

# Promoting Gender Equality in EFL Education: A Study of Textbook Representation and Teacher Perceptions in Northern Iraq

Shamim Akhter

Faculty of Education & Liberal Arts (FELA), INTI International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN, Putra Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Qiannan Lu\*

Guangzhou College of Technology and Business, China

Tribhuwan Kumar

College of Science and Humanities at Sulail, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj - 11942, Saudi Arabia;  
Distinguished Adjunct Faculty, Saveetha School of Engineering, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 602105, India

Chaohai Lin

Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology, China

Majid Raza

School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (SMMTC), Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Musarat Shaheen

Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

**Abstract**—This study focuses on the representation of gender stereotypes in *Sunrise* EFL textbooks (Grades I–XII) used in public schools in Northern Iraq, as well as on teachers’ insights regarding these representations. The analysis centers on four key areas: the social roles of adults, housework roles, educational roles, and professional roles, taking into account variables related to school type. A mixed-methods approach—combining qualitative and quantitative content analysis—was employed. A questionnaire was used to achieve the main objective of the study. The findings reveal that men are often portrayed as dominant, while women are depicted as passive and confined to domestic settings. According to the data, teachers’ perceptions confirm that cultural gender ideologies continue to reinforce gender segregation in high schools. Based on these findings, the study recommends that educational authorities develop clear guidelines to address gender bias in EFL education in order to promote gender inclusivity, particularly in developing countries.

**Index Terms**—gender inequality, content analysis, *Sunrise* textbooks, Role Belief

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individual and social identities, and schools serve as key institutions in this developmental process. According to Freeman and McElhinny (1996), a school is an organization in which learners seek to discover both their personal and social selves. In this context, the institution fosters a meaningful connection between its structured environment and the students it serves. Language textbooks, as essential components of the educational system, play a particularly significant role in the teaching and learning process. Scholars who analyze these materials are instrumental, as textbooks contain the foundational elements of language instruction (Richards, 2009; Lee & Collins, 2010; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Wells & Moon, 2019; You et al., 2019; Acheson et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). Ahmad and Shah (2014) argue that in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, teachers regard textbooks as the essential foundation for instruction, as students are introduced to the foreign language through these materials. Moreover, as Lee (2019) notes, “textbooks not only teach students how to read and write, but they also play a key role in inculcating virtues valued by society, whether intended or unintended, in the form of a hidden curriculum” (p. 204). Our central concern regarding the hidden curriculum is the portrayal of gender in EFL textbooks. This issue has received considerable attention from authors, policymakers, and educational researchers within the field of English language teaching and learning. In some countries, cultural backgrounds influence the tendency to prioritize one gender over another.

As a result, the dominance of male-centered narratives in educational textbooks has become widespread across the Middle East and has even influenced English-speaking communities. Many researchers have concluded that issues related

to gender representation in textbooks are ongoing and can negatively impact learners' perceptions of gender roles within society. Explicit forms of gender bias are particularly evident in the contexts in which teachers observe and evaluate students' abilities or inabilities to perform certain tasks. These biases also influence how gender characteristics are understood and internalized. Furthermore, such perceptions are shaped by various instructional elements, including specific lessons, teacher feedback, classroom behavior, and educational resources (Titus, 1993; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Tatar & Emmanuel, 2001; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Namatende-Sakwa, 2018; Lee, 2019; Jiang et al., 2022).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender equity encompasses numerous critical aspects of society. Various stakeholders—including governments, textbook publishers, and authors—play a significant role in shaping the content of EFL coursebooks, contributing a range of perspectives. It has been argued that both EFL learners and teachers face ongoing challenges and opportunities in navigating these educational materials (Li et al., 2022; Alam et al., 2023; Barjestesh et al., 2025). A substantial body of work by scholars such as Hartmann and Judd (1978), Alptekin (1993), Kabira and Masinjila (1997), Ansary and Babaii (2003), focuses on issues of gender equity. While many textbook authors, publishers, and policymakers are aware of gender-related concerns, they often unintentionally perpetuate stereotypical norms rather than addressing gender inequity directly.

Some researchers argue that the persistence of gender-biased content in textbooks is part of a larger systemic issue within the educational supply chain, leaving a lasting negative impact on students' social development. According to Abdelrady et al. (2022), Assefa et al. (2023), and Barjestesh et al. (2025), textbooks are powerful tools that educate learners about social relationships and the broader fabric of human interaction. Language, as they argue, holds immense power—not only in conveying emotion but also in shaping individuals' perceptions of the world. In some cases, even a single word can influence a person's decision-making or worldview. When left unexamined, language can exert a subtle yet profound humanistic influence, potentially leading to the marginalization of specific learner groups—especially when rooted in gender role stereotyping.

