

ADDRESSING DISABILITY REPRESENTATION IN THE INDONESIAN ELT TEXTBOOKS *ENGLISH FOR NUSANTARA* OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract: ELT textbooks are pivotal in delivering foreign language materials and inserting moral and intercultural values. Particularly in the *Merdeka* curriculum, textbooks are essential for building students' noble characters, promoting the values of equity and diversity, and reflecting inclusivity. In this regard, ELT textbooks are expected to provide inclusive learning materials, including the visual and textual representation of disabilities. As research on disability representation in Indonesian ELT textbooks has remained underexplored, this present research attempts to address the lacuna by discussing how people with disabilities are portrayed in the ELT textbooks *English for Nusantara* devoted to junior high school. The study employed a two-phase exploration of disability representation through content and multimodal discourse analysis, delving into textual and visual artifacts in the textbooks. The results reveal that the portrayal of people with disabilities in the textbooks is still limited. In addition, the textbooks describe the characters with disability in positive stereotypes, yet they do not provide sufficient representation within society. The researchers, thus, highlighted the need to cover more balanced and broader disability-related content both in texts and images in the ELT textbooks.

Keywords: disability, *English for Nusantara*, Indonesian ELT textbooks

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v36i2/207-227>

With the prevalence of an inclusive approach and its practices, social diversity as a value has increasingly gained traction in social policy, including in education (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a). Save the Children (2016) adds that inclusive education, as one dimension of a rights-based quality education, responds positively to the individual learning needs, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, cultural background, nationality, or other characteristics. In other words, this educational approach puts substantial emphasis on promoting greater equal access to quality education that addresses diverse needs and increases the visibility of minority groups. Waitoller and Thorius (2016) contend that curriculum materials and content standards need to reflect the diverse backgrounds, histories, and narratives of people in society, including those with disabilities. The inclusion of students with varying abilities and needs in mainstream schools can allow them to learn together with their peers who have various characteristics, which eventually helps to develop their full potential, promote positive values and attitudes, and

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enhance socio-emotional development. In addition, the practice of inclusive education aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted by the United Nations (2025), particularly on Goal 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially vulnerable populations, such as people with disabilities.

The Indonesian government has developed policies and programs in its inclusive education. Referring to *Data Pokok Pendidikan (Dapodik)*, the main education data, the government has established approximately 40.164 inclusive schools from primary to secondary school levels in order to provide education for students with special needs (Ihsan, 2024). Despite the increasing number of inclusive schools in Indonesia, the number of children with disabilities who cannot attend school is also constantly increasing. There are several challenges to the implementation of inclusive education, such as limited resources, a lack of qualified inclusive educators, disparity distribution of inclusive educational facilities, and low societal awareness and attitude. Awareness and attitude toward inclusive education also vary among members of society; some have grown awareness and a better understanding of inclusive education, yet some negative stereotypes or biases, particularly on people with disabilities, still prevail.

To nullify the negative stereotypes, an inclusive culture should be developed and strengthened, such as through inclusive training and education for teachers, parents, and students. One sample of class-based initiatives is by encouraging students to collaborate on projects or assignments. This allows the opportunities to learn from one another, build mutual understanding, and promote respect toward differences. Teachers can also incorporate various inclusive learning media and/or textbooks that depict various disabilities and cultural backgrounds to break down stereotypes, appreciate differences, and develop social empathy. The inclusion of people with disabilities in textbooks can help disabled students feel seen and valued, while non-disabled students can learn to appreciate differences, engage various perspectives, and develop a fine-grained understanding of the social needs and reality of people with disabilities (Pogorzelska, 2016). Such a representation of disabilities will create positive, inclusive learning environments and nurture social acceptance within the school community.

A number of studies delving into the representation of people with disabilities have been conducted in some countries, such as Iran (Cheng & Beigi, 2011), Poland and Sweden (Pogorzelska, 2016), Spain (González-Palomares & Rey-Cao, 2022; Vidal-Albelda & Martínez-Bello, 2017), Iran and England (Hodkinson et al., 2018), Pakistan (Gulab & Khokhar, 2018), Jordan (Abu-Hamour et al., 2019), and Hungary (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a, 2023b). Those studies presented conclusive findings, noting that people with disabilities remain underrepresented in school textbooks. In the Indonesian setting, such a line of inquiry has to date remained sparse. In 2022, the Indonesian government has been implementing a new curriculum which focuses not only on the cognitive but also the moral dimensions, one of which relates to actively building an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society. New textbooks have also been published and are expected to address those inclusive points.

