



The Role of School Communities in Doing and Undoing Gender in ASEAN

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Abstract

Schools present an ideal setting to dismantle gender inequality in society by changing structures, norms, and practices that perpetuate gender inequality in schools. The ‘doing gender’ framework stipulates that gender is socially constructed, while the ‘undoing gender’ framework stipulates that gender can be deconstructed. This paper explores the role of schools as a site to ‘do’ and ‘undo’ gender in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Member States. It examines the deliberate efforts of school communities (teachers, students, and school administrators) in constructing or de-constructing gender in four areas-classroom practices, textbooks and other instructional materials, student leadership, and sports. Based on a secondary analysis of qualitative data collected through multiple methods, including Focus Group Discussions (FDGs), surveys, expert interviews, and school visits in the ASEAN Member States, the study identifies the processes through which school communities engage in perpetuating as well as resisting and challenging gender biases in school and classroom practices. The findings suggest that forces at individual, school, and policy levels interact dynamically to preserve as well as dismantle gender. Thus, interventions at different levels are imperative to break the cycle of reproduction of traditional gender norms and practices and attain gender equality in schools.

Keywords: Doing Gender, Undoing Gender, School, Gender Bias, Gender Stereotypes

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บทบาทของชุมชนโรงเรียนในการปลุกฝังและลบล้าง สถานะทางเพศในภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

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บทคัดย่อ

โรงเรียนคือจุดเริ่มต้นในการทำลายความไม่เท่าเทียมทางเพศในสังคม โดยการปรับเปลี่ยนโครงสร้าง บรรทัดฐาน และพฤติกรรมที่ส่งเสริมให้เกิดความไม่เท่าเทียมกัน กรอบทางความคิดด้านการระบุเพศ (doing gender) กล่าวว่าเพศเกิดขึ้นจากการหล่อหลอมทางสังคม ในขณะที่กรอบทางความคิดด้านการท้าทายเรื่องความไม่เสมอภาคทางเพศ (undoing gender) ได้แย้งว่าการระบุเพศดังกล่าวสามารถถูกลบล้างได้ ดังนั้น งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จึงสำรวจบทบาทและอิทธิพลของโรงเรียนในการเพิกเฉยและการท้าทายความไม่เสมอภาคในภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้โดยศึกษาการดำเนินการของชุมชนโรงเรียน ในการล้มล้างความคิดและพฤติกรรมใน 4 ด้าน ประกอบด้วย พฤติกรรมในห้องเรียน หนังสือและสื่อการเรียนการสอน บทบาทความเป็นผู้นำของนักเรียน และกีฬา การเก็บข้อมูลประกอบด้วย การจัดประชุม Focus group การสำรวจความคิดเห็น การสัมภาษณ์ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ และการเยี่ยมชมโรงเรียน ผลการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล พบว่า แรงผลักดันในระดับบุคคล โรงเรียน และนโยบายต่างมีผลเกี่ยวข้องกันในการเสริมสร้างหรือล้มล้างความเข้าใจทางเพศ ดังนั้น การแทรกแซงในระดับต่าง ๆ เหล่านี้เป็นส่วนสำคัญในการล้มล้างค่านิยมและความคิดดั้งเดิม เพื่อเสริมสร้างค่านิยมใหม่แห่งการเท่าเทียมกันทางเพศ

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Introduction

In the field of gender studies, sex and gender are generally considered to be two different constructs. While sex is considered a biological trait, gender is considered a social construct or product of daily social practices or behaviors. Sociologists West and Zimmerman (1987) developed the notion of ‘doing gender’, which refers to individuals performing daily interactions and activities deemed appropriate for one’s sex category, thus creating differences between females and males. West and Zimmerman’s “Doing Gender” publication brought new attention to the role of the forces at the socio-interactional level in constructing and maintaining the binary gender categories of femininity and masculinity in society. However, many scholars have also criticized the notion of gender for ignoring human agency and its potential to undo gender and reduce gender inequality in society. For instance, Deutsch (2007) argues that if gender can be constructed, it can also be dismantled, and calls for research on both doing and undoing gender in social interactions.

