Multimodal constructions of gender in EFL textbooks: A critical discourse analysis from global perspective

Tanzil Huda,[1]* Nguyen Thi Thuy Loan,[2] Avinia Prismantikasari,[1]
Refianisya Rachmanda,[1] Fatwa Pujangga Aroeboesman,[1] Adrian Arfa Adhinata[1]

[1]Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Indonesia, [2]AMES, Australia

Textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping learners' perceptions of gender norms and social identities. This study investigates how gendered identities are constructed through multimodal elements – such as text, images, and audio - in a widely used secondary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis and multimodal theory, the study reveals recurring patterns in gender representation. While some content challenges traditional stereotypes, subtle yet persistent biases remain, particularly in portrayals of occupational roles, personal agency, and gendered color schemes. Male figures are predominantly depicted as leaders or professionals, whereas female figures are more often shown in passive or domestic roles. These findings emphasize the need for critically informed revisions of educational materials to promote more inclusive, balanced, and equitable gender representations. The study contributes to global conversations on gender and education by emphasizing the importance of critical literacy in language classrooms and the role of pedagogical design in challenging entrenched gender ideologies.

Keywords: gender representation, multimodality, critical discourse analysis, EFL textbooks, critical literacy

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks serve as a cornerstone of formal education across diverse global contexts, offering a structured and accessible medium through which learners acquire both academic knowledge and social understanding. In language education, textbooks are especially critical, as they provide systematic exposure to vocabulary, grammar, and communication practices while supporting the development of essential key skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Carefully curated to align with curriculum standards and students' cognitive levels, textbooks function not only as instructional guides but also as cultural transmitters. Beyond their pedagogical role, they shape learners' worldviews by covering values, social norms, and identity constructs (Kempe & Grönlund, 2019). Given their widespread and sustained use, textbooks are among the most influential tools in shaping young learners' worldviews—particularly regarding gender.

Globally, research has shown that traditional gender stereotypes are frequently embedded in educational materials. These stereotypes typically associate men with leadership, agency, and professional success, while women are often depicted as nurturing, passive, and confined to domestic roles (Pawlicki, 2020).

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Such portrayals reflect deeply rooted cultural narratives that valorize masculine attributes in public and professional spheres, while relegating femininity to supportive and private domains (Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016). When learners – particularly at a young age – are exposed to these biased representations, they may internalize distorted perceptions of their potential and social roles (Kollmayer et al., 2018). Thus, textbooks do more than educate; they actively participate in the reproduction of societal norms, shaping learners' beliefs about what is natural or acceptable for men and women.

In this context, representation is not merely descriptive but constructive – it creates and circulates meaning through multiple semiotic modes, including language, images, layout, and narrative structures. These meaning-making resources are shaped by the cultural and ideological contexts in which they are produced and consumed. Consequently, educational materials do not simply mirror society – they help shape it. Representation in textbooks, as a signifying practice, can either reinforce dominant gender ideologies or challenge them, depending on how gender roles are portrayed.

In recent years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly called for a more equitable and gender-sensitive approach to curriculum design. Gender – understood as a socially and culturally constructed category – encompasses a range of identities, roles, and expectations that vary across contexts and over time (Gebregeorgis, 2016). Because educational content plays a powerful role in defining and legitimizing these constructs, inclusive and balanced representations are critical for promoting gender equality. Studies analyzing textbook content have consistently revealed imbalanced gender portrayals, with male characters frequently depicted in active and dominant roles, while female characters are often underrepresented or portrayed in secondary, supportive positions (Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020; Moya Guijarro & Martínez Mateo, 2022). Such imbalances contribute to a narrow and stereotypical understanding of gender, limiting learners' perceptions of what they can achieve or aspire to.

