

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN PAKISTANI TEXTBOOKS AND SCHOOLS: PERSPECTIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract

Male vs. female representation in school textbooks and in its surroundings have significant impact on their perception of social roles, identity and expectations on men and women. Textbooks have been seen to be a source of stereotypical gender roles portraying the notion of patriarchy in Pakistan. This time is a qualitative article that analyses the secondary school educators' point of view about the issue of gender representation in the Pakistani textbooks and schools. The study explores the teachers' perception of gender portrayals and their influence on students, as well as the difficulties involved in the teachers' attempts to promote gender equality in class. Semi structured interviews were conducted with secondary school teachers both in public and private schools. The results show that textbooks "mostly" present males in dominant, professional and leadership positions and females in domestic and supportive positions. Teachers acknowledged the impact such representations have on attitudes and aspirations of students. But some teachers also had "traditional beliefs which normalized" gender stereotypes. The study suggests the need revision of curriculum content, providing gender sensitive teacher training and implementing inclusive education practices for equal gender participation for Pakistani schools.

Key Words: Gender, textbooks, gender stereotypes, Curriculum, education, Pakistan

Introduction:

Gender norms in education are essential contributors to how learners process their social roles, identify and imagine themselves and their future intentions. It is held that in countries like Pakistan with the socialization of South Asia, the textbooks being used in school are regarded as very influential as they carry the knowledge of the academics apart from building cultural norms and values. In recent years, there has been extensive research focusing on the continued centrality of textbooks in the reinforcement and/or contestation of conceptions of gender boundaries in classroom settings (Hussain et al., 2023; Liu, 2025).

In Pakistan, several recent studies suggest that the balance of genders in textbooks is still vastly disproportionate, resulting in a greater representation of males and females. Further, male figures are depicted more often in professional, leadership and decision making roles while female figures are more often mentioned in the domain of domestic roles and care taking roles in the light of critical discourse analysis of English and Urdu textbooks (Ahmad et al., 2023; Nasir, 2023). These representations help to contribute to the perpetuation of gender conventions in the early and secondary education system.

Moreover, the analysis of recent studies in the Pakistani secondary level textbooks indicates that representation of images and figures as well as the textual content has substantial impact on the perpetuation of gender stereotype and the depiction of males in an active and public domain, whereas the portrayal of female in passive or private space in these textbooks (Hussain

et al., 2023; Women Studies International Forum, 2024). In sum, all of these images have an impact on the students' ideas of social acceptability for men and women, and thus on their future career and educational goals.

International studies carried out in the past few years also confirm these results, showing that gender bias in textbooks is not a local problem, but a global one. Michael Liu conducted a large-scale study employing the NLP method on textbooks from 22 countries and found that the masculine gender of all characters is always overrepresented in both story and job roles despite some modest progress in recent decades, gender inequality clearly still exists in education materials globally. These examples of global evidence help to support the notion that the content in the text is significant in the reproduction of gender hierarchies in varying contexts.

As an intermediary between content and learners, the teacher is an important force in comprehending and maybe handling these representations. The qualitative studies conducted in Pakistan recently indicate that many teachers have been aware of gender discrimination in textbooks and have advanced for the revision of textbooks based on cultural or educational norms; however, some teachers have endorsed the traditional gender roles as culturally appropriate and educationally justifiable (Agha & Shaikh, 2023). The teachers' duality in perception reflects the complexity of tackling with classroom situation and gender bias.

Moreover, discussions about gender-warped pedagogy and teacher training to equip teachers to think critically about curriculum content and advocate for equality in classroom interactions have gained traction in educational discourse in the recent years (UNESCO, 2023; News Report on Teacher Education Reform, 2025). If not, the textbooks can keep giving students the same gender message that restricts potential and reinforces gender gap.

