



Narrative Structure Analysis of MTs Students from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

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This study aims to describe the narrative structure of fables written by students of MTs YP H. Datuk Abdullah, to compare male and female students' narratives, and to analyze the influence of gender perspectives on story construction. The analysis framework employs Todorov's (1971) narrative structure theory, consisting of five stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, repair, and new equilibrium. A descriptive qualitative method was used with 32 seventh-grade students (15 male and 17 female) selected purposively as the subjects. Data were collected through fable writing tasks and semi-structured interviews, and validated through methodological triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. The results show significant differences: the majority of male students (11 out of 15, 73%) produced concise, action-oriented narratives that went straight to the core of the story with a simplified Todorov structure, while 4 students (27%) wrote longer or slightly more reflective narratives. In contrast, the majority of female students (12 out of 17, 71%) produced longer, expressive, and reflective narratives, emphasizing social relationships, emotions, and moral values with a complete Todorov structure, while 5 students (29%) produced shorter or less reflective narratives. The synthesis indicates that male students tend to emphasize physical action and outcomes, whereas female students emphasize emotional reflection, social interaction, and moral messages. These findings have implications for developing gender-responsive narrative writing strategies, enabling teachers to adapt methods that optimize students' cognitive and expressive abilities.

Abstrak

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Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan struktur narasi fabel siswa MTs YP H. Datuk Abdullah, membandingkan narasi laki-laki dan perempuan, serta menganalisis pengaruh perspektif gender terhadap konstruksi cerita. Kerangka analisis menggunakan teori struktur narasi Todorov (1971) dengan lima tahap: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, repair, dan new equilibrium. Metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif digunakan dengan subjek 32 siswa kelas VII (15 laki-laki, 17 perempuan) yang dipilih secara purposive. Data dikumpulkan melalui tugas menulis fabel dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan divalidasi melalui triangulasi metode, peer debriefing, dan member checking. Hasil menunjukkan perbedaan signifikan: mayoritas anak laki-laki (11 dari 15, 73%) menulis narasi ringkas, berorientasi aksi, dan langsung ke inti cerita dengan struktur Todorov sederhana, sedangkan 4 anak (27%) menulis narasi lebih panjang atau sedikit reflektif. Sebaliknya, mayoritas anak perempuan (12 dari 17, 71%) menulis narasi lebih panjang, ekspresif, dan reflektif, menekankan hubungan sosial, emosi, dan nilai moral dengan struktur Todorov lengkap, sementara 5 anak (29%) menulis narasi lebih ringkas atau kurang reflektif. Sintesis menunjukkan anak laki-laki lebih menekankan aksi fisik dan hasil, sedangkan anak perempuan menekankan refleksi emosional, interaksi sosial, dan pesan moral. Temuan ini memberi implikasi bagi strategi pembelajaran menulis narasi yang responsif gender, membantu guru menyesuaikan metode untuk mengoptimalkan kemampuan kognitif dan ekspresif siswa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Narrative is one of the essential forms of language expression in the cognitive, social, and cultural development of students. According to Ryan (2007), narrative is a fundamental way for humans to understand the world and organize their experiences. A narrative does not merely present a sequence of events but also reflects the identity, values, and worldview of its narrator. In the context of secondary education, particularly in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), the ability to write and analyze narratives becomes a key competence in language learning, as it allows students to express experiences, construct identities, and shape social realities.

The analysis of narrative structure has been largely influenced by classical theories, such as Todorov (1971), who explained that a narrative follows a pattern of initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of conflict, resolution, and the establishment of a new equilibrium. This pattern not only helps in understanding storylines but also enables researchers to identify differences in individual narrative styles. In the educational context, McCabe (2019) emphasized that narrative structure is an important instrument in language learning, as it helps students construct coherent and meaningful texts.

Narrative studies have since evolved to explore the relationship between language, identity, and power. Riessman (2008) highlighted that narrative serves as a method for understanding both personal experiences and social phenomena. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) further conceptualized narratives as “small stories” that reflect the performativity of everyday identities. This perspective suggests that students’ narratives can be seen as a window into how they construct their identities, including gender identity.

