

---

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Analysis of Personal Traits in 16 Omani English Language School Textbooks

Dr. Adnan Bataineh

Center of Foundation Studies, University of Buraimi, Buraimi, Oman

**Corresponding Author:** Dr. Adnan Bataineh, **E-mail:** [adnan.m@uob.edu.om](mailto:adnan.m@uob.edu.om)

---

| ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze 16 English language school textbooks used in the Omani government schools. Quantitative and qualitative content analyses are used to investigate personality traits found in the textbooks. The analysis included all personal traits implied by images and texts in the textbooks. According to Hawkins's (2007) classification of personal traits, personal traits are examined: traditional and feminist gender traits. The study results have indicated that there is a balanced representation of males and females in terms of personal traits. The study has also shown that the majority of masculine personal traits are stereotypical. Females were portrayed in different situations that conveyed masculine and feminine traits. Males were portrayed as risk-takers, *self-reliant, nurturing, adventurous, decisive, competitive, and aggressive*. Females were portrayed in a variety of personal traits such as *nurturing, understanding, affectionate, risk-taker, self-reliant, competitive, aggressive, adventurous, and decisive*.

| KEYWORDS

Content analysis; feminist traits; gender balance; personal traits

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

**ACCEPTED:** 25 July 2022

**PUBLISHED:** 03 August 2022

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.8.5

---

### 1. Introduction

Language (e.g. written, spoken) is considered one of the most important means of social communication that humans use every day and body language. Language is one of the sources of knowledge and sciences; hence, it is closely related to learning, teaching, and education. It is incumbent to point out that language does not only serve as a means of communicating our ideas and thoughts to others, but it is also a means through which we perceive the world around us. In other words, language plays an important and enormous role in our lives. Language is closely related to thought and reality. It conveys and shapes our ideas, emotions, and thoughts every day. It is an inseparable part of our daily identity. Language helps to shape our identity when we interact with other people from other cultures.

One of the areas that affect learning and teaching, in general, is male and female representation in textbooks as well as the existence of linguistic bias based on gender. Male and female representation in school curricula can directly or indirectly affect and shape learners' attitudes and future expectations because they are deemed as an integral part of the learning process. In other words, male and female representation in school curricula can positively or negatively affect learners themselves in terms of their self-esteem and self-confidence (Zakka & Zanzali, 2015). Moreover, Mutekwe and Modibe (2012) stressed the need to review school and non-school textbooks to provide gender-balanced textbooks and avoid the negative effects of gender bias on learners. It is also incumbent to point out those textbook designers and publishers need to conduct constant textbook reviews to fight gender bias. The presence of gender bias should not be tolerated in the target school textbooks. Mutekwe and Modibe (2012) pointed out that, "textbooks need to be reviewed with gender perspectives to provide balance and gender-sensitive education to all children". (p. 371) He stated that textbook authors should be aware of the undesirable effects of gender bias on learners. In other words, learners particularly susceptible ones (e.g. children) should not be exposed to school textbooks loaded with instances of gender bias. Special measures should be taken to avoid the presence of gender bias in their school textbooks. The presence of

gender bias is harmful and damaging to learners. Mutekwe and Modibe (2012) emphasized that the negative effects of stereotyping should be taken into consideration by textbook authors. The presence of gender bias is serious and specific actions should be taken to fight it.

Gender bias in textbooks is one of the most examined areas in gender and education studies. Gender bias in school and non-school textbooks is usually associated with three notions: preferring males to females, negative influence on females, and societal expectations of what is labelled as "norm". Cook (2016) has indicated that gender bias refers to "the favouring of one gender over another, usually with negative implications for women" (p. 1). In other words, gender bias is generally associated with females in textbooks. This association is usually negative and it causes undesirable effects on females' identity in different textbooks. Cook (2016) also maintained that gender bias is closely related to specific societal expectations in terms of males and females. She has pointed out that, "Gender bias, as opposed to sexism, is referenced to normative gendered expectations regarding appropriate roles, values, and behaviours for men and women" (p. 1). She concluded that "therefore, within a patriarchal society, these expectations still exist and are evident in the institutions that govern daily life" (p. 1). In other words, gender bias against females has a powerful presence in various lifestyles, particularly in traditional societies. It forces males and females to assume specific beliefs, manners, and convictions that they do not believe in or feel convinced to follow. Male or female identity and actions are usually shaped by the society they live in.

It is also important to point out that the investigation of gender representation in the Arabian Gulf context (e.g. Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar) has not been researched or reported. Few studies have been conducted to examine gender representation in the Arabian Gulf context (e.g. United Arab Emirates). Therefore, more studies on gender representation in school textbooks are needed. In addition, many key questions on gender representation in school curricula remain unanswered. For example, the scope and nature of gender bias in school curricula in the Arabian Gulf area. In other words, the literature gap on gender portrayal in the Arabian Gulf context is still present.

