

Gender Representation in Indonesian Language Textbooks: A Critical Analysis of Fictional Texts across Junior Secondary Grades

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ABSTRACT:

Gender representation in educational materials is crucial because fictional texts used in language learning can influence social perceptions and gender roles. While previous research has highlighted gender bias in textbooks, less attention has been paid to fictional texts in Indonesian junior secondary textbooks. This study investigates gender portrayal in ten fictional texts for Grades VII to IX—five from Grade VII, two from Grade VIII, and three from Grade IX. Using a qualitative approach, it analyzes character roles, narrative agency, emotional expression, caregiving, authority, aspirations, and relationships. Results show that males are often linked to action, responsibility, decision-making, achievement, and future goals, while females are primarily associated with caregiving and family. Nonetheless, some flexible patterns emerge: female characters exhibit persistence, competence, courage, knowledge, and authority in education, while male characters can show vulnerability, emotionality, and caregiving. Across the grades, gender depiction varies more in design than in progression toward equality. Overall, gender representation in fictional texts is multidimensional, shaped by characterization, language, social roles, and the allocation of agency, authority, care, and aspirations.

Keywords: gender representation; fictional texts; Indonesian language textbooks; gender construction; junior secondary education.

1. Introduction

Language textbooks occupy an important position in formal education because they do not merely provide materials for developing linguistic and literary competence, but also mediate students' encounters with social values and ways

of understanding the world. In Indonesian language education, texts are central to activities such as reading, writing, and literary appreciation, making the selection of textual materials an important part of the learning process (Nadiyah et al., 2023; Lasifa et al., 2019; Wahyuni & Herlinda, 2021). In this context, fictional texts

deserve particular attention because they present social realities through characters, relationships, actions, conflicts, and narrative perspectives. Through these elements, students encounter representations of social roles that may appear natural or taken for granted. Gender is one of the social dimensions that can be constructed through such representations. Thus, although fictional texts are primarily presented as materials for language and literary learning, they may simultaneously function as discursive spaces in which particular understandings of masculinity, femininity, family roles, authority, and social relationships are reproduced or negotiated.

Previous studies have demonstrated that gender representation remains an important issue in educational materials. Research on Indonesian thematic textbooks has identified gendered differences in the representation of social roles and activities, with male characters frequently associated with more public and active positions and female characters with domestic roles (Wahyudi & Lutfauziah, 2023; Indriyani et al., 2024). Putri et al. (2024), through a critical discourse analysis of Indonesian language textbooks, likewise showed that gender representation is constructed through textual organization rather than simply through the presence of male and female characters. Similar concerns have been reported in studies of English-language textbooks used in Indonesian educational contexts. Fahriany et al. (2019) identified gendered patterns in English textbooks for Islamic junior high school students, while 'Aini et al. (2021) examined gender representation in an Indonesian Grade IX English textbook. More recent corpus-assisted research has also continued to identify gender imbalance in textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum (Adawiyah & Oktavianti, 2023), while Zahra et al. (2024) highlighted the persistence of less visible or "hidden" gender bias in Indonesian ELT textbooks. These studies collectively indicate that educational materials can reproduce gendered patterns through language, characterization, activities, and other representational resources.

The issue becomes more complex when the focus is placed specifically on fictional texts. Fiction is

a narrative form in which gender can be constructed through the interaction of characterization, plot, conflict, dialogue, and relationships among characters. Previous literary studies have shown that gender relations can be examined through the representation of stereotypes, resistance, power, and character positioning in literary works (Marjuni & Ulwani, 2021; Nugroho & Suhendi, 2022; Fahmi & Arfiyanti, 2020; Zulfie & Kusumayanti, 2023). Blangsinga et al. (2021), for example, identified patriarchal binary oppositions in narrative texts included in Indonesian English textbooks. Such findings demonstrate that narrative texts can reproduce established gender relations while also providing possibilities for resistance or alternative representations. In this regard, fictional texts differ from textbook materials considered as a whole because the narrative structure provides particular spaces for characters to act, speak, make decisions, experience emotions, and negotiate relationships. The proposal underlying the present study likewise identifies fictional texts as a form of narrative discourse with strong potential to construct gender implicitly through characters, plot, and conflict.

