

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender Equity Teaching in Primary Education: Is the Fifth Grade NCTB *English for Today* Textbook Gender-Inclusive for the Students in Bangladesh?

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the fifth grade NCTB textbook of English for Today for instances of gender equity and the analysis based on theories of Representation, Gender Performativity and Cognitive Development to deduce whether the mentioned textbook is gender-inclusive to a significant degree. The research incorporates primary data from the textbook, with evidence of activities, professions, and instances, to argue if the socio-cultural representations are ‘gendered’. This research functions as a response to the gender discriminatory issues and existing unequal treatments, especially toward the women. The purpose of this research is to bridge the gap between the current textbook and one particular mission of the National Curriculum Framework 2021 – “To ensure a sensitive, accountable, integrated, and participatory education system”. The qualitative data analysis utilizes the techniques of content analysis, thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis from the lexical and illustration data. The finding suggests that the textbook in concern is gender-equitable ‘to a certain extent’ as there is sufficient evidence, with room for improvement in particular areas. This finding helps the NCTB textbook writers to address whether there is any shortcoming and make necessary improvement in the following editions. The limitation of this paper is that it fails to incorporate the issues of third gender due to the sizable discussion it demands alone. Further research can be conducted on both third gender’s inclusiveness to the textbooks as well as the theoretical impact of equitable representations. This study maintains a methodological rigor through its theoretical framework, systemic data collection and analysis to ensure a comprehensive and reliable evaluation gender equity in the textbook.

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1. Introduction

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in Bangladesh is responsible for developing and maintaining the national curriculum for primary, secondary, and higher secondary education. Its primary goal is to ensure a standardized and quality education system throughout the country. As the

National Education Policy 2012 prioritizes the primary education of Bangladesh, NCTB develops and updates the curriculum based on the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education¹ on the basis of the National Curriculum Framework 2021². It covers various subjects, including Bengali, English, mathematics, science, social science, and more. The curriculum outlines the learning objectives, content, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies for each subject at different levels of education. Also, the *Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)*³: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*, aspires to a shared vision when it comes to primary education and gender equity teaching.

Why is teaching gender necessary in the current context of Bangladesh? Despite the policy changes by the government that are widely implemented across organizations and institutions, gender discrimination and inequality is still at large throughout the country. According to a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2015⁴, approximately 87% of ever-married women in Bangladesh have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime, despite all the regulations and promotions of gender equality and equity.

It is one instance out of many where women are hierarchized, mistreated and denied equal access to some of the most basic rights, let alone all-equal opportunities and treatments. No policy can bear fruits of harmonious relationship

¹https://nctb.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nctb.portal.gov.bd/page/0d5a8524_e5bc_4bfc_9e14_985380773fa9/2023-04-05-05-53eb730ced57e4704a4e10e83b40a6d305.pdf

²https://nctb.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nctb.portal.gov.bd/page/0d5a8524_e5bc_4bfc_9e14_985380773fa9/2023-04-05-05-53eb730ced57e4704a4e10e83b40a6d305.pdf

³ <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/4-quality-education/>

⁴<http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/SubjectMatterDataIndex/YearBook15.pdf>

between male-female in the society if there exists the preconceived notion of superiority, prejudice and bias within individuals. Thus, teaching of equity among genders from early stages of an individual is left as a viable way of finding resolution to this crisis.

In terms of lessons regarding gender equity, the NCTB has explored various solutions to render the education system effective for the students of Bangladesh across all districts. Alterations have been made in the previous years, dating back to textbooks written under the curriculum of 2012, marking the temporality as the inception point of such approach. While the NCTB's efforts are aimed at providing a comprehensive and quality education to students across Bangladesh, promoting standardization, and preparing students for higher education and the challenges of the modern world, this underlying approach of gender equity teaching has been welcomed by critics. However, how effective it is when it comes to practicality begs a thorough reading of these textbooks to identify the instances that challenge the preconceived gender notions and deconstruct the binary oppositional hierarchies which preexist in our society.

