

Gender Representation in English Textbooks for Nusantara Kids: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study

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Abstract

This study investigates gender representation in the English textbook "Nusantara Kids for Grade 5 SD/MI," officially published by Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology under the Merdeka Curriculum. Employing Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, this qualitative research examines character frequency, assigned roles, specific character traits, and embedded ideological messages in the textbook's texts, dialogues, and illustrations. The findings reveal a consistent male-centered pattern. Male characters appear more frequently (58%) than female characters (37%). Furthermore, male characters are predominantly assigned professional and public roles, such as doctors or community leaders, while female characters are overwhelmingly confined to domestic tasks like cooking and childcare. Regarding character traits, males are depicted with competence, agency, and leadership, whereas females are attributed nurturing qualities like patience and kindness. Consequently, the textbook's ideological messages normalize male centrality and authority, positioning women in supportive or peripheral roles. Although minor attempts at gender balance exist, they fail to overcome the prevailing male dominance. These subtle representational patterns reinforce patriarchal norms, critically impacting young learners during their formative gender identity development. Finally, this study explicitly recommends that textbook developers, policymakers, and educators adopt more inclusive practices to foster gender-equitable English language education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender Representation, EFL Textbook, English for Nusantara, Merdeka Curriculum, Indonesia

1 Introduction

Educational textbooks are rarely neutral in ideology. They not only teach language skills but also act as cultural artifacts that express, justify, and spread specific social values, including those related to gender. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where textbooks often serve as the primary or sole source of language input (Chojimah & Susanto, 2024; Sano et al., 2001), the ideological messages within these materials assume significant educational importance. When students repeatedly engage with materials portraying social realities in

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consistently gendered ways, these portrayals do more than reflect society; they actively reinforce and normalize such norms (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2001).

A preliminary examination of EFL textbooks used in Indonesian elementary classrooms, including English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5, points to a recurring problem: male and female characters are not given equal space, voice, or value within the same instructional pages that students read, discuss, and imitate every day. Male figures tend to dominate as the visible, active, and decision-making characters in stories, dialogues, and exercises, while female figures more often appear as passive, supportive, or domestic figures with narrower roles and fewer opportunities to be shown as capable, knowledgeable, or in charge. Because elementary-aged learners are still forming their understanding of who they are and what they may become, this imbalance is not merely a matter of textual detail; it carries real consequences inside the classroom. Boys repeatedly exposed to male characters portrayed as leaders, experts, and adventurers may come to see public achievement and authority as naturally theirs, while girls repeatedly exposed to female characters confined to care-giving and domestic settings may come to see their own ambitions as properly limited to the private sphere. Such patterns can quietly shape classroom dynamics; for instance, who is expected to speak up, lead group work, or be praised for competence and who is expected to assist, listen, or stay in the background, reproducing gendered hierarchies among young learners well before they are old enough to question them critically. Left unaddressed, this dynamic risks turning the English textbook, intended purely as a language-learning tool, into an unintentional vehicle for teaching children narrow and unequal ideas about gender. Addressing this problem requires more than acknowledging its existence; it calls for the deliberate and consistent placement of gender equality principles within textbook content itself, ensuring balanced character frequency, diverse role assignments, and even-handed trait attribution so that English language materials can support, rather than undermine, equitable social development for both male and female students.

The relationship between language, gender, and power is a key focus in applied linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Research shows that textbooks across subjects, education levels, and countries tend to depict men and women in ways that support patriarchal norms: males are shown in dominant, authoritative, and public roles, while females are mainly assigned domestic, subordinate, or passive roles (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Al-Kayed et al., 2020; Amerian & Esmaili, 2015; Kazmi et al., 2023). These patterns are not accidental but have ideological consequences, especially for young learners whose ideas about gender and social roles are still forming (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Nazimi & Hatifi, 2023).

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum has introduced major changes to elementary English education. A notable feature is the development of local, government-issued textbooks aiming to align English learning with Indonesian identity and cultural values. The textbook *English for Nusantara Kids for Grade 5 SD/MI*, published by Kemendikbudristek (2022), is a key product of this reform, seeking to balance global English skills with Indonesian cultural grounding. However, its approach to gender equity in representation has received little scholarly attention.

