

ACCESS to gender balance

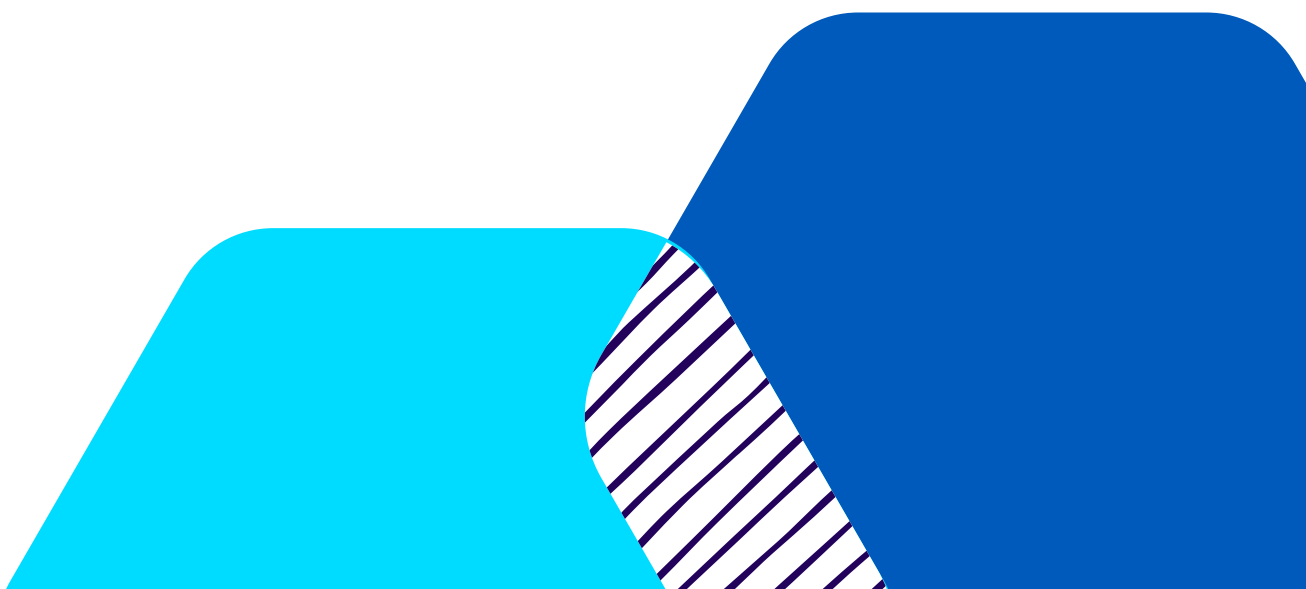
A toolkit for teachers



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Author biography

Ginny Rowlands has over 30 years' experience in ELT, 18 of those in Asia. Her experience encompasses implementing and evaluating pre-service and in-service teacher professional development programmes, curriculum design and materials development, introducing change and managing transitional strategy. Ginny has a strong

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Introduction

This toolkit is designed for educators who would like to improve their awareness of issues connected to gender bias and gender representation in English language learning materials. It explains some key concepts and then demonstrates problems where gender bias and gender representation might appear.

The toolkit is designed to help teachers recognise gender issues through analysing sample learning materials. It introduces a problematising framework: Access to Gender Balance, to apply to English language learning materials. Using the framework's questioning strategies, teachers can compensate for any gender bias or gender misrepresentation they find. The toolkit provides guidance on applying Access to Gender Balance to focus on gender bias in various ways.

Aims

Through using this toolkit you will:

- Explore gender-representation issues in English language learning materials
- Explore strategies for managing gender bias and achieving gender balance
- Apply 'gender-balancing' strategies to sample English language learning content
- Explore resources for bringing gender balance into the English language learning classroom.

Glossary of terms

Gender bias:

One gender appears to be better, stronger, more successful than the other

Gender representation:

How men and women are shown in images and texts

Gender balance:

Men and women are shown as equals

Gender equality:

Males and females have the same opportunities without discrimination

Gender-sensitive teaching:

Being aware of problems in learning materials related to gender representation and taking steps to address those issues

Gender analytical:

Being critical of learning materials that show gender bias

A gender angle:

When a language learning topic is connected to common gender issues

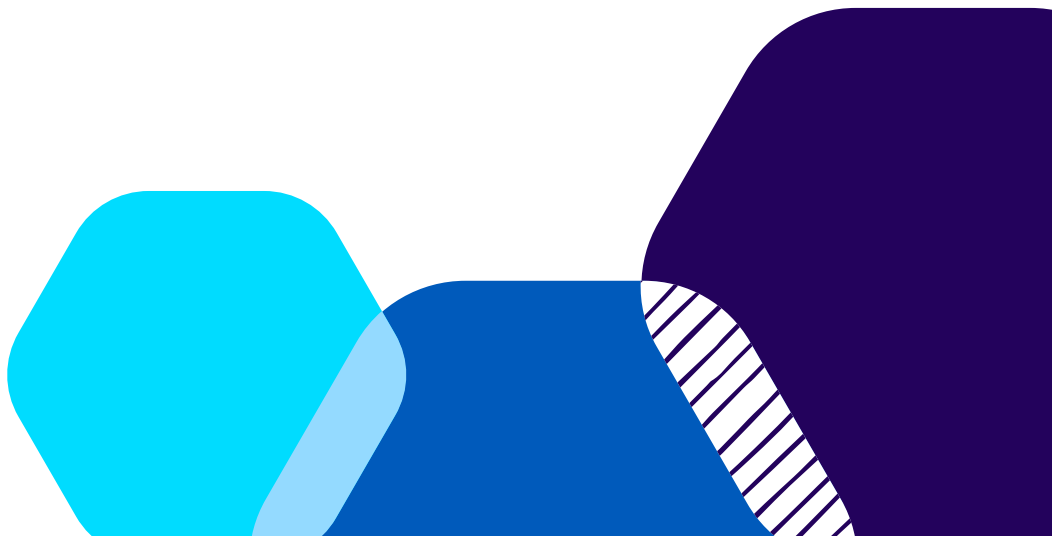
English language learning content and its influence on learners

Reflect on these statements about gender representation in English language learning materials.

