

Reinforcing Patriarchy through Images: Representation of Gender in Primary Level Textbooks of Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

Textbooks are a source of learning cultural norms, and social values and play a significant role in personality development. The words and images illustrated in the textbooks are influential in framing a gender and social identity. The textbooks and the syllabus taught at the primary and secondary levels are the core elements of classroom activities. These books convey to students to follow traditional roles for women and men and ignore the gender representation problem. The objectives of the study are (a) to explore the patriarchal role reinforcement through images presented in Urdu textbooks for primary-level students, and (b) to analyze covert patriarchal practices in textbooks. The method used for the current study is exploratory qualitative, data was analyzed through thematic analysis under the umbrella of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of images of textbooks of primary level in Punjab Province applied to get an appropriate interpretation of data. The researcher with the support of the literature studied found that the textbooks were gendered and did not represent both genders equally. Though Pakistan has an equal proportion of the male and female population in terms of numbers gender, still discrimination is evident in every sphere of life. Unfortunately, the situation in education generally and in textbooks images particularly not encouraging for females by any means.

Keywords: Education; Gender inequality; Patriarchy; Textbooks

Introduction

This paper aims to explore how the images shown in primary-level textbooks reinforce the patriarchal system by representing one gender as superior, powerful, wise and bold while the other gender as soft, emotional, caring, weak and low in wisdom. The importance of equal gender representation in textbooks is pivotal to achieving gender equality. Many pieces of research focused on the under-representation of the female gender in textbooks (Agha et al., 2018; Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Ullah & Haque, 2016). The issue in developing countries until recent years was gender inequality in access to education. Challenging gender inequity in education is beyond access to education only, it is encompassing a wide range of factors such as textbooks, curricula and educational planning and implementation. Our educational system in its current shape is a tool to reinforce and reproduce traditional gender hierarchies (Durrani, 2008). Schools are considered the main institution of socialization. The process of learning is done through textbooks and written forms of language. The role of teachers in the learning process is also vital. Educational materials are highly gendered and support patriarchal social norms in Pakistan. Women who have little space in public spaces are further marginalized by reducing them to home boundaries in textbooks (Khan et al., 2014).

The current textboard of Pakistan has branches in all provinces responsible for producing quality textbooks. However, it can be seen that male dominance and masculinity are in all subjects of the curriculum. Women are represented as submissive and subordinate. These books contributed significantly to producing gender discrimination in society (Khattak, 2018). Textbooks are a source of learning cultural norms, and social values and play a significant role in personality development. The words and images illustrated in the textbooks are influential in framing a gender and social identity (Widodo, 2018; Wuryani & Yamtinah, 2018).

The textbooks and the syllabus taught at the primary and secondary levels are the core elements of classroom activities. These books convey to students to follow traditional roles for women and men and ignore the gender representation problem. Even teachers are not aware of the importance of equal gender representation in textbooks (Agha & Shaikh, 2022). Ullah and Skelton (2013) stated that the government of Pakistan tried its best to eliminate gender biases and disparities in school textbooks. They have achieved certain goals but the gender disparity is still evident in textbooks.

There are some interesting findings from the study, one of the findings is that textbooks examined have a total of 1852 illustrations or images, 1220 illustrations represent males and only 632 represent the female gender in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. There are 53 domestic chores-related descriptions or depictions, 48 times women represent domestic chores and 4 times indicated that men also do domestic chores. This is quite a wide gap comparing both genders and also an indication of how strong patriarchy is in our society. Agha et al. (2018) focused their work on another province named Sindh, almost with the same objectives. They analyzed both text and pictorial representation of genders in primary-level textbooks by using the thematic analysis technique. The result showed that men are for outside activities and women remain inside the home, another significant theme was men and women's representation regarding paid work; men are shown 28 times while only 5 women were depicted as productive workers. The portrayal of women in textbooks is as physically weak, economically dependent and doing typical household work without any say in decision-making. Syed and Agha (2019) concluded that the representation of women in secondary textbooks is much less than their contributions to society.

They further stated that textbooks are reinforcing traditional patriarchal norms and treating women as a secondary citizen. Shahnaz et al. (2020) conducted a study about the importance of children's literature in developing their personalities. They analyzed an Urdu magazine which is the oldest and most well-distributed magazine among children in Pakistan. They concluded that magazines follow typical patriarchal norms by giving more representation to males and showing them as powerful. Jabeen et al. (2014) tried to trace gender discrimination in the curriculum by analyzing the Punjab Textbook board books.

