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**AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN PAKISTANI  
TEXTBOOKS**

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***Abstract***

This paper attempts to investigate how the two genders are represented in the English textbooks of class IX and X used in the secondary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. In this study, a descriptive analysis of the text is used to examine sexism in the categories of visibility, order of mention, generic masculine expressions and occupational roles. The results of this study reveal that women suffer from poor visibility by the ratio of 25% against 75% in one book and almost 12% against 88% in the other. In the order of mention, men are given the first place and the generic expressions are male referenced. Whereas, men are drawn in a wide range of occupations, women are most often stereotyped as stay at home wives. Lastly, the study is concluded by recommending gender inclusive content in textbooks and creating awareness among teachers to present a balanced view of life to learners.

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**Keywords:** Gender Representation, Textbooks, Visibility, Stereotypical role, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## 1. Introduction

The progress of a nation depends on the quality of education provided to its members. One of the main tools available to students for learning is the text book. It is required that this material be compiled in such a way as to be satisfactorily all inclusive in terms of the various aspects of life to furnish learners with a balanced perspective. This is important because learners consciously and unconsciously internalize the content provided to them and hence fashion their thoughts and opinion in particular directions. In Pakistan, publishing of the textbook is the responsibility of provincial boards which are approved by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education. The focus of this paper is to analyse the English textbooks of secondary level of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for the investigation of how both the genders are represented in them. This is carried out with reference to visibility, firstness, generic masculine expressions and occupational roles.

Language reflects the beliefs, life styles and culture of a particular society. As it is used by human beings, it is moulded and fashioned by them in accordance with their needs either consciously or unconsciously. Spender (1985) gave the idea of what is known as the “dominance” approach claiming that women are left disadvantaged in the male dominated society where meaning is defined by men literally through writing dictionaries. This approach views women as an oppressed group and hence the role of men as dominating and women’s subordination is held responsible for linguistic differences in their respective speech. The power that goes with men in a patriarchal, men-driven society is translated into language through linguistic practices. Doing power is often a way of doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The Pashtun society is viewed as one in which male dominance is relatively greater as compared to others. The purda (veil) system for women, particularly in the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is ample proof of the segregation of both genders and hence the less amount of opportunities for women to get education and play a fair role in all walks of life. It is normally believed that man is solely responsible for work and earning and women is left to control the house hold affairs and take care of children. Although this trend is changing now, especially in the urban areas of the province, the reading material at schools still exhibit the same conventional representation of both the genders.

Sexism has been viewed differently by different authors. The term was originally applied to denote ideas and practices seeking to downgrade women relative to men. Language plays a significant role in the maintenance and strengthening of sexist values and it is far more subtle and deeply rooted and hence less widely recognized (Porreca, 1984). Spender (1985) argues that sexism depicted in the language is one of the major reflections of a patriarchal society. She believes that in a male dominating society, the language represents male superiority and undermines the females.

A considerable body of research exists in the field of gender representation in textbooks. In the following pages a review of such works is presented conducted in different cultures and countries like United States, Iran, Jordan, Africa, Hong Kong, Japan and Pakistan. Starting from Porreca (1984), the researcher, then has focused on more recent works. Porreca is the often cited work so far as investigation of gender in textbook is concerned. She selected 15 ESL textbooks from a range of 27 different ESL centres in an attempt to make a systematic, quantitative analysis of the different aspects of sexism. In the content analysis of the material, she focused on the number of male/female occurrences, both textual and in illustrations. The order, in which male or female were mentioned first, was counted. Next, occupational

roles were counted both in terms of the number of occasions mentioned for male/ female as well as the total number of occupations for both genders. Then, the frequency of nouns referring to male and female were tabulated. Masculine generic expressions were also noted. Finally, in order to analyse the stereotypical portrayal of men and women, adjectives employed for male and female were recorded with their frequencies.

Results revealed that women were mentioned only half as often as men despite the fact that women comprise a little more than men in United States. As regards occupational role, women suffered from far less visibility than men. Both in text and illustrations, men outnumbered women in the ratio of 5:1. Further, women were portrayed in traditional stereotypical roles of waitress, nurse, doctor etc. Finally, adjectives used for women were limited to emotions, beauty and marriage, whereas, those for men focused on renown, intellect and education.

To investigate gender representation, Schleicher & Hobson (n.d) analyzed four African Languages secondary level textbooks including Swahili, Yoruba, Hausa and Zulu. They selected two chapters from each textbook, ranging in publication from 1904 to 1998. The criteria for their study were: frequency of males and females in the text, male and female reference order, frequency of male and female appearance in pictures, number of male centered versus female centered reading selections and occupational roles associated with men and women. Their results show that gender bias is present at all these levels. Women are utterly under represented, hence excluded. It was revealed that many of the textbooks failed to include women in the reading material-reading passages, grammar exercise, dialogues and pictorial texts.

