

Gender Roles and Identity in Visual Representations of Primary Education Textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

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Textbooks serve as a vehicle for social change. From childhood in school through textbooks and classroom experiences students embrace gender socialization, societal norms, and beliefs, gender roles, inequality, and bias. So, it is very important to make textbooks gender-neutral, to do this, textbook analysis is required. This study investigates the images used in textbooks of primary education in West Bengal and national curriculum and textbook Board, Govt. of Bangladesh, to examine gender stereotypes and bias. The study adopted qualitative and documentary research approaches through content analysis. The findings demonstrate that gender patriarchy and bias are reflected through visual imagery in textbooks. Images often lack representation of women and tend to portray them engaging in indoor tasks such as domestic and household work, or menial labor. Meanwhile, men are predominantly shown in outdoor, professional, and leadership roles, reinforcing gender disparities in identity and societal roles. There is a limited attempt to showcase gender neutrality in primary-level language textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh, and there's minimal encouragement for gender reflection, hindering the development of sustainable perceptions of gender roles in society. The findings of the study provide a foundation for policy changes at the state or national level to ensure the development and implementation of guidelines that promote gender-neutral content in educational materials and are useful for textbook development agencies, textbook writers, and teachers in developing a gender-sensitive curriculum, and textbooks.



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INTRODUCTION

Textbooks serve as essential educational tools that not only provide accessible academic knowledge but also significantly influence students' thinking and development. They go beyond content delivery, shaping students' perceptions of social values, cultural expectations, and gender norms (Zhou et al., 2021; Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Through both visual imagery and textual narratives, textbooks transmit implicit and explicit messages that impact children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth (Asadullah et al., 2018; Ullah & Skelton, 2012; Nandi et al., 2021). Research shows that many textbooks perpetuate traditional gender roles, presenting males in active roles and females in passive or domestic roles (Ullah et al., 2014; Kobia, 2009; Mills, 2003). UNESCO (2015) emphasizes the critical role of early education in reducing gender bias and fostering equality. Primary school is a formative period in which students' worldviews and identities are developed (Brown & Lee, 2021; Jones, 2022; Smith, 2023). Therefore, primary-level curricula and textbooks play a vital role in addressing stereotypes and building inclusive attitudes

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(Ali & Hussain, 2019; Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Blumberg, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 1991; UNESCO, 2016). Studies have long shown how textbooks reflect and reinforce gender ideologies (Brusokaite, 2013; Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Liu & Su, 2019).

Previous studies have highlighted that gender sensitivity in school textbooks is a critical concern in educational development, especially in regions where traditional gender norms are deeply entrenched. Research by Islam and Asadullah (2018) and Mukherjee (2019) indicates that textbooks can either reinforce gender stereotypes or promote gender equity. In areas such as West Bengal and Bangladesh—regions with shared historical and cultural backgrounds—gender roles are still largely shaped by patriarchal systems. Women are frequently portrayed as homemakers, while men are associated with leadership and public roles (Rahman & Islam, 2021; Chowdhury, 2009; Bhattacharjee & Goswami, 2020). In the context of primary education, studies from Bangladesh reveal a dominant depiction of men in active roles, while women are shown in domestic or passive positions (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Similar patterns are observed in West Bengal, where educational materials often depict women in subordinate roles and exclude them from leadership representations (Das, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to explore how textbooks used in primary education in West Bengal and Bangladesh reflect and potentially perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases through visual imagery and content representation.

This research aims to examine how gender stereotypes are conveyed through imagery in primary education textbooks used in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh. The main objective is to uncover the implicit visual cues that may reinforce traditional gender roles and identities, which often go unnoticed but have a profound impact on shaping students' perceptions from an early age. By analyzing textbook illustrations, the study seeks to identify patterns of gender representation and assess the extent to which these depictions reflect or challenge prevailing sociocultural norms within both regions. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the intersection between gender, culture, and education. By focusing on visual content—a dimension often overlooked in textbook analysis—this study offers a fresh perspective on how gender biases may be subtly embedded in learning materials. The findings are expected to provide valuable input for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators in designing more gender-sensitive educational content. Ultimately, this research supports efforts to create inclusive and equitable learning environments that promote gender equality and critical thinking among young learners.

