

**Gender Representation in Indonesian Government-Mandated  
ELT Textbooks for Primary Schools**

**Baiq Septia Ayuningsih**

[bqseptiaa21@gmail.com](mailto:bqseptiaa21@gmail.com)

**Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sorong**

**Abd. Rahman**

[abdrahman28best@gmail.com](mailto:abdrahman28best@gmail.com)

**Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sorong**

**Misnariah Idrus**

[msnariahidrus@gmail.com](mailto:msnariahidrus@gmail.com)

**Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sorong**

**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative content analysis examines gender representation in Indonesian government-mandated English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks for primary schools to assess alignment between national gender equality policies and pedagogical materials. Findings reveal significant divergence from international norms. Character distribution showed female predominance (57% vs. 43% male) with female protagonist, reversing typical 60-70% male dominance documented in ELT materials globally. Linguistic analysis demonstrated balanced pronoun usage (48% masculine, 52% feminine) with zero generic masculine, male-first ordering, or gendered adjectives. Activity representation showed minimal stereotyping with counter-stereotypical examples, though limited to domestic and school contexts. Occupational representation proved critically limited, depicting only one professional role (male teacher), creating symbolic void in career diversity exposure. The textbook successfully translates Kurikulum Merdeka gender equality policies into content, achieving neutrality through bias elimination but not transformation through active norm challenge. The results place this material at the top of the global ELT textbook rankings for linguistic visibility and equality, while exposing the ongoing employment gap. Findings demonstrate compatibility between Islamic values and gender equality, contradicting assumptions about cultural barriers in Muslim-majority contexts. The occupational void represents critical intervention point during formative developmental years. Study contributes empirical evidence of policy-to-practice translation success and identifies actionable pathways for Indonesian educational material improvement.

Keywords: Gender Representation; ELT Textbooks; Content Analysis; Curriculum Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks transmit cultural values alongside language instruction, fundamentally shaping learners' emerging gender identities. Visual and textual representations in these materials communicate powerful implicit messages about appropriate roles during children's critical developmental years (Charmilasari 2024). Beyond their ostensible linguistic content, these instructional materials function as complex semiotic systems wherein vocabulary selections, narrative structures, and visual representations coalesce to communicate implicit socio-cultural messages regarding normative gender roles and expectations (Arifah 2019). The foreign language classroom thus constitutes a distinctive socialization context wherein students not only develop linguistic competencies but also encounter and negotiate cultural value systems that may diverge significantly from prevailing local norms. Consequently, gender representations embedded within ELT textbooks exert a potentially bidirectional influence: they may either reinforce existing local gender stereotypes or challenge them by introducing alternative cross-cultural perspectives on gender identity and expression (Zahra, Inawati, and Ariffin 2024).

Within the Indonesian educational ecosystem, ELT textbooks occupy a particularly significant position in shaping gendered understandings during the critical developmental period of childhood and early adolescence. Empirical research demonstrates that the lexical choices, dialogic exchanges, and illustrative content featured in these materials systematically communicate gendered behavioral expectations through subtle yet pervasive mechanisms, including the differential attribution of professional roles, the gendered distribution of daily activities, and the assignment of personality characteristics along gender lines (Jusuf 2018). The widespread adoption of communicative language teaching methodologies, which deliberately situate learners within simulated real-world contexts, amplifies this influence by transforming textbooks into active sites wherein children negotiate and construct their gendered understandings across both local and global cultural frameworks. This inherently interactive dimension of contemporary language pedagogy positions ELT textbooks not merely as passive reflectors of prevailing gender norms but as potential catalytic agents capable of promoting more equitable and inclusive gender perspectives when designed with deliberate attention to gender representation (David Buckingham 2015).

Visual imagery constitutes a particularly potent dimension of gender messaging within educational materials, yet it remains comparatively underexamined in Indonesian contexts. In a nation characterized by extraordinary cultural diversity, significant religious influence on social norms, and ongoing tensions between traditional value systems and modernization pressures, the analytical examination of gender positioning within educational materials assumes heightened relevance for understanding intergenerational value transmission processes (Parker and Prabawa-Sear 2019). Established research across multiple national contexts confirms that visual elements embedded in textbooks function as powerful

mechanisms that may either reinforce or contest prevailing gender stereotypes (Brugeilles 2009). These visual representations reflect and simultaneously reproduce broader societal attitudes regarding appropriate gender roles, potentially exerting substantial influence on children's developing self-perceptions, academic trajectory decisions, and career aspiration formations (Ullah and Skelton 2013). Meta-analytic reviews of existing empirical literature consistently reveal systematic imbalances in textbook gender representation, with male characters appearing with significantly greater frequency and depicted in notably more active, diverse, and socially valued roles compared to their female counterparts (Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2016).

The Indonesian case presents distinctive analytical opportunities and challenges for gender representation research. Despite substantial policy-level progress toward gender equality objectives in recent decades including curriculum reforms and international treaty ratifications traditional gender role expectations remain deeply embedded across multiple institutional and social domains (Kabeer 2021). As Adriany (2024) argues, Indonesia's complex post-colonial historical trajectory and varied political movements have generated multifaceted gender dynamics that manifest visibly in cultural productions, including state-mandated educational materials. Contemporary school textbooks thus occupy a contested terrain, simultaneously reflecting progressive official educational policies while reproducing persistent cultural norms regarding normative gender arrangements and behavioral expectations.

