

Gender Bias in Indonesian Endorsed EFL Textbooks: Qualitative Meta-Analysis

Putri Tarisa Ariyani¹, Nuskhan Abid²

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kudus, Indonesia
¹ Farisaariyani16@gmail.com, ² nuskhan@uinsuku.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines patterns of gender representation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in the Indonesian context through a qualitative meta-analysis. The study is motivated by the persistence of unequal portrayals in learning materials, despite the national curriculum's emphasis on equality and inclusivity. Data were collected from scientific articles published between 2015 and 2025 and selected through the PRISMA framework. From this process, three studies that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed through conceptual and thematic synthesis. The findings reveal consistent patterns of imbalance across visual elements, narrative structures, and language use. Male characters are more frequently represented and are commonly associated with active, productive, and prestigious roles in public domains. Female characters tend to appear less frequently and are more often positioned in passive, relational, or domestic roles. In addition, stereotypical patterns are reinforced through the distribution of activities, occupational roles, and linguistic choices. These results suggest that textbooks function not only as instructional materials but also as instruments that reproduce social values aligned with patriarchal ideology. Such representations may influence students' perceptions of gender roles. Therefore, systematic evaluation and revision of learning materials are necessary to promote more balanced and inclusive representation.

Keywords: Gender Bias; Gender Representation; EFL Textbook; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies show that male characters are more frequently represented in English textbooks used in English as a foreign language (EFL). They are also depicted as more dominant in social roles than women (Kayed et al., 2020). The pattern is similar in Indonesia, where EFL textbooks still reflect an unbalanced representation of gender. Male characters appear more frequently in texts and conversations. They are usually associated with active, prestigious, and public roles, whereas female characters are described in weaker terms and limited to domestic or passive roles (Fatmawati et al., 2022; Suwastini et al., 2023; Yanti & Wirza, 2022). In addition, an analysis of English foreign language (EFL) textbooks reviewed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture shows that these books not only convey multicultural values but also have ideological objectives, such as eliminating gender stereotypes and promoting equality (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Previous research consistently indicates that gender inequality in EFL textbooks is closely linked to patriarchal ideology, which shapes both educational content and broader social expectations. Male characters continue to dominate in both the frequency of their appearances and the social and professional roles assigned to them. At the same time, female figures are frequently marginalized through limited participation and stereotypical portrayals (Kayed et al., 2020). Although the national curriculum in Indonesia emphasizes equality and inclusivity, the instructional materials used in classrooms do not yet fully reflect these principles (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Similar findings highlight that gender bias persists in the form of unequal visibility, linguistic dominance, and occupational representation,

reinforcing male-centered perspectives in EFL learning materials (Fatmawati et al., 2022). Moreover, this imbalance extends beyond textual content and is reinforced through visual and ideological representations that subtly support patriarchal norms (Emaliana et al., 2019). These conditions indicate that gender bias is not merely incidental but systematically embedded within educational materials.

The number of studies examining gender bias in Indonesian EFL textbooks has increased in recent years; however, most analyses remain limited in scope and methodology. Previous studies have largely focused on individual textbooks or descriptive content analysis without integrating findings to identify broader ideological patterns (Fatmawati et al., 2022). In addition, only a limited number of studies explore how textual and visual elements interact to reinforce gender bias (Andini et al., 2023). Research also indicates that teachers may lack awareness of gendered visual representations, suggesting that the ideological implications embedded in textbooks are not always critically recognized in classroom practices (Rusmawaty et al., 2024). Furthermore, subtle gender stereotypes continue to persist even in textbooks that appear to present balanced representations (Chojimah et al., 2024). These limitations lead to fragmented understanding and highlight the need for more integrative approaches that capture recurring patterns across multiple studies.

In the context of education, textbooks serve not only as instructional tools but also as influential sources of social knowledge, shaping students' perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of social roles (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). The way gender is represented in textbooks can significantly influence how learners construct ideas about identity, power, and societal expectations. Repeated exposure to imbalanced representations may lead students to internalize stereotypical gender roles as natural or normative. In EFL contexts, this influence becomes even more critical, as language learning inherently involves acquiring the cultural meanings embedded in texts and discourse. Therefore, examining gender representation in EFL textbooks is essential not only from a linguistic perspective but also from a socio-cultural and ideological standpoint, as it may affect learners' perspectives and future aspirations.

