

UNVEILING GENDER BIAS THROUGH CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: REPRESENTATION IN *ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA* MERDEKA CURRICULUM TEXTBOOK

Andi Robby Samawa^{1*}, Iwan Jazadi².

^{1,2} English Education Department, STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa

Article Info

Article history:

Received July 12, 2025

Revised August 1, 2025

Accepted August 5, 2025

Keyword:

Gender Representation, Critical
Discourse Analysis, ELT
Textbook, Merdeka
Curriculum, Multimodal
Discourse

Abstract

This study critically examines gender representation in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VII textbook, the flagship English Language Teaching (ELT) material for Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum*. Using a qualitative design and Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), twelve multimodal extracts from Chapter 1 were analyzed to uncover how male and female identities are portrayed through text and visuals. The findings reveal a clear imbalance in both frequency and agency: male characters appear nearly three times more often than female characters and are consistently depicted as active protagonists with hobbies and social interactions, while female figures are limited to passive or relational roles, such as sisters or unnamed peers. Despite the curriculum's stated goal of inclusivity and gender equity, the textbook subtly reproduces patriarchal ideologies and hegemonic masculinity through muted female voices and restricted social positioning. These results echo global patterns of gender bias in ELT materials and highlight a critical gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. The study concludes by offering practical implications for teachers, textbook authors, and policymakers, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive material development and critical literacy approaches in ELT classrooms.

Copyright © 2025 STKIP Paracendekia NW Sumbawa.
All rights reserved.

✉ Corresponding author:

Email Address: plurdotcom.ars@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks remain a central resource in language learning despite the growing availability of digital and multimodal materials. They not only structure teaching sequences but also implicitly convey values, social norms, and ideologies (Garton & Graves, 2014). In Indonesia, the recent *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Freedom Curriculum) emphasizes student-centered learning, granting teachers and students greater flexibility in exploring learning materials independently (Dharma et al., 2020). The official English textbook for Grade VII, *English for Nusantara*, is a primary tool to achieve these goals. It integrates various genres—descriptive, narrative, procedural, and analytical texts—designed to foster communicative competence while reflecting cultural values (Adawiyah & Oktavianti, 2023).

However, textbooks also function as ideological instruments that shape learners' perceptions of the world. They reproduce cultural knowledge, including notions of gender roles and power relations (Apple, 2004). Previous studies have shown that textbooks often reflect gender stereotypes, portraying men as active agents with prestigious roles, while women are depicted as passive supporters or confined to domestic and relational identities (Harwood, 2010; Mustapha, 2012; Suwarno et al., 2021). Such unbalanced representation can subtly reinforce patriarchal values and limit students' understanding of gender equality (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007).

In English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, gendered biases may appear visually (through illustrations and photographs) and linguistically (through pronoun usage, names, and activity descriptions). For instance, men are often associated with outdoor activities and leadership, whereas women are linked to emotional or family-oriented roles (Barton, 2012; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). Studies in Asia and Africa found that ELT textbooks frequently marginalize female characters, either through omission or through stereotypical depictions that limit female agency (Hussain et al., 2023; Huang, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, several studies confirm similar trends. Suwarno et al. (2021) combined corpus linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal hidden masculine dominance in government-distributed English textbooks. Adawiyah and Oktavianti (2023) conducted a corpus-assisted study of *Kurikulum Merdeka* ELT materials and found persistent imbalances in gendered references. While some recent books attempt more inclusive representation, subtle forms of bias remain. Importantly, these biases may contradict the curriculum's stated principles of equality and inclusivity.

Although there is a growing body of research on gender representation in Indonesian ELT textbooks, few studies apply a multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focusing on the *English for Nusantara* textbook, which is the latest standardized material under the 2022 Merdeka Curriculum. Existing studies mostly adopt quantitative content analysis or lexical frequency approaches, without deeply interrogating how visuals and texts jointly construct gender identities (Fatmawati et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2024). Moreover, many studies focus on primary school textbooks (Anjarwati et al., 2022; Salsabila et al., 2023), while investigations at the junior high school level remain scarce.

Furthermore, gender equality is explicitly promoted within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, yet there is limited empirical evaluation of whether the *English for Nusantara* textbook aligns with these principles. The hidden curriculum embedded in visual narratives, dialogues, and character roles has not been sufficiently explored through a critical lens. Thus, a CDA-based study can reveal how language, imagery, and power relations intersect to reproduce—or challenge—traditional gender norms.

