Gender Disparity in English Textbooks by Baluchistan Textbook Board

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality worldwide has worked its way into many Asian societies, including Pakistan (Ali et al., 2011). In Pakistani schools, textbooks are generally the sole teaching/learning resource the teachers and students rely on for all learning. The stereotypical representation of gender in these textbooks is likely to encourage school-going girls and boys to adopt the gendered roles depicted in their textbooks later in life (Dean, 2007). Although numerous researchers have undertaken the content analysis of English textbooks within the context of Pakistan, there is a severe dearth of research focusing on gender disparity in the English textbooks taught in the province of Baluchistan, while the social importance of these textbooks cannot be ignored considering the cultural context and values of Baluchistan. The current study has tapped the research gap by investigating gender depiction in the English textbooks by the Baluchistan textbook Board through a qualitative analysis using Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), precisely the Transitivity Analysis model given by M. A. K. Halliday (1976). The study has precisely explored the process-participant transitivity patterns in the contents of the selected textbooks to investigate the relative presence of both genders, their relative positioning and interaction in texts, the roles they are assigned, the activities they are engaged in, their social standing as well as the sexist language used in the contents of the textbooks. The study found gender disparity reflected in all these aspects in the selected textbooks.

Keywords: ESL, Textbooks, Gender disparity, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Transitivity analysis.

1 Introduction

Gender inequality is a common occurrence, found in many cultures around the world. Asian societies, including Pakistan, are also plagued with this injustice (Ali et al., 2011), where an individual’s roles, duties, responsibilities, and liabilities are defined primarily by their gender instead of their skill set. Particularly in Pakistan, gender-defined roles are an amalgam of customary heritages and common morals (Zaman, Stewart & Zaman, 2006). Both men and women are expected to behave in line with their gender roles and engage in stereotypical jobs, activities, and behaviors to be accepted in our society. Our culture primarily prescribes two gender roles: masculine (characteristics associated with men) and feminine (characteristics associated with women). For all civilizations and societies, gender-based roles, including activities, social positions, personality traits, and various competencies and skills, may vary depending on a society's culture. A human being is a social animal. To live in society, he has to be socialized, and many agents are involved in the socialization process, which transmits the traditional gender roles in children. The foremost agent is the family, and the schools play the second significant role in socializing the children. It is the duty of the family and school to provide the right kind of education. In schools, education aims not only to impart knowledge to a group of students but to illuminate the minds of a diverse group of students and help them in their holistic development.

The teaching/learning materials taught at schools are vital for transferring these gender roles to students. Any school’s curriculum is the crux of education and the strongest tool to transmit and transform the students' culture, values, and beliefs. As Jabeen, Chaudhary and Omar (2014) asserted, schools are hubs for imparting social values, and essential to social transformation through education is the role of textbooks. The contents of the textbooks can have a vital part in laying the foundation for the ideals the students may develop and keep up with later in their adult lives. Ullah and Skelton (2012) reiterate that the worldviews depicted in textbooks can no doubt...
have a lasting impact on the student’s life. In a nutshell, children develop their identities in the light of the gendered idols presented in the textbooks (Campbell, 2010).

In Pakistani schools, textbooks are generally the sole teaching/learning resource the teachers and students rely on for all learning. Hence, when textbooks present a gendered image of society, it encourages the readers to take up the stereotypical gender roles presented in them (Dean, 2007). It is, therefore, imperative for the school curriculum to generate gender sensitivity among the students to build a better future free of stereotypes. The present study also argues that when students come in contact with stereotyped gendered content in textbooks, such notions, ideals, and behaviors are translated and performed in real life. As a result of this transfer, not only the lives of an individual are affected, but the lives of the people linked with that individual also make an impact. Consequently, the whole of society is affected. Since the social importance of these textbooks cannot be ignored, these must be examined to ensure that both genders are adequately represented in the content, language, as well as visuals included in the textbooks (Muzaffar, 2017).

2 Literature Review

Previously, various studies have been conducted on the issue of gender representation in textbooks. A study ‘Teaching Gender: Sex Education and Sex Stereotypes’ by Szirom (1988) reported that the current curriculum is geared toward instilling a sense of being passive, dependent, and subservient in female children. In contrast, boys are socialized to be active, independent, and dominant. Anderson and Hamilton (2005) studied ‘Gender Role Stereotyping of Parents in Children’s Picture Books’. The purpose of this study was to look at how fathers and mothers were portrayed and critique stereotyped roles for both mothers and fathers. The findings show that fathers are underrepresented in picture books compared to moms. In terms of feeling, carrying babies, and conversing with youngsters, textbooks portray fathers as cold and uncaring. Mothers are shown in textbooks as affectionate, feeding their children, and chattier with them.