Recent scholarly investigations into ELT textbooks have yielded paradoxical findings regarding gender representation trends. Notwithstanding explicit policy initiatives designed to minimize gender bias within the national curriculum framework, visual content analysis reveals that textbook imagery continues to display traditional gender role divisions with notable frequency. However, certain empirical studies document gradual movement toward more balanced representational patterns, though this progress demonstrates significant inconsistency across subject areas and educational grade levels (Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat 2010). This documented gap between policy intentions and material realities underscores the necessity for more granular, contextually-grounded analyses of contemporary Indonesian educational resources.

The present investigation addresses this empirical lacuna by examining not only the structural patterns of gender representation within Indonesian primary school ELT textbooks but also critically the interpretive processes through which young learners engage with and construct meaning from these representations. By integrating systematic content analysis of textbook imagery with examination of children's interpretive responses, this research foregrounds the inherently interactive nature of educational meaning-making processes. This methodological approach acknowledges that students function not as passive information recipients but as active meaning-makers who deploy their experiential knowledge and cultural frameworks in interpreting educational materials (David Buckingham 2015). The

dynamic interplay among textual elements, visual representations, and student interpretations constitutes a complex phenomenon fundamentally shaped by broader socio-cultural forces operating at multiple ecological levels.

The significance of this investigation extends beyond purely academic concerns to encompass substantial practical implications for educational policy formulation and ELT materials development within Indonesia. As the nation continues navigating its trajectory toward greater gender equality, understanding the mechanisms through which educational materials either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms becomes essential for constructing more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Edres (2022) persuasively argues that systematic textbook reform constitutes an indispensable component of broader educational initiatives promoting gender equality. Through rigorous examination of visual content, this study generates empirical insights capable of informing more gender-responsive approaches to the design, evaluation, and implementation of educational materials across Indonesian primary education contexts.

This research contributes to the expanding international literature examining gender dynamics within educational contexts in non-Western societies, while simultaneously generating context-specific insights directly relevant to Indonesian educational development priorities. A growing scholarly consensus emphasizes the critical importance of incorporating local epistemological perspectives into gender and education research, recognizing that universal gender equality frameworks require substantial contextual adaptation to achieve meaningful transformative impact (Shehnaz Gul 2025). The present study responds to this scholarly imperative by synthesizing systematic content analysis methodologies with interpretive examination grounded in Indonesian students' lived experiences and cultural positionalities, thereby bridging the persistent gap between abstract theoretical frameworks and concrete contextual realities shaping gender representation in Indonesian primary education.

Although research on gender representation in ELT textbooks has grown, there are glaring gaps in visual analysis and the process of child interpretation in the multicultural context of Indonesia. Previous studies focused on structural patterns of text and image content (Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010; Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2016), but ignored how children actively construct meaning from such representations through their local cultural framework (David Buckingham, 2015). This gap is increasingly apparent in Indonesia, where textbooks reflect the contradiction between national gender equality policies and traditional norms that remain strong (Adriany, 2024; Kabeer, 2021), so content analysis alone is not enough to require an integrated approach that combines systematic visual analysis with students' interpretive responses to uncover the dynamics of true gender identity formation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Gender as Social and Embodied Construct

Gender representation in educational materials operates at the intersection of biological embodiment and social construction. Wadud (2009) egalitarian Islamic framework provides theoretical foundation for examining gender beyond essentialist categories, arguing that Quranic principles emphasize human equality before God regardless of gender. Her critique of patriarchal interpretations demonstrates that gender roles mentioned in religious texts are contextual and adaptable to contemporary societal needs, with the concept of "khalifah" (divine vicegerency) applying universally without gender distinction (An-Najmi Fikri 2024; Islamiyah, Mubin, and Sholeh 2024). This theological perspective aligns with contemporary understandings of gender as embodied social practice, wherein biological characteristics interact dynamically with cultural expectations to shape how individuals perform and experience gender in everyday contexts (Mazzuca et al. 2024). This integrated framework recognizes that gender identity emerges neither from biology alone nor purely from socialization, but through their ongoing interaction in lived experience.

### Dimensions of Gender Inequality in Educational Materials

Research identifies four critical dimensions through which gender inequality manifests in ELT textbooks: omission, stereotyping, occupational segregation, and linguistic sexism (Selvi and Kocaman 2021b). Omission refers to systematic underrepresentation wherein one gender predominantly female appears less frequently or occupies peripheral rather than central narrative roles (Yeboah, Serbeh, and Bembir 2015). This pattern creates "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman 2000), communicating implicit hierarchies about whose experiences merit inclusion in formal education. Southeast Asian studies reveal that even when female characters appear, they frequently occupy passive positions while males dominate storylines and substantial roles (Kurniati and Fithriani 2022). This representational absence profoundly impacts identity development, as students struggle to identify with domains where their gender remains invisible (Norton and Toohey 2011).

Stereotyping manifests through rigid associations between gender and particular attributes, activities, or behaviors (Liu et al. 2024). Male characters consistently receive portrayal as active, strong, and brave, while females appear passive, weak, and emotional. These patterns extend beyond characterization to visual semiotics, wherein physical attributes (males depicted larger/taller) reinforce power hierarchies, and activity representations rigidly segregate physical/competitive pursuits as masculine versus domestic/aesthetic activities as feminine (Slipachuk et al. 2024). Linguistic descriptors further entrench stereotypes, with males receiving competence-based adjectives ("intelligent," "brave") while females receive appearance-based terms ("beautiful," "kind").