Despite the growing number of studies on gender bias in EFL textbooks in Indonesia, there remains a lack of integrative research that synthesizes findings across studies to reveal broader patterns. Most previous research has focused on individual textbooks or specific aspects of analysis, resulting in fragmented understandings of how gender bias is consistently constructed and reproduced. Therefore, this study aims to systematically examine patterns of gender representation through a qualitative meta-analysis, with a particular focus on identifying recurring themes in visibility, roles, and language use. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of ideological influences in educational materials and to support the development of more equitable and inclusive EFL textbooks. This analysis used a conceptual and thematic synthesis approach to identify, group, and integrate recurring patterns, such as character visibility, role distribution, and language representation (Kayed et al., 2020; Thomas & Harden, 2008). This study also applies limited quantification to themes that tend to emerge in specific patterns across various studies, thereby strengthening the interpretive findings (Emaliana et al., 2019; Yolanda, 2025). This approach aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender bias is constructed and reproduced in EFL textbooks, particularly as it relates to patriarchal ideology in educational content.

METHOD

This research method employs qualitative meta-analysis as a secondary research method to

identify, examine, and synthesize the findings of previous studies on gender representation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in Indonesia (Abid, 2022; Guo & Wang, 2023). This approach was chosen because it can reveal recurring conceptual and ideological patterns across various research contexts, thereby enabling researchers to identify trends in gender bias and representation, including visibility, social roles, and language use in textbooks. Qualitative meta-analysis emphasizes thematic and conceptual analysis of textual and visual data, rather than numerical data, in line with the views of Snyder (2019) and Thomas & Harden (2008) regarding the importance of qualitative synthesis for uncovering patterns of discourse, bias, and ideological values that are not always apparent in a single study.

Data Collection

Data collection in this study followed the principles of a systematic review, using secondary data from scientific articles indexed in Google Scholar. The publication range was limited to 2015–2025 to ensure the findings remained relevant to the context of English-language learning in Indonesia. The article selection process used the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021), comprising four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, an initial search was conducted using the keywords "Gender Bias AND Gender Representation AND EFL Textbooks AND Indonesia." The screening stage was used to remove duplicate and irrelevant articles. In the eligibility stage, abstracts and introductions were reviewed to assess alignment with the research focus. The final stage, inclusion, yielded a set of articles that met all criteria for further analysis. This article selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

