Representation of gender interactions in language textbooks in Egypt

Reinforcing dominant ideologies or a tool for change ?

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Résumé : The study involves a comprehensive analysis of primary sources, specifically focusing on three mandatory language textbooks utilized in Egyptian public high schools : Arabic, English and French. The research employs a content analysis methodology, which entails a systematic examination of the character interactions depicted in images within the textbooks. The primary objective of this analysis is to uncover the implicit prevailing ideologies in educational materials that endorse gender segregation in the Egyptian society, which serves as an obstacle to women's active engagement in the public sphere.

Mots-clés : gender representation ; social roles of textbooks ; gender in teaching materials ; gender-segregation ; Islamic ideologies in Egypt ; culture-specific gender inequality ; content analysis.

Introduction

Textbooks are perceived as the forefront of the state's authorized teaching materials, reflecting values and signifying society's aspirations (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991 ; Foster and Crawford 2006 ; Sleeter and Grant 1991). The debate amongst educators questioned the function of the school textbook : there are those of who perceive it as a mirror of society, whereas others see it as a vector of social transformation. Sinigaglia-Amadio (2010 : 48) stated that if a textbook is a mere reflection of the society in which it is produced, it would then find itself "naturally" reproducing stereotypes, inequalities, discriminations and other existing social flaws or dysfunction. However, if textbooks are considered as tools of social transformation, on the contrary, it should provoke reflections and challenge the dominant representations.

Background of the study

There is variation, however, among countries in the role of textbooks in the classroom due the differences in teaching and learning cultures. The level of rigidity of curricula could either require teachers to strictly follow the order of the book content, or adopt a more flexible approach that allows them to rearrange the content and/or supplement with other material. In the latter case, students rely on textbooks mainly for afterschool assignments (Lambert 2000 ; Horsley and Walker 2013). Despite the use of other genres of teaching materials, educators still rely on textbooks more than any other supplementary texts in the classroom. A textbook-centered curriculum still prevails even in times of growing digitalization (Berendes 2018 : 518). Following this point, one can argue that textbooks still hold the same status in students' learning journey as was once described by Husbands :

> The principal teaching tools we have to develop our learners' understanding and awareness are words : their words, our words and the words of actors in the past as they are presented to us in documents or as textbooks. Textbooks are probably the first body of knowledge that learners are introduced to and thus the most common text with which learners are most *au fait* (1996 : 88).

Because of their omnipresence inside the classrooms, students perceive textbooks to be authoritative and approved ; likewise, the public considers their subject matter as a divine source of knowledge (Apple 1993 ; Wade 1993 ; Crawford 2003 ; Osborne 2004 ; ; Fan and Zhu 2007 ; Pingel 2010).

As an instrument of socialization and a source of ideological discourse, textbooks introduce young people to an existing cultural and socio-economic order with its relations of power and domination. As explained by Schissler (1990 : 81), textbooks "reflect the traditions a society has formed over decades or centuries ; they contribute to developing the individual's self-esteem." Indeed, the importance of reviewing textbooks to uncover the hidden, underlying assumptions and stereotypes within their content cannot be overlooked (Foster and Crawford 2007). Hence, it is crucial to investigate the underlying meaning of the cultural messages presented through school textbooks, since they may not only teach learners socio-cultural values, but also how to embrace their own place in society ; a particular problematic issue for women in patriarchal societies.

In our study's context, it is anticipated that language textbooks in Egypt will promote the "official" or "traditional" culture during the content selection process. Consequently, the composition of textbooks, encompassing topics, situations depicted in dialogues, vocabulary usage, and imagery, as well as explicitly presented themes, is expected to originate from choices that mirror the preferences of the prevailing class or gender. We have opted to examine the portrayal of gender interactions in textbooks, recognizing its significance and controversy within Egyptian society.

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The birth of gender segregation in modern Egypt

The case of gender mixing is a controversial topic in Egypt and affects all classes based on their interpretation of Islamic teachings. Although patriarchy is on no account unique to Muslim-majority societies, still the anthropologists who studied the Egyptian model of gender segregation proposed by Salafism during the 1970's – and still affects the present public space – deeming it sui generis due to several factors. Salafism is a reform branch movement of Sunni Islam whose modern-day advocates claim to emulate "the pious predecessors" (al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ ; often refer to the first three generations of Muslims) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible (Wagemakers 2016). Gender mixing is not encouraged in Islam, as El-Guindi explains "Islam condemns cross-sex exposure whether by unnecessary or taboo contact or through immodesty in dress and behavior (1981 : 476). In other words, usually the discourse focuses on women, in particular, rather than both genders as highlighted by Valerie Hoffman-Ladd that "the modesty and segregation of women" is as an "attempt to preserve traditional values perceived to be Islamic" (1987 : 43).

