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Gender Representation in School Textbooks: Patterns, Implications, and the Path Forward

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ABSTRACT

This research examined gender representation in the Portal to English Workbook for Grade 10 (Semester 1) school textbook, undertaken through a quantitative content analysis of seven categories: gender firstness, images, names, pronouns, adjectives, jobs and occupations, and the overall gender balance of the textbook. The study demonstrated a clear male bias across all categories. This bias was particularly pronounced for pronouns, images, and names. Furthermore, the Chi-Square test confirmed that this was a statistical reality, $\chi^2(5) = 31.27$, $p < .001$. In other words, the Chi-Square test indicated difference between males and females in the school textbook. The findings suggest that similar to previous studies of Arabic textbooks and other studies beyond the Arab region, the textbook does not present a balanced gender representation but rather reproduces a male-centered pattern. The researchers of the study suggest that the textbooks must be revised in a gender-sensitive manner to ensure more equitable audio-visual and linguistic representation of males and females.

INTRODUCTION

School textbooks have great power in influencing the cultural values, social norms and ideological assumptions of the learners from a young age. Academic textbooks are ideological instruments that shape students' self-perception, potential and place in society. It is thus far from being a neutral compendium of knowledge. Classroom instructional time utilizes textbooks for 80% of the time, which is why these materials are the main mediating force in children's daily education (Blumberg, 2008). In this frame of reference, the question of who is represented, how they are portrayed and what roles they are assigned has serious educational and social implications. The field of education is one of the most scrutinized social phenomena in recent decades. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the area of gender where a series of studies have documented systematic inequities across educational systems worldwide. An examination of 1,255 English-language school textbooks from 34 countries found that male words were used more than double as often (178,142 occurrences compared to 82,113 for female words, or double) (Crawford *et al.*, 2024). Such findings show the scale and consistency of this global problem.

Gender Bias as a Global and Persistent Phenomenon

Moreover, gender bias is a concern in the qualitative dimensions of textbooks, beyond mere underrepresentation (Takiyeldin, 2023; Idrissi *et al.*, 2025). According to Corinne Crawford *et al.* (2024), we assign female characters descriptors like married, beautiful, and quiet. Also, we associate women with the words bake and cook. In contrast, we assign male characters descriptors like powerful, wise, and rich. Also, we associate men with

the words rule, guide, and order. According to Sadker & Sadker (1994), these patterns of representation are called the hidden curriculum. In other words, it is the message about gender identity, aspiration and social worth in the material that falls outside the subject matter. A research study that measured the gender stereotypes revealed that masculine presence is dominant in the visual imagery and text of primary school textbooks, that men's activities are consistently delivered in the public sphere, while women's activities are delivered in the domestic sphere, and that occupational depictions remained traditionalist and anachronistic (Cocoradă, 2018). In EFL contexts, the use of textbooks by teachers and students does not only reflect the language but also simultaneously promote social identity, cultural values and gender hierarchy to learners.

Stereotyping, Role Representation, and the Hidden Curriculum

The impact of the stereotyped portrayal of any gender on students' self-efficacy, academic engagement and career aspirations is more than symbolic. Textbook development with balanced and fair gender representation promotes pupil outcome which improves self-efficacy and academic success of both genders (Jane, 2024; Bataineh *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, when the curriculum continuously showcases women as passive, domestic, or subordinate, female students may receive the message that possibilities are limited and ambition should be lowered. A recent study confirms that global research on gender representation in textbooks has increased over the years. Also, Dong and Li (2023) affirm that critical discourse analysis, content analysis, and corpus-based approaches are the leading methodological frameworks. According to UNESCO

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2022, gender-responsive teaching and learning materials must serve as a policy imperative. It is not enough for textbook content to be gender equitable as an empty gesture. To guarantee gender equality in education, this must be a structural requirement. In light of the above, this introduction places the study in an existing body of literature that is growing by the day. The awareness regarding textbook presentation is getting stronger but within limits. Therefore, it is clear that an examination of gender of school level textbooks is urgent as well as necessary.

