

A critical discourse analysis of gender representation in the Saudi EFL context: A case study of four EFL textbooks



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ABSTRACT

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This paper investigates the relationship between gender bias and educational materials for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Saudi EFL context by drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA). The paper's objective is twofold: first, to explore the extent to which females are biased in the discourse of four EFL textbooks and the various reasons and ways of this biased gender representation. Second, to show the extent to which the disproportion of female gender representation is due to cultural values or to the gender bias of the textbooks' authors. The study uses a qualitative critical discourse analysis to investigate four EFL textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. The analytical focus is on five topics: (a) gender visibility, (b) gender importance in sequences, (c) gender representation in occupations, (d) gender-attributed traits and (e) the relationship between both genders. Findings reveal that the selected EFL textbooks contain gender-stereotyped scenarios that are in favor of the male gender. Women are portrayed as stereotyped and marginalized as a result of this disparity. The study concludes that the four EFL textbooks used in Saudi Arabian schools displayed gender-biased content and recommends reevaluating the EFL textbooks to be gender-biased-free.

Contribution/ Originality: This study adopts a qualitative critical discourse analysis to investigate the relationship between gender bias and educational materials for teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the Saudi EFL context. It explores how females are under-represented in the discourse of four EFL textbooks and the various reasons for this under-representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Saudi Arabia, the English language has remained a mandatory subject taught to students from grades 4 to 12 in both male and female schools. Male and female students do not study together in one classroom setting in any public or private schools due to religious and cultural restrictions. However, male and female Saudi students are taught the same curriculum despite this situation exists (Sulaimani, 2017). Recently, social discussions on women's status in Saudi Arabia have become far more popular. In this regard, government officials have continued to make conscious efforts to improve the status of women regarding employment and in other avenues within the public sector. However, despite a person's education status being directly translated into employment and job fulfillment, a number of social, educational, legal, and occupational factors continue, figuratively, to blockade any Saudi woman's full and total participation in society (Alqahtani, 2024).

In the Saudi EFL context, gender bias is a complex problem with structural, cultural, and religious roots (Aljuaythin, 2018). If there has been some improvement recently, there is still more to be done to provide a fair learning environment that gives every student agency. According to Alqahtani (2024), Saudi Arabia can guarantee that EFL education functions as a vehicle for individual and social growth, unhindered by gender-based prejudice, by tackling biases in curriculum design, teaching methods, and resource allocation as well as by cultivating an inclusive culture. With an ever-expanding set of people worldwide with whom we communicate, the expressions we put forth across cultures and countries have a particular way of addressing cultural values and ideals. The means of foreign language communication sometimes leave room for error in today's climate of sensitivity to equality, and gender representation comes off as being of top concern. Social forces bring us together through linguistic variances, trying to establish, maintain, and propel different relationships between each other, language, and gender. According to Aljumiah (2016), social equality has to do with the gender gap created by using excessively masculine tones and other linguistic subtleties related to the discrimination or erasure of the female role as seen in everyday language.

EFL has remained a favorite subject for years as its teaching within and outside the borders of countries, such as the United States, England, Australia, and New Zealand remains vital for students from non-English-speaking regions. One might mistakenly think that this subject is free of gender bias and sexism, as languages are sometimes viewed as straightforward academic courses involving vocabulary and grammar drills. However, several studies have revealed differences in the extent to which specific gender-based disparities have become obvious (Al-Qatawneh & Al Rawashdeh, 2019; Alqahtani, 2024; Healy, 2009; Lee & Collins, 2010; Otlowski, 2003). These studies revealed many findings concerning the representation of men and women in ESL/EFL textbooks. These findings included the overrepresentation of men, the likelihood that men would assume more powerful and diverse occupational roles than women, the assignment of gender-stereotypical roles and activities to both men and women, and the observation that women spoke less and performed a smaller range of discourse roles in dialogues.

In EFL instruction, gender bias can have serious repercussions because they accept social signals that minimize their potential. Female students in particular may experience a decline in self-esteem and enthusiasm to study English. English literacy is becoming essential in the job market and in higher education. This may limit their options. The pressure to fit in with stereotyped ideas of masculinity may also affect male students which can make it more difficult for them to express themselves freely in a second language. Florent and Walter (1989) defined sexism as "an unconscious cultural bias, expressed in and reinforced by the language people learn from childhood." In Saudi Arabia, the English language remains the only foreign language taught in public and some private schools. It is also taught in graduate schools and in universities for both male and female students at the same time in spite of the fact that their classes are separated by sex. If the only foreign language that Saudi students study contains sexist features, its teaching would eventually enable the further development of sexism in Saudi Arabian society. Therefore, as a result, it is imperative to question whether Saudi English textbooks reflect the efforts to minimize sexist features of the English language teachings.

The current study attempts to investigate gender representation in the area of education in Saudi Arabia. The attempt was also made to describe how textbooks display and represent the equality between both genders to provide a basis for the initiation of the promotion of gender equality in textbooks in the educational system. Moreover, the attempt is made in this study to increase the awareness of the role of gender stereotyping among teachers of Saudi schools. The pages that follow are an overall evaluation of EFL textbooks used at the secondary and elementary school levels and are intended to sensitize the community about the existence of any biases to observe instances of inequality, and to propose a way to minimize or eliminate these occurrences for the reduction of such a phenomenon.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study attempts to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To explore the extent to which females are biased in the discourse of four EFL textbooks under investigation.
2. To demonstrate the various reasons and ways of this biased gender representation in the four selected EFL textbooks.
3. To show the extent to which the disproportion of female gender representation is due to cultural values or to the gender bias of the textbooks' authors.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research question is sought to be answered in this study:

To what extent do males and females appear in equal numbers in the texts at the level of sentences (i.e., dialogues, passages, readings, illustrations, and exercises)? Who is more "visible"?