School settings play a critical role in changing gendered mindsets or, conversely, reproducing traditional gender values and attitudes in society (Stromquist, 2007; Thein, 2015). School-based dynamics shape gender beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of students and may induce determinantal effects on them. According to Aina and Cameron (2011), early gender bias experiences of children influence their attitudes and beliefs related to their formation of relationships, access to equitable educational opportunities, and participation in the workforce, and impede their physical and psychological well-being. Ultimately, the transmission of societal gender beliefs to individuals leads to enduring gender inequality across multiple societal dimensions (Eble & Hu, 2022). Thus, schools present an ideal venue to dismantle gender inequality in society by changing structures, norms, and practices that reinforce gender differences in schools. While there has been much research in the field of pedagogy to explore how gender differences are created and perpetuated in educational settings, there has not been much attention paid to the processes that eliminate gender inequities.

Studies on gender formation and the role of schools in ASEAN (e.g., Marpinjun & Ramsey, 2017; Azisah, 2012; Pattalung, 2008; Vu, 2008; Jasmani et al., 2011) show that gender bias and stereotypes remain entrenched in schools. Gender bias and stereotyping in schools may manifest in multiple and subtle ways, such as through pedagogical

methods of teachers who may carry gender prejudices, school curriculum and activities that are differentiated for girls and boys, or textbooks that promote ideals of femininity and masculinity (Erden, 2009; Aina and Cameron, 2011; Amin et al., 2018; Stromquist, 2007; Bigler, 1995). These school-based dynamics shape gender beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of girls and boys and may induce determinantal effects on them. According to Aina and Cameron (2011), early gender bias experiences of children influence their attitudes and beliefs related to their formation of relationships, access to equitable educational opportunities, and participation in the workforce, and impede their physical and psychological well-being. Ultimately, the transmission of societal gender beliefs to individuals leads to enduring gender inequality across multiple societal dimensions (Eble and Hu, 2022). Thus, schools as socio-interactional sites for gender construction or deconstruction present an opportunity to dismantle discriminatory gender norms in society.

Against these backdrops, this study aims to explore the potential of the school system as a site at the socio-interactional level to do and undo gender in ASEAN. It examines the role of school communities (teachers, students, and school administrators) in doing and undoing gender in four areas- classroom practices, textbooks and other instructional materials, sports, and student leadership. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are presented in the sections that follow. It is suggested that doing and undoing gender scholarships may provide important perspectives to explore how schools contribute to the construction and deconstruction of gender. Then, the study explores macro-level indicators of gender inequality, including in the education sector, in ASEAN to understand the broader gender equality contexts in the region. Finally, the study explores how gender ideology is reflected in school practices and how school communities, including teachers, students, and administrators, contribute to constructing and de-constructing gender in schools.

Literature Review

Doing Gender Framework

West & Zimmerman (1987)'s article on doing gender is considered to be a groundbreaking publication that established the distinction between sex and gender and underscored the significance of social interactions in the construction and maintenance of gender. The authors argue that while sex is biologically determined, gender is "the activity

of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The authors define gender as a routine and recurring accomplishment achieved through individuals continuously doing gender in all social situations, as those who don't are held accountable for their actions. The authors assert that gender is not inherently natural or essential. However, the differences between female and male that are created by repeatedly doing gender at the interactional level appear natural and essential. The resulting social order created by this process then acts as a potent reinforcer and legitimator of existing social and institutional arrangements based on sex category.

Doing gender framework suggests that both individuals and institutional forces help create and maintain binary gender distinctions. According to West & Zimmerman (1987), though individuals are the ones who 'do gender' and help create differences between females and males, these differences are expressed, legitimized, and reinforced through the creation of a variety of institutionalized frameworks and social situations. For example, institutional rules such as dress codes shape individual actions, thus enforcing gendered practices (Woehrle & Engelmann, 2008). West & Zimmerman (1987) suggest that social transformation should be pursued both at the institutional and interactional levels. However, the authors warn that "in appreciating the institutional forces that maintain distinctions between women and men, we must not lose sight of the interactional validation of those distinctions that confers upon them their sense of 'naturalness' and 'rightness'".

West & Zimmerman (1987)'s article led to numerous sociological research on doing gender, which has provided a staggering amount of evidence that women and men do gender, but their gender performance varies across time, space, ethnicity, and social institution (Risman & Davis, 2013). The article was published amidst growing criticism against the prevalent psychology and personality-focused sex role theory for overemphasizing the role of socialization during childhood in gender construction. The sex role theory has been criticized for its language use that presumes that people's gendered behaviors remain stable across their life cycle or socio-cultural contexts (Risman & Davis, 2013). It has additionally come under fire for placing too much emphasis on micro-level factors and failing to acknowledge the intricate link between micro, meso, and macro variables (Stromquist, 2007). Sex role theory assumes that people internalize the gendered norms

that were prominent when they were growing up, whereas the doing gender approach postulates that people respond to shifting contemporary norms throughout their lives, suggesting the prospect of revolutionary change within a considerably shorter time frame than suggested by sex role socialization theory (Deutsch, 2007).

