

Double Fatherless: Unconscious Gender Bias, the Scarcity of Male Kindergarten Teachers, and Social Justice in Indonesian Education

Ni Komang Dwi Eka Yuliati¹, I Putu Sriartha², Wayan Mudana³, I Made Pageh⁴
Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha

Article Info

Article history:

Received: 8 December 2025

Publish: 1 January 2026

Keywords:

Unconscious Gender Bias Male;
Teachers In Early Childhood;
Education Fatherless;
Social Justice;
Nyentana;
Indonesia Education;
Early Grade Reading Literacy.

Abstract

This study analyzes the phenomenon of "double fatherless" as a manifestation of unconscious gender bias in the Indonesian education system, focusing on the absence of male figures in both family and school contexts. Through literature review, analysis of training documents (INOVASI), and examination of empirical cases, the research identifies that unconscious bias against men results in stigmatization of male teachers in early childhood education while simultaneously creating a double burden for women who bear both domestic and public roles. This study connects this global phenomenon to local Indonesian context, particularly the nyentana practice in Tabanan Bali which displays gender ambivalence: strengthening women's position as heirs while multiplying their social responsibilities. Using frameworks of relational justice (Nancy Fraser and John Rawls) and critical education theory (Paulo Freire, John Dewey), the research proposes a reorientation of education that accommodates not only gender equality in a narrow sense, but also recognition of male vulnerability and complexity of gender relations in multiethnic Indonesian contexts. Research findings indicate the need for teacher training based on critical awareness of symmetrical gender bias, gender-sensitive curriculum accommodating non-mainstream families, and inclusive policies that position men in caregiving roles without stigma. Practical implications include redesigned teacher training, reform of recruitment policies, research on student resilience in gender-responsive family and school contexts, and important implications for early grade reading literacy development.

This is an open access article under the [Lisensi Creative Commons Atribusi-BerbagiSerupa 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



Corresponding Author:

Ni Komang Dwi Eka Yuliati

Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha

Email: ekayuliati.ylai@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

To date, discourse on gender equity in Indonesian education has often focused on women as subordination, marginalization, and victims of gender-based violence (INOVASI, 2022). Attention to this issue is crucial and has led to the development of various progressive policies, such as teacher training on gender equality and curriculum development that showcases women in various professional fields. However, there is a significant gap in the analysis of gender equity in education, namely that men's experiences as subjects who also experience subordination, marginalization, stereotypes, violence, and social burdens rarely receive serious attention in academic and policy discourse (Thorpe et al., 2020; Moosa & Bhana, 2020).

This research raises a unique issue by connecting three phenomena at once: (1) the scarcity of male teachers in early childhood education (PAUD/TK) due to social stigma, (2) the absence of a father figure in the homes of many Indonesian children (fatherless at home), and (3) the dual implications of the absence of a warm and supportive masculine

figure both at home and at school (double fatherlessness). The concept of "double fatherlessness" becomes a lens for understanding how unconscious gender bias not only ignores men's emotional and social needs but also reproduces the absence of empathetic male figures in educational institutions (Ambawani et al., 2024; Dogutas, 2021).

This phenomenon is complicated by Indonesia's pluralistic local context. Marriage practices such as *nyentana* in Bali represent a dramatic reorientation of conventional gender roles: men enter the wife's family home, and women (*sentana rajeg*) assume the position of lineage inheritor (Reconstruction of *Nyentana* Marriage in Balinese Society, 2025). Ambivalence arises because, while women in *Sentana* receive legal and social recognition, their double burden is increased—bearing responsibilities typically considered "masculine" (family finances, customary inheritance) while still fulfilling domestic roles. Conversely, men who enter *nyentana* experience complex negotiations of masculinity within their wife's family (Aspects of Gender Justice in *Nyentana* Marriage, 2024).

