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GENDER AND ETHNIC DEPICTION IN EFL TEXTBOOKS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the depiction of gender in the textbooks for EFL students, published by Punjab Textbook Board Lahore. Various research studies portraying women in EFL/ESL textbooks (Ansary and Babi, 2003; Hartman and Judd, 1978) have shown that the several roles of women such as stereotype mothers and housewives are consistently being perpetuated in several existing language textbooks. Moreover, many cultures portrayed in these textbooks are devoid of true representation of their ethnic make-up. Considerable sections of the depicted society in the textbooks are either underrepresented or neglected altogether. Therefore, the current has investigated the existing textbooks of English language Punjab Textbook Board Lahore at school level for unpacking the role of man and women particularly the portrayal of women in their stereotypical roles, and delineation of ethnic groups i.e. the textual representation of ethnic groups. For this purpose three English textbooks of grade 6th, 7th and 8th were selected and then analyzed by using discourse and content analysis technique

The outcomes reflected that English Textbooks used at elementary level in government schools keep on presenting women in its stereotypical roles such as typical traditional mothers and housewives underestimating her intellectual and physical potential, which have been observed in the developed countries. The society is divided on ethnic line which is given great importance. The study bears importance as it will bring into limelight the deplorable condition and status of women, helping to improve their status and conditions.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally observed that school textbooks transmit societal knowledge (Gillborn, 1990). The studies related to women depiction in textbooks of EFL (Baghdadi and Rezaei, 2015; Ansary and Babii 2003 & Hartman and Judd 1978) reflect that there exist a bias in representing men and women in textbooks. Moreover, in several textbooks, the roles allocated to women can be termed as stereotypical roles i.e. of housewife and mother. Woman stereotypical portrayal is helpful in reinforcing the old and traditional mindset that “women are to stay at home and men are to go out to work”. Women are mostly restricted to household activities and seen less in open in comparison to men who have been observed engaged in outdoor business (Baghdadi and Rezaei, 2015; Ansary and Babii, 2003 etc.).

The students should be aware of the various roles that women play in the society and they ought to participate and should be familiar with the linguistic terms and texts used in reference to women. Moreover, it is also the responsibility of English teachers to keep their students updating about the new developments, trends and traditions taking place in their relevant linguistic fields. They should also highlights the major imminent problems which need to be demystified (Pierce, 1990).

A number of research studies have tried to apply themselves to the exploration of textbooks including developing and designing textbooks for different levels. However, very few of them have look at EFL textbooks in relation to gender bias and ethnic diversity. Moreover, Research studies in the past (Otlowski, 2003, Liew, 2007, Abdul Hamid, 2008, Malik & Ayaz, 2010) have indicated that the textbooks at elementary level are biased which needs to be studied in a more thorough fashion. The present research is an attempt to explore the same issue at secondary level in a cohesive and comprehensive manner.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How far the school textbooks are male chauvinistic?
2. How do the EFL Textbooks reflect and are in line with the modern pedagogical and social expectations of the reform relating to representation of gender and race?
3. How EFL PTB textbooks are gender biased?
4. How ethnic diversity is represented in EFL PTB textbooks?

Significance of the study

This study will have significance both, authors and editors of the textbooks. It will be beneficent for thinkers to formulate their views in more authentic and positive way. It will be also of use for young scholars who are working on ethnic diversity.

Delimitations of the Study

The study is limited in its analysis up to the text contents of the Punjab English Textbooks of grade six to grade eight students in Government Elementary Institutions. The study presents a content analysis which is based largely on analysis of the poems, reading passages, dialogues, illustrations, activities, photos, and exercises incorporated in course books of students only.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking broadly, the issue of language and gender has always been given prime importance. Consequently, it has been extensively explored. Holmes (1991) and Sunderland (2000) are two most influential and important sources for exploration of gender and language. Holmes (1991) review of gender and language remained a bit broader in range while Sunderland (2000) has focused on specific issues. There did appear another and very relevant review to the current study conducted by Mustapha (2014) wherein learning materials including texts and classroom interactions have been combined. The current study as dealing with the textbooks as well has taken assistance from Mustapha (2014) as well. Language and gender studies specially dealing with text books can be divided into three categories:

First categories: In this category studies which have shown that language textbooks are biased against femininity (Chandran and Adullah 2003; Mukundan, 2003; Cincotta, 1978 & Hellinger, 1980). They have shown that men have always been the focal point and appeared in very prominent roles in different sphere of life while women in comparison have been sidelined, under represented to the extent that they stayed invisible.

