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Mapping research on gender representation in English-language textbooks: A systematic review of thematic distribution and overlap

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Abstract:

Gender representation in English-language textbooks raises concerns about educational inclusion and equity, yet existing scholarship offers limited clarity on how different dimensions of representation are examined and integrated across studies. This study characterizes the literature, maps five research themes, and examines their distribution and co-occurrence across publications. Guided by PRISMA, this systematic review screened 358 identified records and included 45 studies published between 2007 and 2024. Study characteristics were summarized descriptively, and five themes were coded non-exclusively to assess their thematic overlap. Games and leisure activities attracted the most research attention (21 studies; 46.7%), followed by visual representation (20; 44.4%), language and terminology (16; 35.6%), occupational roles (13; 28.9%), and cultural and regional contexts (8; 17.8%). Twenty-four studies addressed one theme, and 21 addressed multiple themes, including two covering all five. Visual representation overlapped with leisure activities in 12 studies, while language overlapped with occupational roles in eight. The mapping distinguishes four content dimensions from one contextual dimension, providing an interpretive structure informed by Gender Schema Theory. Theme frequencies and overlaps describe research coverage, not the prevalence, direction, or severity of gender bias. Education authorities should pilot gender-responsive textbook review policies that assess language, images, occupations, and activities using transparent, context-sensitive criteria, with documented findings guiding possible revisions before procurement and classroom adoption.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender representation in English-language textbooks remains an important concern in educational research because instructional materials communicate not only language knowledge but also portrayals of social identities, occupations, activities, and relationships. From a critical perspective, language education also provides a context for examining how gender identities, social roles, and power relations are represented (Pavlenko, 2004). Through linguistic and visual content, textbooks may present gender-linked roles and expectations that warrant critical examination (Taylor, 2003; Ullah et al., 2014; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). Previous studies have identified patterns of gender representation in English textbooks across educational contexts in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008; Ariyanto, 2018; Suchana, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of examining educational materials from a gender-sensitive perspective, although textbook analysis alone cannot establish the effects of textbooks on students' perceptions or behavior. Beyond identifying particular stereotypes, it is therefore important to understand how existing scholarship has approached different dimensions of gender representation and whether these dimensions have been investigated separately or together.

Previous research has examined gender representation in English-language textbooks through various thematic and analytical perspectives. First, studies have examined portrayals of women and men, gender stereotypes, and traditional and social roles in English-language textbooks (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Ghorbani, 2009; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008; Tyarakanita et al., 2021). Second, other studies have focused on linguistic and visual representation, including gender-related terminology, character references, illustrations, character prominence, and interactions between female and male characters (Ariyanto, 2018; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Lee & Collins, 2009; Suchana, 2024; Yang, 2016). Third, studies have examined occupational roles, everyday activities, and gender portrayals across educational, cultural, and national contexts, including comparisons across school subjects (Crawfurd et al., 2024; Fithriani, 2022; Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Jehle et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). Collectively, these studies demonstrate the multidimensional scope of gender representation research, although differences in analytical focus, textbook characteristics, and educational contexts complicate direct comparisons of substantive findings.

Despite extensive research on gender representation in English-language textbooks, limited attention has been paid to how research themes are distributed and overlap across studies. While previous empirical studies have examined specific textbooks and literature reviews have synthesized reported gender inequalities (Mihira et al., 2021), the organization and co-occurrence of research themes remain insufficiently mapped. Addressing this gap, the present systematic review examines 45 publications (2007–2024) across five themes: language and terminology, visual representation, occupational roles, games and leisure activities, and cultural and regional contexts. Its novelty lies in quantifying thematic distribution, distinguishing single-theme and multi-theme studies, and identifying study-level thematic overlap. Furthermore, it differentiates four content-related dimensions from a cross-cutting contextual dimension, providing a structured framework for understanding research attention without equating thematic frequency with the prevalence or severity of gender bias.

