

Reproducing or challenging gender stereotypes? Literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks under the merdeka curriculum

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Gender Representation Literary Texts Literacy Merdeka Curriculum Textbooks	This study aims to: (1) analyze the gender values projected in literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum and (2) examine how gender projection operates in literary works and its manifestation as a source of literacy. Literary text in a textbook not only functions as the material of learning language but also as the medium representing the social value and construct of gender roles. This study uses a qualitative approach combined with content analysis of the literary texts contained in the Indonesian language textbook for Junior High School and Senior High School students in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum (Emancipated Curriculum). The research data were collected through documentation by identifying and classifying literary texts containing gender representation. The findings mainly show two points: first, gender perspective has been integrated in some literary texts through character representation, critical description towards gender representation, and the discussion of gender issues in narrative texts; and second, some literary texts still reproduce dichotomous gender stereotypes which strengthen the patriarchal roles, representing women as weak and subordinated figures while men are represented as strong and dominant figures. However, some texts also show a more inclusive representation by presenting an empowered woman with a sense of agency. This study concludes that gender representation in literary texts potentially influences students' understanding of gender roles in the community, so that textbook development needs to consider gender diversity and balance in the literary materials.

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Introduction

Gender literacy is an important issue in education because it is related to students' understanding of the social concept of gender equality and equity. Gender literacy not only covers the capability to understand the concept of gender but also the capability to recognize and criticize gender stereotypes and roles inequality in the community (Verdugo-Castro et al., 2022). In education, strengthening gender literacy can help students develop a more critical perspective on social relations and culture, which constructs the concept of gender (Condrón et al., 2025). Through education, gender awareness could be implanted to reduce the practices of discrimination and stereotypes in the aspects of social life (Alimuddin, 2023; Sibanda & Herman, 2024; Kuteesa et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, various studies have shown that educational materials in schools, including textbooks, continue to reproduce gender stereotypes and reinforce patriarchal constructions. Textbooks play an important role in this context because they not only present learning materials in the form of knowledge but also convey social values and constructions that may influence how students perceive gender (Solihati & Hikmat, 2018). According to the World Economic Forum (2025), women still experience inequality in terms of access and participation in the workforce. Besides, women also tend to experience a wage gap and difficulties in accessing equal career opportunities to men. In education, women encounter difficulties in accessing equal access of education as men, especially in developing nations. Therefore, gender projection in textbooks needs to be examined more comprehensively, not merely based on the presence of male and female characters, but also by considering the roles, characteristics, and gender values constructed within literary texts (Kabeer, 1994; Kube et al., 2024; Sironić & Dabić, 2025; Rule & Estera, 2026).

Literature is a part of language study that has a critical position in the process of constructing students' social perspectives. Literary products not only offer aesthetic values but also present the reflection of social reality, including the existing gender issues in the community (Darma, 2004; Keller et al., 2023; Condrón et al., 2025). Through the representation of figures, plots, and conflicts, literary texts reflect the power relations and gender role construction in social life. Therefore, literary texts in textbooks potentially become important media in developing gender literacy at school.

As an example, a novel entitled *Laskar Pelangi* (The Rainbow Troops) by Andrea Hirata portrays the issue of gender inequality. The female figures in the novel, such as Ibu Muslimah and Bu Mus, were depicted as independent women, yet affected by patriarchal perspectives. As in Krippendorff (in Jewkes et al., 2014; Cortés & Aires, 2021), "social norms always exist in every linguistic construction, especially in action involving words or other verbal symbols". His argument aligns with Foucault (in Nurgiyantoro, 2016), "freedom is a way to fight against any forms of oppression and inequality and to find out any initial points for a change". Therefore, literary works with a gender perspective are an important example for the community to change its patriarchal perspectives.

On the other hand, literature has an essential role in developing gender literacy in education, which is crucial to fighting against prejudice and gender discrimination. Wolf (1991; 1993; 2002) explains that feminism emphasizes gender-friendly education. Naomi Wolf's principles of feminism aim at achieving genuine gender equality through women's empowerment at the individual level and a greater extent of social and cultural change. One way to achieve the objectives is by incorporating literary works (poetry, prose, and drama) in Indonesian language textbooks (Shayne et al., 2016; Adukia et al., 2023; Sumarmi, 2023). Incorporating literary texts with gender issues in the textbooks is expected to make the students understand their social and gender reality around them in a better way.

According to previous research, some of the circulated textbooks do not contain gender-related issues. In Aries (2022) and Stuhler (2024), textbooks with no gender-related content shape students' minds and foster stereotypical behavior. For example, a Social Studies book for third-grade elementary school students contains a lot of masculine language and emphasizes the traditional gender roles. Similarly, Widyaningsih (2021) reports that some textbook samples with no gender-related content, such as in Sociology, depict women as the "weak link" in a family. These books can strengthen the existing gender role stereotypes and cause gender inequality in the community (Nemani et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025).

Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum have been distributed as a solution to develop Indonesia's education (Darni, 2017; Hussein & Ali, 2021). This effort aligns with the government's attempt to develop the Merdeka curriculum (Emancipated Curriculum) as a way to synchronize the materials taught in the classroom with the necessities in the workforce and the community (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Now, Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum have been published by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for grade 7 to 9. In this case, gender projections in literary texts are crucial to discuss in these textbooks.

Gender projection is a way to express gender identity reflected from behavior, appearance, and attitudes in relevance to the prevailing gender norms in the community. Gender projection is also related to cultural behavior, including the implemented gender perspectives and values in the community. In literary studies, gender projection refers to how gender characteristics and roles are reflected in the literary texts, in character development, character engagement, and any themes represented in the texts. Gender projection in literary study is related to accurate representation of gender, which expands the understanding of the role of gender in the community. The projection also has a negative impact on the harmful gender stereotype or any presentation of an imbalance in gender value in the community (Febriani, 2018).

