

Gender Representation In Primary Level (Grade V) English Language Textbooks In Pakistan

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to investigate how gender is represented in English language textbooks at primary level. The prime objective of this study was to find out whether the portrayal of males and females in the textbooks reviewed is fair or biased. The content analysis of English language textbooks taught in Grade V was carried out. The findings of this study revealed that the textbooks are not gender sensitive, simultaneously; there is a great deal of inequality in the representation of males and females. Furthermore, the stereotypical and traditional meanings of masculinity and femininity continued to persist in these textbooks. It is anticipated that findings of the present study will create awareness regarding gender biases prevalent in the education sector. Furthermore, the results of this study will create cognizance in the authors, thinkers and writers to reflect the positive image of females and to reduce gender biasness from the textbooks.

Keywords: Textbooks, Gender bias, Gender sensitive and Stereotypes.

Introduction

Education plays a significant role in imparting values and beliefs of a society to the learner through various ways, and textbooks are one of them. It is noteworthy that textbooks set important influences on students' thoughts. As Khurshid, et.al (2010) said:

The textbook clearly can be a powerful tool for influencing ways in which both children and adult think about core human rights concepts and values, the image of women/girls, and the concept of gender equality.

The textbooks also contribute to learning through dissemination of knowledge. It is pertinent to mention that books also help in transmitting models of social behaviour, norms and values to the learners. The textbooks are also considered as a useful tool for both imparting education and bringing a social change in the society.

Since every society has its gender stereotypes i.e. the predominant concepts of what men and women are supposed to be like, the same gender disparity and stereotypes are reflected and portrayed in Pakistani textbooks. These textbooks are considered as one of the powerful sources of promoting that belief system and propagating and/or breaking stereotypes and have a great influence on the thinking patterns of young learners. As Pešikan, A. and Marinković, S. (2006) said:

These gender stereotypes affect the psyche of children by focusing them to perform a set pattern of behaviour pre-determined on the basis of gender discrimination.

Rationale and Significance

This study aims at investigating gender biasness that exists in the field of education, especially in primary level textbooks in contemporary Pakistani society. The reason for carrying out this study and focusing exclusively on Grade V textbooks is because English is taught as a core subject in Pakistani/local school since Montessori. If the content of the textbook is based on gender-typed material, it may well contribute to the development of sexist attitudes at a subconscious level in the minds of the young learners.

Practical implications

The study is carried out in order to create awareness about gender biasness that prevail in the education sector and subsequently call on stakeholders to revise these texts in order to make Pakistani textbooks gender sensitive and gender aware. Furthermore, the findings of this study will create cognizance in the authors and writers to reflect the positive image of females and reduce gender biasness from the textbooks not to say that it will also help recommend that textbooks in schools should be carefully selected. Those textbooks should be avoided that are full of stereotypes or gender biases in order to evade producing and peddling gender role ideologies and stereotypes in the young learners.

Research Questions

The area of research study is textbook analysis and answers to the following questions will be sought in this study

1. How gender is portrayed and represented in Grade V, English Language textbooks by different publishers?
 - a) What is the ratio of female to male characters in the selected textbooks?
 - b) What type of occupations, activities, and human attributes are assigned to males and females in the textbooks in both visual and written texts?

Literature Review

The term gender bias can be defined as unequal treatment, prejudice or discrimination, among males and females due to the foster stereotypes – a widely held but fixed and overgeneralised idea of a thing or person – of social roles that are prevailing in the society. However, being sensitive to the differences that exist between males and females, and treating them both fairly and equally, is gender sensitivity or gender awareness.

Various researches were carried throughout the world in order to examine the gender biasness that persists in textbooks. Zeenatunnisa (1989) carried out a study on eight Pakistani secondary school level textbooks. The findings of her study revealed that educational material aimed at educating males only by focusing exclusively on males' qualities and skills. The textbook material is making a great part of the population invisible by not taking in account the changing roles and status of Pakistani women in productive activities and services, thus, reinforcing conservative and stereotypical role of women.

