



The Social Construction of Gender in the Experience of Vocational School Adolescents A Critical Approach

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Abstract

In the context of vocational high schools, gender role divisions and stereotypes are often reinforced by the educational environment and social practices, which have an impact on career choices, social interactions, and future opportunities for adolescents, so this research aims to analyze how gender norms and stereotypes are formed and maintained in vocational high schools, identifies the social dynamics that influence adolescents' experiences of gender roles, presenting a critical approach to understanding and challenging the social construction of gender in educational institutions. It is also hoped that this research can provide important insight into how vocational education institutions become dynamic spaces in shaping adolescent gender identity. These findings also open a discussion regarding the importance of educational reform that is more inclusive and gender equal, so that it can encourage students to explore their potential without the limitations of gender stereotypes. Through a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and participant observation, this research explores how patriarchal values, traditional gender norms, and educational policies implicitly shape adolescents' gender identity. This research concludes that the education system in vocational high schools is not gender neutral, but rather reproduces gender-based social injustice. Therefore, efforts are needed to deconstruct gender norms that exist in the curriculum and educational practices, in order to create a more inclusive and fair learning environment for all teenagers, regardless of their gender identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is understood not only as something natural but as the result of social and cultural processes that influence the behavior, identity and role of adolescents in society. Gender is a social and cultural concept that refers to the roles, responsibilities and norms identified as masculine or

feminine in a society. Judith Butler, a philosopher and gender theorist, suggests that gender is a performance (performance or action) that is repeated and produces the illusion of gender identity. According to Butler, a person "performs" gender through everyday actions and not because of natural or biological characteristics. Thus, gender is considered as the result of ongoing performative actions and not as something essential or fixed. (Butler, 1999, pp. 3–33) This differs from the biological concept of sex, which refers to the physical and physiological differences between men and women. (Marhumah, 2011, pp. 168–182) Gender includes various attributes that are not only limited to physical characteristics, but also include aspects such as behavior, identity and social roles. The concept of gender understands that these differences are not innate, but rather the result of social construction that influences the way individuals understand themselves and interact with the society around them. (Achmad, 2019, pp. 70–91)

The social construction theory of gender explains that gender is not something that is innate or natural, but is formed and influenced by society through social interactions, culture and institutions. This theory focuses on how gender roles, expectations, and norms are constructed, learned, and transmitted in society. One of the main theories in the social construction of gender is Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler argues that gender is not a fixed identity or inherent to an individual, but rather a series of actions and performances that are repeated in a social context. Gender is "performed" through everyday behavior that conforms to societal norms about masculinity and femininity. (Butler, 1999, pp. 3–33)

Overall, the social construction theory of gender emphasizes that gender is something that is formed through social processes, not determined by biology. This opens up space for critique of traditional norms and supports a more inclusive and dynamic view of gender identity. The social construction theory of gender has had a major influence on the way institutions shape and maintain gender roles in society. According to this theory, gender is understood as something that is socially constructed, meaning that gender roles and norms are not determined naturally or biologically, but are formed through social interactions and practices supported by various institutions such as family, school, media, religion, etc. and government. (Berger & Thomas Luckmann, 1995, pp. 45–57)

Gender can also be seen as a spectrum, recognizing the diversity and complexity of gender identities beyond the traditional binary framework of male and female. The definition of gender includes two main dimensions: first, gender as a social category applied to individuals and groups in society; second, gender as personal identity as understood and internalized by the individual. Socially, gender provides an interpretive framework that guides the norms, expectations, and roles that are attributed to individuals based on their identification as male or female. Gender identity, on the other hand, is an individual's internal experience of themselves as male, female, or another form of gender identity. (Agusalim et al., 2023, pp. 12–13)

In this modern era, gender issues are increasingly receiving significant attention in various aspects of life, including in formal education environments. Vocational High Schools (SMK) as educational institutions that prepare students to enter the world of work, have an important role in shaping the understanding and experience of gender among teenagers. In the social interaction of society, where social and cultural structures greatly influence views about gender, understanding and Gender experiences among vocational high school youth can be a reflection of broader social dynamics. Because often the understanding of gender in individual development, especially among teenagers, is influenced by various factors, including social norms, culture and education.

