



Similarities and Differences of Gender Stereotypes in Elementary School Textbooks

Zhiqi Huang¹, Sihan Liu², Ziruo Yang³, and Yunqiao Zou⁴(✉)

¹ School of Guangzhou Ulink College, Guangzhou 510000, Guangdong, China

² School of Jinan Foreign Language School, Jinan 250000, Shandong, China

³ School of Zhengzhou Huimin Senior Middle School, Zhengzhou 450000, Henan, China

⁴ School of Foreign Languages, Tianjin University of Science and Technology, Tianjin 300000, China

zouyunqiao@mail.tust.edu.cn

Abstract. Textbooks are important materials through which students receive their values. The different editions of textbooks domestic and abroad to some extent influence the perception of students by both genders, which might become a serious obstacle to the process of gender equality. This paper reviews and analyses the similarities and differences between the texts and illustrations of gender stereotypes presented in different textbooks not only in China but also in other countries. This paper found that there are significant quantitative differences in the frequency of gender representation, including the diversity of roles played and the amount of textual representation of gender stereotypes in different textbooks. The number of males in these sections is much higher than the number of females. The selection of appropriate teaching materials, the raising of teachers' awareness of gender equality and the reform of the curriculum are important so that gender inequality can be addressed in textbooks.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes · Textbooks · Elementary schools

1 Introduction

1.1 Gender Stereotypes

The conception of gender can be defined as both biological and social gender, covering multiple disciplines such as biology, psychology, and sociology [1]. Gender is a common perspective that people use conventionally to distinguish the different roles of men and women play in society. This is in line with that gender has to do with behaviours that have become associated with masculinity and femininity, and also associated with people's self-identity [1]. Therefore, it is not difficult to find that gender stereotypes have already been created unconsciously in the invisible as people mention the gender-related topic.

The term stereotype was introduced by Lippman in 1922 in his book *Public Opinion* [2]. It refers to the social classification of a person according to gender, race, age, or

Z. Huang, S. Liu, Z. Yang and Y. Zou—Contributed equally.

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occupation [2]. It is a series of ideas about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviours of a particular group or the characteristics associated with a social group and its members. Gender stereotypes are an important part of stereotypes, a special kind of social stereotype; in this case, the men and women who hold stereotypes are also the objects of stereotypes [2].

1.2 The Phenomenon of Gender Stereotypes on Children

Generally, the socializing influence of gender roles begins even when a new life is just born. According to Berk, girls and boys are treated differently at birth [3]. Berk's study found that even though there is no gender difference in height, weight, or health among the newborns in the study, parents tend to use words like "beautiful," "delicate," and "small" when describing female infants, and "firm," "robust," and "coordinated" when describing male infants. This phenomenon above shows the initial gender biases child received from their family members, which is still the case that happening in schools [3]. It was in this direction that the American Association of University Women (AAUW) argued that the differential treatment given to boys and girls by teachers and the society dangerously hampered the educational progress, self-esteem, and career choices of girls [4]. At the same time, based on Aboud and Durkin, stereotype influences cognitive developmental changes in students and also affects the way they understand the meaning of construct, attributes, and change in role-taking [5, 6].

As a result, it is reasonable to argue that the surrounding environment plays a paramount role in children's self-conception. In addition, Mangal found that environmental or location forces, especially the home, neighbourhood, and school atmosphere, significantly influence the educational attainment of students [7].

2 Review of Domestic Literature

2.1 Literal Aspect

In the analysis of the experimental Chinese textbook of Beijing Normal University, it is found that the gender roles of the protagonists have the following characteristics: 1) from the frequency of gender characters: men are more than women; 2) From the professional level of gender figures: men are higher than women; 3) From the perspective of gender role image: men are better than women [8]. As it is a textbook, it not only shows the obvious gender stereotype but also rationalizes and fixes this idea.

Researchers analyzed the eight sets of Chinese textbooks published in the People's Education Edition. They concluded that men are the absolute dominant writers, and the works of male authors are the main source of Chinese textbook selection [9]. This behavior exacerbates the lack of opportunities for girls to identify with their gender due to gender differences between men and women.

Moreover, the protagonist gender in the titles of all eight sets of primary school Chinese textbooks and the protagonist gender in the text is dominated by men, supplemented by female protagonists [9]. In the selected articles, women have the single ability and weak personalities [10]. After further analysis of the textbooks of Hubei Province of

China, the titles representing men mostly appear in human names, such as Zhang GA, the Soldier, Maupassant's worship, the song of Lei Feng, my uncle Mr. Lu Xun and other articles. In addition to the names of characters in "Chang'e running to the moon," "The goddess mending the sky" and "Mulan joining the army," the other articles representing women are gender titles such as sending sunshine to grandma and poems dedicated to mom [11].

Textbook depictions of men tend to be more comprehensive and varied, while depictions of women tend to be more homogeneous. Only focusing on shaping male characters will aggravate the gender imbalance and deepen the influence of gender stereotypes on students.

