GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA GRADE VII: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender representation in the English for Nusantara Grade VII textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum. The research was conducted to identify how male and female characters are represented in terms of visibility, roles, and activities, and to determine the dominant patterns of gender representation in the textbook. A descriptive qualitative design with directed qualitative content analysis was applied. The data consisted of textual and visual representations of male and female characters in Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 of the textbook. The coding categories were adapted from previous gender representation studies and covered male and female visibility, domestic and public roles, and active and passive activities. The findings show that gender visibility is relatively balanced, with male characters appearing 116 times and female characters 108 times. Domestic roles appear more frequently than public roles, with 39 male and 43 female domestic-role representations, while public roles appear only 1 time for males and 2 times for females. Active activities dominate the textbook, appearing 101 times for males and 98 times for females, while passive activities remain rare. These findings indicate that the textbook presents both progress and limitation: it provides relatively balanced visibility and activity representation, yet public-role representation remains limited.

Keywords: Gender Representation, English Textbook, Qualitative Content Analysis

A. Introduction

English textbooks play a central role in English language teaching and learning because they serve as one of the primary learning resources that guide teachers and students throughout the instructional process. In English as a Foreign Language contexts such as Indonesia, textbooks provide structured learning materials, language input, classroom activities, and learning objectives that support curriculum implementation. Textbooks are expected not only to facilitate language acquisition but also to provide meaningful learning

experiences that help learners develop communicative competence (Tomlinson, 2008). McGrath (2002) also emphasizes that textbooks remain an essential component of language education because they organize learning content systematically and provide a practical framework for classroom instruction.

Beyond their function as instructional resources, English textbooks also transmit social and cultural values. Through texts, illustrations, dialogues, and learning activities, textbooks communicate implicit messages about how society is organized and how individuals are expected to behave. These implicit messages are often understood as part of the hidden curriculum, because they reinforce particular beliefs, norms, and values beyond the explicit language objectives of the curriculum (Lee, 2014). In language education, learning materials function not only as vehicles for language acquisition but also as agents of socialization that shape learners' perceptions of social identities and social relationships (Mustapha, 2012).

One of the social values embedded in English language textbooks is gender. Gender does not merely refer to biological differences between males and females. It reflects the social expectations, roles, and behaviours that societies construct for men and women (Oakley, 2005). As language learning materials, English textbooks may communicate these expectations through the ways male and female characters are presented in texts, dialogues, illustrations, and activities. Since junior high school students are still developing their social understanding, repeated exposure to gender-related messages in textbooks may contribute to how they perceive the roles and expectations associated with men and women.

At a global level, gender representation in textbooks matters because learning materials socialize students into particular values, roles, and identities. When male and female characters appear unevenly in texts, illustrations, or classroom activities, textbooks may sustain gender stereotypes and limit learners' understanding of equality (Mustapha, 2012; Agni et al., 2020). In the Indonesian context, this issue becomes more important because the

Merdeka Curriculum promotes inclusivity, and English for Nusantara Grade VII is expected to reflect those principles. Recent studies, however, still show mixed results, ranging from relatively balanced portrayals to continued male dominance, passive female roles, and subtle traditional bias (Iriana et al., 2024; Fauziyah et al., 2025; Samawa & Jazadi, 2025).

Previous studies have examined gender representation in English as a Foreign Language textbooks by analyzing visibility, occupations, activities, linguistic features, illustrations, and character portrayals. Lee (2014) examined two Japanese EFL textbook series through the perspective of the hidden curriculum and found that gender-inclusive language had become more common, yet female invisibility, male-first ordering, and stereotypes remained evident. Lee (2016) similarly investigated four Japanese EFL textbook series using corpus linguistic techniques and found improvements in gender-neutral vocabulary and the title Ms., but male-first ordering and stereotypical portrayals of women continued to appear.

In the Indonesian context, Lestariyana et al. (2020) explored female representation in government-mandated English textbooks for junior high schools and found that female visibility had increased, but traditional gender stereotypes remained evident in domestic and public role portrayals. Agni et al. (2020) reported that female characters were underrepresented in visibility, occupations, activities, and adjectival portrayals in an Indonesian senior high school EFL textbook, while male characters occupied broader public and professional roles. Saputra (2019) found that male characters dominated both textual and visual representations in When English Rings a Bell. More recently, Artini et al. (2024) identified attempts to challenge conventional gender roles in an Indonesian eighth-grade EFL textbook, but subtle stereotypes remained visible in physical appearance, activity settings, and character portrayals.

