

# Revealing Gender Bias on ELT Textbook: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

There would be long efforts done by the government to eliminate gender inequality in education. These efforts emphasize on building positive images on female and male representations, particularly on the textbook. However, this paper examined that in the ELT textbooks are still inculcated with the representation of gender biased. The gender inequality can be portrayed in several ways, including (1) gender stereotyping, (2) quantitative imbalance, and (3) male firstness. This form of gender inequality emerged in the form of visual artifacts. The visual artifacts refer to pictures which illustrate the theme discussed (e.g. *a cooking mother, business man*). The existence of gender biased and stereotypical representation in the textbook shows the facts that gender inequality really happens. It is suggested then that the government help the textbook developer to promote gender equality through the use of textbooks.

**Keywords:** *Gender biased, stereotype, visual artefacts, verbal expression, ELT Textbook*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

School textbooks have been identified as having a substantial impact on the formation of gender identities, as well as a source of reinforcement for gender discrimination and society's prevalent social structures. This idea is in line with [1] who argued that the language input taught in school textbook and stated in the curriculum is tinged with culture, gender and power issue. The school textbook used in school provide chances to the students to use available linguistics resources and engage them in a contextually appropriate [2]. As a result, school textbooks have been highlighted as a significant contributor to the construction of gender identities, as well as a reinforcement agent of gender discrimination and a society's prevailing social structures. Children's motivation and life choices are also influenced by the existing school textbooks. As reported by [3] that gender-biased portrayals in textbooks may have an impact on children's choice of careers. Others have suggested that seeing their "appropriately gendered role models" in books and other educational materials might help students develop self-esteem and a sense of themselves in society [4].

ELT textbooks may show gender differences between men and women, either promoting or ignoring gender equality. In light of this social phenomenon, it is critical to raise EFL teachers' awareness of gender bias in ELT textbooks. As we know that gender bias has already depicted in those books which affect both teachers and students' perceptions of how gender and its social practices enacted in real life situations. In this regard, [5] argues that evaluating numerous aspects of sexism in foreign language textbooks, primarily ELT textbooks, has sparked a critical examination of textbooks as representation of male and female genders in ELT classes. As a result, more research is needed into how gender prejudice is depicted in ELT textbooks. The current critical discourse study looks at how representation is represented in ELT textbooks.

## 2. TEXT BOOKS AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL PRACTICE

Textbooks are one type of instructional resource that includes suitable classroom discourse resources that allow students to engage in social action while using the target language. Textbooks, as we can see, play a

significant effect in shaping the students' thought, social action and values. Teachers, as facilitators and sources of knowledge in the classroom, must be mindful of the possible risk of gender bias in textbooks. They should ensure that gender equality is practiced in their classroom. [6] further suggested that teachers should critically evaluate textbook content before employing them in the classroom since textbooks may undermine the objective and school curriculum's principles.

Furthermore, teachers as educators, as well as the stakeholders such as government, should collaborate to elevate public awareness of gender issue. It happens because formal education equips children with abundant opportunities for role modeling and imitation in which those role models can support children in their development. In relation with these ideas [7] conducted a survey in Hongkong. In this survey on community opinions of gender issue in Hong Kong, 25.6% Hong Kong respondents indicated school textbooks influenced their attitudes toward gender stereotyping. From this situation, it is clear that as teachers, we need to be more careful and aware of the content of textbooks during the activity of teaching learning process. In fact, the existence gender bias in the textbook really affect the children 'development. It is entering their mind in subtle ways. In addition, previous studies [8];[9]; [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]; [14]; [15] revealed that gender inequality can be presented in several ways, including (1) gender stereotyping, (2) quantitative imbalance, and (3) male firstness.

### **2.1 Gender Stereotyping**

Gender stereotyping is one form of inequality in gender issues. In this stereotyping, women frequently play minor roles compared to men. Male, on the other hand, have a greater range of options when it comes to social and occupational roles. [16] show that because physical education and sport are school topic associated with males and masculinity, females who show any interest in participating in sporting activities risk being labeled as having a 'femininity deficit'. In the textbooks, the pictures of doing exercises or specific sports like playing football, running, boxing always be represented by male. It indicates that men have more power than women.

[17] also noted that cooking, cleaning, washing clothing, pitching water, caring for children, and taking on all domestic responsibilities were all depicted in the school texts portrayed as the women roles. The verbal illustration in form of written texts shows that when discussing about daily activity topic, women always represent these domestic responsibilities. The visual artifact also indicates about this condition. The pictures showing activities of cooking in the kitchen, washing the dishes, caring babies are always be represented by women. Those visual artifacts and verbal expression were portrayed in the textbooks.

### **2.2. Quantitative Imbalance**

Another type of gender inequality is quantitative imbalance. It can be seen through textual and visual portrait in the textbooks. It is becoming consistent trend when excluding and exposing, under represent women, implicitly portraying them as less important. In line with this idea, [18] found that females have been considerably under-represented in EFL textbooks at school, with a ratio of 6:1. Another investigation conducted by [19] showed that gender representation in children' books indicated that male characters were three times more frequently represented than female characters. From these points, it cannot be denied that imbalance representation of male and female happened explicitly and implicitly in the textbooks taught by teachers.

