

diverse are the activities in which these characters are engaged?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender and Sex

While sex pertains to the biological differences that distinguish males, females (Bulter, 1990), gender is a social or cultural construct that involves the ascription of certain traits to a particular sex (Litosseliti, 2006).

2.2. Gender Equality in Hong Kong and Japan

Gender equality has been advocated since the establishment of The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in 1996. It aims to create a pluralistic and inclusive society free of discrimination, with no barriers to equal opportunities, and gender equality is one of the major concerns (EOC, 2023). According to the report on gender equality in Hong Kong in 2021, there are more women than men in Hong Kong. The sex ratio (number of males per 1,000 females) declined from 971 in 2006 to 910 in 2021 (excluding foreign domestic workers). Regarding education, the proportion of females (aged 15 and above) who attained secondary education or higher was 79.4% in 2021, which was lower than the corresponding figure of 85.4% for males. Additionally, in the 2021/22 academic year, the enrolment of female students (52.0%) in higher education programs supported by the University Grants Committee surpassed that of male students (48%). Despite advancements in educational opportunities over recent decades, women still face disparities compared to men in terms of economic participation, employment earnings, political and public representation, as well as access to high-ranking executive and professional positions.

Widely known as a male-dominated society, gender inequality has been a long-established issue in Japan. It was ranked 120 out of 156 developed countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) Report issued by World Economic Forum (2021), which measures the gap between gender representation in political, economic and education sectors. It is evident that the Japanese government has made prominent effort in various aspects to promote a 'gender-equal' society and to improve the status of women in the last few decades (Lee, 2018). The establishment of Gender Equality Bureau (GEB) in 2001 aims to formulate plans and policies on the quest for gender equality. With the collaboration with other ministries, including Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, GEB has implemented numerous policies on fostering positive attitude towards mutual respect, cooperation and equality between men and women, as well as promoting women's active participation in economic activities (Gender Equality Bureau, n.d.). Despite the intensive enactment of relevant policies for gender equality and women empowerment, the Basic Policy on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (2023) reported that the proportion of females attaining top executive positions in Japan was 8.8% as of 2022 which was significantly lower than that of males holding top management positions. The gender imbalance

in upper management positions and unsatisfactory GGI ranking indicate that further efforts are needed to progress towards the realization of 'gender-equal' society in Japan.

2.3. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a quantitative method which involves the counting of frequencies of occurrence of certain selected features (Franzosi, 2008). These features include the frequency with which male and female characters appear (Hellinger, 1980; Gupta and Lee, 1990; Lee & Collins, 2009; Amini & Birjandi, 2012), their respective occupational and domestic roles (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Gupta & Lee, 1990; Sakita, 1995; Barton & Sakwa, 2012), and their distinguishing traits and characteristics (Sakita, 1995; Evans & Davies 2000; Kobia, 2009).

2.4. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on the content expressed through language (McEnery, Xiao, & Tono, 2006) and investigates gender representation through dialogues. The investigation will typically entail an analysis of various factors, including the total word count of male and female characters, the mean length of their respective utterances, and the number of turns they take in the dialogues (Jones, Kiteu, & Sunderland, 1997; Mukundan & Nimehchisale, 2008).

2.5. Previous Studies (Hong Kong and Japan)

The representation of gender roles in educational materials has been a topic of increasing interest in recent years. In this section, this paper will explore studies that examine how gender is presented in educational materials in Hong Kong and Japan respectively. To be specific, section 2.5.1 presents studies from Japan and Hong Kong that reveal the prevalence of gender stereotypes in textbooks, with women often portrayed in subordinate and stereotypical roles. On the other hand, section 2.5.2 presents studies that highlight some progress in gender representation, such as the increased visibility of women visually and textually, and the use of more gender-neutral pronouns in recent textbooks. These studies provide valuable insights into the ways in which gender is represented in educational materials and the progress that has been made towards gender equality in these contexts.

2.5.1. Studies Presenting Gender Stereotypes in Asia - Hong Kong and Japan

Sakita (1995) analyzed ten EFL high school textbooks published between 1989 and 1992 in Japanese secondary schools. She adopted both quantitative (content analysis) and qualitative analysis. Examples of gender inequity were observed, such as the underrepresentation of women and their tendency to be portrayed in subordinate positions or with stereotypical jobs that assist men. This inequity was also reflected in the linguistic features such as the use of adjectives and activity descriptions. The stereotypical gender roles were evident in the association of certain traits with men and women. Specifically, in these ten textbooks, men were typically associated with physical

strength, body size, and reputation, whereas women were associated with traits such as weakness, emotion, attractiveness, and domesticity.

Another case study examining a Business Japanese textbook, *Kacho*, undertaken by Thomson & Otsuji (2003) consistently substantiates the hypothesis that Japanese women were underrepresented in educational materials; they adopted a discourse analysis to count the turns male and female characters take and the roles they play. Their findings revealed male characters dominated the discourse, taking 179 out of a total of over three quarters of all turns, while female characters had only 57 turns. Moreover, the female characters were limited to subordinate and domestic roles such as a wife, daughter, subordinate colleague, and secretary, which implied the perpetuation of male dominance and the invisibility of women in the discourse. The discursive feature and roles reinforced a subordinate position for women in Japan.

Similarly, Au (2004) analyzed the gender representation in three primary English Language textbook series in Hong Kong, namely *New Welcome to English (2nd edition)*, *Integrated Primary English (TOC edition)*, and *New On Target*. The investigation revealed the textbooks portrayed males and females in a traditional manner, with the husband/father being depicted as the decision maker while the wife/mother was often portrayed as more passive. Additionally, Au (2004) conducted interviews and observations of teachers and students, and discovered many of them reinforced the gender stereotypes in the textbook dialogues by enacting the same gender roles during role-playing exercises in the classroom. This study corroborates the findings of the two studies above (Sakita, 1995; Thomson & Otsuji, 2003) that gender stereotypes were prevalent in textbooks in Japan and Hong Kong.

