



STUDENT’S PERCEPTIONS ON GENDER REPRESENTATION IN “ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA” (A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS STUDY)

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Article History:

Accepted September 2025;

Revised November 2025;

Approved December 2025.

Abstract: The purpose of this research is to examine gender representation in the English for Nusantara textbook for Grade VIII and to explore students’ perceptions of these representations. The research method employed is a qualitative approach involving critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. The analysis draws on Van Dijk’s Socio-cognitive Approach to examine how gender is represented semantically, syntactically, rhetorically, and visually. Data was collected from a criteria-based sample of two students at SMP Negeri 10 Cirebon, both of whom demonstrated strong English proficiency. The results showed revealed that male characters are predominantly represented in active, central roles across stories, visuals, and sentence structures. In contrast, female characters tend to occupy background or passive roles and are often linked with emotional, domestic, or supportive functions. The use of language also shows a significant disparity in pronoun frequency and character traits, with males described using positive and dynamic adjectives, while females are more often associated with personal appearance and social limitations. The findings suggest that textbooks should strive for balanced portrayals to avoid reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Gender Representation, Textbook Analysis, Student Perception, English for Nusantara, Socio-cognitive Approach.

INTRODUCTION

This present study aims to investigate how gender is represented in EFL textbook through both texts and visuals, and student's perception. Specifically, it focuses on how genders are depicted in images, dialogues, and narratives often in terms of roles, occupations, and personality traits. According to Agni et al., (2020), gender bias in the EFL textbooks in Indonesia could be seen from visual and textual representations, various activities, roles, occupations, and adjective descriptions. Textbooks is significant due to its influence on learners' perceptions and identity formation. Correspondingly, Widodo & Elyas (2020) stated that in the educational context, textbooks not only teach context knowledge and skills, but also instill sociocultural norms and value-laden ideologies into learners. In researching students' perceptions of gender representation in EFL textbooks using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, push and pull factors significantly influence their attitudes and engagement.

Textbooks are often seen as reliable sources of knowledge and guidance by students, especially those who are still developing. The reality is, students see a book affected by how it looks; the pictures, colours, and short sentences. By this fact, Ghoushchi et al., (2021) stated that the textbook's illustrations can shape their impression. Pictures convey information more efficiently and effectively than words do. As a result, the way gender is depicted in textbooks could influence how students perceive themselves as individuals and members of a large society in the long run. It is crucial to evaluate school textbooks critically for both their instructional effectiveness and their ability to influence students' gender-related attitudes, beliefs, and identity development. Therefore, Wijayanti et al., (2022) suggest teachers should critically evaluate textbook content before use it in their classroom since textbooks may undermine the objective and school curriculum's principles.

Researching gender representation in textbooks provides the evidence needed to address these biases and drive change. This research enables more balanced and inclusive educational resources development. Moreover, Fikri & Irwandi (2024) argue, promoting equity in education and encouraging critical thinking require that textbooks include a variety of inclusive and diverse points of view. It provides guidance on how to create more equal classrooms for teachers. If the textbook's contents are not evaluated, it means that the gender imbalance that continues to persist in the materials can impact students, teachers, society as a whole, and the textbook itself. Although, Cecilia *et al.*, (2020) demonstrated that incorporating examples of non-traditional gender roles in education from an early age is important in promoting gender equality over the long term. Young

students who think that textbooks are the only sources might limit their aspirations. When a textbook shows gender bias or stereotypical ways, such as showing women are dependent on men or playing roles domestically. These impacts, with girls feeling underrated and unworthy, and boys may think that they should be masculine, strong, hard workers, leaving feeling's affirmation. It is not only limiting their personal growth, moreover serves gender inequality between generations. Students may think that these gender stereotypes are “natural” or “normal”. It is just like what Apsari et al., (2022) considering that gender is present in numerous aspects of modern social life and can thus directly influence students' gender identities and ideas, gender equity is crucial for Indonesian students.

Previous researchers have discussed several relevant studies with different objectives, focuses, and methodologies using various tools to provide recommendations for this study. Some of the previous studies include: To begin with, as reported by Fithriani (2022) explored gender portrayal in local and international ELT textbooks for primary education, focusing specifically on familial and professional context to determine if gender stereotyping persists. In accordance with that, this study compared “English Chest 6 *Indonesian context*” to “Let’s Go 6 *International context (used in 160+ countries)*”. Both textbooks show unequal gender portrayals, females are more visible in local ELT meanwhile males dominated in International ELT. Gender stereotypes persisted with females being linked to household responsibilities and males in professional areas.

The previous study about student’s perception written by Sakale & History (2020) is investigating student’s perception of textbooks in Moroccan High Schools. Research findings indicate that students prefer learning with varied themes, non-textbook materials, and opportunities to choose topics based on their interests. They emphasize the importance of extracurricular activities and real-world content to increase learning engagement. In addition, students support the use of songs and role-play as effective imaginative strategies for improving speaking skills, in line with previous empirical findings.

