

Female and male Character Representation in English Textbooks of Cambodian Secondary Schools: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

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Abstract

Gender representation in the textbook becomes a noticeable topic for many scholars and researchers since it is believed that the representation of female and male influence the learners in many ways. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out how female and male characters are represented in listening dialogues from English textbooks in Cambodian secondary schools. The quantitative approach was used in this research study. Moreover, the researcher used descriptive statistical analysis as a tool to investigate the frequencies of women and men characters. The representations appeared in 11 randomly selected conversations in each chapter of the English textbook namely *English for Cambodia Grade 7*. This method is analyzed based on an adopted model developed by Tahriri & Moradpour (2014) which focuses on three dimensions of gender relation, subject position, and content categories. After analysis, the findings demonstrated that most of the conversations are male-female relations. Three subject positions are shown. Meanwhile, the gender characters countered in all dialogues showed slightly different between women and men. Regarding the content categories, six different categories are found. This study confirms gender bias in textbook that female characters are perceived and presented as being less than their male counterparts.

Keywords: *Gender Representation, English Textbook, Cambodian, Gender Analysis, Female and male Characters*

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality and stereotype are popular topics to discuss among researchers worldwide. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2019), in Cambodia, 24% of women are illiterate, compared to 16% of men in the same age range. Girls have fewer educational chances than males; primary schooling serves both sexes equally, but the number of girls declines in higher education. Only 40% of women have completed secondary school. Therefore, 45% of Cambodian women believe that educating a son is more essential than educating a daughter. Another study from Cambodia stated that the perceptions of women in society among Cambodians were influenced by the culture, standards, traditions, and values of their country (Dim et al., 2018). When it came to duties spanning from lower level to higher level chores in everyday life, women were seen as "weak, submissive counterparts to men." Consequently, Gender equality is still struggling in the education system in Cambodia based on this perception.

In education, gender inequality has mainly been seen and recognized (Blickenstaff, 2005; Blumberg, 2008; Islam & M. Niaz, 2018; Kobia, 2009;

Mahmood, 2011) (European Commission, 2016; Francisco, 2007). Furthermore, school textbooks, as key mass media and gender socialization agents, play a vital role in shaping students' worldviews of the female and male genders in society (Kobia, 2009). Additionally, (Kobia, 2009), stated that the textbook is a key component of the educational discourse, and it can affect social power and gender stereotypes. Furthermore, textbooks serve a critical role in EFL education because it is via textbooks that learners become acquainted with the values and culture of the target language (Sulaimani, 2017).

In addition, the contents in the textbooks significantly influence the learners. Responding to all of these matters, numerous research studies have discussed gender representation in educational material. Plenty of studies illustrate gender representation in the EFL textbooks' contents (Aguilar, 2021; Ahsanuddin et al., 2022; Azad, 2020; Kobia, 2009; Li et al., 2017; Sulaimani, 2017). Most of these research papers discovered the equality of females and males in terms of textbooks' figures and the roles of gender. While there are some of them try to analyze deep into the content in the EFL textbook. There is plenty more research study on this topic.

Limitation of this research paper is the researcher focus only one textbook. Moreover, the author chose only one conversation from each chapter of the material to analyze in the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender norms are biased and often incorrect portrayals of the distinct social identities and roles of female and male and they may contribute to the expansion of the gender gap (Li et al., 2017). Meanwhile, students' textbook is the sources that mostly influence the learners' mindset. Many studies had showed the gender role represented in the textbook.

Azad (2020), claimed that photos are an important aspect of ELT textbooks, and how they represent their writers' views. In this study, the researcher aims to analyze the role of female and male in the photos of the Iranian high school ELT textbook which is called *Prospects 1,2,3*. Chi-square analysis, co learners' concisenessntent analysis, and social semi-logical analysis are used to analyze the illustration in this study. The finding showed that the male photos have higher ratio in comparison to female pictures. Moreover, Azad (2020) argued that the female representations were offered only to entice female readers. Regarding the gaze direction, the photos of the female always look away from the viewer, while the photos of the male often look to the viewer. Talking about the distance, a close-up frame is often seen as male, and females are the opposite. However, fully clothed were found in the textbook with both women and men. In conclusion, this research found that the authors of the *Prospect Series* textbook showed that both women and men are treated equally in terms of the image in the textbook. Additionally, Khalid & Ghania (2019) also conducted a study about gender representation. The study focuses on how to investigate the position of the female and male roles in three Algerian secondary school English textbooks. The researcher used visual discourse in this study. The results of the study showed that photos of adult females were seen across the three English textbooks. The researcher added that there should discuss the problem of gender equality in the educational material to make the learner

conscious on the gender inequality problem and misunderstanding.