This primary research question abounds in other subsidiary questions that are further attempted to be answered as follows:

1. To what extent are males and females represented in photos and illustrations?
2. What types of domestic roles can be seen as being chiefly male or female?
3. What numbers and types of occupations/jobs are linked to male and female characters?
4. What kind of inferior/superior relationships are present? (e.g., more females are shown as nurses and males as doctors in most textbooks worldwide)
5. When and how do male and female characters interact?
6. What kind of impacts do the authors and publishers have on gender bias?

The remainder of this study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background and literature of the study wherein detailed discussions of critical discourse analysis (CDA), CDA in EFL textbooks, CDA and gender representation as well as some previous and related studies relevant to the topic under investigation are provided. Section 3 offers the methodology of the study in which a focus is made on data collection, description, rationale, and the design of the study as well as the analytical procedures adopted in the analysis of the selected data. Section 4 is dedicated to analyzing the selected data and showing the results of the study. In this section, the focus is on five areas: gender visibility, gender first place occurrences, gender representation in occupations, gender attributed traits, and the relationship between the male and female genders. Section 5 discusses the results obtained from the analysis of the selected data. Section 6 concludes the study and provides some recommendations and pedagogical implications for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to language research beyond examining the structure of conversation (Fairclough, 1995). CDA is mainly concerned with understanding how language reflects, upholds, and occasionally subverts societal power dynamics. It seeks to reveal how language sustains or challenges domination, shapes social structures, and reinforces beliefs. According to van Dijk (2015), CDA draws on linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and political theory to examine topics like social justice, injustice, and inequality. The term 'discourse' in CDA describes spoken or written communication that represents societal norms, beliefs, and hierarchies of power (Khafaga, 2017). Discourse is understood as a way to shape reality and impact our perceptions of the outside world instead of being viewed as an impartial instrument for communication. According to Wodak and Meyer (2015), the ways that language is utilized to exercise power are at the heart of CDA. It investigates how speech is shaped by power relations and how language either reflects or reproduces ideologies. Though they are

frequently concealed or ignored in society, ideologies are belief systems that determine cultural norms, legislation, and behavior. Fairclough (1995) maintains that the relationship between language and social systems is emphasized by CDA, as it makes the case that discourse both influences and is influenced by the social environment. Social, economic, and political systems are inherently unequal, and language both reflects and perpetuates these disparities.

Weiss and Wodak (2007) argue that CDA analyzes texts and discourses using a range of qualitative research techniques. These include (a) linguistic analysis, which concentrates on the text's actual structure. Vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and discourse markers are all examined. For instance, CDA might look into the use of metaphor, modality, or passive versus active voice in order to reveal the hidden ideological meanings beyond the use of these linguistic forms. (b) Thematic analysis, which entails locating the text's underlying themes and concepts. This could involve determining the representation of specific social groups or issues (such as ethnicity, gender, and class). (c) Narrative analysis, which examines how discourse constructs stories, specifically how people or groups are portrayed as heroes, villains, or victims. The framing of topics, such as how a social phenomenon or political event is portrayed, is another area that narrative analysis looks at. (d) Reading critically, which constitutes taking into account a text's social and historical background in addition to its linguistic components (Weiss & Wodak, 2007). This entails being aware of how the literature either mirrors or questions the social structures and power dynamics of the era.

Thus, CDA is an effective method for comprehending how language and society interact. It enables scholars to investigate how speech shapes power dynamics, creates reality, and upholds or subverts societal norms and ideas (Khafaga, 2019). CDA provides a sophisticated method for comprehending the various ways that language functions in the real world by concentrating on the linguistic, discursive, and social aspects of language (Fairclough, 1995). Its uses in politics, the media, and education demonstrate how it can shed insight on how language either upholds or challenges dominance and power (Khafaga, 2021). In a time when language still has a significant influence on political agendas and public opinion, CDA is still a crucial tool for analyzing the discourses that influence our daily lives (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

2.2. CDA in EFL Settings

Recently, there has been a lot of interest in CDA in the context of education and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (e.g., Chisholm, 2018; Filipović & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2020; Martínez, 2012). These studies highlight the role of CDA in offering instruments for examining how language in educational settings shapes and reflects identities, ideologies, and power relations. Crucially, CDA's employment in EFL contexts provides insightful information about how instructional strategies, classroom dynamics, and teaching materials influence students' comprehension of language, culture, and social norms. One of the main venues for the reproduction or contestation of social structures and ideas is education. CDA allows researchers and teachers to closely examine the language used in textbooks, curriculum, and classroom conversation to identify underlying power dynamics and ideological biases (Blumberg, 2007). For example, implicit gender and cultural biases that perpetuate stereotypes are frequently found in textbooks. CDA opens the door to more equal and inclusive learning environments by identifying and addressing these biases. Additionally, CDA aids teachers in comprehending how language shapes students' identities and perspectives. For instance, teacher-student hierarchical relationships are frequently reflected in classroom interactions. CDA can shed light on how language is used to negotiate and enact authority by examining these exchanges (Fairclough, 1995).

