

Gender (InEquality) in Locally Published EFL Coursebooks in Türkiye

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Abstract:

This study investigates gender representation in two English as a foreign language coursebooks published by the Ministry of National Education for elementary schools in Türkiye. Using content analysis, it aims to explore how gender is portrayed through visuals and linguistic elements. It adopts a categorization of representational imbalances, gender stereotyping, and linguistic sexism for analysis. The findings reveal persistent gender imbalances, with males dominating visual representations and high-status occupations, while females are more visible in dialogue-based content, particularly songs and chants. Both coursebooks reproduce traditional gender stereotypes, portraying females in domestic, nurturing, or service-related roles and males in outdoor, technical, and leadership roles. Linguistic analysis also identifies gender-biased language, including the overuse of titles, firstness patterns, and male-oriented occupational terms. Despite increased awareness of gender issues, the study demonstrates that these coursebooks continue to reinforce both explicit and implicit gender biases. The study underscores the need for coursebook developers and educational authorities to adopt gender-sensitive approaches, integrating globally recognized guidelines on gender-fair language and promoting diverse, non-stereotypical representations. These measures are crucial to fostering equitable gender perceptions among young learners and challenging entrenched societal norms.

Keywords: Gender (in)equality, gender representation, gender stereotype, coursebook analysis, English as a foreign language.



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INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has become a central priority in global development agendas. Within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (2015), SDG 5 specifically aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by addressing structural inequalities across multiple sectors, while SDG 10 focuses on reducing inequalities within and among societies. Education plays a key role in achieving this goal by shaping learners' perceptions of gender roles and social expectations from an early age. Despite numerous efforts to promote gender equality, Türkiye continues to experience persistent gender disparities in labour force participation, political representation, and educational attainment (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024).

Education plays a crucial role in addressing gender inequalities, as it shapes socialization processes and identity construction. Given that early childhood is a formative period in shaping ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs (Maesaroh et al., 2022), primary education serves as a critical platform for cultivating values of equality. Among the elements influencing socialization at school, coursebooks may be considered the next most important factor, after teachers. As widely noted in educational research, coursebooks are not neutral pedagogical tools but cultural artefacts that reflect and reproduce dominant social ideologies. In this regard, coursebooks used for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) are particularly significant, as they often combine language learning with cultural representations and frequently present social roles and identities through textual and visual narratives. Coursebooks have been examined in relation to the social and global values they transmit to learners (Zorba & Nickolson, 2022). They may reinforce cultural prejudices and gender bias, reflecting and perpetuating dominant gender ideologies, and learners may be affected by prevailing socio-cultural perspectives in the coursebooks (Ünveren Kapanadze, 2019). In line with UNESCO's call (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009) to reduce gender inequalities through education and teaching materials, and with the broader global commitment to achieving gender equality under the SDGs (United Nations, 2015), the development and evaluation of gender-balanced coursebooks becomes imperative in order to support broader global efforts toward gender equality.

Within this framework, ensuring that educational materials reflect principles of gender equality has become an important priority for policymakers and researchers. In this regard, systematic analyses of gender representation in EFL coursebooks are needed to inform gender-responsive pedagogy and evidence-based coursebook design, as gender bias in coursebooks is referred to as "an invisible obstacle on the road to gender equality" (Blumberg, 2007, p. 345). Given the significance of early education in shaping children's gender perspectives and the limited research examining English coursebooks recently published by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) for primary education, this study aims to address this gap by analysing gender representation in 3rd and 4th grade coursebooks. Specifically, this study addresses the research question "To what extent and in what ways do EFL coursebooks for elementary schools published by the MoNE reflect gender inequality in their content and language use?" To answer this overarching question, the following sub-questions are addressed:

1. To what extent do the coursebooks exhibit gender imbalance in the visibility, frequency, and distribution of male and female characters?
2. How are male and female characters portrayed, and do these portrayals reinforce traditional gender stereotypes?
3. Do the coursebooks contain instances of linguistic sexism?

