



How Is Gender Visually Represented in the Arabic Textbook *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshī’* in Volume 3?

Widi Astuti^{1*}, Hisyam Zaini², Zamzam Afandi³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Correspondence E-mail: 25304021004@student.uin-suka.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 09 Aug 2026

First Revised 30 Aug 2026

Accepted 14 Oct 2026

Publication Date 19 Oct 2026

Keywords:

Arabic textbook

Gender representation

Multimodal discourse analysis

Social actors

Visual representation

ABSTRACT

Arabic textbooks not only present linguistic material, but also shape social representations through text and illustrations. The aim of this study is to analyse the construction of visual gender bias in *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshī’* in Volume 3, through the lenses of visibility, page distribution, agency, social space and visual prominence. The study employs a qualitative, document-based approach using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, which combines Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar with Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis. A total of 429 character appearances across 45 illustrated pages were inventoried and coded according to visibility, agency, social space and visual prominence. The results show a male dominance of 373 appearances (86.9%), whilst women accounted for only 56 (13.1%). Of the 45 illustrated pages, 24 depicted only male characters, 20 depicted both genders, and only one depicted female characters exclusively. Male visual prominence was reinforced through a wider range of public, professional, authoritative and achievement-oriented roles, whereas women were primarily depicted in caregiving and domestic roles. These findings suggest that visual inequality operates through frequency, page distribution and the division of agency; consequently, textbooks require a review of representation and critical mediation by teachers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic textbooks are regarded as pedagogical tools designed to simplify the complexities of the language through the presentation of vocabulary, dialogues, reading passages and exercises. Textbooks are also generally understood as relatively neutral tools designed to help learners achieve language proficiency. However, this assumption of neutrality is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain as a number of studies have shown that textbooks not only convey linguistic knowledge but also mediate certain social representations including representations of gender through their choice of characters, sentence structures, dialogues, illustrations and the allocation of roles within the learning material (Apple, 2004; Khusen, 2017; Ryan & Giroux, 1984). In studies of the curriculum and textbooks, teaching materials are often interpreted as part of the hidden curriculum, as they convey certain social values through seemingly ordinary aspects of learning.

In research on Arabic textbooks, this issue is evident in the tendency for men to be more prominently featured as characters, subjects of sentences and holders of public roles, whilst women are more frequently depicted in domestic settings or in more limited roles (Kuraedah et al., 2023; Taufiq & Choirih, 2021). A similar pattern was also found in the study by Aldzakhiroh et al. (2024) on the textbook *Al-'Arabiyyah lil Induniysiyyin*, which showed that men tend to be positioned as active, strong figures closely associated with work and the public sphere, whilst women are more frequently represented in limited roles associated with the domestic sphere (Aldzakhiroh et al., 2024).

Comparable patterns have also been documented across educational contexts, where male characters tend to occupy a broader range of professional and public roles while female characters remain underrepresented or more frequently associated with domestic and caregiving activities (Ariyanto, 2018; Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Kehinde et al., 2022).

On the other hand, Brilliant et al. (2025) explain that *Al-'Arabiyyah lil Induniysiyyin* was developed using a contextual approach that links language material to the everyday situations of beginner-level learner (Brilliant et al., 2025). These findings are particularly interesting when considered alongside research on gender bias. If everyday contexts are selected and presented through themes, characters, dialogues and activity designs, then these contexts cannot be treated as entirely neutral backdrops. Context is always a social construction that carries values, norms and role regulations; consequently, a contextual approach does not automatically result in equitable representation.

This tension becomes even more apparent when language is understood as a social practice (Sunderland, 2006). Research on language and gender shows that linguistic structures, lexical choices and communicative conventions can contribute to the reproduction of norms regarding masculinity and femininity (Dian Maharani et al., 2025). In Arabic language learning, Editia et al. (2024) also emphasize that gender bias can arise through the dominance of the masculine (*mudzakkar*) form over the feminine (*muannats*), the choice of grammatical forms, and linguistic practices deemed normal in textbooks (Qushayyi Akbar Editia et al., 2024). This pattern can also be understood in relation to the Arabic grammatical convention of *taghlīb* (تغليب المذكر على المؤنث), whereby masculine forms conventionally serve as the default when male and female referents are grouped together. While this grammatical convention should not in itself be equated with social bias,

its operation within pedagogical discourse provides an important linguistic context for examining how masculine forms may become more routinely visible than feminine forms (Ryding, 2005; Soliman et al., 2023). Thus, the issue of representation is not only related to who appears in the text, but also to how linguistic devices, characterization, and social scenarios work together to construct recurring gender stereotypes.

