



A Study on Gender Bias Against Females in High School English Textbooks Published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press

—Based on the Comparison of the 2004 Version and the 2019 Version of the Textbook

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ABSTRACT. As an important source of teaching content, gender bias in textbooks has a very important influence on students' establishment of correct gender attitudes. This paper takes the 2004 version and the 2019 version of the high school English textbooks published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as the research objects and makes a comparative study of the two versions of the textbooks from the content and language levels. The literature method and text analysis method are used to analyze the frequency of male and female characters in the textbook, the nature of male and female characters and the differences in the language used to describe male and female characters. It is found that there are still gender biases against females in the latest 2019 version of the textbooks, which is contrary to the concept of gender equality education. This issue needs to attract the attention of all sectors of society, especially the textbook editing and reviewing departments, and truly incorporate gender equality awareness into the compilation of textbooks.

Keywords: FLTRP; high school English textbooks; female gender bias; gender awareness

1 Introduction

Since ancient times, females have been regarded as a disadvantaged group in all aspects of social life, and gender bias and stereotypes against women have existed for a long time. With the development of economic globalization, females play an increasingly important role in the political and economic arena, and the issue of female gender bias has gradually attracted widespread attention [1]. As an important medium of teaching and source of teaching content, textbooks play an important role in the learning process. They are the main means for students to understand the world and life as well as an important way to learn gender roles and gender concepts. The roles

of male and female shaped in textbooks have a subtle and important influence on high school students who are in the critical period of world outlook and value formation. In 2001, the State Council adopted the "Outline for the Development of Children in China (2001-2010)", which clearly pointed out: "Incorporate gender equality awareness into education content" [2]. This regulation aims to improve educators' gender awareness, reduce or even eliminate gender discrimination in education, and convey scientific gender concepts to students. If there is a serious imbalance in the presentation of gender, social roles and family roles, students are likely to form gender concepts and understandings that are not in line with reality, which is not conducive to the realization of the educational goal of cultivating students' correct gender awareness.

The research on gender in textbooks can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s, when Western scholars carried out research from the perspective of anthropology and social psychology, and then some feminists devoted themselves to this field and achieved some important results. Foreign research on gender bias in textbooks started earlier, and in the 1970s and 1980s it triggered a research upsurge with a wide range of research objects, including science books, EFL/ESL textbooks and history textbooks. However, the research on textbook culture in China started relatively late, and initially focused on Chinese textbooks. After entering the 21st century, the research on gender culture in textbooks of various subjects has only begun to expand and deepen. As one of the basic courses, the importance of English is self-evident [3], but there are few studies on gender culture in English textbooks. Some scholars have conducted research on the issue of female gender bias in the 2004 version (hereinafter referred to as the 04 version) textbooks published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (hereinafter abbreviated as FLTRP) and put forward many effective suggestions for the compilation of textbooks. However, there are a lot of gaps in the research on whether there is still gender bias against female roles in the 2019 version (hereinafter referred to as the 19 version) published by the FLTRP, which represents the results of the new curriculum reform. Based on this, this paper takes the 04 version and the 19 version of high school English textbooks published by the FLTRP as the research objects, makes a comparative analysis of the two and keeps pace with the times to explore whether the new curriculum reform has made an ideal achievement in the issue of gender bias in the textbooks. This is the very innovation of this paper.

This paper collects the text and illustration data of each unit in the 2004 version of the compulsory student textbooks 1 to 5 and the 2019 version of the compulsory student textbooks 1 to 3 published by the FLTRP. Taking the literature method and text analysis method, this paper conducts a comparative study of the two versions of the textbooks from the two dimensions of content and language, explores what improvements have been made on the issue of gender bias against females and provides some references for the future textbook compilation.

2 The gender bias against females in the 2004 version of textbooks published by the FLTRP

Through the study and analysis of the 2004 version of the compulsory student textbooks 1 to 5, it is found that the proportion of males and females in this version is seriously unbalanced, showing a male-dominated trend and exposing the problem of gender bias to a large extent. The problem of gender bias in textbooks is mainly reflected in the following three aspects: the frequency of male and female characters; the difference in the nature of male and female characters; and the difference in the language used to describe male and female characters.