As people are becoming more conscious of gender bias with the passage of time, it needs to be examined whether it is reflected in new textbooks or not. In order to do this Lee & Collins (2006) studied twenty recent and earlier English textbooks in Hong Kong. Sexism was examined in seven categories including pictorial representation of genders and their roles and activities, omission, masculine generic constructions, roles, titles and order of appearance. The comparison revealed that writers have become more conscious in terms of sexist practices in some categories. Their approach differed from others in that they included semantic roles as well. Gender bias was examined against five semantic processes (material, verbal, relational, mental and existential). This showed subtle gender stereotyping and shifts of semantic roles in recent and earlier textbooks.

Such findings are further strengthened by Mineshima (2008) and Nagatomo (2010) in Japan. Mineshima analyzed an EFL textbook for the investigation of gender. He concluded that there was a fair representation of both male and female characters in the text. Closeness was observed in male/female utterances and also in the number of first appearance. Almost the same number of occupational, interests and family roles were assigned to both genders. Gender inequity, was observed, however, in the qualitative analysis of the text. It was revealed that so far as domestic chores were concerned, females carried much greater burden than males.

In a similar vein, Nagatomo (2010) analyzed gender representation in one of her own book entitled *Conversation Topics for Japanese University Students*, published in 1994. Her findings were similar to the previous study. She concluded that there was no such gender imbalance in the book as manifested in previous studies. Conversely, it was discovered that female characters enjoyed more visibility and were

more active than males. A number of gender stereotypes were found but they were mainly related to the topics.

But how far is this consciousness incorporated in the teaching material of the developing countries? In order to examine how far gender is included in Pakistani textbooks, Shah (2012) analysed three English textbooks of the Punjab province at secondary level. She also conducted interviews with curriculum experts and collected data from teachers using questionnaires. Her findings revealed that only two lessons out of 22 of English Book 9 discussed issues related to women. Similarly, in English Book 10, out of a total of 21 lessons, only one was devoted to female gender. Regarding order of mention, the study showed that men were pre dominantly mentioned first. With reference to allocation of roles, stereotypical traditional roles like mother and sister were assigned to women. Finally, the content analysis of the books indicated that the masculine generic constructions were male referenced. In the interviews conducted by the researcher with experts, the results were similar to those of content analysis, confirming that sexism was present in textbooks. The questionnaires given to teachers, however, differed from them, showing that textbooks were gender inclusive.

A similar picture is presented in Amini & Birjandi (2012), concluding that sexism is still prevalent in the EFL textbooks of Iran. Despite the fact that females almost out number males in Iranian society and have become quite active participants in recent years, they are still less visible in texts and illustrations. Their findings revealed that as regards firstness, women's turn came after men. In occupation, women were assigned traditional roles like teaching and in control of house hold affairs. In activities, too, women were stereotyped and shown as performing errands like cleaning, making tea etc. Further, they were portrayed as careless and over-emotional, crying after TV films. On the contrary, men were depicted as busy in a variety of activities from playing football to swimming to buying.

In another such study. Nofal & Qawar (2015) examined an English EFL book named Action Pack 10 for investigation of gender representation in Jordan. They employed content analysis at both linguistic and visual level. The findings revealed that there was over-presentation of male characters at linguistic, social and visual level. In text and illustrations, male outnumbered female in appearance by the ratio of 3:1

Recent researchers on gender portrayal in textbooks in Ethiopian and Saudi Arabian context reveal that gender bias is still a serious concern. Sulaimani (2017) investigated an EFL textbook for gender representation in Saudi Arabia, and concludes that the book presents a biased picture by completely excluding women from half of the units of the book. Similarly, Dejene's (2017) analysis of social studies books taught in Ethiopian schools (grades 5-8) reveal that there is unfair representation of males and females in the textbooks.

Islam. K & Asadullah. M (2018) conducted a more comprehensive, comparative analysis of the English language textbooks taught in Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi government secondary schools. Through the content analysis of the books, their findings confirmed a pro male prejudice. The combined (textual and in illustrations) aggregate female share was 40.4%. Women were often depicted as busy in household affairs whereas men were drawn in more professional activities. The researchers found a balance in the proportion of female to male characters in Malaysian and Indonesian books but under representation in Pakistani and Bangladeshi textbooks.

