



Investigating Gender Representation In Indonesian English Language Textbook

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Abstract

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Gender biases and stereotypes are still prevalent in language textbooks, although a few studies have identified instances of positive representation. This study investigates gender representation in the 7th-grade of Indonesian EFL textbooks published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MONECRT), which recently published with the new guideline of Merdeka Curriculum. Focusing on the portrayal of gendered character activities and domestic roles, the study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine both visual and verbal representations. Guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional framework and Van Leeuwen's elements of social practice, the findings revealed that activities portrayal of female was stereotyped as passive, dependent, needing others and characterized more evaluative. Furthermore, male portrayed as hasty and having poor time management. In contrast, the domestic role of gender portrayed equal as both father and mother depicted with housework activities including cooking and cleaning. To sum up, the portrayals of gendered character activities often perpetuate entrenched stereotypes, while emerging discourse shows positive representations of domestic roles. This study underscores the significance of increased awareness among teachers and textbook developers regarding gender-related issues in English education.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, gender representation, gender equality, English language teaching textbook*

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INTRODUCTION

Textbook plays significant role in English language teaching (ELT). In Indonesia ELT textbooks are provided and mandated by National Ministry of Education and Culture – Research and Technology (MONECRT). In which, the use of mandated books is regulated for public school. Textbooks are considered to be trusted resource that teachers and students use repetitively both in class and at home, arguably textbooks are deemed as the second most important factor in students' socialization process after teachers (Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei 2020; Riazi 2003). The materials and the contents of textbook play a crucial role in shaping students' social values. Textbooks are known to contain various elements that reflect real-life situation, cultural diversity (Lee and Li, 2020) as well gender equality (Lee, 2018). Thus, the representation of gender in textbooks has a significant impact on the development of language learners' gender identities as they provide a framework for how gender roles are perceived and valued in society.

From the past five years, gender issues in English as foreign language (EFL) language textbooks in Indonesia have been documented by many researchers (Ariyanto, 2018; Lestriyana, 2020; Suwarno, 2021; Rizkiyah, 2022). The findings reported various results, nonetheless the representations of gender still and should be concern of ELT textbook developer. Ideologically, visual content of published

textbook in Indonesia have to avoid ethnic-religious racial sentiments, gender bias, pornography content, bullying and violence (Direktorat Jenderal Peraturan Perundang-undangan, 2022). Nevertheless, biases and stereotypes still continue being reinforced in ELT textbooks. Such instance, Setyono (2018) examined the 10th through the 12th grade MONEC mandated EFL textbooks from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective. Focused on visual and textual discourses of female character, the finding revealed grade 10th textbook still reinforce stereotyped activities. The women were visually represented with stereotypical social practices such as gossiping and complimenting physical appearance, on top of housework activities such as cooking and baking. Although, a constructive portrayal of women also reported. In this case, a wider social role of woman as the 12th grade textbook depicts a Mayor of Surabaya, Tri Rismaharini.

Gender equality issues are a global concern, it was not unique to Indonesia only but many countries around the world as well. Researchers have conducted analysis in various countries to shed light on this issue. For instance, Lee, a prominent researcher on textbook analysis has contributed many analyses including Hong Kong and Australian ELT textbooks in 2010 (Lee & Collins, 2010), and Japanese textbook in 2014 (Lee, 2014;2018). What is more, gender inequality rooted in the patriarchal history of Muslim majority countries. It has been an ongoing debate and is evident in studies conducted in Iran (Salami & Ghajarieh, 2015; Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020), and Turkey (Aydinoğlu, 2014). Similarly, the curriculum in Indonesia has undergone frequent reforms to pursue gender equality over the past decades, resulting in the updating and revision of ELT textbooks to align with these changes. Earlier studies conducted in Indonesia primarily analyzed ELT textbooks aligned with the 2013 Curriculum. All discussed studies finding suggest gender equality were still debated issue. However, there has been limited investigation regarding gender representation on the recent MONECRT mandated ELT textbooks which aligned with *Merdeka Curriculum*.

