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Does gender discrimination in textbooks impact the holistic development of girls?

Bhargava Ishi Harsh

Utpal Shanghvi Global School, Mumbai, Maharashtra

ABSTRACT

This report contains information on how textbooks are plagued by gender discrimination. It talks about the effect of these prejudices on different countries based on their levels of development, and how their ignorance towards changing gender roles affects the growth of the younger generations.

Keywords: *Gender Discrimination, Holistic Development, Textbooks*

‘The main hope of the nation lies in the proper education of the youth’ opines Erasmus (D, 2014). At times these educational textbooks promote prejudices and stereotypes (Rogers, 1994). History textbooks portray men to be powerful kings, having insignificant traces of any dominant female figures (Sengupta, 2007). The foundation of gender stereotyping of textbooks begin at elementary level (Masud, 2020) when children are brought up amidst all these prejudices against genders, I wonder, what effect it will have in future.

As per the Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO, textbook gender bias is a predicament for all genders (Benavot, 2016). This information is unbiased as it comes from a trustworthy global organisation. A recent study revealed that gender inequality in textbooks is seen worldwide (BBC, 2020), where illustrations depict males being better suited to jobs like doctors and police whereas females as house wives and nurse (Ramandas, 2018) Just 18 percent of women’s photos were depicted by Economic Textbooks, making them believe they are unfit for the job thus cannot achieve success (Flaherty, 2018). Such prejudiced gender norms conveyed via schoolbooks curb student’s engagement in class and border their expectations in education and life. Absence of democratic leadership support and little or no help from the community limits policy transformation that plagues textbooks with more gender bias. The patriarchal system in accordance with the social expectations require girls to be worthy human beings, while boys are exempted from these lessons resulting in increased criminal records (European Institution for Gender Equality, 2017) As per research, 75.65% of all lawbreakers are males (Strictland, 2017) In my opinion, vulnerable teenagers may lose prestigious opportunities due to gender favouritism (Benavot, 2016). Inspired by Maharashtra State Bureau of Textbook Production and Curriculum Research of 2019, I believe that other country’s government should revise the textbooks and illustrate more positive female role models. Equity in education should also be maintained across the globe.

Pictures and stories in American textbooks promote the ideas of girls being petite figures. They also show boys as athletic, rugged males. This discourages girls from taking up sports, resulting in them having poor fitness levels challenging them to face a troubled life. (Uzoma, 2018) Sometimes, it also causes boys who are lanky to develop negative self-image causing a poor self-esteem. At an early age, societal stereotypes instil that a corporate career is not for women and even if they choose to perceive it, the glass ceiling keeps them from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy. Another research revealed that 70% of working staff in the hospitality sector comprised of females. This data is free of bias and sounds accurate and recent as it is updated (Eggers, 2017).

According to World Economic Forum’s 2020 Gender Gap Index, Indonesia stands 85th in 153 countries (World Economic Forum, 2020). 90% of girls in Indonesia are enrolled in school, yet in 2015, only 50% of females were employed (Valev, 2019) reason being the prevailing gender stereotypes where illustrations depict women staying at home and males earning money (Perasso, 2017). Another reason for textbook bias was underrepresentation of female characters in English curricula, 40.5% as compared to 62.4% male characters (Asadullah, 2020). This unbiased information is recent and updated. I strongly believe, textbook stereotypes result

in boys believing that they are superior to girls making them speak in a condescending manner, peeling away their self-confidence. In my opinion, individuals should opt for any profession of their choice irrespective of their gender.

In Pakistan only 47% women are literate compared to 73% men (Plecher, 2020). The lack of religious freedom is one definite reason for this. It is a very well-known reality that the culture in Pakistan is full of gender roles and their community does not consider men and women to be equivalent and assume women are weak and do not deserve qualification (Blumberg, 2015). These statistics may not be completely accurate as they are slightly outdated and may contain some bias. Only 24 images of females were depicted in English textbooks of secondary school. E-textbooks for grade 10 illustrated 54.4% images depicting males and only 45.5% females. Three textbooks of 11th standard represented pictorial illustrations of 58.6% men compared to 41.3% women. When 8 textbooks of 12th standard were examined, it represented 49.6% images of males whereas 46.2% of females. After analysing these eye opening statistics, I feel such gender bias in Pakistani textbooks definitely hinders the delicate mind of learners.

As stated earlier, Indonesia has a female literacy rate of 90%. On the contrary Pakistan has a meagre female literacy rate of 47 % (Srivastava, 2019). This means that more children in Indonesia were exposed to textbooks portraying gender bias.

Gender bias is something that is ingrained in our culture and extricating it will be a tough task. A reform minded government that encourages equity in education should be appointed. On a national level, the government should issue new textbooks that portray women as pilots, doctors and engineers and recruit experts to review these publications (Mattu, 2016). Educational Institutions should take up cookery as a compulsory subject in school to break the traditional mind-set that Boys don't cook. I believe, teachers should act as catalyst in achieving multi-ethnic goals and reduce prejudices from a student's life by discouraging grouping by gender and welcoming inclusion (Rogers, 1994). I will start a reading club after school and motivate members to read books featuring strong female protagonists (Catherine, 2019).

This report has helped me become a feminist. Before research, I knew gender bias prevails but not in textbooks. During research, the articles and blogs I referred to made me conscious that females are underrepresented and portrayed in stereotypical roles in textbooks worldwide. Now, I comprehend such bias approach towards gender acts as hidden obstacle and hinders the holistic development of individuals. I vouch to always stand up for my gender. To quote the song "Legendary", 'We're turning HISTORY, into HER-STORY!' (Robinson, 2018)

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