

## Analysis of Gender Bias in Advanced English Teaching Materials (BITL): A Study of the Merdeka Curriculum Textbook

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Received: 12 01, 2025 | Accepted: 12 11, 2025 | Published: 12 13, 2025

### ABSTRACT

Gender bias in textbooks is an important issue in education that needs to be examined, because teaching materials not only serve as a source of knowledge, but also as a tool that shapes the values, perceptions, perspectives, and behavior of students. An unbalanced representation of men and women in teaching materials can reinforce social stereotypes and patriarchal structures and create an unequal educational environment. This study aims to analyze the existing gender representation in the Advanced English Textbook for the Merdeka Curriculum for Grade XII F2 by examining how the roles, activities, professions, and narratives of men and women are presented. Using a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach based on the nurture perspective, this study identifies forms of marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, symbolic violence, and double burdens that may appear in the book's content. The analysis was conducted systematically on the text, narratives, illustrations, and dialogues to see whether the material represented equality or replicated gender bias. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more gender-sensitive teaching materials, provide recommendations for educators to implement inclusive learning, and support the creation of a fair educational environment in line with the spirit of the Merdeka curriculum.

**Keywords:** gender bias, content analysis, gender representation, textbooks, Merdeka Curriculum.

### How to Cite:

Baiq Helmalya Roshita, & Yulia Agustina. (2025). Analysis of Gender Bias in Advanced English Teaching Materials (BITL): A Study of the Merdeka Curriculum Textbook. Educational Journal, 1(2), 330-342. <https://doi.org/10.63822/31x2n391>

## INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in instilling positive values and norms in students. However, in practice, some education systems actually shape behaviors and habits that give rise to various issues in society, including in the field of education itself (*Gender Bias in Student Textbooks in the 2013 Curriculum, 2013*). Patriarchal views continue to influence social constructs, leading to male dominance in various aspects of life, including education. Male dominance in curriculum implementation and unequal relationships can have an impact on education (Hidayat, 2011:124, in Hafidhatur Rosyida 2024:3). This condition occurs because of an unbalanced social structure, which leads to role differentiation between men and women. Thus, the curriculum has the potential to reinforce gender inequality if it is not designed or implemented critically.

One important component in creating equitable education is assessing gender in teaching materials. Books are one of the most powerful teaching materials in shaping children's beliefs, attitudes, and values (Sumalatha 2004 in H. Wu). Rosyida, in her research, argues that textbooks are used for various lessons that are structured in accordance with the learning objectives listed in the curriculum (Rosyida, 2004:6). When gender representation is unbalanced, stereotypical, or biased, students can absorb mindsets that do not support equality. This condition is an important reason why the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes inclusion, differentiation, and student-centered learning. Therefore, textbooks compiled based on the Merdeka Curriculum are also expected to reflect these values, including gender equality.

In the context of inequality, gender bias can arise through marginalization. Marginalization is a process of exclusion of certain groups due to gender differences (Afandi et al., 2019). This concept arises because gender is considered synonymous with sex. This assumption places women as secondary breadwinners. As a result, women often receive lower wages than men, especially when their level of education is low. It turns out that this is a common problem: unfair gender division of labor causes weakness for women in general (Dan, 2015). Subordination occurs when women are considered inferior to men. Women are considered responsible for and have a role in domestic or reproductive matters, while men are responsible for public or production matters (Menjelang & Demografi, n.d.). This is a result of social systems and structures that place men and women in disadvantageous positions.

Afandi et al. (2019) state that stereotypes or negative labeling is the assignment of a fixed image/label/stigma to a person or group based on a false or misguided assumption. Stereotypes or negative labeling of women also reinforce inequality. Labeling generally occurs in two or more relationships and is often used as a reason to justify an action by one party against another. In everyday life, these stereotypes serve to fulfill a person's psychological need to internalize shared values, build a collective identity, and justify one's actions towards other social groups (Ponorogo, n.d.). Gender inequality is also evident in the form of violence, both physical and non-physical. Misunderstanding gender positions women as the weaker party, which triggers sexual harassment, exploitation, rape, and domestic violence (Afandi et al., 2019). In addition, women often experience a double burden. Tanlain (n.d.) states that one of the reasons why women experience a double burden is the social construction of society itself. The still-strong patriarchal culture places men in a higher position than women. The most they do is substitute the work to other women, such as domestic helpers or other female family members. However, the responsibility still rests on women's shoulders. As a result, they experience double the burden.