At present, curriculum in Indonesia was on the progress of transitioning into new curriculum, *Merdeka Curriculum*. As a result, MONECRT mandated new ELT textbooks. However, this transition has created a gap in terms of gender representation within MONECRT mandated ELT textbooks, as in recent researches primarily focused within high school (Aulia, 2023) and elementary school textbooks (Awaliyah, 2022). To fill this gap, this research reports findings of gender representation on the newly ELT textbooks with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. As previous result findings show disparities, male dominant, and strong stereotyping, therefore it is important to conduct a study of gender representation on Indonesian ELT textbooks. Considering the significant role of textbooks in shaping students' perceptions of gender and identities. Thus, the chosen textbook was *English for Nusantara untuk SMP/MTs Kelas VII* [English for Nusantara dedicated for Middle School or Islamic Middle School Grade 7th]

Therefore, this research sought to answer the following questions: How are the activities of female and males represented visually and verbally? How are the portrayal of domestic roles of gendered characters represented visually and verbally? Supposedly, by examining the representation of gender in Indonesian ELT textbook, this research contributes to current global movements towards gender equality and recent emphasis on the inclusion of gender perspective in

education. Additionally, teachers would be more aware of selecting gender inclusive ELT textbooks. Consequently, students' understanding of gender roles and identity in society wouldn't be bound to traditional stereotypes.

METHODS

To address the research questions earlier a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research design was adopted. CDA is an interdisciplinary study of discourse that views language as social practice and takes into the context of language use (Wodak and Myer 2001). Qualitative analysis was implemented as it offers valuable insight into how discourse either perpetuates or challenges gender-based inequality. A CDA was employed to investigate the representation of genders in nationally mandated EFL textbooks through visual and verbal depictions. The visual and verbal artifacts analyzed were comic strips. The analysis was focused on the portrayal of male and female in terms of activities, and domestic roles. The study utilized Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model. Additionally, the study also adopted van Leeuwen's (2008) elements of social practices to identify and analyze gendered discourse in verbal and visual illustration.

The examined textbook was national curriculum English Language Teaching textbook, which was mandated by Indonesian Ministry of Education – Culture, Research and Technology. The textbook entitled *English for Nusantara untuk SMP/MTs Kelas VII* [English for Nusantara dedicated for 7th Grades of Middle School and Islamic Middle School]. Published by the MONECART in 2022, written based on *Merdeka* Curriculum and written by Dismayanti, I.L., Febrianti, Y., Nurlaelawati, I., Suharto, P.P., Fellani, A.J., Rahmadhani, R. Consisted Of 5 chapters and 264 pages.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

An Emergence of Positive Representation Alongside the Persistent Presence of Stereotypes and Bias in Activities portrayal.

Table 1 shows the variety of result in regards activities portrayed by gendered characters. Nearly all comic strips depicted in the examined textbooks presented with both genders. Out of five chapters and a total of twenty-four comic strips depictions, four were selected to be analyzed and discussed in regards of activities portrayal of gendered character. The stereotyped representation of female in the textbook can be seen on Text 1 and Figure 1.

Text 1: The written dialogue of comic strip Figure 1.

Andre : Hi, Galang how are you?

Galang: Fine thanks, how about you?

Andre : Yeah, I'm Ok. By the way, this is Monita.

Galang: Hi, Monita, nice to meet you.

Monita: Nice to meet you too, Galang.

Andre : Monita is our classmate, today is her first day at school.

Galang: Oh, I see.

Andre : Monita likes playing mobile games too.

Monita: And I also like drawing manga.

Galang: Cool, I love manga, but I can't draw.

Andre : You know we can play mobile games together.

Galang: The more, the merrier.

Monita: Right! By the way, I've got to find my seat. See you later.

