Gender Stereotypes Portrayed in Five Most Popular Indonesian Folktales: Literature in ELT

Alfia Sari[1], Sueb[2], and Mirjam Anugerahwati[3]

[1]Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia
[1]alfia.sari.2202218@students.um.ac.id
[2]Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
[2]sueb@unesa.ac.id
[3]Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia
[3]mirjam.anugerahwati.fs@um.ac.id

Abstract. Folktales have been a medium through which children can transfer knowledge, language, and cultural values at an early age. The existence of folktales cannot be separated from the values prevalent in society. Numerous moral principles are sound for life. As literary works for learning, folktales should introduce gender roles. However, some local cultures and ideologies can represent the role of gender in some areas. Therefore, this study investigates the gender stereotypes in the five most popular Indonesian folktales: Roro Jonggrang, Timun Mas, The Legend of Malin Kundang, The Origin of Lake Toba, and Bawang Merah Bawang Putih. These stories were chosen because they are the most searchable folktales online and are the most used as learning materials in Indonesian school textbooks: *English for Nusantara* and *When English Rings a Bell*. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) analyzes the relationship between discourse language and other semiotic cues. The results revealed two aspects of each character's social and domestic roles. The male characters dominate the stories, where male characters are depicted as people who work, travel, and fight. In contrast, female characters are depicted as housewives who do all the housework. This showed a patriarchal culture is involved in the stories, which impacts the portrayal of men and women in society. Therefore, gender construction in these five most popular folktales is needed as they are used as learning materials to teach values to young learners.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; ELT; folktales; gender; literature

Abstrak. Cerita rakyat telah menjadi bagian dari media untuk mentransfer pengetahuan, bahasa, dan nilai-nilai budaya, kepada anak-anak pada usia dini. Keberadaan cerita rakyat tidak lepas dari nilai-nilai yang lazim di masyarakat. Dalam konteks Indonesia, cerita rakyat dapat menghibur dan mendidik anak-anak karena mengandung banyak prinsip moral yang baik untuk kehidupan. Sebagai karya sastra untuk media pembelajaran, cerita rakyat harus mengandung "nilai-nilai baik", termasuk peran gender. Studi ini menyelidiki stereotip gender yang digambarkan dalam lima cerita rakyat Indonesia paling populer. Cerita-cerita ini dipilih karena cerita rakyat yang paling banyak dicari di platform online dan cerita rakyat yang paling banyak digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran di buku pelajaran sekolah Indonesia. Analisis wacana kritis (CDA) digunakan di studi ini untuk menganalisis hubungan antara bahasa wacana dan isyarat semiotik lainnya. Hasilnya mengungkapkan bahwa ada dua stereotip yang digambarkan dalam cerita rakyat. Stereotip maskulin yang mendominasi cerita di mana karakter laki-laki digambarkan sebagai tampan, kuat, pekerja keras, ambisius, bijaksana, berani, dan kuat. Sebaliknya, karakter wanita digambarkan sebagai cantik, lembut, baik hati, lemah, dan tanpa henti. Karakter wanita digambarkan secara fisik lebih banyak daripada pria. Budaya patriarki terlibat dalam cerita, yang berdampak pada penggambaran laki-laki. Oleh karena itu, konstruksi gender dalam lima cerita rakyat terpopuler ini sangat dibutuhkan karena digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran untuk mengajarkan nilai-nilai kepada pelajar muda.

Kata kunci: analisis wacana kritis; cerita rakyat; gender; karya sastra; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris

INTRODUCTION

Folktales have been used as teaching materials in EFL classrooms to teach language and culture to young learners for many years. Many studies found that the use of folktales helps students improve their language skills (Nyoman & Gana, 2018; Istiq'faroh et al., 2020; Nyoman Mantra & Maba, 2018), students' learning achievement (Muslim et al., 2009; Lwin, 2015; Soenarto & Tjahjani, 2021) and their speaking motivation (Istiq'faroh et al., 2020; Nyoman Mantra & Maba, 2018). Folktales had a great deal of opportunity to develop social values, increase knowledge, and improve student interaction and teacher-student communication (Kuyyenhoven, 2007; Nicolopoulou, 2011; Jirata, 2019). Folktales are the most popular materials used in teaching language to young learners. They have rich linguistic and cultural resources, making it easy for students to learn the language and digest the moral values inside the story. Deacon and Murphy (2001) mentioned that using folktales may encourage students to retell stories while learning the language in the classroom, which promotes the use of vocabulary in context and language structures. Thus, students can acquire new vocabulary and language structures from the stories.