Using a nurture perspective, this study was conducted to examine gender bias in the Advanced

English Textbook for Grade XI F2 of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study aims to determine how men and women are represented, the distribution of roles, professions, activities, and narratives presented in the Grade XI F2 English textbook through gender analysis. In addition, the purpose of this study is to determine whether this Advanced English Textbook for the Merdeka Curriculum has avoided gender bias or instead replicates stereotypes that can influence school culture and student development. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to improving the quality of teaching materials, provide recommendations for teachers in more gender-sensitive learning practices, and encourage the creation of teaching materials that are more equitable, inclusive, and in line with national education goals.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research is a qualitative descriptive study, which is a study of data collected and expressed in words and images (Moleong, 2000:03). This method is combined with content analysis because it is in line with the research objective, which is to provide an in-depth description of the forms of gender representation that appear in teaching materials. The object of this study is the 2021 edition of the Advanced English Textbook for Grade XI (Phase F) of the Merdeka Curriculum, written by Rida Afrilyasanti and published by the Book Center of the Standards, Curriculum, and Education Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The units of analysis in this study are the illustrations and texts contained in the book.

Data collection techniques were carried out using observation and literature study. Document observation was conducted by reading each section of the book thoroughly, then noting the sections that contained representations of gender. Literature study was used to obtain concepts, theories, and indicators of gender bias and injustice from experts as a basis for analysis categories. Furthermore, the data was analyzed qualitatively by reducing the data, presenting the data, and drawing conclusions or verifications, Miles & Huberman (1992: 16). With this research method, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture of the forms of gender representation that appear in textbooks and their implications for the learning process will be provided.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The concept of gender as explained by Sulistyowati (2021) is that gender is a human perspective or perception of women or men that is not based on biological differences. Meanwhile, Fibrianto (2018) argues that the differences in functions and roles between men and women are not determined by biological or natural differences, but rather by their respective positions, functions, and roles in various aspects of life and development. Understanding gender construction is an important issue when analyzing teaching materials, including the Advanced English Textbook for Grade XII F2. Through text, images, dialogue, and examples of language use in context, textbooks have the potential to produce or challenge gender stereotypes. Therefore, a gender study of textbooks is necessary to see how representations of men and women are constructed, the extent to which balance is displayed, and whether the teaching materials reflect the principle of gender equality in the learning process.

The data shows the differences in roles between men and women in the Advanced English Textbook for Grade XII F2 through several specific teaching materials, including Digging the Hidden Gem of Borneo (Kalimantan), Connected to Social Media, Get in Touch with Nature, Future Methods of Payment, and Today's Life. Grouping based on lessons helps in understanding the context presented by the book (Rosyida, 2024:11). Analysis of these various themes shows how, through the depiction of activities, professions, and interactions between characters, the textbook indirectly shapes social constructions of gender roles. Each learning unit offers patterns of representation that show both the preservation of traditional stereotypes and indications of changing gender roles in a contemporary context. This allows researchers to find biases or imbalances in representation in the book's material.

Based on the data analysis conducted in the study of gender bias in the Grade XII F2 Advanced English Textbook, the results are as follows: (1) gender bias in the advanced English textbook of the independent curriculum, and (2) representation of gender bias in the Advanced English Textbook of the Independent Curriculum. These findings indicate that gender representation in the textbook is still not fully in line with the principles of gender equality expected in the independent curriculum.

### **Gender Bias in Advanced English Textbooks in the Merdeka Curriculum**

Gender bias in the Advanced English textbook for Grade XII F2 of the Merdeka Curriculum shows that there is gender bias in the imbalance of roles. The gender bias that appears is divided into four categories: (1) gender bias in visual representation, (2) gender bias in characters and traits, (3) gender bias in activities and interests.