In Indonesia itself, education in vocational high schools does not only focus on developing technical skills, but must also include learning about social values, including understanding gender. (Sulistiyowati, 2021) Unfortunately, many vocational high school teenagers are still

trapped in conventional thinking that limits gender roles,(M. Maria, personal communication, September 29, 2024a) thereby hindering their personal and professional development. This has the potential to create injustice and discrimination in various aspects of life, both at school and in society. The phenomenon of Social Construction of Gender in Vocational High Schools (SMK), reflects how gender norms and stereotypes are formed, maintained, or even strengthened in the educational environment. In vocational high schools, which often offer specific vocational or vocational education, gender-based role separation is often clear. This phenomenon arises through several aspects, such as the highly polarized division of areas of expertise, social interactions, and expectations from teachers, peers, and society.

The social construction of gender is a process in which society, through social norms, values and practices, shapes the roles, expectations and behaviors that are considered appropriate for men and women. In the educational environment, especially at the Jenangan 1 State Vocational School (SMK), the social construction of gender plays a significant role in influencing the choice of major, patterns of social interaction, as well as teenagers' views on the role of gender in their personal and professional lives. Rapid technological developments, the need for workers who have practical skills are increasing in this era of globalization, making vocational high schools one of the right choices for students who want to immediately enter the world of work after graduating from high school. By taking part in a skills program that suits their interests and talents, vocational high school students have the opportunity to become ready-to-use workers who can make a positive contribution to the industrial world. Therefore, the meaning of vocational high school is not just an ordinary school, but is a level of education that has an important role in producing young people who are ready to face the challenges of the world of work.(Yenes & Yusuf, 2021, pp. 95–101)

Although education is expected to be an instrument for promoting gender equality, in reality, the school environment often reinforces gender stereotypes. The division of majors in vocational high schools tends to reflect gender segregation which is still strong, where engineering and automotive majors are dominated by men, while more women choose majors related to culinary arts or beauty. This reflects traditional expectations regarding socially constructed gender roles.(Khotimah, 2009, pp. 158–180) Many teenagers in vocational high schools may face various forms of gender stereotypes that limit them in choosing certain majors or careers. For example, there is a perception that certain majors are more suitable for men or women, which can influence their choices in education and future careers. In addition, experiences outside the classroom, such as interactions with peers and the social environment, also play a role in shaping their views about gender.(Dacholfany et al., 2023)

Teenagers are an age group that is in a transition phase,(Supratman, 2016, pp. 75–96) where they begin to form self-identities and understand different social roles based on gender. However, there are still many stereotypes and social norms that can influence the way they view gender. Apart from that, the rapidly growing phenomenon of social media also contributes to shaping teenagers' perceptions about gender. Inaccurate information or overrepresentation of gender can reinforce stereotypes and influence their experiences in interacting with peers and the environment.(Rosyidah & Nurwati, 2019) Therefore, it is important to understand how vocational high school youth interpret the concept of gender and how they experience it in this social context.

In a broader context, gender inequality that is rooted in the world of education strengthens social inequality in society.(Murtado et al., 2024, pp. 17511–17524) Therefore, it is important to conduct a critical study of how the social construction of gender is formed and internalized by adolescents in vocational high schools, as well as how educational practices can reproduce or challenge these inequalities. Through a critical approach, it is hoped that this research can reveal the factors that play a role in this process and provide recommendations for creating a more

equitable and inclusive educational environment for all students, regardless of their gender identity.

Therefore, critical examination of gender norms and stereotypes in vocational education is essential to dismantle structured inequities, provide more equal opportunities for students, support resistance to traditional gender norms, and encourage more inclusive education policies. Especially at SMKN 1 Jenangan, which is known as a vocational high school which produces many graduates who are able to work in foreign companies, as well as some who continue on to their favorite tertiary institutions. This not only impacts students and the school environment, but also brings significant changes to the world of work and society as a whole.

