

Gender roles and identity in visual representations of primary education textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Textbooks serve as a vehicle for social change. From early childhood in school, through textbooks and classroom experiences, students learn about gender socialization, societal norms and beliefs, gender roles, inequality, and bias. Therefore, it is crucial to create gender-neutral textbooks, which requires textbook analysis. This study aims to analyze the images used in primary education textbooks in West Bengal and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Government of Bangladesh, to examine gender stereotypes and bias. The study employs qualitative and documentary research approaches through content analysis. The findings indicate that patriarchy and gender bias are reflected in the visual imagery of textbooks. Images often underrepresent women, portraying them in indoor roles such as domestic work, household tasks, or light labor, while men are predominantly shown in outdoor, professional, and leadership roles, reinforcing gender disparities in identity and societal roles. Efforts to demonstrate gender neutrality in primary-level language textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh remain limited, and encouragement for gender reflection is minimal, hindering the development of sustainable perceptions of gender roles in society. The findings contribute to 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 creating a gender-sensitive curriculum and textbooks.

Keywords: Gender Roles and Identity, Visual Construct, Language Textbooks, Primary Education.



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INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are essential educational tools that not only provide academic knowledge but also shape students' thinking, social perceptions, and development. Zhou et al. (2021) and Islam & Asadullah (2018) emphasize that textbooks influence students' understanding of social values, cultural expectations, and gender norms. Through visual and textual content, textbooks convey explicit and implicit messages affecting cognitive, emotional, and social growth (Asadullah et al., 2018; Ullah & Skelton, 2012; Nandi et al., 2021). Research shows many textbooks perpetuate traditional gender roles, portraying males in active and professional roles while females appear in passive, domestic, or household roles (Ullah et al., 2014; Kobia, 2009; Mills, 2003). UNESCO (2015) stresses that early education is critical in reducing gender bias and fostering equality. Primary school is a formative period for shaping students' worldviews and identities (Brown & Lee, 2021; Jones, 2022; Smith, 2023). Therefore, primary curricula and textbooks must address stereotypes and encourage inclusive attitudes (Ali & Hussain, 2019; Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Blumberg, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 1991; UNESCO, 2016). Studies also show 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 remain strong. According to Islam and Asadullah (2018) and Mukherjee (2019), textbooks can either reinforce gender stereotypes or promote gender equality. In regions such as West Bengal and Bangladesh, which share similar historical and cultural backgrounds, gender roles are still largely shaped by patriarchal systems. Rahman & Islam (2021), Chowdhury (2009), and Bhattacharjee & Goswami (2020) note that women are often portrayed as homemakers, while men are associated with leadership and public roles. In the context of primary education, research by Islam & Asadullah (2018) shows a dominance of male representation in active roles, while females are depicted in domestic or passive positions. Similar patterns are observed in West Bengal, where Das (2017) and Bhattacharya (2020) found that educational materials often depict women in subordinate roles and exclude them from leadership representations.

Based on the preliminary review, several research gaps have been identified related to the objectives of this study. First, although many studies have highlighted gender stereotypes in textbooks, the focus has primarily been on textual content or narratives, while visual representations illustrations and images have rarely been analyzed in depth. Second, research comparing primary education contexts in regions with different historical and cultural backgrounds, such as West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh, remains limited. Third, the implicit effects of visual imagery on shaping students' gender perceptions from an early age have not been extensively explored, even though they may reinforce traditional gender roles and identities. Fourth, previous studies rarely assess the extent to which visual representations challenge or reflect prevailing sociocultural norms. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing textbook illustrations, examining patterns of gender representation, and exploring their implicit impact on students' gender perceptions, offering a new perspective on the intersection of gender, culture, and education.

This study aims to examine how gender stereotypes are conveyed through visual imagery in primary education textbooks used in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh. Its primary goal is to reveal implicit visual cues that may reinforce traditional gender roles and identities, which often go unnoticed but significantly shape students' perceptions from an early age. By analyzing textbook illustrations, the research identifies patterns of gender representation and evaluates the extent to which these depictions reflect or challenge prevailing sociocultural norms in both regions. The study emphasizes visual content, a dimension often overlooked in textbook analysis, offering a fresh perspective on how gender biases may be subtly embedded in learning materials. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators in creating more gender-sensitive educational content, ultimately supporting inclusive, equitable learning environments that foster gender equality and critical thinking among young learners.

