

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN GRADE 1 AND GRADE 2 ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS PRESCRIBED FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

Wint Thi Thi Phyo¹

Abstract

Textbook plays a crucial role in the socialization of young learners because they can influence how learners perceive society. Therefore, research in the field of gender representation in textbooks is as important as any other area of study. This study investigates the visual representation of gender in two English textbooks (Grade 1 and Grade 2) prescribed for primary education in Myanmar. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. For the visual analysis, Yang's (2014) model of analysis for gender representation was adapted, particularly in relation to visual representation. Additionally, this study conducted a qualitative interpretation of gender representation in relation to the social context. The results show that in the visual representation of gender, males and females were fairly represented in the illustrations of both textbooks. Some gender stereotyping was found in terms of occupations, but it was minimal in the illustrations of both textbooks. Furthermore, the study found a significantly equal representation of males and females in illustrations related to classroom activities. However, with regard to involvement in outdoor activities, genders were somewhat represented through stereotypical portrayals. Research in the field of gender representation in English textbooks can help create a gender-neutral learning environment for young learners.

Keywords: gender representation, visual analysis, English textbooks

Introduction

Both genders should be equally represented in society, with each having the opportunity to participate in all domestic and social roles. Promoting gender equality is important for both men and women to have equal opportunities in society. However, many people and nations perceive males as “more socially and economically valuable than females” which denies the rights of women to participate and to be fairly represented (Craenest, 2015). Over the recent decades, there have been increasing educational and job opportunities for females all over the world, including Myanmar, along with greater awareness of gender equality.

Gender equality is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender equality (SDG 5) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The same right and fair opportunities between both male and female are encouraged in most areas such as representation in political positions, administrations, business and the right to education. Despite this, people in Myanmar still have strong perceptions of stereotypical gender differences.

It is important that both genders are equally represented in textbooks. Textbook plays a crucial role in the process of socializing young learners because they can influence the way learners perceive our society. The relation between language and gender in textbooks has attracted attention since the 1970s, for example, the first studies on gender representation in textbooks are Coles, 1977; Porreca, 1984. Textbooks give the message about which behaviour is inappropriate or appropriate for the learners. In addition, the textbooks serve as a source from which the learners acquire gender stereotypes. These stereotypes between

¹ Department of English, University of Mandalay

females and males can clearly be seen in different domains such as education, economy, and politics. Young learners are easily influenced by their surroundings, so it is important not to underestimate the impact of textbooks. After all, textbooks are still a fundamental tool of education in the twenty-first century.

Therefore, research in the field of gender representation in textbooks is as important as any other. There are a number of studies that prove that gender representation in textbooks is still an issue that has to be dealt with in order to create gender equality in learning materials (Porreca, 1984; Sakita, 1995; Lee and Collins, 2009). Gender representation in English language textbooks has been widely researched (UK: Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland 1997; Russia: Rifkin 1998 ; Sweden: Skolverket 2006; Japan: Pihlaja 2007; Australia: Lee and Collins 2008; Hong Kong: Yang 2014).

Within the context of Myanmar, there are a few studies to examine gender representation in the prescribed English textbooks despite a number of studies have been done in evaluating textbooks and coursebooks with different perspectives. The intention for conducting research in the field of gender representation is to promote awareness of misconceptions of gender, which include the gender biases (Emilia et al., 2017). Gender bias manifests itself in all spheres of people's social life, such as education, family, workplace, services sector, and business field.

Sunderland (1992) highlighted that representation of gender in textbooks “potentially affects students as language learners and users” in three different ways: 1) as socialization agents that influence the learners unconsciously; 2) students become demotivated and their learning is adversely affected, if, for example, the female students find that only a few characters in their textbooks are female who have only limited roles; and 3) models of language are used as classroom practice.

