

Gender Representation in NCERT English Language Textbooks at the Middle School Level

Dr. Ranjita Marak¹; Sandhya Tiwari²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Vasanta College for Women, Varanasi, India

²M.Ed., Department of Education, Vasanta College for Women, Admitted to the privileges of Banaras Hindu University, India

Corresponding Author Email: ranjita.vasantabhu@gmail.com

Abstract—Textbooks are not only instructional materials but also cultural instruments that shape learners' perceptions, values, and social identities. In the context of language education, especially in English, textbooks play a significant role in transmitting ideologies through text and imagery. This study critically investigates gender representation in English language textbooks published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for middle school students (Classes VI to VIII), specifically '*Honeysuckle*', '*Honeycomb*', and '*Honeydew*'. Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilizes thematic content analysis to examine both textual and visual elements within the textbooks. The analysis is organized into five key themes: Author, Gender Representation through Animals, Occupation, Role Models, and Visual Representation. Findings reveal notable disparities in the frequency, roles, and contexts in which male and female characters are depicted. Males are often portrayed in active, leadership, and professional roles, while females appear less frequently and are typically assigned passive or domestic roles. Furthermore, the study highlights the complete absence of transgender representation across all three textbooks, reinforcing a binary and exclusionary view of gender. The research concludes that as student progress through grades, textbooks increasingly reinforce traditional gender roles, limiting inclusive and diverse representations.

Keywords: Gender representation, English language textbook, NCERT, Middle school level

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is more than a mechanism for disseminating knowledge, it is a powerful social institution that shapes identities, promotes core values, and nurtures social cohesion. As a foundation of democratic life, education enables individuals across gender, caste, religion, and socioeconomic backgrounds to participate equally in society (NCF, 2005). Among the many instructional resources used in schools, the textbook holds a central role guiding pedagogical practice and structuring students' learning experiences (Putra et al., 2024).

Textbooks, traditionally viewed as repositories of academic content, also function as cultural artifacts. They convey societal values, reinforce ideologies, and reflect prevailing norms, often becoming silent agents of socialization (Miranda & Nurbatra, 2019). In particular, language textbooks go beyond teaching grammar and vocabulary; they introduce students to literary narratives, characters, and contexts that subtly influence their worldview (NCF, 2005). Through these texts, students internalize ideas about identity, morality, and social roles (Nurhidayah et al., 2023). In India, English has come to symbolize educational aspiration and access to national and global opportunities. Though rooted in colonial history, English today serves as a bridge to higher education, global interaction, and intellectual development. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) emphasizes the role of English in fostering multilingual competence and transferable cognitive skills, while also facilitating learners' awareness of diverse cultures and identities.

However, alongside these academic functions, English textbooks often reproduce deep-rooted gender norms. Gender, unlike biological sex, is a social and cultural construct shaped through lifelong processes of socialization such as naming, role allocation, and differential exposure to activities (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). These processes are reflected in educational content, where male characters are frequently portrayed as leaders or adventurers, while female characters appear in passive, supportive, or domestic roles (Muzdalifah et al., 2021). The images and narratives presented in textbooks shape children's understanding of gender, influencing how they perceive themselves and others including their aspirations, behavior, and sense of self-worth.

Such depictions contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, rigid societal assumptions about appropriate roles and behaviors for men and women which significantly affect students' academic interests, confidence, and career pathways

(Gharbavi, 2012). The *Global Gender Gap Report (2020)* highlights that the underrepresentation of women in textbooks remains a global issue, reinforcing traditional gender roles and sustaining structural inequality across generations. Early studies in India, such as those by the National Conference on Women's Studies (NWS, 1981), also revealed the near invisibility of women and girls in curricula. Subsequent analyses by the Department of Women's Studies at NCERT in the 1990s identified a partial and tokenistic inclusion of women, with stereotypical portrayals still dominating textbook narratives (NCERT, 2013–14). Moreover, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), stress the importance of inclusive, equitable learning environments that challenge gender bias and promote empowerment for all learners (Dawar & Anand, 2017). Yet, despite these global commitments, textbook content continues to reflect outdated gender roles rather than challenge them. Therefore, while textbooks are essential academic tools, they also play a pivotal role in shaping social attitudes. This research critically examines English language textbooks through a gender lens, analyzing both textual and visual elements to uncover the subtle and persistent ways in which gender stereotypes are embedded. This study underscores the need for gender-sensitive textbook design to promote equitable and inclusive education. The findings aim to support educational reform by encouraging a more balanced and empowering representation of all genders in instructional content.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A considerable body of research has explored how gender stereotypes are perpetuated through educational materials, particularly English language textbooks. Scholars have identified consistent patterns of gender bias across different countries, educational levels, and cultural contexts. These biases are not only reflected in the visibility of male and female characters but also in the language, illustrations, and roles assigned to them.