The gender dimension in narratives becomes relevant as research shows differences in the tendencies of narratives produced by male and female students. Fivush and Buckner (2003) found that girls tend to emphasize emotional and relational details, whereas boys focus more on action and

physical events. These findings are consistent with Peterson (2011), who demonstrated that differences in boys' and girls' narrative memory influence the ways they construct stories.

For example, a sentence written by a female student might be: *"They smiled and felt closer because they helped each other."* This emphasizes emotional aspects and social relationships, showing how girls highlight feelings and interactions among characters in their narratives. By contrast, a male student might write: *"The tiger appeared and tried to attack him."* This sentence focuses on action and physical tension, illustrating that boys' narratives often highlight dramatic or conflict-driven events. Analyzing these examples reinforces the findings that gender differences shape both the structure and focus of narratives. Girls tend to construct stories by emphasizing interpersonal relationships and emotional experiences, while boys emphasize action, conflict, and external events.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Tannen (1990) asserted that male and female communication styles differ systematically, including in narrative use. Sunderland (2004) added that narratives are laden with gendered discourses that shape representations of men and women. Similarly, Mills (2017) showed that language and gender are closely interrelated and often produce specific social constructions that are reflected in texts, including students' narratives.

Gender in narrative is also linked to identity theory. Butler (2011) argued that gender is performative, meaning that it is not naturally inherent but constructed through discursive practices, including narrative. This is reinforced by Davies (2003), who demonstrated that children construct gender identities through reading and writing activities. Thus, MTs students' narratives can be analyzed as a form of social practice that reflects their gender constructions.

In the context of Islamic education, Nilan's (2009) study on Indonesian youth masculinity revealed that cultural and religious values shape how students perceive gender identity. This is particularly relevant to narrative analysis in MTs, as these institutions integrate religious and general education. Consequently, students' narratives are influenced not only by personal experiences but also by the religious and cultural norms of the school environment.

Theoretically, narrative studies have also been shaped by structural and discursive approaches. Genette (1980) explained that narrative analysis involves aspects of time, voice, and mode of storytelling. Labov (2010) emphasized the importance of life experience structures in oral narratives, which can serve as the basis for analyzing students' written narratives. Grabe and Kaplan (2014) added that mastering narrative structure is closely tied to the broader development of academic writing skills.

Moreover, narrative literacy is closely related to the development of critical literacy. Gee (2015) asserted that literacy is not merely a technical ability to read and write, but also a socially embedded practice infused with ideology. Lazar (2005), through critical feminist discourse analysis, demonstrated how language reproduces power and gender ideologies. This underscores the significance of analyzing narratives through a gender perspective, as students' narratives may reflect both the reproduction and resistance of prevailing gender ideologies.

Zipes (2012) showed how fairy tales and folklore shape collective imagination about gender through narrative. Østern and Knudsen (2019) emphasized that narratives in education function not only as a medium of learning but also as instruments for developing practice-based educational theories. Thus, analyzing MTs students' narrative structures from a gender perspective contributes simultaneously to educational theory, linguistics, and gender studies.

From a social dimension, Wertsch (2002) argued that narrative functions as the "voices of collective remembering," linking individual experiences with collective memory. Schiffrin (2006) also stressed the relationship between narrative and identity in social interaction. Wood (2015) further noted that gendered communication is always shaped by cultural contexts, suggesting that MTs students' narratives may differ from those of students in general schools.

Considering these theoretical foundations, this study is necessary. Analyzing narrative structures through Todorov's theory enables the researcher to describe common patterns in MTs

students' stories. Meanwhile, the gender perspective reveals how male and female students express experiences and identities differently. This study also contributes to the development of a more inclusive Indonesian language pedagogy and supports gender equality in education.

The research problem arises from the following questions: how can MTs students' narrative structures be understood based on Todorov's theory? How do narrative structures differ between male and female students? And how is gender construction reflected in the narrative texts they produce? The objectives of this study are to describe the narrative structures of MTs students using Todorov's framework, to compare narratives produced by male and female students, and to explain the influence of gender perspectives on their narrative constructions.

