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AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN VISUAL IMAGES IN CHAPTER 1 OF ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA FOR GRADE 4 STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender representation in visual images in Chapter 1 of *English for Nusantara* for Grade 4 students. The aim of this study is to analyze how male and female characters are portrayed in terms of roles, activities, and interactions. A qualitative research design was applied using content analysis to interpret the visual data. The data were collected from selected images on pages 1, 3, 8, 13, and 16–17, which show daily routines and family interactions. The findings indicate that both male and female characters are present in the textbook, but their roles are not ,equally distributed. Female characters are more often associated with domestic and caregiving roles, while male characters are portrayed as independent and sometimes dominant. Some images show a more balanced representation, especially in neutral activities, but this pattern does not appear consistently across the chapter. The study shows that gender representation in the visual images still reflects traditional stereotypes and has not fully supported equal representation.

Keywords: *Gender Representation, Visual Images, English Textbook, Content Analysis, Gender Role*.

A. Introduction

Gender representation has become an important issue in educational materials, especially in English textbooks used by young learners. Textbooks not only function as tools for language learning but also act as sources of social values that influence students' perspectives. Hall (1997) explains that representation is a process through which meaning is constructed and communicated through language and images. The way male and female characters are portrayed in textbooks can shape students' understanding of gender roles in society from an early age. Visual images are particularly influential because they are easily interpreted and remembered by children. Sunderland (2000) also argues that language learning

materials can reflect and reinforce social ideologies, including gender roles, which makes it important to critically analyze textbooks.

Visual images play a significant role in supporting students' comprehension in language learning, especially at the elementary level. Images help learners connect words with real-life contexts and make learning more engaging. They also function as tools that simplify abstract concepts into more concrete forms. Mayer (2009) states that learning is more effective when information is presented through both visual and verbal modes. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) further explain that images have their own "visual grammar" that conveys meaning through elements such as position, interaction, and representation. Therefore, analyzing visual images is essential to understand how meaning, including gender roles, is constructed in textbooks.

Previous studies have shown that gender bias still exists in English textbooks across different contexts. Male characters are often portrayed as active, dominant, and independent, while female characters are associated with domestic and nurturing roles. Lee and Collins (2010) found that male characters appear more frequently and are given more prominent roles in textbooks. Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) also revealed that female characters are often underrepresented and limited to traditional roles. These findings suggest that textbooks may still reflect stereotypical views of gender. As a result, students may internalize these representations as normal or acceptable social roles.

Based on these issues, this study focuses on analyzing gender representation in visual images in Chapter 1 of English for Nusantara for Grade 4 students. The study aims to examine how male and female characters are portrayed in terms of roles, activities, and interactions. Goffman (1979) explains that visual representations often reflect patterns of gender display that exist in society. Blumberg (2008) also states that textbooks can transmit gender bias in subtle but influential ways. By focusing on visual images, this study provides a more specific and detailed understanding of how gender is constructed in educational materials. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more

balanced and gender-equal textbooks in the future,

Previous Study Recent studies show that gender representation in English textbooks remains an important issue in education. Setyono (2018) found that female characters are often portrayed in limited roles, especially in domestic contexts, which may influence how students perceive women's roles in society. Ariyanto (2018) also reports that male characters tend to dominate both in number and in the variety of roles they perform, giving them more visibility and importance in the learning material. Ullah and Skelton (2017) highlight that such imbalance reflects broader social expectations about gender roles in educational materials and reinforces existing stereotypes. These findings suggest that textbooks may still reinforce traditional gender roles that influence students' perspectives and shape their understanding of social identity.

Another line of research highlights how representation is constructed through both visual and textual elements in textbooks. Widodo (2018) argues that images and texts work together to shape meaning and influence how students interpret information presented in learning materials. Lee (2016) explains that gender representation in educational materials is often influenced by cultural and social norms that are embedded in society. Mustapha (2016) further emphasizes that textbooks can reflect broader ideologies related to gender roles, even when they appear neutral on the surface. This indicates that gender representation in textbooks is not always neutral but shaped by underlying social expectations that may not be immediately visible to learners.

