

# Gender Representation in English Language Textbooks: Action Pack 10

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine gender representation in one of the English language textbooks in Jordan, namely, Action Pack 10. Three questions are posed concerning the ratio of female to male characters and the depiction of female and male characters in social settings and in domestic settings as well. A content analysis is carried out, including linguistic and visual analyses. The results have revealed that male characters are over-presented linguistically, visually and socially. The ratio of females to males in texts and illustrations is 1:3 and males monopolize more social roles than females. In conclusion, Action Pack 10 has failed to mirror the modern Jordanian society where the Jordanian woman enjoys excellent positions and is highly admired.

## Keywords

Gender Bias, Representation, EFL Textbook, Jordan, Action Pack 10

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## 1. Introduction

The biased construction of gender in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook has been an invisible obstacle to equality in educational context. This discrepancy in gender could, though unwittingly, lead to a narrower understanding of the social roles that females play and to fewer chances for female students to practice the target language (TL) than male students (Nagatomo, 2010). Turner-Bowker (1996) suggests that textbooks teach children what behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate and that they serve as a source that children acquire gender stereotypes from. The state intensive efforts made to bridge the gap between males and females are clear in a variety of domains such as politics and economy. However, there is evidence from different studies on gender, e.g. Shteivi (2003) and Hamdan (2010), that this gap is not adequately abridged in EFL textbooks yet.

*Action Pack Series* is taught in public schools in Jordan from grades 1 to 12. Interestingly, intensive efforts are being

exerted to develop and improve the contents of this series of textbooks on regular basis. In 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced a developed version of Action Pack for grades 9 and 10. Recently, they introduced the 2014 Action Pack for grade 11.

This study aims at examining the representation of gender and gender roles in an EFL textbook. Specifically, it examines whether there is balance in the representation of gender in the 2013 Action Pack textbook for grade 10, which serves as the EFL syllabus in the Jordanian preparatory public schools. The study also aims to look at the depiction of both male and female in social and domestic settings. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the ratio of female to male characters?
2. To what extent are [wo]men depicted in social settings?
3. To what extent are [wo]men depicted in domestic settings?

The researchers hypothesize that despite the efforts exerted to produce a textbook that mirrors the modern Jordanian society

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where males and females are treated equally, the 2013 Action Pack 10 fails to fulfill such equality.

## 2. Review of Literature

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 (e.g. drawings and photographs) and textual (e.g. conversations and written texts) presentations of female and male characters such as Porreca (1984), Sadker & Sadker (2001), Shteiwi (2003), Lee and Collins (2008), Hamdan & Jalabneh (2009), Hamdan (2010) and Hall (2014).

Porreca (1984) studied sexism in fifteen of 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 to 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." (p. 718). 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." (p. 705)

Sadker & Sadker (2001) identified seven types of bias that often appear in educational materials. These types were (1) omission where males and females are not equally presented in text and illustrations, (2) sexist language where masculine pronouns and terms such as mankind and policeman are used, (3) stereotyping where the genders are featured in traditional roles such as male heavy-equipment operator and female nurse, (4) imbalance where minimal information is given on important issues, (5) unreality where controversial topics are ignored in favour of traditional views, (6) fragmentation where groups are portrayed in a fragmented or clustered fashion so that all women writers are featured together rather than integrated throughout, and (7) cosmetic bias where efforts are made to have materials look balanced when only minimal coverage is actually offered.

In Jordan, Shteiwi (2003) conducted a study on the representation of gender roles in 96 primary school textbooks. He found that the majority of public roles were male-dominated, 87%, whereas female roles were traditional such as teaching.

Similarly, Hamdan and Jalabneh (2009) examined the dominance of gender in conversational topics, mainly, dialogues and comprehension passages in Action Pack Series textbooks which were offered to preparatory and elementary students in schools of Jordan from grade one to grade 9. The researchers proposed one question to achieve the study objective (i.e. which specific sex dominates maximally the conversational topics in EFL used in the series?). They concluded that "textbooks practically reflect reality; but, this is due to the fact that women's stereotype is visible more than men's." (p. 55) This was overt as the fewer females took turns when compared to male characters.