	True	False	I don't know
Teachers use English language learning textbooks for about half of their instruction time			
English language learning textbooks portray contemporary norms and values through imagery and texts			
The images and texts found in English language learning materials should represent females and males as equal			
If females are shown to be less active than males (for example, in sports or leisure activities), then they are not represented equally			
If males are never described doing household chores, then those learning materials are not representative of 21st century life			
If a textbook represents females and males as equals, it can positively influence the way children think about their roles in society			

English language learning textbooks and learning materials are essential tools for both teachers and learners because they provide a structured syllabus with a bank of activities to activate and practise language. Learners value their content, trust them as authoritative and see them as useful linguistic references. Many teachers use

textbooks for between 75–90 per cent of the instruction time (Sadker and Zittleman, 2007). They create visual and textual contexts for learning English and paint a picture of how society functions 'by directly or indirectly transmitting models of social behaviour, norms and values' (Brugeilles and Cromer, 2009a:14).



So, if females are represented only in stereotypical ways – for example, only doing housework or being secretaries – then those materials are not representing the place of women in modern society. They cannot be considered gender balanced and may look somewhat old-fashioned. Likewise, if males are not portrayed sharing family responsibilities such as childcare, then those materials are equally problematic, and cannot be considered gender balanced either. Both portrayals do not reflect current norms and can therefore be considered gender biased.

When learners see females and males as equals in textbooks, this can help them develop positive attitudes and expectations for their futures, empowering girls and creating mutual respect between girls and boys.

‘ If education is also about social justice and citizenship, classroom practices that promote gender equality and challenge unfair gender norms are crucial. The stated and implicit messages that are communicated in the classroom about what girls and boys can do and be is likely to have an impact on their subject choice, their progression and their life chances. ’

(Ingram 2019)



Key concepts: How does gender bias or gender misrepresentation appear in English language learning textbooks?

Visibility

Just under half of the world's population is female¹. This should be reflected in text, illustrations and recordings in English language learning textbooks, so that females and males are equally represented in those materials. You can begin to check gender visibility, and understand a bit more about the textbook you are using, by asking simple questions like these:



Are there the same number of girls in the images as boys? If yes, the material is gender balanced.

Are there more boys with central roles than girls in stories and non-fiction texts? If yes, the materials do not represent society.

Do boys say more than girls in dialogues? If yes, boys dominate the interaction in dialogues.

Are girls omitted from images and texts? If yes, girls are under-represented.

When females do not appear as often as males in the text or in illustrations (which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women's accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included (Sunderland, 1994). Such female 'invisibility' in English language learning textbooks 'may contribute to female learners' low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence' (Blumberg, 2015).

Stereotyping

UNESCO defined 'gender stereotypes' as simplistic generalisations about the gender characteristics and roles of individuals and/or groups, and about the differences among them (UNESCO, 2011).

You can begin to check gender stereotyping in learning materials by using questions like these:

1. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>

Are boys and men described as dominant physically?

If yes, this suggests a stereotypical view of male gender roles.

Are girls and women shown as quiet and shy?

If yes, this maintains the stereotype that women are not comfortable contributing to discussion.

Are females and males shown in ways that do not reflect their real position in contemporary society?

If yes, this maintains a stereotype: e.g. males are not portrayed looking after children and females are not shown working outside the home. This does not reflect modern society.

**Are girls and women portrayed as dependent on boys and men?**

If yes, this maintains a stereotype: e.g. males are central in images and texts and women are largely shown only because of their connection to males; for example, as their wife, their assistant at work.

Are girls and women portrayed in restricted occupations and activities?

If yes, this maintains a stereotype: e.g. females are being shown in restricted and stereotypically female jobs and not working; for example, in science or in management.

Are girls and women only shown in certain sports?

If yes, this maintains a stereotype: e.g. there are no texts or illustrations of women doing the same sports as males (for example, football, athletics), suggesting that they do not do so.

Gender stereotypes are frequently built on prejudiced thoughts or beliefs about the worth, capabilities and potential of females and males. Despite not being built on facts or evidence, stereotypes are perpetuated in society through attitudes, the media and cultural practices.

‘...both males and females are depicted in such gender-stereotyped ways that girls’ and boys’ visions of who they are and what they can become are constrained ... so that girls are led away from mathematics and science and into gender-stereotyped courses of study.’

(Blumberg, 2008:04)

Gendered discourse

Dialogues are a key component in English language learning materials. They are used to model spoken language and to provide opportunities for learners to practise language in a communicative, meaning-focused way.

If those dialogues are not gender balanced, one gender may be disadvantaged over the other. For example, girls may never practise starting a conversation, or they may miss out on practising certain language. Girls may also absorb the message that they should not be initiating or taking control of dialogues themselves when using English.

Additionally, girls could gain a false impression of their relationship with boys. They might believe that they should accept a boy’s point of view or not argue. Equally, boys might feel anxious about taking the lead and directing the conversation.

You can begin to check for gendered discourse in a textbook using key questions like these:

Do females and males participate and communicate in dialogues equally?

If yes (e.g. they speak about the same amount), this is good and provides gender balance.



Do males dominate certain language functions?

If yes (e.g. they usually speak more and ask more questions), this is not ideal and not gender balanced.

Do males and females have equal roles in texts?

If yes (e.g. there are texts showing both females and males as the central character; for example, someone in history, a hero, a remarkable person), this is good and provides gender balance.

Do females play a dependent role in mixed-gender dialogues?

If yes (e.g. they are usually shown waiting for the male to initiate the dialogue), this is not ideal and not gender balanced.