Recent studies also show that there have been efforts to create more balanced gender representation in educational materials. Yolanda and Syafryadin (2025) found that modern textbooks begin to present male and female characters in similar roles, showing an attempt to promote equality. Emilia et al. (2017) highlight that gender equality in educational materials is influenced by curriculum development and policy changes that aim to reduce bias. Sari (2019) explains that classroom materials play an important role in shaping students' perspectives on gender and can support more equal representation

when designed carefully. This suggests that gender representation is gradually improving, although the changes are not always consistent across different contexts.

Despite these developments, most previous studies focus on general textbook content rather than specific visual analysis. Nugroho (2016) emphasizes that textbook analysis often overlooks detailed visual elements, even though images play a significant role in meaning-making. Puspita (2020) explains that visual images have a strong influence on students' interpretation of meaning in learning materials, especially for young learners. This creates a gap for further research that focuses specifically on visual images in a particular chapter to gain a deeper understanding. Such a focus can provide more detailed insights into how gender roles are constructed and communicated through visual representations in textbooks.

B. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using content analysis to examine gender representation in visual images. Qualitative research is appropriate because it focuses on interpreting meaning and understanding how social realities are constructed through data (Creswell, 2014). The data are taken from Chapter 1 of English for Nusantara for Grade 4 students, specifically focusing on images found on pages 1, 3, 8, 13, and 16–17, which depict daily routines and family interactions involving both male and female characters. The data were collected through documentation by observing and selecting relevant visual images that represent gender roles. Each image was identified, described, and categorized based on the roles, activities, and interactions shown by the characters. The analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis to systematically interpret the visual data and identify patterns of gender representation. The roles of characters were classified into categories such as domestic, public, and neutral activities to examine differences in representation. According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis allows researchers to analyze data in a systematic and replicable way while interpreting meaning. Through this process, the study aims to identify whether gender representation in the selected

textbook reflects balance or continues to reproduce traditional stereotypes.

C. Result and Discussion

Picture 1 (page 1)



The visual images on page 1 (chapter opening of My Morning Routine) reflect how gender roles are constructed through everyday activities. Hall (1997) explains that representation is a process of producing meaning through images, which means that the portrayal of male and female characters in textbooks is not neutral. In the top-left image, a male character is shown making the bed, representing independence and personal responsibility. In contrast, the top-right image depicts a female character cooking, which reflects a domestic role traditionally associated with women (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012). The positioning of these images side by side highlights a clear distinction between male and female responsibilities. In the lower section, images of children having breakfast and a family interaction scene show both genders present, yet the mother appears more involved in caregiving activities, reinforcing nurturing roles for females (Lee & Collins, 2010). This pattern indicates that although both genders are included, their roles are not equally distributed, which may influence students' understanding of gender roles from an early age.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the concept of gender display and multimodal representation. Goffman (1979) argues that visual media often present men and women in patterned ways that reflect societal expectations. In this case, male characters are associated with independence and activity, while female characters are linked to domestic and caregiving roles. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) further explain that images carry meaning through visual structures such as positioning and interaction, which can subtly reinforce social norms. The repeated depiction of female

characters in domestic contexts may lead students to perceive these roles as natural and appropriate for women (Blumberg, 2008). Meanwhile, the portrayal of male characters as active and independent supports traditional masculine roles. Sunderland (2000) also emphasizes that language learning materials can reproduce gender ideologies through both text and images. Therefore, the visual representation in this textbook suggests that gender roles are still constructed in a traditional and stereotypical way rather than promoting equality.

Picture 2 (page 3-4)