### **2.3 Male Firstness**

It refers to the first position of male in the textbooks. Male firstness prioritizes men to the first position while women are relegated to second place. [20] in his research of gender representation in Hongkong primary school ELT textbooks, he discovered when two nouns were paired for gender, men were stated first more often for instance *Mr and Mr Cheng; brother and sister*. To conclude, this situation exemplifies the male firstness portrayed in ELT textbooks.

Gender stereotyping, quantitative imbalance, and male firstness are the examples of gender inequality presented in the textbooks. If the teachers are not aware with these various forms of gender inequality, then it will affect the students' perception on gender identities. Since the textbooks are becoming the agent of knowledge dissemination, it is expected that it contributes to students' up bringing by conveying social behaviors, norm and values. Therefore, textbook are tools for education and social change and should avoid gender inequality representation.

## **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA**

This study investigated gender bias in one of ESP textbooks: Career Path Medical. This ESP textbook is used for teaching and learning activities in vocational context. Gender biases were represented in form of visual texts. These texts are parts of social practice which cannot be separated from social context. Due to this situation, this research is grounded in the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. This Critical Discourse Analysis was deployed to analyze these visual texts. In relation with it, [21] adds the elements of social practices; actions, performance modes, presentation styles, location and eligibility condition. This analysis was intended to demystify gender bias representation in the ESP textbook: Career Path Medical.

This selected textbook was utilized to gather the data regarding visual text stated in the textbook. In this book, it consists of 3 levels. Each level contains 15 topics

which relate to medical themes. This textbook was selected because it exhibits social practices of teaching and learning process in the vocational context. The gender bias elements which become the focus were gender stereotyping, quantitative imbalance and male firstness.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Gender biases are invariably stated in this ESP textbook. This book can also become sources of gender biases that go unrecognized by teachers and students. Female characters (in form of girls and women) are depicted in this case conducting activities which reflect gender bias and stereotypes

The visual texts in form of pictures or photographs in this textbook portray a variety of gender bias. Most of these visual texts contain gender bias. The stereotypical pictures of female gender can be illustrated in most of themes. The first example is in theme 7: Respiratory system.

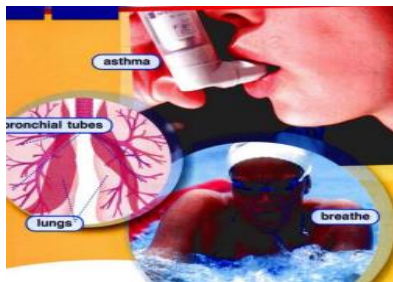


Figure 1 Theme 7

The presentation style and performance mode cover a colorful visual text with two pictures of a woman suffering asthma and a swimming man. This supports the establishment of gender stereotyping because the material action describes two different actions. In this part, the gender bias is depicted in the picture of a woman suffering asthma. The woman is valued as weak and powerless person. By contrast, there is a picture of a swimming man which shows the movement of taking breath. The male picture represents a strong, powerful and muscular man. This action discrimination contributes to women's unfavorable perceptions and does not support the discourse of inequality

The second example of gender stereotyping can be seen in the following picture.



Figure 2 Theme 13

It is clear to see that the performance mode and presentation style were in form of colorful images. The semiotic actions in these images showcase different role (job), two women as patients, and other men as doctor or general practitioners. The women role as patients indicates unfair stereotype. The women are treated as stereotypically weak and easy to get sick. Meanwhile, the male gender is seen as strong people, therefore they are treated as doctors. Beside that based on Gendered Discourse Model [22], it is apparent that these two gendered discourses are diametrically opposed. Furthermore, female social actors are also underrepresented in high-level jobs. Male social actors are represented as engineer, bus drivers, doctors, scientist and many more, while the female social actors are only represented in just few cases. In almost all themes in this textbook, the pictures provided show very strong gender role from male side. It seems to be discriminative and unfair. The percentage of 90 % visual texts of male doctors indicates imbalance proportions of gender role. This imbalance representation apparently supports the discourse of women's marginalization

In this ESP textbook, gender bias also found in term of male firstness. The masculine visual artifacts tend to come first and usually on the left side layout.

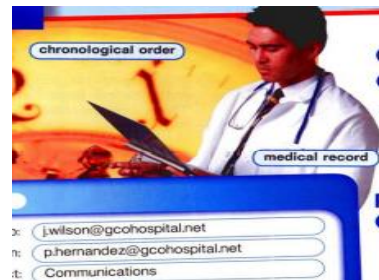


Figure 3 Theme 2

From the presentation style, it is clear that the image showcases a colorful visual text with a single picture. He performs it alone rather than accompaniment with a female doctor. This traditional gendered discourse exposes women marginalization in science, technology and medicine [22]. This implies that actually a female doctor may also take the role of a doctor equally

These dominance pictures strengthen the points of gender inequality. It represents the main point that men are treated full of pride and powerful. The textbook exhibits a gap in terms of visual images. The portrait of male and female characters in this textbook show gender differences. It is against the rules that the presentation style of the images should embody gender equality because it will affect the student social behavior in the future.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The discourse study has examined visual images in the ESP textbook. Career Path: Medical in vocational context. The representation of gender bias in this book

occurs in term of stereotype, quantitative imbalance, and male firstness. These findings present practical implications for both teachers and students. In this situation teachers need to be more sensitive in responding to it. [23] further suggest that they need to improve their awareness of gender equality.

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