According to Amari (2015), CDA is especially pertinent in EFL contexts because language acquisition entails navigating cultural and ideological elements in addition to gaining linguistic competence. Cultural presumptions and worldviews that may favor some groups over others are commonly incorporated into EFL textbooks and instructional materials. For instance, English-language resources frequently marginalize non-Western cultures in favor of Western standards and viewpoints (van Dijk, 2015). With the help of CDA, teachers may evaluate these

resources critically and make sure they encourage critical thinking and cultural diversity. Furthermore, CDA can improve students' critical literacy abilities. EFL students can become conscious of how language affects their perception of the world by critically evaluating texts. In a worldwide world where English is used as a lingua franca and a means of information access, this ability is essential. Students can be encouraged to examine news reports, commercials, or political speeches to spot ideological statements and persuasive techniques. In addition to enhancing language skills, these kinds of activities promote critical thinking and civic engagement. Consequently, CDA provides useful resources for analyzing the function of language in educational and EFL situations (Amari, 2015). CDA can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments and equip students with critical literacy skills by exposing hidden power dynamics and ideological biases. But for it to be implemented successfully, issues with curriculum design, teacher preparation, and cultural sensitivity must be resolved. The relevance and potential of CDA will only increase as education places a greater emphasis on the growth of critical thinking and global citizenship, making it a crucial strategy in modern teaching methods (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2001).

2.3. CDA and Gender Representation

According to Dai (2015), the term "gender representation" describes how various genders are portrayed in speech, literature, the media, and other discourse mediums. What is deemed proper conduct, appearance, and duties for men and women are determined by social standards. These images are dynamic and change as cultural movements and societal views do. Traditional gender norms frequently endure despite advancements in gender equality. They are constantly reinforced by a variety of discursive practices. For instance, gender stereotypes are reinforced in large part by the media. Men are typically portrayed as forceful, independent, and career-focused, whereas women are typically portrayed as beautiful, passive, and domestic. These gender-based stereotypes have practical repercussions, influencing how people view themselves and other people. According to Chandler (1997), gender behaviors are learnt rather than natural, gender roles are socially constructed. For example, women are typically viewed as sensitive, compassionate, and kid-friendly whereas men are typically seen as powerful, intelligent, and independent (Hussain, Naz, Khan, Daraz, & Khan, 2015).

Fairclough (2001) claims that CDA is a comprehensive method of examining language as it looks at how social power dynamics, ideologies, and identities are shaped by and influenced by speech, whether it is written, spoken, or visual. The study of gender representation is one important area where CDA has been used (Ahmad & Shah, 2019). In light of CDA's theoretical framework, language is a tool that both reflects and reproduces societal power relations rather than being neutral. This viewpoint is particularly pertinent to the study of gender since language both creates and reflects gender identities, either supporting or contradicting societal norms surrounding masculinity and femininity. CDA studies the linguistic construction of identities, including gender identities. Gender is a social construct that is shaped by the language used to represent and classify people rather than a biological actuality (Javani & Tahriri, 2018). The formation and societal perception of men's and women's identities are influenced by the way they are portrayed in discourse, including the adjectives used to characterize them.

Moore (2007) asserts that a biased portrayal of men and women in EFL textbooks may lead to a false perception of societal norms and social and cultural realities. Despite Saudi Arabia's focus on EFL textbooks, it appears that they have not yet been well assessed, particularly with regard to gender representation (Aljuaythin, 2018). Furthermore, one of the most common issues with published novels is the unequal representation of gender. Several scholars have identified gender bias in ESL textbooks (Aljumiah, 2016). The terms "sex" and "gender" are commonly used interchangeably. But conceptually, these two terms are different. The former refers to the biological differences that separate men and women (Litosseliti, 2006) while the latter is "a cultural or social construct." This gender adoption supports the idea that sex roles are "learnt" (Sunderland, 2012) wherein a person learns how to become a "boy" or a "girl" and picks up traits that are deemed masculine or feminine (Yule, 2006).

2.4. Previous and Related Studies

The theme of gender representation in EFL textbooks has been extensively discussed by many scholars at the global level. These studies have addressed this theme from different perspectives by shedding light on the significance of EFL textbooks as relevant sites where gender representation can be presented and communicated to learners and teachers (e.g., Al-Taweel, 2005; Otlowski, 2003; Samadikhah & Shahrokhi, 2014; Tomlinson, 2001), investigating the way gender related issues are not properly represented in the Iranian textbooks, which is something that ruins the chances of women's voices in the society (Azizifar, Koosha, & Lotfi, 2010), examining the representation of sexism in ELT in Hong Kong and Australia and revealing that gender parity has been encouraged through legislation more in Australia than in Hong Kong (Lee & Collins, 2010), highlighting the role of teachers and curriculum designers to be aware of sexist language usage and also of sexist bias in the materials they select for use in the classroom (Tahan, 2015; Wolfson, 1989), discussing the status of sexism in Iranian EFL/ESL textbooks and concluding that showed that females were fundamentally shunted into indoor passive activities, such as watching TV at home, sitting in the classroom, reading, and so forth (Ansary & Babaii, 2003), highlighting the negative influences learners have when undergoing a gender stereotyped learning and teaching materials (Kobia, 2009; Porreca, 1984) and exploring the extent to which there is a development with regard to a more de-gendered language use in the Swedish EFL textbooks and how Swedish secondary schools appear to be keen on creating dialogues that were sexism free (Mustedanagic, 2010).

More relevant to the present study, Xiaoping (2005) investigated the content of three EFL textbooks used in elementary schools in China. The main objective of the study was to determine gender stereotypes in the textbooks. She argued that the females represented in the textbooks were simplified while the men had a proper representation. Females were simplified about the roles that they were given in the textbooks. According to Xiaoping, such forms of stereotyping in textbooks may negatively affect the learning process of the students as well as their social life. Porreca (1984) also evaluated 15 books that are utilized in the United States. In the analysis of gender representation in these texts, she established that chauvinism has persisted and thrives in the ESL texts. Although females comprise at least half of the population in the United States, their representation in the texts was minimal. Furthermore, Kobia (2009) investigated masculinity and femininity in the EFL textbook series in Kenya as well as gender depiction images at the elementary stage in the *Let's Learn English Series*. Kobia (2009) concluded that more males than females were depicted in the pictures, titles, functions, and names. Moreover, the results of the study showed that females were under-represented in editorship, authorship, and designing the textbooks (Kobia, 2009). Amerian and Esmaili (2015) employed Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional model of CDA to assess gender in EFL textbooks. Their study's conclusions showed that there were both overt and hidden instances of sexism in the textbooks. Overt sexism was portrayed as prejudice against women whereas covert sexism was using women as marketing props. The study also showed that these textbooks embraced the marketing and commercial discourse, which typically takes advantage of women.

