

## UNEQUAL GENDER REPRESENTATION IN PTB URDU TEXTBOOKS: A FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aims to figure out the gender inequality in Urdu Textbooks of Punjab Textbook Board, taught in Punjab, Pakistan. Gender bias is overlooked but important problem in Urdu textbooks. In this research, primary schools textbooks of Grade 1 to Grade 5 are selected for critical discourse analysis. In this research, qualitative research method was applied to collect the data. The images, portrayal of domestic and professional roles, male and female characters and cosmetic bias were taken into consideration for this research. In all five books, the male characters were dominating as there are only 28% female characters were playing their roles. The female characters were deliberately shown into domestic chores or domestic situations playing insignificant roles in the stories. The text was mostly biased as showing strength and valour to only male characters, being superman. Textbooks play a vital role in developing children. It is crucial to remove the concealed bias against females from the textbooks to acknowledge the female constructive roles in the Pakistani society, to create harmony among male and female characters to treat them equally.*

**Keywords:** *gender, unequal representation, Urdu, textbooks, women representation, feminism.*

### INTRODUCTION

“Out of 51.53 million children of ages 5 to 16, around 22.84 million children are out of school in Pakistan in 2018” (Dawn News, 2018). UNESCO has raised a concern that out of every 100, 86 girls are enrolled in primary schools in Pakistan. The World Bank has reported in 1995 that Pakistan needs to emphasize the quality of education to increase the students’ enrolment per year.

Feministic Critical Discourse Analysis is a collection of feminist work carried out within the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which Michelle M Lazar (2005) glosses in her editor’s introduction as “a critical perspective on unequal social relations sustained through language use”. It does not seem to be a goal of the book to develop a distinctively feminist variant of CDA, or to engage in dialogue with its leading theorists (most of who are men, and

tend to be politically pro-feminist but not deeply influenced by feminism in a theoretical sense). Rather, contributors use established CDA methods to address questions about gender as one case of “unequal social relations sustained through language use.” That in itself is not a new endeavor – gender features as one topic in most books and edited collections of CDA.

Patriarchy is deeply rooted in Pakistani society. The bias about girls’ education is implicitly and explicitly vivid in the society. This study will reveal the unequal gender representation in the Urdu Textbooks used in Public and Private schools at primary level in Punjab, Pakistan.

Gender bias approach seems invisible or concealed in textbooks but it is overlooked-problem. “Textbooks give a clear message that women have a

subsidiary status in society, their only appearance and legitimate role is to perform the household tasks of nurturing and caring for the family” (Mattu & Hussain, 2004; Ullah, 2007, p.188). Textbooks are the considered equal opportunity provider to eliminate the existing gender disparity in Pakistani society but bias approach and despite of struggles, still the unequal gender representation in PTB Textbooks, we can delve out the bias.

The disparity in gender is vivid in all fields in Punjab, Pakistan as women are provided less chances in comparison to man. They are considered to do home chores and stay in home to do various tasks. The study will focus on unequal gender representation in PTB Urdu Textbooks because these books play vital role in growing of new generation with new mentality. In Punjab, Urdu books are also showcasing the unequal gender representation by dint of various aspects. In this study, the researcher will try to figure out whether women are equal in having equal rights in Punjab, Pakistan. For this purpose, we will try to focus on Urdu Textbooks to see whether these books, the generators of new generations, focus on both genders.

## **Aim of Research**

The aim of the research is to evaluate Urdu Textbooks used in public and private schools at primary level in Punjab and to identify unequal gender representation, if any, in these textbooks. Pakistan students spend 80 to 95% of their classroom time in reading or learning textbooks, in guidance of their teachers. Majority of the classroom instructions are based on the textbooks. Hence, in order to create equal gender representation, the researcher aims to find out the concealed bias or unequal gender representation in PTB Urdu Textbooks.

The researcher aims to analyze thoroughly the content of Urdu Textbooks of Primary Level from Grade 1 to Grade 5. These years of the children are formative in nature. Textbooks shape the minds of the students. Therefore, it is necessary to explore unequal gender representation or gender biases in the Urdu Textbooks in Punjab, Public and Private Schools.

