

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN HIGHER SECONDARY ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA AND FBISE

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Abstract

Curriculum plays a foundational role in shaping opinions, beliefs, and worldviews given its grounding in sociocultural ideologies. Therefore, gender representation in school curricula has been the subject of research across the world since the 1970s. Although a handful of studies have been conducted in Pakistan, they have consistently reconfirmed deep-seated gender bias in textbooks despite governmental pledge to gender equality in education through administrative and financial investment over the past few decades. While previous studies have focused on primary- and secondary-level textbooks from individual provinces, the current study reviews most recent higher-secondary English textbooks taught in schools and colleges affiliated with 8 KP boards as well as FBISE hence their impact on a large number of young men and women about to embark on professional journeys. Broadly informed by the theory of Anti-Oppressive Education (Kumashiro, 2000), this qualitative research has used directed content analysis to explore gender representation in the selected textbooks to conclude that despite governmental commitment to empower women through education, these Grade XI and XII textbooks launched in 2020 and 2021 respectively, fail to eliminate gender inequality from the curriculum. The article concludes by providing recommendations for systematic elimination of gender bias from the curriculum.

Keywords: *gender representation, English textbooks, higher secondary school, FBISE, BISE, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.*

Introduction

Curriculum plays a foundational role in shaping opinions, beliefs, and worldviews given its grounding in sociocultural ideologies.

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Indeed, as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) note, people “establish their identities and their differences through the diverse ways in which they interpret texts, and more generally incorporate them into their own practices” (p. 14). Therefore, school textbooks, in particular, have been identified as “one of the principal mechanisms for the discursive acquisition of gender identity” (Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina 2022, p. 2). Given that textbooks may be the only books some children read, they are powerful tools of shaping their views, identities, career choices, and life goals (Treichler & Frank 1989; Gupta & Yin 2009; UNESCO 2020). Therefore, gender representation and bias in school curricula have been the subject of research across the world since the 1970s and 1980s. However, despite extensive research and policy reforms in various countries, as per UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2020), “countries still produce textbooks with gender-based stereotypes and limited references to women and girls” (p. 3). In some countries, however, “[t]he gendering of the curriculum is almost accepted as a curriculum feature rather than a curriculum problem or a phenomenon requiring investigation and research” (Looney and Morgan 2001, p. 75).

Pakistan is among countries that require major gender-based curriculum reforms. As the signatory of Education for All (EFA), Pakistan devised a plan to achieve the EFA goals including gender equality in education by 2015. In this regard, Pakistan's National Education Policy 1998, the Education Sector Reforms 2001-2015, and the National Plan of Action 2001-2015 reflected a commitment to the “elimination of all kinds of gender disparities in education by 2015” (Mirza 2004, p. 2). For this purpose, school curricula were extensively reviewed and revised from 2005-2007 in line with the recommendations of the Provincial Textbook Boards, the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education, and the National Textbooks Review Committee. However, Ullah & Skelton (2013) concluded that despite a huge administrative and financial investment, “the elimination of stereotypical gendered messages from school textbooks” continued to be “a dream” (p. 186).

After the 18th Constitutional Amendment, The National Education Policy of Pakistan 2017 was launched in coordination with the provincial units. The policy once again emphasizes gender equality in education to “empower women and girls within the shortest possible time” (p.13). In this regard, National Curriculum Council (NCC) of Pakistan develops primary and secondary school curriculum and periodically reviews the selection of materials for textbooks taught at various levels across the country. National Curriculum for English Language: Grade I-XII developed in 2006 by the then Federal Ministry of Education Pakistan continues to be “a reference document” for “stakeholders” (Preamble) that emphasizes “gender and cultural neutrality” in the curriculum (p. 144). However, despite this pledge to gender equality, a cursory glance at various curricula developed as part of the policy framework provides ample evidence to the contrary. A case in point is Grade XI-XII English compulsory textbooks developed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Textbook Board in 2020 and taught across schools affiliated with 8 Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as the Federal Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education (FBISE). Given that these textbooks were developed as late as 2020 and 2021 and are taught across the country, makes them a subject of inquiry vis-à-vis their gender representation. This paper, therefore, conducts a content analysis of the teaching materials in these books to ascertain if they comply with the policy pledge of gender equality in the curriculum.

