



**Women's image in Saudi School Curriculum
(A comprehensive study of English textbooks
in public schools)**

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Abstract

Women have been fighting various forms of discrimination for generations. They continue to confront stereotypes, particularly in conservative communities such as Arab societies, primarily due to cultural factors. While Islam safeguards women's rights to equality and the Saudi government is making substantial efforts to promote gender equality, women in Saudi Arabia are inadequately represented in some educational materials used in the schools of the Saudi kingdom. The Saudi Arabia 2030 Vision places a strong emphasis on women's empowerment and their pivotal role in achieving sustainable social development. However, school textbooks still perpetuate outdated stereotypes of Saudi women as homemakers with traditional family responsibilities, while men are often depicted as career-oriented with strong personalities. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify how Saudi women were portrayed in Saudi school curricula, specifically in English textbooks used in public schools, such as those published by McGraw Hill, the adopted English curriculum for middle-stage students in Saudi national schools. The study employed a qualitative content analysis methodology to examine the representation of women in these textbooks, both in narrative content and visual illustrations. It sought to understand how these portrayals might influence female students' perceptions of gender roles within Saudi society. The findings of this study contributed to our understanding of how educational materials can shape societal attitudes and further emphasize the need for a more thorough evaluation of diverse materials to ensure an accurate and empowering portrayal of Saudi women, aligning with the goals of the 2030 Saudi Vision.

Keywords: gender representation, equality, school curriculum, women empowerment, Saudi Vision 2030.

الملخص:

أُلقت الدراسة الضوء على تمثيل المرأة السعودية في الكتب المدرسية للغة الانجليزية (سلسلة McGraw Hill للمرحلة المتوسطة) المستخدمة في المدارس الحكومية. هدفت الدراسة إلى تحليل صورة المرأة السعودية في هذه الكتب المدرسية ومقارنتها مع رؤية المملكة ٢٠٣٠ والتي عززت دور المرأة السعودية ومساهماتها في المجتمع. كما استكشفت الدراسة الآثار المحتملة لهذه التصويرات على تصورات الطلاب وتوجهاتهم وفهمهم للأدوار الجندرية. واستخدمت الدراسة تحليلاً نوعياً للمحتوى لتحليل السرد والصور في الكتب المدرسية المختارة. أظهرت نتائج التحليل نمطاً سائداً لتصوير المرأة السعودية في أدوار تقليدية حيث الصور في محتوى تلك الكتب المدرسية تعزز الصورة النمطية وتقيد دورها إلى النماذج الجندرية التقليدية. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن تلك الكتب المدرسية لم تقدم صور الأدوار المتنوعة التي تلعبها المرأة في المجتمع السعودي والمساهمات للمرأة السعودية في المجال السياسي ومجلس الشورى والطب والعلوم والرياضة، غيرها. اقترحت الدراسة أن تلك التصويرات النمطية للجنسين في الكتب المدرسية قد يكون لها آثار على تصورات الطلاب وتوجهاتهم المهنية وتصوراتهم للأدوار الجندرية. وشملت الدراسة أيضاً مواضيع تتعلق بتمثيل الجنسين، والنمطيات الجندرية، والمساواة بين الجنسين، وتمكين المرأة، وتناغمها مع رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية 2030 والتنمية المستدامة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: تمثيل الجنسين، النمطيات الجندرية، المساواة بين الجنسين، المنهاج الدراسي، تمكين المرأة، رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية 2030، التنمية المستدامة.

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed a massive transformation in all fields including women's participation in society. Women's rights achieved significant advancements in recent years in terms of women empowerment in the Saudi community. Such empowerment is further driven by the efforts of the Saudi government in this concern which is proven by the signing of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) in the year 2000 (United Nations) This great achievement should be aligned with a change in Saudi women image in all sectors especially in the educational one. More attention should be given to the educational material taught at schools since they have a strong influence on students' perceptions of their self-image and ambitions. Portraying Saudi women in English textbooks needs to be compatible with the vision of the government so as to achieve its desired goals. Accordingly, this introduction discusses women's empowerment in Saudi Vision 2030, highlights women representation in Saudi public schools' materials, and outlines the research significance, objective, and questions.

1.1 Women's Empowerment in the Saudi Vision 2030:

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative aimed to diversify the country's economy, reduce its dependence on oil, and promote social and cultural changes. The initiative included goals related to education, including efforts to enhance the quality of education and promote a more open and tolerant society.

The evolving role of women in Saudi Arabia is a part of a global trend towards recognizing the importance of gender diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of society. As the country continues on this path, it will be interesting to observe how these changes contribute to the broader goals of social and economic development.

The new governmental attitude recognizes women as active agents in sustainable development which is in dire need for women, as well as men, power and abilities (Hvidt, 2018). Therefore, the Saudi government carries out various initiatives to enhance women's empowerment in the workforce and leadership roles. Through following these new policies, women's contribution in development has been on the rise. Statistics show that the number of women is growing whether in leadership positions, job market, or higher education achievements (Ministry of Education, 2014; Riyadh Post, 2016).

2030 Saudi vision does not only consider women's empowerment in society as a matter of women's rights but also as a



crucial factor in achieving desired development in all sectors. Benefiting from the immense abilities and talents of Saudi women will enrich society and work on achieving the vision's goal at a higher pace. Therefore, the vision emphasizes providing women with equal opportunities and supporting their participation in various fields. Saudi women are increasingly seen as vital contributors to the country's economy, social fabric, and overall well-being. Based on this, the number of women in the job market is thriving and their role is becoming more visible in the Saudi economy (Hvidt, 2018). Recent statistics revealed that women constitute 52% of university graduates, 20% of the Shura Council and own at least 40% of private wealth (Ministry of Education, 2014). According to the World Bank statistics, Saudi women accounted for 15.2 % of the total Saudi workforce in 2016. The Saudi government is seeking to increase the percentage to 28 % by 2020 (Riyadh Post, 2016). This will require the efforts of all the sectors of the society combined to revisit the image of women that is rather unrepresentative of Saudi women in real life. There need to be a new image consistent with the Saudi vision 2030. This is best achieved and disseminated by means of educational material used at schools.