Research on gender representation in Indonesian EFL textbooks has mostly focused on secondary school materials (Andini et al., 2022; Chojimah & Susanto, 2024; Fidyarningsih & Oktavianti, 2024), while studies on primary-level Merdeka Curriculum textbooks remain scarce

(Amirulloh & Suryati, 2026). This gap is important since primary learners are at a critical stage where their gender and social role concepts are strongly shaped by educational content.

This study addresses this gap by using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA model to analyze gender representation in English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5. It explores: (1) the frequency of male and female characters in text and visuals; (2) the social, occupational, and domestic roles assigned to each gender; (3) character traits linked to male and female figures; and (4) the ideological messages conveyed by these patterns. The study aims to offer insights useful to scholars of critical applied linguistics, curriculum developers, and educators promoting gender equity in Indonesian EFL education.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to examining language, viewing discourse as a space where social power relations are enacted, maintained, and challenged. CDA assumes that language, even in everyday use, is never ideologically neutral but always reflects and shapes social reality (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2001). According to Fairclough (1995, p. 1), discourse is "language as social practice," meaning that producing or interpreting text is also a social act influenced by and influencing broader social structures and ideologies.

Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework, commonly used in CDA research on educational materials, analyzes discourse on three interconnected levels. The first level, textual analysis, focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, transitivity, modality, and how social actors are grammatically represented. The second, discursive practice, investigates how texts are produced and consumed, considering how they draw from, reproduce, or transform existing social discourses. The third, social practice, places these patterns within wider institutional and ideological contexts, exploring the power relations and social formations the text reinforces or challenges. Together, these levels enable a deep critical examination of the ideological functions texts perform (Andini et al., 2023; Topkaya & Gun, 2023).

Educational textbooks are rarely neutral in ideology. They not only teach language skills but also act as cultural artifacts that express, justify, and spread specific social values, including those related to gender. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where textbooks often serve as the primary or sole source of language input (Chojimah & Susanto, 2024; Sano et al., 2001), the ideological messages within these materials assume significant educational importance. When students repeatedly engage with materials portraying social realities in consistently gendered ways, these portrayals do more than reflect society. They actively reinforce and normalize such norms (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2001).

2.2 Gender Representation in EFL Textbooks: International Evidence

Extensive international research consistently documents gender imbalance and stereotyping in EFL and ESL textbooks worldwide. Common findings include the predominance of male characters, who appear more frequently and occupy a wider, more prestigious range of occupational

and social roles. Females are disproportionately shown in domestic and subordinate roles and are more often associated with relational and aesthetic traits, while males are linked to agency, authority, and intellectual competence (Aljuaythin, 2018; Amerian & Esmaili, 2015; Kazmi et al., 2023; Nazimi & Hatifi, 2023).

Al-Kayed et al. 2020 applied Fairclough's 1995 three-dimensional framework to analyze ELT textbooks used in Jordanian higher education, finding that males dominated occupational roles such as craftsmen and fitness trainers. While some aspects showed relatively equal social status between genders, stereotypical role assignments persisted, favoring males.

Amerian and Esmaili (2015) identified systematic sexism in international EFL textbooks, both overt, through explicit discriminatory depictions, and covert, through female objectification as marketing tools. Aljuaythin (2018) found significant underrepresentation of female characters in Saudi Arabian elementary EFL textbooks across frequency, activities, illustrations, and social/domestic roles, with males dominating.

In Pakistan, Ahmad and Shah (2019) found Grade 5 textbooks to be highly gender biased, with males appearing more frequently and in more diverse roles. They recommended increasing female authorship and raising teacher awareness of gender bias. Kazmi et al. (2023) observed pervasive gender discrimination in secondary school textbooks in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, where females were stereotypically depicted and marginalized.

Topkaya and Gun (2023) noted that although Turkish university EFL textbooks showed approximate gender balance in character frequency, qualitative analysis revealed persistent male bias in occupational roles and the order in which genders were introduced. Nazimi and Hatifi (2023) documented stark gender discrimination in Afghan Grade 7 textbooks, with males occupying nearly all authoritative and public roles, while females were almost absent from professional contexts.