In the Saudi EFL context, some studies have been conducted to investigate gender representation in EFL textbooks. Aljumiah (2016) examined racial and gender-based social power dynamics in high school-level foreign EFL textbooks tailored to the Saudi setting. Aljumiah (2016) used the dialectical-relational approach to CDA developed by Fairclough (1989) and Fairclough (2015) to analyze these textbooks. The results showed that gender notions like male domination and women's marginalization were repeated and upheld by concealed discourses in the EFL textbooks. The second study was conducted by Sulaimani (2017) who looked at international EFL texts designed for the Saudi context from a CDA standpoint. The results indicated that the textbooks were gender biased in favor of men because nearly half of the units disregarded women. In another study, Aljuaythin (2018) looked at two EFL textbooks used to teach English at the high school level, Smart Class 5 and Smart Class 6 which were released by MM Publications in 2016. The study examined four elements of the textbooks: the social roles that are connected with men and women, the activities that they participate in, the frequency of occurrences of men and

women, and the visual representations of the two genders. According to the analysis, the textbooks' portrayal of men and women was biased in favor of men. Women were relegated to traditional roles and marginalized. More recently, Alqahtani (2024) examines whether the traditional portrayal of Saudi women has persisted or if the country's EFL textbooks reflect Vision 2030's transformative efforts regarding women's empowerment. The visual portrayal of Saudi women in six textbooks that are used to teach English in Saudi secondary schools and are part of the mega goal series serves as the analytical focus point. The study looked at how women were portrayed from three different perspectives which are as follows: how many of them appeared in textbooks compared to all human illustrations, what social roles and professions were shown, and what activities they were involved in.

The above theoretical preliminaries and literature have made it clear that gender representation is an issue that requires further research to ensure that the appropriate results are achieved in the EFL textbooks, particularly in the Saudi EFL context. Therefore, the current study seeks to advance the domains of material evaluation and gender studies by offering a critical gender evaluation of English textbooks for elementary and secondary education in Saudi Arabia. This study looks at EFL textbooks designed for the Saudi context making it comparable to other Saudi studies. Nevertheless, the analytical approach employed to achieve this goal is different as it attempts to offer a qualitative CDA to investigate gender representation in the Saudi EFL textbooks.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses critical discourse analysis to analyze the gender representation in four selected EFL textbooks. CDA is relevant to be used in this study because it is a qualitative analytical method for analyzing, understanding, and elucidating how discourses create, uphold, and justify social injustices. Similarly, CDA is interpretive, examining social settings and nuanced meanings that impact communication.

3.1. Data Collection, Description, and Rationale

In this section, a descriptive analysis is made of the four EFL textbooks as approved by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and intended for use by elementary and intermediate level students. The main materials used for the data analysis are the following:

1. English for Saudi Arabia: First-year secondary, Term 1 (student's book, 2011).
2. English for Saudi Arabia: Second year secondary, Term 1 (student's book, 2015).
3. Smart Class One: English language, elementary stage, fourth elementary grade (student's book, 2015/ 2016).
4. Traveller 6: English, third secondary grade, Term 2 (student's book, 2015/ 2016).

Table 1 shows a general description of each EFL textbook used in the analysis. The table highlights key information regarding the textbooks for education in Saudi Arabia. It shows a brief description of the level for which the books are intended, their authors and publishers, and how many units they contain.

Table 1. General description of the EFL textbooks used in the analysis

No.	Book title	Publisher/Author	Units	Pages
1	English for Saudi Arabia: First year secondary	Saudi Ministry of Education (Al-Madinah Publication Printing Company)	6	83
2	English for Saudi Arabia: Second-year secondary	Saudi Ministry of Education (Al-Madinah Publication Printing Company)	6	127
3	Traveller 6	Mitchell H Q-Malkogianni Marileni (Saudi Ministry of Education Publication)	8	119
4	Smart class one	Mitchell H Q-Malkogianni Marileni (Saudi Ministry of Education Publication)	4	123

All of the textbooks represented in this study have frequent visual aids, such as photographs, illustrations, and word art, providing a more broadened view of Saudi cultural nuances and traditions than one would get in a foreign (not Saudi) written and published book.

Four reasons constitute the rationale for selecting these EFL textbooks in particular. First, the selected three EFL textbooks are provided by the Saudi government's Ministry of Education and are used in public and private primary and secondary schools by both males and females (separately). Second, the selected represent the main EFL textbooks that are presented in the elementary and secondary stages in Saudi Arabia. Third, the selected textbooks abound in linguistic and ideological expressions that mirror gender-biased representation at the word, phrase, and sentence levels of discourse representation. Fourth, the selected EFL textbooks have an authoritative character since they have the ability to shape students' opinions on a variety of topics. Saudi students learning a foreign language may be influenced by the religious, social, educational, and cultural elements of the foreign language background.

3.2. Design of the Study

A qualitative critical discourse analysis is used in the application on textbooks based on the data gathered from the respective texts, images, and dialogues/speech in each of the textbooks in the series. The analyses are chiefly based on the following items.

1. Gender visibility (pictures and texts).
2. Gender importance in a sequential list of people (firstness).
3. Gender representations in domestic roles.
4. Gender-attributed traits in occupational roles.
5. Gender interaction and activities (e.g., boys and girls playing, learning, working, dancing, and so forth, although this is admittedly more of a sociolinguistic/social aspect than discourse analysis).
6. Gender relationship (e.g., males talking to females, males and females working together).

