Analysis of Gender Representation in "My Next Words": Unpacking First Grade Elementary School Students' Book

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the pervasive issue of gender representation in educational materials, focusing on the elementary school context. The research problem centers on assessing how gender is portrayed in the textbook titled "My Next Words for Elementary School," designed for 1st-grade students. The purpose of the research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the textbook's content, examining categories such as omission, firstness, occupational visibility, nouns, masculine generic construction, and adjectives, within the framework proposed by Porreca (1984). The methodology employed is a content analysis with a descriptive qualitative design. The study meticulously examines the 13 chapters of the textbook, analyzing both textual and illustrative elements. The findings reveal a balanced gender representation in text and illustrations, fostering an inclusive learning environment. The arrangement of sentences demonstrates an equitable introduction of male and female characters, promoting a sense of equality. The textbook breaks away from traditional gender norms by incorporating diverse occupational roles, ensuring both male and female characters engage in various professions. Nouns related to gender are thoughtfully selected to avoid reinforcing stereotypes, and masculine generic construction is balanced. Adjectives are distributed fairly between male and female characters. In the findings, the study emphasizes the contribution of the analyzed textbook in promoting gender inclusivity and avoiding stereotypes in elementary education. This research has implications for curriculum development and instructional material design, advocating for more inclusive and gender-sensitive educational resources in elementary schools.
Key words: Gender Representation; Coursebook Analysis, Elementary Students

INTRODUCTION

The profound essentials of instructional materials in the realm of language acquisition remain indelible. Serving as foundational instruments, textbooks play a pivotal role in molding the linguistic development of students, endowing them with indispensable skills to navigate the intricacies of a language. EFL textbooks,

underscored by Saraswati & Ayu, (2021), assume a significant function in facilitating English language acquisition. These instructional resources not only guide educators in disseminating content but also provide essential input through diverse explanations and activities, as articulated by Ayu & Inderawati, (2019). Within this framework, English textbooks emerge as indispensable guides steering students through the intricacies of grammar, vocabulary, and communication. In the pages of these educational resources, students encounter the multifaceted aspects of language, laying the groundwork for their future linguistic competence. Hence according to Ayu (2020), textbooks universally establish the foundation for content learning, the equilibrium of skills imparted, and a spectrum of language exercise activities conducted by students in the classroom.

Nevertheless, an often-abandoned facet of language textbooks lies in the representation of gender within their content. Ekowati et al., (2021) argued that language Teaching and Learning Textbooks are one of the primary components of the education system in general, and English education in particular, which may practice gender bias. They also play an important role in ELT education, as textbooks typically educate students about the culture and values of the target language. English textbooks, akin to other instructional materials, possess the capacity to either reinforce or challenge societal norms. As advocated by Atay & Danju, (2012), textbooks should be meticulously crafted to cater to the needs of both female and male students. The presence or absence of gender balance within these textbooks holds the potential to shape students' perceptions of gender roles and contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypes. Lucy et al., (2020) research on Content Analysis of Textbooks via Natural Language Processing reveals gender-based materials in textbooks that align with the language learning curriculum. The scrutiny of gender representation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, as observed by Aguilar (2021), serves as a prism unveiling societal adherence to conventional philosophies, a phenomenon laid bare by Triyaswati and Emaliana (2021). Hence, a meticulous examination of gender representation within the pages of English textbooks is imperative to comprehend and rectify potential biases that may inadvertently influence young minds.

A nuanced analysis becomes particularly imperative when scrutinizing English children's textbooks. Implicit gender messages and values interwoven into the textual fabric, as posited by Nisak et al (2020), may clandestinely shape students' conceptions of gender, emerging as guiding principles for real-life behavior. It becomes essential to discern the impact of educational practices on children's perceptions of gender, fostering comfort with both their own and the opposite sex, as emphasized by Ozer et al. (2019). Upon entering primary school, children acquire the ability to distinguish gender roles and learn societal norms through the socialization process in both familial and educational settings (Atay & Danju, 2012). These materials, tailored for young learners navigating the formative stages of language acquisition, assume a pivotal role in shaping not only linguistic proficiency but also socio-cultural perceptions. The characters, scenarios, and narratives embedded in these textbooks contribute significantly to the construction

of children's understanding of gender roles, exerting influence on their perspectives from an early age.