These studies show that gender representation in EFL textbooks remains a relevant research problem. However, most existing studies focus on particular aspects, such as visibility, occupations, illustrations, or

linguistic features, rather than integrating multiple dimensions of gender representation within one analytical framework. In addition, many studies in Indonesia analyzed textbooks produced under previous curricula or different educational levels. Research examining English for Nusantara Grade VII under the Merdeka Curriculum remains limited. This gap creates a need to examine how a contemporary Indonesian EFL textbook represents male and female characters in both textual and visual content.

The present study therefore investigates gender representation in English for Nusantara Grade VII by using the integrated analytical dimensions of visibility, roles, and activities. Visibility refers to the frequency and balance of male and female appearances. Roles refer to domestic and public social positions assigned to characters. Activities refer to active and passive actions performed by male and female characters. These dimensions allow a more comprehensive analysis because gender representation is not only a matter of how often characters appear, but also how they are positioned and what actions they perform.

Based on the background above, this study addresses two research questions. First, how are male and female characters represented in English for Nusantara Grade VII in terms of visibility, domestic and public roles, and active and passive activities? Second, what gender representation patterns dominate the textbook based on those three aspects? The purpose of the study is to analyze male and female representations in the textbook and to identify the dominant patterns of gender representation. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to gender representation studies in EFL textbooks and practically to English teachers, textbook writers, and curriculum developers who need to evaluate the social messages embedded in classroom materials.

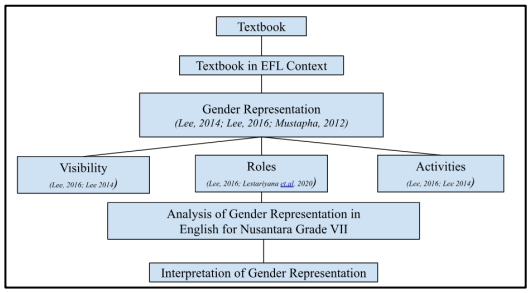


Figure 1. Kerangka Konseptual Penelitian

Figure 1 summarizes the analytical logic of the study. Textbooks are positioned as instructional resources and cultural artifacts in the EFL context. Gender representation is examined through visibility, roles, and activities. These dimensions are then used to interpret how male and female characters are represented in English for Nusantara Grade VII. The framework supports the analysis because it connects textbook studies, gender theory, and qualitative content analysis in one sequence

B. Research Method

This research employed a descriptive qualitative research design using qualitative content analysis to examine gender representation in English for Nusantara Grade VII. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to identify, classify, and interpret representations of male and female characters in textual and visual materials without manipulating variables. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In this study, the descriptive qualitative design enabled the researcher to interpret how gender was represented in the textbook through both texts and images.

The study applied directed qualitative content analysis because the coding process used predetermined analytical dimensions derived from previous gender representation studies. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define qualitative content analysis as a research method for the subjective interpretation of text data through systematic classification, coding, and theme identification. Directed qualitative content analysis is suitable when existing theories or previous research guide the coding process. In this study, visibility, roles, and activities were used as the main categories for analyzing gender representation.

The data source was English for Nusantara Grade VII Junior High School, published in 2022 by the Centre for Books, the Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment of Education, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The textbook was written by Ika Lestari Damayanti, Iyen Nurlaelawati, Yusnita Febrianti, Pipit

Prihartanti, Aji Jehan Fellani, and Raymon Rahmadhani. It was selected purposively because it is an official textbook for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and is directly relevant to the objective of examining gender representation in English learning materials.

The corpus was limited to three chapters: Chapter 1, About Me; Chapter 2, Culinary and Me; and Chapter 3, Home Sweet Home. These chapters were selected because they contain various textual and visual representations of male and female characters. The limitation also kept the corpus manageable and focused. The data consisted of reading passages, dialogues, conversations, instructions, exercises, captions, illustrations, pictures, and other visual elements that portrayed male and female characters in different social contexts.