2.5.2. Studies Showing Improvement in Gender Representation in Hong Kong and Japan

Lee & Collins (2008) conducted an empirical study comparing twenty English Language textbooks published and used in Hong Kong secondary schools in the late 1980s – 2000s. They employed content, linguistic and visual analysis to consider differences in gender representation and the use of gender neutral language in these twenty textbooks. In terms of character types and frequency, Lee & Collins (2008) conducted content analysis to compare the twenty textbooks. A statistically significant difference was found for an obvious reduction in the numerical dominance of male characters. The ratio for the total number of female to male mentions in recent and earlier textbooks was 1:0.96 and 1:1.69 respectively, indicating a more even spread of the number of female and male mentions in textbooks. However, women have been depicted in a narrow range of social roles, predominantly as homemakers, in earlier and more recent textbooks. In visual representations, women have been comparatively underrepresented, with males being described as more dynamic and athletic. Their findings corroborate those of another empirical research (Yang, 2011) about gender representation in a Hong Kong primary English Textbook series, *New magic*, published in 2008. She found that

males and females were almost equally represented and were portrayed in a similar range of activities. Females were also visible in both illustrations and texts. The increased visibility of women both visually and textually was also confirmed in Lee's comparative study (2014) about two English language textbooks series published in 1988 and 2005 respectively. However, the findings still revealed a perpetuation of some stereotyped images of two genders.

Moreover, Lee & Collins (2009) compared ten Australian books with ten Hong Kong English language books for secondary school students and obtained the similar results that the Hong Kong writers, comparatively, adhered to the customary practice of presenting male nouns first, while portraying women in a narrower spectrum of social roles and perpetuating stereotypical notions of women as being weaker, more submissive, and confined to domestic spheres, despite the Hong Kong writers paying more heed to the inclusion of females visually. The Hong Kong writers made greater use of the dual pronoun he/she in textbooks than their Australian counterparts.

Linguistically speaking, in Lee & Collins' study (2008), the assumption that more gender-neutral generic pronouns would be used by recent textbook writers was confirmed as masculine generic pronouns are far less frequent in the textbooks (29 tokens) than in the earlier textbooks (53 tokens). However, when two nouns are paired by sex, men have tended to be mentioned first, except in the case of a fixed phrase, in these twenty textbooks.

Some improvement was also evident in Lee's corpus study (2018) about two series of EFL textbooks for senior high school students published in Japan in 2011, *Orbit* and *Unicorn*. The study revealed the presence of certain indications of gender equality, such as the widespread employment of gender-neutral language, exemplified by terms such as "salesclerk" and "waitperson" and the use of the gender-neutral "Ms" for women. Nevertheless, the persistence of the male-first phenomenon in modern Japanese textbooks suggests the continued subordinate position of women.

To summarize, in section 2.5.1, studies from Japan and Hong Kong showed that gender stereotypes were prevalent in educational materials, with women often portrayed in subordinate and stereotypical roles. Section 2.5.2 presents studies that confirmed the persistence of gender stereotypes and the phenomenon of prioritizing male nouns in Hong Kong and Japan. However, the studies also highlighted some progress, such as the increased visibility of women visually and textually, and the use of more gender-neutral pronouns in recent textbooks. As the previous studies focused on male and female characters only, and the textbooks published in or before 2011, this study will include gender-neutral characters and examine three types of characters (male, female and gender-neutral) in the recently published textbooks series *Longman English EDGE (2nd Edition) 1A* and *1B* and *New Horizon: English Course Book 1* in Hong Kong and Japan using content and discourse analysis.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Textbook Selection

The two series of EFL textbooks, *Longman English EDGE (2nd Edition) 1A (LE1A) and 1B (LE1B)* published by Pearson in Hong Kong in 2023 and *New Horizon: English Course Book 1 (NH1)* published by Tokyo Shoseki in Japan in 2021, were selected (see Table 1). They were chosen because of their representativeness and popularity. They are recommended by the Education Bureau in Hong Kong and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan, and widely used in the first-year junior high English language classrooms.

Table 1. Hong Kong and Japanese EFL textbooks analyzed

Textbook	Target	Units	Pages
LE1A	Junior High	4	114 (excluding Appendix)
LE1B	Junior High	4	112 (excluding Appendix)
NH1	Junior High	12	131 (excluding Glossary & Appendix)

3.1.1. Longman English EDGE (2nd Edition) 1A and 1B

LE1A and *LE1B* are textbooks widely used by junior secondary one students in Hong Kong. The textbooks incorporate eight comprehensive units, each centered around popular and engaging topics such as school life, sports, and leisure activities, and align with the latest curriculum framework set by the Education Bureau (EDB) that students should be aware of issues related to social justice and gender equality (CDC, 2018).

3.1.2. Tokyo Shoseki New Horizon: English Course Book 1

New Horizon: English Course is a series of three textbooks (Books 1 – 3) which has long been one of the most commonly used authoritative textbook series for junior high school students in Japan (Gendered Japan, 2017). In response to the nature of this study, only *New Horizon: English Course Book 1 (NH1)*, which is used by the first-year junior high school students, was selected to be compared to *LE1A* and *LE1B*. This textbook consists of

twelve themed units, each of which encompasses various texts and target language features aiming to equip students with the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

3.2. Methodology

To answer the research questions, this research aimed to compare various aspects of the selected textbooks *LE1A* and *LE1B* and *NH1* both quantitatively and qualitatively. These aspects included counting and analyzing the content of dialogues in each unit, the number of domestic and occupational roles by male, female, and gender-neutral characters, the different activities undertaken by these characters, the character initiating the conversation, the occurrence of males and females in dialogues, and the number of spoken words and turns taken by male, female, and gender-neutral characters. The subsequent sections will present and discuss the findings, thus providing the implications for gender equality in educational materials, language teaching, and the design of educational materials.