#### **1. Gender Bias in Work Roles**

Visual illustrations play a very strategic role in learning because they are a simple, effective, and efficient form of visual communication (Pembelajaran, 2006). Gender bias in visual representation arises when images, illustrations, or photos in textbooks show an imbalance between men and women in terms of number, position, and symbolic function. Before discussing the results of the analysis, it is important to understand that every visual element, such as pictures, illustrations, or photos, not only serves as a complement to the material but also has the potential to convey certain messages. These visual messages can influence how students interpret themselves, their social roles, and their surroundings. With this understanding, the analysis becomes more meaningful because it is able to reveal the dimensions of representation hidden behind the visual appearance in textbooks.

When books more often feature one gender in a particular context, this can create an unbalanced picture of who is considered relevant, competent, or appropriate in that situation. Ultimately, visuals do not only serve to complement the text, but also become a medium that implicitly conveys stereotypical values. In the Advanced English Grade XII F2 Merdeka Curriculum textbook, this imbalance is evident in several sections, especially in the selection of chapter cover visuals.

A. Gender bias in visual representation in the material “Digging the Hidden Gem of Borneo”

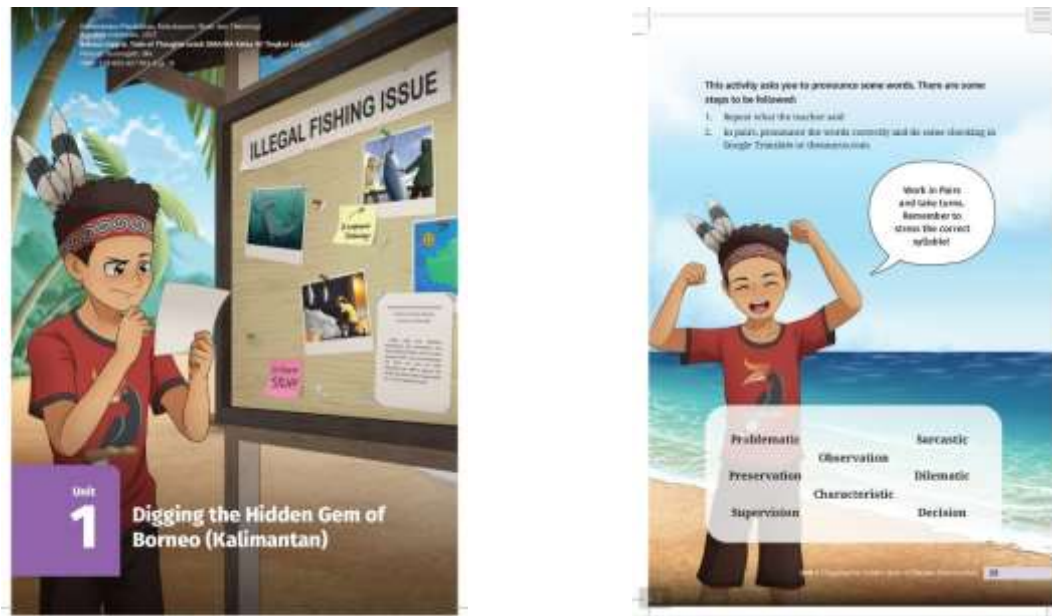


Figure 1. Cover of Chapter 1 and visual data on page 23

In Chapter 1, the visuals are dominated by men depicted as being active in public spaces. Specifically, they are seen looking at sheets of paper in folders while standing on the beach. These men appear to be actively observing their surroundings, indicating their involvement in exploring nature and adventure activities. As discussed earlier, images, illustrations, or characters are not merely complementary elements but convey hidden messages to the reader. There is no representation of women in these visuals, either as participants in exploration or observers of activities. The absence of women in these visuals indicates an imbalance in visual representation, where activities that are considered challenging and require courage and take place in open spaces are always associated with men.