Undoing Gender Framework

Following the conception of the doing gender framework, which emphasizes the role of social interactions in constructing gender, many scholars (for example, Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Messerschmidt, 2009) have criticized the framework for disregarding human agency in challenging gender differences and ignoring the potential for social transformation. The concept of undoing gender was first introduced by Butler (2004) in her book titled “Undoing Gender”. Without specific reference to West & Zimmerman (1987)’s article, Butler (2004) states, “Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized”. She suggests that undoing gender requires breaking the gender binary; for instance, in gender discourse, usages of the terms such as “gender blending” or “transgender” expose that the gender binary is a social construct. According to Kelan (2010), Butler’s conception of undoing gender is rooted in a poststructuralist and discursive approach.

The ethnomethodological approach, which West and Zimmerman (1987) used in their development of the doing gender framework, offers another perspective on undoing gender (Kelan, 2010; McDonald, 2013). The ethnomethodological approach to gender studies views that gender is achieved through action and interaction (Brickell, 2006). Following the ethnomethodological tradition and building on the conceptualization of doing gender framework by West and Zimmerman (1987), Deutsch (2007) offers a new conceptualization of undoing gender. According to Deutsch (2007), “doing gender” refers to social interactions that reproduce gender differences whereas “undoing gender” refers to social interactions that lessen gender differences. Expressing concern over the fact that the doing gender framework is commonly employed to study gender maintenance and conformity, Deutsch (2007) calls for more research on how gender is dismantled at the interactional level. Deutsch (2007) identifies four research topics that scholars can examine how gender can be undone at the interactional level- when and how social

interactions come to be less gendered, not merely differently gendered; the conditions under which gender is insignificant in social interactions; whether all gendered interactions perpetuate gender inequality; how structural and interactional levels can work together to bring about transformational change; interaction as the site of change. In recent years, the undoing gender framework has been used extensively to research organizations as a site to undo gender. In line with the works of West and Zimmerman (1987) and Deutch (2007), this paper examines the school system as a site to do and undo gender.

Undoing Gender in Education

There have been numerous studies on how gender is produced in work and organizations, and the undoing gender framework has been increasingly being used to study organizations as a site to undo gender in recent years (Kelen, 2010). A similar trend can be seen in gender and education scholarship as well. Scholars of gender and education highlight a number of practices targeting both educators and students that are needed to undo gender in education. Some of these practices include- training for teachers and administrators to effectively respond to gender role conflict, sex education for students that explores sexual power relations, promoting new ways of doing gender through extracurricular activities, and changing peer culture that promotes the stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity (Stromquist & Fischman, 2009). In practice, however, there is a tendency to see gender issues in education only in terms of unequal access to education for both girls and boys and the underrepresentation of women in certain fields of study (Stromquist & Fischman, 2009).

Murphy-Graham (2009) investigated how the Honduran secondary education program, *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* (SAT), attempts to undo gender by encouraging students to reexamine gender relations in their daily lives and found that comprehensive interventions are needed to enhance females' capacity to break down gender stereotypes and norms. The SAT program, designed by a Colombian NGO in the early 1970s and currently being implemented in multiple Central American Countries, focuses on textbooks, tutors, study groups, and the community to empower students to take charge of their growth and contribute to social transformation. The comparative study of women in SAT program and women in the control group, and interviews with these women's spouses, relatives, and tutors, found that SAT participants had a higher level of gender consciousness and

a greater ability to negotiate gender relations. The key characteristics of the SAT program that makes it a transformative innovation in education to undo gender include- gender issues are incorporated in the curriculum; the concept of gender is linked with the broader concept of justice; students engage in self-reflection as well as dialogue; teachers are offered the opportunity to self-reflect in professional development sessions and; it places emphasis on change among individuals as well as in social structures to undo gender.

Bajaj (2009) uses Deutsch (2007)'s framework of undoing gender and analyzes a Zambian school's deliberate attempt to undo gender through educational policies and practices. The study compares practices related to school cleaning and human values education between the school, a low-cost private school referred to as Umutende School, and government schools to demonstrate how the school strives to reduce gender inequality and how students respond to school policies. Instead of hiring workers to clean the school as is typical in government institutions, students at Umutende were responsible for doing it themselves. In government schools, students engaged in cleaning duties either as punishment or as needed, which usually led to a gendered division of labor. In contrast, at Umutende, with separate campuses for girls and boys, all students had to participate in cleaning tasks equally. The study found that such practice at Umutende encouraged male students to carry out domestic chores at home. Similarly, Umutende's focus on values such as peace, equality, and social justice through daily interactive sessions resulted in a stronger grasp of women's rights violations among its students compared to government school students.