Another research was conducted by Pešikan, A. and Marinković, S. (2006) on comparative analysis of male and female characters in pictorial illustrations shown in the textbook, *The World Around Us* (2004). Findings of this analysis were compared with the results of earlier analysis of textbook, *Nature and Society* (1999). Results revealed that the old textbooks (1999) portrayed the stereotypical roles of gender, while the treatment of different sexes is much more balanced in the new textbooks (2004).

Khurshid, et.al (2010) study dealt with females' representation in Urdu and English textbooks at Secondary level, including Grade IX and X. The analysis revealed that females are under-represented in the textbooks. Furthermore, the proportion of males is greater in the textbooks whereas females are mostly invisible in the content as well as in the illustrations. Moreover, activities that have high and prestigious status in the society are assigned to males whereas activities which are related to females have socially low and inferior status.

Saleem, F. and Zubair, S. (2013) carried out a research on "Representing Women in Curricula". Their content analysis of Pakistani textbooks i.e. Urdu and English at the primary level revealed that the numbers of female characters in the textbook were less than male characters. Similarly, the activities and occupations in which the women were presented were limited and in accordance with the societal expectations. Hence, the result showed that the present curriculum is gender bias and gender insensitive, promoting stereotypical gender roles at primary level.

Methodology

Qualitative research paradigm is employed for this research study, as it is flexible and subjective in nature, thus allowing analyzing data subjectively. The method that is used for the present study is content analysis and the sample includes four (04) English textbooks by four different publishers. The sole reason for taking primary level (Grade V) English Language textbooks by different publishers is that in various private and government schools of Pakistan, especially in Sindh, textbooks of various publishers are recommended rather than Sindh textbooks only. This study specifically focuses on investigating the gender representation in following textbooks:

- Book 1 My English Book 5 - Royal Corporation, Karachi.
- Book 2 English 5 - Apple Educational Press, Lahore.
- Book 3 Junior English 5 - Sunrise Publications.
- Book 4 Oxford Progressive English - Oxford University Press.

Analysis of the Textbooks

Saleem, F. and Zubair, S. (2013) framework of textbook analysis is adapted to see how gender is portrayed in these textbooks

1. Invisibility and Non-Recognition
 - a) Frequency of males and females characters in categories.
 - b) Frequency of males and females characters in themes.
 - c) Frequency of males and females character in textbooks.
 - d) Frequency of males and females names in the lessons.
 - e) Number of females and males as leading characters.
2. Gender Division of Labor
 - a) Occupations assigned to genders.
 - b) Occurrence of gender associated activities.
3. Stereotypes of Femininity and Masculinity
 - a) Attributes assigned to males and females
4. Pictorial Illustrations
5. Sexist (Gender-Biased) Language
6. Personnel in the Textbook Production

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study according to the above framework are as follows

1. Invisibility and Non-Recognition

a) Categorical Analysis

To carry out the content analysis of the textbooks, the lessons were divided into five (05) different categories: biographies, poems, essays, dialogues, and stories.

Frequency of Males in Categories

Categories	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
Biographies	-	83.33%	100%	-
Poems	100%	-	-	85.71%
Essays	-	-	100%	-
Dialogue	62.5%	66.67%	100%	57.44%
Story	67.56%	75%	95.23%	66.07%

Frequency of Females in Categories

Categories	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
Biographies	-	16.67%	-	-
Poems	-	-	-	14.28%
Essays	-	-	-	-
Dialogue	37.5%	33.33%	-	46.80%
Story	32.43%	25%	4.76%	33.928%

The above charts reveal the ratio of the frequency of occurrence of males and females in different categories of lessons. The percentages of females occurrence in all the above mentioned categories is less than 50% and, in some of the cases, females cease to exist while the frequency of males' occurrence in all the categories is greater than 50%.

b) Thematic Analysis

The themes of the lessons were categorized into five (05) different categories: historical, fictional, religious, nature, and general.