## **2. Literature Review**

Many researchers on gender issues investigated personal traits in school and non-school textbooks to identify the existence or non-existence of gender bias in these textbooks. School and non-school textbooks, in general, portray males and females in traditional and stereotypical cases. Males are usually looked at as 'strong', 'clever', 'independent', 'hardworking' while females are seen as 'emotional', 'dependent', 'friendly' and so on. Toçi and Aliu (2013) stated that "many researchers discuss that men are always represented as humans who do not cry, who are emotionally stronger and sometimes illogical and women as nurturant and emotionally weaker" (p. 36). It is also worth mentioning that these gender-biased images have been found in school and non-school curricula since the sixties. Healy (2009) stated that "many EFL texts were biased against femininity" (p. 92). She also argued that these textbooks reflect the idea that women's place is usually at home. In other words, women should appear traditionally. She indicated that such textbooks saw "woman's place was in the home, raising a family and supporting her husband from the sidelines. There was no need to represent women in a different light. Putting it bluntly, men were more important than women" (p. 92). In other words, stereotypical and traditional gendered personal characteristics dominate school textbooks.

In general, many studies showed that school or non-school curricula are embedded with traditional, stereotypical, and biased personal traits. Women occupied negative personal characteristics whereas men enjoyed positive personal traits. Nur Abida and Darni (2017) investigated gender bias in language textbooks in elementary schools in Java using qualitative research methods. They analyzed gendered images to investigate job types, games, and attitudes. The findings of the study have indicated that stereotypical images of males and females were prevalent in such textbooks. The study has also revealed that gender discrimination between girls and boys is still ingrained in the school textbooks in terms of games and attitudes. Nur Abida and Darni (2017) concluded that "Gender-biased tendencies are still embedded in elementary textbooks and continue to dominate the pages of school books" (p. 133). In addition, Atay and Danju (2012) carried out an analysis of Grade 1 and Grade 5 textbooks used in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and students' views about personal traits in gender role society. They used a mixed-method to analyse these textbooks. Study findings revealed that men and women were portrayed in stereotypical ways in these school textbooks. Men were portrayed as "being brave", "being dependent", "independent", "clever", "leader", "creative", "supportive", "rich", "hardworking", and "lazy", while women were portrayed as "beautiful", "sweet", "emotional", "happy", "sad", "surprised" and "friendly". The study also showed that men and women shared the following personal traits in these textbooks: "active", "passive", "aggressive", and "sensitive". Another study was conducted by Al Kayed et al. (2020) to analyze gender representation in EFL textbooks used at Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan using Fairclough's (1999) three-dimensional framework. Domestic roles, visibility of males and females, males' and females' activities, semantic roles, and pictorial representation were investigated to examine the presence of gender bias. The study findings have revealed that "the EFL textbooks were biased in favour of men in certain roles and activities" (p. 244). The study has also indicated that the designated textbooks have exhibited "some degree of equality between males and females in terms of pictorial representation, visibility, and some activities and roles" (p. 244). Moreover, Damigella and Licciardello (2014) studied stereotypes and prejudices in five different primary school reading textbooks. They

investigated one hundred seventy-four texts from these textbooks. One of the areas they examined was personality traits. Their study revealed that positive traits like sympathy, determination, courage, virtue, curiosity as a sign of intelligence and foxiness were more associated with males than females. The percentage was 71% (male) to 29% (female). The study also showed that negative traits like timidity, envy, vanity, and curiosity as an expression of being a busybody were far more associated with females than males. The percentage was 84.6 (females) and 15.4 (males). In other words, stereotypical personal traits are still prevalent in these textbooks. Females were associated with negative traditional traits, while males were seen with positive traditional traits. Bataineh (2020) conducted a study to investigate gender bias in first-grade Arabic language school textbooks. He investigated the following categories: gender firstness, gender roles, gender illustrations, gender nouns, and gender names. In general, the study findings have indicated that gender bias against females is still present. The study has concluded that female gender roles were traditional whereas male gender roles were traditional and varied.

It is also worth mentioning that Karama (2020) investigated gender bias in school mathematics textbooks in Palestine from Grade 1 to 12. He used content analysis to investigate professions, names, action verbs, pictures, and pronouns. The study findings have indicated that males' presence is still dominant whereas females' presence was marginal and insignificant. In other words, mathematics school textbooks used in schools in Palestine are gender-biased against females. In addition, Lewandowski (2014) conducted a contrastive study to examine gender stereotyping in EFL textbooks published in the 1970s, 1980s, and three twenty-first century titles. The study results showed that "the recently published grammar textbooks portray the two genders in a much less stereotyped way than the 20<sup>th</sup>-century course books" (p. 83). The study has also revealed that character traits associated with males and females are still stereotypical and traditional even though NTs (New Textbooks) show that an effort has been put to improve females' presence and character traits compared to OTs (Old textbooks). Lewandowski (2014) stated that "Character traits seem to be more associated with male-gendered subjects in both the OTs and NTs. It has to be noted, however, that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century textbooks contain a markedly higher proportion of female subjects in this domain than the 1970s and 1980s course books" (p. 89). The study findings also showed that men were usually associated with the following personal traits: employment, intellectual activity, independence, great achievements, rationality, hobbies, and skills. On the other hand, Lewandowski (2014) stated that men were sometimes associated with negative stereotyped personal traits such as breaking the law, being aggressive, and getting addicted to alcohol and smoking. She concluded that the NTs offer more gender-balanced, gender-equal, and non-sexist embedded content. Lewandowski (2014) argued that NTS, "definitely reflect a significant move towards gender egalitarianism. Moreover, they are free from manifestations of blatant sexism, which can be found in the OTs" (p. 97).

