




# Utilizing narratives to promote gender equality in the classroom

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**Abstract:** Sexism is an ongoing issue in many layers of society, including educational institutions such as schools. Students witness and experience sexism in daily life, whether inside or outside the school, which may affect them negatively. Students should be guided and facilitated to be aware of sexism and to understand gender equality between men and women and its importance. This paper uses a descriptive qualitative method to dig deeper into the existence of sexism at school and narrative as a tool to promote gender equality among students. The result shows that various forms of sexism may happen in school, and students should be guided to be aware of those sexist forms. Narrative can be an effective tool to promote gender equality to students because it is easier to comprehend, fun, engaging, relatable, and can shape people's worldviews. For future studies, it is recommended to dig deeper into how compelling narratives can promote gender equality not only to secondary students but also to young learners and higher education students.

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## INTRODUCTION

All human beings are equal before God. Both men and women are created in the images of God and receive the same cultural mandate, as written in Genesis 1:27-28, which is to fill the earth, subdue and rule over it. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic position, all human beings are equal in the presence of God.<sup>1</sup> Paul affirmed in Galatians 3:28 that there is no need to differentiate people as Jew or Gentile, enslaved person or free, male or female because all are one in Christ Jesus. However, as opposed to the ideal state of creation written in the Word of God, in the reality of this world, sin caused people in society to treat each other differently and unjustly based on gender.

Gender, which is commonly used to refer to human sex, is a term that correlates with various roles, meanings, personality traits, and elements of identity. It is constructed by the people based on the tradition or culture in the society.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term "gender" is applied to man and woman as created by God since the beginning of this world (Gen. 2:22).

<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, Wives' Marriage, and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Rose McDermott and Peter K. Hatemi, "Distinguishing Sex and Gender," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 1 (January 14, 2011): 89-92, [https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S1049096510001939/type/journal\\_article](https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S1049096510001939/type/journal_article).

Due to sin, human beings' fundamental nature and life fell into moral corruption.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the equality between men and women has turned into the existence of sexism in society. Sexism itself is defined by Swim & Hyers<sup>4</sup> as the attitudes, beliefs, actions, and practices that show negative stereotypes or encourage rough treatment or discrimination between men and women.

Sexism, such as gender discrimination, gender bias, sexual harassment, and many more, is still an ongoing issue today. Sexism exists in many layers of society. School as an educational institution is not an exception. Some teachers and staff members were perpetrators of sexism. Through their thoughts and actions, it can be seen that they believe in gender stereotypes. The researcher observed that a homeroom teacher encouraged male students to develop their sports talents, but she did not encourage female students. Teachers who have sexist gender stereotypes may influence students, other teachers, and staff members to also believe in gender stereotypes, especially those who are not aware of sexism issues.

School is supposed to be a place where students learn. Christian education must aim at guiding students into truth and wisdom. In a world where making a meaningful ethical decision is unavoidable, teaching right and wrong in school is required.<sup>5</sup> In a world where sexism consistently exists, students must be taught that sexism is against the word of God and that there should be efforts to eliminate it. God calls teachers to guide students just like the Spirit of Truth guides people into all truth.<sup>6</sup> The teacher should guide students to understand gender equality and how to implement it daily. If gender equality is promoted and taught to the young generations, then there would be a chance that the chain of sexism can be cut to an end. According to the scripture, the next generations will be able to live in an ideal society where men and women are equally respected.

To promote gender equality to students, teachers should plan the teaching and learning to enable students to learn and experience gender equality. In this research, the researcher chose narrative to promote gender equality to the students in English teaching and learning. Meyer<sup>7</sup> stated that language learning could address various subject matters and discuss multiple topics; thus, teaching ethical concerns such as gender equality during English teaching and learning is possible.

As the Oxford Dictionary describes, narrative means a description of events or, in its synonymous meaning, a story. Chatman<sup>8</sup> categorized narrative into several forms, which are written narrative (e.g., novels), spoken narrative (e.g., films), drawn narrative (e.g., comics), dance, as well as music. Choosing narrative as a tool to teach gender equality to students is supposed to be effective because of the strengths and benefits narrative possesses. It is expected that with the help of narrative, students will be more motivated to learn, understand easier, and develop long-term memory over the message of gender equality.

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<sup>3</sup> Joel Beeke and Paul M Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 2: Man and Christ* (Crossway, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Julia C. Becker, Matthew J. Zawadzki, and Stephanie A. Shields, "Confronting and Reducing Sexism: A Call for Research on Intervention," *Journal of Social Issues* 70, no. 4 (December 9, 2014): 603–614, <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.12081>.