Table 1. The portrayal of gender in the textbook

In Text 1 and Figure 1, a noticeable gender bias was evident. The scene was set within a school environment, indicated by the uniforms and context of the dialogue involving students engaging in social interaction. The initiator of the conversation was male, clearly portrayed through his gestures and dialogues. Monita's positioned behind Andre, and her hand gesture placed towards his back, symbolizes a female character introduced by a male counterpart, rather than

Chapter	Theme	Description	The portrayal of gender	Page
1 & 5	About me & This is My School	The depictions of male student introducing his female friend to another person.	Female students represented and dependent.	p. 24, 206
2	Culinary and Me	Depictions of male and female domestically having equal roles.	Father and mother depicted doing same housework activities (cooking).	p. 61, 64,
2	Culinary and Me	Depictions of male ate his breakfast at school.	Male student stereotyped as hasty and having poor time management skill.	p. 62
3	Home sweet home	Depictions of male doing cleaning activities and house chores.	All family members portrayed cleaning the house regardless of genders and domestic roles.	p. 133
3	Home sweet home	Depictions of female and male have distinct characteristic.	Female student characterized strongly evaluative than male.	p. 106
5	This is My school	The depictions of female having conversation in regard to join <i>Pencak Silat</i> extracurricular activity.	Female student portrayed as member of <i>Pencak Silat</i> extracurricular activities.	p. 222

independently introducing herself. This reflects a recurring pattern of male intervention and female dependency in social scenarios. Furthermore, Monita consistently responds to utterances made by Andre and Galang, reinforcing a dynamic where the male characters steer the conversation. This portrayal not only

suggests male dominance in interactions but also positions Monita as a passive participant. This aligns with prevailing gender norms and stereotypes that associate females with passivity and dependency, contrasting with the active role attributed to males (Namatende-Sakwa, 2018). Consequently, this portrayal contributes to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, portraying females as passive and needing male intervention. The visual cues and dialogues collectively underscore gender bias and its potential influence on perpetuating societal stereotypes.

Figure 1. Visual illustration of text 1 (p. 24)



Figure 2. Visual illustration/comic depiction of text 2 (p. 206)

Text 2. A Similar dialogue style in line with text 1 (p.206).

Galang : Hi, Monita, how's your day?

Monita : It's great.

Galang : Monita, this is Pipit. She is a new classmate. Pipit, this is Monita.

Monita : Hi, Pipit, nice to meet you.

Pipit : Hi, Monita. Nice to meet you too.

Galang : What is our next subject after the school break, Monita?

Monita : It is science with Pak Romy, we will learn at the science laboratory.

Pipit : Oh really? Where is the science laboratory?

Monita : It's next to the library, we can go there together.

Pipit : Ok, thank you Monita. I just can't wait to study with Pak Romy.

A similar comic strip that depicts same gender stereotype was also found in the same chapter (p. 26) and chapter 5 (p. 206). In the illustration of text 2 (chapter 5) the material action was similar, which male introduced his female friend to another person. In this case, Galang introduced Pipit to Monita. The same gesture was also depicted, which Pipit was standing behind Galang. On top of that, Galang (male) was the one who held the conversation as well. As Galang was the one who initiates, introduces, and asks further theme question. In other words, this representation may indicate that Pipit was perceived as needing an introduction which was a similar case to Monita. The representation of gender, particularly female in these chapters of the textbook still adhere to stereotypical patterns, making it susceptible to gender bias. This is very concerning since textbooks represent target language identities and culture portrayal (Tomlison, 2012), which may result a gender identity of female that is passive and dependent.

