

## *The Visual Representation of Gender Roles in Primary School Textbooks in Indonesia*

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the extent to which visual representations of both males and females in widely used primary school textbooks reinforce gender stereotypes. The research applies a multimodal approach based on visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The research aims to critically examine social semiotic sources, reveal ideas and values, and how in-group and out-group are represented in textbook discourse. The results show that in textbooks used in primary school males are more likely to be portrayed as 'active' and having a high-status 'position', while females are more likely to be portrayed in lower situations. Women are more likely to be portrayed in ways that reproduce gender stereotypes such as doing household chores or providing care. In contrast, men are more likely to be portrayed as agents, competent and powerful, and have various professional roles such as scientists, police officers etc. These patterns reflect a social structure where Indonesian men have a privileged position of power and authority such as in the field of science. This finding has important implications for ensuring a balance between men and women both pictorially and numerically.

Keywords: Representation, Women, Men, Visual, Textbooks, Multimodal

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## Introduction

Textbooks are considered authoritative sources and possess significant influence (Acheson et al., 2020). Textbooks have the potential to improve students' comprehension (Chambliss & Calfee, 1989). They also continue to serve as indispensable educational resources at every educational level across the globe (Bansiong & Wan, 2019). Furthermore, textbooks impart specific paradigms that influence students' disciplinary perspectives (Atchison, 2017). Acheson et al. (Acheson et al., 2020) state the pictures in a textbook, when interpreted as realistic images of time, convey truth or reality to the audience. As a result, the pictures in a textbook have the potential to be highly influential. Additionally, the images contained within textbooks have an impact on the comprehension of the course material and the discipline as a whole. Images are more effective at communicating intricate concepts than text; as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Acheson et al., 2020).

Textbooks are essential educational resources that offer standardized content to both teachers and students (Lee et al., 2023). They guarantee that the course material is in line with required curricula, assist in implementing teaching methods, and serve as a central reference for instructional activities (Lee et al., 2023). According to Sadker and Zittleman (Bansiong & Wan, 2019), researchers have found that students allocate 80-95% of their classroom time to studying textbooks.

Textbooks are not without their problems (Atchison, 2017). One such issue is exemplified by Cragun (Atchison, 2017), they present material in a format that is readily comprehensible, but they frequently omit essential complexities in the process. Examining textbooks through visual analysis is crucial as photographs, just like written content, expose underlying assumptions regarding gender throughout our society (Baro & Eigenberg, 1993). They further explained that the term "policeman" implies that the majority of police officers are men, while texts that do not include pictures of female police officers further support the perception that policing is a profession dominated by males. Therefore, by means of visual representations, textbooks have the potential to question or uphold prevailing cultural prejudices. Moreover, pictorial analyses, similar to textual studies, offer insights on the societal construction.

The research on gender representation in textbooks has been extensive and comprehensive English-language (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Fahriany et al., 2018; Yonata & Mujiyanto, 2017), Geography (Schuermans, 2013; Wright, 1985; Yeoh et al., 2004), and Physics (Gumilar et al., 2022; Lawlor & Niiler, 2020; Namatende-Sakwa, 2019). However, to date, little research has been carried out on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) textbooks. Here, the author is interested in researching gender representation in Indonesian ICT textbooks. In line with what was said by Sunderland (in Barton & Sakwa, 2012) that textbooks intended for use in developing countries have received significantly less attention.

In addition, this article focuses on the extent to which visual representations of both males and females in widely used primary school textbooks reinforce gender stereotypes. What is the message sent by the picture (visual) in a textbook to the reader? This paper conducted an analysis of a commercial science textbook that was specifically designed for first-grade Indonesian students.

## Method

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach. The research applies a multimodal approach based on visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This article focuses on the extent to which visual representations of both males and females in widely used primary school textbooks reinforce gender stereotypes. The case textbook in this investigation was a commercial science textbook that was designed for Indonesian first-grade students. In the field of picture examination, the main emphasis is placed on the analysis of visual elements included in an image. This involves the process of recognizing the individuals or things shown, understanding the actions being carried out, and assessing the attributes and traits displayed by the subjects being depicted.