The urgency of this research lies in its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches narrative linguistics by integrating Todorov's theory, gender analysis, and the context of Islamic education. Practically, it provides teachers with insights into gender-based differences in students' narrative styles, enabling the development of more responsive narrative teaching strategies. Furthermore, this research supports educational policies that emphasize critical literacy and gender equality, aligning with the government's efforts to build a generation that is both inclusive and of strong character.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with narrative analysis as the main framework. The qualitative method was chosen because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how MTs students construct narrative structures from a gender perspective, rather than merely counting frequencies or linguistic patterns. As emphasized by Creswell (2018), qualitative research is relevant for exploring complex meanings, particularly when the researcher focuses on process, context, and interpretation.

Narrative analysis was selected because it enables the mapping of students' thought patterns, ideas, and constructed experiences in the form of stories (Riessman, 2008; Labov & Waletzky, 1997). From a gender perspective, this study also refers to the views of Butler (1990) and Sunderland (2004), who highlight that language and narrative are crucial arenas for both the reproduction and resistance of gender constructions.

The research subjects were seventh-grade students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) YP. H. Datuk Abdullah in Tanjung Morawa District, Deli Serdang Regency, selected through purposive sampling. This selection considered the students' ability to produce written narratives with sufficient maturity, as well as the relevance of adolescence as a stage of gender identity formation (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

Data were collected through narrative writing assignments, in which students were asked to create free stories on specific themes such as personal experiences, friendship, or family. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' perspectives on their narrative writing experiences and how they represented gender roles in their stories. This technique is consistent with the recommendations of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) regarding the importance of data triangulation in qualitative research. The validity of the research was strengthened through methodological triangulation (writing assignments and interviews), peer debriefing, and member checking with students. Moleong (2017) emphasized that in qualitative research, data credibility can be maintained through the researcher's intensive involvement in data collection and repeated verification of interpretations with participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This article is the result of a community service program at MTs YP. H. Datuk Abdullah, carried out in July 2025. The program focused on analyzing fable narratives written by students,

with the aim of understanding the differences in thinking patterns, linguistic styles, and narrative structures used by male and female students. The outcomes of this activity are documented in this article, which presents the findings, analysis, and pedagogical implications. Below are several photos documenting the community service activities :



Figure 1. Group photo with the speaker, the principal, the vice principal and the Indonesian language teacher



Figure 2. Photo with the students during the socialization and fable storytelling training



Figure 3. Photo of the activity with the speaker during the socialization and fable storytelling training

The findings of the study on fable narratives written by MTs students reveal noticeable differences between male and female students. These differences are evident in sentence length, narrative focus, the application of Todorov’s structure, approaches to conflict resolution, and the quality of details presented.

Table 1. Fable Narrative Sentences Based on Todorov's Structure

No.	Gender	Aspects of Narrative Structure	Example of Narrative Sentences
1	Man	Equilibrium	"The rabbit is sleeping under a tree."
2	Man	Disruption	"A wolf suddenly appears and chases the rabbit."
3	Man	Repair	"The rabbit ran as fast as he could to survive."
4	Man	New Equilibrium	"The rabbit went back to his tree and continued sleeping."
5	Man	Equilibrium	"A deer is drinking in the river."
6	Man	Disruption	"The tiger appeared and tried to attack him."
7	Man	Repair	"The deer ran and fled."
8	Man	New Equilibrium	"The deer are safe back in the woods."
9	Man	Equilibrium	"Birds are playing on tree branches."
10	Man	Disruption	"Kittens scare birds."
11	Man	Repair	"Birds fly to other places."
12	Man	New Equilibrium	"The birds are singing again in a different tree."
13	Man	Equilibrium	"Rabbits and turtles prepare for the race."
14	Man	Disruption	"Rabbits sleep too long during races."
15	Man	Repair	"The rabbit ran fast but lost."
16	Woman	Equilibrium	"The rabbit is preparing food for his friends on a sunny morning."
17	Woman	Disruption	"Suddenly the heavy rain made them wet and confused."
18	Woman	Recognition	"Rabbits are worried that their friends are cold."
19	Woman	Repair	"The rabbit and his friends cover each other with large leaves to keep them dry."
20	Woman	New Equilibrium	"They laughed together after the rain subsided and learned to help each other."
21	Woman	Equilibrium	"Deer and birds are playing together in the meadow."
22	Woman	Disruption	"Suddenly a tiger appeared and they panicked."
23	Woman	Recognition	"They are aware that they have to work together to avoid danger."
24	Woman	Repair	"Deer and birds help each other, birds guide the way while deer distract tigers."
25	Woman	New Equilibrium	"The tiger left, they were both safe and learned the importance of cooperation."
26	Woman	Equilibrium	"The rabbit and his friends are playing in the calm river."
27	Woman	Disruption	"A fox wants to steal their food."
28	Woman	Recognition	"Rabbits realize they have to keep food together."
29	Woman	Repair	"All friends work together to drive the fox away and rearrange the food."
30	Woman	New Equilibrium	"They smile and feel closer because they help each other."

