

Female Representation in The Seventh-Grade English for Nusantara Textbook: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Textbooks function as both language resources and cultural, ideological instruments that influence students' comprehension of gender identity. This study examines the representation of female characters in the English for Nusantara Grade VII textbook by Ika Lestari Damayanti et al. (2022) and how these depictions reflect underlying gender ideology. Textual and visual extracts were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough) combined with multimodal analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen) through three analytical phases: description, interpretation, and explanation. Research indicates that female characters are often portrayed in nurturing, supportive, and passive roles, encompassing caregiving, assistance, and generosity. Male figures, by comparison, seem more central and proactive in verbal and action-oriented episodes. Despite several visual depictions showcasing ladies as imaginative and self-assured, these empowering representations are statistically less prevalent. The textbook embodies commendable moral standards yet perpetuates nuanced gender inequality in role allocation. A more equitable representation is essential to foster healthy identity development for both male and female learners.

Keywords: Female; Critical Discourse Analysis; Multimodality; Gender Ideology; ELT Textbook

INTRODUCTION

Education forms an essential cornerstone in the shaping of students' language, social values and identity. In many education systems, including Indonesia's, textbooks remain the primary learning materials and significantly impact learners' perceptions of social duties and cultural standards. Academics like Apple (1992), Luke (1997), and Pennycook (1994) argue that textbooks are philosophically, politically, and culturally affected, making them not impartial. Their texts and visuals convey world perspectives and teach children how to behave, think, and interact with others. English as a Foreign Language textbooks have two parts. While learning language, they reinforce social ideals such as cooperation, respect, empathy, and gender parity. According to Widodo (2018), textbooks are cultural products that reflect societal qualities and moral codes. Peace ideals are emphasized in the global curriculum. UNESCO (2013) defines peace culture as a combination of values, attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles that promote justice, solidarity, and non-violence. According to authors like Galtung (2013) and Balasooriya (2001), peace involves eliminating discrimination, injustice, and structural inequality, not merely the absence of conflict.

Mandarani et. al (2021) already suggested similar findings in Huda (1999), Alwasilah (2012) suggest that EFL learning should not only focus on language competences but also promote moral values, appreciation of diversity and social service. Values such as respect, industriousness and modesty mentioned in Liu (2005), are suitable to be applied to language classrooms because students are taught not only by linguistic representations but also visual ones found in their textbooks. Research on gender has demonstrated that how men and women are represented in educational materials can affect the attitudes of learners toward what is

appropriate or possible for men and women to do. Sunderland (2006), Mills (2008) and Lazar (2005) claim that gender representation in language textbooks mirrors patriarchal systems, with males outnumbering females, receiving an active role and holding a position of power.

In several nations, it is common to find that textbook analyses result in female characters continuing to be under-represented, stereotyped and relegated to domestic spaces (Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Lee & Collins, 2009; Mustapha, 2013). In Indonesia, a number of studies found such pattern. In the study by Indah and colleagues (Indah, 2017; Indah & Lestari, 2018), it is noted that gender bias in textbooks was also found at different levels of education. They found that public, intellectual and leadership roles are typically dominated by male characters. Santika (2020) also underscores that women characters in many Indonesian language textbooks are depicted less often and stored in a passive or supportive role. These results indicate that Indonesian textbooks continue to perpetuate nuanced stereotypes concerning gender.

Current studies in Indonesia indicate that biased material persists in EFL textbook, for instance the study from Ayu et. al (2025) that supports with the figures and entertain students to make comfort on studying. Yulistiana et al. (2022) discovered stereotypical role portrayals in junior high school textbooks, with men depicted in activities or at work and women frequently depicted at home or school. Adawiyah and Oktavianti (2023) used corpus-assisted CDA to show that male pronouns are still highly prevalent in textbooks under the new curriculum. Jameaah, Setiawan, and Hermagustiana (2024) found that female characters had limited employment and role alternatives. Research by Artini et al. (2023) and Erlina et al. (2022) supports the imbalance between text and visual in modern textbooks.