This depiction reinforces traditional stereotypes that men are more active, dominant, and capable in physical and public activities, while women are not seen as having the freedom to engage in outdoor activities or are placed in passive roles. In the context of education, such visuals can influence students' perceptions of the roles of men and women, suggesting that exploration and adventure are predominantly male domains. As a result, women are seen as less relevant to outdoor activities or physically challenging activities, thereby limiting their understanding of gender equality. Furthermore, the position of the male figure holding the sheet of paper directly in front of the map gives an impression of authority and the ability to understand new things, such as directing the course of exploration. Meanwhile, the absence of female figures means that they do not play a significant role in the context of these activities. This visual representation shows how textbooks convey gender bias subtly through illustrations, not just through text. Therefore, the visual analysis of chapter 1 emphasizes the need for awareness of gender representation in teaching materials, so that both genders can appear equally in various activities.



### B. Gender bias in visual representation in the material “Connected to Social Media”



Figure 2. *Cover of Chapter 2 and Activity A.1 (Listening) p. 44*

In Chapter 2, entitled *Connected to Social Media*, the visuals only show female characters without any representation of men, as seen from the cover image of this material. Women are depicted using gadgets and interacting with social media. The dominance of female figures in this context shows a tendency toward unbalanced gender representation, as the digital world and social media are portrayed as being closer to women than to men. The absence of male figures in these visuals has the potential to lead to the understanding that the use of social media and other digital activities is more synonymous with women. In reality, however, both men and women are equally active as users of social media for various purposes.

In the second image in listening activity 1, a woman is shown, and students are asked to answer two questions that seem to refer to women. This depiction has the potential to reinforce the assumption that women are more easily affected by online interactions, negative comments, and social pressure on the internet. In fact, men can experience the same things as women. Visual representations such as this can influence how students understand the dynamics of social media use. By only showing images of women who appear tired and anxious, the textbook indirectly creates the impression that women are a group that is more emotional and more affected by social pressure. This certainly does not reflect the complex reality because the experience of digital stress is universal and not limited to one gender.

C. Gender bias in visual representation in the material “Today’s Life”

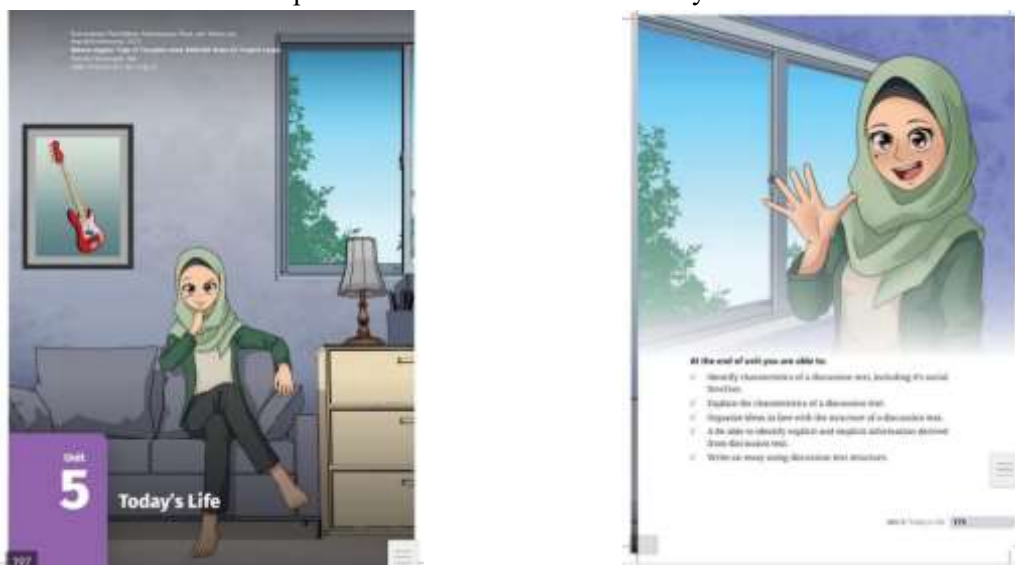


Figure 3. Cover of Chapter 5 and Visual Data, p. 179

Gender bias in Chapter 5 of Today's Life is very clear, as all of the visuals focus on women. The supporting images on the opening page and the illustrations of activities show women as the center of attention, with no male figures present. This representation, which is entirely centered on women, depicts an inequality in lifestyle, because modern life is not only depicted as favoring women, but men as well. In other words, modern life is only depicted through a female perspective. The visual dominance of women in this chapter can trigger the perception that women are the figures most synonymous with today's lifestyle. Although this depiction is not negative, the absence of male figures in the same context makes the representation less inclusive. This is because modern life is essentially universal and experienced by all genders, but these visuals invite a different perspective that only women are in this space of activity.