Titus (1993) explains that gender roles influence human thought, emotions, and behavior in complex ways, as they reflect the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of masculinity and femininity within specific contexts. Supporting this view, Islam and Asadullah (2018) highlight that the degree of gender stereotyping in textbooks varies across countries—for instance, Malaysian and Indonesian textbooks tend to present more equitable representations of women compared to those used in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

As Sunderland (1994) aptly states, “The most non-sexist textbook can become sexist in the hands of a teacher with sexist attitudes.” This highlights that the school environment as a whole—beyond just teacher perceptions—plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of gender. In addition to educators' attitudes, the materials and methods used in teaching significantly influence how gender roles are conveyed. Sikes (1991) emphasizes that teachers must actively address gender stereotypes and their impact on students' personalities in order to combat the differentiation, discrimination, and bias often embedded within educational institutions. Lee (2019) further notes that gender bias and harassment remain persistent issues in Japanese society, where students often lack the opportunity or platform to express themselves openly.

The present study aims to build a bridge between textbook content and classroom realities by analyzing how gender is presented in textbooks used across the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) from primary through high school. Additionally, the study investigates public school teachers' perceptions of gender role stereotypes, examining how their beliefs influence their educational practices. Ultimately, this research explores how male and female representations evolve in EFL textbooks from the early grades to secondary education.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on evaluating the visual and verbal elements employed by teachers while teaching *Sunrise* textbooks across Levels 1 to 12 in primary and high schools. Specifically, the study analyzes gender stereotypes present in these materials, as such stereotypes can be harmful to society by reinforcing limited and prescriptive roles for males and females. Shannon and Hsieh (2005) observed that the use of content analysis in research increased significantly, with 97 studies utilizing this method between 1991 and 2002. Similarly, Kyngäs and Elo (2007) found that nearly 70% of methodological papers published in the 21st century employed content analysis, while only about 15% relied on statistical quantitative data. Based on these findings, this study adopts content analysis as the primary method for examining gender representation in the *Sunrise* textbooks.

### **Research Questions**

- 1: What is representation of gender stereotypes in *Sunrise* textbooks of high and primary schools?
- 2: What are the effects of gender stereotypes on linguistic material of *Sunrise* textbooks of high and basic schools?
- 3: What impact do gender stereotypes have on the visual content of *Sunrise* textbooks used in high school and primary education?
- 4: How we measure the level of perception of a high school teacher about gender stereotypes?
- 5: How we measure the level of perception of a basic school teacher?

6: What is difference between high school teacher and basic school teacher's perception of gender stereotypes?

### **Participants and Setting**

To investigate teachers' perceptions, data were collected from a sample of 390 teachers across 25 schools (16 primary and 9 high schools) within the city of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Specifically, 250 teachers (64.1%) were from primary schools, while 140 teachers (35.9%) were from high schools (Grades 10 to 12). All participants were subject teachers of Mathematics, English, Arabic, and Kurdish.

### **Instruments**

Twelve textbooks were used as instruments in this survey to determine the actual frequency of gender representation—specifically, the portrayal of men and women. The questionnaire employed a non-probability sampling technique for data collection.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was based on the data design developed by Christensen and Massey (1989). It utilized the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ), which is widely recognized for its self-report measures and assessment of communication patterns. A 5-point Likert scale was employed for the analysis. The questionnaire included statements categorized according to specific criteria:

- Educational Role Beliefs: Items 1 to 11 (n = 11)
- Domestic Role Beliefs: Items 12 to 19 (n = 8)
- Professional Role Beliefs: Items 20 to 28 (n = 9)
- Adult Social Role Beliefs: Items 29 to 32 (n = 4)

### **Materials**

This study focuses on the English language textbooks known as the *SUNRISE* series, which are used in public schools within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG). The *SUNRISE* textbooks are divided into two main educational levels: the basic education level, which comprises nine textbooks (Grades 1–9), and the high school level, which consists of three textbooks (Grades 10–12). The textbooks for Grades 1–6 contain a total of 18 units, Grades 7–9 include 7 units, Grade 10 consists of 10 units, Grade 11 contains 9 units, and Grade 12 comprises 8 units.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study examines gender representation in the *Sunrise* textbooks used in public primary and secondary schools. It focuses on three key areas: statistical representation, linguistic and visual content, and teachers' perceptions.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To examine the textual and pictorial content, the researchers employed content analysis. The primary objective of the study was to investigate the representation of male and female roles in English language textbooks. As previously mentioned, twelve textbooks used from Grades 1 to 12 were analyzed. For each book, three major categories were examined: textual (documented), linguistic (dialectal), and visual (graphical) content. Finally, the study also explored teachers' perceptions of gender stereotypes and their impact on students' social development.