Despite the growing body of research, an important gap remains. Most previous studies have examined textbooks at the level of the book as a whole, identifying gender imbalance, stereotypes, or differences in representation without systematically isolating fictional texts as a specific textual genre. In the Indonesian language context, existing studies have largely focused on elementary and senior high school textbooks, while research specifically examining fictional texts in Indonesian language materials for junior secondary school remains limited (Wahyudi & Lutfauziah, 2023; Putri et al., 2024; Indriyani et al., 2024; Ulfah et al., 2019). The proposal similarly identifies this limitation, noting that studies of gender in textbooks generally employ content analysis, critical discourse analysis, or multimodal analysis but seldom concentrate on a particular text type. Moreover, identifying whether a text contains gender bias does not by itself explain how gender is constructed through

narrative discourse. Attention is therefore needed to the relationship between character positioning, social roles, actions, lexical choices, interpersonal relations, and narrative development.

This gap is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesian language education because teaching materials are closely connected to curricular purposes that extend beyond linguistic competence to include character formation and social values. Consequently, gender representation in fictional texts should not be considered only in terms of whether male and female characters are equally present. It is also necessary to examine who is positioned as an agent, who possesses authority, who performs caregiving and domestic work, who is permitted to express emotion, and whose aspirations become central to the narrative. Such an approach is consistent with the view that educational discourse may communicate social meanings through representations that appear ordinary or natural within learning materials. The present study therefore treats fictional texts as discursive practices in which gender is constructed through language and narrative rather than as neutral literary content.

Accordingly, this study examines the representation and construction of gender in fictional texts contained in Indonesian language teaching materials for junior secondary schools, with attention to texts from Grades VII, VIII, and IX. The study focuses on how gender is represented through characterization, social roles, relationships, actions, emotional expression, authority, and narrative positioning, and how these patterns vary across grade levels. Rather than assuming that fictional texts simply reproduce conventional gender stereotypes, the study investigates the coexistence of conventional and more flexible gender configurations within the corpus. In this way, the study aims to contribute to research on gender and educational discourse by shifting attention from textbook-level representation to the specific narrative mechanisms through which gender is constructed in fictional texts for Indonesian junior secondary students. The study also provides a basis for considering how the selection

of fictional texts may contribute to students' encounters with gender roles and social values in Indonesian language education.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative interpretive design to examine gender representation in fictional texts contained in Indonesian language teaching materials for junior secondary schools. The analysis focused on how male and female characters were represented through characterization, social roles, interpersonal relations, actions, emotional expression, authority, language use, and narrative positioning. The corpus consisted of ten fictional texts from Indonesian language teaching materials for Grades VII, VIII, and IX: five texts from Grade VII, two from Grade VIII, and three from Grade IX. Each text was treated as an individual unit of analysis.

Data were collected through documentation and repeated close reading of the selected texts. The analysis considered textual evidence within its immediate narrative context, including character descriptions, activities and occupations, interpersonal relations, dialogue, evaluative expressions, and the distribution of activities and responsibilities between male and female characters. The analysis covered three interconnected dimensions: (1) character and gender characteristics, (2) gender roles and relations, and (3) linguistic and narrative representation. The first dimension examined gender, narrative position, personality, abilities, and attributes; the second examined domestic and public activities, caregiving, decision-making, authority, dependence, and interaction; and the third examined lexical choices, evaluative expressions, dialogue, narration, actions, metaphors, and other linguistic and narrative resources through which characters were positioned.