People's internalized views of gender stereotypes are formed by different socialization agents (e.g. schools) and other social processes (Law and Chan, 2004) argue that. Though different contemporary media (e.g. television, films, music, video games, and the Internet) may play a role here, in schooling, textbooks “represent the everyday for children” because textbooks provide content that is delivered to pupils at all but the earliest levels of their learning (Kobia, 2009). Previous studies mention that books may have a considerable impact on children's attitudes, values, and behaviour as children spend a great deal of time reading them at school.

Textbooks are still used in a majority of English classrooms nowadays, despite digital materials (e.g. e-books) being more commonly used than previously. Though teachers are advised to use a wide range of teaching resources to broaden students' learning experiences, textbooks are the major source of teaching materials used in most primary English classrooms. Designing a textbook, especially an ELT textbook, requires consideration of a number of factors such as ethnicity, age, class, mental level, gender, purpose, etc. Additionally, language textbooks play a crucial role in providing language models for ESL/EFL learners.

According to Butler (1990), gender roles are taught from an early age on through interaction with society. Social institutions like schools, family, and the media create a learning environment for young learners that teaches them to differentiate between the behaviour of boys and girls. Primary schools are one of the first social institutions a child encounters and they play a crucial role in shaping young minds and creating attitudes towards gender. In most primary schools of Myanmar, textbooks are the most commonly used teaching materials. And, it is

questionable whether English textbooks prescribed for primary education in Myanmar are gender-biased or gender-equitable.

Given the centrality of textbooks in teaching and learning, the purpose of the present study is to investigate visual representation of gender in Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks prescribed for primary education in Myanmar.

In order to examine the representation of gender in Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks through visuals, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What is the frequency of representation for male and female characters in the illustrations of Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks?
- (2) How are domestic / occupational roles visualized for male and female characters in these two textbooks?
- (3) In terms of involvement in activities, how are male and female characters depicted in the illustrations of these two textbooks?

Literature Review

Gender and Language

Gender and language is an interdisciplinary field of study originating from a wide range of academic disciplines, including sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, women's studies, and linguistics (Tannen, 1994). There are three important past approaches of gender and language, which focused on language use: deficit, dominance, and difference approaches. The 'deficit' approach considers that women's language is deficient when compared with that of men's (Jespersen, 1922). The second approach, the 'dominance' approach, is based on the belief that "the male is the superior sex" (Spender, 1985, p. 1), which leads to "women's powerlessness and subordinate status" (Speer, 2005, p. 32). For the 'difference' approach, Tannen (1991) found that there are differences in the styles of language use in conversations for males and females, because males and females "grow up in what are essentially different cultures."

The issues of language and gender have drawn a lot of research interests. The relationship between language and gender was put into the spotlight when Lakoff (1975), in her book "Language and Women's Place", mentioned that in patriarchal society, women's language is the representation of powerlessness, triviality, and insecurity. Additionally, Cameron (2005) pointed out that the relationship of language and gender is based on what activities women and men participate in. As asserted by Sunderland (2000), while identity will not be determined by what kind of language and how the language is used and gender is represented in the society, it will shape their identity. In any context, including in educational setting, perception and expectation towards students are realized through gendered language (Sunderland, 2000).

Language is an important aspect of gender through which individuals make sense of their ideas and feelings about the world (Connell, 2008; Holmes, 2008). Language plays a central role in the socialisation of children (Mineshima, 2008) and is an important pedagogical influence on developing conceptions of gender: 'language can also be a primary factor through which gender biases are explicitly and implicitly perpetrated' (McClure, 1992). Research in the area of gender and education shows much evidence that 'within schools, textbooks play a significant role in the gender socialization of children' (Lee and Collins 2008; Britton and Lumpkin 1977).

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes have been identified as “beliefs about the characteristics and behaviour of each sex” (Manstead and Hewstone, 1995) which are “widely shared” among members of a culture (Etaugh and Bridges, 2010). People from different cultures tend to have different gender stereotypes, that is, in particular, beliefs about how males and females differ in terms of personality traits, interests, and behaviours (Kail, 2007) and an understanding of what ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ mean (Blaine, 2007). Someone’s ideas about gender are thus influenced by his/her culture. The same ideas are not held universally; nevertheless, many gender stereotypes have a familiar quality to people worldwide and can be readily recognised as a list of characteristics used to describe either men or women. These gender-stereotyped beliefs tell people not only “what men and women are like” but also “how men and women should be” (Kite et al., 2008, p. 208).