2.1 The frequency of female characters in textbooks is lower than that of male characters

After statistics and analysis, the frequency of male characters in Books 1-5 in the 04 version of the textbook is significantly higher than that of females. The author made detailed comparisons mainly from the following two aspects, one is the frequency of male and female characters in the text (The source of the text here from two parts: reading and vocabulary and cultural corner), and the other is the frequency of male and female characters in the illustrations (cover and title page illustrations included).

Low frequency of female characters in the texts.

	Male	Female	Percentage of male characters	Percentage of female characters
Total	53	9	85%	15%
Book 1	6	4	60%	40%
Book 2	20	4	83%	17%
Book 3	8	1	89%	11%
Book 4	12	0	100%	0
Book 5	7	0	100%	0

Fig. 1. Frequency of male and female characters in the texts in the 04 version (self-made)

From Figure 1, it can be seen that the frequency of female characters in the 04 version of the textbook is obviously lower than that of male characters. The textbook focuses on male characters, and largely ignores female characters. On the one hand, in Books 1-5 there are 62 different characters in total, among which male characters are mentioned 53 times, accounting for about 85%, while female characters are mentioned only 9 times, accounting for about 15%. On the other hand, in texts that mention both males and females, female characters tend to be secondary, occupying a relatively short space, and far less important than male characters. For example, in Module 3 and Module 4 of Book 2, there are musicians and painters introduced in the texts, without mention of any female characters. There is a huge lack of female characters in

Book 1-5. Most of the texts develop from a male perspective or center on male characters, and the phenomenon of gender bias is obvious.

Low frequency of female characters in illustrations.

	Male only	Female Only	Male and female	Percentage of male only	Percentage of female only	Percentage of male and female
Total	75	20	37	79%	21%	28%
Book 1	8	6	10	57%	43%	42%
Book 2	20	2	5	91%	9%	19%
Book 3	6	0	3	100%	0	33%
Book 4	18	5	7	78%	22%	23%
Book 5	23	7	12	77	23%	29%

Fig. 2. Frequency of male and female figures in illustrations in the 04 version (self-made)

In the 04 version of the textbook, the proportion of female characters only as the main body in illustrations is much lower than that of male characters. It can be seen that the textbook is dominated by male characters, and the importance of male characters is emphasized from the visual level. Among the 132 illustrations with characters as the main body, there are a total of 75 illustrations with male characters only as the main body, accounting for about 79%, while there are only 20 illustrations with female characters only as the main body, accounting for only 21%. It is especially obvious in Book 2, that the proportion of illustrations of male characters only is 10 times that of female characters only. From the data above here, it can be found that the 04 textbook also strengthens the male image and weakens the female image at the visual level through the supporting illustrations. One picture is worth ten thousand words. As an effective auxiliary means in the teaching process, the illustration of the article is the interpretation and supplement of the text, giving students the most intuitive impact on the visual [4]. The main audience of the high school textbooks is the high school students in the critical period of the formation of world outlook and values. The proportion of males and females in the illustrations is seriously unbalanced, and the importance of female characters is not fully demonstrated, which may cause wrong gender concepts for high school students in the critical period of growth.

2.2 Female characters mostly appear as family roles

The characters of male and female appearing in the 04 version of the textbook also show bias against female characters. Male characters often appear as social roles, emphasizing male social contributions, while the only 9 female characters mostly appear as family roles.

On the one hand, the male characters appearing in the textbooks Book1- 5 in the 04 version often appear as celebrities who enjoy high popularity or great men who have made great contributions to history. Among the 53 male characters that appear in the

textbooks, 32 are celebrities or those who make contributions, and the proportion is as high as 60%. Among the 9 female characters, the number of celebrities or those who make a significant contribution in a certain aspect is 0, and the female characters have not been highlighted and their value and social contribution have been neglected. On the other hand, textbooks place males in a certain era background or a certain occupational background, and mostly appear as social roles. Among the 53 male characters that appear, except for the student characters, family characters and characters with no clear nature, which appear due to the targeted audience of the textbook itself that is determined by the inherent attributes are students and teachers, there are a total of 53 male characters, among which 30 characters appear as social roles, accounting for about 57%. The female characters are simply given a simple identity or emphasized as family roles to complement the male characters. The difference in the nature of the male and female characters in the textbooks and the lack of female role models undoubtedly convey to students the wrong message that the social roles played by males are more valuable and socially recognized than females [5].