This study contributes three novelties. First, it focuses on the most current textbook: It analyzes *English for Nusantara* Grade VII, a flagship ELT textbook officially published by Indonesia's Ministry of Education in 2023. Second, it integrates Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to examine textual, visual, and socio-ideological layers of representation simultaneously (Fairclough,

1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Last, it evaluates whether the textbook fulfills *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s stated commitment to gender equality in education.

By combining linguistic analysis, visual semiotics, and critical theory, the study provides a more holistic understanding of how gender is constructed in ELT materials for Indonesian junior high schools.

Based on these gaps, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How are male and female characters represented visually and textually in English for Nusantara Grade VII? (2) Does the textbook reflect the principles of gender equality stated in the Merdeka Curriculum? (3) What implicit ideologies and power relations about gender are reproduced through the textbook's discourse? Accordingly, the objectives of this research are: (1) To identify patterns of gender representation in both visual and linguistic forms in the textbook; (2) To evaluate whether the representation aligns with gender equality principles promoted by the curriculum; (3) To uncover underlying ideologies and their potential impact on students' perceptions of gender roles.

This research offers theoretical, pedagogical, and policy significance. Theoretically, it enriches the application of CDA in ELT material analysis, bridging multimodal discourse and educational ideology. Pedagogically, it equips teachers with critical awareness to select and adapt materials that promote inclusivity. For policymakers and textbook authors, it provides empirical evidence to guide more equitable and gender-sensitive material development in future curriculum reforms. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing efforts to ensure that ELT textbooks do not merely teach language, but also foster values of equality and social justice in Indonesian classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

A textbook is not merely a collection of linguistic input or pedagogical exercises but also a carrier of cultural values and social ideologies. According to Tarigan (in Rahmawati, 2017), a textbook serves as a structured learning resource prepared by experts to guide students' knowledge acquisition systematically. However, as Apple (2004) emphasizes, textbooks function as ideological state apparatuses, embedding dominant social norms and reinforcing power structures. Within English Language Teaching (ELT), textbooks shape learners' perspectives on language, culture, and social roles (Garton & Graves, 2014).

The *English for Nusantara* textbook, designed under Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka*, ostensibly promotes inclusivity and cultural awareness. However, prior research suggests that even recent textbooks may unintentionally reproduce gender stereotypes and patriarchal narratives (Suwarno et al., 2021). Thus, a critical interrogation of textbook content is necessary to uncover its hidden curriculum, especially regarding gender. Gender differs from sex in that it is socially constructed and context-dependent. Whereas sex refers to biological differences, gender encompasses roles, responsibilities, and expectations assigned by society (Kartini & Maulana, 20

19; Nurjannah, 2022). Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity explains how certain masculine traits become culturally dominant, marginalizing alternative masculinities and femininities. In educational discourse, such dominance often manifests as male-centered narratives, privileging male characters as agents of action and relegating female characters to supportive or relational roles (Mustapha, 2012).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that reveals how language, power, and ideology interact in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). CDA examines both explicit and implicit meanings in texts, focusing on how discourse reproduces social inequalities. Fairclough's three-dimensional model includes: (1) Textual Analysis – examining vocabulary, grammar, and visuals. (2) Discursive Practice – analyzing how texts are produced and interpreted. (3) Social Practice – linking discourse to broader social and ideological contexts.

Van Dijk (2001) further emphasizes that CDA exposes how discourse supports or challenges dominant ideologies, such as patriarchy. In the educational context, CDA helps reveal how textbooks construct gendered identities and perpetuate hidden biases (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Relevant Studies

Numerous studies highlight gender imbalance in ELT textbooks globally. In Pakistan, Ullah and Skelton (2013) found that public-sector textbooks disproportionately depicted men as leaders and women as passive figures. Similarly, Huang (2023) examined Chinese junior high school textbooks and discovered persistent female underrepresentation in narratives and illustrations.

In Indonesia, Suwarno et al. (2021) combined CDA and corpus linguistics to analyze government-distributed ELT textbooks, revealing symbolic male dominance and stereotypical portrayals of women as caretakers or siblings. Fatmawati et al. (2022) confirmed similar trends, showing that Indonesian EFL textbooks marginalize female identities through omission or limited professional roles.

Several studies have specifically examined *Merdeka Curriculum* materials. Adawiyah and Oktavianti (2023) conducted a corpus-assisted study on new ELT textbooks, finding improved but still unequal gender representation. They reported that male characters remained numerically dominant and had more diverse emotional and social roles. Zahra et al. (2024) also analyzed Indonesian ELT textbooks and found that visual content subtly reinforced traditional gender norms despite textual attempts at inclusivity.