<sup>5</sup> G R Knight, *Filsafat Dan Pendidikan: Sebuah Pendahuluan Dari Perspektif Kristen* (Jakarta: Universitas Pelita Harapan, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> H. Van Brummelen, *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Learning and Teaching* (Colorado: Purposeful Design (ACSI), 2009).

<sup>7</sup> D. Prošić-Santovac, "Happily Ever After: Teaching Gender Equality in the Primary Classroom," in *Integrating Culture and Language Teaching in TEYL*, ed. V. Savić and I. Ćirković-Miladinović (City Press, 2013), 69.

<sup>8</sup> Joanna Szurmak and Mindy Thuna, "Tell Me a Story: The Use of Narrative as a Tool for Instruction," 2013.

Based on the elaboration as written above, this paper aims to dig deeper into the existence of sexism at school and narrative work as a tool to promote gender equality to students and to guide students to understand and experience gender equality. This paper will answer several research questions: How does sexism occur at school, and how can narrative be a tool to promote gender equality for students?

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach in which the researcher will try to describe an object, phenomenon, or social setting in narrative writing. The method used in this paper is a literature study in which the researcher attempts to collect data from literature sources correlated with the research problem. The data collected from books, journals, and other academic articles will then be analyzed and elaborated in a narrative writing style.

## DISCUSSION

### Sexism in School

Sexism is an ongoing issue that still haunts many people today. It exists in various social settings, may it be inside the family, in the workplaces, in public communities, in social media, and also in school institutions. Sexism is defined as an unequal or discriminative treatment of others based on their sex, male or female<sup>9</sup>. Swim & Heyers<sup>10</sup> described sexism as individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and actions that show negative opinions towards others based on their sex and promote unequal status between men and women<sup>11</sup>. Sexism can be in the form of hostile sexism and blunt and resentful sexist acts such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and assaults. Sexism can also be more subtle, seemingly harmless, benevolent sexism, such as gender stereotypes.

Sexism still exists continuously in society, and school is not an exception. The perpetrators of sexism can be the teachers, the staff, and even the students. Tiedemann stated that teachers could display implicit and explicit sexist beliefs within the classroom and treat male and female students differently.<sup>12</sup> Not only teachers but students can also become the perpetrators of sexism. Recent studies show that students believe that girls are intellectually superior to boys and that girls have better manners and traits, which enhance learning.<sup>13</sup> That belief implied that they discriminated against boys' intelligence and techniques.

Many forms of sexism happen in educational institutions. First, the prevalent acts of sexism that people can notice happening in school are the subtle sexist gender stereotypes. According to interviews by Jones and Myhill<sup>14</sup>, as well as a survey of 350 elementary and

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<sup>9</sup> Laura Bates, *Everyday Sexism* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Becker, Zawadzki, and Shields, "Confronting and Reducing Sexism: A Call for Research on Intervention."

<sup>11</sup> Laora Mastari, Bram Spruyt, and Jessy Siongers, "Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Social Spheres: The Impact of Parents, School and Romance on Belgian Adolescents' Sexist Attitudes," *Frontiers in Sociology* 4, no. 47 (May 31, 2019), <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00047/full>.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell Leaper and Christia Spears Brown, "Sexism in Schools," 2014, 189–223, <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0065240714000020>.

<sup>13</sup> B. L. Hartley and R. M. Sutton, "A Stereotype Threat Account of Boys' Academic Underachievement," *Child Development* 84 (2013): 1716–1733; M. Latsch and B. Hannover, "Smart Girls, Dumb Boys!?: How the Discourse on "Failing Boys" Impacts Performances and Motivational Goal Orientation in German School Students," *Social Psychology* 45 (2014): 112–126.

<sup>14</sup> A. Heyder and U. Kessels, "Do Teachers Equate Male and Masculine with Lower Academic Engagement? How Students' Gender Enactment Triggers Gender Stereotypes at School," *Soc Psychol Educ* 18 (2015): 467–485.

middle-school students by Brown & Stone<sup>15</sup>, it is said that teachers regard girls as more intelligent and more obedient; meanwhile, they regard boys as lazier and more problematic. This kind of gender stereotypical belief the teachers have thus impacts the discriminatory treatment of the students. Students noted how the teachers were more lenient toward the female students and stricter toward the male students.