Based on the identified research gap and the objectives outlined, this study is grounded on the hypothesis that visual constructs in primary education language textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, reflecting deeply rooted sociocultural norms despite contemporary efforts toward educational reform and gender inclusivity. It is assumed that the visual imagery used in these textbooks reinforces binary gender roles, portraying males predominantly in active, authoritative, and public roles, while females are frequently depicted in passive, domestic, and supportive contexts. Given the shared historical and cultural background of West Bengal and Bangladesh, yet differing educational policies and curriculum designs, this research hypothesizes that while some patterns of gender representation may overlap, distinct visual narratives will emerge that reflect each region's specific socio-educational priorities. The study anticipates that despite global advocacy for gender equality in education, the visual content within these textbooks remains a subtle but powerful tool in maintaining gender bias. By critically analyzing and comparing the imagery across both regions, this study seeks to validate whether these textbooks act as silent agents of gender socialization, shaping the early perceptions and expectations of young learners toward gender identity and roles in society.

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study adopts a qualitative and documentary approach, utilizing document review as its primary method. This methodology is widely acknowledged in qualitative research for its capacity to delve deeply into texts and materials (Negou et al., 2023). Documentary analysis is defined as a systematic and rigorous procedure for reviewing or evaluating both textual and

electronic documents (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014; Yehl, 2010; Prior, 2003). This method allows researchers to investigate complex issues through a careful and interpretive examination of documents. In this study, the main focus is on primary school textbooks, analyzed as key documents that reflect and transmit educational values. These textbooks are treated not just as instructional materials but also as social instruments that communicate cultural norms. The use of document review enables a critical exploration of how textbooks contribute to shaping student understanding of gender. It also provides insights into the structural and visual composition of the content within the educational context.

To extract meaningful patterns and interpretations from the textbooks, this study employs content analysis, a robust qualitative technique for analyzing communication artifacts (Krippendorff, 2019). Content analysis is particularly effective for uncovering meanings, interpreting societal influences, and identifying recurring themes in documents (Cohen et al., 2017). According to Krippendorff (2019), this method involves making replicable and valid inferences from text and contextualizing its usage. Prior (2003) and Merriam (2009) also emphasize that documents, especially textbooks, often contain a blend of text and visuals such as images, diagrams, and symbols. This study pays specific attention to the visual content of textbooks, focusing on how gender roles and identities are depicted through illustrations. By analyzing these visual constructs, the research aims to decode the underlying gender narratives presented to young learners in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Ultimately, this approach helps reveal how gender ideologies are subtly embedded in educational materials.

Four language books of West Bengal board of primary education named “Amr Boi” for class I; ii) “Amr Boi” for class II; iii) “Amr Boi” for class III; iv) “Patabahar” for class IV; and Four language books of West Bengal board of primary education named National Curriculum and Textbook Board Govt. of Bangladesh named i) Amar Bangla Boi for class I; ii) Amar Bangla Boi for class II; iii) Amar Bangla Boi for class III; iv) Amar Bangla Boi for class IV has been chosen through the purposive sampling technique as samples in this study. Primary Education Board, School Education Department, govt. of West Bengal and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Govt. of Bangladesh were the publishers of the textbook. This textbook has been implemented in government schools only. But most private schools have different textbooks than government primary schools. Private school textbooks were not included in this study. The validity of research data used credibility, transferability, triangulation, dependability, and confirmability (Lewis, 2015; Ngugi, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Denzin, 2009; Patton, 1999).