Vahdatinejad (2017) investigated the presence of linguistic sexism in the Iranian high school EFL textbooks. He used quantitative content analysis to investigate the following categories: pronouns, title names, and firstness. The findings of the study have revealed that females are still underrepresented and suffer from gender bias. Yatim and Paramasivam (2015) conducted a study entitled "Linguistic Sexism and Gender Stereotypes in the Writing of Selected Malay Male University Students". They investigated the occurrence of gender stereotypes in some Malay male students' essay writings. The analysis revealed that "Malay males display the normative gender role stereotypes of a woman as polite, modest, understanding, supportive and adept at homemaking" (p. 373). In other words, Malay females, in general, are portrayed with negative and stereotypical personal characteristics. On the other hand, the analysis has also shown that Malay females are portrayed in some cases as "intelligent and educated with professional careers of their own" (p. 373). In sum, Yatim and Paramasivam (2015) strongly believe that the findings of their study closely reflect the Malay culture.

Finally, Jannati (2015) studied how social gender identity is reflected by the use of adjectives and pictures in the ILLI pre-intermediate series textbooks. The analysis of adjectives used with males and females showed that adjectives with negative connotations are more associated with males than females. The study also found that adjectives commonly associated with females were physical appearance-related such as beautiful, slim, shy, emotional, sincere, etc., while the majority of adjectives associated with males were personality-related such as talkative, rude, educated, brave, proud, etc. In sum, school and non-school textbooks are still embedded with stereotypical and traditional personal traits.

To sum up, recent studies have shown that school and non-school textbooks contain traditional and stereotypical gendered personal characteristics. Males were usually associated with positive personal traits (e.g. strong, active, supportive, and creative) while females were generally associated with negative personal traits (e.g. emotional, sensitive, dependent, and sad).

### 3. Methodology

The study performed an analysis of personal traits implied by images (pictures, photographs, and illustrations) and texts in the school textbooks at hand. Personal traits are classified according to Hawkins's (2007) Personal Traits. Hawkins's (2007) personal traits are used in the present study because they have been used in previous gender representation studies and are effective and useful in identifying and examining the personal traits of males. Hawkins classified certain personal traits associated with males and females. According to Hawkins (2007), some personal traits are associated with males (e.g. adventurous, aggressive,

argumentative, assertive, competitive, and son) while other personal characteristics/traits are associated with females (e.g. affectionate, emotionally expressive, feminine, impetuous, nurturing, and so on). Analyzing personal characteristics/traits using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits would help in identifying the existence of any gender-biased personal characteristics/ traits associated with males and females in the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks. Table 1 offers a detailed description of Hawkins's traits associated with males. Table 2, on the other hand, offers a description of personal traits associated with females.

**Table 1**  
*Hawkins's (2007) Masculine Personal Traits*

---

Trait	Meaning
Adventurous	Actively exploring the environment, real or imagined
Aggressive	Actions and motives with intent to hurt or frighten; hostile
Ambitious	Eager to achieve something. Seeks material possessions or career success
Argumentative	Belligerent: verbally disagreeable with another person
Assertive	Taking charge of a situation, making plans, and issuing instructions
Competitive	Challenging to win over another physically or intellectually
Decisive	Quick to consider options/situations and make up mind
Masculine	Is heterosexual in feelings toward females?
Risk-taker	Willing to take a chance on personal safety or reputation to achieve a goal
Self-reliant	Can accomplish tasks or handle situations alone with confidence

**Table 2**  
*Hawkins's (2007) Feminine Personal Traits*

Trait	Meaning
Affectionate	Openly expressing warm feelings: hugging, touching
Emotionally expressive	Allowing feelings to show, including temper tantrums, crying, or laughing
Feminine	Is heterosexual in feelings toward males?
Impetuous	Quick to act without thinking of the consequences
Nurturing	Actively caring and aiding another's development, be it physically or emotionally – especially towards children
Panicky	Reacting to a situation with hysteria: crying, shouting
Passive	Following another's lead and being active in a situation
Shy	Readily frightened, bashfully reserved
Tender	Handling someone with gentle sensitivity and consideration
Understanding	Being able to see and comprehend a situation from another person's perspective; showing empathy. Singing in a foreign language applies to this trait

### **3.1 Measures**

#### *3.1.1 Total number of male and female personal traits in textbooks*

The total occurrences of personal traits in all school textbooks are counted and analyzed using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits.