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Commercialization of Higher Education in Hong Kong: A Case Study of the Business School Undergraduate Admissions Prospectuses by Ma (2024). The results revealed a widespread use of promotional language, first-person to pronouns to build relationships, and extensive use of evaluative adjectives.

Another study written by Alweldi (2024) investigates Barack Obama’s victory speech to determine how he used language to draw audience attention and make them believe in him as president. The results show that Obama effectively used language in social and political contexts

to support his plans and connect with audiences. He particularly emphasized making people feel included in the victory and addressed the needs of lower social classes.

Research by Lestariyana et al., (2020) examined female representation in two government-mandated English language textbooks used in Indonesian junior high school, focusing on social contexts such as family, occupations, school, participation, and hobbies. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) applied in this research, both analyzed verbal and visual texts. The data were collected with manual recording on gender characters in each unit, frequency of feminine and masculine pronouns. After that, the researchers analyse the framework using several criteria such as percentage of pictorial texts with females/males, percentage of females/males depicted as children, and percentage of domestic/professional visual contexts. The results show male characters (62,8%) dominated over female characters with 37,2%. Females are still portrayed stereo-typically as housewives.

Those previous studies above have different goals. Therefore, the researcher conducted a study entitled “Student’s Perceptions on Gender Representation in “English for Nusantara” (A Critical Discourse Analysis Study)” This research which wants to investigate how gender is represented in the textbook. Differently, this study looks at how students perceive gender representation in textbooks in order to determine how it affects their perception on gender and society specifically using SCA from Van Dijk (2015). Therefore, this study will erase the gap in that part which automatically will give the new findings.

METHODOLOGY

The current study makes an effort to use a qualitative approach. Creswell (2018) defines qualitative research as a method for investigating and comprehending the interpretations that people or groups make of a social human issue. No wonder, this present study is qualitative research because it will identify student’s perception of gender representation. Furthermore, this present study not only identifies student’s perception but also elaborate gender representation. Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to analyze the gender representation of roles or stereotyped involved in the English for Nusantara textbook. One of the characteristics of discourse itself purpose by Mandarani (2018) is more qualitative, therefore will discuss and try to understand the hidden messages.

In this study, the researcher used two research instruments, namely Textbook Analysis and interviews. This research uses textbook analysis in order to gain information of gender

representation in English for Nusantara textbook. This kind of analysis refers to Van Dijk's CDA theory namely micro structured analysis. And in order to gather information for this study research uses Interviews. the researcher asked respondents a series of questions on how they felt about the way gender was portrayed in textbooks. Two students from SMP N 10 Cirebon's second grade were interviewed by the researcher. The interview instrument in this research contains 7 questions related to gender representation in different context (stories, visual, gender traits, and dominance).

The primary data of this research is conducted by the researcher herself directly from two 8th grade students at SMP Negeri 10 Cirebon as its first source or place where the research object was carried out. The main consideration is that this school is the most suitable setting for this present study. It is because, this school meets the criteria which suitable for this research. 1) Merdeka Curriculum is applied in this school. 2) Therefore, English for Nusantara textbook is possibly used in English as Foreign Language Learning.

The secondary data of this present study was obtained from the results of students interviews in order to elaborate how they perceive the gender representations in English for Nusantara textbook. In addition to that, the results of textbook analysis are used to identify gender representation in the textbook. Two junior high school students are involved in this research. The participants consist of girl and boy. They are in 8th grade. They are in the 14–15 age bracket. These are the students who perform well academically and have a strong command of the English language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part discusses the research findings related to gender representation in English for Nusantara textbook and student's perception of it. The discussion gained from the finding of text analysis based on semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical also interviews in order to know student's perceptions of gender representation in textbook.

Gender Representation in English for Nusantara Textbook

This section explained findings of gender representation in English for Nusantara Textbook. this include semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical analysis in accordance with text analysis from Van Dijk.

In terms of semantics, it was found that pronouns referring to men, such as he, his, and him, appear much more frequently than pronouns referring to women, such as she and her. Men in this book are depicted as the center of the story, owners of something important, and the main actors

who make decisions. In contrast, female characters are often labeled with less positive traits such as “loud,” “shy,” “childless,” and “widow.” This suggests that women are often represented through emotional characteristics or social status that tend to be limiting. In terms of work, men are represented in important roles such as breeder, firefighter, soldier, and rescuer, all of which involve strength, leadership, and social responsibility. Meanwhile, women are only depicted working as online children's clothing sales assistants or as teachers, who are more associated with caregiving roles.

Syntactically, gender differences are also evident in the choice of sentence structure. Men are more often the subject in Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) patterns and are in active sentences, while women are often the object or recipient of the action in passive sentences. For example, “Galang and Andre help the librarian every Thursday” is an example of men as active subjects who help others, while for women, sentences such as “I was chosen as the class representative” use passive sentences that remove the agent of the action and reduce the active role of women. Additionally, sentences describing men are generally longer, more complex, and full of details, while sentences describing women tend to be short and less in-depth.