### **Text Analytics:**

This term refers to the analysis of the frequency of male and female characters, their occupations, and domestic roles as depicted in textbooks. Although gender role expectations differ across societies and cultures, each group upholds specific norms that influence how gender is represented.

### **Analysis of male and female attributes:**

This section analyzes the representation of males and females through gendered nouns and pronouns in the *Sunrise* textbooks for Grades 1 to 12. The results of the textual analysis for *Sunrise 1*, focusing on the ratio of male to female characters, are as follows:

TABLE 1  
ANALYSIS OF *SUNRISE* LEVEL 1-12 DETERMINED BY THE RATIO OF MALE TO FEMALE CHARACTERS

Textbook	T. value of group	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Level 1	15	8	53.3	7	46.7
Level 2	6	3	50.0	3	50.0
Level 3	134	91	67.9	43	32.1
Level 4	140	91	65.0	49	35.0
Level 5	121	99	81.8	22	18.2
Level 6	100	47	47.0	53	53.0
Level 7	960	467	48.6	493	51.4
Level 8	721	316	43.8	405	56.2
Level 9	861	509	59.1	352	40.9
Level 10	847	606	71.5	241	28.5
Level 11	862	471	54.6	391	45.4
Level 12	842	681	80.9	161	19.1
Total	5609	3389		2220	

The results of the textual analysis of *Sunrise* textbooks (Grades 1–12) were compiled to assess the proportion of male to female character representation. Overall, female characters were underrepresented in comparison to their actual proportion in both the general population and school enrollment. In contrast, male characters were frequently portrayed in prestigious occupations.

In *Sunrise 1*, male characters accounted for 53.3% of the representations, while female characters represented 46.7%, indicating a higher degree of male visibility. In *Sunrise 2*, gender representation was balanced at 50% for both males and females. However, *Sunrise 3* showed a significant disparity, with males comprising 67.9% of the characters and females only 32.1%. Similarly, in *Sunrise 4*, males held 65% of the representation, whereas females made up just 35%.

Gupta and Lee (1990) conducted a similar study and found consistent results, highlighting the underrepresentation of female characters compared to males. In *Sunrise 5*, this disparity was even more pronounced, with male characters accounting for 81.8% and female characters only 18.2%.

Interestingly, *Sunrise 7* and *Sunrise 8* demonstrated a reversal of this trend, with female characters outnumbering male characters. In *Sunrise 7*, females represented 51.4% and males 48.6%, while in *Sunrise 8*, females accounted for 56.2% compared to 43.8% for males.

In the remaining textbooks for Grades 9 through 12, male dominance in character representation re-emerged. For instance, in *Sunrise 10*, male characters were featured 71.5% of the time, while females appeared in only 28.5% of the content. A similar pattern was observed in *Sunrise 12*, where male characters constituted 80.9% of the depictions, matching the findings of Ansary and Babaii (2003), who reported female representation at just 19.2% and male representation at 80.9%.

### Assessment of occupational roles

This section evaluates the portrayal of male and female characters in occupational roles within the *Sunrise* textbooks (Grades 1–12), with a focus on the gender-based distribution of work-related activities.

TABLE 2  
EXAMINATION OF OCCUPATIONAL ROLES

Textbooks		Occurrence	%
Level 01	Male	1	0.09
	Female	1	0.09
Level 02	Male	1	0.09
	Female	1	0.09
Level 03	Male	6	60.00
	Female	4	40.00
Level 04	Male	4	57.14
	Female	3	42.85
Level 05	Male	7	70.00
	Female	3	30.00
Level 06	Male	7	63.63
	Female	4	36.36
Level 07	Male	6	60.00
	Female	4	40.00
Level 08	Male	12	75.00
	Female	4	25.00
Level 09	Male	19	67.85
	Female	9	32.14
Level 10	Male	13	76.47
	Female	4	23.52
Level 11	Male	23	65.71
	Female	12	34.28
Level 12	Male	23	65.71
	Female	12	34.28

Law and Chan (2004) proposed a system for classifying occupational roles by gender, categorizing them into five types. This study focuses on two of these categories: controlled male and dominated female, to analyze gender role representation in the *Sunrise* textbooks. As shown in Table 2, neither male nor female characters in *Sunrise 1* and *Sunrise 2* were assigned any occupational roles, resulting in a total count of zero and a corresponding percentage of 0%.

In *Sunrise 3*, male characters occupied 60% of the occupational roles ( $n=6$ ), while female characters accounted for 40% ( $n=4$ ). Similarly, in *Sunrise 4*, male characters held a dominant position in occupational roles with 57.14% ( $n=4$ ), compared to female characters who represented 42.85% ( $n=3$ ).

