



Gender Representation in Indonesian ELT Textbooks of Junior High School: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores gender representation in Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks for Junior High School under the Merdeka Curriculum, employing a corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The research identifies gender-related references and analyzes positive and negative character constructions. The findings indicate a persistent gender imbalance, with male references appearing more frequently than female references in categories such as famous names, fictional names, ordinary names, and pronouns. Male characters are often portrayed with a mix of positive and negative traits, while female characters are predominantly depicted in a positive light. The study concludes that while progress has been made, there is still a significant need for more balanced and inclusive gender representation in educational materials. Addressing these imbalances is crucial for creating an equitable learning environment that reflects and promotes gender equality.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, ELT Textbooks, Gender Representation, Gender Visibility, Merdeka Curriculum*

Introduction

In the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the design and selection of textbooks wield significant influence over students' linguistic proficiency by providing materials that closely emulate real-world social interactions in the target language (Ariyanto, 2018). Textbooks are a cornerstone of EFL education, shaping students' linguistic abilities and social understandings. As primary sources of language input, these textbooks significantly influence students' communicative skills and worldview (Tomlinson, 2012).

The role of textbooks is particularly crucial in developing countries like Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language and serves as a key medium for cultural exchange and social mobility (Widodo, 2018).

The Merdeka Curriculum, recently introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, aims to revitalize the core principles of Indonesian education. It emphasizes a student-centered approach, encouraging independent learning and critical thinking (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022). As part of this curriculum, new English textbooks have been developed for Junior High School students. These textbooks are intended to enhance various language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing, and to provide a rich array of topics that reflect real-world contexts.

Gender representation in ELT textbooks significantly impacts students' understanding of societal roles and cultural diversity. These textbooks serve as more than tools for language acquisition; they shape students' perceptions of gender and cultural norms. As primary language input sources, textbooks can either challenge or reinforce stereotypes, influencing students' communicative abilities and worldview (Sunderland, 2000; Wen-Cheng et al., 2011).

Under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, the newly developed English textbooks—*English for Nusantara* for grades VII, VIII, and IX—aim to support student-centered learning by integrating listening, speaking, reading, writing, and project work. These resources promote independent learning while embedding diverse cultural themes and societal values (Hermawan et al., 2022). By aligning with the curriculum's objectives, these textbooks not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also foster critical thinking and cultural awareness.

However, concerns remain about the representation of gender and cultural authenticity in these materials. Despite their inclusive intent, the textbooks sometimes perpetuate gender imbalances through stereotypes, unequal visibility, and biased firstness (Amerian & Esmaili, 2015). Such portrayals can inadvertently reinforce traditional societal expectations, limiting their potential to promote equitable cultural exchange and understanding.

Research has consistently highlighted gender biases in educational materials. For example, Ram (2008) identified significant gender biases in Pakistani primary school textbooks, while studies on Indonesian English textbooks revealed persistent gender stereotypes, even amidst growing awareness of gender equality (Ariyanto, 2018b; Lestariyana et al., 2020). Despite this, research on Indonesian ELT textbooks, particularly those under the Merdeka Curriculum, has not adequately addressed issues of gender visibility and firstness. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining both the prominence of gender and the discourse surrounding it, contributing to a deeper understanding of gender representation in these materials.

Recognizing that school curricula play a pivotal role in shaping societal values and norms (Nizeyimana et al., 2021), this research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze linguistic features and discourse structures within the textbooks. CDA, as described by Wodak (2014), is a problem-oriented methodology that uncovers hidden ideologies embedded in discourse, making it particularly effective for exploring implicit gender ideologies in educational content (Al Kayed et al., 2020). By focusing on both visual and textual portrayals, this study aims to uncover how the Merdeka Curriculum English textbooks influence students' perceptions of gender roles and expectations.

The use of CDA in educational research offers valuable insights into various perspectives, including gender, ethnicity, and cultural representation in textbooks (Amerian & Esmaili, 2015). Additionally, theories of gender representation highlight how educational materials can challenge stereotypes and promote more inclusive gender roles (Caldeira et al., 2018). By applying CDA, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks contribute to shaping students' understanding of gender norms, filling a critical gap in existing literature on Indonesian ELT materials.