Egyptian feminist activists in early 20th century, such as Qâsim Amin and Huda al-Sha'râwï called for women to take part in the Egyptian public spaces, faces covered, based on Islamic modernist approach. At the same time, al-Azhar's Fatwa Council – Egypt's most influential Sunni opinions, declared in 1937 that the *Hanafi* School did not consider veiling of any sort to be obligatory. Consequently, women acquired an increasingly prominent role in public ever since.

Starting in the 1960s, the State encouraged a feminine ideal of modesty without the veil. Sheikh Ahmad Hasan al-Baqūrī, President of al-Azhar at the time, argued that the obligation for women to veil in any form was specific to the Prophet's family and therefore not incumbent on Muslim women more broadly. Furthermore, Islam permitted women not only to expose their heads and limbs, but also to travel independently and liberally outside the home. However, this call for women's independence faced a backlash from the two Islamist rivals[1], the Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafis*, marking the end of consensus among them as well. There had been numerous internal divisions amongst their scholars regarding the legal status of a woman's face and the appropriate dress code, but all participants in these debates assumed individual modes to be sufficient for women in public spaces. Consequently, the early 1970s signified a shift in discourse, transitioning from questioning whether women should be present in public spaces to exploring how they could maintain their modesty while navigating heterosexual public spheres. For example, women were permitted to negotiate public space with the accompaniment of a male chaperone (*mahram*). Modesty was also a precondition for women's engagement in public life.

The swift population growth in Egypt throughout the 1970s led to an elevated need for education, transportation, and employment. President Sadat's implementation of an Open-door economic policy during this era symbolized a profound desire for an improved quality of life, driven by a fresh encounter with Western consumer culture.

[1]The Muslim Brotherhood and Salfists are Egypt's main rival islamists ; the highly dense population of Egypt makes it a "key prize" for competing ideological movements, religious and secular (Rock-Singer 2016 : 283).

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This shift posed novel challenges for Islamists in their attempts to maintain patriarchal authority over women's modesty. *Salafis* and Muslim Brotherhood sought to redefine their vision on public morality to distinguish themselves from their competitors and to lay claim to the mantle of religious authority in Egypt. Fortunately, due to both textual and practical considerations, scholars from both ideological backgrounds did not oppose women's right to education. On the textual aspect, numerous hadith reports advocating female education found broad acceptance among *Salafis*. Similarly, the *Salafi* perspective on Islamic motherhood emphasized the importance of educated mothers capable of effectively nurturing their children both in knowledge and religion. Thus, female education remained a fundamental aspect of the Salafi initiative, even as the growing presence of women in public spaces stirred apprehension (Rocky-Singer 2016 : 296).

However, *Salafis* called women to return home to protect their chastity, while ignoring the fact that these calls were economically elitist. Their justification focused on sympathizing with women who commuted *via* overcrowded means of transportation with complete disregarded to the relation between modesty and class as there were women who could secure private They also called for women to be removed from educational or professional environments that might threaten their chastity or modesty, which is also a scenario that could be attained with the help of domestic servants. That gave rise to the Muslim Brotherhood to undertake practical solutions to facilitate women's presence in public sphere in cooperation with the Islamic Student Movement, *al-jamaa al-Islämiyya.* This collaboration marked the birth of the phenomenon of gender segregation in Egypt's modern history :

> Together, these organizations had secured gender- segregated seating on a set number of train routes, particularly between Cairo and Alexandria, beginning in February 1978, thus protecting female students and workers of limited income who relied on public transportation. Similar challenges related to gender mixing awaited university students inside and outside the classroom, and the Brotherhood, again in cooperation with the Islamic Student Movement negotiated with the administration of Cairo University to provide separate spaces for men and women for university events hosted in the university's out- door stadium. The goal of separation was also extended to the classroom : *al-Da'wa* boasted that the Faculty of Agriculture at Cairo University now provided separate seating in lecture halls for male and female students and, in the near future, the lectures themselves were separate (*Ibid.* : 301).

Women were in public to stay with the new sense of economic independence, hence *Salafis* had to adapt to this reality to compete with the Muslim Brotherhood for a popular audience.

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Literature review

Gender representation in textbooks in Egypt and the MENA region

Many researchers necessitated more gender investigations in non-Anglo settings and in languages other than English (Warwick *et al.* 2014 ; Mustapha and Mills 2015 ; Niehaus 2018) to provide another culture-specific perspectives to further expand current theories of gender representations. However, a limited number of studies investigated representation of gender equality in school textbooks in Arab countries. The prevalence of political unrests and sectorial conflicts that result in wars in some countries, the region's goals have been directed towards political stability and economic recovery. There has been a recent surge of studies on post-conflict reconstruction in war-torn cities in the Middle East and North Africa region rather than being limited to re-establishing pre-conflict conditions (Steinø *et al.* 2020 ; Stohl, *et al.* 2017 ; Hallaj 2017). However, studies directed towards rebuilding human agency and civil society in affected regions are scarce. In fact, the basic human rights of having access to education is still fought for in some of the Middle East and North African countries.