No substantial difference was found between male and female characters in *Sunrise 5* and *Sunrise 6*. In *Sunrise 5*, male characters comprised 70% ( $n=7$ ), while female characters accounted for 30% ( $n=3$ ). On the other hand, *Sunrise 6* features a nearly equal distribution of male and female characters in professional roles. Males occupied 63.63% ( $n=7$ ) of the occupational roles, whereas females held 36.36% ( $n=3$ ).

A minor discrepancy can be observed in *Sunrise 7*, where male characters held the majority of occupational roles, comprising 60% ( $n=6$ ), while female characters represented 40% ( $n=4$ ). In *Sunrise 8*, male characters were more prevalent in occupational roles, holding 75% ( $n=12$ ), compared to 25% ( $n=4$ ) for female characters.

In *Sunrise 9* and *Sunrise 10*, there is a significant disparity between the two character types. In *Sunrise 9*, males represented 67.85% (n=19), while females accounted for 32.14% (n=9). This disparity is particularly pronounced in *Sunrise 10*, where male characters significantly outnumber female characters in occupational roles—males held 76.47% (n=13), and females held only 23.52% (n=4).

Finally, a comparable observation can be noted in *Sunrise 11* and *Sunrise 12*. In both textbooks, male characters occupied 65.71% (n=23) of the occupational roles, while female characters accounted for 34.28% (n=12).

### Examination of internal roles

TABLE 3  
EXAMINATION OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

<i>Sunrise</i>	Father	Mother	Brother	Sister	Uncle	Aunt	Grandpa	Grandma	Husband	Wife
<i>level 1</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>level 2</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>level 3</i>	4	11	8	8	6	4	3	4	0	0
<i>level 4</i>	4	10	9	10	0	3	2	2	0	0
<i>level 5</i>	6	12	14	14	3	3	2	2	0	0
<i>level 6</i>	8	12	3	15	5	5	0	0	0	0
<i>level 7</i>	10	10	7	7	0	0	2	0	0	0
<i>level 8</i>	0	8	7	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>level 9</i>	9	8	9	10	0	0	0	0	0	5
<i>level 10</i>	6	5	6	10	0	0	0	5	0	0
<i>level 11</i>	23	10	9	18	0	0	0	0	11	6
<i>level 12</i>	11	17	3	2	0	0	0	0	2	5
<i>Total</i>	81	103	75	103	14	15	9	13	13	16
Total Males: 192 (43.43%)										
Total Females: 250 (56.56%)										
Total: 442 (100%)										

Two fundamental issues were observed in this section. It highlights two key concepts: masculine generic constructions and man-compounds, both of which reflect traditional gender roles (e.g., *father*, *mother*). Among the 442 characters analyzed, 192 are male (43.43%) and 250 are female (56.56%). Despite the higher numerical representation of female characters, male characters appear more frequently in domestic roles.

### Linguistic Analysis of Books:

When the researchers analyzed these textbooks (Grades 1–12) from a linguistic point of view, they identified two domains that were measured: the first is *inclusive language*, and the second is *male-associated compounds*.

#### Inclusive and Male-associated compound

When the gender of a person is unspecified, generic masculine pronouns such as *he* and terms that include *man* are often employed to refer to individuals regardless of their sex. However, linguistic analysis of *Sunrise 1* revealed no instances of the masculine pronoun *he* or any man-related compounds. In contrast, *Sunrise 2* demonstrates a more inclusive approach by employing neutral alternatives for both genders. For instance, the pronoun “s/he” is used to refer to either male or female characters, as seen in: “S/he is my friend” (*Sunrise 2*, p. 2) and “S/he has a/an...” (p. 3). No instances of masculine generics or man-compounds were found in *Sunrise 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12*. However, the analysis of *Sunrise 11* presents a neutral portrayal of gender. For example, when discussing a local businessperson, the accompanying adjectives are gender-neutral, making the description applicable to both males and females. These adjectives are presented in a way that allows the phrase to be interpreted as either “his” or “her” constructive operation. Similarly, in another example, “A pilot is required to experience years of training before they can complete the job,” the use of the singular *they* maintains gender neutrality, as the gender of the character is not specified. In *Sunrise 9*, both masculine and feminine pronouns are used in a balanced manner, as illustrated in the sentence: “She/he is a charming young boy/girl.” These instances demonstrate that options for both genders were provided, allowing flexibility in interpretation based on context.

Overall, these observations highlight an evolving awareness of gender inclusivity in language use. Promoting gender equity through such linguistic representation aligns closely with the broader goals of education.

#### Adjectives

This section emphasizes the use of positive and negative adjectives to characterize male and female figures in the *Sunrise* textbooks. Table 4 illustrates how gender is represented through the use of adjectives for both sexes. Upon interpreting the results, it becomes evident that more adjectives are used to describe male characters compared to female characters. Of the total adjectives identified, 58 (58.6%) were used positively for males, while 41 (41.4%) were used for females.