3.3. Analytical Procedures

In this study, an examination was made of how gender bias is demonstrated in four EFL textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. For this study, research and "counted" items were attained in an online format that included the front cover of the textbook (should it possess an image of a person) as well as all images within the book that contain at least one human image, whether that be in silhouette, cartoon drawing depiction, photograph, or other such imagery. If the image presented did not contain any portrayal of a person, it was not counted. In this research, also taken into account was text presented in dialogues, representation as a speaker (i.e., "[female] said to [male]," and word art (an image that shows English words that have been altered to display a more playful or aesthetic look than found in standard texts), as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. An example of word art in a smart class textbook.

Although many ways of analyzing the textbooks and their imagery were available, the first method used in this current research was to use pictures as the main method of analysis, as all the books were full of pictures and the measurability of images was consistent. Images are notable in any textbook because they are so prevalent and easily fit into an educational model suitable to stimulate learning motivation and often leave more lasting impressions than foreign words (Wu & Liu, 2015). In this section, the details of the practical component of this research, i.e., dealing with the material of the study and the method used to analyze data, are outlined.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results of this study are derived from the questions listed in the methodology section. Examples are presented and described in this section as well, from representations such as pictures, illustrations, and words in the text. Charts and tables have been provided to show the difference between the two genders (male and female).

4.1. Visibility

In this instance, visibility refers to the actual presence of characters in the text, dialogue, and images throughout the textbooks (Nagatomo, 2010). The characters were taken into consideration in images (photographs, illustrations, etc.), lessons and explanations in the text, and exercises for students. The covers of the textbooks were also included as were all appendices and glossaries/dictionaries near the ends of the textbooks. This information was used in the ultimate objective of locating the importance of females and their representation in the Saudi learning environment as well as overall societal depictions. When looking at the question of gender visibility in both pictures and texts and deciphering to what extent males and females appear in equal numbers in the texts at the level of words and sentences, the numbers are dismal. Many female gender roles are barely represented at all, accounting for the quality known as invisibility. While it would have been biased to show women only working in a kitchen/around the house, it was another, far more shocking discovery to find that the female gender was so underrepresented that it was virtually nonexistent. In the *first-year secondary* textbook, out of the entire 83 pages of that textbook, there were only five pages with five images that showed a female depicted as background silhouettes in a fully covered hijab, faces unclear, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Examples of women's depictions in the first-year secondary EFL textbook.

The images in Figure 2 merely state that “she is Saudi”/ “she isn’t Saudi” and “she’s Syrian.” All women are depicted with the same facial features in this book. The reason why these females are represented in this manner is attributed to religious and cultural restrictions in Saudi society where women are anticipated to follow a unified dress code in public places that covers their bodies from head to toe except for the face and hands. A list of other pronouns announcing their Saudi national citizenship, or lack thereof, follows the same model of speech, and no woman is represented in speech, dialogue, or image throughout the rest of the textbook. The same textbook also lacked simple words for set female roles (such as mother, daughter, girl, etc.). Obvious invisibility can be the most devastating, harmful gender bias out there. Women in many countries throughout the world are underrepresented, so it can easily be implied that female gender representation is less valuable than male representation for any function. This is of special interest since what is considered a "normal" gender representation for one area or culture, the opposite can be said for a different culture, appearing as "abnormal" or even "disgraceful" or "offensive." It is this sort of gender bias and gender functionality in textbooks that have been examined regarding linguistic equality. The effect this has on learning English and the language's customs/culture requires further study, but the consequences could very well be crushing.

As for the idea of who more frequently appears first when two nouns are paired for gender, males or females, the answer is obviously males. According to Table 2, women barely exist in images in the textbooks, and when they do appear, they are mostly represented next to a male, except in four occasions identified in the first- and second-year textbooks (see *first year textbook*, p. 28; *second year textbook*, p. 73) as illustrated below in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Exclusive four occasions where women are not represented alongside males in the 1st and 2nd Year textbooks.

As this evidence resounds as a result of gender bias in textbooks, an in-depth assessment was conducted for this project by counting all images with people in all four textbooks represented. The categories into which the images were placed included the total number of relevant images, a number of images with male-only representation, pictures with female-only representation, and the total number of images that included both male and female images together. Table 2 shows these results.

Table 2. Representation of males as opposed to females in the textbooks

Textbook title	Total images using people	Male only	Female only	Both male and female
1 st year secondary	281	276	1	4
2 nd year secondary	91	81	3	5
Traveller 6 textbook	47	47	0	0
Grade 4 smart class textbook	273	183	77	13

Table 2 describes the representation in the textbooks of males as opposed to females. It is prevalent that the secondary level books (first, second year, and traveller 6 secondary textbooks) have the lowest female representation when it comes to visibility. On the contrary, although the *grade 4 smart class textbook* has the second highest number of images, it still has the highest representation of females. 90 out of 273 images contained females. As a result, approximately 33% of the images in the book include females. The only glaringly large explanation for this is that the *Smart Class* book is given to and studied by children in grade four. This is due to the Saudi Arabian cultural belief that children who have not reached puberty have little to no perception of the difference between males' and females' sex and age. For this reason, many representations of females are acceptable at this level of school.

4.2. Firstness

'Firstness' in this study lies in the indication of perceived importance in the order of a list of people, whether it be two entities or a thousand. Given two pronouns or proper nouns (names) paired with their gender opposite counterpart (e.g., "he and she", "Mohammed and Fatima", "The men and women," etc.), every single listing in these Saudi textbooks put males first over females. There is no rule for this kind of preference in the English language, yet the explanations in English list couplings this way in all the book's portrayals. In short, male firstness is exponentially more prevalent than female firstness only occurs within a homogenous set of females. This sort of firstness was unilaterally the same across all four textbooks examined. Furthermore, male firstness was present not only in pronouns and proper nouns but also in all possessive cases (e.g., his/hers, he's/she's/ and their negative equivalents), subjects, objects, sentences, and phrases when and if such examples appeared. It should be noted that the most widely accepted use of female to- male ratios occurred in the fourth textbook listed, the grade four textbook (*smart class*), intended for elementary-age students.