Cracynest (2015) examines gender stereotypes in children's literature and English as second language novels. The study concluded that the representation of men was twice as much as women in the photos in the book, and men frequently appeared as compared to women. Islam and Asadullah (2018) conducted a comparative content analysis of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi school textbooks and found prejudice against women represented in some form in all the textbooks. However, the percentage of female exclusion in Pakistani textbooks was the highest. However, this study focuses on the textbooks taught in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), leaving the potential for further research into the textbooks taught in Sindh and Balochistan.

Gender disparity in textbooks is not a novel research area in the Pakistani context. Several studies and surveys have been conducted around this issue and have explicated a biased depiction of the two genders in textbooks. One of the earlier studies by Anwar (1982) on school and college textbooks revealed a partial portrayal of male and female characters in the textbooks. He further concluded that about the choice of an occupation or profession, males were provided an extensive range of opportunities, while, for females, future pathways were restricted and usually tied to domestic work. In 1989, Zeenutunnisa conducted a study that proved that masculine characters were more prevalent in textbooks as compared to feminine characters. They were occupied in a broader variety of activities than the females. The study also showed that men and women were assigned typical roles where men’s work was usually administrative and involved problem-solving skills, whereas women were shown as emotional beings. Zeenutunnisa (1989) concluded that these textbooks play a chief role in preserving the patriarchal morals and values associated with gender.

Another study (Jafri, 1994) piloted at the primary and intermediate level of English, Urdu, and Pakistan Studies textbooks shows that a general inclination towards the male gender exists in all the books. In contrast, females are downplayed most of the time and deprived of many opportunities available for men in all walks of life. Mirza and his colleague Malik (1999) further delved into this disparity and conducted a detailed review of the books taught at the primary level. This study also confirmed that females are shown as creatures lacking decision-making power, weak and dependent, whereas men are shown as idols of strength, activity, and hard work. Ambreen and Uzma (2001) evaluated Urdu textbooks taught at the school level in Pakistan with a feminist perspective and revealed that females were described as incompetent, dormant, reliant, and second-class citizens. They further concluded that
such discrimination in the representation of male and female characters might arouse feelings of superiority of one sex over the other. Another study by Mattu and Hussain (2004) states that textbooks for school children clearly endorse the notions of male supremacy among children.

Although numerous pieces of research have been conducted on the content of the textbooks within the context of Pakistan, I could not come across a single study that has entirely focused on the gendered depiction in textbooks taught in the province of Baluchistan. However, Baluchistan’s social and cultural norms are much different from those prevalent in other regions in Pakistan. Baluchistan is considered the country’s least developed region, and the masses are considered backward and less civilized, yet females are the most deprived segment of society. Most girls are denied their right to education, and the female literacy rate in Baluchistan is the lowest in the world. Furthermore, dearth of research in the region of Baluchistan, it is expected that the contents of the English textbooks would also showcase gender inequality; however, a deeper analysis of these textbooks can help explicate the gender disparity prevailing within the culture of Baluchistan and the recognition of these social and cultural issues might eventually pave the way to the resolution of these issues as well.

3 Methodology

The present study carried out the analysis of English textbooks by the Baluchistan textbook board. The materials analyzed were English textbooks taught in the public schools in Baluchistan from the level "beginners" (an initial level below grade 1) to grade 10; hence, a total of 11 textbooks. The study analyzed the textbooks for gender bias/stereotypes in them. The study aimed at a thorough qualitative analysis of the contents of the textbooks; hence the method used is content analysis. The analytical tool used to investigate the textual representation of genders in the selected textbooks was Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) precisely the Transitivity Analysis model given by M. A. K. Halliday. SFG analyses the text at the clause level; hence a thorough analysis of all the units/texts and end-of-unit exercises has been conducted at the clause level. The transitivity system mainly classifies a clause into three components. The process is realized by the verb phrase, the Participant(s) carrying out or affected by the process and usually realized by noun phrases, and the Circumstances forming the adjunct component of the clause generally expressed by the prepositional and adverbial phrases (Simpson, 2004). The process makes up the nucleus of the clause. Halliday (1994) has identified six process types under transitivity labeled Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioural, and Existential (distinguished according to whether they represent physical actions, speech, states of mind, or states of being).