1.2 Background Information on Saudi Women Representation in Public School Curriculums:

Saudi Arabia has been undergoing significant socio-economic reforms as part of its Vision 2030 initiative. This initiative aims to diversify the Saudi economy, reduce its dependence on oil, and bring about social and cultural changes. The efforts include improvements in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic policies. One crucial aspect of these reforms is the focus on empowering women and enhancing their role in society. Vision 2030 seeks to promote women's rights, increase their participation in the workforce, and improve their access to education.

Women's image in Saudi Arabia curriculums adopted in public schools in different school subjects has been a debatable issue due to the significant change in women's status presently witnessed in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom exerts all efforts to make significant strides in enhancing women's rights and gender equality in all fields such as work, education, and the right to drive. However, the image of Saudi women in curriculums does not comply with this transformation since it is rather traditional and limited in scope. Women have always been presented in curriculums performing domestic roles but never performing any roles while engaging with society, e.g. at work, which perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes. Such an image does not

reflect the real image of women in Saudi society; even in the past, women had significant roles in commerce, business, academia and public service.

This false image roots the belief that women are only useful for domestic functions, and they prioritize being housewives. Being reared on that image falsifies the perceptions of young female students and makes them lose faith in their dreams and ambitions. Hence, there was a serious need to change such image in order to level up young females' expectations to make the most benefit of female force in the Saudi community. Therefore, Saudi government emphasizes the importance of revising curriculums adopted in Saudi public schools to reflect Saudi women image correctly. Aligning with 2030 vision, serious changes have been made to educational materials to promote gender equality and women empowerment in lead positions. Through the analysis adopted in this study concerned with women image in public school curriculums, particularly in English textbooks, the study aims at highlighting the existing women image, identifying potential bias and presenting further recommendations and suggestions to achieve more successful representation of Saudi women in public school curriculums.

1.3 Literature Review

The intricate interplay between social issues and education has been a subject of prolific research spanning numerous eras. Gender representation, as one of the paramount societal concerns, has received extensive scrutiny from various vantage points. Consequently, a multitude of studies have been undertaken to investigate the impact of educational materials on gender equality. These investigations have concentrated on unveiling and dissecting the misrepresented portrayal of gender within curricula across diverse educational levels.

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing body of research pertaining to these themes, with a specific emphasis on the representation of gender within educational textbooks and its implications within the unique context of Saudi Arabia.

1.3.1 Gender Representation in School Textbooks

Numerous studies have delved into the issue of gender representation within educational textbooks and its profound impact on students, offering diverse perspectives. Many of these studies underscore the intricate connection between gender bias and the prevalent portrayal of women within traditional, constrictive social roles. For instance, a notable study conducted by Harper and de Jong

(2004) centered on the examination of gender roles in social studies textbooks commonly utilized in educational settings.

The findings of this investigation illuminated the presence of gender portrayals that tend to perpetuate and reinforce deeply ingrained gender stereotypes. Within the studied textbooks, women were frequently depicted as passive individuals who adhered to established rules, while men were portrayed as active and authoritative figures. These biased representations left an indelible imprint on students' perceptions and conceptions of societal roles, actively contributing to the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and, consequently, influencing their broader understanding of gender dynamics within society.

Similarly, Hamilton et al. (2006) have conducted an analysis of gender representation in children's picture books which concluded that there were gender disparities through characters' detection. In the books analyzed, the researchers found that males appeared more frequently than females with big differences in their roles. Women were presented in domestic and nursing functions, while males were presented in more professional and leadership roles. The study tackled how early exposure to gender bias can influence children's perspectives on their roles in life.

In a related study, Foroutan (2012) explored female representation in school textbooks. The study emphasized the strong bias against women in favor of male figures to stress male superiority in society. Male portrayals were leaders, ambitious, and near to accomplish their goals; on the other side, women were portrayed as followers and caregivers of men and families. Such findings highlight the need to change these portrayals to achieve gender equality in society and reduce the oppression of women.

In another study conducted by Warschauer et al. (2012), the analysis highlighted gender representation in mathematics textbooks used in elementary schools. The study concluded that math's specialized books tend to portray males as more talented in mathematics and science. This conclusion perpetuates stereotypes that science is not a female field by nature. This negative stereotyping results in girls' lack of confidence in their scientific abilities and goals, potentially leading to lower participation and achievement in STEM fields. Such portrayal does not help males to accept females to be their peers in scientific fields, as they have a rooted perception that they are not good enough.

Moreover, Tan and Yadav (2017) explored gender representation in computer science textbooks adopted in middle schools. The study also concluded that the books have significantly underrepresented women, while males are predominating. This lack of female representation in computer science materials may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in the field and perpetuate the perception that computer science is a male-dominated domain.

Existing research, as well as numerous previous studies, have illuminated the depiction of women within educational materials, revealing the presence of gender biases. These studies underscore the imperative for a fundamental transformation in the portrayal of women to advance gender equality and foster a more comprehensive understanding of women's roles in society.

By diligently addressing these erroneous gender representations, curriculum developers possess the capacity to instigate substantive alterations in educational materials. This proactive endeavor enables the promotion of a more authentic and inclusive portrayal of women, thereby contributing significantly to the broader objective of achieving gender equality and amplifying the recognition of women's diverse contributions to society.

1.3.2 Women Portrayal in Educational Materials in Arab Societies:

Concerning women's image and representation in educational material in the Arab world, many studies have been conducted on this concern. For example, Alagha (2012) explored women's images and their roles in Arabic language curriculums adopted in Palestinian national schools. The results indicated that women were often underrepresented and sometimes misrepresented especially in terms of political, national, and professional fields. Throughout the study, the scholar stressed that, in various educational materials, Arab communities do not provide an accurate portrayal of the image of Arab women. Accordingly, they do not reflect women's true achievements and fundamental roles in society. This, in turn, negatively affects the process of shaping women's perception of themselves and their self-esteem.