With regard to the scant attention to inclusive education in the ELT textbooks, the researchers only found one study conducted by Ulya et al. (2025) that has shown types of disability representation in the ELT textbooks entitled “*English for Nusantara*” grades VII, VIII, and IX. The study engaged descriptive content analysis, which underscored the types of disabilities, yet it lacked a deeper exploration of how ideational meanings were embedded in

textual and visual artifacts, and the combination thereof. Examining the interaction between those two modalities allows for a more nuanced understanding of how disabilities are represented in Indonesian ELT textbooks, which cannot be achieved by content analysis. Thus, an examination grounded in a more fine-grained theoretical lens is crucially required. The present study endorses in-depth multimodal discourse analysis to reveal how images and texts in *English for Nusantara* are interconnected to build systematic explanations and socially comprehensive meanings (Hardukiewicz-Chojnowska & Pol, 2021; Wang, 2021). Without such an investigation, some potential problems may arise, such as inaccurate understandings of disability among junior high school students.

In order to fill the gap, while extending the previous investigation by (Ulya et al., 2025), this study employs an in-depth scrutiny of how disability is represented through multimodal artifacts in *English for Nusantara* grades VII, VIII, and IX, which have been nationally endorsed in almost all junior high schools. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What types of disability representations are covered in the “*English for Nusantara*” textbooks? and (2) How do these textbooks construct meaning about disability through textual and visual modalities? This line of inquiry is devoted to both empirical and practical contributions by carefully examining the extent to which the textbooks emphasize inclusivity for people with disabilities. By extension, the inquiry aspires to nurture a wider attention to inclusive textbooks in the future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Importance of Inclusive Textbooks

In Indonesia, the number of children (5-19 years) with disabilities is approximately 2.2 million or 3.3 percent of the total number of children (Syarifah, 2023). The Indonesian government has applied a number of policies and programs to support children with disabilities, such as providing special curricula and schools for more inclusive education. This commitment is formalized in Indonesian law (*UU Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*, 2003), stating that special educational services are provided for students with special needs. The mission is further strengthened by *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, Dan Teknologi Nomor 48 (2023)*, focusing on inclusive education. The practice of inclusive education, per se, benefits the students with disabilities, such as increased social acceptance regardless of the differences and/or impairment they have. However, a number of studies have reported that being part of the mainstream educational settings does not guarantee that children with disabilities will be accepted, valued, and immersed in the classroom, especially because most non-disabled children ignore their peers with special needs (Mamas et al., 2020). In addition, negative attitudes toward students with special needs remain prevalent, such as bullying, teasing, and social distancing (Alnahdi, 2019; Schwab, 2017). It is therefore imperative to equip students with relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes to nurture social acceptance for people with disabilities (Pogorzelska, 2016). In this case, teachers play a crucial role in augmenting the awareness of disability in teaching and learning processes, while promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom communities. In so doing, a wide range of learning media, activities,

and resources, including textbooks that highlight individuals with special needs, can be deployed to help students learn about disabilities and foster inclusive values.

Textbooks have a prominent position in school curricula as they present knowledge and culture in society, covering products, norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors (Pogorzelska, 2016). It plays a vital role in providing learning resources, supporting the learning process, directing the instruction, and facilitating the design of learning and assessments. Furthermore, textbooks provide the presentation of subject matter, develop students' learning autonomy, present ideological/social meaning, embed ideas about multiculturalism as well as globalization, and cultivate noble characters and identities (Kiss & Weninger, 2017). Thus, ideal textbooks should encompass disability-related content to promote respect and equality as the precursors to a growing inclusive atmosphere. These contents will help non-disabled students to learn about disability, which is probably new for them, and subsequently mitigate the barriers to education among people with disabilities (Browning & Cagle, 2017; Knoll et al., 2017) and help students to discover, discuss, and change the negative stereotypes of disability (Symeonidou, 2018). The portrayal of disability will also affect the self-image and motivation of students with disabilities. In conclusion, in order to support the practice of inclusive education in the Indonesian educational context, school textbooks should also accommodate the representation of people with disabilities.

Multimodal Textbook Analysis

Textbooks are one of the samples of multimodal artifacts as they consist of written texts, images, audio, and even videos to facilitate students' learning. Engaging multimodal resources can enhance students' understanding of social values. Vast empirical studies have explored diverse social values in textbooks through multimodal analysis. These studies document the pivotal roles of multimodal resources to deliver linguistic learning content and construct deeper social meaning and ideological messages (Damayanti et al., 2021; Walton & Dixon, 2022; Weninger, 2021) However, previous research on Indonesian ELT textbooks rarely examined disability representation through a multimodal lens, except for the study by (Ulya et al., 2025), which engaged descriptive content analysis. Thus, a deeper analysis of Indonesian ELT textbooks through a multimodal lens into disability representation becomes increasingly critical.