Many studies found the positive benefits of using folktales as children's literature in teaching English. Nyoman & Gana, (2018) found that folktales significantly aid students in developing their critical reading abilities, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension of specific events in EFL classrooms. They could be a powerful and inspiring source to encourage students to read and practice English to improve their vocabulary and grammatical skills. Teachers may support students in forming favorable opinions of the English language, enabling them to read, and possibly enhancing their extensive reading abilities using folktales. Folktales can draw students into reading activities and give them memorable experiences. Additionally, it teaches students how to predict events, infer meaning, and draw conclusions from the actions and behaviors of characters in folktales (Nyoman & Gana, 2018). This activity may help students improve their reading ability, as folktales are short and simple to read. Students can complete their discussion and analysis of tales in a single class period.

However, in teaching language and cultural values using folktales, students may consume many variables, including gender stereotypes. Moreover, some folktales are used as learning resources in Indonesian school textbooks. Thus, it is important to make the story free from the stereotypes set by the community, including gender roles. Ideally, folktales used to teach young learners must not include biased knowledge and should not conform to the stereotypical norms of their surroundings (E. Andalas & Qur'ani, 2019). Since the folktales used will relate to the learning of knowledge children accept, the stories should be evaluated based on the topic, form, and content. This is crucial because young learner's perceptions at their developmental stage are insufficient for them to comprehend the gender ideologies that are imposed on them socially and culturally (Kurniawati, 2011).

The portrayal of one gender as the major character in children's books can suggest gender bias. It arose as a result of gender stereotypes where people judge men and women differently (Koch et al., 2015)Gender bias demonstrates how gender stereotypes are influenced by people's opinions and judgments, even when we consciously disagree with them. "Gender bias" describes how one gender is treated unfairly when the opposite gender is overrepresented (Beiki, 2017). Hentschel et al., (2019) stated that men and women frequently internalize gender stereotypes. Children's literature frequently depicts traditional gender roles for both boys and girls (Brower, 2017). Girls are often presented as naive, submissive, sweet, and reliant. Male characters are known for their combativeness, physical strength, adventure, and independence. Therefore, teachers need to examine how others perceive both genders and how they perceive themselves concerning stereotypical characteristics. Gender

stereotypes, as explained by social role theory, arise from the unequal allocation of men and women to specific social roles, both inside the household and in the workplace (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). People's stereotypes are classified into several things, such as their occupations, role behaviors, inherited characteristics, or emotions (Plant et al., 2000; Haines et al., 2016). There are two ways of measuring gender stereotypes explicitly: by giving questionnaires to respondents (Haines et al., 2016). Moreover, implicitly employs response time to gauge the connections between a gender group and a stereotypical trait or quality.

The general stereotype was women have been misled by gender bias to participate in limited social roles (such as fashion designers), to play domestic or traditional social roles (such as cooking, knitting, and babysitting), and to experience unfair treatment when operating a business and obtaining managerial and political positions (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). These stereotypes are believed to limit women and, at the same time, overgeneralize men. Hence, overgeneralized, inaccurate, or persistent beliefs can lead to misconceptions about the stereotypes that maintain the appearance of bias, dominance, and inequality. Ferguson (2018) wrote an article titled "Must Monsters Always Be Male? Huge gender revealed in Children's Books," in which male characters with masculine roles dominated 100 children's picture books published in 2017, while female characters were eliminated from one-fifth of the books based on top rankings. Many children's books, such as The Gruffalo, Guess How Much I Love You, and Dear Zoo, use male pronouns to refer to all animals. Male characters with male narrative perspectives predominate in the cast. Indeed, there was inequality in the number of male and female characters in the story. Male figures outnumber female ones in number. This circumstance confirms that cultural products can reveal underlying power relations and the ideal form of cultural construction in society including children's literature (Haryantia & Suwana, 2014; Macalister & Ethridge, 2019).