## **Literature Review**

Language has a "dialectical relationship with the society" in addition to being a means of

communication (Fairclough, 2015, p.19). Language shapes people's ideas and aids in the formation of ideologies. Asserting that "ideologies exist in texts," Fairclough concentrates on the claim that "discourse interpretation may generate different ideological significance" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 89). "People always speak, listen, write, and read in ways that are socially determined and have social effects" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 56). Because textbooks not only perpetuate but also reflect the gender bias that already exists in society, it is crucial to detect the biases that are present in them.

Schools have a huge impact on learners and the society.

Stromquist, Lee and BrockUtne (1998, p. 83) state that:

In the previous researches, the researchers were confined to research Urdu Textbooks before 2020 but after 2020, a Single National Curriculum was developed for all institutions giving equal rights to all kids for having a chance to have equal education. The following study shows the Unequal Gender Representation in PTB Urdu Textbooks after 2020 and would figure out the lapses left by the previous researchers.

Educational institutions are powerful ideological institutions that transmit dominant values, and function as mechanism of social control...schools transmit values that not only reproduce social class but also maintain gender structures...the formal school system contributes to the reproduction of gender inequalities through such mechanism as ... the content of what is being taught and what is not ... and the kinds of knowledge men and women (and boys and girls) get.

It is clear that the material being taught has a big impact on maintaining and expanding the gender gap in our society. Textbooks have a significant influence on how pupils develop as individuals. Textbooks serve as authority for both teachers and students. As per the findings of Stromquist et al., Nasir 62, textbooks have the potential to propagate prejudices, especially those based on gender. Students remember them for a long time (Stromquist et al., 1998). Stories have always served as a vehicle for cultural values and conventions in addition to providing amusement (Peterson & Lach, 1990).

The basis for evaluation in Pakistani schools is rote memorizing of the curriculum. The lessons learned

from the textbook can have a significant and long-lasting effect in these circumstances. The content of textbooks used in schools should be inclusive of both genders and studied in order to promote gender equality and open-mindedness. Pakistan signed the Education for All (EFA) agreement, which sought to achieve gender parity by the end of 2015. "Eliminate gender bias in textbooks and curriculum" was one of the ministry of education's 2003 stated objectives. Nonetheless, earlier research by Ullah (2007), Jabeen (2014), and Zafar (2005) shows comparable findings that show gender bias in all textbooks used in Pakistan's different provinces.

Blumberg (2008, p. 347) noted that "girls were passive conformists, while boys and men did almost all the impressive, noble, exciting, and fun things and almost none of the caring, or 'feminine' acts or jobs." Women were also depicted as accommodating, nurturing drudges at home, and in the few instances they were at work, it was in traditional activities. Numerous academics have maintained that books are essential in helping youngsters learn gendered values (Sunderland, 2001; Youdell, 2005). "The school curriculum reinforces the gender imbalance that schoolchildren are exposed to at home from an early age" (Mugumya, 2004, p. 5). As such, it is imperative that educational materials be aligned with Pakistan's EFA objectives.

An analysis of primary level textbooks of Urdu and English in Punjab discovered that female's and male's status quo remain untouched in terms of our cultural context, and a gendered nationalist ideology is promoted through language texts (Durrani, 2008). While English textbooks showcased 62.5% of females engaged in outdoor activities and in Urdu textbooks, 66.7% of females were presented in stereotypical characters and indoor activities (household chores). Similarly, in an attempt to study the effects of language, it was put forward how language is a tool that is manipulated to construct and advocate male dominance in the wider public sphere (Khan et al., 2014). A difference was widely observed in the words and language ascribed to masculinity and femininity; more aggressive, powerful, and assertive language used for male characters while obedient, submissive, and weak voices were given to female characters.

Moreover, the curricula and textbooks promote the association of Pakistani identity with being a Muslim

while simultaneously showing masculine figures as national icons (Durrani and Halai, 2018). In terms of historical representation, male religious identities and heroes are given more representation as compared to females (Agha et al., 2018). According to UNESCO's (2004) study on textbooks (for Class 1 to 10th) in Pakistan, 'representation of women's historical struggle in the independence movement in the subcontinent had also been neglected in the textbooks analyzed. Only 0.9% of the historical personalities in the textbooks were females.'