This current study adopted Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), focusing on the critical roles of social context in meaning-making (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014). The framework highlights three components of meaning resources, encompassing ideational, interpersonal, and textual resources (Damayanti & Febrianti, 2020). This research focuses on ideational metafunction to document how meanings are constructed and connected across verbal and visual resources in the *English for Nusantara* textbooks. In SFL theory, the Intersemiotic Complementarity framework allows the examination of the interconnectedness between verbal and visual elements embedded in texts (Royce, 1998). Moreover, Royce (1998) explained that the ideational intersemiotic complementarity elaborates the four types of ideational intersemiosis, consisting of identification, activity, circumstance, and attributes. Each of these can be represented through several modalities in texts. In addition, how textual and visual texts construct meaning can be seen through the types of relationships within ideational intersemiosis,

covering repetition (identical experiential meaning), synonymy (the same or similar experiential meaning although they are in different signs), antonymy (opposite experiential meaning), meronymy (the relation between the part and whole of something), hyponymy (the relation between a general class of something and its sub-classes), and collocation (an expectancy or high probability to co-occur in a field or subject area). By applying multimodal analysis, the current study extends previous research by Ulya et al. (2025), which has only reported disability categories and their frequency. Engaging a more nuanced theoretical and methodological lens, this study aims to expand the discourse on how meaning is produced and distributed through the interaction of texts and images in the *English for Nusantara* textbooks.

METHOD

This present study investigated the representation of people with disability in ELT textbooks entitled *English for Nusantara* grade VII, VIII, and IX at junior high schools in Indonesia. These three books, published by *Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* in 2022, have been nationally endorsed for classroom use. Qualitative approaches were employed to critically and comprehensively analyze the textual and visual contents, with the orientation to interpret how people with disabilities are portrayed in all units and examine to what extent the representations appear (Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2019).

Data Collection

The researchers amassed the data by carefully reading all pages of the three *English for Nusantara* textbooks. This systematic review aimed to compile all the texts and images representing disabilities. A total of 16 instances that portrayed disability were identified. Those data were then categorized into two types: textual data, which cover reading passages, exercises, and dialogues; and visual data referring to the visual resources that accompanied the texts. The collected texts and images were subsequently coded using the categorization frameworks adapted from Gulya & Fehérvári (2023a) and the World Health Organization (2011). The coding categories are hereby presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Categories


| Data Types | Categories | Sub-Categories | Description |
|------------|------------------------|---|---|
| Texts | 1. Stories | 1.1 Narrative texts involving disabled characters | Texts in the form of stories, dialogues, or narrative passages where a character with disability is present or discussed. |
| | 2. Informational Texts | 2.1 Evidence-based disability information | Descriptive, factual, or instructional texts providing explicit information about disability, accessibility, inclusion, or related social issues. |
| Images | 1. Gender | 1.1 Male | The disabled individual is clearly identified as male. |
| | | 1.2 Female | The disabled individual is clearly identified as female |
| | | 1.3 Mixed Group | Both male and female disabled individuals appear together in the same image. |

| Data Types | Categories | Sub-Categories | Description |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| | 2. Age | 2.1 Child | Characters appear to be under 18 years old. |
| | | 2.2 Adult | Characters appear to be approximately 18–60 years old. |
| | | 2.3 Elderly Person | Characters appear to be above 60 years old. |
| | 3. Relation | 3.1 Close Relation | The disabled individual is shown with close family members or close friends, indicating a personal bond. |
| | | 3.2 Distant Relation | The disabled individual is pictured with people who do not appear to have a close personal relationship (e.g., classmates, acquaintances, public). |
| | 4. Participation | 4.1 Alone | The disabled individual is shown alone |
| | | 4.2 With other people with disabilities | The disabled individual appears together with one or more individuals with disabilities. |
| | | 4.3 With nondisabled people | The disabled individual appears with individuals without disabilities. |
| | 5. Physical Activity | 5.1 Inactive | The individual is shown sitting, standing, or posing without active movement. |
| | | 5.2 Active: Sport | Participating in physical exercise or sports activities. |
| | | 5.3 Entertainment | Engaged in leisure or entertainment activities (e.g., music, dancing, performing). |
| | | 5.4 Work | Engaged in work-related activities, either formal or informal. |
| | | 5.5 Education | Depicted in learning or teaching settings (e.g., classroom, studying, school tasks). |
| | | 5.6 Daily Routine | Engaged in everyday activities (e.g., eating, walking, shopping, commuting). |
| | 6. Type of Disability | 6.1 Visual Impairment | Indicated by visual aids such as white cane, braille, or special glasses. |
| | | 6.2 Hearing Impairment | Indicated by hearing aids or use of sign language. |
| | | 6.3 Physical Disability | Visible mobility impairments such as wheelchair, crutches, or prosthetics. |
| | | 6.4 Cognitive Disability | Suggests intellectual or developmental disabilities. |
| | | 6.5 Mental/ Emotional Disability | Suggests mental health or emotional challenges. |
| | 7. Social Status | 7.1 Elite | Depicted with high social status (e.g., public figure, professional, formal attire). |
| 7.2 Non-elite | | Depicted as ordinary individuals in everyday contexts. | |

The coding process was carried out through several stages: familiarization with the data, independent coding, discussion, and agreement. The process was managed by three coders with master's degree academic backgrounds in applied linguistics and English education. The involvement of three coders aimed at ensuring a trustworthy coding process. Three coders

worked independently based on the predetermined coding categories. To achieve intercoder reliability, the degree to which the coders agreed on assigning categories to discourse units was consistently evaluated through a collaborative interpretive approach (van Enschoot et al., 2024). The coders compared and discussed the results to resolve emergent discrepancies while establishing accurate analysis. Table 2 presents samples of how the three coders initially coded the data. The initial independent coding results exhibit both agreements and disagreements. The coders subsequently revisited each interpretation result based on the textual and visual evidence alongside the operational coding scheme. When differences arose, the researchers reevaluated the contextual cues and referred back to the coding definitions to reach the final consensus.