These three phenomena—the absence of male teachers in early childhood education (PAUD), fatherlessness at home, and gender ambivalence in local practices such as *nyentana*—suggest that gender inequality in education is not about women versus men, but rather about how social structures, stereotypes, and biased norms hinder the realization of full humanity for all parties. This study aims to analyze these phenomena through the framework of social justice (relational justice) and critical educational theory, and to propose a reorientation of educational practices that are more inclusive and accommodate the complexity of gender relations in Indonesia's multicultural context.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a reflective-philosophical study design enriched by empirical analysis. The primary data comes from:

- A study of international literature on unconscious gender bias, male teachers in early childhood/kindergarten, and the fatherless phenomenon (Ambawani et al., 2024; Dogutas, 2021; Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2020; Thorpe et al., 2020).
- Analysis of the "Unconscious Bias" training document developed by INOVASI (2022) as a representation of teacher training policy and practice efforts in Indonesia.
- A review of *nyentana* cases in Bali taken from legal articles and gender studies on the reconstruction of *nyentana* marriages, gender justice, and legal protection of men (Reconstruction of *Nyentana* Marriages in Balinese Society, 2025; Aspects of Gender Justice in *Nyentana* Marriages, 2024; Legal Protection of Men at *Nyentana* Marriages in the Bali Region, 2024).
- Literature review on early reading literacy and the influence of male figures in the family on children's literacy development (Nord et al., 1997; Clark et al., 2009; Lestari, 2020; Muntoni, 2018).

The analytical techniques used were thematic analysis and conceptual-philosophical analysis. First, all texts (articles, reports, training modules, legal documents) were read repeatedly to identify key themes: (a) forms and mechanisms of unconscious gender bias, (b) stigma and vulnerability of male teachers in PAUD/TK, (c) configuration of gender roles in *nyentana* practices, (d) implications for children and educational justice, and (e) the relationship between the presence of male figures and the development of early reading literacy. Second, these themes were linked to the framework of relational justice (Rawls, 1971; Fraser, 2008) and critical educational theory (Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1916) to produce a reflective reading of "double fatherlessness" and social justice in education.

Validity is maintained through triangulation of sources (international literature, national training modules, and local cases of Nyentana) and consistency of philosophical argumentation linking empirical findings to the theoretical framework used.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the phenomenon of “double fatherlessness” as a situation where children live without an active father presence at home, either because the father is completely absent (for example, due to work migration, divorce, or death) or because he is physically present but has minimal involvement in caregiving. At the same time, they also rarely encounter a warm and supportive male figure at school because the proportion of male teachers in early childhood education/kindergarten is very small and often overshadowed by stigma and suspicion (Ambawani et al., 2024; Sullivan et al., 2020; Thorpe et al., 2020; Dogutas, 2021). In various international studies, men in the realm of early childhood care are considered “unusual,” positioned as a potential threat, and often restricted from intimate care tasks such as cuddling, changing diapers, or soothing crying children. So that children who have lost a father figure at home again do not find a safe and supportive male figure at school.

Read from Rawls's perspective of justice, this condition indicates that the starting point of children's lives is not “fair” because they are missing one of the relational figures important for socio-emotional development, while social structures and educational policies do not truly redress this inequality (Rawls, 1971). Fraser added that this problem is not only an issue of distribution (the lack of male figures in early childhood education), but also the recognition of caring masculinity and the representation of men as caregivers that are absent in the design of early childhood education policies (Fraser, 2008). The INOVASI module (2022) describes this as unconscious gender bias, namely the automatic tendency to prioritize one sex that works subtly and symbolically, seen in practices such as the dominance of men as class leaders, the tolerance of aggressive behavior of male students, and the lack of attention to their emotional needs.

International literature shows how male teachers in early childhood education (ECE) experience subtle marginalization: their motives are often questioned, they are subject to stricter supervision, and they are often prohibited from performing the same caregiving activities as female teachers due to parental concerns (Thorpe et al., 2020; Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Ambawani et al., 2024). Consequently, men in early childhood education bear a “double burden”: on the one hand, they must continually prove their professionalism as educators, and on the other, they must manage persistent stigma and suspicion. In Freire's view, this practice reflects a “naive consciousness” that accepts gender stereotypes as natural—women are synonymous with safe caregivers, men are synonymous with potential danger—when in fact, emancipatory education demands that teachers, principals, and parents re-examine these realities and recognize that these unconscious biases are what hinder the emergence of more humane caregiving relationships for children (Freire, 1970).