With a deeper understanding, it is hoped that strategic steps can be identified to increase awareness and knowledge about gender, so as to create a more inclusive and fair environment for all teenagers. By better understanding these dynamics, it is hoped that useful insights can be gained to develop education policies that are more inclusive and support gender equality in the school environment. So it is very necessary to study in more depth the social construction of gender in the experiences of vocational high school teenagers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been carried out in vocational high schools and can increase knowledge, including Elpika Yenes et.al.(Yenes & Yusuf, 2021, pp. 95–101) Through literature studies, it was found that career guidance is needed by vocational school students as preparation before entering the world of work because after they complete their studies at vocational school, their next goal is to continue. educational level or starting a career according to their skills at vocational school. The school provides services in the form of guidance and counseling, evaluation of needs, attention to students' talents, all of which so that students gain professional maturity by being able to recognize talent abilities and analyze career opportunities, especially in making the right career choice.

There is also Heni Sulusyawati's research on high school students' career planning in terms of socio-economic status, gender and major(Sulusyawati et al., 2017, pp. 8–14) using a quantitative approach, it was found that for high school students, students' career planning in terms of socio-economic status, gender and major was in the high category, however, on average, the career planning of students from high and low socio-economic status was higher than students from high and low socio-economic status. currently. And there is no significant difference in students' career planning in terms of male and female gender. However, on average, male students' career planning is higher than that of students women. Meanwhile, from an overview of the departments, there is no significant difference in the career planning of students majoring in science and social studies. However, on average, the career planning of students majoring in science is higher than students majoring in social sciences. And there is no interaction between the variables of socio-economic status, gender and major in explaining students' career planning.

Apart from that, Zaitun Qomariah(Zaitun Qamariah, 2024, pp. 202–220) in the analysis of the dynamics of gender equality in English language teaching and by using a literature study approach found the fact that understanding the challenges of gender dynamics in English language teaching is very important to promote gender equality and inclusivity in the language learning environment. By addressing bias, power imbalances, and socio-cultural influences, teachers can create inclusive classrooms where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. There is also Syaefudin Ahmad who conducted research in terms of building gender-oriented education.(Achmad, 2019, pp. 70–91) Through literature studies, Syaefudin found that the rights that men and women must receive in education are the same. Although there are still inequalities

ranging from stereotypes of traditional mindsets to women's low need for education and even marginalization of women from getting a decent education in some areas. This shows that women still do not get a fair share in education. Many women do not have as many opportunities to enjoy education as men. The hope is that the fact that there are more women than men should lead to equal policies in education for both genders.

METHOD

This type of research is qualitative using a phenomenological approach which aims to understand the experiences of vocational high school teenagers in dealing with certain phenomena. This phenomenological study focuses on how vocational high school teenagers give meaning to their personal experiences, especially in the social construction of gender. By emphasizing natural settings and placing researchers as key instruments who will explore in depth programs, events, processes and activities. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 27–29)

Primary data was obtained from key informants using interview techniques conducted on the head of curriculum, head of student affairs, head of counseling guidance and class 11 students of SMKN 1 Jenangan. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions, experiences and understanding of gender, as well as how they feel and interpret gender roles in everyday life in the school environment. In these interviews, researchers used open questions that allowed teenagers to tell their stories. their personal experiences, including their perceptions of gender roles, how they understand masculinity and femininity, and how gender stereotypes influence their choices. The interviews were also packaged in the form of structured questions and answered by grade 11 students via Google forms, this was done because they wanted answers that suited each student's experience. The interview results were analyzed thematically, identifying main themes and patterns that describe how gender is constructed in the vocational high school context. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from documents, articles and books related to the gender experiences of vocational high school teenagers. (Sulaiman Tripa, 2019, p. 171)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK), initially only opened three departments, all of which were building engineering, machining engineering and electrical engineering. As time progressed and due to societal demands, new departments were opened, namely motorbike engineering, welding engineering and device engineering. soft until now there are nine majors. Meanwhile, for students who were initially only male students, the increase in majors caused several female students are also interested in studying at the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK). (Oediyanaingsih, 2024c)

Many vocational high school youth may face various forms of gender stereotypes that limit them in choosing certain majors or careers. Because of the perception that certain majors are more suitable for men, such as welding engineering, machining engineering, refrigeration engineering and air conditioning which seem macho and masculine which are not suitable for women, which can influence their choices in education and careers in the future.