Accordingly, this study aims to characterize existing research on gender representation in English-language textbooks, examine the distribution of five major themes, and identify patterns of thematic overlap at the study level. Three research questions guide the analysis: (1) What are the publication, methodological, and geographical characteristics of the 45 included studies? (2) How are the five themes of gender representation distributed across

these studies? (3) To what extent do these themes co-occur within individual studies, including the overlap between cultural and regional contexts and content-related themes? Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory provides an interpretive perspective for understanding the relevance of gender associations in language, images, occupations, and activities, without testing their effects on readers. Conceptually, the study clarifies the distinction between representational content and contextual dimensions. Methodologically, it offers a transparent study-level mapping of thematic coverage and overlap. Practically, the findings may inform future research designs and the development of multidimensional, context-sensitive indicators for evaluating gender representation in English-language textbooks.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study used a systematic literature review (SLR) to map research on gender representation in English-language textbooks used in formal education. It followed the systematic review principles of Tranfield et al. (2003) and the PRISMA reporting guidelines. The analysis covered the characteristics of 45 selected studies, the distribution of themes, and thematic overlap at the study level. As a descriptive mapping, theme frequency indicates the number of studies examining an aspect; it does not indicate the frequency, direction, magnitude, or severity of gender bias in textbooks.

Literature Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted across nine academic sources: Google Scholar, ERIC, Semantic Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search combined keywords related to gender representation, stereotypes, bias, and roles with "English textbooks" and "English language textbooks," adapting search terms to each source (Bramer et al., 2017; Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Publications from 2007–2024 were considered. A total of 358 records were identified, comprising 352 from academic sources and six from other sources. Manual duplicate checking based on titles, authors, and DOIs identified no duplicates (n = 0). Each included study was attributed to its first recorded identification source; therefore, the source distribution reported in the Results reflects the 45 included studies rather than all initially retrieved records.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Study selection was guided by predefined criteria covering publication period, research focus, educational context, publication type, language, full-text availability, and data suitability. Eligible studies examined gender representation, stereotypes, or bias in English-language textbooks used in formal education, particularly through linguistic, visual, occupational, recreational, and sociocultural dimensions. Publications unrelated to these objectives or lacking sufficient information for thematic analysis were excluded. The eligibility criteria are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Study inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Studies published between 2007 and 2024.	Studies published outside the period 2007–2024.
Studies examining gender representation, gender stereotypes, or gender bias in English-language textbooks.	Studies not directly examining gender representation, stereotypes, or bias in English-language textbooks (ineligible research outcomes).

Studies focusing on English-language textbooks used in formal educational settings across different educational levels.	Studies examining materials unrelated to English-language textbooks or outside formal educational settings (ineligible educational contexts).
Academic research publications, including journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, book chapters, and research reports containing extractable findings.	Editorials, opinion pieces, nonacademic publications, or publications without extractable research findings (ineligible publication types or study designs).
Publications written in English.	Publications written in languages other than English.
Full-text publications available for eligibility assessment.	Publications whose full texts were unavailable for eligibility assessment.
Studies providing sufficient information on textbook contexts, research methods, and aspects of gender representation for data extraction and thematic coding.	Studies providing insufficient information for reliable data extraction or thematic classification.

Source: Compiled by the researchers, 2024.

Formal education encompasses the educational levels represented in the final corpus. The review was therefore not restricted to primary or secondary education.

Study Selection

The literature search identified 358 records, comprising 352 from academic databases and six from other sources. Manual duplicate checking based on titles, authors, and DOIs identified no duplicates (n = 0). Of the 358 records screened, 180 were initially excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria. Further title and abstract screening excluded 110 of the remaining 178 records, including 60 for irrelevant outcomes, 30 for ineligible study designs, and 20 for unsuitable study populations or educational contexts. Subsequently, 68 full-text publications were assessed, of which 23 were excluded for irrelevant outcomes (n = 14) or ineligible study designs (n = 9). Ultimately, 45 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final data extraction and thematic analysis (Figure 1).