4.3. Domestic Roles

Having male and female roles is a hallmark of any society although scores of countries have been trying to level the playing field in that area for years; it should be apparent by now that simply acknowledging females is a hard enough task when looking at a Saudi textbook; finding their role in an ancient culture proves even trickier for these textbook publishers. While women were noted as being somewhat diversified worldwide from multiple textbooks (e.g., She is Russian. She is not Syrian. etc.), finding more than household or "traditional" roles was difficult (*first term secondary school textbook*). Table 3 lists examples of occupational roles and their respective textbooks. Significantly, there was no collaboration or interaction between male and female characters. This may be due to the fact that male and female students are taught separately and in altogether different schoolhouses.

Table 3. Examples of occupational roles

Books	Men and women depicted (Separate frames)	Only men depicted (Separate or same frame)	Only women depicted (Separate or same frame)
<i>First year secondary</i>	Standing and citizenship and being in a family.	Socializing, working, piloting and teaching	Standing
<i>Second year secondary</i>	Being with a family, shopping	Teaching, learning, construction, driving, working, socializing, emergency services, bicycling, being on a team, smoking, talking, praying, traveling, shopping, writing, eating, dreaming and playing.	Washing dishes and carrying water on the head.
<i>Traveler 6</i>		Shaking hands, using a computer, attending college, playing sports, driving,	

Books	Men and women depicted (Separate frames)	Only men depicted (Separate or same frame)	Only women depicted (Separate or same frame)
		getting arrested, telephoning, doctoring, being an artist, running, exercising, relaxing, graduating, reading, gardening, banking, and waiting tables.	
<i>Smart class one</i>	Playing, personal introductions, socializing, familial roles, having a pet, cheering, eating, drinking, having fun, playing, personal introductions, socializing, familial roles, having a pet, cheering, eating, drinking, and having fun.	Crafting, riding the bus, eating, using technology, classroom learning, teaching, being “smart”, drawing, having their own family, being tall, exercising, relaxing, graduating, reading, gardening, banking, waiting tables, crafting, riding the bus, eating, using technology, classroom learning, teaching, being “smart”, drawing, having their own family, being tall, having muscles, and celebrating.	Gardening, reading, holding a baby, having emotions, babysitting, shopping, housewives, caring, walking, gardening, reading, holding a baby, having emotions, babysitting, shopping, housewives, caring, and walking.

The examples shown in [Table 3](#) illustrate how dominant the male presence is in Saudi textbooks and how that gender bias seems to grow with each passing year of schooling. This is evident because the most basic textbook intended for elementary-aged school children has the most roles apparent for females and males able to do the same activity, as well as the highest number of occupational and domestic roles for females that are reserved for their gender (in the book, not necessarily in reality). As mentioned before, I surmise that this is due in part to the religious and cultural restrictions or to the author(s)/publisher(s)/ the Saudi Ministry of Education’s wish to shelter the female students from the harsh reality of the greater social structure they are bound to encounter.

4.4. Occupation Roles

As it was noted in the section pertaining to “visibility,” there are few images to speak of in the first, second, and traveler secondary textbooks other than those that simply acknowledged a woman’s existence. [Table 3](#) shows examples of the occupational roles.

Based on the contents of the selected four textbooks, there has been somewhat of a revolution of more inclusive parts for women in roles that were not traditionally thought of by many people as female (e.g., doctor, teacher, accountant, etc.). Since women are encouraged to branch out more into the new roles being carved out for them in the society and culture of Saudi Arabia, it would only stand to reason that more occupational roles, traditional or not, should be represented in their EFL textbooks. This is even truer for learning a new language than for Saudi vocations because the international scene is ever-growing, and many business people use English as a language for communication in the event that neither party speaks the other’s language. Even if female images are not designed as a model in textbooks, it is my opinion that simple lists of jobs and careers and how a female would be represented could prove beneficial for learning, seeing that those jobs can and do exist for women. Eventually it would be nice to see male and female roles in the workplace represented equally.

4.5. Gender Interactions and Activities

One would expect to find an equal representation of gender-linked activities because both male and female students learn from the same materials. This means that the two genders would interact together, either in a wedding, taking a walk, playing a game, holding hands, and so forth. This was not the case in any of the Saudi materials that were examined in this study. However, there are 22 instances listed in [Table 2](#) where both males and females are depicted together which is different from the interactions between men and women discussed above. In

those 22 instances, although the male and female are in one picture, they are portrayed far away from each other. This is a way to create a social distance between male and female counterparts. There was not a single instance throughout all the pages in which males and females were depicted in the same frame, let alone through an interaction or relationship, except in one case where a young girl who was depicted to have a short dialogue with an elderly male was accompanied by an adult female. As mentioned in the visibility section, this example is identified in the fourth grade *smart class* textbook (p. 38) and is due to the conservative nature of education and the people of Saudi Arabia. Figure 4 is an illustration of this exception.



Figure 4. An exclusive example of a young girl having a dialogue with an elderly man in a smart class textbook.

4.6. Relationships

Relationships can be defined in this context as sharing a common tie, a feeling of closeness between two or more individuals. Sharing no relationship would be the opposite of it. As for inferior and superior relationships and their effect on sentence structure, there are no examples of which to speak. Male and female characters do not interact (e.g., dialogue) in any singular frame or series of frames and, thus, do not exhibit any type of relationship except that of solitude. Basically, the "relationships" in the textbooks at hand are non-existent and, hence, not a true depiction of the world of reality in which we live.

