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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Gender Representation in Children's EFL Textbooks: A Comparison between Private Primary Schools and Language Centers in Fes

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| **ABSTRACT**

It is commonly assumed that the social and cultural values of societies are always ingrained in their educational systems, particularly in teaching and learning materials. Textbooks are one of the materials in which gender stereotypes have been documented worldwide. In the Moroccan context, children's EFL (English as a foreign language) textbooks used in primary schools may transmit typical patterns and discriminatory images about gender, which perpetuate more gender disparities. To this end, this research aims to determine the way gender is depicted in four EFL textbooks for the 4th grade published between 2012 and 2020 in Morocco. It also tends to exhibit the major differences between EFL textbooks used at language centers (Super Minds 4 and Let's Go 4) and private primary schools (English Pass Pack 4 and Passport to English 4). The research is conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results of this study show that there are equal gender representations in EFL textbooks used at language centers compared to textbooks used at primary schools in terms of nouns and proper names, pronouns, non-human character representations, and roles associated with males and females.

1. Introduction

Before delving into the way gender is represented in EFL textbooks, defining key terms is always seen as favourable. To start with, textbooks are the most useful materials educators use for instruction. According to Brugeilles and Cromer (2009), a textbook is ''the core learning medium composed of text and/or images designed to bring about a specific set of educational outcomes, traditionally a printed and bound book including illustrations and instructions for facilitating sequences of learning activities'' (p.14). In simple words, textbooks are tools comprising holistic content used in classrooms for learning purposes. Educators always rely on textbooks as they support and guide the course and adopt their content as it is or alters it to meet students' needs. Students, in turn, depend on these materials to learn, review, and boost their knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, the notion of gender is defined in the English Oxford Dictionary (2008) as ''the state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one's sex'' ('Gender', n.d). That is to say, gender represents all the cultural and social characteristics and features men and women have adopted through their socialization in a particular culture or society. This indicates that gender is constructed and not something biological like sex.

As for gender stereotypes, the term signifies all the beliefs and thoughts people carry about feminine and masculine characteristics, roles, and behaviors (Martin & Dinella, 2001). These assumptions can be found in any aspect of society, including education. As an illustration, there is a common belief that mathematics is men's domain; for this reason, they are highly represented in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) positions as they reflect their status in society (Qio-Ping, 2013). Whereas women are usually seen in teaching positions associated with humanities and social sciences (Raccah and Ayalon, 2002). Additionally, the ratio of women's participation in lower educational levels, such as early childhood and primary levels, is usually higher than men's due to the fact that these arenas have been considered feminine (Wu, 2023). Another feature of gender stereotypes in education is that boys are assumed to outperform girls in scientific subjects while girls do better in languages (Chaochao et al., 2020).

Therefore, these gender stereotypes just mirror what society supposes to be feasible for men and women in terms of roles, behaviors, expectations, dress code etc… (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2020). EFL textbooks are one of the materials where gender is always alluded to but in a hidden way (Sunderland, 2000). In the same vein, it has been exhibited that EFL textbooks are biased towards women as they produce gender stereotypical and fallacious portrayals privileging men.

To this end, the present investigation seeks to answer the following questions :

1-How are men and women depicted in children's EFL textbooks used at primary private schools and language centers in Morocco?

2-What are the major differences between these EFL materials in terms of nouns, proper names, pronouns, non-human characters, and gender roles?

2. Literature Review
Selecting teaching and learning materials has always been challenging because students are the first to cope with their content. In this line of thought, numerous studies have been conducted to examine how men and women are represented in children's EFL textbooks and what segment is overrepresented. Previous and recent studies reported discriminatory gender representations and common gender stereotypes in EFL textbooks for young learners. Following a 2011 study on gender prejudices in children's EFL, McGabe et al. (2011) evaluated some schoolbooks published between 1900 and 2000 and employed in American elementary schools to display that male characters were more likely to appear than female characters. Surprisingly, instead of being represented as neutral, animal characters were identified as males. Another survey by Brusokaitė (2013) on male and women representations in a British textbook highlighted that women's contribution to the labour market was marginalized because they occupied secondary roles while men were overrepresented, particularly in professions that require degrees and knowledge. Added to this, Bilić (2016), in her analysis of some EFL textbooks used for teaching children in Croatian elementary schools, emphasized that gender bias is maintained in terms of visibility, frequency, and linguistic features.