Thus, this study discusses the gap between how literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks of the Merdeka curriculum represent gender awareness and how far the existing gender representation reproduces or challenges gender stereotypes. Accordingly, this article addresses two main research

questions: (1) what gender content is represented in literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks based on the *Merdeka Curriculum*, and (2) how is gender projected through literary works and manifested as a source of literacy? This study aims to review gender projection in the existing literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum for Junior High School and Senior High School students. Specifically, this study aims to identify the forms of gender representation in literary texts while also analyzing stereotypical tendencies or gender inclusivity presented in each of the literary works. Thus, this research expects to contribute to the development of gender literacy in education and become the evaluation ground for the development of a more responsive textbook to the issue of gender equality.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with qualitative content analysis to review the gender representation and projection in the literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks embedded with the Merdeka curriculum (Emancipated Curriculum) (Rohidi, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Content analysis is used as this method allows the researcher to identify the patterns of apparent meaning, social representation, and ideological constructs within the texts (Krippendorff, 2018). The approach is utilized to review how gender is represented through characters, social relations, and narratives in the literary texts used as the content of literary learning.

This study refers to Wolf's (2002) feminist perspective as the analytical framework, which emphasizes gender equality, women's empowerment, criticism of women's objectification, and the importance of education as a way to escape from gender inequality. The perspective is employed to identify the form of stereotypical or inclusive gender representation in the literary texts.

The data of this study came from the Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The analyzed books were the official books available in digital format on the website of <https://buku.kemendikdasmen.go.id/katalog>. The analytical unit of this study are literary texts in the books comprising poetry, prose, and drama. Figure 1 and Table 1 presents the Indonesian language textbooks analyzed in this study.



Fig. 1. The Indonesian Language Textbooks with Merdeka Curriculum

Table 1. Research Data Resources

Education Level	Class	Types of Literary Texts
Junior High School	VII	Poetry, short stories, drama (Subarna et al., 2021)
Junior High School	VIII	Poetry, short stories (Gusfitri & Delfia, 2021)
Junior High School	IX	Poetry, short stories, drama (Nukman et al., 2022)
Senior High School	X	Poetry, short stories, drama (Aulia et al., 2021)
Senior High School	XI	Poetry, short stories (Waskitaningtyas & Mawarti, 2021)
Senior High School	XII	Poetry, short stories, drama (Trimansyah, 2022)

The data were chosen with a purposive sampling method under the criteria of (1) literary texts contained in the official textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum; (2) texts containing the elements of gender representation through their characters or social relations; and (3) texts containing the narratives or conflicts related to gender roles. The data were collected through the study of documentation of literary texts in the learning textbooks. The data collection processes went through some stages, including: (1) identifying the whole literary texts in the textbooks; (2) selecting texts with gender representation; (3) classifying texts according to the type of literary works (poetry, prose, drama); and (4) data coding according to the category of gender representation.

Data analysis went through some stages, adapting an interactive analysis model comprising data reduction, data presentation, and drawing a conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 2005). The analytical procedures include: (1) open coding: identifying the elements of gender representation in the literary texts, including the characters social roles, power relations, and gender narratives; (2) categorization: grouping the data into analytical categories according to the perspective of feminism, which are gender equality representation, gender stereotype, patriarchal relations, and representation of women's empowerment; (3) interpretation: interpreting social and ideological meaning from gender representation in literary texts; and (4) synthesis: drawing patterns of dominant gender representation content in the literary texts material of the books. Table 2 presents the analytical categories of gender representation in textbooks.

Table 2. Analytical Categories of Gender Representation

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Analytical Indicators</i>
Gender stereotypes	Women as weak, domesticated, and subordinated figures
Patriarchal domination	Men as the main character, leader, or decision maker
Equal representation	Men and women have equal social roles
Representation of women's empowerment	Women as independent and active figures with agency

Results and Discussion

This part discusses two main points: (1) gender contents in the literary texts of Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum, and (2) how gender projection works in the literary texts along with its manifestation as the source of literacy.

Gender in the Literary Texts in Indonesian Language Textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum

Gender is an important material to be integrated into the education system (Setyaningsih et al., 2018). One strategy to integrate gender is through textbooks as learning resources. Textbooks are important in the emergence of the new curriculum, the Merdeka curriculum, or the Emancipated curriculum. The textbooks are the prerequisite and the main learning resources in the education system. In the Indonesian language study, literary works are presented with texts. Hence, in education, literary texts do not only become texts containing the writers' imagination, but also the cultural artefacts that record values and knowledge, including gender projection.

The high proportion of literary texts containing gender-related issues indicates that Indonesian language textbooks provide substantial opportunities for developing students' gender awareness through literary learning. These texts can function not only as reading materials but also as pedagogical resources for examining how women and men are represented, how social roles are constructed, and how gender relations are negotiated within different cultural contexts. Therefore, the analysis of gender representation in literary texts is important for identifying whether textbooks reinforce conventional gender stereotypes or promote more equitable and inclusive perspectives.

Some types of texts are available in the Indonesian language textbooks, for Junior High School students, including: (1) traditional poetry (*gurindam* (couplet poem), *pantun* (quatrain rhymes), *mantra* (spells), *tembang kinanthi* (*kinanthi* poetic song)), (2) fantasy story, (3) short stories, and (4) poetry. For Senior High School students, the Indonesian language textbooks contain: (1) anecdotes, (2) *hikayat* (tale), (3) short story, (4) poetry, and (5) drama. Therefore, quantitatively, there are 38 (73%) from 52 literary texts containing gender issues in Indonesian language textbooks. The depiction of the data can be seen in Figure 2.