The findings of study showed that there is wider gender gap in representation of both genders. Upon examining the stories in textbooks, they found 37 percent stories were male centered and only 4 percent stories were female centric. These textbooks portrayed 89 personalities as ideal/good, 71 personalities are male only 12 out of 89 personalities are female. Men are shown powerful, strong, dedicated, patriotic and wise by putting historical stories of male personalities while female historical stories are underrepresented in the textbooks.

The rationale of the study

It is pivotal to highlight the shortcomings in an existing system to undo the problems related to the system. The educational system in Pakistan is not ideal or free of biases and errors. There are many studies concluded that textbooks are the major source of inequality, gender discrimination, minority marginalization, and unequal representation of all segments of society (Agha & Shaikh, 2022; Ali & Hussain, 2019; Khan et al., 2014; Ullah & Haque, 2016). These all studies were conducted before the implementation of the Single National Curriculum.

The SNC was seen as a crucial element in undoing the present inequality, bias, gender discrimination and traditional social norms. However, civil society and human rights organizations found many flaws in the SNC and demanded to exclude gender-sensitive materials and seek a just representation of genders, minorities and ethnic groups (Shahzadi, 2022). The researcher after going through the previous literature, found that there is a knowledge gap when it comes to the analysis of the reinforcement of patriarchy through textbooks. The textbooks before the launch of a single national curriculum were not supporting gender parity but one was expecting a positive and dramatic change in the textbooks through the revision of curricula under SNC. This one-point objective guides the researcher to design the current study to explore the issue of reinforcement of patriarchy even after changing the textbooks for primary-level education.

Review of literature

Kostas (2021) reported that gender-normative patterns are vital in shaping gender identity among students. Textbooks are a source of personality development as well as learning sociocultural norms of society. The findings of the study suggested that girls were more concerned and reader to subvert gender inequality in textbooks while boys were not much concerned about the issue. The textbooks were androcentric and focused on emphasising femininity and hegemonic masculinities. Emaliana and Tusita (2019) elaborated that students are bound to study what was written by specific people who might have some biases about race, class and gender. There is a hidden curriculum in the textbooks, which tends to strengthen the traditional power and social structure of society. Therefore, the role of textbooks in shaping social identities cannot be ignored.

The study also confirmed that there was a significant gap regarding gender representation of male and female in terms of text and images used in secondary books. Blangsinga et al. (2021) raised an important point in their study about the presence of gendered binary in textbooks. The appearance of a gendered binary means more coverage of masculinity and marginalizing femininity. These schemes are very much in support of traditional gender roles and covertly reinforce patriarchal practices. Textbooks are a prime source of constructing gender identity in a given social context. They concluded that images depicted males as having strong patriarchal traits and female images were shown as the typical inferior gender. Dar and Bano (2023) concluded that there was an imbalance in gender representation in Primary English Textbooks in Pakistan. These books presented a traditional and stereotypical way of socialization as a way forward to socialising the students. They further recommended that there is a dire need to run an awareness campaign and also to change the textbooks for better socialization of the students. Javaid et al. (2020) highlighted that in Indian textbooks males were shown as leaders, rulers and

professionals. Females have excluded any type of role or attributes in Hindi Textbooks. The majority of the stories in the textbooks were about males, apart from this inequality in terms of representation, textbooks also lacked gender sensitivity.

Textbooks were instrumental in reinforcing patriarchal roles and masculinity. Wafa (2021) concluded that school textbooks are gender biased and affect the learning process of students. Education is the most important institution for learning and socialization of children after the family. There is a need to revisit school curriculum and textbooks to achieve gender parity. The role of teacher, attitude towards gender roles and school policy are equally important to control gender-based violence, harassment and inequality. Košir and Lakshminarayanan (2023) researched the visuals in Indian science books and traced gender inequality through a feminist lens. They found that patriarchy and gender discrimination a global phenomenon that needs to be investigated in every field of social life. Visual constructs are utilized to convey a message to students and these are important to frame student's knowledge and perceived social and natural reality. There are number of studies which confirmed that textbooks are gender biased, more representation of male gender than female gender is evident. Paneru (2019) argued that one of the biggest hurdles in the way of gender equality is our educational system; Educational materials such as textbooks are stereotypical in terms of representation of male and female gender. Primary-level students are keen to learn new things and adopt them as role models; the unequal gender representation leads towards imbalance and normalizes certain traditional gender roles.