The teacher's role in addressing gender representation

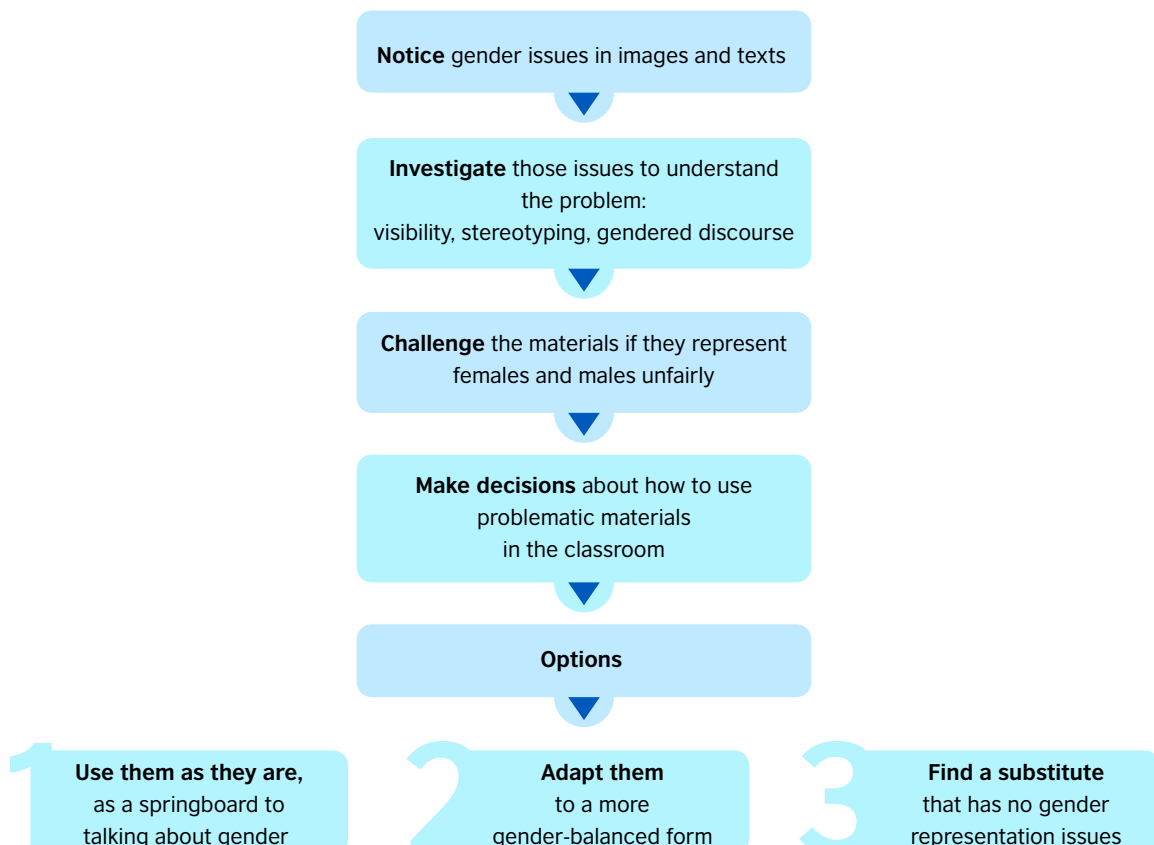
Teachers should always be critical of school textbooks and supplementary resources that they source themselves. Questions such as these can help you reflect on the materials being used:

- Will the materials achieve what you want them to achieve?
- Will they help your learners to develop the language and skills they need?
- Do they contain the relevant language structures and vocabulary for the learners' current level?

Being gender analytical requires you to assess the materials you bring into the classroom, from gender representation and gender-bias perspectives. The overall aim should be to use materials that reflect society as it really is, or in ways in which it is changing.

Teachers need to aim to be aware, curious, critical and creative. The flowchart, in Figure 1 below, demonstrates practical steps that teachers can follow to assess, and act upon, materials they use.

Figure 1: Steps towards gender balance



The ACCESS framework: developing gender-sensitive practice

Gender-sensitive teaching recognises that gender representation issues exist, and that they have an impact on learner attitudes towards learning, engagement with the subject and learner aspirations for the future.

The ACCESS framework is designed to help teachers problematise gender sensitivity. Using the ACCESS framework when planning for learning, adapting and/or sourcing materials for the classroom, it helps you ask directed questions that you can integrate into your decision-making to:

- Assess, critique and challenge English language learning materials from the perspective of gender representation

- Address unequal representation by **equalising** the materials, or by **substituting** alternatives, in order to **solve** the issues and improve the learning experience.

Each stage of the ACCESS framework, and its related questions, can be used by the teacher in their planning for classes and adaptation of materials. It can also be used by teachers with their learners in class.

