



ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN SINDHI LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS FOR GRADE 7

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Abstract

This study evaluates the portrayal of gender in grade 7 Sindhi textbooks in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The research evaluates the written and illustrated components for representation of the male and female figures in terms of language, roles, and level of influence within society. Major results show that there is a worrying gap in portraying equitable gender representation, with men disproportionately represented in almost all professions, assuming leadership roles while women are often relegated to household and caregiving roles. The study notes the persistence of stereotypical views on gender and how such practices may influence students' choices and perceptions of self. More work is needed in the curriculum to foster an equitable educational system attentive to gender disparities.

Keywords: Gender-Bias and Stereotypes, Educational Reforms

Introduction

The inclusion of different genders in school textbooks contributes to students' understanding and acceptance of social roles and expectations (UNESCO, 2021). Textbooks, as central instructional aids in formal education, familiarize learners with wider societal frameworks, often perpetuating or confronting gender biases through words and images (Wille et al., 2022). More recent international research highlights that the existence of gendered inequalities and stereotypes—especially in school textbooks—has, and continues to contribute to the relegation of women to subordinate positions of dependents (EIGE, 2020). Within the South Asian region, studies show active and leadership roles are overwhelmingly ascribed to males, with female characters assigned to passive, effortless, and domestic activities (Jabeen & Mahmood, 2021). That is especially true of Pakistan which is noted for having a wide plethora of research documenting gender imbalance in educational resources (Durrani & Halai, 2018; Latif & Saeed, 2020). However, while some studies have focused on Urdu and English medium textbooks, these regional language textbooks, especially in Sindhi, remain severely neglected (Memon & Shah, 2023).

In line with the patriarchal boundaries already set for Pakistan, textbooks used in public and private schools in Sindh notoriously depict biases towards women (Ali et. al, 2022). An initial glance at the Sindhi textbooks indicates a worrying situation where the majority of male characters as fathers, scientists, political figures, and farmers dominate the narrative, while women are underrepresented and constrained to the roles of caregivers, teachers, and housewives. (Khan & Abbasi, 2023). Such stereotypes reinforce prevailing gaps in societal structures and actively shape the possible future endeavors and self-esteem that students wish to create and eliminate the need to engage in (Aslam & Kingdon, 2021). Research indicates that girls who are provided with textbooks that contain little to no female role models in STEM fields or leadership positions are discouraged from pursuing these professions later as adults (Breda et al, 2020). Subsequently, boys start to adopt the belief that exercising authority and achieving career success are fundamental masculine traits, deepening the existing divides surrounding gender (Charles & Bradley, 2018).



Such stereotypes are not limited to personal goals. They influence entire educational systems. In Pakistan, studies found that sexist representations lead to lower motivation levels among girls, especially in so-called “male” fields like mathematics and physics (Andrabi et al., 2022). Moreover, women’s underrepresentation in socio-political and historical narratives written in textbooks constructs the narrative of women being omitted from public life (Saigol, 2020). This is particularly alarming for Sindh, where the proportionate literacy rate for females (46%) is significantly lower than that of males (72%). Gendered content in textbooks could worsen existing inequalities (Sindh Education Sector Plan, 2023).

The recognition of these problems has been noted globally, however, reforms in Sindhi-language textbooks have been slow. The introduction of policies aimed at moving towards the integration of gender inclusivity in Sindh Textbooks Board has been introduced, but the application remains low (Memon, 2023). One of the most critical limitations of the use of Sindhi medium textbooks is the absence of research on the portrayal of gender which cripples the advocacy of change (Hussain & Malik, 2022). This study fills this void by analyzing the gender representation of 7th and 8th grade Sindhi textbooks through qualitative methods.

With the completion of this study, the debates regarding the equity of education in Pakistan will have the required material to address the gaps identified in the curriculum alongside, designing curricula, policy papers, and training manuals for teachers.

Problem Statement

Textbooks for schools of all levels in Sindh, Pakistan, show deep gaps regarding gender representation and roles. Gender representation plays an important part in developing students’ views of societal roles, individuals’ self-identity, self-image and aspirations. For example, men are typically placed in dominant employment positions while women are usually ‘softer’ figures performing household duties. These portrayals not only reinforce stereotypes but, more importantly, impact students’ motivation towards school. In particular, secondary school female students may feel diminished self-efficacy because the role models presented in the materials are not relatable or relevant. On the other hand, the peers who do not relate to their learning materials being geared towards predominantly men are likely to develop a prevalent sense of entitlement or limited appreciation for gender equality. More needs to be done globally to tackle the issues of equitable access to education for various genders, but not much focus is placed on the serious consequences of school textbooks’ gender representation in motivation for students in Sindhi. Bridging this gap in teaching resources is necessary to allow students to shape their identity in an equitable and engaging manner.

