Gender Representations: A Case Study of Semiotic Analysis of Gender Bias in EFL Textbooks

Supath Kookiattikoon[1], Wachiraporn Kijpoonphol[2], Parichart Kluensuwan[3], Huiying Zhang[4] and Walton Wider[5]

Abstract

This case study investigates gender representations in the EFL textbooks "New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6" through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts. The research addresses four key areas: (1) gender visibility in illustrations, (2) the order of gender mentions, (3) the distribution of domestic and occupational roles, and (4) the prevalence of masculine generic nouns. "New Say Hello 6" demonstrates a higher female visibility (M = 44.01%: F = 55.99%), suggesting an effort to address gender inequality, yet male-only illustrations still persist, indicating entrenched cultural biases. The consistent 'male firstness' in gender mentions subtly reinforces gender hierarchies. Domestic roles are predominantly assigned to females, while males occupy a broader range of professional roles, reflecting traditional gender stereotypes. Despite the rarity of masculine generic nouns, their presence underscores language bias that marginalizes female experiences. Applying Barthes' theories of myth, signification, and naturalization, the study reveals how these representations perpetuate and naturalize gender norms and ideologies. This study serves two purposes: (1) to illustrate how Barthes' semiotic concepts can be used to illuminate the ideology embedded in EFL textbooks, and (2) to emphasize the need for critically examining and revising educational content to foster more inclusive and equitable gender representations.

Keywords: *Barthes' Semiotic Concepts, Gender Representation, Gender Bias, English Textbooks*

INTRODUCTION

Gender has been a topic of enduring interest in the field of language education, with evolving conceptualizations in recent times. For many, gender is recognized as a complex and distinctive issue, and there is no consensus on gender differences in language acquisition (Hery & Abas, 2020). However, common views on gender in language education often rely on traditional ideas, leading to oversimplifications and ineffective generalizations (Sunderland, 2000). An area of concern is the presence of gender stereotypes in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, which disseminate sexist attitudes and values to both child and adult learners (Ansary & Babaii, 2003).

Given the global significance of English textbooks as primary instructional resources for language learning, it becomes crucial to critically examine their content and representations. The objectives of teaching and learning English extend beyond mere language proficiency in real-life scenarios; they encompass gaining insight into diverse cultures (Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2014; Wang & Hemchua, 2022). This study aims to explore the depiction of gender, one of the main cultural representations in EFL textbooks and its potential implications for learners and educators. By analyzing gender representations, this research endeavors to shed light on the broader socio-cultural impact of language education materials and advocate for a more inclusive and balanced approach to gender portrayal in EFL textbooks.

Gender representations and bias in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks have been a subject of scholarly interest. Previous studies have indicated a systematic bias against female characters, while portraying male characters with a positive bias (Sunderland, 2000). This study contributes to the existing literature by conducting a content analysis of two EFL textbooks to investigate the portrayal of gender, with a focus on

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[1] Shinawatra University, Thailand. E-Mail: Supath.k@siu.ac.th

[2] Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand. E-Mail: wachiraporn.k@ubu.ac.th

[3] Shinawatra University, Thailand. E-Mail: Parichart.k@siu.ac.th (Corresponding Author)

[4] Hohai University, People's Republic of China. Email: zhanghuiying@hhu.edu.cn

[5] INTI International University, Malaysia. E-Mail: Walton.wider@newinti.edu.ac.my

textual descriptions and visual illustrations. Drawing on empirical research conducted by Ansara and Babaii (2003), this study examines the presence of sexist and unfair depictions of women in the selected EFL textbooks. The investigation also encompasses a review of previous studies spanning different time periods, including a recent content analysis conducted by Svien (2018), which explored gender representations through both lexical items and visual illustrations.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the EFL textbooks, this research aims to identify and critically assess gender biases and stereotypes perpetuated by language education materials. The findings hold implications for fostering gender equality and sensitivity within language education curricula and highlight the need for more inclusive and balanced portrayals of gender in EFL textbooks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores various facets of gender, including roles, responsibilities, participants, and biases. It also delves into Barthes' semiotic theories, examining how to interpret deeper meanings through his concepts. Additionally, it reviews research studies that use a semiotic approach to uncover underlying meanings in textbooks.

Gender Roles, Responsibilities and Occupations

Gender roles, responsibilities, and occupations are multifaceted constructs influenced by a complex interplay of household structure, resource access, global economic influences, and other context-specific factors. Societal expectations regarding gender roles vary significantly, shaped by the unique needs and social hierarchies of each society. Male gender roles are often associated with attributes such as strength, power, and authority, while female gender roles are commonly associated with delicate personality traits. Teig and Susskind (2008) assert that promoting the social status of traditionally feminine occupations like nursing and teaching during elementary school years might positively impact boys' perceptions of these careers, potentially increasing the likelihood of boys considering these occupations in their future. However, since the most prestigious occupations tend to be stereotypically masculine rather than feminine, the demographic composition of the workforce is likely to continue favoring masculine-dominated fields in the future.

Gender Bias

Sunderland (2000) highlighted the presence of gender bias in the content analysis of certain English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. This bias predominantly exhibited a negative impact on female characters and manifested in three distinct categories. The first category is "exclusion," where male characters were disproportionately over-represented compared to females. The second category, termed "subordination and distortion," indicated that male characters tended to occupy more powerful and diverse occupational roles than their female counterparts. Lastly, the third category, labeled "degradation," entailed the portrayal of female characters as stereotypically emotional and subjects of ridicule. A study examining English Language Teaching (ELT) materials corroborated these findings, revealing a discriminatory bias in favor of males, who were depicted as dominant characters with a broader range of social and occupational roles, and described as physically and emotionally strong (Porreca, 1984).

Barthes's Semiotic Theoretical Concepts

While some textbooks depict gender roles equitably, others present unequal portrayals. Gender schema theory posits that limited (and stereotyped depictions of girls may hinder them from considering diverse life alternatives Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010, as cited in Lindsey, 2015). Consequently, Thai students exposed to content from Thai textbooks might internalize gender schemas presented in EFL textbooks. Given these observations, it becomes essential to investigate gender representations and biases in EFL textbooks intended for Grade 6 students, including an exploration of the male-to-female representation ratio. This investigation can be enriched by employing Roland Barthes' theoretical concepts from *Mythologies* and his other works to critically analyze these representations.