Literature Review

Curriculum plays a significant role in enriching “the meaning, language, and knowledge forms that students actually use to negotiate and inform their lives” (Giroux 1995, p. 304). If textbooks portray a gendered picture of the world, they inadvertently encourage their readers to assimilate the roles as constructed in these books (Dean 2007). Directly or indirectly, ideologies disseminated through syllabi inform the choices and decisions students make in their practical lives. Therefore, since the 1970s, various studies have been conducted across the world to not only unveil gender bias in curricula but also to

devise policy frameworks to address it (Baldwin & Baldwin 1992; Gupta & Yin 2009; Dawar & Anand 2017; Torre-Sierra, Guichot-Reina 2022; Kadri 2022). Gender representation in ELT textbooks, in particular, has received considerable scholarly attention given their portrayal of social relationships and settings as key parts of language teaching (Sunderland et al. 2002). A number of studies noted an overrepresentation of males in relation to females; gendered occupational representations; gender stereotypical behaviors and activities; and speech differences between men and women (Cincotta 1978; Schmitz 1975; Hellinger 1980; Talansky 1986; Porecca 1984; and Sunderland et al., 2002).

In the context of Pakistan, scholarly interest in gender bias in the curriculum was sparked in the 1980s (Nisa 1989; Jafri 1994); however, no considerable work was produced until a few years ago. Khurshid et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study of secondary-level English and Urdu books of Grade 9 and 10 to conclude that women were either under-represented or discriminatorily represented. Considering the decade-long efforts by the ministry of education and UNESCO to eliminate gender bias from education, Ullah and Skelton (2013) looked at Grade 1-8 textbooks of English, Urdu, and Social Studies. Their study confirmed that “despite the prevailing claims of achievements, the new textbooks are ideologically invested – and contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality” (p. 183). Mahmood and Kausar (2017) also analyzed gender representation in Grade 9 and 10 English textbooks taught in the secondary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to conclude that “women suffer from poor visibility by the ratio of 25% against 75% in one book and almost 12% against 88% in the other” (p. 923). They also reinforced previous studies’ observation of women’s stereotypical and subservient representations. Qasim (2018) investigated gender representation in secondary-level English textbooks in Punjab using both quantitative and qualitative methods to conclude that female characters are underrepresented “with respect to socially marked gender items and gender marked linguistic items” (p. 1). Ali and Hussain (2019) analyzed gender representation in primary textbooks of English and Urdu through a qualitative content analysis to confirm a much higher

“visibility of males ... in photographs, images, characters and narrators” (p. 83). Furthermore, women were represented in stereotypical gender roles, using vocabulary that reflected gender stereotypes. More recently, Channa (2020) conducted extensive research on primary school textbooks in the government schools of Sindh to conclude that they “contribute to the construction, inculcation, and perpetuation of gender roles in Pakistan” (n.p.). Channa’s quantitative analysis confirms the findings of Ali & Hussain (2019) by identifying 83%-17% male-female representation ratio in these books.