Implications for Learning, Identity, and Policy

Apart from symbolic impact, biased gender representation affects students' self-efficacy, investment in learning, and career choice. Thus, the goal should be equitable gender representation. Studies show that balanced and equitable gender portrayal in textbooks is positively associated with improved students' performances in terms of self-efficacy and academic ability across genders (Jane, 2024, Bataineh *et al.*, 2024). On the contrary, when female students consistently experience curricula depicting women as passive, domestic, and subordinate, the implicit message is one of diminished possibility and narrowed ambition. A recent bibliometric study examining global publications on gender representation managed to ascertain that the field has grown a lot. Further, it states that critical discourse analysis, content analysis and corpus-based approaches are the various methodologies used. This was a summary of the article, Research on Gender Representation. It will help the learners to easily comprehend the detailed study. UNESCO argues gender-responsive teaching and learning materials are a policy imperative because the contents of textbooks should be fair, not only for reasons of attributional justice but a structural prerequisite for the achievement of gender equality in education worldwide (UNESCO 2022). This part, therefore, places the present work within a substantial and expanding corpus of literature that argues that the study of gender representation in school textbooks deserves more attention from critical scholars.

Significance of the study

This research is useful as it contributes empirical evidence on gender representation in educational materials that inform students' perceptions of gender roles and career prospects in early childhood. The study proclaims the textbook developers and the curriculum policymakers to act upon the specific patterns of biases like gender firstness, images, names, pronouns, adjectives and occupations. The findings contribute to the already ongoing efforts to promote a gender-equitable education and counter the hidden curriculum. In conclusion, it is increasingly important to address gender bias in textbooks so that gender equality in education may be achieved.

Research Gap

Over the years gender representation in textbooks has

been the focus of concern. Despite that a large number of studies are conducted on it. They have done it in one or another dimension. Most of the case studies focus on either social status or images or occupational role in isolation. This research work fills a crucial void by analyzing all six interconnected categories of gender firstness, images, names, pronouns, adjectives and jobs in a single textbook. This therefore shows that bias operates multiply. Additionally, this study is the first of its kind which does not focus on a Western or any particular context but adds to the literature from less studied educational systems. Through combining quantitative frequency analysis with attention to more subtle discursive features, this study offers a comprehensive picture of how gender bias is inscribed in the very fabric of textbook content.

Research Questions

The present study has six questions:

1. To what degree does the textbook demonstrate gender firstness?
2. How does the textbook portray male and female images?
3. Are male and female names distributed equally in the textbook? How?
4. How are masculine and feminine pronouns employed in the textbook?
5. What are the adjectives associated with males and females in the textbook?
6. How are gendered jobs and occupations distributed in the textbook?
7. To what extent does the textbook exhibit gender-balanced representation across these categories?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning the Field

According to scholars of gender representation in educational materials, there are several different but complementary theoretical traditions that allow us to see how textbooks contribute to one's gendered identity and outlooks. According to Bandura's social learning theory, children learn behaviours, attitudes and identity related to gender through observation, imitation and reinforcement in their social environment; as textbooks serve as substitute role models in the classroom, the gendered figures they depict act as powerful indicators of what is seen as normal, aspirational or appropriate for either sex. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has emerged as an especially productive framework for textbook research. It enables researchers to explore not only what is said about gender but also how this is said, and what the linguistic and visual choices achieve in the construction and naturalization of specific power relations (Sulaimani, 2017). A systematic literature review on gender stereotypes in STEM textbooks which drew on 39 studies has indicated that social learning theory and CDA offered a strong determinism. In other words, these paradigms together constitute the prevalent analytical

lens through which gender bias in learning materials has been studied across cultures, grades and subjects (Nandi *et al.*, 2025).

