

**Gender Representation & Language Textbooks: A Study on Private School Textbooks of English Language at Secondary Level**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The English language is considered to be the lingua franca and connecting language worldwide; therefore, it gained recognition as a second language far and wide. With the help of language learning, novel norms, dogmas, and morals of an individual are cultivated. Henceforth, language textbooks should advocate culturally, politically, and gender balanced ideas in a way that influences learners in a constructive approach. Textbooks are fabricators of personality that draw students' attention towards their content. The investigation on gender representation and language textbooks is done in order to investigate the depiction of females in language textbooks that are taught at private schools. This study is meant to investigate how authors of language textbooks employ naming/ word level, notion of transitivity, and discourse in describing male and female genders. The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature, and the source of data collection is language textbooks published by Oxford University Press, editors taught at grade-9 & 10. The study revealed that transitivity choices made by authors were favouring male; characters of both books were male in the majority, and gender bias can be seen through the professions allocated to males and females. The present investigation is limited to English language textbooks at grade-9 & 10 only. This study suggests that there is a lot of necessity to work on the gender bias in schoolbooks and they should be planned in a way that embodies gender sociable content. The current investigation is significant for policy proposers, the government of Sindh, the curricula committee, and textbook designers.*

**Keywords:** Gender Portrayal, Depiction, OUP textbooks, English language

**INTRODUCTION**

Schooling is considered to be a main source of progress of any country in the age of globalization, according to the human capital theory. This is why developing a “knowledgeable society” with the help of education is one of the key priorities of policymakers everywhere around the globe. Therefore, increasing access to education for everyone through strengthening the school setup is one of the requirements for all policy planners around the world. Every culture has gender images and characters as one of the obligatory parts; henceforth, the approach in which men and women are portrayed in the course books is playing a part in constructing beliefs and values among learner’s mind. It must be kept in mind that authors of the books should not propagate any specific gender in textbooks. As ‘Every living being has equal rights’,

this should be respected and catered to while characterization of male and females. One of the studies by Labov (1972) stated that female characters have specific utterances while males have others, so we can find bias in language in the books, even. Educational books are designed to include text and images, and they provide multiple information regarding culture, latest trends, biographies, and many moral lessons, and portray genders in any other way. It is also observed that in many families, course books are the only source of information, as that is the only book they keep, maybe for any of the reasons, so these books help them reshape their ideas and values. A learner learns almost 32000 course book sheets from the beginning to the secondary level for his/her progress. Women's underrepresentation and bias in Pakistani textbooks is one of the issues that is hampering women's image and role in science and other related fields. Sometimes it shows that textbooks are '*Gender Blind*'.

This study is to explore gender stereotyping and indistinctness of women in textbooks. It is an analysis of the female gender at three levels, word level, phrase level, and discourse level, where the role of the female is analysed in terms of key roles, characterization, and discourse.

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To explore how naming and the notion of transitivity are employed by textbook writers in language textbooks to depict females by the OUP publishers.
- ii. To explore how discourse is employed by the textbook writer to represent women in characters and content by the OUP publishers.

### **Research Questions**

- i. How naming and notion of transitivity employed by writers to depict the female image by the OUP publishers?
- ii. How is the depiction of females employed to depict females in characters and in content by OUP publishers?

### **Significance of the Study**

This current study is significant for textbook writers, policy makers, educationist and curricula committees who are making the policies for designing textbooks and can play an important role in advocating gender equality and fairness for females in content and illustrations.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Education plays a significant role in any of the country's economic, political, and societal improvement and progress. Education can solve many issues related to society and can help in advancement and development. Therefore, education should play its part in promoting gender fairness, as it needs to address this issue, and it can be done with the help of education. The importance of women in education and the issue of gender imbalance now need to be addressed, and the ratio of female education is becoming less so it must be worked on so that education can be for all (Manion, 2016). Textbook writers decide how and what to add while designing a textbook as it's totally up to their will and wish. According to UNICEF (2015), an educated mother can educate her daughters/sons better than an uneducated mother. It is also observed by policymakers that textbooks are gender biased, and they have raised their voice against it through different policies, but still, it is not implemented well.

Mebratu and Semela (2022) revealed in their study that in Ethiopian society, females are portrayed in supplementary roles having revealing clothes, and shown to be innocent and eye-catching. While in their textbooks male are appeared to be more in power attribution, which is inaccurate if we don't consider it as distorted. The message that is conveyed through text and illustration is showing woman inferior to man maybe intentionally or not. Ahmed (2006) also suggested that the National Council of Educational

Research and Training (NCERTS) (1982-1983) is trying to incorporate gender fairness and remove all the bias from schoolbooks, but still, things are in a transition period.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study takes Mills' Model (1995) as a theoretical framework for examining female characters in textbooks of secondary level in Sindh, Pakistan. As it is debated by many feminists whether there can be a variance in the writing of male and female writers or not. As it was argued by some French feminists that male and female authors have differences in their writings, but they were unable to explain it with examples or logic (Mills, 1995).



**Photograph 2.1 Taken from Mills (1995) Model**

Mills (1995) discusses some of the psychological factors of a woman as a mother who wants to make her son an independent and wishes to have him work instead of her. Even still, now we can see such types of norms existing in our society where more preference is given to menfolk. As men are considered to be bread winner and female subordinate to them. Mills (1995) highlights that females have been stereotyped in novels, textbooks, advertisements, and media.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative and descriptive study. Qualitative study is more momentous and thought-provoking in natural settings and in social sciences (Denzin, 2005). This study focuses on Mills' Model (1995), which has three levels of analysis from the word level to phrase, and then at the discourse level. The Oxford University Press publisher's books of the English language, which are followed by private schools of Pakistan, are collected as a basis of data collection from levels 9 & 10.