Data Extraction

Each of the 45 included publications was assigned a unique code (E1–E45). Extracted data included publication year, identification source, publication type, geographical context, research method, thematic focus, and key findings on gender representation in English-language textbooks. Study characteristics were summarized using frequencies and percentages, with 45 studies as the denominator. Geographical distribution was distinguished from the cultural and regional contexts theme, which was assigned only to studies explicitly examining sociocultural or regional influences on gender representation. Multiple thematic codes could be assigned to individual studies to identify the distribution and overlap of themes. Key findings were used to contextualize the themes without assuming consistency in the direction or degree of gender bias across studies. A study-level extraction matrix linking each code to its corresponding publication is recommended to ensure transparency and traceability.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages based on 45 included studies. Thematic coding classified studies into five categories, allowing multiple codes per study to identify thematic distribution, single- and multi-theme coverage, and cross-theme overlap. Because categories were not mutually exclusive, cumulative percentages could exceed 100%. Theme frequencies reflected research attention, while thematic overlap indicated dimensions examined together rather than consistency or directional relationships

in the findings. The analysis focused on study characteristics, thematic distribution, and co-occurrence patterns, without inferring the prevalence, direction, or severity of gender bias in textbooks, as this would require a separate synthesis of study-specific findings using comparable indicators.

PRISMA Study Selection Flow

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

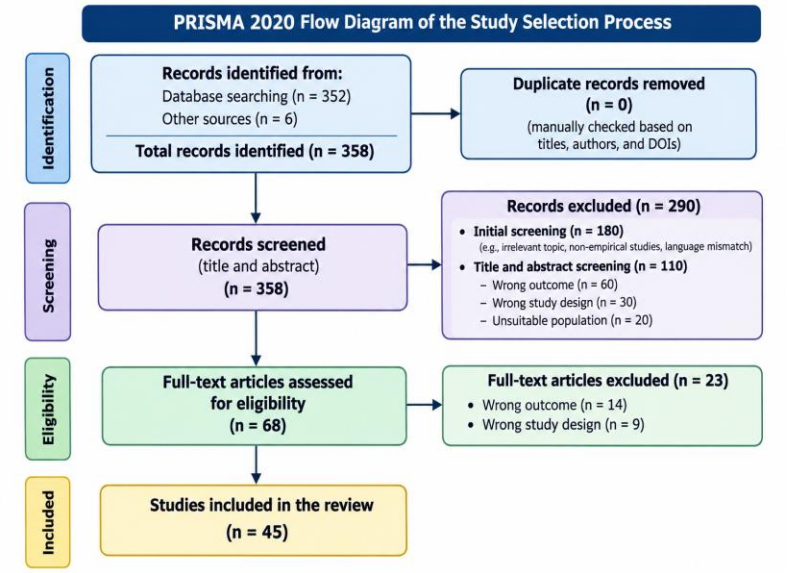


Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process. A total of 358 records were identified, comprising 352 records from database searches and 6 records from other sources. All records were manually checked for duplication based on titles, authors, and DOIs, and no duplicate records were identified (n = 0). Consequently, all 358 records proceeded to the screening stage.

During the screening stage, 290 records were excluded. These exclusions were conducted in two steps. First, 180 records were excluded because they did not meet the initial screening criteria, such as topic irrelevance, non-empirical nature, or language mismatch. The remaining 178 records were further screened based on titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 110 additional records, including 60 for the wrong outcome, 30 for the wrong study design, and 20 for an unsuitable population.

Subsequently, 68 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. At the full-text stage, 23 articles were excluded, including 14 for wrong outcome and 9 for wrong study design. Ultimately, 45 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final data extraction and review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Characteristics of the included studies

The review included 45 publications, which were characterized by publication year, source of identification, publication type, geographical context, and research method. These characteristics provide an overview of the reviewed literature and establish the context for the subsequent thematic analysis.

Publication Year

The 45 included studies were published between 2007 and 2024 (Table 2). The highest publication frequency was recorded in 2022 (n = 6; 13.3%), followed by 2012 and 2021 (n = 5; 11.1% each). Publication frequencies fluctuated throughout the review period, with no consistent upward trend. These findings describe the temporal distribution of the selected studies rather than overall publication trends in research on gender representation in English-language textbooks.

Table 2

Distribution of the Included Studies by Publication Year

Publication Year	Number of Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
2007	1	2.2
2008	2	4.4
2010	2	4.4
2012	5	11.1
2013	4	8.9
2014	3	6.7
2015	1	2.2
2016	3	6.7
2017	3	6.7
2018	2	4.4
2019	4	8.9
2020	2	4.4
2021	5	11.1
2022	6	13.3
2024	2	4.4
Total	**45**	**100.0**

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the 45 included studies. Individual percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. No included studies were recorded for 2009, 2011, or 2023.