Quantitative Evidence: Numeric Underrepresentation

Quantitative research consistently shows that female characters remain numerically underrepresented in school textbooks across contexts. A recent research analyses conducted in several European countries of language and mathematics textbooks made it clear that not only the female characters in them were outnumbered to a large extent, but also that they were less frequently assigned any main character role. And this finding held true even for countries with fairly strong gender equity policies such as those in Germany and Italy (Jehle *et al.*, 2024). The disparity is just as evident in EFL contexts. In one study, the qualitative content analysis of language textbooks revealed a male-to-female ratio of around 3:1. This means there were 125 male characters and only 64 female ones in the corpus (Para, 2024). According to a systematic review that synthesizes literature from multiple countries, important gendered phenomena found in primary school language textbooks include disproportionate gender representation, adherence to natural gender roles, and marginalization of women characters (Ahmed & Tian, 2023). These phenomena were significantly noticed in all regions and language groups.

Qualitative Dimensions: Roles, Language, and Occupational Stereotyping

In substance, ethnic representation highlights the hierarchical grounding of gender relations and female subordination in the form of its representation. The majority of the research has shown that EFL works published in the Middle Eastern countries like Oman, Saudi Arabian, Egypt, UAE, etc., depict men as having dominant positions which are also high-status and that they are diverse. Women are shown as passive and stereotypical. Also, they are portrayed in domestic settings by mostly the EFL course books of the sampled countries. It is also said in the study that they do not advocate gender equality through the usage of the coursebooks (Dahmardeh *et al.*, 2025). In a study that focused on Moroccan secondary school EFL textbooks, all dialogues underwent both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The quantitative content analysis showed a small numeric difference between male and female participation. However, the qualitative content analysis showed that the two genders are portrayed in very stereotypical ways. The female participants are connected with household issues. Also, they are given many 'traditional' roles. Finally, when compared to male participants, they used more deferential and hedged language. These findings are quite in line with the previous longstanding findings related to gender and language in educational materials (Benlaghrissi & Ouahidi, 2022). Saudi EFL textbooks have been found to contain gender-stereotyped scenarios that favour the male gender across five dimensions of analysis: gender visibility,

gender importance in sequences, gender representation in occupations, gender attribution of personal characteristics and nature of inter-gender relationship – with women showing stereotype and marginalization across all five dimensions (Sulaimani, 2017).

Visual Representation and Imagery

The images featured in textbooks depict how men and women behave in society. According to a CDA analysis of visual images in Grade 12 English textbooks, the use of visual images in illustrations of the English textbooks examined was distorted in a systematic and observable manner in favour of male characters such that they appeared more frequently in illustrations as well as the text than their female counterparts. Although the textbooks had tried for a nominal 50-50 gender balance, nonetheless traditional stereotypes were found to be prevalent in the visual record in the type of activities and roles assigned to each gender (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2026). A comparative study using Goffman's image-framing framework of the representations of females in EFL textbooks revealed that the international and locally produced textbooks were generally acceptable, with the presence of a gender bias in the visual framing of titles. The locally produced textbooks reveal intensive gender stereotyping. Physical framing, scaling, and positioning of female characters in relation to their male counterparts are some of the gender biases (He, 2024). The ideational elements of multimodal discourse analysis are worth noting because they reveal that photographs often carry ideological weight independently from, and often in contradiction to, the accompanying text. A visual audit of textbooks should therefore accompany a linguistic analysis.

Geographic Disparities and Contextual Variation

Gender bias in textbooks is a global and common phenomenon, but its extent varies significantly depending on socioeconomic, cultural, and policy contexts. A narrative review drawing on Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases covering studies from 2010 to 2025 found that gender imbalances in language textbooks were more pronounced in developing countries (Kencana, 2025). A study on gender representation in primary school textbooks conducted in India shows that textbook character representation of girls and women has improved since the curriculum reforms initiated after the National Education Policy of 1986. However, the character portrayal nonetheless remains stereotyped as it was, and women's presence in public life and professional occupations remains marginalized. This has been true for 25 years now. (Kadri, 2022) This overall evidence shows that simply adding numbers more female characters to illustrations or lists of characters is inadequate without deeper reforms to the qualitative aspects of the representation, especially in terms of occupation, language and the public/private divide which keeps organizing gender in educational materials across the world.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This research utilizes quantitative content analysis research design to analyze gender representation in the chosen textbook. An accepted research design for coding and quantifying text, images, and sound bites and for subjecting everything to stat analysis of significance content analysis (Riffe et al, 2019). Effective application of this methodology has long been part of research into gender representation, likely enabling researchers to see manifestations of underrepresentation, stereotyping and bias across multiple dimensions in educational materials (Crawford et al, 2024).