Other relevant research includes: (1) Anjarwati et al. (2023) analyzed a primary school textbook (*My Next Word*) using Porreca's (1984) framework, revealing male dominance in job-related visibility. (2) Salsabila et al. (2023) explored gender in *English in Mind Student's Book 3* for high school, finding male protagonists frequently central to the narrative. (3) Nazimi and Hatifi (2023) conducted a CDA of Afghan textbooks, demonstrating how cultural ideologies shaped gendered discourse.

These studies collectively underscore the pervasiveness of gender bias in ELT textbooks across different levels and contexts, emphasizing the need for critical evaluation of newer materials like *English for Nusantara*.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine how English for Nusantara Grade VII represents gender both visually and linguistically. The framework enables a multimodal analysis that integrates textual and visual elements, providing a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed. At the textual level, the analysis focuses on how male and female characters are portrayed in terms of frequency, agency, activities, and relational roles. It looks closely at how names, pronouns, dialogues, and visual positioning contribute to the construction of gender identities within the textbook. Moving beyond description, the discursive practice level explores how the textbook, as an institutional product, reflects curriculum policies and wider societal expectations of gender. This level considers how the authors' choices and the textbook's intended audience contribute to the shaping of gendered narratives. Finally, the social practice level connects these textbook discourses to broader social ideologies, particularly those rooted in Indonesia's patriarchal cultural context, while also evaluating whether these discourses align with the Merdeka Curriculum's stated goal of promoting gender equality.

In addition to Fairclough's CDA model, the study draws on Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity to interpret why male-centered narratives persist in educational materials, even in contexts where inclusivity is emphasized in policy. By combining CDA with gender theory, this research provides a critical lens to evaluate the extent to which the textbook supports or undermines the curriculum's vision of inclusivity.

From the literature reviewed, several important insights emerge. Textbooks are not neutral; rather, they function as ideological tools that shape learners' social understanding and reinforce particular worldviews. Gender imbalance is a recurrent phenomenon across educational contexts and levels, with textbooks consistently privileging male characters in both visibility and agency. CDA has proven to be an effective tool to reveal hidden power relations in discourse that traditional content analysis may overlook, especially when considering both linguistic and visual modes of representation.

However, very few studies have focused specifically on English for Nusantara Grade VII, the flagship junior high school textbook of the Merdeka Curriculum. Existing research tends to rely heavily on quantitative content analysis, often missing the deeper ideological implications embedded in multimodal discourse. By combining visual and textual analysis within a critical framework, this study fills that gap and contributes new evidence on how gender equality is operationalized—or, in some cases, undermined—in the most recent Indonesian ELT materials.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Qualitative research allows the exploration of social phenomena within their natural context, emphasizing rich descriptions rather than numerical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design is particularly suited to investigating how gender ideologies are subtly embedded in textbook discourse. CDA was adopted because it provides a critical lens to examine how language and visuals reproduce or challenge social hierarchies and power relations (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

By combining qualitative description and CDA, the study aimed to uncover the linguistic and visual representations of gender in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for Grade VII. This approach aligns with similar studies analyzing gender ideologies in educational materials (Nazimi & Hatifi, 2023; Suwarno et al., 2021), where CDA has been proven effective in revealing both explicit and hidden gendered meanings.

Research Setting and Object

The study focused on the textbook *English for Nusantara* Grade VII, which was officially published in 2023 by Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as the standard material for junior high schools under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This textbook was selected because it represents the most current and nationally standardized ELT resource, thus reflecting the government's latest pedagogical and ideological stance on education.

Although the initial plan was to analyze three chapters (beginning, middle, and end), Chapter 1 ("About Me") was ultimately selected as the core data set. This chapter introduces students' self-identity and social roles, making it an ideal entry point to observe how gender is constructed in foundational narratives. Moreover, Chapter 1 contained a rich variety of multimodal texts, including: (1) The book cover illustration, (2) Three comic strips, (3) Four worksheet visuals, (4) Narrative and dialogue texts introducing characters.

These diverse elements provided sufficient data for an in-depth CDA while maintaining analytical feasibility.

Data sources

Two types of data were examined: (1) Visual data: Images, comic strips, and cover illustrations depicting characters and their activities. (2) Textual data: Dialogues, narratives, and lexical items (names, pronouns, professions, hobbies) related to gender roles.

A total of twelve multimodal extracts were purposively selected based on their relevance to gender representation. Selection criteria included: (1) Presence of human figures identifiable by gender, (2)

Use of gendered pronouns or character names, (3) Situational contexts where identity, interaction, or activity could reflect gender roles.