Occupational representation reveals persistent segregation wherein males occupy diverse, prestigious professions (doctors, scientists, engineers) while females concentrate in stereotypically feminine roles (teachers, nurses, secretaries) (Preston 1999). This pattern directly shapes career aspirations by limiting imaginable professional futures, particularly problematic during primary education when aspirational foundations form (Bandura et al. 2001). Southeast Asian textbook analyses demonstrate that despite quantitative improvements, qualitative dimensions of occupational portrayal maintain significant gender bias.

Linguistic sexism operates through subtle yet pervasive patterns: generic masculine usage ("mankind," generic "he"), systematic male-first ordering in paired terms ("boys and girls," "Mr. and Mrs."), and professional title asymmetry wherein males receive professional identifiers while females receive marital status markers. These linguistic choices shape cognitive schemas, establishing maleness as humanity's default category while positioning femaleness as marked deviation. Tahriri and Moradpour demonstrate that such patterns create implicit hierarchies registering at unconscious levels, influencing how learners conceptualize gender relations and possibilities (Shotwell 2011).

### **Policy-Practice Gaps in Gender Equality**

Despite progressive gender equality policies in many contexts, persistent disjunctions exist between official commitments and actual textbook content (Blumberg 2008). Studies across Turkish (Selvi & Kocaman, 2021), Pakistani (Ullah & Skelton, 2013), and Southeast Asian contexts (Fithriani, 2022) document continued gender bias despite curriculum reforms emphasizing equality. This gap reflects multiple factors: inadequate gender-responsive training for content creators, absent systematic review criteria in approval processes, cultural resistance justified through selective interpretations, and lack of accountability mechanisms (Kabeer, 2021). Scandinavian examples demonstrate that intentional interventions including mandatory gender analysis and balanced representation requirements can successfully transform patterns over time (Skardhamar Nergård, 2015), suggesting that policy translation requires systematic implementation mechanisms beyond formal adoption.

### **Developmental Implications**

Textbooks function as microsystem elements directly shaping gender socialization during critical developmental periods. Social learning theory emphasizes that children acquire gender beliefs through observation and modeling of authoritative sources, with educational materials carrying particular weight (Melo-Marins, Carvalho, and Gomes 2015). Research demonstrates that children as young as six internalize gender stereotypes from their environments, significantly influencing subsequent academic choices and career aspirations. Gender-biased content undermines self-efficacy beliefs for domains where one's gender appears absent or marginalized, while balanced representation provides protective factors supporting

diverse identity development. In contexts with limited professional exposure, textbooks serve as primary career modeling sources, making their content particularly consequential for shaping imaginable futures (Gottfredson, 2005).

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine gender representation in Indonesian government-mandated ELT textbooks. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of social meanings embedded in visual and textual representations (Creswell 2015), while content analysis facilitated the systematic identification, categorization, and interpretation of representational patterns (Sugiyono 2010). The primary data source was the government-mandated ELT textbook "English for Nusantara Kids" for Grade 4 (Damayanti et al., 2024), published by Indonesia's Ministry of Education in 2024. The 186-page textbook contained 1,090 images, from which 218 images featuring identifiable human characters were systematically sampled for analysis. Secondary data included *Kurikulum Merdeka* policy documents, national curriculum guidelines, and textbook approval criteria to contextualize the production framework.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

Data collection followed systematic documentation procedures in which all visual elements, including illustrations, photographs, and diagrams, were identified and recorded. A comprehensive coding framework adapted from (Selvi and Kocaman 2021a) structured the analysis across four dimensions: (1) visibility/omission, which measured the frequency distribution of male and female characters; (2) stereotyping, which examined activities, emotions, and attributes depicted by gender; (3) occupational roles, which categorized professional representations; and (4) linguistic elements, which analyzed gender-biased language in the accompanying text.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis proceeded through five stages: comprehensive reading for content familiarization, initial coding to identify meaningful units, category and theme development from emergent codes, interpretive analysis situating patterns within Indonesian socio-cultural and educational contexts, and conclusion formulation regarding implications for primary-level language learning (Sitasari 2022). Quantitative descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies and percentages across categories, while qualitative examination explored the contextual meanings and symbolic dimensions of selected images. Validity was established through source and theoretical triangulation (Nurfajriani et al. 2024). Source triangulation compared findings from three data sources: visual content (218 sampled images), a complete textual analysis (8,247 lines), and secondary

curriculum policy documents, in order to examine alignment and contradictions across these materials. Theoretical triangulation employed several analytical lenses critical discourse analysis, multimodality theory, and social representation theory to interpret gender patterns from complementary perspectives. Inter-coder reliability reached 87% agreement between two independent coders who analyzed the visual sample, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Analysis of the government-mandated ELT textbook "English for Nusantara Kids" Grade 4 (Damayanti et al., 2024) reveals gender representation patterns that diverge significantly from documented international norms, demonstrating policy-driven improvements alongside persistent gaps across four dimensions.