4. Findings and Discussion

In terms of the content analysis of the selected textbooks, *LE1A* and *LE1B* mainly focus on aspects of daily lives of students, with an emphasis on their personal experiences and school-related topics such as self-introduction, sports, hobbies, food, and holidays (see Appendix 1). Most of the activities were conducted in the family or school setting because these topics specifically cater to junior form students. The engagement of male, female, and gender-neutral characters is relatively equitable. The textbooks provide a well-rounded exploration of the daily activities while maintaining a fair representation of the three types of characters. *NH1* provides similar content with the primary focus on gaining meaningful experiences related to students' school and social life (see Appendix 2). Both male and female characters engage actively in a range of activities, such as making new friends from foreign countries, talking about cultural activities, and sharing memorable moments with others. It is worth noting that gender is clearly portrayed as either man or woman in the chosen Japanese textbook with the exclusion of gender-neutral characters.

Table 2.1 Domestic and occupational roles of male, female and gender-neutral characters in dialogues in *LE1A* and *LE1B*

Units	<i>Longman English EDGE 2nd Edition (1A and 1B)</i>			
	Domestic roles and occupational roles	Male (number of occurrences)	Female (number of occurrences)	Gender-neutral / Not specified (number of occurrences)
Unit 4	Parents			1
Unit 2	Cousin	2		
Units 2, 4	Aunt		2	
Units 5, 6	Grandmother		2	
Unit 7	Grandfather	1		
Unit 7	Brother	1		
Unit 7	Mother		1	
Unit 8	Sister		1	

Unit 8	Father	1		
Total		5	6	1
Units 1, 5	Teacher	1	1	
Units 1, 4	Student	1	1	7
Unit 2	Reporter	1		1
Unit 2	Photographer	1		1
Unit 2	Martial arts coach	1		
Unit 2	Vlogger			1
Unit 3	Coach	1		1
Unit 4	Writer			2
Unit 5	Cook		2	
Unit 8	Internet influencer	1		
Total		7	4	13

Table 2.2 Domestic and occupational roles of male, female and gender-neutral characters in dialogues in NH1

<i>New Horizon: English Course Book 1</i>				
Units	Domestic roles and occupational roles	Male (number of occurrences)	Female (number of occurrences)	Gender-neutral / Not specified (number of occurrences)
Unit 6	Brother	1		
	Daughter		1	
	Father	1		
Unit 9	Cousin		1	
Total		2	2	
All units	Student	22	26	
Units 0, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11	Teacher	3	5	
Unit 4	Police officer	1		
Unit 7	<i>Rakugo</i> performer		1	
Unit 9	Doctor		1	
Unit 9	Tourist		1	
Unit 9	Hiker	2		
Unit 11	Server	1		
Total		29	34	

In *LE1A* and *LE1B*, the roles of male, female and gender-neutral characters were examined in their conversations. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the domestic and occupational roles mentioned in the dialogues in these two textbooks. Concerning domestic roles, a balanced proportion of domestic roles to male and female characters was observed, suggesting that females are not confined to domestic roles or responsibilities as the textbook authors also assigned a relatively equitable number of domestic roles to male characters. As for occupational roles, the textbooks exhibited a notable level of diversity, encompassing different professions such as vlogger, photographer, teacher, writer, and the like. It is worth-highlighting that more than half of these occupational roles were played by the gender-neutral characters, exceeding the total number of occupational roles played by male and female characters. The findings show an obvious improvement that the authors encourage

equal opportunities for different occupations for individuals irrespective of their gender identity.

Similarly, the proportion of domestic roles to male and female observed in *NH1* is equally distributed (see Table 2.2). When it comes to occupational roles, both males and females played the role of teachers. The other roles played by female characters included *Rakugo* performer, doctor and tourist while male characters took the roles of police officer, hiker and server. Both domestic and occupational roles were clearly assigned to either male or female characters, so none of them were played by gender-neutral characters. One distinctive observation was that women tended to take the roles of showing care (i.e., doctor) and being artistic (i.e., performer) whereas men tended to play the authoritative role (i.e., police officer) and adventurous role (i.e., hiker). It was deemed salient that gender stereotype in occupational roles was demonstrated in this Japanese textbook.

Table 3.1 Range of activities performed by male, female and gender-neutral characters in LE1A and LE1B

<i>Longman English EDGE 2nd Edition (1A and 1B)</i>				
Units	Activities	Male (number of occurrences)	Female (number of occurrences)	Gender-neutral / Not specified (number of occurrences)
Unit 1	Talking to a student	1		
Units 1, 3	Explaining to a teacher / student			2
Unit 1	Scolding a student		1	
Units 1, 3	Giving instruction / Assigning tasks to students		1	1
Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Chatting with friend(s)	4	8	12
Unit 2	Interviewing	1		1
Unit 2	Collecting things (miniatures, comic books)		1	1
Unit 2	Taking photos	1		1
Unit 2	Doing martial arts / Kung Fu	2		
Unit 2	Doing calligraphy		1	1
Unit 2	Vlogging			1
Unit 3	Fencing			1
Unit 4	Cycling	1		1
Unit 4	Playing badminton		1	
Unit 4	Visiting a place (e.g., museum, country park) / travelling	1	3	2
Unit 4	Seeing a film	1	1	
Unit 4	Discussing books			1
Unit 4	Camping		1	1
Unit 5	Cooking / making food		1	
Unit 5	Doing groceries			1
Unit 6	Having a reunion dinner	1		
Total		13	19	27
Percentage		22%	32.2%	45.8%

