

Gender Discrimination in English Textbooks of Public Schools (Grade 6) Regarding Reflection and Depiction

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Abstract:

This study analyzed English textbooks used in grade 6 in public schools to evaluate gender discrimination portrayal. The findings revealed a significant disparity between male and female representation, with males dominating various aspects, while females were often portrayed in passive and stereotypical roles. The language used in the textbooks further reinforced gender biases, perpetuating traditional stereotypes. To address this issue, the study proposes three actions: prioritizing gender equality in educational policies, holding publishers accountable for avoiding gender-biased content, and encouraging writers to create gender-neutral texts. Overall, the research highlights the urgent need to create an inclusive educational environment that challenges traditional gender roles and promotes equal opportunities for both genders.

Introduction

Gender discrimination is a pressing global issue, particularly relevant in Pakistan due to deeply ingrained patriarchal norms. Education and textbooks hold immense influence in shaping attitudes about gender, making it essential to scrutinize their content for any bias or discrimination. This research focuses on English textbooks used in public schools for grade 6 in Pakistan. The goal is to identify instances of gender discrimination and explore its impact on students' beliefs. Employing qualitative methods, including critical discourse analysis, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how education can

either perpetuate or challenge gender discrimination in Pakistani society. Ultimately, the research seeks to foster an inclusive and fair education system that empowers all students, regardless of gender, by shedding light on the role textbooks play in reinforcing or combating gender inequality.

The main goal of this study is to increase consciousness regarding gender discrimination in English textbooks used in Pakistani government schools and to offer suggestions for developing more inclusive and gender-aware educational materials.

Gender Concepts in Pakistan: Prevalent Perspectives and Notions

Gender discrimination is a widespread issue, and Pakistan's education system plays a crucial role in shaping gender attitudes. Analyzing the portrayal of gender in English textbooks used in government schools is vital due to its impact on societal perceptions. Scholars have raised concerns about gender representation in learning materials since the 1970s. For instance, a content analysis of California textbooks showed consistent depiction of females in traditional roles and males in joyful and adventurous activities, perpetuating patriarchal notions.

Pakistani society is considered rigidly patriarchal, where gender-based attitudes are deeply ingrained, placing men in dominant roles and subjugating women. Men are viewed as breadwinners and active contributors, while women are confined to domestic roles and often undervalued throughout their lives. These biases extend to favoring male children over females within households. To foster an inclusive society that values gender equality, it is crucial to address these stereotypes and biases in textbooks and recognize women's achievements and contributions in all fields.

Understanding Gender Development: Theories and Concepts

Gender is a multifaceted concept that encompasses social, cultural, psychological, and biological aspects. According to social learning theory, gender roles and behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Gender schema theory suggests that children actively construct gender identities based on social information. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory proposes that gender identity is formed during the phallic stage of development, while the social constructionist theory emphasizes that gender is a socially constructed concept shaped by interactions and cultural practices, with power dynamics playing a crucial role.

Influencing Children's Perception: The Impact of Gender Representation

Children's gender development can be significantly influenced by the representation of gender in English textbooks. Studies have shown that gender biases in books can lead to the internalization of gender stereotypes, affecting children's development, self-esteem, and behavior. Books can be powerful tools for promoting gender equality by challenging stereotypes and presenting positive representations of both genders.

However, the current state of gender representation in children's books often perpetuates gender stereotypes, with female characters portrayed as emotional and submissive, while male characters are depicted as active, rational, and dominant. This type of gender stereotyping can have lasting effects on children's attitudes and perceptions of gender roles.

Moreover, the absence of representation of female characters in textbooks can negatively impact young girls' self-esteem and aspirations, limiting their career choices and opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial to address gender discrimination in English textbooks to promote gender equality and positive gender development, challenging harmful stereotypes and providing a more balanced representation of both genders.

Feminism: Concept and Evolution

Feminism, a multifaceted social, political, and cultural movement advocating for women's rights and gender equality, has evolved over time. It emerged in the 19th century and has since encompassed a diverse array of theories and practices aimed at dismantling patriarchal structures and empowering women. In the literary sphere, feminism has made significant strides, with women writers challenging traditional norms and advocating for gender equality. The feminist literary movement gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s during the second wave of feminism, promoting the inclusion of diverse women's perspectives and challenging gender biases in literary texts.

Furthermore, feminist scholars have developed frameworks for analyzing gender discrimination in educational materials, including textbooks. These approaches, such as feminist pedagogy, intersectionality, and social constructionism, aim to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive representation of gender roles in educational materials. By adopting feminist approaches, it becomes possible to abolish gender bias in textbooks and foster a more equitable and empowering learning environment for all.

