

The Representation of Boys' and Girls' Activities in School Textbooks

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Gender representation in school textbooks across societies has been researched and discussed persistently since 1970s. A considerable number of these studies unpacked that gender bias in textbook (GBIT) is quite persistent and virtually implicit obstacle in the way of gender equality. This does not mean that another study looking at the gendered messages in school textbooks is unnecessary as textbooks, especially in the developing countries like Pakistan, need to be regularly examined to sensitize concerned authorities (textbooks writers, policy makers and approving authority) for adopting appropriate steps for the elimination of gender bias in textbooks. Drawing on feminist analysis of textbooks, this paper examines the representation of boys and girls in textbooks in Pakistan and asserts that gender biased illustrations in textbooks make the child an object of educational gaze and conditions boys and girls to accept the stereotypically engendered and hierarchical ways of seeing and reading the social world. The study is informed by social constructionist theory of 'gender', and therefore draws on feminist poststructuralist. Gender biases in 24 textbooks (Social Studies, Urdu and English) from class 1 to 8 were analyzed with the help of a qualitative content analysis approach. The overall claim that this study reached is that public school textbooks are still embedded with gender bias illustrations which may have adverse effects on the children's identity formation. ¹

Key Words: Feminist analysis, social constructionism, content analysis, educational gaze, identity formation

Almost all of the world's nations adopted the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Goals, as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). One of the key objectives includes the firm global pledge to gender equality in education. Goal five of the Education for call for "eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality" (Blumberg, 2009, p. 365). Being the signatory to EFA, Pakistan's commitment to the elimination of all kinds of gender disparities in education by 2015 has been outlined in many official documents, i.e. Pakistan's Education Sector Reforms 2001–2015; National Plan of Action (NPA)2001–2015, National Education Policy (NEP) 2009 . (Ullah & Skelton 2014; UNESCO, 2004). For the achievement of goal V of the Dakar Framework for Action 2000, the NPA has "outlined three major strategies of which one has a specific focus on making the school environment lively and attractive and eliminating gender bias in the curricula and textbooks" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 8). The Federal Ministry of Education expresses very strong commitment to eliminate gender bias in textbooks (GBIT) (Ministry of Education, 2003b). To this end, the Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated curriculum reform in 2005. The review and reform process was completed in 2007 and the new curriculum was approved by the Curriculum Wing of the Federal Ministry of Education (Ullah 2013). The approved curriculum was notified to all textbooks boards across Pakistan for developing textbooks. The new textbooks were expected to be free from gender biases and gender stereotypes (Ministry of Education 2007; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). The main focus of this paper is to examine and illustrate the extent to which traditional and essentialist constructions of gender continue to pervade contemporary school textbooks. The study findings suggest that despite a decade long effort by the Ministry of Education (MoE) government of Pakistan and international organizations (IOs) to eliminate all forms of gender inequality in education, [including gender biases from textbooks], there are indications that the new textbooks are embedded with gender bias messages and stereotypical representation of male and female. Nevertheless, some progress has been made toward ending the gender gap in primary schooling (UNESCO, 2008).

The Constitution of Pakistan places an increased emphasis on equality of education and equal educational opportunities for all. Article 38 of the 1973 constitution speaks of providing education to all citizens, irrespective of gender biases. Similarly, article 34 of the constitution outlines that women participation in spheres of national life should be ensured. The Ministry of Education of the government of Pakistan claim that without women's equal access to quality education and their participation in economic activity, long term sustainable socio-economic development is not possible.

