

Analysis of Gender Representation in *Pre-Intermediate Market Leader: Business English Practice File*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine gender representation in one of the textbooks used at Sohar University to teach business English. The textbook is entitled Pre-Intermediate Market Leader: Business English Practice File. Content analysis is used to analyze the following three categories: gender visibility, gender firstness, and occupational roles. In general, the study results have revealed that gender bias against females is less visible than males and gender equity is to some extent achieved in this text book. The results have indicated that this textbook exhibited a balanced representation of gender in terms of gender visibility, females have more occupational roles than males and females' occupational roles were varied whereas males were only traditional. The study results have also revealed that males usually appear before females (gender firstness) in the textbook.

Keywords: gender visibility, gender fastness; gender bias, occupational roles

Introduction

Education is one of the most important cornerstones of developing and advancing modern societies. Modern societies pay much attention to offering gender equality education at an early age because it helps in facilitating a balanced and smooth learning process for present and future generations. Habibul Haque (2012) states that, "When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come". Textbooks are deemed as one of the most critical components of the learning process. UNESCO (2005) confirms that "textbooks and learning materials play a key role in the learning process" (Education Bureau, 2009). Moreover, Sumalatha (2004) points out that, "Textbooks are the most powerful instruments in shaping children's belief, attitudes and values (Wu & Liu, 2015). In addition, Tahan (2015) states that, "The textbook is an essential vehicle for the socialization of gender at school". Therefore, textbooks used in schools should offer an equitable representation of male and female learners.

Literature Review

Gender Bias Representation in Textbooks

Many studies around the world have shown that gender bias in school and non-school textbooks is still prevalent. Zakka & Zanzali (2015) carried out a study titled "Gender Bias in Primary School Mathematics Textbooks in Nigeria". The study aimed to examine gender bias in two primary schools mathematics textbooks for primary grades 5 and 6 in Nigeria, using content analysis. The findings of the study showed that gender bias is present in these school textbooks in favor of males. Females were shown as being less visible and underrepresented. Gharbavi & Mousavi (2012) conducted a study titled "A Content Analysis of Textbooks: Investigating Gender Bias as a Social Prominence in Iranian High School English Textbooks". They used content analysis to examine male and female visibility in illustrations, texts and the male/female occupational roles in four EFL school textbooks used at Iranian high schools. The findings of the study showed that gender bias is still dominant in these high school textbooks. Finally, Amini & Birjandi (2012) conducted a study on gender bias in Iranian high school EFL textbooks. The main purpose of their study was to "examine the extent and types of gender bias in two of the Iranian mostly used EFL textbooks at the high school level". They investigated five categories that included: "visibility, firstness, generic masculine constructions, sex-linked occupations and activities".

The findings of the study revealed that gender bias is still inherent in these textbooks. In conclusion, the previous studies showed that gender bias is deeply rooted and inculcated in school textbooks despite the fact that extensive efforts have been made to have a balanced portrayal of males and females in school and non-school textbooks.

Gender Visibility

Visibility refers to “the relative numbers of males and females appearing in textbooks and is perhaps the easiest aspect of gender balance to examine” (Stockdale, 2006). Many studies have shown that gender visibility in school and non-school curricula is generally in favor of males. Some studies have found that masculine names, pronouns and adjectives usually outnumber feminine names, pronouns and adjectives in textbooks. Bahman & Rahimi (2010) conducted a study entitled “Gender Representation in EFL Materials: An Analysis of English Textbooks of Iranian High schools”. The study aimed at investigating gender bias in three volumes in English textbooks used in Iranian high schools. It concluded that “the manifestation of women and men in these textbooks was not fair. In other words, the presence of men was more highlighted than that of women regarding names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives attributed to them”.