In this study, researchers employed a systematic and rigorous content analysis approach to collect data, focusing specifically on visual representations in primary school textbooks. Following the method outlined by Collado and Atxurra (2006), each page of the selected textbooks was thoroughly reviewed to identify and interpret gender roles and identities depicted in visual content. The process began by categorizing all images into two groups: those containing human characters and those without, in accordance with the framework provided by López-Sánchez (2019) and Caton (2019). This initial classification ensured a targeted analysis of imagery relevant to gender representation. The emphasis was placed on illustrations and photographs portraying human figures, which were then analyzed for gender-based cues and roles. By isolating the images that included human characters, the researchers could concentrate their attention on the pictorial content most likely to convey social messages related to gender (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Brown & Green, 2018; Dyer, 1982).

Once human-centered visuals were identified, the researchers conducted an in-depth analysis to determine how gender roles and identities were constructed. Each image was examined for symbolic elements such as posture, attire, activity, and context, with detailed descriptions provided to document recurring themes and patterns (Page et al., 2022). This descriptive phase was essential for interpreting implicit gender narratives and allowed the researchers to identify subtle reinforcements of gender stereotypes. As Ball and Smith (2017) and Prosser (2006) have noted, rich descriptions are crucial for interpreting visual data, offering context and enabling more nuanced

analyses. The researchers ensured methodological consistency by documenting their observations thoroughly, allowing for transparency and replicability. The final stage of the research involved synthesizing these findings into a comprehensive report, summarizing key insights and drawing meaningful conclusions about the portrayal of gender in the textbooks from West Bengal and Bangladesh (Davis & Lee, 2021; Creswell, 2014; Milne & Muir, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Gender Roles and Identities Portrayed in Visual Construct Within Language Textbooks of Primary Education in West Bengal

The representation of gender roles in educational materials significantly shapes children’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors from an early age. In primary education, textbooks not only serve as instructional tools but also reflect and influence societal norms. In West Bengal, primary language textbooks often include visual elements—illustrations, drawings, and photographs—that convey implicit or explicit messages about gender roles and identities. These visuals can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or promote more equitable representations. Examining how gender is portrayed through visuals in these textbooks is crucial for understanding its broader impact on students’ social development. This study aims to critically analyze the visual representation of male and female figures in West Bengal’s primary language textbooks, focusing on roles, activities, and appearances. The findings will reveal the extent to which educational content supports or challenges existing gender norms in society.

Table 1. Gender Roles And Identities In Images Within Language Textbooks of Primary Education In West Bengal

		
Child-caring by female Source: Class-V “Patabahar” pp.-80	Cooking by female Source: Class-V “Patabahar” pp.-80	Sewing by female Source: Class-II “Amr boi”
		
Break the paddy by sieve Source: Class-III “Amr boi” pp.-85	Food distribution by female Source: Class-III “Amr boi” pp.-169	Food serving by female Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-193
		
Bring water by females	Female as a house cook	Garland by female Source: Class-

Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-150

Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-192

I “Amr boi” pp.-217

The images in West Bengal’s primary language textbooks predominantly portray females in traditional domestic roles such as cooking, sewing, child-caring, serving food, and fetching water. These visuals, found across various grade levels, reinforce gender stereotypes by consistently depicting women as caregivers and homemakers. The absence of diverse or active roles for female characters suggests a limited representation of gender, potentially shaping students’ perceptions of gender roles in a narrow and unequal way from an early age.

**Table 2. Gender Roles and Identities in Images Within Language Textbooks
Of Primary Education in West Bengal**



Working in the field by male
Source: Class-V “Patabahar” pp.-55



Male as shopkeeper; Source:
Class-II “Amr boi” pp.-23



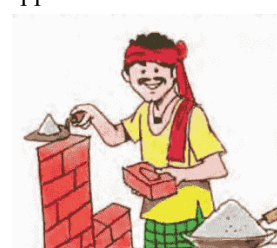
Male as Driver and Traffic
Surgeon; Source: Class-II “Amr
boi” pp.-42