Frequency of Males in Themes

Themes	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
Historical	-	83.33%	100%	60%
Fictional	70%	72.41%	95.65%	67.18%
Religious	66.67%	91.67%	-	-
Nature	100%	-	-	-
General	51.16%	28.57%	100%	52.78%

Frequency of Females in Themes

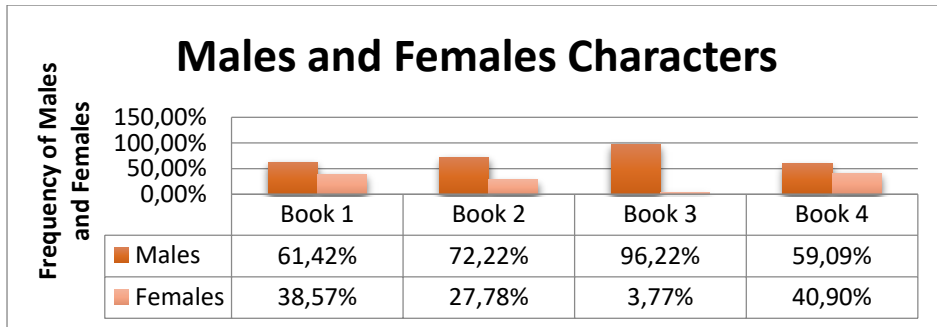
Themes	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
Historical	-	16.67%	-	40%
Fictional	30%	27.58%	4.347%	32.81%
Religious	33.3%	8.33%	-	-
Nature	-	-	-	-
General	48.83%	71.42%	-	47.22%

Once again, the inconsistency between frequencies of occurrence of male and female characters in themes is very much explicit through this chart. The percentage of female characters in all the themes is less than 50%; they are non-existent in the theme of nature. There is only one theme in

Book 2 “General” in which the percentage of male characters is less than 50%. Overall, males outnumbered female characters in all the themes.

c) Frequency of Males and Females Character in Textbooks:

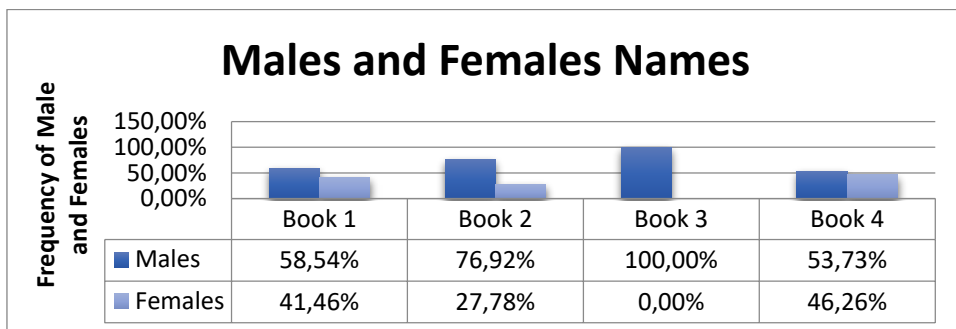
The following bar chart shows the inconsistencies in the projection ratio of male and female characters in all four textbooks. The number of female characters is less in comparison to male ones, which implies that women are not deemed as important as men.