Sexism in school also happens through subtle gender bias in textbooks. Cambridge Dictionary (2008) defines gender bias as the unequal treatment difference between men and women. There is a prejudice in favor of or against a particular gender. According to a 30-year study by Bongiovanni of language and grammar textbooks in Germany, the United States, Australia, and Spain<sup>16</sup>, men significantly outnumber women in example sentences (on average by about 3:1). In addition, according to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, girls and women only accounted for 44 percent of the time in secondary school English-language textbooks in Malaysia and Indonesia, 37 percent in Bangladesh, and 24 percent in Pakistan's Punjab area (2020). The sexism in school textbooks is not straightforward because students learn using a textbook. If students are continuously exposed to learning from something that does not portray gender equality, they may be influenced by it negatively. Thus, it is true that gender bias in textbooks is, as Blumberg<sup>17</sup> stated, an almost invisible obstacle to gender equality in school and beyond.

Other than subtle and deceptively harmless sexism, extreme and blatant sexism also unsurprisingly exists in educational institutions, such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assaults. Based on considerable research on elementary and middle school students, it is found that female students were discriminated against by male students and coaches when it comes to sports. Those female students were receiving teasing and perceived as inferior when participating in school sports activities (Brown et al., 2011; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011; Solomon, 2014). Multiple surveys indicated that sexual harassment happened to male and female school students (Brown, 2014; Lichty & Campbell, 2012). Based on a report by the National Education Union and UK Feminista, it was found that 37% of girls and 6% of boys had been victims of sexual harassment in school (2019).<sup>18</sup> In Indonesia, based on a yearly report by Komnas Perempuan, it is recorded that 176 teachers were the perpetrators of sexual assaults in 2019 (2020).

To summarise, sexism has been an ongoing issue in various social settings, including educational institutions. Sexism in school exists in varied forms, from subtle benevolent sexism such as gender stereotypes to resentful hostile sexism such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual assault. The perpetrators and the victims of sexism in school can be the teachers, staff, and students. Thus, sexism is a crucial issue to be aware of by all parties of educational institutions, and there should be follow-up actions to tackle all acts of sexism that already and may happen in school.

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<sup>15</sup> C. S. Brown and E. A. Stone, "Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination: How Sexism Impacts Development," in *Equity and Justice in Developmental Science: Theoretical and Methodological Issues* (S.S. Horn, M.D. Ruck & L.S. Liben, Eds.) *Advances in Child Development and Behavior* (J.B. Benson, Series Ed.) (Elsevier Inc., 2016), 105–128.

<sup>16</sup> Caroline C. Perez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Man* (New York: Abrams Press, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Rae Lesser Blumberg, "Eliminating Gender Bias in Textbooks: Pushing for Policy Reforms That Promote Gender Equity in Education," *Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report* (2015).

<sup>18</sup> "A Study on Sexism in Schools and How We Tackle It," *UK Feminista*, last modified 2023, <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>.

## Narrative as a Tool for Teaching and Learning

Oxford Learner's Dictionary described the noun "narrative" as a description of events synonymous with the story (2008). As defined by Bruner<sup>19</sup>, narrative is a way of structuring information that is then expressed in different media into forms that are easy to comprehend and relevant to people who access it. There are several different forms of narrative. Narrative can be factual, based on experience, or fictional, based on the author's imagination. Narrative can be novels, plays, films, TV shows, biographies, memoirs, essays, and many more. Chatman<sup>19</sup> categorized narrative into several actualizations or forms, which are written narrative as in story books and novels; spoken narrative as in plays and films, drawn narrative as in comics; dance movements as in mime and narrative ballet; as well as music narrative as in songs.

Educators have long used a narrative to enhance students' learning as it serves multiple benefits for the teaching and learning process. The narrative can turn abstract ideas or information into a more precise, more easily understandable, and more relevant form. Multiple authors (Dahlstrom, 2014; Matuk, Hurwich, Spiegel, & Diamond, 2021; Swanson, 2015) have declared that factual or fictional narrative helps to organize abstract ideas and complex information in order for it to be easier to comprehend. Narrative can also enable people to connect information and ideas into personal experience and relate emotionally to the characters or situations of the story, thus raising their empathy and awareness.

Various studies show that narrative is a fun and engaging tool that can increase students' interest, comprehension, engagement, and learning motivation and stimulate critical thinking and creativity.<sup>20</sup> Due to its easy comprehension, fun, and engaging nature, the narrative will likely be remembered longer. An empirical study by Graesser and Ottati<sup>21</sup> also explained the intrinsic benefits of narrative in four main steps of the human information process, one of which include transferring information into long-term memory.

Narrative can also help students to understand ethical issues and shapes their worldview. Driscoll and McKee<sup>22</sup> affirmed that the moral values acquired from stories could shape

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<sup>19</sup> Renate Prins, Lucy Avraamidou, and Martin Goedhart, "Tell Me a Story : The Use of Narrative as a Learning Tool for Natural Selection," *Educational Media International* 54, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 20–33, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09523987.2017.1324361>.