Selling and buying Fruits by Males;
Source: Class-II “Amr boi” pp.-164



Male as Navy officer; Source:
Class-II “Amr boi” pp.-234



Male as Mason Source: Class-II
“Amr boi” pp.-233



Male as postmaster; Source: Class-
II “Amr boi” pp.-234



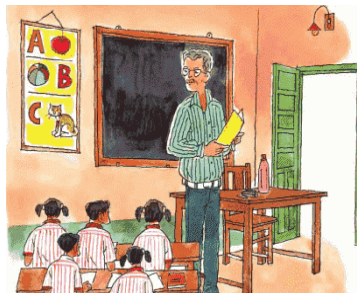
Male as a soldier; Source: Class-II
“Amr boi” pp.-234



Male as Chef; Source: Class-II
“Amr boi” pp.-234



Male as Musician
Source: Class-II “Amr boi” pp.-243



Male as Teacher; Source: Class-I
“Amr boi” pp.-30



Male as Van driver; Source:
Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-77

In West Bengal's primary textbooks, images often depict males in various active and authoritative roles such as soldiers, officers, shopkeepers, and professionals. This portrayal reinforces traditional gender norms by presenting men as dominant, skilled, and publicly engaged. In contrast, females are typically assigned limited domestic roles, which creates a stark disparity between the representations of the two genders. This imbalance in visual representation can influence children's perceptions, reinforcing the idea of gender hierarchies and limiting aspirations, especially for young girls. When these gender norms are depicted as natural and unchangeable, they may restrict the development of broader career aspirations and reinforce stereotypes. By normalizing these imbalanced roles, textbooks may inadvertently perpetuate gender inequalities and restrict the scope of possibilities that children can envision for themselves in the future.

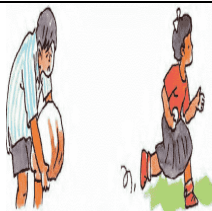
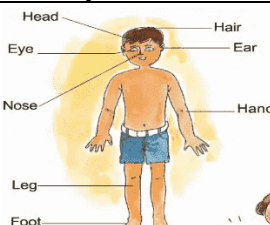
















Table 3. Gender Roles And Identities in Images Within Language Textbooks of Primary Education in West Bengal

 <p>Football is played by males Source: Class-I "Amr Boi" pp.-60.</p>	 <p>Cricket is played by males Source: Class-II "Amr Boi" pp.-26</p>	 <p>Kite flying by males Source: Class-V pp.-122</p>
 <p>Run competition by males Source: Class-III "Amr Boi" pp.-47</p>	 <p>Yoga by male Source: Class-I "Amr Boi" pp.-45</p>	 <p>Rope jumping by a female Source: Class-I "Amr Boi" pp.-60</p>
 <p>Doll playing by female Source: Class-I "Amr Boi" pp.-56</p>	 <p>Ludo played by female Source: Class-II "Amr Boi" pp.-252</p>	

The images in the textbooks depict boys participating in active, outdoor activities such as football, cricket, and running, while girls are shown engaging in more passive, indoor pursuits like playing with dolls and Ludo. This recurring visual pattern reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, associating physical strength and competitiveness with boys, and passivity or domesticity with girls. Such portrayals perpetuate the notion that certain traits and behaviors are inherently linked to gender, limiting children's understanding of the diverse roles that both males and females can occupy. By presenting gendered expectations in this way, these visuals can hinder the development of more inclusive perspectives, preventing children from recognizing the full range of possibilities

for themselves and others. This biased representation, if left unchallenged, can contribute to the reinforcement of gender norms and restrict the development of a more equitable view of gender roles at an early age.

Table 4. Gender Roles And Identities in Images Within Language Textbooks Of Primary Education in West Bengal

 <p>Boys carrying heavy weight and Girls carrying lightweight; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-9</p>	 <p>Human body parts showed by male; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-16</p>	 <p>student teacher</p> <p>Male as teacher and female as a student; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-31</p>								
 <p>a fat man</p> <p>Healthiness showed by male; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-153</p>	 <p>A gentleman; Source: Class-II “Amr boi” pp.-239</p>	 <p>push</p> <p>Male as strong; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-9</p>								
<table><tr><td></td><td>I am Arjun. I have a cricket bat.</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>You are Rubina. You have a beautiful smile.</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>She is Rimi. She has a doll.</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>He is Imran. He has a football.</td></tr></table> <p>Sports instruments specified by gender</p>				I am Arjun. I have a cricket bat.		You are Rubina. You have a beautiful smile.		She is Rimi. She has a doll.		He is Imran. He has a football.
	I am Arjun. I have a cricket bat.									
	You are Rubina. You have a beautiful smile.									
	She is Rimi. She has a doll.									
	He is Imran. He has a football.									