#### *3.1.2 Total number of male and female personal traits in each textbook*

The total occurrences of personal traits in each school textbook are counted and analyzed using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits.

#### *3.1.3 Total number of male and female personal traits in Grade 4 textbooks*

The total occurrences of personal traits found in Grade 4 textbooks are counted and analyzed in comparison with Grade 11 textbooks using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits.

#### *3.1.4 Total number of male and female personal traits in Grade 11 textbooks*

The total occurrences of personal traits in the Grade 11 textbooks are counted and analyzed in comparison with Grade Four textbooks using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits.

#### *3.1.5 Total number of male and female personal traits in Grade 1 textbooks*

The total occurrences of personal traits found in Grade One textbooks are counted and analyzed in comparison with Grade Seven textbooks using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits.

#### *3.1.6 Total number of male and female personal traits in Grade 7 textbooks*

The total occurrences of personal traits found in Grade Seven textbooks are counted and analyzed in comparison with Grade One textbooks using Hawkins's (2007) personal traits.

### **3.2 Sample of the Study**

The school textbooks examined in this study are currently being used in all Omani state schools. These school curricula are the latest and most updated school textbooks developed, designed, and supervised by the Omani Ministry of Education. 16 English language textbooks used in Omani schools constitute the sample and population of the study. Eight books from grades One and four are currently being used in the Basic Education level (Phase One) and eight school textbooks are currently being used in grades Seven and 11 in the Post-Basic Education level (Phase Two). Each semester includes two textbooks: 1) the Post-Basic Education level (Phase Two) has two textbooks: the first one is called *Class Book* and the other one is called *Skills Book* while the Basic-Education level (Phase One) textbooks are called *Course Book* and *Work Book*.

### **3.3 Data Selection: Textbooks**

16 school textbooks were chosen from Phase One and Phase Two for two reasons. Firstly, the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks offer a comprehensive perspective of the contents of the two phases. Hence, this study provides a comparative analysis of the two phases of the Omani educational system. In other words, it is expected that this study will shed some light on the aspects of similarities and differences between these two school phases. Secondly, only 16 school textbooks were chosen because it is considered time-consuming, unmanageable, and difficult to handle and analyse all school texts used in Omani schools. The total number of English textbooks used in Omani schools is 48. Simple random sampling was employed to select the school textbooks used in the present study. 16 Omani EFL school textbooks were randomly selected from 48 Omani EFL school textbooks currently being used in all Omani government schools. The selected sample population consisted of 16 school textbooks from grades One, Four, Seven, and 11. Therefore, the selected sample is representative and unbiased. McLeod (2014) has stated that it is good to use random sampling because one's sample "should represent the target population and eliminate sampling bias". Random sampling refers to, "each member of a population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Also, each combination of members of the population has an equal chance of composing the sample" (Statistics Canada, 2013). It is worth mentioning that random sampling is widely used and it is simple and easy to perform (Statistics Canada, 2013).

### **3.4 Data Analysis Method**

The present study uses a mixed-method approach. It employs quantitative and qualitative methods to examine gender representation in these 16 Omani school textbooks used in the Basic and Post-Basic Education Cycles. Tashakkori and Newman (2010) defined a mixed-method approach as a method that, "systematically integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to research to answer research questions." (p. 514). They elaborated on the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods. They added that,

Quantitative researchers follow a post-positivist worldview and are predominantly interested in collecting and analyzing numerical data with structured methods. Qualitative researchers follow a more constructivist worldview and are predominantly interested in collecting and analyzing narrative data using open-ended (holistic) procedures. (p. 514)

The study will employ the mixed-method approach because it has been widely used in studies on gender representation in textbooks and is effective in analyzing and understanding the contents of textbooks. It is also worth mentioning to state that Wisdom and Creswell, (2013) mentioned that, "such integration permits a more complete and synergistic utilization of data than do separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis" (p. 1). In other words, using quantitative and qualitative methods renders analyzing comprehensive.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The present study performed an analysis of personal traits of the images (pictures, photographs, and illustrations) found in the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks according to Hawkins's (2007) Personal Traits. The findings of the study, in general, have indicated that the majority of personal traits related to males were traditional and stereotypical. The findings of the present study also showed that females, on the other hand, were portrayed in images (pictures, photographs, and illustrations) in a variety of situations that convey feminine and masculine characteristics/traits.