In a similar study exploring women's image in Arab school curriculums, Ootom (2014) applied a content analysis of an Arabic language book used in the primary stage in Jordan. He compared the presence of men and women and the distribution of their social roles in the book. The conclusion of the study revealed inequality in gender representation and portrayal of social roles. While women were mainly represented in traditional roles such as mothers and caregivers, men



were portrayed in more effective social roles; mainly roles of achievements and leadership. Additionally, the study emphasized the significance of real representation of gender to challenge stereotyping and promote gender equality.

In the same context, AL-Khalidi (2016) examined the portrayal of the image of women in national school textbooks taught in Jordan to evaluate women's representation and explore whether a systematic approach was followed in this concern. The research found that women's image in the textbooks involved in the study was neither accurate nor systematic. This random and unrealistic portrayal lacked a comprehensive and balanced approach to representing Arab women. This stresses the need for a more structured and deliberate approach to represent women in educational materials which will significantly contribute to enhancing gender equality.

Women's image in school textbooks is the focus of a number of Saudi studies. For example, Al-Malki and Ogunsiji (2015) conducted a study to examine gender representation in ESL materials adopted in Saudi curriculums through a content analysis of a random sample. The study found that there are various aspects of gender stereotyping and bias throughout the curriculums. This was revealed through presenting women in limited representation compared to men whose presence was dominant throughout the books. In the same context, Al-Saadi and Zahedi (2019) investigated female characters' presence in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. The results revealed a limited and stereotypical representation of women, with a focus on traditional roles and depictions that reinforce gender biases. The study emphasized the importance of providing more empowering and inclusive representations of women's image in EFL textbooks.

Alghamdi (2018) adopted a content analysis of science textbooks in Saudi national schools to detect gender representation and explore the image of women. He concluded that science books included many forms of gender bias which root for traditional stereotyping in Saudi community. In science-related books, women's presence was very limited according to men in a reflection that science is not a possible domain for women.

Based on this review, many school curriculums in the Arab world adopt a biased representation and image portrayal of women. In these curriculums, women assume traditional roles while the leading positions are reserved for men which further establishes gender inequality and misrepresentation of women.

1.3.2 The Impact of Gender Stereotypes in Textbooks on Students' Perceptions and Attitudes

In order to highlight the contribution of this study, it is significant to explore previous research that tackles the impact of gender stereotypes and misrepresentation of women's images in schoolbooks on students' perceptions. Research indicates that exposing students to stereotyping in gender representations in all stages of schooling mainly contributes to rooting and reinforcing gender biases, especially at an early age. This exposure negatively influences female and male students' attitudes towards their social roles, which may result in limiting their aspirations and career choices.

According to Cimpian et al. (2018) gender stereotyping usually connects intelligence and cleverness with boys rather than girls. Through examining gender representation in children's books, he indicated that gender stereotypes strongly influence early perceptions and attitudes of children toward academic abilities. This suggests that gender stereotypes in textbooks can perpetuate societal inequalities and hinder the development of a more inclusive and equal society.

Through a systematic review, Ahmed and Khan (2020) examined different studies concerning gender representation in school textbooks and how it can affect students' perceptions. Analysis of the results of the study provided an overview of the effects of gender stereotypes and a discussion of implications for educational practices. This overview highlighted the critical impact of stereotyping along with the crucial need for more inclusive and unbiased representations of gender in textbooks to foster gender equality and promote positive student outcomes.

Similarly, Bongalos and Obinario (2020) applied a systematic review to explore the effects of gender representation on students' career aspirations through examining various schoolbooks in high school. By discussing relevant studies, the review emphasized a relation between being exposed to female misrepresentation and female students' career choices and ambitions. The review also stressed the crucial role educational material plays in affecting students' perceptions of gendered career options.

In another study by Chen and Shih (2021) a meta-analysis was used to examine the effect of gender stereotypes portrayed in school textbooks on the students' perceptions of gender roles. The research analyzed data from multiple studies. The meta-analysis findings revealed that gender representation in textbooks in all school stages has significant effects on the students' attitudes toward their perceptions of gender abilities. The study emphasized the need to have

more equal gender representation in all educational stages through unbiased and inclusive portrayal.

Moreover, Li and Liao (2021) conducted a meta-analysis in order to investigate the effects of gender stereotypes in textbooks on students' academic self-concept. Through adopting data analysis from multiple studies, the meta-analysis compared gender representation in textbooks and the student's perceptions of their own academic abilities. The study concluded that gender stereotyping negatively influenced females' academic self-concept and their attitudes toward their self-esteem, highlighting the importance of addressing gender biases in educational materials.

Based on the findings of the previous studies, it is apparent that the representation of gender within schoolbooks yields a considerable and influential impact on students. These representations profoundly shape students' perceptions of gender roles, self-esteem, and self-concept, as well as their aspirations and ambitions. The manner in which genders are portrayed in schoolbooks, particularly from an early age, significantly contributes to the formation of children's attitudes, self-identity, career aspirations, and their fundamental beliefs regarding gender roles.

The cumulative evidence from the reviewed studies underscores the compelling imperative for a shift toward more equitable, diverse, and inclusive representations within educational materials. This need for more balanced and representative portrayals holds true not only on a global scale but also within the specific context of Saudi Arabia, thereby advocating for transformative changes in educational content that promote a more comprehensive understanding of gender roles and foster gender equity.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The portrayal of women in educational materials carries significant weight due to their role as influential tools in shaping students' attitudes and viewpoints on various societal issues, particularly regarding gender roles. This significance is particularly pronounced in educational materials used in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curriculums within public schools. These curriculums heavily rely on audio-visual content, magnifying the impact of the images and representations they convey. Consequently, this study underscores the pressing necessity for educational curriculums to offer a truthful reflection of society that includes women's capabilities and contributions.