Khokhar (2020) examined the process of marginalization of female in education during the different time frames of our society. He found that in the Zia era, women's representation in textbooks was nominal even though they were not visible in the process of writing and publishing textbooks. Women were shown doing domestic chores and ordinary work in the textbooks while for boys, there were many professions and works shown in the same textbooks. Ali and Hussain (2019) found that the gender representation in primary textbooks is tilted towards the male gender.

They also found women's image and roles are displayed as submissive passive and dependent, while a male is courageous, bold and hard-working. They also found that male character was more visible than female in the textbooks. Furthermore vocabularies used in the textbooks reinforce traditional and stereotypical cultural norms. Jabjiniak and McCabe (2022) explored the construction of women through history books in the USA. The textbooks were analyzed by using functional linguistic analysis. The results showed how women's agency and roles were portrayed in history books, It was concluded that book texts were aligned to reinforce the patriarchal construction of power and women's subjugated position in society through the selected linguistic choice of textbooks.

Alkhadra et al. (2022) stated that school textbooks stereotypically portray boys and girls, like girls are doing domestic work and boys are doing labour work. They found that women were either marginalized or annihilated in the content and language of textbooks. They also found that women's representation and visibility were limited while male representation was visible in every sphere of social life. The effects of this gender discrimination in textbooks are not neglectable and it is difficult to minimize the gravity of the problem without doing major changes in the curricula.

Methodology

The present study is designed to explore the meanings of images in primary textbooks of Urdu in Punjab province. The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach because it provides the platform to analyze the data which is in the shape of text, images and illustrations. Many researchers used Critical discourse analysis to unfold the hidden meanings of a text in a certain social setting. CDA has a widely used technique in linguistic studies, the social scientist also adopted CDA as an analysis technique to examine the texts, images and other written material for macro-level studies.

Thus, a key concern of CDA is how certain texts, language patterns and illustrations shape our understanding of a specific social phenomenon. Feminist CDA is a blend of critical discourse analysis and feminist discourse. Feminists built their case that CDA was covering social issues but it was not gender-power centered, so feminist CDA is a technique to analyze the text, images and illustrations from the feminist perspective (Lazar, 2005). The researcher applied a purposive sampling technique for sample determination. Textbooks of Urdu subjects from grades 1 to 5 were selected for analysis. The researcher's focus in the present study is the visual representation of males and females in the selected textbooks. All the images which are part of a lesson in the selected books were under scrutiny and selected images were analyzed under the guidelines of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis.

Results and Findings

In this section, the researcher will present the findings of the current study. The researcher developed three major themes or categories for the analysis of images from the textbooks. These themes are basically, narrated from the basic elements of patriarchy (Walby, 1989). These are dominance, oppression and exploitation of women by men through social and cultural normative patterns.

Under this theme, the researcher has analyzed the images of the textbooks and found how the pictorial portrayal of male and female support the traditional norms and play a role in reinforcing the already deep-rooted patriarchy.

Figure 1



Book Urdu 1, Page Number 114
2023)

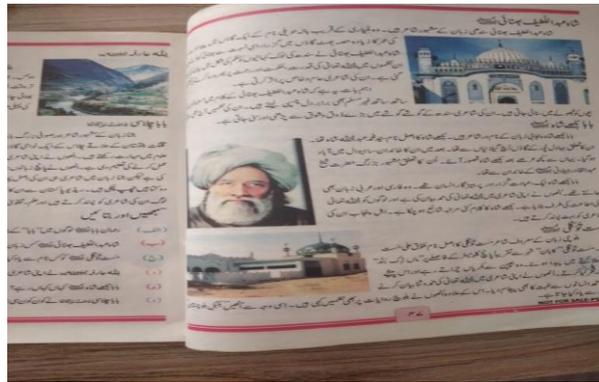
Figure 2



Book Urdu 3, Page 151(Urdu Grade 3, 2022-

The images shown above are a testament to patriarchy. Women and girls are encouraged to remain inside the boundary wall of the house while boys are free to roam anywhere. The explicit explanation of the image is that boys are doing exercise but it is also giving the message that only boys are allowed to go out and exercise.

