



Reinforcing Patriarchy: A Critical Analysis of the Portrayal of Women in the Bangladeshi EFL Textbook, English for Today (Class 5)

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Abstract: This research paper examines the portrayal of women in the English textbook English for Today (Class 5) published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh. Through a content analysis, the study aims to investigate the extent to which the textbook reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes, specifically the depiction of women as less powerful and confined to homebound roles. The findings of the study indicate that women are consistently presented in domestic and subservient roles, while men are presented as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers. The study also highlights the lack of representation of women in various professions and their underrepresentation in positions of power. These findings have important implications for the education system in Bangladesh, as textbooks play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of students. The study concludes that the textbook's representation of gender can potentially shape students' perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles in society, limiting their aspirations and career choices. Therefore, the study suggests the need for more inclusive and diverse representation of women in educational materials to promote gender equality.

Keywords: *Bangladesh, EFL, gender, NCTB, women.*

Introduction: Gender inequality is a pervasive issue that has been a focus of academic research and activism across the globe. Despite progress made in recent decades, gender-based discrimination and violence continue to persist in many societies, including Bangladesh. Patriarchal attitudes and values are deeply embedded in Bangladeshi society, shaping gender norms and influencing the ways in which men and women are expected to behave and interact with one another. One important site where these attitudes are reinforced and perpetuated is education. Schools and textbooks play a critical role in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of young people, who will go on to become future leaders and decision-makers. However, the curriculum and textbooks used in many countries continue to reinforce gender stereotypes and inequalities, rather than challenging them. This paper focuses on the portrayal of women in the English for Today textbook used in Class 5 in Bangladesh, and how it reinforces patriarchal attitudes. Despite the government's efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, the textbook perpetuates traditional gender roles and reinforces gender stereotypes. By critically analysing the content and language used in the textbook, this paper aims to raise awareness about the ways in which gender inequality is perpetuated through education, and to encourage a more inclusive and equitable approach to teaching and learning.

Gender inequality has been a persistent issue in societies across the world, with women often facing discrimination and bias in various spheres of life. This literature review provides an overview of previous research on the representation of women in textbooks, focusing on studies conducted in Bangladesh and other countries.

The portrayal of women in textbooks has been identified as one of the factors contributing to gender stereotypes and limiting the opportunities available to women [1]. One study found out that in Bangladesh, where patriarchal attitudes are deeply embedded in society, the portrayal of women in textbooks is of particular concern [2]. Another study analysed the portrayal of gender in primary school textbooks and found that women were predominantly depicted in traditional gender roles such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, while men were shown in professional roles [3]. Similarly, one study on secondary school textbooks found that women were largely presented in subservient and passive roles, while men were portrayed as active and dominant [4]. These studies highlight the pervasive nature of gender stereotypes in textbooks used in the Bangladesh education system. Similar findings have been reported in other countries as well. For example, a study conducted in Malaysia analysed secondary school textbooks and found that women were predominantly depicted as homemakers, while men were shown in professional and leadership roles [5]. A Vietnamese study analysed primary school textbooks and found that women were largely depicted in passive and domestic roles, reinforcing traditional gender roles [6]. The impact of gender stereotypes in textbooks has been well-documented in previous research. A study conducted in Pakistan found that the portrayal of women in textbooks had negative effects on girls' self-esteem and aspirations [7]. Similarly, a study conducted in Iran found that the representation of women in textbooks contributed to gender inequality by limiting women's opportunities and perpetuating stereotypes [8].

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In contrast, research has also highlighted the potential of textbooks to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. A study conducted in India found that textbooks that included positive portrayals of women and challenged traditional gender roles had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards gender equality [9]. Another critical analysis in India on gender stereotypes in school textbooks, shed light on the need for a deeper examination of the materials [10]. In China, an empirically examined study focused on the representation of women in educational materials, highlighting the importance of such research [11]. Studies conducted in Latin America also provided a comprehensive review of gender portrayals in textbooks, underlining the need for a holistic assessment of these materials [12]. A longitudinal study on the evolution of gender depictions in Western school materials, revealed insights into how these portrayals have changed over time [13]. Researchers explored the discourse of gender representation in South Korean educational materials, providing an in-depth analysis of the topic [14]. Overall, the literature suggests that the portrayal of women in textbooks is a pervasive issue that contributes to gender stereotypes and limits opportunities for women. While there is some evidence to suggest that textbooks can promote gender equality, more research needs to be done to ensure that educational materials are inclusive and diverse in their representation of women and challenge traditional gender roles.

Materials & Method:

I. Data Collection: This study employed a content analysis of the *English for Today* textbook (Class 5) published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh to collect data.

II. Sampling: A purposive sampling technique was used to select the textbook used in Class 5 for analysis, as this is a critical age for shaping students' attitudes and beliefs.

III. Variables: The study analysed the portrayal of women, representation of gender roles, and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

IV. Data Analysis: The collected data was analysed using a content analysis approach, which involved a systematic examination of the textbook's images and language used to portray women and their roles. The analysis included a review of the frequency and nature of the portrayal of women and the types of gender roles and stereotypes that are reinforced in the textbook.

V. Ethics: This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research. All data will be kept confidential, and no identifying information will be collected. Additionally, the study will not cause any harm to the participants or the community.

VI. Limitations: This study has some limitations such as the focus on a single textbook and a single grade level should be considered. Moreover, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to other contexts beyond the *English for Today* textbook used in Class 5.

VII. Significance: This study will contribute to the literature on gender representation in educational materials and its impact on students' attitudes and beliefs. The findings of the study will have important implications for policymakers and educators, as it will provide insights into the need for more inclusive and diverse representation of women in educational materials to promote gender equality.