This purposive sampling strategy aligns with similar CDA studies on textbooks (Huang, 2023; Jamil et al., 2024).

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through document analysis. The researcher systematically reviewed all visual and textual components of Chapter 1. Each extract was digitally cataloged, annotated, and coded for potential gender indicators.

The key steps were: (1) Initial Screening – Identifying all sections containing male and female representations. (2) Extraction – Capturing relevant visuals (cover, comic strips, worksheet images) and textual excerpts (dialogues, self-introduction passages). (3) Categorization – Organizing the extracts into analytical units (e.g., visual vs textual, active vs passive representation).

This approach ensured that both visible representation (what is shown) and symbolic absence (what is omitted) could be critically examined.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model: (1) Textual Analysis (Description) Examined linguistic features (pronoun usage, naming patterns, hobbies, professions) and visual cues (character positioning, activity, gestures). (2) Discursive Practice (Interpretation) Investigated how the textbook's authors constructed meaning and how readers (students) might interpret gendered discourse. (3) Social Practice (Explanation) Connected textbook representations to broader social ideologies and the *Merdeka Curriculum*'s stated goal of inclusivity.

To operationalize these dimensions, five guiding questions were adapted (see Table 1).

Table 1. Guiding questions

CDA Dimension	Guiding Question	Focus
Textual Analysis	What is shown or omitted about male/female characters?	Visibility, naming, pronouns, activities
Identity Construction	How are male and female subjects positioned?	Active vs passive roles
Discursive Practice	What ideologies are promoted through the text?	Values, norms, stereotypes
Social Practice	Who benefits or is marginalized?	Power relations, social implications
Pedagogical	How might this shape student perceptions?	Classroom effects, hidden

CDA Dimension	Guiding Question	Focus
Impact		curriculum

This framework ensured a systematic interrogation of gender representation across linguistic, visual, and socio-ideological layers, following the approach of Machin and Mayr (2012) for multimodal CDA.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To enhance credibility and reliability, several strategies were employed:

- Triangulation: Findings were cross-verified by examining both textual and visual data and comparing them with existing literature (Fatmawati et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2024).
- Peer Debriefing: Two ELT colleagues reviewed the coding scheme and preliminary analysis to reduce researcher bias (Fikri & Irwandi, 2024).
- Reflexivity: The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to acknowledge personal assumptions and positionality during analysis (Suwastini et al., 2023).
- Audit Trail: A detailed record of extract selection, coding decisions, and analytical steps was maintained to ensure transparency and replicability (Nazimi & Hatifi, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

As this study analyzed publicly available textbook materials, no direct human participants were involved, minimizing ethical risks. However, the researcher ensured that all interpretations remained faithful to the textbook content without misrepresentation.

Alignment with Results

This methodological approach enabled the identification of quantitative patterns (e.g., frequency of male vs female visuals) and qualitative nuances (e.g., male-centered narratives and stereotypical activities). The Results section later presents these findings in detail through frequency tables, pie charts, and illustrative quotes, all derived from the analytical framework described above.

RESULTS

Overview of the Data

The analysis focused on twelve extracts from *English for Nusantara* Grade VII textbook under the 2022 Merdeka Curriculum. The extracts included the book cover, three comic strips, four worksheets, one unit structure page, and several supporting texts. In total, 15 visual representations and 32 textual excerpts containing gender indicators (names, pronouns, professions, hobbies, or activities) were examined.

From the visual data, male characters appeared significantly more frequently than female characters. Textually, male names and pronouns dominated the narrative, often appearing as the central actors in stories and dialogues. Female characters were present, but primarily in supporting or relational roles, such as “sisters” or unnamed “friends.”

Visual Representation of Gender

The visual representations in the textbook show numerical and positional imbalance. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of gender in illustrations.

Table 2. Distribution of Gender in Visual Illustrations

No	Type of Visual	Male Characters	Female Characters	Total
1	Cover illustration	2	1	3
2	Comic strips (3 episodes)	5	2	7
3	Worksheet visuals (4 items)	4	1	5
Total		11	4	15

As illustrated in Table 1, male figures appeared almost three times more often than female ones. On the book cover titled “*About Me*”, two male students flank a single female student positioned at the center. While this positioning avoids complete invisibility of females, the surrounding male characters implicitly frame the visual narrative. A bar chart (Figure 1) would show a clear dominance of male presence across all visual categories.