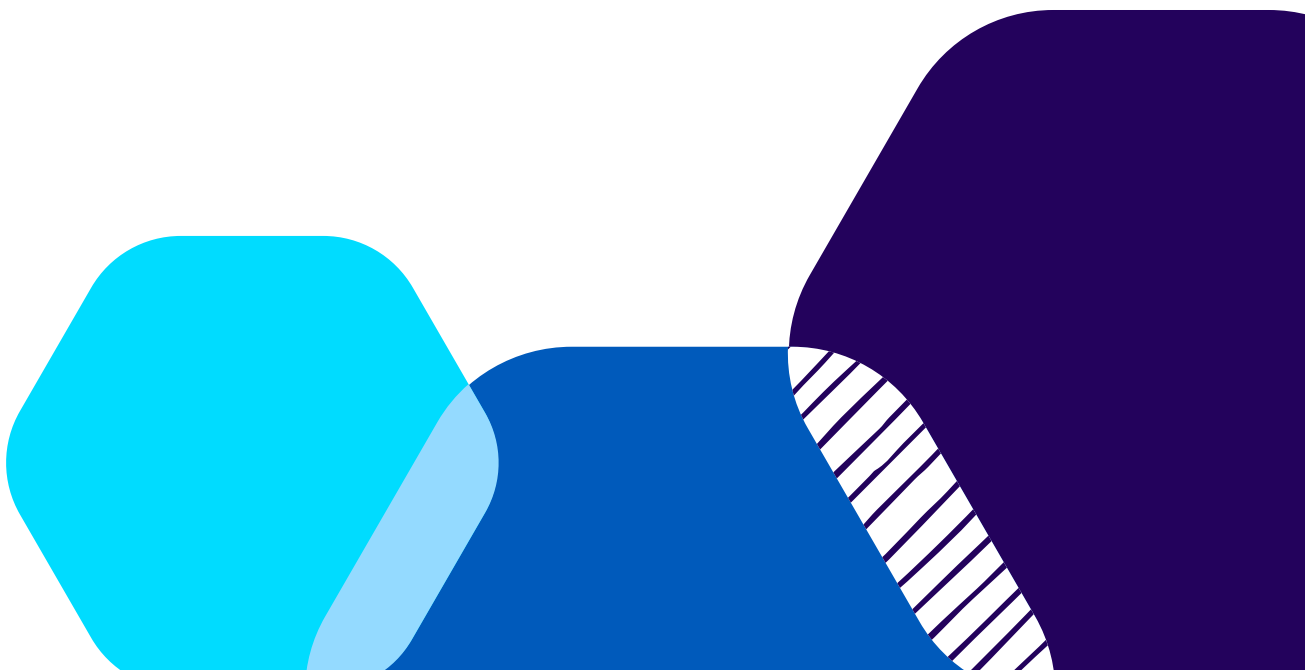


Table 1: ACCESS to Gender Balance framework

<p style="text-align: center;">A Assess</p>	<p>Is there a ‘gender angle’ to the materials?</p> <p>Is the lesson topic relevant to gender – e.g. focused on occupations, sports, family?</p> <p>Are women empowered, or do the images or text reinforce stereotypical gender roles? For example: Are girls and women portrayed in restricted occupations, activities and sports?</p> <p>Is the way the topic is portrayed fair to both genders?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">C Critique</p>	<p>Are there the same number of girls in the images as boys?</p> <p>Do males say more than girls in dialogues?</p> <p>Do females and males participate and communicate in dialogues equally?</p> <p>Do males dominate certain language functions?</p> <p>Are there more boys with more central roles than girls in stories and non-fiction texts?</p> <p>Does the text consciously make any unfair generalisations about female and male behaviour? For example: Are boys and men described as dominant physically?</p> <p>or</p> <p>Are girls and women shown as quiet and shy?</p> <p>Does the text enable an interpretation where men and women are on unequal terms?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">C Challenge</p>	<p>Are females and males shown in ways that do not reflect their real position in contemporary society?</p> <p>Are women or girls diminished because they are less visible and in less prominent roles? For example: Are girls omitted from images and texts?</p> <p>Do males and females have equal roles in texts?</p> <p>Does the text describe the structure of society, and the relations between men and women in a fair way? For example: Are girls and women portrayed as dependent on boys and men?</p> <p>Do females play a dependent role in mixed-gender dialogues?</p> <p>Is there any opportunity to challenge or counter any misrepresentation (visibility, stereotypes, gendered discourse)?</p>

NOTE: Questions that are bolded have been highlighted in previous sections of this toolkit.

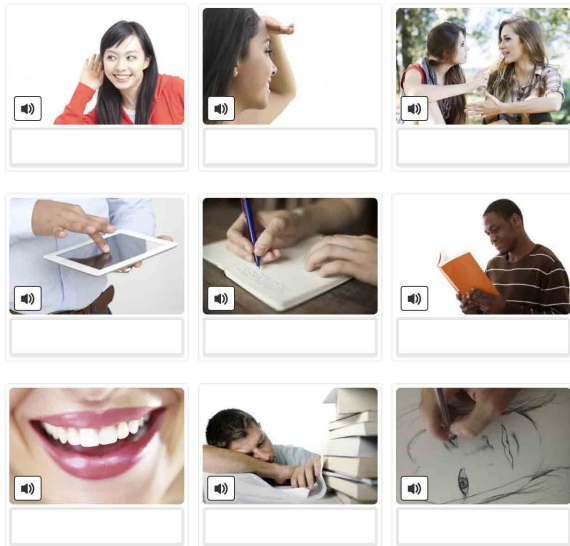
<p>E Equalise</p>	<p>Can you reverse the female and male roles without changing the level or form of gender representation?</p> <p>Does 'flipping the gender' (change male roles for female roles and vice versa) highlight any 'hidden bias' in the original?</p> <p>If females are given more empowered, positive roles, does it provide an opportunity to talk about gender parity with your learners?</p> <p>Is the misrepresentation so pronounced that you have to reject the learning material?</p>
<p>S Substitute</p>	<p>Can you find an alternative, more gender-equal text that will achieve the same learning goals?</p> <p>When learners swap the roles (male for female and vice versa), do they notice any gender bias?</p> <p>Can you use the misrepresentation in the text to hold a productive discussion on gender bias?</p> <p>Can you create alternative texts or dialogues without gender bias?</p>
<p>S Solve</p>	<p>Using these strategies, are you representing females and males equally?</p> <p>Do the learning materials better represent gender roles in contemporary society, and therefore more accurately reflect real life?</p> <p>Are girls empowered by what they see and read?</p> <p>Do boys and girls have mutual respect for each other?</p> <p>Do learners gain more understanding of gender bias?</p>



Using ACCESS to check images

Example 1: Images used for teaching vocabulary

The nine images below are taken from an online English language learning activity for A1–A2 (CEFR) teenage learners. They are used to introduce a vocabulary or lexical set: actions. The learners click on the speaker icon to hear the word and then choose the written form from a list and match it to one of the images.



We can check the images for gender bias or gender misrepresentation, using questions from the **ACCESS to Gender Balance** framework. The table below (Table 2) has been created to provide a tool for reflection and planning when using the ACCESS framework. The text provided below in each column is for example and reference only, and the amount of text used, or the comments included, will be entirely up to the user/teacher. Please note that although the stages are outlined in full below it may be possible to combine some during the assessment of the materials. This is shown in examples provided.

This first example shows a sample analysis of images from a learning activity where, on reflection, no action is required to support an improved gender balance.

Reference: <https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/vocabulary/a1-a2-vocabulary/actions>

Table 2: Sample analysis using the ACCESS to gender balance framework

	Checking for gender balance	Gender sensitivity/potential actions
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This vocabulary set (actions) has a 'gender angle' if males are shown doing more of what is likely to be regarded as superior/highly skilled/more important tasks than females, or if more of one gender is represented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The actions are 'gender balanced'; male and female genders are equally represented (four male + four female, with one which could be either gender)
Critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no visibility, stereotyping or gendered discourse issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The images are gender balanced – use them
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is nothing to challenge from a gender balance perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the images
Equalise	N/A	N/A
Substitute	N/A	N/A
Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no gender issues, so the images can be used 	N/A

Using the ACCESS framework in this way means teachers can recognise and confirm that the images represent gender fairly and are gender balanced.

