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GENDER REPRESENTATION: A CASE STUDY OF GRADE VI ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

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Abstract
Social norms are executed through textbooks. A society can develop gender socialization, beliefs, and inequality in its young generation through their textbooks and classroom experiences. Therefore, analysis of the textbooks for fostering gender fairness is vital. Keeping in view this necessity, the present study is conducted to analyze English textbook at the middle level of education in Pakistan to examine the formulation of gender stereotypes. The study comprises of content and visual analysis of English textbook, at grade VI, designed by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) through mixed method research. The results reveal that male dominance is featured in textbook both in images and text. The females are depicted as under-served, having less diverse job roles, and doing household chores. Portrayal of traditional gender roles in textbooks wholly neglect the upgraded version of gender roles in Pakistani society. These findings are helpful for textbook development agencies, writers, and teachers to shape policies at the national level for producing gender-inclusive curricula and textbooks.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a powerful communicative tool to reflect cultural diversity as well as influence social mobility. It shapes how a particular community functions, evolves, and perceives itself. It is so firmly connected with its users, their identity and social roles that the term 'language' is transformed into 'gendered language' since 1970s. Littoseliti (2006), a proponent of constitutive approach, suggests that language does not simply reflect gender as a trait we possess, rather it constructs and enacts gender as, according to Butler (1990), gender is not a fixed identity rather, it is a performative act shaped by repeated behaviors, gestures, and language practices that create the illusion of being natural. Language plays an active role in maintaining, creating, and transforming gender identities through social practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Social practices of gender are manifested through the literature of a community. The most authentic, reliable and officially approved source of literature of a society is its textbook.

Textbooks serve as foundational artifacts that reflect, reinforce, and sometimes distort the linguistic practices, gendered ideologies, and social norms of a particular society. They are not merely containers of knowledge but are educational, cultural, pedagogical, and ideological products and act as instruments of socialization for training children in "ways of acting, doing, valuing and being in the world" (Gee, 1990, p. 143). The unequal representation of women in textbooks is a fundamental problem since it might restrict students' access to education and promote gender bias and stereotypes.

This study highlights a grave and frequently listed problem of under-representation of women in academic texts in public school education system in Pakistan. This research contextualizes the gender roles within the sociocultural nuances of Pakistan, providing valuable insights into the educational material. This paper applies the Multi-modal Discourse Analysis framework to create meaning using multiple communication modes, such as text and images, used in the selected textbook to depict the gendered stereotypes in Pakistani education system.

In Pakistan, there is a great need to put emphasis on gender representation in textbooks, especially at school level to ensure gender equality. The unique objective of this research is to critically examine the imagery and content of the textbook to notify the content development agencies and educational policy makers to promote gender inclusive and unbiased learning environments.

Research Questions

1. What are the nouns used to represent gender stereotypes in English Textbooks at middle level?
2. How are the male and female represented using image?
3. What does the use of particular nouns, adjectives and images reflect about Pakistani educational system and society at a broader level?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In sociolinguistics and feminist theories, the relationship between language and gender has been frequently studied, revealing how language perpetuates, challenges, or reconstructs societal expectations tied to gender. In 1972, Robin Lakoff published an article entitled ‘‘Language and Woman’s Place” for nurturing the concept of the deficit approach regarding difference in speech patterns of men and women linked to subordinate position id women in society. This approach opened up new vistas of debate leading to a series of research.

Deborah Tannen (1990) looked at linguistic variation across gender but with a different lense of ‘difference’. Tannen argued that males and females inhabit diverse cultures and linguistic worlds. They grow up in different backgrounds for verbal interaction. Further study by Butler (1990) reveals the performative aspect of gender where she challenges the notion of gender as a fixed category. Language, in her view, is not merely a tool for expressing pre-existing identities but a mechanism through which gender itself is constituted and destabilized. For Butler, “linguistic repetition, such as the persistent use of gendered pronouns, naturalizes binary distinctions, yet also contains the potential for subversion through queer reappropriations” (Butler, 1990, p.178). Tannen’s static model (1990) is directly challenged by Cameron (2005) in "Language, Gender, and Sexuality", inspired by Butler’s performativity, using data from British National Corpus to show gender as enacted via repeated linguistic acts (e.g., "ladette" speech).