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Making international commitments, government of Pakistan has placed gender equality as one of the central objective of its education policies from 1998 to 2009 (NEP, 1998; NPA, 2001; NEP, 2009; Ullah & Skelton, 2014). One of the key objectives of the NPA was/is the development of curriculum and textbooks free from gender stereotypes as gender bias textbooks have adverse negative effects on the identity, behaviours and careers aspiration of girls (Ullah 2013; Fox, 1993). Blumberg (2009) argues that sexism in curriculum and textbooks diminishes female learners' educational achievements and career aspiration. Fox (1993, p. 23) argues that "everything we read constructs us, makes us who we are, by presenting our image of ourselves as girls and women, as boys and men". Kohl (1995) stresses that school textbooks transform the way boys and girls look at and relate to the social world they live in. The overall claim of feminist research studies across societies is that gender representations in school resources reinforce and legitimate gender systems (Skelton 1997; Frances, 2010; Ullah 2013). It is then evident that gender bias discourses in the text and illustrations which constitute textbook knowledge have controlling and regulating power. Following these insights, this paper focuses on gender bias in public school textbooks in Pakistan. Our key objective is to delineate the embedded messages in texts and illustrations of textbooks used in the school curriculum which serve to reinforce the dominant gender constructions. Drawing on feminist scholarship on gender, the study is informed by Social constructionist theory of 'gender'. Social constructionist theory of 'gender' asserts "that 'gender' is a social category, hence a social construction, which can be negotiated and left fluid instead of something fixed and eternal" (Ullah, 2013, p. 7). Social constructionists argue that gender identity is learned by children via social institution such as family, mass media, peer, school and so on. This means we are not born boys or girls but rather become boys or girls through socialization process (Millet, 1971). Drawing on social constructionist understanding of gender, it can be argued that gender bias textbooks (GBT) turn young boys and girls into feminine and masculine individuals. Social constructionists claim that the world children experience and the individual they find themselves to be are first and foremost the product of socialization, including schooling as one of the most influencing socialization processes. Schooling in general and gender bias textbooks in particular play a very crucial role in making children as gendered individual as "students spend as much as 80 to 95 % of classroom time using textbooks and that teachers make a majority of their instructional decisions based on the textbooks" (Sadker & Zittleman, 2007, p. 144). It is vividly clear from the feminist analysis of children's books across societies that gender bias in textbooks does matter and a critical analysis of textbooks in Pakistan along the axes of gender is essential to know whether school textbooks in Pakistan pose any challenge to gender bias representation of boys and girls or perpetuate sexism.

Method

Although there are many different textbooks taught to private and public school pupils, the current study focused on the analysis of textbooks taught in public sector schools authored and approved after the curriculum reforms in 2007 and in the light of Education Policy 2009. The reasons for choosing of textbooks taught in public schools were: first, these textbooks are taught to 73 percent of the children who attend public schools. Second, these have been developed in accordance with the Federal Ministry of Education's guidelines; to eliminate gender biases (Ullah, 2013). Third, the approval for these textbooks comes from the Federal Ministry of Education Government of Pakistan and, thus, represent stand point of the government (Saigol, 2010; Ullah and Skelton 2014; Ullah 2013). It is important to mention that the study focused on the core curriculum (Urdu, Social Studies and English) as these are taught to all students from class 1 to 8. Second, these newly developed textbooks are currently taught in public schools. It is important to mention here that the focus on these subjects does not qualify that other subjects (i.e., general sciences and mathematics) are free of gender biases. The twenty four books examined were selected by employing purposive sampling technique. The paper, as mentioned earlier, examines gender stereotypes in the school textbooks, therefore, the methodological approach in this study was a combination of content analysis and discourse analysis. "Content analysis is an approach used by second wave feminists in the 1970s/1980s, and explored gender inequalities embedded in texts and images of school textbooks (Skelton, 2006 as cited by Ullah 2013, p 299). Following feminist poststructuralists, the paper focused on exploring the hidden and underlying meanings embedded in the texts and images, forms of relationship, metaphors, patterns of power and desire created in the texts using the theoretical lens set out in the work of Davies (1989), Wing (1997), Yeoman (1999). While examining boys and girls representations in school textbooks, our key focus was to highlight whether school textbooks perpetuate or challenge gendered stereotypes and gender codes. The analysis of textbooks along the axes of gender enables us to highlight following areas in which textbooks represent boys and girls in stereotypical ways.

Gender divisions in children's activities / central characters in textbooks

Gender divisions in children's activities

Studies across the world have found that textbooks portray women in stereotypical gender role (Ullah, 2013; Skelton 1997, 2011; Apeji, 2001; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). The large number of studies that have been undertaken in this area

area does not mean that another study examining gendered messages in school textbooks is unnecessary. This article, as stated earlier, argues that textbooks do matter as text and illustration from textbooks contribute immensely in constructing and scaping the boys' and girls' minds who are at an impressionable age. The concern that this article voices here is that the representation of gender stereotypes, gender identities and gendered relationship in the textbooks is so deep that gender roles and activities of minor boys and girls are strictly sex based and distinguished from each other. The quantitative content analysis findings in Table 1 clearly illustrate how children's activities are depicted as sex-typed and gendered.