Although much existing research has examined textual and visual gender representations, a notable gap remains in the exploration of multimodal constructions of gender - that is, how various elements such as text, imagery, color schemes, and audio components interact to produce and convey gendered meanings. As educational materials increasingly adopt digital and multimedia formats, understanding these multimodal dynamics is essential for capturing the full scope of gender representation. There is a pressing need for empirical studies that address how these semiotic modes interact, what ideologies they reflect, and how they shape students' perceptions of gender – particularly in global language learning contexts such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where textbooks often serve as students' first structured encounter with global cultures and gender norms.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining how gender roles and identities are constructed through multimodal features in senior high school EFL textbooks. Specifically, it investigates how combinations of textual and non-textual elements contribute to shaping gender ideologies and how these may influence learners' perceptions of gender

roles and expectations. The aim is not only to identify patterns of representation but also to critically assess whether these representations reinforce or challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

The inquiry is guided by the following research questions:

1) How are gender roles and identities constructed through multimodal elements (text, images, color, and audio) in senior secondary EFL textbooks?
2) To what extent do these multimodal representations reinforce or challenge traditional gender stereotypes?
3) What underlying gender ideologies are embedded in the multimodal design of the EFL textbook, and how might these influence learners' perceptions of gender roles?

Gender Representation in Educational Textbooks

Scholars have long argued that textbooks reflect and reinforce dominant gender norms. In her seminal work Pawlicki (2020) noted that educational materials often perpetuate traditional gender roles, typically associating men with leadership, power, and professionalism, while portraying women in domestic and caregiving roles. Similarly, Moya Guijarro and Martínez Mateo (2022) found that textbooks tend to portray male characters in active and authoritative roles, whereas female characters are more frequently shown in passive or supportive capacities. This imbalance in representation has been shown to influence students' perceptions of appropriate gender roles, thereby reinforcing broader societal expectations surrounding masculinity and femininity (Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016).

The Role of Multimodal Elements

Multimodal elements – including text, images, audio, and color – play a crucial role in shaping how gender is represented in textbooks. These elements which serve as means of communication, refer to the use of multiple modes of expression – such as written language, visual imagery, and sound – to construct meaning (Adami, 2017; Álvarez Valencia, 2016; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023; Mills & Unsworth, 2017). Importantly, these modes do not operate in isolation; rather, they work in concert to convey comprehensive messages about gender. For example, images frequently reinforce gender roles by depicting men and women in conventional or stereotypical contexts. Similarly, audio components – such as voice characteristics, tone, and speech patterns – can also contribute to gender representation, as certain vocal styles are often culturally associated with either masculinity or femininity (Halliday, 2013).

In educational materials, gendered language and the visual depiction of characters in specific roles subtly shape students' perceptions of gender norms. The use of color schemes – such as blue for boys and pink for girls – further entrenches binary gender distinctions. Moreover, the overall visual design of textbooks often reinforces occupational stereotypes. For instance, Amerian and Esmaili (2014) who found that men were predominantly represented in high-status professions such as doctors, while women were more frequently portrayed in lower-status jobs or domestic roles.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes

While many textbooks continue to reinforce traditional gender roles, recent studies highlight growing efforts to

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challenge these stereotypes. For example, Ruiz-Cecilia et al. (2020) observe that some contemporary textbooks incorporate gender-neutral language and depict characters in non-traditional roles to foster more inclusive understandings of gender. These materials aim to present a more balanced perspective, in which both male and female characters are portrayed in leadership positions, caregiving roles, and activities that are not tied to specific gender expectations. Similarly, Suchana (2018) argues that textbooks featuring diverse representations of gender can help dismantle stereotypes and promote equality by offering students a wider array of role models across different contexts.

However, despite such progressive efforts, implicit gender biases often persist within educational texts. Kollmayer et al. (2018) emphasize that early exposure to biased narratives in textbooks can significantly shape children's perceptions of their abilities and appropriate societal roles. This ongoing presence of bias underscores the need for continuous revision of educational materials to ensure more equitable depictions of all genders and to expose students to a broader spectrum of identities and roles.

The Need for Gender Perspective in Textbooks

The integration of a gender perspective in educational materials is crucial for promoting equality and challenging entrenched stereotypes. As Gebregeorgis (2016) emphasizes, gender is not an inherent biological attribute but a socially constructed concept that influences individuals' roles and responsibilities within society. Given the influences role of textbook in shaping learners' worldviews, they should reflect an understanding of gender as a fluid and diverse spectrum rather than adhering to a rigid binary framework. Supporting this view, Halliday (2013) argues that textbooks must evolve to incorporate diverse voices and experiences, thereby confronting the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles and fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine how multimodal elements shape gender representation and perpetuate stereotypes in high school English textbooks. It focuses on how various modes of how various modes of communication – such as images, audio, and textual descriptions – contribute to the construction of gendered identities within the selected textbook, *English for Change*, the official English textbook issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia*), was chosen as the documentary source. As a compulsory textbook, it is assumed to be widely used by millions of senior high school students across the country. The data analyzed in this study consist of three primary multimodal elements within the textbook, including: **Images**: Visual representations of male and female characters, including their roles, activities, and interactions in both academic and social contexts. **Textual Descriptions**: Written content describing male and female characters, with particular attention to language used in relation to gender roles, responsibilities, and stereotypes. **Audio**: Spoken elements such as monologues or dialogues that