Table 2. Sample of Coding among Three Coders

| Data | Categories | Coder 1 | Coder 2 | Coder 3 | Final Consensus |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|---|
|  | Text Images | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories • Male • Child • - • Alone • Active: Sport • Physical Disability • Elite | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform Text • Male • Child • - • - • Alone • Inactive • Physical disability • Non-elite | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories • Male • Child • - • Alone • Active: Sport • Physical Disability • Non-elite | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories • Male • Child • - • Alone • Active: Sport • Physical Disability • Non-elite |

Data Analysis

The researchers used a two-phase analysis combining content analysis and multimodal discourse analysis for in-depth interpretation of both explicit and implicit messages in a textual or visual artifact (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf et al., 2017), as shown in Figure 1.

Content analysis was engaged to address the first research question, while multimodal analysis was devoted to the second one. The researchers employed content analysis by identifying all disability-related textual and visual data. To avoid bias, operational definitions of disability based on the World Health Organization (2011) and Gulya & Fehérvári (2023a) were employed. In the second phase, selected data (4 samples out of 16 data obtained from the textbooks) were further examined using multimodal analysis to explore how textual and visual artifacts constructed meanings about disability (Jewitt et al., 2016). These 4 samples were selected because they contained both textual and visual resources that constituted verbal–visual meaning-making. Similar data were excluded from the analysis.

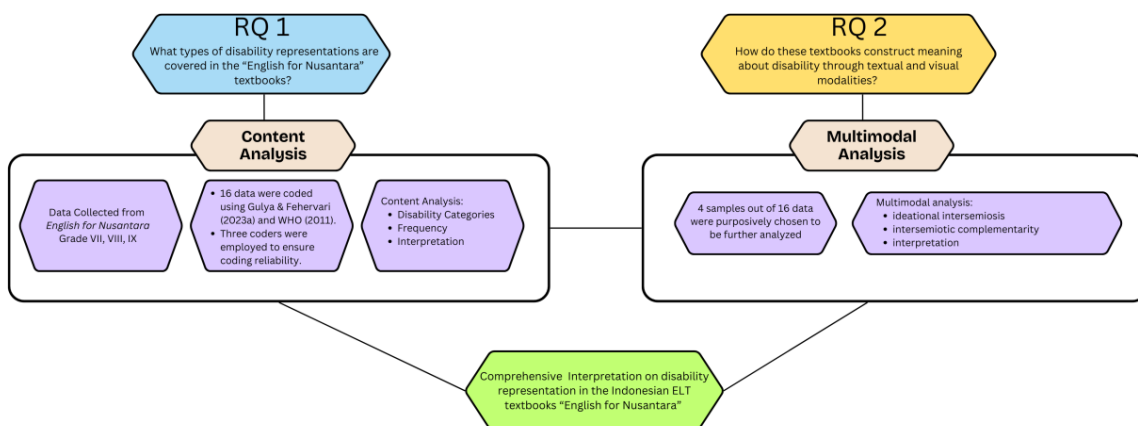


Figure 1. Data Analysis Procedure

As this current research focused on ideational meanings, textual data were analyzed in the lexical choices, and visual data were analyzed to identify the actions and non-actions that signified the disability representation (Damayanti et al., 2025). Further, the researchers employed ideational intersemiosis and intersemiotic complementarity frameworks to examine interconnectedness between textual and visual elements (Royce, 1998). The multimodal analysis sought to establish a comprehensive understanding of the representation of disabilities. To ensure the credibility of data analysis, the sample analysis is shown in Table 3.

The samples of multimodal analysis depict the synergy of visual and textual artifacts, complementing each other to construct the meaning. Both portray disability as a normal aspect within the school context and frame the disabled characters as active, capable members of the learning community.