Gender representation in EFL textbooks is often overlooked, particularly in Indonesian English education. Despite textbooks' acknowledged influence in shaping societal norms, there is a lack of understanding about how these materials may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes or challenge existing norms. The focus on a single textbook, "My Next Words for Elementary School," released in 2021 by the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture, exacerbates the research problem. The study acknowledges its limitations and emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive analysis with a larger sample size to fully understand gender portrayals in EFL textbooks.

The adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum for elementary education and the mandatory nature of English education in Indonesia make this research imperative. The practical significance of comprehending gender representation in instructional materials arises as English education becomes an essential component of the curriculum. The research highlights that investigating gender representation is not only a theoretical endeavor but also a practical requirement to guarantee that the teaching resources correspond with the changing standards and beliefs of society. The need to recognize and address potential biases that could affect developing minds and shape children's conceptions of gender roles from an early age underscores the urgency of the situation.

Several earlier studies on gender bias in English textbooks produced mixed results and were only able to examine a small number of student levels. When Julianti & Ikhsanudin (2019) examined the gender bias in the junior high school textbook, they found that it was less common.

The gender representation in elementary school textbooks across international curricula used in 160 countries was evaluated by Nisak, Furaidah, and Sulistyo (2020), who discovered that the presence of equality in gender representation produces a balanced depiction of males and females in textbooks. However, Anjarwati (2023) and Albina et al. (2023) investigated how gender is portrayed in elementary English textbooks and elucidated the gender bias that exists in textbooks for the fourth and fifth grades in Indonesia and the Philippines. It was suggested that they conduct a more thorough examination of other English textbooks, regardless of level. (Albina et al., 2023; Anjarwati et al., 2023). Given the conflicting findings of the aforementioned studies, gender bias in English textbooks remains a topic for discussion and may manifest itself in other English textbooks. Thus, the goal of the current study was to examine how gender was portrayed in the elementary school English textbook "My Next Words" an English textbook for first graders of elementary school.

Textbooks, serving as relations of cultural norms and societal expectations, are not mere relations of information. It is within this contextual backdrop that our study

boards on a comprehensive investigation of the first-grade English textbook, "My Next Words for Elementary School," released in 2021 by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. It is also related to the previous study conducted by Anjarwati et al., (2023). This study examines gender representation in the 2021 English textbook "Student's Book My Next Words for Elementary School" using Porecca's framework. The study acknowledges its limitation in focusing on one textbook and suggests a broader analysis with a larger sample for a comprehensive understanding of EFL textbook portrayals. This exploration is not merely an academic pursuit but assumes practical urgency as English education attains mandatory status in Indonesia, aligning with the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum for elementary education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

The researcher's statement in this study is supported by several sources. A previous study by Anjarwati (2023) titled "Gender Representation in English Textbook for 4th Grade Entitled Student's Book My Next Word for Elementary School" clarified the gender bias present in the grade 4 English textbook My Next Words. Using Porecca's framework, this study looks at how gender is represented in the English textbook "Student's Book My Next Words for Elementary School" published in 2021. The study notes that concentrating on just one textbook has limitations and recommends a more comprehensive analysis using a larger sample to gain a thorough understanding of how EFL textbooks are portrayed. A Content Analysis of "Gender Bias in When English Rings a Bell Textbooks" by Julianti & Ikhsanudin, (2019) contains additional, less frequent sources that support the idea that gender bias exists in textbooks. According to Julianti & Ikhsanudin, (2019), The analysis shows that gender bias still exists in some categories, despite some categories having a balanced representation of men and women. Men are often portrayed as initiators and leaders in visibility, a persistent gender bias. Albina et al., (2023) present a further statement titled "Gender Inequality is Real: Dominance Of Male Representation In An Elementary English Textbook" that highlights the gender bias in student books. However, the study revealed more conflicting findings about the roles played by men and women in the book.

The Impact of Gender Representation in Early Education

The impact of books and textbooks on young minds is profound, serving as early role models that significantly contribute to the formulation of preconceptions by the age of five. The representation of gender within these educational materials plays a pivotal role in shaping students' perspectives on gender. Acknowledging this influence highlights, the inherent importance of crafting and sustaining gender-balanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, particularly for young learners during their formative years. Saraswati & Ayu, (2021) stated that EFL

textbooks play an important role in helping students learn English, but they also teach them about gender stereotypes unconsciously.