Blommaert (2005), Fairclough (2010), and Wodak (2015) use CDA as a framework to reveal ideologies, power dynamics, and socioeconomic inequalities in texts and pictures at the global level. Integrating CDA with multimodal analysis, such as Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Grammar of Visual Design*, reveals how images convey meaning through gaze, distance, composition, and framing. Multimodal CDA allows for a deeper understanding of how visual elements can reinforce or resist gendered discourses. The government-produced *Merdeka Curriculum* textbook English for Nusantara is a standard for Indonesian junior high school. It involves acquiring language and cultural values. One study (Chindy Yolanda & Syafryadin, 2023) examined gender representation in eighth-grade textbooks, but only for seventh-grade textbooks. This is a concern as seventh graders are still forming social identities and are very receptive to classroom text messaging.

Another limitation in the current literature is the connections between peace values and gender representation. Both Widodo (2018) and Thongrin (2012) discuss about peace education in EFL context, however limited studies found related to the construction of peace as an aspect values integrated with gender perspective in Indonesian textbooks. In the same way textbooks may adhere to promoting multiculturalism while reinforcing gender stereotypes, leading to confrontations between progressive value-oriented aims and traditional roles. In addition, a lot of times studies also depend on quantitative or superficial content analysis counting images or pronouns or names for example. It is rare that linguistic analysis, semiotic analysis and CDA are all used together to examine the interaction between talking texts and visuals in meaning production. Scholars such as Van Dijk (2006), Gee (2014) and Machin & Mayr (2012) highlight that to make sense of ideology inscribed in textbooks, researchers need to study linguistic structures but also other ways by which the visual dimension interacts with language. This cross-cutting, mixed-methods approach will be necessary for understanding the more nuanced gendered patterns.

It is against this backdrop that the present research deeply examines the female students' character representation from the seventh grade English for Nusantara textbook. It employs CDA and multimodal semiotic analysis to reveal the underlying meanings and representations that frame learner perceptions. The current study also aligns with peace value education by considering whether the textbook promotes equality, respect and desirable social action. The research question was: How are female characters represented linguistically and graphically in the English for Nusantara book for Grade VII?

METHOD

To conduct the analysis of the data for this study, the authors utilized CDA. CDA was chosen because it provides a framework to reveal how discourse reflects, sustains, or challenges social power and gender ideology, as discussed by Fairclough (2013). The main source of data is the English for Nusantara Grade VII textbook published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2022. The book was selected because it functions as an official learning resource that shapes students' views regarding gender and social identity in Indonesian school contexts.

The analytical procedures were guided by Fairclough's (1992) CDA model and completed through four stages:

1. Data Identification and Familiarization
The authors analyzed all components of the textbook, including dialogues, reading passages, story excerpts, and illustrations. Each page was regarded as a potential data source associated with the depiction of female characters and their roles within the context.
2. Coding and Description (Text Analysis)
 - a) Relevant excerpts were analyzed utilizing indicators of gender representation. The procedure encompassed two distinct methods of analysis. Linguistic analysis scrutinized vocabulary selection, modality, transitivity structures, and speech distribution to determine power dynamics.
 - b) Visual analysis used social semiotic interpretation from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to observe character placement, gaze, body posture, activity roles, and interaction patterns.
3. Interpretation of Discursive Practice
The coded data were evaluated to determine how discourse builds female students, including female students as caregivers, knowledge holders, helpers, or active participants. This step also evaluated how students would interpret these portrayals.
4. Explanation at the Social Practice Level
The final phase related the findings to wider sociocultural contexts in Indonesia, including gender norms in schools, expectations of politeness, the influence of collectivist values, and contemporary efforts toward gender equality.

The authors independently assessed the data and subsequently compared interpretations until consensus was achieved to establish reliability. This verification process enhanced the study's validity and credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The textbook analysis shows that visual elements are both decorative and important, shaping students' social understanding. Each figure conveys subliminal messages about identity, behavior, and morality in school. The results show that instructional materials repeat character depictions, interactional roles, and cultural norms. Visuals may help readers understand social relationships, morality, and gender norms, according to these patterns. The depictions show how textbooks quietly convey educational beliefs through ordinary settings, gestures, and interactions. Thus, the results are given and explained figure by figure to clarify how each visual affects moral growth, social learning, and student character.