Bowker (1996), in a foundational study on children's picture books, revealed that male characters were more prominent in both titles and illustrations. Adjectives describing male characters were often linked to strength and action, while those for females suggested passivity and traditional femininity. Similarly, Sovic and Hus (2015), through semiotic analysis, found that males were frequently portrayed as adventurous and active, whereas females appeared passive and socially conforming. These gendered portrayals in early learning materials set the foundation for internalized stereotypes among children.

Several researchers have highlighted the greater visibility and dominance of male characters in both text and imagery. Ansary (2003) reported that women were largely invisible or confined to indoor and traditional roles in ESL/EFL textbooks. Supporting this, studies by Bahman and Rahimi (2010), Amini and Birjandi (2012), and Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) found that male figures consistently outnumbered female ones and were assigned professional or leadership positions, while women were typically shown in subordinate or domestic roles. Parashar and Singh (2020), examining NCERT textbooks in India, found similar patterns, noting that male characters were often linked to active and prestigious occupations, while female characters were largely confined to supportive functions.

Cross-cultural research has further emphasized the universality of gender bias in educational texts. Foroutan (2012) identified a dominance of male representation in Iranian textbooks across Persian, Arabic, and English subjects. Islam and Asadullah (2018), in a comparative study of textbooks in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, found that women were often excluded or misrepresented, thereby reinforcing traditional stereotypes that undermine gender equity goals. In India, Bhattacharya (2017) and Singh and Bammi (2013) confirmed that English textbooks continued to reflect male-dominated narratives and visuals, despite progress in educational gender equity. In Ethiopia, Bachore (2022) similarly noted the underrepresentation of female characters, particularly in illustrations and proper nouns.

Language structure and lexical choices have also been scrutinized. Hameed (2012) found that English textbooks used in Punjab featured gender-biased language, particularly in adjective usage and semantic roles, reinforcing male-centered perspectives. Tajeddian and Enayat (2010) observed that linguistic patterns favored male prominence through generic masculine terms and frequent use of "firstness," placing men before women in sentence structures. Iswansyah and Ardini (2023) further highlighted stereotypical occupational portrayals in Indonesian textbooks, where men were consistently depicted in public roles and women in domestic settings, often supported by gendered nouns and grammar.

The portrayal of gender roles in textbooks not only shapes perceptions but also affects student aspirations. Mburu and Nyagah (2012) observed that girls in Kenyan textbooks were presented with limited career options, while boys had broader occupational representations. Darni and Nur Abida (2017) also reported gender bias in Indonesian elementary school textbooks, noting that

boys were linked to dynamic, outdoor games, and girls to passive, nurturing activities. This division extended to career representations and behavioral expectations, reinforcing gender-specific socialization.

While some recent studies suggest improvements in gender representation, imbalances persist. Lestariyana, Widodo, and Sulistiyo (2020) and Vidari (2021) found that male characters continued to dominate in both text and illustrations in Indonesian high school English textbooks. Female characters, when present, were frequently associated with domestic roles. Though “Bhasha Inggris” showed relatively balanced gender portrayal in sections like games, traditional stereotypes were still prevalent overall. Ani, Yanto, and Fitriyana (2021) found that men occupied more active and prestigious roles in textbooks, while women were shown in limited and conventional roles, often wearing traditional attire. Similarly, Rachmijati and Cahyati (2018) concluded that men were more frequently depicted in diverse and professional roles compared to their female counterparts.

Collectively, these studies reveal a persistent global pattern of gender bias in educational materials. Male characters dominate both in visibility and in the roles, they occupy, while female characters are often underrepresented or relegated to stereotypical positions. These portrayals not only reflect societal norms but also help shape and perpetuate them in future generations. As such, there is an urgent need for textbook reform and gender-sensitive content development that aligns with the goals of Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality). Addressing these issues in educational content is essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study gender representation in English textbooks of NCERT.
2. To study the differences in messages regarding representation of gender in English textbook of NCERT.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

IV.I. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing content analysis as the primary method to examine gender representation in English language textbooks published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Qualitative content analysis enables a systematic exploration of both textual and visual elements to identify patterns, themes, and underlying messages related to gender equity. NCERT, established in 1961 as an autonomous institution under the Government of India, plays a pivotal role in shaping school education. Its primary objectives include conducting and promoting research in school education, and developing model textbooks, teaching aids, and digital resources aimed at enhancing the quality of learning across India.

