

Gender Representation in the Verbal and Visual Content of Arabic Textbooks: A Critical Content Analysis Study at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau

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American Psychological Association 7th Edition Style Citation

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Article History

Received : 19/05/2026

Revised : 17/06/2026

Accepted : 18/06/2026

Keywords

Arabic Textbooks; Critical Content Analysis; Gender Representation; Verbal Texts; Visual Texts

Subjects

Applied Linguistics; Gender Studies; Arabic Language Education

Article Structure

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Abstract

This study investigates gender representation in the verbal and visual texts of Arabic textbooks used at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau, namely Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in 1 and 2. The study employed a critical content analysis approach to examine how gender is constructed through both visual and verbal elements in the textbooks. Visual data were analyzed through four indicators: pictures that only included men or women, foregrounded male/female figures in relation to backgrounded ones, pictures of boys and girls, and visual contexts identified as domestic or professional. Verbal data were analyzed through three indicators: men and women as subjects, objects, and possessives in sentences. The findings reveal that male representation remains dominant across both dimensions. In the visual texts, men were more visible, more frequently foregrounded, and more often represented as children than women. In the verbal texts, men also appeared more frequently as subjects, objects, and possessive forms in sentence structures. These findings indicate that gender bias in the textbooks operates simultaneously at both visual and verbal levels. The study confirms that Arabic textbooks function not only as pedagogical tools but also as ideological media that may reproduce gendered power relations. Therefore, the development of Arabic teaching materials in Islamic higher education needs to be more responsive to gender-inclusive and equitable representation.



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A. Introduction

Textbooks serve not only as pedagogical tools for imparting language skills, but also as socio-cultural mediums that produce, normalize, and transmit values, identities, and social relations to students. In this context, gender representation in textbooks is a critical issue because instructional materials can shape students' perceptions of who is deemed worthy of appearing in public spaces, who is associated with authority, and how men and women are constructed within specific social relationships. Recent studies indicate that gender representation in textbooks remains a problematic arena because educational texts often reproduce traditional social roles, disparities in visibility, and gender-based stereotypes that have the potential to reinforce symbolic inequality in the classroom (Dewi et al., 2022; Huang & Singh, 2026; Suchana, 2025; Tabatadze, 2023).

In studies of language textbooks, gender issues become increasingly relevant because language does not operate neutrally. Lexical choices, the order in which characters are mentioned, the distribution of roles in dialogues, conversation topics, and even forms of address and the subject's position in the narrative can serve as ideological markers of the relationship between men and women. Research on English textbooks in Indonesia, for example, reveals patterns of male domination, male firstness, and gendered language stereotypes in the dialogues and monologues of textbooks used in secondary schools (Suwastini et al., 2023). These findings confirm that language teaching materials not only teach linguistic structures but also convey specific perspectives on gender that learners may accept as normal (Suwastini et al., 2023).

Beyond the verbal dimension, gender representation in textbooks is also constructed through the visual dimension. Images, illustrations, gestures, clothing, character positions, activities, and social settings are not merely aesthetic embellishments but integral parts of a system of meaning that operates in tandem with the verbal text. From a multimodal perspective, gender meaning is often produced through the interaction between words and images; thus, analysis that relies solely on verbal language risks overlooking important ideological layers. Marefat and Marzban (2014) emphasize that visual and verbal discourse in textbooks can mutually reinforce each other in shaping gender identity and revealing the ideology underlying such representations. In the context of Arabic textbooks, the appropriateness and representational function of visual elements have also been questioned; research on *"al-'Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik"* indicates that visuals are not neutral elements but rather crucial components that help determine how the material is understood and interpreted by learners (Marefat & Marzban, 2014; Widyanti & Muta'ali, 2022).

In the realm of Arabic textbooks, research on gender representation is indeed beginning to develop, but its scope remains relatively limited. A study by Al-Qatawneh and Al Rawashdeh (2019) of ninth-grade Arabic textbooks in the United Arab Emirates found that male-biased representations remain dominant, including through the "males-first" phenomenon that places women in secondary positions. In Indonesia, Kuraedah et al. (2023) demonstrate that Arabic textbooks recommended by the government also exhibit male dominance both verbally and visually, and represent gender roles in an unbalanced manner across various themes. At the national level, these findings confirm that gender issues in Arabic textbooks are not a marginal issue but a structural problem that persists in widely

used pedagogical materials (Al-Qatawneh & Al Rawashdeh, 2019; S Kuraedah et al., 2023).