Barthes argues that cultural objects, including language and images, do not simply reflect reality but actively construct meanings through a process of signification. In *Mythologies* (1972), he explores how everyday cultural phenomena, such as advertisements and popular media, are imbued with ideological values that serve to naturalize and perpetuate dominant social norms. Barthes' concept of myth reveals how seemingly innocent or neutral representations function as vehicles for ideology, shaping our understanding of gender roles, stereotypes, and societal expectations. Applying this framework to EFL textbooks allows researchers to uncover the subtle ways in which language and visual representations reinforce gender biases, thereby influencing how learners perceive and internalize gender identities. This is particularly relevant when examining the depiction of gender roles, responsibilities, and occupations in textbooks.

Central to Barthes' critique is the notion of denaturalization, which involves questioning the naturalness and inevitability of cultural norms presented as common sense. By dissecting the underlying ideologies embedded in cultural artifacts, Barthes encourages readers to challenge and deconstruct these myths to reveal their constructed nature. In the context of EFL textbooks, denaturalization helps researchers identify and critique gender stereotypes that are often presented as universal truths. This approach allows for a critical examination of how language education materials perpetuate and normalize gender biases, offering insights into the ways in which educational content can either reinforce or challenge societal norms related to gender. Barthes' semiotic approach emphasizes the study of signs and their meanings within cultural contexts. He distinguishes between denotation (the literal, surface meaning of signs) and connotation (the cultural, symbolic meanings associated with signs). Applied to the analysis of EFL textbooks, this framework enables researchers to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in language and visual representations of gender. By examining how specific words, phrases, images, and narratives construct and convey gender identities, researchers can elucidate the cultural codes and discourses that shape learners' perceptions and understandings. Barthes' semiotic analysis thus provides a methodological toolset for exploring the complex interplay between language, culture, and gender in educational materials.

In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Barthes examines the concept of readerly and writerly texts. Readerly texts present a fixed meaning, easily consumable and straightforward, while writerly texts require active engagement from the reader to produce meaning. This distinction is relevant to the analysis of EFL textbooks as it highlights the degree to which these educational materials allow for multiple interpretations or reinforce a singular, potentially biased narrative. Understanding this can help assess whether the textbooks encourage critical thinking and diverse perspectives or simply reinforce existing stereotypes. Moreover, Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) introduces the concepts of studium and punctum in the context of photography, which can be extended to visual representations in textbooks. Studium refers to the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of an image, while punctum is the personal, emotional response that pierces the viewer. Analyzing images in EFL textbooks through these lenses can reveal not only the intended cultural messages but also the unexpected elements that might resonate differently with individual students, thereby affecting their perception of gender roles. By integrating Barthes' theoretical concepts from *Mythologies* (1957), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), *Camera Lucida* (1980), and *S/Z* (1970), this study provides a robust framework for critically analyzing gender representations in EFL textbooks (Barthes, 1957, 1970, 1973, 1980). Applying these codes to textbook narratives allows for a deeper understanding of how stories and examples within educational materials construct and convey gender norms. As well as shaping learners' understanding of gender.

Also relevant to the study of gender bias is Barthes' process of naturalization, as discussed by Barthes in *Mythologies*. This process refers to the way myths transform cultural and ideological constructs into what appears to be natural and self-evident truths. The process involves the masking of the arbitrary and constructed nature of social norms, presenting them as inherent and unchangeable aspects of human life. Barthes argues that naturalization is a powerful mechanism for maintaining the status quo, as it renders social inequalities invisible and unquestionable. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of gender representation in educational texts, where the repeated depiction of traditional gender roles can make such roles seem natural and appropriate. The critical work of scholars like Hall (1980) and van Dijk (1998) has expanded on Barthes' insights, exploring how naturalization functions in various forms of discourse and contributes to the perpetuation of social hierarchies. Conversely, denaturalization involves exposing the constructed nature of what is taken to be

natural. Barthes advocates for a critical stance that reveals the ideological underpinnings of cultural myths. By denaturalizing myths, one can challenge the seeming inevitability of social norms and open up possibilities for change. Barthes' call for denaturalization has influenced critical pedagogy and media literacy, encouraging educators and students to question and critique the representations they encounter. Freire (1970) and hooks (1994) have similarly emphasized the importance of critical consciousness in education, advocating for teaching methods that empower learners to recognize and resist oppressive ideologies.

Barthes' theory of signification, elaborated in *Elements of Semiology* (1964), builds on Ferdinand de Saussure's model of the sign, which consists of the signifier (the form) and the signified (the concept). Barthes extends this model to include a second order of signification, which he terms connotation. In the first order, the sign functions at the level of denotation, representing the literal meaning. In the second order, the sign operates at the level of connotation, where it conveys cultural and ideological meanings. This dual layer of meaning is crucial for understanding how gender roles are depicted in educational materials. While the denotative level might present a seemingly neutral image or text, the connotative level imbues it with cultural significance, often reinforcing gender stereotypes. Barthes' analysis of connotation has been influential in media studies, as demonstrated by works such as Fiske (1990) and Chandler (2007), who examine how media texts communicate deeper ideological messages.

Barthes' semiotic concepts of myth, signification, naturalization, and denaturalization provide a robust framework for analyzing gender representation in educational texts. These concepts help uncover how cultural and ideological messages are embedded in seemingly neutral images and language, reinforcing traditional gender norms. By applying Barthes' theories, researchers and educators can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable educational content, challenging the myths that sustain gender biases.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

One of the seminal studies in this area was conducted by Ansara and Babaii (2003), in which they systematically investigated the presence of sexism in ESL/EFL textbooks. The researchers employed two distinct methods of analysis to scrutinize the manifestation of sexist attitudes and values in two selected EFL textbooks. Firstly, a quantitative content analysis was conducted to assess (a) the visibility of both sexes in texts and illustrations and (b) the presentation of female/male topics in dialogs and reading passages. Secondly, a qualitative inquiry was undertaken to explore (a) gender-linked job opportunities, (b) gender-based activity representations, (c) stereotyped gender roles, (d) gender-based firstness in mentioning characters, and (e) the use of masculine generic language. The study's results revealed that the two EFL textbooks could be characterized as sexist, as they presented students with an unfair and unacceptable portrayal of women during their early exposure to the English language. Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) took a slightly different approach by examining the relative social prominence of females and males in four EFL and ELT textbooks designed for pre-university students in Iran. Their study specifically focused on identifying the frequency of gender-biased pictures within these textbooks. The findings revealed that male characters were more prominently depicted than females in the pictures of the textbooks. Furthermore, male characters were represented with a wider range of occupational roles compared to their female counterparts.