<sup>20</sup> Michael F. Dahlstrom, "Using Narratives and Storytelling to Communicate Science with Nonexpert Audiences," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. supplement\_4 (September 16, 2014): 13614–13620, <https://pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1320645111>; Lucas Kohnke, "Using Comic Strips to Stimulate Student Creativity in Language Learning," *TESOL Journal* 10, no. 2 (June 26, 2019), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/tesj.419>; Camillia Matuk et al., "How Do Teachers Use Comics to Promote Engagement, Equity, and Diversity in Science Classrooms?," *Research in Science Education* 51, no. 3 (June 10, 2021): 685–732, <https://link.springer.com/10.1007/s11165-018-9814-8>; Tin Lam Toh et al., "Use of Comics to Enhance Students' Learning for the Development of the Twenty-First Century Competencies in the Mathematics Classroom," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 437–452, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02188791.2017.1339344>; Fatma Gizem Karaoglan Yilmaz, Burçin Gökkurt Özdemir, and Zehra Yasar, "Using Digital Stories to Reduce Misconceptions and Mistakes about Fractions: An Action Study," *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology* 49, no. 6 (August 18, 2018): 867–898, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0020739X.2017.1418919>; X. Mirvan, "The Advantages of Using Films to Enhance Student's Reading Skills in the EFL Classroom," *Journal of Education and Practice* 4, no. 13 (2013).

<sup>21</sup> Dahlstrom, "Using Narratives and Storytelling to Communicate Science with Nonexpert Audiences."

<sup>22</sup> David Swanson, "Fictional Stories With Ethical Content: Guidelines for Using Stories to Improve Ethical Behavior," *Ethics & Behavior* 26, no. 7 (October 2, 2016): 545–561, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10508422.2015.1081095>.

people's worldviews. Multiple authors<sup>23</sup> also asserted that narrative, specifically fictional narrative which integrates moral or ethical content, can effectively teach ethics, introduce and discuss sensitive, controversial issues in a safe environment, and encourage awareness of those mentioned ethical issues. In addition, Kennedy & Lawton<sup>24</sup> claimed that fiction could boost the application of ethical theories by portraying moral issues and situations more clearly.

In sum, narrative can be an effective tool for teaching and learning as it serves multiple benefits. The strength of the narrative is that it is easier to comprehend and transfer into long-term memory, relatable, fun, and engaging. In addition, narrative can also increase students' interest and learning motivation. It can stimulate their critical thinking and creativity. Consequently, utilizing narrative in teaching and learning can be an effective strategy to teach students critical ethical issues and situations, thus improving their awareness, encouraging appropriate behaviors, and shaping their worldview.

### **Narrative as A Tool to Promote Gender Equality in School**

As an educational institution, a school should be where students can learn ethics. In a world where gender inequality is still an issue that is yet to be resolved, students can encounter, witness, or experience acts of sexism in their daily lives. Even in school, students can be either the victims or perpetrators of sexism. Thus, students need to be aware that sexism is an ongoing issue in society and is very dangerous. It is the responsibility of teachers, as shepherd leader who is called to guide students in the way of wisdom<sup>25</sup>, to guide and facilitate students to understand gender equality and its importance as well as its relevance to students' lives and the society they live in.

Teachers can facilitate students to learn about gender equality by utilizing narratives, such as movies, written stories, poems, songs, and many more. Narrative can be a powerful tool to bring awareness to the students about the issue of sexism and to promote gender equality because of its strengths and benefits. First, as previous researchers have proposed, the narrative is proven to catch students' interest and engagement.<sup>26</sup> It is said that students are more motivated to learn when the instructional method correspondent with their preference.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the narrative can transform abstract knowledge to be easier to comprehend and longer to stay in the memory.<sup>28</sup> The topic of gender equality may sound foreign and challenging for some students, especially those growing up in a conservative patriarchal society

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<sup>23</sup> Patricia Gouthro and Susan Holloway, "Reclaiming the Radical: Using Fiction to Explore Adult Learning Connected to Citizenship," *Studies in the Education of Adults* 45, no. 1 (March 21, 2013): 41–56, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02660830.2013.11661640>; Zalika Klemenc-Ketis and Janko Kersnik, "Using Movies to Teach Professionalism to Medical Students," *BMC Medical Education* 11, no. 1 (December 23, 2011): 60, <https://bmcmededuc.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6920-11-60>; Swanson, "Fictional Stories With Ethical Content: Guidelines for Using Stories to Improve Ethical Behavior."

<sup>24</sup> Swanson, "Fictional Stories With Ethical Content: Guidelines for Using Stories to Improve Ethical Behavior."