In terms of negative descriptions, 43 adjectives (58.1%) were used for male characters, compared to 31 (41.9%) for female characters. Overall, the findings suggest that male characters are more frequently described using both positive and negative adjectives, whereas female characters are associated with fewer adjectives overall and slightly less negative characterization than their male counterparts.

TABLE 4  
GENDER DEPICTION AND THEIR ADJECTIVE

	Constructive Adjectives		Adverse Adjectives	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>level 1</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>level 2</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>level 3</i>	4	5	4	3
<i>level 4</i>	4	3	7	4
<i>level 5</i>	3	2	5	3
<i>level 6</i>	5	4	4	4
<i>level 7</i>	8	3	3	4
<i>level 8</i>	5	6	2	6
<i>level 9</i>	8	6	4	4
<i>level 10</i>	6	12	10	3

### Gender role stereotypes portrayed in the pictographic content of *Sunrise* textbooks in High Schools and Basic Schools

#### Pictorial Analysis

This section reports the results that are gained from *SUNRISE* textbooks from 1-12 illustration shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5  
PICTORIAL ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN ALL *SUNRISE* TEXTBOOKS

<i>Sunrise</i> Textbook Series	Male	Female
<i>level 1</i>	124	148
<i>level 2</i>	167	94
<i>level 3</i>	218	25
<i>level 4</i>	288	294
<i>level 5</i>	291	245
<i>level 6</i>	286	321
<i>level 7</i>	271	153
<i>level 8</i>	137	120
<i>level 9</i>	136	120
<i>level 10</i>	251	133
<i>level 11</i>	471	391
<i>level 12</i>	128	145
<b>Total</b>	<b>2768</b>	<b>2189</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>

The results indicate a total of 4,957 male and female characters represented in the illustrations. Of these, male characters accounted for 2,768 (56%), while female characters comprised 2,189 (44%). This data illustrates that male characters were depicted more frequently than female characters. These findings suggest a consistent pattern across most *Sunrise* textbooks, where female figures were underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts.

TABLE 6  
RESPONSES FROM TEACHERS FOR EACH ITEM, COMPARING HIGH SCHOOL AND BASIC SCHOOL, ORGANIZED BY DOMAIN

	Average	SD	Average	SD
<b>Educational Perspectives</b>				
Element 1 Boys are slower than girls to read	2.28	0.96	2.87	1.30
Element 2 Girls are quieter than boys	1.78	0.79	2.34	1.21
Element 3 Boys and girls can't work together	3.34	1.27	2.52	1.19
Element 4 Female enrollment in Higher education	2.39	1.25	2.62	1.23
Element 5 Discipline and young men	1.74	0.69	2.86	1.38
Element 6 young boys with academic achievements	3.75	1.29	2.37	1.40
Element 7 Boys and challenging physical activities	2.09	0.93	2.05	1.20
Element 8 young men and math	2.63	1.29	2.96	1.44
Element 9 young boys and ability to think logically	2.01	0.98	2.93	1.46
Element 10 Girls and software basics	2.79	1.30	2.56	1.39
Element 11 Wives and education	1.84	0.98	3.23	1.35
<b>Domestic Role Opinions</b>				
Element 12 Men and household chores	2.70	1.48	3.37	1.37
Element 13 Men as final decision maker	3.31	1.51	2.28	1.36
Element 14 Men's suitability for childcare	1.76	0.91	2.55	1.36
Element 15 Gender Equality for women	3.52	1.39	3.15	1.24
Element 16 Child-rearing responsibilities	4.07	1.01	2.50	1.23
Element 17 Role of women in household	3.70	1.10	2.64	1.22
Element 18 Young boys engaging with dolls	2.59	1.01	3.98	1.20
Element 19 Young women involved in athletics	2.19	1.10	3.16	1.44
<b>Perspectives of Professional Roles</b>				
Element 20 Employment opportunities for men	3.93	0.81	2.87	1.41
Element 21 Men in leadership roles	3.76	1.22	2.75	1.40
Element 22 Job income of females	2.56	1.21	3.08	1.36
Element 23 Female managers in companies	3.07	1.14	3.00	1.38
Element 24 Men employed under a female supervisor	3.86	1.22	2.62	1.37
Element 25 Female mechanics	3.10	0.95	3.27	1.37
Element 26 Male army officers	3.56	1.38	2.48	1.30
Element 27 Female police officers	1.96	0.94	3.24	1.35
Element 28 Female politicians	2.24	1.10	3.00	1.38
<b>Adult Community Role Opinions</b>				
Element 29 Men in leadership roles	3.68	1.42	2.31	1.36
Element 30 Participation of females in community events	2.70	1.35	3.10	1.40
Element 31 Females' usage of nicotine	2.64	1.02	2.02	1.01
Element 32 Women and divorce	2.36	1.52	2.42	1.46

