Gender Representation in Moroccan Secondary School English Textbooks: A Case Study of "Insights into English"

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Abstract

This study examines gender representation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook, Insights into English, which is currently used in the second year of the Baccalaureate programme in Moroccan public high schools. The research aims to investigate how male and female characters are portrayed and to evaluate the textbook's role in fostering gender equality. The study contextualises gender bias and sexism within society. It explores the textbook's influence on learners' identity construction, examining portrayals of both genders, with specific attention to the representation of women. Using content analysis, the study systematically analyses the textbook's content to identify gendered portrayals and potential biases. The findings reveal significant patterns of gender representation, highlighting areas where stereotypes persist. The paper concludes with recommendations for addressing sex bias both within the textbook and in classroom interactions, advocating for pedagogical strategies that promote gender equity and inclusivity. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender sensitivity in educational resources and underscores the importance of critical evaluation of textbooks in shaping learners' social identities.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Gender discrimination is still common in the media, where men and women are often shown differently based on how they look, dress, or speak (Tannen, 1994, p. 55). In many ads, for example, only parts of a woman's body are shown to sell products, turning the female body into something to be used for marketing. These images send subtle messages about what roles men and women should play, often placing women in passive or decorative roles. But this kind of gender bias isn't just limited to media—it also shows up in school textbooks. Like ads and media, textbooks can reflect and spread these same stereotypes, shaping how students see gender roles from a young age. That's why it's important to look closely at how gender is represented in educational materials.

Likewise, women are discriminated in educational venues. They are represented as subordinate to men in almost all pictures and dialogues in students' textbooks. This emphasises that women are taken as an 'object' to be looked at rather than a 'subject' to talk to or listen to (Mulvey, 1996, p. 421). If people are socialised in the public and the private spheres to talk

according to a schema that is already settled and well defined, students are instructed to behave and talk according to a designed program.

Students are like vessels that absorb what instructors teach them. Therefore, if the textbook in particular or other resources in general are fraught with gender discriminating materials, students will understand that gender disparity is as 'normal' as anything they learn culturally and subconsciously in society; as a result, students will not question that for the reason they are not aware of it.

This research aims to rate the gender representation in one of the Moroccan English textbooks. Many researchers (Sano, Lida, and Hardy, 2001; Dominiguez, 2003; Holmqvist and Gjörup, 2006; Lee and Collins, 2006; Stockdale, 2006; Mukundan and Nimehchisalem, 2008; Foulds, 2009; Healy, 2009; Hamdan, 2010; Khurshid, GulGillani and AamirHashmi, 2010) have tried to detect gender inequality in textbooks through various types of research. Yet, fewer researchers have focused on English textbooks as a case study.

Hence, the purpose of this research is to analyse critically, objectively, and academically the issue of gender in one of the Moroccan textbooks. We will rely on *Insights into English* as a case study to see whether this textbook is fraught with materials related to gender disparity or not.

In doing so, the research is meant to raise the consciousness of people in general and textbook designers in particular to the fatality of merging gender bias into educating textbooks. Children are socialised in their homes and educated in school to make a difference between men and women. They are instructed to make a clear cut between what should belong to women in terms of clothes, food, and colours and what should pertain to men (Tannen, 1994, p.55).

The reason behind conducting this research is to examine objectively the representation of gender in *Insights into English,* hoping that it will raise awareness among professionals about what should be included and what should be neglected. So, the current research is a springboard for future research to delve deeply into the intricacies of the issue of gender inequality in the Moroccan textbooks.

1.1. Hypothesis
Like some other Moroccan textbooks, *Insights into English* could be gender biased.

1.2. Research Questions
To what extent does the textbook under examination represent gender equity?

If there is any gender bias, what are its features?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
The issue of gender in textbooks has been hotly debated in the past few years in many countries. The following review of the literature will provide the reader with the most prominent textbook analyses in eleven different countries, among which is Morocco.