Table 3.2 Range of activities performed by male, female and gender-neutral characters in NH1

<i>New Horizon: English Course Book 1</i>				
Units	Activities	Male (number of occurrences)	Female (number of occurrences)	Gender-neutral / Not specified (number of occurrences)
Unit 0	Getting to know a new classmate	1	2	
Unit 0	Giving instructions / Assigning tasks to students		1	
Unit 1	Making new friends	1	1	
Unit 1	Talking about sports	2	2	
Unit 1, 3	Playing badminton		2	
Unit 1, 4,	Talking about sports	1	3	
Unit 2	Introducing a new student/teacher	2		
Unit 2	Talking about neighborhood	1	1	
Unit 2, 4	Talking about eating habit	2	1	
Unit 3, 8	Taking videos	1	1	
Unit 3	Playing musical instrument	1		
Unit 3, 9	Asking for directions		2	
Unit 3, 9	Giving directions	2		
Unit 4	Talking about weather	1	1	
Unit 4	Talking about animals	1	1	

Unit 5	Jogging	1		
Unit 5	Dancing	1		
Unit 6	Scuba diving	1		
Unit 6	Talking about food	1	1	
Unit 6	Reading comic books		1	
Unit 6	Asking for help		1	
Unit 7	Talking about performers	1	1	
Unit 7	Watching performing arts	2	1	
Unit 7	Feeling sick		1	
Unit 7	Talking about scary things	2	1	
Unit 8	Watching TV		1	
Unit 8	Inviting friends	1		
Unit 8	Preparing a surprise party	2	1	
Unit 8	Writing a birthday card		1	
Unit 8	Cooking	1		
Unit 9, 11	Talking to a student	1	1	
Unit 9	Talking about the future		1	
Unit 9	Listening to a presentation	1	1	
Unit 9	Hiking	2		
Unit 10	Talking to a teacher	1		
Unit 10	Travelling		1	
Unit 10	Talking about New Year's Day		2	
Unit 11	Talking about experience of playing sports	1		
Unit 11	Talking about camping	1		
Unit 11	Talking about school memories	1	1	
Unit 11	Taking order	1		
Unit 11	Ordering food		1	
Total		37	36	0
Percentage		50.7%	49.3	0

The authors of *LE1A* and *LE1B* included a diverse range of both indoor and outdoor activities in various contexts. Table 3.1 summarizes the activities performed by the characters. Gender-neutral characters were actively involved in the majority of these activities, accounting for 45.8% of the total activities. Female characters participated in approximately one-third of the activities, while male characters had the least involvement, constituting only 22% of the activities. The inclusion of gender-neutral characters in a significant portion of the activities indicated a less gender-based categorization of activities, thus challenging traditional gender roles. For instance, gender-neutral characters undertook traditionally female-associated tasks, such as grocery shopping. Furthermore, certain activities in the textbooks demonstrated power dynamics, including the act of giving instructions, assigning tasks, or scolding a student. These activities were performed by female characters, suggesting a subversion of a power relationship between male and female characters. However, it is noteworthy that some activities traditionally associated with masculinity, such as engaging in martial arts in unit 2, were performed by male

characters only. Conversely, activities such as socializing with friends exhibit a stark gender disparity, with female characters engaging in these interactions significantly more frequently than their male counterparts. These findings suggest that men were more dynamic and sporty, while women were more static and talkative. However, the aforementioned activities were limited to a few instances, and therefore their impact may not be of significant importance and magnitude. Overall, these implications in this section highlight the authors' efforts to defy gender stereotypes through the engagement of characters in different activities.

In *NH1*, both male and female characters are equally active in participating in a variety of indoor and outdoor activities which are outlined in Table 3.2. Male characters accounted for 50.7% of the total number of activities, while female characters accounted for 49.3% of it, which is slightly less than that of male characters. This even distribution suggests that the authors intentionally strike a balance between male and female characters in terms of the engagement in these activities. As one's personality is correlated with his or her performance of particular

activities, the authors also portrayed both genders as robust and outgoing individuals who participate in sport activities and mingle with the others in a social context. Although the engagement of activities was quantitatively balanced among male and female characters, two gender stereotypical activities associated with men and women's personal qualities, including giving directions and asking for directions respectively, were identified in units 3 and 9. Conventionally, men have better navigational skills and sense of direction compared to women. This implies that there is still bias towards both genders in terms of particular personal qualities which may further reinforce the gender stereotypical ideology.

Table 4.1 The character who starts the conversation first (per dialogue) in LE1A and LE1B

Longman English EDGE 2 nd Edition (1A and 1B)	Male first	Female first	Gender-neutral first
Unit 1	1	0	2
Unit 2	2	2	2
Unit 3	0	0	3
Unit 4	1	3	3
Unit 5	0	2	1
Unit 6	0	1	1
Unit 7	1	1	0
Unit 8	1	0	1
Total	6	9	13
Percentage	23.4%	32.1%	46.5%

Table 4.2 The character who starts the conversation first (per dialogue) in NH1

New Horizon: English Course Book 1	Male first	Female first	Gender-neutral first
Unit 0	2	2	0
Unit 1	1	2	0
Unit 2	2	1	0
Unit 3	0	3	0

Table 5.1 Occurrence of males and females in dialogues (per dialogue) in LE1A and LE1B

Longman English EDGE 2 nd Edition (1A and 1B)	Male only	M > F / N	Female only	F > M / N	Equal share (M and F)	Gender-neutral only	Equal share (M and N)	Equal share (F and N)
Unit 1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Unit 2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	2
Unit 3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Unit 4	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	4
Unit 5	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
Unit 6	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Unit 7	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Unit 8	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Total	0	0	2	0	6	6	5	9
Percentage	0	0	7.2%	0	21.4%	21.4%	17.9%	32.1%