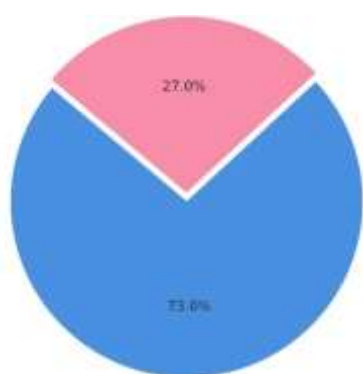


Figure 1. Proportion of Gender in Textbook Illustrations
(Male: 73% | Female: 27%)

Beyond frequency, the activity roles in visuals also reveal a gender pattern. Male students are often depicted engaging in active hobbies such as fishing or sports, while female students are shown only in neutral or passive poses, like smiling, winking, or standing beside male peers.

For example, the cover page presents a girl making a playful “peace” sign, while a boy confidently gestures a thumbs-up. In *Unit 2: I Love Fishing*, the only activity visualized is Galang fishing, with no equivalent scene showing a girl’s hobby or agency.

Linguistic Representation of Gender

The textual analysis revealed a male-centered narrative structure, with male characters frequently introduced as protagonists. Table 2 shows the frequency of gendered names and pronouns:

Table 3. Frequency of Gendered References in Texts

Type of Reference	Male	Female
Proper names	7	2
Pronouns (he/his)	21	–
Pronouns (she/her)	–	6
Professions/hobbies	5	1

The most frequently mentioned character is Galang, who appears in three out of four units. In contrast, no female character is given a standalone storyline. Even when female family members are introduced, they are defined relationally (e.g., “*I have two sisters*”) rather than as autonomous individuals.

A typical textual extract reads:

“My name is Galang. I am from Kalimantan. I love fishing after school with my friends.” (Unit 2: *I Love Fishing*)

Here, the male hobby—fishing—is explicitly linked to outdoor activity and agency. Meanwhile, female characters only appear at the end of the comic strip as Galang’s sisters:

“I have two sisters. One is in junior high school, and the other is in primary school.”

No details about the sisters’ hobbies, interests, or achievements are provided.

Pronoun usage further underscores the imbalance. The pronoun he/his is used three times more often than she/her throughout the chapter. Moreover, masculine references are associated with adventurous or productive actions, whereas feminine references are either neutral or invisible.

Thematic Representation and Activity Roles

When examining the thematic content of each unit, male perspectives consistently frame the narrative:

- Unit 1: Galang from Kalimantan
 - Focuses on self-introduction through Galang's life story.
- Unit 2: I Love Fishing
 - Centers on Galang's hobby, fishing.
- Unit 3: Galang and Friends
 - Again foregrounds Galang, with "friends" serving as background figures.

No female character appears as the title figure in any unit. Female identities remain implicit, secondary, or attached to male roles.

For example, in the comic strip "*Galang's Introduction*", dialogue shows male characters exchanging personal information and discussing hobbies. Meanwhile, female figures appear only briefly, standing in the background without speaking lines.

Andre: "What's your hobby?"

Galang: "I love fishing. What about you?"

Andre: "I like mobile gaming. Maybe we can play together."

Notably, **no girl participates in this dialogue**, reinforcing a boys-only social space.

Summary of Gender Representation Patterns

The analysis of visual and textual data yields three **major findings**:

1. Numerical Imbalance
 - Male characters appear three times more often in both images and texts.
2. Activity and Agency Gap
 - Male characters are depicted as active protagonists with defined hobbies and social interactions, while females are passive or relational figures without independent roles.
3. Narrative Centrality of Male Perspective
 - Unit titles, dialogues, and storylines consistently center on Galang, marginalizing female experiences and perspectives.

In summary, the textbook attempts to maintain surface-level inclusivity by including at least one female figure on the cover and in some visuals. However, deeper analysis shows a persistent male-dominated narrative structure, reinforcing subtle gender biases in both visual and linguistic representation.

DISCUSSION

RQ1: Visual and Textual Gender Representation

The first research question asked: How are male and female characters represented visually and textually in *English for Nusantara* Grade VII? The Results showed a clear numerical dominance of male characters—73% in illustrations and nearly triple the mention of male names and pronouns compared to female ones. Male characters not only appear more often but are also depicted in active roles—engaging in fishing, sports, or expressing opinions—while female figures are mainly relayed through relational identifiers such as “sister” or “friend,” consistent with findings in Pakistani and Chinese contexts (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Huang, 2023).