Sano, Lida, and Hardy (2001) examined fifteen English textbooks used in **Japanese** middle schools to assess the gender representation in them. The textbooks were organised in five series

as follows: *New Horizon English Course*, Books 1-3, *New Crown English Series*, Books 1-3, *Sunshine English Course*, Books 1-3, *Total English*, Books 1-3, and *One World English Course*, Books 1-3. The results showed that there were no occurrences of gender-biased language (e.g., chairman) and that the number of verbs used by females exceeded the number of those used by males. However, male characters played major roles in decision-making and were portrayed as engaged in actions, while female characters were given subordinate roles.

Dominguez (2003) examined *New Interchange Intro,* an ESL textbook used in multicultural and multiracial ESL/EFL programs in **Canadian** language schools. She aimed to depict any signs of gender bias in the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the textbook. The researcher found that there was a numerical balance between female and male characters, both in text and illustrations. As for the occupational roles assigned to them, both males and females performed non-traditional jobs, e.g., a male receptionist, cook, and teacher, and a female security guard, doctor, and judge. Dominguez also analysed conversations and concluded that women and men were given the same status and were given equal opportunities for interaction. She concluded that *New Interchange Intro* was a suitable textbook for ESL/EFL classrooms since it had a fair and respectful representation of both genders.

In the last few decades, **Swedish** society witnessed a development towards equality between men and women. In this respect, Holmqvist and Gjörup (2006) considered textbook analysis as a means to explore to what extent education reflected this development. They investigated six English textbooks used in middle and high schools. The textbooks were: *Wings*, *Good Stuff*, *Blueprint B*, *Toolbox*, *All in One 2,* and *All in One 3*. The results revealed that: first, male authors outnumbered female authors, second, the males' representation in pictures was promoted whereas the females were diminished, and third, the majority of the occupations were attributed to men and were, in general, stereotypical; e.g., male occupations: inventor, pilot, policeman, and veterinarian. Female occupations: florist, teacher, nurse, and hairdresser. It was then clear that the textbooks analysed enhanced gender bias and inequality; this was the reason why Holmqvist and Gjörup described them as not reflecting the changes that their society was undergoing and not living up to the requirements of the government.

In **China**, Lee and Collins (2006) explored gender representation in six ESL textbooks used in high schools. Three of the textbooks, *Progress 5*, *English 2000: Book 5,* and *New English Treasure 1B*, were still in use when the research was conducted, whereas the other three, *English: A Modern Course 1*, *English: A Modern Course 5,* and *New Integrated English 1*, were no longer used. Their study aimed to compare these two categories and see if the new generation of textbooks reflected the improvement of the social status of women in China. The outcomes of the study proved that the recent textbooks made use of various strategies to avoid gender bias and stereotyping and depicted women as active members of society. In spite of the promising conclusions, Lee and Collins suggested that there was still room for improvement and fair treatment of the two genders.

Stockdale (2006) examined the representations of men and women in *Impact Values*, an EFL textbook aimed at adult students in language schools in the **United Kingdom**. She found that there was a significant gender imbalance in terms of the number of male and female characters featured in the textbook. Gender stereotyping was also manifested through

portraying women as concerned with trivial matters such as fashion. Men, in contrast, were concerned with world peace, the environment, and other important issues in society. As for the depiction of the aspect of firstness, masculine pronouns and nouns were, most of the time, in first positions. In general, throughout the textbook, men got more attention and were treated as more powerful than women. According to Stockdale, more gender balance could be achieved through the conscious attention of the authors to the materials presented in textbooks.

Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) conducted a study that described the representation of gender in *Forms 1, 2, 3,* and *4,* English language textbooks approved for use in **Malaysian** high schools. This research was considered innovative compared to the previous studies because it made efficient use of the advanced technological tools of analysis. The results indicated that there was an absolute gender bias in the textbooks in question; in addition to nouns referring to males preceding those referring to females, males outnumbered females, females were also less prominent in conversations, and in most cases did not initiate dialogues.

In his analysis of *Touchstone Book 2*, an EFL textbook intended for adult and young adult learners in language schools in the **United States**, Healy (2009) stated that the authors did an admirable job as they succeeded in avoiding gender bias throughout the book. He explained how they managed to give an equal portrayal of both genders in the workplace and how they were fair as they represented women first nearly as often as men. The same fairness could be noticed in the results of the discourse analysis; the writers tried to make the conversations as gender even as possible by giving both genders the same amount of talk. As a conclusion, Healy recommended the textbook for use in English classrooms.