The same case also appears in Indonesian children's literature many stories are dominated by male figures with a 5:3 ratio (E. Andalas & Qur'ani, 2019). It is important to select folktales that contain good values, including gender roles for children's literature because children's reading material, or children's literature, plays a significant role in the early development of children's knowledge. Children's literature with a purpose is crucial for instilling social values in them. Therefore, the content of the material from children's books greatly contribute to the acquisition of children's knowledge and experience from various situations, events, or places in their lives (Roper & Clifton, 2013; Cer, 2015).

Several studies investigating gender stereotypes in folktales have been conducted. Darmadali (2022) did research on finding women's representation in Indonesian Eastern folktales, showing that Eastern Indonesian folktales and patriarchal ideology are inextricably linked. These tales demonstrate how men and women hold different positions in Indonesian culture. Additionally, just like in folktales from Western Indonesia, the female characters also experience objectification and inequality. Hapsarani (2017) conducted a research with the findings of her investigation into the objectification of women in the three Indonesian classic folktales that were treated unequally. Women are portrayed as objects of pleasure, mistreatment, and even male violence. However, men are portrayed as dominating and possessing power over women. It is in contrast with women, who are depicted as being helpless and vulnerable so that men can easily trick them. Additionally, women are portrayed as the targets of male aggression while also requiring the assistance of men. On the other hand, Indonesian folklore depicts the ideal woman as glamorous, gentle, honorable, and knowledgeable in domestic matters. Most previous studies showed that there is gender inequality and bias in some Indonesian folktales. Hence, further investigation into other folktales is needed to find out how these

folktales depicted some gender stereotypes. Therefore, teachers can consider this aspect when selecting literature for teaching resources.

This study investigates how gender stereotypes are portrayed in Indonesia's five most popular folktales by using critical discourse analysis (CDA). This is a distinct method because it could tackle social issues. It is especially interested in issues of dominance, power dynamics, and inequality, as well as how they are maintained or resisted via text and conversation by individuals in social groups (Van Dijk, 1985). The researcher selected the folktales from online websites that have surveyed and summarized the most popular Indonesian folktales. In addition, the researchers identified some English textbooks used by Indonesian students. As a result, these five folktales are commonly used as a reading resource. They are Malin Kundang, Roro Jonggrang, Lake Toba, Bawang Merah Bawang Putih, and Timun Mas. Therefore, this study is believed to give teachers perspective on understanding the issue of stereotypical gender roles in instructional materials and allow them to reconstruct the story without changing the storyline.

METHOD

This study used critical discourse analysis to investigate the mechanisms and tactics used to enact, justify, and perpetuate specific gender-related beliefs and points of view. The present study aimed to analyze gender stereotypes portrayed in the five most popular Indonesian folktales by analyzing the language used by male and female characters. A critical discourse analysis was used to study language use as a social and cultural practice. Critical discourse analysis analyzes the dialectical relationships between discourse (including language and other semiotic cues, like body language or visual cues) and social roles (Fairclough et al., 2004). Purpose sampling was used to select the five most popular Indonesian folktales. Palinkas et al. (2015) mentioned that purposeful sampling is a commonly employed method in qualitative research to deliberately pick and identify cases that provide substantial and relevant information about the studied topic. The data were collected from the five most popular folktales from some web pages including www.idntimes.com, www.factsofindonesia.com, www.gramedia.com, www.ceritarakyatnusantra.com, and https://balaibahasa.kemendikbud.go.id which are *The Legend of Malin Kundang* (*folktale from West Sumatra), Roro Jonggrang* (*folktale from Central Java*), *The Origin of Lake Toba* (*folktale from North Sumatra*), *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* (*folktale from Riau*), and *Timun Mas* (*folktale from Central Java*). These selected stories are also used in English for Nusantara textbooks and learning materials at schools. The five stories that were identified were taken from the website www.ceritarakyatnusantara.com, one of the most comprehensive databases for the preservation of folktales managed by the Center for the Study and Development of Malay Culture (Sugiarti et al., 2022), located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The data were analyzed using a three-dimensional framework by Fairclough (2001), including describing the text, interpreting the relationship between text and interaction, and explaining the relationship between interaction and social environment. The data collected in this study were analyzed using the three-dimensional models by Fairclough (2015). Discourse analysis proposed by Fairclough (2015) has three phases: description, interpretation, and explanation. The description refers to the text analysis. It is a description of the linguistic strategies applied in a text. Concerning the text's situational context, interpretation focuses primarily on analyzing discourse practices to investigate the relationship between the text and the creative and interpretative discursive processes. Analysis of a social practice is linked to explanation. While explanation examines the relationship between the discursive and social processes, interpretation focuses on the relationship between the discursive practice and the text. The procedures for this study were adopted from Amerian and Esmaili (2015). The four-stage analysis was examined first: the

