

Analysis of Gender Bias in Two Arabic Language Textbooks - Grade 1

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the presence/absence of gender bias in the first-grade Arabic language school textbooks used at public schools in the Sultanate of Oman. Content analysis is used to analyze the following four categories: gender illustrations, gender roles, gender firstness, gender nouns, and gender names. In general, the study results have shown that gender bias against females is still ingrained in the first-grade Arabic language textbooks. The results have indicated that first-grade school textbook did not exhibit a balanced representation of gender in terms of gender illustrations, gender roles, gender firstness, and gender nouns. In addition, male gender roles were traditional and varied whereas female gender roles were traditional. The only category that exhibited a balanced gender representation of males and females was gender nouns. In the light of these results, some recommendations have been made.

1. Introduction

This study aims at analyzing the presence/absence of gender bias in the first-grade Arabic language school textbooks. It is crucial to investigate the presence/absence of equal gender representation in school curricula for two main reasons. Equal or unequal representation of gender in textbooks may have positive or negative effects on students' achievements. Iqbo et al. (2015) emphasized that, "academic achievement is based on the degree of intellectual stimulation that the child could receive from learning situations. The student's gender stereotype and location may play vital roles in his or her academic achievement" (p. 3). Martin et al. (2007) strongly believe that negative stereotypes in textbooks hinder students' performance and leads to negative expectations (as cited in Iqbo et al., 2015). In addition, school curricula may have a negative impact on student's career choice. Betz (2005) indicated that there are two ways in which gender roles stereotypes can influence females' choice of careers. The first stereotype is the belief that the first priority for women is to have and raise children. The other stereotype is related to work. It is believed that certain types of jobs are appropriate for men while other types are appropriate for women (as cited in Diekmann, 2015). In other words, the presence of stereotypical and traditional gender roles in school curricula can negatively influence males and females career choice. Mkuchu (2004) emphasized the importance of textbook contents in promoting gender equality/inequality among young learners. Mkuchu (2004) confirmed that, "the content and illustrations presented in textbooks may promote positive and negative thoughts about self, sex, occupations, life expectations and life chances (as cited in Nunoo, 2017) (p. 100). Therefore, school textbooks should offer a balanced representation of males and females. Equitable gender representation should be a priority for curricula authors and designers.

2. Literature Review

Various studies have been conducted to analyze the presence/absence of gender bias in school and non-school curricula. The majority of past and present studies have shown that gender bias is still ingrained in textbooks. Asadullah et al. (2018) conducted a study entitled "Gender Bias in Bangladeshi School Textbooks: Not Just a Matter of Politics or Growing Influence of Islamists" to investigate the presence of gender bias in the Bangladeshi school textbooks. They examined 1507 pages of six government textbooks and two unapproved textbooks. Asadullah et al. (2018) examined, "gender stereotypes in terms of

exclusion and misrepresentation of a particular gender throughout the textbook” (p. 85). In addition, the study findings showed that these textbooks exhibit gender bias against females. Asadullah et al. (2018) stated that,

The gender division of labor portrayed within the textbooks reveal a strong prevalence of female stereotypes. Women appear in a narrow range of occupational roles—primarily engaged in domestic chores—while male occupational roles are associated with power, prestige and wealth (e.g., king, prophet, caliph, professor, and landlord). Women rarely appear as a leading character. (p. 86)

Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) examined gender bias in Iranian high school textbooks using content analysis. They analyzed various gender-related categories such as gender visibility in illustrations and texts in addition to gendered occupational roles. The findings of their study indicated that gender bias is still a problem in the Iranian high school textbooks. The study concluded that female’s visibility is low compared to male’s visibility. The study findings also showed that male’s occupational roles were more varied than female’s occupational roles. Ansary and Babaii (2003) conducted a study to examine sexist attitudes and values manifestations in two school textbooks entitled “*Right Path to English I & II*”. They used mixed method research by integrating elements of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis included the analysis of the following gender categories: gender visibility in illustrations and texts, and gendered topic presentations in dialogues and reading passages. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, included the examination of gendered jobs, gendered activity types, gender roles, gender firstness and masculine generic conception. The findings of their study revealed blatant gender bias against females is still present. In addition, the study indicated that male’s dominance is powerful and visible in these school textbooks. The study concluded that females suffer from low visibility, traditional occupational roles, and underrepresentation in all designated gender categories.