In addition, the selection of women as the main visual in this material can lead to new stereotypes, such as women being more relevant to topics of daily life, trends, or lifestyle changes. In fact, cultural shifts and social dynamics in the modern era are also greatly influenced by the role of men, but unfortunately this is not represented in this chapter. Thus, visual representation bias in chapter 5 is evident through the imbalance in the proportion of figures displayed. This imbalance is important to analyze because visuals in textbooks play a major role in shaping how students interpret gender roles in everyday life.

## 2. Gender bias in character and personality

The differences in characteristics between men and women are often associated with masculine and feminine values. Masculinity is a stereotype about men that can be contrasted with femininity as a stereotype of women (MASCULINITY, 1999). Masculine refers to traits that are usually attributed to men, such as being strong, tough, and smelling of sweat. Conversely, femininity describes traits associated with women, such as being weak, gentle, and fragrant. Gender bias in characteristics arises from certain perceptions or beliefs attached to groups based on personality traits that are considered to reflect those groups. These stereotypes are often rooted in assumptions or perceptions that are not entirely accurate or

tend to be exaggerated, which can influence how individuals from certain groups are treated. The emergence of stereotypes between the two genders is also supported when the characters and traits of men and women are not balanced.

In this book, men are portrayed as strong, independent, active, brave, and confident characters. Meanwhile, female characters are more commonly known for being emotional, sensitive, and dependent on their surroundings. When these stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in everyday conversation, they have the potential to limit individuals' ability to express their true potential. Therefore, it is important to understand how biases against certain traits and characteristics arise, as well as how we can identify and avoid them so that the representation of each gender becomes more fair and equal.

#### A. Gender bias in characters and personality in the material "Digging The Hidden Gem of Borneo"



Figure 3. Activity B.3 Reading Text (Narrative Text) pp. 9-10

The story of "Bujang and Bukit Kelam" depicts two young men as the main characters, namely Bujang Beji and Tumenggung Marubai. The two have opposite personalities. Tumenggung Marubai is kind-hearted and humble, while Bujang Beji is powerful but greedy and arrogant. The story begins when the two young men go fishing at the Simpang Malawi River and the Simpang Kapuas River. While fishing, Bujang Beji intends to cut the top of a rocky hill with his magical powers, while Tumenggung Marubai catches fish as best he can. This narrative reinforces the stereotype of men as subjects of strength and courage.

The dominance of masculinity is clearly seen in Bujang Beji's personality as he cuts the top of the rocky hill with his supernatural powers. Gender bias in folklore or storybooks often highlights men as active leaders, while women tend to be absent or placed in passive roles. In the context of nurture theory, this bias is not innate, but rather the result of social constructs that can be changed through more gender-equitable stories to reduce stereotypes and representation gaps. The depiction of characteristics in this story is clearly seen in the substance of this book. Men are depicted as physically healthy and courageous. On the other hand, stereotypes portray women as subjects who are physically weak and dance. In this representation, gender bias reinforces roles and characteristics based on sex, where men are associated with strength and dominance, while women are associated with gentleness and aesthetic beauty.



B. Gender bias in characters and personality in the material “Today’s Life, Connected Social Media, dan Get in Touch in Nature”



Figure 4. *Visual Data from Materials (Today’s Life, Connected to Social Media, and Get in Touch with Nature) pp. 191, 61, 134*

In Chapter 5, gender bias is evident in the visuals presented. In Activity B.9, there is an image of a woman sitting in front of a laptop with a confused and stressed expression, as if she is struggling to cope with the demands of modern life. The next visual in Figure B.7 shows a woman as the party who is more vulnerable to digital bullying. Tagged with hashtags such as *#insult*, *#bully*, and *#hate*, this reinforces the stereotype of women as targets of negative comments on social media. The last image in Activity D.4 shows a man enjoying his vacation. The visual depicts an expression of happiness that the holiday has arrived. It can be distinguished and concluded that this representation implies that women are more vulnerable to difficulties or confusion in activities related to technology.

