



The Impact of fairy tales on shaping gender concepts among secondary school students in Vietnam

Le Thi Kim Ut, Thu Dau Mot University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Email: utltk@tdmu.edu.vn

Abstract: Fairy tales, as a genre of folklore, significantly influence the cognitive process and the formation of gender stereotypes among lower secondary school students in Vietnam. This study analyzes traditional fairy tales that reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes within the cultural context of East Asia and Vietnam, thereby assessing their impacts on gender perceptions among Vietnamese lower secondary students. Drawing on gender theory frameworks, the research focuses on examining Vietnamese fairy tales and conducting quantitative surveys alongside in-depth interviews with some lower secondary school teachers. The findings reveal that a substantial number of Vietnamese fairy tales contain gender bias, depicting male and female characters in “traditional” ways: females are often portrayed as weak and submissive, while males are strong and decisive. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicate a correlation between exposure to gender-stereotyped fairy tales and biased gender perceptions among students. ANOVA tests also reveal significant differences based on gender and residential area. The study proposes implications for the education sector, publishers, parents, and other stakeholders regarding the selection, adaptation, and transmission of fairy tales to promote equitable, flexible, and humanistic gender perspectives among the younger generation.

Keywords: *Gender stereotypes, education, gender, secondary school students, fairy tales, media.*

1. Introduction

In the process of developing social cognition and personal identity, children are profoundly influenced by informal educational media, among which literature - particularly fairy tales - plays a prominent role. Fairy tales are not merely a form of entertainment or a moral education tool; they also function as a cultural sign system that transmits and reinforces gender norms that have been socialized over generations (Zipes, 2015; Arnaldi, 2021). Numerous international studies have demonstrated that children’s literature, especially fairy tales, often carries implicit messages about gender roles, personality traits, physical appearance, and power dynamics between male and female characters (Nikolajeva, 2016). Male characters are typically portrayed as strong, courageous, and action-oriented, whereas female characters often appear as weak, passive, and reliant on physical beauty or assistance from men for success (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011). These gendered patterns contribute to the formation of gender concepts - children’s understanding, expectations, and self-conception regarding what is considered appropriate for their gender (Martin & Ruble, 2019).

In Vietnam, fairy tales such as Tấm Cám, Thạch Sanh, Sọ Dừa, and Chú Đổng Tử have long been an integral part of childhood development. However, these stories also exhibit numerous manifestations of gender bias: female characters are often associated with physical beauty and submissiveness, while male characters are linked with action, rationality, and power (Nguyễn Thị Minh, 2022). In the context of modern education, which emphasizes gender equality and the development of individual competencies irrespective of gender norms, the continued transmission of conservative gender values through fairy tales poses significant challenges for early gender education. According to UNICEF (2023), children internalize gender messages at a very early age - long before they consciously understand gender meanings - through images, narratives, play, and particularly



through books. Analyzing the relationship between fairy tales and gender perception is therefore both theoretically and practically significant, as it supports the adaptation of educational content to the goal of fostering children's holistic development.

Although some international and domestic studies have addressed this issue, most remain at the level of cultural-literary discourse or motif analysis from a gender-critical perspective, without deeply assessing the actual impact of fairy tales on children's gender concepts in real-life reception. Furthermore, there is a lack of updated research in the context of Vietnam's implementation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum, which emphasizes the development of learners' qualities and competencies through essential, practical, and modern educational content, harmonizing ethics, intellect, physical fitness, and aesthetics. Against this backdrop, the study "The Role of Fairy Tales in Shaping Gender Concepts among Vietnamese Children" aims to clarify: (1) the extent to which gender stereotypes are reproduced in Vietnamese fairy tales; (2) the relationship between exposure to fairy tales and components of children's gender cognition; and (3) differences across gender, residential area, and age group. The research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical foundations for developing learning materials, improving gender education, and guiding the publication of children's literature toward gender equality, in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UNESCO, 2020).

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework

2.1.1. Gender theory and the social role of gender

The concept of gender is understood as a socio-cultural construct that reflects societal expectations and norms regarding behaviors, roles, and characteristics attributed to men and women. This differs from the concept of biological sex, which refers to innate biological attributes of individuals. Gender is a product of social construction, wherein individuals learn and perform gender roles through social interaction and the reproduction of cultural values (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

According to Judith Butler (1990), gender is not a fixed entity but an effect produced through discourse and practice, commonly referred to as gender performativity theory. Butler argues that behaviors such as dressing, speaking, and expressing emotions are not mere manifestations of gender but active constructions of gender, constrained by prevailing social norms. Complementing this argument, West and Zimmerman's (1987) symbolic interactionist perspective emphasizes that "doing gender" is a continuous process occurring in everyday life, thereby reinforcing or challenging the gender order established by society.

Concerning children, gender socialization plays a decisive role in shaping gendered concepts, attitudes, and behaviors. This process begins very early, as children interact with family, language, play activities, media, and especially children's literature (UNICEF, 2023). According to Ridgeway and Correll (2021), children are not merely passive recipients but active interpreters of gender models conveyed to them, constructing their own gender identity in the process.

Additionally, social role theory, developed by Alice Eagly (1987), posits that gender differences do not originate from biological factors but from the historical division of socio-economic roles between men and women. The way society assigns roles to each gender (e.g., men as leaders, women as caregivers) gradually becomes a cultural norm and social expectation, shaping gendered behaviors from an early age.

Within the current educational and cultural context, these theories provide a foundation for understanding how media products, including fairy tales, serve as a crucial vehicle for reinforcing or transforming gender roles. As concluded by Theunynck and Vermeersch (2022), traditional children's literature, including fairy tales, often reflects outdated gender ideologies, whereas contemporary works have the potential to reshape gender perceptions toward greater equality.

2.1.2. Social role theory

The Social role theory of gender, proposed by Alice Eagly (1987), posits that gender stereotypes are formed as a result of the historical division of labor between men and women. Consequently, society assigns to each gender specific roles, behaviors, and personality traits that align



with their socially expected functions (Eagly & Wood, 2012). When these expectations are repeatedly reinforced, they develop into gender stereotypes and solidify norms regarding male and female roles.