The analysis of fable narratives written by MTs students shows significant differences between those created by male and female students. Based on data from 15 male and 17 female students, the differences are evident not only in sentence length and complexity but also in narrative focus, as well as the use of emotions and moral reflection. This analysis employs Todorov’s narrative structure framework, which consists of five stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, repair, and new equilibrium.

1. Male Students' Narratives

Male students' narratives are generally characterized as concise and action-oriented. Their sentences tend to be shorter and go directly to the core of the story without additional emotional details or descriptions of atmosphere. Examples of the data demonstrate this pattern:

Equilibrium	:	"A deer is drinking in the river."
Disruption	:	"Tiger appears and tries to attack him."
Repair	:	"The deer ran and ran away."
Equilibrium	:	"A deer is drinking in the river."
Disruption	:	"The tiger appeared and tried to attack him."
Repair	:	"The deer ran and fled."
New Equilibrium	:	"The deer are safe back in the woods."

The analysis indicates that male students place greater emphasis on physical actions in their stories, such as running, chasing, or fighting. Conflict resolution tends to be practical and immediate; for instance, a rabbit or a deer simply runs to save itself without any explanation of motivation or emotional reflection. The application of Todorov's structure is also relatively simple, with most narratives covering only equilibrium, disruption, repair, and new equilibrium, while the recognition stage (awareness of disruption) rarely appears or is not explicitly expressed.

The implication of this pattern is that male students perceive fable narratives primarily as a sequence of events to be resolved, focusing more on the progression of the storyline than on character development or interpersonal relationships. This suggests that male students are more inclined to use language to convey actions and outcomes rather than emotional reflection.

1. Female Students' Narratives

In contrast, female students' narratives demonstrate a more complete and expressive structure. The sentences are longer, rich in detail, and include descriptions of atmosphere, characters' emotions, as well as social interactions. An example of a female student's fable narrative is as follows:

Equilibrium	:	"Rabbit preparing food for his friends on a sunny morning."
Disruption	:	"Suddenly heavy rain made them wet and confused."
Recognition	:	"Rabbit is worried that his friends are cold."
Repair	:	"Rabbits and their friends cover each other with large leaves to keep them dry."
Equilibrium	:	"The rabbit is preparing food for his friends on a sunny morning."
Disruption	:	"Suddenly the heavy rain made them wet and confused."
Recognition	:	"Rabbits are worried that their friends are cold."
Repair	:	"The rabbit and his friends cover each other with large leaves to keep them dry."
New Equilibrium	:	"They laughed together after the rain subsided and learned to help each other."

The analysis shows that female students place greater emphasis on the emotional and social dimensions of the story. The recognition stage is clearly present, reflecting the characters' awareness of disruptions as well as their reflections on their own feelings and those of others. The repair stage involves not only physical actions but also moral values and social learning, such as helping one

another or learning to maintain friendships. Female students’ narratives are more structured and align with Todorov’s five-stage pattern, making the storyline appear more coherent and reflective.

The implication is that female students view fable narratives as a medium for emotional and moral expression, highlighting the educational messages embedded in the stories. They demonstrate concern for social relationships, empathy, and the consequences of actions, thereby allowing readers to better understand the characters’ motivations and reflections.