The visual content reinforces gender hierarchies by portraying males as stronger, healthier, and more knowledgeable (e.g., teacher, health model), while females are depicted as passive or subordinate (e.g., student, carrying lighter loads). These portrayals perpetuate the notion of male dominance in strength, intelligence, and authority. Additionally, assigning sports tools by gender further limits children's freedom to explore interests beyond traditional roles, potentially reinforcing lifelong gender biases and inequality.

Gender Roles And Identities Portrayed in Visual Construct Within Language Textbooks of Primary Education in Bangladesh

The representation of gender roles and identities in educational materials plays a significant role in shaping children's perceptions of social norms and expectations. In Bangladesh, primary school language textbooks serve not only as tools for linguistic development but also as mediums through which social and cultural values are conveyed. Visual elements within these textbooks, such as illustrations and images, contribute substantially to the construction of gender identities from an early age. This study aims to examine how gender roles and identities are visually portrayed in language textbooks used in primary education in Bangladesh. It seeks to identify



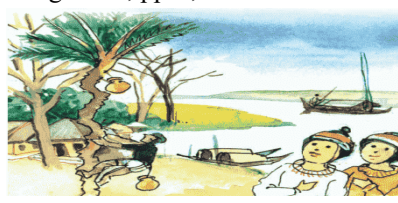



patterns of gender representation and explore the potential implications these portrayals may have on young learners' understanding of gender roles. The research also highlights the presence of implicit gender bias in visual content and its possible influence on children's developing worldview.

Table 5. Gender Roles And Identities in Images Within Language Textbooks of Primary Education in Bangladesh

		
Farming by Males; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-3	Marketing by Males; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-6	Childcaring by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-14
		
Movement by Males; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-21	Studying by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-22	Male as Soldiers; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-28
		
Male as Scientist; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-40	Male as Driver; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-60	Male as Doctor; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-60
		
Male as Shopkeeper; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-60	Female as Teacher; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-60	Childcaring by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-61
		
Childcaring by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-75	Childcaring by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-76	Male as an Artist; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-80

The images in the textbook depict strong gender stereotypes, where men are portrayed in dominant roles such as farmers, scientists, soldiers, and professionals, while women only appear in nurturing and teaching roles. This pattern reflects a systemic bias that reinforces the traditional division of roles and limits children's views of more diverse gender potentials and roles. Revision is needed to create gender equality in education.

**Table 6. Gender Roles And Identities in Images Within Language Textbooks
Of Primary Education in Bangladesh**

		
Female as Teacher; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-3; Class-i	Cattle Gazing by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-12; Class-i	Males are brave and protective; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-13; Class-i
		
Cooked by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-32; Class-i	Hardworking by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-35; Class-i	Going market by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-7; Class-ii
		
Hardworking by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-25; Class-ii	Farming by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-35; Class-ii	Tree climbing by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-45; Class-ii
		
Outdoor work by male and Indoor work by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-3; Class-iii	Female as health worker; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-4; Class-iii	Male as shopkeeper; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-5; Class-iii
		
Amar Bangla Boi; pp-34; Class-iii	Outdoor game by Males; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-42; Class-iii	Male as role model; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-77; Class-iii

The images in the textbooks continue to reinforce traditional gender roles, with males predominantly shown in active, outdoor, and leadership roles such as cattle grazing, farming, market activities, and outdoor games. Males are also described as brave, hardworking, and protective. In contrast, females are mainly depicted in nurturing, indoor, and caregiving roles like teaching, cooking, and health work. This persistent gender stereotyping limits children's understanding of diverse gender capabilities and perpetuates societal biases. Educational content revision is essential to promote gender equality and broaden children's perspectives on gender roles.