Figure 3



Book Urdu 4, Page Number 47(Urdu Grade 4, 2022-2023)

There is no harm in including poets from different areas of a country to acknowledge their contributions and make children learn about their contributions through the lessons in textbooks, but why only include male poets? It is a big question from a feminist perspective, there should be women poets' representation to make it more inclusive and gender-equal representation. This image is also an example of classic patriarchal norms where women's visibility is ignored purposefully and women's contributions are omitted knowingly to erase their presence in the history of humankind.

Figure 4



Book Urdu 2, Page Number 31

The image tells the whole story by itself. A woman is falling due to the things she is carrying. It shows that woman is weak and cannot carry heavy things or even a cluster of daily-use products. So, she needs someone's help here. This situation can happen to both genders, but the question is why writers decided to depict a woman's image for the said purpose. While everyone knows that women in rural and urban areas, carry weight more than what is shown in the image daily. They collect fodders and carry drinking water, wood and other daily use products. This image, by any means, is not justifiable and looks like an obvious attempt to degrade women and reassure the patriarchal notion that woman is weak compared to man.

Figure 5



Book Urdu 1, Page Number 107 (Urdu Grade 1, 2022-2023)
128

Figure 6



Book Urdu 2, Page Number 128

Figure 5 and Figure 6 show that in one image mother is guiding his son on how to behave in a certain social situation, while in the second image, a father is guiding the son on how to operate a computer. This is a clear indication of how patriarchy works in society and how our textbooks facilitate patriarchy to reaffirm its position in society. The pertinent question is that if a mother can guide children about social issues, why she can't teach the children about the computer? It is the predetermined notion of patriarchy that women are not good at science education. The other important issue is why the father can't teach the children about social behaviour and why it's the duty of the only mother to make children learn about social values. These images are the prime depiction of the patriarchal mindset in our society.

Figure 7



Book Urdu 2, Page Number 115 (Urdu Grade 2, 2022-2023)

Figure 7 is showing that a man going for a morning walk. It seems to routine matter and a good habit for the fitness of a person. But the covert message is that this is a luxury that only men are allowed to do morning walks, and women are ideally to remain inside the home. Public spaces are for men and they can use and utilize these spaces for their mental and physical well-being. Women who are already discriminated against and marginalized are further pushed back due to these types of portraits of men, ignoring women's visibility and access to public spaces.

Figure 8



Book Urdu 2, Page Number 46 (Urdu Grade 2, 2022-2023)

Figure 8 indicates a girl is playing with dolls. For decades, feminists have raised their voice to undo these playing patriarchal norms where girls play with dolls and boys has a truck, bus, car and other toys to play with. This pictorial display of a rigid patriarchal norm is unnecessary and unwarranted here. Textbooks are vital for the learning process, and they should be used in a manner where all segments of society have equal and just representation.

Discussion:

Through its textbooks, Pakistan's educational system has been criticized for reinforcing patriarchy and gender inequality. Textbooks are an effective tool for shaping students' beliefs, attitudes, and

values, and they play an important part in the transmission of culture and knowledge. In Pakistan, gender stereotypes have been discovered in textbooks, reinforcing patriarchal standards and promoting gender inequality. Textbooks, for example, generally portray women as inferior and subordinate to males. They reinforce traditional gender roles by portraying women as housekeepers and males as breadwinners and leaders. Women are often depicted as dependent on men, with marriage and children serving as their main goals in life.

Furthermore, textbooks usually present a limited view of history and ignore the contributions of women. This erasure of women's contributions to society reinforces the notion that women have played no major role in shaping history and that women's primary role is in the private sphere. Furthermore, textbooks often promote harmful beliefs and stereotypes about gender and sexuality. Some textbooks, for example, perpetuate the myth that women are responsible for men's sexual desires and that women who do not follow traditional gender standards are immoral and promiscuous.

These stereotypes and biases in textbooks can have long-term effects on students' views and opinions about gender and gender roles, contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality and women's marginalization in society.

Attempts have been made in Pakistan's educational system to address these problems. Progress, however, has been slow, and more needs to be done to guarantee that textbooks support gender parity and challenge patriarchal norms. The Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan aims to harmonize the educational system throughout the nation and guarantee that all students, regardless of socioeconomic class or geographic location, have access to the same level of education. To foster a sense of unity and cohesion among all public and private schools in the nation, the SNC seeks to offer a uniform framework for education. The SNC is likewise intended to handle some of the problems that have been found in Pakistan's educational system, such as inequalities in educational access, educational quality, and curriculum content. By creating a single curriculum, the SNC hopes to improve educational quality and content consistency and make sure that students have the information and skills they need to succeed in a world that is changing drastically.