The textbooks were selected based on the reputation and popularity of the publishers, as well as the recommendations of teachers. All of the textbooks are the most recent editions and are based on the *Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP)* program of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Republic of Indonesia. Table 1 displays the detail of the book. The textbook comprises a total of 163 pages.

Table 1: The Book's Information

<b>Title</b>	<i>Lebih Dekat Dunia TIK Untuk Kelas 1 SD dan MI KTSP</i>
<b>Year</b>	2017
<b>Author</b>	Sri Huning
<b>City</b>	Solo
<b>Publisher</b>	PT Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri

## Results and Discussion

The visual mode is analyzed through the lens of the visual grammar theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen to examine the portrayal of women in ICT textbooks.



**gambar 1.1** anak bercerita dengan ibunya

Figure 1: Child Telling Stories With His Mother

"Child telling stories with his mother" is the title of the image above, which depicts two participants. The child is dressed in blue trousers and a yellow shirt, with both arms extended. His mother, who is sitting slightly sideways on the left side of the image, is gazing at her son. The vector in this image is achieved by establishing eye contact, which advances from his

son to the mother. Consequently, the son is transformed into a "*reacter*," while the mother is transformed into a "*phenomenon*."

The object in this image is depicted in a small size and is captured in a "*medium close shot*," which positions the reader as a "*viewer*" slightly above the image. When the reader peers at the image, it appears as though they are looking slightly down. This can be interpreted as implying that they possess more authority as a "*viewer*" than the "*represented participants*" in the image. The reader is only able to establish a social relationship with the "*represented participants*" through the use of a "*medium close shot*." They are perceived by the reader as individuals in general; they are not, however, among the most personal. Additionally, this implies that the "*represented participants*" provide a comprehensive representation of mothers and the activities that are frequently associated with the domestic role of mothers in Indonesian society.

The reader's gaze is not addressed by either participant; rather, it is directed in a different direction to prevent any interaction between the two. The '*viewer*' is positioned as an observer when there is no eye contact between the '*represented participants*' and the '*viewer*'; they do not '*demand*' but '*offer*' to the reader. The reader is granted the opportunity to observe the events depicted in the image. The frame and the "*participant*" in the image are diminutive. This results in a greater degree of control over the "*represented participants*" for us as "*interactive participants*."

The mother is situated on the left side of the image, while the kid is situated on the right side. This is due to the compositional layout. The left side of the image is considered "*given*," while the right side is considered "*new*," as per Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The mother and her actions are "*given*" to the kid while it is "*new*" in the image above. In this context, it is necessary to clarify that the '*given-new*' composition is applicable to cultures in which the reading flow is left-to-right. Conversely, cultures that employ a right-to-left or top-to-bottom reading flow, such as Arabic culture (Hermawan, 2013), are unable to employ the '*given-new*' composition. This culture is comparable to the left-right reading and writing culture of Indonesia. The term "*given*" in the image under examination refers to the mother, and the actions of the mother are considered to be common, natural, and appropriate.

The color yellow is associated with contentment and warmth (Rokhim et al., 2022). This is due to the fact that blue is frequently linked to the hue of the sea or mountains. The mother's green attire can provide a natural and revitalizing appearance (Monica & Luzar, 2011). It may be inferred that the mother is enthusiastic and that it is regarded "*traditional*" for a mother or wife to perform this task.

In brief, the data visualization demonstrates that the "*represented participants*" function as a representative sample, offering a full depiction of the general attributes of moms in Indonesia. This is in line with John et al.'s (John et al., 2013) findings that mothers typically organize, direct, instruct, and participate in compassionate dialogues. Furthermore, mothers are responsible for the primary care and supervision of their children (Asfari, 2022).



Figure 2. Two Girls Are Chatting on the Phone

In the picture 2 above there are two participants; two girls who are on the phone, wearing a long-sleeved purple shirt and a short-sleeved pink shirt. The girl's position on the left of the picture is talking with her hands on the table and her position is slightly sideways. She is looking at what is in front of her. The other girl's position on the right with her hands open on the table.