Discussion

Persistent Gender Stereotypes in Textbooks

This research identifies a consistent pattern of gender-based bias and patriarchal representations in primary-level language textbooks used in both West Bengal and Bangladesh. According to Yang (2016), the visual elements within these educational resources exhibit a clear disparity in the portrayal of male and female figures. Women are often confined to a limited range of stereotypical roles, primarily centered around caregiving, teaching, and household duties, as noted by Sharma et al. (2016). These roles reflect traditional expectations of femininity, which restrict women to passive, nurturing functions within the private sphere. In contrast, Connolly et al. (2022) argue that men are typically depicted in more active, authoritative, and socially valued roles such as farmers, market vendors, professionals, and leaders engaged in outdoor work. This skewed portrayal reinforces dominant gender ideologies that are deeply ingrained in South Asian societies, perpetuating them through educational materials. As Yang (2016) suggests, such visual narratives not only reflect existing societal norms but also play a crucial role in transmitting and normalizing these values to young learners during their formative years.

The findings of this study are reinforced by earlier research, particularly the work of Islam and Asadullah (2018), who revealed similar gender portrayals in Bangladeshi school textbooks. Their analysis demonstrated that male characters overwhelmingly dominate visual depictions in various professional and leadership contexts, such as scientists, businessmen, and authority figures, as noted by Ellemers et al. (2019). In contrast, female characters are consistently shown in passive roles, engaged in domestic chores or caregiving, often lacking autonomy or social influence, a pattern identified by Jatav et al. (2023). These repetitive portrayals contribute to a narrow conceptualization of gender capabilities, providing children with a limited framework for imagining what they or others can aspire to be based on gender. According to Gauci et al. (2023), by reinforcing conventional gender norms through images, textbooks not only mirror societal inequalities but also actively contribute to their persistence. This visual reinforcement of gender hierarchies from an early age is concerning, as it restricts children's perceptions and aspirations, particularly those of girls, regarding their potential roles in society, as emphasized by Islam and Asadullah (2018).

Findings from Bangladesh indicate that similar trends are observed in primary school textbooks from West Bengal. Studies conducted by Das (2017), Chatterjee (2018), Mukherjee (2019), and Bhattacharya (2020) collectively highlight a persistent pattern of gender stereotyping in visual content. According to Das (2017), these textbooks often present men as dominant figures operating in outdoor or public domains—such as offices, farms, and markets—symbolizing authority and action, a pattern also noted by Tickner (1992). In contrast, women are frequently depicted in confined indoor settings, performing tasks like cooking, cleaning, and caring for others, suggesting subordination and limited societal engagement, as observed by Kan and He (2018). As Martin and Ruble (2004) argue, these repetitive and gendered visual narratives shape the subconscious perceptions of students, reinforcing the idea that gender dictates one's role and status in society. The continued inclusion of such biased imagery not only undermines efforts toward gender equality but also restricts children's cognitive development by limiting their exposure to diverse, non-traditional gender roles, as highlighted by Martin and Ruble (2004). Ultimately, these portrayals hinder the cultivation of equitable gender attitudes among young learners, reinforcing gendered stereotypes that can persist into adulthood.

Theoretical Implications and the Need for Reform

From a theoretical standpoint, the content of textbooks holds substantial influence in shaping how students perceive gender roles and societal expectations. Critical education theorists, such as Foshay (1992), argue that textbooks function as ideological instruments that can either maintain or challenge existing social inequalities. Similarly, Sleeter and Grant (1991) contend that textbooks

play a significant role in shaping students' understanding of the world, reflecting dominant cultural values and reinforcing societal norms. In the context of West Bengal and Bangladesh, Suchana (2024) highlights that the current portrayal of gender in primary education textbooks tends to reinforce patriarchal norms by presenting biased representations. This portrayal contradicts the concept of education as a liberatory process, as discussed by Ruth and Janowitch (2014), who emphasize that education should empower learners to critically engage with and challenge systems of oppression. Instead of fostering critical consciousness, the textbooks in question often reflect and perpetuate dominant gender ideologies, as Kumlu (2024) suggests. This demonstrates how educational content, which may appear neutral on the surface, can, in reality, serve to reproduce and legitimize social hierarchies unless it is purposefully designed to promote equity and inclusion.