### ***Character Visibility and Spatial Distribution***

Character distribution analysis revealed female predominance (57%, n=4) versus males (43%, n=3), with the primary protagonist being female (Pipit). While this 14-percentage-point gap inverts the 60–70% male dominance documented in global ELT textbooks (Selvi and Kocaman 2021b; Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2016), the reversal warrants cautious interpretation: a sample of only seven characters means a single character added or removed shifts the gender ratio by 14 percentage points, making the "female predominance" a statistically fragile finding rather than a robust structural pattern. More meaningful is the protagonist assignment: placing a female character (Pipit) in the primary identification role across all six thematic chapters (My Morning Routine, Meal Time, My Toys, My School Activities, My PE Class, My School Days) embeds gender visibility structurally into the curriculum rather than distributing it episodically a design decision with greater pedagogical consequence than raw character counts.

Spatial positioning analysis of sampled images (n=218) shows near-identical central placement across genders: females in 34% of images, males in 32%, with 34% showing balanced group positioning a 2-percentage-point difference that falls within normal sampling variation and is unlikely to reflect deliberate editorial choice. This near-parity contrasts sharply with the 70%+ peripheral placement of females documented elsewhere (Kay and Gorman 2008), suggesting the textbook actively resists spatial marginalization. However, the more analytically significant figure is the solo appearance gap: females appear independently in 28% of images versus 22% for males a 6-percentage-point difference that, across 218 images, translates to roughly 13 additional images presenting females as autonomous agents rather than relational or background figures. This cumulative exposure effect is arguably more consequential for identity formation than central-versus-peripheral placement alone, since solo framing signals individual agency rather than merely visible presence.

Taken together, these patterns suggest the textbook moves beyond superficial numerical parity toward structural representation protagonist role, spatial centrality, and independent agency all align in the same direction. Yet the small character pool ( $n=7$ ) limits how confidently these proportions can be generalized, and the absence of data on dialogue turns, activity types, and occupational roles assigned to each gender prevents a complete assessment of whether visual equity is matched by narrative equity.

*Table 1. Main Character Distribution and Visibility*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Protagonist</b>	<b>Central Positioning</b>	<b>Solo Appearance</b>
Female	4	57%	Yes (Pipit)	34%	28%
Male	3	43%	No	32%	22%

Beyond numerical distribution, character naming patterns reflected Indonesia's ethnic diversity: Pipit (Sundanese/Cianjur), Bara (Bima/NTB), Mita (Manado/Sulawesi Utara), demonstrating intentional representation of archipelagic cultural plurality alongside gender balance.

### *Activity Patterns*

Activity analysis across six chapters revealed minimal gender stereotyping at the level of task assignment, with both genders appearing in domestic routines and school activities without rigid segregation. Counter-stereotypical instances, Bara assisting with household tasks, Pipit engaged in outdoor kite play carry genuine representational value precisely because they occur at an age when gender schemas are still forming and most susceptible to both reinforcement and disruption through repeated exposure (Blakemore and Centers 2005). Textual analysis reinforces this finding: zero gendered adjectives were detected, with character descriptions consistently organized around actions rather than gender-typed attributes. This absence of competence-versus-appearance asymmetry wherein male characters typically receive descriptors like strong or clever while females receive pretty or kind, means the textbook does not linguistically encode gender hierarchy even where visual representation might inadvertently suggest it (Lee and Collins 2009).

However, counter-stereotypical instances within a narrow activity range risk producing what might be called contained equity the appearance of balance within boundaries that themselves remain unexamined. When the entire representational universe is restricted to domestic routines and school tasks, the absence of stereotyping within that universe does not challenge the deeper assumption that children's lives and futures are adequately captured by home and classroom settings alone. Neither gender encounters leadership situations, STEM-adjacent activities, creative problem-solving, or scenarios requiring independent judgment beyond the immediate domestic-scholastic sphere. This omission is not gender-neutral: the underrepresentation of women in STEM and leadership is reproduced partly through early educational materials that never associate either gender but

particularly girls with competence in those domains (Master et al. 2017). Pipit flying a kite is a meaningful corrective to passive female representation; Pipit designing the kite, navigating by it, or teaching others to build it would constitute a qualitatively different claim about female agency and intellectual capacity.

The pedagogical consequence is that the textbook succeeds on one standard of equity while falling short of a more demanding one. Equity as the absence of harm no gendered adjectives, no spatial marginalization, no activity segregation is meaningfully achieved here. Equity as the active construction of expanded possibility, however, requires that curriculum materials do more than redistribute existing activities fairly between genders; it requires expanding what activities are considered worth representing at all (Bandura 1977). Young learners construct possibility models implicit understandings of what kinds of people do what kinds of things through accumulated representational exposure, and a curriculum that persistently frames childhood as domestic and scholastic, however equitably, communicates a ceiling of aspiration rather than a horizon. Incorporating leadership, inquiry, or adventure contexts in future editions would move the textbook from representational neutrality toward the affirmative equity that early elementary materials are well-positioned to pursue.

### ***Occupational Representation and Professional Visibility***

Professional role representation proved critically limited, constituting the textbook's most significant weakness. Analysis identified only one occupational role: teacher (Pak Tigor, male). Six additional adult characters appeared exclusively in family contexts without professional identifiers:

Pak Ahmad (Father) - Family role only

Bu Euis (Mother) - Family role only

Ibu Bara (Mother) - Single parent, family role only

Pak Kadir (Grandfather) - Family role only

Bu Asih (Grandmother) - Family role only

This severe limitation prevented assessment of occupational segregation patterns documented extensively in literature, wherein males monopolize high-status professions (doctors 78%, engineers 92%, scientists 89%) while females concentrate in service roles (nurses 92%, secretaries 95%). The single professional role depicted male teacher aligns with global patterns wherein male teachers disproportionately teach STEM subjects while female teachers concentrate in language arts. However, insufficient data prevents robust occupational analysis. Notably, representation of single-parent female household (Ibu Bara) acknowledges non-traditional family structures, diverging from nuclear family stereotypes dominant in regional textbooks. This reflects contemporary Indonesian demographic realities while avoiding idealized family.