Accordingly, this study attempts to shed light on the perceptions of secondary school teachers on the portrayal of gender in Pakistani textbooks and schools. Interpretation of teacher activities is important as they are users of course materials and one of the influencing agents in delimiting students' perceptions of gender roles. This is a study that seeks to make important contributions to the highly charged debate of gender equity in education by revealing teachers' perceptions and negotiations, as well as responses to representations involving gender in teaching materials.

Research Questions

1. What is Secondary school teachers' attitude towards gender representation in Pakistani textbooks?
2. What are some familiar gender stereotypes that you see in textbooks and school practices?
3. What impact does gender representation have on the learning, attitude and career aspirations of students?

Research Objectives

1. To find out the Secondary school teachers' attitudes towards the representation of gender in Pakistani textbooks.
2. To uncover the various kinds of gender stereotypes that is commonly found in textbooks and in school.
3. To explore the effect that the representation of gender has on students' attitudes and aspirations.

Literature Review

In Pakistan and other developing countries, where textbooks have multiple applications in shaping students' attitudes towards social roles, the issue of gender representation in textbooks continues to be an important subject of study in the field of education. Recent studies (2022-2025) reveal that textbooks remain male-centric with the active, dominant, and public

characterization of males and the passive, domestic, and minimal insignificant role of females for carrying out tasks or engaging in activities (Ahmad et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2023).

Gender Bias in Pakistani Textbooks

Recent study in Pakistan has also found that there is the gender disparity at all the subjects and at various levels of grades. Male dominant linguistic and image portrayal in textbooks was found when Wolsey International High School textbooks were critically analyzed and found that male characters were dominantly depicted in all the contexts in both area of languages and areas of images including management, leadership, science and professional status (Nasir, 2023; Tabassum et al., 2025). Contrary to this, ladies are normally projected with housekeeping, emotional part and helping functions, reinforcing traditional patriarchal roles for ladies.

In the same way, JALT (2025) carried out a study of the Grade 8 English textbooks in Punjab which revealed boys were consistently described as active agents (leaders, problem-solvers, workers) whereas girls' negative characters appeared in passive or restricted roles, and fewer than any English textbooks depicted women successfully in leadership positions or at work (professional achievement). The present imbalance indicates that the curriculum has not led to a change in the gender bias in curricular content.

Visual and Linguistic Representation of Gender

The latest multimodal analyses suggest that gender-bias even exists regarding illustrations and images in textbooks. Biology-driven gender differentiation is common: the females might appear in interiors like residential houses or classrooms, while the males in exteriors, professions, and leadership roles (Thalho, 2025). This visual affirmation is a strong influence in cultivating pupils' implicit belief in gender division of labor.

As a language, treating textbooks, masculine forms tend to be employed more often than feminine forms (and male-focused examples) are. This linguistic bias contributes to the invisibility of women's contributions in various fields such as science, politics, and economics (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Impact on student's viewpoints

Recent studies have shown that the portrayal of gender in textbooks has a significant impact on the aspirations, attitudes and identity process of students. Multiple instances of the interaction between gendered content and students cause students to adopt traditional gender roles, such as vocational for women and leadership for men within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects (Hussain et al., 2023).

These findings were echoed in the international literature, which shows that boys' and girls' access to textbooks generates gender differences in confidence in studying STEM and leadership studies (Liu, 2025). This implies that the textbook bias also carries implications of gender inequality in the field of education and employment in the long term.

Teacher's interpretation of gender representation

The teacher is a key figure who explains and influences what goes on in the classroom. Recent studies conducted in Sindh, Pakistan reveal that gender bias in textbooks is noticed by students and teachers, but teachers still continue to use the textbooks without any critical adaptations because of the curriculum constraints and teachers' inability to be trained (Agha & Shaikh, 2023).

In some teaching institutions, stereotypical gender role is considered as culturally appropriate, whereas other teachers show conscious effort to question and change it by facilitating the discussion of the class in an inclusive manner. This difference emphasizes the teacher's beliefs as a factor that can uphold or challenge gender stereotypes in education.