Tarrayo (2014) conducted a study on gendered language and sexism in six English language preschool textbooks used in the Philippines. The study investigated various categories including gender representation in illustrations, the concept of being the "first" character introduced, portrayals of occupational roles, character attributes, and interests and lifestyles. The findings indicated that both genders were depicted in the textbooks. However, male characters appeared more frequently than female characters in the illustrations. Concerning the concept of being introduced first, male characters were more commonly presented before female characters. Additionally, females had lower visibility compared to males when it came to occupational roles. The range of occupational roles for females was narrower, often confined to stereotypical professions, while males had a broader array of options. Female characters were predominantly shown participating in indoor activities, primarily centered around household chores. In the following year, Abdelhay and Benhaddouche (2015) affirmed that the incorporation of both text and illustrations in educational materials enhances students' academic performance. They specifically focused on illustrations within the context of Spotlight on English 1.

The findings revealed a notable imbalance in favor of male illustrated characters. Moreover, when examining occupations, it became evident that female representation was characterized by limited diversity and was overshadowed by male-dominated professions. In terms of familial roles, females were depicted fulfilling roles within the family dynamic, often without male counterparts. In contrast, a significant number of male characters were illustrated engaging in sports activities, whereas female involvement in such activities was notably sparse, with just one female character depicted in a sporting context. The researchers concluded that the illustrations within this textbook exhibited a bias against females and were characterized by a narrow and restrictive portrayal.

One of the recent studies was conducted by Santoma (2020), with the aim of examining gender representation in an electronic EFL textbook for high school students. However, the researcher's focus was solely on the text and did not include the illustration aspect. Content analysis was employed as the methodological approach. By utilizing the UNESCO framework as a basis for textbook analysis, the researcher identified several characteristics to evaluate, including sex-age, designation, actions, attributes, and relations with other characters. It is worth noting that only sex, age, and designation were examined in this study. Regarding designation in gender representation, it encompassed various aspects such as first names, family relationships (e.g., mother, uncle), other relationships (e.g., friend, neighbor), and occupational status (e.g., occupation, political or religious office). The results indicated a clear dominance of male characters across all designation categories, reinforcing the notion of males holding a dominant role. This prevailing presence of male characters highlighted a lack of gender equality within the textbook. Previous studies exploring gender role representations in EFL textbooks and Thai health and physical education textbooks have consistently demonstrated a pronounced gender bias (Ansara & Babaii, 2003; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Abdelhay & Benhaddouche, 2015; Svien, 2018; Kijpoonphol et al., 2019; and Santoma, 2020). One plausible approach to addressing how Grade 6 EFL textbooks perpetuate sexism is to revisit this issue over an extended period, as demonstrated by the timeframe from 2003 to 2020. A review of research studies on gender representations in both EFL and Thai textbooks reveals that elements such as visibility, generic pronouns, firstness, and occupational roles are commonly employed to investigate language-related aspects (Ansara and Babaii, 2003; Svien, 2018; Kijpoonphol et al., 2019). Collectively, these studies underscore the persistent presence of gender bias in language teaching materials across various subject areas.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

To analyze the patterns of gender representation in two EFL textbooks, namely "New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6," which are utilized in Grade 6, through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

To compare the depiction of gender bias in the two EFL textbooks using Barthes' semiotic concepts, focusing on the following categories: (1) gender visibility in both texts and illustrations, (2) the concept of firstness, (3) portrayal of domestic and occupational roles, and (4) use of masculine generic nouns.

Research Questions

What were the patterns of gender representation in English textbooks (specifically "New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6") used by Grade 6 students, as analyzed through Barthes' semiotic theory?

How was gender bias portrayed in the two English textbooks ("New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6") using Barthes' semiotic concepts, across the following categories: (1) gender visibility in both text and illustrations, (2) the concept of firstness, (3) depiction of domestic and occupational roles, and (4) utilization of masculine generic nouns?

Research Design and Instrument

Research Design

The mixed methods approach was employed as a research strategy to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data within the study. The frameworks of Ansara and Babaii (2003), Svien (2018), and Kijpoonphol et al. (2019) were adapted to guide this process.

Research Instrument

A checklist was employed as the research instrument to gather quantitative data, while a content analysis method was utilized for collecting qualitative data. The following categories, sourced from prior research studies, were used to analyze the data:

> Gender visibility in both text and illustrations
>
> Gender-based precedence
>
> Domestic and occupational roles
>
> The use of masculine generic nouns

Research Materials

The two EFL textbooks chosen for Grade 6 students served as the corpus for this research study due to the following reasons:

One of these textbooks was locally produced by Thai scholars and authors, while the other was authored by foreign writers.

These textbooks were widely utilized and held significant popularity among primary schools in Ubon Ratchathani province.

Although numerous Thai scholars and authors have authored several EFL textbooks for Thai primary schools in the past and present, there has been limited focus on EFL textbooks for higher levels, which are often authored by foreign writers and reprinted in Thailand. Consequently, selecting EFL textbooks at these levels would not allow for the identification of potential differences between Thai and foreign authors in terms of gender representations. EFL textbooks for younger learners were not considered for analysis due to their limited content and text availability.

Data Collection and Analysis

To systematically collect both quantitative and qualitative data, this study analyzed textual references and visual illustrations depicting gender identities. The investigation focused on several key categories. The first category entails an assessment of gender visibility within both textual passages and visual representations. In discerning the gender of characters, particular attention was directed towards their contextual appearances. For textual visibility, a multi-faceted approach was undertaken. Firstly, an enumeration of pronouns employed to denote males and females was conducted. Subsequently, an investigation into the usage of proper nouns for character identification was pursued. Additionally, a scrutiny of generic nouns employed to signify male and female entities was undertaken. Furthermore, a meticulous analysis of illustrations, encompassing depictions such as images, cartoons, or photographs, was carried out. Notably, instances where the same characters were recurrently referenced within a single text were accorded a singular count. Instances where gender classification was ambiguous or indistinct were deliberately excluded from the analytical process. It is noteworthy that depictions of animal characters that could potentially resemble certain genders were deliberately disregarded from the quantitative assessment.

The second category pertains to the concept of "gender firstness." This involves the careful notation of instances where male and female characters are introduced for the first time within the textual content. Instances of common noun pairs and pronoun pairs were systematically recorded, particularly if they coexisted

within the same sentence or exhibited parallel structures within a given reading paragraph, description, dialogue, or sentence structure. In essence, grammatical constructs that encompassed both male and female entities within a singular sentence were also meticulously tallied. The third focal area pertains to the exploration of domestic and occupational roles. Firstly, an exhaustive enumeration of domestic roles attributed to both males and females was undertaken. In scenarios where a role was accompanied by a corresponding illustration, these instances were accorded a single count. Moreover, textual descriptions outlining the responsibilities and intricacies of domestic roles were construed as indicative of said roles and were included in the tally. Following this, an equivalent analysis of occupational roles was similarly conducted.