However, the existing research landscape still reveals several significant limitations. First, much of the research on Arabic textbooks in Indonesia focuses more on content appropriateness, scientific approaches, curriculum alignment, or general linguistic and visual aspects, rather than specifically on gender representation as an ideological construct (Nurul Hadi, 2018; Sodiq & Alindah, 2024). Second, gender studies on Arabic textbooks in Indonesia tend to be centered on the madrasah level or on specific popular textbooks such as *al-'Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik*, so the context of religious higher education has not been extensively addressed (Ainurrofiq & Ahmad Mujib, 2025; Nur Hadi, 2020; S Kuraedah et al., 2023; Widyanti & Muta'ali, 2022). Third, existing studies more frequently discuss approaches and methods of Arabic language instruction (Suja, Muassomah, et al., 2025; Suja, Syarifaturrahmatullah, et al., 2025). Thus, there remains room for research that positions textbooks as multimodal texts and as practices of ideological representation.

The context of STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau is significant in this discourse because Islamic religious universities serve not only as spaces for teaching Arabic but also as spaces for shaping students' scientific, social, and religious perspectives. In this context, Arabic textbooks have the potential to serve as a medium that does more than merely introduce vocabulary, grammar, and language skills; they can also convey specific social constructions regarding men and women. Since Arabic itself is often misunderstood as a language that is inherently gender-biased, it is important to distinguish between the Arabic grammatical system and the social representations of gender within the instructional materials. Nurcholis (2019) asserts that Arabic cannot simply be positioned as a language that is inherently oppressive toward women; rather, bias more often arises from the practices of representation, interpretation, and social construction that accompany its use. Therefore, what needs to be critiqued in this study is not merely the structure of the Arabic language, but rather how textbooks mobilize verbal and visual resources to shape specific gender images within the learning context.

Based on this exposition, this study aims to analyze gender representations in the verbal and visual texts of Arabic textbooks used at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau through a critical content analysis approach. This focus is important because it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how gender is constructed through language choices, role distribution, order of mention, types of activities, characterization, as well as visual elements such as body position, social space, attributes, and inter-character relationships. Thus, this study is expected to contribute on three levels simultaneously: strengthening research on gender representation in Arabic language education, developing critical evaluations of textbooks in Islamic religious universities, and providing an academic foundation for the development of Arabic teaching materials that are more reflective, inclusive, and gender-sensitive.

Textbooks serve not only as a medium for conveying knowledge and language skills, but also as an ideological medium that produces and reproduces certain social values. In this context, gender representation refers to the ways in which men and women are portrayed, positioned, assigned roles, and interpreted through both verbal and visual elements within instructional materials. Recent

studies indicate that textbooks often still contain symbolic inequalities, whether through the dominance of male visibility, a sequence of mention that prioritizes men, or stereotypical role division (Dalimunthe & Susilo, 2021; Dewi et al., 2022; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). In a study of ninth-grade Arabic textbooks in the United Arab Emirates, Al-Qatawneh and Al Rawashdeh (2019) found that gender representation in the books still exhibits bias, including a tendency toward male firstness. Similar findings were also reported by Tabatadze (2023), who demonstrated that school textbooks can serve as vehicles for perpetuating gender discourse that maintains certain power dynamics.

In language education, the issue of gender representation is particularly significant because textbooks not only teach language structures but also provide models of social interaction for students. Dialogues, readings, exercises, and illustrations in textbooks can shape perceptions of who appears as the main actor, who holds authority, and who is positioned as a supporting figure. Kuraedah et al. (2023) demonstrate that Arabic language textbooks recommended by the Indonesian government remain dominated by male representations, both verbally and visually. This finding aligns with the results of Suwastini et al. (2023)'s study on English textbooks for junior high schools in Indonesia, which identified patterns of male domination, male firstness, and gendered language stereotypes in dialogues and monologues. Thus, language textbooks play an active role in shaping students' social horizons regarding gender relations that are considered normal and legitimate.

In the realm of Arabic language textbooks, studies on gender representation are indeed fewer than those on English language textbooks; however, several significant studies have already shown that issues of gender inequality remain significant. Al-Qatawneh and Al Rawashdeh (2019) found an imbalance in the representation of men and women in Arabic language textbooks in the UAE, including in the frequency of appearance, forms of evaluation, and the order in which characters are mentioned. In Indonesia, Kuraedah et al. (2023) demonstrated that government-approved Arabic textbooks for Islamic schools still represent men more dominantly than women in both text and images. Hadi (2020) also showed that *al-'Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik* can be categorized as a gender-biased textbook, with a high level of bias in images and a moderate level in sentence descriptions.