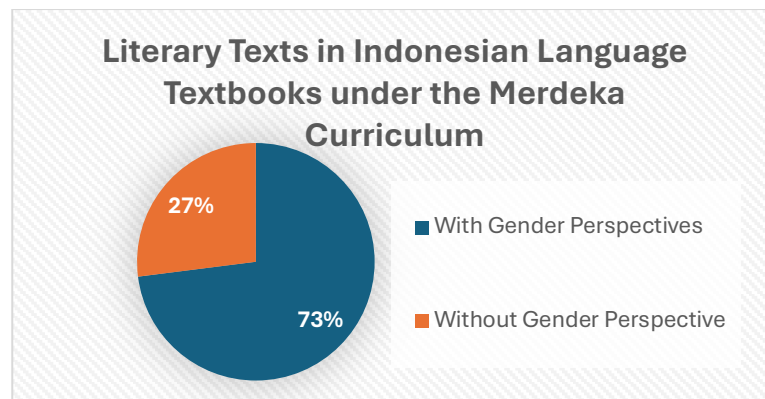


Fig. 2. The Proportion of Literary Texts with Gender Issues in Indonesian Language Textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum

Gender can be integrated in literary texts through character representation, criticisms of gender stereotypes, and investigations into gender issues. Character representation refers to the explanation of women's specific characteristics within the scope of gender. The criticisms of gender stereotypes refer to the criticism of labelling women as weak and helpless. Meanwhile, investigations into gender issues are related to how gender becomes a social issue and is considered in every aspect of life. Table 3 shows the matrix of gender maps in the literary texts under the Merdeka curriculum.

Table 3. Matrix on Gender Maps in the Literary Texts of the Textbooks

No	Educational Event	Type of Literary Texts	Title	Gender Projection Strategies
1	Junior High School	Traditional Poetry	<i>Pantun</i> (Quatrain rhyme) and <i>Tembang Kinanthi</i> (Kinanthi poetic song)	Criticism of gender stereotypes Character representation
2	Junior High School	Fantasy story	<i>Bola-Bola Waktu</i> (The Balls of Time) by Rakhma Subarna, <i>Kue-Kue Mao</i> (Mao Cakes) by Rakhma Subarna, <i>Keberanian Emas</i> (The Brave Emas) by Rakhma Subarna	criticisms of gender stereotypes, and investigations into gender issues
3	Junior High School	Short stories	<i>Itam dan U</i> (Item and U) by Weni Rahayu, <i>Kotak Sulap Paman Tom</i> (Uncle Tom's Magic Box) by Maya Lestari Gf, <i>Parki dan Alergi Telur</i> (Parki and His Egg Allergy) by Maya Lestari Gf	Character representation and criticisms of gender stereotypes
4	Junior High School	Poetry	<i>Kedai Kopi Pukul Sebelas Siang</i> (A Coffee Shop at Eleven AM) by Maya Lestari Gf	Character representation and criticisms of gender stereotypes
5	Senior High School	Anecdotes	<i>Liburan Kuli Bangunan</i> (A Builder's Day Off), <i>Perundungan Tanda Sayang</i> (Rough Love in Disguise)	Character representation and criticisms of gender stereotypes
6	Senior High School	Tale	<i>Hikayat Si Miskin</i> (A Tale of the Poor)	Character representation and criticisms of gender stereotypes
7	Senior High School	Short Stories	<i>Tarian Pena</i> (The Dancing Ink) by Virginia C.C. Pomantow, <i>Setelah Dibawa ke Ruangan Besar</i> (The Aftermath of The Big Room Event) by Wildan Pradisya Putra, <i>Mengapa Mereka Berdoa kepada Pohon</i> (Why Did They Pray to the Big Tree) by Faisal Oddang, <i>Tukang Cukur</i> (The Barber) by Budi Darma, <i>Malaikat Juga Tahu</i> (Even the Angels Know) oleh Dee Lestari, <i>Hatarakibachi</i> (The Worker Bee) by Awit Radiani, <i>Semangkuk Perpisahan</i> (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana	Character representation, criticisms of gender stereotypes, and investigations into gender issues

No	Educational Event	Type of Literary Texts	Title	Gender Projection Strategies
8	Senior High School	Poetry	<i>Ibu</i> (Mother) by D. Zawawi Imron, <i>Sajak Seenggok Jagung</i> (Ode to a Heap of Corn) by W.S. Rendra, <i>Gadis Peminta-Minta</i> (The Female Beggar) by Toto S. Bachtiar	Character representation, criticisms of gender stereotypes, and investigations into gender issues
9	Senior High School	Drama	<i>Semangkuk Perpisahan</i> (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana	Criticisms of gender stereotypes

According to Table 3, gender is integrated into literary texts through character representation, criticisms of gender stereotypes, and investigations into gender issues (Rokhmansyah et al., 2018). These elements are situated in the texts in equal proportions between men and women (in terms of characters, conflicts, and themes), and gender inclusive language (neutral language that does not refer to any gender and recognizes gender diversity). The integration of gender in the literary works in Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum can be seen in Figure 3.