Applied to fairy tales, it is evident that female characters are often portrayed in domestic roles, passive in nature, and associated with caregiving and self-sacrifice; in contrast, male characters typically occupy leadership roles, engage in combat, and take action. These roles reflect the internalization of social norms concerning gender, prompting children to learn how to regulate their behavior to conform to societal expectations based on their gender.

2.1.3. Model of media influence on children's gender perception

Recent studies have developed models explaining how media - including books, films, and narratives - shape children's gender perceptions. According to Coyne et al. (1997), children who are frequently exposed to media content containing gender stereotypes tend to develop traditional gender beliefs, such as the notion that girls should be weak and boys should be strong. Similarly, Tsao (2017) points out that children do not merely passively absorb gender-related content from media; they also reconstruct gender beliefs by associating themselves with characters. When children identify with a character (e.g., a princess or a prince), they are more likely to internalize the gender attributes displayed by that character, thereby forming expectations and guiding their gendered behaviors.

2.1.4. International studies on the influence of children's literature on gender perception

Children's literature, particularly fairy tales and other forms of folklore, plays a crucial role in the process of gender socialization by providing children with role models, behaviors, and expectations associated with gender roles. From the perspective of social sciences and education, numerous international studies have demonstrated that children's literature not only reflects but also reproduces and reinforces gender ideologies within society (McCabe et al., 2011).

Content analysis of children's literature and gender stereotypes

One common line of research focuses on analyzing gender stereotypes embedded in children's literature. A study by Crisp and Hiller (2019), based on 2,638 children's books published in the United States between 2008 and 2018, revealed that male protagonists still dominate and that gender traits are often portrayed in stereotypical ways: males as strong and proactive, while females are depicted as gentle, submissive, and often associated with domestic spaces. This contributes to children's unconscious internalization of unequal societal expectations regarding male and female roles.

Similarly, a study conducted in Sweden - a country widely regarded as highly gender-equal - by Theunynck and Vermeersch (2022) analyzed 100 popular children's stories and found that, although modern works have made efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, a significant proportion of traditional gendered patterns persists within narratives, particularly through the recurring portrayal of princesses or devoted mothers.

The impact of literature on children's gender perception

Beyond content analysis, some experimental studies have measured the impact of literature on children's gender attitudes and perceptions. In a research by Koss and Teale (2020), elementary school students in the United States were divided into two groups: one group read books promoting gender equality, while the other read traditional stories. Results indicated that the group exposed to gender-equal literature demonstrated more flexible perceptions of gender roles and were more accepting of nontraditional behaviors, such as boys caring for younger siblings or girls engaging in sports.

A recent study conducted in Canada by Ryan and colleagues (2020) also emphasized that children aged 5 to 8 are capable of interpreting gender messages conveyed through stories and that repeated exposure to gendered characteristics can influence the development of self-identity as well as restrict children's expectations regarding future careers and social roles.

Trends in reforming children's literature content

Recent international studies also reflect a shift in the conceptualization of children's literature toward gender inclusivity. Several publishing houses in Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, and the United States have actively produced books that showcase gender diversity, feature gender-neutral characters, or present role-reversed narratives (e.g., a princess rescuing a prince). This approach not only enriches literary content but also broadens the space for children to express and explore gender



identities (Allen & Franklin, 2023).

In summary, international research consistently affirms that children's literature is not merely an educational tool but also a medium for social construction, exerting a profound influence on how children perceive themselves and others through the lens of gender. In the context of a global movement promoting gender equality in early education, evaluating the content of children's literature - particularly traditional genres such as fairy tales - has become essential to aligning educational strategies with the comprehensive development goals for children.

2.1.5. Content analyses of fairy tales in the East Asian cultural context

Fairy tales in East Asian countries are not merely products of folk culture but also serve as vehicles for transmitting traditional values, including conceptions of morality, family, social hierarchy, and, notably, gender roles. The East Asian cultural context - deeply influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and patriarchal ideology - has left a profound imprint on the construction of characters, plot structures, and messages embedded within fairy tales (Nguyen Thi Thanh Binh, 2021; Lin, 2020).

Narrative Structure and Gender Roles under Traditional Value Systems

East Asian fairy tales often adhere to a dualistic structure of good versus evil, in which female characters are idealized through virtues such as gentleness, endurance, diligence, and self-sacrifice, whereas male characters are associated with qualities of bravery, intelligence, and achievements in the public sphere. In many narratives, women gain value primarily when chosen or married by a man of social status (Tran Thi Hong Lien, 2020).

For instance, in the Vietnamese tale *Tam and Cam*, the character Tam epitomizes the archetype of a submissive and virtuous woman who, despite repeated harm, does not resist but instead awaits divine justice. This storyline reflects a belief in fatalism while reaffirming virtue as an essential gender norm for women. Similarly, in the Chinese tale *Mencius' Mother Moved Three Times*, the maternal figure is celebrated not only for her sacrifice but also for her responsibility in ensuring her son's academic success - underscoring the notion that women are recognized primarily through motherhood and the achievements of their male offspring (Yue, 2021).

Fairy tales as instruments for reinforcing patriarchal social order

A common feature of East Asian fairy tales is the establishment of a patriarchal order in which men hold material and symbolic power. Children exposed to these narratives are more likely to internalize restrictive gender roles: men as breadwinners and women as caretakers. Kim and Lee's (2019) analysis of 50 Korean folktales revealed that women are often defined through their biological functions (as wives and mothers), whereas men are consistently portrayed in leadership roles, as warriors, or decision-makers. Similarly, Japanese tales such as *Momotaro* and *Urashima Taro* reinforce the image of men as community saviors, while women are either absent from central roles or relegated to supporting characters, thereby shaping a cognitive model of male dominance and female subordination in children's gender perceptions (Miyazaki, 2022).