Second category In the second category, the studies have shown modest improvement in gender bias though still far from gender equity but did remain less offensive. The studies have shown signs of improvement in the direction of gender equity (Blumerg, 2007; Carlson, 2007 & Healy, 2009).

Third Category: Here studies have mostly focused on the limitations of progressive textbooks. They argue that progressive textbooks are good if seen as textbooks but what is more important than that is how the teachers take up and present these textbooks. The need of the hour is to research teachers' use of the text. It is the teacher who can interpret and takes it in any direction. Therefore, the focus should be on the use of text by the teacher (Gharbavi and Mousavi, 2012; Hamdan 2010 & Gillani and Hashmi, 2010).

As indicated above Ethnic diversity and Gender bias in textbooks are not something which can be restricted to particular part or country of the world. It can be generally observed across the globe though different in intensity and percentage. Purnelle (1996) explained in details that American education teaches the students curse and hatred (ethnocentric bias) reflected and surfaced by a some of the studies leading to dire consequences. Otlowski (2003) while investigating Ethnic Diversity in Japan showed solid proof that EFL textbooks were biased regarding the representation of ethnic groups. She stated that the textbooks failed to offer a true portrayal of the ethnic structure of the society.

Baghdadi and Rezaei (2015) turned to Iran to explore the gender orientation of Irani EFL text books and showed that men have been given a prominent place in different activities than women reflecting the male domination. Gupta (1990) explores the issue of gender distinction in Primary Schools Singapore. Their study shows that males are portrayed possessing large canvas of roles as compare to females. The available women's roles seemed to be based on the nurturing occupations (nurse, teacher). For instance, just one female emerged in academic realm against ten men. Holmqvist, (2006) men hold the maximum of mentioned professions. Females are portrayed either without a profession or possessing some stereotypical one in Swedish EFL textbooks. Domingues (2003) showed that in Candian School Textbooks, women's and men's roles seemed to be employed interchangeably. There was minimal difference in the text between occupations of male and female (females 11, males 13). The writer of the Series knew about mentioning non-conventional professions for both male and female characters (e.g. female –security guard, doctor, judge; male- teacher, receptionist and cook)

Despite the fact that in Pakistan gender disparity and ethnic diversity are commonly observed in textbooks at different levels but unfortunately it has not been properly investigated. Very limited number of studies have addressed gender disparity (Jafri, 1994; Mirza, 2004 & Zafar, 2005). The studies conducted shows that very little space has been given to female character, while mostly they have focused on the male gender (Shah, 1985). Women have been given depicted in negative manner and mostly portrayed as submissive (Mirza, 2004). In addition masculine bias in textbooks has also been brought forth by a number of studies (Zafar, 2005). Furthermore, women have been shown in traditional stereotypical roles such as cleaning, cooking and washing (Anwar, 1998 & Mirza, 1999).

The above short review shows that gender bias and ethnic diversity are important and debatable issues and the need to be addressed in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to unpack the gender bias and ethnic diversity in Pakistan.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The section explains the methods along with procedures employed for carrying out the investigation. The study is designed to investigate gender bias and ethnic diversity in EFL textbooks at Elementary Level. The methods and procedures of the study are as

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is an exploratory and analytical research which is based mainly on the content analysis of three students' English textbooks at the elementary level. For this purpose, three English textbooks of grade 6th, 7th and 8th were used. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed and every book was thoroughly read page after page and each play/ essay/ story of the book was considered as a unit to indicate character. Each page in each book page was considered as a unit and each page was counted just for once. The percentages were worked out to conduct the statistical analysis. All the lessons were placed in four distinct categories to facilitate the

process of analysis. These categories included play, story, essay and bibliography. The lessons were also divided into four thematic categories, i.e. general, historical, religious and fictional.