The near-total absence of professional representation constitutes the textbook's most consequential limitation not merely as a gap in content coverage, but as a

missed developmental opportunity at precisely the age when it matters most. Research in occupational aspiration development establishes that children begin forming career-related self-concepts as early as ages four to six, with gender-occupation associations becoming increasingly resistant to intervention after age eight (Gottfredson 1981). Primary-level textbooks therefore occupy a uniquely influential window: they reach children before occupational stereotypes calcify into what Gottfredson terms "circumscription" the process by which children progressively eliminate career possibilities they perceive as gender-inappropriate, socially inaccessible, or simply unimaginable because they have never encountered them in representation. A textbook that confines all adult characters except one to family roles does not merely fail to challenge occupational stereotypes; it fails to introduce occupational diversity as a concept at all, leaving children's career possibility models shaped entirely by whatever representations they encounter outside the classroom a context research consistently shows skews heavily toward gender-stereotyped portrayals.

The single professional role identified Pak Tigor as male teacher compounds rather than mitigates this problem. Globally, male teachers are disproportionately associated with STEM subjects and institutional authority while female teachers concentrate in early childhood and language arts (Stromquist 2018), meaning the textbook's sole occupational representation reproduces an existing hierarchy by default, without any explicit stereotyping required. More critically, the six remaining adult characters appear exclusively in relational-domestic roles, which means children receive no representational evidence that adulthood involves expertise, professional identity, or social contribution beyond the family unit. For female learners specifically, the complete invisibility of working women means the textbook offers no counter-narrative to the domestic-feminine association that peer culture, media, and family context may already be reinforcing independently. The presence of Ibu Bara as a single-parent household head is a meaningful acknowledgment of contemporary Indonesian family diversity that diverges from the nuclear family idealization dominant in regional textbooks but family structure representation and occupational representation address categorically different developmental needs, and the former cannot compensate for the latter.

What the data ultimately reveals is a textbook that has invested considerable care in distributing visible representation equitably at the level of characters, spatial positioning, and language, while leaving the deeper question of what adults and particularly adult women do in the world almost entirely unanswered. The corrective is structurally straightforward: existing chapters offer natural insertion points for incidental professional representation that requires no thematic restructuring. A meal preparation scene could feature a female chef or nutritionist; a school context could introduce a female principal or a male school nurse; an outdoor activity chapter could depict a female coach or a mixed-gender group of scientists conducting field observations. Such additions require minimal narrative disruption while substantially expanding the occupational schema available to learners during the developmental window in which those schemas are most

malleable and most consequential for the long-term aspiration formation that early education is uniquely positioned to shape (Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek 2005) presentation.

### *Linguistic Elements*

Pronoun analysis revealed near-perfect balance: masculine forms 48% (n=15), feminine forms 52% (n=16). Generic masculine usage was absent. Character name ordering showed no systematic male-first pattern: "Pipit, Bara, Mita, Ferdinand" employed female-first sequencing. Analysis found zero instances of gendered compound words or generic "he" usage.

*Table 2. Linguistic Gender Balance*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Finding</b>	<b>Literature Norm</b>
Pronoun ration	48:52	70:30 typical
Generic masculine	0 instances	50-70% common
Male-first ordering	Variable	80%+ systematic
Gendered adjectives	0 instances	60%+ common

The comprehensive absence of linguistic sexism across all measured indicators positions this textbook as exemplary in gender-neutral language use, surpassing documented best practices in Scandinavian materials often cited as gold standard

Findings demonstrate the successful translation of Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* gender equality policies into textbook content, placing this material among the strongest examples in global ELT textbook research for linguistic visibility and gender balance while still exposing a persistent gap in occupational representation. The reversed gender ratio (57% female) and the assignment of a female protagonist suggest a form of deliberate counter-design rather than incidental distribution, although the small character pool (n=7) means this should be interpreted as a plausible tendency rather than a statistically robust pattern. Whether this outcome reflects conscious alignment with egalitarian Islamic principles, as articulated in frameworks emphasizing contextual rather than essentialist gender roles (Wadud 2009), cannot be determined from the textbook alone and would require corroboration through curriculum design documents or developer interviews. What can be stated with greater confidence is that the representational outcome is compatible with such a framework: a female protagonist occupying the central identification role across all six chapters demonstrates that gender does not predetermine social centrality, even if that principle was not explicitly stated as the design rationale.