#### Instructive Role Opinions (Elements 1–11):

The results reveal that the majority of respondents demonstrated varying degrees of equitable beliefs. Secondary (high) school teachers generally exhibited more independent and equitable perspectives across most elements, with particularly strong equitable beliefs in Element 2 (87.2%, avg. 1.78), Element 5 (89.3%, avg. 1.74), and Element 9 (79.2%, avg. 2.01). In contrast, basic (primary) school teachers expressed more balanced or equitable beliefs in selected elements, such as Element 2 (64.0%, avg. 2.34), Element 3 (57.6%, avg. 2.52), Element 6 (66.4%, avg. 2.37), and Element 10 (56.8%, avg. 2.56). Element 6 reflected neutrality among secondary teachers (70.0%, avg. 3.75). Notably, the final element showed a clear contrast: secondary teachers exhibited strong equitable beliefs (83.6%, avg. 1.84), while primary teachers expressed a neutral stance (35.2%, avg. 3.23). Overall, secondary teachers demonstrated a stronger inclination toward equitable beliefs across the majority of elements.

#### Domestic Role Opinions (Elements 12–19):

Secondary school teachers demonstrated more equitable or democratic beliefs in Elements 12 (62.9%, avg. 2.70), 14 (85.0%, avg. 1.76), 15 (61.4%, avg. 3.52), 18 (46.4%, avg. 2.59), and 19 (65.0%, avg. 2.19). However, they showed more neutral or less equitable views in Elements 13 (55.0%, avg. 3.31), 16 (77.8%, avg. 4.07), and 17 (63.6%, avg. 3.70). In comparison, basic school teachers exhibited more democratic or equitable beliefs in Elements 13 (68.8%, avg. 2.28), 14 (61.6%, avg. 2.55), 16 (60.4%, avg. 2.50), and 17 (50.0%, avg. 2.64), but maintained neutral positions in Elements 12 (54.8%, avg. 3.37), 18 (74.4%, avg. 3.98), and 19 (39.6%, avg. 3.16). Overall, both groups displayed a combination of democratic and neutral viewpoints, with basic school teachers often exhibiting stronger democratic tendencies in this domain.

#### Professional Role Opinions (Elements 20–28):

Secondary school teachers mostly demonstrated neutral views across Elements 20–26, as indicated by high percentages and average values above 3.0. However, more equitable beliefs were observed in Elements 22 (50.7%, avg. 2.56), 27 (79.3%, avg. 1.96), and 28 (66.0%, avg. 2.24). Conversely, basic school teachers showed more equitable attitudes in Elements 20 (49.2%, avg. 2.87), 24 (54.8%, avg. 2.62), and 26 (58.8%, avg. 2.48), while maintaining neutral positions in the remaining elements. Notably, in Elements 27 and 28—where secondary teachers leaned toward equitable beliefs—basic teachers displayed more neutral responses (33.6%, avg. 3.24) and (37.6%, avg. 3.0), respectively.

#### Adult Community Role Opinions (Elements 29–32):

In Element 29, secondary school teachers exhibited neutral views (22.9%, avg. 3.68), while basic school teachers displayed more democratic beliefs (69.6%, avg. 2.31). In Element 30, secondary teachers leaned toward equitable views (57.1%, avg. 2.70), whereas basic school teachers maintained neutrality (42.0%, avg. 3.10). For Elements 31 and 32, both groups expressed equitable beliefs, although basic school teachers showed stronger democratic tendencies. Specifically, secondary teachers recorded 37.2% (avg. 2.64) and 63.6% (avg. 2.36), while basic school teachers registered 72.0% (avg. 2.02) and 63.2% (avg. 2.42), respectively.

## V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the *Sunrise* textbooks (Grades 1–12) reveals a clear gender bias, evident in the underrepresentation and stereotypical portrayals of women. Female characters are often depicted in traditional, low-paying roles such as childcare and retail, reinforcing passive traits and limiting career aspirations. These portrayals can negatively impact students' mental health and social development (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Gender-biased EFL workbooks perpetuate false narratives, offering limited opportunities for girls—symbolically granting them “only one third of the sky”.

Despite the pivotal role that textbooks play in shaping student perspectives, there is a lack of extensive research on the *Sunrise* series used in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) education system. Previous studies on gender equity in textbooks include those by Amerian and Esmaili (2015), Samadikhah and Shahrokhi (2015), and Sulaimani (2017). Foundational research by Britton and Lumpkin (1977), Hellinger (1980), and Rezai et al. (2022) has also documented the global underrepresentation of women in educational materials.