Impressions of masculinity and femininity in choosing a major are also influenced by experiences outside the classroom, such as interactions with peers and the social environment, which also play a role in shaping their views about gender. (Dacholfany et al., 2023) Although the government gives freedom of educational rights to citizens without considering any exceptions in terms of distinction. All levels of society have the same rights. It is only the patriarchal paradigm

that often influences human thought patterns which then spreads the assumption that even though women have higher education, the best and most ideal position is below men.(Safitri et al., 2021)

Critical studies of gender in the experiences of teenagers in vocational high schools highlight how the social construction of Gender influences students' choice of educational path, social interactions, and career opportunities. Vocational high schools, which offer vocational or vocational education to prepare students for the world of work, are often spaces where traditional gender norms are reinforced or even challenged. Critical analysis of the social construction of gender also focuses on how gender norms and expectations are formed, maintained, and reinforced in vocational education environments. Vocational education, designed to prepare students directly for the world of work, often reflects the segregation and gender bias that exists in society. The following are some of the main perspectives from critical gender studies regarding the experiences of adolescents in vocational high schools:

Gender Segregation in The Choice of Study Programs and Careers

One of the main aspects analyzed in critical gender studies is the choice of majors based on gender stereotypes. In vocational high schools, gender separation is often very clear. One of the main findings in a critical study of gender in vocational high schools is the existence of gender segregation in the choice of majors, especially for electrical and welding majors.(Wijaya, 2024) Male and female students often choose different vocational programs in accordance with existing gender stereotypes. This gives rise to masculine and feminine stigmas. "Masculine" Majors Majors such as mechanical engineering, automotive, information technology, or electrical are often considered more suitable for male students. This is driven by the view that men are superior and suited to mechanical skills, technology, and physically demanding work as well as heavy or rough equipment. On the other hand, majors that do not involve manual tools and only rely on computer skills and skills such as multimedia software engineering (RPL), fashion design, catering, beauty, or secretary are often chosen by female students, because of stereotypes that place women in roles. -roles that are more related to aesthetics, care, and service.(M. Maria, personal communication, September 29, 2024)

The gender expectations attached to a particular gender cause students to feel bound to choose a major that "fits" their gender. For example, boys are more interested in technological fields while girls tend to choose majors such as culinary arts, fashion design, or nursing, which are traditionally associated with domestic or caring roles, so are considered more "feminine". In Vocational High Schools (SMK) Vocational programs such as mechanical engineering, automotive, or information technology and industry are often dominated by male students, because these fields are considered more in line with the masculine image of physical strength, technical skills, and toughness tend to be areas that sharpen the brain minimal use of dangerous heavy equipment such as drawing and building techniques as well as software engineering.(Wijaya, 2024) The percentage of gender inequality in classes at Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) Jenangan can be seen from the nine departments opened, seven departments have a majority of only male students and only three departments filled with almost equal gender numbers of men and women(Oediyananingsih, 2024a).

As a vocational school based on technology, Jenangan Vocational School does not limit the choice of majors to female students, but in reality not many female students are interested in choosing majors that come into contact with rough tools and involve risks, such as machining and welding engineering and cooling engineering and air conditioning where all the students are male. For departments where the majority work in front of computers or operating software, half the class are female students. Such as software RPL engineering, industrial engineering and also industrial information engineering where a quarter of the students are women (Oediyananingsih, 2024b). This understanding is certainly inseparable from the existence of teachers as professional

educators who must have relevant qualifications and master various abilities in pursuing their duties and functions in an effective manner and meeting professional standards.(Masnah et al., 2024, pp. 202–214)

Critical analysis shows that this division is not just a reflection of personal interests, but is the result of a gender socialization process that begins in childhood. Children are raised in an environment that introduces rigid gender roles, which are then transmitted in educational choices. This division reflects not only student preferences, but also social pressures from the environment, teachers, family, and peers.(Lorber, 2018, pp. 318–325)

This segregation not only reflects gender stereotypes in society, but also influences students' career opportunities after graduation, because fields that are considered masculine tend to have higher salaries and social status compared to fields considered feminine.