The final category revolves around the identification of masculine generic nouns. Grammatical and syntactical rules were structured in a manner that reflects the conventional derivation of feminine terms from their corresponding male forms (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). The current study scrutinized two distinct types of generic nouns: (1) singular generic nouns that encompass both generic individuals and those of unspecified gender, and (2) the utilization of masculine nouns that historically encompassed both male and female referents. Furthermore, exemplars representing each category were meticulously gathered for subsequent analysis.

The data was subjected to analysis based on the frequency of occurrence. The investigation encompassed the identification of gender visibility within both textual passages and visual illustrations. Furthermore, an evaluation of gender firstness, domestic and occupational roles, and instances of masculine generic nouns depicting both males and females was conducted, involving a meticulous enumeration. In order to expound upon variations observed in the frequency of these gender-related aspects, a quantitative approach was employed. This involved the calculation of the frequency count for each category, subsequently followed by a comprehensive percentage-based analysis. To further deepen the investigation and acquire nuanced insights into the realm of gender bias and gender representations, a qualitative methodology was incorporated. Employing the technique of content analysis, this approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the textual data. It's noteworthy that the application of content analysis extends beyond textual data, encompassing diverse forms such as images or illustrations (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Barthes' semiotic concepts were integral to the analysis, providing a robust framework for understanding the data. Barthes' theory of signification, which distinguishes between denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (cultural and ideological meanings), was applied to the textual and visual elements to uncover deeper gender biases. For instance, while a denotative analysis might count the instances of male and female pronouns, a connotative analysis reveals the cultural implications of these usages, showing how certain roles and attributes are culturally coded as masculine or feminine. In examining "gender firstness," Barthes' concept of myth was crucial. Myths, according to Barthes, transform cultural constructs into naturalized truths. By analyzing the initial introduction of gendered characters, this study exposed the myths that prioritize male visibility and reinforce traditional gender hierarchies. Barthes' idea of naturalization helped to highlight how repeated depictions of gender firstness contribute to the normalization of male dominance in educational texts.

Barthes' notion of denaturalization was employed in the exploration of domestic and occupational roles. This process involves questioning the 'naturalness' of cultural norms. By critically examining how textbooks depict gender roles, the study denaturalized these representations, revealing their ideological underpinnings. This analysis demonstrated how traditional gender roles are perpetuated through educational content, thus challenging their inevitability and opening up possibilities for more inclusive portrayals. Finally, Barthes' structural analysis of narrative, particularly his codes from S/Z, was applied to the narratives within the textbooks. The hermeneutic code (enigma), proairetic code (actions), semantic code (connotations), symbolic code (binary oppositions), and cultural code (references to a body of knowledge) were used to dissect the stories and examples, uncovering the ways in which they communicate gender norms. This structural approach provided a deeper understanding of how textbooks construct and convey gender identities through both language and imagery. By incorporating Barthes' semiotic concepts into the analysis, this study not only quantified gender representations but also critically examined the cultural and ideological messages embedded in educational materials. This comprehensive approach highlighted the subtle and overt ways in which gender biases are reinforced, providing a foundation for advocating for more equitable and inclusive educational content

RESULTS

Patterns of Gender Representations in each Textbook

The four categories (gender visibility in text and illustrations, firstness, domestic and occupational roles, and masculine generic nouns) were employed. Table 1 illustrates the patterns of gender representations in the 'New Say Hello 6' EFL textbook.

Table 1: Gender representations in 'New Say Hello 6

Categories	Visibility in texts		Visibility in illustrations				Domestic roles		Occupational roles		Masculine generic nouns
Gender \ Unit	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	5	14	30	50	1	-	-	-	-	2	-
2	4	6	5	21	1	-	1	2	-	2	-
3	4	8	59	63	2	-	-	-	1	-	-
4	3	4	13	23	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
5	5	6	12	22	-	1	-	3	-	1	-
6	5	2	10	19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	9	6	20	33	2	-	-	1	-	-	-
8	20	6	33	17	-	-	-	-	5	-	-
9	6	6	78	62	3	-	-	-	2	2	-
10	8	8	41	73	-	-	1	1	-	1	-
Total	69	66	301	383	9	1	3	8	8	8	-
%	**51.11**	**48.89**	**44.01**	**55.99**	**90**	**10**	**27.27**	**72.73**	**50**	**50**	**-**

The analysis revealed that "New Say Hello 6" exhibited the highest prevalence of male firstness. Following closely, the second-highest occurrence was associated with female domestic roles, while the third-highest was linked to the visibility of females in illustrations. The categories of visibility in text and occupational roles shared similar proportions of male and female representations, concluding the list.

In summary, male visibility in the textual content and male firstness exhibited a higher frequency than their female counterparts. Conversely, female visibility in illustrations surpassed that of males. When examining domestic roles, the findings demonstrated a greater prevalence of female domestic roles compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, the occupational roles portrayed equal representation for both genders. Notably, no instances of masculine generic noun representation were identified. As a result, it can be deduced that "New Say Hello 6" presented a higher number of male representations in comparison to female representations.

Categories	Visibility in texts		Visibility in illustrations				Domestic roles		Occupational roles		Masculine generic nouns
Gender \ Unit	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	25	25	65	57	1	-	-	-	26	20	1
2	8	7	47	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	11	10	11	12	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
4	9	13	25	12	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
5	4	2	48	37	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
6	16	9	53	23	2	-	-	-	9	6	-
Total	73	66	249	159	3	1	1	-	36	26	1
%	**52.52**	**47.48**	**61.03**	**38.97**	**75**	**25**	**100**	**0**	**58.06**	**41.94**	**-**

Table 2 illustrates the patterns of gender representations in the 'Smile 6' EFL textbook.

As indicated in Table 2, it was found that "Smile 6" had the highest level of male representation in domestic roles. There was only one masculine generic noun that appeared in Unit 1. Therefore, it can be noted that "Smile 6" emphasizes male representations. Males appeared at least 5% more frequently than females in every category.

Gender Representations in Both Texts And Illustrations

The frequency of male and female visibility in the texts of each EFL textbook was recorded.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Male and Female Visibility in Texts.

| Textbooks	Males	Females	Total
New Say Hello 6	69 (51.11%)	66 (48.89%)	135 (100%)
Smile 6	73 (52.52%)	66 (47.48%)	139 (100%)
Total	**142 (51.82%)**	**132 (48.18%)**	**274 (100%)**

As indicated in Table 3, "Smile 6" had a higher number of male mentions in its texts. The data in Table 3 also support the conclusion that there were more males mentioned in the texts than females.