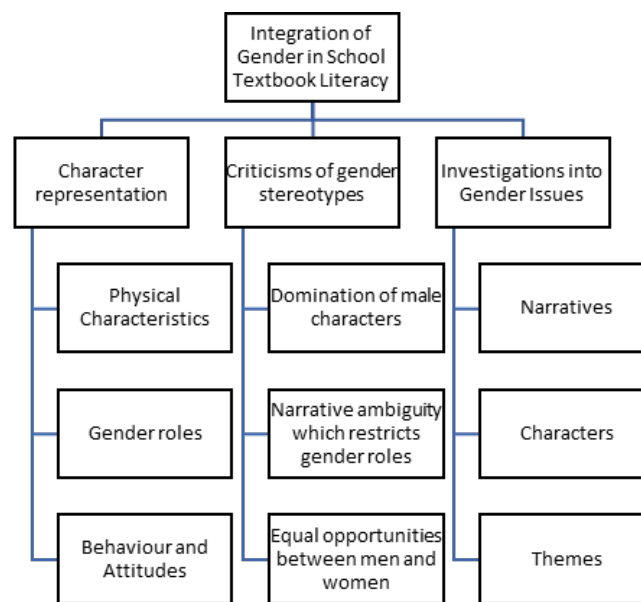


Fig. 3. The Chart of the Integration of Gender in School Textbook Literacy

The chart in Figure 3 shows that the integration of gender in literary texts in Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum is divided into three main dimensions, which are representation, criticisms of gender stereotypes, and investigations into gender issues. These dimensions represent different analytical levels yet are intertwined in building a comprehensive understanding of gender. Character representation emphasizes how gender is constructed through physical characteristics, social roles, and character behavior and attitudes in the literary texts. Meanwhile, criticism of gender stereotypes becomes a reflective space challenging the dominant patriarchal narrative, such as male character domination and the restriction of female characters' roles in the structure of the story. The investigations into gender issues refer to the extensive exploration of themes and narratives, including how gender becomes a part of the conflict, values, and social messages in literary texts.

Moreover, the part also shows that the integration of gender in a literary text is not limited to a single dimension but is multidimensional and contextual. Each dimension contributes to shaping reproductive and transformative gender representation. On the one hand, literary text reproduces stereotypical patterns through the imbalanced depiction of characters and power relations. Yet, on the other hand, there is also an attempt to present a more inclusive perspective through narratives, which opens a room for equality and women's agency. Therefore, this part emphasizes that literary texts in school textbooks do not only work as a medium to learn language but also become a discursive arena, which can shape students' critical awareness of gender issues in social life.

First, the representation of gender-oriented character refers to how the character is described in the literary works by considering their gender identity and roles. The representation covers how men and

women are represented in the literary works and how their gender roles are explained. Gender representation is visible through these characteristics: (1) physical characteristics, (2) gender roles, and (3) behavior and attitudes (Astuti, 2016). In the textbooks, gender representation is depicted in fantasy stories (*Bola-Bola Waktu* (The Balls of Time) by Rakhma Subarna, *Keberanian Emas* (The Brave Emas) by Rakhma Subarna, *Kue-Kue Mao* (Mao Cakes) by Rakhma Subarna), short stories (*Itam dan U* (Item and U) by Weni Rahayu, *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* (Uncle Tom's Magic Box) by Maya Lestari Gf, *Parki dan Alergi Telur* (Parki and His Egg Allergy) by Maya Lestari Gf, *Tarian Pena* (The Dancing Ink) by Virginia C.C. Pomantow, *Setelah Dibawa ke Ruangan Besar* (The Aftermath of The Big Room Event) by Wildan Pradisya Putra, *Mengapa Mereka Berdoa kepada Pohon* (Why Did They Pray to the Big Tree) by Faisal Oddang, *Tukang Cukur* (The Barber) by Budi Darma, *Malaikat Juga Tahu* (Even the Angels Know) oleh Dee Lestari, *Hatarakibachi* (The Worker Bee) by Awit Radiani, *Semangkuk Perpisahan* (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana), anecdotes (*Liburan Kuli Bangunan* (A Builder's Day Off), *Perundungan Tanda Sayang* (Rough Love in Disguise)), tales (*Hikayat Si Miskin* (A Tale of the Poor)), and poetry (*Ibu* (Mother) by D. Zawawi Imron, *Sajak Seonggok Jagung* (Ode to a Heap of Corn) by W.S. Rendra, *Gadis Peminta-Minta* (The Female Beggar) by Toto S. Bachtar).

Physical characteristic representation is a depiction that covers the physical characteristics related to gender, visual appearances, voices, and body posture. For example, female characters are frequently depicted as having long hair, feminine body posture, and other attributes related to beauty and femininity, as seen in the following excerpt of *tembang kinanthi* (traditional poetry) in the Indonesian language textbook for 7th Grade (page 43).

...
Seorang wanita kurus kering (A woman of skin and bone)
Gelungnya rusak campur tanah, (Her hair bun is damaged and crusted with soil)
Terlihat iganya yang kurus. (Her ribs are protruding and fragile) (Subarna et al., 2021)

The excerpt describes women's physical condition. Women usually have hair buns. Usually, female hair is so long that it could be styled into a bun. This excerpt depicts the characteristics of a woman. Gender representation is also depicted with roles and responsibility aligns with gender stereotypes. For example, in a traditional gender perspective, female characters are always presented as loving mothers, wives, or caregivers, while men are always displayed as leaders, fighters, and family protectors (Febriani et al., 2022). In this case, the example of gender representation can be seen in the following excerpt from a short story entitled "*Itam dan U*" (Itam and U) by Weni Rahayu in the Indonesian language textbook for 7th grade, page 145, as follows.

...
"Itam mengkhayal, mungkin Ayah pergi melaut ke tempat yang jauh, mencari ikan yang besar.
Mungkin Ibu melanjutkan sekolah lagi, seperti yang selalu dia impikan." (Itam imagines, "Perhaps my dad is sailing to a distant place, catching huge fish. Probably mom is going to school again, as she has dreamt of.")
 (Subarna et al., 2021)

The excerpt implies that there is no stigma for women to stay at home and finish all domestic chores. The short story represents women as "powerful" although they have had a child. Therefore, a mother can also pursue a higher level of education as she dreamed of.