It requires gender sensitive contents that represent equity in access and participation of both genders and break the stereotypes from a very early age. Theorists like Lawrence Kohlberg and Judith Butler account for the importance associated with endorsing the values at such an age because this is the foundation upon which the following conceptions are generally built upon.

The very first social institution other than family where the young children can be taught values of equity is their earliest visit to the schooling system – the primary education. According to UNESCO⁵, around 16,230,000 students are enrolled into primary schools each year in Bangladesh. It shows the impact can be made potentially if the basic conceptions are laid deeper that speaks the words of gender equity.

⁵ <https://uis.unesco.org/country/BD>

Therefore, this paper identifies a social phenomenon such as gender inequality and discrimination, reaches the root of an individual's psychological development and recognizes the potential for primary education to contribute to eradicating this issue from within. Theorists who have worked on gender-related fields are held as the intellectual guidelines for this paper while discourse analysis and study representation are the recurrent methods for assessing the data collected from NCTB's latest edition primary *English for Today* textbook.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The objective of this paper is to investigate the latest Fifth Grade NCTB *English for Today* textbook to assess whether this textbook is gender-inclusive and to analyze the potential outcomes based on acclaimed theories.

1.2 Rationale of the study

Primarily, this paper identifies gender discrimination and inequality in the Bangladeshi society as a major issue that requires immediate response from different levels. Also, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 aspires to 'Eliminate All Discrimination in Education' by 2030, which is in alignment with the goal of this paper. Although this issue can be confronted from different perceptions, the reason behind placing the NCTB primary curriculum in the foreground has to do with the concept of learning from an early age and its significant impact on society. Concepts like gender or other socio-cultural phenomena can be taught without bias to this particular age-group within an institutional system, and learning with the surrounding as well as societal interaction will not only render equitable learning effective, but also make English language learning more efficient. On that note, NCTB at the moment stands out for 'the latest revision of the curricula brought about a wave of change that signals a step in the positive direction' (Siddique, 2023). Since *English for Today* is the only NCTB textbook that teaches the English language, it sets the foundation to satisfy the growing need of English language proficiency in the technology-driven world of the 21st century – as stated by the NCTB chairman Professor Dr. A K M Reazul Hassan. Most of the assessments have been made with the secondary curriculum while the

primary is less attended but supposedly carry a higher potential for impact on the young minds. Thus, this paper has borrowed concepts from prominent critics and investigated deep into the Fifth Grade NCTB *English for Today* textbook to find out if, and to what extent, the textbook is gender-inclusive so that a society that practices gender equity can be envisioned.

2. Literature Review

The core issue that this paper is challenging is gender inequality which contributes to discrimination in Bangladesh. United Nations General Assembly's Article 1 states⁶ in 1979: "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

It is evident in the context of Bangladesh as well, that this phenomenon is at large in different levels of the society and culture. "Although, there has been steady progress in reducing gender inequality in different sectors (education, health, employment etc.) there exists a huge inequality in these sectors of Bangladesh and participation of women is very low compared to their male counterparts. Gender inequality has appeared as the major stumbling barrier in achieving the development targets" (Gender Inequality in Bangladesh, 2011, p. 5).

According to UNICEF⁷, "It (gender equity) refers to differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or differences between the sexes. Equity ensures that women and men and girls and boys have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Genderglossarytermsandconcepts.pdf>

⁸ https://www.academia.edu/29414316/Bangladesh_Education_Sector_Mapping

⁹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345983471_Gender_Analysis_of_NCTB_textbooks_corresponding_to_the_usage_of_Language

reaching the finishing line. It is about the fair and just treatment of both sexes that takes into account the different needs of the men and women, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group” (Gender Equality: Glossary of Terms and Concepts, 2017, p. 3).

An extension of work by Priess and Hyde in the *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* in 2011 argues that, “The cognitive development approach to gender, pioneered by Lawrence Kohlberg, contends that children’s ideas about gender develop in a stage-like manner. That is, as children gain knowledge of the gendered world around them, their thinking about gender changes in qualitative ways” (p. 101). So it is evident that a child’s earlier stages are most crucial when it comes to attaining values on society and culture, in this case, on gender, its diversity and equity.