Unfortunately, due to the heightened focus on other agendas, less attention has been given to research on textbook integrity and inclusion. Because the region, Egypt in specific, currently face various challenges after two recent revolutions and political unrests, one might question the relevance to this research to the current state. Yet, political and economic stability will never be attained when the public discourse is tainted with underlying gender hierarchy that impedes development. Élisabeth Ratheberg (1994), in an article on gender and development, asserted that,

> La perspective genre et développement conduit non seulement à l'élaboration des stratégies d'interventions et d'actions positives assurant une meilleure intégration des femmes aux initiatives de développement en cours, mais elle entraîne inévitablement un réexamen fondamental des structures et institutions sociales. [the gender and development perspective not only leads to the development of intervention and positive action strategies ensuring better integration of women into development initiatives. underway, but it inevitably involves a fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions] (Cited in Labourie-Racapé 2004 : 117).

That said, myriad of studies in predominantly Muslim countries, namely Iran and Pakistan, examined the hidden gender role messages of textbooks. The evidence suggests that textbooks are tainted with gender stereotypes, patriarchy, and a presence of extremist Islamic ideology (Alrabaa 1985 ; Shafiq and Ross 2010 ; Amini and Birjandi 2012 ; Ullah and Skelton 2013 ; Bağ and Bayyurt 2015). In Arab countries, however, there is scarcity in the research on hidden curricula and textbook evaluation. Recently, in line with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal that calls for "inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning," (United Nations 2015) some studies focused on inclusion in textbooks. One of these studies concluded that female to male characters portrayed in the Tunisian textbooks was as low as 30% in

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2007 (Perasso 2017). A disappointingly alarming statistic given that Tunisia marks the forefront of women's rights in the MENA region because of the progressive status of Tunisian women.

Another recent study by Wafa (2021) investigated the stereotypes in Arabic language textbooks in Primary years in Egypt. The outcome is female characters were mostly associated with derogative roles, while males were represented in more dominant roles. As Wafa suggests, this gender bias curricula conditions girls to traditional roles in the society and limits their employment choices (2021 : 374). Based on the findings, the author posits that female career choices later in life are affected by gender representation in school textbooks in the primary stage. It is worth mentioning that the majority of research on gender representation focuses on the primary year's textbooks. A phenomenon that creates a scarcity in the studies on teens in secondary years, who ought to be prepared for the workplace.

The studies mentioned above, despite their scarcity, suggest a growing interest in Arab countries towards examining school textbooks with a gender lens. Beforehand, gender parity in Arab countries was and is currently measured by equal access to education with a recent emphasis on STEM programs. Girls are encouraged to perform on par with boys in advance science and math courses in secondary school and higher education. The 2021 UNESCO Science report shows the percentage of female graduates by discipline using 2018 data : agriculture 49.4% ; engineering 20.9% ; health & welfare 56% ; natural sciences 64.2% ; ICT 36.8% ; which suggests that 50% of STEM graduates in Egypt are women. On the other hand, these results are not reflected in the Egyptian market as percentage of women is lower than men in STEM careers. It could be argued that gender bias, not academic performance, prevents women from entering and progressing in STEM careers. One could argue that this is the same scenarios in all Arab countries where gender equality has been achieved according to the SDG tracker. In fact, gender gap analysis demonstrates how "qualified women [are graduating] out of the education system, [yet] many industries are to hire, retain and promote them" (WEF 2018 : V). Women often find themselves in a gendered institutional culture with glass ceiling and few female role models (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull 2016). This patterns of gender disparity are evident in universities in both developing and developed countries (Burkinshaw and White 2017 ; Howe-Walsh and Turnbull 2016 ; Manfredi 2017 ; Shepherd 2017 ; Winchester and Browning 2015) and the corporate sector (World Economic Forum [WEF] 2017). Therefore, the access to education is not a sufficient measure of gender equality in a given society. The pattern we see here unravels a paradox within the education system that grants access to education and opens doors to girls, yet reinforces a gender gap in a society that has deeply-rooted traditions about gender roles and segregation.

The evident growing interest in gender disparity in the Middle East, where the status of women widely varies, has led to the recent scrutiny of school curricula for overt and covert sexism. Despite the scarcity of research on language and gender in education in Arab countries, it can be seen that EFL textbooks have been the chosen texts for the available gender representation studies, whereas Arabic textbooks have not been

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as common without a clear justification for this avoidance. Hence, in this study we analyze a sought after gender representation analysis.