Positive and negative character traits are key elements of an individual's personality that shape behavior and social interactions. Richard (2017) notes that positive traits like empathy, integrity, and resilience contribute to personal growth and foster constructive relationships, enhancing one's ability to collaborate, communicate, and face challenges confidently. Conversely, negative traits such as selfishness, dishonesty, and stubbornness can create conflicts and impede personal and professional development. Richard (2017) also emphasizes that these negative traits can exacerbate problems like harassment and bias in digital spaces, affecting participation and engagement in activities such as gaming.

While there has been extensive debate on character traits, there is limited research on gender representation in the latest textbooks under Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka. This study aims to fill this gap by examining gender representation and characteristics in the newest English textbooks for junior high school students, using corpus tools like Antconc and a corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach by Wodak.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a powerful framework for examining the relationship between language, power, and ideology in educational materials. This methodology is particularly effective for uncovering implicit messages about gender roles and societal expectations embedded within texts. By analyzing both linguistic and visual elements, CDA reveals how language and imagery in textbooks can shape perceptions, legitimize inequalities, and influence students' understanding of gender dynamics.

The research focuses on two main questions:

- 1) What gender-related references and characteristics are presented in these textbooks? and 2) How are positive and negative traits attributed to each gender in the Junior High School textbooks?

Literature Review

The representation of gender in educational materials, particularly textbooks, has been a critical area of study within gender studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Textbooks, as primary tools of education, significantly influence students' perceptions of gender roles and norms. These educational resources are not only conveyors of knowledge but also vehicles for cultural and social messages, often reflecting and perpetuating existing societal structures and ideologies (Ariyanto, 2018). The analysis of gender representation in textbooks, therefore, becomes essential in understanding how gender biases are communicated to students and how these biases may shape their understanding of gender identities and roles.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a robust framework for examining how power relations and ideologies are embedded in language and discourse. Wodak (2014) describes CDA as an approach that systematically analyzes the ways in which discourse structures enact, reproduce, or challenge power and inequality. In the context of gender representation in textbooks, CDA enables researchers to uncover the subtle ways in which gender stereotypes are perpetuated through language and imagery. By examining the discourse used in textbooks, researchers can identify patterns that reinforce traditional gender roles and norms, as well as instances where these roles are challenged or subverted (Fairclough, 2013).

Gender representation theory complements CDA by focusing specifically on how gender identities and roles are depicted across various media, including textbooks. This theory posits that the ways in which gender is represented in texts and images not only reflect social realities but also actively shape them (Caldeira et al., 2018). For instance, traditional portrayals of women as passive, nurturing, and domestic, contrasted with portrayals of men as active, strong, and authoritative, serve to reinforce existing gender hierarchies. Conversely, more progressive representations that challenge these stereotypes can contribute to a broader social change by promoting gender equality.

Research in this area has consistently shown that textbooks often reinforce traditional gender roles, with male characters typically depicted in more diverse and active roles than female characters. Studies such as those by Ahmad and Shah (2019) and Adawiyah and Oktavianti (2023) have found that males are often overrepresented in textbook content, both in terms of frequency and the nature of roles they occupy. For example, males are more likely to be shown in leadership

positions or engaging in adventurous activities, while females are often relegated to supportive or passive roles. This imbalance not only limits the aspirations of female students but also reinforces the notion that certain roles and behaviors are inherently male or female.

The concept of gender polarization, as discussed by Bem (1993), is also relevant here. Gender polarization refers to the division of social roles and attributes into rigid, binary categories of male and female, often emphasizing differences while minimizing similarities. In educational texts, this polarization can manifest in the way characters are depicted and the activities they engage in. For instance, a textbook might depict boys as naturally inclined towards science and math, while girls are shown excelling in the arts or domestic activities. Such representations contribute to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, limiting the potential of students to explore interests and skills outside of traditional gender norms.

Corpus-based studies have emerged as a powerful tool for examining gender representation in textbooks. These studies analyze large collections of text to identify patterns in language use and representation. For example, a corpus-based analysis might reveal that male pronouns and names occur more frequently than female ones, or that certain adjectives (e.g., strong, brave) are more commonly associated with male characters, while others (e.g., gentle, caring) are linked to female characters (Bennett, 2010). By providing empirical data on language use, corpus studies can offer a more objective analysis of gender bias in textbooks, complementing the more interpretative approaches of CDA.