IV.II. SELECTION OF TEXTBOOKS

For this study, English language textbooks for Classes VI to VIII, titled ‘*Honeysuckle*’, ‘*Honeycomb*’, and ‘*Honeydew*’, respectively, were selected. These textbooks are part of the curriculum prescribed by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and are designed in accordance with the pedagogical principles outlined in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). These books aim to strengthen students’ reading comprehension, language skills, and literary appreciation. The middle school level was purposefully chosen for analysis as it represents a critical developmental phase in learners’ cognitive and social growth, where exposure to equitable and inclusive content can significantly influence their attitudes and understanding of gender roles.

IV.III. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Data was collected through a structured content analysis approach. Initially, the selected textbooks were reviewed in their entirety. All instances of gender representation both textual and visual were identified and extracted. This included names, characters, pronouns, occupations, activities, and imagery related to male, female, and any non-binary or gender-neutral depictions. The content was then organized into thematic categories such as visibility, roles and responsibilities, linguistic representation, and occupational portrayal. Each element was coded based on recurring patterns and underlying messages. Finally, the data was interpreted to uncover the implicit and explicit gender-related narratives embedded in the textbooks. The analysis focused on determining the balance or disparity in representation and the extent to which the content aligns with the principles of gender equity.

IV.IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this study, a qualitative content analysis approach has been employed, with a particular focus on thematic content analysis to examine various dimensions of gender representation within the selected English language textbooks. The content has been systematically categorized into five key themes to facilitate a comprehensive and in-depth analysis. These themes include:

1. Author,
2. Gender Representation through Animals,
3. Occupation,
4. Role Models,
5. Visual Representation.

Each theme addresses a specific aspect of how gender roles and identities are conveyed through both textual and visual elements. In addition, the study aims to compare the patterns of gender representation across the three NCERT textbooks 'Honeysuckle', 'Honeycomb', and 'Honeydew' to identify shifts, consistencies, or disparities in portrayal across the middle school levels.

THEME 1: AUTHOR

The analysis of authorship category focuses on identifying the number of male, female, and transgender writers who contributed to the lessons and poems. The data are presented below.

Table 1: Author Representation in English Language Textbook of NCERT (Class VI- VIII)

Unit	Class VI			Class VII			Class VIII		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	0	0
2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
3	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
4	0	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
5	2	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0
6	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
7	2	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0
8	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
Total	6	5	0	8	8	0	11	1	0

Note: Here 'M' denotes Male, 'F' denotes Female and 'T' denotes Transgender

An analysis of the English textbooks for Classes 6 to 8 highlights a notable gender imbalance in author representation. In Class 6, out of 15 lessons and poems, 6 are authored by men, 5 by women, and 3 by unknown or anonymous writers. Class 7 shows a more balanced approach, with 8 texts each written by male and female authors, and one by an anonymous writer. However, Class 8 reflects a significant disparity, featuring 11 male-authored texts, only one by a female writer, and one anonymous. Across all three textbooks, there is no representation of transgender authors, and male writers significantly outnumber their female and anonymous counterparts, especially in the higher grade levels. While Class 7 demonstrates an effort toward gender parity, the overall trend, particularly in Class 8, indicates a dominance of male voices. This uneven representation suggests a need for more inclusive and diverse author selection to ensure that students are exposed to a broader range of perspectives and experiences.

THEME 2: GENDER REPRESENTATION WITH ANIMALS

Table 2: Gender Representation with Animals in English Language Textbook of NCERT (Class VI - VIII)

Class	Animal Character	Pronoun Used	Gender Assigned
6	Dog	He	Male
	Wolf	He	Male
	Bear	He	Male
	Lion	He	Male
7	Squirrel	He	Male
	Dog	He	Male
8	Cricket	He	Male
	Fox	She	Female

A close analysis of the English textbooks for Classes VI to VIII reveals a consistent pattern in the portrayal of animal characters, where masculine pronouns are predominantly used. This trend is especially evident in the way animals are gendered in narratives, often aligning with traditional masculine traits such as strength, power, leadership, and dominance.

In the **Class VI** textbook, Unit 2's lesson *How the Dog Found Himself a New Master!* portrays a series of animal characters, including a dog, wolf, bear, lion, and cow. All are explicitly referred to using masculine pronouns except the cow, whose gender is not specified. For instance, the narrative begins by stating, "He was sick and tired of wandering about by himself and looking for food" (NCERT, Class VI, p. 17), referring to the dog. Later, the wolf is described as "who was as strong as he was fierce" (p. 18), and the lion as "He is the strongest beast on earth" (p. 20). Even the bear is introduced in a similarly gendered manner: "There's a bear out there, and he might eat up both of us" (p. 18). These descriptions associate masculine pronouns with traits such as power, ferocity, and leadership reinforcing traditionally male-coded characteristics through the portrayal of animal figures.