Based on the research objectives, the preliminary conclusion indicates that visuals in primary education textbooks have the potential to convey implicit messages regarding gender roles and identities. Existing illustrations tend to reflect patriarchal norms, with males more frequently depicted in active and leadership roles, while females are often shown in domestic or passive roles. This suggests a possible reinforcement of gender stereotypes from an early age through learning materials. Based on this preliminary conclusion, the research questions are: How are gender patterns represented through illustrations in primary education textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh? To what extent do these visualizations reflect or challenge prevailing sociocultural norms? And how do implicit messages in illustrations influence students' gender perceptions at the primary education level? These questions form the basis for an in-depth analysis of gender representation and bias in educational materials.

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study adopts a qualitative and documentary approach, utilizing document review as its primary method. According to Negou et al. (2023), this methodology is effective in qualitative research for enabling an in-depth examination of texts and materials. Bowen (2009), Yin (2014), Yehl (2010), and Prior (2003) explain that documentary analysis involves a systematic and rigorous procedure for reviewing or evaluating both textual and electronic documents. This approach allows researchers to investigate complex issues through careful and interpretive examination. In this study, primary school textbooks are treated as key documents that reflect and transmit educational values. They are viewed not merely as instructional materials but also as social instruments that communicate cultural norms. Employing document review enables a critical exploration of how textbooks shape students' understanding of gender and provides insights into both the structural and visual composition of 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, the researchers employed a systematic and rigorous content analysis approach to collect data, focusing specifically on visual representations in primary school textbooks. According to Collado and Atxurra (2006), each page of the selected textbooks should be 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, following the framework proposed 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 examined for gender-based cues and roles. By isolating images with human characters, the researchers could focus on the pictorial content most likely to convey social messages related to gender, as emphasized by Banks and Zeitlyn (2015), Brown and Green (2018), and Dyer (1982).

Once human-centered visuals were identified, the researchers conducted an in-depth analysis to examine how gender roles and identities were constructed. According to Page et al. (2022), each image should be analyzed for symbolic elements such as posture, attire, activity, and context, with detailed descriptions documenting recurring themes and patterns. This descriptive phase is essential for interpreting implicit gender narratives and identifying subtle reinforcements of gender stereotypes. Ball and Smith (2017) and Prosser (2006) emphasize that rich descriptions are crucial for interpreting visual data, providing context, and enabling nuanced analyses. The researchers maintained methodological consistency by thoroughly documenting their observations to ensure transparency and replicability. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a comprehensive report, summarizing key insights and drawing meaningful conclusions about the portrayal of gender in textbooks from West Bengal and Bangladesh, as recommended by Davis and Lee (2021), Creswell (2014), and Milne and 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



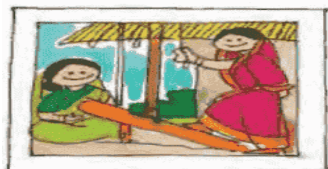
Child-caring by female
Source: Class-V “Patabahar” pp.-80



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



Bring water by females
Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-150

Food distribution by female
Source: Class-III “Amr boi” pp.-169



Female as a house cook
Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-192

Food serving by female
Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-193



Garland by female Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-217

Note: image taken from teaching module in West Bengal

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

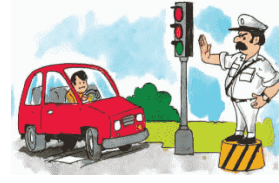
Gender Roles and Identities in Images Within Language Textbooks Of Primary Education in West Bengal



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



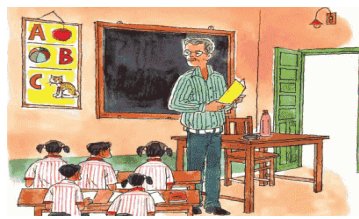
Male as a soldier; Source: Class-II
“Amr boi” pp.-234



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

Note: image taken from teaching module in West Bengal

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

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

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

Boys carrying heavy weight and Girls carrying lightweight; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-9

Human body parts showed by male; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-16

student teacher

Male as teacher and female as a student; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-31

a fat man

Healthiness showed by male; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-153

A gentleman; Source: Class-II “Amr boi” pp.-239

push

Male as strong; Source: Class-I “Amr boi” pp.-9

	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.