In the work titled “Bangladesh Education Sector Mapping”⁸ by Manzoor Ahmed , Khondoker Shakhawat Ali and Kishwar Kamal Khan from BRAC IED, the key takeaway on gender is that there is a lack of equal inclusiveness between male and female students, with the latter dropping significantly in number. Action Aid’s work “Gender Inequality in Bangladesh” suggests that “literacy rate of female might be 60.68 percent at national level in 2014, which is 39.32 percent lower than the National Education Policy (NEP, 2010) target of 100 percent” (Ferdaush & Rahman, 2010, p. 9).

Other works on gender sensitive language in NCTB textbook draws the data from “class six, class seven, and class eight and analyses to distinguish whether there exists any proof of disparity in terms of the portrayal of gender through any entity (lexical items, images, other tools including graphical data, chart, etc.)” (Sakib, 2020, p. 1)⁹. Similar secondary curriculum study with gender analysis on the backdrop was conducted by Molla Huq in 2008, with the older curriculum which isn’t relevant today and it has been 15 years since such studies had been published

by researchers. Furthermore, Mian Md. Naushaad Kabir's discussion of "incorporating literature into second or foreign language (L2 or FL) teaching has been noticed, especially at the higher secondary (the last stage of K-12) level in Bangladesh" (2021, p. 202) works with NCTB *English for Today* but disregards primary level textbooks. Only Afroza Aziz Suchana extensively worked on the grade 5 textbook to remark that "visibility and participation of women and men are not equally found in images and dictions" (2021b, p. 310). However, Suchana's discussion quantifies in/equal representations, but is very limited in highlighting the impact on that particular age group of students. An example of teaching in government schools, explored by J M Saiful Islam, suggests that teachers "do not try new examples and they do not think the examples are gender biased" (2021, p. 43).

So the insignificance of whether the primary curriculum is inclusive of the two genders, namely male and female, is clearly identified. And it is pushed even further with the question whether the current 2025 primary curriculum by NCTB (majority of which had been sketched out in 2018) disseminates the teachings of gender equity among the young pupils. This paper, therefore, takes the initiative of collecting data from the latest primary NCTB textbooks from Bangla Medium (equivalent to the English Version), in the shape of recurrent images, taxonomy and discourses that are closely tied with ideas of gender equity, or the lack of it.

3. Theoretical Framework

The approach of data collection and analysis this paper undertakes requires both a theoretical backbone with conceptual framework to proceed effectively. Theoretical framework endorses three interconnected theories of revered thinkers and theorists while the conceptual framework is sketched out based on those theories with the methodological approach in mind. This conceptual framework will set the parameters for the qualitative values to aid in assessment whether the NCTB *English for Today* textbook is effective to improve gender sensitivity for the Bangladeshi primary school students or not.

3.1 Lawrence Kohlberg: Cognitive Development Theory

Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive development theory primarily focused on moral reasoning, but he also made contributions to understanding gender development. According to Kohlberg, children's understanding of gender develops through a series of stages, much like their moral reasoning.

In his theory, Gender Constancy is the stage that typically occurs between the ages of five and seven. At this point, children comprehend that gender is biologically determined and does not change based on appearance, clothing, or behavior. They recognize that boys will grow up to be men, and girls will grow up to be women.

He suggests that children's gender development progresses as they acquire cognitive abilities and a more advanced understanding of the world. However, it is important to note that Kohlberg's theory has been criticized for not considering the social and cultural influences on gender development, as it primarily focuses on individual cognitive processes.

Kohlberg's theory is selected because it identifies the key aspect of age for children's learning of gender identities and values. The limitations are acknowledged and to make up for that, Judith Butler's thoughts are included in the framework that helps in building this research.

3.2 Judith Butler: Gender Performativity

Judith Butler is a prominent philosopher and gender theorist known for her concept of "gender performativity." Butler challenges the traditional understanding of gender as a fixed and innate characteristic, arguing that gender is not something we are, but something we do.