In Book 2, the percentage of male characters is 61.42% and that of female characters is only 38.57%. Similarly, the percentage of male characters in Book 3 is 96.22% and that of female characters is only 3.77%; in Book 4, a difference of 9% (59.09% males compared to 40.90% females) notwithstanding stresses the under representation of women. Hence, females are not given much importance as compared to males in all four textbooks.

d) Frequency of Males and Females Names in Lessons

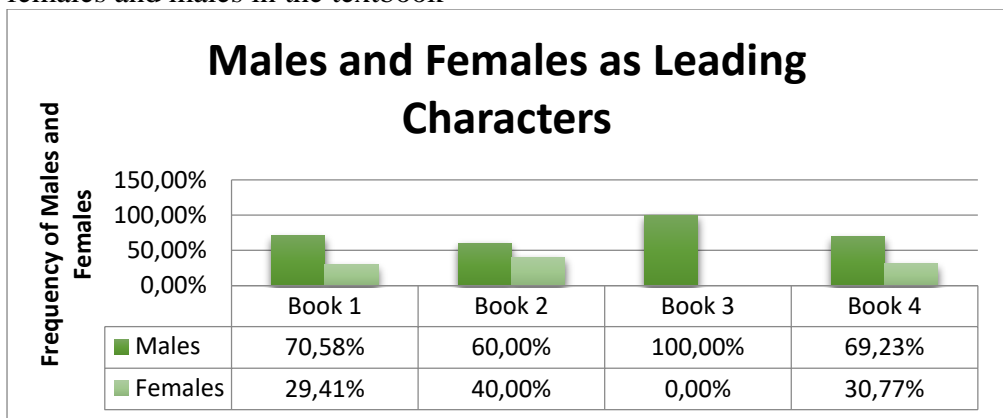
Naming or not naming helps shape the readers’ attitude towards characters in the text and also shows the importance of the characters **Saleem, F. and Zubair, S. (2013)**. Since a person’s name is a very important identity mark, it can be said that females’ identity is at stake in all of these textbooks. The following chart shows divergences in the frequency of males and females name.



The percentages of male characters in Book 1 and 2 are 58.54% and 76.92%, whereas the percentages of female characters are only 41.46% and 27.78%. As far as Book 3 is concerned, it is heavily gender biased because the percentage of male characters is 100%. There is not a single female name that is used in the reading text of Book 3. Last but not the least, Book 4 also follows the trend and keep women invisible; though, it not at such a large scale. The percentage of male characters is 53.73% and that of female characters is 46.26 %. Overall, women are underrepresented in all of these textbooks, which supports the notion that females are extremely unimportant and only males are worth writing about.

e) Number of Males and Females as Leading Characters

The bar chart clearly reflects inequality in the representation of females and males in the textbook



In Book 1, the percentage of male characters is 70.58% and percentage of female characters is only 29.41%. Similarly, in Book 2 and 4 the percentages of female characters are 40.00% and 30.77% respectively. On the other hand, percentages of male characters in Book 2 and Book 4 are 60.00% and 69.23%. Moreover, in Book 3 percentage of male characters is 100% while females are completely invisible in this book.

2. Gender Division of Labor

a) Occupations Assigned to Males and Females

The following tables indicate the demarcation and division of occupations assigned to males and females

Occupations		
Males		
student	chieftains	traveller
shopkeeper	student	explorer
pottery maker	businessman	reporter
thieves	lawyer	business partner
robbers	barrister	student
farmer	baker	chiefs
teacher	rescuers	manger of the factory
headmaster	scientist	triathlon
guide	leader	doctor
cook	chieftains	captain
crewman	weatherman	driver
metal worker	sailor	mayor
lawyer	doctor	baker
monk	engineer	butcher
goldsmith	builders	piedpieper
hunter	soldier	farmer
knight	tailor	tourist

Occupations		
Females		
teacher	attendant	nurse
student	tailor	

As far as professional life is concerned, males enjoy more occupational roles and are shown in greater diversity of occupations than females. Females are only portrayed as teacher, nurse, attendant, tailor and as a students, whereas males are shown as farmers, doctors, manger, businessmen, and so on. This is far from today's reality, because these days females are taking part in almost all types of professions. Hence, it can be said that these textbooks have assigned conventional and very stereotypical roles to both genders.

b) Occurrence of Gender Associated Activities

The content of the textbooks indirectly builds up the inequality of males and females in the minds of the young learners