The analysis proceeded from individual texts to cross-text and cross-grade comparison. First, each text was analyzed independently to identify patterns directly supported by textual evidence. Relevant data were then grouped by analytical dimension and interpreted within their immediate

narrative contexts. The findings were subsequently synthesized within each grade level and compared across Grades VII, VIII, and IX to identify recurring and varying configurations of gender representation. The interpretation was informed by a critical discourse perspective, particularly the view that gender representation is constructed through linguistic, narrative, and social choices. The analysis remained interpretive rather than statistical and did not treat every gender-related difference as evidence of discrimination or inequality. Interpretations were retained when supported by identifiable textual evidence, including character actions, descriptions, dialogue, directives, evaluative expressions, interpersonal interactions, and aspirational statements.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Overall Patterns of Gender Representation

An analysis of ten fictional texts spanning Grades VII to IX indicates that gender representation incorporates both traditional and more progressive patterns. Male characters are frequently portrayed as active agents engaged in responsibility, problem-solving, achievement, and future-oriented goals. Conversely, female characters are generally associated with caregiving, familial duties, and domestic responsibilities. Nevertheless, these tendencies are not absolute. Certain texts depict female characters as proactive individuals demonstrating persistence, competence, courage, knowledge, and decision-making abilities, while male characters are also portrayed as expressing emotions, engaging in caregiving roles, exhibiting vulnerability, and engaging in reflective thought. Overall, the gender representation within the corpus involves overlapping roles concerning agency, social responsibilities, emotional expression, authority, and aspiration.

The pattern becomes particularly visible in the five Grade VII texts, which present a relatively diverse configuration of gender roles. In *Misteri Terowongan Kereta*, Bapak is represented as a knowledgeable adult who guides the children and provides direction during their journey. In *Bola-*

Bola Waktu, male characters are associated with work, learning, family responsibility, and economic activities, while the mother is more strongly associated with food production, selling, and domestic work. In *Sibir Unik Mao*, Mao is portrayed as a girl who experiences learning difficulties and social exclusion but develops into a diligent, talented character who gains recognition through persistence. Similarly, *Keberanian Emas* positions Emas as an active female agent who confronts the central conflict through courage, determination, and intelligence. Meanwhile, *Itam dan U* combines male physical activity, protection, and persistence with representations of fear, sadness, affection, and vulnerability. These texts therefore show that conventional gender associations coexist with alternative forms of characterization within the same grade level.

The two Grade VIII texts further demonstrate that gender roles are recognizable but not completely exclusive. In *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom*, male characters occupy central narrative positions through action, curiosity, learning, and responsibility, while Randu is also characterized through regret, guilt, and crying. In *Parki dan Alergi Telur*, the mother's caregiving role is prominent through her attention to Parki's diet and health, including her authority in regulating his food. However, the father also participates in caregiving and provides emotional support, while Parki himself is represented through both dependency and emotional responses. These configurations complicate a simple opposition between male agency and female passivity because caregiving and emotional expression are distributed across male and female characters in different ways. The data therefore suggest that gender roles are constructed through recurring associations rather than fixed or exclusive categories.

The Grade IX texts provide another configuration in which gender representation is closely related to education, authority, aspiration, and family expectations. In *Tabu* (IX-01), Isrul is represented as a boy who strongly desires to continue his education, while his father occupies a dominant position in determining educational

decisions and family responsibilities. In Teks 1 (IX-02), Lif's educational aspirations are negotiated within the family, while Amak exercises authority by influencing his educational direction and considering his future. In Teks 2 (IX-03), male characters are associated with academic achievement, intellectual ability, and personal aspirations, while Bu Mus occupies an authoritative pedagogical position in guiding students. These representations show that female authority in Grade IX is not limited to domestic or caregiving roles but may also operate through educational guidance and decision-making. At the same time, male characters continue to be associated with aspiration, achievement, intellectual ability, and personal agency. Thus, the Grade IX texts demonstrate that gender representation operates through differentiated but overlapping forms of authority, aspiration, and social responsibility.