Although the above studies consistently reconfirm the same findings at both primary and secondary levels, it is important to conduct the current study for at least three reasons. First, as per the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2022, Pakistan ranks 145/156 for economic participation and opportunity and 135/156 for educational attainment. Given these exceptionally low rankings, gender equality in the curriculum continues to be a serious concern. Indeed, Khokhar (2020) explored women’s representation in textbooks in Pakistan to ascertain its impact on the educational and career choices made by women students in postgraduate programs. He concluded that “female role models that could inspire them to select a particular profession were missing in the textbooks,” therefore, the available female representation in textbooks determined the choice of future profession or lack thereof for female students (p. 35). Likewise, Emerson (2021) studied “the intersection of national building, curriculum, and its dissemination through textbooks and gender in South Asia” through a critical study of the government school textbooks in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. She concluded that curriculum contributes to the reproduction of “gender divisions, which in the cases of Pakistan and Sri Lanka have contributed to violence” (p. 1). Added to this is the fact that, despite governmental pledge to gender equality in education, gender bias in the curriculum continues to be a sad reality. Indeed, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 found that the “share of females in secondary school English language textbook text and images” in Pakistan was merely 24% (p. 40).

Secondly, the above studies are based on primary and secondary textbooks while there is no research available on higher secondary school textbooks that are the primary data of this study. Given that students study these books just before entering university and commencing their career journeys, the content of these books helps shape not only their future educational and professional choices (Khokhar 2020) but also their ideologies (Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina 2022). Besides, the above studies have looked at textbooks taught in KP, Punjab, or Sindh while the current study looks at Grade XI and XII English textbooks that have been designed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa textbook board; however, they are also taught in the schools affiliated with Fbise across the country including the Federal Capital hence their impact on millions of young men and women. Finally, and most importantly, these books were launched in the year 2020 and 2021; hence, their critical analysis vis-à-vis gender representation is crucial to ascertain if teaching materials in the new books have been revised based on the above research, policy recommendations, or the governmental pledge of gender equality in education as per the educational policy as well as the constitution of Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is drawn from the theory of Anti-Oppressive Education, which seeks to unveil oppressive educational methods underlying traditional practices in education. Anti-oppressive education proposes structural and policy reforms that can transform educational practices vis-à-vis curriculum, pedagogy, classroom management, and school culture. Kumashiro (2000) has identified four approaches to anti-oppressive education: “education for the other, education about the other, education that is critical of privileging and othering, and education that changes students and society” (p. 25). The term “other” refers to traditionally marginalized groups in a society, including female students (p. 26). “Education for the other” approach works to improve educational experiences by creating inclusive “spaces for all students” (p. 28). “Education about the other” approach highlights the role of the curriculum in

perpetuating normative discourses about the other that lead to their stereotypical representations and proposes the integration of specific knowledge about the other in the curriculum which inculcates empathy for them. “Education that is critical of Privileging and Othering” approach implies understanding hegemonic structures that marginalize some and privilege other groups to re-render these relations. Finally, “education that changes students and society” approach engages with the way oppression is carried out through “discourse and citation” (p. 40). This approach proposes altering discursive and citational practices to bring about change. In its analysis of the selected textbooks, this paper draws particularly on the second and the fourth approach; through an understanding of the dominant discursive practices that stereotype women, the paper analyzes the selected teaching materials to understand how the curriculum represents women within the dominant gender discourse.

Methodology

This research is focused on the English textbooks of Higher Secondary School designed and developed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board and taught in the public schools and colleges affiliated with 8 boards of KP and the FBISE. There are several reasons for choosing these textbooks. To begin with, as outlined above, textbooks play a critical role in shaping gender perceptions, roles, and models among students (Lee & Collins 2009; Blumberg, 2009). Secondly, while previous studies have mostly looked at primary and secondary level textbooks, this study analyzes higher secondary school textbooks taught to 16–18-year-olds who are about to embark on a new phase in their educational careers that will not only determine their professional choices but also cement their worldviews. Thirdly, while previous studies have looked at the primary and secondary textbooks taught in the schools of KP, Punjab, or Sindh, this study looks at the higher secondary school textbooks that have been introduced across the country in 2020 and 2021. Given that there are hundreds of FBISE schools/colleges across Pakistan including the Federal Capital, gender representations in these books have implications for young men and women beyond a certain

province. Finally, English textbooks are relatively more progressive given that a variety of teaching materials from international sources is included in them that represents different gender ideologies. Therefore, a critical analysis of English textbooks can provide valuable insights into the content of the other subjects as well.