These findings confirm that the issue of gender in Arabic textbooks is not a marginal issue but a structural problem in the design of learning materials. However, most existing studies remain concentrated on the school context or on specific popular textbooks. The context of Islamic religious higher education remains relatively under-explored, even though at this level Arabic is studied not only as a foreign language but also as a medium of scholarship, an academic identity, and a means of shaping students' socio-religious perspectives. Thus, research within the context of STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau will fill a significant gap in the existing literature.

Based on the literature review above, there are at least two main trends. First, previous research consistently indicates that gender bias in textbooks persists through the dominance of male visibility, role stereotypes, and an unbalanced distribution of social space. Second, in the Indonesian context, studies on gender representation in Arabic language textbooks are indeed beginning to emerge, but

they remain limited and focus more on the school level than on Islamic higher education.

Therefore, the study on Gender Representation in Verbal and Visual Texts of Arabic Textbooks at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau, holds a clear position within the academic landscape. This research not only continues previous studies on gender bias in Arabic textbooks but also extends them to the context of Islamic religious higher education and deepens the analysis through critical content analysis. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the discourse on gender representation in Arabic language education. From a methodological perspective, this study underscores the importance of analyzing the relationship between verbal and visual modes in an integrated manner. From a practical perspective, this study can serve as a foundation for critical evaluation in the development of Arabic language textbooks that are more gender-sensitive, reflective, and inclusive.

B. Method

This study employs Krippendorff (2019) content analysis. This method was chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth interpretation of gender content represented both explicitly and implicitly in textbooks. The analysis will cover verbal texts (readings and dialogues) and visual texts (pictures, illustrations, photos) to gain a comprehensive understanding of how gender is constructed and presented to students. Content analysis in this study involves the grouping, coding, and counting of written and visual texts. To enable accurate conclusions, this study employs the framework proposed by Kuraedah et al. (2022), which involves rigorously analyzing qualitative data and converting it into quantitative data.

In this study, we used the Arabic textbooks officially employed in the intensive Arabic language program for all students at the Sultan Abdurrahman State Islamic College in the Riau Islands (*Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in 1 and 2*). The objective is to conduct a study focusing on how gender is represented in the Arabic textbook used at the Sultan Abdurrahman State Islamic College in the Riau Islands, which implements an intensive Arabic language program for all students. The units of analysis include several components within the textbook, such as unit opening pages, reading texts, and dialogues, as well as accompanying visual elements that have the potential to represent gender content. Detailed information is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Information on the Arabic Textbook

Materi Ajar	Author	Year	Publisher
Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in 1	Language Unit of STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia	2021	Insan Robbani & STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Press
Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in 2	Language Unit of STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia	2021	Insan Robbani & STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Press

In this study, the researchers selected verbal and visual texts depicting gender representations in the reading passages and dialogues found in the book *Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in 1 and 2*, which is used at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia, for text analysis. In addition, some Arabic instructors also use other sources, such as worksheets, materials from the internet, and other books published by private publishers. However, we did not

include these sources in this text analysis study because the specific additional sources may vary from one instructor to another. For the analysis, verbal and visual texts depicting gender bias and gender stereotypes were selected. For the verbal text analysis, we focused only on the readings and dialogues in the textbooks.

In this study, the researchers analyzed all visual components in our visual analysis based on selected topics by adopting a framework (St Kuraedah et al., 2023) for the critical evaluation of gender representations in visual and verbal texts. These visual concepts are (1) images depicting only women or men, (2) images of women or men who are highlighted compared to those placed in the background, (3) images of boys or girls, and (4) visual context, which can be identified as “domestic/professional.” For verbal texts to measure gender representation in textbooks, the researchers focused on three main indicators: (1) the percentage of women and men as subjects in sentences, (2) the percentage of men and women as objects in sentences, and (3) the percentage of men and women as possessors in sentences. The researchers used a manual method to analyze gender representation in the text by conducting content analysis. The frequency of gender representation was calculated to identify feminine and masculine pronouns. Afterward, the researchers compared the two genders. Following the general quantitative analysis of gender representation, the researchers conducted a discursive analysis that emphasized the visibility of gender bias and stereotypes.