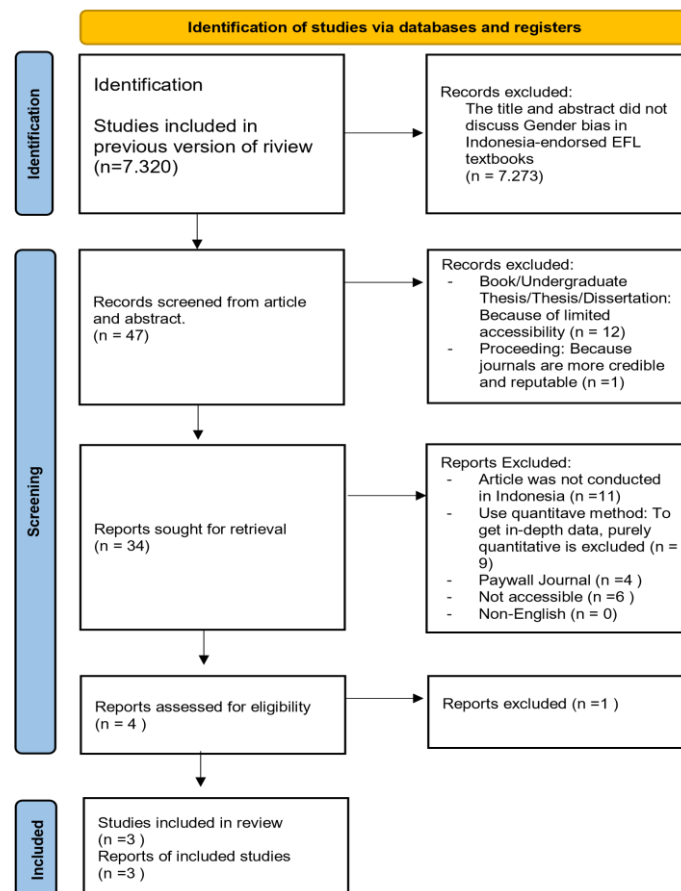


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 (J. McKenzie et al., 2017)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This study applied inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that selected articles were relevant to gender bias in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in Indonesia. Articles included were open-access journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, in English, that discussed gender representation or bias in EFL textbooks in Indonesia and used a qualitative or mixed-methods approach. Exclusion criteria included articles published outside Indonesia, not specifically addressing gender bias in textbooks, focusing solely on pedagogical aspects, using purely quantitative methods without in-depth analysis, not in English, and not available in full. Articles meeting the criteria were then analyzed through reading and systematically analyzing the findings. Each article was reviewed in depth, and then key information was grouped into categories of representation and ideological values to identify patterns of representation of men and women. The final stage involved interpretive analysis to identify key themes of gender construction in EFL textbooks in Indonesia.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers employed a qualitative meta-analysis approach while adhering to research ethics, such as transparency and accuracy in data use. The researchers cited sources accurately to maintain academic integrity. Additionally, the researchers established objective inclusion and exclusion criteria to minimize bias in data selection. The analysis was conducted while preserving the original context of each study examined. The researchers are committed to reporting the research findings transparently and responsibly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and Publish or Perish for publications from 2015 to 2025, with the keywords “Gender Bias,” “Gender Representation,” “EFL Textbooks,” and “Indonesia.” The use of this keyword combination aimed to obtain data that was more specific and relevant to the research focus. All data obtained were then exported to and managed in Mendeley to facilitate screening, grouping, and identifying titles and abstracts that met the research criteria. In the initial stage, the search yielded 7,320 documents. The distribution of publications shows variations in the number of publications each year during the 2015–2025 period, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Identification from year to year

| Years | Identification | |
|-------|----------------|--------|
| | Outcomes | Result |
| 2015 | 217 | - |
| 2016 | 462 | 1 |
| 2017 | 297 | 1 |
| 2018 | 601 | 6 |
| 2019 | 439 | 4 |
| 2020 | 557 | 3 |
| 2021 | 973 | 1 |
| 2022 | 869 | 7 |
| 2023 | 994 | 10 |
| 2024 | 991 | 7 |
| 2025 | 920 | 7 |
| Total | 7.320 | 47 |

Based on Table 2, the number of publications fluctuated annually, with the highest increase occurring during the 2022–2025 period. Subsequently, all documents were selected based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts to the research focus. The screening process identified 7,320 documents in the initial stage, of which only 47 met the inclusion criteria. These documents consisted of (n=34) journal articles, (n=12) books, and (n=1) conference proceedings, while no theses or dissertations (n=0). A total of 7,273 other documents were eliminated because they did not meet the inclusion criteria or were not relevant to the research topic. Further details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Type of Result data in the identification stage

| No | Item | Total |
|----|-----------------------|-------|
| 1 | Journal article | 34 |
| 2 | Book | 12 |
| 3 | Thesis/dissertation | 0 |
| 4 | Proceedings | 1 |
| 5 | No research was found | 7.273 |
| | Total | 7.320 |

During the screening phase, data were focused on (n=34) initial articles, which were then selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that did not address gender bias, were outside the Indonesian context, or did not use qualitative or mixed methods were eliminated. As a result, (n=30) articles were excluded, and (n=1) duplicate article was removed, leaving (n=3) articles that met the eligibility criteria for further qualitative meta-analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that gender bias remains a significant issue in education in Indonesia, particularly in terms of visibility, social roles, language use, and the ideological values embedded in EFL textbooks. Male roles are still presented more prominently, while women are largely confined to less visible and less powerful roles. This pattern suggests that textbooks serve not only as a source of language learning but also as a means of reinforcing gender representations, reflecting the influence of patriarchal ideology in education (Fatmawati et al., 2022). To provide a more systematic overview, a thematic synthesis of the findings is presented in Table 4, highlighting recurring patterns of gender imbalance in both visual and textual representation and in language use across various contexts. These findings not only identify forms of gender bias but also reveal broader social constructions and their potential implications for students’ perceptions of gender roles.