According to Butler, gender is not determined by biology or essential traits but is instead constructed through a series of repetitive acts and performances. Gender identity is formed and maintained through the continual repetition of culturally prescribed behaviors, gestures, and expressions that are considered appropriate for a particular gender.

Butler argues that gender is a social and cultural construct, and these performative acts create the illusion of a stable gender identity. By performing gender in accordance with societal norms, individuals are recognized and classified as either male or female.

However, Butler also critiques the restrictive nature of gender norms and argues for the possibility of challenging and subverting these norms through acts of gender nonconformity and disruption. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing that gender is not a fixed or natural category but a fluid and malleable construct that can be deconstructed and reconstructed.

3.3 Stuart Hall: Representation

Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist and sociologist, examined the representation of gender in various forms of media, including textbooks. He argued that media representations, including textbooks, play a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing cultural norms and ideologies related to gender.

According to Hall, representations of gender in textbooks are not neutral or objective but are constructed through specific cultural, social, and historical contexts. These representations often reinforce and perpetuate existing gender stereotypes, norms, and power dynamics within society.

Hall highlighted the importance of analyzing how gender is represented in textbooks and other media forms, as these representations contribute to the formation of individuals' gender identities and shape their understanding of gender roles and expectations. He emphasized that these representations are not fixed or natural but are socially constructed and subject to change over time.

Hall also argued that media representations are not only reflective of existing social norms but also have the power to shape and influence these norms. Therefore, challenging and transforming gender representations in textbooks can contribute to broader social and cultural change by promoting more inclusive, diverse, and equitable understandings of gender.

4. Methodology of the study

The methodology section describes the tools, techniques and methods utilized in this paper to collect and analyze the data with justification of each part to ensure the clarity of the progression for this research. This paper conducts qualitative research since the gender inclusive instances are argumentative and the degree or the extent cannot be numerically measured. The research philosophy incorporates interpretivism since the implicit as well as the explicit data need to be interpreted using concepts and theories rather than measured in any given scale. The approach is both deductive and inductive due to the nature of the data and its interaction with the research question that provokes the research.

For this research, the data collection method includes textual and visual analysis from the primary NCTB English for Today textbook since the interpretive approach functions based on the representations of both genders. The sampling strategy for this paper is systematic as it thoroughly investigates lexical data and illustrations to identify and highlight the instances of gendered activities. The data is primary since the only source is the NCTB English for Today at primary level, thus it is reliable to address the research question that dictates the argument of this paper. The data analysis incorporates three methods of content analysis, thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. Content analysis directly refers to the excerpts from the textbook while thematic analysis interprets them from a gender equity spectrum. Critical discourse analysis then furthers the discussion by attempting to make assessment based on the theoretical backdrops. The textbook is a mere reflection of the curriculum designed by NCTB, thus dissecting this textbook is one of the most valid methods to evaluate the gender inclusive nature of the curriculum.

5. Data Analysis & Discussion

The data analysis chapter gathers all the instances of the latest primary NCTB English for Today textbook. From textual analysis, instances are identified and are further discussed in light of the theoretical framework. The English for Today textbook is dissected, words and phrases related to gender identified, illustrations interpreted and overall inclusion of both genders are highlighted.

The following textbook is the focal point of this paper, from which all the evidences are drawn out for further analyses:

Class 5	
Book Name	Writers
<i>English for Today</i>	Shaheen M. Kabir, A. M. M. Hamidur Rahman, Md. Zulfeqar Haider, Gautam Roy

5.1 NCTB Textbooks: Class 5

Despite the attempts at gender inclusive textbook composition, the class 5 edition of *English for Today* stands out as a degree of disappointment in this regard. In page 10, Mrs. Monwara Islam represents the traditional notion of a ‘housewife’ mother who performs all the household chores and enjoys sewing during her idle hours. She also receives sewing orders from her friends and neighbors, allowing her to earn based on performing a passionate activity. This challenges a social norm where women are prevented from accessing the economy – especially if she is a housewife or homemaker.