C. Findings and Discussion

Gender Representation in Visual Text in Textbooks

Table 2. Visual Text Data

Book	Pictures that only included women/men		Foregrounded pictures of women/men to backgrounded women/men		Pictures of boy/girl children		Visual context, which could be identified as “domestic/professional”	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>Al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah al-Rā’i’ah lil-Mubtadi’īn Volumes 1</i>	20	7	8	2	7	7	10	4
<i>Al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah al-Rā’i’ah lil-Mubtadi’īn Volumes 2</i>	10	2	0	0	9	3	8	10
Total	30	9	8	2	16	7	18	14

Note:

M= Male, F= Female

Table 2 shows that gender representation in the visual content of the two books *Al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah al-Rā’i’ah lil-Mubtadi’īn 1 and 2* tends to feature more men than women. For the indicator “pictures that only included women/men,” the number of images featuring only men reached 30, while those featuring only women numbered only 9. This finding indicates that the visual visibility of men is far more dominant than that of women throughout the books. A similar disparity is evident in the “foregrounded pictures of women/men versus

backgrounded women/men” indicator, where men were recorded 8 times, while women were only 2. This suggests that when characters are placed more prominently in the visual composition, men are more frequently made the focal point than women.

Regarding the “pictures of boy/girl children” indicator, the number of boys is also higher than that of girls, at 16 to 7. This data indicates that the dominance of male representation is not limited to adult characters but is already established in the depiction of child characters. Meanwhile, in the visual context identified as domestic/professional, the gender distribution appears relatively more balanced, but men remain slightly more dominant, at 18 compared to 14 for women. This finding suggests that women are beginning to appear in both domestic and professional visual contexts; however, overall, the visual space of the books is still largely dominated by male representations. Thus, overall, the visual data in both books show a trend of male dominance in terms of visibility, prominence, and the representation of child characters, while women are present in more limited proportions. For further clarification, see Figure 1 below:

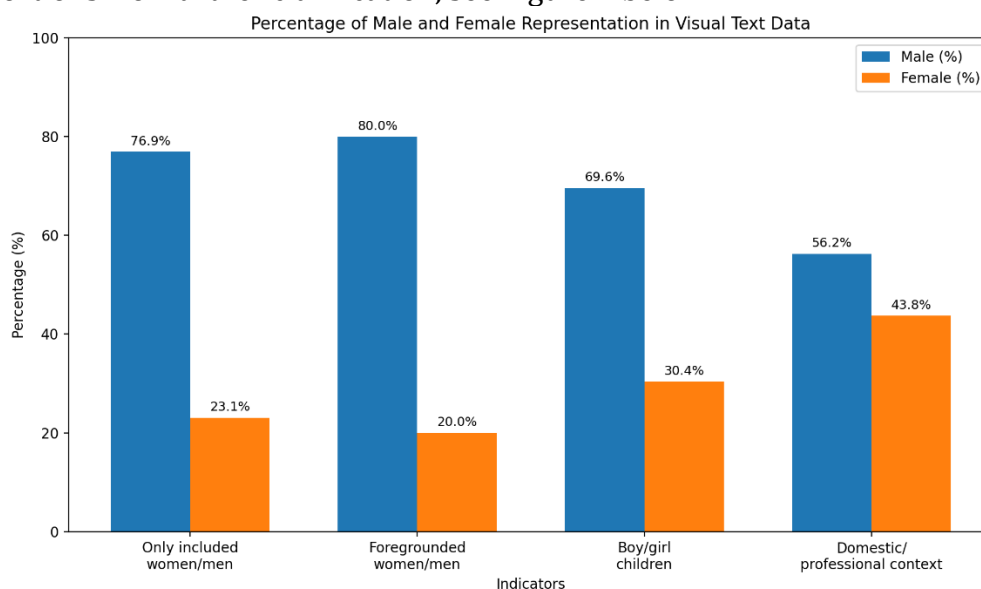


Figure 1. Percentage of Gender Representation in the Visual Content of Textbooks

Gender Representation in the Verbal Text of Textbooks

Table 3. Verbal Text Data

Book	the percentage of women and men as subjects in sentences		the percentage of men and women as objects in sentences		the percentage of men and women as possessive in sentences	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in Volumes 1</i>	162	91	72	46	94	52
<i>Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in Volumes 2</i>	108	27	6	0	14	5
Total	270	118	78	46	108	57

Table 3 shows that gender representation in the verbal text of the two books *Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'īn 1 and 2* also reveals male dominance over females across all analyzed indicators. Regarding the subject indicator in sentences, the number of male references reached 270 occurrences, while female references numbered only 118. This data indicates that men are far more frequently positioned as the primary actors or agents within sentence structures, making them verbally dominant in driving the narrative, dialogue, and actions constructed within the books. The same pattern is evident in the sentence object indicator, where men appear 78 times, while women appear 46 times. This suggests that, although both genders are present as the targets of actions, the representation of men remains higher than that of women.