Four instruments supported the analysis. First, the Gender Representation Coding Guide provided operational definitions and indicators for each category. Second, the Main Coding Sheet recorded the location of the data, excerpts or image descriptions, gender categories, codes, and analytical notes. Third, the Frequency Tally Sheet summarized the occurrence of each analytical category after coding. Fourth, the Narrative Interpretation Sheet synthesized coding results into broader patterns of gender representation. These instruments were used to maintain consistency, transparency, and organization in the analysis.

The coding guide consisted of six codes. V-M was used for male visibility, including male names, male pronouns, and male illustrations. V-F was used for female visibility, including female names, female pronouns, and female illustrations. R-D was used for domestic roles, such as cooking, cleaning, or taking care of family members. R-P was used for public roles, such as teacher, leader, speaker, office worker, or decision maker. A-A was used for active activities, including leading, working, playing sports, cycling, cooking, and other productive or participatory actions. A-P was used for passive activities, such as watching, listening, or assisting.

The data collection procedure began with textbook selection and corpus limitation. The researcher then

reviewed every page of the selected chapters and identified textual and visual data relevant to gender representation. Each relevant item was documented by chapter, page number, data type, contextual description, and coding category. After extraction, the data were classified using the analytical categories. This procedure was consistent with document analysis, which treats documents as primary data sources and requires a systematic process for reviewing and evaluating documents in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009).

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the selected chapters by reading and reviewing them repeatedly. Second, relevant textual and visual units were identified. Third, each unit was coded based on visibility, roles, and activities. Fourth, frequencies were counted to identify dominant tendencies. Fifth, the coded data were interpreted narratively to explain the meaning of the patterns. Although the study is qualitative, frequency counts were used as supporting evidence because they helped indicate the relative dominance of each representation category.

Research ethics were addressed by using a publicly available textbook as the data source and by presenting textbook excerpts and images only for academic analysis. Since the study did not involve human participants, issues related to informed consent and participant confidentiality did not apply. Nevertheless, the analysis was conducted carefully to avoid misrepresentation of the textbook content. The researcher also cited theoretical and empirical sources to support the interpretation and to situate the study within previous scholarship.

C. Result and Discussion

The analysis indicates that gender representation in English for Nusantara Grade VII is relatively balanced in visibility and activities, but unequal in the distribution of roles. The textbook presents male and female characters across texts and illustrations, and both genders are frequently involved in active participation. However, domestic roles appear far more frequently than public roles. Public-role representation is limited for both genders, even though female characters appear slightly

more often than male characters in this category.

Table 1. Frequency Tally of Gender Representation

Category	Male	Female	Total
Visibility	116	108	224
Domestic Roles	39	43	82
Public Roles	1	2	3
Active Activity	101	98	199
Passive Activity	2	3	5

The frequency tally shows that male visibility appears 116 times and female visibility appears 108 times. The total visibility count is 224. The difference between male and female visibility is small, with male characters appearing slightly more often. This pattern suggests that the textbook does not strongly exclude female characters. Both genders appear in names, pronouns, dialogues, illustrations, and family or school contexts. However, male characters still receive slightly higher visibility across the analyzed chapters.

The first dimension, visibility, refers to the frequency and balance of male and female appearances in textual and visual content. In Chapter 1, male characters such as Galang and Andre are introduced through names, self-introductions, and illustrations. Female characters such as Monita also appear in dialogues and visual scenes. In Chapter 3, the Rahmansyah family illustration presents male and female characters together in a shared family context. These examples show that the textbook includes both genders consistently across the analyzed chapters.

The visibility pattern answers part of the first research question by showing that male and female characters are represented in relatively balanced ways. Male visibility remains slightly higher, but the difference is not large enough to indicate strong invisibility of female characters. This finding differs from earlier studies that reported strong male dominance in textbook representations, such as Saputra (2019) and Agni et al. (2020). At the same time, it is consistent with more recent findings that show increased female visibility in Indonesian EFL textbooks, although not necessarily full equality (Lestariyana et al., 2020; Artini et al., 2024).