Case studies of the practice of nyentana in Bali reveal another ambivalence in gender relations. Sentana rajeg women hold important positions as lineal heirs and holders of customary responsibilities, which formally appears to strengthen women's position, but various legal and gender studies show that they actually experience a double burden: shouldering the economic, social, and customary responsibilities typically assigned to men, while still carrying out traditional domestic roles (Aspects of Gender Justice in Nyentana Marriages, 2024; Legal Protection of Men at Nyentana Marriages in the Bali Region, 2024; Reconstruction of Nyentana Marriages in Balinese Society, 2025). Men who enter the nyentana system also face vulnerabilities because they are often seen as “less manly,” have

limited authority in family decision-making, and are sometimes considered mere "guests" in the kinship structure. Thus, the redistribution of women's formal status as heirs does not automatically lead to a fair redistribution of workload and power for both parties.

In Fraser's framework, *nyentana* serves as a local example of the tension between recognition and redistribution: there is symbolic recognition of women, but the redistribution of burdens and access to decision-making is not entirely equitable (Fraser, 2008). For education, this means that teachers need to be aware that children from *Nyentana* families bring complex gender experiences and cannot simply be assumed to come from "matriarchal families that are automatically more equitable." When the three layers of findings—double fatherlessness, bias against male early childhood education teachers, and *nyentana* practices—are brought together, it becomes clear that gender justice in education needs to be understood as relational justice: fatherless children at home and at school, as well as children from *nyentana* families, live within configurations of power and affection relations that are not always visible on the surface but that profoundly influence their learning experiences and identity formation.

In particular, the implications for early reading literacy are crucial. International studies have shown a strong link between fathers' involvement in literacy activities and children's reading development; for example, Nord et al. (1997) reported a high proportion of fathers regularly reading to infants while living at home, while Clark et al. (2009) found that children view fathers as the second most important influencer in motivating reading interest. However, fathers' levels of involvement in providing literacy opportunities are generally lower than mothers', thus the phenomenon of double fatherlessness reduces children's opportunities to engage in meaningful literacy activities with male figures. The absence of male teachers in early childhood education (ECE) further reinforces the stereotype that reading is a "feminine" activity, and research by Lestari (2020) and Muntoni (2018) demonstrates how models available in schools shape stereotypes of reading ability, leading to boys' underachievement when boys perceive reading as inconsistent with their masculine identity.

Various studies recommend that teachers actively present male role models and male authors who demonstrate that reading and communication are cross-gender skills. The presence of male teachers fully engaged in classroom literacy activities can be a powerful intervention to dismantle these stereotypes (Lestari, 2020; Clark et al., 2009; Gest et al., 2004). The involvement of male figures in literacy activities has been shown to influence not only reading achievement but also language comprehension, expressive abilities, and reading motivation. For children from *Nyentana* families, the complexity of gender relations at home will also influence how they read and identify with characters in books. If the curriculum and teaching materials only present traditional family models with rigid gender roles, they risk feeling isolated and underrepresented, which can decrease their engagement in reading activities. Reading materials that reflect diverse family structures and flexible gender roles have the potential to increase engagement.

The INOVASI (2022) module has made important strides through the development of a gender-sensitive curriculum, gender awareness training, inclusive language, anti-discrimination policies, and regular monitoring, but this analysis suggests that this perspective needs to be explicitly extended to literacy learning. This includes positively recognizing and protecting men as caregivers and literacy figures to ensure their presence is normalized in the home and classroom; introducing non-mainstream families—such as *nyentana*, female-led families, and fatherless families—as legitimate and dignified family forms in the literacy curriculum; providing reading materials that actively feature male role models engaged in literacy and caregiving; and training teachers to critically reflect on how

their gender biases influence literacy instruction, including expectations about boys' reading interests and the quality of support provided. Within the broader discursive framework, the evolution of gender justice discourse in Indonesian education moves from mere equality of access and outcomes to substantive equality, and this paper proposes a leap towards relational justice that transforms power relations so that both women and men can escape the shackles of a rigid gender system, while Freire's liberation pedagogy and Dewey's inquiry-based approach offer practical pathways to building critical awareness of gender stereotypes, reconstructing inclusive classroom norms, and using reading literacy activities as a shared learning space about family diversity and more humane gender roles.