Activities		
Males		
Playing cricket	playing cricket	started legal practice
Travelling	playing bat ball and badminton	entering politics
Visiting people	going for picnic	uniting the scattered Muslim
standing on the head	going fishing	started legal practice
feeling sorry	selling candies, vegetables	entering politics
hitting buffaloes in the leg	breaking the law	taking over the business
feeling shameful	established a laboratory	talking about cricket match
measuring the weather of earth	invented tin-foil phonograph	making pancakes
sailing to Srilanka	invented electric bulbs	consoling others
searching things	rowing alone to Pacific	getting rid of the partner
praying to Allah	quarreling with others	breaking the metal tube
asking for forgiveness	breaking the law	went out to work
feeling lonely	established a laboratory	shooting animals
getting worried	making money	consoling others
making excuses	buying joystick	thinking constantly
desiring for more	asking questions	consoling others
explaining things	shivering	quarreling with others
ploughing the fields	making money	breaking the law
visiting historical places	fixing the seats	making money
shooting animals	putting in the seat belts	buying joystick

Activities		
Females		
reading stories	parting information	making channel for stream
making clay toys	taking care of the child	sewing buffalo skins together
helping grandmother	giving soup and medicines	grinding some grains
making rille	reading story to the child	making dinner
stitching clothes	saving money	saving grains for future
cutting clothes	sewing money inside the linen	writing a formal letter
talking	advising the child	feeling helpless
sitting passively	asking a riddle	getting hesitated
walking to South Pole	cleaning dirty bag	Stammering
pulling heavy sledges	examining child's toe	Snapping
shopping online on internet	helping mother	pleading

Males are shown in a wide variety of activities – all active, outdoor works are performed by males. Contrariwise, indoor works are reserved for females in most of the cases. The activities in which the males are involved include seeking knowledge, helping others, being part of religious activities, and even intellectual activities. Incidentally, females are mostly associated with service-oriented activities such as seeking knowledge, taking care and advising others as housewives/mothers/daughters, and most importantly doing household chores. Interestingly, in one of the lessons, 2 female characters set out on an expedition in order to make the world record (Book 4, pg. # 4). This is the only extraordinary example; the rest of the activities in which females are involved are related to taking care of family members and doing household work. Hence, the differences in the inequality of

representation are further displayed through the activities in which the males and females are involved.

3. Stereotypes of Masculinity and Femininity

a) Attributes Assigned to Males and Females

All four (04) textbooks depict great difference in the number of attributes assigned to males and females. The nature of attributes associated with females and males clearly shows that the textbook is promoting stereotypical gender attributes.

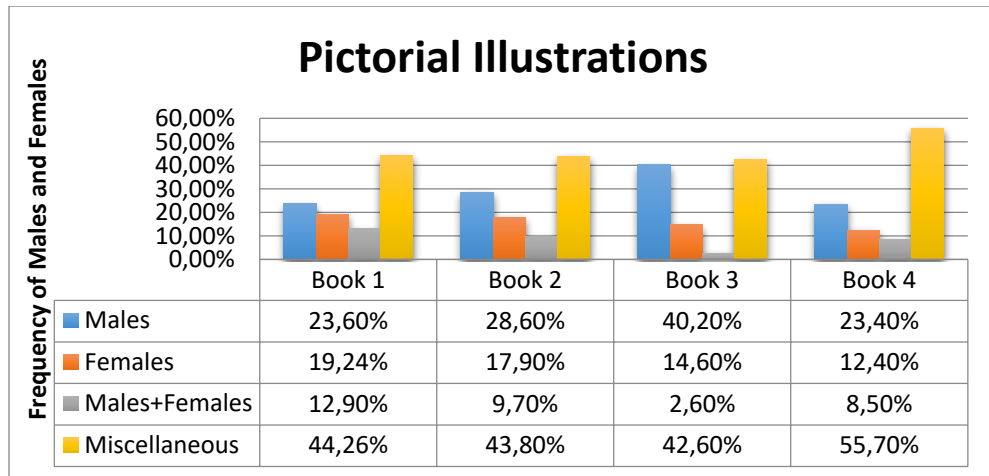
Attributes		
Males		
clever	loving	faithful
brave	caring	great scholar
hero	softhearted	brilliant student
hardworking	funny	hardworking
religious	merciful	great law giver
pious	talkative	honest
thankful	good listener	efficient lawyer
helpful	bad listener	skillful
trustworthy	intelligent	quick learner
intelligent	brave	sharp minded
kind	truthful	curious
naughty	the saint of saints	busy
curious	the leader	faithful
brave	cunning	daydreamer
kind	greedy	wimp
educated	shrewd	liar
poor	famous	honest
wild	brilliant	silly
good boxer	genius	dishonest
master	inventor	wicked
dirty	lazy	sharp
hardworking	fast	kind
clever	rude	hypocrite