Previous research in this area, such as the studies conducted by Blangsinga et al. (2021) and Andini et al. (2023), has highlighted the persistence of gender biases in educational materials, even in contexts where there is a stated commitment to gender equality. For example, Blangsinga et al. (2021) found that English textbooks in Indonesia still frequently depict gender in stereotypical ways, with female characters often shown as passive or in traditional roles, despite efforts to promote gender equality in education. Similarly, Andini et al. (2023) identified a significant imbalance in the representation of males and females in senior high school textbooks, with males being more frequently depicted and in more prestigious roles.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine three English textbooks for Junior High School under the Merdeka Curriculum. The textbooks analyzed—*English for Nusantara* for Grades VII, VIII, and IX—were selected based on their status as part of Indonesia's newest curriculum, which emphasizes inclusivity and critical thinking and is set to be implemented nationwide. Selection criteria included their publication under the Merdeka Curriculum framework, their use across all three Junior High School grades, and their alignment with national educational goals, ensuring replicability for future research.

The texts were converted into a corpus using AntConc, a corpus analysis tool developed by Anthony (2023). The corpus analysis included tools such as Keywords in Context (KWIC), Wordlist, cluster, and collocate functions (Szudarski, 2017), which allowed for a systematic examination of gender-related references. These references were categorized into five types: famous names, fictional names, ordinary names, generic nouns, and pronouns. Additionally, the analysis explored the distribution of positive and negative traits attributed to each gender, providing insights into overall gender visibility.

The results obtained from AntConc were aligned with the broader CDA framework by applying the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) developed by Wodak, which categorizes social actors as either positive or negative based on their character traits and roles in the texts. This integration ensured that corpus findings were contextualized within the critical discourse analysis, linking linguistic patterns to societal power structures and ideologies.

While the corpus-assisted approach offered robust quantitative insights, it also presented potential limitations. For instance, the reliance on frequency and collocation data risks overlooking subtle textual nuances and contextual meanings, which could lead to misinterpretation of certain gender-related references. To mitigate this, qualitative CDA principles were employed to interpret the findings, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of both explicit and implicit gender representations. Despite these challenges, this combined methodology provides a detailed and replicable framework for examining gender dynamics in educational materials.

Out of the numerous strategies proposed by Wodak, this research simply employs the predication strategy. Predication technique aids researchers in categorizing social actors, specifically gender-related references, as either positive or negative, in order to determine if stereotypical, evaluative attributions of positive or negative attributes are present (Wodak P.R., Meyer M. - *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2001), n.d.).

TABLE 4.1 *Discursive strategies*

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential/nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • membership categorization • biological, naturalizing and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymies • synecdoches (pars pro toto, totum pro pars)
Predication	Labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits • implicit and explicit predicates
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • topoi used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment
Perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances
Intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of (discriminatory) utterances

Figure 1 Framework

Results

The English for Nusantara-Grade VII textbook indicates the highest distribution of gender-related references within its content, with male references consistently dominating all categories. In contrast, the English for Nusantara-Grade VIII textbook shows the lowest distribution of gender-related references, with fewer mentions of both male and female references overall. This suggests a less pronounced gender representation in Grade VIII compared to the other textbooks.

Notably, the English for Nusantara-Grade IX textbook stands out for including the most famous and fictional names among the three, but even here, male references dominate, especially in the case of fictional characters and famous names. The English for Nusantara-Grade VII textbook, by contrast, did not include any famous names or fictional names, which could potentially limit the diversity of gender representation in that text.

These findings highlight the key disparity in the prominence of male references across categories. Male characters and figures continue to be more frequently referenced and presented, reinforcing traditional gender roles where men are more prominently featured as famous personalities or fictional characters. The absence of female references in these same categories, particularly in Grade VII, underscores the imbalance in gender representation. This further emphasizes the need for more intentional and equitable gender portrayals in future educational materials.

The researcher analyzed the extent of characterization and the use of positive and negative portrayals in the textbooks to examine how each present and constructs gender-related references.