This bias is even more apparent in the instructions for student activities. An example of a case that must be observed using a female character is “Ani,” who is in a stressful or problematic situation. The selection of women as subjects in problematic situations can reinforce the old stereotype that women are more emotional, less stable, or more likely to experience difficulties in their daily routines. In fact, the ability to deal with pressure, problems, or confusion is not a trait that depends on a particular gender. On the other hand, in the last picture, a man is seen smiling, which reinforces the inequality between the two genders. So, when the material only shows female characters in a vulnerable position facing problems, students can indirectly conclude that such traits or habits are often associated with women rather than men. This shows that there is a gender bias that limits perceptions of women's abilities and emotional resilience in the context of modern life. Conversely, when teaching materials only show male roles, students unconsciously assume that activities related to such roles are often associated with male characters only.

### 3. Gender bias in activities and interests

The definition of interest according to language (etymology) is the effort and ability to learn and seek something. In terms of terminology, interest is the desire, liking, and willingness towards something that interests them. Interest is an internal component within an individual that greatly influences their actions (Teoretis, 2018). In the context of gender bias, interest often does not arise naturally but is shaped by social constructs that differentiate between male and female preferences.

Gender bias also arises from these differences. The preferences in question include differences in hobbies, sports, and games. In many representations, men are more often portrayed as having an interest in physical activities. Conversely, women are more often depicted as having gentle hobbies or activities that are carried out in limited spaces. This pattern influences the interests and hobbies of students, because they may feel that certain interests should be in accordance with their gender, rather than their personal desires.

### A. Gender bias in activities and interests in the “Get in Touch With Nature” material

[illegible]

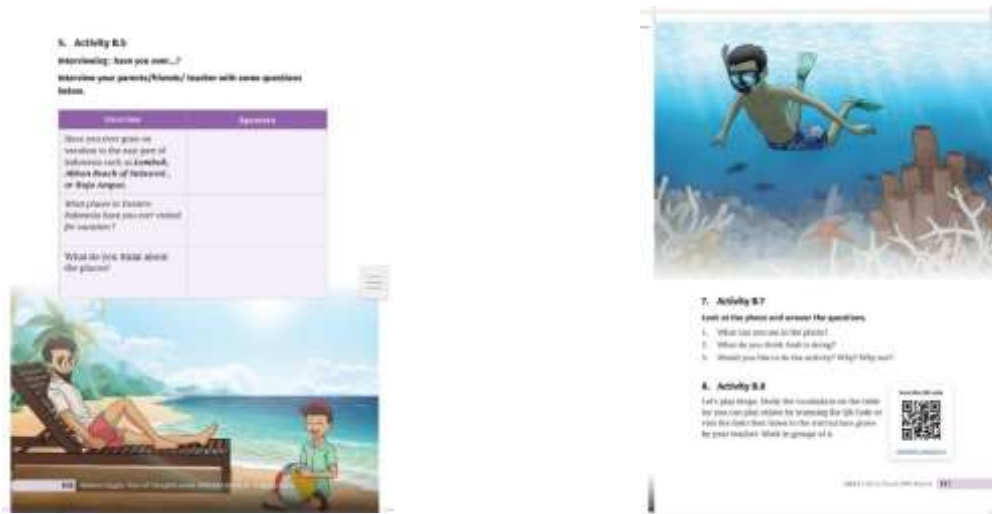


Figure 5. Visual Data for Activity D.2, Activity B.2, Activity B.5, and Activities B.7 and B.8 on pages 26, 104, 108, and 111.