Across the corpus, the representation of male characters is therefore more complex than a

characters also participate in caregiving and family responsibilities, particularly in *Parki dan Alergi Telur* and other narratives in which protection and family support form part of male characterization. At the same time, female characters are not represented exclusively through domesticity. Mao and Emas demonstrate persistence, competence, courage, and direct agency in Grade VII, while Amak and Bu Mus demonstrate knowledge and authority in educational contexts in Grade IX. These patterns indicate that the corpus contains both recurring gender associations and representations that complicate those associations.

Thus, gender representation in the corpus is uneven but multidimensional. Conventional associations remain visible, particularly between male characters and agency, action, responsibility, and achievement and between female characters and caregiving and domestic roles. However, these associations coexist with alternative representations in which women demonstrate

Table 1. Overall Patterns of Gender Representation

Dimension	Predominant pattern	Alternative pattern
Narrative position	Male characters are frequently positioned as central agents of action, responsibility, and achievement	Female characters also occupy meaningful and, in some texts, central narrative positions
Agency	Male characters are frequently associated with action, decision-making, problem-solving, and achievement	Female characters demonstrate persistence, competence, courage, initiative, and decision-making
Social roles	Female characters are more strongly associated with caregiving, domestic activities, and family responsibilities	Male characters also participate in caregiving, protection, and family support
Emotionality	Male characters may be associated with action and emotional restraint in conventional configurations	Male characters also express regret, sadness, fear, vulnerability, affection, and reflection
Authority	Male authority is visible in family decision-making and responsibility	Female authority emerges through caregiving, knowledge, educational guidance, and decision-making
Aspiration	Male characters are frequently represented through educational, occupational, and future-oriented aspirations	Female characters also demonstrate competence, educational agency, and purposeful action

conventional association between masculinity and emotional restraint. Male characters experience and express regret, sadness, fear, vulnerability, affection, and reflection, as illustrated by Randu in *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* and the male characters in *Itam dan U*. Male

agency, competence, knowledge, courage, and authority, while men participate in care and express emotional vulnerability. The main patterns identified across these dimensions are summarized in Table 1. This finding is broadly consistent with previous studies of gender

representation in Indonesian educational materials. Wahyudi and Lutfauziah (2023) found that male characters tend to occupy more active and public positions in thematic textbooks, while Ulfah et al. (2019) identified unequal positioning of male and female characters in Indonesian language textbooks. Indriyani et al. (2024) likewise reported differentiated gender roles in Indonesian educational materials. The present findings extend these observations by showing that gender differentiation is also embedded in narrative agency, social roles, emotional expression, caregiving, and forms of authority.

The overall patterns identified across the corpus can be organized into four interconnected dimensions: narrative position, agency, social roles, and emotionality. As shown in Table 1, male characters are more frequently associated with central narrative positions, action, decision-making, and responsibility, while female characters are more strongly associated with caregiving and family-related roles. However, the corpus also contains alternative configurations in which female characters demonstrate initiative and authority, while male characters participate in caregiving and express a range of emotions. Table 1 summarizes these predominant and alternative patterns across the four dimensions.

3.2. Gendered Roles, Agency, and Emotionality

The distribution of gendered roles in the fictional texts shows a recurring association between male characters and agency, while female characters are more strongly associated with caregiving, domestic responsibilities, and, in several texts, active forms of agency. Across the three grade levels, male characters commonly initiate actions, make decisions, solve problems, pursue achievements, or articulate future aspirations. However, these patterns are not exclusive. The final corpus consists of five texts in Grade VII, two texts in Grade VIII, and three texts in Grade IX, allowing the analysis to identify both recurring gender associations and variations across the narratives.

The association between male characters and agency is visible across the corpus, although its

form varies between texts. In *Bola-Bola Waktu* (VII-02), male characters are associated with work, learning, family responsibility, and economic activities, while the mother is more strongly associated with food production, selling, and domestic work. In *Misteri Terowongan Kereta* (VII-01), Bapak functions as a knowledgeable adult who guides the children during their journey. In *Itam dan U* (VII-05), male characters are associated with physical activity, protection, persistence, and responses to challenging circumstances. These representations indicate that male agency frequently operates through action, knowledge, responsibility, and protection. At the same time, the Grade VII corpus also contains female characters who exercise direct agency rather than occupying exclusively supportive roles.