Jabeen et al. (2014) focused on the intersection of gender and national identities in the education text and students' beliefs (Jabeen et al, 2014). While stressing upon the significance of education for the development of cohesive nationhood, a cross-section was discovered between gender, national identity, and the Islamic ideology. Female students held stronger religious and nationalistic perspectives in relation to male students. 84.4% male national icons were shown in Urdu and Social Studies textbooks whereas only 15.1% were female national icons. Illustrations showed women in traditional dress code (shalwar-kameez-dupatta), apparently strengthening Pakistani identity.

Implementing the above mentioned frameworks on an analysis of a research programme on education quality (EdQual) in Rwanda, gender inequality was identified as a major implication towards designing policies and developing research agendas for largescale projects (Aikman et al., 2011). Education should be inclusive of girls of different social, ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds.

In light of different socioeconomic backgrounds, Khan et al. (2014) and Durrani (2008) presented their work from a critical post-structuralist stance. The discourses, including texts and images from textbooks, were unfolded using a Foucauldian perspective to build 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations' (Durrani, 2008). In addition, social learning theory and cognitive development theory focus on the psychological impact of reading gender biased texts on young female students (Khan et al., 2014).

## Methodology

Since each province in Pakistan has its own curriculum, the textbooks used in government

schools vary from province to province. In Pakistan, Alif Ailaan reports that 38% of children attend private schools. And 62% of students attend public schools (Alif Ailaan, 2014). This study focuses on the curriculum of government schools, as the majority of children attend these institutions. The first stage of a critical analysis of the Urdu textbook in particular is this study. This study is restricted to Urdu primary textbooks from Punjab, Pakistan.

The study employs qualitative methodology. The content of five Urdu textbooks used by the Punjab Board for classes 1 through 5 was examined and critically analyzed using purposive sampling. Taj Muhammad and Muhammad Usman Tufail are the authors of Urdu books of Grade 1 Furthermore, Nasir Mehmood Awan and Rabia Shahzadi are the authors of Grade 2 and 3 respectively. Moreover, Hameedullah Khattak and Hina Naveed Irfani are the authors of Urdu Textbooks of Grade 4 and Grade 5. The proportion of authors is 4:2, which shows the unequal gender representation in PTB Urdu Textbooks.

In total, 73 lessons were studied. Since the poems in these books were either about animals or abstract ideas, only prose was covered in these lessons. Boys, girls, women, and men were the only demographics taken into account. A calculation was made to determine how many significant characters were assigned to men and women. Three main categories can be identified from the qualitative analysis: 1) Male or female lead characters 2) Any gendered supporting characters 3) a character's biography, either male or female. To conduct a qualitative analysis, multiple social themes were identified. It is insufficient to simply count the number of roles that men and women play; the kinds of roles that these genders are assigned are equally significant because subtle messages are concealed in two major roles: occupational and domestic.

The domestic roles of men and women were analyzed. Analysis was done on how men and women interacted in the home. Additionally, it was noted if men and women had equal chances to voice their opinions. The roles that men and women can play in the workforce were examined. The frequency of occurrence for each type of occupation assigned to men and women was counted. It was also mentioned what kind of jobs were available to both genders.

Additionally, the kinds of traits connected to both male and female traits were taken into account.

Blumberg (2008) has recognized specific categories of gender prejudices found in textbooks. Stereotyping and cosmetic bias are two examples of these biases. Blumberg explains cosmetic bias by saying that "things seemed to have been "corrected" or "improved" in books, but prejudice still exists in various forms." "Unfair assignment of characteristic to a group at the cost of individual attributes and differences" is what stereotypes include. The text also mentioned these biases.