### **4.1 Male and female personal traits in all school textbooks**

Males were generally portrayed as *risk-takers, self-reliant, adventurous, decisive, competitive, and aggressive*. Males were portrayed as conveying the following masculine traits:

1- Risk-taker: males were seen as crossing wadis (flooding water in certain places), standing on balls, and sailing around the world in a boat. Males were also portrayed as going to the moon, Romeo (Romeo and Juliet), climbing Mount Everest, hunting Moby Dick (a huge whale), Terry Fox (as he suffered from cancer), and so on. In other words, the designers and publishers of the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks used personal characteristics/ traits that are traditionally associated with males. Using such male traditional personal characteristics would enhance and maintain the traditional view that males are usually more risk-takers than females. In this perspective, many people perceive it as gender bias against females.

2- Adventurous: males were portrayed as exploring the Wahiba sands. It is a place full of adventures. The inclusion of some females in such adventurous situations (e.g. crossing the Wahiba sands) is a step ahead in achieving gender equality in the Omani EFL school textbooks. In other words, adventurous is not always synonymous with males only.

3- Competitive: males were portrayed as swimming, participating in Judo competitions, weight lifting, and roller-skating.

4- Decisive: Males were portrayed as decisive in certain contexts. For example, Terry Fox was decisive to fight cancer and collect donations to help research in the area of cancer.

5- Aggressive: Males were seen in aggressive situations in the Omani EFL school textbooks. For example, images of males polluting the environment while being on a picnic.

6- Self-reliant: Males were seen as self-reliant in many situations in the present study. For instance, images of a national inventor who relied on himself to achieve his goal. In addition, males were seen as trying to keep the environment clean (not depend on others to do it).

In addition, it is noteworthy that males were portrayed in many places as *nurturing* (feminine trait). Males were also seen in one image as *affectionate* and another as *understanding* (feminine traits). Males were portrayed as conveying the following feminine traits:

1- Nurturing: The Omani EFL school textbooks contained many male images in nurturing situations. Males were seen, for example, helping disabled people, reading stories at night for their children, fathers expressing their feelings towards their teenage son, volunteering to help others, planting trees, singing to a toddler, and taking care and observing one's son in the water. It is noteworthy to say that the presence of many males in such situations in the Omani EFL school textbooks is a step in the right direction. Males need to be portrayed as nurturing because it helps to change the stereotypical view that males are not generally nurturing. It would help in achieving gender balance in school curricula.

2- Affectionate: One image of a male being affectionate towards an animal (e.g. dog) was seen in the Omani EFL school textbooks. This characteristic/trait is usually associated with females. The presence of only one male image that expresses affection has a serious implication. It implies that males, in general, are not affectionate. This stereotypical view of men not being affectionate is no longer deemed acceptable in today's school curricula.

3- Understanding: The 16 Omani EFL school textbooks contained some images of males showing their understanding of the importance of keeping the environment clean (e.g. recognizing the dangers of environmental pollution). The presence of such images would enhance gender equality and promote gender balance in the Omani EFL school textbooks.

Females, on the other hand, were generally portrayed in a variety of personal traits. Unlike males, females were portrayed in a spectrum of feminine and masculine traits. They were portrayed as *nurturing*, *emotionally expressive*, *risk-takers*, *self-reliant*, *competitive*, *aggressive*, *adventurous*, and *decisive*. It is an indication that the current situation (e.g. gender bias and gender inequality in textbooks) is changing and that gender bias against females is gradually vanishing.

1- Nurturing: Females were portrayed in different situations that imply that they are nurturing. For example, the mother's feelings towards her teenage son, volunteering to help others, and feeding animals at the zoo. The presence of female images in such situations enhances and supports the status quo in societies where females are generally nurturing.

2- Emotionally expressive: The Omani EFL school textbooks contained many images of females being surprised, happy, and unhappy. Females, for instance, were seen happy in situations like winning races, welcoming people, and participating in the Olympic Games. In addition, females were seen as surprised in situations like when females do not have any idea about something (e.g. body language expressions). Finally, females were seen as unhappy in different situations (e.g. a teacher telling her student that he was coming late to class).

3- Risk-taker: One of the most interesting findings of the present study is the portrayal of females as risk-takers. Portraying females as risk-takers, in my opinion, is one of the aspects that enhances gender equality and balance. Females, for example, were portrayed as playing football on the bus, performing the role of Juliet (Romeo and Juliet), and sailing around the world. The portrayal of females as risk-takers in school textbooks is fundamental to improving the stereotypical representation of gender in a conservative country like the sultanate of Oman.

4- Self-reliant: The 16 Omani EFL school textbooks contained some interesting images that convey the idea of self-reliance. Females were seen taking care of the animals at the zoo (zookeeper). This personal characteristic/trait is, in my opinion, one of the most challenging images in a conservative society like Oman. It is unlikely to find an Omani female occupying the job of a zookeeper. In general, the Omani society would not approve of such an occupation for females.

5- Competitive: The analysis of images present in the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks has revealed the presence of many female images as being a competitive person. Females, for instance, were portrayed in various situations such as competing in horseracing, weight lifting, ice-skating, skiing, tennis competition, and world-famous musician competing with others. The fact that these images are abundant in these Omani EFL school textbooks is a sign that gender equality and equity are improving and actions are being taken to achieve gender balance.