Hills & Croston (2012) highlight that Physical Education (PE) remains the subject in coeducational schools that is most likely to be delivered in gender-segregated sessions and argue that such practices are associated with doing gender approach that emphasizes differences in girls' and boys' attitudes, behaviors, capacities, and experiences that can limit girls' learning opportunity and reinforce gender inequality. The authors mention that problems such as teasing, harassment and exclusion may exist in coeducation. However, investigating such issues requires a different approach rather than an emphasis on gender differences. Against these backgrounds, the authors conducted ethnographic research on gender, physicality, and Physical Education (PE) in a mixed-gender school located in a city in the North of England using the undoing gender framework to understand girls' experiences of mixed-gender PE. The study conducted a narrative analysis to understand

how girls interpreted their experiences of PE and physicality. The study found evidence of undoing gender, such as girls challenging the concept of male superiority, girls' and boys' participating positively during physical activities, girls recognizing the benefits of mixed gender settings, evidence of similarities between girls and boys and shared experiences, and recognition of girls' abilities. However, the dominant narratives also positioned boys as the key instigators of teasing and exclusion and more capable and driven students. The study recommends a number of approaches to address the problems of teasing, harassment, and exclusion embedded within PE. Some of these approaches include identifying and implementing best practices based on physical educators' experiences, interventions based on an understanding of the complexity of girls' social identities in relation to PE, focusing on the individual needs of students, and encouraging girls and boys to reflect on and consider gender inclusive behaviors.

Methodology

This study performs a secondary analysis of data on the current status of gender equality in ASEAN educational systems collected in 2020 as part of the second phase of the project titled 'Elimination of Gender Stereotypes and Sexist Language in Education Materials in Primary and Secondary Levels in ASEAN'. The project was initiated by Thailand's Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and implemented by the Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society (CPCS), National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkok, Thailand (Vichit-Vadakan, 2021). While the first phase of the project aimed to understand the issue of gender stereotypes and sexist language in school textbooks in the ASEAN region, the second phase of the project sought to understand a wider range of gender equality issues in the region, especially in schools. In the second phase of the project, the data were collected through expert interviews and either Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) or a survey involving teachers, students, and school administrators in each ASEAN Member State with the exception of Thailand, where data were obtained through school visits that involved direct observations, on-spot interviews, and a survey (Vichit-Vadakan, 2021). This study builds on the existing dataset to explore the role of ASEAN school communities (teachers, students, and school administrators) in doing and undoing gender in four areas- classroom practices, textbooks and other instructional materials, sports, and student leadership.

Findings

Current Status of Gender Equality in ASEAN

The ASEAN and UN Women (2021)'s Global Gender Outlook report reports that the ASEAN Member States have achieved impressive strides toward gender equality in recent years, with particular successes in reducing child marriage rates, reducing maternal mortality, and enhancing access to education. However, addressing inequality continues to be a significant obstacle for countries and the region. Although the poverty rates in the ASEAN Member States have decreased over the past few decades, women in the region are still more likely than men to live in poverty, and 58 percent of women still earn less than their male partners. Moreover, men are 11.5 times as likely as women to be employed, and only 13 percent of young men are outside of education and the workforce, compared to 24% of young women. Furthermore, though more women are now participating in decision-making, with women making up 20% of parliamentarians and 24% of middle and senior managers, gender parity has not been reached. In addition, 9% of women and girls faced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months.

Global Gender Gap Report (2022), released by the World Economy Forum (WEF, 2022) ranks 140 countries according to the Global Gender Gap Index, which tracks progress towards closing gender gaps across four dimensions- Economic Participation & Opportunities, Educational Attainment, Health Survival, and Political Empowerment- in 140 countries. The overall statistics for ASEAN member countries are shown in Table 1. The data indicate important differences among ASEAN member states. The Philippines ranks first among ASEAN Member States and 19th in the global ranking, while Myanmar ranks last among ASEAN Member States and 101st in the global ranking. However, at the sub-index level, Myanmar and Lao PDR are the most advanced countries in the world on Health Survival and Economic Participation & Opportunity, respectively. On Education Attainment, the Philippines ranks first, and Lao PDR ranks last among the ASEAN Member States.