Sano et al. (2001) in their analysis of Japanese EFL textbooks found that, despite the removal of gender-biased language at the lexical level, implicit stereotypes persisted in verb usage and chapter topics. Male characters were associated with actions like "choosing" and "deciding," while female characters' speech lacked substantive content. This underscores the importance of analyzing qualitative dimensions of gender representation beyond mere frequency counts.

2.3 Gender Representation in Indonesian EFL Textbooks

In the Indonesian setting, there has been a notable increase in research examining gender representation within EFL materials over recent years, consistently revealing concerning trends. Andini et al. (2023), utilizing a multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach grounded in Fairclough's framework, analyzed the official 2017 senior high school EFL textbook published by Kemendikbud and identified significant gender bias across all textual elements. Male characters dominated visual content (25.6% compared to 11.6% for females), passage texts (46.3% male versus 34.3% female), dialogue sections (51.8% male versus 38.8% female), and exercises. Qualitative findings highlighted that males were predominantly associated with advanced education and professional expertise, while females were largely confined to traditional social roles emphasizing appearance.

In contrast, Chojimah and Susanto (2024), examining five Indonesian EFL textbooks from Erlangga Publishing through Van Dijk's CDA lens, presented a more complex picture. Their study revealed that female images slightly outnumbered male images overall, and the distribution of male and female roles was generally balanced. They interpreted this as reflecting an egalitarian ethos among the authors. However, they cautioned that frequency alone is insufficient to gauge true representational equity, as the narrative context, character functions, and authority levels also play crucial roles.

Fidyaningsih and Oktavianti (2024), applying corpus-assisted CDA to Merdeka Curriculum ELT textbooks for junior high students, found persistent gender imbalance, with references to males exceeding those to females across categories such as notable names, fictional characters, common names, and pronouns. Their analysis of character traits added further nuance, showing that while female characters were often attributed positive qualities, these were primarily relational or nurturing rather than professional or intellectual.

Similarly, Amirulloh and Suryati (2026), focusing on a primary school EFL textbook (Grade 6 My Next Words) aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, employed corpus and micro-semiotic analyses and found that despite the author's efforts toward gender visibility balance, a 9% disparity remained. Male characters were more frequently linked to physical, authoritative, and outdoor activities, whereas female characters were more commonly associated with domestic, caring, and indoor roles.

2.4 Textbooks as Ideological Instruments

Critical scholarship consistently treats educational textbooks not merely as instructional tools but as ideological vehicles, places where a society's dominant values, assumptions, and power relations are encoded, legitimized, and passed on to successive generations of learners. Fairclough (1995) argued that ideological content is most effective when it remains invisible, presenting social arrangements as natural, inevitable, or as how things are. In terms of gender, this means textbooks reinforce patriarchal ideologies not by overtly endorsing inequality but by routinely depicting men and women in ways that align with traditional gender roles, making these roles seem commonsensical and unquestionable.

This is why Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is particularly apt for analyzing textbook content critically. By exposing the implicit ideological assumptions hidden in seemingly neutral language and imagery, CDA reveals how textbooks participate in what Fairclough (1995) called "the reproduction of social inequalities." Islam and Asadullah (2018), in a comparative study of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi school textbooks, found pervasive stereotypical gender representations at both primary and secondary education levels, reinforcing traditional roles that restrict female learners' aspirations. Alqahtani (2024) similarly documented significant gender imbalance in Saudi secondary school EFL textbooks, despite official commitments to women's empowerment via Vision 2030, highlighting the often wide gap between policy intentions and textbook realities.

For elementary school learners, the ideological stakes embedded in textbook content are especially high. At this critical developmental stage, children are forming their understanding of social norms and their own potential roles within society. Repeated exposure to textbook

portrayals within formal education settings gives these images particular authority, often absorbed unconsciously as social facts. When these depictions consistently position males as more capable, prominent, and socially important than females, they contribute to cognitive schemas that may persist into adulthood (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Amirulloh & Suryati, 2026).