Another study was conducted by Amini & Birjandi (2012) titled “Gender Bias in the Iranian High School EFL Textbooks” to “examine the extent and types of gender bias in two of the Iranian mostly used EFL textbooks at the high school level”. The study investigated different categories related closely to gender bias in EFL high school textbooks such as visibility, Masculine Generic Constructions, Occupations, and Activities used in these school textbooks. The findings of the study showed that sexism (gender bias) is still dominant and ingrained in the Iranian EFL high school textbooks. In addition, it is necessary to point out that these EFL school textbooks offered an overrepresentation of “linguistic manifestation of masculine generic”. Finally, Wu & Liu (2015) conducted an analysis of gender representation in primary English textbooks used in mainland China from 1978 to 2003. The analysis included texts and illustrations found in these textbooks. They investigated different categories such as visibility, occupational roles, domestic roles, and domestic activities of adults, school activities of children, utterance, and firstness. The study findings have indicated that gender bias is still present in these textbooks. The study has also shown that females are still less visible than males. Statistics have also shown that males outnumber females in these primary English textbooks used in mainland China.

Occupational Roles

Examination of gendered occupational roles constitutes an integral part of almost any study on the portrayal of gender balance or imbalance in school or non-school textbooks. Many studies indicated that females were underrepresented and portrayed in traditional occupational roles in comparison with their male counter parts. Hall (2014) conducted a study on gender representation in current EFL textbooks used in Iranian High schools. One of the areas investigated was occupations linked to gender. The study findings, in general, showed that gender bias is still prevalent in these EFL school textbooks. As for occupational roles linked to males and females, they study showed that “An examination of the distribution of household responsibilities revealed that the previous research found females in more traditional stereotypical roles such as doing the dishes, cooking, serving food, setting the dinner table, and taking care of the children. The sad reality is that the findings of the new research highlight the same biased results”. Moreover, Fahim (2010) conducted a study titled “Gender Issues and Textbooks: Gender Bias in Pashto Primary School Textbooks in Afghanistan”. The study aimed to examine “gender roles in the new Pashto Language textbooks (grades 1-6) based on Afghanistan’s National Curriculum Framework, 2003. Furthermore, 10 primary schoolteachers were also interviewed to know their perception of gender roles”. One of the areas examined in this study included gender related occupational roles. The findings of the study revealed that women were portrayed in passive roles whereas men were portrayed in active roles. Women, for example, were seen as preparing food, sewing, and so on, while men were seen as playing football, working outside their homes in offices and so on. In general, the study showed that gender related occupational roles are still biased against women. Women were depicted in traditional and stereotypical roles whereas men were depicted in more active roles.

Finally, Hamdan (2010) conducted a study on gender bias titled “English-language Textbooks Reflect Gender Bias: A Case Study in Jordan”. Hamdan (2010) conducted a content analysis of textbooks used in the Jordanian public schools in grades 1 to 9. The researcher conducted content analysis of “all dialogues, reading passages, and activities on the level of word and sentence”. He analyzed jobs and occupations linked to males and females in these public school textbooks.

The findings of the study showed that gender bias related to occupational roles is still dominant in these public school textbooks. While men were seen as practicing “a variety of jobs and are portrayed as effective and dominant characters in the labor market”, females were seen as practicing “traditional jobs such as teachers and nurses”. In conclusion, some studies show that there is a gender bias in terms of occupational roles in school and non-school textbooks. Females are depicted in stereotypical and traditional occupations while males are depicted in more active and dominant occupational roles.

Gender Firstness

Porreca (1984) defined gender firstness as “the order of mention, termed firstness” (Stockdale, 2006). Gender firstness is considered as an indicator of linguistic sexism in curricula. Many researchers examined and analyzed gender firstness in school and non-school textbooks to identify the existence or inexistence of gender bias. Stockdale (2006) examined the portrayal of gender in English as Foreign Language (EFL) textbook called *Impact Values*. The examination included areas such as visibility, firstness, nouns and discourse. Her study revealed that, “While *Impact Values* may show significant improvement over the materials reported in the studies in section 2; there still exists a significant gender bias toward males”. In most cases, males were mentioned more than females and males came first in terms of Mixed Gender Dialogues and Proper Name Pairs while females’ presence exceeded males’ presence in Points of View Opinions.