The **Class VII** textbook continues this pattern. In Unit 1's poem *The Squirrel*, the animal is referred to as male: "He wore a question mark for tail" (NCERT, Class VII, p. 17). Likewise, in Unit 4's lesson *The Ashes That Made Trees Bloom*, a dog character is initially referred to generically but is soon assigned the pronoun "he", as seen in the line, "He led the old man to a spot behind the house" (p. 57). While other animals appear in the text, they are not assigned gendered pronouns, highlighting a selective gendering where key animal characters are typically male. This selective use of masculine pronouns again positions male identities as the default, especially for characters that take active or central roles in the storyline.

In the **Class VIII** textbook, the use of masculine pronouns remains prominent. In Unit 1's poem *The Ant and the Cricket*, the cricket is referred to with "he": "When he found that at home" (NCERT, Class VIII, p. 20). However, there is a small but notable shift toward inclusion. In an exercise related to a prose piece, a fox is referred to using the feminine pronoun "she," as seen in the line: "What does she want to know?" (p. 48). While most animals in the textbook remain ungendered, the presence of even one example where a female pronoun is used indicates a slight move toward more balanced representation, a contrast to the consistent male-gendering in earlier classes.

It is worth acknowledging that the use of "he" for animals may stem from narrative simplicity rather than explicit gender bias. Authors and textbook developers might choose a single pronoun to maintain clarity and narrative flow, especially for young readers. However, when this choice defaults almost exclusively to masculine pronouns particularly when depicting traits like strength, action, or authority it subtly reinforces a gendered perspective. Over time, this can shape how children interpret roles, behaviors, and even characteristics as being inherently linked to one gender.

THEME 3: OCCUPATION

An analysis of the **Class VI** English textbook reveals a gender imbalance in the depiction of occupations, with a notable predominance of male characters in professional and public roles. Male figures are shown performing a total of eight different occupations, including those of a woodcutter (NCERT, Class VI, p. 28), student, gardener, cart driver, hawker, watchman, and member of the panchayat (NCERT, Class VI, p. 88). These roles often involve physical labour or take place in public domains,

reinforcing the stereotype that such professions are traditionally male-oriented. In contrast, female characters are represented in only four occupational roles: student, principal, astronaut, and housewife.

The disparity becomes more apparent when examining the nature of these roles. The inclusion of professions like woodcutter, watchman, and hawker for male characters underscores the association of men with strength, mobility, and visibility in public spaces. Meanwhile, the role of housewife, assigned to a female character, reflects a more domestic and conventional depiction of women's responsibilities. This reinforces long-standing gender norms that restrict female roles to the private sphere while allowing male characters greater occupational diversity and authority.

However, the textbook does include instances that indicate a gradual move toward more progressive and inclusive representation. For example, the depiction of a woman as a school principal, "*I had heard a great deal about Miss Beam's school*" (NCERT, Class VI, p. 54) and as an astronaut, "*She was a girl from a small town who touched the skies*" (NCERT, Class VI, p. 50) suggests a recognition of women's evolving participation in leadership and scientific fields. These portrayals reflect a subtle but important shift in narrative, acknowledging that women can occupy influential and aspirational roles in society. Despite these positive examples, the overall depiction remains skewed in favour of male characters, particularly in terms of quantity and the type of occupations represented.

In the **Grade VII** textbook, male characters are represented in a significantly greater number of occupational roles compared to female characters. Male figures are depicted in sixteen distinct occupations, including roles such as king, bodyguard, fisherman, courtier, farmer, shoemaker, soldier, music master, doctor, policeman, journalist, servant, beggar, actor, and writer. In contrast, female characters are assigned only two roles: student and housewife. This sharp disparity reflects a clear gender bias, where occupational diversity is almost exclusively reserved for male characters. Many of the male-dominated roles such as bodyguard (NCERT, Class VII, p. 8), courtier (p. 37), farmer (p. 53), shoemaker (p. 72), and soldier (p. 117) are traditionally associated with strength, authority, and public life. The consistent assignment of such roles to male characters reinforces stereotypes that link men with power, labour, and influence, while implicitly suggesting that these professions are unsuitable or inaccessible for women. These depictions marginalize female presence in professional contexts and perpetuate the notion that leadership, physical work, and public service are inherently male domains.

Conversely, the representation of female characters is limited and narrowly focused. Aside from being portrayed as students, women appear only in domestic roles, such as housewives. For instance, the line "*The old woman made a cushion of the ash for the cherry tree*" (NCERT, Class VII, p. 56) reflects a traditional, home-bound activity typically associated with caregiving and support. The complete absence of women in a wide range of professional roles contributes to the reinforcement of gender norms, limiting how young readers perceive women's capabilities and societal contributions.