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, which Creswell and Creswell (2018) define as an approach used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon, relying on the researcher as the key instrument, multiple forms of data, inductive and contextual analysis, and a final written account that captures participants' or texts' perspectives in rich, descriptive detail. Within this broad qualitative tradition, a qualitative approach is well-suited to the present study because its primary objective is not merely to count instances of gendered representation but to interpret their meanings and social significance, an interpretative task that demands close, context-sensitive engagement with the textual data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). Consistent with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) characterization of qualitative inquiry as emergent, holistic, and concerned with participants' or texts' own meanings rather than the researcher's predetermined categories, this study allows patterns of gender representation to surface through sustained, close reading of the textbook rather than through fixed quantitative hypotheses.

More specifically, within this qualitative framework, the study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its analytical lens, drawing on the three-dimensional model introduced by Fairclough (1995), which examines discourse simultaneously as text, discursive practice, and social practice. This CDA approach was chosen because it moves beyond surface-level description to interrogate how language and imagery in the textbook construct, naturalize, or contest gendered power relations, treating English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 not simply as a neutral pedagogical resource but as a discursive artifact embedded within broader Indonesian social and educational ideologies. By situating Fairclough's (1995) textual, discursive, and social practice levels within the qualitative principles outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the study can move systematically from close linguistic and visual observation of the textbook to broader interpretation of the ideological messages it conveys about gender. While frequency counts are reported as part of the analysis, in line with established practices in CDA-based textbook research (Andini et al., 2023; Kazmi et al., 2023), these quantitative measures serve as entry points for critical interpretation rather than definitive analytical outcomes.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data for this study are drawn from English for Nusantara Kids for Grade 5 SD/MI (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), an official government-issued textbook mandated for use nationwide as the English language teaching material for fifth-grade elementary students under the Merdeka Curriculum. The textbook consists of six thematic chapters covering topics such as personal identity, family and daily routines, community activities, the natural environment,

cultural celebrations, and health and wellness. Each chapter features a mix of text and visual components including reading passages, dialogues, vocabulary and grammar exercises, listening activities, illustrated stories, and reflection questions. Designed for students aged ten to eleven, the textbook is available in both print and digital formats through Kemendikbudristek's official platform.

This research was carried out via document analysis of the *English for Nusantara Kids for Grade 5 SD/MI* textbook. Since the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis focusing exclusively on the textbook, no human subjects were involved. The textbook was the sole data source, with all gender-related textual and visual content across the six chapters systematically analyzed.

3.3 Research Instruments

The primary tool for analysis in this study is the researcher's theoretically informed framework, which is based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model. Additionally, a structured data recording sheet was designed to systematically capture instances of gender representation across six categories: (1) character frequency, which counts male and female appearances in both text and visuals; (2) occupational and social roles, detailing activities, professions, and social functions attributed to each gender; (3) domestic roles, noting how often and in what ways household and caregiving tasks are depicted; (4) character trait attributions, focusing on qualities, skills, and personality traits assigned to characters; (5) visual representation, examining the placement, activities, and presentation of male and female figures in illustrations; and (6) generic masculine language, tracking the use of masculine-default pronouns, nouns, or terms in contexts where gender is unspecified or generalized.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was guided directly by the four research questions of this study namely (1) the frequency of male and female character appearances, (2) the occupational, social, and domestic roles assigned to each gender, (3) the character traits attributed to male and female figures, and (4) the broader ideological messages conveyed through texts, dialogues, exercises, and illustrations and was carried out through a sequence of CDA-based analytical steps adapted from Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model. Step One involved data familiarization and coding, in which all six chapters of the textbook were read repeatedly, and every instance of a male, female, or gender-indeterminate character in passages, dialogues, exercises, and illustrations was identified and tallied, directly generating the frequency data needed to answer research question one. Step Two involved categorization of roles and traits, in which each coded character instance was classified according to the occupational, social, and domestic role it performed and the personality or character traits attributed to it, addressing research questions two and three. Step Three constituted textual analysis proper, where linguistic elements such as transitivity patterns (identifying agents and recipients of actions), lexical choices in character descriptions, and grammatical structures positioning male and female social actors were scrutinized in depth, strengthening the evidentiary basis for research questions two and three. Step Four examined the data through the lens of discursive practice, considering the discursive norms and genre expect-