feature gendered roles or interactions, including tone of voice, speech patterns, and the contexts in which male and female voices appear. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research typically draws upon unstructured data sources such as text, images, and audio to explore complex social phenomena. These forms of data are particularly valuable for uncovering underlying cultural and ideological messages embedded in educational materials. Given that gender representation and stereotypes are often subtly conveyed through multiple modes of communication, a qualitative approach is well-suited to capture the nuanced ways in which these representations are constructed.

The analysis is guided by Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), an approach designed to explore how different semiotic modes interact to produce meaning. This involves identifying recurring patterns in the use of visual, linguistic, and auditory features, and analyzing how these modes function together to construct particular gender representations. The study aims to uncover how the interplay of these elements contributes to the portrayal of gender roles, the reinforcement of stereotypes, and the perpetuation of societal norms related to masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, it seeks to offer a deeper understanding of how textbooks influence students' perceptions of gender.

Data collection involved a comprehensive review of the textbook, with particular attention to instances where gender roles, expectations, or stereotypes were conveyed through any combination of the identified multimodal elements. Each mode was analyzed based on the following criteria: **Representation of gender roles**: How were male and female characters depicted in terms of occupation, social roles, and behaviors? **Stereotypical portrayals**: Do the text, images, or audio perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes (e.g., men in leadership roles, women in domestic or supportive roles)? **Interrelationships between modes**: How do textual, visual, and auditory elements interact to reinforce or challenge gender representations?

To ensure a systematic and rigorous analysis, data were manually coded using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. These themes were then interpreted within the broader socio-cultural context in which the textbook is situated. Special attention was given to the potential implications of these representations for students' understanding of gender roles, particularly how multimodal elements may shape learners' perceptions and internalization of gendered behaviors and expectations. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, a triangulation strategy was employed through peer cross-checking of the data analysis process by a qualified colleague.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal significant patterns in gender representation within the analyzed textbook, especially through its multimodal elements – audio, text, and images. The analysis underscores the complex interplay of these modes in constructing and reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes.

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Audio Analysis

The audio components were examined across four key dimensions: verbal content, voice characteristics, context and theme, and implicit bias.

Verbal Content: The use of gender-specific language in the textbook frequently reinforces traditional gender roles. For instance, in Unit 1, Activities 6a and 6b, female characters are described using adjectives such as "gentle" and "beautiful," while male characters are associated with traits like "strong" and "brave." These descriptors perpetuate stereotypical representations of femininity and masculinity. Nonetheless, some instances suggest an effort to challenge these conventions. In Unit 4, Activities 3b and 3c, the character Nina is referred to as a "little hero," thereby disrupting the typical association of heroism with male figures and promoting more gender-neutral traits such as courage and independence. Moreover, the use of gendered pronouns further reflects these patterns. Female pronouns ("she," "her") are predominantly used in caregiving and emotionally driven contexts, as seen in Unit 3, Activity 3, whereas male pronouns ("he," "his") are more common in depictions of leadership, such as in Unit 1, Activity 8, where male characters are positioned as decision-makers.

Voice Characteristics: The voice characteristics of male and female characters display marked distinctions that reflect traditional gender dynamics. Female characters often speak in nurturing or tentative tones, as illustrated by Nina's dialogue in Unit 4, where she expresses concern and seeks approval. In contrast, male characters frequently adopt more assertive and directive tones, particularly in contexts involving problem-solving or leadership, such as in Unit 2, Activity 3. Additionally, female voices are predominantly featured in explanatory or supportive roles – for example, in Unit 3, Activity 5, where a female character provides clarification – while male voices are more commonly assigned authoritative or instructive functions. These patterns reinforce conventional power hierarchies, positioning male characters as leaders and decision-makers, and female characters as helpers or facilitators.