Example 2: Images used to provide contextual information for a reading or listening text

Now, let's look at another example. Here is a simple image, which can potentially be used in a number of different ways by the teacher, including to introduce the topic of gender. The ACCESS framework, and the same table highlighted in Example 1, can provide guidance on how we can do this.



For example, teachers might use the photograph below to set the context for a reading or listening task. In this case, let's assume the text is about the benefits of playing video games.

First, the image can be used as a pre-reading prompt by asking lead-in questions like these:

- What are these men doing?
- How do they feel?
- Are there any benefits to gaming?

Learners discuss the questions in pairs, which enables them to predict and imagine the text content before reading and, importantly, allows them to begin to reflect on gender considerations. Images can be a very useful tool for aiding comprehension of a text to come, as learners are now expecting to find references to, in this case, time spent gaming and how it helps them.

Now, let's break down the gender analysis into the key ACCESS steps, and reflect on what the questions reveal. The table below (Table 3) shows how a topic can be critiqued from a gender perspec-

tive and then extended to include, for example, a survey about gaming, a discussion about stereotypical male and female activities, and potentially to introduce information about the opportunities that exist in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and software careers.

Note: According to the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE, 2022), women who play video games are three times more likely to study for a STEM degree than those who do not play video games.

Table 3: Sample analysis using the ACCESS to gender balance framework

	Checking for gender balance	Gender sensitivity/potential actions
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This topic has a 'gender angle' because playing video games is an activity stereotypically assigned to males, even though video games are also played by women (47% of European gamers are female²) The photo continues the stereotype 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The photo only shows males playing a video game
Critique	There are visibility and stereotyping issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The image is not gender balanced; women are not represented, although globally they may enjoy video games
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's capabilities as video gamers are diminished by their absence There is an opportunity to challenge the representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the image but draw attention to the stereotyping (or see if learners have already noticed it!) Use it as a springboard to talk about other activities stereotypically assigned to males (e.g. football, boxing)
Equalise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to equalise (in follow-up lessons), through investigation of gaming and gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You could equalise by bringing in some data about female video gamers Learners could survey their class and then other classes on time spent gaming – to 'check the stereotype'
Substitute	N/A	N/A
Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no gender issues, so the images can be used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussing gaming from a gender perspective can influence male and female attitudes about STEM and potentially change career aspirations³

2. <https://www.isfe.eu/data-key-facts/2021-key-facts-about-europe-s-video-games-sector/>

3. <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/stem>

Using ACCESS to check dialogues used for teaching English

Next, let's look at an example of a simple dialogue and go through how the ACCESS framework can be used by teachers, step by step⁴, to analyse and adapt those materials to help reduce gender bias and make them more gender balanced. The key steps are outlined below.

A girl and boy are at school, they are talking on a Monday morning, about their weekend activities

Tom : Tell me about your weekend.
 Sue : I stayed home and watched TV.
 Tom : You're a couch potato!

Example 3:

This is a very simple dialogue to practise talking about the past; in this case what a boy and a girl did at the weekend. It introduces regular past forms (adding -ed to the base verb) and the distinct pronunciations of that form: /d/ in played and /t/ in watched.

STEP 1: Assess

Apply the ACCESS framework to the dialogue to check for gender balance.

Table 4: Sample analysis of a dialogue using the ACCESS to gender balance framework

	Checking for gender balance	Gender sensitivity/potential actions
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because the male speaker is rude and unnecessarily critical of the girl's weekend activity, this dialogue possibly has a 'gender angle' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use it and help learners find the issues: for example, there is no phatic language, and the conversation stops abruptly; the boy's opening words are dominating and semi-aggressive; they are also quite unnatural; the criticism flies out of nowhere; the girl does not have a chance to stand up for herself
Critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The way it is constructed is not gender equal: the boy's language instructs her to respond and then when she does, he criticises her response; the girl answered with the facts, not expecting him to judge her activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to use it in order to reveal the issues and then solve them (see questions below)
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The boy's language and intentions can be challenged, using questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use it to reveal the issues by comparing with more friendly dialogues (see alternative dialogue below)
Equalise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest changes to help learners notice the difference they make; for example, swapping the roles, adding more respectful terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners can create new dialogues that are gender equal
Substitute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See below example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See below example
Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners notice how dominating language can be upsetting; they learn alternative language that is more respectful 	

4. Steps may vary depending on how a teacher applies the ACCESS framework. Examples below are for illustrative purposes only.

STEP 2: Critique the text

So, once you've identified the possible gender issues you can critique the text. Steps a) and b) offer a chance to do this.

a) Raise awareness of the gender issues; for example, you can use the problematic dialogue to reveal the issues. Use questions such as these to help learners notice gender issues in the text and raise their awareness of the gender imbalance:

- **Does Tom ask Sue a question?** No
- **Does he use an instruction?** Yes
- **Which is more polite, a question or an instruction?** A question
- **If someone called you a couch potato, how would you feel?**
Possibly inferior or lazy
- **Who dominates the conversation?**
Tom does
- **Does Sue criticise his behaviour?** No
- **Is this a good way to represent girls and boys?** No

b) Then, have the learners read the dialogue with Tom and Sue's roles swapped (Sue starts the dialogue, Tom responds, Sue criticises him). Ask the learners if it sounds the same? Or unusual? If so, how?

STEP 3: Challenge and equalise the text⁵

Now create and then present a more gender-balanced (adapted) version of the dialogue so that learners can notice the difference. Once learners have been introduced to the idea of gender-balanced dialogues, and gender sensitivity, a useful learning activity is to give the learners opportunities to create their own versions of dialogues, instead of the teacher.