Table 3. Sample of Multimodal Analysis

| Sample | Ideational Intersemiosis | Ideational Intersemiosis Complementarity | Interpretation |
|----------|---|---|--|
| Grade IX | <p>Visual</p> <p>Identification: The character in a wheelchair is shown speaking in multiple panels.</p> <p>Activity: Speaking gestures, attentive posture, and group interaction around him.</p> <p>Circumstance:</p> | <p>Repetition Verbal “I have an idea” = Visual gesture of explaining Synonymy Peers say “I agree,” “I think you’re right” = visual nodding and attentive postures. Meronymy</p> | <p>The text and image show Made not as a “disabled student” but as a capable team member and idea generator. His wheelchair is visible, but it is not mentioned explicitly in text; identity is centered on cognitive, leadership,</p> |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>214 English for Nusantara untuk SMP/MTs Kelas IX</p> <p>215 Chapter 4 Upcycling Used Materials</p> | <p>School corridor, school uniforms, and peers surrounding him.</p> <p>Attributes: Calm expression, assertive hand gestures, engaged eye contact.</p> <p>Text Identification: “I have already got an idea in my mind.” — identifies the boy (Made) as the contributor.</p> <p>Activity: Contributing ideas, explaining, and agreeing/disagreeing in group discussion.</p> <p>Circumstance: School setting, class project on recycling things.</p> <p>Attributes: Calm expression, assertive hand gestures, engaged eye contact.</p> | <p>The wheelchair is shown visually but not mentioned verbally.</p> <p>Hyponymy: School project (general) = specific actions (idea-sharing, problem-solving)</p> <p>Collocation: Disability, teamwork, creativity</p> | <p>confidence, and social abilities.</p> |
|---|--|---|--|

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Types of Disability Presented in the “English for Nusantara” ELT Textbooks

Subsequent to the data collection from the three textbooks, the frequency of disability representations through texts and visuals is quantified. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Disability Representation in “*English for Nusantara*” for Grades VII, VIII, and IX

| Data Types | Categories | Sub Categories | Freq |
|--------------------|--|-------------------------------------|------|
| Text | Stories | | 13 |
| | Other (texts with evidence-based information about disability) | | 1 |
| Image | Gender | Male | 11 |
| | | Female | 2 |
| | Age | Child | 13 |
| | | Adult | 0 |
| | | Elderly Person | 0 |
| | Relation | Close relation (family and friends) | 13 |
| | | Distant relation | 0 |
| Participation | Alone | 2 | |
| | Together with people with disabilities | 0 | |
| | Together with nondisabled people | 11 | |
| Physical Activity | Inactive | 3 | |
| | Active: sport | 1 | |
| | Entertainment | 0 | |
| | Work | 0 | |
| | Education | 7 | |
| | Daily routine | 2 | |
| Type of Disability | Visual impairment | 0 | |
| | Hearing impairment | 0 | |
| | Physical disability | 13 | |
| | Cognitive disability | 0 | |
| | Mental health and emotional disability | 0 | |
| Social Status | Elite | 0 | |
| | Non elite | 13 | |

Table 4 reports 14 textual data showing disability-related contents, including 9 texts accompanied by illustrations and the rest had no supported images. Among those data, 13 were categorized as stories in the form of stories, dialogues, or narrative passages; only one was categorized as evidence-based information text. Some samples of textual excerpts are shown below:

Excerpt 1

*“Finally, the boy standing on the right is Made. He uses **a crutch.**”*

Excerpt 2

*“Made is **special.** He uses a **crutch** and sometimes uses a **wheelchair.**”*

Excerpt 3

*“After all, I enjoyed the tour, especially since **the facilities were friendly for people with disabilities like me** “Made was happy with the tour because **the facilities supported people with disabilities.**”*

Further, based on the image categories, there were 13 images of people with disability, consisting of 11 males and 2 females. The male characters referred to the single character, namely *Made*, a student who appeared in the textbooks in Grades VII, VIII, and IX. The female character also referred to the single character (*Monita's sister*) that only appeared in the textbook for grade VII. No other female characters with disabilities were found in the textbooks for either grade VIII or IX. All characters identified with disability were students aged 13-15 years old at grades VII-IX of junior high school. No adult or elderly characters with disabilities appeared in the textbooks. Further, in terms of social interaction, the 13 images displayed characters alongside individuals with whom they had close relationships. No images presented the characters interacting with acquaintances, unfamiliar individuals, or other people with disabilities. In addition, the physical activities done by the characters are categorized as active, including sporting activities (n=1), studying at school (n=7), family activity (n=2). The identified disabilities merely referred to physical disability as indicated by the characters that used a crutch/wheelchair. There was no data related to a person with visual impairment, hearing impairment, cognitive disability, or mental and emotional disability. Finally, all the images refer to the non-elite group, which refers to characters who had ordinary jobs and lives. The three ELT textbooks included no portrayal of famous or successful characters with disabilities, such as actors, athletes, artists, and scientists.

The Representation of Disability through Textual and Visual Artifacts in “English for Nusantara” ELT Textbooks

The content and multimodal discourse analysis revealed that disability is mostly represented through male child characters, particularly through *Made*, a character with physical disability (*Made* uses a crutch/wheelchair). Across the three textbooks, the textual and visual resources mostly focus on male youths, but female adults with disability are hardly visible. All of the textbooks portrayed characters with disabilities through texts and images alongside their non-disabled peers. These characters with disabilities are depicted to partake in school activities with their friends, sports, and dinner with families, which capture a multitude of contexts associated with an inclusive environment, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Sample of Texts and Images Representing Disabled Characters and Their Social Activities in *English for Nusantara* Textbook

The *English for Nusantara* textbooks for grades VII, VIII, and IX display Made, the one with physical disability. He appears active as a basketball player, which underscores his active engagement regardless of his physical limitations. Then, the disability-related texts presented neutral, descriptive language, i.e., he uses a crutch and sometimes uses a wheelchair, which is supported by corresponding visual depictions of assistive devices (see Figure 3). Both textual and visual artifacts described the character as being “special”, signifying the unique abilities to be supported with assistive devices. The word ‘special’ emphasizes that the standard approach is not always adequate for satisfying this particular need. However, disability representation was limited to physical disability. The absence of other disability types (e.g., sensory or cognitive), coupled with the consistent depiction of non-elite social status in ordinary, school-based settings, may narrow the understanding of broader disabilities among junior high school learners.