Context and Theme: A traditional gendered division is evident in the context and themes portrayed through the audio elements. Female characters are frequently situated in domestic, emotional, or aesthetically oriented settings, whereas male characters appear more often in adventurous, professional, or authoritative roles. For example, in Unit 1, male characters are engaged in decision-making scenarios, reinforcing their association with leadership and public authority, while female characters are primarily involved in caregiving and familial responsibilities. Nonetheless, there are instances of progressive representation. In Unit 4, Activities 3b and 3c, the character Nina is depicted in a leadership capacity, signaling a deliberate shift toward more inclusive and egalitarian portrayals that challenge traditional gender expectations.

Implicit Bias: Implicit biases are evident in the unequal distribution of roles between male and female characters. Female achievements are frequently framed through relational lenses - emphasizing actions like "helping others" rather than highlighting individual accomplishments - as

exemplified in Unit 3. In contrast, male characters are consistently portrayed as decision-makers and problem-solvers, reinforcing hierarchical gender dynamics. This recurrent assignment of passive or supportive roles to women, alongside active and authoritative roles to men, contributes to the normalization of traditional gender stereotypes and has the potential to shape students' perceptions of appropriate gender behaviors and societal roles.

Image Analysis

The analysis of the visual elements focuses on the frequency and representation of male and female characters, their roles, and the use of color.

Frequency of Representation: The visual representation of male and female characters appears to be approximately balanced in terms of frequency. For example, in Unit 1, page 3, two male and two female characters are depicted within a single image. Similarly, in Unit 3, page 102, both male and female characters are shown together. These instances indicate a relatively equal gender representation in the textbook's visual content.

FIGURE 1 | Frequency of gender "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 1, p. 3)

FIGURE 2 | Frequency of gender "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 3, p. 102)

Role Depictions: Although the gender frequency is balanced, the roles portrayed often reflect traditional gender norms. Male characters are predominantly shown in prestigious and professional occupations, such as doctors, while female characters are often depicted in less prestigious roles, such as traders or in domestic settings. The textbook tends to favor male characters in high-status professional roles, reinforcing the stereotype that men occupy leadership and professional positions, while women are confined to supportive or domestic roles.

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FIGURE 3 | A Doctor Representation by Male, "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 3, p. 116)

FIGURE 4 | A Trader Representation by Female, "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 5, p. 190)

Additionally, occupational images – such as that of an online motorcycle taxi driver – are predominantly associated with male characters. This representation underscores a notable gender disparity in the portrayal of the workforce, reinforcing societal expectations and norms surrounding male-dominated professions.

FIGURE 5 | An Online Driver Representation by Male, "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 5, p. 222)

Color Representation: The use of color further reinforces gender stereotypes. Blue is consistently associated with male characters, while pink is used to represent female characters. The textbook adheres to this gendered color conventions, depicting male characters in blue clothing and female characters in pink, thereby reinforcing traditional associations between color and gender roles.

FIGURE 6 | Color Identification, "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 1, p. 3)

FIGURE 7 | Color Identification, "English for Change" (Grade XI, Unit 3, p. 109)

Textual Elements
Despite some gendered representations in the visual and audio elements, the textual content in the textbook demonstrates progress in promoting gender equality. In Unit 1: ***Digital Skills and My Identities***, activities such as "Ask a classmate you trust based on their experience" are gender-neutral, intentionally avoiding the assignment of skills or traits based on gender. Additionally, prominent figures such as Maudy Ayunda and Joshua Irwandi are featured in significant roles in technology and art, offering a balanced representation of both genders in fields traditionally dominated by one gender.

In Unit 2: ***Love Your Environment***, the descriptions and activities are largely gender-neutral. However, the phrase "A woman plants flowers in the garden" subtly perpetuates a stereotype by linking nurturing and caregiving roles with women. Then, in Unit 3: ***Healthy Living for a Healthy Future***, gender-neutral dialogues and examples are employed, ensuring that all students can equally engage in discussions about health and wellness. Nevertheless, the depiction of a "doctor and a patient" subtly reinforces gendered stereotypes regarding healthcare professions.

Furthermore, Unit 4: ***Indonesian Environmental Figures*** highlights both male and female environmental activists, emphasizing the leadership potential of women in environmental protection. The portrayal of young male and female activists in leadership roles challenges traditional gender norms. Finally, Unit 5: b adopts a fully gender-neutral approach to financial literacy, promoting the idea that financial management is a skill applicable to all, regardless of gender.