Sports instruments specified by gender

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 in educational materials shapes children's perceptions of social norms. In Bangladesh, primary school language textbooks serve not only for language development but also to transmit social and cultural values. Visual elements, such as illustrations, play a key role in constructing gender identities. This study examines how gender roles are visually portrayed, identifies representation patterns, and explores their potential influence on young learners' understanding and implicit biases regarding gender.

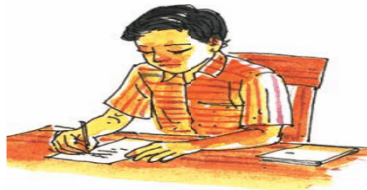
Table 5

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
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Movement by Males; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-21



Studying by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-22



Male as Solders; 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

Note: This data was taken by researchers from teaching modules in Bangladesh

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



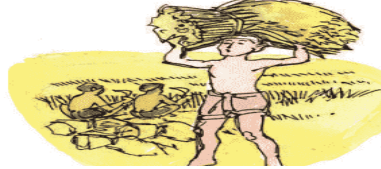
Cattle Gazing by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-12; Class-i



Males are brave and protective; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-13; Class-i



Cooked by Female; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-32; Class-i



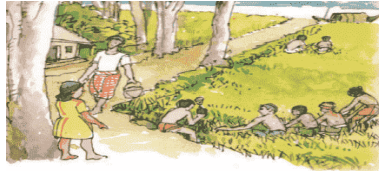
Hardworking by Male; Amar Bangla Boi; pp-35; Class-i



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

Note: This data was taken by researchers from teaching modules in Bangladesh

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 study reveals a persistent pattern of gender bias and patriarchal representation in primary-level language textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Yang (2016) interprets visual elements as reflecting a clear disparity between male and female figures, with women predominantly depicted in stereotypical roles such as caregiving, teaching, and household duties, embodying traditional femininity. In comparison, Connolly et al. (2022) observe that men are shown in active, authoritative, and socially valued roles, including farmers, market vendors, professionals, and community leaders engaged in outdoor work. Sharma et al. (2016) further argue that these contrasting representations do not merely mirror societal norms but actively reinforce them, emphasizing public, agentic roles for men and private, nurturing roles for women. Collectively, these analyses suggest that textbook visuals shape young learners' understanding of gender, subtly transmitting and normalizing entrenched ideologies while perpetuating existing social power structures in the region.

The findings of this study align with observations by Islam and Asadullah (2018), who interpret Bangladeshi school textbooks as portraying male characters predominantly in professional and leadership roles, such as scientists, businessmen, and authority figures, reflecting societal expectations of male agency and competence. In contrast, Jatav et al. (2023) and Ellemers et al. (2019) analyze female characters as frequently confined to passive, domestic, or caregiving roles, often lacking autonomy or influence. Interpreting these portrayals, Gauci et al. (2023) suggest that textbooks do not merely reflect societal inequalities but actively reinforce them. Comparatively, Islam and Asadullah (2018) argue that early exposure to such hierarchical gender representations constrains children's aspirations, particularly for girls, limiting their perception of possible societal roles and perpetuating entrenched gender norms from a young age. Collectively, these analyses indicate that textbook imagery constructs a narrow framework of gender capabilities, shaping children's understanding of socially acceptable roles.

Findings from Bangladesh indicate that similar gendered patterns are evident in primary school textbooks from West Bengal. Das (2017) interprets these textbooks as depicting men predominantly in outdoor or public spheres, such as offices, farms, and markets, symbolizing authority and active engagement, a pattern also noted by Tickner (1992). In contrast, Chatterjee (2018), Mukherjee (2019), and Bhattacharya (2020) observe that women are largely confined to domestic spaces, performing caregiving or household tasks, signaling subordination and limited societal participation, a point further analyzed by Kan and He (2018). Martin and Ruble (2004) suggest that such repeated visual narratives shape children's subconscious understanding of gender, reinforcing traditional role expectations. Comparatively, these analyses indicate that textbook imagery not only mirrors societal norms but actively constrains children's cognitive development by limiting exposure to diverse, non-traditional roles, thereby hindering the cultivation of equitable gender attitudes and perpetuating stereotypes into adulthood.