	Title	Female character	Nature of the female character	Importance
Book1 (4)	《My First Day at Senior High》	English teacher		
	《My New Teacher》	English teacher		
	《My New Teacher》	English teacher		
	《My First Ride on a Train》	18-year-old girl		
Book2 (4)	《ZhouKai》	ZhouKai's mother	family character	Simple conversation with the male character
	Module 4 Reading and Vocabulary	Student		As a complimentary character
	《Film Review: Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon》	Film character		
	《Film Review: Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon》	Film character		
Book3 (1)	《Sandstorms in Asia》	Citizen in Beijing		Mentioned only by one sentence

Fig. 3. The nature and importance of the 9 female characters (self-made)

2.3 Bias against female characters in the verbal description

In addition to being more male-oriented in terms of the frequency and the nature of male and female characters, the language itself also shows gender bias against females. On the one hand, some of the characteristics and advantages of male characters are described in detail in a large space, which is full of profound emotions. On the other hand, the female characters are only described objectively in a few strokes. For example, in the article "ZhouKai" in Book 2, the sentences "I hated that", "I am crazy about football" in the protagonist ZhouKai's confession showed the image of a straight and sunny high school boy. As for ZhouKai's mother, a brief dialogue depicts

the image of a housewife who takes care of her children. On the other hand, when it comes to the choice of words when describing male and female characters, the description of male characters is obviously more positive, and highlights males' masculinity, while the words used to describe female characters are relatively negative. For example, in Book 1 "My New Teachers", the male teacher Mr Wu is described using positive words such as "popular" and "energetic", while the description of the other two female teachers is "nervous", "shy" and "strict", "serious" to describe. As an important way in the process of English learning input, reading texts carries rich humanistic elements and plays a vital role in cultivating students' positive emotional attitudes and correct values [6]. The language itself in the textbook tends to describe the positive image of males, while the objective tone or even slightly negative description of females will make students have a large degree of prejudice against females and affect their formation of correct gender concepts.

3 The gender bias against females in the 2019 version of textbooks published by the FLTRP

The 19th version of the textbook, as the latest version of the senior high school English textbook, has great improvements and significant changes in thematic content, unit structure and overall characteristics [7]. After scholars researched and discussed the gender issues in the previous version, the 04 version, and put forward targeted suggestions for improvement, the gender bias against females in the 19 version has been greatly improved but not completely eliminated. The author still interprets the gender bias in the 19 version from the frequency of male and female characters; the difference in the nature of male and female characters; and the difference in the language used to describe male and female characters.

3.1 The frequency of male and female characters in the 19 version of the textbook is relatively balanced, but gender bias against females still exists

According to statistics and analysis, the frequency of female characters in Book 1-3 in the 19 version of the textbook has increased, but the frequency of male characters is still higher than that of female characters. The author still conducts comparisons from two aspects, namely, the frequency of male and female characters in the texts (The source of the text here from two parts: understanding ideas and developing ideas) and the frequency of male and female characters in the illustrations (cover and title page illustrations included).

The proportion of female characters in the texts is still lower than that of male characters.

	Male	Female	Percentage of male characters	Percentage of female characters
Total	39	16	71%	29%
Book 1	11	4	73%	27%
Book 2	14	9	62%	38%
Book 3	14	3	82%	18%

Fig. 4. Frequency of male and female characters in texts in the 19 version (self-made)

Compared with the 04 version of the textbook, the frequency of female characters in the 19 textbook has increased as a whole, but male characters are still dominant, and the bias against female characters still exists. There are 55 characters mentioned in the 3 textbooks, including 39 male characters, accounting for about 71%, and 16 female characters, accounting for about 29%. Although the description of these 16 female characters is obviously longer, there is still a large gap in the number of male characters and female characters in the overall number, and male characters occupy an absolute dominant position. The 19 version still does not pay enough attention to female characters, and the difference in the number of characters will make students mistakenly believe that men are more important than women, which is not conducive to students forming correct gender concepts and values.

Female characters still appear less frequently than male characters in illustrations.