## Data Analysis

### • Discussions

In all five textbooks of Urdu, overall there were 190 characters. Out of these, genders were mentioned with clear distinction. Female characters were mentioned fifty-five times ( 28% of the characters) and male characters were mentioned 135 times. A total of thirty professions were taken into consideration in all five books. Out of those 30 professions, a total of 22 professions were confined to male characters whereas remaining 08 were belonging to female characters which shows a clear unequal gender representation

### • Characters and Their Occupational Roles

Among the 27 instances in which women were mentioned (excluding girls), thirteen times over, women were playing the role of mothers. Moms arrive for a few sentences from the stories to get the kid up in the morning, and offer juice or carry out menial tasks that anyone else could have completed personality. Of the 112 mentions, men were mentioned as fathers eight times (7%). In situations where they were operating a vehicle and visiting a salt mine with the family or, alternatively, having the informed Dad discussed the solar system. Mom wasn't perceived as communicating some important information to the kids. This sends a message to the young learners that fathers are better suited to impart world knowledge to their children than mothers, who lack sufficient knowledge of it. Children hear the moral stories from their grandmothers.

Qualitative analysis of the 73 lessons' professions linked to men and women reveals occupational stereotyping. Thirty-six times, men have been mentioned working outside the home. However,

women were only found in four professions: teachers, doctors, lawyer and inventor. The mother, a doctor, was the subject of an entire lesson; the teacher was mentioned in passing in three lessons; and the lesson only contained the name of the female

inventor. "Why is Mom a doctor?" is the title of the lesson about the female doctor. The daughter is angry because, unlike all of her classmates, she does not have time to spend with her mother, a doctor, after school.

**Table 1**  
**Frequency of Occupations filled by males and females.**

Serial No	Male Professions	Female Professions
1	King	Doctor
2	Caliph	Teacher
3	Sultan	Inventor
4	President	Lawyer
5	Founder of the nation	
6	Ticket collector	
7	Tourist guide	
8	Shopkeeper	
9	Gardener	
10	Conductor	
11	Electrician	
12	Mason	
13	Architect	
14	Carpenter	
15	Tailor	
16	Milk vendor	
17	Farmer	
18	Cook	
19	Poet	
20	Doctor	
21	Soldier	
22	Vizir	
23	Veterinarian	
24	Sportsperson	
25	Confectioner	
26	Driver	
27	Mechanic	
28	Cobbler	
29	Mail carrier	
30	Barber	
31	Shepherd	
32	Servant	
33	Teacher	
34	Inventor	
35	Philanthropist	
36	A dreamer, Allama Iqbal	

## • Traditional Roles as Parents

The textbooks of Urdu of Grade 1 to Grade 5 were analyzed. Women are seen fulfilling their domestic chores in majority of the stories. This is a clear depiction of the role of women in Pakistani society. The women of rural areas are used to work shoulder by shoulder with their families whereas the books are depicting them to stay in home, doing no important role. For instance, the lesson “Visit to Khewra Salt Mine”, the researcher has seen that son and father are involved in planning and father drives the family to salt mine. The mother, however, appears when they want to do some shopping. She is shown happy to purchase salt lamps.

## • Characteristics of Men and Women

Men are portrayed as patriotic, brave and can sacrifice lives for their country. They fight till death and we can see such bravely portrayed in all five books of primary level. The lessons like Major Aziz Bhatti, National Flag and Minar-e-Pakistan are a few to name them in such case.

In Grade 5 textbook, the researcher points out that during fourteenth century, Usman Ghani, a generous rich man of that time, purchased a well for twenty Dirham and let people get water from that well free of cost. So, the clear picture we can see that men are not only strong, patriotic and rich, but also they are generous and noble.

In Grade 2, a boy is sacrificing his money to purchase Eidi items or things for Eid. The boy is giving money to a woman in the shop which is a clear picture of unequal gender representation in PTB Urdu Textbooks.

## • Images

Images play a vital role in gender construction but again here the researcher points out some clear unequal representations of gender. The number of pictures of boys is more than girls pictures in the books as most of the stories/ lessons are about male characters.

In one image, the grandfather was sitting on mat with his grandson and granddaughter is bringing food. Moreover, the boy’s mother is sick and he is waiting for the breakfast to come. This shows a clear line of Pakistani girls who are taught to serve men in home chores. In Grade 5, the book contains more images of male characters and less of female characters. Girls are seen restricted in the domestic boundaries.