Curriculum reform in terms of gender sensitivity

In recent years, attention has been paid to gender responsive approach in curriculum reform. There is a strong focus in the field of educational policy on an inclusive representation of both male and female scientists, leaders, entrepreneurs and decision makers. (UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, the teacher education reforms in some areas have focused on cultivating teachers' abilities to critically analyze textbooks for gender bias, teaching using the principle of inclusiveness in the classroom (News Report on Teacher Education Reform, 2025). But uptake of this is still low, especially in public school schools.

Gap in Existing Literature

While there is a substantial body of literature relating to CTA of textbooks, the importance of examining teachers' experience and meanings attributed to the representation of gender in Pakistan at the secondary education level has received less attention. Most of the literature available exist efficiency analyses of textbooks themselves, but not how teachers interpret, mediate and react to gender bias in their classroom context. This study strives to fill in this void by venturing on the primary perspectives of teachers at the secondary level.

Theoretical Framework

This research is fundamentals on the bases of feminist theory and social learning theory.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory focuses on social institutions in terms of their role in sustaining gender differences. It states that although education is often celebrated as fundamentally empowering, the didactics tend to echo patriarchy and defend men's experiences to the detriment of women's work.

Social Learning Theory

Kids acquire "behaviors" and "attitudes" and "social roles" from observation and simply imitating others, as proposed by Bandera's Social Learning Theory. Textbooks and teachers serve important modeling that affects student's perceptions of acceptable gender role. Combined, these theories portray the ways textbook representations and classroom practices impact students' gender perceptions and behaviors.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to understand the secondary school teachers' views on gender representation in the book and schools in Pakistan. To get to the heart of teacher's lived experiences and interpretations of the content of gender in educational materials, a phenomenological method was used. The secondary school teachers from both public and private schools of Pakistan were selected in the study population utilizing purposive sampling technique from different subject areas, including English, Urdu, Pakistan Studies and Social Studies (SS) who were selected in numbers ranging from 10–15. Data were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews that enabled participants to provide their opinions and experiences about the way that gender is represented in textbooks and in these approaches to teaching. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data with responses transcribed, coded, and sorted into: emerging themes related to gender stereotypes, classroom dynamics and the educational challenges.

Results

The results of this research come from the qualitative interviews of 12 secondary school teachers in public and private schools. Male and female teachers were the same for the sample (6 male and 6 female). Participants were anonymized with the code T1–T12. The age of the participants ranged from 28-55 years with teaching experience of 5-22 years, Five main themes with thematic analysis of the qualitative data were as follows:

Male Dominance in Textbooks

- Traditional Gender Roles Reinforced
- Student Attitudes and aspirations affected

- Gender bias in classroom practices
- Change in curriculum and conduct teacher training in this direction

1: Male Dominance in Textbooks

The majority of teachers indicated that the books overwhelmingly depict males more often than females and girls with power than boys or girls. All teachers emphasized the presence of males in the professional or academic roles, while females appeared to be restricted to domestic or care giving or teaching roles.

Teacher T7 (28years old, female) said:

“Boys are represented mainly as actors and agents of society and girls as solely support roles in the house or domestic activities in most of books”

Male perspectives were clearly and predominantly associated with illustrations and narratives when compared to female perspectives, as both male teachers and female teachers agreed.

2. Traditional Gender Roles Reinforced

It was pointed out to the participants that textbooks clearly reinforce traditional gender expectations. The male teachers (T1, T5, and T6) tended to see these representations as culturally positive, while the some female teachers (T9, T12) noted that these stereotypes limit girls' aspirations and confidence.

Teacher T9 (44 year's old, female) commented:

“There is an increased perception that a girl's mind is limited with regard to career possibilities, as textbooks still promote domestic life more than professional goals”

Whilst participants of older generations tended to adhere to these roles as a norm, and as a tradition, socio-cultural norms, younger teachers were more critical with regard to gender bias.

