



La revue *Aleph. langues, médias et sociétés* est approuvée par ERIHPLUS. Elle est classée à la catégorie B.

Gender invisibility in the French Primary School textbooks in Algeria

إخفاء النوع الاجتماعي في الكتب المدرسية للغة الفرنسية بالتعليم الابتدائي بالجزائر

L'invisibilité du genre dans les manuels scolaires de l'école primaire française en Algérie

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	Soumission	Publication numérique	Publication Asjp
	06-05- 2021	20-12-2022	31-01-2023

Éditeur : Edile (Edition et diffusion de l'écrit scientifique)

Dépôt légal : 6109-201

Edition numérique : <https://aleph.edinum.org>

Date de publication : 20 décembre 2022

ISSN : 2437-1076

(Edition ASJP) : <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/226>

Date de publication : 31 janvier 2023

Pagination : 143-153

ISSN : 2437-0274

Référence électronique

Rima Belouari et Bakhta Abdelhay, « Gender invisibility in the French Primary School textbooks in Algeria », *Aleph* [En ligne], 10 (1) | 2023, mis en ligne le 31 janvier 2023. URL : <https://aleph-alger2.edinum.org/7869>

Référence papier

Rima Belouari et Bakhta Abdelhay, « Gender invisibility in the French Primary School textbooks in Algeria », *Aleph*, 10 (1) | 2023, 143-153.

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Introduction

The element of gender is omnipresent in the various settings of life, education, media, workplace, etc. Regarding the educational setting, gender has been investigated variously in such setting with regard to classroom interaction, language learning, the learning materials, etc. Gender representation in the school textbooks has taken a great part within this kind of research. When examining the early studies (e.g. Hartman and Judd, 1978 ; Hellinger, 1980 ; Porreca, 1984), it was observed that at its very beginning, gender in the school textbooks was investigated in terms of a number of categories including invisibility to the end of detecting gender bias in such learning materials.

1. Gender representation

1.1. Gender Representation in the School Textbooks : Early Beginning

The issue of gender representation in the school textbooks is not contemporary. It was, first, investigated during the 1970s. More particularly, Blumberg (2007) claimed that the hidden gender biases started to be exposed nearly during 1970-71 when the activists and the educators, chiefly in the U. S, began to scientifically document them through employing content analysis of the textbooks and also employing other qualitative methodologies. Soon, endeavors to ameliorate gender bias in the textbook (and in the curriculum) spread all over the world. Furthermore, Sunderland et al. (2002) stated that the 1970s and the 1980s saw a flurry of content analyses of how gender was represented in the foreign language textbooks. Baiqiang (2008) and Amini and Birjandi (2012) added that since the 1970s, the researchers around the world showed interest in the investigation of gender bias within the ESL/ EFL materials and since then such studies became prevalent.

Regarding the results that the early studies reached (e.g. Schmitz, 1975 ; Hartman and Judd, 1978 ; Hellinger, 1980 ; Porreca, 1984), Sunderland (2000a, p. 212) claimed that the findings indicated that the women were poorly represented in the textbooks in terms of *“in “visibility, stereotyping of personality traits and occupational roles (including illustrations), and derogatory treatment”*.

1.2. Gender Representation in the EFL Textbooks

Gender is evident in the EFL classroom, partially through the textbooks. According to Sunderland (1992), the studies which examined gender in the language textbooks tended to highlight three important aspects: the female character invisibility, gender roles stereotypes, and language as discourse where sex-mixed dialogues are analyzed. Besides; Sunderland et al. (2002) claimed that examining these textbooks is of high importance because they show the people interacting with each other not only socially but also recurrently verbally.

Most of those studies were in the form of content analyses and found that the female characters were poorly represented at the levels of their visibility, occupational roles, personal traits and derogatory handling. That biased representation against the females could be categorized under the senses of “exclusion” (e.g. Hellinger, 1980), “subordination and distortion” (e.g. Cincotta, 1978; Porreca, 1984) and “degradation” (e.g. Hartman and Judd., 1978; Talansky, 1986) (Sunderland, 2000a, 2000b). Concerning the language textbooks which were subjected to the linguistic analyses, they showed the females in the dialogues as speaking a smaller amount, rarely speaking first and carrying out less discourse roles (Sunderland et al., 2002).

1.3. Forms of Bias in the School Textbooks

Gender bias appears in several forms in the school textbooks. That pushed the researchers to investigate such bias in terms of a number of categories, mainly invisibility, stereotyping and linguistic sexism. Regarding the sexism markers in the textbooks, Scott et al. (1972) as cited in Sakita (1995) claimed that

“Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language or if they show women and men only in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interest, traits and capabilities”. (p. 5)

Thence, sexism in the textbooks underlies the omission of women’s achievements as well as the use of the denigrating language and the stereotypical gender roles.