Wu and Liu (2015) examined gender representation in three sets of primary English textbooks used in China from 1978 to 2003. They examined various gender categories included in texts and illustrations in the designated textbooks. These categories under investigation included gender visibility, firstness, utterance, occupational roles, domestic roles, domestic activities of adults, and school activities of children. The study revealed that gender bias is still prevalent and persistent in these textbooks despite the fact that some improvements have been made over the last 30 years. Wu and Liu (2015) have also emphasized that book authors and designers still have a long way to achieve gender equality in school textbooks. In other words, more efforts are needed on the part of the Chinese government to fight gender bias. They recommended that the Chinese government should develop a formal guideline for editors to help them eliminate gender bias in school textbooks. Ariyanto (2018) conducted another study entitled “A Portrait of Gender Bias in the Prescribed Indonesian ELT Textbook for Junior High School Students”. Critical discourse analysis was used to examine gender bias in the representation of males and females in the Indonesian ELT textbooks published by the Ministry of National Education. Units of analysis of the textbooks included visual and verbal texts. The findings of the study indicated that gender bias is still present in visual texts. For example, the *visual artifacts* used in the textbooks are found to be biased. Ariyanto (2018) clearly stated that,

In Chapter 1, the stereotypical treatment of female gender can be seen by the depiction of three students saying, “Good morning, how are you?” The visual artifacts in the individual pictures and speech bubbles show two male students who are stereotypically treated as enthusiastically active to greet others. Meanwhile, the female student appears passive. (p. 10)

The study has also revealed that gender bias is not present in verbal texts. In other words, there was a balanced representation of males and females in such verbal texts. Ariyanto (2018) concluded that,

In contrast, the verbal texts or excerpts show a treatment of genders by the writers of the textbook that shows no gender differences when using the TL; For example, no gender-based discussion tasks are included in the textbook, where students would have to discuss attitudes as values depicted in visual and verbal texts. (p. 21)

Zakka and Zanzali (2015) examined gender bias in two primary school mathematics textbooks used in Nigeria for grades 5 and 6 using content analysis. The findings of the study indicated that male presence is still dominant whereas female presence is less visible. In other words, gender bias is still ingrained in the designated school textbooks. Finally, Fahim (2010) conducted a study to examine gender roles in the new Pashto language textbooks for grades 1-6 used at the Pashto primary schools. 10 primary schoolteachers were also interviewed to understand their view of gender roles. The study used quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The findings of the study revealed that gender bias is prevalent in the school textbooks. In other words, traditional gender roles are still visible. For example, passive gender roles were associated with females whereas active roles were associated with males. Fahim (2010) has indicated that female gender roles included, “taking care of children, looking after domestic chores and to live in subordination to males” (p. 27) whereas males were seen “in active roles mostly outside home settings” (p. 27). Fahim (2010) has also pointed out that the findings of teacher’s interview are in

line with the findings obtained from textbooks analysis. He stated that, “the majority of both male and female teachers believed that certain occupations are male exclusive such as driver, president, carpenter, national army soldier while certain others are female exclusive such as kindergarten teacher”. (p. 27). The study also showed that the majority of males and females still believe that traditional occupational roles associated with males and females are acceptable.

3. Methodology

This study aims to investigate the existence/inexistence of gender bias in the first-grade Arabic language school textbooks used in Oman’s public schools. The present study performed a content analysis of the two textbooks to investigate:

- i. gender roles;
- ii. gender illustrations;
- iii. gender firstness;
- iv. gender names;
- v. gender nouns.

3.1 Materials

The sample of the present study consists of two first-grade Arabic language school textbooks used at the public schools in Oman. One textbook is used for semester 1 and the other textbook is used for semester 2. The Omani ministry of education publishes the two textbooks.

3.2 Data Collection Analysis

The present study performs a content analysis of the following five categories: gender roles, gender illustrations, gender firstness, gender names and gender nouns. The analysis includes all illustrations (images, pictures, photos) and texts found in the two textbooks. The quantitative analysis of the contents of the two textbooks investigates the following categories: the total number of masculine and feminine gender roles in the two textbooks. In addition, it performs an analysis of gender illustrations (images, pictures, photos) by counting the total number of male and female illustrations in the two textbooks. Male and female names and nouns are examined by counting the total number of occurrences of male and female names in the two textbooks. Finally, gender firstness is examined by counting the total occurrences of males being mentioned before females and vice versa. The qualitative analysis, on the other hand, sheds some light on the nature of gender roles in the two textbooks. In other words, it seeks to determine the presence of traditional or nontraditional gender roles in the two textbooks.

3.3 Description of Sample

The sample textbook consists of two textbooks designed for the first and second semesters. The textbook used in the first semester has 141 pages. It has two major themes: *This is my city* and *This is my homeland*. On the other hand, semester two textbook has 96 pages and contains the following two major themes: *My hobbies* and *My exciting tales*. Both themes focus on teaching Arabic alphabets. The two textbooks contain simple and basic activities such as *Read, Color Words, Pronounce a Word, Write a Letter, Write a Word, Listen and Answer, Match Words, Tick the Correct Answer*, and so on. Both school textbooks use short stories to facilitate students’ learning process.

4. Results and Discussion

The study performed a quantitative analysis of the collected data from the two sample textbooks. It is worth mentioning that that the category of gender roles was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to get better insights into the representation of gender roles in the two textbooks.