6- Aggressive: Females were seen in some situations as aggressive in the Omani school textbooks. Females were portrayed as aggressive in situations like polluting the environment on a picnic etc.

7- Adventurous: Females were seen in adventurous situations like images of exploring the Wahiba Sands etc. Seeing images of adventurous females in Omani EFL school textbooks is a step towards gender balance and equality.

8- Decisive: The school textbooks used in the present study contained some images of females as being decisive. Females, for example, were portrayed as casting their ballots in the elections. Being decisive is one of the missing female personal traits in the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks. Therefore, the decision to include decisive images of females in school textbooks would be a step in the right direction to achieving gender equality.

#### ***4.2 Masculine and feminine personal traits in each school textbook***

The present study findings have shown that some of these Omani EFL school textbooks contain a higher number of masculine and feminine personal traits than other school textbooks. For example, *Course Book B* (Grade 11) has five masculine and feminine traits: risk-taker, nurturing, self-reliant, competitive, and decisive. *Skills Book A* (Grade Four) and *Skills Book B* (Grade Four), on the other hand, have only two masculine and feminine traits. In addition, *Work Book A* (Grade 11) and *Work Book B* (Grade 11) have only three masculine and feminine traits whereas *Class Book A* (Grade Four) and *Class Book B* (Grade Four) have four masculine and feminine traits. In other words, Class Books and Course Books have a higher number and variety of masculine and feminine traits than the Skills Book and Work Books. Table 3 provides detailed information about the number and variety of masculine and feminine traits found in the 16 Omani EFL school textbooks.



**Table 3**  
*Masculine and Feminine Personal Traits in Each School Textbook*

Textbook	Females	Males	Total
Class Book A Grade Four	Nurturing, self-reliant, risk-taking	Adventurous, nurturing, risk-taking	6
Skills Book A Grade Four	Nurturing	Risk-taking	2
Class Book B Grade Four	Competitive, aggressive	Competitive, understanding, nurturing	6
Skills Book B Grade Four	0	Nurturing, affectionate	2
Course Book A Grade 11	Emotionally expressive	Emotionally expressive, nurturing, risk-taking, self-reliant	5
Work Book A Grade 11	Risk-taking, nurturing, adventurous	Risk-taking, nurturing, adventurous	6
Course Book B Grade 11	Competitive, nurturing, decisive	Risk-taking, decisive, nurturing	6
Work Book B Grade 11	0	Risk-taking, decisive, nurturing	3
Class Book A Grade One	0	Emotionally expressive	1
Skills Book A Grade One	0	0	0
Class Book B Grade One	Emotionally expressive	Emotionally expressive	2
Skills Book B Grade One	Risk-taking	0	1
Class Book A Grade Seven	Adventurous, affectionate	Adventurous	3
Skills Book A Grade Seven	Emotionally expressive	Emotionally expressive	2
Class Book B Grade Seven	Emotionally expressive, Nurturing, adventurous	Nurturing, risk-taking, adventurous, emotionally expressive	7
Skills Book B Grade Seven	Emotionally expressive	Emotionally expressive, aggressive	3

One of the surprising findings of the study is that *Skills Book B* (Grade Four) and *Work Book B* (Grade 11) did not contain any personal traits associated with females. It is a strong indicator of sexism and gender bias against females. It is difficult to imagine two textbooks that do not have any personal traits associated with females. One may deduce that gender was not on the list of school textbook designers and publishers. It is annoying to see females' characteristics/traits invisible in two Omani EFL school textbooks.

It can also be noted that many textbooks have more personal traits associated with males than females. For example, *Class Book B* (Grade Four), *Skills Book B* (Grade 4), *Course Book A* (Grade 11), *Class Book B* (Grade Seven), and *Work Book B* (Grade 11) have more personal traits associated with males than females. On the other hand, it can be noticed that *Class Book A* (Grade 4), *Skills Book A* (Grade Four), *Work Book A* (Grade 11), *Skills Book A* (Grade Seven), and *Course Book B* (Grade 11) and so on have the same number of personal traits associated with males and females. In other words, gender representation in the eight Omani EFL textbooks is still in favour of males over females in general. Females are still marginalized and invisible in some Omani EFL school textbooks. More effort should be made to improve gender balance in these school textbooks.

### **4.3 Masculine and feminine personal traits in Grade 4 school textbooks**

The analysis of personal traits in Grade Four images provided some interesting findings. First, the present study has shown that the most frequent personal trait in Grade 4 school textbooks is "nurturing". The analysis revealed that "nurturing" as a personal trait was used five times in different images. It is also worth mentioning that "nurturing" was used two times in female images and three times in male images in Grade Four textbooks. In other words, using a feminine trait with males more than females is an indication that gender bias against females is not as powerful as it used to be. Progress is being made in these textbooks in terms of offering more balanced personal traits.