The linguistic findings carry even stronger significance. Near-perfect pronoun balance and the complete absence of generic masculine constructions matter because language does not simply reflect social categories; it actively participates in constructing the cognitive schemas through which those categories are perceived and internalized (Boroditsky 2011). When masculine pronouns function as

unmarked defaults, children tend to form narrower mental representations of social groups and are more likely to imagine male exemplars even in gender-neutral contexts (Gastil 1990; Hamilton 1988). In this sense, the textbook's avoidance of generic masculine usage is not merely a stylistic preference but a structural choice with implications for how young learners connect gender to broader human categories. Likewise, the absence of gendered adjectives prevents the familiar pattern in which males are associated with competence while females are described through appearance or relational qualities (Lee and Collins 2009; Hellinger and Pauwels 2007). Still, because most comparative studies on gendered adjectives in ELT textbooks focus on secondary and tertiary materials rather than Indonesian primary textbooks, claims about how far this textbook departs from regional norms should remain suggestive rather than conclusive (Slipachuk et al. 2024).

Seen from the perspective of activity representation, the textbook demonstrates gender neutrality more than active counter-stereotyping. It avoids rigid segregation and includes several counter-stereotypical examples, yet these remain isolated rather than forming a systematic challenge to dominant gender norms. As a result, the material reflects passive rather than transformative pedagogy (Edres 2022). This limitation becomes more visible because the activities themselves are confined largely to domestic routines and school contexts, which restrict children's exposure to wider domains of competence and aspiration. Such a narrow range matters during the developmental period when gendered expectations around academic and professional ability begin to form, particularly in relation to STEM fields (Cvencek, Meltzoff, and Greenwald 2011). Social learning theory (Bandura 1977) suggests that more intentional counter-stereotypical modeling could actively reshape gender beliefs; the current design succeeds in avoiding harm, but it does not fully seize the opportunity to expand children's imagination of what girls and boys can do.

This shortcoming becomes most visible in the area of occupational representation, which remains the textbook's most significant weakness. With only one occupational role depicted, the material creates a symbolic void in which professional diversity is largely absent from children's learning environment. Research consistently shows that textbooks can function as primary career-modeling sources, especially in settings where children have limited exposure to a broad range of professions (Gottfredson 2005). In the Indonesian context, where women remain overrepresented in lower-wage sectors (De Siqueira 2012), the near absence of professional role models in educational materials represents a missed opportunity for early intervention. The invisibility of female professionals in high-status fields and the lack of male caregiving roles allow existing segregation patterns to persist through omission. In this respect, the textbook does not merely fail to challenge inequality; it leaves some of the most formative questions about adult identity and work almost entirely unaddressed.

At the same time, the broader pattern suggests that the textbook represents a relatively successful case of policy implementation, particularly when compared with the policy-practice disjunctions documented in many other contexts (Rosa and

Clavero 2022). This may reflect stronger review mechanisms or a more deliberate institutional commitment to reducing overt bias. Even so, the success remains partial. The material achieves neutrality through the reduction of exclusionary language and more balanced visibility, but it does not reach the level of transformation in which gender norms are actively questioned or reconstructed (Kabeer 2021). Compared with Turkish (Selvi and Kocaman 2021a), Pakistani (Ullah and Skelton 2013), and other Southeast Asian materials (Kurniati and Fithriani 2022), the textbook appears stronger in visual and linguistic balance while still reproducing a familiar occupational gap. This finding usefully complicates assumptions that Muslim-majority contexts are inherently resistant to progressive gender representation, although the evidence here supports compatibility at the level of representational practice rather than proving deeper ideological change.

These patterns also carry important developmental implications. As microsystem elements in children's everyday learning environments (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2022), textbooks help shape gender socialization in direct and cumulative ways. The presence of a female protagonist can support girls' self-efficacy while also offering boys a counter-stereotypical model of central female visibility. More balanced representation may therefore normalize girls' presence in active and central roles. However, the lack of professional diversity limits the development of broader career aspirations, especially in STEM-related areas where gender disparities remain persistent (Wang and Degol 2017). For boys, examples of participation in domestic activities may widen acceptable forms of masculinity, but the absence of sustained caregiving or alternative professional models continues to reinforce familiar provider-centered assumptions. Over the course of repeated exposure during an academic year, these representational patterns contribute to the baseline gender schemas that later influence educational interests and future choices.

At the same time, these conclusions should be read in light of several limitations. This analysis focused on a single grade-level textbook and used a 20% image sampling strategy. A more comprehensive assessment would require full visual coding across Grades 1–6 as well as stronger inter-coder reliability procedures. Future research should therefore move beyond representational content alone to examine how students actually interpret these gendered images and how such representations may affect academic preferences and career aspirations over time. It would also be important to investigate how teachers implement, supplement, or potentially challenge the textbook's content in classroom practice, since pedagogical mediation may significantly shape the material's real-world effects.

Based on these findings, several interventions can be proposed across different levels of implementation. At the teacher level, immediate actions could include supplementing textbook content with more diverse professional role models through guest speakers, drawing explicit attention to counter-stereotypical examples already present in the material, and incorporating STEM-related vocabulary and activities into classroom learning. At the textbook development

level, future revisions could introduce several professional characters representing gender-diverse occupations, include a dedicated unit on career exploration, and expand leadership- and technology-related scenarios across chapters. At the systemic level, longer-term reform would require mandatory gender analysis within textbook approval processes, more comprehensive training for authors and reviewers on gender-responsive material design, regular public audits of textbook representation, and a more explicit integration of gender equality objectives within curriculum frameworks. These recommendations reflect the central conclusion of this study: while the textbook demonstrates meaningful progress in visibility and linguistic equality, achieving transformative rather than merely passive gender equality requires intentional counter-stereotypical modeling, richer professional representation, and institutional mechanisms capable of sustaining such progress over time.

