GENDER REPRESENTATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS OF BIHAR AND RAJASTHAN

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the representation of gender in English language textbooks of Bihar and Rajasthan through a gender-sensitive perspective. The present study aims at gender bias in the content of English language textbooks of Bihar and Rajasthan State Boards. Two English language textbooks of Grade VII were examined and taught in schools were chosen as the sample of the study. Research paradigm quantitative content analysis was used as a research methodology. The findings from the study showed male characters outnumbered the females. Females depicted in the content of the textbook are less visible than males. Unequal distribution of achievements of males and females in the content was found. Also, the male authors outnumbered the female authors. Thus, the research has shown that there is a need to have a gender-sensitive and equal representation of males/females to avoid an imbalance in gender representation in textbooks.

Keywords: Gender representation, English language textbooks, Gender inequality, Content analysis

Introduction

Textbooks are the most visible component of the curriculum, it is closest to the hearts of students and the message delivered by the textbooks has a powerful impact on the learners, especially in the early years (Loan, 2010). [1] Children are prone to acquire these concepts efficiently during the formative years of their

life and have a tendency to develop children's way of thinking (Bhattacharya, 2017). In the Indian Context, textbooks play pivotal sources of knowledge. They promote critical thinking and creativity in children. Thus, it is important to include issues of equity and equality in textbooks because large boys and girls access textual material in schools especially in rural areas (NCERT, 2016). According to WHO "The word Gender is used to describe the characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of women and men, boys and girls which are socially constructed. "*Gender is related to how we perceive and expect to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organized, not because of our biological differences*" (WHO, 2021). Traditionally, India has a long history of male-dominated societies where women are controlled and suppressed by male members of society. Education Commission of India, 1965 promised to deliver quality between both men and women (Kalia, 1986). National policy on education (1986), promotes equality in education and emphasizes eliminating inequality concerned with gender. In the Indian context, the emergence to promote female education was witnessed in the latter half of the twentieth century, which can be seen in Millennium development goals and the 'education for All' campaign (Mohan & Vaughan, 2008). The movement was based on gender parity. The turning point for women in education came in 1975 in India when the report on the status of women's Towards Equality in India was introduced by the Ministry of Education and Social welfare.[2] This has been acquired as a center stage for gender concern in India (NCERT, 2013-16 & Bhattacharya, 2017). The education of women was more acceptable with no loss of national identity. In the first decades of the new India was entitled to equal rights to women but gender differentiation in education has remained. The notion of gender inequality was prevalent and the different social roles were maintained. A suitable and relevant curriculum for both girls and boys was a silent issue in women's education under colonial rule. By 1882 the favor to redesign the curriculum to meet the special needs of girls was supported by the Education Commission (Chanana, 1996). Several studies found the majority of female characters failed to express career goals, men in more prestigious and higher status roles. This gender difference shown in context, language development affects how children perceive themselves, especially the older children (Hus & Sovic, 2015). Despite various attempts that have been made, the ground realities still portray gender violence, gender discrimination towards women and girls. Gender discrimination continues to plague contemporary society. It begins with family and is reinforced by schooling and then oozes in society (NCERT, 2006). Pandey (2004) cited in his paper, The national

curriculum framework (2005), recognized that "*we must use textbooks as one of the primary instruments for equality since for a great majority of school-going children, as also for teachers, it is the only accessible and affordable resource for education"* (Amruthraj, 2012). According to Save the Children "Gender Inequality *is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender causing one sex to be privileged or prioritized over other".* The gender inequality presented in textbooks and syllabus is a great concern as it serves as a design for future society (Bhattacharya 2017).

Literature Review

Ullah et.al (2018), the study found that the visibility of female characters was low, and there was a numerical imbalance between female and male representation. Males outnumbered females in all the studied textbooks. Bhattacharya (2017), The findings of the study revealed that several male characters are more than female characters, the male-centered language was used in all the three books, male characters are more engaged in both active and passive roles than females. NCERT Report (2013-16), The findings of the study had highlighted that there was a shift from gender concern to gender inclusions in the subjects but there was a need to reflect women more in the textbooks, the stories of their ordinary woman struggle, aspirations, and in leading and unconventional roles should be reflected. Waqar & Ghani (2019), The findings of the study revealed textbooks have the visibility of more male role models in the form of religious and male personalities in ELT textbooks. Female characters and visibility were shown in small numbers in the majority of the textbooks. Suhartono & Kristina (2018), the representations of more male characters and images were shown as compared to female characters. The male percentage was dominated by the female percentage.