Purpose of the Study

This particular research aims to evaluate the portrayal of gender in the Sindhi language textbooks in Class 7 published by the Sindh Text Books Board Jamshoro. The reason why these grades were selected is because Grades 6 to 8 is an important period in the elementary level as children start to formulate their social and cognitive understanding of the world around them. This research attempts to focus on this stage to ascertain if there exists gender discrimination, like many other societal inequalities that exist, within school curriculum materials including textbooks at peripheral stages before fully transitioning into the mainstream education system.

How boys and girls are represented as active participants in the content of the textbooks in question along with the roles and activities assigned to them will also be examined to find out whether the materials perpetuate bias or foster equity. Because textbooks are important in shaping the attitudes of young learners, this study is important to the classroom instructional



materials policy and policy on education in inclusive settings in the region of Sindh. The study will add more material to the discussion of unequal access to education, and propose some actions to address the issue of gender bias in such teaching aids. In textbooks, this study seeks to find out through a systematic comparison of pre and post reform textbooks whether the attempts made are genuine or not. The research hopes to bolster efforts for educational policy in constructive ways – during the fundamental period of academic development in which students’ understanding of gender and aspiration is shaped by their environments, active pedagogical frameworks guide how these elements are integrated for holistic student development.

Objectives

1. To assess representation of genders in Sindh language textbooks by studying male and female figures concerning their roles and attributes.
2. To assess whether there is gender discrimination in the manner the images are done and in the accompanying text.
3. To assess whether gender roles are presented in the textbook as socially constructed or attributed characteristics.
4. To define methods of integrating diversity principles into textbook reform proposals.

Research Questions

1. What is the representation of gender issues in textbooks?
2. What are the titles assigned to male and female characters?
3. Are female characters also represented as active or powerful figures like male characters?
4. How are the gender roles in the family, education, and community functions depicted: are these roles socially constructed or taken for granted?
5. Do the textbooks perpetuate or redefine existing stereotypes of gender roles?
6. What are the consequences of gender bias in textbooks regarding students’ career aspirations?

Literature Review

Textbooks serve as powerful shaping tools of young minds by transmitting invaluable information and reinforcing societal value. Stereotypes of masculinity and femininity brought up within the culture is strongly influenced by the gender portrayal in the textbook, especially in language textbooks. This work analyzes the portrayal of gender in the Sindh language textbooks for grade 7 and studies if these textbooks and supplementary readers are reinforcing stereotypes or balanced. Using feminist theory (Butler 1990) and social constructivism (Vygotsky 1978), the focus of this work is how textbook and instructional materials are laden with masculinized and feminized languages and images as well as roles and how these portrayals convey specific gender messages. The feminist approach concerns how gender is performative, meaning it is actively constructed through language, while social constructivism deals with the internalization of cultural standards because of the educational materials presented to them.

Men continue to be overrepresented as authors and leaders while women remain consigned to the home in the school textbooks globally (Blumberg, 2007; UNESCO, 2019). In South Asia, the bias does not improve as Pakistani textbooks portray women as passive and men as domineering (Durrani, 2008). In Pakistan, studies of Sindh textbooks have shown the same trends, featuring women only as mothers or educators, while men are professionals and leaders (Shaikh & Shah, 2018; Khuhro et al., 2023). In the Texan Sindh textbooks, male characters are described as ‘brave’ and ‘intelligent’ while female characters are labeled



‘obedient’ and ‘caring’ (Soomro & Laghari, 2020). Such gender regarding representations curtail the range of aspirations girls are likely to pursue, and reinforce public spheres masculinity dominance (Halai, 2010).