Table 1. Examples of different process types adapted from Nguyen (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>I do my exercise near the lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>I smile at them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>I do not understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>They say, I have acted crazy all my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>I am a kindly grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td>Today there’s Christianity in the south</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing transitivity patterns, especially the process-participant patterns in clauses, can help unveil the ideological positioning of the contested parties in the text (in the present study’s case, the male and female gender) hence appropriate for the study.

The present study has explored the process-participant transitivity patterns in the contents of the selected textbooks to investigate the relative presence of both genders, their relative positioning and interaction, the roles they are assigned, the activities they are engaged in, their social standing as well as the sexist language used in the contents of the textbooks.

4 Data Analysis and Discussion
The content analysis of the selected textbooks revealed that the textbooks abound in a stereotypical and biased representation of the female gender. A major depiction of gender bias in the selected textbooks is that the male gender has been given more space than the female gender. The texts in the selected textbooks generally involve more male characters than females; for instance, unit 3 in Book 1 on p. 51 (fig. 1) has 9 male characters while 6 female characters are depicted in it, while activity on “action verbs” on page 66 (fig. 2) in the same book has 8 male and just 1 female character engaged in different action verbs (i.e., material processes in SFG terms) which further asserts the male gender being more active while female gender as passive in the society.

Besides, the only action verb the female character is engaged in is rather a passive activity of “reading” as compared to the material processes like “playing” and “running” which the male gender is engaged in. The finding, to some extent, syncs with the findings of a previous study by Mirza and Malik (1999), which also observed females represented as weaker creatures who lacked decision and ruling powers, being inactive and cowardly. In contrast, men were shown as idols of vigor, muscle, and decisiveness. The finding also coheres with Anwar’s study (1982), which has revealed an unfair proportion between the depiction of male and female characters in the selected textbooks, with males given more space than females. Zeenutunnisa (1989) also found that male characters were leading in number in the majority of the textbooks she analyzed and that the males were associated with a wider range of activities than the females.

The selected textbooks include several texts/lessons/activities, including dialogue between characters. In these dialogues, there is absolute segregation of genders in that there are only male or female characters interacting with each other and no cross-gender communication as such; for instance, unit 3 on p.51 in English 1 (fig.2 above); Oral communication practice activity on p. 45 (fig. 3) & 89, Unit 13 on p. 85 & Unit 15 on p. 95 in English 6; Oral communication practice activity on p. 19, p. 38, p. 55, p. 70 (fig. 5), p. 78 (fig. 6) and p.106 of English 7; Oral communication practice activity on p.17 (fig.4) & p.44 in English 8.
In all these instances the characters are engaged in dialogues (i.e. verbal processes) while each interaction occupies similar gender characters (either male or female) into the participant roles of sayer and receiver. The depiction is likely to foster the binary positioning of male and female genders in the minds of the students and consequently seep through society at large.

Another finding of the study is that the male gender is given precedence over the female gender in the selected textbooks in that there are a number of different texts which are written from the perspective of a male character with little or no depiction or involvement of the female gender, for instance; unit 4 “My Family” on p. 63 and unit 8 “Cleanliness” on p.104 (fig. 7) in English 1, and, unit 4 in English 2 (fig. 8).

However, in certain instances in the textbooks, the precedence of male gender over female gender is coded in mentioning the male nouns/pronouns prior to the female gender, the sexist language; for instance, in unit 4, “My Family” on p. 63 in English 1 (fig. 9) and the language exercises on p.13, 41 (fig. 10), & unit 12 on p. 108 in English 2 (fig. 13), in the activities on p. 27, 31, 35 (fig. 11), 42, 65 & 85 (fig. 12) in English 3; activity on p. 46 in English 7.
It can be seen in fig 9 that all the male members in the family have been mentioned before their female counterparts, i.e., grandfather before grandmother, brother before sister, father before mother. Also, the narrator in the text (Saad) is male, so the text is written from the perspective of a male character and he is further representing all the male members prior to the female members in the family. In fig. 10 & 11, the masculine gender is mentioned prior to the feminine gender.
In fig 12 & 13 as well, it can be clearly seen that male characters are described before the female characters in the text.