Lastly, there is a scarcity of studies in Arab countries, specifically in Egypt, to cross examine gender representation across mandatory language textbooks : Arabic, English, and French. Since, the pivotal role of language textbooks is to influence learners' gender awareness and interpretation of the surrounding and target culture, it can be argued that our study aims to fill a gap in the literature in that regard as well and provide a comparison of representations across the three languages in the secondary school curricula.

While myriad of studies focused on gender stereotypes in textbooks to reveal the effect on women career aspirations and gender roles, we were concerned with the effect of women representation in terms of sharing the public sphere and interacting with the opposite gender.

Research aim and objectives

The primary objective of our study is to address a significant gap in the existing literature concerning the representation of gender interaction as a form of gender equality and women empowerment. The aim is to gain a deeper comprehension of whether this interaction is encouraged or discouraged within the contents of textbooks.

Secondly, we delve into an examination of how cross-gender interaction is depicted within the three language textbooks : Arabic, English, and French. This analysis aims to uncover the distinct ways in which each language portrays interactions between genders.

Hence, bridging gaps between society, research and education policies- represented by state schools to shed light on women in the public sphere in Egypt, and to assess the current gender-sensitive measures applied to textbooks to empower women and promote gender equality awareness amongst new generations. Hence, the findings of this study is reusable for decision makers, and for initial and continuous teacher trainings to play the roles in mitigating gender stereotypes. Within this work, we tried to answer the following research questions :

1. Does the content of secondary mandatory language textbooks in Egypt promote or discourage cross-gender interaction ?

2. Are there variations in the social messages conveyed by the three language textbooks – Arabic, English, and French – regarding cross-gender interaction ?

Methodology

Content analysis is adopted in this study to quantitatively count and analyze the representation of women throughout the textbooks under review. Content analysis has varied in its definitions with varying meanings. Babbie's (2010 : G2), for example, broadly labeled as "the study of recorded human communications," while in this research we adopt Neuendorf's :

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> Content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method, including attention to objectivity/intersubjectivity, *a priori* design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing. It is not limited as to the types of messages that may be analyzed, nor as to the types of variables that might be measured (2011 :10).

Another reason to support adopting content analysis approach in this research is its ability to provide the researchers with an optimal level of authenticity. In comparison to other methodologies, the data collected using a content analysis is not created by the researcher and is non-interactive ; hence, the inherent level of authenticity (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

Through this understanding of content analysis, we followed a conceptual approach to understand what the text is about, considering content from a gender representation perspective. This is carried out by systematically reducing school textbooks' pictures into manageable categories as recommended by Beach *et al.* "[…] considering content from a particular theoretical perspective, such as socio-historical, gender, cultural, or thematic studies" (2009 : 130). Furthermore, these categories are later analyzed to make inferences about the content that would unravel the real meaning of the themes presented to learners. Within the scope of our study, we focused on characters types of interaction, or lack thereof, their posture (static or engaged), and lastly the interaction is in single-sex or cross-gender setting.

Characters as focus of analysis

We opted for focusing on characters situated in texts and pictures for their ability to indicate visibility or exclusion, and promote or demote stereotypes through their depicted social role or personality attributes. According to Reuters, "les personnages du roman n'existent pas dans notre univers et ne sont constructibles qu'en relation avec l'énoncé du texte…). Elle invite – encore et toujours – à analyser univers, histoire et protagonistes, engendrés par les récits, au travers des signes linguistiques qui les constituent[2]" (2016 : 12). Consequently, the characters depicted throughout the textbooks serve as indicators of the ideologies and power dynamics being conveyed to the learners.

Corpus

There is a total of 4 public secondary schools' language textbooks reviewed in this research. The 4 textbooks taught in the Egyptian public schools, throughout the secondary education are : 2 Arabic textbooks (one used in each academic term) : *The Arabic Language [تعبيرها تغلا]; The Arabic Language, [Let's Get Creative]* ع الديع الاليه ; English textbook, *Hello,* and French textbook, *Club @dos plus 3*. The designation "ARA1" ; "ARA2" ; "ENG1" ; "FRA1" will be used for reference in this study. These

[2] [The characters in the novel do not exist in our universe and can only be constructed in relation to the text's statement…). It invites us – again and again – to analyze the universe, story and protagonists engendered by narratives, through the linguistic signs that constitute them.] Our translation.

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language textbooks are mandatory across all public secondary schools ; therefore, we did not have to make any choices in the selection process.