Apart from stereotyped representation of female, the stereotyped representation of male was also appeared. Depicted in figure 3, Galang can be seen eating his fried rice which he claimed to be his breakfast. *Nasi goreng* (fried rice) is one of Indonesia's national dishes that served as main course. The dialogues of Galang suggest he didn't have time to have a proper breakfast at home, as a result of waking up late and hurried to school. Furthermore, Galang was depicted eating his food in a quick manner. On the other hand, Monita was having a snack rather than a main course, which implies that she already had breakfast. Moreover, Monita responded to Galang, "It's late for breakfast now", the statement and lexical choices given by Monita suggests it was past the usual time for having breakfast, based on "late" emphasis. Thus, these eating activities and dialogues depicted may happened during school recess. This portrayal of Galang stereotyped male as hasty and having poor time management. Compares to female which was the opposite. In other words, these depictions make men and women distinct. This depiction of negative masculine gender stereotypes could possibly shaped gender identities of male students. Furthermore, male portrayal having poor time management may linked to playing mobile game. As Male portrayed having a tendency of liking mobile game illustrated frequently, apart from figure 1 the depictions also appeared on another comic strip (p. 21, 30, 31).



Figure 3. Comic strip represents activities at school (p. 61 & 62).



Figure 4. Comic strip depicting an evaluative remark (p. 106).

A similar finding to previous study was also re-appeared on the textbook examined. Ariyanto (2018), drawing conclusion from Parviz and Gorjian (2014) study and his textbook analysis that female was stereotyped as “strongly self-reflexive and evaluative.” As seen in figure 4, Monita presents evaluative remarks. In this case, Monita was making a positive evaluation of Galang’s house, expressing admiration for its appearance and asking about the material used for the walls. The lexical choice of “nice house” and the curiosity about the walls being made of wood indicate that Monita was providing her subjective evaluation of the house’s quality and design. Furthermore, Monita provides her evaluation on the radio. On the other hand, Andre (M-white shirt) does not use evaluation language despite having same curiosity as Monita. Therefore, despite different curriculum and year of published the 7th grade ELT textbook that mandated by MONECRT still has same gender treatment, which female and male were portrayed distinctly as both genders do not have equal opportunities to utilize the target language for evaluating or describing (Ariyanto, 2018).



Figure 5. Comic strip depicting female extracurricular activity. (p. 222).

On the contrary, a positive representation was also depicted. Drawing from affirmative response which Leni question and the detailed information, Pipit was depicted as a member of *Pencak Silat* extracurricular activity. *Pencak Silat* is a name of a martial arts, a tradition of Indonesia and one the cultures of Indonesia, which is one of culture heritage from Indonesia acclaimed by UNESCO. Later Pipit describes the activities in *Pencak Silat* extracurricular activities, which suggests the activities were physically demanding. Eventually Leni later shows interest and ultimately will join the extracurricular activity. This finding proves contrast to earlier findings. As earlier findings female stereotyped performing in activities that

less physically demanding such as knitting, cooking, and cleaning (Ndura, 2004). Female often characterized as passive and generally weak (Lee & Collins, 2010), contrary to male which depicted with physical demanding activities and associated with physical strength (Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Lee, 2018). To sum up, traditionally physical demanding activities were often associated with males, while females were stereotypically depicted in more passive activities. However, in the textbook examined, females depicted engaging in activities that were traditionally considered masculine and physically demanding, particularly a martial art. This portrayal once more challenges the traditional stereotypes of gender and promotes a more diverse and inclusive representation of gender.

Challenging Traditional Stereotypes of Domestic Roles through Gender Representation.

Contrary to both recent findings and traditional stereotypes, the depiction of domestic roles in the examined textbooks demonstrates a significant departure from traditional norms. The departure from traditional stereotypes was heavily represented throughout the examined textbook. Furthermore, an enhanced understanding of representation was attainable through the recurring appearances of gendered characters, as the comic strips connected one to another. In figure 6, the characters depicted in the comic strip revolve around Monita's family. As seen in figure 6, there were four characters presented, Monita, Monita's father, mother, and sister. In this comic strip, Monita's father depicted as the one who cooked their lunch. Based on the depiction of the foods and beverages that he brought, along with the presentation style which he wore an apron. Furthermore, Monita's father's speech process also corroborates this. This portrayal indicates an attempt to leave traditional stereotype. A departure from traditional stereotype which women/girl were usually in charge of doing housework and serving family members (Setyono, 2018). This change was quite significant to reduce gender domestic roles that depicted poorly compared to previous textbooks and towards gender equality.