A number of studies highlight the visual dimension as a key area for analyzing gender bias. Izzuddin et al., (2021) and Uyuni et al. (2023) demonstrate that illustrations in the *Al-Asas* textbook in Sudan can portray women as secondary figures, although positive representations supporting the idea of equality are also found in certain sections (Izzuddin et al., 2021; Uyuni et al., 2023). Kuraedah et al. (2023) also found that government-approved Arabic textbooks in Indonesia remain dominated by representations of men, both in the text and in the visuals (Kuraedah et al., 2023). These findings demonstrate that images are not merely a complement to the text, but rather a part of the production of meaning that helps shape the way learners recognize social roles.

Research across language, social science and science textbooks further demonstrates that visual inequality may be encoded not only through numerical visibility but also through positioning, activity, occupational status and the social meanings attached to depicted roles (Elmiana, 2019; Košir & Lakshminarayanan, 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Building on this trend, this article focuses primarily on the visual dimension. Previous studies have widely demonstrated male dominance and the tendency for women to be confined to domestic roles, but the discussion of how these patterns are shaped through illustrations, layout, visual emphasis, and the relationship between images and text still needs to be further (St Junaeda, 2025). This study aims to analyze the construction of visual gender bias in *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi’in* Volume 3, and to explain the relationship between images and text in shaping the division of public and domestic roles. Its novelty lies in the simultaneous mapping of visibility, page distribution, agency, social space and salience as a single multimodal representational structure.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, document-based approach, using *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi’in* Volume 3 as its primary source. The corpus comprises all 45 illustrated pages featuring human characters, with 429 character occurrences serving as the units of analysis. The data comprises illustrations, icons, page layouts and accompanying text in the form of titles, passages, dialogues and captions. The analysis utilizes Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar, Fairclough’s (2013) critical discourse analysis, and van Leeuwen’s (2008) framework for the representation of social actors (Aljuaythin, 2018; Fairclough, 2013; Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, 2006; Leeuwen, 2008). The analysis stage involves cataloguing visual units and page contexts, coding for gender, visibility, agency of action, public-domestic settings, and salience/composition, followed by the interpretation of the relationship between images and text. Frequency counts are used descriptively to illustrate the distribution of representations, rather than for statistical inference (Nunun et al., 2020).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Gender Visibility in Illustration

The visual data in *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi’*in Volume 3 reveal a marked disparity in the visibility of male and female characters. To examine this disparity, the analysis considers both the frequency of character appearances and the proportion of each gender within the illustrations. Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of male and female characters, providing an initial overview of the gender imbalance in the textbook’s visual representation.