4.1. Gender illustrations

The present study results indicate that there is a blatant gender bias against females in illustrations (images, pictures, photos) in the two school textbooks. Table 1 contains the total number of male and female illustrations in both textbooks. Statistics indicates that the total number of male illustrations far exceeds female illustrations. The total number of male illustrations in both textbooks stands at 160 whereas it stands at 110 for females. In other words, huge gender gap is present between males and females. In addition, statistics shows that the biggest difference between males and females in terms of illustrations is in semester one textbook. Male illustrations stand at 83 while female illustrations stand at 45. In other words, these two school textbooks contain unbalanced representation of males and females. Males are dominant whereas females are less visible.

Table 1: Total Number of Male and Female Illustrations

Gender	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
Male	83	77	160
Female	45	65	110

4.2 Gender firstness

The analysis of gender firstness in the sample school textbooks revealed that gender bias against females is visible. Table 2 shows that the total number of males being mentioned before females is 12 while the total number of females being mentioned before males is eight. The analysis of the statistics of the two sample textbooks indicate that gender bias is still a problem in the sample textbooks. Moreover, the statistics from Table 2 clearly shows that semester one textbook offers a balanced representation of males and females. Males were mentioned four times before females whereas females were mentioned three times before females in texts.

Table 2: Gender Firstness

Gender	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
Males	4	8	12
Females	3	5	8

4.3 Male and Female Names

The findings of the analysis of male and female names in the sample textbooks indicate that gender gap is still visible. The findings show that the gender gap is in favor of males over females. Table 3 indicates that the total number of male names is 26 while the total number of female names is 15. In addition, statistics obtained from Table 3 undoubtedly show that priority is given to males over females in semester one school textbook. The dominant presence of male names in the two sample textbooks indicates the need for a prompt action to deal with gender bias in the Omani public school textbooks. It is also worth mentioning that the frequency of male names is much higher than female's. The name that has the highest number of occurrences was *Munther*. It was mentioned 17 times in semester one textbook. The female name that has the highest number of occurrences, on the other hand, was *Nada*. It was mentioned 14 times in semester two textbook.

Table 3: Male and Female Names

Gender	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
Males	15	11	26
Females	8	7	15

4.4 Male and Female Nouns

The present study results indicate that there is a balanced representation of males and females in terms of male and female nouns in the two sample school textbooks. Table 4 shows that the total number of male and female nouns is three. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that male and female nouns included only *mother, father, brother, man, and grandfather*. The presence of a balanced portrayal of males and females in this category is a step in the right direction.

Table 4: Male and Female Nouns

Gender	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
Males	2	1	3
Females	1	2	3

4.5 Gender roles

Table 5 shows that the total number of gender roles assigned for males is 12 whereas the total number of gender roles assigned to females is five. It is an indication of the powerful presence of gender inequality in the designated school textbooks. Statistics obtained from Table 5 also show that gender gap between males and females is getting bigger in

semester one sample textbook. The number of gender roles associated with males is nine compared to only three gender roles associated with females.

Table 5: *Gender Roles*

Gender	Semester 1	Semester 2	Total
Males	9	3	12
Females	3	2	5

In addition, Table 6 shows that the majority of male and female gender roles are traditional. Males, for example, were portrayed as *students, police officers, news reporters*, etc. Females, on the other hand, were depicted as *students, teachers*, etc. It is also important to point out that males had more nontraditional gender roles than females. Males, for example, were depicted as scuba divers and clowns. In general, the presence of such gender roles is seen as nontraditional in the Omani context as Oman is a conservative society.

Table 6: *Gender Roles Associated with Males and Females*

Males	Females
Student, painter, clay maker, army officer, news reporter, police officer, engineer, scout, actor, scuba diver, clown.	Student, teacher, scout, painter.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aims at analyzing the presence/absence of gender bias in the first-grade Arabic language school textbooks. The findings of the present study confirm the findings of past studies on gender bias in school and non-school textbooks. Gender bias is still ingrained in grade one school textbooks used in Omani public schools. The analysis of the following gender categories has clearly shown that males are more visible than females: gender illustrations (images, pictures and photos), gender firstness, gender roles, and gender names. The only gender category that has a balanced representation of males and females is gender nouns. The analysis has also shown that males have more varied gender roles than females. It is also worth mentioning that males have some untraditional gender roles in the two sample school textbooks.

The present study recommends that school textbook authors and designers consult some guidelines on sexism in textbooks. It also recommended that it should be made mandatory for all textbook authors and designers to follow specific guidelines that deal with identifying gender bias, sexism, gender inequality, etc. in school curricula. It is also worth mentioning that similar studies should be conducted on other Arabic language school textbooks used in Oman to have better insights into the nature and scope of gender representation. Future studies should include quantitative and qualitative analyses of Arabic language school textbooks used in public schools in Oman.

It is also worth mentioning that the present study has one limitation. It only examines two Arabic language school textbooks used in Oman. Therefore, results of the present study are, in general, applicable to the two school textbooks. It is recommended that future studies on gender bias in Oman include the analysis of more school textbooks. In other words, a large sample of school textbooks is generally more representative of the population because it provides results that are more accurate.

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