tations influencing the textbook's creation, including the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum and standard design principles of primary EFL textbooks, to understand how these patterns were produced and are likely to be consumed by teachers and learners. Step Five situated the findings from the previous steps within the wider framework of Indonesian gender relations and the educational system's role in either perpetuating or challenging these dynamics, generating the interpretation of ideological messages required to answer research question four. Throughout all five steps, triangulation was ensured by cross-referencing textual and visual data, while analytical transparency was upheld through detailed reflexive documentation of the reasoning involved.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Frequency of Gender Representation

The most immediately noticeable aspect of gender representation in the English textbook for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 is the unequal frequency of male and female character appearances. A systematic tally of all textual and visual components across the six chapters shows a clear pattern of male numerical predominance. Male characters act as the main agents or subjects in roughly 58% of occurrences, while female characters account for about 37%, with the remaining 5% representing gender-neutral or indeterminate characters. This trend is evident in all textual categories: in reading passages, male characters appear as subjects or protagonists more often than females in four out of six chapters; in dialogues, male speakers tend to initiate and lead conversations, whereas female speakers more commonly respond or affirm; and in exercises and activity texts, male characters are more frequently depicted than female characters.

Table 1: Frequency of Gender Representation in English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5

No.	Gender	Percentage	Note
1	Male	58%	Indicates the proportion of character occurrences in which male figures act as the main agents or subjects across reading passages, dialogues, exercises, and illustrations.
2	Female	37%	Indicates the proportion of character occurrences in which female figures act as the main agents or subjects across reading passages, dialogues, exercises, and illustrations.
3	Gender Indeterminate	5%	Indicates the proportion of character occurrences whose gender is not explicitly identifiable from the text or illustration.
4	Total	100%	Represents the overall total of character occurrences used as the basis for comparing the frequency of male and female representation.

The visual analysis reveals a generally consistent trend: in group activity scenes, male characters are more likely to be centrally placed and depicted in active, forward-moving poses,

whereas female characters are more often shown in peripheral positions, fulfilling observational or supportive roles. These results closely correspond with findings by Andini et al. (2023), who reported male pictorial dominance at 25.6% compared to 11.6% female in Indonesian senior high school EFL textbooks; Ahmad and Shah (2019), who described the Pakistani Grade 5 textbook as "highly gender biased" with males prevailing in all categories; and Al-Kayed et al. (2020), who noted similar frequency imbalances in Jordanian EFL textbooks. As highlighted by Amirulloh and Suryati (2026) and Chojimah and Susanto (2024), the persistence of this pattern across different contexts indicates that male numerical dominance in EFL textbooks is a structural characteristic of the field, resistant to change despite increasing policy commitments to gender equity.

While frequency provides an initial picture of gender visibility, it does not fully explain how gender ideology is constructed. A closer examination of occupational and social roles offers deeper insight into the ways male and female characters are represented throughout the textbook.

4.2 Occupational and Social Role Representation

The analysis of occupational and social roles assigned to male and female characters reveals a distinct gendered division of social labor. Male characters are linked to a broader and more varied range of professional and public roles. Throughout the six chapters, male characters are portrayed as doctors, community leaders, sports coaches, farmers, and adventurers. In Chapter Three, which focuses on community activities, key figures of authority and professional expertise such as the village head, the health advisor, and the sports coach are consistently represented as male. This pattern aligns with Aljuaythin's (2018) findings that Saudi EFL elementary textbooks limited female characters to a narrow set of stereotypically feminine roles, and with Amerian and Esmaili's (2015) observations that international EFL textbooks associate males with a significantly broader range of social activities than females.