Findings

In this section, we will demonstrate the form of interactions that occur between the male and female characters as presented in the three language textbooks. The data in this section will highlight the authors' views regarding gender segregation or interactions. The type of interactions of each individual male and female characters are displayed and compared in the following tables.

Tab. 1 : Type of male characters' positioning in ENG1, (%)

Gender	Alone	Co-existing	Interacting
Male	34	19	47

Tab. 2 : Type of female characters' positioning in ENG1, (%)

Gender	Alone	Co-existing	Interacting
Female	19	15	66



Fig. 1 : Comparison between characters' positioning in ENG1, (%

We compared the data in *Table 1* and *Table 2* as shown in *Figure 1*, and the result is that male individual characters in ENG1 are less interactive than female characters by 19% difference. The number of co-existent characters is almost similar, while the number of male characters portrayed alone is almost twice the number of that of women (34% – 19%).

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Fig. 2 : Example of co-existing characters

The job advertisement, *Figure 2*, provides an example of the photos of co-existing male and female characters without direct interaction.

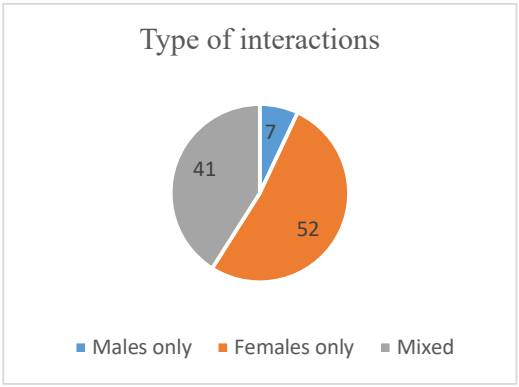


Fig. 3 : Type of interactions between characters in ENG1, (%)

Upon a closer examination of the type of interactions taking place between individual characters in ENG1, it was clear that an overwhelming majority of interactions (93%) were carried out by same gender interactions. Male-female interactions, on the other hand, are only 7% of the total number of characters.

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FIG. 4 : Single- sex cooperative interactions



FIG. 5 : Single- sex cooperative interactions

Figure 4 and *Figure 5* are samples of same sex interactions prevalent in ENG1. The only occurrences of male-female interactions were in either family settings as demonstrated in *Figure 6.*

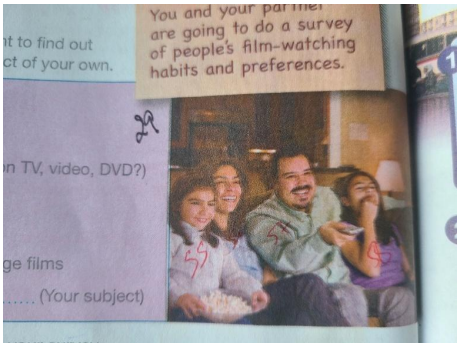


FIG. 6 : Cross-gender interaction

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The additional photo category involving cross-gender interaction is confined to professional settings and is also depicted through illustrations rather than actual photographs (refer to *Figure 7*).



Fig. 7 : Cross-gender interaction in professional setting

While, women were represented as frequently as men in a state of interaction, yet none of the genders were portrayed taking part in a co-ed educational, sporty or friendship interactions. This strongly suggests that the intended message from the authors is to promote gender segregation within these contexts.

Within the French textbook (referred to as FRA1), the following tables serve to elucidate the author's perspectives on interactions within single-sex and cross-gender settings.

Tab. 3 : Type of male characters' positioning in FRA1, (%)

Gender	Alone	Co-existing	Interacting
Male	21	22	56

Tab. 4 : Type of individual female characters' positioning in FRA1, (%)

Gender	Alone	Co-existing	Interacting
Female	26	14	59

Upon analyzing the data related to the quantity of male and female characters and their placements throughout the book, we proceed to offer a comparative analysis between the two tables (refer to *Figure 8*).

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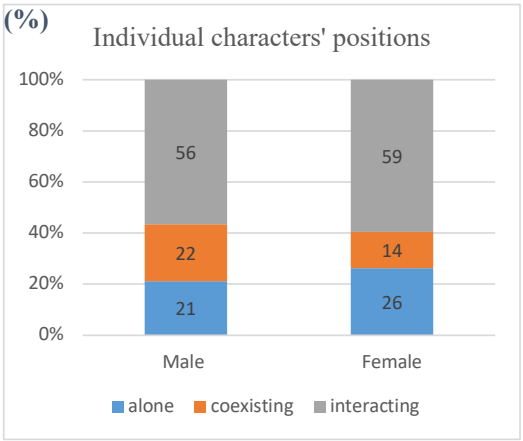


Fig. 8 : comparison between characters' positioning in FRA1, (%)

Here, it is evident that co-existing is more prevalent among male characters compared to females, and the degree of interaction is similar for both genders (56% – 59%). Consequently, FRA1 demonstrates a gender-balanced approach in the positioning of characters. Shifting our attention to the nature of interactions undertaken by these characters.