Male dominance is also evident in the possessive indicators within sentences, with 108 instances for men and 57 for women. This finding suggests that references to ownership, personal relationships, or attributes attached within possessive structures are more frequently associated with male characters than with female ones. When examined by book, *al-Marḥalah al-Ūlā* generally shows a higher number of verbal occurrences for both males and females compared to *al-Marḥalah al-Thāniyah*. However, the underlying pattern remains the same in both books: males are consistently more dominant than females as subjects, objects, or possessors in sentence constructions. Thus, this verbal text data confirms that gender inequality in textbooks is not only evident in visual aspects but is also strongly present in linguistic structure, particularly in the assignment of more prominent syntactic roles to males. For further clarification, see Figure 1 below:

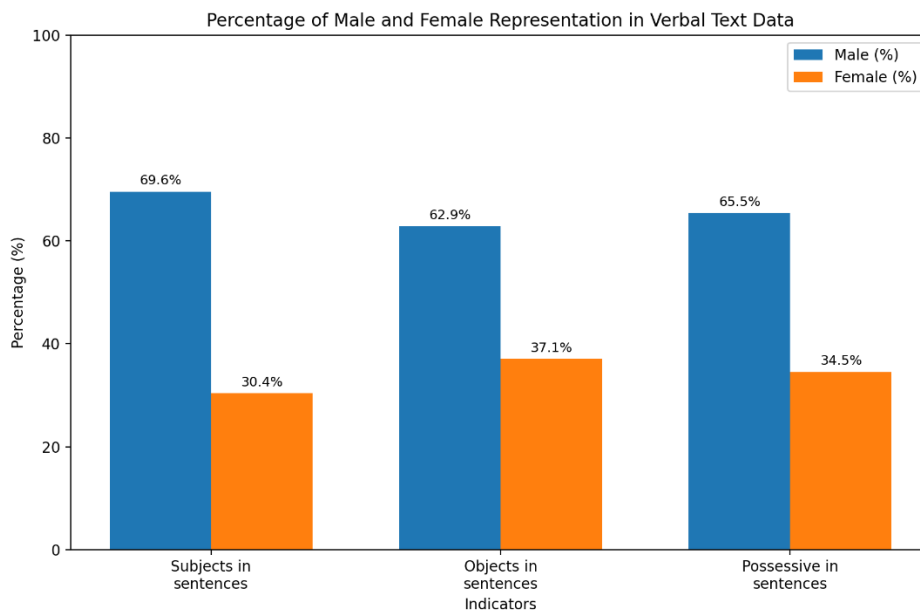


Figure 2. Percentage of Gender Representation in Textbook Verbal Texts

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that gender representation in the textbooks *Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'īn 1 and 2* is still dominated by males, both in visual and verbal content. In the visual aspect, males more frequently appear as the sole figure in an image, are more often placed in a prominent position, and are more frequently depicted as children compared to females. In the verbal aspect, males are also more dominant as subjects, objects, and possessors

within sentence structures. This pattern indicates that gender dominance operates not only at the level of visibility but also at the level of syntactic role distribution and the focal point of representation within the textbook.

These findings align with the research by Al-Qatawneh and Al Rawashdeh (2019), which showed that Arabic textbooks in the UAE still contain gender representation disparities, including a tendency toward male-firstness and male dominance in character appearances. These research results also reinforce the study by St Kuraedah et al. (2023), which found that government-approved Arabic textbooks in Indonesia are still dominated by male representation, both verbally and visually. Thus, the patterns found in textbooks at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau can be interpreted as part of a broader trend in the design of Arabic language textbooks, where men are more frequently positioned as the primary social figures.