The study is informed by the theory of Anti-Oppressive Education propounded by Kumashiro (2000). In its focus on identifying the dominant discourses that stereotype women in these textbooks, the study draws, in particular, on the “education about the other” and “education that changes students and society” approaches. The study uses a qualitative content analysis as it “goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text” and “allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner” (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009, p. 2). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) outline three approaches to content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. In conventional content analysis, text data is the source of coding categories whereas in a directed approach, a theory or relevant research findings provide the initial codes to guide the analysis. A summative content analysis, however, includes a statistical or comparative analysis of keywords or content that is interpreted vis-à-vis its underlying context. This study uses directed content analysis also known as “deductive category application” (Mayring 2000). This approach draws on existing theory or research “to identify key concepts or variables as initial coding categories” (1281). Further, “operational definitions” can also be determined for each category drawing on available theory or research. Because this research seeks to ascertain if the newly designed textbooks reflect the findings of previous research or the relevant policy recommendations to eliminate gender inequality, directed content analysis is the most suitable approach for this study as its “main strength” is to test and extend the “existing theory” or research (p. 1283). Furthermore, “a directed approach makes explicit the reality that researchers are unlikely to be working from the naive perspective that is often viewed as the hallmark of naturalistic designs” (p. 1283). Therefore, based on the

anti-oppressive theory of education as well as previous research studies, the following categories have been devised to guide the analysis of the selected textbooks:

1. Pictorial and textual visibility of male and female characters.
2. Gender-Specific roles, activities, and behaviors.
3. Gendered Language and Discourse.

Analysis and Discussion

Grade XI Textbook

The Grade XI textbook was prepared by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board and approved by the Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education Abbottabad in 2020. The “Foreword” of the textbook notes that effort has been made to “eliminate” “gender bias”; however, the content of the book does not live up to this promise. To begin with, the eight-member committee constituting the author, editor, and reviewers does not have any female included. This 100% male representation in and of itself predicts a biased choice of contents. The title page of the book carries an image of a man jumping over an abyss from one cliff onto another with the sun rising in the horizon. The same image is repeated on the frontispiece with a long quotation from Frank Outlaw captioned “It’s All About Character”. Thus, with an all-male authorial team accompanied by male pictorial representation, the book sets its tone of male bias that persists throughout. The textbook consists of 22 lessons: one address, eight essays, six short stories, five poems, one letter, and one play only two of which are authored by women writers both of whom are American. While the short story “It’s Country for Me’ is taken from a collection authored by a couple, the remaining 21 lessons are written by local and foreign male authors. Out of the 24 pictures that accompany different lessons, only 3 show women all of whom are mothers while there are 14 images of one or more men. As previous studies have noted, the little representation that women have in these textbooks perpetuates traditional roles as mothers, caretakers of family, etc. (Hellinger 1980; Kowitz & Carroll 1990; Qasim 2018; Ali and Hussain 2019; Mahmood and Kausar 2017).