The analysis has also indicated that the trait "risk-taking" was used two times with males and one time with females in Grade Four textbooks. In addition, some feminine traits were used with males (e.g. understanding and affectionate) while some masculine traits were used with females (e.g. competitive, aggressive, and self-reliant). This is another indication that gender bias against females is diminishing in one way or another. In other words, Grade 4 textbooks show a balanced gender representation.

### **4.4 Masculine and feminine personal traits in Grade 11 school textbooks**

The analysis of personal traits present in Grade 11 images (pictures, photographs, and illustrations) provided some fascinating findings. Similar to Grade Four school textbooks, the analysis has indicated that the most frequent personal trait in Grade 11 Omani EFL school textbooks is "nurturing". The analysis has revealed that "nurturing" as a personal trait was used six times in different images. It was also noted that "nurturing" was used two times in female images and four times in male images in Grade 11 Omani EFL school textbooks. In other words, it is interesting to see a trait that is usually associated with females (e.g. nurturing) is being used more with males than females in school textbooks. It is an indication that gender balance and bringing change to stereotypical personal traits used in school textbooks is crucial to school textbook designers.

Moreover, four masculine personal traits were used in female images (e.g. risk-taking, adventurous, competitive, and decisive) whereas two feminine personal traits were used in male images (e.g. emotionally expressive and nurturing). In other words, masculine and feminine personal traits are overlapping in male and female images. In addition, more male-associated personal traits are being used with females than the other way around. Stereotypical personal traits seem to be less visible in the current Omani EFL school textbooks. Gender equality is getting momentum in the Omani EFL Grade Four and 11 school textbooks.

It is also worth mentioning to point out that Grade 11 school textbooks have more personal traits than Grade Four school textbooks. For example, Grade 11 school textbooks have 20 personal traits while Grade Four school textbooks have 14 personal traits.

### **4.5 Masculine and feminine personal traits in Grade 1 school textbooks**

The analysis of personal traits present in Grade One images showed that the prevalent trait was "emotionally expressive". Males and females were shown to be unhappy and afraid in many situations like drowning, and falling off chairs and beds. The trait "emotionally expressive" was used with males and females at the same time.

The other interesting point is that *Skills Book 1 A* (Grade One) did not contain any personal traits. In addition, Grade One school textbooks contained only one risk-taking personal trait assigned to a male (e.g. swinging on a tree).

### **4.6 Masculine and feminine personal traits in Grade 7 school textbooks**

The analysis of Grade Seven Omani EFL school textbooks indicated that these textbooks contained a variety of personal traits assigned to males and females. "emotionally expressive" and "nurturing" personal traits were the most prevalent traits for males and females. Males and females were seen laughing, being afraid, hugging, and feeling pain in their bodies (e.g. teeth). In addition, males and females were seen as "nurturing". Females were seen nurturing two times (e.g. helping disabled women) while males were shown nurturing one time (e.g. caring for animals and birds because of environmental pollution).

Other personal traits included observing males and females being "adventurous" (e.g. crossing the Wadi (males and females), (male) sea gliding). Grade Seven textbooks contained more images of adventures assigned to males than females. A female was shown as being "affectionate" (e.g. towards a cat) while a male was seen as "risking-taking" (e.g. climbing a mountain).

## **5. Conclusion**

The objective of the present study was to investigate the presence of personality traits found in textbooks. The analysis involved all personal traits implied by images and texts in the textbooks. The findings of the present study have shown that there is a balanced representation of males and females in terms of personal traits. The study has also shown that the majority of masculine personal traits are stereotypical. The findings of the present study are not completely consistent with previous studies on the portrayal of personal traits in textbooks. The findings of the present study, in general, have shown that the majority of personal

traits related to males are traditional and stereotypical. Females, on the other hand, were portrayed in different situations that convey masculine and feminine characteristics. In general, males were portrayed as *risk-takers, self-reliant, nurturing, adventurous, decisive, competitive, and aggressive*. Females, on the other hand, were usually portrayed in a variety of personal traits such as *nurturing, understanding, affectionate, risk-taker, self-reliant, competitive, aggressive, adventurous, and decisive*. In other words, there is an effort on the part of the Omani ministry of education to offer a balanced gender representation and less gendered stereotypical personal traits against females in school textbooks. It should also be pointed out that the presence of females in a variety of situations that convey masculine and feminine traits in the Omani EFL school textbooks is not enough to achieve gender equality in these textbooks. More efforts should be made to achieve gender balance in these school textbooks.

Many studies were conducted around the world to examine the scope and nature of personal traits in school and non-school textbooks. Previous studies on personal traits associated with males and females have indicated that personal traits associated with males and females in textbooks are usually non-traditional and stereotypical (Atay & Danju, 2012; Hawkins, 2007; Lewandowski, 2014 and Jannati, 2015). The findings of these studies do not completely go in line with the findings of the present study. One of the findings of the present study showed that females enjoyed a variety of personal characteristics (e.g. *affectionate, nurturing, risk-taker and aggressive*).