The second dimension concerns roles. Domestic roles appear 39 times for male characters and 43 times for female characters, with a total of 82 occurrences. Public roles appear only

1 time for male characters and 2 times for female characters, with a total of 3 occurrences. The data show that domestic roles dominate the role category. Although female characters appear slightly more often in domestic roles, the difference between male and female domestic-role representation is small. Male characters are also represented in domestic activities, such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and taking out the trash.

The role data indicate that the textbook does not assign domestic work exclusively to women. One example is the father figure who says, 'I have cooked special food for our lunch.' This representation shows a male character actively participating in household food preparation. Another example is the Rahmansyah family cleaning-up scene, where both male and female family members perform household chores. These scenes challenge a rigid stereotype that domestic responsibility belongs only to women. However, the very low frequency of public roles shows that the textbook provides limited representation of public, professional, or leadership positions for both genders.

Female characters also appear in public-role contexts. For example, the statement 'Your mom has got a promotion from her office' represents a female character in a work-related public context. This is important because it positions a female adult beyond the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, public roles appear only three times across the selected chapters. This limited representation reduces the textbook's capacity to present diverse social and professional possibilities for male and female characters. Therefore, the textbook shows progress in domestic-role sharing, but it still needs stronger public-role representation.

The third dimension is activities. Active activities appear 101 times for male characters and 98 times for female characters, with a total of 199. Passive activities appear only 2 times for male characters and 3 times for female characters, with a total of 5. These numbers show that active activities dominate the textbook for both genders. Male and female characters are mostly represented as participants who speak, interact, learn,

play, cook, clean, move, and engage in social or leisure activities. Passive activities are rare, which suggests that neither gender is consistently framed as inactive or dependent.

Examples of active activities include Galang fishing, Monita participating in conversation, characters playing badminton, family members cleaning the house, and students engaging in school-related interaction. Passive activities include listening to music or watching. The textbook therefore emphasizes action and participation across both male and female characters. This pattern supports a more balanced representation because it avoids placing female characters only in passive positions or male characters only in active positions. The difference between male and female active activities is small, and both genders are presented as involved in learning, family, social, and leisure contexts.

The coding examples show that textual and visual units can contain more than one category at the same time. For instance, a male character who cooks is coded as male visibility, domestic role, and active activity, while a female character who receives a promotion is coded as female visibility and public role. This confirms that each representation must be read through context, not only through gender labels.



Figure 2. Contoh Aktivitas Aktif pada Tokoh Laki-laki



Figure 3. Contoh Aktivitas Pasif pada Tokoh Perempuan

Overall, the narrative interpretation shows three main patterns. First, visibility is relatively balanced, although male characters remain slightly more visible. Second, domestic roles are slightly more associated with female characters, but male characters also participate in domestic work. Public roles are very

limited for both genders. Third, activities are dominated by active participation for both male and female characters, while passive activities are rare. These patterns show that the textbook has moved toward more inclusive representation, especially in visibility and activity, but still needs improvement in the diversity of roles.

The findings suggest that English for Nusantara Grade VII answers the first research question by presenting gender representation that is relatively balanced in visibility and activities, but less balanced in roles. Male and female characters appear across textual and visual contexts, but role representation remains concentrated in domestic settings. This pattern demonstrates that gender representation should not be assessed only by counting appearances. A textbook may show both genders frequently, yet still provide limited social roles or occupational possibilities.

The visibility finding shows improvement compared with earlier textbook studies that reported stronger male dominance. In the present study, the difference between male and female visibility is only 8 occurrences. This suggests that English for Nusantara Grade VII attempts to include female characters in the learning materials. The presence of female names, female illustrations, and female dialogue participation indicates that female characters are not invisible in the selected chapters. However, the slightly higher male visibility also shows that full balance has not been completely achieved.

The role findings reveal a more complex pattern. Domestic roles dominate the textbook, but they are not assigned only to female characters. This differs from traditional representations in which women are frequently confined to household contexts while men occupy public roles. The father cooking for the family and male characters participating in cleaning scenes indicate that the textbook challenges some conventional domestic stereotypes. This finding is important because it shows that domestic responsibility can be represented as a shared family responsibility rather than a gender-specific obligation.

However, the lack of public-role representation remains a limitation.