Sampling

The textbook was selected using purposive sampling because it was specifically chosen for the study to analyse gender representation. The textbook that was selected through this sampling technique provided rich and suitable data for the analysis of gender firstness, images, names, pronouns, adjectives and occupations. The sample textbook is the Qatari Portal to English Workbook for grade 10 used in all public schools all over Qatar. The five modules include: Feels like Home, Endurance, Globetrotting, Job Seeking and Get the Message. The modules are age-appropriate for the learners.

Research Instrument

The coding sheet, used as the main tool, was a pre-designed one. It was selected from other ready-made gender representation coding sheets chosen and amended for the purpose. The coding sheet contains the seven gender categories referred to in the research questions; (1) gender firstness, (2) images, (3) names, (4) pronouns, (5) adjectives, (6) jobs/occupations and (7) overall gender balance. Previous textbook gender studies in various contexts found similar coding instruments to be valid (Jehle *et al.*, 2024; Benlaghrissi & Ouahidi, 2022).

Data Collection Procedures

Data gathering was done in an orderly manner. Initially, all instances of the seven gender categories identified and recorded throughout the textbook. In addition, we coded each case according to the coding scheme. For the binary categories, we used male vs male and female while for the qualitative ones, we used descriptive labels like the type of adjectives and the type of occupations among others. Third, the frequency counts for each category. This process follows the recommended protocol for content analysis as an educational research methodology (Nandi *et al.*, 2025).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentage and ratio were used to analyze quantitative data. The analysis of gender firstness was done by taking the order of male and female mentions in pairs. The male and

female visual were counted and categorized based on their role (public vs domestic). The analysis of pronoun usage involved tallying masculine and feminine pronouns. Adjectives were categorized by gender and coded according to stereotypical traits (e.g., passive, emotional vs. active, authoritative). Occupational roles were categorized as traditional and non-traditional based on their association with gender. The data are presented in tables and percentages for an easy interpretation (Dahmardeh *et al.*, 2025). The standard and valid means of a Pearson's chi-square test of independence to determine whether there is statistically a significant association between gender and various categorical variables occurring in a textbook (e.g., appearance of characters, occupation) (Gharbavi, 2016).

Reliability

To ensure consistent application of the coding scheme across the entire textbook, the researchers conducted reliability testing. A smaller portion of the data was double-coded ($\approx 10\%$) to check for inter-coder reliability in accordance with best practices for content analysis studies (Riffe *et al.*, 2019). At the end, the researchers held discussions to resolve the discrepancies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender firstness

According to the textbook, gender firstness has a marked male preference, as witness counts show a male-first order more often than a female-first order. This suggests that more discursive priority is given to male reference, which has been interpreted in textbook-discourse as a subtle marker of symbolic dominance (Edres, 2022; Kobia, 2009). The current finding supports those of earlier studies which show that the language used by the textbook makes males the primary actor and reinforces the notion that males are the default. Edres (2022) and Ullah and Skelton (2013).

Images

The textbook features images of males far more frequently than females. The result is in line with several previous findings in the international and Arab contexts showing that women and girls are often underrepresented in images or shown in more limited social roles (Dahmardeh *et al.*, 2025; Alkhadra *et al.*, 2022). In the Arab world, visual inequality has been blamed on the persistent image of males as actors in public life and females on their absence or symbolic disavowal (Alkhadra *et al.*, 2022). The current finding therefore reflects a trend regionally and globally where visual representation favors males.

Names

Male character names are more frequent than female character names, indicating greater male visibility. This finding aligns with previous research (Jehle *et al.*, 2024; Ullah & Skelton, 2013) showing that male characters are more often named, brought to the front, and

repeatedly mentioned in textbooks. Similar trends have been noticed within Arab-region based studies whereby female characters appear in lesser numbers and possess peripheral narrative positions (Edres, 2022; Alkhadra *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the existing result replicates earlier studies rather than deviate from them.