Table 1 English for Nusantara-Grade VII Textbook Characterization Distribution

Textbooks	Categories	Frequency	Gender-Related Positive Characteristics	Frequency	Gender-Related Negative Characteristic	Frequency
English for Nusantara-Grade VII	Famous Names	0	0	0	0	0
	Fictional Names	0	0	0	0	0
	Ordinary Names	408	Happy, Basketball Player, cycling, cooks, teach	5	0	0
	Generic Nouns	37	Makes, sitting, playing, likes, cycling	5	0	0
	Pronouns	330	Proud, sweet,	2	0	0

In the *English for Nusantara- Grade VII* textbook, no negative characteristics or construction were found throughout the presentation. In contrast, this textbook's positive characterization or construction took over the whole presentation. This textbook did not mention categories, such as famous and fictional names. In this case, it is important to attach famous names or influential people with positive characteristics to present in the textbook the students will study. Meanwhile, since there was no mention of these categories, this textbook did not appear to have any characteristics for the fictional names.

Overall, this *English for Nusantara--Grade VII* textbook presented all the positive characteristics without any negative characteristics; this will be good for the student to apply and learn the positive characteristics in their life. *English for Nusantara--Grade VII* distributed almost seven hundred and seventy-five positive characteristics.

Table 2 English for Nusantara-Grade VIII

Textbooks	Categories	Frequency	Gender-Related Positive Characteristics	Frequency	Gender-Related Negative Characteristic	Frequency
English for Nusantara-Grade VIII	Famous Names	2	Only mentioned names, but no characteristics.			
	Fictional Names	19	Strong, small, fast	3	Tricks, rage, chase, defeated, childless, widow	6
	Ordinary Names	190	Promised, leader, beauty, goodness,	4	Beat, lonely, underestimated	3
	Generic Nouns	97	Wished, helped, ride, feeling	4	Worried,	1
	Pronouns	343	Promised, goal, stared, sniffed, calm, tried, beautifully, happily, watched,	9	Chased, angry, loud, shouts,	4

In this *English for Nusantara--Grade VIII* textbooks, the positive or positive characteristic is higher than the negative construction. It can be seen in the table above, especially in the pronouns mentioned 9 times in positive construction. The positive construction varies from appearance to emotions and actions. Meanwhile, for the negative construction in this textbook, the fictional names presented the highest occurrences of negative construction, mostly from the narrative material titled "Timun Mas."

Table 3 English for Nusantara-Grade IX

Textbooks	Categories	Frequency	Gender-Related Positive Characteristics	Frequency	Gender-Related Negative Characteristic	Frequency
English for Nusantara-Grade IX	Famous Names	2	Scientist, hard worker, smart	3	0	0
	Fictional Names	117	Power, surprised, fast, princess	4	Chasing, shouting, beating, fighting,	4
	Ordinary Names	298	Selling, amazed, princess, snorkeling	4	Shouted,	1
	Generic Nouns	37	Happy, couple, beautiful, carrying	4	cried	1
	Pronouns	257	Ran, thankful, fast,	3	Chase, scared, badly, beloved	4

English for Nusantara-Grade IX has various positive and negative constructions. However, positive construction still has a higher distribution than negative construction. It can be seen in the table above that in the famous name; there is no negative construction in this textbook. *English for Nusantara-Grade IX* textbook has some reading passages and some kind of text that elaborate on this textbook, such as narrative text, recount text, descriptive text, report text, and procedure text. That is why this textbook could contribute lots of gender references to pronouns.

The findings reveal examples of both progressive and traditional gender portrayals across the textbooks. A progressive example is seen in the *English for Nusantara-Grade VIII* textbook, where female characters are associated with qualities like leadership, beauty, and resilience, and are depicted engaging in active roles such as riding and helping. Additionally, participation in activities requiring physical and mental strength, such as in the narrative "Timun Mas," reflects an effort to break away from passive stereotypes. On the other hand, traditional portrayals persist, particularly in the *English for Nusantara-Grade IX* textbook, where female characters are frequently depicted as princesses and associated with attributes like beauty, crying, and fear, reinforcing dependent or emotional roles. Meanwhile, male characters in this textbook embody power, bravery, and independence through actions like chasing, shouting, and fighting, aligning with conventional views of masculinity. These examples highlight a mix of progress and continuity in gender representation.