4. Are there statistically significant differences between the two coursebooks regarding the quantity and quality of gender representation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Representation

This study assumes that EFL coursebooks are not merely linguistic tools; they also convey broader global and social values such as equality, diversity and inclusion. Thus, they may influence learners' perspectives on various social phenomena, particularly gender, at early stages of cognitive and social development. The distinction between sex and gender is also critical in this context. While sex refers to inborn biological differences between males and females, gender encompasses the socially constructed actions, roles, behaviors and activities attributed to men and women (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Lips, 2020; Sunderland, 2011). Gender imposes expectations, actions and it contributes to the substantiation of gender socialization (Papadima, 2021). Therefore, it is obvious that gender roles are especially identified by society.

To explore the relationship between coursebook content and learners' perceptions of gender, this study draws upon Gender Schema Theory. This theory suggests that individuals develop cognitive frameworks, or schemas, related to gender early in life (Bem, 1981). These schemas are shaped by social agents such as families, schools, and educational materials, such as coursebooks. Once internalized, gender schemas influence how individuals perceive themselves and others in relation to societal norms. Since students rarely question the authority or accuracy of what they read in coursebooks, coursebooks must present accurate and balanced gender representations. In this sense, promoting gender-balanced representations in coursebooks is also consistent with broader global efforts to advance gender equality and reduce social inequalities as emphasized in SDG 5 and SDG 10.

Misrepresentations, imbalances or stereotypes in gender portrayals can lead to long-term effects on learners' development. According to Sunderland (2011), gender-biased coursebooks may influence learners' gender perceptions through restricted female representations, may demotivate female learners due to their underrepresentation, and may reinforce male-first interactional patterns in classroom discourse. Also, gender bias in coursebooks may influence learners' (especially female ones) social, domestic, academic, and professional careers and choices. Therefore, gender-biased coursebooks can inadvertently perpetuate inequality, whereas balanced ones can foster inclusive attitudes. Given these multifaceted ways in which gender is conveyed through coursebooks, ensuring fair and accurate representation is particularly important for young learners. This study, therefore, analyses elementary EFL coursebooks in Türkiye to identify how gender is represented and whether these representations align with principles of gender equity. In this regard, this study can contribute to aligning coursebooks with global commitments to gender equality and social inclusion reflected in the SDG. Also, the findings aim to inform educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers seeking to promote a more equitable learning environment.

To systematically examine gender representation in EFL coursebooks, this study focuses on three interrelated dimensions: representational imbalance, gender stereotyping, and linguistic sexism (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Lee, 2018; Lee & Collins, 2009; Porreca, 1984). Representational imbalance refers to the unequal frequency or visibility of male and female characters in both texts and visuals (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). EFL coursebooks present

dialogues and utterances from both genders, necessitating balanced representation as there are both genders in classrooms. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) emphasize that gender representation can be analysed through how characters are portrayed in terms of appearance, roles, activities, and social interactions. These elements, whether verbal or visual, significantly influence learners' understanding of gender norms as they provide contextual and cultural knowledge.

As for gender stereotypes, they are defined as the shared “beliefs about what qualities can be assigned to people based on their gender” (Lips, 2020, p. 4). Gender stereotypes most commonly encountered in coursebooks relate to occupations, adjectives, activities and responsibilities since every society has its own clichés based on gender. Lips (2020) notes that children internalize such roles from as early as age seven, making the content of coursebooks especially impactful.

Linguistic sexism refers to language that marginalizes or excludes a particular gender, usually female (Lee, 2018) and often manifests through subtle linguistic structures. Porreca (1984) highlights the prevalence of generic masculine forms (e.g., using “he” or “mankind” to refer to all people) as one of the most common examples. Also, gendered suffixes (e.g., actress), asymmetrical titles (e.g., Mr. vs. Miss), and male-default occupational terms (e.g., chairman) significantly influence learners' understanding of gender norms by providing contextual and cultural knowledge, may limit individuals' potential and are often internalized from an early age (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). These three dimensions provide the analytical framework for examining gender representation in the coursebooks analysed in this study.