In the Moroccan context, only a few critical works have been produced on this issue in early grades. A survey conducted by Delgado and Bedmar (2019) on five Moroccan children's textbooks reported that women were overrepresented in traditional and domestic roles more than in leadership positions. In Benattabo's research (2020) on nine Moroccan EFL textbooks, findings revealed that there was a hegemony of males' representations over females. He asserted that typical gender roles are still visible in these textbooks, prioritizing men. Following Benattabo, Benlaghrissi (2023) uncovered that there was a gender gap in the representations of men and women in terms of frequency, activities, and gender roles in some EFL textbooks used in Moroccan schools.

3. Methodology
3.1 *Materials*
The EFL textbooks investigated in this inquiry are currently used in teaching grade 4 in Moroccan private schools and language centers. Two textbooks are mainly used in primary private schools, namely, *English Pass Pack 4* (Scott and Atkinson, 2019) and *Passport to English 4* (Oulbouch and Yacine, 2020). The other 2 textbooks, *Super Minds 4* (Putcha, Gerngros, and Lewis-Jones, 2012) and *Let's Go 4* (Nakata, Franzier, and Hoskins, 2012) are employed at language centers. These textbooks are designed by American and Moroccan male and female teachers and practitioners to serve the needs of children learning English as a foreign language. Further, the materials are a series of books entailing student's books and workbooks from grade 1 to grade 6, but the study was selective, and only students' books for grade 4 were examined. The textbooks include 8 units with common themes except *Super Minds 4,* which comprises 9 units. The choice of these textbooks was motivated by a desire to divulge whether there is progress regarding the content of EFL textbooks in terms of gender equality since gender discrimination in EFL textbooks has been documented in previous Moroccan studies.

3.2 *Procedure of Analysis*
The study adopted a content analysis method that merged both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Content analysis is a well-known technique employed in social sciences. It is " a method of analysing written, verbal, or visual communication messages'' (Cole, 1988). For this purpose, the total number of nouns, pronouns, and characters associated with males and females in pictures

and texts were counted in this study. Put differently, nouns and proper names used to address females (Mary, woman, girl, aunt, mother, policewoman, etc…) and nouns that refer to males (Tim, man, grandfather, fireman, etc…) were measured. Moreover, the study also included female pronouns (her, she, and hers) as well as male pronouns (his, he, and him). Nouns that were ascribed to non-human characters were also taken into account. In addition, gender roles and occupations were measured and examined. Finally, the differences in the textbooks under investigation were provided.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Nouns and Proper Names Referring to Males and Females

Table 1 presents the findings related to the number of female and male nouns and proper names, as well as the total number of both nouns in each material (see Table 1).

Table (1): Nouns and Proper Names Referring to Males and Females

Textbooks	Number of Female Nouns		Number of Male Nouns		Total
English Pass Pack 4	31	34 %	58	66 %	89
Passport to English 4	89	42 %	120	58 %	209
Super Minds 4	183	51 %	180	49 %	363
Let's Go 4	255	50 %	255	50 %	510

The first and second textbooks used at primary schools clearly show the dominance of males over females according to frequency counts of nouns and names compared to the third and fourth textbooks employed at language centers. On one hand, 89 is the total number of male and female nouns in *English Pass Pack*, 31 is the number of female nouns with 34 % while 58 is the number of male nouns with 66 %. In *Passport to English,* there are 209 male and female nouns and names in total, with 89 female nouns, which is 42%, and 120 male nouns, with a percentage of 58%. On the other hand, *Super Minds* includes 363 female and male nouns, with 183 that refer to female nouns, approximately 51%, and 180 male nouns, which is 49%. Similarly, 510 is the total number of male and female nouns in *Let's Go,* with an equal percentage of male and female nouns, which is 50%, with 255 nouns for both genders.

Accordingly, it is apparent in the statistics that males outnumber females in these textbooks except in *Let's Go*, where the ratio of males and females is equal. For *Super Minds*, the proportion is almost equal between both genders, with a trivial difference. These two textbooks are mainly applied to teaching English at language centers and usually follow European textbook design rules that count gender equality when constructing learning materials. Thus, there is a rise in gender awareness, and this is seen in gender representations in texts and illustrations. On the contrary, in *English Pass Pack* and *Passport to English*, gender bias and the hegemony of men over women are easily noticed in the linguistic features used in texts and dialogues. This latter only reflects the masculine mentality that still dominates the educational system. To validate or disprove this argument, it is also advantageous to analyze the number of male and female pronouns in these schoolbooks.