In addition, Nagatomo (2010) performed an analysis of gender representation in an EFL textbook titled “Conversation Topics for Japanese University Students”. She investigated the textbook using Porecca’s (1984) framework that included the following areas: Visibility, Gender firstness, Gender neutral and gender specific nouns and Gender stereotypes. The findings of the study revealed in general that, “a Gender imbalance of textbook character that has been noted in previous studies was not found in this book. In contrast, the female characters were more visible and played more active roles than male characters”. For example, it was interesting to notice that the study showed that gender firstness was in favor of females. Nagatomo (2010) stated that “Women spoke first 65% of the time in conversations and 40% of the time in the task listening exercises. Although there was no great difference in who speaks first in the dialogues in this textbook, it is worth noting that whoever spoke first tended to have more speaking turns”. Finally, Healy (2009) performed a study of gender representation titled “The Representation of Women and Men in a Modern EFL Textbook: Are Popular Textbooks Gender Biased? She analyzed a textbook called Touchstone Book 2. The study investigated gender representation through the examination of occupations, names, pronouns and exclusive nouns, firstness, and spoken discourse. The findings of this study showed that there is a balance in gender representation. The textbook is found to be free of gender bias. As for gender firstness, the researcher stated that he “found that the authors have represented women first nearly as often as men. The spoken discourse is very even with women and men making similar amounts of moves, using similar amounts of words and speaking for similar lengths of time”. In conclusion, most studies show there is a tendency towards establishing a balance in gender representation in terms of gender firstness in school and non-school curricula.

The Present Study

This study aims to examine gender representation in the Pre-Intermediate Market Leader: Business English Practice File textbook. It seeks to identify the existence or inexistence of gender bias in this particular textbook. The study performed a content analysis of the text book to investigate:

- 1- The total occurrences of male and female names and third person singulars (gender visibility).
- 2- The total occurrences of gendered occupational roles and their nature.
- 3- The total occurrences of males and females appearing before each other (gender firstness).

Methodology

1. Materials

One university textbook currently used at Sohar University constitutes the sample of this study. The textbook is entitled *Pre-Intermediate Market Leader: Business English Practice File*, published by Pearson Education Limited in 2012. This textbook is used to teach business communication skills (UNIH1000 and UNIH2000) to English language and translation students in level one. It is also used to teach business communication skills (UNIR 1000 and UNIR2000) to students from engineering and business faculties at Sohar University.

2. Data Collection Analysis

This study includes a content analysis of the following three categories: Gender visibility, Occupational Roles, and Gender Firstness. The analysis includes all texts found in this textbook. The study includes quantitative and qualitative analysis of the contents of this textbook in terms of the three above mentioned categories. The quantitative analysis includes the total number of masculine and feminine names and pronouns (he, him, she, and her) found in the textbook (gender firstness). In addition, it also includes an analysis of gender visibility by examining the total number of masculine and feminine names and 3rd person singulars (he, him, his, she, her, and hers). Finally, the total number of occupational roles associated with males and females in this textbook. The qualitative analysis, on the other hand, includes the nature of occupational roles present in this textbook. The qualitative analysis focuses on identifying traditional or nontraditional occupational roles found in the textbook.

3. Procedure

Procedures used in this study focus on two levels. The first level dealt with counting the number of male and female occurrences present in textbook. Then the results are represented in tables along with the total number of these male and female occurrences with an in-depth analysis. The second level includes the nature of occupational roles associated with males and females in this textbook. Major themes of masculine and feminine occupational roles appearing in the textbooks are tabulated and analyzed (e.g. traditional or nontraditional themes).

4. Description of Sample

The sample textbook consists of 12 units and 96 pages focusing on major business themes such as *careers, companies, marketing, products, great ideas, stress* and so on. In general, the first four units are taught in semester one while the other four units are taught in semester two at Sohar University. The sample textbook aims at pre-intermediate level students. The first eight units, taught at level one at Sohar University, focus on teaching three language skills: reading, writing, and language skills. Language skills include teaching students *present and past tenses, requests, time clauses, question formation* and so on. The reading section focuses on teaching skimming and scanning reading techniques in addition to business terminologies. The writing section pays much attention to teaching students how to write different types of e-mails (formal, informal, and semi-formal), CVs, cover letters, punctuation, editing, answering enquiries and so on.