An examination of the **Grade VIII** English textbook reveals both continued gender biases and emerging efforts toward greater gender inclusivity in the portrayal of occupational roles. Male characters are depicted in a broad range of professions, including student, policeman, doctor, servant, farmer, scientist, mountaineer, soldier, manager, king, lawyer, and teacher. In contrast, female characters are represented in a narrower set of roles: student, housewife, freedom fighter, teacher, and maid.

The distribution of roles highlights a clear imbalance in the depiction of power and physical agency. Male characters are frequently placed in authoritative and physically demanding occupations. For instance, the king is introduced in a commanding pose: "*Sword in hand the king came into the chariot*" (NCERT, Class VIII, p. 70), the soldier is featured in active combat scenarios (p. 11), and the mountaineer is portrayed in a physically challenging environment (p. 73). These roles align with traditional masculine ideals, reinforcing the association between men and leadership, courage, or physical endurance. In contrast, female characters are largely confined to conventional roles, such as teacher, housewife, and maid. For example, the depiction of a domestic scene, "*His mother was pouring coffee for everyone*" (NCERT, Class VIII, p. 85) reinforces the stereotype of women as caregivers operating within the private sphere.

This disproportionate portrayal sends a subtle yet powerful message: that men are the primary participants in public, professional, and creative life, while women are relegated to the private sphere. Although the presence of female students may suggest access to education, the lack of representation in careers or leadership positions fails to reflect the diversity of women's roles in contemporary society.

THEME 4: ROLE MODEL

Table 3: Representation of Role Model in English Language Textbook of NCERT (Class VI- VIII)

Class	Unit	Role Model	Gender
VI	Unit 4	Kalpna Chawla	Female
VII	Unit 8	Indian Soldier	Male
VIII	Unit 2	Tilly Smith	Female
	Unit 3	Freedom Fighters	Both
	Unit 5	H.P.S. Ahluwalia	Male
	Unit 7	Stephen Hawking	Male
	Unit 7	Firdaus Kanga	Male

In the Class VI textbook, only one role model is presented, a female figure, Kalpna Chawla, the first Indian woman astronaut. No male role models are featured, resulting in a female-centric representation. In contrast, the Class VII textbook exclusively highlights male role models, particularly in Unit 8 (*A Homage to Our Brave Soldiers*), where only male soldiers are celebrated for their bravery, reflecting a clear gender imbalance.

The Class VIII textbook offers a more balanced portrayal, showcasing both male and female role models. Tilly Smith is recognized for her life-saving actions during the tsunami, and women are acknowledged as freedom fighters. Male figures such as Stephen Hawking and Firdaus Kanga are also featured, along with male freedom fighters. While male role models are still more numerous, this textbook demonstrates a more inclusive approach compared to Classes VI and VII. But all the three textbooks showed no representation of transgender as a role model.

THEME 5: VISIBILITY IN IMAGES

The visibility category focuses on analyzing the number of male and female figures depicted in the illustrations and images within the textbook. This includes examining how often each gender appears visually, providing insights into the balance or imbalance of gender representation in the textbook's visual content. The following data reflects this analysis.

Table 4: Visibility Representation in English Language Textbook of NCERT (Class VI - VIII)

Unit	Class VI		Class VII		Class VIII	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Unit 1	5	0	5	0	13	1
Unit 2	0	0	3	5	1	1
Unit 3	15	0	88	7	100	7
Unit 4	0	1	3	1	8	0
Unit 5	1	6	7	1	4	0
Unit 6	4	2	6	4	6	0
Unit 7	28	14	1	1	2	0
Unit 8	5	3	3	0	0	0
Total	58	26	116	19	134	9

The visibility analysis of the Class 6 English textbook reveals a clear gender imbalance, with male figures depicted far more frequently than females across most units. Male characters appear consistently, occupying a wide range of roles such as a student

doing homework, a hockey player, a village leader addressing community issues, a devoted son collecting forest resources, and an empathetic animal lover. This repeated visual presence reinforces male centrality in both public and private spheres.