Another study from China stated that textbooks serve a vital role in education, and they have a significant influence on students' cultural values, customs, and attitudes regarding social roles and identities (Li et al., 2017). The researcher's goal was to discover the gender inequality between females and males in the English textbook which was the educational material of schools in Guangzhou. This city is located in South China which more than ten million people living there. The study showed that the male character in the textbook is generally seen more than the female character. Comparing the famous personalities and proportions of both genders, illustrated that famous females appeared little more than famous males. Moreover, the result showed that famous females are from the success of education, while famous males generally came from the success of various careers. In the conclusion of the study, the researcher also added that the textbook's authors should clarify the problem of gender roles in the educational material, especially in the textbook.

Kobia (2009) also claimed that gender sensitivity is one of the growing challenges that has sparked heated arguments in a variety of settings, including the academic system in particular and textbook publications in Kenya. The study aims to investigate the English textbook called *Let's learn English Series (LLE)* in terms of the role of women and men according to the textbook's visuals. Both quantitative and qualitative are involved in this article. The researcher chose particular factors such as jobs, attitude, and the use of language to cover the role of both genders. The finding appeared that there is gender bias in this LLE textbook. In terms of textbook production, most of the responsibilities such as editor, author, and other production team appeared to be a man than woman. Furthermore, looking through the illustration in the LLE series, male characters are seen more than the opposite gender. There is also a gender stereotype made due to men being mostly in productive activities than women. Moreover, the study shows that the attitude of the female is negatively compared to the male attitude. The finding illustrates that the power of males is bigger than that of females. Males are mostly the leaders and the female is the one who supports them. Meanwhile the same as other criteria, men were found to have more valuable property than women.

Similar to Sulaimani (2017), the author studied the role of women and men in the EFL textbook of *English Unlimited Special Edition/ level 1*. This textbook is used at a Saudi university located in Saudi Arabia. The goal of this research is to find out the gender frequencies in the textbook dialog divided into three dimensions: content, subject location, and the relations of the female and male. To analyze this study, the researcher used quantitative data. The CDA was used as a model to analyze. The result of the study had shown that textbooks treated females and males unequally. The role of the female was slightly represented in the textbook. Nearly half of the unit had been done without the role of the female in the textbook. Moreover, the relationship of both genders cannot be more friendly. However, according to the subjects and contents, women and men were both in the same position, while females are described less commonly than males.

In Summary, most of the previous studies about gender representation in EFL textbooks showed that there is still inequality between females and males. Moreover, these researchers gave the value of textbooks as one of the most

influential materials to learners. However, the authors should use this educational material to be a place where learners are treated equally. So far, the representation of women and men in the EFL textbook has been studied by researchers from worldwide and has been a vital issue that people need to take more attention to as well as in Cambodia.

Conducting on how the role genders represent in the EFL textbook is an important key to involving learners' consciousness about the problem of gender in society. Not only students but teachers are taking benefits from this study. Most of these research papers discovered the equality of females and males in terms of textbooks' figures and the roles of gender. While there are some of them try to analyze deep into the content in EFL textbooks. By the way, there is still a gap between all of the studies above. The studies about how they invented the character of females and males in educational materials are not popular among researchers. Nonetheless, this paper will discover the character of females and males in the EFL English textbooks in Cambodia through the text. According to this gap in the research study, discovering the textbook context to analyze the role of women and men should be studied because it could help learners recognize how the education system is differently treated between female and male. Moreover, the result could provide information to the researcher in the future to solve the problems that have been found in the study. Furthermore, it could help develop the education system in the future. Thus, this paper aims to answer two main questions:

1. How are female and male characters presented in listening dialogues of the course books selected?
2. What are the differences between female and male roles portrayed in the textbook's listening conversations?

METHOD

Materials

This study will analyze the official public course book of the *Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS)* used in Cambodia's education system. This ELT course book, namely, *English Grade 7 (Students' book)* is the English textbook that is being used by all the secondary school classes in Cambodia. There are three grades in secondary school, so there are three levels of ELT course book provided according to each grade. For this study, the researcher focuses only on one grade which is grade 7 textbooks. Additionally, this course book has been produced through funding from the *Nippon Foundation*. To create this textbook, it is the result of the work of the *Australian Center for Education* (as the writing team), MoEYS (as the adviser), the *Education Support Center "KIZUNA"* (as the organizer), and Professor *Stephen Bax of CRELLA, UK* (as the leader of the project). This course book aims to be attractive and motivating for the young students.