Second, the criticism of gender stereotypes refers to the process of evaluating and inquiring into the prevailing opinions on the roles and behavior expected from men and women in society. Gender stereotypes are cliché portrayals or generalizations related to the roles, behavior, or specific characteristics associated with gender. The criticism asks several questions about several things. First, the dominant male character is represented as a strong and aggressive figure. The fact raises questions about whether female characters can only be represented as weak, submissive, or objectified. Second, the ambiguous narrative raises questions about whether the message restricts gender roles or gives a more inclusive and diverse opportunity for different genders. Third, the last question is about whether men and women have the same opportunity to develop their personality, influence the plot, and become the agents of change in the story (Llorens et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

Criticisms of gender stereotypes exist in the traditional poetry (*pantun* (quatrain rhyme) and *tembang kinanthi* (kinanthi poetic song)), fantasy story (*Bola-Bola Waktu* (The Balls of Time) by Rakhma Subarna, *Keberanian Emas* (The Brave Emas) by Rakhma Subarna, *Kue-Kue Mao* (Mao Cakes) by Rakhma Subarna), short stories (*Itam dan U* (Item and U) by Weni Rahayu, *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* (Uncle Tom's Magic Box) by Maya Lestari Gf, *Parki dan Alergi Telur* (Parki and His Egg Allergy) by Maya Lestari Gf, *Tarian Pena* (The Dancing Ink) by Virginia C.C. Pomantow, *Setelah Dibawa ke Ruangan Besar* (The Aftermath of The Big Room

Event) by Wildan Pradisya Putra, *Mengapa Mereka Berdoa kepada Pohon* (Why Did They Pray to the Big Tree) by Faisal Oddang, *Tukang Cukur* (The Barber) by Budi Darma, *Malaikat Juga Tahu* (Even the Angels Know) oleh Dee Lestari, *Hatarakibachi* (The Worker Bee) by Awit Radiani, *Semangkuk Perpisahan* (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana), anecdotes (*Liburan Kuli Bangunan* (A Builder's Day Off), *Perundungan Tanda Sayang* (Rough Love in Disguise)), tales (*Hikayat Si Miskin* (A Tale of the Poor)), poetry (*Ibu* (Mother) by D. Zawawi Imron, *Sajak Seenggok Jagung* (Ode to a Heap of Corn) by W.S. Rendra, *Gadis Peminta-Minta* (The Female Beggar) by Toto S. Bachtiar), and drama (*Semangkuk Perpisahan* (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana).

An example of a criticism of gender stereotypes is in the following excerpt of a short story entitled *Bola-Bola Waktu* (The Balls of Time) by Rakhma Subarna in the Indonesian language textbook for 7th grade on page 51 as follows.

....

Semua tampak sempurna. Namun, mengapa Ivan menyesal berada di tahun ini? Tadi pagi ia mengetahui bahwa ayahnya tidak lagi bersama mereka. Ayah meninggal karena sakit. Kata Ibu, Ayah sering mengabaikan sakit yang dideritanya dan berkeras membantu ibu. Ayah bahkan menolak tawaran Ibu untuk membayar seorang pekerja. Ayah ingin hasil penjualan kue ditabung untuk biaya kuliah Ivan nanti. (Everything looks perfect. However, why does Ivan feel regret this year? This morning he knew that his dad passed away. He died of sickness. His mother said that Dad frequently ignored his illness to work hard, helping her. Dad also refused Mom's offer to hire someone. Dad wants to use the money he earns from selling cakes as savings for Ivan's college tuition.)
(Subarna et al., 2021)

From the excerpt, the criticism of gender stereotypes refers to the restriction of the female role as it portrays the absence of barriers for women in a gender inclusive environment. In *Bola-Bola Waktu* (The Balls of Time), the Dad supports her wife in selling cakes. He also did that of his own volition to sincerely help his wife and improve the quality of their family's life. Therefore, the depiction of Mom and Dad here has supported the representation of equal opportunity between men and women.

Third, the investigations into gender issues refer to the understanding of the roles, identity, and social relations related to gender construction. In literary works, the presentation of gender issues involves the identification and understanding of equality, gender stereotypes, gender roles, and gender discrimination reflected in the narratives, characters, and themes narrated in the texts. The explanation of gender issues invites the readers to analyse and comprehend the social, cultural, and psychological impacts of the dynamics of gender reflected in the literary works (Nursida, 2015).

Gender issues exist in the fantasy stories (*Bola-Bola Waktu* (The Balls of Time) by Rakhma Subarna, *Kue-Kue Mao* (Mao Cakes) by Rakhma Subarna, *Keberanian Emas* (The Brave Emas) by Rakhma Subarna), short stories (*Itam dan U* (Item and U) by Weni Rahayu, *Kotak Sulap Paman Tom* (Uncle Tom's Magic Box) by Maya Lestari Gf, *Parki dan Alergi Telur* (Parki and His Egg Allergy) by Maya Lestari Gf, *Tarian Pena* (The Dancing Ink) by Virginia C.C. Pomantow, *Setelah Dibawa ke Ruangan Besar* (The Aftermath of The Big Room Event) by Wildan Pradisya Putra, *Mengapa Mereka Berdoa kepada Pohon* (Why Did They Pray to the Big Tree) by Faisal Oddang, *Tukang Cukur* (The Barber) by Budi Darma, *Malaikat Juga Tahu* (Even the Angels Know) oleh Dee Lestari, *Hatarakibachi* (The Worker Bee) by Awit Radiani, *Semangkuk Perpisahan* (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana), and poetry (*Ibu* (Mother) by D. Zawawi Imron, *Sajak Seenggok Jagung* (Ode to a Heap of Corn) by W.S. Rendra, *Gadis Peminta-Minta* (The Female Beggar) by Toto S. Bachtiar).

Gender issues are reflected in the theme of a poem entitled *Ibu* (Mother) by D. Zawawi Imron, which projects the sacrifice of a mother and the sincerity of her heart to make a better living for her offspring. In the poem, a mother is depicted as a figure who educates their child to be able to improve their living existence as a mature and strong figure in encountering every challenge in life. Mother is the one instilling life philosophy for children. They are also the ones teaching children love (Mafrukhi et al., 2019). Mother also teaches their son to respect their father (symbolised as "the sky"), followed by themselves (symbolised as "the earth"), as in the following excerpt.