Table 4 portrays the frequency and percentage of male and female representations in the illustrations of each EFL textbook.

Textbooks	Male	Females	Total
New Say Hello 6	301 (44.01%)	383 (55.99%)	684 (100%)
Smile 6	249 (61.03%)	159 (38.97%)	408 (100%)
Total	**550 (50.37 %)**	**542 (49.63%)**	**1,092 (100%)**

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of male and female visibilities in illustrations.

As indicated in Table 4, "New Say Hello 6" predominantly featured female visibility in its illustrations. In contrast, "Smile 6" had a higher prevalence of male representations in its illustrations (61.03%). Furthermore, there were instances where female characters were absent from the illustrations.
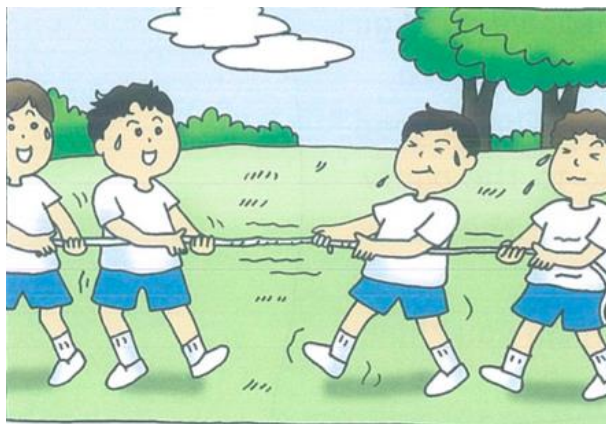
Picture 1: Absence of Female Visibility in 'New Say Hello 6,' Unit 10 (Good Children), p. 110.

In the next illustration, a band is depicted playing and singing songs. Notably, there are no female singers or musicians present in the illustration.

Picture 2: Absence of Female Visibility in Smile 6, Unit 6 (That's Entertainment), p. 78.

Gender Firstness Analysis

As previously mentioned, 'firstness' refers to word pairs where both male and female terms occur together, with one preceding the other. These pairs can include pronouns (he and she, him and her), nouns (father and mother, uncle and aunt), and titles (Mr. and Mrs.). To analyze gender firstness in the two EFL textbooks, we observed all instances where both genders were mentioned together.

We found instances of 'firstness,' where masculine words came first, in pairs of nouns and pronouns, such as 'Winai and Weena,' 'men, women' (in New Say Hello 6), and 'a boy or a girl' (in Smile 6). However, we observed only a few cases of 'feminine-words first,' which included pairs of nouns like 'my sisters and my brothers' (in New Say Hello 6) and 'mum and dad' (in Smile 6). To provide a clearer presentation of these findings, we have illustrated the results in Table 5.

Table 5: Frequency and percentage of gender firstness

Textbooks	Male	Females	Total
New Say Hello 6	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Smile 6	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4 (100%)
Total	**12 (85.71%)**	**2 (14.29%)**	**14 (100%)**

As indicated, the total percentage of male-first mentions was 85.71%, while female-first mentions accounted for 14.29%. This suggests a bias towards males in the textbooks. Below, you'll find additional examples from the 'firstness' category.

1. **Winai and Weena** *have rice and eggs.*

Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 1 (About myself), p. 4.

2. *There are clothes shop for* **men, women** *and children.*

Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 2 (Going shopping), p. 20.

3. *Is it* **a boy or a girl***?*

Excerpt from Smile 6, Unit 1 (What do you want to be), p. 17.

4. *Is* **he/she** *shy?*

Excerpt from Smile 6, Unit 6 (That's entertainment), p. 92.

There were a few examples where females are mentioned first.

    1.   *In the afternoon, we visited our grandparents with* **mum and dad.**

    Excerpt from Smile 6, Unit 3 (It was great), p. 42.

The examples demonstrate a higher tendency for males to be mentioned first. In some EFL textbooks, like Smile 6, the authors made an effort to avoid gender bias and achieve a balance between male and female first mentions.

Domestic and Occupational Roles

The results of the domestic roles were initially presented in Table 6, along with explanations. Following this, examples were provided in both textual and pictorial formats.

Table 6: Frequency and percentage of domestic roles

Textbooks	Male	Females	Total
New Say Hello 6	3 (27.27%)	8 (72.73%)	11 (100%)
Smile 6	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Total	**4 (33.33%)**	**8 (66.67%)**	**12 (100%)**

Table 6 indicates that New Say Hello 6 portrayed more female domestic roles than male domestic roles. Notably, certain illustrations depicting both male and female domestic roles were excluded from the count. Below are some examples of texts and illustrations related to domestic roles in the textbooks.

Here are some examples of female representations in domestic roles:

    1.   *Mom is washing clothes.*

    Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 5 (What we need), p. 52.

    2.   *Mom is cooking.*

    Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 5 (What we need), p. 52.

For the male representations of domestic roles, there were a few examples.

    3.   *Dad takes his children to the zoo.*

    Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 4 (Animals), p. 47.

The results of occupational roles were initially presented in Table 7 with explanations, followed by examples in both textual and pictorial forms.

Table 7: Frequency and percentage of occupational roles

Textbooks	Male	Females	Total
New Say Hello 6	10 (52.6%)	9 (47.4%)	19 (100%)
Smile 6	36 (58.06%)	26 (41.94%)	62 (100%)
Total	**46 (56.79%)**	**35 (43.21%)**	**81 (100%)**

Table 7 illustrates that New Say Hello 6 and Smile 6 provide similar proportions of male and female occupational roles.

Some examples of roles and illustrations concerning occupational roles in each EFL textbook were identified as follows. The occupational roles of male and female characters in New Say Hello 6 were then illustrated in Table 8.
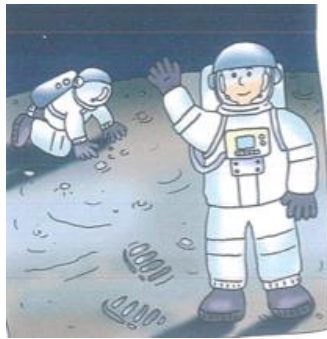
Table 8: Occupational roles of males and females in New Say Hello 6.