Sample Model of Analysis

For this study, the dialogues of listening comprehension in *English textbook grade 7* were analyzed based on an adopted model developed by Tahriri & Moradpour (2014). This model was the result of adopting and designing which is based on the principle of CDA and the model of Fairclough (2001). According to

this model, three dimensions consisted such as the dimension of gender relations, subject positions, and contents.

Procedure

To illustrate the female and male representation in the textbook's dialog, there is a procedure as follows:

1. Dimension of male/female relations:

The course book was interpreted section by section, while relations were counted whenever two or more characters engaged in a dialogue. The sort of relationship between the speakers, such as teacher-student or friend-friend, was used to code the discussions. The frequency of both gender dialogues was counted individually, and then these dialogues were counted collectively throughout the textbooks. The identified male/female relations were then categorized as equal, unequal, or unclear. The goal of this categorization was to detect unequal situations in these relationships and, ultimately, to determine which gender occupied the superior position. However, duplicates were also recorded in the relations. That is, if one individual was subject to two or more relationships in the same role, every one of these relations were included.

Example a: male-male conversation (Dara and Avornng are the male names according to Cambodian context)

“Dara: Hi! I'm Dara. I'm better than Avornng! I can play football well. I can ride a bike! I can swim!

Avornng: Oh, Dara. I'm better than you! I can climb trees really fast. I can speak English well. I'm really good at English.

Dara: Oh yeah. But can you feed the dog?

Avornng:”

Example b: female-female conversation (in Cambodian context Bopha and Linda are female's name)

“Bopha: Can you see him?

Linda: Yes! Can you guess who he is?

Bopha: Has he got a red bag?

Linda: No! He's got a blue bag!

Bopha: Has he got a big nose?

Linda: No, he hasn't

Bopha:”

Example c: male-female conversation (for Cambodian context Bopha is a girl's name, and Dara is a boy's name)

“Bopha: How often do you go on Facebook after school?

Dara: I never go on Facebook after school!

Bopha: How often do you go to the pagoda after school?

Dara: I usually go to the pagoda after school.

Bopha:”

2. Dimension of subject positions:

Every time speakers in a dialogue spoke to each other, an incidence of a subject position was collected. Each gender's topic positions were classified into four categories: friends, social, job-related, and other subject positions.

Example a: sample conversation that shows the subject's position about "Family"

"Dara's Mum: Dara! Dara! Dara! Oh my goodness! Where is that boy?

Dara! Why are you in bed?

Dara: I am not going to school!

Dara's Mum: Yes, you are!

Dara: No, I'm not.

Dara's Mum:"

Example b: sample conversation that shows the subject position about "Friend"

"Bopha: Sreymao, are you a good student?

Sreymao: ummm...

Bopha: Can I ask you some questions?

Sreymao: OK"

3. Dimension of contents:

Each dialogue in the textbook had its topic coded. The information gathered from all dialogues was then divided into six categories covering a wide range of topics. Then, topic categories were chosen to investigate gender equality in these talks. Thus, the frequency of both genders was collected for each content category. Finally, the total number of occurrences in the textbook was shown.

Example: Content of conversation (Asking about habits):

Conversation 3: *"Bopha: How often do you go on Facebook after school?*

Dara: I never go on Facebook after school!"

Conversation 9: *".....Linda: You have to get up for school in England too, Tom.*

Tom: Yes, but in England, I don't have to get up until 8 o'clock. 8 o'clock is much better than 6 o'clock."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research study aimed to conduct the data from the English Grade 7 textbook to discover the unequal gender relations in the conversations. Statistical description was used to analyze the data found.

According to figure 1 below, the data illustrates the frequency of relations in the conversations in the textbook. There are 11 conversations from each chapter of the textbook are randomly selected to study in this research. The data is divided into three relations which are male and male conversations, female and male conversations, and conversations between females and males. The finding showed that most of the conversations (8 out of 11 dialogs) happened between females and

males. However, there were slightly different between the dialogs of female-female and male-male relations which 2 out of 11 conversations are the relations between female and female, and 1 out of 11 conversations are the relations between male and male.