Statement of the Problem

In defining the educated person, the role of schools has great importance and thus the role of textbooks is profoundly impactful. The students in classrooms are guided through textbooks. There is a strong need to study gender representation in textbooks because it affects both the education and the position of women in society.

Aim of the study

The study aims to address gender bias in the content of English language textbooks of Bihar and Rajasthan State Boards. The English language textbooks of Grade VII taught in schools were examined.

Objectives of the study

1. To find an equal representation of males and females in terms of characters, visual illustrations in the textbooks.

2. To find out the equal representation of males and females in terms of contributions/ achievements in the textbooks

3. To find out the equal representation of male and female authors in the textbooks.

Research Questions

1. Do the images in the textbooks show an unequal representation of males and females?

2. Do the statements or events provoke gender demean (inferior) either gender in the textbooks?

The rationale of the study

Gender alone is not the women or girl's issue and including only women and girls while developing a curriculum is not enough. However, the challenging part is to develop a framework addressing both men and women giving equal status in the textbooks. Textbooks serve as a major source of information to students and have a great influence on children's thoughts or ideas (Kuruvilla & K.T, 2015). The knowledge constructed in the textbooks impacts the attitudes and values of the children. The study proposes to analyse the English language textbooks of grade VII of Bihar and Rajasthan states. The NCERT (2013-2016) report has shown a shift from gender concern to gender inclusion, still, the need to include women more in the textbooks was found in the states Assam, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Odisha, Bihar, Maharashtra. Out of the state, the researcher chooses to do these two states because of the time constant, cultural proximity, and the lowest female literacy rate.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited to the textbook of only VIIth grade under two different state boards. The study uses the SCERT textbook of the English language of Bihar and Rajasthan. This study cannot be generalized to some extent due to the small sample size. The analysis of the content is mainly based on gender representation.

Research Methodology

Devi (2008), defines "*content analysis as the analysis of what is contained in the content*". Content analysis data is a tool used to take numerical data from word-based data (Cohen et. al, 2017). According to Anderson & Arsenault (1998:102), quantitative content analysis is the simplest form which involves counting concepts, words, or occurrences in documents and reporting them in tabular form (Cohen et.al, 2017). The researcher uses a quantitative content analysis method to examine and present in tabular form. The strategy used to evaluate the objectives of the study is to give in-depth information concerning gender representation in the existing textbooks. To achieve the objectives, the SCERT English language textbooks of Grade VII of Bihar and Rajasthan state namely Radiance Part II and English Reader are used for content analysis.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data analysis was done based on the following research questions.

1. To find out Male/Female representation in the textbook: This includes visibility of both the gender, whether both males/females are present equally in the textbook. The visibility in terms of the total number of male and female characters present in the textbook.

Table: 4.1

The number of male and female characters in the textbook of Bihar Radiance-Part-II

Unit	Male	Female
Unit 1 Sympathy (poem)	6	-
Unit 2 Krishna & Sudama	2	
Unit 3 Aladdin found the wonderful lamp	2	1
Unit 4 The peacock- our national bird	3	1
Unit 5 I had a dove (poem)	-	-
Unit 6 Ivan	6	4
Unit 7 Japan- the land of the Rising sun	-	-
Unit 8 Mother Teresa	-	1
Unit 9 These Simple Things (poem)	-	-

Unit		
Unit 10 The lost child	6	1
Unit 11 A Kabaddi Match	5	-
Unit 12 Suraj and Titu	2	-
Unit 13 Running through the rain (poem)	-	-
Unit 14 Birbal outwits the cheat	3	-
Unit 15 The Girl with the crutches	1	3
Unit 16 Books- our best friends (poem)	-	-
Total	36	12

Findings: The above table shows male characters in the textbook Radiance Part II outnumbered the female characters. The total number of male characters in the textbook found is 36 and female characters are 12. It confirms the visibility of more male characters than females.

Table: 4.2

The number of male and female characters in the textbook of Rajasthan English Reader

Unit	Male	Female
Unit 1 The Unique Sacrifice	2	4
Unit 2 My Dream School	4	2
Unit 3My Best Friend (poem)	-	-
Unit 4 Reduce Waste	-	-
Unit 5 Outside the classroom	2	-
Unit 6 The doorway to the world	1	-
Unit 7 Sympathy (poem)	3	-
Unit 8 The Tiger man	1	-
Unit 9 True Successor	3	-
Unit 10 Smile (poem)	-	-
Unit 11 A letter to a Friend	-	3
Unit 12 New Heights	4	1

Unit 13 Royal Joke (Poem)	2	-
Unit 14 You can do	5	2
Unit 15 The Glory of Ancient Science	4	-
Total	31	12

Findings: The above table shows male characters in the textbook Radiance Part II outnumbered the female characters. The total number of male characters found in the textbook is 31 and female characters are 12. It confirms the visibility of more male characters than females. Male characters are more shown than females in terms of visibility.