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Index in ASEAN

Global Ranking	Country	Sub Index Ranking			
		Economic Participation & Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health & Survival	Political Empowerment
19 th	Philippines	16 th	46 th	30 th	35 th
49 th	Singapore	28 th	65 th	123 rd	66 th
53 rd	Lao PDR	1 st	109 th	55 th	116 th
79 th	Thailand	15 th	92 nd	37 th	130 th
83 rd	Vietnam	31 st	88 th	141 st	106 th
92 nd	Indonesia	80 th	102 nd	77 th	90 th
98 th	Cambodia	61 st	105 th	42 nd	121 st
103 rd	Malaysia	88 th	56 th	68 th	123 rd
104 th	Brunei Darussalam	49 th	48 th	104 th	144 th
106 th	Myanmar	101 st	96 th	1 st	118 th

Source: WEF (2022)

ASEAN's educational indicators suggest gender parity in some areas and gender inequality in others. In most countries, the mean years of schooling for males are higher than for females, with the exception of Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, and Myanmar (UNDP, 2018). Data on the net enrollment rate in primary education indicates no significant gender differences in the region apart from Thailand, where the net enrollment rate for males exceeds the rate for females by 7.6 percentage points (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). In terms of the net enrollment rate in secondary education, the rate for females exceeds the rate for males in Cambodia, Malaysia, and the Philippines by more than 5.0 percentage points. In contrast, the rate for males exceeds the rate for females in Myanmar and Thailand by 5.1 and 11.4 percentage points respectively (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). The share of female graduates in STEM programs at the tertiary level varies among the countries. While Myanmar and Brunei Darussalam perform well with more than 50% share of female graduates, Cambodia is at the bottom, with only 16.7% of female graduates (UNDP, 2018). Although girls have higher attendance and completion rates for secondary

schools in most ASEAN member states, women and girls are less likely than men and boys to be in employment, education, or training in adolescence and early childhood due to highly differentiated gender roles that disproportionately allocate unpaid domestic and care work to women and girls (UNICEF, 2019). In addition, these quantitative indicators do not capture the gendered experiences of school communities, which may require qualitative assessment (Subrahmanian, 2005).

Persistent gender inequality across multiple domains in society is rooted in cultural norms and practices that differentiate between female and male (Jayachandran, 2015). In Southeast Asia, the dominant gender ideal for men is that of the breadwinner, warrior or political and religious leader and the dominant gender ideal for women is that of dutiful wife and mother (Roces, 2022). These ideals are reflected in and cut across the domains of politics, education, and economy as well as the social and private lives of people in the region. In the region, religion plays a significant role in defining and policing traditional gender ideals (Roces, 2022). In Muslim-majority countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, Islamic law regulates marital matters like divorce and polygamy and women are disproportionately the aggrieved party in most cases (Devasahayam, 2009). In Thailand, where Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion, women are not allowed to get ordained (Khuankaew, 2015), and it is widely believed that religious merits can be accumulated efficiently by becoming a monk, having a son ordained as a monk, or donating to male members of the Sanga (Seeger, 2006). Throughout Southeast Asia, there is a high prevalence of violence in the forms of marital rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. In Vietnam, 34.4% of women experience physical or sexual abuse from an intimate partner in their lifetime (General Statistics Office, 2010). Similarly, in Myanmar and Cambodia, half of the men are likely to defend beating their wives, which suggests that they support gender-based violence (UNICEF, 2019).

Doing and Undoing Gender in ASEAN Schools

Classroom practices

The study's findings indicate that teachers in ASEAN play a significant role in maintaining gender division in the classroom through punishment, praise, and guidance, negatively impacting female students' academic prospects. While teachers are found to be aware of the concept of gender equality generally, they tend to have unconscious

gender biases and stereotypes, which are reflected in their teaching practices and interactions with students. Teachers are found to perpetuate the stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity that dictate men should be bold, active, strong, and exhibit no feminine behavior. In contrast, women should be polite, obedient, neat, and physically attractive. Both female and male students are criticized if they attempt to go against the prevailing gender norms. Teachers also encourage male students to be outspoken in the classroom, for example, by paying more attention to their queries or encouraging them to present group work in front of the classroom. Such classroom practices limit female students' opportunities to develop their confidence as well as valuable skills such as leadership and communication. Teachers also tend to hold math-gender bias, which is shown to impact female students' potential in STEM subjects negatively. For example, in Thailand, it was found that girls' interest in mathematics and science decreases drastically as they progress up the grade levels. This suggests that teachers' gender bias may negatively impact girls' self-confidence and academic interests, especially in subjects like mathematics and science. In addition, the division of chores in classrooms is found to be along the traditional gender roles.