	Male only	Female only	Male and female	The percentage of male only	The percentage of female only	The percentage of male and female
Total	87	58	51	60%	40%	26%
Book 1	18	13	13	58%	42%	30%
Book 2	30	26	20	54%	46%	26%
Book 3	39	19	18	67%	33%	24%

Fig. 5. Frequency of male and female figures in illustrations in the 19 version (self-made)

It can be seen from Figure 5 that the frequency gap in the illustrations between male and female characters in the 19 version has narrowed, but there is still a certain gap. The proportion of illustrations with male characters only as the main body is 60%, and the proportion of illustrations with female characters only as the main body is 40%. Even in Book 3, there are 20 more illustrations of male characters than females. It can be seen that illustrations with males only as the main body still occupy a larger proportion, and the illustration has not reached the level of balance between males and females. This mode of illustration may still influence students to establish correct gender perceptions, ignoring female roles and values.

3.2 The difference in the nature of male and female characters in the texts: the value and importance of female social roles are not reflected

The female characters created in the 19 version of the textbook have begun to show a trend of diversification. The nature of female characters has begun to change from family roles to social roles, but there are still large differences in the nature of male and female roles, and people who have made greater contributions or have a significant impact on society are still dominated by males. Compared with the 04 version, the 19 version no longer focuses on portraying the image of heroes and great men for male characters. The male characters selected in the textbooks have not only the images of famous people, but also the images of ordinary people. When showing female characters, there are also multiple social roles, and no longer family roles alone. But it is worth noting that when females appear in textbooks as social roles, they are often portrayed from the perspective of stereotypes of women, rather than highlighting their personal values. For example, in the article "Stars after the Storm" from Book 3, the "mother" is portrayed as a strong, courageous and hopeful female image in the face of disasters, but the stereotype that the role of mother "should be strong and great" has not been shaken off [8]. And the characters who have made huge contributions and have far-reaching influence are still limited to male characters. The neglect of females' personal values in teaching materials and the lack of major contribution roles may cause students to fail to fully view females' contributions, which is contrary to the principle of gender equality and fairness [9].

	Title	Female character	Nature of the character	Function in the text
Book 1	«High School Hints »	High school graduates		
	«High School Hints »	Writer	Social role	
	«Misadventures in English »	Netizen		
Book 2	«A Child of Two Cuisines »	Mother	Family role	Spread the culture of Chinese cuisine; impersonal value
	«Gold Truth »	Junior doctor/teacher	Social role	
	«Running into a Better Life »	Runner		
	«Blogging Australia »	Professional photo blogger	Social role	
	«Coast to Coast »	Student		
	«Sharks: Dangerous or Endangered? »	Film character		
Book 3	«Absolutely agony! »	Female adviser		
	«The New Age of Invention »	Interviewer	Social role	
	«Stars after the Storm »	Mother	Family role	A mother's strength and hope in the face of disaster; impersonal values; stereotypes

Fig. 6. The nature and function of the 16 female characters (self-made)

3.3 Verbal description of male and female characters: Positive attitudes toward female characters

After in-depth research and analysis of the text language, the 19 version of the textbook has both positive and negative descriptions of male characters, both positive and objective descriptions. For example, the sentence "Having a brother is an advantage" from "Just a Brother" in Book 1 praise brotherly affection; another example, in Book 3 "Absolute Agony", "in a total mess", "let off steam" and other words are used to describe the male protagonist Ben as emotionally out-of-control. The description of female characters presents a fair, objective and positive attitude. For example, the sentences in Book 1 "High School Hints", "but I figured I'd just go all out...if you fail, no problem, next time you can fail better!" show the protagonist Lisa as an optimistic and positive female high school student image. In terms of word selection, the description of female characters is also very positive, such as "fantastic", "working hard" and other positive words appearing in the description of Lisa. The 19 version highlights the positive and energetic images of females in the verbal description while the description of male characters tends to be objective and true. The improvement of the language of male and female characters will help students to attach importance to female characters and learn the excellent qualities of females [10].

4 Comparative analysis of gender bias against females in the 2004 version and 2019 version of textbooks published by the FLTRP

Through the comparative analysis of the 04 version and the 19 version of the textbook in the above chapters, it is found that the 19 version has made targeted improvements to the issue of female prejudice, and the emphasis on female roles has increased significantly. The frequency of female characters, the nature of the female characters, and the verbal description of female characters have been significantly improved. But the significance of females' roles still takes a back seat when compared to males'.