Empirical analysis of Sindhi textbooks (Ahmed & Bhutto, 2021) points out underrepresentation of women in civic and professional activities which may act as a disincentive for girls to consider taking up leadership positions. On the other hand, curriculum inclusivity is known to foster interest among girls towards education and future employment prospects (Schild, 2018). Considering grades 6 to 8 represent an important shift in the students’ mental and social development activities, examining this age group enables the investigation of the extent that textbooks may influence the children’s perception of gender identity in the long term. This analysis attempts to address the following inquiries: what is the gender portrayal in textbooks? Is there an attempt to reinforce or eliminate stereotypes? How would the portrayal affect student aspirations? This study responds to these questions with a view to promote equity and inclusion in the educational resources developed for use in Sindh.

Research Gap

While there is an increasing awareness of gender inequality in education, very little scholarly work has been done on the issue of representation in Sindhi language textbooks for Grade 7. Other studies have tended to concentrate on the educational content or textbooks written in Urdu and English, completely missing the ethnocentric and sociolinguistic aspects of materials written in Sindhi. In addition, most of the studies available tend to focus on quantitative approaches, thereby ignoring the qualitative aspects of how language, imagery, and narrative construct gender roles. How these textbooks influence students’ perceptions of gender roles within the family, school, and society has not been researched. With the analysis of Sindhi textbooks for middle school, this study intends to broaden the boundaries of qualitative research and gender studies in education by analyzing the messages, both overt and covert, that textbooks portray regarding students’ identity as women and men, as well as their anticipated social roles. This study aims to fill this void and thereby contribute to the discussion on the need for educational policy change in Sindh in relation to gender-sensitive curriculum reform.

Methodology

This research uses a systematic content analysis approach to study gender representation in seventh-grade Sindhi textbooks. It analyses both the illustrations and the text for bias, stereotypes, and roles as well as specific attitudes that were held. The study evaluates the Sindhi language textbooks sanctioned by the Sindh Textbook Board, restricting the scope to only up-to-date state-issued versions for relevance. Through purposive sampling, the study also emphasizes content depicting educational, professional, social, and family activities to capture dominant gender portrayal narratives. The analysis involves an exhaustive review of all pages where themes are open coded and axially coded. Illustrations are also analyzed for gender, visibility, position, and active engagement, and themes are coded into categories. Analysis of the data is based on social constructivism and gender theory, which assists in explaining how these roles are reproduced and produced. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, they were triangulated with existing literature on gender equity and bias in South Asian educational materials and validated through peer debriefing where academic peers critique the analysis for reliability and consistency. This ensured an accurate portrayal of the study findings. This approach helps achieve a robust detailed study of the gender representation in the curriculum.



Analysis of Gender Representation in Sindhi Language Textbooks For Grade 7

Table 1: Visibility of Women in Textbook Content

Lesson No.	Page No.	Representation of Women	Key Issues	Recommendations
Front Cover	-	Girl depicted as a housewife; boys in active roles	Reinforces traditional gender roles	Show girls in diverse roles (students, athletes, professionals)
Lesson 13 (Wright Brothers)	34	Susan Catherine as a nurturing mother	Passive role; no intellectual contributions highlighted	Emphasize her influence on sons' education/skills
Lesson 31 (Freedom Struggle)	86-88	Fatima Jinnah, Begum Haroon as leaders	Limited to political roles; no everyday heroism	Include grassroots female activists
Lesson 34 (Cultural Diversity)	98	Women in traditional attire	Reduced to cultural symbols	Highlight women in agriculture, arts, and economy
Lesson 26 (Football)	71	No women shown in visuals but ignored in text	Neglect of Women's Athletic Achievements	Add profiles of Pakistani women footballers

Table 2: Stereotypes and Gendered Roles

Theme	Examples from Textbook	Stereotype Perpetuated	Impact on Students	Solutions
Domestic Roles	Girl on cover doing chores; Lesson 35 (handicrafts)	Women = homemakers; men = breadwinners	Limits girls' career aspirations	Show men in caregiving roles
Beauty/Marriage	Noori Jam Tamachi (Lesson -)	Women valued for beauty/spousal status	Reinforces patriarchal norms	Discuss Noori's agency beyond marriage
Education	Lesson 2 (Hazrat Aisha's scholarship)	Exception, not the norm	Overlooks everyday female scholars	Include modern female academics
Sports	Football lesson (men-only focus)	Sports = male domain	Discourages girls from athletics	Feature women's tournaments