Gender Representation in ELT Coursebooks

Research on gender representation in EFL coursebooks began with Hartman and Judd's (1978) seminal work and has continued as coursebooks have evolved over time. Studies have generally examined three dimensions of gender representation—visibility, gender stereotypes and linguistic sexism—in either globally-published EFL coursebooks or locally-produced ELT coursebooks. These three dimensions have become the most commonly adopted analytical framework in coursebook studies examining gender representation. Globally-published EFL coursebooks are often reported to demonstrate relatively balanced representation of genders. For example, Al Kayed et al. (2020) analysed one globally-published EFL coursebook and found an equitable distribution of male and female characters in both visual and dialogue-based content. Similar findings have been reported in several studies suggesting that globally-published EFL coursebooks are often designed to promote gender equality, reflecting deliberate editorial choices rather than passive cultural norms (e.g., Yaghoubi-Notash & Nariman-Jahan, 2012; Yang, 2011).

Locally-produced EFL coursebooks, on the other hand, are usually developed to meet national goals. Therefore, studies examining gender representation in locally-produced EFL coursebooks may yield varying findings depending on the sociocultural context. Nevertheless, the literature frequently reports gender inequalities in both visual and textual content (e.g., Adawiyah & Oktavianti, 2023; Ahmadabadi & Azad, 2023; Albina et al., 2023; Bachore, 2022; Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Esmaili & Amerian, 2014; Lee, 2018; Lee & Collins, 2009; Mengistie & Worku, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). These studies collectively demonstrate that gender representation in locally-produced EFL coursebooks is often shaped by sociocultural norms and educational policies specific to each context.

Methodologically, early studies largely employed quantitative content analysis, focusing on frequency counts or percentages of male and female representations. However, Sunderland (2011) emphasized that quantitative data alone may overlook subtle forms of embedded sexism. For example, Huang (2025) demonstrated that examining dialogue structures can reveal inequalities even in materials that appear quantitatively balanced. Consequently, more recent studies tend to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, analysing character roles in dialogues, interaction patterns, and narrative contexts (Teliousi et al., 2020; Zhou & Weninger, 2025). Discourse-based analyses, in particular, focus on the interactional roles of genders in dialogues, highlighting more subtle forms of bias beyond simple frequency counts. This methodological diversification reflects the growing recognition that gender representation in coursebooks operates not only at the level of visibility but also through discourse and interaction patterns. Although such approaches may be less applicable to elementary-level coursebooks that contain limited textual content, the present study applies a partial discourse-oriented perspective by examining initiating dialogues to reflect gender representation patterns in the analysed coursebooks.

Studies focusing on gender stereotypes in locally-produced EFL coursebooks report recurring patterns (Huang & Liu, 2024; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Maesaroh et al., 2022; Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020; Teliousi et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhou & Weninger, 2025). Common stereotypes include teaching being associated predominantly with females, technical and high-paying professions being assigned primarily to males, sports activities depicted as male-dominated, physical appearance descriptors applied more frequently to female characters, household responsibilities allocated to females, and outdoor responsibilities assigned to males. Linguistic sexism analyses further examine how culturally shaped language choices reproduce gendered norms (Zhou & Weninger, 2025).

The literature also presents comparative studies highlighting disparities between globally-published and locally-produced EFL coursebooks, as well as comparisons among locally-produced EFL coursebooks across different contexts. For example, Zorba and Nickolson (2022) emphasized that locally-produced EFL coursebooks in Türkiye tend to depict traditional gender norms more strongly than globally-published alternatives. On the other hand, Dahmardeh et al. (2025) analysed 64 locally-produced EFL coursebooks across seven Middle Eastern countries and reported frequent gender inequalities, calling for more inclusive coursebook development.

In the Turkish context, research primarily focuses on locally-produced EFL coursebooks, as state-mandated coursebooks are compulsory in schools. Studies conclude that locally-produced EFL coursebooks have generally gender imbalances (e.g., Şimşek, 2022). Additionally, studies examining secondary and high school EFL coursebooks have consistently reported male overrepresentation in occupational, leisure, and outdoor activities, while female characters are more frequently associated with domestic and care-related roles (e.g., Akbulut-Uzun & Gelmez-Burakgazi, 2021). Similar patterns have been observed in higher education EFL coursebooks, although some illustrations depict females in positions of authority (e.g., Can Acar, 2021; Gün & Zehir Topkaya, 2023).