Like Shteiwi (2003) and Hamdan & Jalabneh (2009), Hamdan (2010) examined the occurrence of gender bias in textbooks, namely, the Action Pack Series from grades 1 to 9, used in public schools in Jordan. The content analysis of the discourse was based on a checklist designed to calculate the number and types of jobs for males and females. The researcher leaned against both qualitative and quantitative analyses and concluded that the selected textbooks reflected the culturally-prevalent gender bias. He also maintained that males practiced a variety of jobs and were depicted as effective and dominant characters in the labour market. However, females practiced traditional jobs such as teachers and nurses. He added that "the results of this study illustrate a tendency toward gender asymmetry in Jordanian EFL texts greater than the gender asymmetry in Jordanian society as a whole". (p. 25)

In Hong Kong, 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 published books which were in use with ten published in the late 1980s and early 1990s in order to examine changes in gender representation in secondary English language textbooks published and used in Hong Kong over the past two decades. Results revealed that although women enjoyed more frequent presence in the newer 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 Iran, Hall (2014) investigated gender representation in EFL textbooks that were designed and taught in Iranian secondary schools. The researcher made use of two methods of analysis; namely, a systematic quantitative analysis and a qualitative analysis. Results showed that there was an imbalance in gender representation in ELT curriculum in Iran due to the fact that "the state-run education programs are indigenised to meet the country's cultural and religious ideologies." (p. 260)

### 3. Methodology

The English language textbook analyzed in this study is the 2013 Action Pack 10. *Action Pack 10*, which is authored by Edwina Johnson and published by York Press in England, is based on the *General Guidelines and General and Specific Outcomes for the English Language: Basic and Secondary Stages* in Jordan, where all four language skills are integrated in topics. The textbook has been especially written to appeal to the student's age group and interests. Each level of *Action Pack Series* includes a Student's Book, a cassette with the listening material, an Activity Book and a Teacher's Book. The selected textbook, i.e. *Action Pack 10*, comprises 6 modules.

The textbook is selected purposively due to its newness. It was adopted for Jordanian schools in accordance with the approval of the Board of Education decision for the 2013/2014 academic year. The Students' book is chosen for content and visual analyses. A systematic recording and tabulation are made of the characters and mentions of men and women in the written texts that include dialogues and interviews, letters and emails, stories, biographies, brochures, articles and reports that are related to different topics such as botany, zoology, ecology, science, literature and celebrities.

For data collection, the researchers went through the following steps in order. First, the textbook was selected. Then, the textbook was examined and studied in depth. This step is called 'mass observation'. (Gharbavi, 2012) In content analysis mass observation yielded to categorized hypotheses (Cohen & Manion, 1992). Content analysis included two phases of mass observation: the first was carried out after textbooks selection in order to let the researchers have a brief look at the textbook and to make sure that it contained the data they were looking for. (Gharbavi, 2012) After the researchers had observed the textbooks, they divided the textbook contents into different divisions, such as visual characters, characters mentioned, social activities and domestic activities, etc. The second phase aimed to modify the original hypotheses that had been formulated before the first phase (Gharbavi, 2012). After textbook observation, the researchers chose different categories for investigation.

The researchers tallied: (1) male and female characters and roles where each character being checked once, regardless of the number of times they appeared in the module; (2) male and female mentions textually; (3) female and male social roles (e.g. doctor, designer, inventor and chemist) and domestic roles (e.g. mother, father, daughter and son).

Illustrations were included in this study on the grounds that there was a large number of pictures in the selected book. These pictures were designed to enhance students'

understanding of the context and lesson contents and learning interests through making the book colourful and illustrative. The focus of the visual investigation was on: (1) the number of women and men in texts and pictures; and (2) the kind of social and domestic roles undertaken by women and men. It is worth mentioning that each of the researchers conducted the analysis individually. Then, results were cross-checked jointly to solve the discrepancies detected.

### 4. Findings

The analysis of the written texts as shown in table 1 below shows that the total number of the characters is 54 in the book. The majority of characters are males, 78%, whereas a small fraction of the characters is allotted to females, 22%.

**Table 1.** Representation of women and men in written texts.

Character	Frequency	Percentage
Male	35	78
Female	19	22
	54	100

As far as visual analysis is concerned, results reported in table 2 below show that pictures are divided into two types, namely, one-character pictures where one person appears and multi-character pictures where two people or more appear.

**Table 2.** Frequency of occurrence of women and men in pictures.

One-character pictures		Multi-character pictures	
Male	Female	Male	Female
30	10	11	9
75%	25%	55%	45%

Regarding one-character pictures, the results show that males have 75% of the pictures while only 25% of them are for females. Similarly, when it goes to multi-character pictures, the results show that this type of pictures is male-dominated as 55% of the characters are males while 45% of them are females.