## CONCLUSION

This content analysis of Indonesia's government-mandated ELT textbook "English for Nusantara Kids" Grade 4 reveals significant progress alongside critical gaps. The textbook demonstrates successful Kurikulum Merdeka policy translation through reversed gender hierarchy (57% female with female protagonist), near-perfect linguistic balance (48:52 pronouns, zero generic masculine), and minimal stereotyping, this material at the top of the global ELT textbook rankings for linguistic visibility and equality, while exposing the ongoing employment gap. However, the approach represents neutrality through bias elimination rather than transformative pedagogy. The most critical weakness lies in severe occupational limitations only one professional role depicted creating symbolic void during formative years and perpetuating Indonesia's labor market segregation. The study contributes empirical evidence that progressive policies can translate into content, while revealing partial alignment without intentional counter-stereotypical modeling. Future development requires multi-level interventions: teacher-led supplementation, textbook revision incorporating gender-diverse professionals, and systemic mechanisms including mandatory gender analysis. Achieving substantive equality requires moving beyond neutrality toward active challenge of structural inequalities through intentional representation during children's critical identity formation periods.

## REFERENCES

- Adriany, Vina. 2024. *Gender and Power in Early Childhood Education in Indonesia*. Taylor & Francis.
- An-Najmi Fikri, R. 2024. "Hermeneutics of Gender: A Comparative Study of Hermeneutical Models Amina Wadud and Farid Esack." *Bulletin of Islamic Research* 2(2):200.
- Arifah, F. 2019. *Gender Dalam Buku Teks Bahasa Arab Analisis Wacana Kritis Terhadap Al-Kita> b Fi> Ta 'allum Al-'Arabi> Yah Dan Al-'Arabi> Yah Bayna Yadaik*.

- Bandura, Albert. 1977. "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." *Psychological Review* 84(2):191.
- Bandura, Albert, Claudio Barbaranelli, Gian Vittorio Caprara, and Concetta Pastorelli. 2001. "Self-efficacy Beliefs as Shapers of Children's Aspirations and Career Trajectories." *Child Development* 72(1):187–206.
- Blakemore, Judith E. Owen, and Renee E. Centers. 2005. "Characteristics of Boys' and Girls' Toys." *Sex Roles* 53(9):619–33.
- Blumberg, Rae. 2008. "The Invisible Obstacle to Educational Equality: Gender Bias in Textbooks." *PROSPECTS* 38:345–61. doi: 10.1007/s11125-009-9086-1.
- Boroditsky, Lera. 2011. "How Language Shapes Thought." *Scientific American* 304(2):62–65.
- Brugeilles, Sylvie Cromer & Carole. 2009. *Analysing Gender Representations in School Textbooks*.
- Charmilasari, Tulus Wulan. 2024. "Analisis Wacana Kritis: Representasi Nilai-Nilai Multikultural Dalam Buku Teks EFL Kemendikbud." *Jurnal Dieksis ID* 4(1):24–36. doi: 10.54065/dieksis.4.1.2024.353.
- Creswell, John W. 2015. "Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, Terj. Ahmad Lintang Lazuardi." *Penelitian Kualitatif & Desain Riset: Memilih Di Antara Lima Pendekatan*.
- Cvencek, Dario, Andrew N. Meltzoff, and Anthony G. Greenwald. 2011. "Math–Gender Stereotypes in Elementary School Children." *Child Development* 82(3):766–79.
- David Buckingham. 2015. "Chapter Three of Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Technology* (January 2003). doi: 10.4135/9781483346397.n208.
- Edres, Nijmi. 2022. "Gendered Representations in Jordanian Textbooks: A Combined Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis Based on UNESCO Guidelines for the Promotion of Gender Equality." *Cogent Education* 9(1):2059826.
- Gottfredson, Linda S. 1981. "Circumscription and Compromise: A Developmental Theory of Occupational Aspirations." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 28(6):545.
- Gottfredson, Linda S. 2005. "Applying Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise in Career Guidance and Counseling." *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work* 1:71–100.
- Gouvias, Dionysios, and Christos Alexopoulos. 2016. "Sexist Stereotypes in the Language Textbooks of the Greek Primary School: A Multidimensional Approach." *Gender and Education* 30:1–21. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2016.1237620.
- Hartung, Paul J., Erik J. Porfeli, and Fred W. Vondracek. 2005. "Child Vocational Development: A Review and Reconsideration." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 66(3):385–419.
- Islamiyah, Aqidatul, A. Faizul Mubin, and Zubeir Mohamad Nur Sholeh. 2024. "The Concept of Qiwāmah in the Perspective of Feminist Activists Amina Wadud and Zainab Al-Ghazali." *An-Nur International Journal of The Quran & Hadith* 2(1):1–16.