frequency of male and female occurrences, the kind of activities that the two genders engaged in, the representations of the two genders in pictures, and the roles that are connected with males and females in society and the home. The researcher double-checked and amended the statistics and frequencies to ensure the assembled data was reliable. Then, the analysis turned to a qualitative assessment of these elements in connection to the social setting after gathering quantitative data for these aspects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section opens with the first stage of the CDA, described by Fairclough (2015). This stage involves reporting and explaining the data from the five folktales selected about the four previously described features.

Female and male occurrences

The first aspect discussed is the frequency of female and male occurrences, which was the first topic examined in the five folktales analyzed. The folktales studied identified that the main characters were mostly male except for Roro Jonggrang and Bawang Merah Bawang Putih, whose main characters were female. These folktales also depicted some gender stereotypes drawn from the story and the dialogue between the characters in the story. The detailed occurrences of male and female characters are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Female and Male Occurrences

No	Title	Male	Female
1	The legend of Malin Kundang	28	18
2	Roro Jonggrang	9	12
3	Timun Mas	9	10
4	The origin of Lake Toba	27	6
5	Bawang Merah Bawang Putih	3	40
	Total	**76**	**86**

As shown in Table 1, the total occurrences of male characters are 76 and 86 for the female characters. This indicates that female characters are more featured than males in these five folktales. This was in contrast to a study conducted by Rhubido et al. (2024), which found that a portion of male occurrences were higher than females. The possible reason was that the folktales' characters were predominantly female; thus, the occurrence of female characters was higher than males.

Social and domestic roles

The second aspect of the investigation was the social and domestic roles in which males and females were associated. The social and domestic roles were identified from the activities performed by each gender. This aspect's analysis also revealed that the activities appeared to be gender-specific. The kind of activities and the frequency of each gender is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Kind of Activities

No	Kind of activities	Male frequency	Female frequency
1	Working	2	1
2	Traveling	1	0
2	Doing housework	0	4
3	Farming	1	2
5	Fighting	2	0

As Table 2 shows, several activities portrayed specific genders. For example, males frequently engaged in specific activities, such as working (2), fighting (2), and traveling (1). Meanwhile, females mainly performed housework (4). There was a significant gender imbalance depicted in the characters' activities, as four females did the housework while males did not. The data reported connecting three important issues to the findings using Fairclough's (2015) paradigm, including taking a local perspective, patriarchal ideology, and gender asymmetry and stereotyping in literature. The findings indicated a significant impact of a patriarchal ideology that shaped the value that male or paternal ancestry is valued more highly (Aritonang, 2010).

Some characterizations in the story supported how social and domestic roles were shaped by society. In the Legend of Malin Kundang story, Malin is the main male character described as a smart, hardworking, ambitious, diligent, and strong boy. In the first paragraph of the story mentioned,

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"Malin was a smart kid. He worked hard for his family. He usually caught fish at
the sea, brought it to his mother, and sold it in the town".
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Malin was described as a diligent man who supported his low-income family by working as a fisherman. He was also depicted as a hard worker and independent character who worked hard as a ship merchant until he became a rich man despite his past economic background. Second, there is a hardworking young man character in The Origin of Lake Toba. He is told to be the one who fished and gardened. This was also found in Roro Jonggrang's story, in which the king is described as a fearsome and powerful giant. The opening story stated that.