Sources used to identify studies

The 45 included studies were identified across nine academic search sources (Table 3). Google Scholar contributed the largest proportion (n = 12; 26.7%), followed by ERIC (n = 9; 20.0%). Semantic Scholar and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses each accounted for six studies (13.3%), while the remaining sources contributed smaller proportions. These findings indicate the recorded identification sources of the selected studies rather than the overall retrieval distribution across databases.

Tabel 3

Recorded Search Sources for the Included Studies

Identification Source	Number of Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
Google Scholar	12	26.7
ERIC	9	20.0
Semantic Scholar	6	13.3
ProQuest Dissertations & Theses	6	13.3
JSTOR	4	8.9
Taylor & Francis Online	3	6.7
SpringerLink	2	4.4
Scopus	2	4.4
Web of Science	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the 45 included studies. Each study was assigned to its first recorded identification source. Thus, the distribution represents the identification sources of the

included studies rather than the total records initially retrieved from each source. Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Publication types

The included studies comprised five publication types (Table 4). Journal articles accounted for the largest proportion (n = 33; 73.3%), followed by theses and dissertations (n = 6; 13.3%), conference papers (n = 3; 6.7%), book chapters (n = 2; 4.4%), and other publications (n = 1; 2.2%). This distribution indicates that the reviewed literature was predominantly represented by journal articles, with additional contributions from other academic publication types.

Table 4

Distribution of Included Studies by Publication Type

Publication Type	Number of Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
Journal Articles	33	73.3
Theses/Dissertations	6	13.3
Conference Papers	3	6.7
Book Chapters	2	4.4
Others	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the 45 included studies. Individual percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Geographical distribution

The 45 included studies represented 18 countries (Table 5). Indonesia accounted for the largest proportion (n = 11; 24.4%), followed by Malaysia and Türkiye (n = 5; 11.1% each), and Iran and India (n = 3; 6.7% each). The remaining studies were distributed across 13 countries, each contributing one or two publications. This distribution indicates the geographical diversity of the reviewed literature, although differences in study frequency do not necessarily reflect variations in the prevalence or severity of gender bias across countries.

Table 5

Geographical Distribution of the Included Studies

Country	Number of Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
Indonesia	11	24.4
Malaysia	5	11.1
Türkiye	5	11.1
Iran	3	6.7
India	3	6.7
Pakistan	2	4.4
Greece	2	4.4
Philippines	2	4.4
China	2	4.4
Australia	2	4.4
Ethiopia	1	2.2
Brunei	1	2.2
United States	1	2.2
Switzerland	1	2.2
Lithuania	1	2.2
Sweden	1	2.2
Bangladesh	1	2.2
Uganda	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the 45 included studies. Individual percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Research methods

The 45 included studies employed five categories of research methods (Table 6). Qualitative content analysis was the most frequently used approach (n = 23; 51.1%), followed by quantitative content analysis (n = 11; 24.4%) and critical discourse analysis (n = 5; 11.1%). Studies combining qualitative and quantitative content analysis accounted for 8.9% (n = 4), while other methods represented 4.4% (n = 2). These findings indicate the predominance of content analysis, particularly qualitative approaches, in research examining gender representation in English-language textbooks.

Table 6

Research Methods Used in the Included Studies

Research Method	Number of Studies (n)	Percentage (%)
Qualitative Content Analysis	23	51.1
Quantitative Content Analysis	11	24.4
Critical Discourse Analysis	5	11.1
Qualitative and Quantitative Content Analysis	4	8.9
Other Methods	2	4.4
Total	45	100.0

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the 45 included studies. Individual percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Distribution of research themes

Thematic coding of the 45 included studies identified five major themes: language and terminology, visual representation, professional, occupational, and work roles, games and leisure activities, and cultural and regional contexts (Table 7). As individual studies could address multiple themes, thematic categories were not mutually exclusive. Accordingly, the total number of thematic assignments exceeded 45, and the corresponding percentages did not sum to 100%.