Female agency is particularly visible in *Sibir Unik Mao* (VII-03) and *Keberanian Emas* (VII-04). In *Sibir Unik Mao*, Mao develops from a girl who experiences learning difficulties and social exclusion into a diligent and talented character who gains recognition through persistence and competence. In *Keberanian Emas*, Emas becomes the principal agent in resolving the central conflict by confronting the giant with courage, determination, and intelligence. These representations are significant because agency is not limited to male characters or constructed solely through physical strength. Female agency may instead be realized through learning, persistence, competence, courage, and direct action. Thus, the Grade VII texts simultaneously reproduce conventional associations between masculinity and agency and provide clear instances of female characters occupying active narrative positions.

The two Grade VIII texts further demonstrate that gendered roles are recognizable but not completely exclusive. In *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* (VIII-01), Randu and Paman Tom occupy central narrative positions through action, curiosity, learning, and responsibility. However, Randu is also characterized through regret, guilt, and crying, indicating that male agency is accompanied by emotional expression. In *Parki dan Alergi Telur* (VIII-02), caregiving is strongly

associated with the mother, particularly through her regulation of Parki's diet and attention to his health. Her directive, "*Ini peraturan!*", establishes her authority in relation to Parki's care. At the same time, the father also participates in caregiving by responding to Parki's needs and providing emotional support. These patterns show that caregiving and emotional expression are not exclusively associated with female characters.

The representation of emotionality further complicates conventional gender configurations. In *Itam dan U*, male characters are represented through physical activity and persistence, but they also experience fear, sadness, affection, and gratitude. Similarly, Randu in *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* experiences regret, guilt, and emotional distress after his actions. These representations indicate that male characterization is not restricted to strength, rationality, or emotional restraint. Emotionality is instead integrated into narratives in which male characters remain active agents. In this regard, the corpus presents a form of masculinity in which agency and vulnerability may coexist rather than function as mutually exclusive characteristics.

The association between women and caregiving nevertheless remains prominent, particularly in *Parki dan Alergi Telur*, where the mother's caregiving is closely connected to knowledge and authority concerning Parki's health. However, female representation extends beyond caregiving in other texts. Mao demonstrates competence and persistence in *Sibir Unik Mao*, while Emas demonstrates courage and direct action in *Keberanian Emas*. In Grade IX, female authority is particularly visible in educational and family contexts. In *Tabu* (IX-01), gender relations are connected to educational aspirations and family authority, while in *Teks 1* (IX-02), Amak influences Li's educational direction and considers his future. In *Teks 2* (IX-03), Bu Mus occupies an authoritative pedagogical position in guiding students. The findings therefore show that female roles extend from caregiving and domestic responsibilities to competence, agency, educational guidance, and authority.

Across the three grade levels, the data consequently show that gendered agency is distributed unevenly but does not follow a rigid male-active/female-passive opposition. Male characters frequently receive roles involving action, protection, responsibility, achievement, and aspiration, while female characters remain strongly associated with caregiving and family-related responsibilities. Nevertheless, female characters such as Mao and Emas demonstrate active agency, whereas male characters such as Randu and the characters in *Itam dan U* display emotional vulnerability alongside action and persistence. Similarly, caregiving in *Parki dan Alergi Telur* is shared between mother and father, although the mother's role remains more prominent. These patterns suggest that gender differentiation operates through recurring associations, while individual narratives allow those associations to overlap and become reconfigured.

This pattern is consistent with previous studies showing differentiated gender roles in Indonesian educational materials. Wahyudi and Lutfauziah (2023) found that male characters tend to occupy more active and public positions, while Ulfah et al. (2019) identified unequal positioning of male and female characters in Indonesian language textbooks. Indriyani et al. (2024) likewise reported differentiated gender roles in Indonesian educational materials. The present findings extend these observations by showing that gender differentiation operates not only through social roles but also through narrative agency, emotional expression, caregiving, competence, and authority. In this regard, the corpus simultaneously reproduces conventional associations between masculinity and agency and femininity and caregiving while providing alternative representations of female agency, male vulnerability, and shared caregiving.