Other studies on personal traits have found that personal traits present in textbooks are also gendered biased against females (Atay & Danju, 2012; Damigella & Licciardello, 2014; Hawkins, 2007; Jannati, 2015; Lewandowski, 2014). For example, males are usually associated with positive characteristics (e.g. *cleverness, leadership, creativity, determination, courage, virtue, and so on*) whereas females are usually associated with negative characteristics (e.g. *vanity, envy, timidity, beauty, happiness, and so on*).

It is also worth mentioning that the present study did not include all English language school textbooks used in Omani government schools. Therefore, the findings of the present study do not necessarily apply to all textbooks used in government schools in Oman. In addition, it is recommended to include other English language school textbooks for future studies. Future gender studies, for example, should include the Basic Education and Post-Basic Education systems. In other words, conducting comparative studies on gender issues in the two education systems in Oman is strongly recommended.

### Statements and Declarations

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3888-4759>

**Publisher's Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

### References

- [1] Al Kayed, M., Al Kahawaldah, Kh. S., & Alzu'bi, M., A. (2020). Critical discourse analysis of gender representation in EFL textbooks. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 9 (4). 244-254. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.23.2020.94.244.254>
- [2] Atay, M. & Danju, I. (2012). Analysis of 1st grade and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade textbooks and primary school students' views about personal traits in gender role in society. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 47, 64–73. Retrieved November 27, 2020, from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042812023506>
- [3] Bataineh, A. (2020). Analysis of gender bias in two Arabic language textbooks -Grade 1. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Translation*, 3(12), 181-186. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.12.22>
- [4] Cook, K. (2016). Gender bias. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, 1(2). Retrieved [November 27, 2020](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118663219.wbeggs212/abstract), from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118663219.wbeggs212/abstract>
- [5] Damigella, D. & Licciardello, O. (2014). Stereotypes and prejudices at school: a study on primary school reading books. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, (127), 209-213.
- [6] Healy, D. (2009). The representation of women and men in a modern EFL textbook: Are popular textbooks gender-biased? *Memoirs of the Osaka Institute of Technology. Series B*, 54, (2), 1- 100. Retrieved [December 25, 2020](https://www.oit.ac.jp/japanese/toshokan/tosho/kiyou/jinshahen/54-2/07healy.pdf), from <https://www.oit.ac.jp/japanese/toshokan/tosho/kiyou/jinshahen/54-2/07healy.pdf>
- [7] Jannati, S. (2015). Gender representation in EFL textbooks: A case of ILI pre-intermediate series. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 2 (3), 211-222. Retrieved [November 28, 2020](http://www.jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/viewFile/54/pdf_52), from [http://www.jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/viewFile/54/pdf\\_52](http://www.jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/viewFile/54/pdf_52)
- [8] Karama, M., J. (2020). Gender bias in school mathematics textbooks from grade 1 to 12. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21, (1). 162-171. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from <https://vc.bridgew.edu/ijws/vol21/iss1/13>
- [9] Lewandowski, M. (2014). Gender stereotyping in EFL grammar textbooks. A diachronic approach. *Linguistics online*, (68), 6/14, 83-99.
- [10] McLeod, S. (2014). *Sampling methods*. Retrieved [December 27, 2020](http://www.simplypsychology.org/sampling.html), from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/sampling.html>
- [11] Mutekwe, E. & Modibe, M. (2012). An evaluation of the gender-sensitive nature of selected textbooks in the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum. *Anthropologist*. 14(4), 365-373. Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09720073.2012.11891259>
- [12] Nur Abida, F., I. & Darni (2017). Gender bias in elementary school language textbooks. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 5(1), 128-133. <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijgws.v5n1p13>

- [12] Statistics Canada (2013). *Probability sampling*. Retrieved 17. December 2020, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/edu/power-pouvoir/ch13/prob/5214899-eng.htm>
- [13] Tashakkori, A. & Newman, I. (2010). Mixed methods. *International Encyclopaedia of Education (Third Edition)*, 514-520. Retrieved December 22, 2020, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780080448947002876#!>
- [14] Vahdatinejad, Sh. (2017). Linguistic sexism in the Iranian high school EFL textbooks. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2). 746 – 761
- [15] Wisdom, J. & Creswell, J., W. (2013). Mixed methods: Integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis while studying patient-centered medical home models. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
- [16] Yatin, A., I., A. & Paramasivam, S. (2015). Linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in the writing of selected Malay male university students. *Journal of Language and Communication*, 2, (2), 207-221.
- [17] Zakka, Z., M. & Zanzali, Z., M., Z. (2015). Gender bias in primary school mathematics textbooks in Nigeria. *American Journal of Educational Science*, 1 (5), 223- 228. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <files.aiscience.org/journal/article/pdf/70380042.pdf>