The first lesson of the Grade XI textbook is an “Address” delivered by “the Father of the Nation,” Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on the “responsibilities of youth” (p. 2); however, it makes no reference to girls or women. This male overrepresentation persists in subsequent lessons. “University Days” is an autobiographical essay of a discourse between a male student of Botany and his male professor; “The Progress” is a play about a male scientist, Professor Henry Corrie; and the only letter in the textbook titled “Choice of Career” is both authored by and addressed to a man. In the letter, Dr. Jamshed, as a paternal figure, guides Mr. Kashif through the process of choosing a career. The image accompanying the lesson is that of a man with a briefcase climbing stairs that are rendered in the word “Career”. This not only limits prospects of career to men as noted in other studies (Schmitz 1975; Porecca 1984; Mahmood & Kausar 2017), it also represents men as repositories of wisdom, knowledge, and advice. This is further cemented in the lesson “How to Take a Job Interview” that includes a sample job advertisement that is written by a man; a sample CV that carries a male name and picture; and a sample cover letter that is written by a male student for the post of a Mathematics teacher, which is discursively constructed as a “male subject” in Pakistan. The lesson itself gives advice starting from “dressing smartly” to “carefully plann[ing]” everything; however, the accompanying image is that of a male interviewee facing two male interviewers all three dressed in suits, which, once again, represents the entire activity as men’s domain. Indeed, “because images are culturally-dependent, they are filtered through the viewers’ familiar traditions, personal experiences, knowledge, and worldview” (Satory & Siraj, 2022). Therefore, this biased pictorial and textual representation reiterates the normalizing discourse that career options are restricted to men alone, thereby casting doubt on women’s ability to embark on professional endeavors.

There are six short stories in the textbook all of which overrepresent men, especially in gender stereotypical roles that further the patriarchal notion of separate spheres. “His First Flight” is one such short story based on the theme of “sharing responsibilities” with a male seagull as the main character. The story celebrates the

proWess of the seagull finally overcoming his reluctance to fly. The natural instinct of flying is made pivotal to the action of the story that climaxes in the last sentence: "He has made his first flight" (p. 16). The rendering of a typical act into one of accomplishment parallels the way Pakistani families and society thrive on the achievement of their male members, which may be simply undermined or overlooked in women. The same is true for "It's Country for Me" which is about a thirteen-year-old boy Joel whose life revolves around their huge family farm inherited from his grandfather. Joel, his brothers, and his fathers are represented as farming experts while his only sister is a Roman Catholic nun. Likewise, accomplished men like Arshak in "The White Lamb" have successful careers and drive big cars, which makes him a source of pride for his father and envy for the entire village except that he cruelly abandons his father bringing a tragic ending to the story. This strained father-son relationship also echoes in the story "The Blanket" told from the vantage of a young boy Peter whose father is sending his grandfather to what is implied as an old house. Interestingly, Peter's father has been led to this decision by "the woman he was to marry" (p. 112) who is characterized as materialistic and selfish. This reinforces the patriarchal ideology of young women's desire to drive a wedge between their husbands and their families. As Peter makes his father realize his mistake, the three men representing three generations of patriarchal figures restore order by eliminating the woman from their lives. The importance of father-son relationship and the intergenerational transfer of values is continued in the story "A Long Walk Home" where the father teaches his son a life lesson by example: "Seeing my father in so much physical and emotional pain was the most distressing and painful experience that I had ever faced. However, it was also the most successful lesson" (p. 129). Thus, in line with previous studies (Hellinger 1980; Khurshid et al. 2022), women as "others" are either underrepresented or discriminatorily represented in these textbooks.

This is nowhere more apparent than in "From Mother with Love". The scene on Saturday morning is of the breakfast table: "Minta's father engrossed in his paper; her mother flying around in a gaily colored housecoat, mixing waffles and frying bacon; Minta

setting the table” (p. 31). The division of labor in the family endorses the traditional roles assigned to both the genders. The text normalizes the fact that on a public holiday, men relax as they take a break from their professional responsibilities, but women continue with their routine household chores. The story also elevates the father as physically and emotionally resilient compared to Minta and her mother: “Her eyes had told her (Minta) then, as they told her now, that he would a thousand times rather bear the pain than watch her suffer” (p. 32). The mother, however, is “pretty and caring”; “gay and scatterbrained”; and “fun” (p. 33). She is interested in shopping, listening to music, and looking after her children as typical of women in the Pakistani society. While the father “loved to swim”, the mother “preferred to curl up on a beach blanket and watch them” (p. 34). Ironically, this kind of approach portrays women’s work and responsibilities as simpler or easier, labeled “Sally-Sit-by-the-Fire” (p. 37). The education of Minta, the girl child, has to be sacrificed so that she may take care of her ailing mother while her father performs his daily duties without interruption. The dying mother passes on her household responsibilities to the little girl Minta, who willingly assumes the role as soon as her mother passes away. This not only reinforces the masculine/feminine, strong/weak, rational/emotional binaries based in patriarchal ideologies, they also reify the separate roles assigned to both genders based on their alleged abilities. Because father is portrayed as the breadwinner, the essay “The Importance of Family” eulogizes the father figure without mentioning the mother. The line of action chalked out for the readers is: “Become the father you longed for” (p. 104), sidelining female readers in the family structure while foregrounding men as an indispensable part: “nothing fills the void that is created when men abandon their families, whether out of selfishness, dedication to work, or devotion to ‘important’ causes” (p. 104). This pivotal position of men in the family renders women-led households incomplete or unimaginable.