Overall, the literature indicates persistent gender inequalities in locally-produced EFL coursebooks, including those used in Türkiye. Previous research has consistently identified stereotypical gender roles, occupational segregation, and unequal participation in dialogues, highlighting the need for more inclusive coursebook development. However, research on elementary-level coursebooks remains limited. For instance, Aydınoglu (2014) examined

elementary-level EFL coursebooks and reported male overrepresentation in visual and textual content, the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, and stereotypical occupational portrayals. However, these analysed materials are no longer in use. To date, no recent journal article has analysed the currently used MoNE-published EFL coursebooks in Türkiye. The present study addresses this gap by examining the most recent MoNE-published coursebooks, providing a context-specific and up-to-date analysis of gender representation at the primary level in Türkiye.

METHOD

Research Design

A descriptive research design employing content analysis was used. Content analysis is a systematic, replicable method for examining texts, visuals, or communication artefacts to identify patterns, themes, or biases (Weber, 1990). The study combined quantitative frequency counts with qualitative interpretation of gender portrayals to provide a comprehensive analysis of gender representation.

Data Collection

This study adopts a binary conceptualization of gender (male/female) in the investigation of gender representation due to the overwhelmingly binary representations found in both the literature and the coursebooks analysed. The study examined two locally-produced EFL coursebooks currently in use for 3rd and 4th grades in Turkish public elementary schools (See Table 1). These coursebooks were selected because they are officially published by the MoNE and approved by the Board of Education. Although English instruction in Türkiye begins in the 2nd grade, 2nd grade coursebooks were excluded because no MoNE-published coursebooks were available. The analysed coursebooks, by contrast, are MoNE-published and reflect institutional decisions regarding language and gender representation. This lends them perceived authority and credibility (Lee, 2018), further justifying their selection as the object of analysis.

Table 1. The Details about the Analysed Coursebooks

| Title | Publisher | Grade | Year of Publication | Number of Pages | Gender of Authors |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| İlkokul İngilizce 3 | MoNE | 3 | 2019 | 190 | 3 Females 2 Males |
| Learn with Bouncy | MoNE | 4 | 2019 | 166 | 6 Females 2 Males |

Data Analysis

The analysis followed a step-by-step procedure:

- All textual and visual items in the coursebooks were coded once per unit, regardless of repetition. The coding categories were derived from the analytical framework established in previous studies on gender representation in EFL coursebooks (e.g., Porreca, 1984; Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee, 2018).
- Items were systematically coded by the researcher according to the study's research questions. For sub-question 1, the analysis focused on the frequency and visibility of male and female characters in texts and visuals, including pronouns (*he/she*), names, verbal contributions such as speeches, dialogues, chants, and initiation of dialogues. Sub-question 2 examined occupations, family roles and household responsibilities, adjectives, and

activities associated with each gender. Sub-question 3 addressed linguistic markers, including generic masculine forms, gendered titles (e.g., *Mr.* vs. *Miss/Mrs.*), firstness patterns (e.g., *he and she* vs. *she and he*), and male-default occupational terms (e.g., *policeman*). Since the study involved a single coder, inter-coder reliability was not calculated.

- Frequencies and proportions of gendered elements were calculated. A theoretical 1:1 male-to-female ratio served as a benchmark for assessing gender balance. To compare the two coursebooks (sub-question 4), chi-square tests were applied with a significance level of $p \leq .05$. Effect sizes were not calculated as the focus was on overall gender representation patterns. This quantitative analysis enabled the assessment of proportional frequency (Selvi, 2019).
- Thematic coding and contextual interpretation of gender portrayals were conducted to uncover implicit gendered messages, focusing on household responsibilities, occupations, activities, and adjectives. This step ensured the identification of subtle biases that cannot be captured through counts alone (Sunderland, 2011).

This approach allowed for systematic quantification of gender representation while also providing interpretive understanding of how coursebooks may reinforce or challenge gender norms.