No.	Occupational roles	Male	Female	Total
1	Teacher	-	4 (21.05%)	4 (21.05%)
2	Shopkeeper	-	2 (10.53%)	2 (10.53%)
3	Doctor	1 (5.26%)	-	1 (5.26%)
4	Astronaut	3 (15.79%)	-	3 (15.79%)
5	President	2 (10.53%)	-	2 (10.53%)
6	Soccer player	1 (5.26%)	-	1 (5.26%)
7	News reporter	1 (5.26%)	-	1 (5.26%)
8	Singer	1 (5.26%)	-	1 (5.26%)
9	Dress maker	-	1 (5.26%)	1 (5.26%)
10	Cook	-	1 (5.26%)	1 (5.26%)
11	House caption	1 (5.26%)	-	1 (5.26%)
12	Editor	-	1 (5.26%)	1 (5.26%)
	Total (19 roles)	**10 (52.6%)**	**9 (47.4%)**	**19 (100%)**

Interestingly, male and female occupational roles were distinct. For males, examples included doctor, astronaut, president, soccer player, news reporter, singer, and house captain. In contrast, female roles encompassed teacher, shopkeeper, dressmaker, and editor. Below, you'll find examples of descriptions and illustrations depicting male and female occupational roles in New Say Hello 6.

1. **Neil Armstrong was a United States astronaut**. He was the first person who set foot on the moon**.**

Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 8 (Famous people), p. 90.

Picture 3: Male Occupational Role in New Say Hello 6, Unit 8 (Famous People), p. 90.

2. **Shopkeeper: "Good afternoon. Can I help you?"**

Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Unit 2 (Going shopping), p. 13.

Picture 4: Female Occupational Role in New Say Hello 6, Unit 2 (Going Shopping), p. 13. T

Table 9 illustrates the diversity of occupational roles for male and female characters in Smile 6, surpassing those of the other three EFL textbooks.

Table 9: Occupational roles of males and females in Smile 6

No.	Occupational roles	Male	Female	Total
1	Teacher	3 (4.84%)	1 (1.61%)	4 (6.45%)
2	Doctor	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
3	Camera man	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
4	Office worker	1 (1.61%)	1 (1.61%)	2 (3.26%)
5	Sales clerk	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
6	Nurse	-	4 (6.45%)	4 (6.45%)
7	Reporter/ News reporter	3 (4.84%)	2 (3.26%)	5 (8.06%)
8	Actor	4 (6.45%)	2 (3.26%)	6 (9.71%)
9	Computer programmer	4 (6.45%)	1 (1.61%)	5 (8.06%)
10	Artist	1 (1.61%)	3 (4.84%)	4 (6.45%)
11	Photographer	1 (1.61%)	1 (1.61%)	2 (3.26%)
12	Musician	2 (3.26%)	2 (3.26%)	4 (6.45%)
13	Writer	3 (4.84%)	3 (4.84%)	6 (9.68%)
14	Dancer	-	2 (3.26%)	2 (3.26%)
15	Shop assistant	1 (1.61%)	1 (1.61%)	2 (3.26%)
16	Pilot	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
17	Dentist	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
18	Fisherman	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
19	Conductor	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
20	Singer	5 (8.06%)	2 (3.26%)	7 (11.32%)
21	Film producer	1 (1.61%)	-	1 (1.61%)
22	Business owner	-	1 (1.61%)	1 (1.61%)
	Total (62 roles)	**36 (58.1%)**	**26 (41.9%)**	**62 (100%)**

The occupational roles that featured both male and female characters included teacher, office worker, reporter, actor or actress, computer programmer, artist, photographer, musician, writer, shop assistant, and singer. Below, you'll find examples of descriptions and illustrations depicting these roles in Smile 6.

3. **Elvis Presley was a singer**. *He was in the United States army for two years.*

Excerpt from Smile 6, Unit 6 (That's entertainment), p. 80.
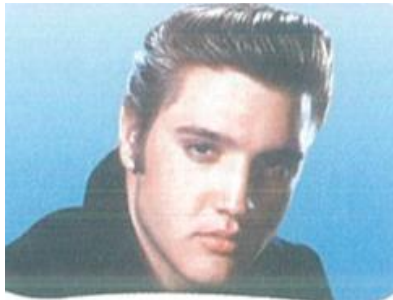
Picture 5: Male Occupational Role in Smile 6, Unit 6 (That's Entertainment), Page 80.

4. **Jennifer Lopez** *moved to Hollywood and* **was a dancer**.

Excerpt from New Say Hello 6, Smile 6, Unit 6 (That's Entertainment), p. 81.

Picture 6: Female Occupational Role in Smile 6, Unit 6 (That's Entertainment), p. 81.

Masculine Generic Nouns

The results of occupational roles were initially presented in Table 12 with explanations, followed by examples in both textual and pictorial formats.

Table 10: Frequency and percentage of masculine generic nouns.

EFL Textbooks	Frequency	Examples
New Say Hello 6	0	
Smile 6	1	She should be an actor.
Total	**1**	

Table 10 shows that masculine generic nouns were rare in the EFL textbooks. New Say Hello 6 had none, while Smile 6 had only one occurrence.

DISCUSSION

In the following discussion, we examine the evidence of gender bias vividly practiced in the two EFL textbooks, as revealed by our content analysis. Each category will be examined in detail based on our research findings, shedding light on the specific instances and implications of gender representation within the textbooks.

Gender Representations and Gender Bias in Texts

Among Among the EFL textbooks analyzed, only one displayed more male representations than female. The remaining three had nearly equal male and female visibility: M = 54.32%: F = 45.68%, M = 52.52%: F = 47.48%, and M = 51.11%: F = 48.89%. These results align with Kijpoonphol et al. (2019), who found similar gender patterns in Thai health and physical education textbooks. "Smile 6," authored by foreign writers, emphasizes male visibility more than female representation, corroborating Santoma (2020) and Bahman and Rahimi (2010), who noted unfair gender representations. This tendency suggests that women may not be portrayed as significantly important, as Tarrayo (2014) observed. This disproportionate representation aligns with Barthes' concept of myth, where cultural products construct and reinforce societal norms. The higher male visibility in "Smile 6" naturalizes dominant gender ideologies, perpetuating the myth of male dominance and marginalizing female representation. Barthes' idea of denotation and connotation is relevant: the literal appearance of males first (denotation) seems neutral, but the cultural significance (connotation) reinforces gender hierarchy. Introducing male characters first subtly reinforces male importance, aligning with Barthes' view that myths make gender bias appear natural.