Transformation of fairy tales in the modern context

In recent decades, under the influence of globalization and the gender equality movement, scholars and educators in countries such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and China have begun to re-examine the content of fairy tales. Many educational programs have integrated gender-critical analysis into the teaching of folklore, enabling students to approach traditional values more selectively (Cheng, 2023). In Korea, the adaptation of folktales to reconstruct gender roles - featuring strong, assertive female characters - has emerged as a trend in early childhood education (Park & Hwang, 2021). Similarly, in Vietnam, some publishers have introduced modernized fairy tales that reflect contemporary gender perspectives, such as reversing the roles of princess and prince, or allowing female characters to actively determine their own destinies.

Within the East Asian cultural context - heavily shaped by traditional ideologies - fairy tales serve not only as a treasured cultural heritage but also as a mechanism for reproducing gender stereotypes. Analyzing fairy tales through a gendered lens does not seek to negate their value; rather, it aims to illuminate the factors that influence children's gender perceptions, thereby guiding a more balanced approach to children's literature in alignment with the principles of gender equality in the



modern era.

Several studies have focused on the indirect role of fairy tales in gender socialization. For example, Nguyễn Thị Thanh Bình (2021) argues that numerous Vietnamese fairy tales - such as Tấm Cám, The Legend of Betel and Areca, and The Coconut Skull - exhibit traditional gender stereotypes. Female characters are often portrayed with the Confucian virtues of tam tông (three obediences) and tứ đức (four virtues), whereas male characters are depicted as active, strong, and authoritative figures. This research raises a critical question: Are these gender norms still appropriate within the context of modern education that promotes gender equality? Similarly, adopting the same perspective, Trần Thị Hồng Liên (2020) analyzed female representations in 30 Vietnamese fairy tales and found a consistent pattern: the ideal woman is depicted as industrious, patient, and self-sacrificing for her family - a reflection of Confucian ideology deeply embedded in cultural life. The author emphasizes the dual nature of fairy tales: while they transmit traditional moral values, they may also restrict individual development if not reinterpreted in alignment with contemporary gender-sensitive educational goals.

On gender criticism in folklore studies

The research trajectory of gender criticism began to emerge more prominently in the early 2010s and has developed significantly in recent years. Nguyễn Thị Minh Thái (2019), as one of the pioneers in cultural studies, proposed approaching fairy tales not merely as literary products but as cultural discourse structures, where power relations concerning gender, social status, and morality are embedded and legitimized. Phạm Thị Thu Hà's (2022) research demonstrates that the representation of gender roles in fairy tales does not merely stop at description but also contributes to the reproduction of patriarchal ideology in modern life if employed passively in education. The author suggests approaching fairy tales with a critical mindset, encouraging students to engage in discussions about gender rather than passively accepting conventional role models.

On emerging trends in reinterpreting fairy tales in education

In the field of pedagogy, several recent studies have proposed using fairy tales as tools for early gender education and fostering critical thinking about gender roles. Nguyễn Phương Linh and colleagues (2023) conducted an experimental study in several primary schools in Hanoi, revealing that when students were guided to analyze fairy tale characters from a gender perspective, they demonstrated a more flexible understanding of male and female roles.

Furthermore, numerous theses and dissertations from major universities such as the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Hanoi National University of Education, and Ho Chi Minh City University of Education have addressed this topic from multiple angles, including:

- (1) Comparing female archetypes in Vietnamese and international fairy tales;
- (2) Analyzing power discourse in fairy tales from a feminist perspective;
- (3) Rewriting fairy tales toward gender equality for early childhood education.

Research in Vietnam in recent years reflects a clear shift from traditional approaches to folklore toward cultural and gender-critical analysis. This is an essential trend for comprehensively understanding the dual function of fairy tales: preserving moral and cultural values while simultaneously carrying the risk of reinforcing outdated gender stereotypes. Approaching fairy tales with a modern academic perspective can contribute to improving the quality of cultural and gender education in schools.

2.2. Research model

The model was developed based on theories of gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 2004), social role theory of gender (Eagly, 1987), and models addressing the impact of media on children's gender perception proposed by Coyne et al. (2016) and Tsao (2017):

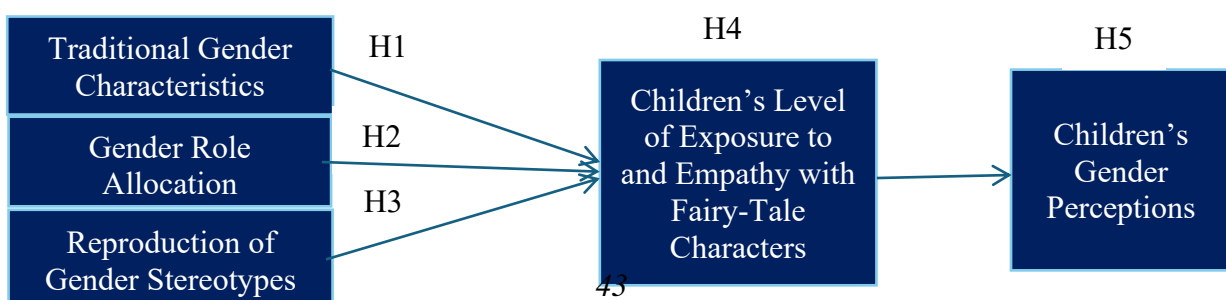


Figure 1. Research Model on the Influence of Fairy Tales in Shaping Gender Perceptions among Vietnamese Secondary School Students

Table 1. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Description	Relationship	Expected Sign
H1	The extent to which traditional gender characteristics are represented (male as strong, female as weak)	Positive	(+)
H2	The extent to which gender role allocation is depicted in fairy tales (labor, behavior, authority)	Positive	(+)
H3	The extent to which gender stereotypes are reproduced (e.g., associating good–evil with gender, rewards–punishments)	Positive	(–)
H4	The level of children’s exposure to and empathy with fairy tale characters	Mediating	
H5	Children’s gender perception	Dependent Variable	

H1: Gender content in fairy tales influences children’s gender concepts

Fairy tales are a prevalent form of folklore that carry cultural symbols and social moral orientations, where the construction of gender roles is often reflected through the portrayal of male and female characters (Zipes, 2012). In Vietnam, stories such as *Tâm Cám*, *Thạch Sanh*, or *Sọ Dừa* frequently reproduce images of women as virtuous and submissive, whereas men are associated with strength and decisiveness. According to gender performativity theory (Butler, 2004), the repetition of gender roles within cultural narratives creates patterns that children tend to internalize and emulate. Therefore, Hypothesis H1 posits that elements such as gender-related motifs, character behaviors, and moral messages in fairy tales can influence how children shape their notions of masculinity and femininity.