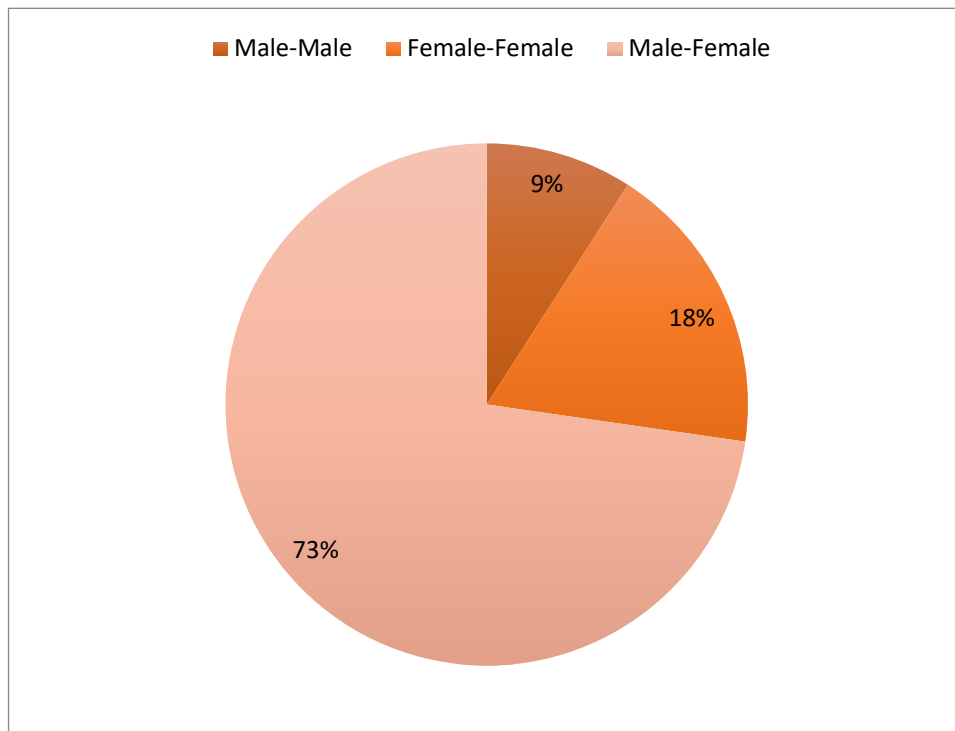


Figure 1: Frequency of Gender Relation in Conversations

Example 1: male-male conversation (Dara and Avorng are the male names according to Cambodian context)

Dara: Hi! I'm Dara. I'm better than Avorng! I can play football well. I can ride a bike! I can swim!

Avorng: Oh, Dara. I'm better than you! I can climb trees really fast. I can speak English well. I'm really good at English.

Dara: Oh yeah. But can you feed the dog?

Avorng:"

Example 2: female-female conversation (in Cambodian context Bopha and Linda are female's name)

Bopha: Can you see him?

Linda: Yes! Can you guess who he is?

Bopha: Has he got a red bag?

Linda: No! He's got a blue bag!

Bopha: Has he got a big nose?

Linda: No, he hasn't

Bopha:"

Example 3: male-female conversation (for Cambodian context Bopha is a girl's name, and Dara is a boy's name)

*“Bopha: How often do you go on Facebook after school?
Dara: I never go on Facebook after school!
Bopha: How often do you go to the pagoda after school?
Dara: I usually go to the pagoda after school.
Bopha:”*

The data from table 1 below displays the number of equal and unequal relations between females and males in conversations. In female and male conversations, the number of case happens 8 times which is 73% of the total dialogs. Out of 11 conversations, 8 conversations showed equal relations between females and males, while only 3 conversations indicated unequal relations between both genders.

As shown in table 1 and table 2 below, the data illustrates that most of the conversations of equal relations between two genders are all dialogs between friend and friend such as a conversation of friends talking about their habits or doing a short introduction. However, in the unequal relations, most of the conversations were about the daily duties of mother and son or grandmother and grandson. Look at Examples 4 and 5 below:

Example 4: sample of equal relations between female and male in conversation

*“Linda: Sophal! I don’t know anyone! Who are all these people?
Sophal: Don’t worry Linda. I can introduce you. That’s my uncle. He’s standing on the stage playing the guitar. He always plays his guitar at weddings.
Linda: Yes, I can see him. Who is that?
Sophal:”*

Example 5: sample of unequal relations between female and male in conversation

*“Sophal: Hi grandma, can we ask you questions about when you were child?
Grandma: Oh...I don’t remember very well now, but I’ll try. Who get the first question?
Bopha: Me! Me! Grandma, did you play games when you were a child?
[.....]
Dara: Did you help your mum and dad at home a lot?
Grandma: Yes.....”*