FINDINGS

Findings on Representational Imbalances

Representational imbalances were examined through the characters' visibility and speeches/dialogues. The analysis indicates that both coursebooks exhibit male overrepresentation in three variables related to character portrayal, with no significant differences between the two coursebooks (See Table 2). As for the characters' speeches/dialogues, the analysis indicates that neither of the coursebooks is gender-balanced, as both favour female. The analysis further reveals that female characters performed most of the songs and chants in both coursebooks, increasing their representation in dialogue-based content. Additionally, a significant difference between the coursebooks was observed only for the variable 'speeches' (See Table 2).

Table 2. Statistical Findings on the Representation of Genders

| Variables | 3 rd grade | | | 4 th grade | | | P | |
|------------------------|------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|--------|------|
| | M | F | R | M | F | R | | |
| Visibility | Appearance of genders | 369 (53) | 326 (47) | 1.13:1 | 300 (48.5) | 319 (51.5) | 0.94:1 | .094 |
| | Mentions about genders | 102 (54) | 88 (46) | 1.17:1 | 174 (58) | 127 (42) | 1.38:1 | .370 |
| | Pronouns | 60 (53) | 54 (47) | 1.13:1 | 135 (61) | 87 (39) | 1.56:1 | .150 |
| Dialogue-based content | Names | 102 (47.4) | 113 (52.6) | 0.90:1 | 67 (54.5) | 56 (45.5) | 1.20:1 | .214 |
| | Speeches | 58 (48) | 64 (52) | 0.92:1 | 52 (64) | 29 (36) | 1.78:1 | .020 |
| | Dialogues | 19 (42.2) | 26 (57.8) | 0.73:1 | 8 (28.6) | 20 (71.4) | 0.40:1 | .240 |
| | Initiating dialogues | 40 | 34 | 1.17:1 | 28 | 28 | 1:1 | .647 |

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|--------------|------|------------|-----|-----------|-----------|--------|------|
| | (54) | (46) | | (50) | (50) | | |
| Songs/Chants | 0 | 8 (100) | 0:1 | 1 (10) | 9 (90) | 0.11:1 | .357 |

* Numbers in parentheses indicate percentage.

Findings on Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotypes are examined through family roles, household responsibilities, occupations, adjectives, and activities attributed to each gender. The 3rd grade coursebook contains a unit titled “My Family” and depicts more family roles than the 4th grade coursebook. Female overrepresentation was observed in family roles across both coursebooks, with no significant difference between them (See Table 3). The coursebooks depict only nuclear families comprising a mother, a father and a child/children.

Table 3. Statistical Findings on Gender Stereotypes

| Variables | 3 rd grade | | | 4 th grade | | | P |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------|-----------------------|---------------|--------|------|
| | M | F | R | M | F | R | |
| Family roles | 81 (49) | 83 (51) | 0.96:1 | 36 (41) | 51 (59) | 0.69:1 | .226 |
| Household responsibilities | 7 (58.3) | 5 (41.7) | 1.40:1 | - | - | - | - |
| Occupations | 8 (36.4) | 14 (63.6) | 0.57:1 | 96 (55.5) | 77 (44.5) | 1.25:1 | .090 |
| Adjectives | 59 (52.7) | 53 (47.3) | 1.11:1 | 46 (56.8) | 35 (43.2) | 1.31:1 | .571 |
| Activities | 148 (58.1) | 107 (41.9) | 1.39:1 | 116 (47.2) | 130 (52.8) | 0.89:1 | .015 |

* Numbers in parentheses indicate percentage.

Related to household responsibilities, the 4th grade coursebook contains no visual or textual representation, whereas the 3rd grade coursebook has some representation. Most of these responsibilities are performed by males (see Table 3). Females are depicted as waking children up, sending them to school, cooking, and making coffee. Males are shown taking children to school, going to or returning from work, sitting at the table, watching TV in the living room, putting children to bed, taking the dog for a walk, repairing items, and doing shopping.