By examining the depiction of Saudi women in English textbooks, this research seeks to illuminate the curriculums' role in either perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes or actively promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The findings from this study can contribute to a more informed and equitable education system that nurtures a broader, more inclusive perspective on gender roles and the role of women in society.

1.5 Research Objective and Questions

The research's primary aim was to conduct an analysis of how Saudi women are portrayed in English textbooks used in Saudi public schools, with a particular focus on the materials published by McGraw Hill and utilized in public middle school. The study employs image and narrative analysis to investigate the manner in which these textbooks represent Saudi women. In pursuit of this overarching objective, the research seeks to address the following key inquiries:

1. How do McGraw Hill publications, specifically the English school textbooks within the Super Goal 5 and 6 student and activity book series, depict Saudi women in their content and imagery?
2. To what degree do these depictions in the textbooks align with the evolving roles and contributions of Saudi women within the broader societal context?
3. What potential consequences can be inferred from these depictions for students in terms of their perceptions, attitudes, and comprehension of gender roles within the educational setting?

By addressing these research questions, this study aimed to contribute to the discourse on gender representation in education curriculums and provide insights for improving the portrayal of the image of Saudi women in English textbooks.

2. Theoretical Framework

The focus of the study is examining the image of women as represented in Saudi public-school curriculums. The theoretical framework of this study draws on social constructivist perspectives and gender theories to examine the concept of gender representation and stereotypes in educational materials. Social constructivism posits that gender is a socially constructed concept that is shaped by societal norms, beliefs, and expectations. It emphasizes that individuals acquire gendered behaviors, roles, and identities through socialization processes, including education.



2.1 The Concept of Gender Representation and Stereotypes

Studying women image in school curriculums entails discussing the concepts of gender representation and stereotyping. In the domain of gender and society, these are two fundamental concepts which are strongly related. Regarding gender representation, it refers to the way through which individuals, particularly women and men, are represented, portrayed and depicted in various forms of media. It addresses representation through images, narratives, and descriptions which mainly contribute to shaping social understanding and perspectives of what it means to be a woman or a man in society. On the other hand, stereotyping means the generalized beliefs and assumptions on attitudes, social roles and main characteristics which are related to a specific gender. These stereotypes can be deeply rooted in society; hence they can perpetuate gender biases by presenting traditional gender norms and expectations. For example, stereotypes may relate women image to shopping, caregiving roles, while men are often presented as assertive, strong, and leaders.

According to Eagly and Wood (2012) stereotyped gender representation always had fundamental consequences on both individuals and society. Young generations are brought up in continuous exposure to such gender inequality, so it strongly affects shaping expectations, opportunities, and limitations related to gender. This rooted view influences people's attitudes towards themselves and towards the other gender; therefore, it has a strong effect on their aspirations, career choices, and overall well-being. Moreover, stereotypes can contribute to the marginalization and discrimination of certain gender identities, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting social progress toward gender equality.

Moreover, Diekman and Eagly (2008) focus on the importance of identifying and understanding the concepts of gender representation and stereotypes. They consider such understanding crucial in order to be able to detect the two concepts presence and effects in educational materials, such as textbooks. They add that through critical analysis of different materials including educational ones to detect the portrayal of women, researchers can determine how professionals deal with stereotyping; namely, to decide whether stereotypes are perpetuated or challenged, and how they may influence students' perceptions and attitudes towards gender. Through various analysis, researchers can achieve accurate results discussing the potential impacts of gendered representations and informing interventions which aim at promoting more inclusive, equitable, and empowering educational experiences for all students, males or females.

These studies provide theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence that support the understanding of gender representation and stereotypes. They highlight the social and cultural factors that contribute to the development and perpetuation of gender stereotypes, shedding light on their influence on individuals' perceptions and behaviors.

2.2 The Role of Education in Shaping Societal Attitudes and Perceptions

The sector of education can play a significant part in rectifying the image of women as presented in society. Given the vital role of education in forming social attitudes and perceptions, including those related to gender, it is important to take advantage of textbooks to improve social norms on gender stereotypes. Educational institutions are the primary influential socialization agents through which society can transmit knowledge, values, and beliefs to future generations. They also function as a vital and effective tool to challenge gender inequality. Curriculum, textbooks, and instructional materials used in education shape the students' primary and basic understanding of the world and their place in it.

Therefore, it is important to rely on education's influence which may be used to reinforce or challenge existing societal norms and stereotypes. Through education, society can root for gender inequality when it includes biased representations whether through images or narratives which perpetuate traditional gender roles and expectations. On the other hand, education can function as a mechanism for social change through enhancing gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and fostering critical thinking and inclusivity.

According to Sadker and Sadker (2005), when educational materials, such as textbooks, accurately represent the diverse experiences and contributions of women and men in society, they provide students with a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of gender roles and possibilities. By featuring positive and diverse examples of women's achievements in various fields, from science and technology to politics and the arts, education can challenge gender stereotypes and inspire young learners to explore their own potential without limitations. Furthermore, inclusive and gender-responsive education can empower students to question and challenge societal norms, promoting attitudes of equality, respect, and inclusiveness. It can foster critical thinking skills, empathy, and an understanding of social justice, enabling students to challenge discrimination and advocate for gender equality both within and outside of educational settings.



Delamont (2003) provides a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between gender, education, and society. He delves into the ways in which education can reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes and examines the social and cultural influences that shape educational practices. The author argues for the importance of gender-responsive pedagogy and the inclusion of feminist perspectives in educational settings to promote gender equality and empower students to challenge societal norms.

Recognizing the role of education in shaping societal attitudes and perceptions highlights the importance of promoting gender-responsive and inclusive educational practices. By integrating gender equality and women's empowerment into the educational curriculum, providing professional development for teachers on gender-sensitive pedagogy, and ensuring the use of non-biased and diverse educational materials, education systems can contribute to positive social change and the creation of a more equitable and inclusive society.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Qualitative Content Analysis Technique as a Methodological Approach

The qualitative content analysis technique is a systematic and rigorous method used to analyze textual or visual data in a qualitative research study. It involves in-depth examination of the content of educational materials, such as textbooks, to identify and analyze patterns, themes, and representations related to gender. This technique allows researchers to gain insights into the meanings, ideologies, and discourses embedded in the materials and to understand how they shape students' perceptions and attitudes toward gender.