3.3. Authority, Aspiration, and Linguistic-Narrative Construction

Beyond social roles and emotionality, gender is constructed through the distribution of authority, knowledge, and aspirations. Male characters are frequently positioned in relation to decision-

making, responsibility, achievement, and future-oriented aspirations, whereas female authority emerges through caregiving, knowledge, educational guidance, and decision-making. These configurations can be observed across different grade levels, although they take different forms in individual narratives. In Grade VII, for example, authority is associated with adult guidance in *Misteri Terowongan Kereta*, while female characters demonstrate competence and direct agency in *Sihir Unik Mao* and *Keberanian Emas*. In Grade VIII, authority is visible through family caregiving and regulation in *Parki dan Alergi Telur*. In Grade IX, authority and aspiration become particularly salient in relation to educational decisions and future expectations, especially through Amak in Teks 1 and Bu Mus in Teks 2.

The relationship between authority and aspiration is particularly clear in *Tabu* (IX-01). The statement “*menentang orang tua adalah tabu*” establishes obedience to parental authority as a normative expectation, while the lexical choice *tabu* evaluates opposition to parents as socially unacceptable. Within this normative structure, Isrul nevertheless expresses an individual aspiration through “*Dia ingin bisa sekolah sampai tinggi, jika perlu setinggi angkasa*.” His aspiration is further connected to his desire to contribute to the development of his village. These expressions position Isrul between established family authority and an individual aspiration for educational advancement. In this case, the male character is not represented simply as obedient or dominant, but as negotiating between parental expectations, educational aspiration, and a desired future social role.

The linguistic construction of these positions shows that gender representation is produced not only through character labels but also through actions, directives, evaluations, and forms of speech assigned to characters. In *Tabu*, the father's directive and Isrul's restrained response, “*iyee—iya*,” linguistically reinforce the hierarchical relationship between father and son. At the same time, the expression “*ingin bisa sekolah sampai tinggi*” constructs Isrul as a subject with an individual, future-oriented goal. The narrative therefore juxtaposes authoritative expressions

that regulate behavior with linguistic expressions that articulate aspiration. As Santoso (2008) argues, grammatical and linguistic choices contribute to the construction of social meaning; terkait hal ini, the present corpus shows how directives, evaluative expressions, and aspirational statements help establish who gives direction, who responds to authority, and who articulates a desired future.

Female authority is constructed through different but related linguistic and narrative resources. In *Parki dan Alergi Telur* (VIII-02), the mother's directive, “*Ini peraturan!*”, establishes her authority in regulating Parki's behavior, particularly in relation to food and health. Her explanation of nutritious food further connects authority with knowledge and caregiving. At the same time, the father also participates in caring for Parki and responds to his needs, indicating that family authority and responsibility are not completely assigned to one gender. The text therefore combines female authority based on caregiving and health-related knowledge with male participation in caregiving and family support.

Female authority also extends beyond domestic and caregiving contexts. In Teks 1 (IX-02), Amak influences Lif's educational direction and considers the implications of his future, positioning her as an important decision-maker in relation to educational aspiration. In Teks 2 (IX-03), Bu Mus exercises pedagogical authority through her role as a teacher who guides and questions students. These representations are different from the caregiving-based authority found in *Parki dan Alergi Telur*, but they share an important feature: female characters are positioned as legitimate sources of knowledge, direction, and evaluation. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa female authority in the corpus cannot be reduced to domestic control, because it may also operate through educational knowledge and institutional or pedagogical relationships.