In contrast, female characters are noticeably underrepresented. Though limited, their appearances carry symbolic significance. One notable image portrays a woman as an astronaut, challenging traditional gender norms and offering a progressive role model. Another image features a female panch among five male panches, suggesting a token but meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making positions. Despite these positive portrayals, the overall visibility of women remains substantially lower than that of men, highlighting an ongoing gender disparity in visual representation. Below are selected visual examples that reflect the portrayal of male and female characters across various contexts:



Fig 1: A Boy doing homework

Source: Honeysuckle (NCERT, Class VI), p.9



Fig 2: Hardworking Men

Source: Honeysuckle (NCERT, Class VI), p.29



Fig 3: A boy as a hockey player

Source: Honeysuckle (NCERT, Class VI), p.7



Fig 4: A female panch among five male panches

Source: Honeysuckle (NCERT, Class VI), p.78

The visibility analysis of the Class 7 textbook highlights a noticeable gender bias. Male characters are frequently shown in active, public, and decision-making roles—working, helping others, engaging in discussions, and performing various tasks. Even in domestic settings, such as cooking, male portrayals subtly reinforce stereotypes, as one image shows a man burning food.

Female characters appear less often and are mostly shown in supportive or passive roles. In mixed-gender scenes, men are often dominant, while women are positioned in secondary roles. However, textbook exercises depict boys and girls together as students, indicating some effort toward promoting gender equality. Overall, the textbook leans toward male-centered visibility, reinforcing traditional gender roles. The images below serve as examples of how men and women are depicted, that illustrate the gender dynamics within the textbook content.



Fig 5: Discussion in Royal Court

Source: Honeycomb, (NCERT, Class VII), p.37

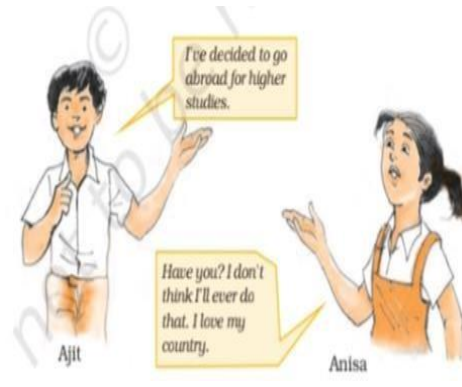


Fig 6: Conversation between a girl & boy

Source: Honeycomb, (NCERT, Class VII), p.82



Fig 7: Man burning food while cooking

Source: Honeycomb, (NCERT, Class VII), p.83

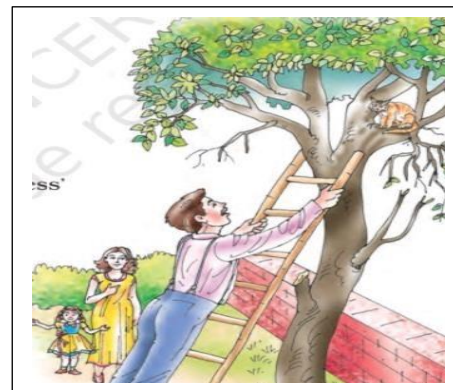


Fig 8: Man helping the cat and female standing

Source: Honeycomb, (NCERT, Class VII), p.108

The Class 8 textbook shows a clear gender imbalance in its illustrations, with men appearing in every unit and women in only a few. Men are depicted in active and diverse roles studying, working, playing sports, caring for animals, and even shown in respectable attire like suits reinforcing their centrality in both public and emotional spheres. In contrast, women appear less frequently and mostly in traditional or passive roles, such as singing or receiving help, often dressed in sarees, which reinforces domestic stereotypes.

Even in scenes where both genders are present like depictions of freedom fighters, men are shown leading and strategising, while women remain in the background. This suggests a subtle but persistent gender bias in visual representation. A few visual representations from the textbook of class VIII are outlined below to illustrate the patterns of gender portrayal and highlight the differences in visibility and role assignment between male and female characters.



Fig 9: Male soldiers playing football

Source: Honeydew, (NCERT, Class VIII), p.13



Fig 10: Male members planning against British

Source: Honeydew, (NCERT, Class VIII), p.43



Fig 11: Both Male and Female freedom fighters

Source: Honeydew, (NCERT, Class VIII), p.36

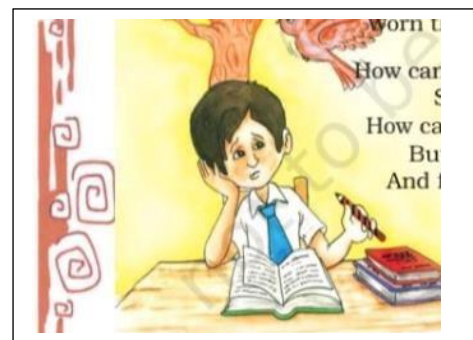


Fig 12: Only Boy is studying

Source: Honeydew, (NCERT, Class VIII), p.80

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis of English textbooks for Classes VI to VIII reveals a persistent and deepening gender imbalance in both content and visual representation. While Class VI makes some effort toward inclusivity featuring a prominent female role model and a few aspirational roles for girls, male characters still dominate in number and narrative importance. The content presents men in diverse, active, and often heroic roles, while women, though occasionally depicted in progressive ways, remain largely confined to traditional or domestic settings.