However, if the difference of leisure time activity between Mr. and Mrs. Islam is contrasted, the male individual seems to be spending more time in creative activity while the female counterpart has to find a means to convert her passion into an economic endeavor. As highlighted by Suchana, “Saikat’s family picture shows the stereotypical representation of women. His mother is only presented in domestic roles. The male character is not shown doing household chores” (Suchana, 2020a, p. 46). While NCTB’s attempt has been to highlight that housewives can also contribute to or take part in the economy, the stark contrast with her male counterpart lays bare how challenging it is for a housewife to earn money realistically.

Page 16 instances out a female model under the category of fashion. It paves into the patriarchal ideology of presenting women as objects to be desired as well as the standardization of beauty – both of which have their own impact on disbalancing the gender equity approach. On the same page, the sports category

shows three different instances of kabaddi, cricket and football – all showcasing male individuals associated with the genres – a representation that undermines women’s contribution or existence in these fields. Instead, they are restricted to fashion modeling, another contrastive notion that can direct the ideological development of a young student.

On page 34, the story of Raju becoming a firefighter is an inspiring one for many younglings and a lesson of discipline along with selflessness. It also highlights one social issue in Bangladesh, why are female students not allowed to participate in a volunteer fire department? Until 2023, no woman ever joined the forces and it began with 15 individuals¹⁰ to set a record. Whereas in the UK, first women to work in the fire department dates back to 1879¹¹. In terms of representation, what NCTB has illustrated is true for the context of the country.



Figure 1: Contrastive gender images of fashion and sports supporting stereotypical gender roles

A commendable illustration and description takes place in page 63. A mother is seen asking her son Azim to put the dishes in the kitchen. This occurrence is a valuable depiction that distorts the patriarchal, invisible line of household chores

¹⁰<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/15-women-join-fire-service-firefighters-first-time-history-742410>

¹¹ <https://sfjwards.com/key-milestones-for-women-in-fire-and-rescue/>

that are often segregated for each gender. Page 66 attempts to amend the contrastive gender stereotype of page 16. Here, Anousha, a female individual is expressing her interest in playing football, often remarked as a men-only sport sphere in Bangladesh's social context. The illustration at the top of the page also breaks stereotypes regarding gendered sports.



Figure 2: Representation of athletes from both genders challenging stereotypical roles

Throughout the textbook, a female in profession and a mother never interacts. Meaning, a mother is never portrayed as someone who is a professional in a particular field, or a professional never shown with motherhood. While Mrs. Islam's sewing journey as a housewife functions as a fragile attempt at bridging this gap, however, a professional woman experiencing motherhood is nowhere mentioned. Such fragmentation of women's choices place a hierarchy within the same gender and establish designated pathways of motherhood or professional journey that rarely cross their ways within textually inaccurate representations.

5.2 Impact of Representation in NCTB *English for Today* Textbook

Borrowing from Stuart Hall, the representation of gender equity in textbooks can have a significant impact on young students in numerous ways. Most of the representations in the NCTB *English for Today* textbook have occurred either as images or concepts in texts. The implications of such representational instances can be manifold and are discussed in this section.

5.2.1 Cognitive Development

Gender equal NCTB textbooks help broaden students' cognitive horizons by exposing them to a diverse range of roles, experiences, and perspectives. This exposure encourages critical thinking, curiosity, and a more comprehensive understanding of the world, fostering cognitive development.

5.2.2 Shaping Perceptions and Attitudes

Primary level textbooks are powerful tools for shaping students' perceptions of gender roles and expectations. When textbooks depict a balanced representation of both genders in various roles, professions, and activities, it can challenge traditional stereotypes and promote the idea that anyone, regardless of their gender, can excel in different fields. Thus, although it is appreciated that NCTB has attempted to involve both the genders in many of the activities that were deemed as 'gendered', some limitations like 'female objectification as fashion models' or 'mothers as housewives' must be addressed. Aside from the professions factor, the shaping of perception on granting equal access to the discussed activities should alter from the traditional path that believes in segregation of boy-girl within the social sphere.