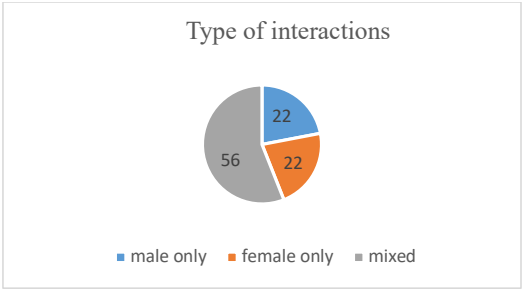


Fig. 9 : Type of interactions between characters in FRA1, (%)

As demonstrated in *Figure 9*, the cross- gender interaction = 56% of the total interaction occurrences. Single-sex interactions, on the other hand, have equal percentages amongst male and female characters = 22%.

As shown in *Figure 10* and *Figure 11*, cross-gender interactions are observed across diverse social occasions. Notably, girls without Islamic headscarves are portrayed engaging with boys outside of familial contexts. Consequently, FRA1 presents a counter-stereotypical portrayal wherein women confidently navigate their participation within the public sphere. Moreover, this depiction shows that these interactions are not confined to familial or professional settings, as observed in ENG1.

As for the first Arabic textbooks, ARA1 and ARA2, we similarly examined the placement of individual male and female characters.

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Fig. 10 : Cross-gender interactions



Fig. 11 : Cross-gender interactions

Tab. 5 : Type of male characters' positioning in ARA1, (%)

Gender	alone	Co-existing	interacting
Male	19	19	63

Tab. 6 : Type of female characters' positioning in ARA1, (%).

Gender	alone	Co-existing	interacting
Female	25	0	75

The data is further demonstrated in the figure below.

Figure 12 demonstrates that nearly 40% of male characters are depicted as co-existing with other characters or being alone. Furthermore, 63% of male characters are engaged in interactions with other characters. Among female characters, the majority (75%) are shown in interactions, while the remaining 25% are depicted alone. Notably, none of the female characters are presented in co-existing scenarios with other characters.

Interestingly, all interactions in ARA1 are gender segregated. Strikingly, an overwhelming majority of men carry out more interactions = 75%, as demonstrated in *Figure 14* and *Figure 15*, whereas females account for only =23%.

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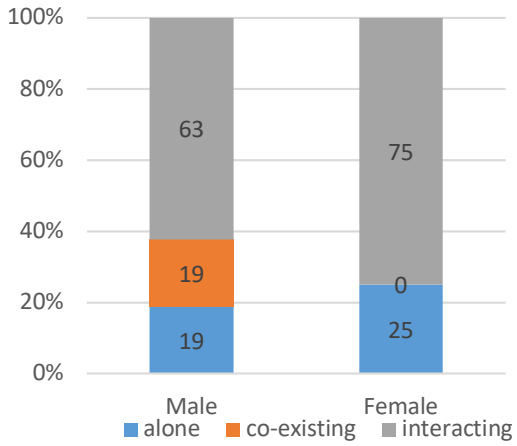


Fig. 12 : Comparison between characters' positioning in ARA1, (%)

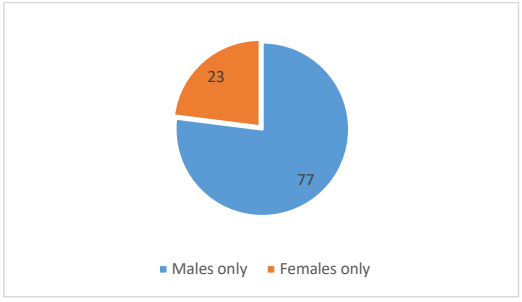


Fig. 13 : Type of interactions between characters in ARA1, (%)

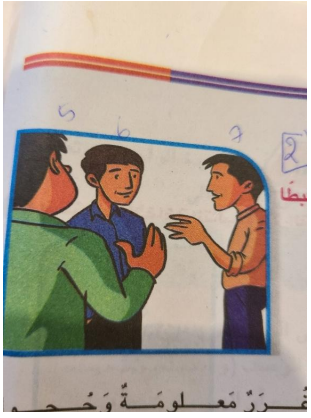


Fig. 14 : Single-sex interactions

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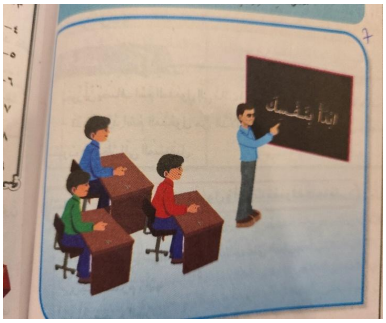


Fig. 15 : Single-sex interactions

The absence of cross-gender interaction is clearly apparent within ARA1. The authors have refrained from introducing counter-stereotypical interactions between men and women, thus inadvertently reinforcing prevalent conservative notions concerning gender segregation behavior in Egypt. Lastly, the same procedure was applied to the second Arabic textbook, ARA2.