STEP 4: Substitute the text

1. Show the adapted dialogue in column A and help learners to 'spot the differences' (underline or highlight)
2. Then show column B – eliciting where and how it is different

A – Adapted dialogue	B – What's different?
Tom: Did you have a nice weekend?	Tom asks a question, it is friendly, he is curious
Sue: Yes, I did. Thank you.	Sue replies happily
Tom: What did you do?	Tom's reaction is respectful and interested
Sue: I stayed home and watched TV.	Sue is happy to give additional information
Tom: Oh, that's nice!	Tom appreciates Sue's activities
Sue: What about you? Did you have a nice weekend?	Sue wants to continue the conversation and returns the question
Tom: I stayed at home too. I played cards with my family.	They find common ground

STEP 5: Finally, you can solve the gender bias

As an example, have the learners make their own sample dialogues and critique each other for gender balance.

5. Two ACCESS steps are combined here, but these can be separated into individual steps dependent on the activity.

Example 4:

Let's look at another example. Again, follow the outlined steps and suggestions to help you analyse the materials presented for gender bias. As you go through the stages of ACCESS, consider how you might also guide learners through the same stages using appropriate learner-focused tasks.

Read the dialogue below from an English language learning textbook. Do you notice any potential gender-related issues?

Susan and Jim are in the same class at school, they are both 12 years old. They met two weeks ago, when the term started. They are still getting to know each other.

It's the beginning of the school day – Susan and Jim meet on the way to their classroom

Jim: Who brought you to school today?

Susan: My mum. My dad's too busy to bring me.

Jim: What does he do? What's your dad's job?

Susan: He's a businessman. He works very hard!

Jim: My dad works hard too – he's a scientist. He works in a famous laboratory. I want to be a scientist when I grow up.

Susan: Oh really!

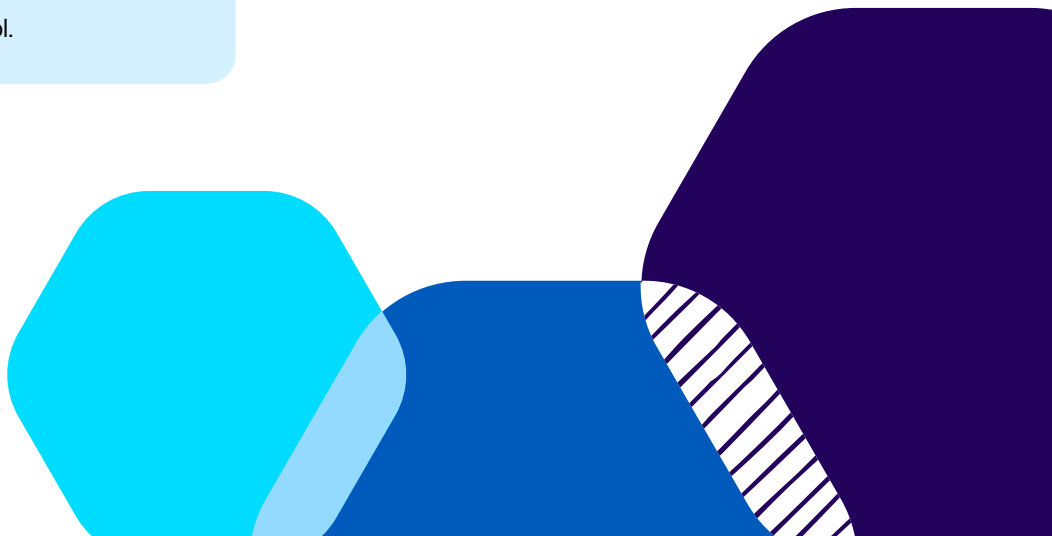
Jim: Yes, my teacher says I can be a great scientist if I study hard. Does your mum work too?

Susan: No, she looks after our home.

Jim: Oh, so she's a housewife. So that's why she has time to bring you to school.

STEP 1: Pre-assessment: create lead-in questions you might ask learners or reflect on

- Is there a gender angle? How does it describe gender norms in society?
- Does the text show females and males on equal terms?
- Do you think the male occupations described are more important than the female occupations?
- Are there any examples of stereotyping?



What can teachers do?

STEP 2: Assess

Apply the **ACCESS to Gender Balance** strategies to check and then address the instances of gender bias and gender misrepresentation.

Table 5: Sample analysis of Example 4 using the ACCESS to gender balance framework

	Checking for gender balance	Gender sensitivity/potential actions
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This dialogue has a 'gender angle' because the male speaker dominates the conversation The text portrays male and female occupations in an unbalanced way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use it and help learners find the issues
Critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The way the dialogue is constructed is not gender equal: the boy asks all of the questions, and the girl plays only a dependent role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to use it in order to reveal the issues and then solve them
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roles can be swapped, to highlight the imbalance The male stereotypes and implicit criticism of the girl's mother and housewives generally can be challenged Gendered language: housewife, businessman 	Use it to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question the idea of male breadwinners What is hard work? The concept of house care Focus on gendered language: housewife (vs homemaker) Businessman (vs office worker)
Equalise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present a gender-balanced dialogue with the same language content (asking about family, occupations) Guide learners to recognising how each change contributes to the gender balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners can read an adapted dialogue where gender bias is eliminated and replaced by more realistic, gender-balanced interaction – to notice the changes/difference (see Example 4B below)
Substitute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an alternative dialogue with no gender issues but with similar language content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use contrastive activities (see Equalise above)
Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners notice how gender-balanced interaction between male and female speakers should/can be more respectful; they learn about occupational stereotypes and to use non-gendered terms 	

Investigate the gender issues in Example 4

STEP 3: Critique and challenge

This sample English language learning dialogue appears, on the surface, to be a harmless exchange about their families, but there are underlying messages about gender norms in society. It is

important to consider and answer questions provided in the ACCESS framework that allow us to assess the dialogue properly.

Stereotyping

The occupations referred to (male: scientist and business manager; female: housewife) maintain old-fashioned norms about female and male occupations and male and female family roles.

The fathers are portrayed as the 'breadwinners', working in stereotypically male occupations (a scientist and a businessman). Susan's mother is not working outside the home and does not have a career. This means she has a lot of free time, according to Jim.

Jim does not consider female work in the home as important as the fathers' jobs, and he shows this when he says: 'So that's why she has time to bring you to school'.