By employing the qualitative content analysis technique, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the images, narratives, and representations of women in English school textbooks in Saudi Arabia's public schools. It allows for a detailed examination of the ways in which gender stereotypes are perpetuated or challenged in these materials, shedding light on their potential impact on students' perceptions and attitudes. The use of this methodological approach ensures a rigorous and systematic analysis of the data, contributing to a deeper understanding of the image of Saudi women in the examined textbooks.

3.2 Research Design and Rationale for Choosing Qualitative Content Analysis

The research design for this study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach. The systematic and interpretive nature of the qualitative content analysis will make it possible to thoroughly explore the images and narratives representing the image of Saudi women in the selected English school textbooks. The rationale for choosing qualitative content analysis is its suitability for examining the rich and nuanced qualitative data present in the textbooks, providing insights into how the image of Saudi women is portrayed and represented.

3.3 Selection of Textbooks from the McGraw Hill Publications Series for Analysis

The study focused on analyzing Super Goal 5 and 6 student and activity textbooks from the McGraw-Hill publications series that are used in Saudi public middle schools. By selecting a specific textbook from a renowned series, the research aimed to investigate how the image of Saudi women is depicted and represented in those textbooks.

3.4 Data Collection Process: Obtaining the Relevant Textbooks

The data collection process involved obtaining Super Goal 5 and 6 student and activity textbooks from the McGraw-Hill publications series which are publicly available on Madrasati platform. Access to these textbooks enabled the researcher to conduct a thorough examination of its content, including images and narratives that are related to Saudi women.

3.5 Data Analysis Process: Categorizing Images and Narratives

The data analysis process entailed a systematic categorization of the images and narratives present in Super Goal 5 and 6 student and activity textbooks. The researcher developed a coding framework or a set of predetermined categories to analyze and interpret the representations of Saudi women. This process involved carefully examining the content, and identifying recurring themes, stereotypes, and any underlying messages conveyed through the images and narratives. The analysis was conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner to ensure comprehensive coverage of the data. Throughout the analysis and discussion, the books were referred to as follows:

Super Goal 5 Student Book (book 1).

Super Goal 5 Activity Book (book 2).

Super Goal 6 Student Book (book 3).

Super Goal 6 Activity Book (book 4).

By employing a qualitative content analysis methodology, selecting relevant textbooks, conducting thorough data collection and analysis, and ensuring reliability and validity, this study aimed to provide valuable insights into the image of Saudi women as represented in the English school textbooks from the McGraw Hill publications series.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Images and Narratives Representing Saudi Women in the Selected Textbooks

The analysis focused on providing a comprehensive description and examination of the images and narratives- related to women – present in the Super Goal 5 and 6 textbooks from the McGraw-Hill publications series. The researcher carefully reviewed the visual depictions, such as illustrations, photographs, and diagrams, as well as the accompanying narratives or text passages that feature Saudi women. This involved analyzing the characters' appearances, roles, activities, and interactions depicted in the textbook. The researcher paid attention to the context in which the images and narratives appear, including the subjects' representation in different settings, professions, and social roles.

4.1.1 Description of Visual Elements

The description of visual elements representing Saudi women in the textbooks revealed a consistent portrayal of women in national Saudi dressing, specifically the black garment or Abaya. The consistent depiction of Saudi women in national attire, specifically the black garment or Abaya, in the textbooks' visual elements reflects the cultural identity and traditional dress of Saudi women. By showcasing women in this attire, the textbooks aim to represent and promote the cultural values and norms of Saudi society.

It is notable that the depicted women are all portrayed as young and have happy and satisfying facial expressions. The emphasis on young women with happy and satisfying facial expressions may intend to project a positive image of Saudi women, portraying them as content and fulfilled individuals within their roles.

Furthermore, the settings in which these women are depicted include houses with families, supermarkets, or malls. The inclusion of such settings suggests focus on daily life activities and roles typically

associated with women, such as caregiving and shopping. These settings reinforce traditional gender roles and highlight women's involvement in domestic and consumer-related activities.

This portrayal, while emphasizing cultural attire and domestic environments, may perpetuate traditional gender roles and societal expectations regarding women's responsibilities within the household and as consumers. While it is important to recognize and respect cultural practices and traditions, it is equally crucial to ensure a balanced representation that goes beyond stereotypes and encompasses the diverse roles and contributions of Saudi women in various domains, including education, business, sciences, and leadership positions (see appendix 1).

4.1.2 Examination of Roles and Activities:

The images representing Saudi women in the relevant books are categorized into two main types:

- Type 1: involves images of women in traditional roles; namely, caregivers and mothers.
 - Book 1, in pages (5, 15, 39, 73).
 - Book 2, p. (92, 97, 112,).
 - Book 3, p. (5, 8, 25, 41, 69).
 - Book 4, p. (111).

The consistent portrayal of women in domestic roles as mothers and caregivers in educational materials can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and limit perceptions of women's roles in society. By primarily associating women with caregiving responsibilities, this image restricts young girls' aspirations and reinforces societal expectations that burden women with household duties. Challenging and diversifying these representations is crucial to promoting gender equality and expanding the range of roles attributed to women. By showcasing women in leadership, professional, and intellectual roles, educational materials can help reshape societal attitudes and perceptions, emphasizing women's capabilities and potential beyond the domestic sphere (see Appendix 1).