In Class VII, gender bias becomes more pronounced. Although male and female authors are nearly equally represented, the thematic and occupational portrayals heavily favor men. Male characters are shown as kings, soldiers, and professionals, while female characters are limited to students or housewives. Notably, there is a complete absence of female role models in this grade, which sends a subtle message that male achievements are more worthy of recognition and admiration.

By Class VIII, this imbalance is even more evident. Male characters and authors dominate the content, and men are consistently shown in leadership, intellectual, or physically demanding roles ranging from scientists to mountaineers. While there are some efforts to present female role models, such as Tilly Smith and women freedom fighters, their roles are often peripheral. Visual representations follow the same pattern, with men shown in active, central roles and women often depicted passively or in stereotypical appearances.

A striking finding across all three textbooks is the complete absence of transgender representation in authorship, character roles, visuals, and examples. Not a single character is identified as transgender, nor are there any narratives or references that include gender-diverse individuals. This invisibility contributes to the erasure of transgender identities in educational spaces, limiting students' exposure to a fuller understanding of gender diversity and reinforcing a binary male female view of society.

This lack of representation especially as students move into adolescence misses a critical opportunity to foster empathy, awareness, and inclusion. The omission of transgender figures not only silences an entire group but also reinforces the marginalization they face in broader social contexts.

VI. CONCLUSION

Overall, the Class VI–VIII English textbooks display a growing gender imbalance in both textual and visual content, with a dominant focus on male characters and achievements. Female representation, though present, is often limited to traditional or supporting roles, and rarely central or empowering. The most glaring gap, however, is the complete exclusion of transgender individuals, reflecting a narrow and outdated understanding of gender.

Such representations matter. Textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping young minds, attitudes, and aspirations. When students repeatedly encounter male-dominated narratives and a total absence of transgender or gender-diverse individuals, they internalize skewed views of societal roles and identities.

To build a truly inclusive and equitable educational experience, future curriculum development must address not only the balance of male and female representation but also actively include transgender and gender-diverse perspectives. This means integrating inclusive language, varied character roles, and narratives that reflect the full spectrum of gender identities in a respectful and meaningful way.

REFERENCE

- Ahmed, S. (2024). A qualitative content analysis exploring gender representation in language textbooks published by Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education. *Social Science & Humanities Open*, 3(1), 1-15.
- Aini, W., Yanto, E. S., & Fitriyana, W. (2021). Gender representation in the English textbook for grade ninth in Indonesia. *INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 8(2), <https://doi.org/>
- Amini, M., & Birjandi, P. (2012). Gender bias in the Iranian high school EFL textbooks. *English Language Teaching*, 5(2), 134–147. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n2p134>
- Apsari, A. A. N., Hidayat, D. N., Husna, N., & Alek, A. (2022). Critical discourse analysis on Bright: An English textbook: Gender equity in a pop Erlanggaular EFL school textbook in Indonesia. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, 4(2), 188–196.
- Anjarwati, D. (2020). Gender representation in the English textbook: A content analysis of Pathway to English for tenth grade senior high school published by [Bachelor's thesis, State Institute of Islamic Studies Purwokerto]. IAIN Purwokerto Repository. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v4i2.9549>
- Amerian, M., & Esmaili, F. (2015). Language and gender: A critical discourse analysis on gender representation in a series of international ELT textbooks. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 4(2), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2014.963>
- Bachore, M. M. (2022). Analysis of gender representation in English language learning materials: The case of grade ten textbook in Ethiopia. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 11(5), 175. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v11n5p175>
- Bahman, M., & Rahimi, A. (2010). "Gender Representation in EFL Materials: An Analysis of English Textbooks of Iranian High Schools." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 9, 273–277
- Bhattacharya, S. (2017). Gender representations in English textbooks used in grade eight under national and state boards, India. *Language in India*, 17(6). Retrieved from <http://www.languageinindia.com>
- Fahriany, Alek, & Wekke, I. S. (2018). Gender representation in English textbooks for Islamic junior high school students. *KAF A'AH JOURNAL*, 8(2), <http://kafaah.org/index.php/kafaah/index>
- Foroutan, Y. (2012). "Gender Representation in School Textbooks in Iran: The Place of Languages." *Current Sociology*, 60(6), 771-787. Available at ResearchGate or X-MOL.
- Goichot-Reina, V., & de la Torre-Sierra, M. (2013). The Representation of Gender Stereotypes in Spanish Mathematics Textbooks for Elementary Education. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-013-0297-6.
- Goundar, S. (2012, May). Research methodology and research method: Methods commonly used by researchers. Victoria University of Wellington.
- Hameed, A. (2012). A gender-based study of English textbooks produced by Punjab Textbook Board and Oxford University Press for elementary level [Doctoral dissertation, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad]. National University of Modern Languages Institutional