Moreover, the concrete descriptions of characters in Chinese textbooks more clearly reflect gender stereotypes. After studying and analyzing a whole set of language textbooks, Zhang found that the gender stereotypes of female characters in the textbooks are very serious [12]. It can be summarized into one sentence: no matter whether they are hard-working, simple, or beautiful and wise, they cannot escape a miserable and tragic fate in the end [12].

However, through the study and analysis of the female characters in the textbook, it is not difficult to find the following characteristics: firstly, these female characters have a narrow field of activity, which were limited to the field of family life, being a mother or a wife and a concubine. Under this circumstance, most of them reflect their dedication and concern for marriage and love. Secondly, when complimenting these women, most of them are mainly superficial and congenial [12]. For example, they are beautiful as flowers and gentle as water, but their abilities and talents were neglected.

2.2 Picture Aspect

Taking Jiangsu elementary Chinese textbooks as an example, this paper shows the number of characters in the figure illustrated in 12 Chinese textbooks and finally concludes that most of the figures are men. It even includes the situation that male characters account for more than 80% of the whole book [10]. Just in terms of the number of illustrations, men far outnumbered women. Just in terms of the number of illustrations, men far outnumbered women. When these factors are superimposed together, the impact on primary school students may be much stronger than the reality of life itself. This is also the possible "strengthening" effect of teaching materials [13]. In the PEP Chinese textbook, the main characters are male characters. No matter whether it is a single figure, multiple figures, or the central figure of the illustration, the number and proportion of female characters are less than that of men [9]. This quantitatively represents a serious imbalance in the representation of men and women, because traditionally men have been superior to women. The reason for it is that this powerful tradition makes it difficult to eradicate the existing gender stereotypes in people's minds.

In the textbooks for middle and high schools of Shanghai Education Edition in China, men mostly appear in the text in the form of individuals or groups of men, while women mostly appear in the text in the form of individuals. Most women are mothers around their fathers, teachers around students, nurses around doctors, grandmothers around children, and unknown women in the crowd [14]. It is as if women were born to serve as background panels. This will lead girls to accept the wrong idea that men are stronger and

more capable when they are young, and boys will feel that they are stronger than women, and this potential ideological harm seriously hinders the process of gender equality.

3 Review of Foreign Literature

3.1 Literal Aspect

Most of the characters in Primary School English Courses in Singapore are male, such as “Males accounted for 71% of all characters whose gender is identified in Ginn, and 70% of all gender characters in the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS)” [15]. Among them, the proportion of male protagonists is much higher than that of supporting actors. This suggests that there is a greater demand for male-dominated books, while women tend to be ignored and marginalized.

Moreover, in Indian primary school textbooks, males not only dominate in numbers but also have abundant and stronger social roles, such as engineers. Meanwhile, under normal circumstances, males take the initiative to output, and control the overall situation and in the upper state in the majority. For instance, in family life, saving plans are run by men while women are tamed at home and restricted to outdoor activities [16].

In addition, according to Gebregeorgis, an Ethiopian Primary School English Textbook shows that most of the boys’ extracurricular activities are the outdoors. For instance, “Most of the boys” leisure activities are associated with outdoors. Boys are depicted playing football with friends and visiting their fathers’ workplaces.” However, girls are restricted to indoor activities like listening to music. It implies that women should be quiet and gentle, and limits the diversity of female roles. Meanwhile, in family activities, girls have more family labour intensity. For instance, a male character described in textbooks is busy with housework only when his siblings are ill. If his sister had not been ill, he would have taken part. It suggests that women prioritize housework before going out to play. Some textbooks even mention family activities only for women. These perpetuate the gender role stereotype that domestic chores should be done by women and are their responsibility [17].

The basic reading series for Singapore primary schools shows that “the roles that seem to be available to women in both series center around the nurturing professions” [15]. It concludes that women’s careers are limited. There are also occupational stereotypes in Greek primary school textbooks. For instance, men should do jobs involving strength, while women should do softer, more detailed work, such as education. It can cause students to judge themselves prematurely, which is disadvantageous to choosing careers they are interested in the future. Meanwhile, name stereotypes are perpetuated in the textbooks of state elementary schools in Tamil Nadu, where males use their species or surnames as suffixes while females are largely excluded [18]. It causes women to misunderstand that men deserve to be stronger and have more power.

3.2 Picture Aspect

This literature presents a textual and illustrative analysis of English textbooks in Indonesian elementary schools. The results of the study show that the illustrations accompanying the linguistic texts reinforce the representation of gender asymmetry, and females are

usually perceived as more dependent than males. The illustrations show that males can entertain themselves without being spoken to others. While females are more passive in answering the questioner's questions. Also, the difference in gestures by men and women can be stereotyped into 'active and passive groups'. This way of presentation is likely to lead men and women to behave in this way and to be assimilated by the stereotyped behavior without being aware of it. However, in this textbook's illustration, there is a small difference in the number of frequencies in which men and women appear.