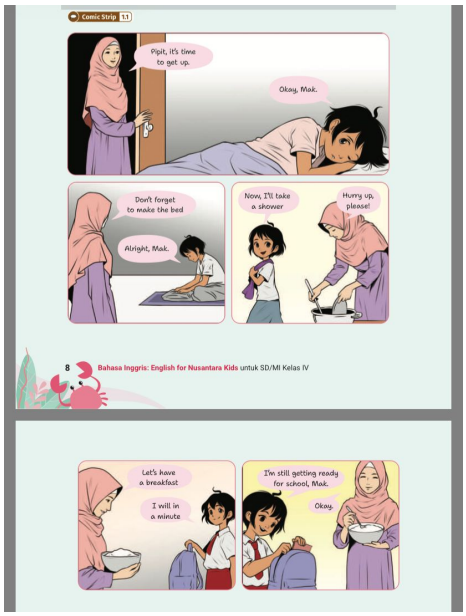


The visual images on page 3 present a sequence of morning activities such as getting up, taking a shower, making the bed, having breakfast, and going to school. Visual representation plays an important role in shaping how learners understand social roles through images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this page, both male and female characters are included, but their roles show subtle differences. A male character is depicted taking a shower, representing independence and personal care, while a female character is shown making the bed, which reflects a domestic task. The activity of waking up appears neutral and includes both genders, but it does not challenge existing gender patterns. Amerian and Esmaili (2015) state that gender roles in textbooks are often distributed in ways that reinforce traditional expectations, which can also be observed in this visual representation.

The lower section of the page shows a female character having breakfast and going to school, indicating that female characters are also represented in educational and public contexts. However, the earlier depiction of domestic activity still places female characters within traditional roles. According to Mustapha (2013), visual representations in textbooks often

reflect cultural expectations about gender roles. The combination of domestic and school-related roles for female characters may suggest partial progress toward equality but still maintains stereotypical patterns. Widodo (2018) also explains that textbook images can subtly transmit gender ideologies through repeated visual patterns. This suggests that although both genders are present in various activities, the distribution of roles is not entirely balanced. Therefore, the images on page 3 continue to reflect a tendency toward traditional gender representation

Picture 3 (page 8-9)



The visual images on page 8 present a comic strip that illustrates a sequence of morning activities within a family context. Visual narratives such as comic strips combine images and dialogue to construct meaning and social roles (Eisner, 2008). In the first panel, a mother is shown waking her child up, reflecting a caregiving role commonly associated with women. This is also supported by Setyono (2018), who found that female characters are often linked to domestic roles in textbooks. The sequence continues with the mother preparing food and reminding the child to get ready for school, reinforcing her domestic responsibilities. The child is shown taking a shower and preparing independently, indicating personal development. Lazar (2005) explains that such representations often reflect traditional divisions of labor. These images suggest that the narrative still associates women with nurturing roles.

The continuation of the comic strip further emphasizes this representation through repeated interactions. In the breakfast scene, the mother is shown serving food while the child prepares for school, which highlights her role as a provider of care. Such repetition is important because it contributes to the process of gender socialization, where individuals learn expected roles through everyday practices (Stockard,

2006). Sunderland (2000) also argues that multimodal texts can subtly reinforce gender ideologies through both images and dialogue. The absence of a visible father figure in these scenes also suggests an imbalance in role distribution within the family. Tuchman (1978) describes this as symbolic representation, where certain groups are underrepresented or portrayed in limited roles. The images not only reflect but also reproduce traditional gender expectations. Therefore, the visual representation on page 8 shows that gender roles are constructed through repeated patterns that emphasize women's responsibility in domestic and caregiving activities



Picture 4 (page 13)

The visual images on page 13 present four children waking up at different times in the morning. Visual representation in educational materials plays an important role in shaping learners' understanding of identity and social roles (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In these images, both male and female characters are shown performing the same activity, which reflects a shared and neutral experience. Each character is depicted in similar positions, such as stretching or yawning, which indicates no clear distinction between genders. This is also supported by Yolanda and Syafryadin (2025), who note that recent textbooks begin to present more equal representation in everyday activities. According to Barton and Sakwa (2012), equal participation of male and female characters in similar

roles can help reduce gender bias. These images suggest a more balanced representation, as no specific gender is associated with a particular activity.

Despite this balanced depiction, the images still need to be interpreted within the broader context of the textbook. Fairclough (1995) explains that meaning in texts and images is shaped not only by individual representations but also by repeated patterns across contexts. While this page presents equal representation, earlier pages showed a stronger association of female characters with domestic roles. This contrast suggests that the textbook includes both progressive and traditional elements of gender representation. Mills (2008) also highlights that gender representation in discourse often operates subtly, where equality may appear in some contexts but stereotypes persist in others. The absence of differentiated roles in this page is a positive indication of inclusivity. However, when combined with previous findings, it shows that gender representation in the textbook is not fully consistent. Therefore, page 13 reflects a partial shift toward equality, but patterns in the textbook still tend to reproduce traditional gender roles.