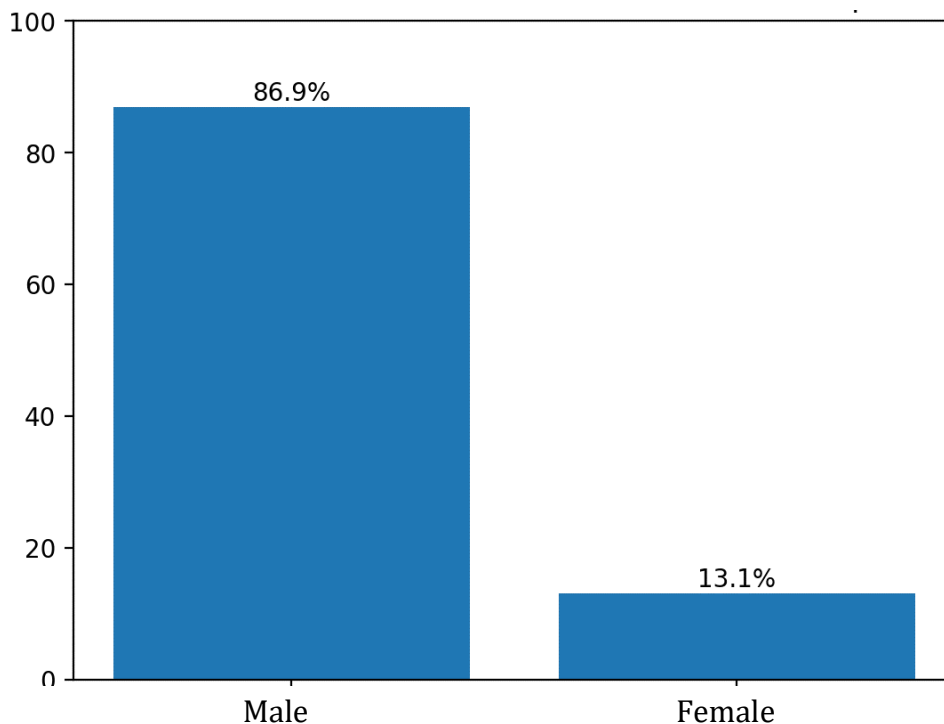


Figure 1. *Percentage of Visibility of Male and Female Characters*

As shown in Figure 1, male characters account for 86.9% of all identified human character appearances, whereas female characters account for only 13.1%. This difference indicates that the visual space in the textbook is predominantly occupied by men. Although female characters are present, their visibility is considerably lower than that of their male counterparts. To provide a more detailed account of this disparity, Table 1 summarizes the number of occurrences and the percentage of male and female characters identified in the illustrations.

Table 1. *Summary of Gender Visibility in Illustrations*

Gender	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Male	373	86,9%
Female	56	13,1%
Total	429	100%

Note: The figures represent the number of times human characters appear on illustrated pages and are coded as male or female.

As detailed in Table 1, a total of 429 human character appearances were recorded across the illustrated pages. Male characters appeared 373 times, compared with 56 appearances of female characters. These figures confirm the substantial numerical imbalance between the two genders in the textbook's illustrations. The predominance of male characters suggests that men occupy a more prominent position in the book's visual representation, while women receive comparatively limited visual exposure. However, the frequency of character appearances alone does not fully explain how gender visibility is distributed across the textbook's pages. Therefore, the analysis also examines the distribution of pages according to the presence of male and female characters.

Table 2 presents the distribution of the 45 illustrated pages according to three visual presence patterns: men only, men and women, and women only. This classification provides a complementary perspective by showing whether female characters appear independently or alongside male characters, rather than merely measuring the total number of character appearances.

Table 2. *Distribution of Pages by Gender Presence*

Visual Presence Patterns	Number of Pages	Percentage of Pages	Sample Page
Men only	24	53,3%	65, 89, 105, 135
Men and women	20	44,4%	20, 138, 170, 207
Women only	1	2,2%	230
Total number of illustrated pages	45	100%	-

As shown in Table 2, 24 pages (53.3%) feature only male characters, while 20 pages (44.4%) include both male and female characters. Only one page (2.2%) depicts female characters without any male characters. This distribution reinforces the pattern identified in Figure 1 and Table 1: male characters not only appear more frequently but also dominate the visual composition across the textbook's illustrated pages. The limited occurrence of women-only illustrations further suggests that female representation rarely occupies the visual space independently of male characters. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that gender visibility in *Al-ʿArabiyyah li al-Nāshīʾn* Volume 3 is characterized by a pronounced numerical imbalance and a predominance of male-centered visual representation.

Agency and the Division of Public and Domestic Roles

Men not only appear more frequently, but are also more often positioned as the principal actors in events of high social significance. They are represented in the realms of war, markets, education, religion, sport, and the professions. Conversely, women appear more frequently in activities related to childcare, caregiving, and domestic work. This disparity is further illustrated in Figures 2–5, which present selected examples of gender representation across different social contexts in *Al-ʿArabiyyah li al-Nāshīʾn* Volume 3.



Figure 2. Page 65: Saladin And His Army

On page 65, men feature prominently in the war narrative relating to the figure of Saladin, as shown in Figure 2. The illustration depicts men as collective actors on the battlefield, leading, moving, and participating in heroic events. Women are absent from this representation of military activity. This visual arrangement associates men with leadership, courage, and historical agency, reinforcing the prominence of male figures in narratives of conflict and collective achievement.



