiveness, the researcher can consult to expert in gender discussion to see whether the content is free from gender bias or not. The designer also needs to consult to expert in pedagogy, especially in material development, to get feedback on the organization of and the learning objective as stated in the syllabus for Junior High School. After consulting those experts, the designer can consult the expert in visualization to get feedback on the visualization and layout of the textbook. In addition, the designer needs a list of standards or criteria as an evaluation guideline.

If the designer has no constraints in terms of time, the designer can conduct the empirical validation. This validation is conducted by giving the textbook to the users and asking the feedback from them. This validation can be conducted using a try-out by trying out some chapters on a sample of Junior High School students. If the designer wants to dig deeper information and gain deeper insight into the textbook, the designer can conduct a pre-experimental or quasi-experimental study and disseminate. However, while conducting pre-experimental and quasi-experimental studies, the designer needs to apply whole chapters to the students and involve the students in the experimental study, which needs a quite long period of time. Therefore, this validation can be time-consuming and require more energy. For this reason, this kind of validation is optional for the researcher.

e. Revision

Revision is done after the researcher has the feedback from the experts. The researcher must carefully ensure that the feedback covered all the aspects in the textbook, especially gender bias and stereotypes. Moreover, the researcher must ensure that the revision is in line with the feedback given.

After revising, the researcher can conduct another validation, especially empirical validation. Revision and validation are stopped when the designer thinks that the textbook does not contain gender bias and stereotype, the contents are well organized, the activities reflect the learning objective in the Junior High School syllabus, and the visualizations are well received (illegible).

f. Final Product

The final product of gender-responsive life skills-based textbook can be used to teach English in Junior High School as supplementary textbook. This textbook can be additional instructional material for the teacher who needs additional materials and activities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Textbooks hold a dual function in education: as instructional tools to support student learning and as cultural artifacts that transmit values, norms, and ideologies. A well-designed textbook not only facilitates classroom instruction but also plays a critical role in shaping learners' identities and empowering them as agents of change. In this conceptual paper, a theoretical framework has been proposed to guide the development of a gender-responsive, life skills-based English textbook. This initiative addresses the persistent presence of gender bias and stereotypes in some existing English textbooks in Indonesia. By promoting inclusivity and fostering essential life skills, the framework aspires to support a more equitable and transformative English language education.

As a conceptual work, this paper does not include empirical validation of the proposed framework. The discussion is grounded in theoretical and normative perspectives, without application in real textbook development or classroom contexts. Consequently, the practical effectiveness, adaptability, and implementation challenges of the framework remain unexplored. Further empirical research is needed to assess its viability and impact in educational settings.

It is recommended that future textbook developers, curriculum designers, and educational stakeholders consider integrating the proposed framework into their practices. Collaborative efforts involving gender experts, language educators, and student representatives are essential to ensure that textbook content is both pedagogically sound and socially responsive. Moreover, pilot studies and field testing should be conducted to evaluate the framework's applicability and effectiveness in various educational contexts across Indonesia.

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Appendix 1

Tables to Check Characters' Visibility

Count the number female and male visibility in the textbook based on the following criteria. You can add other criteria when needed.

Table for counting characters

Characters		Lesson	Exercise	Illustration
Individual characters	Female			
	Male			
	Ungendered or sex unspecified			
Total				
Group characters	Female			
	Male			
	Ungendered			
	Masculine plural			
	Feminine plural			
Total				

Table for counting characters' main features

Character Designation		Male			Female		
		Lesson	Exercise	Total	Lesson	Exercise	Total
1.	First name/Surname						
2.	Family relationship						
3.	Other relationship						
4.	Occupational status						
5.	Social status						
6.	Other status						

Table for counting characters' activities

Activities		Male			Female		
		Lesson	Exercise	Illustration	Lesson	Exercise	Illustration
1.	School activity						
2.	Occupational activity						
3.	Domestic activity						
4.	Buying activity						
5.	Care or caring activity						
6.	Leisure activity						
7.	Social activity						
8.	Routine personal activity						
9.	Negative activity						
10.	Successful activity						
11.	Other activity						
Total							

Adapted from Brugeilles and Cromer (2009)

Appendix 2

Self-Assessment Checklist for Gender Responsive Life Skills-Based

Tick (√) in "equal" if the criteria is equally presented or "not equal" if the criteria has not been equally depicted. The evidence can be list of numbers or words.

Criteria			Depiction		Evidence
			Equal	Not equal	
Contents	1.	Content allocation			
	2.	Adjectives used			
	3.	Diversity of male and female in text			
	4.	Gender representation of occupation			
	5.	Role assigned for male and female in family, school, workplace, and society			
	6.	Distribution of workload of bread winner and household chores			
	7.	Human values in relation to male and female			
	8.	Reference to customary practices			

	9.	The visibility of contribution/achievement of male and females			
	10.	The number of decision making in the area of food, education, and money matters, or health			
Visuals	1.	Representation of male and male active and passive role			
	2.	Depiction of male and female related to roles, occupations, dress, appearance			
	3.	Positioning of male and female in doing activities			
	4.	The same number of active (the protagonist) in the visual			
	5.	The same number of passive (the receiver) in the visual			
	6.	The body language in visual communication			
Language	1.	The same number of masculine and feminine language			
	2.	The same number of mentions and pronouns			
	3.	The equal number of “firstness”			
			Yes	No	Evidence
Activities	1.	Do the exercises explore issues related to gender responsive?			
	2.	Do the exercises attempt to question power relations?			
	3.	Do the exercises relate to students’ real life?			
	4.	Do the exercises promote critical thinking and problem solving skills?			
	5.	Do the exercises promote students’ creativity?			
	6.	Do the exercises promote cooperative and collaborative learning?			
Materials	1.	Do the activities reflect the learning objectives stated in the syllabus?			
	2.	Do the activities cover all language skills and language components?			

Adapted from Srivastava (2017)