RESULT FINDINGS

This section presents analysis of data. The major purpose of the study was to analyze the issue of gender bias and ethnic diversity in EFL textbooks at elementary level. The analysis is presented in the following pages.

Table 2: The Portrayal of Ethnic Group on cover page of English Textbook for Grade 6

Title of the Textbook	Total Human Illustrations	Ethnic Group	Percentage	Pure Pakistani	Percentage
English Textbook for Grade 6	7	0	0%	7	100%

Table 2 shows the portrayal of ethnic group on cover page of English Textbook for grade 6. The cover page of English Textbook for Grade 6 bears total 7 human illustrations. All of them are of pure Pakistanis.

Table 3: The Representation of Ethnic Groups in Dialogues in English Textbooks for Class6

Group	Responses	Percentage
Ethnic Group	Nil	Nil
Pure Pakistani	12	100%
Total	12	

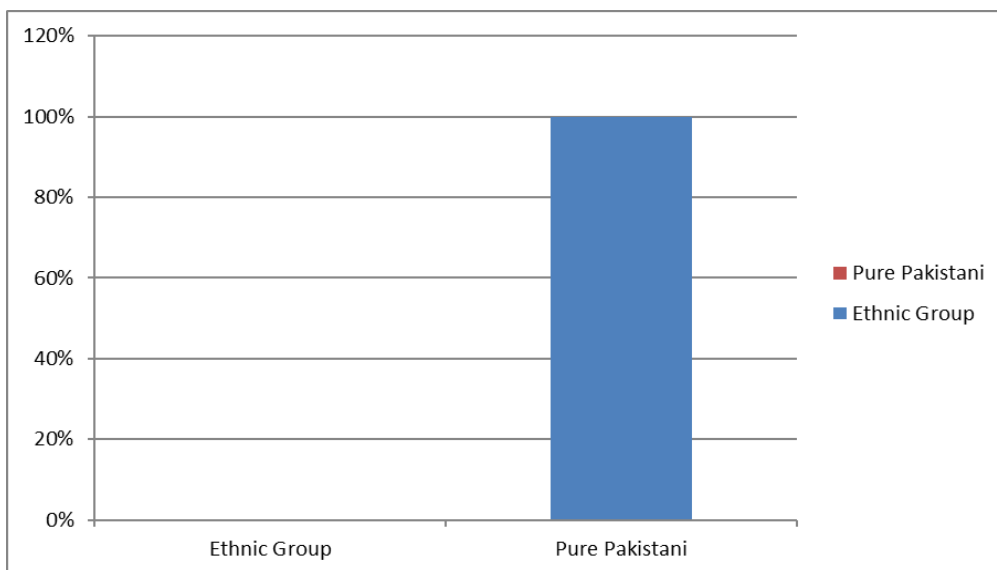


Table 3 shows the representation of ethnic groups in dialogues in English textbooks for grade 6. There are 12 dialogues in the English textbooks for

grade 6. Nothing is represented regarding ethnic groups in dialogues in English textbooks of grade 6.

Table4: The Portrayal of Ethnic Group on cover page of English Textbook for Grade 7

Title of the Textbook	Total Human Illustrations	Ethnic Group	Percentage	Pure Pakistani	Percentage
English Textbook for Grade 7	0	0	0%	0	Nil

Table 4 shows the portrayal of ethnic group on cover page of English textbook for grade 7. The cover page bears no human illustration.