H2: The level of exposure to and empathy with fairy tales moderates the relationship between story content and children’s gender concepts

Not all fairy tales affect all children equally. The degree of influence depends on factors such as frequency of exposure (listening, reading, viewing), the narrative approach, and a child’s empathy with characters (Coyné et al., 2016). According to Reception Theory (Hall, 1980), audiences do not passively absorb meanings but actively reconstruct them based on personal experiences and social context. When children are frequently exposed to fairy tales through family or school settings, or develop strong empathy with a same-gender character, the likelihood of internalizing gender norms increases. Consequently, the variable “level of exposure and empathy” serves as a mediating or moderating factor in the relationship between fairy tale content and children’s gender concepts.

H3: There are differences in gender concepts between boys and girls after exposure to fairy tales

According to Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), children learn to identify gender-appropriate behaviors through roles prescribed by society and reproduced in cultural narratives. Boys and girls tend to perceive, empathize, and respond differently to the same fairy tale. For example, girls may empathize with the character *Tâm*, whereas boys may admire *Thạch Sanh*. Several studies (Tsao, 2017; Nguyen & Pham, 2023) have also shown that fairy tale content can reinforce gender stereotypes if not critically addressed. Therefore, it is essential to examine whether children of different genders develop distinct gender concepts after exposure to the same corpus of stories.

3. Research methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating literary theory, gender theory, and educational studies to explore how fairy tales shape gender concepts among lower secondary school students (grades 6–9) in Vietnam. For empirical data collection, the research team conducted a semi-



structured questionnaire survey with a sample of 240 students aged 12 to 15, currently enrolled in schools located in urban (60%), semi-urban (25%), and rural (15%) areas. Participation was granted with parental (guardian) consent, and the sample was selected using a stratified sampling method combined with convenience sampling to ensure a relatively balanced representation of gender (50.8% female, 49.2% male) and geographical distribution.

The questionnaire was designed to measure the frequency of exposure to fairy tales and the manifestations of gender perceptions after engaging with canonical stories such as *Tấm Cám*, *Thạch Sanh*, *The Starfruit Tree*, and *The Coconut Skull*. Additionally, the research team conducted 10 in-depth interviews with literature teachers and parents to clarify how fairy tales are transmitted and interpreted within educational and family contexts. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation tests, while qualitative data from interviews were examined through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The combination of sociological survey methods and textual analysis allows the study to assess not only the cultural structures embedded in fairy tales but also their practical influence on the formation of gender concepts among lower secondary school students.

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Findings from qualitative research

On traditional gender stereotypes in Vietnamese fairy tales

The content analysis of ten widely recognized fairy tales included in the primary school curriculum and the broader folk literature (such as *Tấm Cám*, *Thạch Sanh*, *The Coconut Skull*, *The Starfruit Tree*, etc.) reveals a consistent set of gender stereotypes embedded and reiterated through recurring literary motifs. Specifically, female characters are often portrayed as gentle, submissive, and patient (e.g., *Tấm* in *Tấm Cám*, the wife in *The Coconut Skull*), whereas male characters typically embody strength, bravery, and self-sacrifice (e.g., *Thạch Sanh* in *Thạch Sanh*, the younger brother in *The Starfruit Tree*). These patterns strongly reflect a gendered division based on the traditional structure of “men in the public sphere, women in the domestic sphere,” wherein male characters assume active, agentic roles, while female characters remain passive, awaiting rescue (Nguyen, 2022). This is characteristic of East Asian cultural norms, deeply influenced by Confucian ideology, which historically shaped ideals of female virtue (Ngo, 2021).

On children’s gender perceptions influenced by fairy tale characters

From twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with eighth- and ninth-grade students at three lower secondary schools (in Ho Chi Minh City, Ben Tre, and Hanoi), findings indicate that most students recognize gender roles through character representations: “girls should be obedient like *Tấm*,” whereas “boys should be heroic like *Thạch Sanh*.” Several female students even stated: “I like *Tấm* because she is kind and doesn’t have to fight like the boys do” (Female, Grade 8, Le Quy Don Secondary School). Conversely, some male students asserted: “Boys must be skilled and strong like *Thạch Sanh* to protect others” (Male, Grade 9, Giang Vo Secondary School). These insights suggest that the process of character identification occurs early among adolescents, and gendered portrayals in fairy tales serve as one of the key factors shaping children’s internalization of societal expectations (Bandura, 2002; Nguyen & Huynh, 2023).

On the influence of transmission and the role of education

From six interviews with teachers and parents, it was found that most adults continue to narrate and interpret fairy tales traditionally, rarely questioning gender roles. One teacher noted, “We teach students to take *Tấm* as a role model for patience and diligence. These were the virtues of girls in the past and are still necessary today.” This indicates that not only the content of the tales themselves, but also the modes of transmission, reinterpretation, and educational framing contribute to the perpetuation of existing gender stereotypes (Hoang & Tran, 2023). The qualitative findings preliminarily affirm that Vietnamese fairy tales continue to sustain and disseminate traditional gender norms. Children tend to internalize gender roles through their engagement with these narratives, particularly when exposure is not accompanied by reflective activities or gender equality education. Consequently, it is essential to innovate pedagogical approaches to teaching folk

literature in primary education so that children can engage with the cultural heritage creatively and critically.