4.7. Potential Author/Publisher Bias

The effects any authors or publishers have on the textbooks can be assumed but are not given much credit in these instances. The books are all authored, published, and distributed by the Saudi Ministry of Education and by H. Q. Mitchell/Malkogianni Marileni. In the first and second years of secondary school levels, since the Saudi government has not shown any female representation, it can be assumed that there was no female input given to the materials. The books do not credit any individuals, but it is a fair assumption that the authors were all male, giving the book a bias from the first storyboards to the final instructions in the classroom. Moreover, the assumption that the authors or the publishers of the textbooks were cautious or aware of gender bias is hard to determine because such a judgment can only be addressed and determined by them.

5. DISCUSSION

In the above analysis, CDA is employed to demonstrate how gender is portrayed in language and how these representations relate to societal power dynamics. The analysis shows that women are underrepresented in the four selected EFL textbooks. The books do appear to be male-oriented as a result of this underrepresentation. It is

analytically obvious that women are marginalized and almost invisible in the four textbooks' visual portrayals. Even when women are shown, there was a propensity to rely on stereotypes about them, including the idea of a "nurturer," which is evident in how women are portrayed as housewives, mothers, or nurses. The analysis also clarifies that applying a CDA's analytical framework helps gain a better understanding of how language reflects and reinforces gender inequality. CDA is nonetheless a potent tool for revealing how gendered identities are created and contested in modern society when applied to gender studies despite its drawbacks. CDA can advance the larger objective of attaining gender equality through ongoing research and critical analysis by exposing and dismantling the discursive practices that maintain conventional gender roles and stereotypes. Crucially, the gender power disparity revealed in the four EFL textbooks can be viewed as a system of power dynamics that work together to create and maintain patriarchal authority, so impeding the achievement of equality for all people.

Reconciling with Aljuaythin's (2018) study, the findings of this paper demonstrate that the four EFL textbooks under investigation are biased in favor of portraying men in more active and leadership roles when it comes to roles and activities. Women are restricted to more traditional and passive roles like housewives and shoppers whereas male characters are frequently shown as professionals, leaders, and achievers. This promotes cultural perceptions that men are better suited to occupy active and important roles and feeds gender stereotypes. Male characters predominate in the four EFL textbooks. Women's experiences and viewpoints are further limited by the limited representation of various female characters with a range of backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities. The accomplishments, struggles, and experiences of male characters are frequently highlighted in the narratives of the four textbooks, giving them a larger part in advancing the plot. Female characters and their stories are further marginalized by this disparity in narrative portrayal, which also lessens their relevance and agency.

The analysis also shows the extent to which male and female characters are represented in textual and visual components using content analysis. Male characters are overrepresented in terms of visibility, actions, and positions, according to the data, which shows a major gender imbalance. The analysis also demonstrates that the status of females in Saudi Arabia had a significant impact on the gender bias represented in textbooks. From a broader standpoint, the results of this study align with those of the previous research mentioned in the literature review section (Aljumiah, 2016; Amerian & Esmaili, 2015; Jannati, 2015; Samadikhah & Shahrokhi, 2014; Sulaimani, 2017). As with earlier research, the current paper indicates that there are examples of gender imbalance and stereotyping in favor of men in EFL textbooks. Similar to earlier research, there are far more men than women in these textbooks. Aside from that, there is a strong inclination to represent women in stereotypical ways. Previous studies on gender representation in textbooks propose the idea that female visibility and representation were almost zero in both pictures and vocabulary, and even less so in the books' quizzes, exercises, and text. The occupational roles were non-existent for women in these textbooks, even when considering traditional female-dominated domestic roles. There was neither female utterance in dialogue nor female "profiles" except for the occasion found in the *Smart Class* textbook as discussed in the results section. "Firstness" was also an issue in the quest to find proper gender representation in the textbooks, as no females spoke first or were listed first either in the chronology of lists or in the comparison of genders. For example, the male was always listed first (e.g., he and his wife). Gender bias was also seen in occupation roles in the sense that females were depicted mostly as housewives while their male counterparts were depicted as doctors, teachers and policemen. Moreover, the same bias can be found in gender interaction, as females barely interacted with males in the four EFL textbooks. Ultimately, as far as female bias is concerned with regard to relationships, the four textbooks did not exhibit any kind of relationship between male and female.

Furthermore, the results of this study reveal that there is a serious imbalance in regard to gender representation in textbooks issued to EFL students by the Saudi government for use in public schools. There are multiple and varied recommendations or solutions that could be taken into consideration in order to better the state of gender equality and representation in Saudi Arabia. Many of those recommendations can become a catalyst by a

further or a more "official" study of the effect they can have on the workplace or on the overall Saudi image and employment across many more levels of schooling and life. A study of EFL beyond grade 12 could also be prudent, through seeing how society reaches (or does not reach) a good gender balance after a certain amount of time has passed. Locating other data/more EFL textbooks that could be analyzed in an effort to determine a concrete result (e.g., an experiment with a hypothesis, control groups and end determination, perhaps) and reporting these findings to the Saudi public as well as to other Middle East governments could also be beneficial for gender representation in that part of the world.