4.1 Increased frequency of female characters

From the perspective of the frequency of female characters, compared with the 04 version of the textbook, the frequency of female characters in the 19 version has increased significantly. The frequency increases by 14% in texts and 9% in illustrations, but there is still a large gap in the proportion of the male and female characters in the 09 version, and male characters are still dominant.

	04 Version textbook		19 Version textbook	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Frequency of male and female characters in the text	85%	15%	71%	29%
Frequency of characters in illustrations	Male only	Female only	Male only	Female only
	79%	21%	45%	30%

Fig. 7. Comparison between the 04 version and the 19 version of the textbook by FLTRP (self-made)

4.2 The nature of female characters is balanced in family roles and social roles

From the perspective of the nature of male and female roles, compared with the 04 version of the textbook, the nature of female characters in the 19 version shows a trend of diversification, and the portrayal of female roles is more three-dimensional, showing and affirming the personality charm and social value of female characters. In the 04 version, female characters mostly appear as family roles, while in the 19 version, in addition to the family role represented by "mother", other social roles were also established. However, characters that have made significant contributions to society and are well-known are still dominated by males. For example, the contributing roles listed in the unit "Making a Difference" in Book 3 are all limited to male characters, and there is no mention of female characters who have contributed.

4.3 More positive verbal description of female characters

In terms of the language used to describe male and female characters, compared with male characters, the choice of words to describe female characters in the 04 version of the textbook shows an objective or negative tendency. However, in the 19 version, the description of female characters is clearer and more praiseworthy, and the words are more positive. For example, "fantastic", "working hard" and other sentences in Book 1 has created a positive and optimistic image of a female high school student facing high school life. Therefore, in terms of the language of the description of male and female characters, the 19 version has made great adjustments, and most of the female characters are praised.

4.4 Female gender bias

To sum up, compared with the 04 version of the textbook, although the emphasis on female roles has increased, the female characters are still in a subordinate position. The frequency of female characters is still lower than that of male characters, social roles are still deficient, and the textbook still ignores females' personal values and fails to reflect females' importance and sense of value. However, the verbal description of female characters in the 19 version is more positive in the texts.

5 Conclusion

Gender bias in textbooks plays a very important role in the construction of students' gender awareness. Through the analysis and comparison of the 2004 version and the 2019 version of the high school English textbooks published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, this paper draws the following conclusions: First, in terms of the frequency of male and female characters, the nature of female characters, and the verbal description of female characters, there still exists gender bias towards females in the 04 version. Second, the 19 version of textbooks, which have been revised under the background of the new curriculum reform, have greatly improved and adjusted the bias against female characters, which is mainly reflected in the rising proportion of female characters in textbooks, the orientation in nature of female begins to be more inclined to social roles from family roles, and a more positive attitude towards the verbal description of female characters. But the issue of female gender bias still exists in the 19 version, and females are still not as important as males. Third, the compilation of teaching materials under the background of the new curriculum reform should be more in line with the current mainstream values, and cultural education in English learning should be regarded as the top priority, but the gender bias of teaching materials against females in the field of gender culture has not been completely eliminated.

This research intends to point out that after the new curriculum reform the issue of gender bias against females still exists in the 19 version of the textbook and aims to attract the attention of the institutions and personnel, directly and indirectly related to this edition of the textbook, so that the editors and reviewers of the textbook can pay attention to the issue of gender bias. Relevant departments can truly incorporate gender equality awareness into the compilation of teaching materials and further promote the realization of gender equality education. Only by fundamentally eliminating the phenomenon of gender bias in textbooks can the subjective initiative of front-line teachers be better played, and students can be guided to view the role of females in an all-round and correct way, so that high school students who are the direct users of the textbooks can establish a correct gender concept and a correct understanding of the role of females, the value and contribution of women in society.

We look forward to the continuous updating of teaching materials in the future to truly eliminate the phenomenon of gender bias, and to incorporate more and more rich, diverse and individual female images into the teaching materials, so as to help young people form more reasonable gender concepts in the process of gender socialization; The new curriculum reform can improve primary and secondary education in a wider area and at a deeper level.

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