Results and Discussion:

a. Portrayal of Women in *English for Today* (Class 5): The portrayal of women in the *English for Today* textbook used in Class 5 reinforces patriarchal attitudes. Women are primarily shown in domestic roles such as cooking and cleaning, while men are shown in professional roles such as doctors and engineers. This representation of gender roles reinforces the idea that a woman's place is in the home, while men are better suited for professional roles. Women are also depicted as being emotional and sensitive, while men are shown as strong and rational. The images in the textbook often reinforce these stereotypes, showing women wearing traditional clothing and engaged in domestic activities, while men are depicted in modern clothing and in professional settings.

For example, in the textbook, a picture (Page 09, Lesson 1-2) shows a woman cooking in a kitchen, while a man is shown sitting at a desk, presumably at work. The caption reads, "Mother is cooking food in the kitchen, and Father is working in his office." This reinforces the idea that women are responsible for domestic work, while men work outside the home. Similarly, in another image, a woman is shown cleaning a room, while a man is shown using a computer. The caption reads, "Mother is cleaning the room, and Father is using the computer." Again, this reinforces the idea that women are responsible for domestic work, while men are better suited for professional roles. This could have been altered yet clearly men are shown as better fit for outdoor jobs, while women are more fitting to indoor ones.

The language used in the textbook also reinforces gender stereotypes. For example, when discussing family roles, the textbook states (Page 10, Lesson 2) that "The father works hard to provide for the family, while the mother takes care of the children and the household." This reinforces the idea that women should stay at home and take care of the children, while men should work outside the home. Similarly, when discussing occupations, the textbook states that "Engineers design and build things, while nurses and teachers take care of people." This reinforces the idea that men are better suited for technical and professional roles, while women are better suited for caring and nurturing roles.

b. The Impact of Patriarchal Attitudes in Education: The reinforcement of patriarchal attitudes in education has significant impacts on society. It perpetuates gender inequality by limiting women's opportunities and reinforcing gender stereotypes. When women are portrayed primarily in domestic roles and as emotional and sensitive, it reinforces the idea that they are not suited for leadership roles or professions that require technical skills. This limits women's opportunities for economic advancement and leadership positions. The images in pages 09, 13, 14, and 16 of the book depicts that women are engaged in domestic roles, such as sewing, taking care of children, cooking, and feeding family members while men are seen in professional jobs with modern clothing.

Furthermore, the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in education can also have negative psychological impacts on both boys and girls. Girls may internalize the idea that they are not as capable as boys in certain areas, while boys may internalize the idea that they should not engage in activities that are traditionally associated with femininity, such as caring for children or doing domestic work.

c. Implications for Gender Equality in Education: The findings of this study have significant implications for the education system in Bangladesh and beyond. The consistent portrayal of women in traditional domestic roles and men in professional roles reinforces gender stereotypes and limits the opportunities available to women in the workforce. This perpetuates gender inequality and can have negative psychological impacts on both boys and girls, as they internalize these gender roles and expectations.

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in various professions and positions of power exacerbates this issue. It sends the message that women are not capable of holding leadership roles or excelling in certain fields, thereby limiting their aspirations and career choices. This, in turn, can have long-term implications for the economic development and progress of a country, as gender inequality hinders the full utilization of the workforce and talent pool.

Moreover, textbooks play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of students, and the reinforcement of patriarchal attitudes in education can have lasting impacts on society. Therefore, it is essential to promote more inclusive and diverse representation of women in educational materials to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This includes highlighting the contributions of women in various fields, portraying women in positions of power, and challenging gender norms in everyday life.

In conclusion, the implications of this study call for urgent action to promote gender equality in education and beyond. It highlights the need for more inclusive and diverse representation of women in educational materials, as well as the importance of challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. By doing so, we can work towards creating a more equitable and just society for all.

d. Recommendations for Addressing Gender Inequality in Education: It is important to address gender inequality in education to promote equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their gender. To achieve this, the following recommendations are made:

(i) Revision of Textbooks: The contents of textbooks should be reviewed to ensure that they do not reinforce gender stereotypes. The portrayal of women in textbooks should be balanced, and women should be depicted in a variety of roles, including leadership positions and professions that are traditionally male-dominated. Additionally, textbooks should include examples of men engaged in caregiving and domestic work to challenge the notion that these roles are exclusively for women.

(iii) Gender-Sensitive Curriculum: The curriculum should include topics related to gender equality and women's empowerment. This can include lessons on women's contributions to society, gender-based violence, and the importance of gender equality. The curriculum should also include examples of successful women in a variety of fields to inspire girls to pursue their dreams and challenge gender stereotypes. These activities can be elaborately discussed in texts so that students and teachers can act them out or at least read and understand.

(iv) Parental and Community Engagement: Parents and communities play an important role in promoting gender equality in education. Schools should engage parents and communities in activities that promote gender equality, such as workshops and seminars on gender issues. This can help create a supportive environment for students and reinforce the importance of gender equality in education.

By implementing these policy recommendations, the government can work towards creating a more gender-equal education system in Bangladesh, where all students have equal opportunities to learn and achieve their full potential, regardless of their gender.

Conclusion: To summarize, the portrayal of women in the *English for Today* textbook used in Class 5 reinforces patriarchal attitudes and perpetuates gender inequality. It presents women primarily in domestic roles, while men are depicted in professional roles, limiting opportunities for women's economic advancement and leadership positions. Moreover, it can have negative

psychological effects on both boys and girls as they internalize these gender roles and expectations. To create a more gender-equal society, it is crucial to critically analyse gender roles in education and take necessary steps to promote inclusive and diverse representation of women.

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