

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Gender is often associated with traits and behaviors inherent in men and women due to social and cultural influences. In fact, many masculine or feminine characteristics are learned or acquired, not inherent (Sovic & Hus, 2015). As a means of communication, language plays a major role in shaping people's beliefs, norms, and attitudes toward this (Suchana, 2024) since gender stereotypes also reinforce conventional views of the roles of men and women (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Therefore, early education is important and can be started in schools. In this case, the language teachers or textbooks used as learning resources play a role that cannot be ignored.

In Indonesia, gender equality is one of the important principles in designing textbooks (Rizkiyah et al., 2022) because textbooks play a role in shaping gender identity (Zahra et al., 2024). However, there are still many materials that are not in line with this principle; for example, the ELT textbook for grade X in the 2013 Curriculum shows gender bias, with a dominant representation of men over women (Fauzi et al., 2023). Since the Emancipated Curriculum is now being implemented, it is crucial to ensure that textbook design adheres to the new curriculum's guiding principles.

The term curriculum refers to a systematic plan that comprises several choices about what will be taught (learning materials), who will teach (teachers), who will learn (students), what context or environment learning will occur in (milieu), what tools and techniques will be employed, how learning will be evaluated (assessment), and the anticipated learning outcomes (El-Astal, 2023). Textbooks are necessary for the curriculum's implementation to support the learning process, and the content must also adhere to the liberated curriculum's guiding principles. Emphasizing the significance of establishing an inclusive learning environment that celebrates variety, especially gender equality, is one of the curriculum's guiding principles.

Researchers have examined gender representation in a number of earlier studies. Using content analysis, Swara and Mambu (2024) investigated gender inequality and stereotypes in foreign-sourced ELT textbooks in an Indonesian school. The findings demonstrated that these issues still exist and that textbooks frequently assign unequal roles and associate particular roles with particular genders. Another study conducted by Mahmood et al. (2021) examined gender representation in two Pakistani grade 9 and 10 ELT textbooks using a critical discourse analysis approach, with results showing that there is gender inequality in the textbooks that favors males. Noviyanti (2024) also conducted a study to examine gender representation in English textbooks for senior high school students that adopted the Emancipated Curriculum and published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology using a content analysis approach with results showing that there is a bias in favor of men in certain roles and activities including social involvement, sports, and athleticism.

Although these studies provide important insights into gender inequality and bias in ELT textbooks, most of the focus is on either the textual or visual aspects separately, without exploring how the modes interact to shape gender meanings. This suggests the need for a more integrated approach to analyze language and images simultaneously. In addition to previous studies, there are also relevant studies that analyze gender representation using systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis. Muzdalifah et al. (2021) used the visual grammar theory proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) to analyze gender representation between men and women in the images of fourth-grade elementary school textbooks published by *Tiga Serangkai* with the results of the study showing that the textbooks contain unequal gender representation through stereotypical depictions. However, little attention is paid to analyzing gender representation in ELT textbooks using systemic functional multimodal analysis. Therefore, the present study will fill the gap by conducting ELT textbook research using this data analysis approach.

B. Formulation of the Problem

1. What are the differences in gender representation between male and female characters in the textbook “My Next Words: Student’s Book for Elementary School”, grade 3?
2. Why are the gender representations diverse in the textbook?

C. Operational Definitions

1. Gender Representation

How gender identity, both male and female, is depicted in various media. In this context, it is in textbooks.

2. Emancipated Curriculum

Emancipated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) is part of the *Merdeka Belajar* program introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology in 2021.

3. ELT Textbook

ELT textbooks are English language learning resources designed to help students understand and master language skills. In this research context, the corpus that will be used is the Emancipated Curriculum third-grade ELT textbook entitled “My Next Words: Student’s Book for Elementary School”. Two units, which are Unit 3 and Unit 4, are chosen as data sources.

4. SF-MDA

SF-MDA is an approach that examines how meaning is created through different modes of communication,

such as text, images, and layout, with a focus on the social function of language in a particular context.

D. Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate the differences in gender representation between male and female characters in the textbook “My Next Words: Student’s Book for Elementary School”, grade 3, and why these differences appear.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study complements existing theories on gender analysis in ELT textbooks by using the Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFMDA) approach. By combining linguistic and visual analysis, this study extends theories of gender representation that often focus only on verbal texts, emphasizing the importance of multimodal elements (images, layout, color) in conveying gender meanings.

2. Practical Significance

This study provides insights for teachers and policymakers on the importance of selecting gender-equitable teaching materials to influence teaching practices.

3. Empirical Significance

This study offers concrete data on gender representation in Indonesian ELT textbooks, which supports recommendations for improving teaching materials.