Repository.<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/12380/0>

15. Irwansyah, M., & Ardini, A. S. (2023). Gender representation in an Indonesian government-endorsed English textbook. *Wanastra: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 7(1), <https://doi.org/10.31943/wej.v7i1.191>
16. Islam KMM, Asadullah MN (2018) Gender Stereotypes and education: A comparative content Analysis of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi school textbooks. *PLoS ONE* 13(1):E0190807. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.Pone.0190807>
17. Jin, X. (2023). How gender stereotype in education impacts female students' development in secondary school. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences RHEE*, 12, 229
18. Kadri, M. (2022). A Review of Gender Representation in Primary School Textbooks in India. *Cambridge Educational Research e-Journal*, 9, 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.90574>
19. Kuraedah, S. T., Gunawan, F., Alam, S., Ubaidillah, A., Alimini, A., & Fitriyani, A. (2013). Gender representation in government-endorsed Arabic language textbooks: Insights from Indonesia. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 123-137.
20. Lestariyana, R. P. D., Noorman, S., & Gunawan, W. (2021). Gender representation in English textbook: A visual grammar analysis. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 21(3), 85-95. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jpp.v21i3.43093>
21. Miranda, H., & Nurbatra, L. H. (2019). Gender representation in the English textbook *When English Rings a Bell*. *Jurnal Perempuan dan Anak (JPA)*, 2(2), 47–58. ISSN 2442- 2614
22. Muzdalifah, A., Noorman, S., & Gunawan, W. (2021). Gender representation in English textbook: A visual grammar analysis. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 21(3), 85-95. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jpp.v21i3.43093>
23. Minson, C. T. (2005). [Title of the article, if known]. *Journal of Applied Physiology*, 99(3), 785–787. <https://doi.org/10.1152/jappphysiol.00376.2005>
24. National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2005). *National Curriculum Framework 2005*. New Delhi: NCERT.
25. National Focus Group on Gender Issues in Education. (2006). *Position Paper on Gender Issues in Education*. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Retrieved from <http://www.ncert.nic.in>
26. National Focus Group on Teaching of English. (2006). *Position paper on teaching of English*. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Retrieved from <http://www.ncert.nic.in>
27. National Institute of Open Schooling. (n.d.). *Senior secondary course: Gender studies*. National Institute of Open Schooling. Retrieved from <https://www.nios.ac.in>
28. Parashar, S., & Singh, S. (2020). Evaluating Gender Representation in NCERT Textbooks: A Content Analysis. *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(4), 323-329. DOI: 10.5958/2321-5828.2020.00051.0.
29. Paraashar, S., & Singh, S. (2020). Evaluating gender representation in NCERT textbooks: A content analysis. *Research Journal of Humanity and Social Science*, 9(1), 1-12.
30. Rachmijati, C., & Cahyati, S. S. (2018). Gender multinumber representation in textbook Bahasa Inggris grade X. *ELTIN Journal*, 6(II)
31. Singh, P., & Bammi, R. (2013). Gender portrayal in school textbooks: A study in Bhopal City Prabandhan: *Indian Journal of Management*, 6(8), 32-40. <https://doi.org/10.17010/pijom/2013/v6i8/60023>
32. Sovič, A., & Hus, V. (2015). Gender Stereotype Analysis of the Textbooks for Young Learners. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 186, 495–501. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.080.
33. Tajeddin, Z., & Enayat, M. J. (2010). Gender representation and stereotyping in ELT textbooks: A critical image analysis. *TELL*, 4(2), 51-79.
34. Turner-Bowker, Diane M., “Gender Stereotyped Descriptors in Children’s Picture Books: Does “Curious Jane” Exist in the Literature?” (1996). Open Access Master’s Theses. Paper 1585. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses/1585>
35. United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2017). *Gender: Definition*. UNICEF. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/gender/>
36. United Nations Human Rights (UNHR). (2014). *Gender: Definition*. United Nations Human Rights. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org>
37. Vidari, V. (2021). An analysis of gender representation in English textbooks for tenth grade students [Bachelor’s thesis, Raden Intan State Islamic University, Lampung]. Raden Intan Institutional Repository. <https://repository.radenintan.ac.id/19109/>
38. World Economic Forum. (2022). *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

<https://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2022>