4.2 *Pronouns referring to males and Females*

Table 2 illustrates the number of pronouns pertaining to males and females in addition to the total number of these pronouns in each textbook (see the table below).

Table (2): Pronouns referring to males and Females

Textbooks	Number of Female Pronouns	Number of Male Pronouns	Total
English Pass Pack 4	13 22%	45 78%	58
Passport to English 4	34 27%	73 58%	127
Super Minds 4	104 49%	105 51%	209
Let's Go 4	61 51%	60 49%	121

The ratio of female and male pronouns in the *English Pass Pack* is 58, of whom are females 13 (22%) and 45 are males (78%). Additionally, in *Passport to English*, the overall number is 127, with 34 (27%) female pronouns and 73 (58%) male pronouns. Otherwise, 209 is the entire number in *Super Minds*, 104 (49%) of whom is for female pronouns and 105 (51%) is for males. In the same way, 121 is the total number in *Let's Go,* with 61 (51%) for females and 60 (49%) for males.

As can be deduced, the proportion of women in Super Minds and Let's Go is equivalent to that of men. Their visibility and presence in texts are as high as men's. This evidence mirrors the writers' and designers' perceptions about gender and their persistence to improve textbook content as far as gender awareness and equality are concerned. However, males appear much more often in *English Pass Pack* and *Passport to English,* which signifies that gender stereotypes are still generated, and the disparity between both genders is reinforced through textbooks. Men are believed to have priority over women because this serves and strengthens their status in society. These fallacious images impact children's thoughts about gender and perpetuate gender stereotypes as unchangeable norms. This idea is also supported by the fact that non-human characters are represented as males (see Table 3).

4.3 Non-Human Character Representations

Table (3): Non-Human Character Representations

	Passport to English 4			English Pass Pack 4			Super Minds 4			Let's Go 4		
Non-Human Characters	F	M	N	F	M	N	F	M	N	F	M	N
Deer		1										
Turtle		1										
Woodpecker		1										
Rabbit		1										
Monkey					1							
Giant					1							
Unicorn								1				
Frog								1				
Duck											1	
Dolphin											1	

As shown in Passport to English, non-human characters, including a deer, turtle, woodpecker, and rabbit, are represented four times as male characters. Similarly, a monkey and a giant are twice mentioned as males in the *English Pass Pack*. Hence, these creatures are identified as males in textbooks with an absence of female references. There is no distinction made between *Super*

Minds and *Let's Go,* where a unicorn and a frog are depicted as neutral and referred to as 'it' in the former, and a Duck and Dolphin are portrayed as neutral in the latter.

Otherwise speaking, the discrepancies between men and women are greater in textbooks used at schools than in the materials employed at language centers. Animals and fantastic characters have been gendered, as exhibited in various studies (Norberg and Nordlund, 2022). They are usually described as male characters to maintain the traditional view that men are more powerful and active than women. Children take these images for granted once they are repeated in materials and presume this is how the world should be. For instance, giants or monsters are always males because they are associated with physical strength and violence, whereas fairies and mermaids are females as they symbolize femininity and beauty. These gender patterns are also found in the occupations ascribed to men and women in the materials (see Table 4).

4.4 Gender Representations in Occupations

Table (4): Gender Representations in Occupations

Textbooks	Female Occupations	Male Occupations
Passport to English 4	Teacher (3), dentist (1), housewife(5)	Firefighter(2), police officer(1), journalist(1), dentist(2), doctor(3),farmer(2), driver(2)
English Pass Pack 4	Housewife(3)	Police officer(1), journalist(1)
Super Minds 4	Teacher(1), police officer(1), journalist(3), doctor(2),housewife(1), farmer(1), scientist(1),astronaut(2), writer(3),detective(1), conductor(1), tour guide(1)	Teacher(2),police officer(1), journalist(2), doctor(1),scientist(1), astronaut(2) ,writer (2),tour guide(1),pilot(1), detective(1),driver(1)
Let's Go 4	Teacher(1), journalist(1),doctor(1), scientist(1),astronaut(1), writer(1),pilot (1),driver(2), tour guide(1), movie star(1), architect(1)	Teacher(1), journalist(1),doctor(2), farmer(1),scientist(1), astronaut(1),writer(1) ,conductor(1),driver(2), tour guide(1), engineer(1)