There are five poems in the textbook all of which are authored by male poets mostly implying a male speaker whose wisdom guides the readers about making important life choices, becoming resilient, and achieving greatness. The poem “Good Timber” written by a male

poet, is based on the theme of “motivation” and “self-belief”; however, once again, the poem is addressing “men” by urging them “to toil” to become “a manly man” and a “patriarch” (p. 25). Interestingly, the universal themes of hard work, forbearance, and perseverance are associated with “men” by using the male pronoun. Assuming a patriarchal hold on matters of struggle and achievement, “nature” is itself portrayed as an accomplice in the perpetuation of manliness. Even the glossary at the end of the lesson foregrounds “patriarch” and “a manly man” by providing their definitions in detail, thus reinforcing not only the gendered ideological discourse of masculine/feminine, strong/weak, and patriarch/subsidiary, but also confining strength of character to men only. Indeed, the lesson provides no role model who could become a source of identification for girl readers. The only poem in the textbook featuring a female character/speaker is Langston Hughes’s “Mother to Son”, where a woman appears but only in the character of a mother, and the purpose of her appearance is to give advice to her son. This furthers the societal discourse about the need for men to be trained for practical life in ways that equips them with the traditional masculine ideals of courage, strength, and independence: “So boy, don’t you turn back/ Don’t you set down on the steps/...Don’t you fall now” (p. 57). Interestingly, the mother/son relation and the concomitant message is offset by the image that accompanies the lesson as it shows a young man looking intently at a woman who has downcast eyes, reflective of the patriarchal culture in which a woman must wear a subdued demeanor in the presence of males, including her son.

Grade XII Textbook

The Grade XII textbook was prepared by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbooks Board and approved by the Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education Abbottabad in 2021 in line with the National Curriculum 2006. Once again, the ten-member committee that compiled the book constituting the author, editor, proofreader, and reviewers has no female member. The textbook consists of 19 lessons (one address, eight essays, six poems, three short stories, and one abbreviated novel), 17 of which are written by male authors. Out of

the 39 pictures that accompany different lessons, only 3 show women while 23 show men and boys. In line with the pictorial representation, men and boys are the central focus of the lessons whereas women are represented consistent with their discursive positions in a male-dominated Pakistani society as confirmed in other studies (Khurshid et al. 2022; Ullah & Skelton 2013). The first lesson titled “Seerat-e-Tayyiba and the Muslim Youth” is centered on “character building” and recounts the early life of the Prophet Muhammad as an example for the youth to emulate. However, there is no mention of the women in the prophet’s life including his wives or daughters who may provide role models for the female readers of this textbook. Likewise, the second lesson is the address of “the Father of the Nation”, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which, once again, neither makes a reference to women nor includes any female role models such as Fatima Jinnah. This omission of women in the first two lessons sets the tone of the textbook that persists throughout.