In contrast, female characters are more commonly portrayed in nurturing, domestic, or traditionally feminized professional roles. Mothers and grandmothers are shown in home settings, while female characters also appear as teachers and nurses. Although these roles are socially valued, their near-exclusive association with female characters, alongside the limited presence of females in a wider range of professional roles, creates a representational framework that restricts the scope of female social contributions. Al-Kayed et al. (2020) identified similar patterns in their study of Jordanian textbooks, noting that confining women to domestic roles while excluding men from them forms an interconnected system of gendered representation that is more limiting than any single representation alone. Kazmi et al. (2023) also found gender discrimination pervasive across nearly all textbook categories, including occupational roles, with the only partial exception being household activities, which closely mirrors the current observations.

Significantly, the textbook does include some counter-stereotypical examples. For instance, in Chapter Three, a female character leads a community art project, showing leadership and creativity. In Chapter Five, a female character delivers an informational presentation to her class, portraying her as knowledgeable in a public context. These examples indicate some awareness by the authors of the need for gender balance. However, they are neither frequent nor prominent enough to counterbalance the prevailing male-centered bias. As Kazmi et al. (2023)

Table 2: Occupational Roles of Male and Female Characters

No.	Male-prevalent roles	Female-prevalent roles	Note
1	Doctor	Teacher	Illustrates how professional and public-facing occupations are predominantly attributed to male characters, while caregiving or service-oriented occupations are predominantly attributed to female characters.
2	Farmer	Nurse	Shows the gendered division between male outdoor/productive labor and female supportive/caregiving labor.
3	Community Leader	Mother	Reflects the association of male characters with public authority roles compared to female characters with domestic/familial roles.
4	Sports Coach	Grandmother	Demonstrates the link between male characters and physically authoritative roles versus female characters and home-based roles.
5	Adventurer	Housewife	Highlights the contrast between male characters' association with exploration and independence and female characters' association with domestic responsibility.

argue, true representational equity requires not isolated counter-stereotypical instances but a comprehensive redistribution of roles, authority, and visibility throughout the textbook. By this criterion, English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5, despite its cultural relevance and intent to reflect Indonesian social diversity, falls short.

Beyond occupational roles, gender ideology is also reflected in the distribution of domestic responsibilities assigned to male and female characters.

4.3 Domestic Role Representation

The textbook's portrayal of domestic roles offers particularly insightful evidence of the underlying gender ideology. Throughout all six chapters, domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, and household management are almost exclusively linked to female characters, particularly mothers and grandmothers. In Chapter Two, which focuses on family and home life, the division of domestic labor is explicitly gendered: female family members are depicted performing cooking, cleaning, and childcare duties, whereas male family members are shown engaging in leisure or professional activities. This reflects findings by Andini et al. (2023), who noted that females in the Indonesian senior high school textbook were tied to traditional domestic roles and "social status and hype," as well as by Amerian and Esmaili (2015), who documented a systematic association of females with household tasks in international EFL materials.

The near-total absence of male characters participating in domestic activities no fathers cooking or cleaning, no grandfathers handling household chores constitutes a powerful discursive

Table 3: Domestic Activities

No.	Domestic Activity	Representation by Gender	Note
1	Cooking	Male: Rarely Represented; Female: Frequently Represented	Indicates that cooking is depicted mainly as a female responsibility, with minimal male involvement shown in the textbook.
2	Cleaning	Male: Not Observed; Female: Frequently Represented	Indicates that cleaning tasks are exclusively attributed to female characters, with no male characters shown performing this activity.
3	Childcare	Male: Not Observed; Female: Commonly Represented	Indicates that childcare responsibilities are consistently assigned to female characters, reflecting the exclusion of male characters from this domestic role.
4	Household Management	Male: Not Observed; Female: Frequently Represented	Indicates that overall household management is portrayed almost exclusively as a female domain across the textbook's six chapters.

act in itself. Such invisibility functions as a form of exclusion as impactful as explicit negative stereotyping, making male involvement in domestic life inconceivable within the textbook's representational framework and thereby normalizing the domestic sphere as inherently female. For the textbook's target audience of ten- to eleven-year-olds, this representational pattern directly influences how both boys and girls perceive their future roles and responsibilities within family life (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Amirulloh & Suryati, 2026). Besides social roles, the language used to describe male and female characters further reinforces gendered expectations.