2. To find out equal Male/female visual representation: This includes the equal representation of males and females in pictures in terms of number and how they are reflected in the content.

Table: 4.3

The representation of the number of males and females in the pictures or visuals in the textbook of Bihar

Radiance Part II

Unit	Male	Female
Unit 1 Sympathy (Poem)	3	-
Unit 2 Krishna & Sudama	6	-
Unit 3 Aladdin found the wonderful lamp	2	-
Unit 4 The peacock- our national bird	-	-
Unit 5 I had a dove (poem)	-	-
Unit 6 Ivan	No visual image	No visual image
Unit 7 Japan- the land of the Rising sun	No visual image	No visual image
Unit 8 Mother Teresa	No visual image	No visual image
Unit 9 These Simple Things (poem)	1	1
Unit 10 The lost child	7	1
Unit 11 A Kabbadi Match	No visual image	No visual image
Unit 12 Suraj and Titu	No visual image	No visual image

Unit 13 Running through the rain (poem)	No visual image	No visual image
Unit 14 Birbal outwits the cheat	3	-
Unit 15 The Girl with the crutches	1	1
Unit 16 Books- our best friends (poem)	-	-
Total	23	3

Findings: The above table shows males outnumbered the females in visual representation in the textbook Radiance Part II. The total number of a male found in visual illustrations are 23 and women are only 3. Males depicted in visual illustrations are more than females. Women are mostly seen inside roles as mothers, wives.

Table: 4.4

The representation of the number of males and females in the pictures or visuals in the textbook of

Rajasthan English Reader

Unit	Male	Female
Unit 1 The Unique Sacrifice	7	9
Unit 2 My Dream School	4	2
Unit 3My Best Friend (poem)	2	3
Unit 4 Reduce Waste	-	1
Unit 5Outside the Class-room	2	-
Unit 6 The doorway to the world	2	1
Unit 7 Sympathy (poem)	3	-
Unit 8 The Tiger man	1	-
Unit 9 True Successor	13	-
Unit 10 Smile (poem)	-	-
Unit 11 A letter to a Friend	-	-
Unit 12 New Heights	11	10
Unit 13 Royal Joke (Poem)	2	-

Unit 14 You can do	6	3
Unit 15 The Glory of Ancient Science	4	-
Total	57	29

Findings: The above table shows males outnumbered the females in visual representation in the textbook English Reader. The total number of a male found in visual illustrations are 57 and women are 29. Males are more in visual illustrations than females. Women are mostly seen doing household work and men working in fields, managers, etc.

3. To find out Male/female contributions or achievements in the textbook: This includes equal representation of male and female contributions or achievements in the textbook.

Table: 4.5

The number of Male and Female achievements mentioned in the textbook of Bihar Radiance Part II

Unit	Male	Female
Unit-8 Mother Teresa	-	1
Unit- 15 The Girl with the crutches	-	1

Findings: The above table presented 2 units of female achievement and no unit to male achievement in the textbook. The findings showed an unequal representation of male and female achievements. Both the units discuss the achievement of females. The contribution/achievement of female characters is underlined and highlighted in the Textbook.

Table: 4.6

The number of male and female achievements mentioned in the textbook of Rajasthan English Reader

Unit	Male	Female
Unit – 1 The unique Sacrifice		1
Unit -8 The Tiger man	1	-
Unit -15 The Glory of Ancient Science	4	-

Findings: The above table presented 3 units of male and female achievement in the textbook. Out of a total of 3 units, 2 have shown male achievements and 1 unit with female achievement. The findings have shown an unequal representation of male and female achievement in the textbook English Reader.

When comparing both textbooks, it was found that Radiance Part II has given place to only female contributions and no place is given to male contributions. On the other hand, the English Reader has shown both male and female contributions in the textbook but unequal representation. The male contribution is more than the female.

4. To find out Male/female authors in the text: This includes the number of male and female authors mentioned in the textbook.

Table: 4.7

The number of the male and female authors in the textbook of Bihar Radiance Part- II

Unit	Male	Female
Unit-1 Sympathy	1 (Charles Mackay)	-
Unit- 5 I had dove	1 (John Keats)	-
Unit-10The Lost Child	1 (Mulk Raj Anand)	-
Unit-13 Running through the rain	1 (John Lea)	-
Unit -16 Books- our best friend	-	1 (Eleanor Farjeon)

Findings: The above table shows 5 units have authors in a total of 16 chapters. Out of which 4 units have male authors and 1 unit has female authors. The unequal representation of male and female authors was found in the textbook Radiance Part II. Despite the fact that the number of authors mentioned in the textbook is few.