These multimodal patterns align with global textbook research: Sunderland’s gendered discourses show girls often occupy background or relational roles, while boys are frontline active agents (Sunderland, 2004). Similarly, Khadidja and Yassine (2024) found comparable visual bias in EFL textbooks, with female characters muted or passive. This “male as norm” phenomenon (de Beauvoir, 1949) implies that male identities are portrayed as the unmarked default, while female identities are reduced. Such imbalance likely affects learners’ perceptions of gendered agency (Connell, 2005).

RQ2: Alignment with Curriculum’s Gender Equality Principles

Research question two asked: Does the textbook reflect the gender equality principles embedded in the *Merdeka Curriculum*? Officially, the curriculum promotes inclusivity and student empowerment, including gender equity (Dharma et al., 2020). However, the subtle, embedded messaging in *English for Nusantara* contradicts these intentions. Although at least one female appears on the cover, her positioning and passivity suggest tokenism rather than genuine inclusivity.

This aligns with global critiques—UNESCO (2016) notes that inclusion of women is insufficient if their roles merely reinforce traditional stereotypes. In the Indonesian context, although Adawiyah & Oktavianti (2023) observed improved gender representation in Merdeka texts, the persistence of male-dominated narratives indicates incomplete implementation. The textbook’s integration of women fails to challenge the hidden curriculum of patriarchal dominance (Apple, 2004).

RQ3: Underlying Ideologies and Power Relations

Relating to the third research question—What implicit ideologies and power relations are reproduced?—our CDA reveals a pervasive hegemonic masculinity in visual and textual discourse (Connell, 2005). Male characters are portrayed as rational, competent, and adventurous—attributes culturally linked to authority and public life. Female characters, by contrast, are confined to private

or relational spaces without distinct hobbies, reinforcing traditional gender dichotomies (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

These ideologies appear entrenched in the textbook's structure. Despite the curriculum's egalitarian stance, the material reflects broader societal values where masculinity is valued publicly and femininity remains private—consistent with Kramarae's *muted group theory*, where female voices are marginalized (Kramarae, 1996). Even in progressive policy environments, entrenched textbook narratives may continue to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

Integration with Literature and New Insights

These findings resonate with prior EFL textbook analyses. Ullah and Skelton (2013) showed male-centered representation reinforcing gender power imbalances, and Suwarno et al. (2021) revealed symbolic male dominance in Indonesian ELT materials. The present study deepens this understanding by applying a multimodal CDA framework, demonstrating how text and image act in concert to shape gender narratives—a methodological advance suggested by Sunderland (2004) and Machin & Mayr (2012).

The Results also reflect emerging cross-cultural patterns: Hosseini Ahmadabadi & Azad (2023) in Iran, and Khadidja & Yassine (2024) in Algeria–France, both found persistent male dominance in bilingual EFL materials when analyzed using multimodal CDA. These studies, together with the current one, suggest an educational normativity that privileges masculine agency across diverse curricular contexts.

RQ Aligned Summary of Key Findings

To recapitulate:

- **RQ1:** Visual-textual analysis reveals male overrepresentation and female passivity.
- **RQ2:** Despite a stated gender-inclusive curriculum, textbook content reinforces inequality.
- **RQ3:** Underlying ideologies reflect hegemonic masculinity, public/private gender divides, and muted female voices.

Such alignment between results and research questions demonstrates the study's coherence and pedagogical relevance.

Theoretical Contributions and Curriculum Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study advances multimodal CDA by linking:

- Fairclough's three-dimensional model (linguistic, discursive practice, social context),
- Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity,

-
- De Beauvoir's "male as norm", and
 - Kramarae's muted group theory

into a comprehensive analytical framework. This fusion enables an enhanced understanding of how social ideology is embedded multimodally, which previous text-centric CDA studies have struggled to illuminate.

Pedagogical and Policy Implications

For practitioners, the findings underline the need for critical engagement with textbook content. Teachers can be encouraged to:

- Discuss observable gender biases,
- Encourage alternative female agency through added examples,
- Include multimodal adaptations that showcase diverse gender roles

For policymakers and textbook designers, this study highlights the gap between curriculum goals and material content, advocating for gender-sensitive editorial guidelines and monitoring frameworks during textbook development and pre-publication review.

Limitations and Future Research

While providing nuanced insights, this study is limited to one unit of a single textbook, potentially limiting generalizability. Future research could:

- Explore other units or textbooks in the Merdeka series,
- Investigate student interpretations of gender representations in classroom settings,
- Expand comparative multimodal CDA across regional curricula

Concluding Synthesis

The study demonstrates that, despite policy rhetorics of gender equality, *English for Nusantara* perpetuates longstanding educational biases through multimodal representations. These findings, grounded in robust CDA and supported by global parallels, spotlight the need for critical educational reforms, ensuring that future ELT materials genuinely reflect the curriculum's inclusive ethos.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined how gender is represented visually and textually in the *English for Nusantara* Grade VII textbook, the flagship ELT material for Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum*. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research revealed three major findings.