Table 7

Distribution of themes by unique study code

Theme	Study codes	Number of studies	Percentage of 45 studies
Language and terminology	E1, E6, E8, E11, E12, E15, E16, E18, E19, E22, E23, E30, E33, E34, E36, E37	16	35.6%
Visual representation	E3, E4, E9, E12, E13, E14, E21, E22, E24, E25, E26, E27, E28, E29, E30, E31, E32, E33, E34, E35	20	44.4%
Professional, occupational, and work roles	E2, E6, E12, E14, E17, E18, E19, E20, E22, E30, E33, E34, E39	13	28.9%
Games and leisure activities	E3, E4, E5, E7, E10, E12, E13, E14, E15, E21, E22, E24, E27, E30, E32, E34, E38, E40, E42, E44, E45	21	46.7%

Cultural and regional contexts	E12, E23, E29, E30, E31, E35, E41, E43	8	17.8%

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the 45 included studies. Because individual studies could be assigned multiple thematic codes, the categories were not mutually exclusive, and the percentages do not sum to 100%.

Thematic dimensions of gender representation in English-Language textbooks

The five identified themes reflect the dimensions examined in research on gender representation, stereotypes, and potential bias in English-language textbooks. Four themes address content-related dimensions, including language, visual representation, occupational roles, and leisure activities, while cultural and regional contexts constitute a cross-cutting dimension that informs the interpretation of gender portrayals across educational settings.

Theme 1: Gender representation in language and terminology

Language and terminology were examined in 16 studies (35.6%), focusing on gender-related expressions, character references, naming practices, and linguistic constructions associated with women and men. Studies by Maulida (2017), Ali and Hussain (2019), and Mebratu and Semela (2022) illustrate how textbook language has been examined in relation to gender stereotypes and representational imbalances. These studies highlight the relevance of linguistic choices for understanding how gender identities and social roles are portrayed. However, their inclusion within the same theme does not imply uniform findings regarding the forms or degrees of linguistic bias.

Theme 2: Visual representation of women and men

Visual representation appeared in 20 studies (44.4%), encompassing the visibility, positioning, activities, and interactions of female and male characters in textbook illustrations. Rong et al. (2021), Roohani and Zarei (2013), Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012), and Amini and Birjandi (2012) examined visual portrayals in relation to gender roles and representational differences. These studies demonstrate the importance of examining not only the numerical presence of female and male characters but also their depicted activities, social positions, and interactions. The prominence of this theme reflects research attention to visual dimensions rather than evidence that visual bias is more prevalent than other forms of gender bias.

Theme 3: Gender representation in professional, occupational, and work roles

Professional, occupational, and work roles were examined in 13 studies (28.9%). This theme addresses the representation of women and men in occupations, leadership positions, technical professions, domestic responsibilities, and supporting roles. Studies such as Habib et al. (2020) and Skliar (2007) examine gendered occupational portrayals in educational materials. Occupational representation provides an analytical basis for examining how textbooks associate particular professional and social responsibilities with gender. Nevertheless, thematic frequency alone cannot establish the prevalence, direction, or consistency of occupational stereotypes across the reviewed studies.

Theme 4: Gender representation in games and leisure activities

Games and leisure activities constituted the most frequently examined theme, appearing in 21 studies (46.7%). This category includes representations of sports, recreational participation, outdoor activities, and other leisure pursuits associated with female and male characters. Ahmad and Shah (2019) and Amini and Birjandi (2012), for example, examined gender-related differences in the portrayal of activities. These studies illustrate how

recreational representations can be analyzed in relation to gendered participation, mobility, and social expectations. However, the frequency of research addressing this theme does not indicate that gender bias in leisure activities is more widespread or severe than in other representational dimensions.

Theme 5: Cultural and regional contexts of gender representation

Cultural and regional contexts were explicitly examined in eight studies (17.8%). Unlike the preceding themes, this category concerns the social, cultural, geographical, and educational settings through which gender portrayals are contextualized and interpreted. Research conducted across different national settings, including Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Pakistan, demonstrates the geographical scope of textbook gender studies. However, geographical location alone does not constitute evidence of cultural analysis. This theme, therefore, identifies studies that explicitly examine the contextual dimensions of gender representation. Differences in educational levels, textbook characteristics, research designs, and analytical indicators limit direct comparisons of gender bias across countries.