Foulds (2009) presented a paper that summarised his analysis of **Kenyan** social studies textbooks, *Standards 1-8*. He aimed to investigate the textbooks' ability to deal with issues of gender and whether they broke through or reinforced gender stereotypes. The outcomes of the study pointed out that although the writers of the textbooks made clear efforts to gender-neutralise the language, the illustrations proved counterproductive to this objective; i.e., images positioned women inside the home while men were shown working in income-generating positions outside of the home.

Khurshid et al. (2010) conducted research that aimed to investigate the representation of females in two textbooks of Urdu and two textbooks of English used in high school classes in **Pakistan**. The results showed that first, the number of male characters was far greater than the female's, and second, the activities attributed to females were shown as inferior, whereas the activities attributed to males were prestigious. The researchers deduced that women were either underrepresented or their representation was discriminatory in the four textbooks.

Hamdan (2010) investigated the weight of gender bias in a series of EFL textbooks that consisted of 9 course books used in public schools in **Jordan**. The series is called *Action Pack Series*, grades 1-9. Hamdan focused on the number and type of occupations assigned to males and females. He pointed out that males were represented as the major element of the workforce in society. Women were without jobs most of the time or with stereotypical ones such as assisting males. The researcher concluded that the image attributed to women contradicted the reality of the modern society of Jordan.

As for **Morocco**, after the reform of the family code in 2004, Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) was resolved on undertaking a project to help implement gender equality and human rights perspectives in the educational system. One part of the project consisted of reviewing school textbooks. Fifty primary school textbooks were analysed but comprehensive reports were given on only 43 of them. The textbooks comprised Arts, Arabic, French, Home Economics, Islamic Studies and History/Geography textbooks. The outcomes of the analyses were revealed in December 2005 by Abderrahim Sabir (the regional director of HREA) at a press conference. Sabir, afterwards, wrote an article describing the phases of the project and the results it achieved.

In this article, he stated that the findings could be summarised in three main conclusions: First, Women were considered as subordinate to men in most of the textbooks. Second, both textual and pictorial representations prioritised men over women. And third, the textbooks were stereotypical and assigned negative characteristics to women and girls. At the end of the article, Sabir (2006) cited the set of recommendations developed by the researchers of HREA to help revise and improve the image of women in Moroccan textbooks.

A range of studies has highlighted the persistence of gender inequality in school textbooks across different contexts. Researchers such as Sano, Lida, and Hardy (2001), Dominguez (2003), and Holmqvist and Gjörup (2006) found imbalanced gender representations in Japanese, Spanish, and Swedish textbooks. Similar patterns were identified in Hong Kong (Lee & Collins, 2006), Malaysia (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008), and Australia (Healy, 2009), where male characters dominated public roles while females were often confined to domestic spheres. In Arab and South Asian contexts, Hamdan (2010) revealed how textbooks reinforce traditional gender norms. Together, these studies underscore the global nature of gender bias in educational materials.

In Morocco, gender roles are deeply rooted in a complex interplay of cultural traditions, religious values, and socio-political structures (Sadiqi, 2003; Ennaji, 2008). These elements significantly influence educational practices and content, including the design and discourse of school textbooks. English language textbooks, as cultural artefacts, not only serve pedagogical functions but also participate in shaping learners' perceptions of social roles and identities (Arfaoui, 2020; Tamo, 2022).

Consequently, examining gender representation in Moroccan English textbooks necessitates a contextualised analysis that considers the socio-cultural norms and ideological underpinnings that inform curriculum development. By situating this study within the Moroccan context, it becomes possible to reveal the subtle ways in which gender ideologies are reproduced, resisted, or negotiated in educational materials.

3. METHODOLOGY

The chosen textbook for examination is the newest edition of *Insights into English* (2013/2014). "*Insights into English*" is recommended for use in the second year Baccalaureate by the Moroccan Ministry of National Education. It is authored by Mohamed Najbi and El Mostapha El Haddad and published by AL MASSAR Edition. This textbook is intended for young adult learners at the intermediate level. It consists of ten separate units, each comprising five main sections: Improve Your Communication Skills, Know Another Culture, Make

Connections, Compare It, and Extend Your Learning Experiences. These sections are clearly organised according to the five areas stressed in the ministerial guidelines and known as the five Cs.