4.2. Quantitative research findings

4.2.1. Descriptive statistics of the sample

The study was conducted on a survey sample of 420 primary and lower secondary school students from three regions representing urban (Ho Chi Minh City), rural (Long An), and mountainous (Kon Tum) areas. Data were collected and processed using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24. The measured variables encompassed three main constructs: (1) the degree of identification with fairy tale characters, (2) traditional gender stereotypes, and (3) gender attitudes.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the survey sample

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	208	49.5
	Female	212	50.5
Age	8–10 years	150	35.7
	11–13 years	170	40.5
	14–15 years	100	23.8
Residential Area	Urban (Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong)	140	33.3
	Rural (Long An)	140	33.3
	Mountainous (Kon Tum)	140	33.3

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of key constructs

Variable	Number of Items	M	SD
Identification	5	3.84	0.72
Traditional Gender Roles	6	3.66	0.85
Gender Attitudes	7	2.94	0.68

The results in Table 3 indicate that the mean score for the Identification variable was 3.84, suggesting a relatively high tendency among children to identify with fairy tale characters, particularly those of the same gender. The variable measuring Traditional Gender Role Allocation had a mean score of 3.66, indicating that gender stereotypes remain prominent in children's perceptions. In contrast, the Gender Attitudes variable scored relatively low ($M = 2.94$), reflecting limited development of gender-equal attitudes, which may be influenced by traditional gender norms perpetuated through fairy tales.

4.2.2. Reliability and validity testing of the scales

4.2.2.1. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Table 4. Results of exploratory factor analysis

Factor	Description	No. of Items	% Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha
F1	Identification with Fairy Tale Characters (IDENTIFICATION)	4	23.5%	.798
F2	Traditional Gender Role Perception (TRADGENDER)	5	27.6%	.812
F3	Attitudes Toward Gender Equality (GENDERATTITUDE)	4	19.7%	.756

The results in Table 4 indicate that the three extracted factors align with the theoretical assumptions. The total variance explained is 70.8%.

4.2.2.2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Table 5. Results of Confirmatory Factor

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
χ^2/df	1.88	< 3
CFI	0.954	> 0.90
TLI	0.943	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.048	< 0.08
SRMR	0.039	< 0.08

The model good fit with the Bentler, 1999), and all standardized factor loadings of the observed variables are greater than 0.60, $p < .001$. measurement demonstrates a data (Hu &

4.2.3. Structural equation modeling (SEM) testing

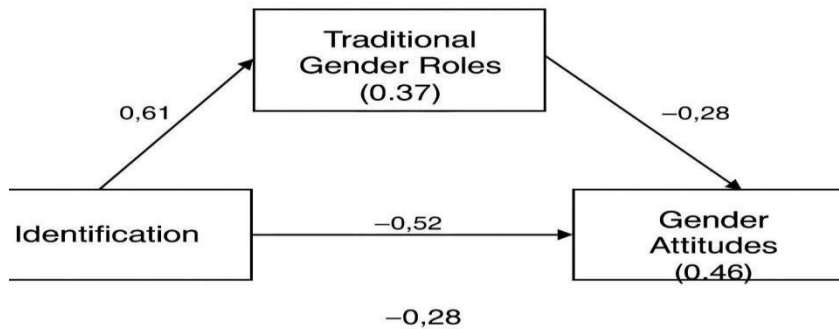


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Testing

Table 6. Relationships among the constructs

Path	Standardized Estimate (β)	SE	CR	p
IDENT \rightarrow TRADGENDER	0.61	0.06	10.17	< .001
TRADGENDER \rightarrow GENDERATTITUDE	-0.52	0.07	-7.43	< .001
IDENT \rightarrow GENDERATTITUDE	-0.28	0.06	-4.67	< .001

The results in Table 6 indicate that the indirect effect of IDENT on GENDERATTITUDE through TRADGENDER was also significant ($\beta = -0.317, p < .01$). The total effect of IDENT on GENDERATTITUDE was $\beta = -0.597$, combining both direct and indirect effects. The SEM fit indices demonstrated a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.05, CFI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.051$), supporting the adequacy of the proposed structural model (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

4.2.4. Testing for group differences (t-test/ANOVA)

Table 7. Gender differences in traditional gender role perception and gender attitudes (Independent samples t-test)

Variable	Male (M)	Female (M)	p -value
Traditional Gender Roles (TRADGENDER)	3.71	3.42	< .01
Gender Attitudes (GENDERATTITUDE)	2.98	3.32	< .01

The results presented in Table 7 indicate that male students tend to exhibit stronger adherence to traditional gender role stereotypes and demonstrate less egalitarian gender attitudes compared to female students, with these differences being statistically significant

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA Results for Group Differences

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Conclusion
Identification	6.31	< .01	Significant difference
Traditional Gender Roles	5.82	< .01	Significant difference
Gender Attitudes	4.96	< .05	Significant difference

The results in Table 8 indicate that children living in urban areas exhibit lower levels of identification (IDENT) and demonstrate more open gender attitudes compared to their rural counterparts.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Comparison with previous studies

The findings of this study reinforce and extend prior research on the influence of children's literature - particularly fairy tales - on the development of gender cognition in children. As Coyne et al. (2016) highlighted, children are highly susceptible to repetitive media content, where gender characteristics portrayed through characters contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes. The present study similarly confirms that the frequency of exposure to fairy tales is significantly associated with the degree of internalization of gender role norms among children.

Moreover, the findings align with Tsao's (2017) framework, which demonstrated that analyses of children's narratives in East Asian cultural contexts reveal a strong tendency to reaffirm traditional male roles as active and leadership-oriented, whereas female roles are often associated with passivity, emotionality, and dependency. In our research, stories such as Tam and Cam or Thach Sanh continue to reflect these traditional gender role orientations, which are unconsciously internalized by children.

However, this study expands the scope by incorporating mediating factors such as gender role allocation and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes to clarify the mechanism through which fairy tales influence gender cognition. This represents a key distinction from previous studies, which primarily focused on correlational relationships between story content and gender formation. For instance, Hamilton et al. (2011) concentrated mainly on counting the frequency of male versus female characters and their associated occupations. In contrast, the present research employs a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach to test indirect effects, demonstrating the mediating role of variables such as character portrayals, actions, and gender role assignments in stories.