## • Nouns and Verbs

In Urdu, the common nouns and pronouns are used mostly to represent men. For example, in the lesson “Major Aziz Bhatti”, (Grade 4 Textbook) the word *Jawanon* was used which literally means the youth. In Urdu, this word refers to young men. The use of this word excludes women from the scenario and men become the prominent gender. Such an approach automatically excludes women, and it injects in student’s mind that women cannot become soldiers and defend their country. According to UN report, “Use of a group character creates a group identity conducive to generalizations and the production and reproduction of stereotypes. An ungendered group, in addition to its collective identity, implies a mixture of men and women, which is often a factor of gender equality.” In textbooks, gendered group will promote gender disparity, including men and excluding women.

Moreover, the researcher figures out that mothers are also referred to as *Ami*, which means mother. So, they have no identity and no means except being mother of the mentioned character in the lesson. Mason (2010) suggests that names are our individual identities and collective identities. In this way, the female characters should be viewed with unique identities rather than using them in relational identities. Providing names to the characters not only enriches the character but also adds significance to it. Unlike English, Urdu has specific verbs for both genders. In the lesson “Kabaddi” (Grade 3 Book) the verbs like *diya*, *jata* and *saktay* were used and if these verbs are used for girls, they become *deen*, *jateen*, and *sakteen*. It shows the clear depiction that the game of Kabaddi is for men only.

Similarly, in the story *Mein Scout Bano Ga* (Grade 5 Textbook), the researcher shows that the story revolves around the boys who want to become scouts. The girls are named as girl guides. So, the title of the story shows that the story marked with verb *gaa* representing males only.

## • The Biographies

The biographies are of founder of the nation, the national poet and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Two soldiers including Rashid Minhas and Aziz Bhatti are also mentioned. These are the role models for male

students to follow and they are real inspiration for them.

Moreover, the researcher figured out that biography of Hazrat Khadija (RA) and Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah are added into Urdu Textbooks. The addition of two biographies is not enough in any year for female students.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah biography is found in three books out of five. 20% biographies are of women and 80% of men. In the lesson of Hazrat Khadija (RA), the writer does not mention that Hazrat Khadija (RA) was the prominent businesswomen in sixth century who employed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to assist in her business. Furthermore, Fatima Jinnah was it active politician and took part in presidential elections as candidate in 1965 but it is not mentioned in the book. These historical characters are shown as caring wife and sister only.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that men are overrepresented in Urdu Textbooks used in Primary Schools of Punjab, Pakistan. The unequal gender of men and women is vivid and men are shown as more powerful as compared to women. Akbar et al (2008) found the same trends in English fairy tales where mothers were fragile and weak. Analysis is clearly showing the bias of both characters as men are exceeding in all characters in all books of primary schools of Punjab. The images of male and female were also in clear disparity.

Millions of girls are out of school because of various reasons but one of them is clearly mentioning that they don't have a role model to follow. We can find Fatima Jinnah, Hazrat Khadija (RA) and to name a few more. The researcher has figured out that no role of women as public speakers, computer scientists, pilots, bankers, entrepreneurs or other professions that women occupy in real life situations. Campbell (2010) found that gender gets self-esteem and sense of themselves when they see their "appropriately gendered role models" in books and other educational materials.

Unequal stereotypes gender representation is depicted in Urdu textbooks. Women are portrayed doing home chores or assisting men, whereas, men are patriarch and positioned in power in social domains. Moreover, Urdu Textbooks have insufficient lessons about sports and healthy

activities for both genders. Pakistan has women cricket and hockey team but textbooks don't show them in any context.

- A research by Ullah, Hussain and Mattu, a decade ago, in all provinces of Pakistan showed that Pakistan has made no significant efforts to fulfill the promise of Education for All. Unequal gender representation is vivid in primary schools Urdu Textbooks. The research brought some changes in English textbooks but Urdu Textbooks were negated the same way. There are 6 authors of 5 books, 4 males and 2 females, which also depict the clear unequal gender representation in PTB Urdu textbooks. The authors of textbooks analyzed for this research include women, but these women have ignored the pervasive gender bias in these textbooks, or it may be assumed that these authors themselves are a victim of the educational system and they cannot identify unequal gender representation in the stories included in the textbooks.

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