Table 1: Number of equal and unequal relations between Female and males in Conversations

No. Conversations	Equal Relations	Unequal Relations
Conversation 1	Friend-Friend	
Conversation 3	Friend-Friend	
Conversation 5		Mum-Son
Conversation 7	Friend-Friend	
Conversation 8		Mum-Son

Conversation 9	Friend-Friend	
Conversation 10		Grandma-Grandchildren
Conversation 11	Friend-Friend	
Total: 8	5	3

Table 2: Number of Unequal Relations in Conversations

Number of Unequal Relations in Conversations	
<i>Mum-Son</i>	2 Conversations
<i>Grandma-Grandchildren</i>	1 Conversation

Table 3 below shows the gender subject position in English for the Cambodian Grade 7 textbook. After doing analysis indicated that 25 characters are found in the selected conversations. Therefore, three main subject positions are found in the conversation: (1) family, (2) friends, and (3) social. In “family”, the total characters were 7 including 4 males and 3 females. Moreover, “Friend” showed that there were 9 female characters which were more than male characters (7 characters). The last subject position, “Social” showed an equal number of characters (1 male and 1 female). Look at the example below:

Example 6: sample conversation that shows the subject's position about “Family”

“Dara’s Mum: Dara! Dara! Dara! Oh my goodness! Where is that boy? Dara! Why are you in bed?”

Dara: I am not going to school!

Dara’s Mum: Yes, you are!

Dara: No, I’m not.

Dara’s Mum:”

Example 7: sample conversation that shows the subject position about “Friend”

“Bopha: Sreymao, are you a good student?”

Sreymao: ummm...

Bopha: Can I ask you some questions?”

Sreymao: OK”

Table 3: Gender Subject Position in English for Cambodian Grade 7 Textbook

Gender Subject Position in English for Cambodian Grade 7 Textbook		
Subject Position	Male	Female
Family	4	3
Friends	7	9
Social	1	1
Total Characters: 25	12	13

On the other hand, content categories in English for Cambodian Grade 7 Textbook are shown in figure 2 below. Six different content categories are found in the analyzation regarding: (1) talking about the habits, (2) general family talks, (3) talking about the past, (4) Short introduction, (5) asking about location, and (6) sharing about abilities. As shown in the bar chart below, two out of six categories are shown unequal according to the number of characters which in “talking about the habits” (male = 2, female = 4) and in “general family talks” (male = 3, female = 2). Meanwhile, The other four content categories share equal numbers of female and male characters. In summary, the total of the characters of all content categories is shown very slightly different (male = 12, female = 13).

Example 8: Asking about habits:

Conversation 3: “*Bopha: How often do you go on Facebook after school?
Dara: I never go on Facebook after school!*”

Conversation 9: “*.....Linda: You have to get up for school in England
too, Tom.*

*Tom: Yes, but in England, I don't have to get up until 8 o'clock. 8
o'clock is much better than 6 o'clock.*”

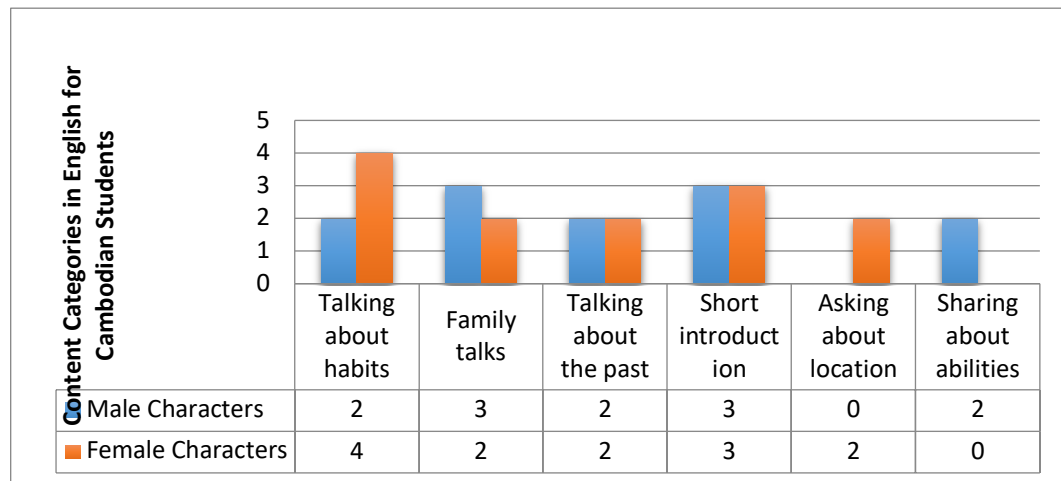


Figure 2: Content Categories in English for Cambodian Grade 7 Textbook

As can be seen in Figure 2, the main topic in their conversations is talking about habits, family, the past, and short introduction. While only female characters talk about location and only males talk about sharing abilities.