- Type 2: involves images of women while shopping:
 - Book 1, p. (2, 39)
 - Book 2. p. (90, 120)
 - Book 3, p. (3, 41, 48)
 - Book 4, p. (111)

Portraying women in various images engaged in shopping activities can perpetuate gender stereotypes and reinforce societal expectations regarding women's roles as consumers. These images often depict women as focused on fashion, cosmetics, and shopping for household items which reinforces the notion that women's primary value lies in their appearance and consumer choices. Such representations can undermine efforts toward gender equality by limiting the perception of women's capabilities and contributions to society. It is important to challenge these stereotypes and present women in a broader range of roles and activities that showcase their diverse skills, achievements, and contributions to various domains beyond consumerism (see Appendix 1).

Note: all the women's visual representation in the four textbooks emphasize the previously mentioned roles except two images only found in book (3) on page 37 which include a Saudi woman in traditional attire holding books as a student in college. The other image is found on page 56 in a cartoon form portraying a Saudi girl studying.

4.1.3 Narratives on Women:

The narratives that involve women's presence in the selected textbooks are categorized in two forms: indirect speech; talking about other female characters, or through direct conversation between female characters. Direct and indirect narrative involvement of women mainly focuses on traditional domestic roles, such as caregiving, cooking, and shopping.

The narrative involvement of females in the books is as follows:

- Book 1, p. (2, 3, 5, 39, 41, 42, 43, 46)
- Book 2, p. (92, 97, 112, 117, 120, 129)
- Book 3, p. (2, 48, 56)
- Book 4, p. (109, 112)

For example, in book 1, (p. 3) the female character Noura is characterized as being a shopping lover in this context: "Noura loves shopping, when she walks into a department store or a mall, she always buys something. She spends a lot of money, but she says shopping makes her happy". In addition, in (p. 5) the lesson discusses daily lifestyle, the narrative compares three female characters Maha, Noura, and Badria by asking questions about their lifestyle. The questions only and exclusively are related to household chores and wellbeing attitudes (see Appendix 2)

Primarily, most of the previously mentioned narratives are made about women cooking refer to (p.5, 11, 39, 41, 42). The context is either expressing love of cooking, asking about it, or talking about a mother teaching her daughter how to cook. By consistently depicting women in the role of cooking and domestic tasks, textbooks may unintentionally reinforce traditional gender roles and contribute to the stereotype that these responsibilities are primarily the domain of women. This can have broader implications, as it may influence societal expectations and perceptions regarding the roles and capabilities of women. This limited portrayal of women primarily in domestic roles may overshadow the diverse talents, ambitions, and aspirations that women have beyond the kitchen. It is crucial to recognize and celebrate the multifaceted nature of women's lives, acknowledging their contributions to various fields and endeavors.

Note: in book 3, (p. 56), there is a cartooned image of a Saudi girl studying. The narrative accompanying the picture has a negative connotation about women, stating: "I won't risk failing again". This implies that there may be a lack of support or opportunities for women to take risks and pursue their ambitions. It also reflects the limited opportunities available to Saudi women in the educational and professional pursuits. This negative connotation highlights the influence of societal norms and expectations, which may restrict women's agency and confidence in pursuing their goals.

4.2 Discussion of Gender Stereotypes and Representations of Women in the Textbooks

The textbooks involved in the study employed visual elements, representation of roles and activities, and narratives in a way that perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces traditional notions of women. Through visual elements, such as images, women are consistently portrayed in domestic settings as caregivers and shoppers. These images often depict women engaged in domestic activities, which reinforces the stereotype that their primary role is within the household. The narrative analysis further reinforces this limited representation by associating women with caregiving tasks and emphasizing their involvement in cooking.

This dominant portrayal of women as caregivers and shoppers with a multi-mention of cooking carries a negative connotation in terms of their agency and empowerment. By consistently presenting women in these roles, the textbooks marginalize their potential for success and contribute to a narrow perception of their abilities and aspirations. For example, the negative connotation associated with the sentence "I won't risk failing again" implies fear of failure and implies

that women should adhere to traditional roles and avoid taking risks or pursuing ambitious goals.

To foster gender equality and empowerment, it is crucial to challenge these gender stereotypes and provide a more diverse and inclusive representation of women in textbooks. This can be achieved by showcasing women in a variety of roles and activities beyond caregiving and shopping, highlighting their achievements, leadership capabilities, and involvement in diverse fields. By presenting a more balanced and empowering narrative, the textbooks can contribute to shaping a society that values women's agency, aspirations, and success beyond traditional gender roles.

4.2.1 Comparison of Male and Female Gender Representation in the Textbooks

The gender representation in the textbooks underlies clear disparity between male and female characters in terms of quantity and diversity. The textbooks tend to have a higher percentage of male characters compared to female characters, which suggests an imbalance in representation. This underrepresentation of female characters limits the visibility and recognition of women's experiences and contributions.

Furthermore, there is a lack of character diversity, with male characters often dominating the textbooks. This limited portrayal of diverse female characters from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities further restricts the representation of women's experiences and perspectives.

In terms of roles and activities, the textbooks exhibit bias towards depicting men in more active and leadership roles. Male characters are often portrayed as professionals, leaders, and achievers, while women are confined to more passive and traditional roles such as shoppers and housewives. This perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces societal expectations that men are more capable of taking on active and influential positions.

Moreover, the narratives in the textbooks tend to focus on male characters' achievements, challenges, and experiences, giving them a more prominent role in driving the storyline. This imbalance in narrative representation further marginalizes female characters and their narratives, diminishing their agency and significance.

To address these gender disparities, it is crucial to strive for a more balanced and inclusive representation in the selected textbooks. This can be achieved by increasing the number of female characters

and ensuring diverse and authentic portrayals of women from different backgrounds. It is essential to depict women in a wide range of roles and activities, showcasing their capabilities and contributions across various domains; and highlight their achievements, skills, and capabilities across various domains, including science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), arts, sports, and more. It should also emphasize the importance of women's contributions to history, society, and culture. Additionally, the narratives should give equal weightage and importance to the experiences and achievements of female characters, empowering them and challenging traditional gender norms.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

In conclusion, this research delved into the depiction of Saudi women in McGraw Hill publications, particularly within the Super Goal 5 and 6 student and activity book series, and sought to understand the alignment of these depictions with the evolving roles and contributions of Saudi women in the broader societal context. Additionally, the potential consequences of these depictions on students' perceptions, attitudes, and comprehension of gender roles within the educational setting were explored.