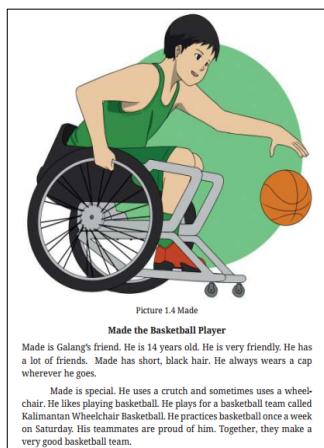


Figure 3. Text and Image Depicting People with Disability

As reported previously, all identified characters with disabilities belong to a non-elite social group. They actively engaged in daily activities, most of which were portrayed wearing uniforms and taking part in school activities, such as group discussions about school assignments/projects with classmates, as represented in Figure 4. The figure illustrates that the school has implemented an inclusive environment in which students with disabilities and non-disabled ones interact, collaborate, and gain equal access to education.

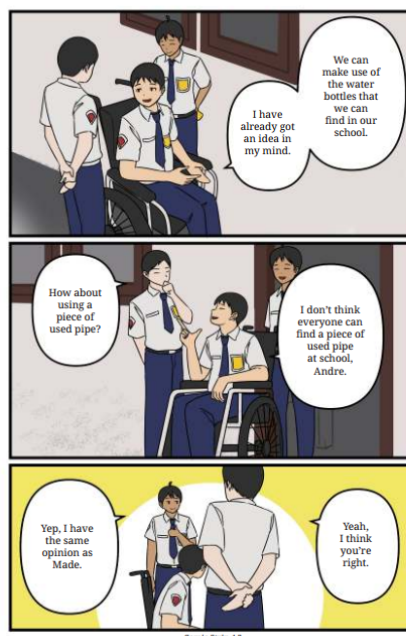


Figure 4. Texts and Images Depicting People with Disability at the School

The ideational intersemiosis analysis revealed a strong interconnection between textual and visual artifacts in representing disabled characters through identification, activity, circumstance, and attributes. Their activities include everyday school interactions, sports, group discussions, and creative projects, showing that disabled characters perform the same social and academic roles as their non-disabled peers. In the circumstance analysis, the text and images situate the characters in some common scenes, such as school, house, and public places, clearly signaling disability integration in mainstream environments. Finally, the attributes assigned to disabled characters are largely positive, including “friendly,” “motivated,” and “creative.” Notably, as grade levels progress, characters express self-confidence and leadership, indicating the increment of agency among characters with disability. Moreover, the intersemiosis analysis demonstrates that disability is constructed not as a medical deficit but as an integral aspect of the characters’ participatory, social, and academic identities. Textual and visual elements in the textbooks work hand in hand to construct equitable identity, without any exaggerated or sensationalized depiction of disability.

The ideational intersemiotic complementarity was shown through repetition, synonymy, meronymy, hyponymy, and collocation. Repetition appears when the text describes a disabled character's roles or actions alongside pertinent visual illustrations. Synonymy is evident when verbal expressions of capability (e.g., "I like playing basketball," "I have an idea") align with visual images, such as a confident posture in doing sports or collaborative activities with peers. Meronymy appears when assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and crutches, are primarily illustrated through visuals. Hyponymy occurs when visual scenes illustrate specific instances of general textual claims, such as: "He plays for a basketball team called Kalimantan Wheelchair Basketball," and the visual showed individuals practicing basketball. Collocation was presented through disability paired with contexts of teamwork, achievement, and friendship, altogether contributing to positive and respectful inclusion. Antonymy, unfortunately, does not appear in the dataset, indicating that text and images never contradict each other in the depiction of disability.

Overall, the analysis results exhibit the unique portrayals of disability-related content in that the textbooks follow distinctive patterns in representing disability across the grades. In grade VII, disability was shown with explicit identification and used a euphemistic label ("special"), emphasizing visibility and acceptance. In grade VIII, disability was presented within family and social interaction without verbal labeling, signaling the normalization of differences. Finally, in grade IX, disability was not made overt through verbal resources, but it was illustrated through intellectual contribution, capability-centered, peer respect, leadership, and empowerment.