Occupations are not included in the 3rd grade curriculum in Türkiye, limiting their presence in the 3rd grade coursebook. Female characters dominate the visual representation of 7 different occupations, appearing 22 times (See Table 3). As for the 4th grade coursebook, the curriculum mandates 15 types of occupations to be taught. As seen in Table 3, male characters dominated most occupational representations. Further analysis suggests that the predominance of female characters on occupational representations in the 3rd grade coursebook results from the fact that all teachers and weather presenters are depicted as females, since females are depicted as teachers, weather presenters, and salespersons, while males are depicted in roles such as repairpersons, cooks, drivers and security personnel. As for the 4th grade coursebook, all businesspeople, engineers, farmers, firefighters, footballer, gardeners, pilots, postmen, scientists, shoemakers, waiters are males, whereas all dancers, nurses, and singers are females. Also, male chefs, police officers, vets, waiters, and writers outnumber their female counterparts, though female teachers and actresses are depicted more frequently than males.

The 3rd grade coursebook contains 26 adjectives, whereas the 4th grade coursebook has 18 due to the limited lexical variety in the curriculum. The analysis shows that males are more frequently described with adjectives than females in both coursebooks, and there is no significant difference between the two coursebooks (see Table 3). Both coursebooks use adjectives primarily to describe physical appearance, with certain adjectives applied exclusively to a single gender. For instance, ‘sad’, ‘unhappy’ and ‘tired’ are used only for females in the 3rd grade coursebook, whereas ‘strong’ is used mostly for males, with a single instance for a female. In addition, there is only one female portrayed as ‘tall’ out of 8 descriptions in the 3rd grade coursebook, whereas three females are portrayed as ‘tall’ out of 13 descriptions in the 4th grade coursebook.

The last variable in gender stereotype is activities. As shown in Table 3, activities are more frequently associated with males in the 3rd grade coursebook and with females in the 4th grade coursebook, which reveals a significant difference between the two coursebooks. However, deeper analysis indicates that activities are applied exclusively to a single gender. For example, all people who are associated with boxing, playing football and tennis, and weightlifting in the 3rd grade coursebook are males whereas most of the people associated with doing exercises or skipping rope are females. In addition, 2 males are depicted as going to a café and a cinema, whereas a female as going to the library. Also, all people who are reading a book and doing homework are females while all of the drivers are males. All the children having a doll are females while all the children having a toy car or a toy robot are males. As for the 4th grade coursebook, all people riding scooters and flying airplanes are males. Additionally, although some females are shown playing football and basketball, weightlifting is still exclusively associated with males, and singing with females.

Findings on Linguistic Sexism

Linguistic sexism was examined through titles, firstness, and gender-biased language. As the 3rd grade coursebook does not include any titles, a comparative analysis is not possible. However, the 4th grade coursebook presents more instances of “Mrs” than of “Mr” (See Table 4), indicating female overrepresentation.

Table 4. Statistical Findings on Linguistic Sexism

| Variables | 3 rd grade | | | 4 th grade | | | P |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----|-----------------------|-------------|--------|------|
| | M | F | R | M | F | R | |
| Titles | - | - | - | 4 (20) | 16 (80) | 0.25:1 | - |
| Firstness | 0 | 6 (100) | 0:1 | 1 (100) | 0 | 1.0:1 | .008 |
| Gender-biased language | - | - | - | 26 (81.2) | 6 (18.8) | 4.32:1 | - |

* Numbers in parentheses indicate percentage

Firstness analysis reveals that female characters are prioritized in the 3rd grade coursebook, whereas male characters are prioritized in the 4th grade coursebook, with a significant difference between the two coursebooks (See Table 4). Regarding gender-biased language, the 3rd grade coursebook included no gendered occupational terms, preventing comparative analysis. Gendered occupational terms in the 4th grade coursebook were predominantly male-oriented (e.g., postman, businessman, fireman, waiter), though only 2 terms (actor and actress, and policeman and policewoman) were used for both genders (See Table 4).

COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

A notable finding of this study is the coexistence of male dominance in visual representation and female dominance in dialogue-based content, particularly in songs and chants. Male overrepresentation in visibility is also among the findings of various studies (e.g., Aydınoglu, 2014; Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Esmaili & Amerian, 2014; Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Mengistie & Worku, 2021; Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020; Şimşek, 2022), whereas female dominance in dialogues contradicts previous studies suggesting male dominance in dialogues (e.g., Mengistie & Worku, 2021). This contrast suggests that numerical visibility alone does not necessarily indicate balanced representation. While female characters appear more frequently in verbal activities, these are often limited to pedagogically constrained forms such as songs and chants, which may not reflect equal participation in meaningful communication. This finding supports Sunderland's (2011) argument that quantitative balance may conceal underlying inequalities and aligns with Huang's (2025) emphasis on examining interactional roles in discourse.

Another finding of this study is female overrepresentation in family roles, which aligns with various studies (e.g., Ahmadabadi & Azad, 2023; Chan, 2021; Esmaili & Amerian, 2014; Zhang et al., 2022). In terms of family roles and household responsibilities, the coursebooks largely reproduce traditional divisions of labour, where males are associated with outdoor and economically productive roles, while females are linked to domestic and caregiving responsibilities. This finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Can Acar, 2019; Dahmardeh et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhou & Weninger, 2025) and reflects the persistence of culturally embedded gender norms.

Similarly, occupational representations demonstrate clear gender bias. Male characters dominate a wider range of occupations, whereas female characters are confined to a narrower range. This pattern has been widely documented in the literature (e.g., Albina et al., 2023; Almghams, 2020; Can Acar, 2019; Gün & Zehir Topkaya, 2023; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020). Additionally, males are often depicted in occupations, particularly in technical and high-status fields, whereas females are often associated with teaching or service-related professions, as suggested by various studies (e.g., Al Kayed, 2020; Can Acar, 2019; Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Mengistie & Worku, 2021; Şimşek, 2022; Telioussi et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). These patterns indicate the persistence of occupational stereotyping in ELT materials.

The study suggests that male characters dominated in the use of adjectives and activities in both coursebooks, which is among the findings of various studies (e.g., Ahmadabadi & Azad, 2023; Albina et al., 2023; Almghams, 2020; Can Acar, 2019; Esmaili & Amerian, 2014; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020). In addition, the use of adjectives and activity distributions further reinforces stereotypical representations. Female characters are often associated with physical weakness or emotional states, whereas male characters are linked to strength and physical activity. Likewise, males are predominantly represented in outdoor and physically demanding activities, while females are associated with indoor or nurturing roles. These findings are consistent with earlier studies (e.g., Can Acar, 2019; Chan, 2021) and reflect deeply rooted gender norms. The persistent depiction of females in passive or supportive roles and males in active or leadership roles reinforces traditional gender stereotypes (Sunderland, 2011).

These stereotypes in family roles, household responsibilities, occupations, adjectives, and activities reflect a broader tendency observed in recent studies on EFL coursebooks in various contexts, including China (e.g., Huang & Liu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhou & Weninger, 2025), Greece (e.g., Teliousi et al., 2020), Indonesia (e.g., Maesaroh et al., 2022), Iran (e.g., Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020), and Spain (e.g., Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020) as well as Türkiye (e.g., Can Acar, 2021; Gün & Zehir Topkaya, 2023). This study argues that locally-produced coursebooks used in different countries tend to reproduce similar stereotypes. These stereotypes generally include teaching as a profession predominantly associated with females; sports activities typically depicted as male-dominated; technical and high-paying professions primarily assigned to men; physical appearance descriptors applied more frequently to female characters; household responsibilities allocated to females; and outdoor responsibilities assigned to males. Overall, the persistence of similar gender stereotypes across different countries suggests that these patterns are not only culturally specific but also globally shared. This indicates that gender bias in coursebooks may operate at both local and global levels.

The analysis of linguistic sexism reveals the overuse of titles, imbalances in firstness, and gendered occupational terms. The overuse of titles for female characters reinforces the notion that women are often defined by their marital status or gender. Moreover, variation in firstness patterns suggests partial and inconsistent attempts to balance gender representation. Finally, the predominance of male-oriented occupational terms indicates the persistence of gender-biased language use, despite increasing awareness in educational contexts. These findings confirm that linguistic choices both reproduce and occasionally challenge gender norms, as also reported in previous studies (e.g., Esmaili & Amerian, 2014; Gün & Zehir Topkaya, 2023; Lee & Collins, 2009).