These are examples of the false impressions that can exist in English language learning materials. Because these are based on exaggerated, inaccurate and rigid generalisations, they have little correspondence with reality (McCormick, 1994).



For example, an analysis of the text reveals subtle, gendered discourse issues, which will be highlighted through critique.

Read the dialogue again; this time focus on the way the conversation is constructed, and the language used. Complete the analysis below to guide your reflection on the text, using either Susan or Jim's names.⁶

1. _____ uses long interaction 'turns', holding the floor and directing the conversation
2. _____ reacts briefly to questions and doesn't ask any questions
3. _____ starts the conversation and asks all four questions
4. _____ is confident and ambitious, almost bragging about their own abilities
5. _____ makes an implicit criticism of their classmate's mother and the role of a homemaker

6. _____ uses gendered language when they refer to their parents' occupations

Teachers can then challenge any potentially false impressions and seek to adapt problematic texts so that they correspond better with reality or students' aspirational goals. From the critique stage we note the following points that can be challenged:

- Jim dominates the conversation, using longer interaction 'turns' than Susan, holding the floor and directing the conversation. Jim starts the conversation and asks all four questions. In contrast, Susan reacts briefly to questions and does not ask any questions herself.
- Jim's directness appears rude when he suggests Susan's mother does not work hard (has time to bring Susan to school). Susan and Jim use examples of outdated 'gendered language': businessman and housewife.

6. A similar activity can be used with learners for classroom reading comprehension, and reflection.

Gender issues in English language learning textbook dialogues

Research in the 1990s found that in mixed-sex dialogues, on average, men started conversations more often and said more than women (Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland, 1997:99).

In 2016, a study into English language learning textbooks used in Pakistan found the same imbalance, with males more frequently leading the dialogues than females. When a female did start a conversation, they found that conversation was taken over by males (Ullah and Haque, 2016:83).

So, what is the impact of this on the girls and boys using these books? Dialogues are a key

component in English language learning textbooks. They are used to model spoken language and to provide opportunities for learners to practise language in a communicative, meaning-focused way. If those dialogues are not gender balanced, then girls may be disadvantaged. For example, girls may never practise starting a conversation, or they may miss out on practising the language of interruption or turn-taking. Girls may also get a false impression of their relationship with boys.



STEP 4: Equalise

In the classroom, you can raise awareness of the gender issues you've identified. For example, you can ask the learners to check:

- Which gender speaks most (by counting the words)?
- Who starts the conversation?
- How many questions do they each ask? (Jim – four; Susan – none)
- List the people and the jobs mentioned
- Can we include the role of a housewife in the list of jobs?
- Can the job names be changed to be gender neutral?

Ask the learners if they think this is fair? Does it represent the way they talk to each other in their own language? If not, consider how can we change the dialogue to equalise some of the points of imbalance; for example, change jobs, assign questions to Susan, changing some of the text, switching the roles.

STEP 5: Substitute

With ideas for equalisation agreed, now you can create a more gender-balanced dialogue to show learners how the conversation can be different. The teacher can support learners in doing this, but should also be aware of maintaining authenticity within the dialogue wherever possible. The aim is to find balance, but this does not mean it will always be exactly 50:50 in all aspects.

Compare Example 4, above with a new, adapted version, Example 4B below.

Ask learners if they can see how the dialogue is different.

What has changed?

Remind learners to think about stereotyping, roles in the dialogue and gendered language. This can be done by eliciting these terms and what they refer to, prior to reading.

Example 4B:

Jim: Hi Jim! Are we late?

Jim: No, we're just in time!

Susan: Who brought you to school today?

Jim: My dad! He always brings me because my mum is so busy.

Susan: My mum's also busy, she works from home as a regional manager. She often has early virtual meetings, so my dad drops me at school on his way to work at the university.

Jim: Oh really! What does he do at the university?

Susan: He's a history lecturer. What does your dad do?

Jim: He's a scientist and my mum is too!

Susan: Oh, do they work in the same place?

Jim: No, but their jobs are similar. They met at university you know.

Susan: I'd love to be a scientist, maybe I can talk to your parents about it sometime!

Jim: Sure, I'll ask them!

If the answer is YES, this means we have addressed the key issues. If the answer is NO, then some further changes may be required.

For example:

- **Target 1: Susan has a more prominent role in the conversation:** She starts the topic, and she asks questions. Possible question(s): Does Susan have a more prominent role? Yes. Does she start the topic? Yes. Does she ask questions? Yes.
- **Target 2: The interaction does not have any gender dominance:** Both of them have a chance to ask and respond and build a picture of their parents, cooperatively. Neither of them dominates the conversation, so the exchange seems more friendly.
- **Target 3: Stereotypical gender roles are eliminated:** The stereotyped male and female occupations have been replaced. Both children's parents are working. The parents appear to have similar occupational status.
- **Target 4: Females are empowered:** Susan is ambitious and confident that she could become a scientist. Jim is supportive and enthusiastic. He believes she could be a scientist in the future.
- **Target 5: Gendered language has been eliminated:** For example, 'businessman' and 'housewife' have been substituted.

STEP 6: Solve

After reading, the teacher can elicit learners' ideas and then guide them to find all of the features that make this example more gender balanced.

Based on the gender-focused analysis, the list of statements below highlights some targets we might aim for in adapting the original text. These offer teachers or learners a chance to target 'equalisation' of a text by considering these statements, and act as a checklist to help reflect on the adaptation and ensure equalisation has happened.

Use the list of statements on the right. Convert each point into a question the teacher (or the learner) can ask about the new dialogue created (4B).



STEP 7: Reflection and round up

Finally, round up and complete the table after all exercises are complete, adaptations are made, and both learners and teacher have reflected on the solutions made.