DISCUSSION

This study discovered gender representation in *English for Cambodia Grade 7 Textbook* used in state high schools in Cambodia. The quantitative approach was used in this research study. Moreover, the researcher used descriptive statistical analysis as a tool in this approach to investigate the frequencies of females and males.

The examination of the selected conversations in the textbook namely

English for Cambodia Grade 7 described females and males in equal ways as shown in the finding (figure 1). The frequency of both genders in the selected conversations was nearly equal just slightly different. However, different from the results in Worku (2019), the results revealed that men and boys were presented unequally and fairly over girls and women in terms of visibility, activities, and power relations. Differently, this research showed a positive way of gender representing in terms of relations between both genders which women and men represented in a small number of differences as shown in figure 1.

Otherwise, the dialogues between females and males were analyzed to find out the gender bias in the conversation. The findings (figure 1 and table 1) indicated that most of the selected dialogues were female and male conversations. This implies that the authors of the book gave importance to the relationship between both genders. Differently, one previous study about the same topic shared different findings. According to Sulaimani (2017), Half of the conversations in the textbook were male and male, while women and men's conversations are nearly unrepresented. Similarly, another study about the gender representation of two textbooks namely Traveller 1 and 2 showed that the dialogues in each textbook represent male characters more than the female characters (Abiky, 2019). The study indicated that the relations between females and males rarely appeared, while only male and male relations has shown many times in the dialogues. Another research study about gender bias in multiple grades from three different countries' textbooks (İncikabı & Ulusoy, 2019) illustrated that many percentages distribution of gender inclusion in textbooks were male, while mixed gender were little percentages. However, the female percentage distribution of gender inclusion in textbooks was small compared to the male in each category.

In contrast, different from the findings of those previous studies, mixed-gender conversations were the most dialogues in this research findings. The aim of the analysis of the relationship between women and men was to find out equal and unequal relations. However, the finding mostly indicated that most of the conversations between females and males were equal. The conversation is the dialogues between two friends. Aside, Sulaimani (2017) demonstrated that out of 25 conversations selected, only 8 conversations were equally related between women and men.

Regarding subject positions, friend position is the most frequent among both women and men. Nevertheless, the total characters in the conversations selected were 25, while 13 were women and 12 were men which were a tiny different. According to Sulaimani (2017), most of the subject's position was societal. The study showed that the occurrences of men characters were more than those of women. Similarly, an analysis study of the representations in Turkish middle school science textbooks illustrated that males were found more than females in terms of gender representations (Akçay et al., 2020).

Gender is one of the most visible social identities that shape how individuals are regarded by others as well as how they perceive themselves (Haghanikar et al., 2022). This implied that gender representations in books influence a lot to the children and this is why content categories in the textbook should be analyzed. As content categories in *English for Cambodian Grade 7 Textbook*, the results revealed that none of the contents were negative. The equality of the number of female and

male in each category were shown as little different (see figure 2). Mostly, the occurrences of women and men in each content category were identical.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer two research questions: (1) how are female and male characters mentioned in listening dialogues of the course books selected? and (2) what are the differences between female and male roles portrayed in the textbook's listening conversations?

According to the finding and discussion above, the characteristics of men were found to be less more women, but the gap between the differences is very identical. It is predicted that the reason the women characters were more than men is because of the stereotypes about women does not important as men so the authors of the textbook made the women character a little more than men character. The results were surprisingly different from the previous studies mentioned in the discussion. Nevertheless, the roles of both genders in the selected conversations from the textbook are mostly equal. Women's and Men's roles in the conversations appeared to be friend-friend relationships, while another role of both genders was related to the family such as mum and children, grandma and grandchildren, and so on.

This study only covered some parts of all conversations from the *English for Cambodia Grade 7 Textbook* due to the researcher's time limit in doing this study. Randomly selected conversations from every chapter in the textbook are used in this study which means that the results of the study will be not perfectly accurate. Meanwhile, the suggestions for future researchers on this topic were suggesting to analyze all of the conversations in the textbook to have a good and accurate finding. Moreover, the researchers also can do a study that analyzes both illustrations and texts in the textbook to find out various results.

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