Ahmed (1992) provided the first systematic audit of 20 PTB textbooks (grades 1–10, 1980s editions) in his research on "Women in Pakistani Textbooks". Males dominating illustrations were found 75% and their professions e.g., doctors, leaders ranked to 90%; whereas females were demonstrated as homemakers. Simple frequency counts filled a foundational gap by quantifying under-representation. This study was limited to PTB/Urdu-medium and no provincial comparison or qualitative stereotypes were analyzed.

Hussain (1999) addressed the scope gap in Gender Images in Pakistani School Textbooks, expanding to 50 NBF/PTB books (grades 1–12, 1990s). Males appeared in 80% of active roles and females in 20% domestic scenes. He ignored language nuances, and intersections like class/ethnicity.

Research by Jehle et al. (2024) shows that European mathematics and language textbooks underrepresent female characters, with no sexual diversity among characters, arise a need for equal representation in diverse roles and occupations for both boys and girls. This study was limited to textual representation of gendered stereotypes while completely neglecting the role of pictural representation of male and female.

Further study by Salamat et al. (2025) conducted at the Grade III English textbooks published by The Punjab Textbook Board, Pakistan shows that

women are submissively dominated, reinforcing gender stereotypes and limiting students' professional aspirations and understanding of gender equality.

To add value to the existing literature on gender representation, this study focusses on the pictorial and textual gender representation in PTB for grade VI English textbook. It analyzes the gendered stereotypes and roles assigned to male and female in the textbook.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The current study investigates gendered stereotypes in grade VI English textbooks designed by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB). Mixed method research is applied to integrate both qualitative and quantitative research for grasping wholistic picture of the phenomenon (Sharma, et al., 2023) used. Moreover, Multimodal Discourse Analysis is applied as a theoretical framework to extend the study of language to the theory and analysis of semiotic resources and to investigate what happens when textual and semiotic choices combine in multimodal phenomena (Jewitt, 2009).

Sample

The book chosen for this research is English language textbook named "English Class VI Based on Single National Curricula" through the purposeful sampling technique. Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board Lahore are the publishers of the textbook. This textbook has been implemented in both government and private sector primary schools.

Data Collection

The data are collected from English Language Textbook (ELT) designed for Grade VI. After thoroughly reviewing the whole book, pictures and texts in chapters and exercises are also reviewed. The focus is to look at the use of nouns and adjectives for males and females along with the social roles, occupations and imagery used to illustrate gender stereotypes in Pakistani culture.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves multiple readings of the textbook, including its text and exercises, as well as its visual components. In the initial phase, nouns representing each gender are identified. In the second phase, gender roles depicted in images and text are classified. The data is subsequently analyzed by calculating frequencies and percentages of gendered language and occupation assignments. Visual analysis led to qualitative findings. These phases are sequentially implemented to clarify how each method contributes to the overall findings. Coding is based on the subject used in the chapter/paragraph and visual data is utilized to assist the discourse description using multimodal discourse analysis framework.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Nouns used in the chapters and exercises of the textbook are categorized separately. In the first review of the sample textbook, three types of nouns: gender neutral nouns, nouns for males and nouns for females are coded. The findings are analyzed with the help of frequency and percentage.

Nominal Representation of Gender

The nouns used in the textbook are shown in the table below:

Table no.01: Nouns used to represent Male, Female and Gender-Neutrality

Sr. #	Nouns for Males	Nouns for Females	Gender-Neutral Nouns
1	Rasool	Daughter	Community
2	Slave	Wife	Children
3	Emperor	Mother	Family
4	Soldiers	Grandmother	Nation
5	Great Heroes	Sister	Muslims

6	Officer	Nurse	Workers
7	Doctor	Teacher	Crowd
8	Minister	---	Army
9	Farmer	---	Laborers
10	Teacher	---	People
11	Ward boy	---	Population
12	---	---	Human
Frequency	11	07	12
Percentage	37%	23%	40%