The present work is an extension of the studies previously conducted on English textbooks. As discussed earlier research has been conducted in the textbooks of the Punjab province where gender bias is believed to be less as compared to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study is, therefore, of considerable importance to find out how both the genders are represented in the comparatively less educated and more male dominant society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Although feminism has contributed to an increased awareness about the rights and equal representation of women, it is hardly translated into practice, particularly, in this part of the world. As regards the population of Pakistan, female outnumber male, but so far as their representation in various aspects of life is concerned, it still remains a far cry in our predominantly male dominated society. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the spectacle is even more serious as the Pashtun society is considered to be relatively more conservative and traditional with reference to the representation of female gender. Apart from the codes of Pashtunwali, which is tilted towards male dominance in the socio-cultural perspective, the textbooks also play their part in unconsciously inculcating the minds of the learners with invisibility of women in the educational perspective as well. This work, then, is an attempt in the analysis of the textbooks to investigate whether these are biased towards the female or both the genders are equally or impartially represented.

## **3. Research Questions**

The paper aims at answering the following questions;

- (a) What is the ratio of male/female characters in the texts?
- (b) What is the order of appearance of male/female gender?
- (c) Whether generic masculine expressions are general or male referenced?
- (d) What kinds of occupational roles are assigned to man and women?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Equal, at least impartial and unbiased representation of men and women is a major global concern not only in the actual, real fields of life but also in the educational context, particularly the material provided to learners. This is evident from the inclusion of gender related matters in international organisations like the UNO as well as in the policies of individual states and governments. As efforts are being made to minimise gender discriminatory laws, policies as well as attitudes and treatments in societies, it remains to be seen as to what is the status of both the genders in Pakistani society.

The purpose of the current work is to analyse the English textbooks of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at the secondary level for gender portrayal. As the Pakistani government has also emphasised the inclusion of gender fair content in the curriculum and contents of the textbooks in its policies on education reforms from time to time, it is worth examining whether the efforts have been translated into practice or not. This endeavour is significant as it might highlight gender apartheid treatment and hence

generate awareness among teachers, learners, and particularly, curriculum/textbooks designers to pay attention to it and minimise and mitigate it. ,

## 5. Research Methods

The procedure selected for this paper is the descriptive analysis of English text book of class IX and X approved by Khyber Puhtunkhwa Text Book Board. These books are taught in all the schools, public and private throughout the province and students are then tested in them in exams conducted by Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education. The data is analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to discuss gender representation. Book IX contains 15 units, whereas book X has 13 units. In both the books, essays, short stories, poems, reports and speeches are included. In book IX, every unit begins with a pre reading activity in the form of questions to familiarize students with the theme of the unit. In the second book, lessons start with unit out comes pointing out that after reading the contents, students will be able to understand these and these key points. In both the books, lessons are followed by grammar and vocabulary exercise focusing on the reading, writing, pronunciation and communication skills of the students.

Gender representation is tested in the following four categories:

- (1) Visibility. It means counting the number of male and female appearances and finding their respective ratio.
- (2) Firstness. It is the order in which male or female are mentioned first.
- (3) Generic male expressions. When words like “man” and “person” is used, whether it is general or male-specific?
- (4) Occupational roles. What kinds of roles are given to male and female characters?

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 Visibility

In the total of fifteen units of English book IX, only one minor poem, “The Old Woman” specifically talks about the female gender and that too in a very limited way. The focus is more on the idea of being old than being a woman as her children go away from her leaving her alone to lead a life of solitude. In the rest of fourteen units, male characters mainly hold the stage and appear prominent and the female gender is either neglected or slightly touched upon. In the domain of the lives of great historic personalities, no woman has been mentioned and only male figures are discussed.

So far as characters are concerned, the researcher has included all type of characters whether they are main characters, named, non- active, or non-named, non-active characters. The following table shows the relative number and ratio of characters in English book IX.

**Table 01.** Ratio of Female/Male Characters in Book IX

| Both Genders | Female           |    | Male             |    |
|--------------|------------------|----|------------------|----|
|              | Number Appearing | %  | Number Appearing | %  |
| 36           | 09               | 25 | 27               | 75 |

It is clear that women are utterly underrepresented in the character representation by the ratio of 25% against men 75%.

Figures are more telling in the second book in this series. English book for class X reveals the following:

**Table 02.** Ratio of Female/Male Characters in Book X

| Both Genders | Female           |       | Male             |       |
|--------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
|              | Number Appearing | %     | Number Appearing | %     |
| 26           | 3                | 11.53 | 23               | 88.47 |

Here, the ratio of male to female characters is 88.47 against 11.53. Women’s poor visibility goes further from 25% to 11%. This a significant difference in visibility and possibly can create a significant amount of difference in shaping the attitude of young learners from school days to internalize a gender biased perspective. A majority of male characters appearing in full force and strength and the invisibility of the other gender is responsible for unconsciously feeding the minds of the learners to accept that the female gender is inferior and hence not worth mentioning as often as the male.