Figure 3. Page 135: A Father and His Son at the Market

A similar pattern is evident in Figure 3, which depicts a father and his son at the market on page 135. Men are represented moving about, interacting, and participating in economic activities within a public space. The illustration positions male figures as active participants in commercial life, further associating masculinity with mobility and engagement in public economic activities.

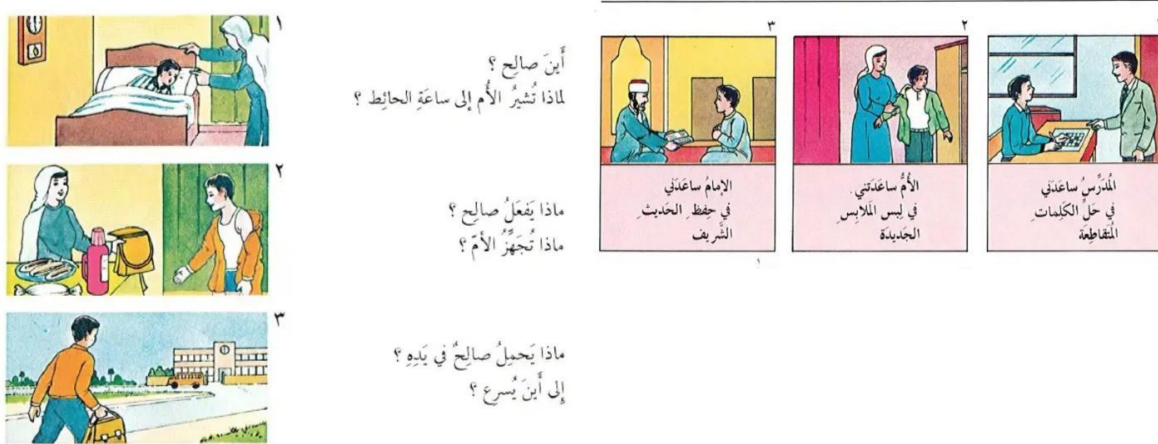


Figure 4. Pages 138 and 170: Parenting and Educational and Religious Authority

The contrast between caregiving responsibilities and educational or religious authority is further illustrated in Figure 4, which presents scenes from pages 138 and 170. On page 138, the mother is depicted waking her son, preparing his packed lunch, and seeing him off to school. These activities position women as responsible for meeting children's everyday needs and supporting their education through domestic care. In contrast, page 170 depicts men in the roles of teachers and religious mentors, while a woman is shown helping a child put on a jacket. Taken together, these illustrations suggest a gendered division of social roles in which women are associated primarily with caregiving, whereas men are more prominently positioned as figures of educational and religious authority.



Figure 5. Pages 163 and 207: Contrast between Men's and Women's Activities

The differentiation between male and female social roles is also evident in Figure 5, which presents illustrations from pages 163 and 207. Page 163 depicts men as teachers, mosque imams, civil engineers, and footballers, whereas women are represented as cleaners. Page 207 depicts men listening to a sermon, participating in warfare, cycling, and celebrating a football team's victory, while women are shown waiting for their children to return home and studying.

To synthesise the patterns identified in Figures 2–5, Table 3 summarises the recurring relationships between gender, agency, and social space across the selected illustrations. The table organises the visual evidence according to six representational patterns, linking the sample pages to their depicted activities and the gendered meanings associated with them.

Table 3. *Patterns of Agency and Social Space in Selected Illustrations*

Representational Pattern	Sample Pages	Visual Representation	Gender Interpretation
Men as heroic actors	65	Saladin and his troops in battle	Courage, conflict, leadership, and historical agency are associated with men.
Men as economic actors	135	A father and his son at the market	Economic activity and mobility in public spaces are associated primarily with men.
Men as educational and religious authorities	163, 170	Teacher, religious instructor, and mosque imam	Knowledge, guidance, and social authority are predominantly attributed to men.
Women as caregivers	138, 170	Preparing provisions and assisting children	Women are positioned as responsible for supporting the needs of children and the family.
Women as domestic and service workers	163, 207	Cleaning, waiting for children, and providing assistance	Women are represented primarily through care work and supporting activities.
Men as subjects of achievement and physical activity	163, 207	Football player, winner, and cyclist	Achievement, competition, and outdoor activities are more frequently represented through male figures.