Figure 6. Comic strip depicting cultural and gender role representation (p. 64)

Setyono (2018) contends that Islamic teachings have significantly contributed to the practice of stereotyped representations of females. Islamic doctrine endorses the notion of men as family leaders, relegating women to domestic roles focused on serving family members. Consequently, the roles of women are often confined to household duties. As Setyono (2018) emphasizes, the portrayal of females engaging in house chores and cooking underscores the significance of domestic skills, which society expects women to possess for their future roles. Historically, Indonesian women have typically juggled dual responsibilities, serving as both homemakers and career women. However, this finding indicates a departure from conventional norms, as both male and female figures are portrayed equally engaged in household tasks, such as cooking, as evident in Figure 3 where Monita mentions her mother made Banana Fritters, and the portrayal of the father in Figure 6. This portrayal suggests a departure from the traditional Islamic roots and stereotypes, symbolizing the representation of both genders as independent characters with equal domestic skills and roles.



Figure 7. Comic strip depicting cleaning activities (p. 133)

Furthermore, with regard to the depiction of housework beyond cooking in the textbook, cleaning activities are portrayed equally as well. Illustrated in Figure 7, two male characters Galang and Galang's father were shown engaged in house cleaning activities. The speech processes within the comic strip reveal that Pak Rahmansyah (Galang's father) collaborates with Galang to clean up the yard. This depiction signifies that domestic roles are equally shared by both fathers and mothers, transcending gender boundaries. This was a significant departure from traditional stereotypes. Contrasting the recent findings and earlier textbooks which predominantly assigned domestic chores to women such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and other household tasks (Lestriyana, 2020; Suwarno, 2021)—these results showcase a modern view of gender roles in stark contrast. The portrayal in these textbooks reflects a progressive representation where both males and females share household responsibilities more equitably.

Discussion

Based on the findings, it can be seen that the textbook was bound from gender bias and stereotypes. The findings suggest that through visual and verbal portrayal neither male nor female were free from biases and stereotypes. In social activities, females were portrayed as passive, and dependent. As they were portrayed many times in need of others' intervention to get to know a new person. Rather than introducing themselves, which the latter would portray female as strong and independent. Not only female was stereotyped, but also male. Male portrayed as the opposite of female, which male portrayed as hasty character on top of poor managing time. As male depicted in hurried to school and eating in a quick manner. These such representations may perpetuate the notion that female was weak, passive and dependent, while also reinforce the stereotype of male as hasty and irresponsible. Apart from stereotypes, bias was found as well. Moreover, the findings suggest female held favoritism as a gender who were more evaluative than male. A distinction characteristic between male and female, which female portrayed strongly as evaluative. This finding was in line with the previous finding of the 7th grade textbook analysis (Ariyanto, 2018).

The portrayal of social practices was concerning due to students' regular interaction with them, as they perform these actions in the target language. According to Yang (2016), gender bias can spread in ELT classrooms when

students integrate social practices from textbook content. On top of that, the representations of gender in the textbook may shape student's social aspect (gender identities). The portrayal of females as passive and weak, and males as hasty, has the potential to impact students' perceptions of gender negatively. As noted by Ullah and Skelton (2013), gender stereotyping can lead to students developing unfavorable views on gender. Furthermore, these gender identities could potentially impact their academic and career decisions. Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) highlight that an altered perception of the two genders might detrimentally affect the comprehension and retention of information among young and susceptible students, impede their emotional growth, and influence their choices in education and profession.

Contrastingly, alongside depictions that adhere to traditional stereotypes and instances of gender bias, there were also discernible instances of positive gender representations. Notably, in terms of domestic roles, both fathers and mothers were depicted with equal responsibility. This contradicts earlier findings that emphasized women, particularly mothers, as solely responsible for household chores and family care (Setyono, 2018; Lestriyana, 2020; Suwarno, 2021). The current findings challenge this perspective by illustrating shared responsibilities. Additionally, portrayals of both fathers and mothers actively participating in house cleaning activities counter stereotypes as well. These multifaceted representations can yield significant impacts on individuals' perceptions and societal attitudes toward gender roles particularly domestic role in family, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Incorporating such diverse gender representations in educational materials could contribute to fostering a more balanced and equal understanding of gender roles among students.