Gender stereotypes arise from perceived differences between men and women. These perceived differences may then manifest themselves as stereotypes in materials used in classrooms (Yang, 2014). Gender stereotypes in books and textbooks may influence people as children, as readers, or both. Hamilton et al. (2006) argue that stereotyped portrayals of the sexes contribute negatively to children’s development, and influence their career aspiration and personality development. Blaine (2007) also suggests that gender stereotypes influence the way people evaluate the behaviour of males and females.

Gender Representation in English Textbooks

Gender representation is the way for depicting both genders (female and male) in a textbook (Yang, 2014). The equality of depictions with respect to balance or imbalance is assumed as fairness treatment of gender in the context. (Holmes and Mayerhoff, 2003). Gender representation in textbooks has been widely researched. Since the 1970s, scholars and researchers have been concerned with the depiction of gender roles in EFL textbooks. Since then, numerous studies have examined the presentation of gender roles in textbooks, shedding light on both visual and textual presentations of female and male characters, such as Porreca (1984), Lee and Collins (2008), Hall (2014), and Yang (2014).

Porreca (1984) studied sexism in fifteen ESL textbooks in six sorts of occurrence, either visual or textual: (1) omission ratio of females compared to males in text and illustration (2) occupational roles (3) frequency of male nouns to female nouns (4) firstness (5) masculine generic constructions and (6) types and frequency of adjectives associated with either sex. In every category of the study, there was evidence that "sexism continued to flourish in ESL materials. Although females comprised slightly over half the population of the United States, they were depicted or mentioned only half as often as males in both texts and illustrations." She added that "the role played by language in maintaining and strengthening sexist values...is less widely understood or acknowledged [than economic gender inequality] probably because linguistic sexism is much more deeply rooted and far more subtle than other forms of sexism."

Giaschi (2000) did a critical image analysis to find the stereotypical ideologies of gender. The images selected for his study were drawn from the award-winning Headway series and 4th Dimension. Seven main questions were posed for the analysis of the image, targeting the activity of the image, the active and passive person in the image, the status of the persons, the body language, the clothing, and finally the direction of the participants’ gaze. The results of Giaschi’s

study revealed that men were given the active role in the images and had a higher status. Women, on the other hand, were presented as submissive and weak.

Skliar (2007) conducted a comparative research to analyze gender bias in Iranian and Turkish ELT textbooks. Critical discourse analysis was used to examine male and female representations in both texts and images of the textbooks. Both Iranian and Turkish ELT textbooks were found to depict women as mothers and housewives and men as breadwinners. In contrast to women, men occupied more active roles in both texts and visual elements.

Lee and Collins (2008) investigated whether recent improvements in the status of women in the country were mirrored in patterns of gender representation in Hong Kong secondary English textbooks. They compared ten current English textbooks with ten older ones from the late 1980s and early 1990s to examine how gender representation in secondary English language textbooks in Hong Kong has changed over the past two decades. Results revealed that although women enjoyed a more frequent presence in the newly published books, some authors maintained the stereotyped image of women as weaker than men, and as operating primarily within domestic rather than social domains.

In Pakistan, Shah (2012) conducted research to explore the gender inclusion in English language textbooks taught at the secondary school level in Punjab. Through the content analysis technique of textbooks, interviews and questionnaires, she observed that equal gender inclusion in the said books was almost indiscernible. The representation of females was not in equal proportion with the males. Female roles appeared to be orthodox ones. Most of the female role models depicted in the said textbooks were associated with the religion of Islam.

Yang (2014) investigated gender representation in two widely-used primary English language textbook series, Step Up and Primary Longman Express, by examining two subgenres that can be widely found in all language textbooks: reading passages and dialogues, and visuals. In other words, textual (lexis and grammar), discourse, and visual representations of gender are analyzed. A combination of different methods was used in this study. The results of this study revealed that males and females were represented similarly and fairly, and showed an improvement over previous textbook studies in gender representation.