In the visual dimension, the dominance of men in categories of images that feature only one gender and images that place the figure in the foreground indicates that men are not only more frequently present but are also more frequently made the center of visual attention. From a multimodal perspective, the emphasis on such positioning is significant because it determines who is read as the primary figure in the representation. This finding aligns with the argument by Marefat & Marzban (2014) that gender meanings in textbooks are shaped through the interaction between verbal and visual elements, so the visual positioning of characters cannot be viewed as merely decorative. In the context of this study, the foregrounding of men reinforces the centrality of masculinity that also emerges at the verbal level.

The dominance of male representation is also evident in the verbal data, particularly regarding the subject function. This is significant because the subject in a sentence typically relates to agency, the primary actor, and the focal point of the action. When men appear far more frequently as subjects, the textbook is linguistically constructing men as the primary agents within the social world depicted by the text. This pattern aligns with the findings of Suwastini et al. (2023), which indicate the presence of male domination and male firstness in English textbooks in Indonesia. In this study, this dominance is even more pronounced because it appears not only in the order of mention but also in the distribution of syntactic functions, making men more discursively active than women.

The finding that men also appear more frequently as objects and possessors indicates that men are not only more active as agents but also more dominant as the focal point of reference within the linguistic relational network. This means that the textbook text more frequently speaks about men, refers to men, and attributes ownership or social relationships to men. This pattern reinforces Nur Hadi (2020) findings, which revealed gender bias in *Al-'Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik*, particularly in sentence descriptions and visual representations. Thus, this study expands upon previous findings by demonstrating that similar biases are also present in Arabic textbooks designed for the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

However, the results of this study should not be interpreted as evidence that the Arabic language is inherently gender-biased. What appears dominant in this study is bias at the level of representation, not at the level of the language system itself. In this regard, the issue is not the existence of masculine and feminine forms in Arabic, but rather the representational decisions in the textbooks: who is chosen

as the main character, who is given agency, and who is more frequently present in both visual and verbal social spaces. This perspective aligns with Nurcholis (2019), who asserts that gender bias in Arabic language learning more often arises from representational practices and social constructions than from the Arabic language system itself.

Theoretically, the findings of this study confirm that textbooks function as ideological mediums capable of reproducing gender power relations. This aligns with Tabatadze (2023) argument, which demonstrates that textbooks can perpetuate gender discourse and maintain certain social hierarchies through seemingly natural representations. In the context of this study, male dominance at the visual and verbal levels indicates that textbooks have not yet fully presented balanced gender relations. Therefore, the evaluation of Arabic textbooks, particularly in Islamic religious universities, should not only focus on linguistic and pedagogical aspects but also on gender sensitivity within their representational structures.

Overall, this study demonstrates that gender bias in the examined textbooks operates consistently on two levels simultaneously: visual and verbal. Men are more dominant in terms of visibility, prominence of position, and syntactic function, while women are present in more limited proportions. These findings underscore that the development of more inclusive Arabic textbooks remains a critical need, particularly within Islamic higher education settings, which not only cultivate language proficiency but also shape students' social perspectives.

D. Conclusion

This study shows that the textbooks *Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Rā'i'ah lil-Mubtadi'in* 1 and 2, used at STAIN Sultan Abdurrahman Kepulauan Riau, still exhibit an unbalanced gender representation in both visual and verbal aspects. In visual content, male figures are more dominant in terms of visibility, positional prominence, and representation of child characters. In contrast, female figures appear in more limited numbers and receive less equal representation. In verbal content, a similar pattern is observed, with males appearing more frequently as subjects, objects, and possessors in sentence structures. These findings indicate that male dominance is not only reflected in the frequency of appearance but also in the distribution of grammatical roles and narrative focal points, confirming that gender representation in the analyzed textbooks remains unbalanced. This also shows that the research objectives stated in the introduction have been achieved through the findings and discussion presented, ensuring consistency across chapters. Theoretically, the results reinforce the view that textbooks function as ideological media that reproduce gender power relations through both verbal and visual representations. Practically, this implies the need to evaluate and develop Arabic teaching materials that are more gender-sensitive, so that language learning is not limited to linguistic aspects but also reflects social justice and inclusive representation. However, this study is limited by its focus on only two textbooks, which restricts generalizability, by its verbal analysis, which does not cover all components, such as exercises and instructions, and by the absence of investigation into how lecturers and students interpret these representations. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the corpus, compare locally and internationally published textbooks, and combine content analysis with reception studies to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the

construction of gender discourse in Arabic language education within Islamic educational contexts.

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