However, the study found instances of deliberate attempts by teachers to undo gender in the classroom. In Vietnam, teachers engage in informal exchanges and encourage each other to use gender-sensitive teaching practices. Vietnamese teachers were also found to engage in informal conversations with students about gender issues in friendship, romantic relationships, and sexual behavior. As the formal reproductive health and sex education curriculum in Vietnamese schools generally focuses on male and female physiology, reproduction, sex, hygiene, and pregnancy, such informal interactions between teachers and students help students to develop skills to effectively deal with biological and social changes associated with puberty, build respectful interpersonal relationships, and support their personal and social development.

In Lao PDR, teachers often encourage female students to express their opinions in the classroom. They also engage in classroom discussions aimed at reducing sexist behaviors among students and imparting gender-equitable values to students, even though these issues are not incorporated into the formal curriculum. However, as most teachers in ASEAN do not undergo gender-sensitivity training, they may not have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide lessons on gender equality and encourage gender-sensitive

behaviors among students, despite their awareness of the importance of teaching gender equality to students. In fact, they may unintentionally propagate gender-biased messages in the classroom. The school administration then must support teachers to undo gender in schools, according to some expert research participants. In Indonesia, it was found that an elementary school had a policy aimed at countering gender biases held by teachers and promoting gender sensitivity in teaching practices, as explained by one of the research participants:

“The school had a policy, starting from affirmative policies for female students to be encouraged to participate more actively, for example, in class. Usually, they prefer to stay silent, compared to male students. So, it is the teacher’s duty to encourage female students to talk and express their opinions. In addition, there is also encouragement for them to take part in the competitions that are being held.”

Textbooks and other instructional materials

Gender bias and stereotypes may be unintentionally reinforced in the classroom through gender-biased language use and unequal gender representation in textbooks and other reading materials. The findings from the study demonstrate the prevalence of gender bias and gender-role stereotyping in textbooks and other instructional materials in ASEAN. Many research participants observed that textbooks and other reading materials contain gender stereotypes that reduce women’s roles to mere domestic work and nurturing. Women are generally associated with professions such as receptionist, counselor, and maid and with indoor activities such as sewing, cleaning, cooking, and participating in cultural and religious events. In contrast, men are associated with professions such as doctors, engineers, and pilots and with outdoor activities such as exercising or playing sports. Textbooks and other instructional materials also promote male supremacy by portraying males as strong, independent, assertive, intelligent, technologically educated, and rational, and women as weak, dependent, passive, emotional, technologically illiterate, and talkative. According to Jasmani et al. (2011), gender stereotyping in textbooks can negatively impact students’ knowledge about gender and female students’ self-esteem.

However, the study found potential for countering gendered messages in textbooks and other instructional materials, given the high level of awareness of the problem and some efforts to address them on the part of teachers and students. The study found that teachers and students in ASEAN are generally aware of the presence of gender bias in textbooks and other reading materials. When restricted by historical texts or gender-biased educational materials, Vietnamese teachers were found to point out their gender-biased nature to students and discuss the details of the circumstances in which those documents were born. Students' unease with gender-biased instructional materials can be observed through the following statements made by two student research participants from Cambodia:

"History textbooks in high school did not include women even though they have made significant contributions to the betterment of society and the country. I used to wonder this, but I did not raise any questions."

"I talked to the principal regarding gender bias in instructional materials. I was told that the school does not have enough budget to change instructional materials."

The instances of teachers and students questioning and resisting gendered messages in textbooks and other instructional materials indicate that forces at the institutional level, such as educational policies or formal school curricula, which influence the choice of instructional materials and contribute to the maintenance of gender inequality, are resisted by the forces at the interactional level (by teachers and students). However, eliminating or significantly reducing gender bias and stereotyping in textbooks requires efforts at all levels. According to Lee & Collins (2008), addressing gender bias and stereotypes in textbooks requires developing a formal code of practice and guidelines for textbook editors that support the use of inclusive language and balanced treatment of sexes as well as incorporating lessons in teacher education programs to guide teachers on how to deal with gender biases in textbooks. An expert study participant from Vietnam notes that even while teachers are aware of gender biases in textbooks and have the skills to address and combat them, they could nevertheless be required by school policy to adhere to the formal school curriculum:

“Gender mainstreaming is not a mandatory activity, so implementation depends on the level of awareness and attitude of teachers. At the high school level, teachers’ compliance with curriculum and textbooks is a requirement. Therefore, if the curriculum and textbooks are not revised to incorporate gender-sensitive content, it is difficult for teachers to integrate gender sensitivity in their teaching practices. The fundamental problem is that the education sector does not view gender mainstreaming as important and needs to be done drastically.”