Table 5
The Representation of Ethnic Groups in Dialogues in English Textbooks for Grade 7

Group	Responses	Percentage
Ethnic Group	3	75%
Pure Pakistani	1	25%
Total	4	

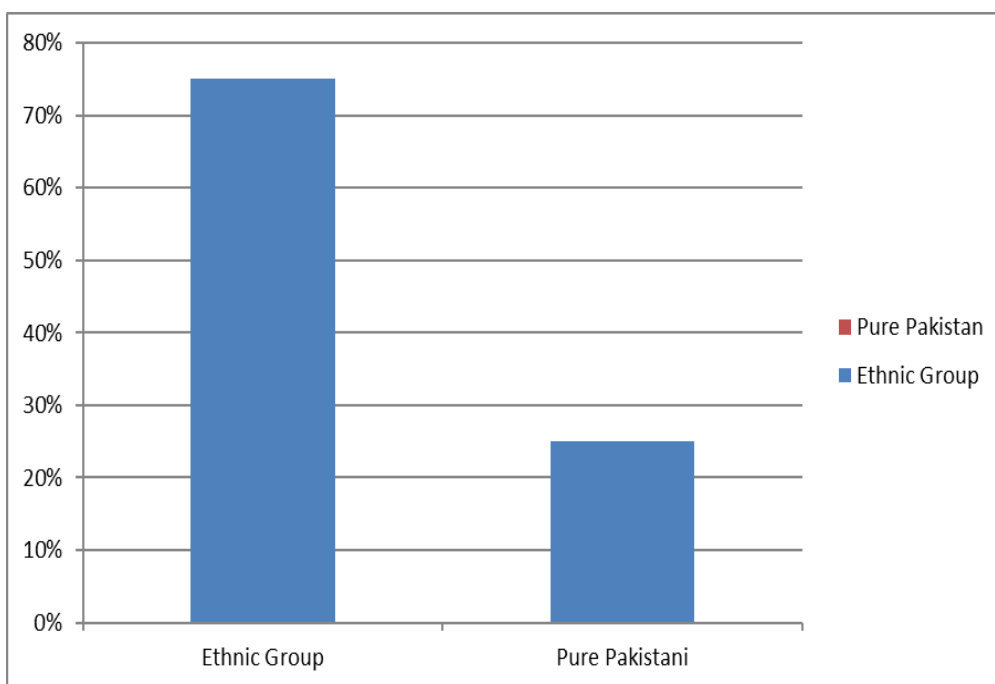


Table 5 shows the representation of ethnic groups in dialogues in English textbooks for grade 7. There are 4 dialogues in the English textbooks for grade 7. Out of 4 dialogues, 3 (75%) dialogues belonged to ethnic groups, while only 1 (25 percent) is belonged to pure Pakistani.

Table6: The Portrayal of Ethnic Group on cover page of English Textbook for Grade 8

Title of the Textbook	Total Human Illustrations	Ethnic Group	Percentage	Pure Pakistani	Percentage
English Textbook for Grade 8	0	0	Nil	0	Nil

Table6 shows the portrayal of ethnic group on cover page of English textbook for grade 8. The cover page bears no human illustration

Table 7: The Representation of Ethnic Groups in Dialogues in English Textbooks for Grade 8