Unit 4	1	3	0
Unit 5	1	2	0
Unit 6	1	5	0
Unit 7	2	3	0
Unit 8	2	2	0
Unit 9	2	2	0
Unit 10	0	2	0
Unit 11	3	1	0
Total	17	28	0
Percentage	37.8%	62.2%	0

Among 28 dialogues in *LE1A* and *LE1B* analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively (see Table 4.1), it was observed that gender-neutral characters initiated the conversation in nearly half of the dialogues, followed by female characters with a lower but significant proportion of dialogue initiations (32.1%). Conversely, the dialogues initiated by male characters constituted the smallest share, accounting for only 23.4%. When it comes to the analysis of 44 dialogues in *NH1* (see Table 4.2), a commonality was found between Hong Kong and Japanese textbooks. Approximately two-thirds of dialogues were initiated by female characters, indicating an imbalance of gender representation in this regard. The findings of both series of textbooks have a few important implications. First, the significant presence of gender-neutral characters in *LE1A* and *LE1B* initiating conversations in nearly half of the dialogues implies that a recognition of individuals who were not identified strictly as male or female provides visibility to non-binary individuals, thereby mitigating gender imbalance and fostering inclusivity in educational materials. Second, a relatively significant proportion of dialogue initiations by female characters in both series of textbooks signified women's active participation in conversations and female empowerment because they took the lead and contribute to the dialogues. Third, the findings that male characters-initiated conversations in the smallest share of dialogues raise questions about the balance of gender representation, which can result in limited portrayal of male characters' perspectives and voices.

Table 5.2 Occurrence of males and females in dialogues (per dialogue) in NH1

New Horizon: English Course Book 1	Male only	M > F / N	Female only	F > M / N	Equal share (M and F)	Gender-neutral only	Equal share (M and N)	Equal share (F and N)
Unit 0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0
Unit 1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Unit 2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Unit 3	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Unit 4	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0
Unit 5	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
Unit 6	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
Unit 7	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0
Unit 8	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Unit 9	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Unit 10	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Unit 11	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Total	1	3	4	3	33	0	0	0
Percentage	2.3%	6.8%	9.1%	6.8%	75%	0	0	0

In *LE1A* and *LE1B*, a total of 28 dialogues were identified in the main reading passages and post-reading exercises for analysis. These dialogues featured various combinations of interlocutors, including only female characters, a male character and a female character, only gender-neutral characters, a male character and a gender-neutral character, and a female character and a gender-neutral character, respectively. Table 5.1 presents a breakdown of the dialogue compositions. Notably, dialogues featuring a female character and a gender-neutral character accounted for nearly one-third of the dialogues in the two textbooks. The number of dialogues featuring a male and a female character was equivalent to those consisting of solely gender-neutral characters, with each constituting 21.4% of the total. Dialogues featuring a male character and a gender-neutral character comprised 17.9%, while those featuring only female characters constituted 7.9%. It is worth highlighting that there were no dialogues featuring only male characters or a greater proportion of male characters compared to female and gender-neutral characters, indicating the absence of male dominance in these two textbooks.

The same approach was applied to analyze the dialogues featuring various combinations of interlocutors found among the total of 12 units in *NH1*. As demonstrated in Table 5.2, the dialogues featuring equal share of male and female characters constituted 75% of the total dialogues analyzed. Neither men nor women were regarded as dominant interlocutors in the dialogues illustrated in each unit. This gender-balanced participation revealed that both male and female characters possess equal opportunity to engage in the mixed-gender conversations. As the mixed-gender dialogues were found in each unit, it is believed that the authors tend to promote a balanced gender representation in a consistent manner.

Discourse Analysis

This study involved a quantitative analysis of the total words spoken, turns taken and the average words spoken per turn by male, female, and gender-neutral characters in the dialogues. The assumption was that characters with more utterances would exhibit greater visibility and

dominance in the conversation. It should be noted that utterances without accompanying names and gender-indicative pictures were excluded from the analysis. When gender-neutral titles like “reporter” (unit 2) or names such as Chris (units 1, 4, 6) and Alex (units 3, 5, 7) were used without specifying the characters’ gender through pictures, these instances were categorized as unisex characters. In *LE1A* and *LE1B*, female characters accounted for the highest proportion of utterances (42.4%), followed by gender-neutral characters (33%) and male characters (24.6%) (see table 10). Regarding the turns taken by these characters, gender-neutral characters had the highest share (41%) but had the lowest average number of words per turn (11.41 words). Female characters accounted for 36.9% of the turns and had the highest average number of words per turn (16.3 words) (see table 6.3). Surprisingly, male characters had the lowest share of turns (22.1%). Despite male characters having relatively fewer turns, male characters had an average of 15.9 words per turn, comparable to that of female characters (16.3 words). The higher proportion of utterances by female characters compared to male characters suggested a positive aspect of gender equality. It provided female characters with adequate visibility and speaking opportunities in the dialogues. Moreover, the inclusion of gender-neutral characters helped avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and provided representation for individuals who were not identified strictly as male or female. However, the lower percentage of turns taken by male characters indicated a relative underrepresentation or reduced participation of male voices in the dialogues. This raises questions about the balance of gender representation and the extent to which male characters were actively involved in the interactions, given male characters having a similar average number of words per turn as female characters.