In the content of the Units too, like Book ix out of 13 lessons, only one is devoted to issues concerning women. “Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan “is the title of the lesson which states her achievements and struggle for gender equality. The theme is very relevant but again the ratio is 12:1. In the rest of the lessons, as shown above, female characters appear just thrice against men who appear twenty three times. This difference leads one to believe that women’s work and accomplishments are less valuable than those of women. According to Porreca:

When females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women’s accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included. (1984: 706)

Her own study of 15 ESL books revealed that men outnumber women by the ratio of 1.77 to 1 against those which she cites (Coles, 1977; Hoomes, 1978; Hellinger, 1980) where the ratio is for every one female there are three or more males. In the investigation of gender in the textbooks of the Punjab province, Shah (2012) presented a similar picture with reference to visibility. In Nofal & Qawar (2015), the ratio of visibility in male to female characters is 3:1 which is similar to the ratio in English book IX here.

## 6.2 Firstness

When a pair of nouns or pronouns occurs together, the one mentioned first is recognized as one having more importance and value. Pairs like husband and wife, son and daughter etc are examples of firstness. Ladies and gentlemen is the only example in English language where ladies are mentioned first, in the textbooks under review, there are numerous instances of firstness in favor of men.

“He lived at his farm along with his **son, wife and her brother**”. Page 88 English Book IX

“He also sent his **son, wife and her brother away**”. Page 90 English Book IX

“So he took a flute that belonged to his **son, left his gold treasure to his wife.**” Page 90 English Book IX

There is one example in which female is mentioned first, but that too, in terms of crying:

“A **woman** screamed. Then one or two children cried. Men’s voices also came from far and near”. Page 76 English Book ix.

So in order of mention also the male gender is preferred at the cost of the female. The one instance in which women are mentioned first, that too is the stereotypical idea of weeping and crying. Here, women are mentioned first not because that they deserve to be ahead of men or that they are important enough to be given the first place but because they are believed to cry more as compared to men. So, although they are mentioned first but the idea of firstness is lost because this mention is in a weak and demeaning way. From that standpoint of order of mention too, men are given the first dominant place and women are left disadvantaged.

### 6.3 Occupational Roles

The Pashtun society is believed to be more conservative as compared to other cultures of the country. Although in recent years trends are changing and there are advances in female education, the involvement of women in occupational roles as depicted in the books is not representative. The ratio of female students is increasing with the passage of time and same is the case with their participation in different walks of life. In the books under discussion, men are shown in a wide range of occupations like being scientists, merchants, policemen, governors, gardeners, watchmen, gate keepers, advisors, bakers, café-runner, geologists, repairmen, guides, envoys, assessors, botanists etc. Woman, on the other hand, are displayed often only as wives, mothers and once as belonging to the occupation of nursing. In the only lesson in which the achievement of a woman is discussed, “Begum Rana Liaqat”, she is mentioned having worked as the governor of one province.

The following tables clearly show the comparison between men and women as depicted in English book IX and X in terms of occupations.

**Table 03.** Occupations for Men and Women in Book IX

| Unit No/Name                        | Occupation for Men                   | Occupation for Women |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. The Holy Prophet SAW             | -                                    | -                    |
| 2. Allama Muhammad Iqbal            | -                                    | -                    |
| 3. Quaid A Great Leader             | -                                    | -                    |
| 4. The Medina Charter               | -                                    | -                    |
| 5. The Snare                        | King, Advisor, Watchman, Horse Rider | Load Carrier         |
| 6. The Two Bargains                 | -                                    | -                    |
| 7. A Visit to Swat Valley           | Botanist                             | -                    |
| 8. Avalanche                        | Baker, Café runner                   | Nurse, Wife          |
| 9. The Farm                         | Land Lord                            | Wife                 |
| 10. A New Microbe                   | Scientist, Geologist                 | Wife                 |
| 11. Confessions of a TV Addict      | Teacher, Repairman                   | -                    |
| 12. Hope is the thing with Feathers | -                                    | -                    |
| 13. The Old Woman                   | -                                    | Mother               |
| 14. The Daffodils                   | -                                    | -                    |
| 15. The Voice of God                | -                                    | -                    |