As summarised in Table 3, male figures are associated with heroic action, economic participation, educational and religious authority, and physical achievement. Female figures, by contrast, are more frequently associated with caregiving, domestic work, and supportive activities.

Salience and Counter-representations

On page 65, men form the centre of a visual narrative about courage and leadership. On page 135, men are depicted participating in market activities. On pages 163 and 207, men appear in a wider range of roles and activities, including professional occupations, religious authority, sport, and physical activities. Women, by contrast, appear more frequently in repetitive and supportive activities, such as preparing for children's needs, helping them get dressed, cleaning, waiting, and assisting them with their studies. Nevertheless, the representation of women is not entirely confined to domestic and caregiving roles. Figure 6 presents a notable counter-representation in which women occupy an educational space independently of male figures.



Figure 6. Page 230: The Representation of Women in Education

As shown in Figure 6, Page 230 is the only page in the data set that depicts women without the presence of men. On this page, women are depicted in an educational setting as teachers and pupils. Women are not portrayed as engaged in domestic work, but are instead shown participating in learning activities and within the school environment.

3.2 Discussion

Gender Visibility in Illustration

These figures become more meaningful when considered alongside the distribution across the pages. Of the 45 illustrated pages analyzed, 24 featured only men, 20 featured both men and women,

and just one featured women without any men. This pattern shows that the visual dominance of men is not merely due to there being more male characters in one or two specific images, but also because the presence of men is more widely distributed across many pages and themes (Fani Prastikawati & Yonata, 2022).

The page distribution pattern shows that male dominance operates not only at the level of character accumulation, but also at the level of visual distribution. If viewed solely in terms of total numbers, the imbalance can be interpreted as a matter of frequency. However, when analyzed through the distribution of pages, it becomes apparent that men have a more consistent presence within the book's visual structure. Not only do they appear more frequently, but they also feature more often without having to share representational space with women. Conversely, women appear more frequently on mixed-gender pages and very rarely occupy visual space on their own. The fact that only one page features women without men suggests that the representation of women is more limited in nature rather than being widespread as a general pattern.

In language textbooks, illustrations are usually seen as a complement to the text. However, in this case, the illustrations actually provide an important space for examining who is made visible and who is made scarce. The far more frequent presence of male characters means that pupils are exposed to a predominantly masculine visual world: men appear in a variety of situations, move through many spaces, and are part of a wide range of learning activities. Meanwhile, women appear less frequently, meaning that the visual experience offered by the book is less balanced (Wijayanto, 2025).

When this visibility data is analyzed using a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach, the issue goes beyond a mere comparison of figures. The frequency of appearance serves as a gateway to examining deeper structures of representation. Characters who appear more frequently tend to occupy a larger symbolic space within the book. They are more readily positioned as subjects whose presence, actions and centrality to events are taken for granted. Conversely, characters who appear rarely risk being relegated to the role of supporting figures or exceptions within the social world constructed by the textbook (Shahifa et al., 2023).

At this point, the visibility data needs to be interpreted in conjunction with further questions: in what activities are men and women depicted, what social spaces do they occupy, and who is cast in the role of the main protagonist? These questions are important because visual bias arises not only from the frequency of appearances, but also from the way in which the book constructs the roles, actions and social positions of each gender within the illustrations.

Agency and the Division of Public and Domestic Roles

The disparity in visibility discussed in the previous section becomes even more pronounced when the illustrations are analysed in terms of agency and setting. Men not only appear more frequently, but are also more often positioned as the principal actors in events of high social significance. They are present in the realms of war, markets, education, religion, sport and the professions. These spaces are not merely backdrops to the images, but social arenas associated with mobility, authority, leadership and achievement. Conversely, women appear more frequently in activities related to childcare, caregiving and domestic work.

On page 65, men feature in the war narrative relating to the figure of Saladin. This visual depicts men as collective actors on the battlefield: leading, moving, and taking part in heroic events. The agency depicted in this image is not ordinary agency, but rather historical agency associated with courage, strategy and power. Women are absent from this space, so the battlefield is constructed as a masculine space entirely inhabited by men.