Secondly, women are often perceived as admirers of male behavior. In most of the illustrations, where the content is family-related, men speak much more often than women, and women usually look at men in an adoring manner. Respect and support are given to their behavior. This behavior affirms the influence of the patriarchal society and brings unequal family relations to the students [19].

Some illustrations in Greek elementary school English textbooks show gender stereotypes are significantly more weighted towards occupations held by males than females. This may be attributed to the under-representation of the occupations available to women. It is limited to occupations such as housewife, teacher, and nurse. For example, men are mostly stereotyped as working as police officers, doctors, bus drivers, and other manual labor-related occupations. This trend becomes more pronounced as the grade level increases.

Another example is that the gender stereotypes in Greek elementary school English textbooks may affect the future career choices and plans of Greek students to a greater or lesser extent. It may also lead to more stereotyping and fixation on students' future career choices [20]. According to 'gateway to English for primary schools two', a total of 772 illustrations were included, of which it was concluded that there were 421 for males and 351 for females [21]. It can be clearly seen that no matter in domestic or foreign textbooks, men appear more frequently than women. In the different primary English textbooks in the article *The representation of Gender and Gender Roles in English Textbooks*, it is clear from the graphs given that there are fewer female authors than male authors, regardless of the subject or the book in which they are found. Furthermore, it is more than certain that in most of the different primary English textbooks, males appear much more frequently than females. From the three textbooks chosen (i.e., *Good Stuff D*, *Blueprint B*, and *All in One 2*), it is clear that males are mostly described as boys with guns, and dirty boys, while females are described as wearing long skirts. Not only that but in *Good Stuff*, the males are mostly presented as aggressive, while the females are pictured as holding children and being timid. And in the textbook (i.e., *All in One*), men are depicted as doctors, while women are mostly nurses. Most of the women are preparing food, while the men are relaxing and drinking beer [22]. This result can easily lead to a loss of self-awareness for both genders and make it difficult to achieve gender equality.

Overall, teachers, as the primary role in the classroom, can achieve gender role parity by selecting appropriate materials [23]. Furthermore, the government tried to inculcate curriculum reforms and emphasized multiple projects and textbooks to improve equality [24].

4 Similarities and Differences in Gender Stereotypes in Textbooks

4.1 Similarities

In terms of language, primary school textbooks at home and abroad think in terms of quantity, which refers to the descriptions of males being represented much more frequently than females. Secondly, in terms of occupational stereotypes, males have a richer and more diverse range of social roles, whereas females are mostly described as ‘teachers’ or ‘nurses’ and similar jobs. In addition, men are often described as controlling and active, while women are described as passive and dependent.

The response approach in textbooks also takes a top-down approach in some literature that is equivalent to that of the national literature. For example, the foreign literature refers to government departments attempting to instil the idea of curriculum reform to eliminate gender bias. In addition, this approach is also evident in the suggestion that primary school textbooks should be more sensitive to the need to increase the achievement of women and to enhance the awareness of women’s own gender identity. Moreover, more similarities in the primary school textbooks of both countries include: the approaches proposed by both sides strive for a more comprehensive and objective self-perception and understanding of women, and both share the vision of breaking gender stereotypes and thereby achieving gender equality at an early stage.

4.2 Differences

While domestic textbooks focus on the proportion of males and females in illustrations, foreign textbooks are better at explaining and analyzing the meaning and direct impact of male and female behavior in illustrations. In terms of responses to gender stereotypes in primary school materials, both domestically and internationally, a top-down approach to policy has been adopted, suggesting feedback mechanisms to monitor policy implementation. In contrast, the bottom-up approach is more commonly used in foreign literature. Gender role parity is achieved by allowing teachers to select appropriate classroom materials. And there are also clear differences in the domestic and international responses in terms of book editors. In China, more attention is paid to the critical review of edited and published textbooks. However, writers in western developed countries are left to construct new concepts of gender equality for men and women, thereby reducing the incidence of stereotypical text and illustrations, which should be learned from.

5 Conclusion

When noticing the elementary school textbooks discreetly, numerous examples can be discovered. Schooling attracts widespread attention and concentration as it accounts for at least 80% of a child’s time during the entire development procedure. The textbook is the carrier of knowledge and the tool for students to learn during their school years. At the same time, it has irreplaceable authority in school education. The choice of textbook content reflects the values and cultural standards of a certain society. Henceforth, concern was expressed with the role of textbooks in unconsciously perpetuating stereotypes and

the extent to which equality issues are directed more towards girls than boys. Therefore, most girls or women are always at a disadvantage when it comes to gender inequality.

The implication of this research is to draw public attention and concentrate on gender stereotypes in textbooks and raise people's awareness to improve the situation mentioned above. To achieve this aim, teachers, authors, and the government all have a responsibility. Also, this paper found that the prevalence of gender stereotypes has decreased with the progress of human society, the popularization of education, the gradual maturation and the improvement of feminism. Although there are still some discrepancies in students' textbooks, these stereotypes have a long way to be broken.

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