In Iran, Amerian and Esmaili (2015) conducted a study that evaluated gender representation in an international ELT series, i.e. *American Headway Student Textbooks*. Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional model of CDA was adopted as a model of study. The findings of their study indicated that the textbooks contained instances of sexism, both overt and covert. The overt sexism was presented as discrimination against women, and the covert consisted of drawing women as instruments for advertising.

In Croatia, Bilic (2016) investigated gender representation in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks used in elementary schools (Grades five to eight). This study compared the textbook series *Way to Go Plus*, written by Croatian authors, with *Project*, written by an English author. The results showed that gender bias does exist in both textbook series, but they differ in their approach of gender issues.

Ahmad and Shah (2019) investigated gender representation in an English language textbook taught to the students of Grade-5 in public and private schools in Punjab (Pakistan) by applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model. It was observed that the textbook displayed a strong gender bias, with males being represented more frequently than females. It also appeared

that the textbook had been designed to maintain male dominance in implicit as well as explicit ways. Such a state of affairs may lead to gender discrimination in practical lives.

Muzdalifah, Safrina and Gunawan, W. (2021) investigated what kind of gender features emerged for the male and female represented in the image of the textbook Grade IV for elementary school in Indonesia. The data were analysed by following the theory of visual grammar by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to analyse the visual text. The study found that there are unequitable gender representations typically because both genders are represented through stereotypical portrayals. Males are represented to dominate language strategies and occupy more public areas, while females are represented to be passive and occupy more private areas.

Bachore (2022) employed content analysis approach which was based four categories of analysis such as language use, visibility/illustrations, occupational roles and firstness to explore gender representation in Grade ten English textbook. It was found that females were underrepresented in language use (particularly in proper nouns and common nouns used), visibility/ illustrations (images and pictures) and occupational roles mentioned in the text. In general, the textbook was characterized by unfair representation of gender in all aspects.

Research Methodology

Materials

In this study, two English textbooks (Grade 1 and Grade 2) prescribed for primary education in Myanmar were selected to investigate gender representation in English textbooks. These textbooks are designed by the National Curriculum Development Committee, with technical assistance provided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). These textbooks are published under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and are taught in all government schools and some private schools in Myanmar starting from the 2016-2017 academic year. The level of English textbooks is described according to CEFR level. English textbooks of lower primary level (Grade 1 and Grade 2) are Pre A1 level. The curricula for Grade 1 and Grade 2 employ a communicative teaching methodology. English textbooks are organised by topics. These textbooks contain numerous illustrations or visual texts. These pictures are designed to enhance students' understanding of the context and lesson contents through making the book colourful and illustrative.

Methods

A mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, was employed to investigate the visual representation of gender in Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks. For visual analysis, Yang's (2014) model of analysis for gender representation was adapted, especially visual representation of gender. Moreover, this study conducted a qualitative interpretation of gender representation in relation to the social context. Accordingly, for the visual analysis of gender representation, the illustrations in all units were thoroughly examined on the basis of the identified categories. In this study, the focus of the visual investigation was on frequency of representation for female and male characters, domestic/occupational roles visualized for male and female characters, and involvement in activities of male and female characters in illustrations.

Results and Discussion

Representation of Male and Female Characters in Illustrations

By adapting Yang’s (2014) method of visual analysis, the number of males and females in the illustrations on each page of the whole book was counted by tallying the occurrence of male and female characters to see how gender is represented in the visuals in Grade 1 and Grade 2. For the illustrations, gender was determined by observing the appearance, especially the style of hair and clothing. Those characters that are too small or not clear enough to allow recognition of their sex were excluded. The number of visualised characters in two textbooks is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of representation for males and females in Illustrations

Books	Males	Females	Total
<i>Grade 1</i>	461 (48%)	491 (52%)	952
<i>Grade 2</i>	201 (45%)	241(55%)	442

As seen in Table 1, there are noticeably many human males and females in the line drawings in each book. In Grade 1, with the occurrence of 491 times (52%), female outnumbers the occurrences of male that appear 461 times (48%). And also, the males appear for 201 times (45%) and the female characters appear for 241 times (55 %) in Grade 2.