Regarding social and domestic roles served by women and men, the researchers followed Law and Chan (2004). Social roles were divided into five major categories male-monopolized, male-dominated, female-monopolized, female-dominated, and gender-shared roles. If a social role was served by men only, it was categorized as male-monopolized. Likewise, if a social role was served by women only, it was categorized under female-monopolized. Whereas female-dominated roles indicated that they were mostly occupied up by women rather than men, male-dominated ones refer to those in which men were portrayed largely. Gender-shared roles were performed by both equally.

**Table 3.** Frequency of occurrence of female and male in social roles.

Male-monopolized social roles	8
Male-dominated social roles	3
Female-monopolized social roles	3
Female-dominated social roles	1
Gender-shared social roles	5

The results reported in the above table indicate the social roles that males and females occupy as illustrated in the 2013 Action Pack textbook. The findings show that the frequency of male-monopolized social roles, such as king, writer, tour guide, university professor, artist and policeman, is 8.

On the other hand, the frequency of female-monopolized social roles, such as child minder, housewife and queen, is 3. Male-dominated social roles are 3 (e.g. inventor, sailor and scientist), and although only one female-dominated social role appears in the textbook (i.e. chemist), the frequency of gender-shared social roles are 5 including Archaeologist, tourist, business person and student.

The results reported in table 4 above show the domestic roles occupied by males and females in the textbook. The four domestic roles undertaken by males as presented in the textbook are father, husband, brother and grandfather. Each of them is found once except the father role which is repeated twice.

**Table 4.** Frequency of occurrence of female and male in domestic roles.

Domestic Role	Male	Domestic Role	Female
Father	2	Mother	2
Husband	1	Wife	2
Brother	1	Daughter	2
Grandfather	1	Aunt	1

Moreover, the domestic roles that are occupied by females as presented in the textbook include mother, wife daughter and aunt. While the social roles of mother, wife and daughter are portrayed twice, aunt is mentioned once.

## 5. Discussion & Conclusions

The content analysis of the selected textbook includes linguistic and visual analysis. The results of the analysis reveal that *Action Pack 10* includes fewer characters than other textbooks in the *Action Pack Series* (e.g. *Action Pack 7*). The author relies heavily on scientific, environmental, geographical topics instead of human related ones.

The results reported in table 1 reveal that despite the continuous efforts to develop and adapt *Action Pack Series* to suit and mirror the modern Jordanian society, males are viewed, numerically, as triple as those of females in written texts. It is clear that the ratio of female to male characters is nearly 1:3.

Similarly, the results reported in table 2 reveal that males

surpass females in number visually. In one-character pictures, the ratio of female to male characters is 1:3. Furthermore, in multi-character pictures, male characters surpass female characters as 55% of the characters are males and 45% of them are females.

These results agreed with Porecca (1984) and Sadker & Sadker (2001). Porecca (1984) has concluded that the female/male ratio of occupations in 15 textbooks was 1:5 and Sadker & Sadker (2001) has stipulated that omission included that males and females are not equally presented in texts and illustrations. Also, they confirm Hamdan (2010) who has studied the depiction of male and female in terms of jobs in *Action Pack Series* (1-9 grades). He concluded that males are emphasized over females.

The results reported in table 3 concerning the presence of females and males in social roles reveal that the majority of roles are male dominated, 13 roles and only 5 roles are equally distributed between male and female characters. Such a result confirms Shteivi (2003) who has concluded that the majority of public roles are male-dominated whereas female roles were traditional such as teaching. Also, it agrees with Sadker & Sadker (2001) who maintained that gender stereotyping was featured in traditional roles such as university professor and female teacher.

Results reported in table 4 concerning the depiction of females and males in domestic roles show that although the number of occurrences of these roles is low for both male and female (i.e. four roles for each), the frequency of occurrence of female domestic roles is 7 while 5 for male. Such a result corresponds with Lee and Collins (2008) who have maintained that "some authors maintained the stereotyped image of women as weaker than men, and as operating primarily within domestic rather than social domains." (p.127)

In conclusion, the findings of the study showed that the hypotheses raised by the researchers are significantly applicable to the problem raised in this study:

1. The ratio of female to male characters in written texts as well as pictures is approximately equal. The estimated ratio is 1:3 where male characters are portrayed as triple as female characters.
2. Women are depicted in different social settings such as child minder, housewife, archaeologist, tourist, business person and student. Nonetheless, men are depicted in more social settings than women. Men monopolize a variety of roles such as writer, tour guide, university professor, artist and policeman.
3. Men and women are depicted in a limited number of domestic roles. While the former are portrayed as father,

brother, husband and grandfather, the latter are portrayed as mother, daughter, wife and aunt.

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