Understanding Gender Roles: A Multifaceted Construct

Gender representation constitutes a nuanced construct encapsulating societal perceptions of femininity and masculinity. According to Atay & Danju, (2012), Gender roles are shaped by biology, environment, and cognitive development and pertain to our behaviors as men and women. This portrayal delineates distinct traits, roles, and responsibilities assigned to men and women, manifesting across spoken, written, and visual mediums. There are differences in the speech of adult males and females, and we should be cautious about assigning these distinctions to gender (Parham, 2013). The graphical manifestation of gender in these textual forms involves careful consideration of both visual depictions and linguistic choices.

The Role of Textbooks in Language Learning

Textbooks play an important role in language learning, serving as the foundation of educational curricula. Textbooks are an important component of any curriculum because they are unique contributors to learning content (Demir & Ertas, 2014). This comprehensive resource provides structured content, exercises, and contextual examples that guide learners through the ins and outs of language acquisition. Textbooks not only contain information and language knowledge to stimulate student competence but also a syllabus designed to guide teachers in teaching based on predetermined competency standards (Lekawael & Rafli, 2018). Its significance lies in its ability to present linguistic concepts systematically, thereby cultivating a solid foundation for students. With carefully designed exercises and explanations, textbooks offer a structured approach, assisting students in understanding the structure and nuances of complex language.

Addressing Gender Stereotypes in Language Education

Addressing the issue of gender stereotypes is essential in educational materials, including language learning textbooks. Gender equality is equal visibility, independence, obligations, and participation of men and women in all aspects of public and private life (Anjani et al., 2022). These stereotypes can perpetuate bias, thereby limiting the scope for inclusivity in language education. Textbooks need to present language in a way that is free from gender bias, thereby ensuring that students are exposed to diverse perspectives. A good textbook must show how men and women interact in society based on roles, positions, environment, culture, and societal structure, which are depicted in a balanced way through pictures and sentence descriptions (Anjani et al., 2022). By challenging and dispelling stereotypes, textbooks can contribute to creating a more equitable learning environment that empowers students to use language without reinforcing harmful social norms.

Children's Cognitive Development and Positive Representation

Recognizing the importance of gender representation for children is paramount, especially in educational resources such as language learning textbooks. Children's cognitive development is greatly influenced by the images, characters, and scenarios presented in learning materials. Teaching materials, especially textbooks, which are an important part of the curriculum and course development, have an impact on gender perceptions as they occur in schools (Acar, 2021). Therefore, textbooks need to include diverse and positive gender representation, thereby creating an environment where children can identify with characters from a variety of backgrounds. Such representation not only increases inclusivity but also contributes to the development of empathy and understanding among young students.

English Textbooks as Reflectors of Societal Norms

Analyzing gender representation in English textbooks reveals the broad impact of language on the formation of societal norms. English textbooks often reflect and reinforce existing gender biases through the examples, scenarios, and language choices they present. Understanding gender in English textbooks is very important for understanding gender in life because it is a very valuable tool for learning the language and its culture (Hadianto, 2022). It is important to critically assess and revise these materials to ensure they are in line with contemporary perspectives on gender equality. By actively addressing and correcting gender imbalances in content, English textbooks can contribute to eliminating stereotypes and fostering an inclusive language learning experience for all.

Frameworks for Analyzing Gender Representation

Frameworks facilitating the analysis of gender representation in textbooks, as exemplified by Porreca's (1984) model, delineate categories including omission, firstness, occupational visibility, noun, masculine generic construction, and adjective. The visibility metric assumes significance, reflecting the proportional representation of men and women in textbooks. Comprehensive analysis of gender representation involves evaluating various characteristics such as sex and age, designations, activities, and interactions.

METHOD

Design and Sample

The study uses a descriptive-qualitative design to analyze the English textbook "My Next Words for Elementary School" published in 2021. Published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, this textbook is specifically meant for first-graders. The design aims to improve students' speaking, writing, and listening abilities by looking at a variety of textbook elements, including song lyrics, vocabulary exercises, games, and exercises. There are thirteen chapters in

the textbook that cover a variety of subjects, such as daily activities, family dynamics, and personal introductions. The chapters include "How are you? " "Hi, I am KIMI. Meow," "My name is Joshua," "My number is ten," "I have four books," "My garden is colorful," "It is a big circle," "I have pencils," "At Cici's farm," "She is Cici and he is Made," "Aisyah's family," "She has some fruits," and "I like fruits.". The study uses Porreca's (1984) framework to methodically examine how gender is portrayed in the chosen textbook.