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"Once, a king named Prabu Baka enthroned in Prambanan; he was a fearsome and
powerful giant."
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This line directly characterized Prabu Baka as a powerful man who could conquer the kingdoms under his authority. The next paragraph mentions a male character named Bondowoso, a powerful knight who would attack Prabu Baka's kingdom. He was described as a man with power, weapons, and armies that obeyed him.

Furthermore, the male character is consistently characterized as either a provider or a traveler with whom they have the freedom to explore uncharted territories. The depiction of male characters in the folktales shows a similar issue in reality, where males participate in more vigorous outdoor activities (Maesaroh et al., 2022). These stereotypes manifested from the local perspective, which has been built and accepted by the majority. Dewi (2019) stated this stereotype has been accepted by most Indonesian people since the male-dominated system and structure that has persisted for an extended period in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the social and domestic roles of women were constructed by society, and the ideal figure of a woman was described as beautiful, kind-hearted, gentle, friendly, weak, relentless, and loyal. One of the most popular local perspectives was that a princess must be beautiful. The word "beautiful" always appeared in Indonesian folktales, especially when they discussed a princess or a woman; for example, the introduction story mentioned that.

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"Once upon a time, there was a king who had seven beautiful daughters".
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"Once there was a king named Prabhu Baka who reigned in Prambanan. Although he
was a giant, he had a beautiful daughter named Roro Jongggrang".
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The princess's stunning face serves as the foundation for the impression of her beauty. Female characters were always depicted physically, such as a description of women in the story The Origin of Lake Toba, where the woman was described as beautiful with long flowing hair and beautiful eyes. The description of beauty was told at the beginning of the story and in other parts. For example, in the Legend of Malin Kundang, Malin's wife was told as a beautiful woman, the daughter of a noble rich man, and in Roro Jonggrang's story where Bondowoso was mesmerized due to Roro's beauty. Sugiarti et al., (2022) discovered similar results in which women were portrayed as feeble entities, and their physical attributes were highlighted. Therefore, the portrayal of women as physically feeble individuals could lead to women's objectification since women were seen as individuals who relied on males for their protection. Women assumed a submissive position and complied with the actions of the masculine characters.

Additionally, the patriarchal culture shaped the domestic roles of women more powerful. There was a dominant setting in most Indonesian folktales where women had to be skilled in domestic work. In the five stories discussed in this study, all the women were depicted that way. The mother character in Malin Kundang's story is described as a single mother who only stayed and waited at home for Malin Kundang to return with fish from the sea or cash from the sale of the fish. In the origin of Toba Lake, the wife was depicted as a housewife who cooked meals and sent them to his husband at the farm daily. These traits were the epitome of a submissive and dependent housewife. Bawang Putih, an orphan, had to do all the household chores, wash all her family's clothes, and cook meals for them. The primary focus of every story was the protagonist's capacity for domestic work. Many studies analyzing the women stereotypes in folktales perceived the same results in which Women are often characterized as having greater authority and control in the realm of domestic sectors (Moon & Nesi, 2020; Zahro et al., 2020; Sugiarti et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, gender stereotypes shown in Indonesian folktales were very strong. These values were depicted from Indonesian society's patriarchal ideology and local perspectives. The social and domestic roles of males and females were described differently based on the number of activity occurrences. Therefore, it leads to an imbalance of roles between men and women. Folktales could be used to transfer knowledge to young learners. Thus, it was essential to select the most suitable folktales and construct the story by decreasing gender bias. Folktales could also be used as material to teach gender roles to the students. Therefore, the role of the teacher and parents in selecting the stories or learning materials for the students was very important. However, this study addressed the folktales from the two perspectives of male and female occurrences and the social and domestic roles. Some aspects need to be analyzed to determine whether to include pictorial analysis and conversation analysis. Hence, future researchers could complete the results of this study by researching and

analyzing the folktales from the pictorial and conversation analysis. As a result, teachers could have some references in selecting the folktales that they could use to teach young learners.

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