Findings from Table 4 illustrate that men and women in these textbooks occupy different jobs; however, in the first and second textbooks, men are overrepresented at the expense of women. In *Passport to English,* females are portrayed once as teachers and dentists and 5 times as housewives. On the contrary, males are more visible in jobs that require power, such as farmer(2), firefighter (2), driver (2), and police officer(1), as well as in jobs that demand intelligence, like a journalist(1), doctor(2), dentist(3). Moreover, in *English Pass Pack*, females are 3 times represented as housewives, whereas men are seen in jobs such as police officers (1) and journalists (1). In *Super Minds*, female characters are depicted in different jobs, even those usually occupied by men, such as a teacher (1), police officer (1), journalist (3), doctor (2), housewife (1), farmer(1), scientist (1), astronaut (2), writer (3), detective (1), conductor (1), tour guide (1). While men are represented in the same jobs as women, including teachers (2), police officers (1), journalists (2), doctors (1), scientists(1), astronauts (2), writers (2), tour guides (1), pilots (1), detectives (1), and drivers (1). In the same line, women are visible in positions such as teachers(1), journalists (1), doctors (1), scientists (1), astronauts (1), writers (1), pilots (1), drivers (2), tour guides (1), stars(1), and architects(1). Whereas men are represented also as teachers (1), journalists (1), doctors (2), farmers (1), scientists (1), astronauts (1), writers (1), conductors (1), drivers (2), tour guides(1), and engineers(1).

For the sake of transparency, typical gender roles are still reinforced in some textbooks, including *English Pass Pack* and *Passport to English,* where men are more represented in management and leadership posts since they suit their social status, while women are only depicted as housewives and teachers given that these tasks are considered feminine. Otherwise, women in *Super Minds* and *Let's Go* are seen in non-stereotypical positions as men, namely, astronauts, scientists, pilots, and drivers, because the content has been revised and improved to meet gender equality objectives. Yet, women are only portrayed as housewives one time in *Super Minds.*

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study has been to investigate how men and women are characterized in four children's textbooks utilized in the 4th grade in private primary schools and language centers in Morocco. A quantitative and qualitative content analysis was performed. The total number of nouns, proper names, pronouns, fantastic characters, and roles assignable to males and females was evaluated.

The results have yielded that males greatly outnumbered females in *English Pass Pack* and *Passport to English* employed in private schools. Given that nouns, proper names, pronouns, and characters connected to males were frequently mentioned in these materials with a significant exclusion of females. Men were overrepresented in prestigious professions compared to women who occupied traditional roles and activities. Otherwise, in *Super Minds* and *Let's Go* textbooks used for teaching in language centers, the proportion of males and females was almost equal, and women were more often seen in leadership positions. Thus, it can be said that some teaching and learning materials used in Moroccan primary schools continue to provide unequal representations despite attempts to combat gender stereotyping images. On the bright side, the content has been improved in other materials, and gender awareness has been raised to provide children with equal portrays of men and women. However, the fallacious images still produced will only impact boys and girls at schools since gender identity is usually constructed at an early age, and children might take these gender patterns as values. According to Hamilton et al. (2006), stereotypical images of males and females negatively affect children's development and limit their assumptions about future feminine and masculine roles and careers.

The findings of this study cannot be generalized since only four textbooks have been examined, and details of gender differences in images, illustrations, and texts in each unit were not submitted. Therefore, further studies on how males and females are depicted in Moroccan EFL children's materials addressing images, texts, and discourse analysis should be conducted to supply in-depth investigations.

Finally, this study puts forward the recommendations listed below :

* Children's textbooks used in all educational institutions in Morocco should be revised and edited to diminish any discriminatory images about both genders.

* Policy-makers and textbook designers are invited to exert more efforts to implement gender equality policies in teaching and learning materials in order to spread awareness among children.

*Schools, parents, and media need to work together to provide children with egalitarian representations of men and women and correct any typical and fallacious assumptions children adopt.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.
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