A similar pattern is evident on page 135, which depicts a father and his son at the market. The market in this illustration is not merely a place of trade, but also a space for social mobility. Men are depicted moving about, interacting and taking part in economic activities. When women are absent from visuals of this kind, everyday economic activities which could in fact be carried out by anyone come to appear as belonging more closely to the male sphere. Here, masculinity is shaped not only through major themes such as war, but also through everyday occurrences such as shopping and being in public spaces (Astafi, 2026).

This division of roles becomes more apparent on pages 138 and 170. On page 138, the mother is depicted waking her son, preparing his packed lunch, and seeing him off to school (Shini, 1983). The woman is portrayed as the figure who ensures the smooth running of the child's daily routine, whilst the boy is directed towards the educational sphere. This kind of visual representation portrays the domestic sphere as a woman's workplace, supporting men's movement into the public sphere. On page 170, this division is even more pronounced: men appear as teachers and religious mentors, whilst women are shown helping a child put on a jacket. In a series of images, men are associated with the authority of knowledge and religion, whilst women are associated with personal care and domestic needs.

Several other images reinforce this pattern through the contrast in activities. Page 163 depicts men as teachers, mosque imams, civil engineers and footballers, whilst women are shown as cleaners. Page 207 depicts men listening to a sermon, at war, cycling and celebrating a football team's victory, whilst women are shown waiting for their children to come home and studying. This contrast is significant as it demonstrates that men are assigned a wider variety of roles: religious, professional, physical, competitive and public. Women are indeed present, but the scope of their agency is narrower and tends to centre on supportive work (Rahm, 2026).

This division of roles shows that the public and domestic categories in the book are not presented at random. Men are more frequently placed in settings that allow them to be seen as agents of action: they teach, lead, fight, work, trade, play sport, and participate in religious activities. Women are more frequently depicted in settings that portray them as the guardians of the continuity of others' activities: waking people up, preparing meals, caring for others, waiting, cleaning, or accompanying others. Through this pattern, the book's visuals establish distinctions not only between men and women, but also between primary and supporting subjects (Adiyanto & Saptiyono, 2022).

Viewed through van Leeuwen's framework of social actor representation, this difference concerns not merely occupational categories but the allocation of social action (Leeuwen, 2008). Male characters are repeatedly positioned as actors who initiate socially consequential processes: they lead, teach, preach, fight, trade, compete, travel, and perform professional work. Female

characters are also active in several scenes, but their actions are more frequently organized around relational and supportive processes such as preparing, caring, cleaning, waiting, and assisting. The asymmetry therefore should not be reduced to a simple active-passive distinction. Rather, it lies in the range and social domains of the actions made available to each gender. Male characters are associated with a broader repertoire of historical, institutional, professional, religious, economic, and physical agency, whereas female agency is more frequently connected to maintaining the everyday activities and needs of others. This pattern is consistent with multimodal textbook research showing that gender inequality can be reproduced through differentiated access to professional, domestic, educational, and public spaces (Keles et al., 2023).

Related studies further show that gender imbalance may persist even when numerical representation appears relatively balanced, because stereotypes can remain embedded in occupational roles, domestic responsibilities, achievements and patterns of social interaction (Huang & Liu, 2024; Suwarno et al., 2021).

In multimodal reading, these distinctions are important because images not only depict characters, but also establish the relationships between characters, actions and space (Dian Maharani et al., 2025). By repeatedly depicting men in markets, mosques, schools, battlefields and sports arenas, the book presents the outside world as a familiar space for men. As women are more frequently depicted engaging in caregiving and domestic work, the book creates the impression that women's roles lie within a more private and supportive sphere. Such associations are not always conveyed through direct statements, but operate through visual repetition that appears natural within the learning materials.