The impact of textbook imagery on students' attitudes and aspirations is further emphasized by Sadker and Zittleman (2007), who argue that persistent gender stereotypes in educational content shape students' perceptions of what roles are appropriate for each gender. According to Sadker and Zittleman (2007), when females are regularly portrayed in domestic or subordinate roles and males in dominant, decision-making positions, children internalize the belief that these roles are fixed and natural. This notion is further supported by Nurwahyuni (2015), who highlights how such repeated portrayals subtly convey to students that leadership, intelligence, and authority are inherently male traits, while caregiving and obedience are female attributes. Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) also emphasize how these portrayals shape individual self-concepts and reinforce wider societal gender disparities by presenting traditional roles as inevitable. As noted by Giang and Dan (2024), textbooks serve as silent instructors of gender norms, subtly guiding children's understanding of their potential and worth. Shi (2023) further stresses the importance of reassessing and revising educational content to ensure that it supports a more balanced and equitable view of gender roles, thereby challenging the stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality.

Boone et al. (1977) explain that Social Learning Theory posits that children learn behaviors and social norms by observing and imitating what they see around them. Within educational contexts, this suggests that the images and stories presented in textbooks significantly influence how students develop their understanding of gender. As Nandi et al. (2024) highlight, when children are repeatedly exposed to illustrations that depict men in powerful, public roles and women in domestic, passive positions, they begin to accept these portrayals as social norms. De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina (2022) further emphasize that this process contributes to the internalization and reproduction of gender stereotypes in students' daily lives. Blasco and Grau-Alberola (2019) argue that such portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles, limiting children's understanding of gender beyond these fixed expectations. In the contexts of West Bengal and Bangladesh, Puja et al. (2024) point out that the lack of gender-neutral or diverse representations in primary school textbooks restricts children's ability to envision gender roles outside of these traditional norms. The consistent absence of women in leadership or professional roles, as noted by Nandi et al. (2024), hinders the development of more inclusive attitudes. This underscores the critical need for educational reforms that prioritize gender-sensitive content to promote more equitable representations from an early age.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from both West Bengal and Bangladesh reveal a significant issue with gender stereotypes and biases in primary-level language textbooks. These visual representations heavily influence young students' understanding of gender roles, often restricting their aspirations and reinforcing societal norms. The consistent portrayal of women in passive, domestic roles and men in active, public roles further entrenches traditional gender expectations. The lack of gender-neutral content or opportunities for critical reflection on gender issues exacerbates these biases, limiting students' perceptions of gender roles. This underscores the urgent need for curriculum reforms that promote gender-sensitive content and encourage equitable representations of both genders. Addressing these biases in textbooks is crucial to fostering a more inclusive and fair view of gender roles, contributing to greater gender equality in society.

There are four suggestions based on the research results. First, in-house training programs for editors, authors, designers, illustrators, and photographers on various aspects of reflection of gender roles and identity through imagery depiction; Secondly, publishers should create a comprehensive assessment checklist for detecting reflection of gender roles and identity in textbooks. Every editor in every subject should use the checklist; Thirdly, additional research on the representation of gender roles and identity in textbooks is anticipated, as well as any other gender-related problems that might be present; Last, before using a textbook, teachers must evaluate the textbooks, and teachers need to read books, current journals, and articles to become better knowledgeable about issues of value.

Due to a lack of sufficient time, selected textbooks of primary-level Bengali language textbooks were chosen for content analysis to study the representation of values in imagery depiction. Other textbooks could be considered. The study's findings aid in the development of guidelines, strategies, and policies for implementing various programs and schemes for gender-friendly curricula and textbooks.

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