Social Influences and Gender Expectations

Adolescents in vocational high schools are often influenced by social and cultural expectations regarding gender in choosing majors and interacting in the school environment. Critical gender studies reveal how these expectations can limit or influence adolescents' educational and career aspirations. Parents and teachers often encourage students to choose a major that "fits" their gender. For example, male students may be encouraged to major in automotive, temporarily female students are directed to the culinary arts department. These expectations reinforce existing gender stereotypes and limit students' choices. Teachers have a major influence in shaping students' gender experiences in vocational high schools. Critical gender studies show that teachers often unknowingly reinforce gender stereotypes by treating students differently based on their gender. For example: Assignment: Male students may more often be given tasks that are technical and physical in nature, while female students are directed to do tasks that are considered "softer" or involve communication skills. However, in some cases, there is tolerance from male students towards female students when they have difficult assignments in their majors, by providing assistance to female students in completing them(M. Maria, personal communication, September 29, 2024b). This reinforces the idea that certain skills are more suitable for certain genders, which in turn strengthening gender boundaries in the world of work.

In fields that are considered masculine, female students often have to fight harder to gain recognition or respect, because they are considered "less suited" in those fields. In contrast, male students may receive less support in majors that are considered feminine. Support and motivation among peers is very necessary, not peer pressure: Interaction with peers also plays a big role for the students themselves. Male students may face pressure to demonstrate their masculinity by choosing majors that are considered "hard" or technical, while female students may feel compelled to choose a more "soft" or artistic path. This pressure can influence students' decisions to follow a path that suits their interests and talents.

Students who choose majors that do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes often experience discrimination or marginalization, both from peers and teachers. Female students who choose to major in engineering, for example, may face: Skepticism and exclusion, being considered less competent than male students, so they have to try harder to prove their abilities, as well as social stigma, women in engineering are often considered to be going against social norms. , which can cause them to be socially ostracized or considered "unfeminine". Likewise, male students in female-dominated majors such as fashion or hospitality often faces ridicule and is considered "unmasculine." This gender-based discrimination creates psychological barriers for students to pursue fields that suit their interests without fear.(Khotimah, 2009, pp. 158–180)

Psychological barriers for students who are already working in fields that are considered inappropriate for their gender make them unable to develop and have difficulty entering the world

of work. At the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK), collaboration with several companies encountered problems when the companies only asked for and accepted male students. Even though the school has tried to negotiate, this has not received a positive response from the company. This condition adds to the row of gender discrimination which of course affects students' psychology (Wijaya, 2024).

The Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) business prepares its female students to enter the world of work, namely holding a career work guidance program in an exercise packaged as a special job fair (BKK) program, this guidance is not only useful for those who want to go straight into work but also career guidance for students and students who wish to continue their studies. This program is usually carried out when they are in class XII.

Gender Performance in the Vocational School Environment

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which emphasizes that gender is something that is "done" through actions and behaviors that are repeated over and over again so as to gain recognition and approval from the wider community. In connection with this understanding, the scope of gender performance in the vocational school environment includes four things, namely planning, implementation, monitoring and efforts built to integrate gender policies in school programs which are in line with development programs starting from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. (Tupamahu, 2020, pp. 128–134)

in the realm of education, women have a very big role because they can build the character of students, which is also relevant in the context of vocational high school teenagers. At school, adolescents display gender them through participation in activities that conform to gender expectations. An emerging phenomenon is the existence of masculine and feminine environments: In vocational high schools, male students majoring in engineering or automotive may demonstrate their masculinity through competitive behavior, involvement in physical activities, and an independent attitude. Meanwhile, female students in majors such as fashion design or beauty may display femininity through adherence to appearance norms and attention to aesthetic details.