Because *Al-'Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi'in* combines illustrations with titles, captions, dialogues, questions, and short verbal prompts, gendered meaning is not produced by the visual mode alone. Image and text can establish complementary semantic relations in which one mode specifies, elaborates, or reinforces meanings produced by the other (Martinec & Salway, 2005). In the selected pages examined here, the verbal elements generally support rather than challenge the gendered roles represented visually. On page 138, for example, the sequence places the mother within the child's morning routine, while the accompanying verbal context organizes the scene around waking, preparing, and sending the child to school. On page 170, the visual distinction between male educational and religious figures and female caregiving is similarly supported by the verbal identification of the activities represented. In these cases, the image identifies gendered participants and spaces, while the verbal mode specifies the actions associated with them.

This visual-verbal reinforcement is analytically important because it makes the division of gender roles less incidental to individual illustrations. When similar associations recur across pages and modes, public authority, professional activity, mobility, and achievement are repeatedly connected with male characters, while care and domestic support are more frequently connected with female characters. The gender imbalance identified in the textbook therefore operates through the convergence of visibility, action, social space, and verbal framing. From a multimodal perspective, the ideological significance lies not in any single image or sentence, but in the cumulative repetition of similar associations across the textbook.

Salience, Counter-representations, and Pedagogical Implications

In addition to frequency of appearance and the division of roles, visual bias in *Al-ʿArabiyyah li al-Nāshiʿin*, Volume 3, can also be identified through salience, or visual prominence. In Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, salience relates to the way an image makes a particular element more visible, more dominant, or more likely to attract the reader's attention (Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, 2006). This emphasis can be achieved through the number of characters, the size of the image, the positioning of the characters, the variety of activities, or the social significance of the actions being depicted (Chai et al., 2025). On pages dominated by men, this salience arises not only because there are more men, but also because they are depicted engaging in activities that are socially perceived as more powerful, such as warfare, sermons, professional pursuits, markets, sport and religious study.

Comparable visual analyses have shown that gender prominence is produced not merely by how often characters appear, but also by whether they are associated with authority, high-status positions and socially consequential activities (Lodge & Reiss, 2021).

On page 65, men are not merely present as characters, but form the center of a visual narrative about courage and leadership. On page 135, men are depicted in market activities that convey a sense of mobility and economic participation. On pages 163 and 207, men appear in a wider range of activities, ranging from professions, religious authority and sport to physical activities. This variety ensures that the representation of men is not monotonous. They appear in many roles, many spaces and many forms of action. Women, by contrast, appear more frequently in repetitive and supportive activities, such as preparing for children's needs, helping them get dressed, cleaning, waiting, or assisting with their studies. Salience in this context operates subtly. An image does not necessarily state that men are more important than women, but visual repetition can create the impression that men are more often at the center of events. When male figures are more numerous, more diverse, and more frequently associated with the public sphere, readers are presented with a visual experience that positions men as active and dynamic figures. When women are fewer in number and more frequently associated with care work, readers encounter a portrayal of women that is more confined to the roles of care and family support.

Page 230 is particularly interesting as it is the only page in the data set that depicts women without the presence of men. On this page, women are depicted in an educational setting as teachers and pupils. This representation is significant because women are not portrayed as engaged in domestic work, but are instead shown participating in learning activities and within the school environment. Upon closer examination, this page can be seen as a counter-representation to the previously dominant narrative. Women are given space to appear, to engage in activities, and to be present in a public setting associated with knowledge.

However, the significance of the representation on page 230 must still be considered within the book's overall visual structure. The portrayal of women as teachers and pupils does indeed convey a positive image, but their presence remains an exception, as they appear only once in a scene featuring women without men. This representation is not yet strong enough to counterbalance the male dominance evident across many other pages. Indeed, as women appear in a space separate from men, this page can also be interpreted as a form of representation that remains segregated: whilst women

are granted access to an educational space, this space is presented as a specialized one, rather than as an everyday, equal and recurring norm (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).

Historical context also needs to be considered in interpreting these representations. Published in Saudi Arabia in 1983, *Al-'Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi'īn* emerged from a particular social and educational context rather than from a culturally neutral environment. Scholarship on Saudi education has documented the institutionalisation of gender-segregated education and its relationship with broader expectations concerning male and female social roles (Baki, 2004). This context does not invalidate the representational imbalance identified in the present corpus. Rather, it helps explain how such patterns could become culturally intelligible and pedagogically routine within the period and setting in which the textbook was produced. The book can therefore be read both as a language-learning resource and as a historical artefact that reflects particular configurations of gendered social participation. More recent research on Saudi educational textbooks indicates that questions of female visibility and restricted social representation remain relevant to the analysis of visual discourse in educational materials (Hudhayri, 2026).