**Table 04.** Occupations for Men and Women in Book X

| Unit No/Name                               | Occupation for Men          | Occupation for Women |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1.The Last Address of the Holy Prophet SAW | -                           | -                    |
| 2.The Caliph and The Gardener              | Merchant, Officer, Gardener | Wife                 |
| 3.After Twenty Years                       | Policeman                   | -                    |
| 4.Population Explosion in Pakistan         |                             |                      |
| 5.Begum Ran Liaquat Ali Khan               | -                           | Governor             |
| 6.The Income Tax Man                       | Income Tax Assessor         | -                    |
| 7.Hazrat Umar Farooq RA                    | Governor, Envoy             | Wife                 |
| 8.Tobacco and Yours Health                 | -                           | -                    |
| 9.Muslims of China                         | Teacher                     | Mother               |
| 10.The Have Cut Down The Pines             | -                           | -                    |
| 11.Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening    | -                           | -                    |
| 12. It is Palin Hard work That Does It     | -                           | -                    |
| 13. Kaghan Valley                          | Guide                       | -                    |

The tables reveal that whereas men are shown in a wide variety of occupations, women are predominantly restricted to the stereotypical roles of wives in charge of the house hold affairs. There are two instances of mother, one of nurse, one of load carrier and one of a governor. This further supplements the idea that just as in visibility, women suffered from poor representation, in firstness, they were considered inferior to men, similarly in occupations too, they are simply invisible and not given due and proportionate status

#### 6.4 Generic Male Expressions

The use of masculine as generic is another instance of sexism in language. Porreca considers this feature as “rooted in the grammar of English language itself” (1984: 708). It is generally believed that the use of words like “man” and “mankind” known as masculine generic constructions stand for people in general. Same is the case with masculine pronouns when it is difficult to specify the sex of the referent. And further, “the distinction between a sex-specific word (e.g., man as a male) and its generic equivalent (man as a human being) is clear from the context (Porreca, 1984 p.708). But it has also been shown in many studies that people hardly think about female when they use or hear these generic expressions.

This aspect of sexism also exists in the books of the present study. Some examples are the following:

“What can **man** do against them? **Man** can build breaks to stop snow. **He** can build barriers at different point”. Book ix page.75

Here, both, the generic expression “man” and the pronoun “he” clearly refers to the male part of man though it is assumed that it refers to both the sexes. But as pointed out earlier, people hardly conceptualize women while using these terms.

“It is a great fallacy that wealth gives **man** happiness. **Bill** was a landlord.” Book ix page. 88

“Man” here may have been used as generic but again, the context makes it clear that it is used for a male named Bill.

Researchers have tried to offer solutions to this problem by devising different strategies. One of these is to use pairs like he/she, his/her, him/her, and s/he (Amini & Birjandi., 2012).

## 7. Conclusion

This paper attempted to investigate gender representation in the English language books of grade IX and X. The descriptive analysis of the texts revealed that the feminine gender is under represented to a great extent in many aspects of sexism. In character count, women suffered from poor visibility at the ratio of 25 against 75 in the first book and at 11.47 against 88.53 in the second book. They were given second place status in order of mention and drawn in stereotypical roles of wives and mothers. Only one occupational role of nurse was allotted to them. In contrast, men were shown in a wide variety of occupational roles. The use of masculine generic expressions, were all male- referenced as proved by the immediate contexts.

As pointed earlier, although the Pashtun society is believed to be male dominated and it is thought that women are confined to the four walls of their homes. But this is not the case in present day society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Owing to the increased use of information technology, mobile, computer and internet, people have become more conscious of the importance of female education and their participation in all fields of life. The increased number of female students at all level of education is a proof of that. Further, the participation and inclusion of women in different occupations which were previously unthinkable is ample proof of the fact that the state of affairs has changed. A good amount of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are participating in politics, doing jobs in NGO`s, banks, offices, and even driving cars. But this is not depicted in the English books reviewed. Here, there is only one minor example of a nurse, and no other occupational role is allotted to women. This is in clear contrast to the present day Pashtun society.

At the school level, the learners have only two sources of getting education. One is the textbook and the other is the teacher. A balance is required in both the sources to furnish the students with a judicious spectacle of life. It is, therefore, needed that steps be taken to fairly include the female gender in the contents of the English textbooks. The teachers also need to be educated and made aware of the issues of gender inequity so that he can employ compensating techniques to provide in case content is lacking in fair gender representation.

This study examined the English textbooks of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at secondary level from the perspective of sexism in four categories. But this does not provide a complete picture of all the textbooks and of other aspects of sexism. Further research is needed in this regard to show whether other material is gender inclusive or not and whether sexist practices are present in other aspects or not?

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