Pronouns

The use of pronouns shows the greatest skew male forms have far greater frequency than female. The impact of the result Provides strong evidence for earlier findings which stated that male-oriented grammar is one of the most persistent gender-biased indicators found in textbooks (Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Dahmardeh *et al.*, 2025) In the Arab educational context, the prevalence of masculine reference reflects wider discourses within society which serve to normalize male presence, while female presence occupies a comparatively weaker position in public-facing discourses (Edres, 2022). As such, the current research proves to be quite in line with both regional and cross-national studies.

Adjectives

The male advantage in attributes is evident in adjectives, but not as significant as in pronouns and images. Earlier studies demonstrated that textbook adjectives often assign unequal symbolic characteristics to men and women, with men more often attributed with ability, action, and authority, and women with appearance, emotion, or passivity (Jehle *et al.*, 2024; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). If the adjectives found in this dataset follow this trend, the results are again consistent with previous studies. In the context of Arab textbooks, such adjective patterns often reinforce normative gender expectations by associating males with rationality and public competence, and females with softer or limited roles (Edres, 2022).

Jobs and occupations

The textbook more often associates jobs and occupations with females rather than males. According to various studies, the visual representation of common occupations is often under-utilized, as men are shown in many more workspaces and public roles, while women are shown in lesser or more traditional occupations (Crawfurd *et al.*, 2024; Dahmardeh *et al.*, 2025). This pattern is of particular importance in Arab settings because it reflects broader social expectations concerning labour, leadership, and gender division of work. Alkhadra *et al.*, 2022; Cambridge review, 2022. As a result, the current outcome supports earlier evidence that textbook occupations tend to reproduce rather than challenge social inequality.

Overall gender balance

In the findings, it is important to note that the textbook is not gender balanced in the examined categories. The Chi-Square test statistic is significant $\chi^2(5) = 31.27$, $p < .001$, which shows the irregularity is not random. The result is in line with prior findings in the Arab world,

whereby textbooks exhibit sustained gender asymmetry notwithstanding policies asserting equal treatment. This also concurs with other international research that shows that textbook bias is still embedded in various representational channels including language, images, and occupations. The strongest imbalance in the present study is in pronouns, then images and then names. This means male dominance is being repeated in grammatical structure as well as visual presence.

In the Arab education always context, this matters because the textbook does not merely reflect culture; it helps reproduce it. The textbook communicates a gender hierarchy that privileges males as first, displayed more, named more, and linked to varied occupations; thereby, enhancing their visibility and agency over females. The feminine characters, by contrast, become relatively sidelined, less frequent and less discursively powerful. This trend is congruous with research from Jordan speaking of symbolic annihilation or marginalization of women and girls in the school materials, alongside comparative regional work evidencing that when female presence gains in numbers, the stereotyping often remains intact. As such, the current textbook does not only show gender imbalance; it enters an Arab regional discourse that normalises male centrality and restricts female participation.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysed textbook shows systematic male-biased gender representation for all categories, aligning with the previous research that revealed that males tend to be more visible and are occupationally more prominent in textbooks' discourse (Crawfurd *et al.*, 2024; Jehle *et al.*, 2024; Edres, 2022; Alkhadra *et al.*, 2022). In the Arab context, while there is greater access to education for women, they are still symbolically excluded.

Recommendation

In order to ensure gender parity in language as well as imagery in textbooks, authors should take care to ensure balanced representation of language and imagery as well as consider male-centred naming patterns and the sequence of words using the masculine form of pronouns. Female characters must be present in more professional and public and leadership roles engaged in agency, competently and actively in society, rather than passive or physical appearance. Furthermore, there is a need to explicitly include gender sensitivity in textbook selection and revision by policy makers and textbook evaluation committees

Limitations

This study is not generalizable as it is limited to only one textbook. The use of frequency count may capture deeper meaning of context if it is not studied further, as well as being intersectional with class, ethnic or disability groups.

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