2. Gender Invisibility in the School Textbooks

Invisibility is one among the forms of sexism and gender bias that appear in the school textbooks. This made it compulsory in any research about gender representation in the school textbooks. Moreover, invisibility, according to Sadker (1991), is characterized as the most harmful form of bias.

Porreca (1984, p. 706) claimed that invisibility occurs '*when females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text)*'. Regarding the meaning that such females' invisibility carries, he added that "*the implicit message is that women's accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included*". (p. 706)

To detect gender invisibility in the school textbooks, the previous studies mostly investigated two main criteria which were the frequency of occurrence of the gender characters and their occurrence in the gender pairs i.e. firstness.

2.1. Frequency of Occurrence

The frequency of the occurrence of the male and the female characters in the school textbooks is one technique that the researchers used to detect gender invisibility in such learning materials. Moreover, gender invisibility is generally examined in the textbooks through counting the frequency of occurrence of the male and the female characters in both the textbook texts and illustrations.

The early studies findings (e.g. Hartman and Judd, 1978; Hellinger, 1980 and Porreca, 1984) confirmed females' invisibility in school textbooks. Healy (2009) attempted to provide an explanation to women's invisibility which was found by the early studies. He stated that during that 1960s, 70s and 80s, a lot of EFL texts tended to be biased against the women because at that time world organization was a different one because the place of the women was at home to raise their children and support their husbands. For him, there was no need to portray them in a different way from the real one. The women, at that time, were considered less important than men who made more important decisions in life.

However, although the women's situation has changed in the society, the very recent studies which examined females' invisibility in the school textbooks (e.g. Barton and Sakwa, 2012; Ansary and Babaii, 2012; Mustapha, 2014; Aoumeur, 2014; Abdelhay, 2015) found that the females are still being represented as invisible.

Jones et al.' (1997) and Mineshima' (2008) studies are exceptional. They arrived to different findings. They bumped into textbooks where both genders were equally visible. Jones et al. (1997) found that the female characters outnumbered the male characters. The female characters were 68 and the male

characters were 58. Similarly, Mineshima (2008, p. 136) found that there were 29 female characters and 33 male characters, but he considered such finding a sign of gender equality when he stated that “*there seems to be ample evidence to suggest that the textbook examined in this study exhibits fairly egalitarian representations of the two genders*”.

2.2. Firstness

Firstness is another technique which was used to detect gender invisibility in the school textbooks. Negamoto (2010) defined firstness as the number of times the male and female characters appear first in texts, including a reading, an exercise or a dialogue. Moreover, Bataineh (2017) claimed that gender firstness is viewed as a linguistic sexism indicator in the curriculum. Many researchers investigated and analysed gender firstness in both the school and the non-school textbooks so as to recognize the existence of gender bias.

There are several nouns which occur in pairs like *fish and chips, salt and pepper, etc.* Though these pairs can grammatically be used individually, they are regularly paired because these pairs are socially taught to be used in a particular order. There are also gender nouns which are often occurring in pairs like *ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, etc.* In these pairs, the male is placed first before the female. This is considered a form of gender bias in language (Healy, 2009). About this positioning of the males before the females in the pairs, Hartman and Judd (1978) claimed that such firstness works to reinforce the subordinate status of the women and it can be easily avoided via only mixing the order

This criteria of firstness was, in fact, investigated by both the early studies (e.g. Hartman and Judd, 1978; Porreca, 1984) and the recent studies (e.g. Healy, 2009; Negamoto, 2010; Shah, 2012; Bataineh, 2017). Both of these early and recent studies found that the males were most of the time mentioned first while the females mostly placed at the second position.

3. Methodology

1. Corpus: The corpus of the study covers the current French school textbooks which are used in the Algerian Primary School. They are three textbooks i.e. those of the third, the fourth and the fifth year in the primary school.
2. Data Collection: Content analysis is chosen as a method to gather data about the frequency of the male and the female characters in the corpus because it is helpful in counting the frequency of occurrence of the characters in the textbooks as well as their positioning in the gender pairs.

3. **Criteria:** This study investigates two main criteria to detect gender invisibility in the textbooks which come as follow:
 - The frequency of occurrence of the male and the female characters in the textbooks.
 - The occurrence of both genders in the pairs
4. **Procedure:** Data collection in this research undergoes to two steps. The criteria of frequency of occurrence and the occurrence of the males and the females in the pairs were, first, counted in each textbook separately to detect gender invisibility in each textbook. Then, the same criteria are examined, but, in the textbooks collectively through counting the frequency of occurrence of the gender characters and their positioning in the pairs in all the textbooks in order to detect gender invisibility in the entire textbooks and to draw general conclusion about it.