Effect of Gender Bias Language Use in Textbooks

The use of gender-biased language in textbooks has significant implications for students' attitudes towards gender and their self-esteem. Studies have found that male characters are often portrayed as active and successful, while female characters are depicted as passive and dependent, leading to negative effects on girls' self-esteem and motivation to succeed academically.

Children tend to relate more to characters of their own gender, shaping their beliefs about appropriate behavior for their gender. Biased portrayals of gender in literature can have lasting effects on children's perceptions of themselves and others. Such textbooks limit readers' potential by confining them to predefined gender roles and reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.

Additionally, gender-biased language in textbooks can also impact students' academic achievement, particularly affecting female students' reading comprehension. Female students exposed to gender-biased language may struggle with comprehension when reading about male-dominated fields due to internalized gender stereotypes.

Overall, gender-biased language in textbooks can hinder the development of individuals as fully realized human beings and perpetuate gender inequalities in society.

Methodology and Procedure

This research is based on feminist theory, which views gender as a socially constructed concept shaped by cooperation and institutions. The study aims to understand and challenge gender inequality while promoting gender equality. The methodology includes drawing from various feminist perspectives such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, and intersectional feminism. Critical discourse analysis will be employed to examine language and images in English textbooks, identifying instances of gender discrimination and inequality. The chapter outlines the research methodology, including the population, sample, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

Research Tools

This part concentrates on the textbooks' gender representation, specifically the content analysis of the English textbooks. The aim is to pinpoint and describe the type of gender images portrayed in the textbooks. There are total 13 chapters and 144 pages in English textbook of grade 6 of public school.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a research method that involves examining texts to identify specific words, concepts, and themes. This approach allows researchers to uncover underlying messages and patterns within the texts. The study aims to comprehensively analyze how gender is portrayed in English textbooks for elementary level. To achieve this, the analysis will focus on linguistic and non-linguistic features such as gender-related themes, representation of male and female characters, language use, and illustrations. Through this methodology, the research aims to gain a thorough understanding of how gender is depicted in the selected texts.

Analysis Techniques

Data relating to the gender discrimination in English textbooks of Government schools (Grade 6) was gathered through textbook provided by Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) Lahore, from time to time.

Data Analysis

This study analyzes the data collected from the English textbooks developed by Punjab Textbook Board for Government elementary schools in Pakistan. The evaluation focuses on how gender is depicted in these textbooks, with separate analyses for Grade 6 book. It compares and contrasts the representation of gender in the government textbooks through linguistic, pictorial, and non-linguistic analyses. The chapter provides detailed findings from these analyses.

Non-Linguistics Analysis

Detection of Gender Related Topics in Chapters

The analysis of topics involved categorizing them into two main groups: those with human characters and those without. The group with human characters was additionally divided into three subcategories: unit titles featuring male protagonists, unit titles featuring female protagonists, and unit titles featuring both male and female protagonists.

Table 1: Showing the Detection of Gender Related Themes/Topics of Chapters in English Textbooks of Govt. Schools produced by PTB

Class	Total no. of Units	Unit Titles with no human entities	Unit Titles with human entities	Unit Titles featuring male protagonists	Unit Titles featuring female protagonists	Unit Titles featuring both genders
	13	11	2	2	0	0

Representation of Male and Female Characters in Texts

The analysis of the narratives or texts was conducted in two stages. Firstly, the number of characters of each gender was examined, and secondly, the nature of their activities was analyzed. The analysis only included human characters with a clear description of their gender.

Table 2: Representing male and female characters in texts of English Textbook produced by Punjab Textbook Board (PTB).

Class	Total number of Characters	Female Characters	Male Characters
6	46	15	31

Depiction of Characters in Social and Domestic Roles

The social roles of characters in professional settings were analyzed by selecting nine professions or fields, including doctor, teacher, farmer/woodcutter, servant, athlete, job person, dominant/ruling position, scientist, and other professions/vocations.

Table 3: Showing depiction of Characters in Social and Domestic Roles in English Textbooks of Govt. Schools produced by PTB

Gender	Doctor	Teacher	Farmer/ Wood - cutter	Scientist	Athlete	Job	Dominant/ Ruling Position	Domestic Worker	Other
M	2	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	3
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0

Pictorial Analysis

Depiction of Male and Female Characters Through Illustrations

The study conducted on the illustrations in English textbooks of Government schools was analyzed and classified into six categories based on gender representation. The categories included illustrations with: images featuring male characters only, images featuring female characters only, images with more male characters than females, Images with more female characters than males, images with equal number of both genders, and images with unidentified character.