Theoretical implications and the need for reform

From a theoretical perspective, textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of gender roles and societal expectations. Foshay (1992) interprets textbooks as ideological tools that can either reinforce or challenge social inequalities, highlighting the inherent non-neutrality of educational content. Sleeter and Grant (1991) similarly argue that textbooks reflect dominant cultural values, thereby reinforcing prevailing societal norms. In the context of West Bengal and Bangladesh, Suchana (2024) observes that primary education textbooks continue to portray biased gender roles, upholding patriarchal structures, which contrasts with the more liberatory vision advocated by Ruth and Janowitch (2014), who emphasize education as a means to empower learners to critically interrogate systems of oppression. Kumlu (2024) further asserts that these materials subtly perpetuate dominant gender ideologies. Analytically, these interpretations suggest that textbooks, while appearing neutral, actively reproduce social hierarchies. Without intentional design promoting equity and inclusion, educational content risks constraining critical thinking and reinforcing entrenched gender inequalities, reflecting and perpetuating societal power imbalances.

The influence of textbook imagery on students' attitudes and aspirations is substantial, particularly in shaping perceptions of gender roles. Sadker and Zittleman (2007) interpret persistent stereotypes in educational content as signaling that females belong in domestic or subordinate roles while males occupy dominant, decision-making positions, suggesting that children internalize these roles as natural and fixed. Nurwahyuni (2015) adds that such repeated depictions implicitly convey that authority, intelligence, and leadership are inherently male traits, whereas caregiving and obedience are female attributes. Comparatively, Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) argue that these portrayals not only influence individual self-concepts but also reinforce broader societal gender disparities by normalizing traditional roles. Giang and Dan (2024) describe textbooks as silent instructors of gender norms, subtly guiding children's understanding of their potential. Shi (2023) emphasizes that revising educational content is essential to counter entrenched stereotypes,

promote equitable perceptions of gender roles, and enable children to envision diverse possibilities beyond conventional norms.

Boone et al. (1977) explain through Social Learning Theory that children acquire behaviors and social norms by observing and imitating their environment, indicating that textbook images and narratives play a pivotal role in shaping students' understanding of gender. Interpreting this perspective, Nandi et al. (2024) suggest that repeated exposure to illustrations depicting men in authoritative, public roles and women in domestic, passive positions leads children to internalize these portrayals as normative. De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina (2022) further argue that this mechanism reinforces the reproduction of gender stereotypes in everyday behavior, while Blasco and Grau-Alberola (2019) note that such depictions limit children's perception of gender possibilities beyond traditional expectations. In West Bengal and Bangladesh, Puja et al. (2024) observe that the scarcity of gender-neutral or diverse representations in primary textbooks restricts children's capacity to envision alternative roles, with the absence of women in leadership or professional positions particularly hindering the cultivation of inclusive attitudes. Collectively, these analyses emphasize the critical need for gender-sensitive reforms in educational content to foster 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.

Based on the study's findings, several theoretical and practical implications emerge. Theoretically, the results support Social Learning Theory, which asserts that children learn behaviors and social norms by observing and imitating their environment, highlighting how textbook imagery conveys gendered expectations. The study shows that primary-level visual content not only reflects societal norms but actively shapes students' understanding of gender roles, reinforcing traditional hierarchies from an early age. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for curriculum developers, textbook writers, and educators to adopt gender-sensitive content and balanced visuals. Diverse, non-stereotypical depictions and opportunities for critical reflection can foster inclusive attitudes, expand students' perceptions of roles, and promote long-term gender equality. These insights inform policy and textbook revision in West Bengal, Bangladesh, and similar contexts.

This study has limitations related to its scope and type of data sources, as the analysis focused only on primary-level language textbooks in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent conditions in other subjects, higher educational levels, or different regional contexts. In addition, the study emphasizes visual representations, while textual content and oral narratives that also influence gender perceptions were not analyzed in depth, limiting the generalizability of the results to the broader education system. Future research is recommended to expand the scope by analyzing various subjects, educational levels, and textual content, exploring the long-term effects of gender representations on students' attitudes and aspirations, and evaluating gender-sensitive curriculum interventions, including cross-country or cross-cultural comparative studies to understand variations in patriarchal influence in education.

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