4. The Results and Their Discussion

Table 1. The frequency of occurrence of the gender characters in the Third Year French Primary School textbook

The female characters	The male characters
52	52

The results of table 1 indicate that the male and the female characters are equally distributed within the textbook. There are as much male characters as the female ones (M: F = 52 :52). Thereby, the males are portrayed as visible as the females. Achieving a total equality in the distribution of the gender characters throughout the textbook is not only an original gender representation, but it also promotes for gender equality among the learners in the social world which is masculine-dominated. In other words, it communicates the thought that both genders are so important that they deserve to be equally included in the textbooks.

Table 2. The frequency of occurrence of the gender characters in the Fourth Year French Primary School textbook

The female characters	The male characters
61	50

The findings in table 2 show that there is an inequality in the distribution of the the male and the female characters in the textbook. The gap in the distribution of the characters reaches 11. There 60 males and 50 females. This makes the male characters more visible than the female characters. This gender representation reflects the unawareness toward the element of gender and it is harmful in the

sense that it backs up the invisibility of women that they suffer from in the society. Besides, it has the effect that it transmits the idea that the males are more important individuals than the females to the young generations.

Table 3. The frequency of occurrence of the gender characters in the Fifth Year French

The female characters	The male characters
53	40

In table 3, the results display gender imbalance regarding the occurrence of the gender characters in the textbook. The gap between the number of the male characters and the female characters is rather big and the bias is evident. There are 53 males and only 40 females. In so doing, the males are more visible than the females. This gender representation is biased in the meaning that it maintains, instead of challenging, the social order where the males enjoy visibility and the females undergo dominance and subordination.

Table 4. The positioning of the gender characters in the pairs in the Third Year French Primary School textbook

The masculine-dominated pairs	The feminine-dominated pairs
- Chafik et Louisa	- Nadia, Dalila et Tarik - Rima et Ali - Bonjour Madame! Bonjour Monsieur! - Good night mum! Good night dad!

The findings in table 4 show that the majority of the gender pairs begin with feminine nouns. There are 04 feminine-dominated gender pairs and only 01 gender pair starts with a masculine noun. This leads to portraying the females more visible than the males. This gender representation is originative and it reflects consciousness towards the element of gender in the school textbooks. Moreover, it paves the way to gender equality among the young generations using the textbooks by transmitting to them the thought that the females are so significant members that they merit to be positioned at the primary place.

Table 5. The positioning of the gender characters in the pairs in the Fourth Year French Primary School textbook

The masculine-dominated pairs	The feminine-dominated pairs
- Des cousins et des cousines - Deux amis et sa cousine - Pêcheur et sa femme - Yacine et sa maman	- Lina et son papa

The results in table 5 indicate that the textbook gender pairs are masculine-dominated and the difference is so apparent because there are 04 gender pairs which begin with masculine nouns, but there is only 01 gender pair where the feminine noun is positioned first. This led to portraying the males more visible than the females. Such gender positioning in the pairs is unfair and it, in fact, supports the secondary status of the women in the society instead of confronting it. Put differently, this portrayal conveys that the females are subordinate members and they fit better to occupy the secondary status in the society.

Table 6. The positioning of the gender characters in the pairs in the Fifth Year French Primary School textbook

The masculine-dominated pairs	The feminine-dominated pairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Massinissa et Amira - Yacine et Narimane - Mes frères et mes sœurs - Les infirmiers et les infirmière - Mohand, Zina et Nina 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sonia et mes deux cousins - Amira et son grand-père - Du père et de la mère - Sa maman et son papa - Fières et fièr -La maman, Yacine et Youcef -Narimane et Massininssa

The results in table 6 demonstrate that the majority of the gender pairs are dominated by the feminine nouns. There exist 07 feminine-dominated pairs and only pairs where the males occur in the first position. Thereby, the females are represented more visible than the males. Such portrayal of the females mostly in the first position is an initiative that encourages for gender equality thought among the young learners.

Figure N° 1. The frequency of occurrence of the gender characters in the French Primary School textbooks

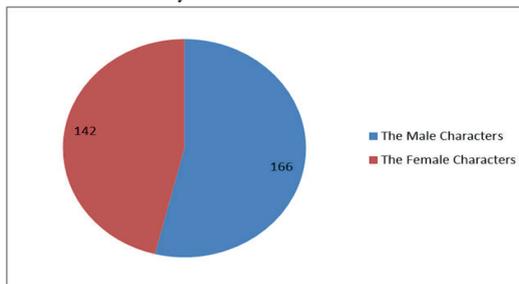


Figure 1 displays that the females are more invisible than the males as the male characters dominate the French Primary School textbooks. Put differently, 166 of the characters are males, but only 142 of them are females. This unfair

distribution of the gender characters in the textbooks supports the dominant-subordinate order that prevails at the level of the real world. In other words, such gender representation backs up males' dominance and females' subordination and invisibility at the society.