<sup>25</sup> H Van Brummelen, *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Teaching and Learning* (Purposeful Design Publications, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Dahlstrom, "Using Narratives and Storytelling to Communicate Science with Nonexpert Audiences."

<sup>27</sup> Mark R. Young, Bruce R. Klemz, and J. William Murphy, "Enhancing Learning Outcomes: The Effects of Instructional Technology, Learning Styles, Instructional Methods, and Student Behavior," *Journal of Marketing Education* 25, no. 2 (August 25, 2003): 130–142, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0273475303254004>.

<sup>28</sup> Dahlstrom, "Using Narratives and Storytelling to Communicate Science with Nonexpert Audiences"; Prins, Avraamidou, and Goedhart, "Tell Me a Story : The Use of Narrative as a Learning Tool for Natural Selection"; C. Watson, "Using Stories to Teach Business Ethics—Developing Character through Examples of Admirable Actions.," *Teaching Business Ethics* 7 (2003): 93–105.

with little or no proper education about gender and equality. Therefore, students can engage and understand better by watching, reading, or listening to exciting narrative works.

The narrative is also a safe tool to introduce ethical issues and enhance the ethics application.<sup>29</sup> Teachers can prepare narrative materials containing sexism and encourage students to discuss and reflect on it. Teachers can also use narrative works that incorporate the message of gender equality. For example, old fairy tales that embedded gender stereotypes and women's domestication beliefs can be used to open a discussion about sexist acts such as gender stereotypes.<sup>30</sup> Since the narrative can invite students to relate emotionally to the characters or situations in story<sup>31</sup>, students can connect the story with their personal experiences. Students will be able to relate the issue of sexism they learn from a story to their personal experience dealing with sexism. Thus, students can better comprehend and even possibly get actual implementations of gender equality, which they can apply daily.

In conclusion, teachers can utilize narrative as an effective tool to guide students to be aware of the ongoing sexism in society and understand gender equality and its importance. With its fun and engaging nature, students will be more interested in learning about gender equality. The message of gender equality they learn from the story can be easier to comprehend and stay in their mind for a long time, thus guiding and shaping their daily behaviors. This way, students eliminate the chain of sexism and build a better and safer society for everyone, regardless of gender.

### **Sexism Occurred at School**

A Christian school is supposed to be a place where students can learn actual knowledge and skills, life values, and ideal characters.<sup>32</sup> A teacher has the crucial role of being a role model for the students as well as guiding them in the way of wisdom (Proverbs 4:11). As Van Brummelen stated<sup>33</sup>, God has called teachers to help students learn and obtain knowledge that will enable them to serve God and others. However, in this world damaged by sin, it is not impossible to find unbiblical beliefs and behaviors happening in educational institutions, such as sexism.

In Indonesia, the patriarchal culture, which maintains the domination of men and subordination of women, has been engraved in the people of the society and may influence ongoing gender inequality or sexism. For example, because women are stereotypically considered to be the carers of the household, and men are expected to be the head of the household, many parents provide better education to their sons than their daughters. This sexism continuously occurs in many levels of society, including educational institutions.

Based on empirical observations, in one Christian junior high school in Tangerang, there were sexist beliefs and behaviors expressed by the teachers and staff members. It was found that a teacher exhibited a sexist belief, which was gender stereotypes—encouraging them to achieve something based on gender stereotypes. The teacher encouraged them to develop sports talents for the male students, but she did not give any encouragement to the female students.

During one of the school morning devotions, another teacher implicitly showed and shared her sexist beliefs towards other teachers and staff members. The teacher stereotyped

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<sup>29</sup> P. Gouthro and S. Holloway, "Reclaiming the Radical: Using Fiction to Explore Adult Learning Connected to Citizenship," *Studies in the Education of Adults* 45, no. 1 (2013): 41–56.

<sup>30</sup> Prošić-Santovac, "Happily Ever After: Teaching Gender Equality in the Primary Classroom."

<sup>31</sup> Matuk et al., "How Do Teachers Use Comics to Promote Engagement, Equity, and Diversity in Science Classrooms?"

<sup>32</sup> G Kurian and M Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Christian Education* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Van Brummelen, *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Teaching and Learning*.

the wife's weakness as being unable to cook, even though the bible never stated that it is a sin if a wife cannot cook. Moreover, cooking is a life skill not strictly labeled or designed for only women. In addition, there was a plan from the school teachers and staff members to hold a seminar for the students about developing talents. However, the content they would share in that seminar was explicitly based on gender stereotypes.