Discussion

The textbooks entitled *English for Nusantara* prescribed by the Indonesian government in the current *Merdeka* curriculum have presented limited disability content. The books lacked textual or visual representations of people with disabilities. These results are consistent with textbook analysis research on disability representation in Indonesia and other countries (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a; Hodgkinson et al., 2018; Pogorzelska, 2016; Ulya et al., 2025). In other words, representing people with disabilities has remained a consistent structural challenge throughout the world. This underlines an urgency for textbook developers to expand inclusive content and disability representation to support inclusive learning goals.

The textual analysis demonstrated that all the texts in the textbooks are predominated by descriptive texts, focusing on personal stories. Literary works with disabled characters were not found despite their advantages in shaping students' attitudes through stories and the illustration of characters. These findings cohere with (Adomat, 2014) who argues that inclusive literature works can reflect social diversity, including a stereotype-free portrayal of people with disabilities. This respectful portrayal can help students with disability strengthen their positive identity and expose all students to nuanced knowledge that mitigates misconceptions and stimulates empathy. The introduction to literary work with characters with disability has been shown to gradually encourage more positive attitudes among students towards people with disabilities (Wilkins et al., 2016). During the school years, students increasingly notice differences among people and, in response, consistently reshape their opinions about others.

Thus, it is vital to instill self-awareness and positive self-image in students, while concomitantly broadening their perspectives.

The analysis also marked an imbalance in the portrayals of disability types in the texts and images. All the disability content referred to the physical disabilities, those who use crutches or sit in wheelchairs. The missing representation of sensory, cognitive, or invisible disabilities reveals conceptual limitations and a stereotypical view of disability, which can lead students to view disability solely as physical impairment and reduce the chance to develop inclusive attitudes within more diverse groups. According to the Indonesian Statistical Center (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022), the number of people with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities is 584,503 (63%), 15,9918 (17%), 79,942 (9%), 109,530 (11%), respectively. This finding affirms studies that wheelchairs are extensively shown as symbols of disability in diverse textbooks (González-Palomares & Rey-Cao, 2022; Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a; Ulya et al., 2025; Vidal-Albelda & Martínez-Bello, 2017). The characters with disabilities in the texts and pictures are thus portrayed from a narrow perspective, overlooking the diversity of people with disabilities (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023b). Wheelchairs are widely included to represent disability in the textbooks, particularly since they are easily identifiable and easily understood as the manifestation of physical disability. However, the frequent use of a wheelchair probably stems from limited awareness of various disabilities. Thus, inclusive textbooks should cover a wider array of disability types, such as physical, sensory (visual and hearing), cognitive, and mental health and emotional disability. A more comprehensive lens can nurture a holistic understanding of different characteristics and needs among people with disabilities.

One of the textbooks described that the character (Made) went to an outdoor tour in a public place and found facilities supportive for people with disabilities. This description indicates that people with disabilities encounter social acceptance and are provided with supportive and appropriate facilities (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a). However, the texts do not explain the facilities, which may otherwise enhance the understanding of people with disabilities. The authors did not dive into what kinds of facilities are required to support people with wheelchairs. Students need to be exposed to the kinds of public facilities to support people with disabilities to be independent and safe. Some of these assistive facilities include ramps, handrail, elevators to accommodate wheelchair users, tactile paving and audible signals at the sidewalks that can help people with visual impairments, accessible toilet completed with grab bars and lowered sinks, priority seating or parking area, screen readers, braille signage, and hearing loop which enhance disabled people to fully participate in public spaces and community life (United Nations, 2007). Explicit information through texts or visuals about these facilities or assistive technologies will raise students' awareness of inclusivity and culture.

Regarding gender category, male characters were dominant over their female counterparts, which lead to the imbalanced gender representation. All the characters were teens, junior high school students. These made the learning resources more authentic to the target students, yet this narrow depiction cannot represent the whole age range in society. In terms of the social context, the analysis revealed the dominance of light activities at school and home, in which characters with disability are shown in isolation or alongside their friends or family members. The portrayals of disabled characters in outdoor activities within the social community include

engagement in a basketball club and activities around public places. This conveyed a clear message to students, implying that being disabled should not be a barrier to engaging in sports or other activities.

The findings in the present study are in contrast with (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a), who stated that the representation of people with disabilities often depicts them alone or with others with disabilities. Their study only documents limited portraits of people with disabilities in common, everyday situations, with very limited stories or pictures showing them along with their families or spouses, or in the company of nondisabled peers. The findings unearthed from the three ELT textbooks portrayed the characters in daily activities with others. In other words, the people with disability in *English for Nusantara* textbooks were depicted as active individuals capable of performing various activities at school or leisure activities with friends and family. No portraits of people with disabilities are found to show them as dependent and helpless, which again marks a significant contrast with similar studies in Poland (Pogorzelska, 2016) and Pakistan (Gulab & Khokhar, 2018). The findings endorse the need for more authentic representations of people with disabilities as commonly encountered in daily-life contexts (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a).