Table 1. Female Representation in English for Nusantara Grade VII Textbook

No	Page/Unit/Chapter	Activity/Context	Linguistic Features (If present)	Visual Features Observed	Role Type	Representation Category
1	Ch.1 U1 p.24	Self-introduction	Polite lexical choices, neutrality	Female character smiling, friendly posture	Social participant	Neutral-positive femininity
2	Ch.1 U1 p.27	Greeting older people	Politeness markers (respect expressions)	Female shown lower gaze, polite posture	Moral role model	Traditional feminine virtue
3	Ch.1 U3 p.61	Introducing friends	Minimal verbal dominance	Male-centered layout, female peripheral	Supportive participant	Passive/secondary
4	Ch.2 U1 p.61	Sharing food	Verbs of offering/helping	Female giving food, male receiving	Caregiver/giver	Nurturing role
5	Ch.2 U1 p.62	Giving advice about eating	Modal "should/must" for guidance	Female correcting behavior gently	Helper/guide	Soft authority, still feminine
6	Ch.2 U2 p.77	Uploading food creation	Expressive verbs: share/post	Female creating, producing content	Active creator	Empowered/agency
7	Ch.3 U3 p.120	Cleaning environment	Action verbs related to cleaning	Female sweeping, tidying	Domestic role	Traditional gender stereotype

8	Ch.4 U2 p.176	Helping friend with instructions	Directive language used kindly	Female assisting another student	Supportive peer	Emotional labor
9	Ch.5 U1 p.210	Giving directions around school	Declarative guiding phrases	Female leading navigation	Leader role	Positive empowerment
10	Ch.5 U2 p.222	Motivating extracurricular activity	Persuasive supportive utterances	Female inviting friend, praying first	Motivator/encourager	Moral & social leader



Figure 1. Self-Introducing



Figure 2. Greeting with older people

In the first figure, a female student is presented as being in a mutually familiar position, demonstrating a friendly and polite female student. As a female student, she can show interest in hobbies, demonstrating a friendly attitude toward her friends. This character teaches that we, as students, should not be shy and smile readily, demonstrating respect. The second figure shows a female student showing a friendly attitude toward an older person, teaching readers to always respect those older than themselves. The teacher's role also includes teaching appropriate moral values, consistent with the teachings of mutual respect. This aligns with research by Widodo (2018), which suggests that textbook presentations should incorporate moral values that support learning.



Figure 3. Sharing foods with others

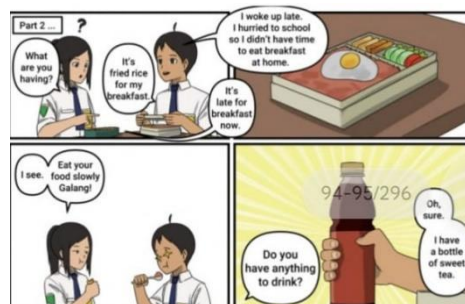


Figure 4. Giving advice



Figure 5. Gender friendship

At third figure, empowering numerous female students, highlights the "About Me" picture, demonstrating cultural courtesy and gender inequality. The figure's subject promotes mutual respect, while the visual arrangement positions men at the center of linguistic and social action. This follows previous research that junior high school ELT teaching materials still subtly display gender stereotypes, particularly through unequal role distribution, visual positioning that suggests hierarchy, and male-centered verbal activity. Despite its modern design, men conversation leaders dominate. In this philosophy, men are energetic, confident, and central, while female students explain things neatly, supportively, and orderly. Sunderland (2020) discovered that gender ideology conversations in ELT are often visual and "natural."

Figure 4 shows a female student's empathy for her schoolmates. A girl gives her pal the meal she brought. This shows her friend's food pride and acceptance. The female student then praises her cuisine. Positive feedback and encouragement without offending are essential for students. The fifth picture instructs a female pupil to eat slowly to avoid choking and accidents. This strengthens moral ideals in English and instills reader empathy. This implies that female students contribute, nurture, and help. Male students are helped and the focus of action, but remain "prioritized" socially. Damayanti (2014) and Talansky (2021) found that textbook graphics often reflect cultural ideas and gender norms. This basic picture helps explain how educational materials discreetly reinforce social ideals, politeness, and gender stereotypes.