Table 1

Gender divisions in children's activities

Categories	Activities	frequency
boys and girls	Painting, exercise, learning Quran, studying, singing national anthem, watching TV, playing sports, engaged in gardening	08
Boys activities	Buying tickets for adult family members, fighting, flying kite, offering prayers in group, helping others outside home, talking about reform of society, selling empty bottles, writing letter to parents, helping father in harvesting crops, carrying out excursion, group study, delivering speech, posting letters, climbing bus in risky way, informing police in time of robbery at the risk of his life	14
Girls activities	Recitation of Quran, serving grandmother, disposing garbage, administering medicine to babies, helping mother in cooking, serving food, praying, doing embroidery, making pottery	09

As mentioned earlier that textbooks are not simply gendered at the level of adult activities but also in terms of children's lives and activities. A total of 31 activities were observed in which female and male children were engaged. Eight (8) activities were found which were common among boys and girls. However, these were gender stereotypical, i.e. boys were watching TV with their family as well as alone whereas girls were depicted watching TV only with their family. This gives tacit messages that 'girls need surveillance and a supervisory gaze'. Similarly, a very wide gap was found between boys and girls engagement in physical leisure activities and sports (Ullah, 2013; Ullah & Skelton, 2014). Boys were demonstrated busy in planting plants as an experiment and using heavy instruments whereas girls were depicted in supporting roles (*Urdu New Book for Class III*, p 86, *Urdu Book for Class I*, p 22). This shows that some aspects of the textbooks (physical education and muscular strength) apply directly to the body and therefore the most gendered. However, these are not the only ways in which bodies are disciplined as masculine and feminine bodies by the school textbooks. Further analysis revealed boys' engagement not only in a wider range of activities compared to girls, but they were shown engaged in activities which are considered masculine (belonging to the public domain). Girls, on the other hand, are depicted in limited range of 'feminine' activities such as serving food, caring for others, serving family members, and disposing of garbage (see for example *Urdu Book for Class I*, p 14; *Social Studies for Class I*, p 57). This gender division in the children's activities is indicative of how strategically children are given frequent signals and messages through school knowledge to develop gender identities and learn about gender expectations. The messages inculcated through representation of females and males in school textbooks contribute to children's understanding of what it means to be a boy, girl, man, or woman (McCabe *et al.*, 2011). Children identify with characters of their own gender in books (Manjari, 1998) and construct identities which are offered to children for them to aspire to (Davies, 1993). The narrow representation of girls and their portrayal in selective activities does not allow female students to make choices that are in keeping with their own personalities and which are self-empowering. Mem Fox (1993) asserts that the way boys and girls portrayed [school textbooks] impacts young learners' perception and attitudes of gender-appropriate behavior in society. Fox further argues that gender bias in textbooks "can be so insidious that it quietly leads boys and girls to accept the way they see and read the world, thus reinforcing the gendered nature of society" (Fox, 1993, p. 13).

The gender bias in dialogues and conversations

With reference to who speaks and when, number of dialogues initiated and turns taken, the analysis of the textbooks revealed that the number of males leading the dialogues was more than that of females (26 dialogues were observed between male members whereas dialogues between females were 12). In 9 cases both males and females participated in the dialogues. In case of the mixed dialogues, the issue was examined with reference to fastness. The analysis revealed that, in mixed dialogues, males outnumber females in leading the dialogues and if it was initiated by a female she was excluded in the very outset and the dialogues were taken over by male voices. A good example is the lesson "*Health and Cleanliness*" narrated in the textbook *Urdu for Class Six*, p 28. In this lesson father starts the dialogue and has 12 turns, son has 11 turns to speak and the daughter gets 6 turns to say something whereas the mother presents tea and has no turn for saying anything at all. The power to speak circulates throughout dialogue but the exercise of power is certainly not equal for all participants. This gives a vivid message that males possess as well as exercise power whereas female are expected to be polite and therefore exercise lesser power or may be powerless. Since females are required to be polite, this puts the onus on them to accommodate male speech. Here it is reinforced that for females it is not polite and