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Gender Representation in Audio Elements

The analysis of gender representation in the audio elements reveals that traditional gender roles are reinforced across several domains, including verbal content, voice characteristics, context, and implicit bias. These elements not only reflect established societal gender norms but also possess the potential to shape and reinforce learners' perceptions of gender roles. The following discussion will explore these categories in greater depth, providing insight into how these patterns perpetuate gender stereotypes and how attempts to challenge these norms are manifested in the content.

Verbal Content Reinforcement of Traditional Gender Roles

The use of gender-specific terminology in the verbal content of the audio material serves to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Female characters are consistently described with adjectives such as "gentle" and "beautiful," which reinforce the cultural stereotype of women being delicate, caring, and aesthetically pleasing (Anjarwati, 2020; Lakoff, 1973). In contrast, male characters are described as "strong" and "brave," which aligns with the classic view of masculinity that emphasizes power, courage, and leadership (Kaplan, 2006; McKenzie & McNeill, 2022). These descriptions not only reflect but also reinforce, societal expectations of femininity and masculinity, thereby limiting the scope of acceptable behavior for both genders.

Despite this reinforcement of gender norms, there are attempts to subvert these stereotypes, as seen in Unit 4, Activities 3b and 3c, where Nina is referred to as a "little hero." This portrayal challenges the conventional association of heroism with male characters and promotes more gender-neutral attributes, such as courage and independence. By presenting Nina as a hero, the content introduces the possibility for a broader understanding of heroism that is not inherently tied to traditional masculine qualities. However, such attempts remain isolated, and the broader narrative continues to depict women as gentle and men as strong.

The use of gendered pronouns further accentuates these disparities. Female pronouns ("she," "her") are most frequently associated with caregiving, emotional intelligence, and nurturing roles, as seen in Unit 3, Activity 3, where female characters are depicted in supportive roles. In contrast, male pronouns ("he," "his") are predominantly used in leadership contexts, such as in Unit 1, Activity 8, where male characters are portrayed as decision-makers. This distinction in pronoun usage subtly reinforces the expectation that women are primarily responsible for emotional labor and caregiving, while men are positioned as leaders and decision-makers (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004)

Voice Characteristics: Power Dynamics and Gendered Speech

Voice characteristics represent another area where gender differences are clearly delineated. Female voices in the audio element are often portrayed as tentative, nurturing, or seeking approval, as demonstrated by Nina in Unit 4. This vocal portrayal aligns with the cultural expectation that women should exhibit more passive and emotionally expressive behaviors, roles traditionally viewed as supportive (Moya Guijarro & Martínez Mateo, 2022). For example, Nina's

dialogue in Unit 4, where she expresses concern, reflects the stereotype of women as caregivers who seek consensus and reassurance.

In contrast, male voices are typically depicted using more assertive and directive tones, particularly in contexts involving problem-solving or leadership, such as in Unit 2, Activity 3. The dominance of male voices in authoritative or instructive roles supports the traditional gender norm that positions men as strong, authoritative figures capable of making decisions and providing guidance. This distinction in vocal characteristics highlights the underlying power dynamics in gender representation, wherein men are positioned as leaders, and women are relegated to supportive roles.

This division in voice characteristics not only reflects societal norms but also reinforces them. By consistently assigning assertive and authoritative voices to male characters and tentative, supportive voices to female characters, the content reflects and reinforces traditional perceptions of gender and power (Hyde, 2005; Lakoff, 1973; Peters, 2020). These gendered distinctions in vocal expression can influence learners' perceptions of authority and leadership, subtly reinforcing the notion that men are more suited for leadership positions, while women are more suited for supportive roles.

Context and Theme: Gendered Divisions in Roles and Settings

The context and themes of the audio element further reinforce traditional gender roles by placing female characters in domestic, aesthetic, or caregiving contexts, while male characters are often depicted in more professional, adventurous, or authoritative settings. For example, in Unit 1, male characters are involved in decision-making scenarios, while female characters are assigned family-related responsibilities. This reinforces the stereotype that men belong in the public, professional sphere, while women are relegated to private, domestic roles (Simulja et al., 2014).

However, there are instances within the content that challenge these traditional gendered contexts. Specifically, in Unit 4, Activities 3b and 3c, Nina is portrayed in a leadership role, offering a contrast to the conventional gender division of labor. Nina's depiction as a leader helps subvert the expectation that only men can occupy such roles, promoting a more gender-neutral view of leadership. While this shift is positive, it remains an exception rather than the norm, with traditional gendered roles continuing to dominate the broader narrative.