Table 4. Frequency of Male and Female Representation in the Textbooks

| No | Title | Author | Methods | Population | Research Object | Findings |
|----|--|--------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| 1 | Unveiling Gender Bias Through Critical Discourse Analysis: Representation in English | (Samaw a & Jazadi, 2025) | Qualitative research using critical discourse analysis (CDA) | Focused on the textbook English for Nusantara Grade VII, khususnya chapter 1 | Gender representation and bias in visual and textual elements of the textbook | - The textbook exhibits systematic gender bias, with male characters dominating both visual and textual representations. - Female characters |

for Nusantara
Merdeka
Curriculum
Textbook

(About Me)

are underrepresented and marginalized, appearing mostly in passive or relational roles.

- Male characters are portrayed as dominant, active, and central, while female characters are less active.

- The narrative is male-centered, particularly focused on the male protagonist (Galang).

- There is a discrepancy between the curriculum's objectives and the textbook's content regarding gender equality.

- This discourse reflects patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity.

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Gender Bias in Textbooks and Test Items of English Language Learning in the Indonesian Context | (Suharton & Kristina, 2018) | Mixed methods (qualitative-dominant content analysis) | Textbooks English Language grade X dan XI | English textbooks and national exam questions related to language use and gender representation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Men dominate language use in leadership and work performance - Women tend to be portrayed in social and passive roles - Men dominate visual and textual representations - Gender bias hurts students' perceptions, motivation, and self-confidence.. |
| 3 | Addressing Gender Bias Issues in Elementary | (Maulida et al., 2020) | Qualitative (content analysis) | All EFL textbooks for elementar | Identifying and measuring the level of gender representation | All textbooks contain gender bias to varying degrees. Men are dominant in the areas of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>School EFL) Textbooks: An Analysis of Grow With English</p> | <p>y school and bias in the students EFL textbook used in *Grow with Banda English* based Aceh: on five aspects Grow (visibility, with priority, English masculine Books 4, generic 5, and 6. constructions, activities, and occupations)</p> | <p>priority, activity, and occupation, while women are dominant only in the area of visibility. In general, men are portrayed as more active, diverse, and having more occupational roles than women, indicating that textbooks are not yet entirely free of gender bias.</p> |
|---|---|---|

Based on Table 4, three articles met the research criteria and were published between 2015 and 2025. All three studies used qualitative and mixed methods approaches to analyze gender representation in EFL textbooks. One (n=1) study used qualitative content analysis to identify textual and visual gender representation, another (n=1) study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover gender constructions and patriarchal ideology in the texts, and another (n=1) study used mixed methods, predominantly qualitative content analysis combined with quantitative analysis of the frequency of appearance of male and female characters.

A synthesis of the three articles reveals a consistent pattern of gender bias in EFL textbooks. Male representation tends to be more dominant both visually and textually, while women are more often depicted in passive and limited roles. Furthermore, textbook narratives generally center on male characters and reflect patriarchal ideology. The findings were then categorized into several main themes for further discussion.

Discussion

The results of this qualitative meta-analysis indicate that gender bias is still consistently found in EFL textbooks in Indonesia, both in terms of visibility, role allocation, language use, and ideological representation. The three studies analyzed show a recurring pattern, where men are presented as more dominant in visual and textual representations, while women are placed in passive, domestic, and relational roles. Furthermore, gender stereotypes are reinforced through the division of professions, social activities, and language choices that tend to prioritize masculine dominance. These lead to several indications that EFL textbooks function not only as a medium for language learning but also as a social and ideological instrument that reproduces patriarchal values and hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, the discussion that will be discussed outlines the main themes found in this study, including the existence of gender bias in EFL textbooks, male dominance and female marginalization, gender-based role and language stereotypes, and their ideological implications for students' perceptions of gender roles.