mannered behaviour to talk about things and issues which interest them. They are not expected to be the centre of the conversation and talk a lot. Females are kept in their places and expected to talk little. This also represents that females are expected to listen more to males as listening to males and accommodating their talks are part of the repertoire of successful feminine behaviour. It is then argued that by blocking females' conversation, the position of inequality is maintained. It can be argued here that textbooks act as conduits through which children learn whose voices in society are more important, who have agency and who lacks it. Dorothy Smith, while addressing the issue, argues that "some students learn that their own voices have authority that they count and should be heard; others learn their lack; some learn that they belong to groups that have agency in society and that they can count on being recognized" (Smith, 2004, p. 285). 'Some students' in the discussion of gender hierarchies in this study refers to male students in general who learn that their voices have authority. These results are similar to those of Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) who also found males' dominance in dialogues in Malaysian English textbooks.

Females and males as protagonists / central characters in textbooks

Examining textbooks for the issue of who are the protagonists in lessons. The study findings revealed that in 46 lessons boys / men were the main characters whereas in 25 lessons girls / women were central to the discussion. Moreover, in most cases the portrayal reflects stereotypes of masculine and feminine roles. This was observed throughout the textbooks (Ullah, 2013). A few examples are shared here in: the description of young girls in *Urdu ki Pehli Kitab* (Urdu Book for Class I) describes a girl as a disciplined child, confirming girl, submissive girl, helping mother in domestic chores, serving grandmother and cleaning home etc. On the very next page of the same textbook, a boy is portrayed as someone who has the ambition of carrying out the gigantic task of uniting the society and making it civilized and progressive (pp 30-33 also pages 14-15). These discourses socialize girls in the feminine and boys in the masculine 'gender codes'. Throughout the textbooks analyzed girls are applauded for being willing to obey, submissive, not excited to do great things, tidy and calm, whereas boys are encouraged to be physically active, excited for doing great things and take challenges of gigantic tasks (for example *Urdu Book For Class I*, p. 14; *My Urdu Book for Class V*, p. 120).

The gendered nature of trips and excursion in school curriculum in KPK

Previous researches on public school textbooks in KPK found that "boys are portrayed, both in text and illustration, in a wider range of outdoors competitive sports, whereas girls are either invisible or presented in selected indoor sports" (Ullah, 2013, p. 248). It was found that textbooks portray sports and physical activities (running and stretching) as boys'/men's prerogative in the textbooks (Ullah and Skelton, 2014; Ullah 2006). The point that is highlighted here is that textbooks are not only discriminatory in terms of sports but are also embedded with texts and illustrations that naturalize and legitimize outing and excursion as boys'/men's prerogative. Table 2 demonstrates the gendered nature of trips and excursion embedded into textbooks.

Table 2

The gendered nature of trips and excursion

The gendered nature of Trip and excursion	Boys	Girls	Total
	Frequency	Frequency	
Scenario one			
Visit to historical places with family	9	8	17
Visit to beautiful valleys with family	8	8	16
Visit to beautiful/popular cities and parks with family	11	11	22
Scenario two			
Visiting historical places without family but with friends/class fellows	9 (75)	3* (25)	12
Visiting beautiful valleys without family but with friends/class mates	7 (87)	1* (13)	8
Visiting big cities and park without family but with friends/class mates	8 (100)	-	8

The findings in table 2 show that there seems to be an attempt at bridging the gender gap in scenario one where girls and boys have an equal opportunity of excursion, trips, and outings with the family. However, when it comes to outings, excursions and trips to beautiful places and big cities with friends and teachers, wide gender discrimination exist (scenario two in table). Thus, it is asserted that although there is a little improvement in this domain of gender in terms of equality, nevertheless, the textbooks still discriminate against girls and women. It is important to stress here that the researchers are fully vigilant and familiar with the cultural norms and religious injunctions regarding girls/women going out of their homes without their men and whom *The Quran and Hadith*² allow them to go out with. The point to be noted here

² Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him

is that boys are given more opportunities of visiting historical places, beautiful valleys and parks with their teachers and friends whereas girls don't have those opportunities. Girls going out on excursions and trips with class fellows and teachers were observed only four times and each instance depicts a day long trip to a nearby place or park. The concern here is that if boys have boys club to make excursions and trips, can't girls have girls clubs? Girls' trips, even with the family, are sometime made conditional. The reading scheme *Every Day English for Class VIII* has a dialogue between father and daughter which makes the daughter's trip to Lahore (Capital of the province Punjab-Pakistan) conditional such as: "*Sofia: I always think about people living in big cities....Sofia: My friend has gone to Lahore to visit her grandparents. Father: there are a few places famous for the variety of dishes. Now go on and open your books to study. If you get above 80% marks in your tests, I will take you to Lahore*".

Some may think of these examples as pointless and of no importance but this shows the significance of small voices in the reproduction of social patterns and social structures. Linda Smith argues that "each individual story is powerful...the point about the story is not that they simply tell a story or tell simply...[but that] the story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people, people with the story" (Smith, 1999, p.145). This deprivation from excursions and outings blocks the opportunity for girls to learn and develop their self-image with diverse experiences, as traveling offers them possibilities of escaping from their prescribed places and roles acquiring new knowledge, which may transform their whole lives and enable them to learn how to be independent as per their wishes and desires. Here it can be argued that school textbooks disseminate a strong implicit and explicit message to the children that they live in a world organized around the idea that girls and boys have different bodies, capabilities and therefore ought to be involved in different activities. we argue that textbooks serve as a tool of surveillance and a tool of social control that education policy makers, predominantly men (Ullah, 2013; Ullah & Skelton, 2013) use to perpetuate the gendered social order (males' hegemony). The gendered nature of recreation does not end here but encompasses the desire to have taste of having leisure time. Textbooks are embedded with messages such as:

Table 3

Gendered taste of spending leisure time

Girls	Boys
It is a hot day. I want a cold drink.	It is a sunny day. I shall play in the park
It is a warm day. I shall study at home	It is a cool day. I like to sit in the sun

The text under the 'Girls' heading are accompanied with pictures which portray them sitting and reading a book and consuming liquid. On the other hand, the boy in the first instance is outside sunbathing which is an important source of vitamin D. This also shows that males have the right to enjoy outside not females. In the second instance the boys is depicted to be engaged in sports actively. These stereotypical representation of girls and boys affirms that the innate differences belief is do deeply embedded and circulated in our culture that it has assumed the status of absolute and fixed reality or 'hegemonic knowledge' that is presented to children as the only true and correct knowledge (See Ullah 2013; Apple, 1991). These representations, in line with the essentialists understanding of gender, legitimize and affirm that 'females and males have innate differences/features and therefore need different food, different activities and spaces. The examination of textbooks provides ground to argue that gendered discourses position and present boys/men and girls/women as gendered bodies in the social world with associated expectation of appropriate behaviour and gender roles for each gender (Woodward, 2011).

Conclusion

The overall conclusion reached from the findings of the study is that despite the strongest commitment of the Government of Pakistan and International organizations, all the twenty four textbooks examined contain gender bias texts and illustrations. The activities of boys and girls are stereotypical. Outing and excursions have been demonstrated as men prerogative. Boys and girls are constructed with the powerful discourses as 'good girls' 'obedient girls' 'tidy girls' 'disciplined girls' 'submissive girls' 'pretty girls', 'thin girls', and ambitious boys, 'sporty boys' 'strong boys' 'cooperative boys', 'big boys' 'reformer boys', 'smart boys'. The manner in which boys and girls are portrayed or genders are represented in school textbooks affect children's understanding of gender-appropriate behavior in society and conditions boys and girls to accept the stereotypically engendered social world. We are vigilant to the fact that changing textbooks/curricula and making them gender balanced is an expensive and slow process but achievable goal if the textbooks authors, selection as well as approving committees consist of people who are gender sensitive and willing to introduce gender balanced textbooks. We do believe that if the curriculum wing of the Ministry of Education, textbooks boards and other textbook production agencies strive to implement the above recommendations, it will go a long way towards promoting gender balance textbooks production in Pakistan. In a nut shell, it is imperative to develop and teach

gender balanced textbooks as gender stereotypes and biases in textbooks can affect an individual's self image-self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of control over one's life (UNESCO, 2008).

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