Furthermore, females were also portrayed as an active character. In social activities, as discussed earlier female portrayed as passive and in need of other or dependent. However, in term of sport activities female has good representation. In the findings, can be seen that two females were interested in martial arts extracurricular activities, *Pencak Silat*. It is worth noting that the presentation style of the characters were presented wearing uniform and the actions were only merely conversation/chatting. Although verbally through the lexical choices suggests Pipit was already part of the extracurricular activity while Leni was on her ways of joining. Such representation was one of breakthrough of breaking stereotypes of female that often depicted as passive, generally weak and performing in activities that less physically demanding (Ndura, 2004; Lee and Collins, 2008, 2010; Lee, 2014). This portrayal of female engaging in martial arts not only challenge traditional perceptions but also highlights the potential of diversified gender within a broader range of activities.

In conclusion, the 7th grade MONEICRT mandated ELT textbook entitled *English for Nusantara* reflects enduring stereotypes and biases in visual and verbal depictions. Both male and female were subject to such portrayals, along with a re-emergence of bias towards females (Ariyanto, 2018). While reinforcing traditional stereotypes, the findings also reveal instances of positive gender representations. Notably, the textbook challenges these norms by showcasing males involved in housework activities such as cooking and cleaning, and females participating in physically demanding activities. Nevertheless, these visual and verbal depictions of

challenging traditional stereotypes were a good sign of progress towards gender equality and the process eliminating stereotypes between genders.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the portrayal of male and female characters in the 7th grade MONECART mandated ELT textbook. Focused on activities and domestic roles portrayal of gendered characters. The inclusion of target language excerpts and visual artifacts, such as comic strip with speech bubbles, facilitated the analysis of gendered discourses. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) conducted revealed that while gendered discourses from both male and female persistently reinforce gender stereotypes and biases. Particularly in activities portrayal, drawing conclusion from findings female was portrayed as passive, dependent and needing others in social activities. The stereotyped was not presented to female only but male as well, the finding suggest male portrayed hasty and lack of time management. On the contrary, the finding shows a breakthrough from stereotypical activities of female that often depicted as weak and restricted to perform less physically demanding activities. Drawing from the portrayal of female as member of *Pencak Silat* extracurricular activities, a traditional martial art of Indonesia which requires high physical performance.

Promisingly, emerging discourse also showcased positive gender representations, particularly in the context of domestic roles within gendered character portrayals. The findings revealed that both men and women, characterized as fathers and mothers, were equally represented in housework activities. Both fathers and mothers engaged in the role of serving family members and taking care of family, exemplified through activities such as cooking. Furthermore, father and son also portrayed engaging cleaning activities. These findings contrast with previous research, where housework was often depicted as being primarily associated with women and girls. This suggest that textbooks authors and developers have taking account in addressing potential stereotypes and biases, aligning with global movement for quality education and gender equality (SDGs) in Indonesian English as Foreign Language (EFL) education. Moving forward, these findings hold significances for book, curriculum developments, teacher, and advancing gender equality efforts within the educational landscape.

The research design employed a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze visual and verbal depictions, specifically comic strips and group pictures. However, this approach left gaps in terms of textual data and learning tasks. Future studies should address these gaps to offer a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, while this study focused on activities and domestic roles, there remain various aspects of gender representation that could be explored for potential stereotypes and biases. To expand the scope, future research endeavors could employ mixed method approaches and consider other critical discourse analysis frameworks, such as post-structural feminist analysis, to further enrich the exploration of gender dimensions within language education.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Concerning the research, authorship, and publication of this paper, the author(s) reported no potential conflicts of interest.

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