First, there is a numerical and positional imbalance in the portrayal of male and female characters. Male figures appeared nearly three times more frequently in illustrations and were predominantly positioned as active protagonists engaging in hobbies and social interactions, while female characters were limited to relational roles, such as “sisters” or unnamed peers. This imbalance perpetuates the traditional notion of male centrality and female marginality, reinforcing what de Beauvoir (1949) termed “male as norm.”

Second, while the *Merdeka Curriculum* explicitly promotes gender equality and inclusivity, the textbook’s multimodal narratives contradict these ideals. The visual inclusion of a single female figure on the cover appears tokenistic, and her lack of agency reflects hidden patriarchal values. Thus, despite policy rhetoric, the material reproduces hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), privileging male voices and activities in ways that normalize gender inequality.

Third, deeper CDA analysis revealed underlying ideologies and power relations that sustain these representations. Through muted female voices, passive positioning, and restricted social roles, the textbook conveys a subtle hierarchy where masculinity is linked to rationality, activity, and public agency, whereas femininity remains private, supportive, and secondary. This ideological bias risks shaping students’ perceptions of gender roles and undermines efforts to promote social justice in education (Apple, 2004; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that textbooks are not neutral pedagogical tools but ideological instruments that embed cultural values and power relations. While *English for Nusantara* introduces localized contexts and inclusive goals, it inadvertently reinforces patriarchal norms through its multimodal discourse. This study thus highlights a critical gap between policy aspirations and classroom reality, emphasizing the need for more gender-sensitive approaches to material development in Indonesia’s ELT curriculum.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made for textbook developers, educators, and policymakers.

1. For Textbook Authors and Publishers

- Future editions of *English for Nusantara* should include balanced representation of male and female characters in both frequency and agency. Female characters should be portrayed as protagonists with diverse hobbies, professions, and social interactions beyond relational roles.
- Visual narratives must be critically reviewed using gender-sensitive editorial guidelines before publication, ensuring inclusivity not only in numbers but also in the roles assigned to each gender.

2. For Teachers and Practitioners

- Teachers should adopt a critical pedagogy approach when using textbooks. By encouraging students to question and discuss gender representations, they can foster critical literacy and raise awareness of hidden biases.

-
- Supplementary materials featuring strong, diverse female role models can be integrated to balance textbook limitations and promote gender-equitable perspectives in ELT classrooms.
 - 3. For Curriculum Designers and Policymakers
 - Curriculum developers must ensure that the stated goals of inclusivity and equality are reflected in both policy and practice, including the textbooks distributed under the *Merdeka Curriculum*.
 - National-level textbook evaluation committees should include gender and social inclusion experts to systematically monitor and revise materials before mass adoption.
 - 4. For Future Research
 - Future studies could examine other units of *English for Nusantara* or compare it with textbooks from previous curricula to analyze longitudinal changes in gender representation.
 - Investigating students' perceptions of gender roles after exposure to such materials could provide insight into the textbook's impact on learners' worldviews.
 - Comparative cross-cultural multimodal CDA could reveal whether similar ideological biases persist across different ASEAN educational contexts.

In conclusion, *English for Nusantara* illustrates how gender bias can persist even within a progressive curricular framework. Addressing these biases requires collective action from policymakers, educators, and publishers to ensure that textbooks are truly aligned with the principles of equality and inclusivity they are meant to promote. Only through intentional, critical revision can ELT materials become catalysts for not just linguistic competence but also for shaping socially just and equitable classrooms.

The findings of this study carry important implications for teachers, textbook authors, and curriculum policymakers. For teachers, the results highlight the need to adopt a critical literacy approach when using *English for Nusantara* in the classroom. Rather than relying solely on the textbook, teachers can guide students to analyze and question how gender roles are presented, encouraging them to recognize and discuss the subtle biases embedded in the material. Such an approach can help students develop a more nuanced understanding of social equality alongside their language learning. In addition, teachers may consider supplementing lessons with alternative texts and visuals that portray female characters in more diverse and active roles, balancing the limitations of the existing textbook and offering richer models of gender representation.