Figure 6. Posting via Social media



Figure 7. Female activity

The sixth figure shows a female student making a food and sharing it with others. The image empowers female students by showing them as creative agents who can create, demonstrate talents, and express themselves. Cress and van Leeuwen (2006) say figures are semiotic

resources that shape social systems through actor selection and action assignment. The image depicts female students as active and industrious, which may increase self-confidence and widen their expression. This supports Damayanti's (2020) claim that pictures in teaching materials might influence students' social roles, especially when female students are portrayed as creative.

The seventh figure shows a female student cleaning. Female students' roles are generally associated with domesticity and childcare. Sunderland (2020) indicates that English language education materials still portray female students as caregivers and orderkeepers, while men are allotted public areas and leadership roles. Maesaroh et al. (2022) also found that while the number of female characters has increased, their positions still represent old ideals, such as service and cleaning. The seventh figure depicts female students as comforters and cleaners, a textbook staple.

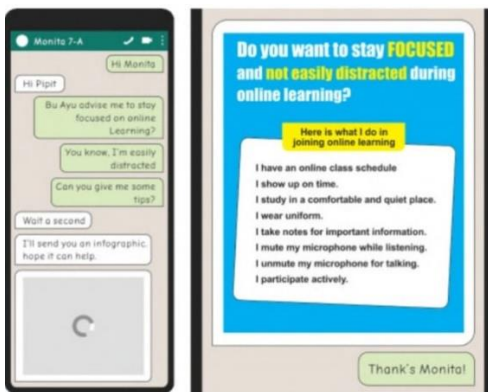


Figure 8. Helping via Social Media



Figure 9. Asking and Giving direction



Figure 10. School Extracurricular

In the eighth figure, Monita helps Pipit with a rule figure when she's preoccupied by her device. This representation promotes cooperation and peer scaffolding through discursive practice. From a CDA perspective, Fairclough (1995) states that text interactions carry information and shape social relationships and identities. Monita's help makes her a helpful friend, while Pipit is a student in need of direction, not weak. This discursive structure stresses learning through compassion and solidarity. Damayanti (2014) found that textbooks often include student-to-student assistance as part of character education values, which is consistent with the idea that positive social relations are framed by friendly, supportive, and power-free narratives.

The ninth figure shows students following directions to the teachers' room and bathroom. This discursively shapes geographic knowledge and school regulations. Van Dijk (1998) noted that text and graphics can show constructive social control, such as how students learn about spatial systems and movement ethics in educational institutions. This guidance shows that the school is orderly and that kids learn the norms without dictatorial representations. The school promotes independence, responsibility, and environmental literacy. Damayanti (2014) also found that Indonesian textbooks commonly include simple tasks that teach discipline and social ethics.

Extracurricular pencak silat begins with a prayer before practice in the tenth figure. This action shows how symbols and rituals institutionalize cultural and religious traditions, according to CDA. Institutional ideologies shape discursive practices, according to Fairclough (2010). The prayer before practice integrates spirituality into schooling and makes physical activity moral. This depiction emphasizes religion, discipline, and local culture. Damayanti (2014) also found that Indonesian textbooks commonly feature moral and religious values in a visual "hidden curriculum" expressed through social circumstances and character gestures.

Discussion

Visual representation influences students' perspectives of social identity, gender roles, and school peace-based principles, according to English for Nusantara textbook numbers. As cultural tools, textbooks impact young learners' behavior, social orientation, and language development. Textbooks teach morality and societal values, according to Widodo (2018). Visual selection, composition, and role allocation must be used to understand this textbook's representations. Peaceful encounters in the textbook build character. Several studies show students sharing meals, helping others, following school rules, and being kind. Galtung (2013) defines peace as more than warlessness. Respect, cooperation, empathy, tolerance, and solidarity are needed. The textbook normalizes morality in school. Female students feed friends to show kindness and empathy. Cultural spiritual discipline is shown by students praying before pencak silat. These scenes demonstrate daily peace, not theory.

Despite these skills, peace is gendered. The figures depict female students as nurturing. Kindness, empathy, cooking, cleaning, and helping distracted friends are their traits. Male students lead debates, decide, and exercise more. Sunderland (2006), Mills (2008), and Lazar (2005) discovered that EFL textbooks reinforce patriarchal stereotypes by placing men in control and assigning girls domestic duties. In Indonesia, Indah (2017), Pradana (2023), and Santika (2020) note that many educational materials limit girl students while boy students dominate intellectually and socially. Textbook shows this pattern. Repeating excellent and helpful activities by female students may perpetuate the impression that caregiving is gender-specific. Because male characters rarely clean or serve food, students may think only girls do. If men are more confident, lead talks, or control group dynamics, students may think authority is masculine.