This division of male and female roles across various contexts reinforce the societal expectation that men and women occupy different spheres of influence. The content's tendency to place men in leadership, professional, and adventurous roles, while positioning women in caregiving and family-oriented roles, shapes how learners internalize gendered expectations in their own lives. These portrayals contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality, suggesting that certain roles – particularly leadership and authority – are inherently suited to men, while others, such as caregiving, are designated for women (Haupt & Gelbgiser, 2024).

Implicit Bias: Gender Hierarchies in Role Assignments

Implicit biases are evident in the disproportionate assignment

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of roles based on gender. Female characters' achievements are often framed in relational terms, such as "helping others," as seen in Unit 3, where female characters are depicted in supportive roles. These portrayals position women as nurturers or caregivers, linking their success to their ability to support others rather than to individual accomplishments (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In contrast, male characters are predominantly depicted as decision-makers and problem-solvers, reinforcing a gender hierarchy that places men in positions of authority and control.

This implicit bias in role assignment reflects a broader societal pattern, where women are often perceived as supporting figures, while men are regarded as leaders and decision-makers. Such portrayals contribute to the ongoing reinforcement of gender hierarchies, positioning men at the top of the social structure and relegating women to subordinate roles. Over time, these representations can influence learners' perceptions of their own potential, particularly when they internalize these gendered expectations (McKenzie & McNeill, 2022).

Gender Representation in Visual Elements and Its Implication

The visual elements in the textbook "English for Change" reveal significant patterns in the representation of gender through the frequency of male and female characters, their roles, and the use of color. These patterns reflect societal gender norms and expectations, which are subtly reinforced through the visual content. Despite a relatively balanced frequency of male and female representations, the roles assigned to these characters, as well as the color associations, align with traditional gender stereotypes. This discussion critically examines these aspects, drawing on relevant literature to explore how these visual cues influence learners' perceptions of gender roles.

Frequency of Representation: Gender Balance and Implicit Bias

The frequency of male and female characters in the textbook's images appears to be relatively balanced. For example, in Unit 1, page 3, and Unit 3, page 102, male and female characters are depicted together in equal numbers, suggesting visual parity between the genders. This might suggest a step towards gender equality in the textbook's visual content, which is often regarded as a positive aspect in educational materials (Esteves, 2020).

However, while the visual balance of representation appears balanced, this parity does not necessarily extend to the roles or contexts in which the characters are placed. As noted by Amerian & Amerian and Esmaili (2014), even when genders are represented equally in terms of frequency, the roles assigned to them often reflect traditional stereotypes. Thus, although male and female characters appear in equal numbers, the roles they occupy, and their professional positions remain unequal. This discrepancy becomes apparent upon closer examination of the specific roles assigned to the characters, which will be further discussed below.

Role Depictions: Reinforcement of Traditional Gender Norms

While the frequency of male and female representation may be equal, the roles depicted in the textbook adhere to traditional gender norms, with male characters often placed in prestigious, professional contexts, and female characters in domestic or supportive roles. For example, in Unit 3, page 116, a male character is depicted as a doctor, a high-status profession that aligns with stereotypical representations of masculinity as powerful, authoritative, and capable (Amerian & Esmaili, 2014). In contrast, female characters, as seen in Unit 5, page 190, are frequently shown in lower-status or domestic roles, such as traders. These representations reinforce the societal expectation that men are suited for leadership and professional roles, while women are relegated to caregiving, supportive, or domestic functions (Gudjonsson et al., 2022).

This pattern is further exemplified in images such as the one in Unit 5, page 222, where a male character is depicted as an online motorcycle driver. This role is predominantly male-dominated, especially in countries like Indonesia, where men constitute the majority of motorcycle taxi drivers (Simulja & Wulandari & Wulansari, 2014). The assignment of male characters to these roles reinforces the notion of men occupying physically demanding, public-facing occupations, while women are largely excluded from such positions. This division reflects broader gendered patterns in the labor market, where men are more likely to be represented in high-status and physically demanding jobs, and women in lower-status or domestic roles (Charles, 2011).