While a few grades—particularly Grades 3 and 4—show comparatively stronger female representation, the overall content across the *Sunrise* series remains predominantly male-oriented. Scholars such as Briere and Lanktree (1983) and Sulaimani (2017) emphasize the urgent need for more balanced and inclusive learning materials. Notably, primary school teachers demonstrated more awareness and critical insight regarding gender bias than their secondary-level counterparts, highlighting the crucial role of teacher perception in fostering equitable and inclusive learning environments.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Abdelrady, A. S., Jahara, S. F., Elmadani, A. E. A., & Kumar, T. (2022). The attitude of Sudanese EFL students towards literature to enrich their vocabulary building. *Education Research International*, 2022(4). <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/7569371>.
- [2] Acheson, G., Holland, A. & Oettle, S. (2020). The Representation of Women in the Photographs of Introductory Human Geography Textbooks. *Journal of Geography*, 119(4), 127-135. DOI: 10.1080/00221341.2020.1765408.
- [3] Ahmad, H. & Shah, S. (2014). EFL textbooks: Exploring the suitability of textbooks' contents from EFL teachers' perspectives. *Transactions on Education and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 12–20.
- [4] Alam, I., Qasim, A., Shah, A. H., & Kumar, T. (2023). Blackboard Collaborate: COVID-19 impacts on EFL classroom learning and knowledge on first year university students. *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning*, 16(3), 221-237. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJKL.2023.132159>.
- [5] Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials. *ELT journal*, 47(2), 136-143.
- [6] Amerian, M., & Esmaili, F. (2015). Language and gender: A critical discourse analysis on gender representation in a series of international ELT textbooks. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 4(2), 103-118.
- [7] Ansary, H., & Babaii, E. (2003). Subliminal sexism in current ESL/EFL textbook. *The Linguistics Journal*, 5(1), 1-11.
- [8] Arslan, Ş. A. (2000). *DersKitaplarındaCinsiyetçilik* (Sexism in Textbooks). Ankara: Başbakanlık KSSGM.
- [9] Assefa, Y., Moges, B. T., & Kumar, T. (2023). Modelling the predictive effects of social media on the relationship between students' engagement and academic achievement in higher education institutions. *Cogent Education*, 10(1). DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2023.2207801
- [10] Barjestesh, H., Vijayaratnam, P., Sabzevari, M., Fatehi Rad, N., Rabani, K., & Manoochehrzadeh, M. (2025). Digital Literacy of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers: Teaching Experience in Focus. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 7(1), 163–171. <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i1.7244>.
- [11] Briere, J., & Lanktree, Ch. (1983). Sex-role related effects of sex bias in language. *Sex Roles*, 9, 625–632.
- [12] Britton, G., & Lumpkin, M. (1977). For Sale: Subliminal bias in textbooks. *The Reading Teacher*, 31(1), 40-45.
- [13] Christensen, A., & Massey, P. (1989). *Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ)* [Database record]. APA PsycTests. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t02529-000>
- [14] Freeman, R., & McElhinny, B. (1996). Language and gender. In S. L. McKay & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching* (pp. 218-280). USA: Cambridge University Press.
- [15] Gupta, A. F., & Lee, A. S. Y. (1990). Gender representation in English language textbooks used in the Singapore primary schools. *Language and Education*, 4(1), 29–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500789009541271>
- [16] Hartman, P., & Judd, E. (1978). Sexism and TESOL materials. *TESOL Quarterly*, 12(4), 383-393.
- [17] Hellinger, M. (1980). For Men must Work and Women must Weep: Sexism in English Language Textbooks used in German Schools. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3(2-3), 267-275.
- [18] Hutchinson, T., & Torres, E. (1994). The textbook as agent of change. *ELT Journal*, 48(4), 315–328.
- [19] Islam, K. M. M., & Asadullah, M. N. (2018). Gender stereotypes and education: A comparative content analysis of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi school textbooks. *PLoS ONE*, 13(1), e0190807. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0190807>.
- [20] Jiang, P., Akhter, S., Azizi, Z., Kumar, Gheisari, A., & Kumar, T. (2022). Exploring the role of content and language integrated learning approach in developing university students' transversal skills with respect to the mediating role of emotional intelligence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.988494