5.2.3 Breaking Down Gender-Based Barriers

Gender representation shown in the textbook can also break down barriers that might have previously discouraged certain genders from pursuing particular fields. For instance, if being an athlete or a firefighter are consistently portrayed as only male-dominated fields, female students might feel discouraged. However, by showing diverse individuals excelling in these subjects, more students across the gender boundaries may feel encouraged to pursue them.

5.2.4 Reduction of Gender Bias

The concept that gender is performative, as discussed by critic Judith Butler, challenges traditional notions of gender being solely biologically determined and fixed. Instead, it suggests that gender is constructed through a series of repeated actions, behaviors, and expressions. This perspective is subtly incorporated into the NCTB textbooks, as suggested by the evidence, can indeed inspire young students to break free from gender discrimination in several ways.

The *English for Today* NCTB textbook presents a significant amount of fair and equal portrayal of genders that can help reduce gender bias and discrimination. Students are less likely to develop prejudiced attitudes when they are exposed to positive and inclusive representations from a young age, that includes the imageries and access of writers into the textbooks from both genders.

5.2.5 Empowerment and Aspirations

When young students observe people of all genders succeeding in diverse fields in their textbooks, it can help to broaden their aspirations. On such note, the textual evidence suggests that this can lead to greater self-confidence and a belief that they too can pursue any career or interest they're passionate about, irrespective of their gender. For instance, the textbook shows examples of doctors, athletes, teachers – both with almost equal access of male and female individuals who are the epitomes of empowerment.

5.2.6 Equitable Learning Environment

When textbooks depict gender equity, it sends a message that all students are valued and respected. This contributes to creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, which is essential for promoting overall student well-being and academic success. But this manner of composing textbooks isn't enough alone because the teachers as well as the school authority must reinforce such practices within the classroom environment, otherwise the learning would only be limited to concepts and not real life habituation.

5.2.7 Critical Thinking and Discussion

Inclusion of gender-equitable content in such primary textbooks should encourage students to think critically about societal norms and stereotypes. This can lead to discussions in classrooms, where students can analyze and question prevailing gender roles, fostering a deeper understanding of social issues. For instance, when they encounter boys participating in household chores or girls playing football, it would open up a gateway for discussion as it challenges the students' preconceived notions on gender roles and the segregations. Step by step, from discomfort, curiosity to discussions and critical thinking, the students will be able to gain insight on gender roles in the society and all the credit goes to the gender representations in the NCTB textbook.

5.2.8 Embracing Authenticity

Understanding that gender is performative encourages students to embrace their authentic selves. They may feel empowered to express themselves in ways that resonate with their true identities, without feeling constrained by societal expectations. This can lead to increased self-confidence and mental well-being. It could start with female students participating in the 'so called' male student activities and vice-versa following the examples presented in the NCTB curriculum.

5.2.9 Challenging Norms and Stereotypes

The *English for Today* textbook from NCTB emphasizes the performative nature of gender that challenges the traditional stereotypes and roles associated with different genders. By highlighting that such roles are not inherent but rather socially constructed, students can become more aware of how societal norms can limit individual expression and potential. The instances of girls playing football or swimming, or the fact that boys are allowed to join girls in such sports activities is a direct challenge to the norms and stereotypes embedded in our society. With such small steps, our society and with it, the country can get rid of this curse of discrimination for good when these young students come of age and assume the helm of social leadership in different positions.

However, it is important to note that the impact of textbook content is influenced by various factors, including the broader cultural context, classroom teaching practices, and the attitudes of educators and parents. While inclusive textbooks are a crucial step, they should be complemented by supportive teaching strategies that encourage critical thinking and open dialogue about gender equity issues.