4.4 Character Trait Attributions

The analysis of descriptive language, dialogue, and narrative framing reveals consistent gendered patterns in the attribution of character traits. Male characters are more often described in terms of rationality, competence, agency, and leadership qualities that confer social value through action and knowledge. When male characters receive praise or attention, it is usually for their achievements, skills, or contributions within professional or public domains. For example, in Chapter One, the protagonist's father is primarily defined by his professional role and social contribution as a doctor, emphasizing agency and public purpose.

By contrast, female characters are more frequently valued for relational qualities, emotional expressiveness, physical appearance, and domestic skills. The mother in the same chapter is portrayed as loving, patient, and skilled in domestic management positive traits that highlight private devotion rather than public or professional accomplishment. This unequal discursive construction of male and female social worth aligns with the pattern identified by Amerian and

Table 4: Character Traits

No.	Male-prevalent Traits	Female-prevalent Traits	Note
1	Leadership	Caring	Shows the contrast between male characters valued for directive, agentive qualities and female characters valued for nurturing, relational qualities.
2	Brave	Patient	Reflects the association of male characters with assertive action and female characters with emotional steadiness in supportive contexts.
3	Intelligent	Kind	Illustrates the link between male characters and intellectual competence compared to female characters and interpersonal warmth.
4	Professional	Helpful	Highlights the association of male characters with public/professional accomplishment versus female characters with supportive service.
5	Independent	Loving	Demonstrates the contrast between male characters' autonomy and female characters' relational devotion within the textbook's narratives.

Esmaili (2015), who noted that females are valued for “being” while males are valued for “doing.” Similarly, Fidyaningsih and Oktavianti (2024) observed that in Merdeka Curriculum junior high school materials, female characters receive consistently positive trait attributions, though these are primarily relational and nurturing rather than professional or intellectual.

This representational imbalance in character traits is significant because, as Van Dijk (2001) argues, repeated textual exposure shapes learners' cognitive schemas and their models of social reality. When textbooks consistently link male characters with active, influential, and professionally esteemed traits and female characters with passive, relational, and domestic traits, they contribute to the development of gender schemas that learners apply to interpret their social experiences (Nazimi & Hatifi, 2023). This influence is particularly critical for the ten- to eleven-year-old learners of English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5, a stage when gender identity and social role understanding are rapidly developing.

4.5 Visual Representation

The visual aspect of English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 warrants distinct analysis, given that illustrations make up a significant portion of the textbook and carry ideological meanings in particularly powerful ways, often presenting themselves as natural, rather than constructed, representations of reality (Aljuaythin, 2018; Andini et al., 2023). Three consistent visual gender coding patterns emerge. First, male figures more often occupy central, foregrounded positions in action scenes, portrayed with active and purposeful postures, while female figures tend to be placed peripherally or in observational roles. Second, male characters are shown in a broader

range of social environments, including outdoor and professional settings, whereas female characters are more frequently depicted indoors, such as in homes or schools. Third, in group scenes with children, mild gender segregation is evident: boys engage in physically active or exploratory activities, while girls participate in more sedentary, communicative, or artistic activities.

These visual patterns align with findings in related literature. Andini et al. (2023) observed even stronger male dominance in images compared to text in Indonesian senior high school textbooks. Ahmad and Shah (2019) reported similar visual coding in the Pakistani Grade 5 textbook. Sano et al. (2001) found that Japanese EFL textbooks conveyed stereotypical gender roles visually, even when gender-biased language had been removed from the text, highlighting the importance of multimodal analysis. The persistence of these visual conventions in English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 suggests that androcentric visual norms are deeply ingrained in EFL textbook production and have not been sufficiently questioned during the development of this textbook.