Furthermore, quantitative data from Vietnam in this domain remain relatively limited. Thus, this study contributes to enriching the body of empirical evidence within the Vietnamese context while establishing cross-cultural similarities in the influence patterns of narratives between Vietnamese children and their counterparts in culturally similar contexts such as China and Korea (Zhao & Wang, 2019; Kim, 2021).

Finally, the present research adds evidence regarding the moderating role of contextual factors such as biological sex and residential area in shaping the extent to which fairy tales influence gender cognition. This finding aligns with Eagly and Wood's (2012) social role theory, which emphasizes that gender cognition is shaped not only by the content consumed but also by the sociocultural conditions in which children are embedded.

4.3.2. Theoretical and practical implications

4.3.2.1. Theoretical implications

The findings of this study contribute to the expansion and empirical verification of foundational theories in gender and media research.

First, the study reinforces and applies Judith Butler's (1990, 2004) theory of gender performativity by demonstrating that gender is not a fixed biological essence but rather a process enacted, reiterated, and internalized through behaviors, symbols, and discourses - in this case, through characters in fairy tales. Children repeatedly exposed to gendered patterns in stories learn to perform gender behaviors according to culturally embedded norms.

Second, the research further supports Eagly's (1987) social role theory by illustrating that fairy



tales, as a form of folklore literature, serve as a medium for transmitting societal expectations regarding gender roles. The recurring roles within these narratives both reflect and reinforce the structure of gender-based division of labor in real life.

Third, the study's conceptual model offers theoretical value by integrating mediating variables such as gender role allocation and stereotype reinforcement to explain the mechanism by which fairy tales influence gender cognition. This approach addresses gaps in previous research, which often depicted simple linear relationships without exploring indirect effects or moderating factors.

4.3.2.2. Practical implications

In practical terms, the findings of this study raise several concerns for the fields of education, publishing, and children's media in Vietnam. The data indicate that fairy tales - traditionally regarded as a tool for moral education - may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes if not edited or approached critically. This underscores the necessity of implementing early gender education programs and integrating critical thinking about gender norms into preschool and elementary curricula (UNESCO, 2020).

Moreover, publishers, editors, and authors of children's literature should be more aware of their social responsibility in selecting and constructing characters. Creating diverse, non-linear gender representations can expand the developmental possibilities for children, rather than imposing rigid roles based on biological sex.

In addition, the study offers valuable insights for cultural policymakers in developing a contemporary body of children's literature that both preserves traditional cultural values and promotes gender equality. Non-governmental organizations and child rights organizations can also leverage this evidence to design media intervention programs or develop new media content that aligns more closely with modern gender norms.

5. Conclusion and managerial implications

5.1. Conclusion

This study elucidates the role of fairy tales as a cultural medium with profound influence on the formation and reinforcement of gender concepts in children. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of gender performativity (Butler, 1990; 2004), social role theory (Eagly, 1987), and models of media influence on children (Coyne et al., 2016; Tsao, 2017), the research demonstrates that popular Vietnamese fairy tales (such as Tấm Cám, Thạch Sanh, Sọ Dừa, Cây Khế) often reproduce traditional gender stereotypes, thereby unconsciously perpetuating gendered norms and role expectations.

Qualitative findings reveal that children tend to identify with same-gender characters and adopt behavioral patterns repeatedly presented through storytelling. Quantitative results further confirm that the frequency of exposure to fairy tales is positively and significantly associated with the internalization of gender stereotypes in children. Additionally, biological sex and residential context (urban vs. rural) emerged as significant factors amplifying differences in gender perceptions among children.

5.2. Managerial and policy implications in education and human resource development

5.2.1. Implications for the education sector and child development

The findings indicate that fairy tales exert a significant influence on the formation and reinforcement of gender concepts in young children through recurring character archetypes and implicit gender stereotypes embedded in narratives. Consequently, the education sector should undertake a thorough review and revision of the fairy tales included in textbooks, curricula, and storytelling activities in preschools and primary schools. Story selection must be approached through a gender-sensitive lens, avoiding works that perpetuate one-dimensional portrayals of traditional gender roles - such as depicting women as inherently submissive, self-sacrificing, or valued primarily for appearance, while associating men exclusively with rationality, power, and action (Collins, 2021; Nguyen & Vu, 2023).

In addition, pedagogical methods should be innovated by incorporating critical reflection activities on storytelling, aimed at fostering multi-perspective thinking and enhancing gender awareness among children. Integrating positive, non-stereotypical gender models into teaching not



only promotes gender equality from an early stage but also nurtures a socially progressive generation, mitigating long-term negative consequences such as low self-esteem, gender norm rigidity, or biased career orientation.

5.2.2. Implications for publishers and children's content creators

In an era where gender awareness is becoming an integral component of education, the study underscores the necessity of diversifying fairy tales and children's literature toward gender-neutral and stereotype-free narratives. By understanding market trends, publishers and content creators should proactively produce adapted versions of traditional fairy tales or create new stories imbued with gender equality values, in which characters are no longer confined to classical gender roles but portrayed with greater flexibility and multidimensional traits.

Developing a repository of stories designed to promote positive gender education - including diverse scenarios reflecting equitable gender roles in real life - will enable children to recognize and evaluate multiple forms of social positions and behaviors for both men and women, thereby fostering inclusive thinking. The importance of investing in progressive children's content lies not only in supporting individual development but also in contributing to a fairer and more humane reading culture, aligned with Vietnam's sustainable development goals.

5.2.3. Implications for parents and caregivers

The findings reveal that parents and caregivers play a central role in shaping children's gender perceptions through daily storytelling practices. However, in reality, many parents remain insufficiently aware of the influence of stories - particularly fairy tales - on reinforcing traditional gender norms or shaping egalitarian gender thinking (Sanders, 2018; Tsao, 2017). Therefore, one critical priority is to raise parental awareness of the repetitive nature and long-term impact of character representations in stories on children's psychology and behavior. Parents should be encouraged to emphasize universal human values such as kindness, perseverance, intelligence, problem-solving abilities, and cooperation - qualities that can and should be cultivated in all children regardless of gender (Coyne et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2021).