Table 6: Example of comprehensive table created through the ACCESS tool

	Checking for gender balance	Gender sensitivity/potential actions
Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The adapted dialogue has a gender angle – but in a positive way The text portrays male and female occupations in a balanced way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use it and help learners find the positive examples of female and male equality
Critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The way the dialogue is constructed is gender equal; the conversation develops cooperatively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to use it to model friendly and cooperative interaction Focus on occupations and stereotypes Focus on language that is non-gendered
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If used in comparison with the original dialogue, the gendered issues can be highlighted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use it to focus on learner career aspirations, data around males and females in STEM; gendered language: housewife (vs homemaker)
Equalise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If used in comparison with the original dialogue, the changes and resulting gender balance can be highlighted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide learners to recognise how each change contributes to the gender balance Learners can create other adaptations that are gender equal
Substitute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the benefits of substituting gender-balanced language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on a range of gender-neutral language
Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners notice how gender-balanced interaction between male and female speakers is more cooperative and respectful; they learn about occupational stereotypes and how to use non-gendered terms 	

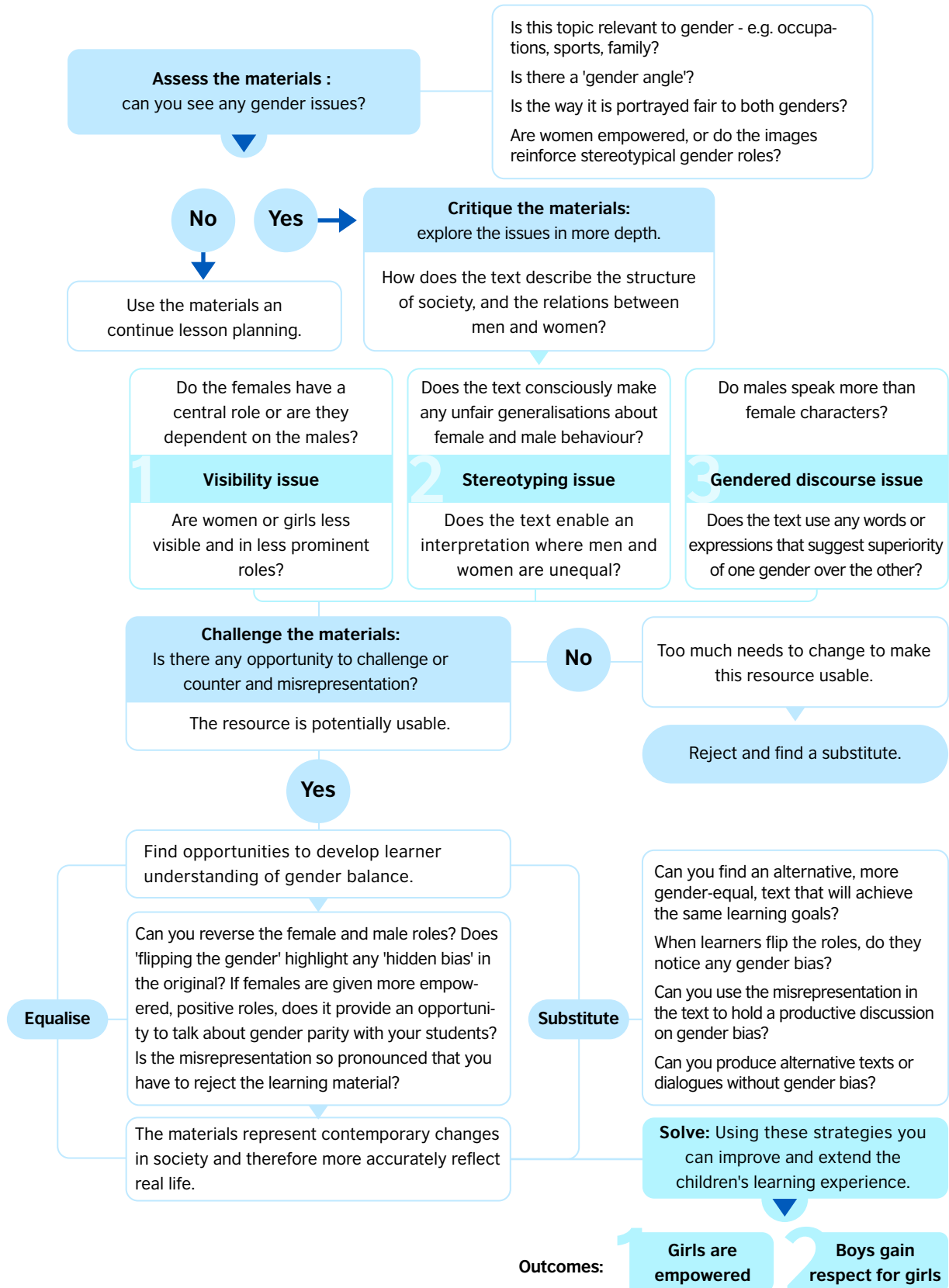
Reflect on the process we used to analyse the images and the dialogues

1. How did you identify gender bias issues?
2. How did you critique and challenge the content?
3. How did adapting the material achieve gender balance?
4. What did you change in the dialogues you created?
5. How did opportunities to talk about gender with learners emerge?

The 'step-by-step' analysis of the English language learning content (images and dialogues) used five questioning strategies that can be applied to learning materials (images, texts, or images plus texts) to compensate for and solve gender issues – those five strategies form the ACCESS to Gender Balance framework.

Figure 2 models the decision-making process that you can use.

Figure 2: Gender-balanced decision making using the ACCESS framework



Now, go back to the statements about gender representation in learning materials that you

considered at the beginning of this toolkit. Are you going to change any of your responses?

	True	False	I don't know
Teachers use English language learning textbooks for about half of their instruction time		False, it's 75% to 90% of instruction time	
English language learning textbooks portray contemporary norms and values through imagery and text	True, if they are gender balanced	False, if they are portraying old-fashioned norms	
The images and texts found in English language learning materials should represent females and males as equal	True, it's a UN Strategic Development Goal to achieve gender equality in education		
If females are shown to be less active than males (for example, in sports or leisure activities), then they are not represented equally	True, males and females can both do the majority of activities		
If males are never described doing household chores, then those learning materials are not representative of 21 st century life	True, if boys see people like themselves helping in the house, they are more likely to be willing to do it too		
If a textbook represents females and males as equals, it can positively influence the way children think about their roles in society	There is growing evidence that opening children's minds positively influences their life choices		

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