Authority and aspiration are also distributed through male characters in ways that vary across the corpus. In *Bola-Bola Waktu* (VII-02), male characters are associated with work, learning, family responsibility, and economic activity. In

Itam dan U (VII-05), male characters demonstrate persistence, physical activity, protection, and responses to difficult circumstances. In Grade IX, male aspiration becomes particularly visible through educational and future-oriented goals, especially in *Tabu* and the other Grade IX narratives. Nevertheless, the presence of male aspiration does not eliminate the authority of female characters. Rather, the texts show that authority and aspiration may be negotiated within family, educational, and social relationships.

These findings are consistent with Putri et al. (2024), who argue that gender representation in Indonesian language textbooks is constructed through multiple layers of discourse rather than simply through the numerical distribution of male and female characters. They also complement studies identifying stereotypes and patriarchal representations in educational and literary texts (Fahriany et al., 2019; 'Aini et al., 2021; Adawiyah & Oktavianti, 2023; Zahra et al., 2024). In the present corpus, authority and aspiration are embedded in particular social relations: fathers may regulate children's responsibilities, mothers may influence educational decisions, teachers may exercise pedagogical authority, and male students may articulate aspirations for education and future achievement. Adapun, the data also show that these positions may overlap, as female characters may exercise authority through knowledge and education, while male characters may participate in caregiving and experience emotional vulnerability.

Taken together, the data show that linguistic and narrative construction does not merely describe pre-existing gender roles but helps organize relations of authority, responsibility, and aspiration. Directives, action expressions, evaluative terms, and aspirational statements position characters differently within social relationships. Male characters are frequently constructed as subjects who pursue achievement, responsibility, and future goals, while female characters may acquire authority through caregiving, knowledge, educational guidance, and decision-making. Nevertheless, these boundaries are not absolute. The coexistence of male aspiration, female educational authority, female

caregiving authority, and shared family responsibilities indicates that gender representation operates through recurring associations as well as processes of negotiation. In this regard, the narratives simultaneously reproduce recognizable gender expectations and provide spaces in which authority, aspiration, and responsibility can be distributed across male and female characters.

3.4. Gender Reconfiguration across Grade Levels and Implications

Comparison across Grades VII, VIII, and IX reveals recurring patterns as well as variations in the configuration of gender representation. Male agency remains visible across the three grade levels, but its narrative forms differ according to the contexts in which characters are positioned. In Grade VII, male characters are associated with guidance, work, learning, practical action, protection, and family responsibility. In Grade VIII, male agency is visible through action, curiosity, responsibility, and participation in family relationships, while caregiving and emotional support are also distributed to male characters. In Grade IX, male characters are frequently associated with educational aspirations, achievement, responsibility, and future-oriented goals. Thus, the cross-grade comparison indicates variation in the forms through which gendered agency is constructed rather than a simple increase or decrease in male dominance.

Female representation likewise demonstrates variation across the three grade levels, although caregiving and family-related responsibilities remain visible. The five Grade VII texts provide particularly clear examples of the coexistence of conventional and alternative female roles. Female characters may be associated with family responsibilities, but Mao in *Sihir Unik Mao* and Emas in *Keberanian Emas* demonstrate persistence, competence, courage, and direct agency. In Grade VIII, the mother in *Parki dan Alergi Telur* occupies a prominent caregiving and regulatory role, while the female characters in the narratives are not necessarily confined to passive positions. In Grade IX, female authority becomes

particularly visible in educational and guidance contexts, as Amak influences Lif's educational direction in *Teks 1* and Bu Mus occupies a pedagogical position in *Teks 2*. The data therefore suggest not the disappearance of conventional female roles, but a diversification of the positions through which female characters are represented.