3: Student Attitudes and aspirations affected

The consensus among all participants was the importance of textbooks content as an influencing factor of students' perception regarding gender roles. The students' studies in the sciences, technical subject and leadership areas have been reported as areas in which female students are reluctant to enter, while male students have been reported as becoming dominant over academic and professional activities.

Teacher T3 (29 year's old, male) said:

“Boys often feel they have a right to lead in certain areas, while girls may be less sure of their talents in leadership.” “Reading habits are internalized – what a student reads, he or she thinks he/she can do”

Repeated exposure to stereotypical content has an effect on turning female students off from learning; especially in conservative communities, said Teacher T11 (33years old, female).

4: Gender bias in classroom practices

Some teachers recognized gender bias is also manifested in the classroom interactions. Teachers T1, T4 and T8 commented that boys tend to be favored for issues where they were invited to speak, leadership opportunities and sports, and girls for issues involving non-opposition, support and other roles.

Teacher T8 (35years old, female) said:

“Teachers make more efforts to lead boys in class activities, even without any intention, boys are more involved in the class activities than girls”

This suggests that classroom usage of textbooks and teachers' expectations are gender-biased in their nature as well.

5: Change in curriculum and conduct teacher training in this direction

All participants genuinely recommended revising textbooks to include equal gender portrayal. The teachers, T6, T9 and T12 made it clear that a critical area that they wanted to focus on was the representation of women as leaders, scientists and professionals.

Teacher T6 (46years old, male) said:

“It is important for students to see men and women equally represented in all fields, so as to widen career aspirations”

The participants also spoke about the need for gender-inclusive teacher training courses that raise awareness among teachers about sexism in teaching and the curriculum.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there is still gender representation in Pakistani textbooks that remains in line with traditional and patriarchal social structure. Most teachers who participated in the study agreed that the majority of role models for young people in the media tend to be male with active, professional and leadership roles and female in domestic and supportive positions. The results confirm recent studies done in Pakistan that have reported that the textbooks remain strongly male gendered and continue to present a lack of female representation in society's public and professional domain (Ahmad et al., 2023; Nasir, 2023).

The results also suggest that teachers believe that pictures and narratives within the textbooks play a significant role in students' learning about gender roles. Study participants noted that subliminal messages have an effect on the aspirations and self-confidence of students, as well as their perception of appropriate professions for men and women. This is in line with the gender belief that comes from gender-bias educational resources (Hussain et al, 2023) which reinforce gender constructs in one's belief. Similarly, an international study conducted by Liu (2025) showed that textual depictions of in authority and professional success of males consistently appeared in text across countries, thus normalizing the presence of males in the discursive field of education.

Findings also showed that there are generational differences in teachers' perceptions in terms of gender representation. The younger teachers tended to be more judgmental about stereotypical roles and stressed equality and inclusiveness, and some of the older teachers felt that traditional gender roles were culturally appropriate. The results also corroborate those argued by Agha and Shaikh (2023) those teachers' personal perspectives on gender and cultural orientations had a profound impact on the interpretations and reactions that teachers facilitated to the depiction of gender in classrooms.

The second important finding of this study lies in the fact that there are no textbooks which are defined solely by gender bias; furthermore, classroom practices and school culture also demonstrate gender bias. They recognized and agreed that boys are encouraged to be more active in leadership activities, debates, judo meetings etc., where girls are inclined to be disciplined and behave modestly and supporting. The result indicates that there is an evidence of how gender roles are learnt from by students, which is called social learning theory, Bandura (1977). So teachers could inadvertently display and enforce stereotypes by how they act and expect students to act in the classroom.

The results also provide evidence of the negative impact of gender stereotypes on the confidence and employment plans of female pupils. Teachers indicated that girls tend to be hesitant in their choices of science, leadership and technical fields as careers because they lack female role models in their textbooks. These results align with UNESCO's (2023) claim that the lack of equitable representation within educational materials is responsible for persistent gender gaps in education and employment. Similarly, the results of the research conducted by Thalho (2025) illustrated that men's domination in textbooks is one cause of the loss of confidence among students, specifically among female students, regarding the ability of women to participate in public life.