The textbooks also encode gender bias in having male and female genders occupied in traditional roles/occupations. For instance, females in the textbooks are mostly depicted as household ladies who are engaged in household chores like mothers engaged in cooking, girls occupied in cleaning and laundry, etc. The only profession assigned to females in the selected textbooks is of a school teacher while male members have been engaged in various outdoor work, play, and occupations. For instance, unit 8 in English 2 (fig. 14 & 15) represents the male and female genders by identifying relational processes as belonging to differential professions. The unit shows just one female identified through the relational process in the participant role of a class teacher, while the male gender has been identified as belonging to a variety of different participant roles like a school principal, sports teacher, librarian, doctor, farmer, postman, watchman, etc.

![Fig. 14. Unit 8, English 2](image1)

![Fig. 15. Unit 8, English 2](image2)

The activity on p. 85 (fig 16), 93 (fig. 17) & 121 in English 2 also represent male and female characters occupied in traditional roles; for instance, the acts (material processes) the male characters are engaged in are:
playing football, swimming, writing, reading newspaper, riding a horse, driving a car and riding a bicycle, while the female characters are represented as engaged in the activities (material processes) of playing with a doll, reading a book and cooking food.

A similar depiction of male and female genders in traditional roles has also been found in the rest of the selected textbooks. In English 3, a dialogue given on p. 63 (fig. 18) between a mother, a shopkeeper, and two siblings (a boy and a girl) at a bookstore encodes traditional gender representation in that while showing their choice of books, the boy says "I want a storybook on Hatim Tai" while the girl "want[s] to buy a fairy tale".

Fig. 16. Activity, English 2  
Fig. 17. Activity, English 2

In English 7, in an activity on metaphors on p. 53, the male and female gender, through attributive relational processes, have been assigned traditional attributes; the male gender is attributed with tall height and the female gender with kind nature.

“Tall: He is a giant.”
“Kind: She is an angel.”
Similarly, in an exercise on p. 14 in English 8 on similes and metaphors, the male gender is attributed with bravery and the female gender with beauty:

"He is brave like a lion."
"She is beautiful like a fairy"

There are instances in the textbooks where the male and female gender are represented in uncustomary participant roles, but these are just a few. For instance:

“He makes a cup of tea” (English 4, p. 18)
“Ayesha is playing hockey” (English 7, p. 31)
“Umer cooked rice” (English 5, p. 26)
“Kinza and Adnan help their mother in her work” (English 5, p. 38)

However, the textbooks have majorly represented male and female genders in traditional roles and occupations and thus have reinforced the findings of a previous study by Mirza and Malik (1999) which observed females as beings lacking decision power and the strength and nerve to establish their status and position whereas men were embodied as influential decision makers owing to their hard work and energy. The results of the present study also cohere with Anwar’s (1982) observation of male youth provided with a wide range of professions as compared to females who were bounded to choose from an inadequate collection of careers while the majority of them are expected to spend their life running the domestic errands.

5 Conclusion

The study concludes that the English textbooks by the Baluchistan textbook board abound in stereotypical and biased depictions of the female gender vs. the male gender. The representation is likely to inculcate biased perceptions about male and female genders and their social roles in the tender minds of the school children, which will consequently foster similar attitudes and behaviors among these children leading to an everlasting impact on their social dealings and interactions with the opposite gender. These textbooks are the sole teaching material followed in the public schools in Baluchistan. Since public sector schools cater to the education of the majority of the population in the province, the content in these textbooks can have a broader appeal and impact on society. It is, therefore, imperative to be extra cautious and vigilant towards the contents included in these textbooks to avoid fostering any sociocultural bias and discrimination that might adversely impact society at large. Gender bias as discussed previously is specifically relevant in the sociocultural context of the province of Baluchistan in Pakistan hence needs to be taken into account on a priority basis in the textbooks produced by the Baluchistan textbook board.

6 Recommendations

The present study has analyzed only the textual representation of gender disparity in the selected textbooks. Further studies may also investigate the visual representation of both genders in the images included in the textbooks. Gender bias/stereotyping, being a significantly important issue in the province of Baluchistan, demands that all the stakeholders involved in the production of these textbooks be given proper training on how to avoid gender disparity in textbooks. Teachers should be trained to teach these texts in a way that should bring the issue to the students’ consciousness and help them resist gender disparity in all aspects of life.

References