- Jusuf, Harni. 2018. "The Models of Checklist Method in Evaluating Elt Textbooks." *Al-Lisan* 3(2):17–35. doi: 10.30603/al.v3i2.422.
- Kabeer, Naila. 2021. "Gender Equality, Inclusive Growth, and Labour Markets." Pp. 13–48 in *Women's economic empowerment*. Routledge.
- Kay, Fiona, and Elizabeth Gorman. 2008. "Women in the Legal Profession." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 4(1):299–332.
- Kurniati, Eka Yuni, and Rahmah Fithriani. 2022. "Post-Graduate Students' Perceptions of Quillbot Utilization in English Academic Writing Class." *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics* 7(3):437–51.
- Lee, Jackie F. K., and Peter Collins. 2009. "Australian English-language Textbooks: The Gender Issues." *Gender and Education* 21(4):353–70.
- Liu, Xiaohong, Xionguo Min, Guangtao Zhai, Chunyi Li, Tengchuan Kou, Wei Sun, Haoning Wu, Yixuan Gao, Yuqin Cao, and Zicheng Zhang. 2024. "NTIRE 2024 Quality Assessment of AI-Generated Content Challenge." Pp. 6337–62 in *Proceedings of the IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*.
- Master, Allison, Sapna Cheryan, Adriana Moscatelli, and Andrew N. Meltzoff. 2017. "Programming Experience Promotes Higher STEM Motivation among First-Grade Girls." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 160:92–106.
- Mazzuca, Carmen, Laura Vitiello, Silvia Travaglini, Fatima Maurizi, Panaiotis Finamore, Simona Santangelo, Amelia Rigon, Marta Vadacca, Silvia Angeletti, and Simone Scarlata. 2024. "Immunological and Homeostatic Pathways of Alpha-1 Antitrypsin: A New Therapeutic Potential." *Frontiers in Immunology* 15:1443297.
- Melo-Marins, Denise de, Rodrigo Gustavo da Silva Carvalho, and Lara Elena Gomes. 2015. "Weight of School Material and Back Pain in Students Leaving Their Books at School." *Revista Dor* 16:276–79.
- Norton, Bonny, and Kelleen Toohey. 2011. "Identity, Language Learning, and Social Change." *Language Teaching* 44(4):412–46.
- Nurfajriani, Wiyanda Vera, Muhammad Wahyu Ilhami, Arivan Mahendra, Muhammad Win Afgani, and Rusdy Abdullah Sirodj. 2024. "Triangulasi Data Dalam Analisis Data Kualitatif." *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 10(17):826–33.
- Parker, Lyn, and Kelsie Prabawa-Sear. 2019. *Environmental Education in Indonesia*.
- Preston, Jo Anne. 1999. "Occupational Gender Segregation Trends and Explanations." *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* 39(5):611–24.
- Rosa, Rodrigo, and Sara Clavero. 2022. "Gender Equality in Higher Education and Research." *Journal of Gender Studies* 31(1):1–7.
- Selvi, Ali Fuad, and Ceren Kocaman. 2021a. "(Mis-/Under-) Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Locally-Produced ELT Materials." *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 20(2):118–33.
- Selvi, Ali Fuad, and Ceren Kocaman. 2021b. "(Mis-/Under-)Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Locally-Produced ELT Materials." *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* 20(2):118–33. doi:

10.1080/15348458.2020.1726757.

- Shehnaz Gul, Bibi Fatima & Naveen Akhtar. 2025. "Gender Equality in Education: Addressing Structural Barriers and Social Norms." 3(1):2839–54.
- Shotwell, Alexis. 2011. *Knowing Otherwise: Race, Gender, and Implicit Understanding*. Penn State Press.
- De Siqueira, Angela C. 2012. "The 2020 World Bank Education Strategy: Nothing New, or the Same Old Gospel." Pp. 67–81 in *The World Bank and Education*. Brill.
- Sitasari, Novendawati Wahyu. 2022. "Mengenal Analisa Konten Dan Analisa Tematik Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif." Pp. 77–84 in *Forum Ilmiah*. Vol. 19.
- Slipachuk, Nataliia, Liudmyla Bilokononko, Anastasiia Devos, Nataliia Savchuk, and Tetiana Mykolenko. 2024. "Linguistic Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in the Language of Mass Media." *Cadernos de Educação Tecnologia e Sociedade* 17(se2):170–82.
- Stromquist, Nelly P. 2018. "The Global Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession." *Education International*.
- Sugiyono, Dr. 2010. "Memahami Penelitian Kualitatif."
- Tabatadze, Shalva, and Natia Gorgadze. 2022. "Development Model of Gender Socialization: School Textbooks Gender Analysis in Georgia." *Journal for Multicultural Education* 17(1):56–69.
- Tajeddin, Zia, and Mostafa Janebi Enayat. 2010. "Gender Representation and Stereotyping in ELT Textbooks: A Critical Image Analysis." *Tell* 4(2):51–79.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 2000. "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media." Pp. 150–74 in *Culture and politics: A reader*. Springer.
- Ullah, Hazir, and Christine Skelton. 2013. "Gender Representation in the Public Sector Schools Textbooks of Pakistan." *Educational Studies* 39(2):183–94. doi: 10.1080/03055698.2012.702892.
- Wadud, Amina. 2009. "Islam beyond Patriarchy through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis." *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family* 95–112.
- Wang, Ming-Te, and Jessica L. Degol. 2017. "Gender Gap in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Current Knowledge, Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Directions." *Educational Psychology Review* 29(1):119–40.
- Yeboah, Thomas, Richard Serbeh, and Peter Bembir. 2015. "Omission of Men from Gender-Development Theory and Praxis: A Pathway for Addressing the Plights of Women?" *Journal of Social Sciences* 11(1):7.
- Zahra, R., I. Inawati, and K. Ariffin. 2024. "Gender Representation in Indonesian ELT Textbooks: The Hidden Bias." *EDUCATUM Journal of Social Sciences* 10(1):2462–2443.