The phenomenon of sexism was in line with previous research, which shows that sexism exists in educational institutions and, without exception, in secondary school. In Nduangbo's journal, she stated that students might face gender-biased and rough treatment from teachers and classmates. Based on an investigation by Joseph, it is concluded that most of the male secondary school students exhibited sexist attitudes and stated opinions that did not support gender equality, which was seen as a challenge to their masculinity. Grossman and Porche (2014) stated that 67 percent of adolescent female students have experienced "microinsults," which is the perception of others based on biased or stereotypical beliefs, in math and science.<sup>34</sup> Another research also shows that teachers' behavior towards male and female students in language reading activities is different, driven by the gender stereotypes belief they have (Retelsdorf, Schwartz, & Asbrock, 2015).<sup>35</sup>

Gender stereotypes and beliefs that unfairly label students can negatively impact their learning and development. Students may be discouraged in specific fields just because it does not suit their gender stereotypes, thus limiting students' true passion and potential. Teachers' behavior which is driven by the gender stereotypes belief they have, may affect students' self-concept of their abilities.<sup>36</sup> Other than teachers' gender stereotypes belief negatively affects students' academic self-concept, it also affects students' performances. Research shows that female students who received negative comments about their math and science abilities ended up believing they had lower math and science abilities than girls who did not receive such comments. The result continues with how those negatively affected self-concepts may also control students' actual outcomes in math and science<sup>37</sup>. Another research also resulted similarly in which it is found that teachers' gender stereotypes belief affect female students' achievement outcomes negatively, even without any grading bias or discrimination<sup>38</sup>.

Students should be able to freely learn and develop their passion, potential, skill, and ability; school is required to support it. However, suppose the teachers already categorize and box students' potentials and skills based on sexist gender stereotypes, and others throw negative sexist comments and gender discrimination at the students. In that case, students will be discouraged and unable to unleash their true potential. It is necessary to quickly spread awareness of the dangerous effects of daily sexism and promote gender equality in school.

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<sup>34</sup> Jennifer M. Grossman and Michelle V. Porche, "Perceived Gender and Racial/Ethnic Barriers to STEM Success," *Urban Education* 49, no. 6 (September 22, 2014): 698–727, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042085913481364>.

<sup>35</sup> Jan Retelsdorf, Katja Schwartz, and Frank Asbrock, "'Michael Can't Read!' Teachers' Gender Stereotypes and Boys' Reading Self-Concept," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 107, no. 1 (February 2015): 186–194, <http://doi.apa.org/getdoi.cfm?doi=10.1037/a0037107>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> C. S. Brown and C. Leaper, "Latina and European American Girls' Experiences with Academic Sexism and Their Self-Concepts in Mathematics and Science During Adolescence," *Sex Roles* 63 (2010): 860–870.

<sup>38</sup> S. Alan, S. Ertac, and I. Mumcu, "Gender Stereotypes in The Classroom And Effects On Achievement," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 100, no. 5 (2018): 876–890.



## Utilizing Narrative to Promote Gender Equality to Secondary Students During English Class

Douglas Wilson<sup>39</sup> asserted that the essential objective of Christian education is to restore images of God damaged by sin into true maturity to fulfill God's mandate and live according to God's words. Accordingly, in school, the teacher is responsible for facilitating and guiding students in transforming and renewing their minds, from misbehaviors to correct behaviors according to the Word of God. Sexism does not follow biblical values. Therefore, the teacher needs to guide students to be aware and understand that sexism is against the word of God and teach students that gender equality is essential to be implemented.

One of the Christian schools in Tangerang, the one that was previously mentioned, stated that the primary goal of language learning is to achieve language proficiency. Teaching and learning should also instill values. Meyer<sup>40</sup> affirmed that language learning could address various subjects. Thus, many topics and concerns can be discussed during teaching and learning. Therefore, while students learn English, they can also learn about gender equality.

Teachers can use narratives to facilitate and guide students to understand gender equality during English language instructional sessions. Researchers can use a short film and a short story with implicit moral values regarding gender equality. Narrative can be a tool to teach, introduce, and open a discussion about ethical issues<sup>41</sup> and biblical values (Van Brummelen, 2009), much like how Jesus uses parables to teach. Thus, teachers who teach English and other languages are believed to be able to deliver the message of gender equality and encourage students to share their opinions.

Since the narrative has the power to transform abstract ideas which are hard to comprehend into a more straightforward and easier-to-comprehend form, thus, as expected, students have potentially successfully understood the message of gender equality with guidance from the researcher. Some of the students will even be able to grasp the value by themselves during group work activities. Students can share their understanding of the gender equality message they get from the narrative work with the whole class during the discussion period.