Instrument and Procedure

The framework proposed by Porreca (1984) serves as the primary tool for content analysis. The categories under consideration are omission (the proportion of females to males) in both texts and illustrations, firstness, occupational visibility, nouns, masculine generic construction, and adjectives. The content analysis is qualitative, providing useful insights into how gender is represented in the textbook. The procedure entails systematically reviewing each category, examining how male and female characters are represented in texts and illustrations, analyzing sentence structure, assessing occupational roles, scrutinizing gender-related nouns, evaluating masculine generic constructions, and examining adjective distribution.

Data Analysis

The content analysis, employing a descriptive qualitative design adopted by Porreca's research (1984), provides valuable insights into various categories:

1. Omission (The Ratio of Females to Males) in Texts and Illustrations
The analysis revealed a balanced representation of gender in both texts and illustrations, contributing to an inclusive learning environment.
2. Firstness
The arrangement of sentences in the textbook demonstrates an equitable introduction of male and female characters, fostering a sense of equality and representation.
3. Occupational Visibility
The textbook incorporates diverse occupational roles, breaking away from traditional gender norms. Both male and female characters engage in a range of professions, promoting a more inclusive understanding of career options.
4. Nouns
Nouns related to gender in the textbook are thoughtfully selected, reflecting a conscious effort to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and to present a comprehensive vocabulary to students.
5. Masculine Generic Construction
The use of nouns for depicting general gender is balanced and inclusive, ensuring that the language used in the textbook does not inadvertently favor one gender over the other.
6. Adjectives

Adjectives used in the textbook are distributed fairly between male and female characters, contributing to a positive and unbiased depiction of both genders.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Researchers identified key findings in an effort to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender role depictions by expanding on the examination of gender representation within the pages of the My Next Words for 1st Grade textbook. This investigation was carried out by employing Porecca's theoretical framework, which consists of six distinct elements. Evaluation of omissions (ratio of women to men) in both text and illustrations, firstness, visibility of work, nouns, masculine generic constructions, and adjectives in the book are among these elements. This analytical approach aims to reveal new insights into the gender representation dynamics embedded in the structure of My Next Words for Grade 1 Primary School.

Omission (The Ratio of Females to Males) in Texts and Illustrations

The analysis of the omission in "My Next Words" reveals a notable difference in the representation of male and female characters in both text and illustrations. In the text, there are 117 instances of male nouns/pronouns compared to 143 instances of female nouns/pronouns. Similarly, in illustrations, there are 107 depictions of males compared to 130 depictions of females. This slight skew towards female representation in both text and images could indicate an attempt to address gender balance, although a more equitable distribution is desirable for fostering a balanced perspective.

Table 1
Omission (The Ratio of Females to Males) in Texts and Illustrations of My Next Words book for first grade

Type	Male	Female
Text Noun, Pronoun	117	143
Illustration Picture	107	130
Total	224	273

Table 2
Omission in Texts and Illustrations Percentages of My Next Words book for first-grade

Percentages	
Male	45.07%
Female	54.93%
Total	100%

Occupational Visibility

The occupational visibility analysis offers insights into the roles associated with each gender. While the book includes a variety of roles for both males and females, it is crucial to critically assess whether certain occupations are stereotypically aligned with specific genders. Male-associated terms include boy, man, brother, father, grandfather, and teacher, while female-associated terms include girl, woman, sister, mother, grandmother, female teacher, etc. This observation emphasizes the need for careful consideration in the selection of occupational terms to ensure a broad and unbiased perspective.

Table 3.
Occupational Visibility of Male and Female in My Next Words book for first grade

Male	Female
A boy student	A girl student
Brother	Sister
Father	Mother
Grandfather	Grandmother
Breeders	Gardener
	Fruit Seller

Gender Activities

The exploration of gender activities in "My Next Words" unveils instances where specific activities are linked to particular genders. The "Look and write" section introduces sentences like "Aisyah is a girl, she is playing swing" and "Dinda is a girl, she is eating ice cream." While these examples challenge stereotypes by portraying girls engaged in diverse activities, it is crucial to expand the range of activities associated with both genders. This diversification can contribute to a more inclusive representation of the myriad interests and capabilities of children, irrespective of gender.