The Presence of Gender Bias in EFL Textbooks

Based on the analysis, gender bias remains a consistent phenomenon in EFL textbooks in Indonesia. All three studies show unequal gender representation across visual, textual, and linguistic aspects. Male characters are more dominant in terms of frequency of appearance and primary roles, while women are more often relegated to passive and secondary roles. Textbook narratives generally centre on men as active, productive, and authoritative figures, while women are more often associated with domestic or relational roles (Samawa & Jazadi, 2025; Suhartono & Kristina, 2018). Furthermore, language usage also reinforces gender stereotypes, where men

are associated with strength and success, while women are more associated with appearance and emotions. Maulida et al. (2020) emphasised that women are present in textbooks, but remain underrepresented in substantive activities and professions. Overall, these patterns indicate that EFL textbooks still reflect patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, evaluation and revision of teaching materials are needed to ensure gender representation is fairer, more balanced, and more inclusive.

Male Dominance and the Marginalization of Women in Representation

The analysis reveals male dominance and female marginalization in EFL textbooks. Men are more frequently featured in text and illustrations and occupy central positions in learning narratives, while women are presented in a more limited and less prominent manner. Samawa and Jazadi (2025) found that men are portrayed as active characters and drivers of the story, while women play a more supporting role. In social and professional contexts, men are associated with leadership, prestigious jobs, and productivity, while women are often relegated to the domestic and relational spheres (Suhartono & Kristina, 2018). Maulida et al. (2020) also emphasized that women's participation in key roles and professions remains limited. These findings suggest that the construction of gender roles in EFL textbooks does not reflect equal representation.

Gender-Based Role, Activity, and Language Stereotypes

Gender bias in EFL textbooks is also evident through stereotypical roles, activities, and language use. Men are more frequently depicted in public activities, leadership roles, and prestigious professions, while women are more often associated with the domestic sphere, caregiving, and social relationships. Maulida et al. (2020) found that the variety of activities involving men is more diverse than that involving women. Suhartono & Kristina (2018) also emphasized the tendency to place men in more dominant positions and with higher social status. From a linguistic perspective, the use of language in textbooks reinforces gender stereotypes. Men are more often associated with strength, rationality, and success, while women are associated with emotional, gentle, and dependent traits. Samawa & Jazadi (2025) emphasized that these language patterns not only reflect social realities but also shape students' perspectives on gender roles in social life.

Ideological Implications and Impact on Students

An analysis of the three studies shows that gender bias in EFL textbooks is not only related to representation but also reflects patriarchal ideologies and hegemonic masculinity. Samawa and Jazadi (2025) argue that gender constructions in textbooks are shaped by discursive practices that reproduce power relations in society. This situation indicates a gap between curriculum objectives that emphasize gender equality and the implementation of biased teaching materials. Gender bias in textbooks also impacts students' psychological and social aspects. Suhartono and Kristina (2018) state that unbalanced representation can influence students' perceptions of gender roles and limit motivation and aspirations, particularly for female students. Therefore, Maulida et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of revising textbooks to be more inclusive by ensuring balanced representation, a wider range of roles, and equitable language use.

CONCLUSION

Based on a synthesis of three studies published over the past 10 years, gender bias persists in Indonesian EFL textbooks. This bias is evident in visual representations, narratives, role assignments, and language use, which favor men over women. Men are more often associated with leadership, achievement, and prestigious professions, while women are more often

relegated to domestic and relational roles.

These findings indicate that textbooks not only function as a medium for language learning but also reproduce social values that reflect patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity. Unbalanced representation has the potential to shape students' perceptions of gender roles and reveal a gap between curriculum goals that emphasize gender equality and their implementation in teaching materials. Therefore, textbooks need to be evaluated and revised to be fairer, more balanced, and more inclusive.

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