The first section, "Improve Your Communication," aims to help students become better communicators in both oral and written forms. The second section, "Know another Culture," helps students gain a deeper understanding of their culture and other cultures. The third section, "Make Connections," encourages students to acquire more information about other content areas and use that information for their own purposes. The fourth section, "Compare It," helps students gain awareness of cross-cultural similarities and differences. As for the fifth section, "Extend Your Learning", it is designed to help the students use English and extend their learning experiences from the classroom to the outside world. The textbook is designed to deal with the following topics: Cultural issues and values, The gifts of youth, Advances in science and technology, Women and power, Brain drain, Humour, Citizenship, International organisations, Formal, informal, and non-formal education, and Sustainable development.

3.1. Procedure

The method used for the analysis of the textbook is the content analysis method. Because of the limited space of this paper, details will not be discussed, but rather a concise account of the clues necessary for understanding this method and how it operates will be provided.

Content analysis is a method aimed at studying recorded human communications, such as speech, written text, interviews, and images. . Neuendorf (2002) defines it as "a summarising, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method and is not limited to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented." (p. 10). From the same perspective, Ole Holsti (1969) states that the technique of content analysis is used in identifying a set of predetermined characteristics and drawing objective and systematic inferences.

Holsti (1969) formulates the main questions addressed by this method as: who says what, to whom, why, to what extent, and with what effect? (Holsti, 1969, cited in Stemler, 2001).

According to Krippendorff (1980), every content analysis must address the following questions:

1. Which data are analysed?
2. How are they defined?
3. What is the population from which they are drawn?
4. In what context are the data analysed?
5. What are the boundaries of the analysis?
6. What is the target of the inferences?

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
4.1. Female and male characters

The representations of gender in the textbook (both textual and visual representations) were carefully scanned in order to count the frequency of appearance of female and male characters. What is meant by characters is those men and women who are given names and are actively involved in the activities of the textbook, those characters discussed and referred to by main characters, and those referred to by only common nouns; e.g. brother, teacher...etc.

Table 1: Textual representations

	Number of characters	Female characters		Male Characters	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Unit 1	12	4	34%	8	66%
Unit 2	16	3	19%	13	81%
Unit 3	16	5	31%	11	69%
Unit 4	11	10	91%	1	9%
Unit 5	8	0	0%	8	100%
Unit 6	9	2	22%	7	78%
Unit 7	7	1	14%	6	86%
Unit 8	5	0	0%	5	100%
Unit 9	18	6	33%	12	67%
Unit 10	13	3	23%	10	77%
Total	115	34	30%	81	70%

The number of male characters exceeds the number of female characters largely. Males are favoured over females especially in some units that are significant to the scope of the study, because of their historical background in bias and discrimination. We would like to draw the reader's attention here to units 2, 4, 5, and 8. Unit 2 deals with "The gifts of youth", unit 4 discusses "Humour", and unit 5 sheds light on the problem of "Brain drain" and unit 8 raises the issue of "International organisations". The over-representation is considered significant in these units because it enhances the stereotypical idea that girls and women are, generally, not humorous, not having any special gifts or talent, not intellectual, and not interested in global issues.

Table 2: Pictorial representations

	Number of characters	Female characters		Male Characters	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Unit 1	37	12	32%	25	68%
Unit 2	120	50	42%	70	58%
Unit 3	22	10	45%	12	55%
Unit 4	63	52	83%	11	17%
Unit 5	26	2	8%	24	92%
Unit 6	23	7	29.5%	16	69.5

Unit 7	25	5	20%	20	80%
Unit 8	33	3	9%	30	91%
Unit 9	30	9	30%	21	70%
Unit 10	44	12	27%	32	73%
Total	423	162	38%	261	62%

As the results clearly demonstrate, the pictorial representations of male characters outnumber those of females. 62 % of the pictures in the textbook portray male characters, whereas only 38% portray female characters. The difference in depiction can hardly be missed in unit 5, which is about "Brain drain". Unfortunately, this unfair depiction is misleading to young learners, especially girls. They might, consciously or subconsciously, conclude that there is no need for education if it is leading nowhere and nothing important can be accomplished in their lives. Consequently, their willingness to learn may decrease.