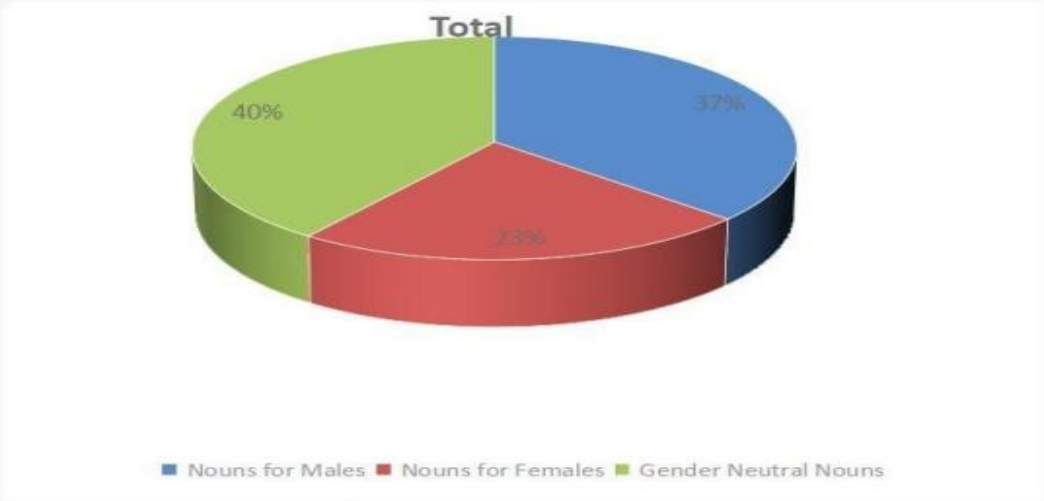


Figure 1: Representation of Male, Female, and Gender-Neutral Nouns

Figure 1 represents the proportion of male, female and gender-neutral nouns used in the textbook of "Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board Lahore" for class VI. It shows that 40% naming words consist of gender-neutral nouns; 37% of the content comprises of male nouns; while 23% represents female nouns.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The pictures, in the textbook, are analyzed through multi modal discourse analysis framework. These visuals are taken from both the chapters and exercises, each visual demonstrating the gendered stereotypes.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF MALE AND FEMALE PROFESSIONS



Figure 3: Male as a Professional Chef

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 11)

Men are considered more suitable for the profession of chef in hotels and restaurants,

because of workplace demands, the ability to work under pressure, management of heavy equipment and late night working hours. These factors collectively make men more visible and accepted in professional kitchens; whereas women usually feel more comfortable cooking in their home kitchen.



Figure 4: Female as a Teacher

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 68)

Teaching profession is often considered suitable for women because of their calm, loving, and kind nature. Moreover, females also feel comfortable with the teaching working hours to contribute to a positive and disciplined classroom environment. In Pakistani society, mothers are often more involved in their children's education, and they tend to feel more at ease discussing academic or personal concerns with female teachers.



Figure 05: Male as a Waiter

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 20)

The preference for male waiters in Pakistan is shaped by cultural traditions, safety considerations, and societal expectations. These elements have influenced women's participation in such roles. As shown in Figure 05, there is a perception that men are more commonly associated with positions requiring business skills, responsibility, and public interaction.



Figure 06: Men as a Guide of God

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 17)

The noble jobs like a Guide of God are typically assigned to men because they have more mobility and freedom to interact with diverse groups, allowing them to communicate ideas effectively. They are often viewed as experienced in handling pressure, conflict, and decision-making because of their roles as family and community heads.



Figure 07: Female as a Nurse

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 20)

Females are considered more suitable for the nursing profession because of their caring, emotional and comforting nature. Such preconceptions reinforce the idea that care giving professions are inherently related to females; while males are reserved for authoritative or leadership positions in healthcare, such as doctors etc.



Figure 08: Male as a Farmer

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 20)

Figure 08 portrays that, in Pakistani society, males usually perform their duty as farmers because it involves ploughing, lifting heavy loads, and working long hours in harsh weather like sunny summer, rain season, and difficult field conditions. In Pakistan, men are the primary breadwinners. Farming becomes a way to fulfil this responsibility and support the household.