The analysis further shows that biased gender representation in the Saudi EFL textbooks would encourage female students to adopt the perspective of female marginalization. This correlates with Moore's (2007) argument that biased depictions of men and women in EFL textbooks may lead to a false perception of societal norms and social and cultural reality. Furthermore, the current study reveals a scenario where males were significantly more prevalent and depicted as aggressive characters, as was the case in Evans and Davies's (2000) study. Reinforcing gender bias in learning materials could slow down or reverse the process of achieving equality among individuals if such representations of men and women in textbooks are actually a reality in that community. Given the number of majors available to male students in Saudi Arabia, it is undeniable that the country's educational system favors men over women. The fact that education is gender-segregated is another. Nonetheless, women are not entirely shut out of today's social reality or schooling system. In actuality, women's status in Saudi Arabia is evolving quickly. Therefore, textbooks that portray gender in a prejudiced manner will impede the development of women's empowerment.

In terms of female/male-centric language, men are more likely than women to be mentioned in phrases in the four textbooks under investigation. These results are in conformity with Al-Qatawneh and Al Rawashdeh's (2019) argument, who argue that the order of mention was one of the elements they looked at while examining the representation of gender in the ninth-grade Arabic language textbook in the United Arab Emirates. According to their study's findings, men are more likely than women to be mentioned in sentences first. Regarding generic pronouns, this textbook contained three masculine generic pronouns that refer to men as the norm while excluding women. In the present study, therefore, men are depicted in a greater variety and at a higher degree of occupation than women. In the four EFL textbooks at hand, gender disparities are clearly present. Women are ostracized and depicted as having incredibly limited jobs, while men are shown in a larger variety and generally at a better level of employment than women. The study's results made it abundantly evident that male roles, names, images, and discourse predominate throughout the textbooks. This may be interpreted as unmistakable proof of prejudice against women as well as inappropriate behavior for school female students who were still immature and still forming their gender roles as well as their emotional, social, and psychological growth.

It is analytically evidenced that there are notable disparities in gender representation in Saudi EFL textbooks. These differences may have some results as follows: First, they may strengthen conventional stereotypes, which constitutes the idea that the overrepresentation of men in positions of leadership is consistent with gender norms and may contribute to the continuation of inequality. Second, they may impact learner perceptions, which comprise the acceptance of constrained roles and goals on the part of females and in relation to the representation by which EFL textbooks are presented to students. Third, they may have an effect on language acquisition, which encompasses the negative impact on female students' involvement in the process of teaching and learning in general and on students' academic engagement, pragmatic competence, and classroom performance in particular.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper provided an investigation of the relationship between gender bias and educational materials for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Saudi EFL context. Its main purpose was to explore the extent to which females are underrepresented in the discourse of four EFL textbooks and the various

reasons and ways of this underrepresentation; and, second, to show the extent to which the disproportion of female gender representation is due to cultural values or to the gender bias of the textbooks' authors. It was analytically demonstrated that there is a serious imbalance in regard to gender representation in textbooks issued to EFL students by the Saudi government for use in public schools. The analysis of the selected four textbooks revealed a gender imbalance in favor of males. Women are portrayed as stereotyped and marginalized as a result of this disparity. The analysis also showed that there is an obvious bias in representation for females in the selected EFL textbooks in terms of dialogicity precedence, firstness, occupation roles, gender interaction, and male-female relationships. This can be attributed to various cultural values and societal norms that dominate the Saudi community. The analysis of the selected data further clarified that females are biasedly represented in the selected Saudi EFL textbooks.

6.1. Pedagogical Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations

Pedagogically, this study recommends curriculum writers and course designers to reconsider and reevaluate the different EFL textbooks presented in the Saudi EFL settings so as to make sure these textbooks are discursively structured by a more de-gendered language, which, in turn, serves to put an end to a gender-biased course system that dominates the Saudi educational atmosphere for a long period of time. In addition to reexamining the textbooks, researchers could examine and transcribe EFL audio recording sources to see if there is any gender bias in these learning media as well. Most content analysis about gender representation has been focused on textbooks' content rather than the entire learning process. Scholars could examine the correlation between the gender of the writers of these textbooks and gender bias in the content. Those who perform these studies could also (in due time) explore teachers' awareness of gender aspects while presenting and presiding over current materials. However, studies could examine a society's particular attitude toward the adoption of gender balance and equal representation. The ultimate solution then could be achieved through a system of votes by the general public, illustrating the general public's opinions on the matter to the government officials who write and publish the materials. The government officials are the ones who publish or authorize the many issues discussed throughout this research as they relate to getting rid of as much gender bias in textbooks and other educational materials as possible in the public and private schools.

This study has some limitations. First, it uses only four EFL textbooks, three of which are from the secondary stage and one from the elementary stage. So, it does not cover all stages of the Saudi educational system or all grades. Significantly, examining a larger sample by incorporating other textbooks from different learning levels would contribute to generalizing the findings to all Saudi EFL textbooks and might reveal similar and/or different results than those presented in this paper. Second, an investigation into different educational media could also be incorporated into the study, especially as more technological tools are added to the classroom, such as computer programs, DVDs, cassettes, and various language-learning curricula. Third, there is no certitude that the authors' bias was a result of the cultural and religious norms or that the authors or the publishers were trying to meet requirements imposed by the government.

In light of this study and its results, an intriguing comparative examination between the EFL textbooks written for the Saudi context and the worldwide editions of the same textbooks could be recommended as the next step in this research. Furthermore, examining students' perspectives to determine whether the textbooks have actually been successful in instilling a patriarchal ideology in their brains would be crucial to analyzing how textbook ideologies affect students' cognitive and ideological backgrounds. Also, it is recommended to incorporate more women in as many roles as can be expected and include female representation in categories like dialogue and text, as well as in illustrations and/or photographs. The Saudi state would have more effect on gender equality as a whole and begin to eliminate the negative conceptions of those outside of Saudi Arabia in regard to male prevalence overall, especially in traditionally male-dominated roles. Furthermore, creating a better set of gender

representations in textbooks that are issued to younger generations is the first step in expanding the ideal that women and men should have equal representation in all aspects and levels of society, allowing the future generations to experience a more balanced society in general.

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