Ibu adalah gua pertapaanku (Mother is the cave of my solitude)/ *dan ibulah yang meletakkan aku di sini* (and it is she who has placed me here)/ *saat bunga kembang menyerbak bau saying* (when the flower blooms scenting the air with love)/ *ibu menunjuk ke langit, kemudian bumi* (you point to the sky then to the earth)/ *aku mengangguk meskipun kurang mengerti* (though I do not fully understand)// (Aulia et al., 2021)

Gender Projection in Literary Works as well as Its Manifestation in Literary Resources

In a mimetic perspective, literary works are the reflections of the social and cultural reality of a particular community (Rahayu et al., 2021). Gender projection in a literary work reflects how the characters are constructed according to gender roles and stereotypes, as seen in the actor characterizations, interactions between characters, power hegemony, and the existing theme in the story. Gender projection in literary works can influence readers' perception and understanding of gender roles and identity in social life.

Through diverse gender projections in literary works, readers can develop a critical understanding of gender roles and relations in the community. Therefore, literary works can become a source of inspiration and a model to readers encountering complex gender issues in the real world. Simply put, literary works have important roles in shaping readers' gender literacy.

Gender projection displays a dichotomous stereotype that strengthens rigid and patriarchal gender roles. Women are depicted as weak and minor figures, while men are depicted as strong and dominant. Yet some of the literary works also project a more inclusive and progressive gender projection by portraying women as empowered individuals. Gender projection in literary works can impact students' understanding and perceptions, specifically on gender roles in the community (Kim, 2016; Vu & Pham, 2025).

In Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum, gender projection is important to discuss, as it shows gender bias in the field of education. The projection can be seen through some strategies: (1) gender characterisation, (2) gender interaction and dynamics, (3) gender conflict and challenges, and (4) gender themes and messages. The scheme of gender projection can be seen in Figure 4.

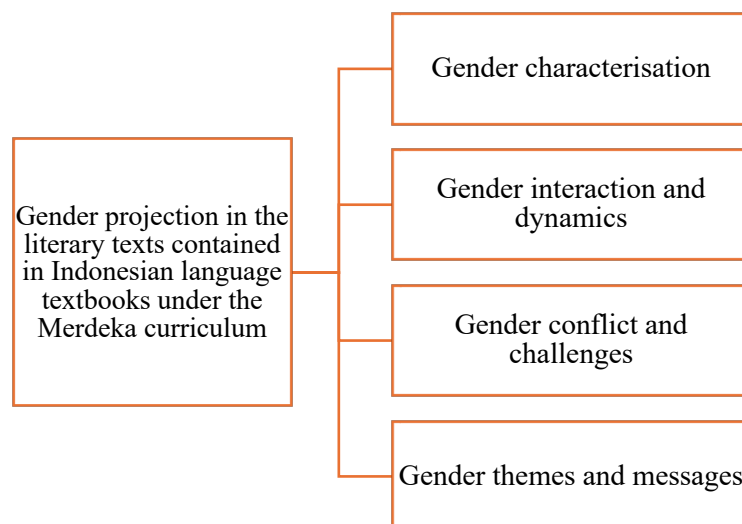


Fig. 4. The Scheme of Gender Projection in the Literary Texts Contained in Indonesian Language Textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum

First, gender characterisation is related to how literary texts portray characters with specific gender roles and behaviors. For example, women are depicted as soft, loving, or domesticated, while men are depicted as strong, brave, or dominant. These characters play the common gender stereotypes existing in the community (Sari, 2025).

In Indonesian language textbooks for 10th-grade students, gender characterisation refers to the dichotomous gender projection, which is a mockery of female characterisation. Specifically, women can also do a job predominantly taken by men, which requires physical power, such as becoming a builder.

Anak saya itu memang jarang liburan. Saya bawa ke tempat kerja saja, menurut dia itu tamasya. Dari pagi sampai sore, dia anteng nyusun lego, pakai batu bata. Kalau orang lain nyusun lego, anak-anak ya jadi robot, anak saya jadi pos ronda. (My daughter was rarely on vacation. I brought her to work. She thought that it was a field trip. She stayed there until late afternoon, playing with the bricks as if it were a Lego. If other kids built their Lego to make a robot, my daughter made it a neighborhood watch post.)

Pulang ke rumah ditanya sama istri saya, "Gimana Nak, seru main sama bapak?" (When we were home my wife asked her, "How was your trip with your Dad? Was it fun?"

"Mantap, Mah! Pokoknya udah gede aku mau jadi kuli bangunan." ("It was fun, Mom! I want to be a builder when I grow up.")

"Hey, masa perempuan jadi kuli bangunan.." ("There's no way that a woman could be a builder..")

"Gak apa-apa, Mah, emansipasi!" ("It's okay, Mom! It's emancipation!")

(Aulia et al., 2021)

The anecdote above contained a contradicting dichotomous critique towards gender characterisation. On the one hand, it contains a "defence" towards women under the name of emancipation. On the other hand, it was a critique of women who always use emancipation, yet they do not want to take on the physically taxing jobs usually taken by men.

Second, gender interaction and dynamics refer to how individuals and groups interact, influence each other, and form the gender norms, roles, and expectations related to gender in the social context. This involves how individuals behave, communicate, and interact according to what they deem as masculine and feminine (Anggraeni, 2021).

Literary texts also portray interaction between characters according to gender stereotypes. For example, there is a dialogue or interaction that reflects the traditional gender roles and expectations, such as men as leaders and women as followers or supporters, as described in Indonesian language textbooks for 8th-grade students on page 117 as follows.

"Biarkan saja, nanti juga hilang sendiri," kata Ayah kalem. (It's okay, it will be recovered soon, said Dad calmly.)

"Bagaimana mungkin Ayah bilang begitu? Ini mata Parki!" (How come did you say so? This is Parki's eye!)

"Bagaimana kalau bintitan itu sesuatu yang berbahaya? Dia harus dibawa ke dokter!" (What if a sty is dangerous? He has to go to the doctor!)