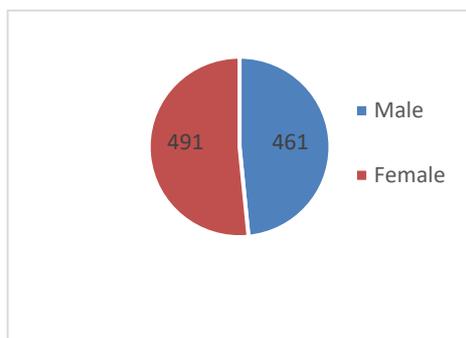


Figure 1. Frequencies of male and female occurrences in the Illustrations of Grade 1

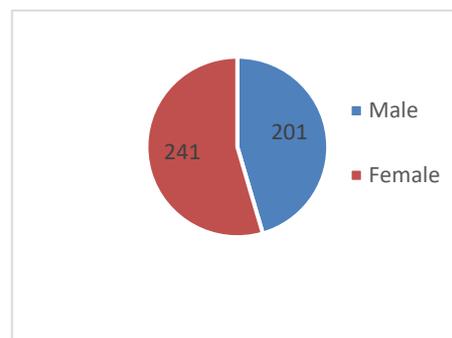


Figure 2. Frequencies of male and female occurrences in the Illustrations of Grade 2

As presented in Figures 1 and 2 , the relatively equal proportion of male and female characters can also be found in the Grade 1 textbook. It is significant that human male and female characters are equally represented in the illustrations in Grade 1. And also, the results of gender visibility in illustrations in the Grade 2 textbook reveal that the proportion of male and female characters tends to be equitable. It can be concluded that human male and female characters are represented fairly in the line drawings and illustrations of both Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks.

Domestic/Occupational Roles of Male and Female Characters in Illustrations

The different domestic and occupational roles of human male and female characters in the illustrations (line drawings) of the whole textbooks of Grade 1 and Grade 2 were examined thoroughly.

Table 2. Domestic/Occupational Roles of Males and Females in the Illustrations of Grade 1

Domestic/Occupational Role	Male Frequency	Female Frequency
Student	412	404
Teacher	6	44
Grandparent	2	2
Parent	11	11
Son/Daughter	20	23
Uncle/Aunt	8	5
Farmer	2	0
Queen	0	2
Total	461 (48%)	491(52%)

Table 3. Domestic/Occupational Roles of Males and Females in the Illustrations of Grade 2

Domestic /Occupational Role	Male Frequency	Female Frequency
Student	123	134
Teacher	0	20
Parent	8	11
Son/ Daughter	6	6
Bus-driver	4	0
Queen	0	2
Others	60	64
Total	201(45%)	241(55%)

As presented in Tables 2 and 3, the significant roles represented for both females and males are students in schools or classrooms as it is due to the fact that primary textbooks are targeted at young children. There is an equal representativeness of the number of male and female students in textbooks Grade 1 and Grade 2. And also, the domestic roles of male and female characters in two textbooks are fairly similar. There is a balanced representation of both genders in terms of domestic roles illustrated in both textbooks such as parents, grandparents, sons/daughters. Besides, 2 illustrations of females being portrayed as queen can be found in two textbooks as it is due to the fact that these illustrations are essentially designed for teaching vocabulary starting with letter 'Q', for instance.