Analysis of Findings

Collected data from the sample textbook are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Part1: Quantitative Analysis

1.1 Gender Visibility

The study results show that there is a balance in the representation of gender visibility in the sample textbook. Table 1 offers a detailed overview of the total number of masculine and feminine names and 3rd person singulars (he, him, his, she, her, and hers). Statistics shows that the total number of male names is exactly the same as female names. It stands at 82. Moreover, statistics has shown that there is a difference in the total number of 3rd person singulars between males and females. Masculine 3rd person singulars outnumbered feminine 3rd person singulars in the sample textbook. The total number of masculine 3rd person singulars is 99 while it is 97 for females. It is also important to point out that the total number of names and 3rd person singulars in the sample textbook is almost the same for males and females. The total number is 181 for males and 178 for females. In other words, this sample textbook, in general, offers to some extent a balanced representation of gender visibility.

Table 1: Total Number of Male and Female Names and 3rd Person Singulars

Gender	Names	3 rd Person Singulars	Total
Male	82	99	181
Female	82	88	178

2) Occupational roles

2.1 Quantitative Analysis

Table 2 offers detailed information about the number of gendered occupational roles in the sample textbook. The total number of occupational roles assigned to males and females in the sample textbook is 29.

Statistics show that occupational roles assigned to females far exceed and outnumber those assigned to males. The total number of occupational roles assigned to females is 17 while it is 12 for males. In other words, this sample textbook is a good example of efforts exerted to eliminate gender bias against females in textbooks.

Table 2: Total Number of Occupational Roles Assigned to Males and Females

Gender	Occupational Roles	Total
Males	12	29
Females	17	

2- Qualitative Analysis

Table 3 shows that males occupied traditional occupational roles whereas females occupied traditional and nontraditional (feminist) occupational roles in the sample textbook. Males were generally depicted as general managers, maintenance engineer, security officers, visionaries, managers, and so on. Females, on the other hand, were portrayed as receptionist, professor; MBA director, secretary, fashion designer, marketing manager, quality control inspector, and so on. Females were portrayed in stereotypical occupational roles such as receptionist, fashion designer, secretary, employee, professor, social worker, and cosmetics company employee. Females were also portrayed in nontraditional occupational roles such as office manager, quality control inspector, assistant marketing director, MBA director, marketing manager, deputy manager, sales manager, and head of department, boss, and manager. In other words, this sample textbook presents a balanced representation of males and females in terms of occupational roles.

Table 3: Occupational Roles Associated with Males and Females

Males	Females
Research and development employee, security officer, maintenance engineer, visionary, marketing department employee, manager, head of customer services, human resources employee, general manager, employee, ticket sale employee, and boss.	Office manager, receptionist, quality control inspector, assistant marketing director, professor, MBA director, marketing manager, cosmetics company employee, social worker, deputy manager, fashion designer, secretary, sales manager, head of department, employee, boss, and manager.

3) Gender firstness

Data obtained from the sample textbook regarding the examination of gender firstness (names and pronouns (he, him, she, her) has shown that gender bias is still inherent. The area of gender firstness analyzed in this study has indicated that males are generally given priority over females in the sample textbook. The sample textbook contained 13 male names being placed before females compared to only 8 female names appearing before male names in different activities. Male names are usually placed before female names in activities used in the sample textbook. In other words, males are still dominant and prevalent in this sample textbook. Moreover, data shows that the total number of masculine pronouns (he and him) that are placed before female names in the sample textbook in activities is 10. On the other hand, only 4 feminine pronouns (she and her) are placed before male names. The gender gap in this sample textbook is big and is considered an indication that male's presence in the sample textbook is still powerful and central.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that almost all previous studies discussed in the present paper have indicated that gender bias is still ingrained and dominant in school and non-school textbooks, the present study indicates that some efforts are being made to improve gender equity in textbooks. The present study results, for example, have shown that females are more visible than males in some areas (e.g. occupational roles), equally represented with males (e.g. gender visibility/presence), and less visible compared to males (e.g. gender firstness). It is therefore deemed necessary to push for more room for gender equity, balance, and equality in school textbooks. Due to the fact that gender bias is deeply-rooted in school textbooks, gender equity should be reinforced in present and future school textbooks. Teachers, educational institutions (e.g. ministry of education), and experts in the area of gender and education should take the initiative in promoting, enhancing, and administering pro-gender equity policies and practices in present and future school textbooks.

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