The findings on the quantitative analysis of total words spoken, turns taken and the average words spoken per turn by male and female characters in the dialogues in *NH1* were different from those in *LE1A* and *LE1B*. First, as shown in Table 11, male characters constituted 52% of total number of words spoken which was slightly higher than that of female characters (48%). Such slight difference in

utterances exhibits no prominent gender dominance in the Japanese textbook. Second, female characters accounted for 56.1% of the turns taken during conversations and had an average of 6.4 words per turn (see Table 13), while male characters constituted 43.9% of the turns but have a higher average number of words per turn (8.9 words). Similar findings were shared by both Hong Kong and Japanese

textbooks. The higher proportion of utterances by female characters compared to male characters indicated a higher degree of visibility which created a positive impact on gender equality. Overall, it seems that there is a growing tendency to achieve gender equality in the Japanese textbook through the construction of mixed-gender dialogues.

Table 6.1 Number of words spoken by male, female and gender-neutral characters in dialogues in LE1A and LE1B

Longman English EDGE 2 nd Edition (1A and 1B)	The number of words spoken by male / female / neutral characters in 8 units		
	Male	Female	Gender-neutral
Unit 1	81	76	146
Unit 2	190	378	200
Unit 3	0	63	117
Unit 4	90	174	165
Unit 5	0	257	52
Unit 6	93	53	61
Unit 7	118	105	31
Unit 8	110	71	141
Total	682	1177	913
Percentage	24.6%	42.4%	33%

Table 6.2 Number of words spoken by male, female and gender-neutral characters in dialogues in NH1

New Horizon: English Course Book 1	The number of words spoken by male / female / neutral characters in 12 units		
	Male	Female	Gender-neutral
Unit 0	27	30	0
Unit 1	33	80	0
Unit 2	90	53	0
Unit 3	69	99	0
Unit 4	85	117	0
Unit 5	68	72	0
Unit 6	49	83	0
Unit 7	178	77	0
Unit 8	107	89	0
Unit 9	198	80	0
Unit 10	10	96	0
Unit 11	156	111	0
Total	1070	987	0
Percentage	52%	48%	0

Table 6.3 Number of turns taken by male, female and gender-neutral characters in dialogues in LE1A and LE1B

Longman English EDGE 2 nd Edition (1A and 1B)	The number of turns taken by male / female characters in 8 units		
	Male	Female	Gender-neutral
Unit 1	3	3	10
Unit 2	20	13	18
Unit 3	0	6	12
Unit 4	6	14	13
Unit 5	0	19	5
Unit 6	4	4	8
Unit 7	4	7	4
Unit 8	6	6	10
Total	43	72	80
Percentage	22.1%	36.9%	41%
Average words per turn	15.9 words	16.3 words	11.41 words

Table 6.4 Number of turns taken by male, female and gender-neutral characters in dialogues in NH1

New Horizon: English Course Book 1	The number of turns taken by male / female characters in 12 units		
	Male	Female	Gender-neutral
Unit 0	3	4	0
Unit 1	6	16	0
Unit 2	10	11	0
Unit 3	9	21	0
Unit 4	14	16	0
Unit 5	8	10	0
Unit 6	9	10	0
Unit 7	19	15	0
Unit 8	15	17	0
Unit 9	12	7	0
Unit 10	2	12	0
Unit 11	12	13	0
Total	119	152	0
Percentage	43.9%	56.1%	0
Average words per turn	8.9 words	6.4 words	0

5. Limitations

5.1. Small sample size

Only a limited number of textbooks in Hong Kong and Japan were selected for analysis; textbooks for senior forms students are not included in this research; moreover, textbooks in other Asian countries such as Korea and Singapore are not included in this paper. Therefore, the findings of a small sample size of textbooks may not be generalisable to English language textbooks (Lee, 2014) in Asia as cultural and societal norms may differ across different countries.

5.2. Lack of linguistic and visual analyses

One limitation of this research on examining gender equality in textbooks is the overreliance on content analysis and discourse analyses, without incorporating linguistic analysis and visual analyses. Excluding these two analyses can potentially reduce reliability and validity as they can proffer additional evidence for the overall evaluation of gender equality in educational materials. However, as most of the dialogues did not include visual elements in *LE1A* and *LE1B* and therefore visual analysis was not adopted in this research.

5.3. Researcher bias

Taking the potential influence of research bias into account is important when we qualitatively examine gender representation in textbooks. Due to researchers' cultural backgrounds and gender, they may have bias that impacts their interpretation of gender representation. It is possible that researchers may favour or overlook gender roles and stereotypes, thus interpreting the data differently.

6. Pedagogical Implications

6.1. Materials Development

Materials developers play a social role in creating textbooks that are inclusive and diverse. According to Brugeilles & Cromer (2009), compiling a list of characters and noting their attributes enable the assessment of parity, or the equitable representation of genders and their respective roles in both private and public domains (Lee & Collins, 2008). There are four stages monitoring the gender system:

1.	Determine the primary attributes of characters that require monitoring and create a catalog of specific details pertaining to each of these attributes.
2.	Utilize pre-established grids to compile an inventory of characters.
3.	Summarize information on characters and their characteristics using summary tables.
4.	Conduct an analysis of the representation of gender, and if deemed necessary, revise the textbook to promote gender equality.

(Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009, p.49)

Lee (2018) suggested that specific guidelines be compiled by the education authorities to help textbook authors write educational materials; this approach can promote the inclusion of diverse scenarios, prevent the exclusion of one gender and highlight fundamental characteristics that reflect the gender system.

6.2. Raising Gender Awareness of EFL Teachers

Language educators, especially frontline teachers, play a crucial role in promoting gender equality through EFL teaching as it can bring about a fundamental shift in how learners think and act. There is a growing need for training gender-sensitive language educators, including both perspective and in-service teachers (Deutschmann et

al., 2021; Lumadi & Shongwe, 2010). It is suggested that the institutions offering teacher education incorporate theories and practices concerning gender awareness and sensitiveness into curriculum while the government departments and education-related organizations provide relevant teacher professional development programmes and on-the-job training on raising gender awareness among teachers to avoid using sexist language and gender stereotyping content in the classroom.