The stereotypical portrayal of female occupational roles as less diverse and confined to traditional stereotypes, while males are depicted in a broader range of roles, supports Barthes' concept of myth. These representations denote specific occupations but connotatively communicate societal norms about gender roles. The depiction of women in limited roles naturalizes the ideology of women's secondary status in professional and public spheres, reinforcing societal expectations and limiting perceived possibilities for female students. The rare use of masculine generic nouns might seem positive, indicating a shift towards inclusive language. However,

Barthes' semiotic theory suggests the persistence of gendered language subtly enforces male dominance. Myths simplify complex realities, creating a natural cultural narrative. Occasional masculine generics are remnants of an older myth that still influences students' perceptions of gender. The alignment with findings from Kijpoonphol et al. (2019), Santoma (2020), and Bahman and Rahimi (2010) supports Barthes' idea of persistent cultural myths, indicating these myths are deeply ingrained in educational materials, perpetuating ideologies across contexts and time.

Gender Representations and Gender Bias in Illustrations

The analysis of gender visibility in illustrations within the EFL textbooks "New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6" reveals patterns illuminated by Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts, including myth, denotation, and connotation. "New Say Hello 6" features higher female visibility (M = 44.01%: F = 55.99%), suggesting a deliberate effort by Thai authors to address gender inequality. This aligns with Barthes' concept of myth, where cultural narratives reinforce societal norms. By increasing female visibility, the authors challenge traditional myths of male dominance. However, persistent unequal proportions and male-only illustrations indicate entrenched cultural myths are hard to change. The absence of female characters in certain illustrations, like the tug-of-war game in "New Say Hello 6," supports Barthes' idea that cultural artifacts shape reality. This exclusion perpetuates the myth of male dominance in public life. The denotation (literal depiction) and connotation (implied meaning) of such illustrations reinforce gender stereotypes, echoing findings by Ansary and Babaii (2003) and Kijpoonphol et al. (2019).

Barthes' theory suggests cultural myths naturalize ideologies. The nearly equal representation of male and female characters in some illustrations reflects an attempt to balance visuals, as noted by Khalid and Ghania (2019). Yet, persistent unequal and stereotypical portrayals indicate ongoing influence of cultural myths. Barthes' concept of denaturalization helps question these portrayals, showing how they normalize gender biases.

Efforts by the authors to balance gender in language are undermined by traditional norms in illustrations. Barthes' semiotic approach encourages critical examination of visuals for deeper ideological messages. Including females in diverse, non-stereotypical roles can challenge prevailing myths and promote inclusivity. Barthes' concepts highlight the need for critically analyzing educational materials for hidden cultural myths and ideologies. Textbook illustrations shape learners' perceptions of gender roles. Applying Barthes' framework helps uncover subtle ways illustrations perpetuate gender biases, pushing for more balanced educational content. This critical perspective underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to achieve inclusive portrayals in educational materials.

Firstness in Gender representations

The third point on gender inequality in "New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6" concerns the consistent practice of 'male firstness' in mentioning gender terms. This pattern, where male terms precede female terms in pairs or pronouns, perpetuates bias favoring males. Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts, especially myth, signification, and the naturalization of norms, provide a critical framework for analyzing this phenomenon. Barthes' concept of myth elucidates how the order of gender mentions in textbooks reinforces gender bias by naturalizing male dominance. It suggests that this 'male firstness' isn't merely descriptive but actively constructs and legitimizes a hierarchy where males are seen as more significant. This ordering subtly communicates societal values and expectations about gender roles, influencing students' perceptions from an early age. Barthes' theory of signification distinguishes between the literal meaning (denotation) and the cultural implications (connotation) of 'male firstness.' Denotatively, it may seem innocuous, but connotatively, it reinforces traditional gender norms, positioning males as primary and females as secondary. This process of naturalization masks the constructed nature of these norms, making them appear inevitable.

The findings resonate with Bahman and Rahimi's (2010) observations, highlighting a similar bias in English textbooks. Barthes' semiotic analysis underscores the need to critically assess educational content for such biases, as textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of gender roles. Addressing 'male firstness' requires denaturalizing these norms, challenging their perceived inevitability, and promoting unbiased representations in educational materials. By applying Barthes' semiotic concepts, educators can identify and

mitigate the perpetuation of gender bias in language use, fostering a more inclusive learning environment that supports gender equality. This approach not only calls for balanced gender representations but also provides a methodological tool for deconstructing and reconstructing educational narratives to reflect more equitable social norms.

Gender Representations and Gender Bias in Domestic Roles

The fourth point examines how domestic roles are depicted in "New Say Hello 6" and "Smile 6," revealing contrasting gender distributions. In "Smile 6," the absence of female family roles and the depiction of a male in a sporting context reinforce the myth that men are primarily associated with activities outside the home. This perpetuates gender ideologies that position men's roles as public and significant, contrasting with women's perceived roles as negligible or confined to domestic spheres (Abdelhay & Benhaddouche, 2015; Tarrayo, 2014).

Barthes' concept of myth clarifies how these representations naturalize specific gender norms. It suggests that such depictions are not neutral but actively constructed to reinforce traditional roles. For instance, the depiction of a father-daughter leisure activity in "Smile 6" denotatively shows a familial interaction, but connotatively, it implies a limited male involvement in essential domestic responsibilities, aligning with entrenched gender roles (Abdelhay & Benhaddouche, 2015; Tarrayo, 2014). In contrast, "New Say Hello 6" predominantly portrays females in domestic roles like house chores and child-rearing, reinforcing the myth of female domesticity and naturalizing women's roles within the home (Abdelhay & Benhaddouche, 2015; Tarrayo, 2014). Barthes' theory of signification underscores how these portrayals, while seemingly innocuous at face value, convey deeper cultural meanings that shape students' perceptions of gender roles from a young age.

These findings underscore the importance of critically analyzing educational content for gender biases and promoting more inclusive representations. Barthes' concept of denaturalization is crucial for challenging these stereotypes by exposing their constructed nature and advocating for educational materials that reflect diverse and equitable gender roles (Abdelhay & Benhaddouche, 2015; Tarrayo, 2014). This approach not only supports a more balanced view of gender but also aligns with efforts to create educational environments that foster gender equality.

Gender Representations and Gender Bias in Occupational Roles

The analysis of occupational roles in the EFL textbooks reveals a significant gender disparity, with males occupying a wider and more diverse range of roles compared to females. This finding is particularly striking given the contemporary reality where females constitute a substantial portion of the workforce and excel in highly skilled professional careers. The textbooks, however, predominantly represent females in traditional, gender-associated occupations such as teaching and nursing, while males dominate a variety of other professions. Applying Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts to this analysis provides a deeper understanding of how these representations function ideologically. Barthes' concept of myth is pivotal in understanding the portrayal of occupational roles in these textbooks. Myths, according to Barthes, are cultural narratives that serve to naturalize and legitimize certain ideologies. In this case, the myth of gender-specific occupations is perpetuated through the representations in the textbooks. By consistently depicting males in a broader range of professional roles and females in traditional, gender-associated occupations, the textbooks reinforce the societal norms that confine women to certain types of work. This myth suggests that it is natural and expected for men to be doctors, pilots, and architects, while women are relegated to roles like nurses and teachers.