This reading is important for Arabic teachers who use textbooks as a learning resource. Textbooks should not be viewed as material to be accepted at face value. Teachers can treat illustrations as material for critical discussion, rather than merely as accompaniments to vocabulary or dialogues. For example, when discussing pictures of markets, professions, families or schools, teachers can ask simple questions: who is shown in the picture, who is not shown, who works outside the home, who looks after the family, and could these roles be envisaged as being more equal? Questions such as these do not interfere with language learning; on the contrary, they can enrich speaking, reading and writing practice.

Another strategy that can be employed is to incorporate supplementary materials. Teachers can present alternative images or texts depicting women as doctors, teachers, organizational leaders, traders, researchers or public figures, as well as men in domestic roles such as cooking, looking after children, cleaning the house or preparing meals. Language exercises can also be redesigned by asking pupils to rewrite dialogues or describe images with a more equitable role reversal. In this way, learning does not stop at mastering vocabulary and sentence structure, but also opens up space for critical visual literacy.

For developers of teaching materials, the patterns identified in this book highlight the importance of a visual audit before the book is widely used. Such an audit must not be limited to checking linguistic accuracy, the progression of the material, or the appropriateness of the themes; it must also address questions of representation namely, whether men and women are given relatively equal space, whether both are offered sufficient variety in their roles, and whether the public and domestic spheres are not rigidly delineated along gender lines. In the context of Arabic textbooks for non-Arab learners, these questions are particularly important because the books not only introduce the language but also convey recurring social narratives through their text and illustrations (Yusuf & Akbar, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that visual gender representation in *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi’in* Volume 3, is unbalanced. Of the 429 character appearances, men appear 373 times (86.9%), whilst women appear 56 times (13.1%). The imbalance lies not only in frequency, but also in page distribution and agency. Men are more consistently portrayed as public figures, holders of authority and achievers, whilst women are primarily associated with child-rearing, caregiving and domestic work. Page 230 presents women as teachers and pupils, but this counter-representation is isolated and therefore does not alter the dominant pattern. Taken together, these patterns indicate that gender imbalance operates not simply through numerical underrepresentation, but through the unequal distribution of visibility, agency, social space and visual prominence. Conceptually, this suggests that gender representation in textbooks needs to be examined as a multimodal structure in which frequency, role allocation and visual emphasis jointly make particular gendered social positions more recurrent than others.

The contribution of this research lies in the simultaneous mapping of visibility, page distribution, agency, social space and salience, which demonstrates how illustrations normalize the division of public and domestic roles. The practical implication is the need for a representation audit in the development of textbooks and for critical mediation by teachers through supplementary materials and language tasks that present more diverse gender roles. As the study covers only one volume and has not yet examined user reception, further research should compare across volumes or series and involve teachers and learners.

This study is limited to a single volume of *Al-‘Arabiyyah li al-Nāshi’in* and to visual and textual data derived from document analysis; it therefore does not establish how teachers or learners interpret these representations in classroom practice. Future research should examine whether the interaction of visibility, agency, social space and visual prominence identified here recurs across other volumes, textbook series and publication contexts. Reception studies involving teachers and learners could further investigate how such representations are interpreted or negotiated, while pedagogical intervention studies could examine how critical visual literacy activities influence learners’ engagement with gendered representations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express his gratitude to Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga and STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta for the opportunity to carry out this research, which has enabled this study and article to be completed and to make an academic contribution.

DECLARATION OF AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

The author (s) used [DeepL Translator to translate the text into English and refine the style to make it sound better]. Authors take full responsibility for all manuscript content.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The authors declare that no funding was received for this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Widi Astuti	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Hisyam Zaini		✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Zamzam Afandi				✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	

C : Conceptualization I : Investigation Vi : Visualization
 M : Methodology R : Resources Su : Supervision
 So : Software D : Data Curation P : Project administration
 Va : Validation O : Writing - Original Draft Fu : Funding acquisition
 Fo : Formal analysis E : Writing - Review & Editing

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest

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