The examination of these textbooks revealed a clear pattern of portraying women in predominantly domestic roles, perpetuating stereotypes that associate women with caregiving, shopping, and engaging in household activities. The visuals accompanying these narratives consistently depicted women in traditional settings, emphasizing their roles within the confines of the household, supermarkets, or malls, and showcasing them wearing the traditional attire. The image of women as depicted in limited roles and settings may inadvertently reinforce and perpetuate gender stereotypes, constraining the agency and empowerment of women. By repeatedly presenting women in domestic contexts, these textbooks may inadvertently send a message that their primary worth lies in fulfilling traditional gender roles, potentially limiting their opportunities for advancement and participation in various domains of society.

The analysis of the English school textbooks in the Super Goal 5 and 6 series revealed a complex and evolving portrayal of Saudi women. While there were instances of progress in depicting Saudi women in more diverse and empowered roles, there was still room for improvement. Stereotypical representations persisted, and some depictions continued to reinforce traditional gender norms. The textbooks did seem to be making efforts to align with the changing



realities of Saudi society, acknowledging the evolving roles and contributions of Saudi women.

The potential consequences of these depictions for students were significant. Educational materials played a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles. Positive and empowering representations of Saudi women could inspire and empower students to challenge stereotypes and envision more inclusive roles for women in society. However, stereotypes and limited representations could reinforce traditional gender norms, potentially restricting students' understanding of the possibilities available to Saudi women.

In light of these findings, it is essential for educational publishers, such as McGraw Hill, to continuously update and improve the portrayal of Saudi women in their textbooks. They should strive for a more balanced and diverse representation that reflects the multifaceted roles and contributions of Saudi women in contemporary society. By doing so, they can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment that fosters a more comprehensive understanding of gender roles, ultimately promoting social progress and gender equality in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, educators and policymakers should remain vigilant in selecting and utilizing educational materials that promote positive and accurate portrayals of women to support students in challenging stereotypes and promoting gender equity.

This research underscored the importance of critically examining educational content, as it has the potential to shape the minds of the next generation and influence the trajectory of societal change. It also emphasized the need for continued research and discussion on the role of educational materials in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles, as well as the broader implications for societal progress and gender equality.

It is crucial to recognize that such representations can have a profound impact on students' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations. By consistently depicting women in limited roles, students may internalize and normalize these gender stereotypes, leading to the formation of rigid gender norms and expectations. This can potentially hinder the aspirations and potential of both male and female students, shaping their beliefs about gender roles and contributing to gender inequalities in various spheres of life.

Therefore, it is imperative to critically examine and challenge these gender representations in textbooks to ensure that they accurately

reflect the diverse experiences, contributions, and aspirations of Saudi women. Efforts should be made to present women in a broader range of roles and activities, showcasing their achievements, leadership capabilities, and involvement in various domains beyond traditional gender roles. By promoting more diverse and empowering representations, educational materials can play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions, dismantling gender stereotypes, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

5.2 Addressing the Potential Impact of These Representations on Students' Attitudes and Behaviors

The potential impact of these representations of women's images on students' attitudes and behaviors is significant. The gender stereotypes repeatedly used in this context can influence students' perceptions, self-concept, career aspirations, and attitudes toward gender roles. The overemphasis on domestic roles and limited portrayal of women in active and leadership roles may contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities in society.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The analysis focused on a specific textbook, and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all textbooks used in Saudi Arabian schools. Additionally, the analysis relied on qualitative content analysis, which may be subjective to some extent. Future research could consider a more comprehensive analysis of a wider range of textbooks to gain a deeper understanding of gender representations in educational materials.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Improvements in Textbook Content and Representation of Saudi Women

Based on the findings, it is recommended that textbook content be improved to provide a more balanced and inclusive representation of the image of Saudi women. This could involve the inclusion of diverse roles and activities for women beyond traditional caregiving and shopping, highlighting their achievements in various fields, and showcasing women in leadership positions. And showcase the achievements of contemporary Saudi women in different domains. This could include business, technology, sports, and other areas where Saudi women have excelled.

Collaborative efforts between educational policymakers, publishers, and educators are essential to ensure the development and use of textbooks that promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes. Textbooks and reading materials authored by Saudi



women should be included. This will bring diverse perspectives and authentic voices into the educational content. Illustrate the various roles that women play within families and communities. Showcase positive examples of women contributing to the well-being of their families and communities. Regularly update textbooks to reflect societal changes and the evolving role of women in Saudi Arabia. This ensures that educational materials stay relevant and accurate.

By addressing these recommendations and promoting a more equitable representation of Saudi women in textbooks, educational materials can play a vital role in shaping students' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, fostering a more inclusive and gender-equal society.

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Appendix 1:

1- Images of women in traditional roles.

Book (1):

p. 5



3. Emma / seldom / after dinner



4. Ahmed and his family / often / on the weekend

p. 15



P. 23



P. 25



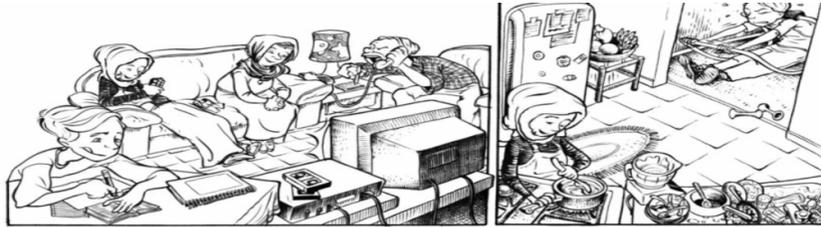
2. Ali and Maha / go / airport

P. 73



Book (2)

P. 92



P. 97



Book (3)

P. 5



P. 8



P. 41



P. 69



Book (4)
P. 111



**2- Images of women as shoppers:
Book (1)
p. 3**



p. 39



Book (2)
p. 90



Book (3)
P. 2



P. 48



Appendix 2:
Narratives on women:

Book (1):
p. 2

Refaa is a health food fanatic. She normally eats vegetarian meals. She hardly ever eats meat. She never drinks coffee, but she loves herbal tea. Sometimes she drinks six cups a day.

p. 3

Noura loves shopping. When she walks into a department store or a mall, she always buys something. She spends a lot of money. But she says shopping makes her happy.