Barthes' theory of signification, which differentiates between denotation and connotation, provides a framework for analyzing these occupational depictions. Denotatively, the textbooks simply list and illustrate various professions. However, connotatively, these representations carry cultural and ideological meanings that reinforce gender stereotypes. The portrayal of males in diverse and prestigious professions signifies their dominance and capability in the professional sphere, while the depiction of females in limited and traditional roles connotes their supposed suitability for certain types of work and their inferiority in more prestigious careers. Barthes' concept of naturalization explains how these occupational roles are presented as common sense and inevitable. The textbooks' representations of males and females in specific roles make these gender norms appear natural and unchangeable. For students, particularly those in Grade 6, these depictions can shape

their understanding of what is possible for their own futures. The naturalization of gender-specific occupations in educational materials thus perpetuates the ideology that certain jobs are inherently suited for one gender over the other.

The findings align with previous studies by Teig and Susskind (2008) and others, who have observed similar patterns in educational materials. Barthes' semiotic analysis highlights the importance of critically examining the content of textbooks for gender bias. The consistent depiction of males in a variety of occupational roles and the relegation of females to traditional roles can limit students' perceptions of their potential career paths. This underscores the need for educational content that challenges these stereotypes and promotes a more inclusive view of gender roles in the workforce. Barthes' notion of denaturalization is crucial for addressing the issue of gender-biased occupational roles. By questioning and deconstructing the representations of gender-specific occupations, educators and researchers can expose the constructed nature of these norms and challenge their inevitability. Denaturalization involves making visible the ideologies that underpin these representations and encouraging a critical examination of their impact. This approach can lead to the development of educational materials that present a more balanced and equitable view of gender roles in the professional sphere.

To counteract the effects of gender-biased representations in occupational roles, it is essential to create textbooks that reflect gender equality. This involves intentionally depicting both males and females in a variety of professional roles and avoiding stereotypical portrayals. By doing so, textbooks can disrupt the myth of gender-specific occupations and present a more accurate and inclusive view of the workforce. This aligns with Barthes' call for a critical examination of cultural artifacts to uncover and challenge the ideologies they propagate. Applying Barthes' semiotic concepts to the analysis of occupational roles in EFL textbooks reveals how language and images perpetuate gender bias and reinforce cultural myths. By understanding the denotative and connotative meanings of these representations, educators can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable educational content. This critical perspective not only highlights the need for balanced gender representations but also provides a methodological tool for deconstructing the myths that shape our understanding of gender roles in the professional sphere.

Gender Representations and Gender Bias in Generic Nouns

The investigation into the use of masculine generic nouns in EFL textbooks revealed minimal instances, consistent with Bahman and Rahimi (2010), indicating a prevalence of male-centric language that underrepresents females. Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts offer a framework for understanding these findings. Barthes' concept of myth interprets masculine generics as reinforcing male dominance by normalizing male perspectives as universal, marginalizing female experiences as secondary or exceptional. This perpetuates gender biases and stereotypes in language and culture (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010). Barthes' theory of signification distinguishes between denotation and connotation, revealing that while masculine generics denote inclusivity, they connotatively privilege male experiences, reinforcing gender hierarchies and marginalizing women (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). The concept of naturalization explains how such language choices become accepted as common sense, obscuring their biased nature and entrenching gender inequality in educational contexts (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017).

These findings align with previous research highlighting the role of language in perpetuating sexism (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). Gender can also be used to reflect social status and reveal aspects of the inner world (Lin *et.al*, 2021).

About the description of the characters, Tian Xiao'e was deeper to touch the depths of Barthes' semiotic analysis emphasizes the need to critically examine language in textbooks to challenge biases and promote inclusive language that reflects gender equality (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). Denaturalization, as advocated by Barthes, involves exposing and questioning biased linguistic practices to foster a more equitable educational environment (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). Applying Barthes' concepts to the analysis of masculine generics in EFL textbooks reveals how language perpetuates gender bias and reinforces cultural myths. Educators can use this critical perspective to develop more inclusive educational materials that dismantle the myth of male universality and promote gender equality (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis of gender representations in EFL textbooks using Roland Barthes' semiotic concepts highlights pervasive gender biases in both textual and visual content. Despite some attempts to achieve gender balance, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of male dominance and stereotypical portrayals of gender roles. This is evident in the higher visibility of male characters, the prevalence of 'male firstness' in language, and the depiction of males in a broader range of occupational roles while females are often relegated to traditional, domestic roles. Barthes' theories of myth, denotation, and connotation elucidate how these representations reinforce cultural norms and societal expectations, making gender biases appear natural and inevitable.

Addressing these biases requires a critical examination and denaturalization of the gendered narratives embedded in educational materials. By exposing the constructed nature of these norms and challenging their perceived inevitability, educators and content creators can work towards developing more inclusive and equitable textbooks. This involves not only balancing gender visibility and representation but also portraying both males and females in diverse and non-stereotypical roles. By doing so, educational materials can promote gender equality, expand students' perceptions of their potential roles in society, and contribute to a more inclusive learning environment that challenges traditional gender hierarchies.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing educational materials that promote gender equity and challenge traditional stereotypes. Textbooks significantly influence students' understanding of societal roles, so it is crucial to ensure balanced and inclusive gender representations. Curriculum developers should depict both males and females in diverse roles to reflect the varied contributions of all genders. Incorporating Barthes' semiotic analysis into textbook evaluation can reveal underlying gender biases. Educators should be trained to identify and address these biases, fostering critical thinking and encouraging students to question stereotypical representations. This approach not only creates a more inclusive classroom environment but also helps students develop a nuanced understanding of gender roles. The concept of denaturalization should be integrated into the curriculum to help students recognize and critique constructed societal norms. By discussing gender biases and analyzing cultural messages in textbooks, educators can promote critical and reflective learning, challenging entrenched stereotypes.

Collaboration between educators, researchers, and policymakers is essential to create materials that reflect contemporary understandings of gender equality. Ongoing professional development can equip teachers to address biases and promote inclusivity. Prioritizing gender equity in educational content and practices will support the development of all students and prepare them to contribute to a more equitable society.

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