5.3 Discussion and Findings

The findings of this research based on the analysis of the fifth-grade NCTB *English for Today* textbook suggest a mixed landscape concerning gender inclusivity. Although there are several instances of gender equitable representations, certain stereotypical and unequal notions still persist throughout the textbook that require attention and improvement. The key findings are as follows:

5.3.1 Presence of Gender Stereotypes

Despite the attempts made by NCTB to promote gender inclusivity, certain instances reinforce traditional gender roles. As portrayed by Mrs. Monwara Islam, women are often predominantly represented in domestic roles, trying to earn money by sewing (Page 10). Additionally, the side by side illustrations of women in fashion and men in sports or in the firefighter position reinforce the segregated professional roles between men and women. Furthermore, association of women in fashion reinforce the beauty-centric, objectifiable representation of women.

5.3.2 Positive Instances of Gender Equity

There exists certain progressive gender equitable contents on the textbook that challenge the gender norms. For instance, boys are seen participating performing household chores, evidenced by Azim in page 63. In addition, girls are represented in engaging male-dominated sports like football and instances of both male and female figures portray them in respectable professional fields like doctors and teachers.

5.3.3 Absence of Intersectional Roles for Women

All of the female characters are shown in a linear path – a mother and an outgoing professional remain two segregated arcs and these two paths don't diverge for any portrayal. While Mrs. Monwara Islam's character is a feeble attempt at bridging a homemaker with access to economy, it does so by keeping her within the confinements of home. Overall, it limits the aspirational scope for young students, especially girls, by not illustrating multidimensional women figures who are capable of balancing multiple roles.

Both positive and stereotypical gender representations carry significant importance in shaping children's perception of gender roles. Equitable illustrations can greatly help reduce the bias, arouse a sense of inclusivity and encourage young students to pursue diverse roles in their lives, irrespective of the gender roles set by a traditional society.

6. Conclusion

From all of the evidence gathered from the fifth-grade English for Today textbook and analyses conducted in the shadow of the critical theories, the conclusion suggests that the current version of the textbook is gender inclusive to a significant degree. In terms of percentage of representation, "there is roughly equal representation in all these categories, which illuminates a positive trend toward gender equality" (Rimpu, 2024, p. 24). As the discussion suggests, such inclusive instances throughout the textbook carry great potential to enforce perceptions with great regards to gender equity and sensitize the students about the discriminatory aspects at an early age. The representations are for most parts reinforcing such conceptions and the performative aspects are subtly handled by NCTB textbook writers. Such learnings at early ages can not only help the students to see things from a gender lens, but also raise dialogues that are much needed to reform a society that believes in gender equity.

The importance of early learning has been stressed through the Cognitive Development Theory and the aftermath can be assessed within a few years of time

when the primary students are of age to form mature discussions about gender discrimination and equality. While previous research has been either conducted with older NCTB textbooks or lay prime focus on the secondary curriculum, this paper adds to the overall study of the particular textbook responsible for learning English. Although the textbook still has room for improvement, like the very few instances that fail to implicate gender equity teachings like segregation of a working mother from motherhood or reinforcing stereotypical gender roles, expectation dictates such instances to be addressed in the coming issues of the textbooks.

Furthermore, an important factor for the entire matter of gender equity teaching relies heavily on the teachers who deliver their lectures on a day to day basis. Such primary teachers carry a great burden of responsibility and therefore need to be impactfully trained beforehand to be able to identify the importance of such teachings. They are also accountable to efficiently deliver the implied messages to the pupils to bear fruit out of NCTB's work that the entire society will benefit from. Otherwise, no amount of textbook alteration would be able to address, challenge and improve the pre-existing gender-oriented socio-cultural challenges. With adequate teaching, sensitization about gender discrimination and seeing the true face of the issue will help children grow up with a newfound perception deeply embedded within their conscience and inclusive behavior will follow naturally.

The recommendations based on this research is that, it can serve as the basis for impact analysis by interviewing the relevant teachers and the students. Also, similar research can be conducted on other NCTB textbooks, from different classes and subjects. Additionally, the concept of third gender is not included in this research. This can be brought to light at an earlier level of NCTB textbooks to sensitive the students from a young age so that it's perceived as a natural phenomenon, without imposing hierarchies.

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