For textbook authors and publishers, the study underscores the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive editorial practices during material development. Balanced representation should not only consider the numerical inclusion of male and female characters but also the depth and agency given to each gender. Moving beyond tokenistic inclusion, female characters need to be presented as protagonists with agency, diverse professions, and meaningful social interactions that challenge traditional stereotypes. Visuals and narratives should work together to reflect the curriculum's ideals of equity and inclusivity, rather than subtly reproducing patriarchal norms.

Policymakers and curriculum designers also have a crucial role in ensuring that the principles of equity and inclusivity embedded in the *Merdeka Curriculum* are fully realized. To achieve this, national-level textbook review panels could include gender and social inclusion experts who systematically evaluate materials before they are approved for widespread use. Regular content audits and revisions are necessary to maintain alignment between policy aspirations and the ideological messages communicated through textbooks.

Finally, the findings open several avenues for future research. Longitudinal and comparative studies could investigate whether gender representation improves in subsequent editions of *English for Nusantara* or across different textbooks within the same curriculum. Research focusing on students' interpretations of gendered discourse would also provide valuable insight into how these representations shape learners' perceptions of equality and identity. By addressing these implications collectively, teachers, authors, and policymakers can ensure that ELT materials function not only as tools for language acquisition but also as catalysts for promoting gender equity and social justice in Indonesian classrooms.

REFERENCES

- Adawiyah, S. Z., & Oktavianti, I. N. (2023). Gender representation in Merdeka Curriculum ELT textbooks: A corpus-assisted study. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.21462/ijeft.v8i2.668>
- Apple, M. W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Barton, A. (2012). The representation of gender in English textbooks in Uganda. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 20(2), 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2012.669394>
- Bernat, E., & Lloyd, R. (2007). Exploring the gender effect on EFL learners' beliefs about language learning. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, 7, 79–91. <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/group/ajedp/>
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Fatmawati, F., Par, L. J. S., Su, Y. R., Selamat, E. H., & Mahir, I. N. (2022). Gender representation in EFL textbooks in Indonesia. *Lensa: Journal of Language and Education*, 12(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.26714/lensa.12.1.2022.19-32>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Fikri, A., & Irwandi, I. (2024). Representation of gender found in *English for Nusantara* EFL textbook. *Journal of Language, Literature, and English Teaching*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.31629/juliet.v5i2.6989>
- Garton, S., & Graves, K. (2014). *International perspectives on materials in ELT*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023315>
- Harwood, N. (2010). *English language teaching materials: Theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hosseini Ahmadabadi, Z. S., & Azad, M. (2023). The critical discourse analysis of gender representation in English textbooks of Iranian high schools: The Fairclough model in

- focus. *Conhecimento & Diversidade*, 15(38), 413–442. <https://doi.org/10.18316/rcd.v15i38.11051>
- Huang, L. (2023). Stereotypical representation of women in junior high school textbooks: A study of English published by Shanghai FL Education Press. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/17/20231264>
- Hussain, T., Umar, H., Khan, I., & Batool, I. (2023). Gender representation: A survey of public sector English textbooks of grades 7 and 8, KP, Pakistan. *Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends*. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct.51.04>
- Jamil, M., Jabeen, M., & Moin, M. F. (2024). Life skills in biology textbooks: A qualitative content analysis. *Journal of Policy Research*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.61506/02.00252>
- Khadidja, R., & Yassine, S. (2024). Multimodal analysis of gender representation in EFL textbooks [Preprint]. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377761908_Multimodal_Analysis_of_Gender_Representation_in_EFL_Textbooks_At_the_Crossroads_and_Let%27s_Meet_Up
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. SAGE.
- Mustapha, A. S. (2012). Dynamics of gender representations in learning materials. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 1(3), 243–270. <https://doi.org/10.4471/generos.2012.12>
- Nazimi, S. Z., & Hatifi, K. (2023). Critical discourse analysis of gender representation in grade seven English textbooks in Afghanistan. *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*. <https://doi.org/10.55544/ijrah.3.2.26>
- Suwarno, T., Triyono, S., Ashadi, & Sahayu, W. (2021). Gender construction in Indonesian government-distributed English textbooks: Combining CDA and corpus linguistics. *Sexuality & Culture*, 25(4), 2158–2175. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09870-5>
- Ullah, H., & Skelton, C. (2013). Gender representation in public-sector school textbooks of Pakistan. *Educational Studies*, 39(2), 183–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2012.702892>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352–371). Blackwell.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Zahra, R., Inawati, I., & Ariffin, K. (2024). Gender representation in Indonesian ELT textbooks: The hidden bias. *EDUCATUM Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ejoss.vol10.1.4.2024>
- UNESCO. (2016). *Textbooks and learning materials review for diversity and inclusion*. UNESCO.