Table 3: Omissions and Missed Opportunities

Area of Omission	Evidence from Textbook	Consequences	Proposed Additions
Female Authors/Poets	No Sindhi poetesses in table of contents	Erases literary contributions	Add works by Kishwar Naheed, Pushpa Vallabh
Economic Contributions	Lesson 34 ignores women in mining/agriculture	Invisible labor	Case studies of female farmers/artisans
Urban/Rural	Lesson 48 (village life)	Marginalizes rural	Dialogue with female



Women	excludes women's voices	women	teachers/doctors
STEM Role Models	No female scientists/inventors	Reinforces STEM gender gap	Profile Pakistani women in STEM

Findings and Discussion

The examination of 7th-grade Sindhi textbooks shows persistent gender discrimination. Key findings include the invisibility of women in sports, literature, and history, where women are instead viewed in a domestic context as beauty and reproduction and their leadership and intelligence is negated. There is a glaring imbalance between the images of women and their textual invisibility; women are shown in pictures, yet are not discussed. To address these inequities, suggestions include the addition of Sindhi heroines, female athletes, and women scientists, retraining teachers to critically engage with gender biases, and having students study local women leaders for assigned projects designed to counter the curriculum-induced woman absence. These changes are needed to meet the curriculum requirements within the context of Pakistan's constitutional equality and foster the empowerment of all students.

Critical Analysis of Gender Representation in 7th-Class Sindhi Textbooks

The gender representation found in Class VII Sindhi textbooks attempts to grapple with social progress but is steeped in glaring stereotypes, revealing a narrative contradiction on women's portrayal. Some lessons like the one on the freedom struggle of Pakistan (Lesson 31) attempt to celebrate women's contribution, in this case, Fatima Jinnah's active participation as a leader, while other lessons reinforce ultra conservative viewpoints, portraying women predominantly in nurturing roles (Lesson 13, Susan Catherine). In addition to depicting women as mothers, the front cover image of the textbook also features them as housewives. By ignoring the few female poets and writers included in the syllabus, the textbook further underscores the women's intellectual subjugation by the forced omission of their literary works, which constructs a patriarchal edifice of literature. Moreover, taught lessons such as football (Lesson 26) exclude women from participating as athletes while assigning women's, Handicraft Work (Lesson 35) as a segregated occupational role. The discourse concerning town and country life (Lesson 18) fails to integrate women, despite their illustration portrayal. Some stories, for instance, those of Hazrat Aisha (RA) and her scholarly activities (Lesson 2) glorify the egalitarian ideal, while others like that of Noori Jam Tamachi turn women into mere decorative objects of beauty and marriage. This discrepancy points to an underlying trend whereby even when the curriculum has a partial conception of integrating women into the content, there is a different approach to engaging with them, and often does not succeed to incorporate the women as complex beings.

Textbooks should actively include women's intellectual, athletic, and professional contributions, while also countering outdated stereotypes through inclusive narratives and fair representation, in order to promote equity.

Recommendations

To address gender imbalance in the educational materials, it is important to enhance the portrayal of female characters, both textually and visually, to make them more active and prominent. This will help break the barrier of their passivity as well as their lack of representation. Moreover, attention should be paid to ensure that balanced and respectful titles are used for both genders in order not to perpetuate the social system of gender inequality. Content should feature a variety of gender representations as males and females in occupations, responsibilities, and in public and private roles, activities, and functions throughout society. No less important is the training of textbook authors and course planners



in the crafting of curriculum documents with a gender bias perspective so that they are properly trained and equipped to identify bias. Most importantly, it is necessary for the government and the education authority to develop strong policies that guide the updating, reviewing, and revising of learner's and other textbooks so that they promote gender inclusiveness and equality. Together, these will help foster a balanced educational framework that empowers all learners.

Conclusion

The Sindhi textbooks for Grade 7 display significant gender bias, perpetuating traditional views on gender roles and narrowing the students' horizons. The representation of female characters is minimal. When they are included, they are placed in subordinate and passive roles. In contrast, males are shown as leaders and professionals. This lack of balance permeates inequality between genders during the formative years of learning, which is rooted in oppressive structures. Such content will shape learners' perception of gender roles, most critical for providing equitable education and career opportunities, particularly aspiring education and future careers, almost exclusively for girls.

There is an immediate need at the policy level, calling for gender-sensitive approaches in content development as well as the superseding powerful ideology of patriarchy, revision of textbooks, and inclusion of other diverse narratives, especially those that glorify other perspectives and genders. These sensitive approaches not only call for policies that tackle discrimination to promote parity but also foster educational balance and progress within society.

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