In the "Color and Say" section, the inclusion of Made and Cici participating in an activity together breaks away from traditional gender norms. However, the identified gender activities seem limited, and introducing a broader spectrum of shared activities can contribute to a richer understanding of gender dynamics.

Table 4.
Gender Activities of Male and Female in My Next Words book for first grade

Male	Female
Having exercises	Playing swing
playing ball	Eating ice cream
	Reading storybook

Noun

This educational resource systematically introduces students to gender-related nouns, encompassing elemental vocabulary items such as boy, girl, he, she, and a spectrum of classroom objects. Beyond these foundational elements, the instructional content encompasses nuanced concepts including possessive pronouns (my, your), numerical counting, and the exploration of dimensions such as colors, shapes, and sizes. Positioned as an invaluable pedagogical aid, the book aspires to elevate the overall standard of learning within educational institutions in Indonesia. Specifically in the context of gender, nouns such as "boy" and "Made" denote the male gender, while "girl," "Cici," and "Aisyah" signify the female gender.

Masculine Generic Construction

Examples include the use of terminology such as "girl" and "boy" to clarify and define different gender identities and roles. The instructional material extends its coverage to encompass broader categories, as evidenced by the inclusion of the term "women," exemplified by phrases such as "Bu Nina is a woman," signifying a comprehensive incorporation of gender-related vocabulary. Although the term "men" is not explicitly articulated within the provided sections, it is reasonably inferred that such terminology is included elsewhere in the book, contributing to a holistic comprehension of gender identities within the framework of language acquisition activities.

Adjective

Examples include the use of terminology such as "girl" and "boy" to clarify and define different gender identities and roles. The instructional material extends its coverage to encompass broader categories, as evidenced by the inclusion of the term "women," exemplified by phrases such as "Bu Nina is a woman," signifying a comprehensive incorporation of gender-related vocabulary. Although the term "men" is not explicitly articulated within the provided sections, it is reasonably inferred that such terminology is included elsewhere in the book, contributing to a holistic comprehension of gender identities within the framework of language acquisition activities.

Content Analysis

A closer look at the content across unit pages in "My Next Words" reveals a diverse range of topics covered in the curriculum. While some units like "Hi, I am KIMI. Meow." and "My name is Joshua" do not explicitly engage in gender-specific themes, units like "She is Cici and he is Made" and "Aisyah's family" provide opportunities to explore and discuss a variety of gender roles within the context of the curriculum.

The examination of the 2021 edition of "My Next Words" illuminates a nuanced bias towards female representation, although this leans only slightly. Notably, this edition marks a considerable advancement compared to its predecessor for 1st-grade students. The analysis reveals a subtle skew in the omission of females to males (54.93% female and 45.07% male), reflecting a more balanced distribution. The inclusion of diverse occupational roles and gender-related activities showcases a commendable effort to break away from traditional norms. While there remains a mild inclination towards traditionally female-associated roles and activities, it is notably less pronounced. The usage of nouns, masculine generic constructions, and adjectives, although leaning slightly towards females, reflects a conscious effort to avoid reinforcing stereotypes. In summary, the 2021 edition of "My Next Words" demonstrates improved gender representation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an examination of "My Next Words" highlights several important findings regarding gender representation in language learning materials. Analysis of omissions shows a subtle trend towards women's representation, which calls for a more balanced distribution to foster a fair perspective. Job visibility indicates a mix of roles for both genders, but underscores the importance of avoiding stereotypes in associating certain jobs with certain genders. Gender activities represent a laudable effort to break away from traditional norms, but there is still room to broaden the scope of activities related to boys and girls. The introduction of gender-related nouns, masculine generic constructions, and adjectives represents a comprehensive approach to incorporating gender-related vocabulary in language acquisition. Despite these positive aspects, content analysis shows that explicit engagement with gender-specific themes varies across units, thus emphasizing the need for consistent and intentional inclusion of diverse gender perspectives in language learning materials. Overall, addressing these findings can contribute to the creation of more inclusive, balanced, and enriching language education resources for students in Indonesia.

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