Furthermore, encouraging multidimensional discussions after each story is an effective approach. Parents may ask children about their feelings, propose alternative endings, or imagine different roles for male and female characters, thereby fostering critical thinking and flexible perceptions of gender roles (Lynch, 2020). Such practices contribute to building a foundation for a generation that values fairness, respects differences, and aspires toward a more gender-inclusive society in the future.

5.2.4. Implications for media policy and gender equality

The findings reinforce the view that cultural content - particularly storytelling and children's media products - plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of gender roles during early childhood and primary school years (Coyne et al., 2016; Tsao, 2017; UN Women, 2020). In this context, integrating gender equality criteria into the censorship and development of children's media content is an urgent requirement for regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Information and Communications, content producers, and media review boards.

Simultaneously, promoting gender education campaigns through storytelling, animation, and modern multimedia platforms is a key strategy for disseminating accurate gender awareness among both children and adults. Media products should be designed not only for entertainment but also for positive educational purposes, featuring character role models with flexible gender portrayals - such as female heroes or emotionally expressive, nurturing male characters - thus establishing a foundation for gender equality and non-stereotypical thinking from an early age (Sanders, 2018; OECD, 2022).

These orientations not only support the goal of creating an inclusive educational environment but also contribute to the implementation of Vietnam's National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2021–2030, which emphasizes the role of media in driving sustainable change in gender stereotypes across society.

5.3. Research limitations

Although this study provides meaningful insights into how fairy tales influence children's



gender perceptions, several limitations should be acknowledged to clarify the scope of its applicability and to inform future research directions.

First, the study primarily relied on survey data from parents, teachers, and caregivers in urban and semi-urban areas. This limits the generalizability of the findings to children in rural, mountainous, or ethnic minority regions, where cultural frameworks and storytelling traditions may differ significantly (Nguyen & Tran, 2021).

Second, the measurement tools, such as questionnaires, were mainly based on adults' assessments of children's gender-related behaviors and perceptions. These tools did not incorporate direct child-focused measures, such as age-appropriate interviews using visual aids or play-based techniques, which could enhance objectivity (Coyne et al., 2016).

Third, the research focused primarily on traditional fairy tales and did not explore contemporary storytelling formats such as animated films, online comics, or children's YouTube videos - forms of media that increasingly shape modern children's gender perceptions (UNICEF, 2020; Tsao, 2017).

5.4. Directions for future research

Building on these limitations, future studies could expand in several directions.

One approach is to conduct comparative analyses among children from diverse geographic regions, particularly rural areas, ethnic minority communities, or regions with distinct indigenous cultures, to examine differences in both exposure to and interpretation of gender-related narratives. In addition, adopting a mixed-method approach - combining interviews, behavioral observations, and age-appropriate cognitive assessments - would enhance both the objectivity and depth of the data.

Moreover, future research should broaden its scope to include digital content and contemporary media formats, such as games, animated films, and online platforms, to better understand how children internalize gender norms in the context of digitalization. These extensions will contribute to refining theoretical frameworks on the impact of children's literature and media on gender construction, while also enhancing the practical relevance of educational and media policies aimed at promoting gender equality in modern society.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to the administration of Thu Dau Mot University and the secondary school teachers who made this research possible by allowing us access to their students. We are also deeply grateful to the students for their enthusiastic participation, without which we could not have collected the necessary data for this study.

References

- [1] Adam, H., & Harper, L. (2021). Gender equity in early childhood picture books: A cross-cultural study of frequently read picture books in early childhood classrooms in Australia and the United States. *Australian Journal of Education*, 65(3), 283–297. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00494-0>
- [2] Ahmad, A., & Susanto, A. K. (2024). Gender roles and representation in a multilingual children's book: An anthology of Indonesian children's stories. *Lexicon*, 11(2), 134–148. <https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v11i2.99598>
- [3] Allen, J., & Franklin, D. (2023). The 2023 wearable photoplethysmography roadmap. *Physiological Measurement*, 44(11). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1361-6579/acead2>
- [4] Ankur Nandi, Tarini Halder, Tapash Das (2024). Gender Representation in English Language Textbooks of Primary Education. *Journal of English as a Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.31098/jefltr.v4i2.2592>
- [5] Arnaldi, D. (2021). Biomarkers of conversion to α -synucleinopathy in isolated rapid-eye-movement sleep behaviour disorder. *The Lancet Neurology*, 20(8), 671–684. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422\(21\)00153-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(21)00153-3)
- [6] Arnaldi, S. (2021). Children's literature and gender: An overview. *Children's Literature Review*.