The vector in this image is established by the gaze, which is directed towards the right. Therefore, the girl wearing purple becomes the role of the 'reacter', while her friend becomes the phenomena, someone whose actions are narrated. Unsworth (Hermawan, 2013) states that when a vector is created by the line of sight of one or more individuals, resulting in their attention being directed towards something, this process is considered more of a reaction rather than an action. In this context, the individuals involved are referred to as "reacters" rather than "actors."

The object in this image is depicted in a small size and is captured in a "medium close shot," which positions the reader as a "viewer" slightly above the image. When the reader peers at the image, it appears as though they are looking slightly down. This can be interpreted as the reader having more authority than the "represented participants" in the image, as a "viewer." The reader is only able to establish a social relationship with the "represented participants" through the use of a "medium close shot." The reader is acquainted with them in the same way that the reader is acquainted with individuals in general. Moreover, this implies that the "represented participants" are a general representation of girls and the activities that are typically associated with the role of women, centered around "inclusive intimacy" with their female companions.

The gaze of both participants is not directed at the reader who is looking but, in another direction, so that there is no contact between them and the reader. The "viewer" is classified as an observer when there is no eye contact between the "represented participants" and the "viewer." The reader is granted the opportunity to observe the events depicted in the image. The frame and the "participant" in the image are diminutive. This results in the reader, who is an "interactive participant," having a larger degree of control over the "represented participant."

In terms of compositional layout, the girl wearing purple is situated to the left of the photograph, while the other girl is positioned to the right. Kress and van Leeuwen propose that the elements positioned on the left side of an image are considered 'given', while those on the right side are considered 'new'. The girl wearing purple in the depicted image is referred to as 'given', but her friend is described as 'new'. In this context, it is important to clarify that the concept of 'given-new' composition applies to cultures that read from left to right. Indonesia is an example of a civilization that has a reading and writing system that progresses from left to right. In the studied image, the term 'given' refers to something that is commonplace or inherent.

Purple, the color of the girl's clothing on the left, is a color that conveys a sophisticated impression (Anugerah et al., 2022). Additionally, purple has been designated as the official color of International Women's Day (Heryandi, 2023). Although pink is associated with joy or affection (Riyanti, 2017). Pink is a color that is frequently associated with feminine characteristics due to its brightness and softness (Vanesha et al., 2024).

The data visualization demonstrates that the "represented participants" are a representative sample, providing a comprehensive understanding of the women's general attributes. Tannen (Tannen, 1990) asserts that girls' conversations revolve around intimacy and disputes, which indicates their apprehension as seen in the picture. Furthermore, she said that girls and women are more "engaged" in interaction than boys and men. This is supported by the findings of Johnson & Aries (Johnson & Aries, 1983). They found that the women engage in conversations with their close friends, which results in a mosaic of personal development and self-discovery, mutual support, enhancement of self-worth, and relationship exclusivity.



gambar 1.6 pak polisi menggunakan ht

Figure 3: Police Officer Using Handy Talky (Ht)

Figure 3 is a self-portrait of a male police officer. The picture depicts an ongoing action, namely the policeman is using a Handy Talkie (HT). In short, he is metaphorical or something. The clothing worn by the police is the general clothing used by the Traffic Police in Indonesia (Bramasta & Hardiyanto, 2022). This picture is an example of metaphorical or symbolic picture.

The results show that in textbooks used in primary school males are more likely to be portrayed as 'active' and having a high-status 'position', while females are more likely to be portrayed in lower situations. Women are more likely to be portrayed in ways that reproduce gender stereotypes such as doing household chores or providing care. In contrast, men are

more likely to be portrayed as agents, competent and powerful, and have various professional roles such as police officers etc.

## **Conclusion**

The results show that in textbooks used in primary school males are more likely to be portrayed as 'active' and having a high-status 'position', while females are more likely to be portrayed in lower situations. Women are more likely to be portrayed in ways that reproduce gender stereotypes such as doing household chores or providing care. In contrast, men are more likely to be portrayed as agents, competent and powerful, and have various professional roles such as scientists, police officers etc. These patterns reflect a social structure where Indonesian men have a privileged position of power and authority such as in the field of science. This finding has important implications for ensuring a balance between men and women both pictorially and numerically.

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