Like the Grade XI textbook, the short stories here portray women in stereotypical roles. “The Last Leaf” is focused on a male artist Behrman’s ambition to paint a masterpiece. Behrman is juxtaposed to Johnsy, the female artist, whose professional worries are dismissed by the doctor who refuses to believe that her illness might have anything to do with them: “Paint! Not paint. Is there anything worth being troubled about? A man?” (p. 44). Instead, he suggests that Johnsy should think about “new winter clothes”, which may inspire her to live. This reinforces the restriction of occupational roles to men and perpetuates the dominant ideology of young women’s identities as determined by either men or trivial interests. Indeed, the female artists, Johnsy and Sue, perform various household chores in addition to their painting endeavors while Behrman’s entire focus is his masterpiece. Besides, Johny is stereotyped as a superstitious and unreasonable woman who keeps counting the falling leaves of a tree outside her window believing that as the last leaf falls, her life will come to an end. On the contrary, Behrman, in his attempt to paint the last leaf to avert Johnsy’s death, dies of pneumonia in the stormy night, thus becoming a hero who sacrifices his life to save that of an irrational woman. The story is grounded in the gender binaries

of ambitious/complacent, pragmatic/sentimental, and rational/irrational. This persists in “Lingkuan Gorge” where male characters are represented as intelligent, wise, and responsible. “Lingkuan Gorge” revolves around a male narrator’s conversation with a young boy Cheng-yu, whose manly demeanor ends up inspiring the narrator. While initially the narrator mistakes the “little boy” for an “imp”, the boy, “with his hand behind his back, his chest extended” asserts himself as “a very grown-up somebody” (p. 132). The boy’s cogent arguments, his manly bearing, and his concluding words inspire the male narrator about his own responsibilities in life: “A man should never leave his post” (p. 134). Thus, almost all the stories perpetuate dominant gendered discourse that shapes and cements reader worldviews.

The poems in the textbook also further the marginalization of female figures. While the “Solitary Reaper” is apparently about a girl, the poem’s focus is the male poet’s reflection on nature. As such, the unnamed girl is merely part of the scenery and an object of the poet’s speculation. The poem is about the male poet’s feelings, observations, and interpretation regarding the girl’s song. The anonymity of the girl marginalizes her as much as the incomprehensibility of her song distances her from the main action of the poem. The poem “If” is about “character building”, however, it uses male pronouns; addresses a male audience; and advises them as such: “Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it/And—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!” (p. 54). Likewise, “The Toys” begins with “My little Son” and presents a father-son bond within the framework of a God-man relationship. Just like God forgives men for their “childishness”, the male narrator, in divine spirit, forgives his son for his disobedience. This father-son relationship continues in the poem “Once Upon a Time” where the narrator addresses his “son” to bemoan the modernist crisis of personal relationships that are marked by pretense and solicits his “son” to restore the narrator’s innocence through his youthful vigor. The pictorial representations accompanying these women are in tandem with the textual representations that together focus exclusively on men. However, the selection from Shakespeare “All the World’s a Stage” that does make a reference to both “men

and women” is nevertheless accompanied by an image that shows different stages of human life rendered in 7 images all of which are those of males (p. 111).

Compared to Grade XI textbook, this one contains an exclusive essay on “Gender inequality and its implications”. While it is welcome to see a lesson on the subject, the lesson’s discourse on gender prejudice is offset by the book’s own embedded gender bias. For instance, while the lesson emphasizes women’s inclusion in all professional fields, the textbook does not provide a single role model for its female readers. The lesson on “Technical Education” is accompanied by images of men engaged in technical exercises. The lesson on “rise of nations through national pride” is based on the life and career of a male sportsperson Jahangir Khan. The story of Khan’s extraordinary struggle is traced to the support of his father and grandfather without mentioning any female figure in his life or in the sport itself. This exclusion of female readers from the prospects of national and international careers, achievements, and goals reinforces the remaining lessons’ depiction of stereotypical and gender-specific roles, activities, and behaviors.