6.3. Providing Explicit Gender-Sensitive Instruction

According to Sunderland (1994), simply having a non-sexist textbook is not enough to ensure non-sexist teaching and student teachers may not be aware of gender issues or may lack the necessary techniques to address gender issues within textbooks (Kızılaslan, 2010). Therefore, teacher education programs and workshops should focus on developing gender-sensitive approaches (Lee, 2021) to assist both pre-service and in-service teachers in recognizing gender biases and devising strategies to address potential gender disparities in educational materials. To illustrate, in instances where gender stereotypes exist both textually and visually, teachers could opt for explicit instruction (Yang, 2014) to undermine the gendered discourse present in textbooks. For example, teachers can choose to discuss the bias present in texts or reverse the roles in dialogues.

7. Conclusion

The present study has examined qualitatively and quantitatively the gender representation of two series of junior high school EFL textbooks, namely *Longman English EDGE (2nd Edition) 1A and 1B* and *New Horizon: English Course 1*, published in Hong Kong and Japan respectively. It is evident that both Hong Kong and Japanese textbook authors recognize the needs to promote gender equality through constructing mixed-gender dialogues in the textbooks. Since this is a comparative study, the major findings of the analyses are summarized, in terms of similarities and differences. Focusing on the dialogues where spoken discourse is analyzed, both Hong Kong and Japanese textbooks exhibit significant proportions of dialogues initiated by female characters, indicating that women tend to take the initiative to proactively start the conversations compared to their male counterparts. The numbers of turns taken by women in the two series of textbooks also account for a higher share in dialogues regardless the average number of words per turn. The similarities of both textbook series reveal that female characters exhibit greater visibility and dominance in mixed-gender dialogues compared to male characters. The prominent presence of women in dialogue initiation and turn-taking reflects the underrepresentation of men, suggesting that there is a tendency for the quest for gender equality when authoring the EFL textbooks. When it comes to the domestic and occupational roles, the selected textbooks of Hong Kong demonstrate a balanced representation of domestic roles among males and females, and a notable diversity of occupational roles, with gender-neutral characters taking on a significant proportion,

indicating progress towards promoting gender equality across professions. Although the balanced gender presentation of domestic roles was observed in Japanese textbooks, gender stereotype in occupational roles still exists in the Japanese textbook, with women taking the roles in showing care and being artistic and men taking the authoritative and adventurous roles.

The findings from this comparative study on examining gender equality have shed light on a few salient implications for future research. First, the underrepresentation of men in textbooks in Hong Kong suggests that there is a need to further investigate factors contributing to this imbalance and whether the underrepresentation of men is prevalent in other English textbooks in Hong Kong. Secondly, as this research adopted content and discourse analyses, it will be more holistic to incorporate visual and linguistic analyses to examine gender equality or representation in the selected textbooks, or other textbooks in the future research. Additionally, the exclusion of gender-neutral names in Japanese textbooks implies that Japanese textbook authors are still conservative or not aware of the use of gender-neutral names to avoid gender stereotypes. Therefore, a broader range of textbook series in both Hong Kong and Japan should be included to provide a more comprehensive picture of gender representation in educational materials, thereby avoiding overgeneralization.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The theme and content of the units in LE1A and LE1B

Longman English EDGE 2 nd Edition (1A and 1B)	Theme / Title	Content		
		Male	Female	Gender-neutral
Unit 1	Nice to meet you!	Mr. Lamb , a teacher, who asked Charlie to explain why he / she was late.	Mrs Lee , a teacher, who scolded Pat.	Pat , a student Chris , a student Charlie , a student.
Unit 2	Just for fun!	Daniel is interviewing Selina Wu about her hobby – collecting miniatures of people and objects. Reporter is interviewing with a martial arts coach, Keith . Dan and Pam are talking about vlogging.	Daniel is interviewing Selina Wu about her hobby. Ricky and Emma are talking about reasons for having hobbies. Riya and Joey are talking about comic books.	Ricky and Emma are talking about reasons for having hobbies. Reporter is interviewing with a martial arts coach, Keith. Dan and Pam are talking about vlogging. Riya and Joey are talking about comic books.
Unit 3	Sport for all	No male characters.	Frank is talking about his dream last night with Sara .	Frank is talking about his dream last night with Sara. Coach is talking about rules with Alex .
Unit 4	Out and about (leisure activities)	Eric is talking about his weekend plans with Chris. Mike and Sandy are discussing the activity organized by their school's Adventure Club.	Jim and Laura are discussing what they will do on the weekend. Ivy and Annie are talking about their weekend plans.	Jim and Laura are discussing what they will do on the weekend. Eric is talking about his weekend plans with Chris . Mike and Sandy are discussing the activity organized by their school's Adventure Club.
Unit 5	Tasty treats!	No male characters.	Amy and Sarah are talking about making tea leaf eggs.	Alex will prepare some strawberry ice cream for the party. Sandy will make sandwiches for the party.
Unit 6	Amazing holidays	Cliff is chatting with his friend, Heidi about a family reunion dinner.	Heidi is chatting with her friend, Cliff about a family reunion dinner.	Chris is talking to Pat about his / her holidays in Tokyo.

Unit 7	Game on	Casey and her grandfather are talking about the games he used to play when he was a teenager.	Casey and her grandfather are talking about the games he used to play when he was a teenager. Chole is talking to her friend, Alex about Board and Good, a board game café.	Chole is talking to her friend, Alex about Board and Good, a board game café.
Unit 8	Are you online?	Theo and Tina are chatting about a mobile app design competition.	Theo and Tina are chatting about a mobile app design competition.	Max and Joey are talking about Japanese food.