Color Representation: Gendered Color Associations

The use of color in the visual content further reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, with blue predominantly associated with male characters and pink with female characters. This color-coding reflects a long-standing cultural convention that associates blue with boys and pink with girls, a practice that became firmly entrenched in the 20th century. In the textbook, male characters are often depicted in blue clothing (Unit 1, page 3), while female characters are shown in pink (Unit 3, page 109). This color association not only reflects but reinforces societal expectations of gendered behavior and appearance, contributing to the formation of rigid gender identities from an early age.

The cultural significance of color is well-documented, with studies showing that color preferences can be influenced by gender stereotypes (Davis et al., 2021). The persistent use of color to signify gender roles in educational materials subtly influences students' perceptions of what is deemed appropriate for each gender, promoting the idea that certain colors – and by extension, certain roles or behaviors – are inherently linked to masculinity or femininity. This reliance on color coding may inadvertently limit students' understanding of gender fluidity and the possibility of transcending traditional gender associations.

The visual content in "English for Change" (Grade XI) reflects broader societal norms and gender stereotypes, despite efforts to balance the frequency of male and female characters. By continuing to depict male characters in prestigious, professional roles and female characters in domestic or supportive positions, the textbook reinforces the traditional gender divide still prevalent in many cultures (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These images perpetuate implicit biases about gender and occupation, influencing

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learners' perceptions of what roles are considered "appropriate" for each gender.

Furthermore, the color-coded representation of gender roles through blue and pink clothing reinforces narrow conceptions of gender identity, especially in young learners who are still developing their understanding of gender. While color itself is neutral, its cultural connotations can shape attitudes toward gender expression and behavior. By adhering to these color conventions, textbooks may inadvertently limit students' conceptions of gender and restrict their potential to explore a broader range of roles and identities.

To promote a more inclusive and equitable representation of gender in educational materials, it is important to provide a more diverse portrayal of roles for both male and female characters. Depicting women in leadership roles, prestigious professions, and dynamic settings, alongside men in caregiving or domestic roles, can help challenge traditional gender norms and offer students a broader understanding of the range of possibilities for both genders (Esteves, 2020; Gudjonsson et al., 2022). Additionally, reconsidering the use of color to symbolize gender and adopting a more neutral color scheme could contribute to dismantling the rigid gender associations often reinforced through educational content.

Gender Representation in Textual Elements and Their Contribution to gender Equality

The textual content of the English for Change textbook, particularly in Units 1-5, demonstrates notable progress in promoting gender equality. While the visual and audio elements occasionally reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, the written content tends to be more inclusive and balanced, providing opportunities for both male and female students to engage with topics and activities without gender bias. This discussion examines how gender-neutral language, the representation of prominent figures, and the treatment of various subjects contribute to challenging conventional gender roles and fostering gender equality.

Gender-Neutral Language in Activities

In Unit 1, titled Digital Skills and My Identities, features activities that are notably gender-neutral, representing a significant move toward inclusivity. For example, the instruction "Ask a classmate you trust based on their experience" avoids the use of gendered language or assumptions about individuals' capabilities based on their gender. This is particularly important, as language not only reflects but also perpetuates societal norms, as argued by West and Zimmerman (1987). By eliminating gender-specific assignments, the textbook creates a learning environment in which students are encouraged to participate based on their personal skills and experiences, rather than being constrained by stereotypical notions of gendered competencies.

This approach reflects a conscious effort to ensure that all learners, regardless of gender, can engage equitably and feel empowered to share their perspectives. By dissociating traits and roles from gender, the textbook promotes a more inclusive pedagogical framework, consistent with contemporary educational values. Scholars such as Hyde (2005) emphasize that the use of non-gendered language fosters equality and helps to mitigate bias. As such, the textbook's reliance on gender-neutral phrasing represents a

critical strategy in challenging entrenched stereotypes and supporting more equitable learning experiences.

Prominent Figures in Technology and Art

The portrayal of prominent figures such as Maudy Ayunda and Joshua Irwandi in Unit 1 – where Maudy Ayunda is recognized for her contributions in the arts and Joshua Irwandi in the field of technology—represents a meaningful effort toward achieving gender balance in the depiction of professional roles and accomplishments. Historically, certain fields have been strongly gendered, with technology commonly viewed as a male-dominated domain and the arts stereotypically associated with women (Leslie & Cimpian & Meyer & Freeland, 2015). By including both male and female figures in these traditionally gendered spheres, the textbook challenges prevailing stereotypes and promotes the idea that professional success is not determined by gender.