Significantly, the most common occupation engaged in by females is teacher in both textbooks. The adult females (44) in the line drawings of the Grade 1 textbook are illustrated as primary school teachers, compared with only (6) male teachers. Similarly, in Grade 2 textbook, the adult females (20) in illustrations are portrayed as teachers whereas there is no male portrayed as teachers. The occupational role of 'teacher' is more stereotypically linked with females than males in the illustrations of both textbooks. Furthermore, (2) pictures of males as

farmer in Grade 1 English textbook, and (4) pictures of males as bus-driver in Grade 2 English textbook tend to be illustrated in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

With regard to research question 2: ‘How are domestic/occupational roles visualised for male and female characters in Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks?’, there are not many different occupational roles illustrated in both textbooks as it is due to the fact that primary textbooks are designed for young children. However, the phenomenon of few gender stereotyping in terms of occupations can be found in the illustrations of both textbooks. Significantly, the occupational role ‘teacher’ is stereotypically associated more frequently with females than males in both textbooks. To the best of my knowledge, this is because the contexts depicted in different units of the two textbooks are often schools or classrooms, and the textbook illustrators may be attempting to reflect reality, given that a significant number of primary school teachers in Myanmar are female.

Involvement in Activities of Male and Female Characters in Illustrations

In investigating visual representation of gender in Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks, the involvement in activities of the male and female characters in the illustrations of two textbooks was observed in detail. According to van Leeuwen (2008), the characters in illustrations may be depicted as “involved in some action” (2008). If they are involved in an action, they may be an agent (i.e. the doer of that action). The number of males and females in the illustrations on each page of the whole textbooks (Grade 1 and Grade 2) was counted by tallying the involvement in activities to find out whether males and females are represented differently through the activities they are engaging in.

Table 4. Involvement in Activities of Males and Females in the Illustrations of Grade 1

Kind of Activity	Male Frequency	Female Frequency
Introducing & Greeting	48	48
Asking & Answering	142	137
Saying & Acting	194	213
Singing	7	7
Playing	5	4
Total	396 (49%)	409(51%)

As seen in Table 4, the activities engaged in by the human males and females in Grade 1 textbook include indoor activities. Most of the activities are classroom activities like introducing and greeting, asking and answering, saying and acting, and singing whereas a few activities of playing outside is depicted in the textbook. In Grade 1 textbook, there is a significantly equal representativeness of the number of males and females represented in illustrations in terms of involvement in activities. As presented in Tables 4 and 5, the majority of activities depicted in Grade 1 and Grade 2 textbooks take place in classroom and school settings. This is due to the fact that the most frequently represented roles for both females and males in these textbooks are those of students. The results can be clarified by noting that both males and females

predominantly participate in activities within classrooms and schools, aligning with the target age group of primary students (6-7-year-old-students).

Table 5. Involvement in the Activities of Males and Females in the Illustrations of Grade 2

Kind of Activity	Male Frequency	Female Frequency
Introducing and Greeting	18	22
Asking and Answering	34	37
Saying and Acting	31	35
Singing	18	13
Dancing	0	5
Drawing	0	6
Writing	0	6
Playing fribee	0	3
Playing on see-saw	0	4
Swimming	5	0
Jumping	5	0
Swinging	2	0
Playing football	8	0
Playing basketball	3	0
Playing in jungle gym	4	0
Playing hopscotch	8	4
Playing on roundabout	2	2
Total	138 (50%)	137(50%)

Table 5 shows that human males and females were depicted engaging in a greater number of different types of activities in Grade 2 textbook. To classify broadly, the activities engaged in by the human males and females in Grade 2 textbooks include not only indoor activities like introducing and greeting, asking and answering, singing but also outdoor activities like swimming, jumping and playing different types of sports. It can be found that similar to Grade 1 textbook, there is a balanced representation of both genders in terms of involvement in classroom activities in Grade 2 textbook. Nevertheless, significantly, males are depicted performing outdoor activities like playing football, swimming, playing in jungle gym whereas females are shown drawing, dancing, and writing.

In terms of involvement in classroom activities, a significantly equal representativeness of males and females represented in illustrations of Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks can be found. In other words, both males and females represented in illustrations of two textbooks Grade 1 and Grade 2 are equally depicted as involving in most classroom activities. However, the phenomenon of males being portrayed as more sporty than females (Lee & Collins, 2008, 2010)

can be found in Grade 2 textbooks. With regard to involvements in outdoor activities, genders are somewhat represented through stereotypical portrayals.