4. CONCLUSION

System of Indonesian education and society. The absence of a warm father figure at home, combined with the scarcity and stigmatization of male teachers in early childhood education (PAUD/TK), creates a relational void that is crucial for child development (Ambawani et al., 2024; Sullivan et al., 2020).

The case of nyentana in Bali demonstrates that changes in local gender structures can simultaneously create space for women's empowerment and create a double burden, both for women in the sentana rajeg system and for men entering the nyentana system. This emphasizes that gender justice cannot simply be understood as an addition to women's formal roles, but must consider the actual distribution of burdens, recognition, and participation in decision-making (Reconstruction of Nyentana Marriage in Balinese Society, 2025; Aspects of Gender Justice in Nyentana Marriage, 2024).

Drawing on Rawls and Fraser's justice framework, as well as Freire and Dewey's critical educational theory, this study emphasizes the need for a shift from a narrow discourse of "gender equality" to one of "relational justice" that recognizes the vulnerability of all parties and reimagines power relations within families and schools (Rawls, 1971; Fraser, 2008; Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1916).

Important Implications for Early Reading Literacy:

This research also revealed that "double fatherlessness" has significant implications for children's early reading literacy development. The absence of male figures at home and at school not only hinders social-emotional development but can also reduce children's opportunities for engaging literacy experiences with male figures, reinforce the stereotype that reading is a "feminine" activity, and diminish the positive impact of male role models on literacy development (Clark et al., 2009; Nord et al., 1997; Lestari, 2020).

To achieve true gender equity and inclusive early reading literacy, Indonesian education needs to:

- Integrating awareness of double fatherlessness into teacher training programs on gender and literacy.
- Actively recruit male teachers who can be role models in literacy learning.
- Designing curriculum and selecting reading materials that showcase family diversity and flexible gender roles.
- Developing gender-responsive pedagogy that recognizes the social-emotional needs of all students and ensures all children feel represented in early reading literacy learning.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **Teacher Training Revision:** Training programs on gender bias (such as INOVASI) need to explicitly incorporate themes of male vulnerability, stigma against male teachers in early childhood education (PAUD/TK), and non-mainstream family dynamics (nyentana, fatherless families) as part of their gender bias modules.

Specifically, training should include discussions on how gender bias can influence literacy instruction and teachers' expectations for male versus female students' reading achievement. Training should be based on a pedagogy of liberation (Freire, 1970), not simply the transmission of knowledge (INOVASI, 2022).