From a rhetorical perspective, the illustrations in this textbook also display a consistent pattern. Men are often placed in central positions in the images, such as in sack races and traditional music parades. They are also depicted with body language that conveys confidence, courage, and strength. Contrastly, women are often in the background, seen carrying items, watering plants, or simply watching. In some images, women are even depicted in awkward, fearful, or worried positions, reinforcing the stereotype that women are weak and need protection. The only image showing women in a central position is in the parade illustration, which unfortunately is an exception to the overall visual pattern. This showed that women's opportunities to be the center of attention in this book are very limited.

From another rhetorical perspective, men are consistently depicted in problem-solving and decision-making roles, with vocabulary emphasizing logic and action, such as “I just kept my balance and my pace.” In contrast, women are more often depicted in supportive and emotional roles, with phrases like “Congratulations!” or “Oh, I’m sorry” indicating that their roles revolve around social relationships and emotions, not leadership or logic.

Student’s Perception on Gender Representation in Textbook

The students’ responses of the interview were the result of this study. There were 7 questions of the interview regarding to the contents of English textbook in teaching English which

is addressed to two students grade VIII in SMP Negeri 10 Cirebon. The themes were gender representation in stories, visual gender representation, character traits attribute to gender, and gender dominance. The researcher uses data coding to make it easier to explain the data. Coding in this study includes:

Table 1. Research Coding

No	Coding	Information
1	R	Researcher
2	S1	Student 1 (Female)
3	S2	Student 2 (Male)

The table above shows several codes in this research to simplify and make it easy to understand. The researcher is coded with “R” to mention the question of the interview. The researcher coding two respondents, which students in VIII grade. The first code is S1 to mean Student 1. The second code is S2 to mean Student 2.

Based on interviews with two students, it appears that the stories in the English for Nusantara textbook show a pattern of gender representation that tends to place men at the center of the story and as characters who undergo significant development.

In the story about soccer, both student 1 (S1) and student 2 (S2) remember Mirza as the main character who struggles with self-doubt until he finally succeeds in becoming a recognized player. This process of struggle, failure, and eventual success is entirely experienced by the male character. Students also note that male characters like Bayu are portrayed positively, as friends who are supportive and help resolve conflicts.

Another story about makeup use also provided an important insight. The first student assessed that female characters who do not care about makeup are portrayed as confident and accepting of themselves as they are. However, the second student considered that after being criticized, the female character finally wanted to change her appearance to pay more attention to herself. This showed that the values instilled in the story still emphasize the importance of appearance for women, even though it is packaged in a message of emotional resilience.

In terms of visuals, students showed diverse perceptions but still followed fairly traditional gender patterns. In the image of a woman giving a speech in public, both S1 and S2 assessed the woman in the image as a confident figure who was brave enough to appear in front of many people. Students viewed this woman as an intelligent and positive figure. This is quite

encouraging because women are depicted as being active in public spaces. However, in the students' interpretations, there are still views that associate women with “gentle” and “friendly” traits, as expressed by S1. This showed that even though women are depicted as active, traditional expectations such as having to speak softly still persist. Another visual in the form of a comic, differences in perspective reappear. When students were asked to describe the characteristics of characters in comics, they provided interesting explanations. Pipit, as a female character, is described as careless, forgetful, but also concerned about cleanliness, beautiful, and cute. The focus on physical appearance, such as “beautiful” and “cute,” is quite prominent in the students' perceptions.

This indicates that although Pipit has good qualities such as maintaining cleanliness, the image of women is still closely tied to physical appearance. On the other hand, Galang, as a male character, is seen as caring, quick to reprimand, and attentive to his surroundings. Galang is portrayed as a meticulous and responsible figure. In this narrative, Galang is positioned as a small leader in daily interactions, while Pipit is portrayed as less meticulous. If this pattern continues to repeat itself in various texts, it will reinforce the perception that men are more suitable to be leaders.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine gender representation in English for Nusantara textbooks and understand students' perceptions of this representation using Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive approach. Findings from the analysis of textbook content and student interviews indicate an imbalance in gender representation in terms of number, role, and gender characteristics. The analysis result shows an imbalance in gender representation in textbooks, where men are more often portrayed as dominant, active, and involved in public activities, while women tend to play supporting, passive roles related to domestic duties. This reflects stereotypes that can influence students' understanding of social roles.

In addition, men are portrayed as confident, rational, and independent, while women are more emotional, obedient, and caring. The lack of brave or expert female characters reinforces traditional gender views. From interviews, some students are aware of this imbalance, although not all see it as a problem, but some show a critical attitude towards these differences. Overall, this study concludes that the English for Nusantara book still shows inequality in gender representation.

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