The SNC also aims to give students a comprehensive education that covers a variety of topics, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as the humanities and social sciences, and to encourage critical thinking, creativity, and innovation. The SNC aims to give students the knowledge and skills necessary to become active, engaged citizens who can contribute to the growth of their communities and their nation by delivering a more well-rounded education. Feminist organizations and activists have criticized Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC) for failing to adequately address gender and women's problems. The SNC is criticized for maintaining patriarchal norms and stereotypes and for failing to address the systematic discrimination and inequities that women and girls experience in the educational system and society at large.

A more inclusive and intersectional approach to education reform in Pakistan has been demanded by feminist groups and activists. This approach should take into consideration the various needs

and experiences of all students, regardless of their gender, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics. They contend that this necessitates a more thorough and all-encompassing strategy for education reform, one that emphasizes social justice, women's rights, and gender issues.

There is no doubt that textbooks are vital and significant agents of learning and social change. The role of textbooks is not just confined to explicit but also has an implicit or latent role in socializing children in a better way. The results of the current study are very much aligned with the study conducted by Syed and Agha (2019) where they analyzed the representation of women in Sindhi secondary books. They found that women's visibility in the public sphere as well as their role in managerial and authoritative positions was neglected in the textbooks. They further concluded that textbooks are the source of strengthening the patriarchal norms in our society. The pictorial analysis presented a true picture of our society where women are seen and presented in supporting roles, domestic workers and caregivers.

The results also highlighted the fact that women are either seen inside the home or going out under the supervision of a male member of the family. Qazi and Javid (2021) argued the issue of underrepresentation and gender inequity in the pictorial display of both genders in different textbooks. Women and girls are capable of performing in every field of social life but the pictures and images shown in the selected textbooks are lacking a proportionate representation of women. While male is seen doing exercises, going out for a walk, performing hard and powerful social tasks. Women's contributions in various fields are neglected while male contribution is over-highlighted.

In Pakistan, textbooks often have gender-stereotypical illustrations that uphold conventional gender roles and reinforce gender inequality. Boys are typically portrayed as active, daring, and aggressive, whereas females are frequently passive, nurturing, and domestic. This serves to affirm the stereotype that women should be passive and submissive while men should be powerful and dominant.

Additionally, a limited and biased perspective of women's contributions to society is presented in many Pakistani textbooks. Women's accomplishments in areas like science, technology, and politics are frequently ignored or minimized in favour of portraying them as mothers, caregivers, and homemakers. The persistence of gender biases and stereotypes in textbooks may hurt students' opinions and assumptions as well as their chances for success in school and in the workforce. To build a more equitable and just society, it is crucial to address these problems and promote gender equality in education.

Limitation of the study

The researcher while doing the current study has acknowledged and wants to point out the limitations of the study. It is difficult to focus on the objectives of the study and incorporate all dimensions of the issue simultaneously in a single study. For better understanding and accurate results, the researcher is bound to limit the scope of the study aligned with available resources, time constraints and other structural and methodological issues. Therefore, the researcher expects that future studies will fill the knowledge gap as well as address the different aspects of the

phenomena. The current study only analyzed the Urdu textbooks of primary classes i.e. from grade 1 to grade 5. Future studies can include middle or elementary-level books for analysis. The second thing is to include other subjects' textbooks to get more inclusive and comprehensive results.

Conclusion

Introducing a Single National Curriculum for primary classes initially and extending it in later years, was a good step from the government. It aimed to eliminate inequality in the educational system. The main objective was to maximize cultural integration and develop critical thinking among students. Results of the studies, though suggest that there are significant omissions and inequalities regarding gender, masculinity, power and subordination of women. The images in all textbooks of Urdu are designed for males and benefit patriarchy to reaffirm its position in society. Traditional gender norms and roles were depicted as the standard pattern of society. Women were shown as weak, emotional and caregivers in the textbooks. Males were shown in all images related to power, prestige and authority while women were shown in indoor activities. Outdoor sports also were represented by male pictures ignoring females altogether. Therefore, based on the results, one can conclude that the Single National Curriculum in its present structure and shape has failed to address the gender equity issue and it reinforced the patriarchal gender norms through both implicit and explicit ways.

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