Critical Discourse Analysis scholars like Fairclough (2010) and Wodak (2015) offer nuanced messages. No discourse is neutral, they maintain, because power systems determine social roles. Power comes from visual composition, not instructions, in this textbook. Even when polite, male students dominate interactions while female students sit behind them. Composition, spacing, gaze, and action establish meaning. These graphics teach students social power. The seventh figure shows a female student cleaning, suggesting a gendered domesticity stereotype. Maesaroh, Asih, and Suhatmady (2022) discovered female characters in Indonesian ELT materials cleansed and cared for. Cleanliness is good but gender disparity hurts it. Peaceful cooperation must be fair. If boys are not shown cleaning or sharing duties equally, morality is communicated unevenly. This textbook uses non-traditional representations. A female student cooks and presents her dinner in the sixth shot. This visual example supports Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)'s assertion that images shape identity. Her creativity suggests autonomy, not passivity. It disproves stereotypes by proving female students can innovate, express themselves, and lead creatively.

But empowering images are rarer than nurturing ones. When caregiver roles dominate, positive empowerment suffers. Kindness and empathy may outlast authority. Balanced identities should be promoted by textbooks with female and male social activists. Help, clean, and be sensitive, boys. Girls should lead arguments, present ideas, and be intellectually proactive. Peace principles bring another important discussion aspect to public behavior. One final figure shows kids contentedly obeying instructor room and bathroom orders. Van Dijk (1998) says that words and images show how institutions teach social discipline through controlled movement. According to the textbook, school is organized and students must behave. Positive reinforcement, not authority, shapes spatial awareness and ethical movement.

These depictions of peace and discipline occasionally lack gender balance. Female students mentor peers more, which is wonderful yet repetitive. All genders should guide, help, clean, respect, and create for gender equality. Peace education will be more equitable when youngsters learn that everyone can lead and be kind. These results suggest multimodal CDA for textbook analysis because to its complexity. According to Machin and Mayr (2012) and study from Mandarani et. al (2021), ideology must be researched through language and image. Textbooks rarely depict discrimination. Everyday encounters, repeated framing, and selective visibility hide power. Nusantara English has slight gender bias. Peace values respect female emotional work over male public authority. Tactful but intellectually significant. To promote peace, respect, and equality, textbook authors must rethink character roles. Girl and boy cook, clean, converse, lead, comfort, pray, and collaborate, promoting justice. Ideal depictions highlight empathy and leadership as human duties, not gendered. Balanced representation helps kids embrace peace via equality. The conversation concluded that Nusantara English teaches respect and collaboration. Uneven gender distribution in these classes. Conventional roles merge with peace values. A future textbook change can keep morality while showing both genders as equal peacemakers. Visual narrative teaches kids politeness, empathy, equality, confidence, and justice.

CONCLUSION

Based on what we found in our research, this book is a great way to learn English and has female characters that are helpful for English learners, especially 7th graders. The study and literature review show that English for Nusantara promotes peace through cooperation, empathy, and discipline, notwithstanding gender disparities. Supportive female student

characters are common. Morality remains important, but social duty enhances it. The writers believe textbooks should show both genders giving, leading, aiding, and creating equally. Language and social equity must be considered while creating images and texts. Thus, language education can foster harmonious, inclusive, stereotype-free character development. Teachers are expected to be more passionate, urge students to seek information, and enjoy studying. This book is practically full thanks to its straightforward presentation and great character drawings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We express our deepest gratitude for the guidance and direction we have received in understanding linguistics and its application in schools. We are also still in the learning stage regarding writing and presenting material represented through scientific writing. May it be beneficial and granted health by Allah Azza Wa Jalla for all of us. Our final words for the ease and feedback given to our writing to the journal editorial team. We are always ready to follow the direction of the editor and accompanying lecturer, Mr. Dr. Li. Trisnendri Syahrizal, M.Hum., for our provisions as journal author.

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