Group	Responses	Percentage
Ethnic Group	1	15%
Pure Pakistani	6	85%
Total	7	

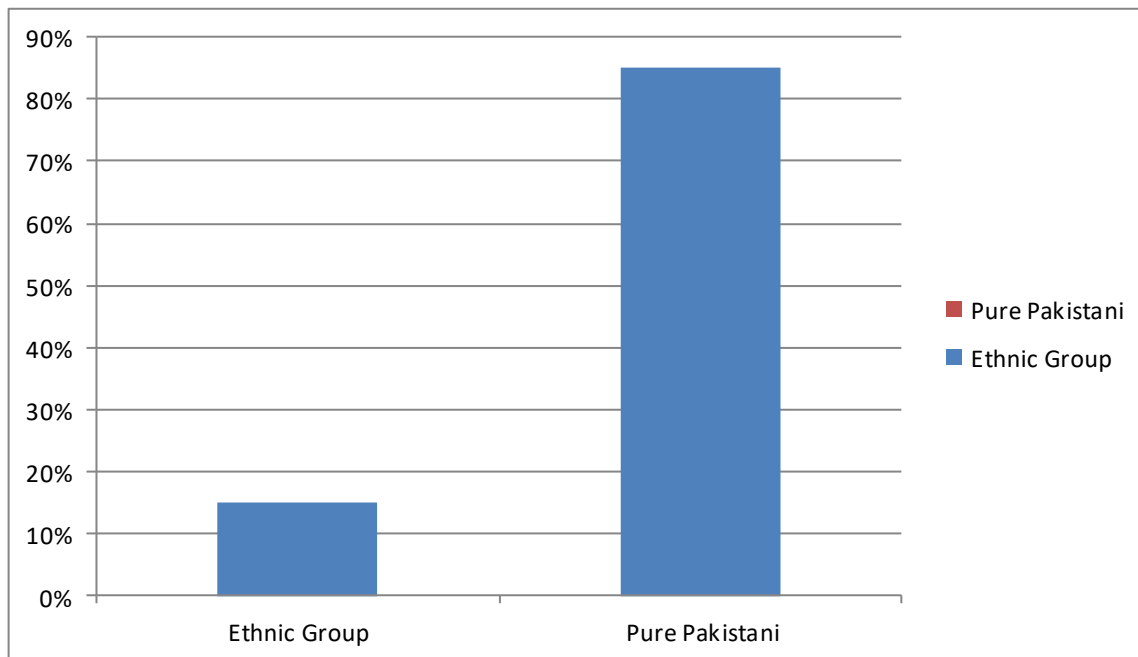


Table 7 shows the representation of ethnic groups in English textbooks for grade 8. Out of 7 dialogues, 6 are conducted between pure Pakistani, while only 1(15percent) dialogue is conducted between ethnic groups.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The section is specified to discuss the obtained results; the researcher attempts to examine how the depiction of various minorities and ethnic groups is reflected through gathered data. The analysis illustrates that there lies a lack of representation of ethnic groups in English textbooks used by government schools at elementary level. The analysis of the cover page of thee analyzed textbooks has no character of ethnic groups. This invisibility in the cover page of thee analyzed textbooks indicates that the element of lack of representation of ethnic groups is prominent.

The analyzed data indicates that the representation of ethnic groups in dialogues in English textbooks for grade 6th has no dialogue regarding the depiction of minorities and ethnic groups. The analyzed data regarding the depiction of minorities in dialogues in English textbooks for grade 7th posses 3 dialogues conducted between ethnic groups. It's a matter of immense regret that only a single dialogue is conducted between ethnic groups in English textbooks of grade 8th.

As far as problem of gender bias is concerned , analysis indicates that cover page of English textbooks of grade 6th bears total 7 human characters, out of these 7 characters,5 characters are male while only 2 characters are female. The cover page of grade 7th and 8th bears no human character. This underrepresentation of female reflects gender bias on the cover page of English textbooks. The findings on the gender ratio of dialogues in English textbooks of grade 7 shows that there are 4 human characters participating in various dialogues. Out of the 4 characters, 3(75 percent) characters are male while only 1 character (25 percent) is female. The analyzed data on the gender ratio in dialogues in English textbooks of grade 8 shows that there are total 7 human characters. Out of these 7 characters, 5(72 percent) characters are male while only 2 characters (28 percent) are female. This underrepresentation of female in dialogues indicates that the textbooks used at elementary level at government schools are gender biased.

CONCLUSION

The analyzed data has enabled the researcher to answer the basic research questions:

- 1) To determine the depiction of gender in EFL textbooks used in government schools at elementary level, we can discern from the results of this study that gender imbalance in portraying gender is quite evident in favour of man in all the identified categories and employed in analyzing the contents of the three selected textbooks. Women are less or rather under-represented as compared to men characters. By and large, the gender bias is prominent in imbalance of representation of images which seem favouring men at the cost of women.

- 2) It is obvious from the analyzed data that EFL textbooks used at elementary level in government schools are gender biased. We find traces of gender bias in the depiction of characters, occupation and activities assigned to the female.
- 3) The findings on the issue of ethnic diversity exposes that there is lack of representation of minorities in the EFL textbooks.

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