

# Stereotypical Gender Representation on the selected Textbook

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**ABSTRACT:** Textbooks are highly important teaching aids since they are used in classrooms on a regular basis and they have an authoritative power. Stereotypical gender representation and gender-biased use of language in textbooks may affect students' performances and social behaviour. The main purpose of this study was to assess how men and women are represented in the SCERT 9<sup>th</sup> std textbook and how gender messages influences the students. The analysis showed that the proportion of male characters is 53.33%, which is higher than the proportion of female characters 26.66% in the textbook. The study also reveals that female characters are attributed more domestic and indoor jobs. Textbooks act as a potential tool for introducing social norms and values among the students. It is important to note that students may acquire consciously or unconsciously both explicit and implicit knowledge provided by the contents embedded in the textbook. Gendered messages have the potential to influence the development of students' attitudes at an impressionable age. Therefore there arises a need for balance in representation of roles for both men and women.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

**Bias** – *n.* a tendency to believe that some people, ideas, etc., are better than others that usually results in treating some people unfairly

**Gender** – *n.* the state of being male or female

**Stereotype** – *n.* an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) To determine the relative frequency of the occurrence of gender in the 9<sup>th</sup> std SCERT English textbook.
- 2) To find out how family, society, textbooks and movies influence the students in imbibing various ideologies related to gender.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Creating a classroom environment that treats women and men equally is important for the educational success of students. However gender equality does not stop with the teacher. It is also important that the materials used are supporting equal treatment. In fact, many classroom materials, especially those that are older, may contain gender bias in activities, photos, or words. These materials can include textbooks, images, reading materials, written assignments, or even test materials. Having students use materials like these in class can reinforce stereotypes about gender roles in society. Classroom materials that reinforce gender stereotypes can discourage students, weaken their motivation and limit their overall academic performance. This can result in fewer opportunities available to students when they finish their schooling.

## 2. METHOD ADOPTED FOR STUDY

The investigator has used the *survey method* and *content analysis* method to conduct the present study. To achieve the first objective the investigator has used content analysis method to analyze how the genders are represented in the 9<sup>th</sup> std SCERT English textbook. For attaining the second objective the investigator has chosen the survey method so that the maximum possible extend can be covered within limited resource. A representative sample of 39 boys of 9<sup>th</sup> std belonging to the age group 13-15, from Govt. Model Boys H.S, Kollam were selected for the present study.

### 3. GENDER STEREOTYPES:

Stereotypes are still present in our society. They play an important role in the way we perceive people and society in general, both positively and negatively. Stereotyping impacts the decisions individuals make and it can lead to prejudice and even discrimination. Cook and Cusack (2010, p. 9) defined a 'stereotype' as "a generalized view or preconception of attributes or characteristics possessed by, or the roles that are or should be performed by, members of a particular group". According to this definition, an individual is automatically supposed to possess certain characteristics or to perform certain roles by mere virtue of membership in a particular group. A stereotype is, therefore, an oversimplified idea. Stereotypes can be related to race, class, age, religion, nationality, sexual preference etc., and give rise to simplistic statements, for example: "blonds are dumb", "the Dutch are greedy", "homosexual men have a great sense of fashion", and "women are terrible drivers". The latter example is a gender stereotype and is based on the supposed social differences between men and women.

### 4. GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION

Education is an important key to gender equality. It improves the position of girls and women, which, in turn, contributes to the social, economic and political development of countries. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (s.d.b) regards education "as one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty". It is "one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process" (UNFPA, s.d.b

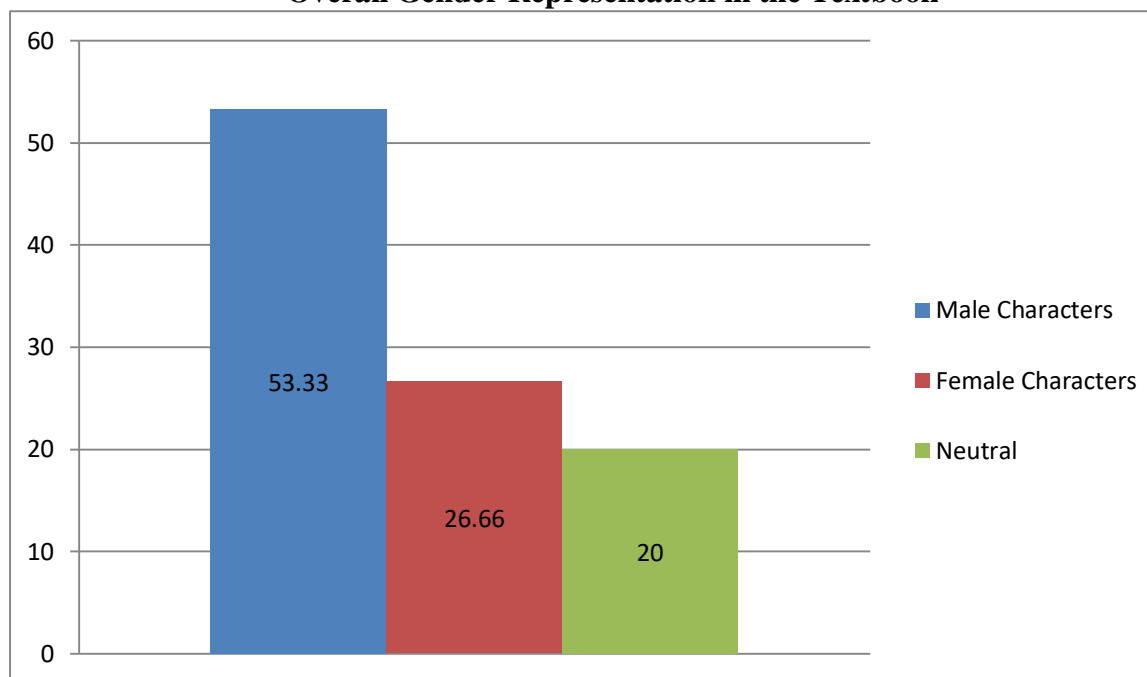
Textbooks are highly important teaching aids since they are used in classrooms on a regular basis, they have authoritative power and they are available to anyone. According to Sadker (2009, p. 88) "students spend as much as 80 to 95 percent of classroom time using textbooks and that teachers make a majority of their instructional decisions based on the textbook". Romanowski (1996) stressed the authoritative power of textbooks. The ideas and values conveyed in the textbook "have power and authority because they are presented in printed and bound textbook with its aura of an authority that is beyond question and criticism" (p.171). Textbooks are also an efficient tool for education that can reach a broad audience since, as Brugeilles and Cromer (2009a, p. 15) stated, they are "still the cheapest of available media, and they are easy to carry and use".