- [21] Kabira, W., & Masinjila, M. (1997). *ABC of Gender Analysis*. Nairobi: FAWE.
- [22] Kumar, T., Nukapangu, V., & Hassan, A. (2021). Effectiveness of code-switching in language classroom in India at primary level: A case of 12 teachers' perspectives. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 11(4), 379-385. DOI: 10.47750/pegegog.11.04.37
- [23] Kyngas, H., & Elo, S. (2007). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107-115.
- [24] Law, K. W. K., & Chan, A. H. N. (2004). Gender role stereotyping in Hong Kong's primary school Chinese language subject textbooks. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 10(1), 49-69.
- [25] Lee, J. F., & Collins, P. (2010). Construction of gender: a comparison of Australian and Hong Kong English language textbooks. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 19(2), 121-137. DOI: 10.1080/09589231003695856
- [26] Lee, J. F. K. (2019). In the pursuit of a gender-equal society: do Japanese EFL textbooks play a role? *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(2), 204-217. DOI: 10.1080/09589236.2018.1423956
- [27] Li, S., Hanafiah, W., Rezai, A., & Kumar, T. (2022). Interplay between brain dominance, reading, and speaking skills in English classrooms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 798900. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.798900
- [28] Namatende-Sakwa, N. (2018). The construction of gender in Ugandan English textbooks: a focus on gendered discourses. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 26(4), 609-629. DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2018.1436583
- [29] Rezai, A., Namaziandost, E., Miri, M., & Kumar, T. (2022). Demographic biases and assessment fairness in classroom: insights from Iranian university teachers. *Language Testing in Asia*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-022-00157-6>
- [30] Richards, J. C. (2009). *The Role of Textbook in a Language Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/role-of-textbooks.pdf>.
- [31] Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). *Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls*. New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Co.
- [32] Samadikhah, M., & Shahrokhi, M. (2015). A critical discourse analysis of ELT materials in gender representation: A comparison of Summit and Top Notch. *English Language Teaching*, 8(1), 121-133.
- [33] Shannon, S. E., & Hsieh, H. F. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. DOI: 10.1177/1049732305276687
- [34] Sikes, P. J. (1991). Nature took its course? Student teachers and gender awareness. *Gender & Education*, 3(2), 145-162.
- [35] Sulaimani, A. (2017). Gender Representation in EFL Textbooks in Saudi Arabia: A Fair Deal? *English Language Teaching*, 10(6), 44-52. DOI: 10.5539/elt.v10n6p44
- [36] Sunderland, J. (Ed.). (1994). *Exploring gender: Questions and implications for English language education*. Lancaster, UK: Prentice-Hall.
- [37] Tatar, M., & Emmanuel, G. (2001). Teachers' perceptions of their students' gender roles. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(4), 215-222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670109598756>
- [38] Titus, J. J. (1993). Gender messages in education foundations textbooks. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(1), 38-45.
- [39] Ullah, H., & Skelton, C. (2013). Gender representation in the public sector schools' textbooks of Pakistan. *Educational Studies*, 39(2), 183-194. DOI: 10.1080/03055698.2012.702892
- [40] Wells, S., & Moon, B. (2019). Towards an anatomy of English textbooks: Counting what counts as English. *English in Education*, 55(1), 70-94. DOI: 10.1080/04250494.2019.1687259
- [41] You, J., Lee, H., & Craig, C. (2019). Remaking textbook policy: analysis of national curriculum alignment in Korean school textbooks. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 39(1), 14-30. DOI: 10.1080/02188791.2019.1572591

**Shamim Akhter** is a faculty member at the Faculty of Education & Liberal Arts (FELA), INTI International University, Malaysia. With expertise in education, language studies, and liberal arts, Akhter has contributed to teaching, research, and academic development in the field. Based in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Akhter is actively engaged in scholarly pursuits and academic collaborations within higher education.

**Qiannan Lu** is a faculty member at Guangzhou College of Technology and Business, China. Lu's academic work focuses on teaching and research in higher education, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the fields of business and related disciplines. Actively engaged in scholarly and institutional development, Lu maintains a commitment to fostering academic excellence and student learning.

**Tribhuwan Kumar** is an Assistant Professor in the College of Science and Humanities, Sulail at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. The researcher has taught English for more than 15 years in various prestigious universities in India and Saudi Arabia. Kumar's research interests include World literature, ELT & Applied Linguistics, and Discourse Analysis.

**Chaohai Lin** is affiliated with the Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology, China. Lin contributes to teaching and research activities within the university, focusing on advancing knowledge in applied sciences and technology-related fields. Through academic engagement and institutional service, Lin supports both scholarly development and student learning.

**Majid Raza** is a researcher at the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (SMMTC), Universiti Utara Malaysia. His academic interests lie in the areas of media studies, communication, and technology-enhanced learning. Raza is actively engaged

in teaching and research, contributing to scholarly discourse and the development of innovative approaches in multimedia and communication studies.

**Musarat Shaheen** is a faculty member at Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan. Her academic work focuses on teaching and research in education and related disciplines. Shaheen actively contributes to scholarly activities, supporting academic development and student learning within the university.