Moreover, the acknowledgment of these individuals based on their achievements—rather than in relation to gendered expectations—reinforces the principle that leadership and excellence are attainable by all, regardless of gender. By presenting Maudy Ayunda and Joshua Irwandi as role models, the textbook encourages learners of all genders to pursue their aspirations without being constrained by traditional norms. This approach provides an important counter-narrative to gendered assumptions often introduced in early education (Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016).

Gender-Neutral Dialogue and Examples in Health

Unit 3, Healthy Living for a Healthy Future, provides a further example of progress in promoting gender inclusivity, featuring gender-neutral dialogues and examples that allow all students to engage equally with topics related to health and wellness. Notably, the activities and discussions surrounding health do not assign caregiving or healthcare roles based on gender—roles that are frequently and stereotypically associated with women. This approach marks a positive step toward dismantling traditional gender norms in educational materials.

Nevertheless, subtle reinforcement of stereotypes persists, as seen in the portrayal of a "doctor and a patient," which may implicitly suggest that authoritative roles in healthcare are more commonly associated with men (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Despite this, the overall gender-neutral presentation of health and wellness topics reflects a more inclusive educational strategy. By avoiding explicit gender assignments in relation to health behaviors or roles, the textbook supports recent educational initiatives aimed at challenging gendered assumptions. Enabling all students to envision themselves in diverse roles within the health sector is essential for fostering equity and inclusivity in classroom discourse.

Environmental Leadership and Gender Equality

Unit 4, Indonesian Environmental Figures, represents a meaningful step toward challenging gender stereotypes by showcasing both male and female environmental activists. The depiction of these individuals in leadership positions conveys a powerful message about women's leadership potential, particularly in domains traditionally dominated by men, such as environmental advocacy. This marks a positive departure from conventional gender norms, which have historically marginalized women in environmental leadership

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roles ([Meo, 2012](#)).

By highlighting both male and female leaders, the textbook underscores the value of gender equality in positions of influence. This representation is particularly significant as it provides students with a more accurate and inclusive portrayal of societal contributions, illustrating that both men and women play vital roles in addressing global challenges. Furthermore, it serves to inspire female students to aspire to leadership roles in fields where they have been historically underrepresented.

Financial Literacy: A Gender-Neutral Approach

Finally, in Unit 5, Personal Money Management, the textbook fully adopts a gender-neutral approach to financial literacy. By framing financial management as a skill relevant to all individuals, regardless of gender, the textbook challenges the persistent stereotype that financial responsibility is predominantly a male domain. This inclusive portrayal promotes the idea that women, like men, are equally competent in making financial decisions and managing resources.

The textbook's gender-neutral stance on financial literacy is particularly significant, as it addresses the societal bias that often portrays men as more financially adept ([Peters, 2020](#)). By presenting financial literacy as a universally applicable competency, the textbook empowers students of all genders to take active control of their financial futures.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the multimodal elements of the English for Change textbook for SMA/MA Grade XI to assess how gender representation and stereotypes are constructed and communicated through audio, textual, and visual components. The analysis revealed several significant patterns in the portrayal of gender roles, many of which reflect traditional societal stereotypes. Findings indicated that male characters were predominantly depicted in authoritative, professional, and leadership roles, whereas female characters were more often associated with caregiving, emotional labor, and supportive functions. These patterns were most evident in the verbal content, voice characteristics, and visual representations.

Although certain aspects of the textbook – such as the use of gender-neutral language and the inclusion of both male and female characters in varied roles – demonstrate an effort to challenge traditional gender norms, implicit biases remain. The consistent use of gendered colors (e.g., blue for males and pink for females) and the depiction of specific professions as male-dominated continue to reinforce stereotypes. Nevertheless, the representation of female environmental activists and the gender-neutral approach to financial literacy illustrate a conscious attempt to promote more balanced and inclusive gender representation.

Overall, the textbook shows commendable progress toward achieving gender balance; however, areas where gender stereotypes persist warrant further attention. Future editions could enhance their commitment to gender equality by addressing issues such as color associations, occupational portrayals, and ensuring equal representation of genders across all contexts. This study highlights the critical role of textbooks in shaping students' perceptions of gender roles and emphasizes the need for educational materials that foster a more equitable and inclusive understanding of gender.

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