4.6 Generic Masculine Language

An often overlooked aspect of gender representation in EFL textbooks is the linguistic construction of gender through grammar and word choice, especially the use of generic masculine forms. In English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5, this occurs mainly in situations where the gender of a hypothetical or unspecified actor is not identified. In such cases, the textbook tends to default to masculine pronouns ("he," "his") or occupational terms with masculine connotations. Although gender-neutral or female pronouns are used in some specific instances, the prevalent use of generic masculine language in unmarked or instructional contexts reflects a widespread convention in English materials that symbolically establishes maleness as the default human identity. Kazmi et al. (2023) identify generic masculine nouns as one of seven categories contributing to gender representation, noting that masculine-default terms symbolically exclude women from the relevant conceptual domains. In the Indonesian EFL setting, where learners are simultaneously acquiring English and adapting to English sociolinguistic norms, the continued use of masculine-generic language in textbooks may reinforce an implicit cognitive link between maleness and generic humanity—an important yet subtle element of gender ideology in textbooks (Amerian & Esmaili, 2015).

4.7 Ideological Implications

The evidence discussed in previous sections presents a clear ideological pattern. The English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 textbook depicts a social environment where male roles, authority, and influence are more prevalent, varied, and esteemed than those of females. While this portrayal is not consistently or overtly discriminatory, there are some counter-stereotypical examples, and the inclusion of local cultural elements brings some diversity; the overall trend remains strongly centered on males. This reflects Fairclough's (1995) concept of ideological discourse, where constructed social norms are presented as natural and unquestioned realities.

These observations are in line with global research. Chojimah and Susanto (2024) assert that textbooks help shape learners' social identities, beyond serving as language learning tools. Al-Kayed et al. (2020) reveal that even when textbooks appear balanced in terms of gender

representation, they can still perpetuate gender biases through the types of roles, authority, and qualities they assign to each gender. Although the Merdeka Curriculum admirably aims to embrace local culture and prioritize students, as Amirulloh and Suryati (2026) point out in a similar context, these intentions do not guarantee gender-balanced representation unless designers focus intentionally and systematically on gender equity.

The patterns found in this study are especially important because of the young age of the students using these materials. As Ahmad and Shah (2019) and Nazimi and Hatifi (2023) highlight, elementary students are at a formative stage, where their ideas about gender roles are highly flexible and easily shaped by educational resources. Textbooks, often seen as authoritative in classrooms, can make their underlying ideologies particularly resistant to scrutiny by both students and teachers. To address this, it's necessary not only to revise future textbook editions but also to adopt teaching methods that encourage students to critically examine and question gender representations as they encounter them.

5 Conclusion

This research conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis on gender representation in the English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 textbook, which is the official EFL textbook for Indonesian elementary schools following the Merdeka Curriculum. Using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA framework, the study found a consistent androcentric pattern in six aspects: male characters appear more frequently in both text and illustrations; they are also linked to a broader and more prestigious range of social and occupational roles; domestic activities are depicted almost exclusively as the domain of female characters; males are more often characterized by competence, agency, and authority, while females are mostly valued for their relational and domestic roles; illustrations tend to reinforce rather than challenge these patterns; and generic masculine language is still dominant in contexts that should be gender-neutral. Although there are a few counter-stereotypical representations, they are too scarce and not strong enough to change the prevailing trend, which, following Fairclough, operates by normalizing patriarchal gender arrangements as something natural in society.

These findings have several important implications. For textbook developers and curriculum policymakers, the study highlights the urgent need for systematic gender auditing protocols as a standard part of textbook development and review. Future editions should ensure equal frequency, diversity of roles, and depth of characterization for both male and female characters; actively include male characters in domestic and caregiving roles; show female characters in professional and leadership positions with equal prominence and authority; replace masculine-generic language with gender-neutral terms; and make sure that visual illustrations reflect a fair distribution of social spaces and activities between genders.

For teachers, the study emphasizes the importance of a critical approach to textbook content using examples of gender representation not just as teaching material, but as a prompt for students to develop critical awareness of social norms and power relations, rather than passively accepting the book's content as an objective reflection of social reality. This is especially crucial since elementary school is a formative period when gender identities are most vulnerable to influence. Teachers who possess strong critical gender literacy can turn bias in textbooks from

a problem into a valuable teaching opportunity.

Overall, this study indicates that although English for Nusantara Kids Grade 5 has attempted to include both male and female characters, gender representation remains uneven in terms of visibility, social roles, and character portrayal. These findings highlight the importance of developing EFL textbooks that promote more balanced and inclusive gender representations to support equitable learning environments for young learners.

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