Public roles appear only three times in the analyzed chapters. Even though the female character represented through promotion from the office is a positive sign, the small number of public roles limits the textbook's representation of broader social participation. Students may not receive enough textual or visual exposure to diverse professions, leadership roles, or community roles for either gender. This is a weak point because the Merdeka Curriculum's inclusive orientation requires not only balanced presence but also expanded possibilities for identity and social participation.

The activity findings are the strongest evidence of relative balance. Active activities appear very frequently for both male and female characters, while passive activities are rare. This means that the textbook generally frames both genders as active participants in learning, social interaction, family life, and leisure. Female characters are not consistently portrayed as passive or dependent, and male characters are not the only ones who engage in productive or social action. This pattern is more progressive than representations reported in studies where women were underrepresented in active and public domains.

These findings are broadly consistent with Lee (2014) and Lee (2016), who found that gender representation in textbooks is visible through character presence, activities, and stereotypical patterns, even when newer textbooks show progress toward equality. They are also consistent with Lestariyana et al. (2020), who found increased female visibility in Indonesian junior high school textbooks while domestic stereotyping persisted. Agni et al. (2020) and Saputra (2019) found stronger male dominance, which is less pronounced in the present study. Artini et al. (2024) similarly found that contemporary textbooks can challenge some conventional gender roles while still retaining subtle stereotypes.

One possible reason for the relatively balanced visibility and activities is the nature of the selected chapters. Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 focus on self-introduction, food, family, home, school interaction, and daily activities. These topics naturally provide opportunities for both

male and female characters to appear. The combination of textual and visual analysis also allows a fuller account of representation because some characters appear in illustrations even when they are not central in written text. This approach prevents the analysis from depending only on language and provides a more complete picture of textbook content.

Another possible reason is the textbook's attempt to present a modern and inclusive educational image under the Merdeka Curriculum. The textbook shows boys and men doing domestic work and girls and women participating in social interaction and public work contexts. This indicates that textbook writers may have attempted to avoid old stereotypes. Yet, the dominance of domestic settings also reflects culturally familiar family contexts that remain common in junior secondary school textbooks. The textbook therefore contains both inclusive and conventional elements.

The dominant pattern in the textbook is active participation rather than passivity. This is positive because it represents learners and characters as socially engaged subjects. However, the stronger pedagogical issue is the narrow range of roles. If the textbook aims to support inclusive education, it needs to present male and female characters in more varied public, professional, intellectual, and leadership roles. Balanced representation requires more than equal numbers. It requires equal breadth of social positioning.

The study contributes to gender representation research by demonstrating the usefulness of integrating visibility, roles, and activities in one analysis. The method shows that gender portrayal cannot be reduced to one dimension. Visibility reveals who appears. Roles reveal where characters are socially positioned. Activities reveal what characters do. Together, these dimensions provide a more precise account of the textbook's gender message. The findings also provide practical input for English teachers, who can use textbook scenes as opportunities for critical discussion about gender roles in family, school, and society.



Figure 4. Representasi Kerja Domestik Keluarga Rahmansyah

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that gender representation in English for Nusantara Grade VII is relatively balanced in visibility and activities, but still limited in the distribution of roles. Male characters appear 116 times and female characters appear 108 times, indicating only a slight difference in visibility. Active activities are also relatively balanced, with 101 occurrences for male characters and 98 for female characters. Passive activities are rare for both genders. These findings indicate that the textbook does not strongly position either gender as invisible or passive.

The strongest imbalance appears in role representation. Domestic roles dominate the analyzed chapters, with 39 occurrences for male characters and 43 for female characters, while public roles appear only 3 times in total. Although domestic roles are not exclusive to female characters, the lack of public-role representation limits the textbook's capacity to show diverse social, professional, and leadership possibilities. Therefore, the dominant pattern is balanced visibility and active participation, combined with a narrow role distribution centered on domestic and daily-life contexts.

The study recommends that English teachers use textbook content critically rather than accepting representation patterns as neutral. Teachers can invite students to discuss why certain roles appear frequently and why public roles appear rarely. Textbook writers and curriculum developers should increase the diversity of male and female characters in professional, leadership, educational, and community roles. Future researchers should expand the analysis to all chapters of English for Nusantara or compare textbooks across different grades to identify broader patterns of gender representation under the Merdeka Curriculum.

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