Like at the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) which is based as a technology vocational school, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) for welding or machining engineering majors, they carry out practical field in a welding and machining workshop which has facilities suitable for a workshop. So far, workshops have been synonymous with heavy and dangerous equipment, conditions that may be unclean and uncomfortable. Meanwhile, for those majoring in drawing and building engineering or software engineering, the only facilities needed are computers, so that the conditions in the practice area are cleaner and more comfortable.

The next thing is the influence of facilities and infrastructure. Facilities in vocational high schools are often designed based on ingrained gender segregation. For example, an engineering workshop that is rough and full of heavy equipment may be designed more for male students, whereas a sleek, clean styling room may be perceived more for female students. This strengthens existing gender norms in vocational education (*Observation in SMKN 1 Jenangan*, 2024). For example, at the Jenangan Vocational School (SMK) which is based as a technology vocational school, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) for welding or machining engineering majors, they carry out field practice in welding and machining workshops which have facilities suitable for workshops. So far, workshops have been synonymous with heavy and dangerous equipment, conditions that may be unclean and uncomfortable. Meanwhile, for those majoring in drawing and building engineering or software engineering, the only facilities needed are computers, so that the conditions in the practice area are cleaner and more comfortable.

Critical gender analysis of gender representation in curriculum and teaching materials also explores how teaching materials and curriculum in vocational high schools can strengthen the social construction of gender. Textbooks, training modules, and course materials often reflect gender biases that already exist in society. Many teaching materials highlight male figures in the fields of engineering, science and technology, while the contributions of women in these fields are rarely mentioned, indicating a lack of representation of women in masculine fields. as well as educational materials often depicting women in domestic or service roles, impressions which reinforce the idea that these roles are "natural" for women as depictions of traditional gender roles..(Marsha R. Shelburn & Patsy G. Lewellyn, 1995, pp. 373–382)

Gender Discrimination and Stereotypes

Critical gender studies also explore experiences of discrimination or bias experienced by adolescents in vocational high schools. Students who challenge gender norms or choose majors deemed "inappropriate" for their gender often face stereotyping or discriminatory treatment. Students pursuing majors that do not conform to gender stereotypes often face discrimination and marginalization.(Sulistyowati, 2021, pp. 1–14) or example, a woman majoring in engineering may face different treatment from teachers and peers, such as being seen as less competent or belittled. Likewise, men in beauty or culinary arts majors may be considered "unmasculine" and ridiculed by the school community

Critical gender studies reveal that these experiences can influence students' self-confidence, perceptions of their abilities, and even their decisions about whether to continue their education or enter the workforce. The stigma against non-traditional gender roles can hinder students from pursuing their interests and talents freely.(Murtado et al., 2024, pp. 17511–17524) This is because female students are often placed in subordinate positions and are expected to choose majors that are more "feminine," while boys are encouraged to pursue majors that are considered more "masculine."

Male students who choose "feminine" majors, namely majors traditionally dominated by women, such as culinary or fashion design, are often seen as "less masculine" and can face ridicule or ostracism from peers. They may have to fight harder to prove their abilities in areas considered "unsuitable" for men. Meanwhile, female students in "masculine" majors such as women majoring in engineering or automotive may face challenges in terms of social acceptance, as well as doubts about their abilities. They may be considered "unfeminine" or viewed with suspicion by male peers.

Members of the "community" expect women to change and adapt – to become more like men – in order to join the "community".(Banks, 1988, pp. 137–146) In some cases, they may also experience direct discrimination from teachers or companies that accept them as interns (*Observation in SMKN 1 Jenangan with Deputy Head of Student, 2024*).

Secondary School Jenangan Vocational School (SMK) is not a mixed major vocational school, but only focuses on technology, so female students are a minority community. Only a quarter of the industrial electronics engineering and industrial automation engineering departments are female, the rest are male. In the building drawing engineering and software engineering majors, the number of students and girls in the class is equal, while the other five majors are all male students.