Male emotionality also complicates a uniform pattern of masculinity across the corpus. In Grade VII, male characters in *Itam dan U* experience fear, sadness, affection, and gratitude alongside physical activity, protection, and persistence. Other Grade VII narratives likewise include male characters who take on family responsibilities and provide guidance. In Grade VIII, Randu in *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* is characterized by regret, guilt, and crying, while the father in *Parki dan Alergi Telur* participates in caregiving and provides emotional support. In Grade IX, male characters are positioned in relation to educational aspiration, family expectations, responsibility, and future goals, creating contexts in which agency and personal

The comparison also shows that the meaning of authority varies according to narrative context. In Grade VII, authority may emerge through adult knowledge and guidance, as represented by Bapak in *Misteri Terowongan Kereta*, while female characters such as Mao and Emas demonstrate agency without necessarily occupying formal positions of authority. In Grade VIII, authority is closely connected to caregiving and regulation, particularly through the mother in *Parki dan Alergi Telur*. In Grade IX, authority becomes more explicitly connected to education and future direction, particularly through Amak's influence on Lif and Bu Mus's pedagogical role. Adapun, these differences should not be interpreted as a developmental sequence in which female authority gradually increases across grades. Rather, they indicate that authority is constructed through different social relationships, including family, caregiving, education, and adult guidance.

The cross-grade configuration can therefore be summarized across four dimensions: male agency, male emotionality and care, female roles

Table 2. Cross-Grade Reconfiguration of Gender Representation

Dimension	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade IX
Male agency	Guidance, work, learning, practical action, protection, and family responsibility	Action, curiosity, responsibility, and participation in family relationships	Educational aspiration, responsibility, achievement, and future-oriented goals
Male emotionality and care	Fear, sadness, affection, gratitude, and vulnerability	Regret, guilt, crying, emotional support, and caregiving	Aspiration, responsibility, family expectations, and personal reflection
Female roles and agency	Family-related roles alongside persistence, competence, courage, and direct action	Caregiving, regulation, and family-related responsibilities	Educational guidance, decision-making, knowledge, and pedagogical authority
Authority and aspiration	Adult guidance, family responsibility, and individual agency	Caregiving authority, health-related knowledge, and interpersonal support	Educational authority, family expectations, and future-oriented aspirations

aspiration coexist with social and familial constraints. These patterns show that emotional expression and caregiving are not confined to female characters, even though conventional associations between women and care remain present.

and agency, and authority and aspiration. Table 2 presents these dimensions across Grades VII, VIII, and IX, highlighting both recurring gender associations and variations in how they are constructed within the different grade levels.

The cross-grade pattern should therefore not be interpreted as a linear progression from gender inequality toward gender equality. The data do not establish such a developmental trajectory because the same corpus contains conventional and alternative configurations at different grade levels. Instead, the findings indicate a process of gender reconfiguration, in which recurring gender associations coexist with alternative forms of characterization. Male characters are frequently associated with agency, action, responsibility, achievement, and aspiration, while female characters continue to occupy important caregiving and family roles. At the same time, male characters may express vulnerability and participate in care, while female characters may demonstrate courage, competence, persistence, knowledge, and educational authority. This variation supports previous findings that gender representation is constructed through textual organization, social relations, and character positioning rather than through the numerical presence of male and female characters alone (Putri et al., 2024).

5. Conclusion

This study shows that gender representation in fictional texts included in Indonesian language teaching materials is characterized by the coexistence of conventional and more flexible gender configurations. Male characters are

frequently associated with agency, responsibility, achievement, decision-making, and future-oriented aspirations, whereas female characters remain strongly associated with caregiving and family-related roles. Nevertheless, these associations are not exclusive. Female characters also demonstrate persistence, competence, courage, knowledge, and educational authority, while male characters may express vulnerability, emotionality, and caregiving. Across Grades VII to IX, these patterns vary in form rather than developing linearly toward gender equality, indicating that gender representation is uneven but multidimensional.

The findings further show that gender is constructed through linguistic and narrative resources, including directives, evaluative expressions, actions, aspirations, and social relations. Accordingly, the evaluation and selection of fictional texts for Indonesian language teaching materials should consider not only the presence of male and female characters but also how agency, caregiving, emotionality, authority, and aspirations are distributed between them. Further research may extend the corpus to other grade levels, textbook editions, and curriculum frameworks and combine qualitative analysis with corpus-based methods to examine gendered linguistic patterns more systematically.

6.

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9. Author Declaration

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.