The analysis combines quantitative data and qualitative observations to offer a comprehensive view of gender representation in the textbooks. Quantitatively, male references outnumber female references across categories, with the *English for Nusantara-Grade IX* textbook showing 535 male pronouns compared to 395 female pronouns. Similarly, famous male names appear more frequently, such as in *English for Nusantara-Grade VIII*, where 3 famous male names are mentioned, but no famous female names are found. Qualitatively, the portrayals of males and females often align with traditional stereotypes. Male characters are described as strong, powerful, and brave, exemplified in activities like fighting and shouting, while females are frequently associated with beauty, kindness, and emotional roles, as seen in characters crying or being scared. However, some progressive elements emerge, such as female characters in *English for Nusantara-Grade VIII* depicted as leaders or active participants, showcasing efforts to present more balanced and empowering representations. This combination of numerical patterns and character descriptions highlights both persistent disparities and emerging shifts in gender portrayal.

Discussion

1. Gender References

Based on the research findings, an in-depth analysis was conducted on the distribution of gender-related references across three Indonesian ELT textbooks for Junior High School under the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings of this study highlight critical opportunities for improving curriculum design and textbook development under the Merdeka Curriculum. The observed imbalance in gender representation—where male references consistently outnumber female references and often depict males in dominant roles—emphasizes the need for intentional efforts to promote equity in educational materials. To address these disparities, curriculum designers and textbook authors must ensure balanced representation of male and female characters in terms of both quantity and narrative prominence. This includes an equitable distribution of names, pronouns, and roles, where female characters are not only supportive or secondary figures but also protagonists and decision-makers. Achieving this balance would help challenge traditional gender norms and offer students diverse role models, fostering an inclusive understanding of societal roles.

Equally important is the portrayal of diverse gender roles and traits. The textbooks analyzed in this study often associated males with active, authoritative roles and females with nurturing or secondary roles. To counteract such stereotypes, textbooks should depict individuals from all genders in a variety of roles. For instance, female characters could be shown as leaders, scientists, and innovators, while male characters could be portrayed in collaborative or caregiving roles. By presenting a broader range of traits and capabilities, educational materials can encourage students to embrace diverse possibilities for their own identities and aspirations, breaking the constraints of traditional stereotypes.

The principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offer a valuable framework for guiding the development of such equitable content. Integrating CDA into the textbook creation process allows authors and editors to critically evaluate the language, imagery, and narratives used in educational materials. This proactive approach ensures that textbooks do not merely reflect societal biases but actively work to challenge and dismantle them. By identifying and addressing implicit gendered power dynamics in texts, CDA can transform textbooks into tools that promote equity and inclusion, aligning with the progressive values of the Merdeka Curriculum.

To ensure the continuous improvement of textbooks, feedback mechanisms involving diverse stakeholders—such as educators, gender experts, and students—should be incorporated into the development process. These collaborative efforts can help identify overlooked biases and refine content to better align with curriculum objectives. Additionally, training for textbook authors on gender-

sensitive language and representation is essential to mitigating unconscious biases during content creation. Educators also play a critical role in this process; by equipping them to use textbooks critically, students can be encouraged to analyze and question the narratives they encounter. This approach nurtures critical thinking and fosters active engagement with societal issues, key goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Recognizing and addressing the limitations of the methodologies used in this study is crucial for future improvements. While corpus-assisted CDA is a powerful tool for analyzing patterns in gender representation, it has potential limitations, such as the risk of misinterpreting textual nuances. To address this, future studies should combine quantitative analyses with qualitative approaches, such as focus group discussions with students and teachers, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how textbooks shape perceptions of gender roles. This holistic approach ensures that the findings inform actionable recommendations grounded in practical realities.

By implementing these strategies, curriculum design and textbook development can evolve to play a transformative role in promoting gender equity. Educational materials that fairly and positively represent all genders not only align with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum but also contribute to a broader societal shift toward inclusivity and equality. This aligns with the broader goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which seeks to foster independent and critical thinking among students, encouraging them to question and re-evaluate societal norms rather than passively accepting them (Nizeyimana et al., 2021).

The observed gender biases in the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks may be rooted in deep-seated cultural and institutional factors that shape societal norms and influence educational materials. Indonesian society, like many others, has historically been influenced by patriarchal values that prioritize male roles in leadership, authority, and decision-making, while assigning women secondary or supportive positions. These cultural norms may unconsciously permeate the work of textbook authors and editors, leading to the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes. Institutionally, the textbook development process might lack robust mechanisms for critical evaluation of gender representation, allowing existing biases to persist. Additionally, limited training on gender sensitivity for authors and educators may contribute to the replication of stereotypes, as creators may unintentionally reflect societal norms rather than challenge them. Addressing these issues requires systemic efforts, including incorporating gender equity as a core principle in curriculum policies, fostering awareness among authors and educators, and engaging diverse voices in the content creation and review processes.