"Astaga!" kata Ayah. (Oh my goodness! Said Dad.)

"Tenang, Bu!" Ayah dahulu sering mengalaminya waktu kecil. Ini bukan hal yang gawat. (It's okay! I also frequently had it when I was a kid. It's not a dangerous thing.)

"Tidak bisa! Ini pasti buruk! Parki harus dibawa ke dokter!" (No way! It must be bad! Parki should go to the doctor!)

Parki memandang kedua orang tuanya berganti-ganti. Sebenarnya, ia juga tidak terlalu paham apa yang terjadi. Ia merasa sependapat dengan Ayah. Bintitan bukan hal yang gawat kok. Temannya, si Alex, juga pernah mengalaminya. Biasanya, bintitan itu hilang dalam seminggu, tetapi Parki merasa ngeri dengan Ibu. Jika Ayah dan Ibu berdebat, Ibu pasti menjadi pemenang. Hal itu sudah terjadi berkali-kali. (Parki looks at his parents one by one. Actually, he does not really understand what happens. He is on his father's side that a sty is not dangerous. His friend, Alex, also had it before. Usually, it will be gone by a week. But Parki feels scared of his mother. If his father and mother argue, his mother will win. It happens all the time.)

"Baiklah," kata Ayah kemudian, "nanti sore kita ke dokter." (Alright, said Dad. We'll go to the doctor this afternoon.)

Tuh, bener, kan? Pasti Ibu yang menang. (See! Mom always wins.)

(Gusfitri & Delfia, 2021)

The excerpt came from a short story entitled *Parki dan Alergi Telur* (Parki and His Egg Allergy) by Maya Lestari Gf. The interaction between men and women also happens in domestic affairs. In the excerpts, "If his father and mother argue, his mother will win. It happens all the time." is a statement projecting a contradicting dichotomy. On the one hand, women are smart in negotiating. On the other hand, men are deemed more "mature" by deliberately giving in to prevent conflict. In fact, they are the true winner.

Third, gender conflict and challenges refer to the clashes or differences caused by roles, expectations, and norms related to gender or sex. Meanwhile, gender challenges refer to any challenges or difficulties encountered by individuals in dealing with their lives according to the regulated gender roles in the community (Nugroho et al., 2023).

Literary texts in schoolbooks also bring conflicts or challenges related to gender roles, such as in any story that describes women's struggles to free themselves from any social restrictions or men facing the expectations of toxic masculinity. These issues are depicted in the Indonesian language textbook for 9th-grade students on page 139.

(Tergambarkan suasana duka ketika suami dan anak-anak dr. Hen datang memeluknya. Pengeras suara di masjid mengabarkan kepergian ibu pada orang-orang. Sanak saudara dan handai taulan

berdatangan. Digambarkan persiapan proses pemakaman. (A somber atmosphere is depicted when Dr. Hen's husband and children hugged her. The loudspeaker of the mosque has broadcast her death to the whole village. All her family and relatives came. They were ready for her funeral)

Suami: kau yakin tidak mau pesan jamuan dari catering saja? (memandang ragu) (Husband: Are you sure that we are not going to hire a catering service for this? (look in doubt))

Dr. Hen: (mengjela nafas panjang) saya hanya mau ibu bahagia karena putrinya bisa memasak. Walaupun Cuma satu, itu juga sajian kematiannya. (sighing) I only want to make my mom happy, knowing that she could cook. Although it's only for once, served at her funeral.

Lampu meredup dan musik sendiri menutup babak ini. The light went dimmed, and a somber song closed the stage.

(Nukman et al., 2022)

In the drama script entitled *Semangkuk Perpisahan* (A Bowl of Farewell) by Miranda Seftiana, Dr Hen stated "*Saya hanya mau Ibu Bahagia karena putrinya bisa memasak. Walaupun Cuma satu, itu juga sajian untuk kematiannya* (I only want to make my mom happy, knowing that she could cook. Although it's only for once, served at her funeral.)". The situation depicts a contradictory dichotomy between gender conflicts and challenges. On the one hand, Dr. Hen encounters a conflict regarding a stigma where a daughter should be able to cook and deal with domestic chores. On the other hand, Dr. Hen successfully passed the challenge by using her potential to be an empowered woman. Meanwhile, her reflection resonates a critique that the pride of a woman's potential is not limited to resolving domestic conflicts.

Fourth, gender theme and message in the literary texts refer to topics and issues related to gender roles, identities, and relations between characters in the story. Meanwhile, gender roles in the literary texts refer to messages or values delivered by the author through narratives or characters in the literary works (Williams, 2022).

Literary texts in textbooks also bring gender-related themes and messages in any stories related to gender equality, rejection of stereotypes, or women's empowerment. These themes deliver important messages and life lessons to the readers regarding gender roles in the community as portrayed in the fantasy story entitled *Keberanian Emas* (The Brave Emas) by Rakhma Subarna in an Indonesian language textbook for 8th-grade students can be seen in Figure 5.