4.2. Pronouns and possessive adjectives

The pronouns (She/he, her/him…) are also taken into account as they make part of the frequency of occurrence of both genders.

Table 3: Number of pronouns and possessive adjectives

	Number of pronouns and possessive adjectives	Female pronouns and possessive adjectives		Male pronouns and possessive adjectives	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Unit 1	32	5	16%	27	84%
Unit 2	7	1	14%	6	86%
Unit 3	31	14	45%	17	55%
Unit 4	100	83	83%	17	17%
Unit 5	26	0	0%	26	100%
Unit 6	25	4	16%	21	84%
Unit 7	24	1	4%	23	96%
Unit 8	28	4	14%	24	86%
Unit 9	32	2	6%	30	94%
Unit 10	23	8	35%	15	65%
Total	328	122	37%	206	63%

It is obvious from the results shown above that there is sorts of gender bias against women as far as the pronouns are concerned. The fact that male pronouns are dominant throughout the textbook may cause the female learners to deduce that they are not as important as males and may, consequently, diminish their motivation for learning.

4.3. Occupations

During the processing of the occupational roles in the textbook, assumptions about their discriminatory nature are dismissed. In addition to the wide range of occupations and roles

assigned to women, many of them are not stereotypical at all, e.g., politician, astronomer, doctor, architect, ambassador, etc. In addition to the occupations cited in the tables below, women are often described as interested in important issues and active in their communities. Men are also portrayed as intellectuals and decision makers who take care of global issues and politics.

However, it is fair to mention that even if the authors are careful to attribute non-traditional occupations to women, men get the lion's share of the number of occupations in the textbook.

Table 4: Roles and jobs assigned to both genders

Jobs and roles assigned to females	Number of occurrence	Jobs and roles assigned to males	Number of occurrence
Cultural anthropologist	1	Cultural anthropologist	2
Writer	1	Writer	5
Sociologist	1	Sociologist	2
Teacher	1	Teacher	5
Actress	7	Actor	10
Politician	5	Politician	25
Doctor	3	Doctor	2
Editor-in-chief	1	Editor-in-chief	1
Singer	1	Singer	1

Table 5: Roles and jobs assigned to a specific gender

Jobs and roles assigned to females	Number of occurrence	Jobs and roles assigned to males	Number of occurrence
Bank executive	2	Bank manager	1
Pharmacist	1	Bank teller	1
Member of an NGO	1	Businessman	2
Architect	1	Economist	1
Journalist	2	Teacher trainer	1
Nationalist	1	Educator	1
Astronomer	1	Lecturer	1
UNICEF Ambassador	1	Psychologist	2
Film maker	1	Philosopher	4
Pilot	1	Historian	2
Principal	1	Comedian	4
Feminist	2	Poet	1
Activist	1	Fire fighter	8
Shirt maker	1	Police officer	1

Musician	1
Football player	2
Goalkeeper	2
Coach	1
Human rights activist	1
Press secretary	1
Film producer	1
Cameraman	5
Inventor	2
Microbiologist	1
Scientist	2
Sales manager	1
Advocate	1
Logician	1
Worker	1

4.4. Dialogues

As it appears in table 6, the number of dialogues in the textbook is thirteen. All of them are Mixed-gender dialogues; i.e., dialogues in which there is interaction between males and females.

The initiation aspect is important in mixed-gender dialogues. Scholars theorise that the dominant gender often initiates the dialogue. It is so because the one who initiates the dialogue is the one who chooses the topic of the discussion and has more power in manipulating the conversation. Itakura (2001) says: "A speaker who makes an initiation... determines what may constitute a relevant response and has the option of maintaining the topic or changing to a new topic." (Itakura 2001, cited in Healy 2009, p. 7).