2. **Inclusive Recruitment Policy.** Early childhood education (PAUD/Kindergarten) schools need to actively recruit male teachers and create a supportive work environment. This includes policies that protect male teachers from stigma and unfounded accusations, training on caregiving tasks that men can perform without suspicion, teacher-to-teacher support groups, and recognition that the presence of male teachers can significantly impact children's engagement in literacy learning (Ambawani et al., 2024; Sullivan et al., 2020).
3. **Gender-Responsive and Multicultural Curriculum:** Curriculum and teaching materials at the early childhood and elementary school levels need to be redesigned to explicitly present diverse families (including *nyentana*, fatherless, and female-led families) and flexible gender roles as normal forms of life, not as special cases or problems. Reading books for early reading literacy should actively feature male role models involved in literacy and caregiving activities (Lestari, 2020; Muntoni, 2018).
4. **Support System for Fatherless Students:** Schools need to develop specific support systems for fatherless students, including mentor programs, warm male figures in schools (male teachers, volunteers), and counseling that is sensitive to the complexities of their families. Specifically, reading literacy programs can be designed to provide opportunities for fatherless children to engage in literacy activities with supportive male figures (Clark et al., 2009; Nord et al., 1997).
5. **Further Research:** Empirical research is needed in Indonesia on:
 - The experiences of male PAUD/TK teachers in various regions in Indonesia and the stigma they face, including implications for their literacy learning.
 - The social-emotional development of fatherless children and how the presence/absence of male teachers in schools affects their resilience and early reading literacy development.
 - How local practices such as *nyentana* influence students' gender relations and how schools can support them holistically, including in literacy learning.
 - The effectiveness of inclusive gender bias training (including double fatherlessness) on changing teacher practices in literacy instruction and expectations for student achievement.
 - The impact of the presence of male role models in early reading literacy books on children's gender attitudes and engagement in learning to read.
6. **Reflective-Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom:** At the classroom level, teachers are encouraged to develop a critical-reflective pedagogy for gender: engaging students in dialogue about gender roles, family, and power relations contextually, using inquiry and role-play approaches, and specifically utilizing literacy learning as a medium for critical consciousness about gender (Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1916). Teachers can select stories that showcase the diversity of families and gender roles, discuss the texts critically, and empower students to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes in literature and everyday life.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of an artificial intelligence tool (Perplexity AI), which provided limited stylistic editing and sentence structure

clarification. The author has reviewed, revised, and takes full responsibility for the entire contents of this manuscript.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ambawani, S., et al. (2024). Resilience of male early childhood education teachers: Experiences and coping strategies. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 12(3), 345–367. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jcer.2024.12.3.1>
- Aspek Keadilan Gender dalam Perkawinan Nyentana di Bali. (2024). *Indonesian Journal of Gender and Family Studies*, 8(1), 102–125.
- Clark, C., Osborne, S., & Dugdale, G. (2009). Why fathers matter to their children's literacy. National Literacy Trust.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Macmillan.
- Dogutas, A. (2021). "They should not be here": Parental views and concerns about male educators in early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1661988>
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Columbia University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
- Gest, S. D., Freeman, N. K., Domitrovich, C. E., & Welsh, J. A. (2004). Shared book reading and children's language comprehension skills: The importance of emotional engagement. *Early Education and Development*, 15(1), 83–106. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1501_6
- INOVASI. (2022). *Unconscious bias: Training material for educators and school leaders*. Innovation for Indonesia's School Children (INOVASI), Australia Indonesia Partnership.
- Lambert, K. (2018). Changing our (dis)course: A distinctive social justice aligned definition of open education. *Open Education Journal*, 4(1), 52–69. <https://doi.org/10.23919/OJED.2018.23283745>
- Legal Protection of Men at Nyentana Marriages in the Bali Region. (2024). *Bali Law Review*, 15(2), 187–205.
- Lestari, M. (2020). Gender and reading literacy in early childhood education. *Atlantis Press Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 429, 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200803.021>
- Moosa, N., & Bhana, D. (2020). Understanding South African male early childhood development practitioners' gender performance in early childhood development centres. *Gender and Education*, 32(2), 162–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2020.1712090>
- Muntoni, F. (2018). Gender-specific teacher expectations in reading: The role of teacher gender and student gender. *Journal of Education Research Online*, 10(2), 108–127.
- Nord, C. W., Lennon, J., Liu, B., & Chandler, K. (1997). Fathers' involvement in their children's schools. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. NCEES 98-091.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press.
- Rekonstruksi Perkawinan Nyentana dalam Masyarakat Bali. (2025). *Tasyri: Journal of Islamic and Family Law*, 11(1), 45–68.
- Sullivan, A., McConnell, B., & Perry, L. (2020). The absence of men: Stigma in early childhood education. *Children and Society*, 34(1), 28–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12371>

- Thorpe, K., Sullivan, A., McConnell, B., & Macalalag, A. (2020). Challenging the status quo: Male educators in early childhood education and care. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 41(2), 156–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2019.1688422>
- Waluyo, B., & Anita, A. (2024). Integrating gender awareness into EFL pedagogy. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 18(3), 1178–1192. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v18i3.20857>