Overall, the findings indicate that both coursebooks exhibit gender imbalances, with dominance alternating between males and females across different variables. This overall pattern aligns with a substantial body of research on locally-produced EFL coursebooks across various contexts, including Australia (e.g., Lee & Collins, 2009), China (e.g., Zhang et al., 2022), Ethiopia (e.g., Bachore, 2022; Mengistie & Worku, 2021), Indonesia (e.g., Adawiyah & Oktavianti, 2023), Iran (e.g., Ahmadabadi & Azad, 2023; Esmaili & Amerian, 2014), Japan (e.g., Lee, 2018), the Philippines (e.g., Albina et al., 2023; Curaming & Curaming, 2020), and Türkiye (e.g., Can Acar, 2021; Şimşek, 2022), which consistently report unequal gender representation. In contrast, studies on globally-published coursebooks suggest a more deliberate attempt to ensure balanced representation of genders, both quantitatively and qualitatively (e.g., Al Kayed et al., 2020; Yaghoubi-Notash & Nariman-Jahan, 2012; Yang, 2011).

However, the findings also reveal inconsistencies across variables and grade levels. For instance, while males dominate visual representation, females are more prominent in certain dialogue-based activities. Similarly, patterns of firstness and activity distribution vary between the two coursebooks. These inconsistencies suggest the absence of a systematic or coherent approach to gender representation in the development of the coursebooks. Rather than reflecting a unified gender equality perspective, the coursebooks appear to reproduce gender patterns in a fragmented and inconsistent manner. Interestingly, the findings also suggest that the more recent 4th grade coursebook does not necessarily demonstrate improvement over earlier materials. In contrast to Aydınoglu's (2014) findings, which reported implicit bias without overt discrimination, the present study identifies both implicit and more explicit forms of gender bias in the currently used coursebook. This contrasts with research in other contexts (e.g., Lee & Collins, 2009), where newer editions tend to show gradual improvement.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined two elementary school coursebooks published by the MoNE in Türkiye in terms of gender representation. The findings reveal that both coursebooks lack balanced gender representation and perpetuate gender stereotypes across multiple domains. By focusing on elementary-level coursebooks, the findings highlight the critical importance of addressing gender representation at the elementary level, given that early exposure to stereotypical roles may shape children's perceptions of social norms and limit their understanding of equitable gender roles.

An important contribution of this study lies in its focus on currently used MoNE-published primary-level coursebooks, providing up-to-date evidence from the Turkish context. The findings suggest that, despite increased awareness of gender issues, coursebooks continue to exhibit gender bias, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Given the role of elementary education in shaping children's perceptions, the persistence of such representations is particularly concerning. Moreover, the persistence of similar gender stereotypes in coursebooks across different countries suggests that these patterns are not only local but also globally entrenched in EFL coursebooks. This highlights the importance of addressing gender bias not only at the national level but also in broader educational contexts. Therefore, there is a need for coursebook developers to adopt more gender-sensitive approaches by promoting diverse and non-stereotypical representations of both genders

This study is limited to two MoNE-published EFL coursebooks for Grade 3 and 4 in Türkiye, both published in 2019. Future research should examine coursebooks produced by private publishers at the same grade levels to identify potential differences in gender representation. The analysis of digital coursebooks may offer a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary learning materials. The coding process by a single coder in this study may be considered a limitation of the study, particularly for categories that require interpretative judgment. Further studies may benefit from involving multiple coders and reporting inter-coder reliability measures to enhance the reliability of the findings. Future research may also explore the impact of gender representation on students' perceptions of gender roles, as well as teachers' perspectives on addressing gender bias in classroom practices. Finally, comparative studies between locally-produced and globally-published coursebooks may also offer insights into how broader, globalized patterns of gender stereotypes manifest in different educational contexts. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing up-to-date evidence from currently used elementary EFL coursebooks in Türkiye, highlighting persistent gender inequalities despite increased awareness. The findings underscore the urgent need for more gender-sensitive coursebook development to foster equitable perceptions among young learners and challenge entrenched societal norms from an early age.

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