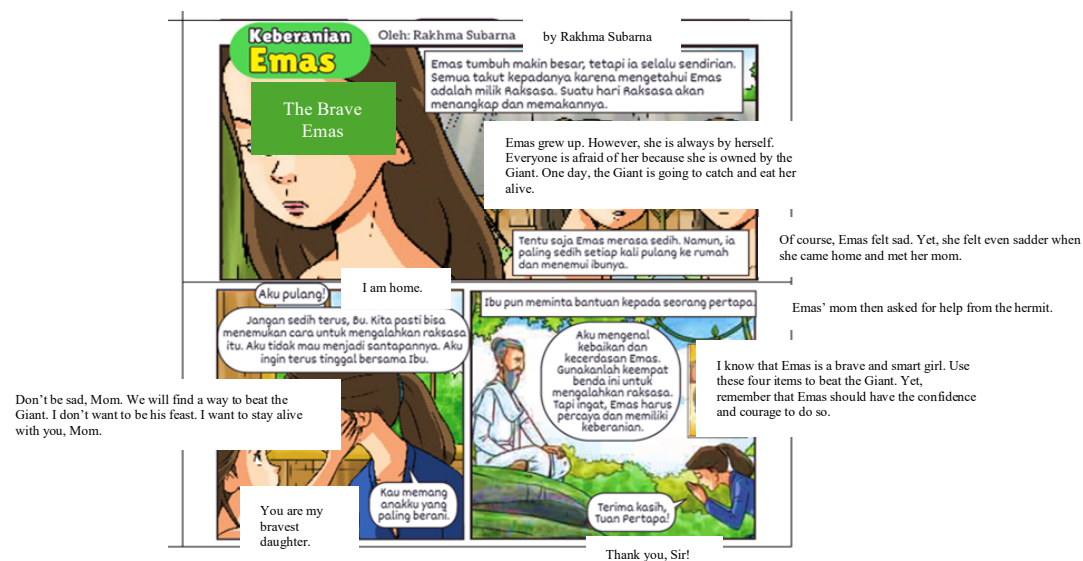


Fig. 5. *Keberanian Emas* (The Brave Emas) (Gusfitri & Delfia, 2021)

Gender themes and messages are projected in the form of stigma that a heroic figure is not always a man. In the story, Emas is a brave girl who defeats the giant. Thus, the themes and messages integrated in the classroom should expand society's understanding of gender equality. The overall framework of gender projection can be seen in Figure 6.

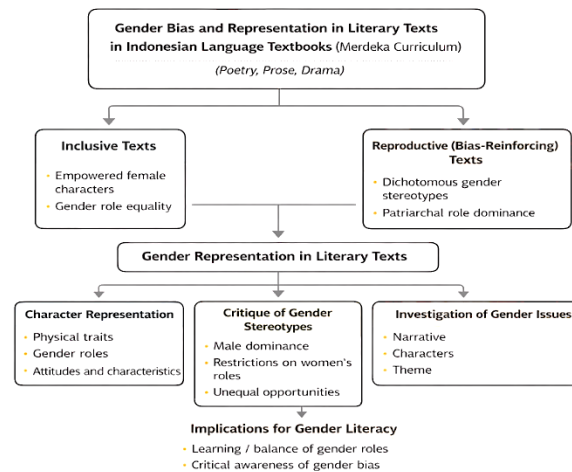


Fig. 6. Gender Projection Framework in the Textbooks

Figure 6 visualizes the conceptual biases and gender representation in the literary texts (poetry, prose, and drama) in the Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum. The elements shift between two poles, inclusive and reproductive texts. Inclusive texts are identified by the existence of empowered female characters and the existence of equal gender roles, while reproductive texts visualize the emphasis on dichotomous stereotypes and the domination of patriarchal roles. The polarity convergences in the field of gender representation in the literary texts analyzed through three main dimensions: character representation (physical characteristics, roles, and behaviors), criticism of gender stereotypes (male domination, restricted female roles, and imbalanced opportunities), and investigations into gender issues (narratives, characters, and themes). All these dimensions lead to the implication of gender literacy, which is shaping learning processes oriented to balanced gender roles and developing students' critical awareness of gender bias in their social life.

Thus, gender projection in literary texts contained in Indonesian language textbooks embedded with the Merdeka curriculum shows plural dynamics shifting between reproduction and transformation of gender values. On the one hand, tendencies of stereotypical emphasis through dichotomous representation exist by placing men as dominant characters and women as subordinates. Yet, on the other hand, some literary texts also present more inclusive alternative narratives, giving spaces for women to appear as active and independent subjects with agency. The findings show that literary texts have double potentials, which are becoming the medium of social ideology reproduction and the platform of criticism and change to unequal gender construction.

The findings emphasize that literary texts in the textbooks not only function as the material of linguistic learning but also work as the instrument of building students' critical awareness of gender issues. Therefore, systematic efforts are crucial in the development and selection of more gender responsive materials, considering the principle of balanced representations, fairness of gender roles, and diverse gender experiences. The efforts will not only make literary texts improve linguistic competence but also contribute to building a more reflective, fair, and inclusive perspective in students' minds when encountering social realities.

This study has several limitations. First, its scope is limited to textual analysis and does not include field research. The analysis focuses on literary texts as part of the content presented in the main Indonesian language textbooks under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. In practice, however, the textbooks used in Indonesia are not limited to the main textbooks; supplementary textbooks are also widely used. Therefore, future research could broaden the scope by examining both main and supplementary textbooks. In addition, future studies are expected to incorporate field research that directly investigates students, as the actual users of these textbooks, to examine their perceptions of gender representations in Indonesian language textbooks and their responses to such representations.

Conclusion

Gender projection in literary texts in the textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum contains two substantial matters. First, gender-related materials in the Indonesian language textbooks under the Merdeka curriculum are integrated through three stages, which are character representation (through physical characteristics, gender roles, attitudes, and behavior), criticisms of gender stereotypes (through the domination of male characters, ambiguous narratives that restrict gender roles, and equal opportunity

between men and women), and investigations of gender issues (through narratives, characters, and themes). Second, gender projection displays the concept of a dichotomous stereotype, which strengthens the rigid and patriarchal gender roles on one side, as well as inclusive and progressive projection on the other. The projection is visible through some strategies: (1) gender characterization, (2) gender interactions and dynamics, (3) gender conflicts and challenges, and (4) gender themes and messages.

Declarations

- Author contribution** : Meina Febriani was responsible for the overall research design and execution of the study. She also led the writing of the manuscript and coordinated collaboration among all co-authors. Rahayu Pristiwati, Ayu Lestari, Ning Imas Ati Zuhrotul Afifah, and Tetyana Lytvynenko contributed to data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of findings. All authors participated in reviewing and revising the manuscript and approved the final version.
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