Cross-theme patterns

Of the 45 included studies, 24 (53.3%) examined a single theme, whereas 21 (46.7%) addressed multiple themes. The strongest thematic overlap occurred between visual representation and games and leisure activities (n = 12), followed by language and terminology and professional, occupational, and work roles (n = 8). Notably, two studies (E12 and E30) addressed all five themes. These findings demonstrate variation in the thematic breadth of existing research and identify dimensions frequently examined together. However, thematic co-occurrence does not establish consistency in research findings, causal relationships, or the severity of gender bias.

Thematic synthesis

Overall, the thematic mapping identifies four content-related dimensions of gender representation and one cross-cutting contextual dimension. The distribution and overlap of these themes provide a framework for understanding how existing studies approach the portrayal of gender in English-language textbooks. This framework offers a basis for developing more integrated and context-sensitive analytical indicators, while recognizing that conclusions about the prevalence, direction, and consistency of gender bias require a separate synthesis of substantive findings using comparable measures.

Discussion

The review of 45 studies identified five themes in research on gender representation in English-language textbooks: language and terminology, visual representation, professional and occupational roles, games and leisure activities, and cultural and regional contexts. Games and leisure activities received the greatest research attention (21 studies; 46.7%), followed by visual representation (20; 44.4%), language and terminology (16; 35.6%), professional and occupational roles (13; 28.9%), and cultural and regional contexts (8; 17.8%). Twenty-one studies examined multiple themes, including E12 and E30, which covered all five. These findings reveal differences in thematic emphasis and analytical breadth, particularly which dimensions were examined together. They also distinguish four dimensions of textbook content from the cultural and regional contexts in which those dimensions are studied. Theme frequencies and co-occurrence describe research coverage, not the prevalence, direction, or severity of gender bias.

Gender representation in English-language textbooks matters for educational equity across diverse settings because textbooks portray women's and men's social participation, occupations, and relationships. Such portrayals can reproduce gender stereotypes, making textbook bias a concern for educational equality (Blumberg, 2008). Studies of Malaysian and Chinese English textbooks underscore the relevance of linguistic, occupational, and visual analysis (Shamsuddin et al., 2015; Huang & Liu, 2024). Research in Uganda and four Asian countries likewise supports the examination of characters' visibility alongside activities and social positions (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Beyond English textbooks, Spanish mathematics textbooks illustrate how numerical parity may coexist with differences in occupational and social portrayals (Guichot-Reina & De la Torre-Sierra, 2023). These findings require context-sensitive interpretation rather than generalization across subjects or countries (De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2022; Tabatadze, 2023). This review therefore identifies dimensions for inclusive textbook evaluation without assessing the prevalence of bias or its effects on students.

Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory provides a lens for understanding why the mapped content dimensions matter: language, illustrations, occupations, and leisure activities may provide cues through which femininity and masculinity are associated with roles. Studies of Iranian EFL textbooks have examined such associations across language and activities (Amini & Birjandi, 2012), while analyses of English textbooks in China and four Asian countries demonstrate the value of considering interactions and social roles alongside visibility (Huang & Liu, 2024; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). The finding that 21 studies covered multiple themes, including E12 and E30 across all five, indicates that these dimensions can be investigated together; it does not show that stereotypes reinforce one another. Conceptually, separating four content dimensions from cultural and regional contexts clarifies the distinction between what textbooks depict and the settings in which depictions are interpreted. This framework offers guidance without testing readers' gender schemas or causal effects.

A central lesson of this review is that mapping scholarly attention requires intellectual restraint: frequently examined themes should not be mistaken for prevalent forms of gender bias (Grant & Booth, 2009). Among 45 studies, 24 addressed one theme, and 21 addressed multiple themes, revealing differences in analytical breadth rather than agreement in findings. Distinguishing content dimensions from cultural and regional contexts further demonstrates the value of coherent coding categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Whereas earlier reviews discussed reported inequalities in English textbooks (Mihira et al., 2021), this review clarifies which dimensions researchers investigate separately or together. Its broader methodological lesson is that transparent selection, explicit coding decisions, and traceable study records are essential for cumulative knowledge (James et al., 2016; Page et al., 2021). Such practices make limitations visible, facilitate meaningful comparisons, and guide future synthesis without overstating the evidence.