Figure 09: Male as Soldiers

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 38)

As shown in Figure 09, men are typically cast as the soldiers and warriors in battlefields to shape empires and nations. Male soldiers must face the extreme environments like deserts, mountains, and cold regions. They are seen as capable of surviving and performing in such tough conditions. They are traditionally expected to bear this emotional and social sacrifice for national duty.



Figure 10: Male as a Doctor

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 57)

A stereotypical belief in Pakistani society is that males are considered more suitable for doctorate profession as a doctor has to face constant exposure to suffering and deaths, night shifts, and emotional distance from the patients. Men are inhabitant to tolerate fatigue, long hours duties and discomfort, requirement of medical field.



Figure 11: Female as Grand mother

Source: (PCTB Textbook-6, pg. 68)

In Pakistani society, females are considered emotional capable for taking care of the house and perpetuate the next generation as their prime obligation. The tasks like doing outdoor jobs are assigned to males because it is assumed that females cannot perform these actions.



Figure 12: female in domestic kitchen

Source (PCTB Textbook-6, pg.61)

Putting emphasis on the caring and supportive nature of females, the domestic tasks like cooking have historically been associated with them. Their organizational skills help in planning meals, managing ingredients, and maintaining cleanliness in the kitchen. Being resourceful, they can make efficient use of available items, reduce waste, and adapt recipes when needed. Additionally, qualities like dedication and responsibility contribute to maintaining household routine. Emotional awareness and diligence may also enhance the overall experience, from presentation to ensuring everyone feels cared for.

FINDINGS

Quantitative analysis of data reflects that English text book reflects 40% gender neutral nouns with highest frequency of nouns in the data. However, if we compare nouns used for males and females, 37% nouns are deployed for male representation marginalizing females with 23% representation in the content.

The in-depth analysis of visual illustrations, in the textbook under analysis, clearly illustrate that males are elected to the posts/professions which require physical engagement demonstrating bravery, power and courage like a soldier, a doctor, a farmer, and a guide to God; females are demonstrated as a caring and a loving personality, performing duties like a teacher, a nurse, a mother, and a grandmother capable for household chores.

CONCLUSION

Language plays an active role in maintaining, challenging, and reconstructing gender identities through social practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Textbooks are the most authentic and officially approved source of indexing a society. This research exertion has detected gendered stereotypes in the content of the English textbook in class VI under the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board, Lahore. The quantitative analysis of data of nouns indicates the expanded use of gender-neutral terms to represent both the genders unanimously. However, where there is requirement to specify the gender, male depiction is projected marginalizing females. The visual illustrations also support the textual evidences for disproportionately representing gender binaries. The females are usually engaged in child bearing, domestic nourishing, and nurturing duties in maintaining houses considered appropriate for females in the society. This type of unequal gender representation in educational content creates negative attitudes and pessimism in learners' minds towards gender roles. Such inaccuracies directly affect young minds, particularly those girls who are ambitious to become future leaders, intellectuals, and officers at higher positions. Although, most of the terms used in this textbook are gender neutral, yet the general content favors male domination both in textual and visual content. Surprisingly, the traditional gender roles depicted in the textbook were assigned to males and females decades ago in Pakistani society. Now, the world has undergone marvelous

transformations where the females are executing the role of political leaders, judicial officials, bureaucrats and what not. However, the educational content in the textbooks is still based on the traditional track of gender biasedness. The main reason for addressing such biases is the realization of equity in an educational setting, where it might foster self-imagining among all students, regardless of gender, into diverse and empowered roles. This study approves the stance of Littoseliti (2006) and Butler (1990) that language does not simply reflect gender as a trait we possess, rather it constructs and enacts gender through social practices.

Recommendations

To overcome inequality and disparity in gender representation in textbooks, content developers, policy makers, and educationists should collaborate for joint venture for equitable gender representation in textbooks fostering inclusivity and egalitarianism for both the genders. The language of the textbooks should not only reinforce existing practices for gender stereotypes in the textbooks, rather it should challenge traditional gender roles and reconstruct/transverse them to cope with the emerging challenges of globalization. Wherever transformation is taking place in society, textbooks should be updated to be aligned with the emerging trends in society.

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