In Chapter 3, “Get in Touch With Nature,” men tend to be highlighted as the main characters in various activities as seen in the visuals presented. Gender bias in hobbies, sports, or interests is reflected through the differences in preferences attributed to men and women. Men are often associated with sports or hobbies related to physical activities, such as soccer, swimming, surfing, fishing, or angling. The dominance of male representation in this material creates the impression that activities involving adventure, exploration, or direct interaction with nature are interests that only create gender representation inequality. This difference in interests is clearly seen in Activity B.2 “The Hidden Gem of East Nusa Tenggara: Nihiwatu.” In the picture, women are depicted building sandcastles, while men are shown surfing. This stark contrast in activities demonstrates gender bias in representation, but also reinforces the stereotype that women are less interested or less capable of engaging in outdoor activities.

This imbalance in representation gives rise to a new perception that masculine activities are more closely associated with men, while feminine activities are associated with women. In reality, however, interest in outdoor activities does not depend on gender. However, through the repeated presentation of visual material such as this, textbooks indirectly shape students' perceptions of the two genders. This unbalanced representation can have a significant impact on shaping students' understanding of gender-based limitations on interests, which should not occur in educational materials.

### Gender Bias Representation in Advanced English Textbooks in the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the visuals presented in the Advanced English Textbook for Grade XII F2 of the Merdeka Curriculum, the representation of women tends to be limited. In the material presented, the imbalance between men and women is clearly visible. Some materials focus on only one gender visually, which can shape students' perspectives on the habits or characteristics of both genders. The visuals that appear for women are generally more passive in nature with regard to women's habits in social life. This representation can influence students' perceptions of women's roles, where women are always considered to have limited freedom of movement.

Traditional perceptions of male and female roles remain evident through the visuals and narratives presented. Men tend to be portrayed more often as active individuals who play a role in various situations in the public sphere. For example, in the story “Bujang Beji and Bukit Kelam,” the main character is a man who has the strength and courage to break the top of a rocky hill, reflecting the stereotype of men who have masculine characteristics and are able to face major problems. Meanwhile, women are more often depicted as emotional, passive individuals, or as having limited space to move around in their daily lives. For example, in the story “The Hidden Gem of East Nusa Tenggara: Nihiwatu,” the image shows women playing on the beach while men are surfing. This difference reflects the stereotype of women as having feminine characteristics or being placed in passive roles.

It is important to recognize that gender role representations in textbooks, as seen in these examples, can reinforce existing stereotypes and hinder more equitable development. Textbooks that display visual inequality, with women as passive characters and men as active and free, can limit students' views of their own potential. A more inclusive education needs to portray women and men as having balanced roles in the family or community, and show that both genders play a role in various aspects of life.

## CONCLUSION

The Advanced English Textbook for the Merdeka Curriculum continues to display various types of gender bias, which can influence how students view gender-based roles, characters, and activities. In the book, there are three main categories of gender bias identified by this study: first, gender bias in visuals; second, gender bias in characters and traits; and third, gender bias in activities and interests. Bias in the category of visual representation is demonstrated by the imbalance in the appearance of male and female characters in the images. Men are more often depicted in the context of public activities, while women are depicted in emotional and passive contexts. This imbalance creates a visual pattern that encourages students to believe that public spaces are more appropriate for men. The book continues to reinforce masculine and feminine stereotypes. In the category of characters and traits, men are depicted as free to express themselves, while women are depicted as overly emotional or vulnerable to social pressure. Narrative and visual patterns such as these reinforce the association of characteristics with specific genders. As a result, these patterns limit students' understanding of gender-neutral character diversity.

Bias can be seen from the division of interests based on gender in the categories of activities and interests. Men are usually associated with extreme activities such as surfing or fishing, while women are usually associated with more leisurely activities, such as playing in the sand or playing on social media, as shown in the visuals. Overall, in the Advanced English Textbook for Grade XII F2 of the Merdeka Curriculum, gender representation still shows differences in roles between men and women. Men are depicted as dominant figures in public spaces, while women are depicted as passive figures or in emotional contexts due to the visual patterns, narratives, and activities displayed. This imbalance has the potential to influence how students understand their identity or potential. Therefore, it is important to represent men and women more equally and inclusively, as well as to support education efforts oriented towards gender equality.



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