Tab. 7 : Type of male characters' positioning in ARA2, (%)

Gender	Alone	Co-existing	Interacting
Male	42	8	50



Fig. 16 : comparison between individual characters' positioning in ara2, (%)

Tab. 8 : type of female characters' positioning in ara2, (%)

Gender	alone	Co-existing	Interacting
Female	40	40	20

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Figure 16 demonstrates the difference between the types of placements that each gender is portrayed in. Male characters have more interactions than female characters by 30%.

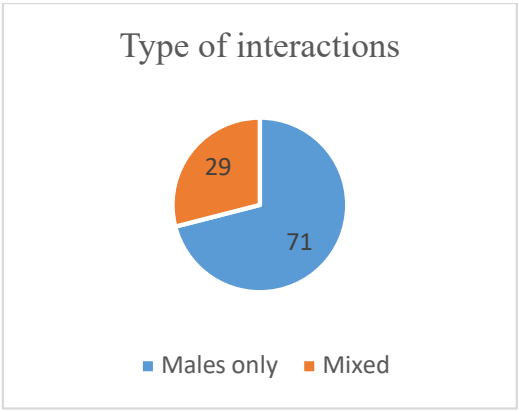


Fig. 17 : Type of interactions between individual characters in ARA2, (%)

Upon conducting a more in-depth analysis of the interactions undertaken by each gender, a significant majority of interactions were observed to occur exclusively between male characters, as depicted in *Figure 18*. In contrast, mixed-gender interactions accounted for only = 29%. Moreover, upon scrutinizing photographs of inter-gender interactions, it becomes apparent that women are often veiled and confined to static positions.



Fig. 18 : single sex interaction

Also, notice in *Figure 19*, the adult female's head is covered in a veil and is the only character not facing the audience. Not showing the woman's face highlights her inferiority vis-à-vis the father. Moreover, hiding the women's face and adhering to the Islamic dress attire in this photo setting (domestic sphere) adds more limitations to women's territorial negotiation[3]. Although females are not obligated to cover their

[3]The purpose and the function of the head and/or face covering (*hijab/niqab*) serves a similar function to that of gender segregation and is based upon the same understanding of female and male sexualities. Veiling, according to Mernissi, is in actual fact "a symbol of sexual segregation". This is so because the

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heads or faces in the presence of their immediate family, it is noteworthy that the authors have opted to depict the woman in the illustration with a covering. This choice seems to emphasize the importance of modesty as a prerequisite for being present and seen.



Fig. 19 : woman with headscarf

Discussion and Conclusion

Interactions between genders in pictures revealed deeper insights and patterns about the authors' views on cross-gender interactions. First, in ENG1, an overwhelming majority of interactions were carried out by same gender interactions. The representation of male-female interactions in the data was quite limited, comprising only a small proportion and primarily occurring within work and family contexts, as illustrated in *Figures 6 and 7*. Notably, the sole depiction of such interaction at the workplace, *Figure 6*, in the form of an illustration rather than a photograph serves to underscore the scarcity of real-life instances of male-female interaction. Lastly, male and female characters did not participate in leisure, social or sports activities throughout the book.

Conversely, the two Arabic textbooks portrayed an even more conservative model, wherein a significant majority of interactions were conducted by characters of the same sex – predominantly men. Furthermore, when cross-gender interactions did occur, they were largely confined to family settings, and women were consistently depicted wearing Islamic attire as shown in *Figure 20* and *Figure 21*. Furthermore, women in cross-gender interactions were consistently depicted in static postures, a portrayal that undermines their sense of agency and active participation.

classical understanding of Muslim sexuality is also "territorial" in a sense that "its regulatory mechanisms consist primarily in a strict allocation of space to each sex." The public sphere belongs solely to the males, while the domestic sphere, the sphere of sexuality, to the female (Duderija 2007 : 298).