In addition, the comic strip and conversational texts showed that everyone can actively raise their opinions during group discussion, a clear manifestation of social acceptance, respect, and cooperation within the group, regardless of physical condition or different abilities. The group project with diverse students' abilities is one of the samples of how teachers/school applies inclusive education (Pogorzelska, 2016). Furthermore, the books show that characters with physical disability can stay physically active (as in doing sports), make intellectual contributions, and demonstrate leadership capability. Pedagogically, these representations are expected to amplify positive attitudes among students. Students are exposed to genuine situations that normalize different abilities in diverse domains. Moreover, comic strips involving people with disabilities can encourage students to grow their empathy and recognize that disabled peers can equally shoulder leading roles within their communities.

The textbooks of *English for Nusantara* exclude the illustrations of people with disabilities participating in elite activities (actors, scientists, and Paralympic sportsmen/women). The absence of such illustrations can lead to an underestimation of people with disabilities and may reinforce the limited stereotypes by discounting the exemplifications of exceptional attainment. This issue can perpetuate inaccurate or inadequate representation of people with disabilities. Without such representations, students are deprived of the opportunities to learn how people with disabilities excel in a wide range of domains. This study contrasts with previous research showing that textbooks with disability-related content oftentimes highlight well-known and successful people with disabilities (González-Palomares & Rey-Cao, 2020; Vidal-Albelda & Martínez-Bello, 2017). Such a description can inspire and motivate students to accomplish similar success. By implication, that description can break the stereotype that people with disabilities are passive, dependent, and helpless (Pogorzelska, 2016).

Instead of perceiving disabilities as limitations or weaknesses, the word 'special' conveys a positive message that disabilities are a gift from God to the special person so the terms must be used with respect to everyone (Lipiec, 2019). Moreover, the text also exhibits that the characters remained active in sporting activities, despite their physical disability. Exposed to this

description of strong-willed characters, students are encouraged to refine their perceptions of people with disabilities, noting that they also have the right to do similar activities as non-disabled peers. Notwithstanding, there remains moderation and adjustment to assist the characters with disabilities to remain equally engaged. This description will help the students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can help them build a more inviting environment with omnipresent acceptance toward people with disabilities. Equally critical to note is that the portrayal of people with disabilities interacting only with others sharing similar constraints can introduce representational bias, as such depictions isolate them from the broader community members (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023a).

The findings have demonstrated that *English for Nusantara* textbooks not only afford multimodal linguistic inputs but also social and moral inputs. The representation of disabilities can facilitate the development of a fuller repertoire of social knowledge. The representation of disabilities can promote inclusive values, trigger positive social change, and nullify social barriers toward people with disabilities (Browning & Cagle, 2017; Knoll et al., 2017; Symeonidou, 2018). Thus, disability representation in *English for Nusantara* textbooks supports the broader aims of character education and inclusive aims in the Indonesian curriculum. The findings further suggest concrete directions for ELT materials development. First, disability representation can be expanded beyond physical disability, while also involving a wider range of age groups and equal gender inclusion. Second, future ELT textbooks need to strengthen multimodal inclusivity through the textual and visual depiction of accessibility features, such as ramps, tactile paving, braille signage, accessible toilets, and kinds of assistive technologies. Third, learning tasks and activities can be designed to promote inclusive participation and social interaction. For example, students are engaged in role plays with inclusive scenarios or projects related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Textbook writers can commence the collaboration with disability advocacy groups, inclusive education experts, and individuals with disabilities during the designing and development stages of materials to ensure authentic and sensitive materials.

CONCLUSION

Grounded in multimodal discourse analysis, this present research has concluded that the ELT textbooks entitled *English for Nusantara* have presented disability content, yet it is limited. The depiction of people with disabilities is imbalanced as it is merely confined to physical disability, such as people with wheelchairs. Most representations reflect non-elite, school-aged characters who are shown to partake in everyday activities with peers at school or with family members at home. Such a narrowed representation does not fully capture the diversity of disabilities present in society. The textbooks consistently describe the characters with disability as active people who can participate in various activities as part of the social community. Although this may contribute to positive and inclusive practices, the exclusion of representation of medical care, supports, and diverse forms of disability can lead to a one-dimensional representation. This positive stereotype does not provide a sufficiently comprehensive representation of people with disabilities. The researchers highlighted the need to develop the awareness of disability-related content through texts and visuals in ELT textbooks, with balanced

inclusion of genders, age groups, social relations, status, types of disabilities, and assistive facilities. Introducing these elements can widen students' perspectives of the whole society, raise their social awareness and positive attitude, and counteract negative stereotypes.

Albeit the contributions, this study warrants several limitations that open opportunities for future researcher. First, the analysis focused on one junior-high school textbook series, *English for Nusantara*. As such, the findings may not represent the broader landscape of ELT materials in Indonesia; examining textbooks from different grade levels (SD, SMP, and SMA/SMK) would canvas a more comprehensive picture. Second, this study analyzed textual and visual contents without investigating how teachers and students interpret or engage with disability-related contents in classroom settings. Future studies are advised to integrate classroom observations, teacher interviews, and focus group discussions with learners to better understand how disabilities are perceived within classroom walls.

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