This is actually applicable to the textbook under examination, females initiated ten dialogues, leaving room for males to initiate only three. However, as far as the roles assigned to both genders, females held the position of power in only 38 % of dialogues.

4.5. Firstness

It is clear that the authors of the textbook have made great efforts to guarantee equal opportunities for both genders throughout the textbook. These efforts are fruitful to a great extent in the aspect of firstness. Firstness means the priority given to a specific gender whenever two characters of opposing genders appear in the same statement. Except for one occasion: Don (for men) and Dona (for women)… in Unit 1, on page 14, there is no occurrence of such aspect.

The results of this study should be understood within Morocco's changing but still largely traditional social and cultural environment, where ideas about gender roles continue to shape both classroom practices and what appears in textbooks (Benlafkih, 2020). Even though there have been national efforts—especially the Vision Stratégique de la Réforme 2015–2030—to make education more fair, modern, and inclusive (Ministry of National Education, 2015), school textbooks still often reflect old-fashioned gender stereotypes. The textbook Insights into English, although based on a modern teaching approach, still carries certain gendered messages that seem to reflect traditional social values more than the goals of current education reforms. This shows that more attention is needed when developing textbooks to make sure they support both good teaching and true gender equality (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006).

Table 6: Dialogues

Unit/page	Dialogue initiation	Dialogue concluding	Number of words issued by females	Number of words issued by males	Number of turns females take	Number of turns males take	Topic of the discussion	Position of power	Female's role	Male's role
Unit 1 p.12	M	F	337	33	4	4	Cultural stereotypes	F	Cultural anthropologist	Interviewer
Unit 1 p. 14	F	M	90	333	11	10	Cultural stereotypes	M	Interviewer	Interviewee
Unit 2 p. 28	M	F	369	89	8	9	Strengths of young people	F	English teacher	
Unit 3 p.52	F	M	50	196	19	19	Conducting a survey	_	Student	Student
Unit 3 p.53	M	M	11	20	3	4	Conducting a survey	M	Student	French teacher
Unit 4 p.67	F	M	185	106	9	8	Women's rights	F	Feminist	Interviewer
Unit 6 p. 91	F	M	124	281	11	11	Humour	M	Interviewer	Writer
Unit 6 p.93	F	F	10	2	2	1	Driving test	_	Friend	Friend
Unit 6 p.93	F	F	18	7	2	1	Promotion	_	Friend	Friend
Unit 6 p.93	F	F	10	2	2	1	Language learning	_	Friend	Friend

Unit 6 p.93	F	F	18	5	2	1	NGO membership	_	Friend	Friend
Unit 9 p.p. 131-132	F	M	74	432	6	6	Education	M	Interviewer	Teacher Trainer
Unit 10 p. 145	F	F	83	257	9	8	Sustainable development	M	Interviewer	Expert
Total	**F=10 M=3**	**F=7 M=6**	**1379**	**1763**	**88**	**83**	_	**F=3 M=5**	_	_

5. CONCLUSION

Throughout the whole textbook, gender bias is undeniably obvious in some of the aspects analysed. In the first place, male characters outnumber female characters both in textual and pictorial representations. Second, the over-representation of male pronouns demonstrates the same bias.

However, both genders are given equal opportunities in dialogues, occupations, and the aspect of firstness, which constitutes an important component of the textbook. Thus, this textbook reflects a certain amount of consciousness about the issue of gender among textbook designers and professionals, although it can be subject to improvement.

Ethical considerations

So that the study would respect ethical considerations, respondents were kindly informed to fill in questionnaires spontaneously and willingly. So as to reassure participants and to work in an academic and professional way, we confirmed on the head of each questionnaire that the respondents' identities and responses would be confidential and used only by researchers and their supervisor in academic affairs. Also, we have devoted a paragraph under the title of the questionnaire to jot down the aim of the research and the general hypothesis that we aimed to confirm in the study. In so doing, the respondents would feel comfortable filling in the questionnaire and, more importantly, know why they are being questioned.

The respondents were informed that the online versions of the questionnaire would be stopped automatically as soon as we receive the necessary number of responses. Besides, we explained that this study is not related to any particular sponsors so that they could write their ideas appropriately and without reservations.

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