Finally, the textbook ends with an abridged version of the novel, *Lord of the Flies* that does not feature a single female character. While one of the expected outcomes of the lesson is the student ability to “[i]dentify universal themes present in literature across all cultures” (p. 184), in focusing on a male-dominated world, the lesson ends up associating universality with maleness. Being a post-WWII novel, *Lord of the Flies* celebrates masculine power signified by Jack and his group with their absolute disregard for law and order. Piggy, the weak, asthmatic, timid boy, is repeatedly mocked and attacked by unruly and physically stronger boys. His desire for order, solidarity, and peace is mocked as feminine, juxtaposed to the masculinity of other boys who hunt, fight, and defy rules. The narrative links Piggy’s feminine nature with the absence of a father figure in his life on account of living with his aunt. The novel thus upholds the binaries of masculine/feminine, strong/weak, manly/effeminate, running through almost all the lessons in this

Grade XII textbook.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Broadly informed by Kumashiro's theorization of anti-oppressive education and a directed content analysis via three predetermined categories, the analysis above confirms that the pictorial and textual visibility of men in these textbooks is significantly higher than that of women. The contents of the books perpetuate gender stereotypes via gender-specific roles, behaviors, and activities. Both the textbooks consistently use gender-specific male nouns and pronouns, which not only excludes women readers from the discussion but also reinforces dominant gender discourses. Men are not only overrepresented, they are also assigned privileged occupations, roles, and responsibilities. Women are either absent in these books or rendered in the only roles that the traditional Pakistani society deems respectable, i.e., mothers or sisters. Where women are not represented as benevolent mothers and sisters, they are portrayed as evil as in the short story "The Blanket". There are no female professional role models; the only passing references to women's professions are those of a "nun" (p. 51); a "typewriter"; a "nurse"; and, worse yet, a "showgirl and blackjack dealer from Vegas" (p. 153). This absence of positive professional female role models or progressive content on gender reduces women's identities to housewives or mothers. As Kumashiro (2000) notes, this "distorted" representation of "the Other" has "more educational significance than the official curriculum" as it reinforces the stereotypes, myths, and partial knowledge about "the Other" that continues to oppress them (p. 32).

Despite the governmental commitment to empower women through education, these most recent textbooks of Grade XI and XII launched in 2020 and 2021 respectively, fail to eliminate gender inequality from the curriculum. Given that these textbooks are taught not only in secondary schools across KP but also in schools affiliated with FBISE across Pakistan including those in the Federal Capital, their biased teaching content has implications for a large number of young men and women. That these textbooks are meant to furnish "learners" with "academic and practical skills" that they can use "to

complete their studies or build their careers after graduating from school” (Khyber 2020, “Foreword”), the findings above are worrisome as they perpetuate regressive ideologies that will make these young men and women unfit for the professional life that our globalized world demands.

The role of the curriculum in encouraging people to think differently has been consistently highlighted (Hyttén 1999; Dean 2007; Ravitch 2010); hence the need for gender reforms in education. Kumashiro suggests that the first strategy for implementing “education about the other” is to “include specific units on the Other” in the curriculum such as “feminist scholarship” or topics from “any of a number of fields in women's studies” (p. 32). The second strategy is “to integrate Otherness throughout the curriculum” such as “discussions of the personal lives of historical figures, authors, political leaders, and celebrities” (p. 33), which is clearly missing in these textbooks. Besides, in “integrating lessons on the Other throughout the curriculum educators can move away from merely adding on a lesson here and there” (p. 33), which is the case in Grade XII textbook that despite containing a lesson on gender continues to perpetuate bias via the “hidden” curriculum. As for the “education that changes students and society” approach, Kumashiro notes that because “oppression originates in discourse, and, in particular, in the citing of particular discourses . . . change requires becoming involved in altering citational practices” (p. 42). Thus, gender representations that disrupt dominant and normative gender discourses must be introduced into the curriculum to not only “stop the repetition of harmful ‘knowledges’” but also to “construct disruptive, different knowledges” (p. 44).

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