- [7] Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- [8] Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Routledge.
- [9] Cheng, T. (2023). PubChem 2023 update. *Nucleic Acids Research*, 51(D1), D1373–D1380. <https://doi.org/10.1093/nar/gkac956>
- [10] Correll, C. U. (2021). Efficacy and acceptability of pharmacological, psychosocial, and brain stimulation interventions in children and adolescents with mental disorders: An umbrella review. *World Psychiatry*, 20(2), 244–275. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20881>
- [11] Coyne, I. T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research: Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(3), 623–630. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.t01-25-00999.x>
- [12] Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, D. A., & Collier, K. M. (2016). It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a gender stereotype!: Longitudinal associations between superhero viewing and gender stereotyped play. *Sex Roles*, 74(3–4), 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0558-1>
- [13] Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- [14] Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 458–476). SAGE Publications.
- [15] England, D. E., Descartes, L., & Collier-Meek, M. A. (2011). Gender role portrayal and the Disney Princesses. *Sex Roles*, 64, 555–567. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9930-7>
- [16] Fate beliefs, meaning construction, and meaning in life - Zhang - 2022 - Asian Journal of Social Psychology - Wiley Online Library
- [17] Garcia-Tsao, G. (2017). Portal hypertensive bleeding in cirrhosis: Risk stratification, diagnosis, and management: 2016 practice guidance by the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases. *Hepatology*, 65(1), 310–335. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hep.28906>
- [18] Jones, T. M. (2011). Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5(2), 141–158. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2006.22697018>
- [19] Kim, B. Y., & Lee, S. Y. (2019). Korean Society for the Study of Obesity guideline for the management of obesity in Korea. *Journal of Obesity & Metabolic Syndrome*, 28(1), 40–45. <https://doi.org/10.7570/jomes.2019.28.1.40>
- [20] Koss, M. D., & Teale, W. H. (2020). Diversity in Newbery Medal-winning titles: A content analysis. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 16(2), 1–19.
- [21] Lin, Y. (2020). miRTarBase 2020: Updates to the experimentally validated microRNA–target interaction database. *Nucleic Acids Research*, 48(D1), D148–D154. <https://doi.org/10.1093/nar/gkz896>
- [22] Martin, C. L., & Ruble, D. N. (2019). Children's search for gender cues: Cognitive perspectives on gender development. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(2), 95–100.
- [23] Martin, S., & Ruble, D. (2019). Parent perspectives on oncology team communication regarding neurocognitive impacts of cancer therapy and school reentry. *Pediatric Blood & Cancer*, 66(1), e27427. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psc.27427>
- [24] McCabe, D. L., Trevino, L. K., & Butterfield, K. D. (2001). Cheating in academic institutions: Prevalence, causes, and proposed action. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5(2), 141–158.
- [25] Miyazaki, A. (2022). Preliminary analysis of the Hayabusa2 samples returned from C-type asteroid Ryugu. *Nature Astronomy*, 6, 214–220. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41550-021-01549-z>



- [26] Nguyễn Phương Linh, Vũ, T. H., & cộng sự. (2023). Ý định hành vi vì môi trường tại nơi làm việc của nhân viên doanh nghiệp Việt Nam. *Tạp chí Kinh tế và Phát triển*, 310 (2). Xem S. 310 (2) (2023): *Tạp chí Kinh tế và Phát triển*.
- [27] Nguyễn Thị Hiền. (2018). Truyện cổ tích Việt Nam dưới góc nhìn giới. *Tạp chí Văn hóa Dân gian*, (2), 43–51.
- [28] Nguyễn Thị Minh. (2022). Biểu hiện khuôn mẫu giới trong truyện cổ tích Việt Nam. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Văn học*, (6), 60–72.
- [29] Nguyễn Thị Minh. (2022). Reconfigurable broadband metasurfaces with nearly perfect absorption and high efficiency polarization conversion in THz range. *Scientific Reports*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-05947-5>
- [30] Nguyễn Thị Minh Thái. (2019). Recovering capitalization for automatic speech recognition of Vietnamese using transformer and chunk merging. *2019 11th International Conference on Knowledge and Systems Engineering (KSE)*, 24–26 October. <https://doi.org/10.1109/KSE.2019.8919342>
- [31] Nguyễn Thị Thanh Bình, & cộng sự. (2021). The direct and indirect costs of colorectal cancer in Vietnam: An economic analysis from a social perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010012>
- [32] Nikolajeva, M. (2016). *Children's literature comes of age: Toward a new aesthetic*. Routledge.
- [33] Nikolajeva, M. (2016). Recent trends in children's literature research: Return to the body. *International Research in Children's Literature*, 9(2), 132–145. <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2016.0198>
- [34] Park, T. K., & Hwang, D. (2021). Unguided de-escalation from ticagrelor to clopidogrel in stabilised patients with acute myocardial infarction undergoing percutaneous coronary intervention (TALOS-AMI): An investigator-initiated, open-label, multicentre, non-inferiority, randomised trial. *The Lancet*, 398(10308), 1305–1316. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01445-8.
- [35] (PDF) Công viên khoa học như là trung tâm của hệ sinh thái khởi nghiệp đổi mới sáng tạo: góc nhìn hệ thống và những hàm ý cho thành phố Hồ Chí Minh.
- [36] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- [37] Temple, C., Martinez, M., & Yokota, J. (2018). *Children's books in children's hands: An introduction to their literature*. Pearson.
- [38] Toro Isaza, J., et al. (2023). Are fairy tales fair? Analyzing gender bias in temporal narrative event chains of children's fairy tales. *Proceedings of the 61st Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2305.16641>
- [39] Trần Thị Hồng Liên. (2020). Công viên khoa học như là trung tâm của hệ sinh thái khởi nghiệp đổi mới sáng tạo: Góc nhìn hệ thống và những hàm ý cho Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh.
- [40] Tsao, Y. L. (2017). Gender issues in young children's literature. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(5), 631–638. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-016-0813-z>
- [41] UNESCO. (2019). *Global education monitoring report 2019: Gender report – Building bridges for gender equality*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371109>
- [42] UNESCO. (2020). *Basic texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020 ed.). UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379091>
- [43] UNICEF. (2020). *Gender socialization in early childhood: Strategies for strengthening positive gender norms in children's media and education*.
Gender: early socialization: Boys and girls - Two of a kind?
- [44] UNICEF. (2023). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2023*. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>



- [45] Vana-Gür, I., et al. (2024). Detecting gender bias in children's books. TU Wien.
<https://www.tuwien.at/en/mg/cstat/projects/news/dgbias-detecting-gender-bias-in-childrens-books-1>
- [46] Vu, T. H. (2022). The impact of fairy tales on children's gender identity formation in Vietnam: A critical discourse analysis. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(2), 189–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12498>
- [47] West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (2015). Small insults: A study of interruptions in cross-sex conversations between unacquainted persons. In V. Burr (Ed.), *Gender and psychology* (pp. 59–75). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- [48] Yue, N. (2021). The concise guide to pharmacology 2021/22: Ion channels. *British Journal of Pharmacology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bph.15539>
- [49] Zhou, S., Sun, X., Pei, J., Peng, Y., & Xiong, Y. (2022). A moral- and event-centric inspection of gender bias in fairy tales at a large scale.
<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2211.14358>
- [50] Zipes, J. (2015). *The Oxford companion to fairy tales*. Oxford University Press.