2. Positive and Negative Construction

After analyzing three patterns of gender negative and positive construction from the textbooks, it could be concluded that the *English for Nusantara-Grade VII* textbook contributed the most in presenting gender characterizations, even though no negative and positive construction was found in this textbook. This is because the famous names in this textbook only mentioned names without characteristics. Pronouns remain the categories that provide the most significant characterization and construction.

Meanwhile, the *English for Nusantara-Grade VII* textbook did not find any negative construction or appear to have any characterization of negative construction. This textbook did not mention categories such as famous and fictional names. In this case, it is important to attach famous names or influential people with positive characteristics to present in the textbook the students will study (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Overall, this *English for Nusantara-Grade VII* textbook presented all the positive characteristics without any negative characteristics; this will be good for the students to apply and learn the positive characteristics in their life. However, due to the prevalent gender representation in textbooks, students develop their understanding of gender concepts and integrate some ideas into their own viewpoints. This underscores the importance of analyzing these textbooks to ensure that future English textbooks offer gender-balanced content while maintaining the necessary material for student learning (Ghosh, 2020).

In examining the characterizations given to male and female characters in English language textbooks, it becomes evident that traditional gender roles are often reinforced through the portrayal of these characters. Female characters are frequently depicted with traits such as shyness, kindness, and emotional expressiveness, which can suggest a more passive and nurturing role. They are often shown as dependent and modest, which may limit how female students perceive their potential roles in society (Lindsey, 2015). In contrast, male characters are generally characterized as brave, strong, and independent, embodying traits associated with leadership and power. These portrayals suggest a more active and dominant role for males, which can reinforce the idea that men are naturally suited for positions of authority and control.

In the latest series of English textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum, there has been some progress in depicting women as more active participants in various spheres, including sports and leadership roles. Women are shown as caring and engaged, taking on challenges and participating in activities that require physical and mental strength. This shift is encouraging, as it provides students with more diverse role models and challenges the traditional, passive female stereotypes (Mills & Mustapha, 2015).

However, there is still room for improvement in how both male and female characters are represented. For instance, while female characters are shown participating in activities like Pencak Silat and badminton, the representation of male characters could be expanded to include a wider range of attributes and roles beyond the traditional stereotypes. Both male and female representations should be balanced and should equally embody positive characteristics, so that students can see that strength, kindness, leadership, and empathy are not confined to one gender. By doing so, textbooks can help promote a more inclusive and equitable understanding of gender roles among students.

To achieve more balanced gender representation in future textbooks, authors and curriculum developers should adopt several strategies. First, they should ensure an equal distribution of male and female characters across all categories, including famous names, fictional names, and pronouns, with deliberate effort to attribute diverse traits to both genders. Textbooks should feature both genders in active, leadership-oriented roles as well as nurturing, supportive roles to break traditional stereotypes. Second, developers should collaborate with gender experts to review content for unconscious biases and ensure inclusive narratives. Third, authors can integrate stories and examples that highlight achievements of both men and women in diverse fields, promoting positive and inspiring role models for all genders. Additionally, illustrations and visuals in textbooks should reflect gender diversity, showing boys and girls equally participating in various activities, from academic and athletic to artistic and domestic pursuits. By implementing these strategies, future textbooks can contribute a more equitable and inclusive perception of gender roles among students.

Conclusion

The study examines gender representation in Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks for junior high school students, particularly focusing on the Merdeka curriculum. The research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus tools to analyze gender-related references, positive and negative constructions of gender, and overall gender visibility across the textbooks. It reveals that these textbooks, in gender references, have a range of gender references, including famous names, fictional names, ordinary names, generic nouns, and pronouns. Male references appear more frequently than female references, suggesting an imbalance in gender representation.

Meanwhile, in positive and negative constructions, these textbooks reveal that both positive and negative constructions are identified, with male characters portrayed with positive traits (e.g., smart, hard-working) and negative traits (e.g., tricks, rage). Female characters are generally portrayed more positively, with

bravery, kindness, and beauty traits.

In conclusion, while the Merdeka curriculum's ELT textbooks show some progress in gender representation, significant disparities remain. Addressing these imbalances is crucial for fostering an inclusive educational environment that empowers all students, regardless of gender.

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