Attributes		
Females		
helpful	caring	furious
skillful	loving	noisy
hardworking	patient	wild
intelligent	good listener	helpful

The gender disparity in attributes appears to strengthen the stereotypes. Masculine stereotypes are strengthened by the exclusive use of attributes such as hardworking, strong, genius, curious while feminine stereotypes are reinforced by the use of attributes like patient, helpful, caring, and loving. Also, there are about 19.73% of negative attributes (in bold) for males. However, females portray 21.05% negative characteristics (in bold) in all four textbooks. This clearly shows that these textbooks are promoting stereotypical gender roles and diminishing the possibility of the students learning and developing otherwise.

4. Pictorial Illustrations

The lessons in the textbooks are supported by too many visual images. Unfortunately, these visual images too depict gender bias.



As far as the frequency of male and female visual images is concerned, the above chart shows that images of males appear more frequently as compared to females. The visual images assign those roles and activities to males and females which are expected of them by the society thus reinforcing the already existing stereotypes regarding males and females. Males are usually seen involved in activities like *reading, farming* (Book 1, pg. # 31,32), *cleaning the car, watering plants, playing bat and ball* (Book 2, pg. # 55,86), *working in restaurant as a chef, taking pictures* (Book 3, pg. #26,69), *running, jumping, rowing the, skiing, climbing the hill, boat, milking cows* (Book 4, pg. #5,7,75) whilst females are the ones who are involved in activities like *washing pots, playing with doll, chopping vegetables* (Book 1, pg. 31), *checking temperature of the child, giving soups, washing dirty bag* (Book 2, pg. # 16,18, 50), *serving in restaurant, applying makeup, teaching students, dancing* (Book 3, pg. #26,69), *buying fruits, making popcorn, doing online shopping, making a sandwich* (Book 4, pg. #6,13,34) and so on. There are very few visual images in which gender stereotypes regarding males and females do not exist. For instance, males are shown as, *colouring the vase, eating apples, crying* (Book 1, pg. #24,31,59), whereas females are presented as *riding bicycle* (Book 1, pg. #39,) *playing badminton* (Book 2, pg. #82) *riding a horse* (Book 4, pg. #6). Even though men and women have equal rights, the traditional and stereotypical model of their particular roles is still alive in Pakistan and existed in all four (04) textbooks.