Inequality of Employment Opportunities and Salaries

Gender roles constructed in vocational high schools also influence inequality in job opportunities and salaries after graduation. Because male-dominated majors tend to be more closely related to higher-paying fields, such as engineering or technology, male students may have better access to more economically rewarding jobs. Vocational high schools focus on preparing students to enter the world of work, and the gender constructs that exist in vocational education

also influence their career opportunities. Many jobs in the vocational sector are segregated by gender,(Murtado et al., 2024, pp. 17511–17524) and vocational high school students are often directed towards career paths that conform to gender stereotypes. Some industries that collaborate with schools are more likely to recruit male graduates than female graduates (Wijaya, 2024).

Male students who graduate from engineering or automotive majors are more easily accepted in industries that require technical workers. However, they may be faced with the expectation of occupying tougher and riskier positions. Female students graduating from beauty or culinary arts majors are often faced with jobs in the service or retail sectors, which generally pay less and have a more limited level of career mobility. Critical analysis of gender shows that this occupational segregation reinforces inequalities in the labor market, with female students tending to be placed in economically less advantageous jobs.(Adamson, 2007, pp. 5–37) So many women end up in vocational fields, Female students who choose majors in care or culinary arts, despite having good job opportunities, often get jobs with lower salaries than in male-dominated technical or industrial fields. This strengthens gender inequality in the world of work. This often happens in society, but the school has provided them with guidance, even in grade 10 they have been invited on industrial visits as a place to enrich their knowledge and open up job networks (Wijaya, 2024).

Efforts for Inclusion and Gender Equality

In some vocational high schools, such as at SMKN 1 Jenangan Ponorogo, there are efforts to promote gender equality by encouraging students to fight gender stereotypes and choose majors based on interests and talents, not social norms. This was propagated from the start by schools through the head of student affairs as well as the head of guidance and counseling(Oediyaningsih, 2024c). Equality of conditions for men and women means that there is gender equality in obtaining opportunities and rights as human beings, so that they are able to play a role and participate in political, legal, economic, socio-cultural, educational and national defense and security activities.(Achmad, 2019, pp. 70–91) At the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK), the BKK program plays a very important role in overseeing the preparation of Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) students to enter the world and social conditions of society. Providing work-based skills integrated into the curriculum is an absolute must for vocational high school students.(Kusmini et al., 2021, pp. 10–19)

This program aims to increase the representation of women in the fields of engineering and technology, as well as providing support for male students interested in parenting or the arts (M. Maria, personal communication, September 29, 2024b). For teenagers in vocational high schools, adolescence is a time of identity formation, including gender identity (Oediyaningsih, 2024c). Critical gender studies highlight that vocational education experiences can influence how students view themselves in relation to existing gender norms. Students who follow career paths that do not conform to gender norms may feel like they have to maintain their gender identity through behavior or actions that are in accordance with society's expectations, or vice versa, they may dare to challenge norms. As part of critical analysis, there is a push to make vocational education more inclusive and responsive to gender issues.

Some strategies that can be implemented include: (1) Increasing gender awareness with educational programs that highlight the importance of gender equality in schools, (2) teaching students about the importance of choosing majors based on interests and skills, not because of social pressure or stereotypes, (3) supporting students in non-traditional fields as an effort schools can provide special support, such as mentoring or role model programs, for students who choose career paths that do not conform to traditional gender norms. Melalui bimbingan dan konseling yang sengaja diberikan untuk membantu siswa mengenal dan mengatasi kekurangan, rintangan, dan permasalahan yang dialami.(Tamami & Mijianti, 2023, pp. 258–269)

This can help students feel more confident and reduce discrimination as well as implementing equal recruitment policies, namely schools can also work together with industry to ensure that female and male graduates have equal access to job opportunities in all fields, especially in sectors that usually dominated by one gender. Furthermore, it was found that at Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK), more than 35% of students chose to continue their studies, and BK here is tasked with providing direction and insight into further study levels. Not a few also continue the family business (Wijaya, 2024).