Previous studies show that using narrative in teaching and learning increases students' interest and learning motivation.<sup>42</sup> Ryan and Deci<sup>43</sup> declared that intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is exciting or enjoyable. When students enjoy the learning activity, it increases their intrinsic motivation. Consequently, students will be able to show good learning performance, which may explain their success in obtaining the message of gender equality from the learning activity.

Based on the elaboration above, it is safe to conclude that the narrative effectively promotes gender equality to secondary students during English language teaching and learning. Due to its flexibility in addressing various subjects, English language learning can be integrated with ethics learning. Students were able to learn gender equality at the same time as learning the English language. Using narrative, which has moral value regarding gender

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<sup>39</sup> Y. T. Khoe, *Filsafat Pendidikan Kristen: Meletakkan Fondasi Dan Filosofi Pendidikan Kristen Di Tengah Tantangan Filsafat Dunia* (Yogyakarta: ANDI, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Prošić-Santovac, "Happily Ever After: Teaching Gender Equality in the Primary Classroom."

<sup>41</sup> Swanson, "Fictional Stories With Ethical Content: Guidelines for Using Stories to Improve Ethical Behavior."

<sup>42</sup> Mirvan, "The Advantages of Using Films to Enhance Student's Reading Skills in the EFL Classroom"; Tin Lam Toh et al., "Use of Comics to Enhance Students' Learning for the Development of the Twenty-First Century Competencies in the Mathematics Classroom," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* (2017).

<sup>43</sup> H. Yulistianti, "Enhancing Motivation in Learning English: Students in Primary School," *Jurnal Edulingua* 3, no. 1 (2016).

equality, can increase students' learning motivation and engage them in understanding gender equality values. It could happen because the narrative has its nature to be fun and engaging, as well as its ability to shape people's worldviews from the moral values embedded in it and to transform abstract information or ideas to be easier to comprehend.

The ongoing sexism issue occurs in various communities, institutions, organizations, and other social settings. An educational institution is no exception. In school, students are exposed to sexist acts either explicitly or implicitly. Students can be the victims of sexism or even the perpetrators. Previous research shows that sexism does occur in school, and it can be in many forms, such as female students being underestimated in STEM and sports<sup>44</sup>; male students are stereotyped as troublemakers by the teachers<sup>45</sup>; gender bias in textbooks<sup>46</sup>; sexual harassment in school<sup>47</sup> and many more.

Sexism which occurs inside the school as well as outside the school, can affect students negatively. For example, if students are continuously being treated according to gender stereotypes, they may feel discouraged from achieving something that does not suit their gender stereotypes. Previous study shows that female students often segregate themselves into excelling in a subject that society views as appropriate to their gender, even though they have a high overall achievement<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, if these female students act against the gender stereotypes, they will get rejected and teased by their peers; if students are not aware that sexism is harmful and an act of injustice, they may grow up thinking that sexism is a common and frightful thing that happens in society. If that happens, the chain of sexism will continue to pass on to the next generation; thus, gender inequality will never be resolved.

Christian Education is supposed to be 'metanoia,' which means transforming students or, as stated by Paul, renewing the mind into the mind of Christ.<sup>49</sup> The practice of education should transform students from ignorance or misbehaviors into awareness and wisdom. God gives Christian teachers a particular task to be the students' shepherd, guiding students correctly.<sup>50</sup> Van Brummelen also asserted that according to Luke 1:76-79, Christian teachers need to proclaim God's work in creation, the impacts of sin, and the possible reconciliation and restoration through the teaching and learning conduct.<sup>51</sup> The teacher needs to guide students to be aware that sexism is an ongoing issue in many layers of society. It is the result of sin, and it is a form of injustice that brings negative impacts on many people. Moreover, there is a chance and hope for transformation and restoration to eliminate sexism and fight for gender equality. Therefore, starting from the classroom, students need to be guided to understand gender equality and encouraged to implement it in daily life.

To promote gender equality to students in the classroom, teachers can plan a teaching and learning activity incorporating ethical issues and values regarding gender equality.

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<sup>44</sup> Brown and Stone, "Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination: How Sexism Impacts Development."

<sup>45</sup> Anke Heyder and Ursula Kessels, "Do Teachers Equate Male and Masculine with Lower Academic Engagement? How Students' Gender Enactment Triggers Gender Stereotypes at School," *Social Psychology of Education* 18, no. 3 (September 27, 2015): 467–485, <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s11218-015-9303-0>.

<sup>46</sup> A. Humardhiana and Y. N. Hidayah, "Confronting Subtle Sexism in An Indonesian EFL Textbook," *ELT-Echo* 5, no. 2 (2020): 137–148.