Student leadership

Regarding leadership opportunities for female students, the findings show that schools have unspoken rules that dictate that leaders must be boys. While boys are encouraged to take the lead positions, girls are expected to work as assistants and work behind the scenes. In Indonesia, for example, male students typically win the elections for the student council, whereas female students usually win the positions like secretary and treasurer. This shows that students are socialized to view males as leaders and females as diligent duty-holders. In Thailand, while most student research participants disagreed that boys make better leaders, some teacher and student research participants believed boys should be in leadership positions because they are stronger and louder, making them more effective leaders. In addition, remarks from some teachers show that there is a tendency to evaluate female leadership based on accumulated experiences and abilities. In contrast, male leadership is assumed to be inherent because of power factors associated with their physique.

However, the concept of male students being seen as ‘natural leaders’ can be broken through peer support, as observed in Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia. In Indonesia, the study found instances of female students attempting to change the gender norm that favored males in leadership positions by encouraging fellow female students to take on informal leadership roles. In Thailand, the majority of student research participants expressed that they would choose a leader based on their individual capabilities rather than biological sex. This indicates that students do not necessarily adhere to societal norms, which are even perpetuated by some teachers. A similar

tendency can be seen in Cambodia. In Cambodia, more female students are winning student leader elections because of the support they receive from their peers.

Sports

Gender bias can also be seen in the usage of school facilities and participation in extracurricular activities, limiting female students' opportunities in sports. There is a widespread belief that sports are for boys and the arts are for girls. Male students thus frequently participate in more athletic and physical activities, while female students are encouraged to participate in stereotypically feminine activities like singing, dancing, painting, embroidery, and cooking. In addition, male students tend to get priority over female students when it comes to using physical space and sports facilities. On this front, a student study participant from Myanmar remarked:

“There is normally only one big playground/football field in most schools, and it is mostly used for playing football and traditional chinlone (woven cane ball), which are group sports mostly teamed up with boys. Even though there is no official rule, these playgrounds are male-dominant areas, where most girls feel unassociated with.”

The findings indicate the role of accountability structures in preserving gender inequality in sports, as postulated by the doing gender framework. That is, female students are held accountable for not conforming to the feminine ideals of beauty and grace, as evidenced by the remarks from two research participants from Myanmar and Thailand, respectively:

“Teachers and the school administration favor boys over girls in sports. Girls are supposed to be gentle, and thus they are not encouraged to engage in physical activity.”

“As I grew older, I did not like playing sports as I was afraid of sweating and stinking.”

In some countries, however, the study found instances of institutional efforts to undo gender in sports. A Thai school was found to have a policy to promote gender inequality in sports and physical activities. Both girls' and boys' futsal and volleyball teams

were appointed to compete outside the school, and the use of the school's physical space appeared more gender equitable. In Brunei Darussalam, the Ministry of Education funds extracurricular and co-curricular activities (CCA) in secondary schools. The ministry requires every student to participate in at least three different CCA activities: one in athletics, one in clubs and societies, and one in uniformed or cultural activities. In addition, the Department of Co-Curriculum Education Brunei (DDDC) ministry frequently organizes events open to both female and male students.

However, institutional efforts to undo gender can be resisted by the school administration and teachers. In Brunei Darussalam, although macro-level policies exist to promote gender equality in extracurricular activities, schools may not necessarily echo the objectives of those policies. According to the informants from Brunei Darussalam, there exist school policies that forbid students from participating in certain activities based on sex. For example, girls are not allowed to play sports such as soccer, softball, and football, while boys are not allowed to take dance lessons. In Indonesia, it was observed that some schools have policies to encourage girls in physical activities like basketball and rock climbing. However, these policies are either half-hearted or patchy and do not necessarily result in true gender equality, as evidenced by a remark made by a research participant from Indonesia:

“The girls are given equal opportunities to join and play any sport since there are separate teams for boys and girls for each sport. If the girls want to join the basketball team, they can. However, when it comes to (inter-school) competitions, boys are the ones who often partake and compete in them.”