### 5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The study reveals that there is imbalance in the portrayal of male and female characters. The analysis shows that the proportion of male characters is 53.33% which is higher than the proportion of female characters 26.66% in the textbook. The textbook presents a rather stereotypical attitude towards females with regard to gender roles. Females are more commonly associated with household duties and their presence in the mainstream is generally invisible when compared to the famous public male personalities. Males outnumber females in illustrations. *Sport* is regarded as a male specific attribute. From the content analysis one gets a picture that males *go, play, see* and *think* whereas females *say, want* and *study*.

The graphical representation of the result given below clearly defines the dominance of male characters over female characters in the textbook.

### Overall Gender Representation in the Textbook



From the study conducted it is found that 97% of the students are happy to be born as a male. About 64.10% of the students stated that they do not get any special priority in their home on the basis of gender. The rest are quite happy about the special priority they receive on the basis of gender. It is appalling that 76.92% of the students think that men have more power than men. About 53.84% has acquired such thoughts of dominance of men over women through movies. Thus it is interesting to note that the movies the students watch have a greater influence in inculcating male chauvinistic thoughts in them. About 33.33% has been influenced by peer groups in attaining ideas about male dominance over women. Only 12.82% of the students responded that their parents play a good deal in imbining gender roles in their mind.

The most appalling idea conveyed by the students was that 69.23% of the students do not wish to bring a change in stereotypical attitude towards gender. About 30.76% do wish to see a change in the stereotypical gender representations. Such attitude was shown from the part of the students as 82.05% of them have never undergone gender discrimination in the society. This may be the reason for their cold attitude towards wishing for a change in the stereotypical gender representations. About 61.53% of the students never noticed gender discrimination in the stories they have read from their childhood days onwards. Though they are unaware about the gender bias that exist in their textbook, 71.7% of the students are of the opinion that their textbook has a strong influence in framing ideas related to gender. About 74.35% of the students have identified characters like 'Strong Men' who are most common in their textbook.

The study helps one to clearly understand how patriarchal norms are developed in a child from childhood days onwards. Another appalling response from the students was that about 61.53% of the students do not agree that women are equal to men in any terms. Only 38.46% have the opinion that women are equal to men as women have excelled in all fields. About 64.10% of the students are not ready to reframe the female characters in their textbook. They did not show any interest in reading stories with strong and bold female characters. Only 35.89% of the students wish to reframe the female characters to be bold and courageous like men.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to assess how men and women are represented in the SCERT 9<sup>th</sup> std textbook and how gender messages influences the students. By means of a quantitative content analysis, the proportion of male to female characters was determined and whether there was a difference between the proportions in the texts was assessed. The analysis showed that the proportion of male characters is 53.33% which is higher than the proportion of

female characters 26.66% in the textbook. Additionally, male characters make up a higher percentage in most of the domains. Textbooks act as a potential tool for introducing social norms and values among the students. It is important to note that students may acquire consciously or unconsciously both explicit and implicit knowledge provided by the contents embedded in the textbook. The study also reveals that female characters are attributed more domestic and indoor jobs such as housekeeper, artist, waitress whereas male characters occupy more prestigious jobs such as scientist, writer, cricketer, environmentalist, coach, coach, career builder, researcher, freedom fighter and so on.

Unfortunately, the presence of gender bias and sexist language in the textbook has the potential to empower and trigger stereotypical thinking in students' mindsets. If the textbooks continue to depict men and women in conventional roles and do not include transgender individuals as a part of society and as acceptable, the new generations of young learners will continue to foster such narrow minded concepts and notions about gender roles in society which can be harmful for the human race at large. Thus, it is essential to review the current textbooks used from the perspective of gender and include and update the books so as to ensure that the current trends in the society are manifested therein. If positive changes are found reflected in the textbooks, young learners, who will eventually become a part of the future societies, will be educated with such positive concepts.

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