Table 2. Comparative Synthesis

Aspects	Son	Daughter
Sentence Length	Short, straight to the core	Long, detailed and expressive
Narrative Focus	Physical action (running, chasing, fighting)	Emotions, social interactions, moral reflection
Structure	Sederhana	Lengkap:
Todorov	equilibrium → disruption → repair → new equilibrium	equilibrium → disruption → recognition → repair → new equilibrium
Conflict Resolution	Practical, fast, without emotional explanation	Contains reflections and moral messages
Example	"The tiger got angry and chased the deer until they got it."	"They fight, but then realize that friendship is more important."

Male students tend to write short sentences that go straight to the core of the story. Their narratives are more concise, prioritizing the sequence of events without adding details or descriptions of atmosphere. A common example is the sentence, “*The tiger got angry and chased the deer until it was caught.*” This sentence highlights a focus on the main action and quick resolution, making the storyline move directly to the goal without further elaboration. In contrast, female students write longer, more detailed, and expressive sentences. They include descriptive elements, atmosphere, and characters’ feelings. For instance, “*They argued, but then realized that friendship was more important.*” This sentence not only conveys action but also the characters’ emotional reflection and a moral message, allowing readers to understand the characters’ motivations and psychological conditions more deeply.

Another difference lies in narrative focus. Male students predominantly emphasize physical actions such as running, chasing, fighting, or escaping. Their narratives are action-oriented, centered on external events and the outcomes achieved. Female students, on the other hand, emphasize emotions, social interactions, and moral reflections. They develop stories by presenting internal conflicts, characters’ feelings, and the social consequences of actions. This makes female students’ narratives more emotion-oriented, enabling readers to understand not only what happens but also how the characters feel and process the events. In terms of applying Todorov’s structure, significant differences are also found. Male students generally use a simpler structure, namely: ***equilibrium → disruption → repair → new equilibrium.***

The recognition stage (awareness of disruption) often does not appear or is expressed only minimally. This indicates that male students’ narratives place greater emphasis on sequences of action and practical resolution.

Female students, on the other hand, employ a complete and well-structured narrative that encompasses all stages of Todorov’s model: ***equilibrium → disruption → recognition → repair → new equilibrium.***

The recognition stage appears more clearly, showing the characters' awareness of disruption and reflection on the impact of events.

Conflict resolution also reveals fundamental differences. Male students tend to resolve conflicts in a practical and immediate way, such as by running away, fighting back, or addressing the problem without emotional reflection. Their narratives prioritize the final outcome rather than the characters' internal processes. In contrast, female students resolve conflicts with reflection and moral messages. Their resolutions not only involve physical actions but also demonstrate an understanding of social and emotional values, such as cooperation, friendship, and empathy.

Overall, this comparison shows that male students tend to create action-oriented stories that are concise and focused on resolving physical conflicts. Female students, on the other hand, produce emotion-oriented narratives that are reflective and emphasize moral values as well as social interactions. These differences align with findings in developmental psychology and linguistics, which suggest that female students are more sensitive to social and emotional dimensions, while male students are more focused on physical action and immediate outcomes. Thus, these results provide important implications for the development of narrative writing instruction strategies, namely adapting teaching methods to gender-based differences so that each student can optimize their writing abilities in accordance with their respective cognitive and emotional styles.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study demonstrates significant differences between fable narratives written by male and female students at MTs YP H. Datuk Abdullah. Male students tend to write concise, action-oriented stories and employ a simpler application of Todorov's narrative structure. In contrast, female students more often produce longer, expressive, and reflective narratives with a complete Todorov structure, emphasizing social, emotional, and moral aspects. These differences highlight that gender perspectives influence students' narrative construction. Language teachers are expected to develop gender-responsive strategies for teaching narrative writing, such as providing opportunities for male students to strengthen their reflective expression and for female students to enhance their skills in constructing concise and effective plots. Furthermore, future research may be conducted at different educational levels or with other text genres to enrich the understanding of gender influences on narrative writing skills.

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