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Fig. 20 : Women in family roles in ARA1



Fig. 21 : Veiled woman in mixed-gender interactions

Among the range of textbooks examined, the French textbook (FRA1) stood out for its inclusion of counter-stereotypical depictions of women in diverse cross-gender interactive scenarios, notably in leisure and sports contexts, as evidenced in *Figures 22, 23, 24*, and *25*. This rich diversity of cross-gender interactions within the textbook actively promotes women's agency and diminishes the portrayal of sexuality as a barrier to such interactions. Importantly, women were consistently portrayed as equal and proactive participants in everyday public sphere activities, thereby transcending secondary static roles. Additionally, their presence was not contingent upon a specific Islamic attire, symbolizing a departure from such conditioned representations.

Finally, representation of gender interaction in textbooks' pictures highlights salient differences between the textbooks' approaches regarding gender segregation. The French textbook's approach presented cross-gender interactions in various counter-stereotypical activities. The English textbook presented a balance between male and female in interactions with peers, however, a strict segregation between the sexes was enforced. Conversely, the Arabic textbooks unmistakably confine women to static

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Fig. 22 : Cross-Gender interaction sample in FRA1



Fig. 23 : Cross-Gender interaction sample in FRA1



Fig. 24 : Cross-gender interaction sample in FRA1

situations, curtailing their interactions to predominantly male-dominated scenarios within gender-segregated settings. Clearly, the representation of gender segregation in the English and Arabic textbooks, reflect the gender segregation within public space that is broadly acknowledged as a key means of facilitating public morality (Rocky-Singer 2016 : 303).

The segregation of sexes, devoid of opportunities for interaction, tends to foster judgments and social categorization. This process involves the mental organization, clas-

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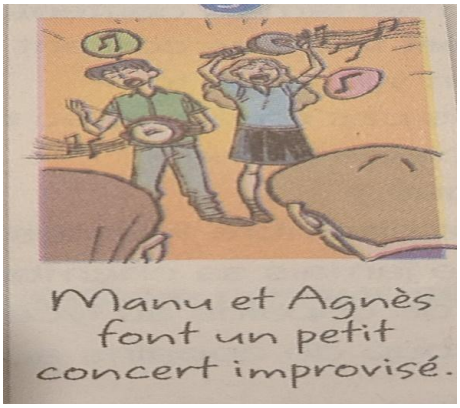


Fig. 25 : Cross-gender interaction sample in FRA1

sification, and quantitative assessment of individuals. Drawing from the insights of Tajfel and Wilkes (1963), this practice may lead students to categorize themselves and others by accentuating both gender differences and similarities, ultimately culminating in the formation of stereotypes.

To combat stereotypes, a number of studies propose that cultivating friendships with peers of the opposite gender, coupled with a rise in such friendships as individuals mature, correlates with the development of positive attitudes toward the other gender over time (Halim *et al.*, 2021 ; Zosuls *et al.*, 2014). While this solution appears logical, it's crucial to underscore the cultural disparities between the Western context, where these empirical investigations are conducted, and the Middle East, as our data portrays.

In our specific cultural context, establishing friendships with individuals of the opposite gender is not socially endorsed. This reality contributes to a widening gap and the reinforcement of prejudices between genders as they advance in age. Against this backdrop, gender segregation takes on a critical role in introducing a positive portrayal of both genders within educational materials. Serving as a shared platform between these two groups, it offers a means to convey gender-related knowledge that enhances self-perception and understanding of others. However, our data indicates that the current endorsement of gender segregation in English and Arabic textbooks ultimately contributes to a broader divide between male and female students.

Implications for publishers and material writers

We hope that this study will help publishers and content creators understand the magnitude of the effect of the textbooks produced and circulated in Egyptian schools on learners and teachers. As asserted by Barthelembs (2021 : 90)

> Les programmes scolaires – et sans doute à plus forte raison, les manuels scolaires–peuvent être envisagés sous deux angles : ils sont à la fois le miroir de la société qui produit (et en ce sens, reproducteurs des inégalités

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> et/ou discriminations) et un outil susceptible de transformer la société en profondeur en permettant de questionner les représentations courantes.[4]

Therefore, secondary textbooks' writers should fully understand the consequences of gender relations representation on adolescents' identify formation, and to understand the current challenges that face the Egyptian society regarding that matter.

Lastly, to promote women emancipation, textbooks should directly address the current setbacks mentioned in our study rather than the current common empowerment strategy that centers on the mere inclusion of women in STEM. This means that writers should start by liberating women from public shaming, which is the main hurdle in their advancement and engagement in public life. To do so, gender interactions in various settings should be normalized and fostered in textbooks through dialogues, inclusions of main actors in stories from both genders and images of gender-shared activities. These activities should not be limited to education, but rather leisure and sports to normalize safe interactions with the opposite gender.

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[4][School curricula – and probably even more so, school textbooks can be considered from two angles : they are both the mirror of the society that produces (and in this sense, reproducers of inequalities and/or discriminations) and a tool likely to transform society in depth by making it possible to question current representations.]Our translation.

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