Equally, participants in the process strongly called out for curriculum reform and the need for teachers' training to be gender sensitive. Teachers suggested the need to update the textbooks for fair representation of leadership, scientific, political and social roles, in general, for both

genders. The recommendation is underpinned by recent discussions in educational policies that call for mainstreaming with a gender focus in educational curriculum development and gender sensitive pedagogy to build equality in the school.

Overall it is concluded that the representation of gender with Pakistani textbooks is still not equal even though there has been awareness about equity in education. Teachers are aware of gender stereotypes but the influence of cultural beliefs and classroom practice are tempering classroom experiences. The findings indicated collaborative action is needed to achieve gender equality in education: Between curriculum developers, policymakers, teacher educators and schools to build more inclusive and balanced educational environment.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating teachers' views on the gender portrayal in Pakistani textbooks and Pakistani school environments in secondary schools. What emerged from the findings was that the gender stereotypes are still very prevalent in the content of textbooks, classroom interactions and school culture. Leaders, scientists and professionals are predominantly male while house and caregiver characters and characters that play supporting roles are predominantly feminine. Representations like these reaffirm traditional male norms and lead to divergent conception of the roles and competence of men and women in society.

Moreover teachers understand that textbooks play a role in shaping pupils' attitudes, their aspirations, and their perception of self. Learners expressed those students' gender role perceptions, self-efficacy, and goals for their future career paths are shaped by repeated exposure to stereotypical depictions. In particular it is likely that female students' aspirations will be constrained because they lack high profile female role models in leadership and professions. Some teachers also recognized that class room practices and institutional expectations also play a role in perpetuating gender bias.

The results also indicated that there were variations of teachers beliefs based on their age, experience, and beliefs. In general, younger teachers supported in terms of inclusiveness and equality; some senior teachers expressed make use of traditional gender roles as being culturally acceptable. Such differences suggest the contemporary existence of cultural artifacts in the educational field involved in Pakistan education, in terms of practices and attitudes.

The study as a whole found that gender inequality in the case of education in Pakistan is not restricted to textbooks only, but goes deep into the social attitude, teaching methods, and institutional culture. In this regard, comprehensive changes in education, that is, curriculum development, teacher training and classroom education should be carried out to attain Gender Equality. Balanced and inclusive representation of both genders in educational materials is important to foster an equal and equitable learning environment and to empower students regardless of gender.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this research the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Revision of Textbooks:** Resources developers and textbook boards need to make changes to textbooks to provide an equal and balanced portrayal of men and women in professional, social, political and leadership positions.
- 2. Inclusion of female role models:** Successful female scientists, leaders, educators, politicians and professionals should be included in the educational material to inspire female learners and single out gender stereotypes.
- 3. Gender-Sensitive Teacher Training:** Teacher training program must comprise participative workshops and courses on gender sensitivity, inclusive pedagogy and equitable classroom practices at teacher level that would enable them to recognize and take care of gender bias.

4. Encouragement of Inclusive Classroom Practices: Reduce Gender Discrimination by encouraging equal participation of boys and girl in debates, leadership activities, sports and class discussions in the school.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation of Curriculum: Instructors and government authorities should periodically review the textbooks and teaching material for discriminatory language, images and stereotypes.

6. Awareness Programs in Schools: Schools should schedule seminars, awareness sessions and discussions on Gender equality and Respect to develop a favorable attitude among students and teachers.

7. Policy-Level Educational Reforms: Education policy creators and adopters should engage in the creation and application of gender equality and inclusive representation in curriculum design, as well as in school culture.

8. Further Research: Further scope of study should include students' perception of the portrayals of gender and study of the content of textbooks at different levels, subjects and provinces of Pakistan.

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