Figure N° 2. The positioning of the gender characters in the pairs in the French Primary School textbooks

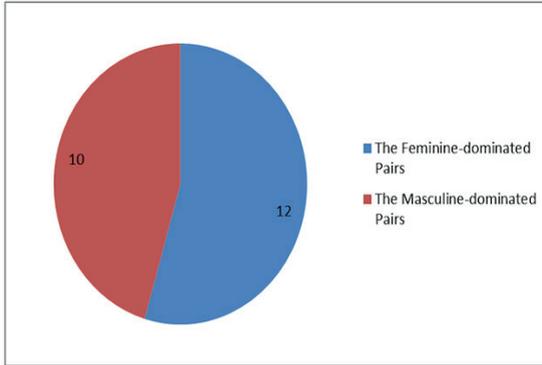


Figure 2 indicates that the females are more visible than the males because the majority of the gender pairs (12) begin with feminine nouns while the rest of the pairs (10) begin with masculine nouns. Portraying the females mostly in the first position encourages for the thought that the females are important members of the society who can occupy a primary status rather than a secondary one.

Conclusion

The French Primary School textbooks in Algeria are sites where the males are more visible regarding their frequency of occurrence, on the one hand, and the females are more visible regarding their positioning in the gender pairs, on the other hand. Although the bias is not so evident, such gender portrayal remains somehow biased with regard to the frequency of occurrence of the characters. However, the positioning of the females in the pairs mostly at the first position makes the difference i.e. it makes gender portrayal in such textbooks more balanced. Thence, it can be said that gender representation in the French Primary School textbooks reflects, to some extent, awareness toward the gender issues.

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Abstract

Gender is omnipresent in the learning materials, mainly the school textbooks. This research aims at examining the subject of gender invisibility in the current French School textbooks which are used at the level of the Algerian Primary Schools. To attain this end, two main criteria were examined within this study. The first criterion was the frequency of occurrence of the male and the female characters in the school textbooks while the second criterion was the positioning of such characters in the gender pairs that appear in these school textbooks. Regarding the methodology, content Analysis is used to collect data about such criteria. Regarding the results, it was found that the males were more visible than the females concerning the criterion of the frequency of occurrence. However, the females were more visible than the males concerning the criterion of the positioning in the gender pairs.

Keywords

Gender, invisibility, French school textbooks

مستخلص

النوع الإجتماعي كلي الوجود على مستوى الوسائل التعليمية خاصة في الكتب المدرسية. هذا البحث يهدف إلى دراسة حجب النوع الإجتماعي في الكتب المدرسية للغة الفرنسية المتداولة

في المدرسة الإبتدائية بالجزائر حاليا. لتحقيق هذا الغرض، تم فحص معيارين في هذه الدراسة. المعيار الأول تمثل في تردد ظهور الذكور والإناث في الكتب المدرسية أما المعيار الثاني تمثل في تموقع الذكور والإناث في ثنائيات النوع الإجتماعي المتواجدة على مستوى هذه الكتب المدرسية. فيما يخص المنهجية المتبعة، تم استعمال تقنية تحليل المحتوى في هذه الدراسة لجمع المعطيات حول هذين المعيارين.

فيما يخص النتائج، توصلت الدراسة إلى أن الذكور كانوا أكثر وضوحا من الإناث فيما يخص معيار تردد الظهور في حين أن الإناث كانت أكثر وضوحا من الذكور فيما يخص معيار التموقع في ثنائيات النوع الإجتماعي.

كلمات مفتاحية

النوع الإجتماعي، حجب، كتب اللغة الفرنسية المدرسية

Résumé

Le genre est omniprésent au niveau des matériaux de l'apprentissage surtout les manuels scolaires. Cette étude vise à examiner l'invisibilité de genre dans les manuels scolaires courants de français dans l'école primaire algérienne. A cette fin, deux critères sont examinés dans cette étude : le premier critère était la fréquence d'occurrence des hommes et des femmes au niveau des manuels scolaires. Le deuxième critère était l'emplacement des femmes et des hommes dans les paires de genre qui apparaissent dans ces manuels scolaires. Concernant la méthodologie, l'analyse du contenu a été utilisée dans cette étude pour collecter les données autour de ces deux critères. Concernant les résultats, il a été trouvé que les hommes sont plus visible que les femmes concernant le critère de la fréquence d'occurrence, mais les femmes sont plus visible que les hommes concernant le critère de l'emplacement dans les paires de genre.

Mots-clés

Genre, invisibilité, les manuels scolaires de français