Table 6. Overall Percentage of Visual Representation of Gender in Grade 1 & Grade 2

Visual Representation of Gender	Grade 1		Grade 2	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Representation for male and female characters in illustrations	48%	52%	45%	55%
Domestic/ Occupational roles visualized for male and female characters	48%	52%	45%	55%
Involvement in Activities of male and female characters in illustrations	49%	51%	50%	50%

Table 6 shows the overall percentage of visual representation of gender in Grade 1 and Grade 2 English textbooks. The relatively equal proportion of male and female characters can be found in both textbooks. The significant roles represented for both females and males are students as it is due to the fact that primary textbooks are targeted at young children. Moreover, there is a balanced representation of both genders in terms of domestic roles illustrated in both textbooks. In terms of involvement in classroom activities, both males and females in illustrations of two textbooks (Grade 1 and Grade 2) are equally depicted.

Based on all the findings above, with regard to the visual representation of gender, it can be concluded that males and females are overall represented similarly though there is only little gender stereotyping in illustrations of either textbooks. Several previous language textbook studies (e.g. Kobia, 2009; Lee and Collins, 2008, 2010; Yang, 2011, 2014) found a higher visibility of male characters in illustrations. This shows an improvement over previous studies of textbooks. Research in the field of gender representation in EFL textbooks can help create a gender neutral learning environment for young learners. According to Butler (1990), gender roles are taught from an early age on through interaction with society. Social institutions like schools, family and the media create a learning environment for young learners. Accordingly, a study in the field of gender representation in English textbooks used in Myanmar primary schools can foster awareness of stereotypes, promote inclusivity and contribute to a more equitable education environment.

Conclusion

The present study investigated visual representation of gender in two English textbooks (Grade 1 and Grade 2) prescribed for primary education in Myanmar. It aimed to understand gender roles and stereotyping in these textbooks in order to enrich the field of material evaluation and gender representation. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were

employed in this study. For the visual analysis, Yang's (2014) model of analysis for gender representation was adapted, especially visual representation of gender. Moreover, this study conducted a qualitative interpretation of gender representation based on the analyzed data. The results reveal that in visual representation of gender, males and females were represented fairly in the illustrations of two textbooks. The phenomenon of few gender stereotyping in terms of occupations was found in the illustrations of both textbooks. An equal representation of males and females was found in the illustrations regarding involvement in classroom activities. With regard to involvements in outdoor activities, genders were somewhat represented through stereotypical portrayals. Overall, males and females were nearly equally represented in the illustrations of two textbooks (Grade 1 and Grade 2) prescribed for primary education in Myanmar. Although some very positive findings as regards the visual gender equality have been found, the result does not reflect the actual number of male and female population in Myanmar.

There were several limitations in this study that are worth mentioning. The study mainly focused on visual analysis to investigate gender representation in Grade 1 and Grade 2 primary English textbooks. Thus, further studies can be carried out concerning gender representation from different perspectives, such as content analysis and discourse analysis. Furthermore, examining a larger sample would contribute to generalizing the findings to all EFL textbooks in Myanmar.

The findings of this study have several important implications for educators, textbook developers in Myanmar. Firstly, the relatively balanced visual representation of gender in the analyzed textbooks is a positive step towards promoting gender equality in education. By presenting both male and female characters fairly in illustrations, these textbooks help to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and encourage young learners to perceive both genders as equal participants in various roles and activities. However, the study also highlights areas that require further attention. The persistence of some gender stereotypes, particularly in outdoor activities, suggests that while progress has been made, there is still a need for more deliberate efforts to eliminate these stereotypes entirely. As gender roles and societal norms change over time, it is crucial that educational content remains relevant and supports the goal of creating a more equitable society. This study serves as a valuable resource for those involved in curriculum development and highlights the critical role that textbooks play in shaping young minds and promoting gender equality from an early age.

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