Table: 4.8

The number of the male and female authors in the textbook of Rajasthan English Reader

Unit	Male	Female
Unit -3 My Best Friend	-	1 (Rashmi)
Unit- 13 Royal Joke	1 (Rabindra Nath Tagore)	-
Unit- 15 A Glory of Ancient Science	2 (Mrinal Mitra & B.G. Verma)	-

Findings: The above table shows 3 units have authors in a total of 15 chapters. Out of which 2 units have male authors and 1 unit has female authors mentioned. The unequal representation of male and female authors was found in the textbook English Reader. Even though the number of authors mentioned in the textbook is few.

Discussion

The present study examined the content of English language textbooks of grade VII of Bihar and Rajasthan State boards. Despite the fact both the textbooks of State Boards follow the guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework (2005), the female representation in the textbooks is underrated in visual content. The findings of the study revealed a male-dominated culture in the content of both textbooks. The male characters dominate most of the stories in the textbooks. The male characters outnumbered the female characters. The visibility of women in the textbooks is under-represented. According to Tabassum and Nayak (2021), this Gender stereotyping has a significant impact on women's career progression. It is an obstacle that restricts women's participation in top-level positions. The study revealed that females in the textbooks were restricted in terms of characters, visuality, and female authors as compared to the male characters. Since content writers of the textbooks have a male majority, it can be assumed that in the present study writers fail to portray an equal representation of the men and women in the content. The Position paper on National Focus Group on Gender Issues (2006), states that the initiatives have been taken to remove sexist biases in school textbooks through an increase in quantitative representation of women and girls and to facilitate 'reverse role' in the textbooks to depict equality. Gender stereotypes and pictures have an adverse effect on females which include exclusion, devaluation, alienation, and lowered expectation, and has a destructive effect on students' personalities (Lesikin, 2001). However, the textbooks should increase

the number of female authors in the textbooks to address the gap as studies have shown that those textbooks written by female authors have a higher representation and frequency of female icons (Durrani, 2018). The present findings of the study support much research done in the field. This paper is fairly in line with the findings of Barton & Sakwa (2012), Alasadi (2014), Sovic & Hus (2015), Ghalib (2017), Ullah, Abdullah, Ahmad & Ali (2018), Suharto & Kristina (2018), Waqar & Ghani (2019), Mehrotra (2012), Bhattacharya (2012), Abdelhay (2015), Kurvilla & K.T (2015), Jin, Ling & Tirmizi (2013). The textbooks of the present study do not show equality between men and women. There are few women in the stories, and they are represented particularly in stereotypical ways. Holmqvist (2006) in his paper pointed out that Renner (1997) showed that in most of the English Language textbooks characters of the female are few. In other words, if learners are exposed to inequality in classrooms, students would conclude that this is how women in society are presented and are not worth mentioning. Thus, it is important to note that the content of the textbook should relate to universal values like accountability, social justice, equality between the genders, balance in the selectivity of the content while choosing. Lastly, the present findings have analysed the limited textbooks in-depth for the study. Hence, we cannot generalize the results to other studies. The findings may vary for other English Language textbooks of State boards.

Conclusion

In the Indian Context, textbooks play pivotal sources of knowledge. They promote critical thinking and creativity in children (NCERT 2013-16). The present study reflects male dominance in the content of the textbooks. It supports the patriarchal regime. The tabular representation has shown that males outnumbered females in most cases. The present findings of the study concluded the unequal representation of males and females. The representation of women in the textbooks is very less as compared to men. Regardless of the fact the countries around the globe are taking serious steps to reduce the biases towards women. Women are not represented in the way that describes their real roles in society (Alasadi, 2017). They are less visible than men in text and illustration. The representation of female characters, pictures, authors' achievements, need much improvement. The present study concluded that English language textbooks of both states do not reflect equality in gender representation. The textbooks attempt to emphasize on gender-inclusion, but the inequality in the content persists. Thus, it can be concluded that a country like India has a long way to go to be gender-neutral. No direct solutions are there to minimize gender equality as it is rooted in culture, norms, and social practices (Sumanjeet 2017).

Recommendations

The equal representation of men and women in the content of English language textbooks of Bihar and Rajasthan will ensure the worth of women and their importance in society. The representation of females needs much improvement in the textbooks to ensure gender equality in the light of the National Curriculum framework 2005.

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