Previous empirical studies have examined gendered language, visibility, occupations, and activities within particular English-language textbooks and educational settings (Habib et al., 2020; Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Orfan, 2023). Similarly, Shallaita et al. (2021) assessed several representational indicators, while Foroutan (2012) highlighted the relevance of linguistic and sociocultural settings. Comparative textbook research also provides evidence that patterns of representation vary across contexts (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). In contrast to these studies of textbook content, Mihira et al. (2021) reviewed earlier findings on gender inequality in English textbooks. The present review shares their multidimensional concern but makes a different analytical contribution by mapping the distribution and co-occurrence of five research themes across 45 publications. Visual representation overlapped with leisure activities in 12 studies,

whereas language overlapped with occupational roles in eight. Its distinctive contribution is thus an account of how scholarship organizes attention, not a claim about which stereotypes predominate.

First, curriculum developers and publishers could pilot a multidimensional checklist that covers gendered language, visual prominence, occupational diversity, and leisure participation, combining counts with qualitative judgments about the roles portrayed. Second, evaluation teams should record educational levels and cultural contexts so comparisons reflect differences in materials rather than national labels alone. Third, teachers could use textbook passages and images to prompt discussion about whose experiences are visible, what activities characters perform, and which perspectives are missing. Fourth, the present review should make its E1–E45 extraction matrix and coding rules accessible, while future researchers should report co-occurrence systematically and synthesize substantive findings before assessing bias patterns. Finally, textbook procurement agencies could test transparent review criteria through small-scale audits and request revisions where documented concerns warrant them. These proposals translate thematic mapping into practical priorities, but their feasibility and effectiveness require evaluation before adoption.

CONCLUSION

This review of 45 studies shows that research on gender representation in English-language textbooks is organized around five themes: language and terminology, visual representation, professional and occupational roles, games and leisure activities, and cultural and regional contexts. Research attention was greatest for games and leisure activities (21 studies), followed by visual representation (20), language and terminology (16), occupational roles (13), and cultural and regional contexts (8). Twenty-four studies addressed a single theme, whereas 21 examined multiple themes; E12 and E30 covered all five. Frequent overlaps linked visual representation to leisure activities (12 studies) and language to occupational roles (8 studies). Taken together, these patterns reveal an uneven but partly overlapping research landscape, with four content dimensions interpreted within a contextual dimension. They characterize scholarly coverage, not the direction, prevalence, or severity of textbook gender bias.

The study contributes conceptually by distinguishing the four content dimensions of gender representation from cultural and regional contexts that inform their interpretation. Read through Gender Schema Theory, this distinction offers a way to organize potential cues through which textbook content depicts gender associations, without claiming to extend the theory or demonstrate effects on learners. Methodologically, the study adds a study-level map of thematic distribution and co-occurrence rather than a synthesis of bias prevalence. In practice, the framework can inform pilot evaluation checklists that examine language, image composition, occupational diversity, and leisure participation, while documenting educational and cultural settings. These applications require testing before their effectiveness can be established across educational settings.

This review is limited to 45 selected publications and relies on thematic classifications rather than a comparable synthesis of individual study findings. Variation in textbook collections, educational levels, research designs, and indicators constrains conclusions about the form or consistency of bias and prevents direct comparisons across countries. The reported co-occurrence of themes also cannot establish causal relationships or mutually reinforcing stereotypes. To strengthen transparency, the current study should provide a traceable E1–E45 extraction matrix, explicit coding decisions, and exclusion records. Future research should verify thematic classifications, synthesize reported findings using comparable

indicators, and test the proposed evaluation framework in print and digital textbooks across different curricular and cultural settings.

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The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of the research, data analysis, or the preparation and publication of this article.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

During manuscript preparation, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to improve the language and clarity of the text. The authors retain full responsibility for the article's content, accuracy, and academic integrity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ankur Nandi: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Visualization; Writing Original Draft. **Tarini Halder**: Conceptualization; Methodology; Supervision; Writing Review & Editing. **Tapash Das**: Formal Analysis; Methodology; Validation; Writing Review & Editing.

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