Table 4: Showing the Depiction of Male and Female Characters through Illustration in English Textbooks of Govt. Schools produced by PTB

Total no. of Pictures	Images with Male Characters	Images with Female Characters	Images with more Male Characters	Images with more Female Characters	Images with equal no. of Male & Female characters	Images with Unidentified Characters
166	35	12	23	0	3	93

Table 5: Showing the Depiction of Male and Female Characters in various activities in Illustrations in English textbooks of Government Schools produced by PTB

Gender	Household Chores	Professional Work	Leisure Activities	Social Interactions	Personal / Family Activities	Other
M	0	21	4	10	1	5
F	2	1	1	5	1	1

Linguistics Analysis

Use of Generic Language

Feminist and gender researchers analyze language to identify instances where masculine nouns and pronouns are used in generic constructions, reflecting societal beliefs that prioritize males. Upon analyzing Grade 6 English textbook, it was observed that most texts utilized gender-neutral terms like "people" and "children" instead of male-centric language. Additionally, gender-inclusive pronouns like "they" were commonly used. However, some texts still exhibited clear use of masculine generic constructions.

Table 6: Showing the use of Masculine Generic Language in English textbooks of Grade 6, 7 & 8 of Govt. Schools produced by PTB.

Class	Masculine Nouns	Masculine Pronouns
6	3	5

Here are the examples of generic constructions used in the texts (grade 6):

- The captain led his group of players to the ground. (pg. 74, Book 6: PTB)
- A driver of the transport is like a captain of the ship. He is responsible for the safety of all the passengers. (pg. 45, Book 6:PTB)

The analysis of government school textbooks showed a consistent pattern where males are mentioned first in paired nouns and pronouns in sentences. Females were consistently presented second, with few exceptions.

- Men and women also visit parks (pg. 41, Book 6: PTB)

Sequence of Paired Nouns/Pronouns

Adjectives Representing Gender

The analysis revealed that positive adjectives such as "great," "holy," "noble," and "brave" were more commonly used to indicate male characters, while females were often represented using softer and more moderate qualities such as "caring," "lazy," and "frightened."

In this textbook, there was a tendency to use attributes that reinforced traditional gender stereotypes. Men were described using words that emphasized their strength, decisiveness, and assertiveness. On the other hand, women were often described using words that emphasized their gentleness, such as "sweet" or "charming," or that implied weakness or lack of courage, such as "poor" or "cowardly." The books also frequently compared male and female characters in ways that highlighted their contrasting traits. For Example:

- One of them is a poor woman... (pg. 1127, Book 6: PTB)

Discussion

The analysis of English textbooks used in public schools in Pakistan revealed a pervasive gender bias. Male characters were consistently depicted as dynamic and productive members of society, while female characters were relegated to traditional, stereotypical roles such as caretakers and homemakers. The texts exhibited patriarchal images of both genders, with women portrayed as trivial objects and commodities for men's use.

Moreover, men were overrepresented in central roles, reinforcing the notion that they are the primary figures in society, while women were often depicted as supporting characters or background figures. The language used to describe men and women also varied, with men receiving a wider range of positive attributes and adjectives, while women were often associated with negative traits.

The use of gender-biased language and portrayals in the textbooks reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates the notion of male superiority, negatively impacting students' perceptions and reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes.

To promote gender equality and create a more inclusive learning environment, it is essential to address and challenge these biases in educational materials.

Conclusion

This research emphasizes that reading goes beyond mere decoding, as readers unconsciously absorb core messages from texts. The study highlights the significance of gender portrayals in textbooks and their impact on children's personality development.

The analysis of English textbooks in Pakistani public schools revealed a clear gender bias, with male characters dominating the narrative and female characters relegated to passive roles. This unequal representation perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces the notion of male superiority.

The research suggests that policies promoting gender equality should be established for textbook development, and publishers, authors, and teachers should play a proactive role in creating gender-neutral and inclusive educational materials. Seminars and workshops can also be organized to raise awareness and challenge gender bias in textbooks. By addressing these issues, textbooks can contribute to fostering a more equitable and respectful society.

Future Recommendations

To eliminate gender biases in English textbooks in Pakistan, stakeholders should conduct comprehensive revisions, provide clear guidelines for publishers and authors, introduce gender-based testing for approval, offer writer training, raise teacher awareness, engage students in discussions, hold seminars and workshops, ensure inclusive curriculum development, collaborate with publishers for inclusive practices, and establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

These steps will create a more equitable educational environment.

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