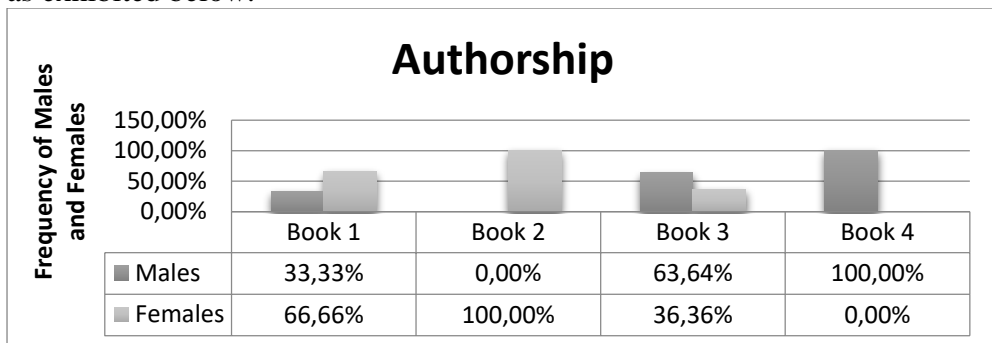
5. Sexiest (Gender Biased) Language

Language is a representation of reality, but the reality represented through language is often a distorted one **Leech (2003)**. The language of all four textbooks under review conveys gender biasness and non-inclusiveness of women. The use of masculine terms and pronouns, for instance, men and the generic ‘he’, denies the full participation and recognition of woman. Authors use masculine nouns and pronouns often in situations where the gender of their subject is unclear, especially when a group to which they are referring to contain both genders. In most of the cases, the generic noun “he” is used to refer to animals. For instance, he is used to refer to Memna (the lamb), Moti (the dog), Kumet (the horse) and Jabir (the wolf), Miru (the peacock) (Book 1, pg. # 4-6, 59), Nag (cobra), red Pony colt (Book 3, pg. #24,54) and the list goes on.

The term “men” is used in generic way; instead of using the more gender neutral terms “people” and “humankind” for instance, “men’s selfish desire” (Book 3, pg. #18), “Men lived in houses”, “Mister Man” (Book 4, pg. #97) were preferred. These words can lead to inconsiderable ambiguity in classroom because students do not understand the generic ‘man’ and think it means male.

6. Personnel in the Textbook Production

As far as authorship of the textbooks is concerned, positive steps have been taken to some extent. Regardless, discrimination is still observed as exhibited below.



In Book 1 and 2, the percentages of female authors are 66.66% and 100%; it is greater than percentages of males, 33.33% in Book 1 and 0% in Book 2. However, in Book 3 and 4, the percentages of males are 63.64% and 100% that again outnumbered females in this regard.

Conclusion

Every society has its own gender belief system and stereotypes that are sometimes represented (reflected?) in textbooks, and these textbooks are

considered as one of the powerful sources of promoting that belief system and propagating and/or breaking stereotypes.

It is quite clear from the analysis of the textbooks that there is a great deal of inequality in the representation of males and females and that these school books were not gender sensitive and gender aware. The traditional meanings of the masculine and feminine have continued to persist along with the binary oppositional categories and stereotypes of active-passive, emotional-rational, dependent-autonomous, and so forth.

One of the points noted during the findings is that the frequency with which the males are presented in the textbooks is greater than that of females. Additionally, the leading characters in most of the texts were males. This means that steps should be taken to neutralize the presentation of men and women in textbooks. Furthermore, the number of female characters in activities and occupations were less than male characters. Similarly, the human attributes favour traditionally-accepted male-dominance in all the textbooks that were analyzed. So, the content of the textbooks needs to be updated to be more representative of the times that we live in.

Moreover, the findings of the study revealed that men were presented as authority figures and the idea of male dominance and their power is repeatedly emphasized in the textbooks, whereas women are shown as meek, submissive beings. So, there is a need for giving female characters an identity, as scientist or an engineer, apart from the ones which define them through roles such as wife, mother, etc.

In a nutshell, the study revealed that gender biasness exists in all four (04) English Language textbooks by different publishers. None of the textbooks are neutral in terms of gender portrayal. Therefore, efforts are required to revise these textbooks and to make them gender sensitive. Unless the textbooks are not gender sensitive, young learners will continue to absorb the gender biases already existing within our society as these textbooks are taught to thousands of students who, ultimately, on the basis of what they have learned, would form their opinions and thinking patterns and reproduce these stereotypes in future.

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Appendix

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