However, for many students, strong social pressures can prevent them from expressing more flexible or non-conformist gender identities. For example, students who have a non-binary or transgender gender identity may face greater challenges in a vocational high school environment, especially if the institution does not yet provide inclusive policies or supports. To carry out gender equality programs, for example the efforts of several vocational high schools have introduced programs or initiatives that support gender equality, such as campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes in choosing majors, as well as providing guidance and mentors for female students who are interested in entering technical or industrial fields. (Sulistyowati, 2021, pp. 1–14)

Impact on Social and Economic Mobility

The social construction of gender in vocational high schools also influences students' social and economic mobility after they graduate. Female students who are trapped in feminine majors may face challenges in terms of income and prospects careers. Female-dominated majors often produce graduates who work in low-wage sectors, such as hospitality, catering or beauty services. Meanwhile, in sectors that are more dominated by men, women often face structural barriers to achieving leadership positions or promotions. This further shows the lack of access for women to leadership positions. In contrast, male students in engineering or technology fields often have a better chance of getting jobs with higher wages and more stable careers. This gender inequality strengthens the economic gap between men and women.

In general, the aim of Vocational High Schools (SMK) is to produce a generation ready to work. However, reality does not always match. Some of them want to continue their studies while others want to go straight to work. At the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK), the Guidance and Counseling sector plays a role in providing assistance, direction and guidance, especially to those who have problems with what they will do after graduating. This insight and provision from the field of Guidance and Counseling (BK) can at least provide enlightenment and input to these students as they move forward (M. Maria, personal communication, September 29, 2024b). The student affairs department also plays a role in directing female students to recognize and provide provisions for field work. It is hoped that from this field work the students will have experience and understanding of real work after graduating. The MoU obtained by the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) does not necessarily guarantee that they will be accepted, because the company itself will carry out an entrance test according to their standards. This has an added impact on social and economic mobility.

The Special Job Fair (BKK) held at the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) is tasked with providing information and services on job vacancies as well as marketing, distributing and placing workers. BKK is also a partner of the government, specifically the Department of Manpower and Transmigration. PT Oselna and JIEX are one of the labor distributors who are partners with the Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK). Male students usually have a greater opportunity to take a series of tests at overseas companies. Meanwhile, female students could get the same opportunity, but they are mostly placed in 51 Maria Waka Guidance Counseling in Interviews at SMKN 1 Jenangan on Wednesday 29 September 2024 at 09.00 WIB at the BP Office of SMKN 1 Jenanga in the household appliance, bread making, nursing, health industry. This

happens because of the company's own request (Wijaya, 2024). The reality on the ground is that conditions are not much better, where the unemployment rate for unmarried women is 2.28 times greater than that of men. (Hermawan et al., 2023, pp. 262–277)

The social construction of gender in vocational high schools plays an important role in shaping students' choices, their experiences during their education, and their future career opportunities.⁵⁴ Segregation of fields of study, teacher expectations, and gender representation in the curriculum all contribute to gender inequality in vocational education. Through critical analysis, we can identify ways to challenge these stereotypes and create a more inclusive educational environment, where students can freely choose career paths based on their interests and talents, not because of social pressures or gender stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

Gender understanding and experiences of youth at Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) are shaped by social construction rooted in cultural norms, social pressure, and the influence of institutions such as family and school. Although most teens still follow traditional gender norms, there is a growing trend to challenge and redefine gender identities in more inclusive ways. The findings show that there is gender inequality, where men and women tend to be limited by rigid gender role expectations, both in academic and social aspects. Teenagers' experiences show that rigid gender norms can limit their personal development and potential.

At Jenangan Vocational High School (SMK) teenagers, they develop an understanding of gender through interactions with family, peers, the media and the school environment. Social interactions at school, including experiences of bullying or support from peers, can strengthen or weaken the social construction of gender. Supportive and inclusive environments can help youth to develop a more critical understanding of gender, while discriminatory environments can exacerbate gender inequities.

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