Appendix 2: The theme and content of the units in *NH1*

<i>New Horizon</i> 1	Theme / Title	Content		
		Male	Female	Gender-neutral
Unit 0	Welcome to Junior High School	Shota is getting to know more about his classmates.	Kana is greeting Shota. A teacher is giving instructions in class. A student is talking with Shota about her favorite food.	
Unit 1	New School, New Friends	Kaito is greeting Asami. Kaito is asking Meg about her favorite sport.	Asami is greeting Kaito. Meg , who is from Australia, is talking with Kaito about her favorite sport. Asami is inviting Meg to play badminton with her. Asami is praising Meg for her badminton skills.	
Unit 2	Our New Teacher	Mr. Toda , a teacher, is introducing Ms. Cook to Kaito . Kaito is introducing Josh to Ms. Cook. Kaito and Ms. Cook are telling each other about the food they usually have for breakfast.	Ms. Cook , a new English teacher from America, is asking Kaito about the neighborhood. Asami is asking Ms. Cook about where she lives and how she commutes to school.	
Unit 3	Club Activities	Josh , a student from the Philippines is telling Meg about the musical instrument he plays and the date and venue of the upcoming concert that he is going to partake in. Kaito is talking with Meg about his feelings and dream to be a professional soccer player.	Meg is taking videos about club activities at school. Asami is telling Meg about the things she brings to badminton practice and her practice schedule.	

Unit 4	Friends in New Zealand	<p>A male police officer is giving directions.</p> <p>David, a student from New Zealand, is talking to Asami in a teleconference.</p> <p>Kaito is asking Emma about the animals in New Zealand and her favorite sport.</p>	<p>Meg is asking a male police officer for directions.</p> <p>Ms. Cook is encouraging Asami to talk to David in a teleconference.</p> <p>Asami and David are chatting about their meal habits.</p> <p>Emma, a student from New Zealand, is telling Kaito about the animals in New Zealand and her favorite sport.</p>	
Unit 5	A Japanese Summer Festival	<p>Josh and Asami, who are taking a walk in a park, bump into Meg.</p> <p>A male student is playing a guessing game.</p> <p>Josh is inviting Asami to dance with him.</p>	<p>Asami, who is taking a walk with Josh in a park, bumps into Meg.</p> <p>A female student is describing an animal to her friend to in a guessing game.</p> <p>Asami is going to eat with Josh after dancing.</p>	
Unit 6	A Speech about My Brother	<p>Kaito is asking Asami if Takuya, her brother, likes scuba diving.</p> <p>Kaito is asking Asami if Takuya likes Filipino food.</p> <p>Daiki is asking Ayaka about her favorite comic book.</p> <p>Meg's dad is helping Meg.</p>	<p>Asami is showing Kaito a picture of her brother.</p> <p>Asami is telling Kaito about her brother's favorite Filipino food.</p> <p>Rika is asking Daiki about Ayaka's favorite comic book.</p> <p>Meg is asking her dad for help.</p>	
Unit 7	Foreign Artists in Japan	<p>Kaito is showing Meg a picture of a <i>rakugo</i> performer.</p> <p>Kaito is inviting Meg to watch a <i>rakugo</i> show.</p> <p>Josh, Kaito and Meg are waiting to watch a <i>rakugo</i> show.</p> <p>Mr. Toda is asking Meg to take a rest in the nurse's office.</p> <p>Eric and Mark are making fun of each other while talking about scary things.</p>	<p>Meg is asking Kaito about the language the <i>rakugo</i> performer speaks.</p> <p>Meg is asking Kaito more about <i>rakugo</i>.</p> <p>Ann, Eric and Mark are talking about scary things in a cafeteria.</p>	
Unit 8	A Surprise Party	<p>Kaito is inviting Meg to his house on the phone.</p> <p>Josh, who organizes a surprise party for Meg, is taking a video.</p>	<p>Meg is talking to Kaito on the phone.</p> <p>Asami is writing a birthday card to Meg.</p>	

		<p><u>Kaito</u>, <u>Josh</u> and Asami are surprising Meg on her birthday.</p> <p><u>Ken</u> is talking to Sally on the phone while cooking dinner.</p>	<p><u>Meg</u> is showing appreciation for Kaito, Josh and <u>Asami</u>.</p> <p><u>Sally</u> is talking to Ken on the phone.</p>	
Unit 9	Think Globally, Act Locally	<p><u>Mr. Toda</u> is asking Meg to make a speech about her cousin.</p> <p><u>Kaito</u> is going to listen to a presentation with Meg.</p> <p><u>Kaito</u> is giving directions.</p> <p><u>Koichi</u> and <u>Bob</u> are discussing the best trail to hike Mt. Fuji.</p>	<p><u>Meg</u> is telling Mr. Toda about her dream job.</p> <p><u>Meg</u> and Kaito are going to listen to a presentation.</p> <p><u>A female tourist</u> is asking Kaito for directions.</p>	
Unit 10	Winter Vacation	<p><u>Kaito</u> is asking Ms. Cook about the places she went in London.</p>	<p><u>Ms. Cook</u> is sharing her London trip with Kaito.</p> <p><u>Asami</u> and <u>Meg</u> are talking about the things they did on New Year's Day.</p>	
Unit 11	The Year's Memories	<p><u>Kaito</u> is sharing his memories of being a soccer player with Asami.</p> <p><u>Josh</u> is sharing his memories of school camping trip with Ms. Cook.</p> <p><u>Kaito</u> is making comments on Meg's photo album.</p> <p><u>A male server</u> is taking Meg's order.</p>	<p><u>Asami</u> is asking Kaito about his experience of being a soccer player.</p> <p><u>Ms. Cook</u> is asking Josh about his school camping trip.</p> <p><u>Meg</u> is showing Kaito a photo album.</p> <p><u>Meg</u> is ordering food in a restaurant.</p>	

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