<sup>47</sup> C. S. Brown, "Sexism in Schools," *Advances in Child Development and Behavior* 47 (2014): 189–214.

<sup>48</sup> Melanie C. Steffens and Petra Jelenec, "Separating Implicit Gender Stereotypes Regarding Math and Language: Implicit Ability Stereotypes Are Self-Serving for Boys and Men, but Not for Girls and Women," *Sex Roles* 64, no. 5–6 (March 11, 2011): 324–335, <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s11199-010-9924-x>.

<sup>49</sup> Kurian and Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Christian Education*.

<sup>50</sup> D. L. Graham, *Teaching Redemptively*, 2nd ed. (Colorado: Purposeful Design Publications, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Van Brummelen, *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Teaching and Learning*.

Teachers can utilize narratives such as films, novels, short stories, or comics to guide students to be aware of sexism and to understand gender equality and its importance.

There are several reasons why narrative can be an effective tool in this matter. First of all, the narrative is fun, interesting, and engaging to students, which may result in students being more motivated to learn. Second, a narrative can convert abstract ideas and information into an easier-to-comprehend form, which can last longer in people's minds. Thus, it will be easier for students to understand sexism issues and gender equality, which may be foreign or challenging for them. Thirdly, narrative can accommodate ethics and introduce ethical issues and the power to shape worldview from the moral values embedded in it.

God created man and woman; both bear the images of God and are equal in value and personhood<sup>52</sup>. As the crown of creation, male and female humans are co-regents to fulfill the creation mandates that God has given.<sup>53</sup> The Word of God does not teach discrimination against people according to gender. On the contrary, from Jesus' deeds and words as written in the bible, it can be seen that Jesus respected and treated women as people equal to men, and He respected women's intelligence and spiritual capacity.<sup>54</sup> Jesus assigned women as credible witnesses (Jo. 4; 20:11-18), even in a society where women were not regarded as legitimate witnesses<sup>55</sup>. This fact affirmed that sexism is not according to the word of God. Sin has its seat in humans' hearts and influences humans' intellect, will, affections, and body.<sup>56</sup> Due to human's sinful nature, sexism occurs in society. Students need to understand this and be encouraged to create a transformation. Graham stated that the Word of God guides applying justice, and Christians are expected to act justly and reflect God's character. Therefore, teachers should encourage students not just to sit still and do nothing while injustice keeps happening. Students need to partake in eliminating sexism, and it is the responsibility of teachers as shepherd leaders to guide and facilitate them to do so.

## CONCLUSION

Sexism is still an ongoing issue in many layers of society, including educational institutions. In school, sexism may exist in various forms, such as gender stereotypes belief, gender discrimination, gender bias, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and many more. Teachers, students, and school staff can be either the victims or the perpetrators of sexism. Students get exposed to, witness, and even experience sexism daily, which may affect them negatively. In the classroom, it is the responsibility of the teachers to guide students to be aware that sexism is against the word of God and needs to be eliminated. Students must understand gender equality and its urgency and relevancy in their and others' lives.

To promote gender equality to students in the classroom, teachers need to plan teaching and learning activities that enable students to dig into the issue of gender equality more deeply. In language learning, teachers can use narratives to promote gender equality. The narrative can make students understand sexism and gender equality more easily and remember the topic for extended periods. Students can relate emotionally to the characters and situations in the narrative works and relate them to their own experiences. Moreover, the narrative

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<sup>52</sup> W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> N Holsteen and M Svigel, *Exploring Christian Theology: Creation, Fall, and Salvation* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Phillip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, ePub Editi. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> L. M. Kohm, "A Christian Perspective On Gender Equality," *DUKE JOURNAL OF GENDER LAW & POLICY* 15, no. 339 (2008): 101.

<sup>56</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996).

is often fun and engaging; thus, students will be more motivated to learn. The narrative may be an effective tool to shape students' worldviews regarding gender equality and consequently influence their behaviors in daily life; thus, students may partake in eliminating the chain of sexism and creating a better society for future generations.

Christian teachers need to be able to guide and facilitate students to know and understand which ground to stand on and encourage them to create a transformation. Teachers can use appropriate and suitable teaching tools in the classroom to promote gender equality, such as narrative; however, to ensure that the tool will be effective, teachers must first know the student's prior knowledge and background. Therefore, teachers will know exactly what type of narrative and which level of comprehension is most suitable for the students. Teachers also need to be very careful in choosing narrative materials to avoid giving misconceptions to students.

For future studies, it is recommended to dig deeper into how compelling narratives can be used to promote gender equality by implementing this in class. The implementation analysis should consider teachers' cultural backgrounds and gender-issue knowledge for a comprehensive evaluation.

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