Picture 5 (page 16-17)





The visual images on pages 16–17 present a comic strip focusing on a father and his child during morning routines. Visual representations in textbooks play an important role in constructing social meanings and identities through images and interactions (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). In these scenes, the father is shown waking the child, giving instructions, and guiding him through activities

such as taking a shower and preparing for school. This portrayal positions the father as an active and authoritative figure within the family structure. The child is depicted as dependent and responsive, following the father's directions throughout the sequence. Davies (2003) argues that gender roles are often constructed through everyday interactions that position males as authority figures. This is reinforced by the father's dominant role in controlling the sequence of activities. Additionally, Mills and Mullany (2011) explain that discourse and interaction patterns often reflect underlying power relations, which can be seen in how the father directs the child's behavior.

The next scenes continue to show the father preparing breakfast and giving advice to the child before going to school. This image shows that male characters are also involved in domestic activities, which may challenge traditional stereotypes that associate such roles only with females. However, the father still maintains a dominant position as he gives instructions and supervises the child's actions. Litosseliti (2013) states that gender representation in discourse often includes implicit hierarchies, where one gender is positioned as more authoritative. Furthermore, Coates (2015) highlights that gender roles are not only about activities but also about how individuals are positioned in relation to power and control. The absence of a mother figure in these scenes creates a contrast with earlier pages, suggesting a division rather than integration of roles. This supports the idea that representation can vary across contexts within the same textbook. Therefore, the images on pages 16–17 reflect a complex construction of gender roles, where male participation in domestic activities is present but still framed within traditional power structures.

The following table summarizes the findings of gender representation in visual images across the selected pages to provide a clear and systematic overview of the analysis.

Page	**Image description**	**Male representation**	**Female representation**	**Gender pattern**
Page 1	Morning routines (making bed, cooking, family scene)	Independent, father figure	Cooking, caregiving	Traditional (unequal)

Page 3	Daily activities (get up, shower, school)	Active, self-care	Domestic, student	Partially balanced
Page 8	Comic strip (mother & child)	Child becoming independent	Caregiving, domestic roles	Traditional
Page 13	Waking up activities	Same activity	Same activity	Equal
Pages 16-17	Comic strip (father & child)	Active, authoritative, caregiving	Not present	Power-based

This table summarizes that gender representation in visual images shows a diverse pattern, but is still dominated by traditional roles. Women are more often depicted in domestic and caregiving activities, while men are more often shown as active and in control. While there are some instances of equality, such as neutral activities, this representation is inconsistent. The book still reflects gender stereotypes despite efforts towards balance.

D. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine gender representation in visual images in Chapter 1 of English for Nusantara for Grade 4 students using a qualitative content analysis approach. The findings reveal that both male and female characters are present in the textbook, indicating an effort to include both genders in learning materials. The images depict various daily activities such as waking up, preparing for school, and interacting within the family. However, the representation of these activities is not entirely balanced. While both genders appear in similar contexts, the types of roles assigned to them differ in significant ways.

The analysis shows that female characters are more frequently associated with domestic and caregiving roles, such as cooking, serving food, and taking care of family members. Male characters, on the other hand, are often portrayed as independent, active, and sometimes authoritative figures within the family. In some sections, there are attempts to present equal representation, particularly in neutral activities where both male and female characters perform similar actions. However, these representations are not consistent across all images. The persistence of traditional gender roles suggests that the textbook still reflects common societal stereotypes.

This study concludes that gender representation in the visual images of the textbook is only partially balanced. Although there are signs of improvement in showing both genders in various activities, the dominance of traditional roles remains evident. This imbalance may influence students' perceptions of gender roles from an early age. Therefore, it is important for textbook developers and educators to create more balanced and inclusive visual representations. Such efforts can help promote gender equality and provide students with a broader understanding of social roles in contemporary society.

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