Tell me, Noura, how much time do you spend shopping?

A lot of time. I shop every weekend. **p. 5**

Lifestyle Survey	Noura	Maha	Badria
Are you a vegetarian?	no	no	no
Do you often eat junk food?	no	no	yes
Can you cook?	yes	yes	yes
Do you work out regularly?	yes	yes	no
Do you drink a lot of coffee?	no	no	no

p. 11



P. 39



P. 41

C. Complete the conversation with **any**, **a little**, **a few**, **dozen**, **package**, **enough**, **many**, and **much**. Then practice with a partner.

Noura: Do you need help?

Mona: Yes. I'm going to make a cake. Please check the refrigerator.
Are there (1) _____ eggs?

Noura: Yes, there are.

Mona: How (2) _____?

Noura: There are only (3) _____ left.

Mona: How (4) _____ butter is there?

Noura: There's only (5) _____ left. There isn't (6) _____ for a cake.

Mona: Can you please go to the store and get a (7) _____ of butter, and a (8) _____ eggs?

P. 42

5 Listening 

Listen to the conversation between Asma and Mrs. Hassan. Write down the things that Asma has in her shopping cart in the supermarket.

In Asma's Shopping Cart

P. 43

Father: Mmm! Smells good.
Mother: Well, I have a real international menu today. I hope you guys like it. First, I have a Mexican dip—tortilla chips and guacamole. Then for the appetizer I have a shrimp cocktail, New Orleans style. After that, we'll have Moroccan style chicken tagine and couscous, with Brazilian passion fruit mousse for dessert. And finally, Colombian coffee.
Father: Sounds great. I can't wait.
Daughter: Do you need any help?
Mother: No, thanks. Everything's under control. Let's sit down and have some guacamole.
* * *
Father: The guacamole was great!
Daughter: How do you make it?
Mother: It's easy. You just follow the recipe.
Father: This chicken is absolutely delicious, too!
Mother: Would you like some more?
Father: No, thank you. I've had more than enough.
Daughter: You should start your own restaurant. You're an excellent cook.
Father: Yeah. I totally agree, but let's keep Mom's cooking for us.
Daughter: I have to learn how to cook.
Mother: I can teach you. It's lots of fun, and it's relaxing.
Father: And it's much cheaper and healthier than eating out.

P. 43

*Dad,
I'm going to make turkey schnitzel for dinner. Can you please pick up the following things when you go to the supermarket?
—some grated Parmesan cheese
—a package of bread crumbs
—4 slices of turkey meat for schnitzel
I think we have everything else. Wait... buy a few eggs and potatoes since there aren't many left.
Thanks a lot. See you tonight.
Maha*



Book (2)

P. 92

Steve does (do) his homework every day.
He always does his homework.

1. Mr. Lewis _____ (talk) to his boss on the phone in the evening five times a week.
2. Mrs. Lewis _____ (watch) TV about once a week.
3. Sarah _____ (eat) chocolate morning, noon, and night.
4. Sarah _____ (make) dinner once a month.
5. Steve _____ (work out) four times a week.
6. Steve _____ (not do) the dishes. It's not his job.

P. 112

Complete the story. Use **a few, a little**, and **a lot of**.

Badria started a new diet called the Fat Flush Program. This is what she told me about it:

"At first, I didn't understand the diet because there were (1) _____ rules—about three pages of them! For example, you have to take 1 tablespoon of oil twice a day. That's not (2) _____ oil, but it helps you lose weight for some reason. You need to drink (3) _____ lemon juice (about a tablespoon) in water twice a day.

Badria takes a lot of oil each day.

She doesn't take much oil each day.

1. Badria drinks a lot of lemon juice in water.
2. Badria can eat a few vegetables on the diet.
3. She can use a lot of spices.

P. 117

My aunt was at my house yesterday. She and my mom made cookies. I noticed that my mom never uses the (1) _____ to make the cookies. My mom says that some things bake better the old-fashioned way, in a

(2) _____ oven. That's why a lot of (3) _____ kitchens today have both types of oven.



P. 120

T chicken / be / in the microwave / three o'clock // 15 minutes

Q: *How long has the chicken been in the microwave?*

A: *The chicken has been in the microwave since three o'clock.*

A: *The chicken has been in the microwave for 15 minutes.*



P. 129

B Complete the conversation. Use **something**, **anything**, and **nothing**.

Hanan: I'm going to the supermarket. Can I get you (1) _____?

Maha: No, thank you. I don't want (2) _____. I went shopping yesterday.

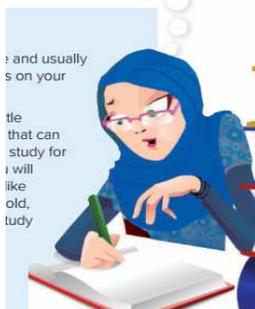
Hanan: I went to the supermarket yesterday, too! But I have (3) _____ for dinner this evening.

Maha: Oh, no! I don't have (4) _____ for dinner either! Can you pick (5) _____ up for me?

Book (3)

P. 56

I won't risk failing again!



Book (4)

P. 97



Appendix (3)
Examples of male presence:
Book (1)
p. 2



p. 5



P. 25



1. Sam / go / Paris

Appendix (4)
Narrative on men:
Book (1)
p. 2

Arthur is really into fitness. He works out at the gym regularly. He runs frequently, and he plays tennis twice a week. From time to time, Arthur goes rock climbing.