Discussion/Conclusion

This study investigated the role of the school system as a site at the interactional level to do and undo gender. The study first conducted a macro-level analysis of gender equality indices in ASEAN, providing an overview of the broader gender equality contexts in the region. The indices show that while the ASEAN countries have made significant progress in enhancing equitable access to education, reducing child marriages, and reducing maternal mortality, there is a persistence of gender gaps in various areas,

including labor market opportunities, wages, political empowerment, and safety, as well as intersecting gender inequalities. The gender equality indices also show that the ASEAN Member States vary in terms of gender equality rankings. The GGGI (Global Gender Gap Index) 2022 ranks the Philippines at the top, followed by Singapore and Lao PDR, whereas Myanmar ranks at the bottom in ASEAN. Countries also vary at the sub-index level. Quantitative educational indicators suggest a positive outlook for gender parity in education in the region; however, such indicators do not account for all aspects of gender disparity, such as the gendered experiences of educational communities. According to Glick et al. (2004), people from countries with lower gender equality scores, as measured by indices such as GGGI, tend to support more traditional gender ideologies. Despite national laws protecting women's rights and progress in many domains, women in ASEAN continue to face discrimination in many aspects of their lives due to deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms that continue to govern women's status in the region.

Then, the study examined how school communities in ASEAN do and undo gender in school. The study found that teachers, students, and the school leadership participate in both the processes of doing gender and undoing gender in classroom practices, textbooks and other instructional resources, and extracurricular activities. Teachers, being products of society, hold gender stereotypes and biases and transfer them to students, often unconsciously, through their disciplinary interactions with students as well as pedagogical practices. It is in line with the findings of Thasniya (2022), who found that gendered classroom practices exist in Indian schools with regard to teacher-student interaction, attention, role assignment, and disciplinary practices, which are linked to the prevalent gender norms and historical context. In this study, it was also observed that teachers understand the concept of gender equality, but many hold discriminatory gender stereotypes and gender beliefs and socialize female students into feminine behaviors. It is consistent with the findings of Marphinjun & Ramsey (2007), who found that early childhood educators in Indonesia hold contradictory principles of gender equality on the one hand and maintenance of traditional norms that uphold gender role division on the other. Students were also observed to engage in the process of doing gender, as evidenced by the fact that they tend to elect male students to student leadership positions and essentially have gender-specific interests in both their academic

and extracurricular pursuits. It was found that teachers and the school system as a whole place gender expectations on students, which are particularly unfair to female students. Consistent with the findings of Aina & Cameron (2011) and Koul et al. (2011), this study found that gender biases associated with leadership, STEM subjects, and extracurricular activities hamper female students' confidence, limiting their equal opportunities to advance their academic and non-academic skills.

The findings also show that schools have the potential to be a site for dismantling gendered beliefs and practices as school communities were found to engage in the process of undoing gender. Despite the lack of teacher sensitivity training and gender-sensitive school curricula, teachers were found to resist and challenge gender bias in schools through reflective exchanges with colleagues and students on gender bias and stereotypes in the school system and encourage female students to pursue academic and non-academic activities that are deemed masculine. ASEAN students were generally found to be aware of the presence of gender stereotypes and biases in schools and what they entail. The study found instances of students attempting to undo gender in student leadership through peer support. Furthermore, the school administration was found to engage in the process of undoing gender through affirmative school policies aimed at providing equal opportunities for both females and males. In addition, the study found attempts from the government to undo gender in schools through the gender-sensitive school curriculum.

This study highlights the importance of taking into account dynamic interrelationships among multi-level processes that produce and reproduce gender beliefs and norms. The study found that government policies for promoting gender equality in schools can be resisted by the school administration, and school policies promoting gender equality can be resisted by teachers. Furthermore, in the absence of gender equality school policies or gender-sensitive curricula, teachers and students resist and challenge gender inequality in schools. These findings are in line with West & Zimmerman (1987)'s doing gender framework and Deutsch (2007)'s undoing gender framework, which highlight the interplay between institutional forces and interactional forces in maintaining or dismantling gender. The findings of this study have important implications for undoing gender in schools. Policy and program interventions at different levels are imperative to break the cycle of reproduction of traditional gender norms and practices and attain gender equality in schools. Undoing gender in schools requires government policies for gender equality in schools,

gender-sensitive school curricula, and gender sensitivity training for teachers, along with individual and collaborative efforts from the school communities.

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