### **Data Collection**

For data collection, two books of English language from OUP publishers have been taken. Both books are taught at a private school in Sindh, Pakistan, at the O-Level. The books of grade-9 has 10 units, while grade-10 also has 10 units. Both books comprise sub-units with activities representing culture, society, latest technology, religious feasts, and current affairs.

## Data Analysis

For data analysis, all the books are read thoroughly: prose, poems, essays, and activities. All three levels are analyzed using Mills' (1995) model of feminist stylistics. How the male and female gender is characterized in all aspects of content and illustrations, and how writers have shown the female image specifically.

## RESULTS

### Analysis at Words Level

#### Generic Masculine Nouns

Here we can see that *Generic masculine nouns* are used by OUP writers in both the grade-9 and grade-10 books. Examples are listed below in a table:

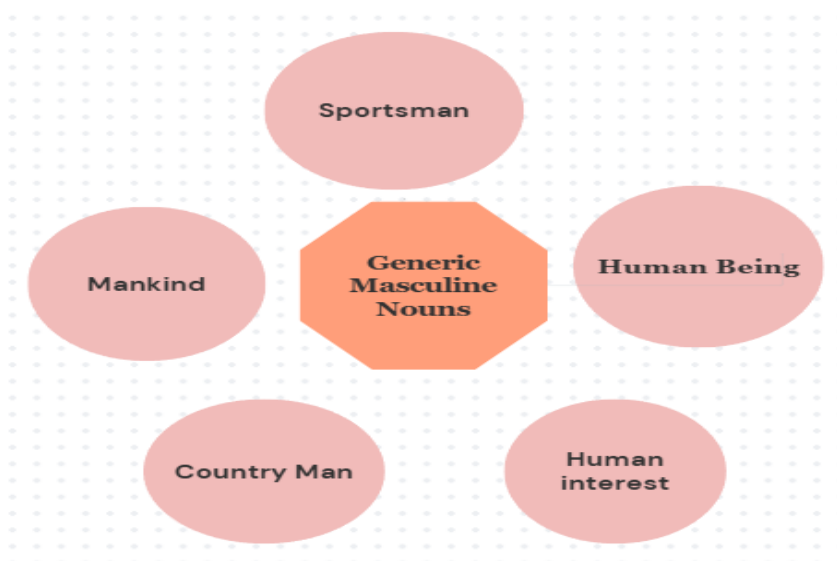
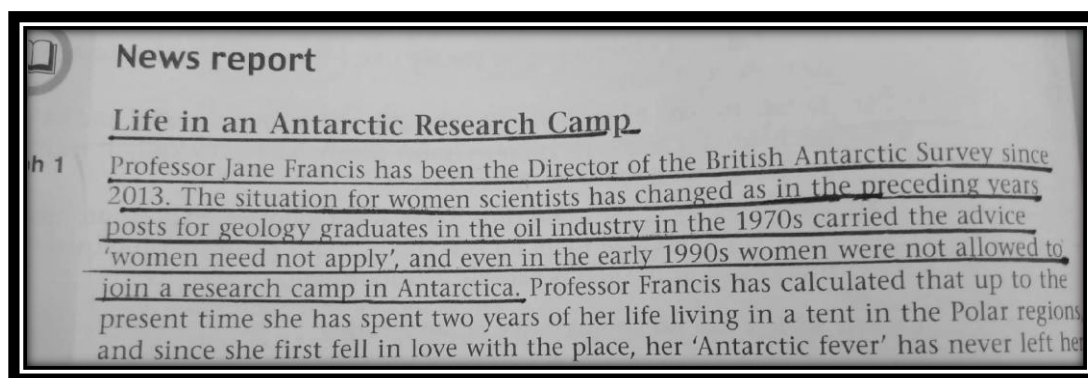


Table 4.1 The use of Generic Masculine Nouns by OUP writers  
Professions for Women and Men



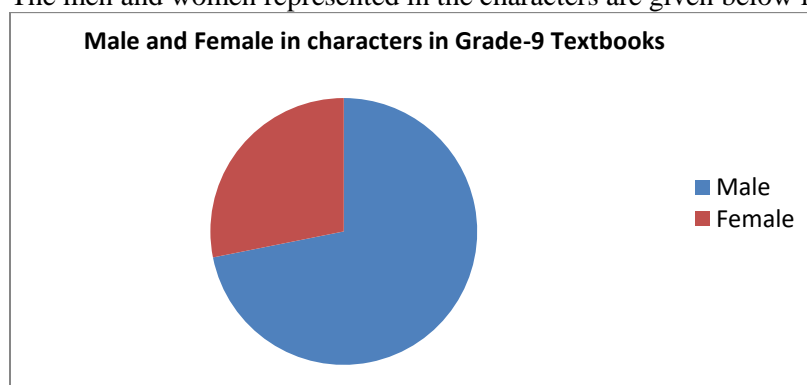
Photograph 4.2 Professions for women in OUP

Professions for Women and Men	
Professions for Women	Professions for Men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writer</li> <li>• Book seller</li> <li>• Teacher</li> <li>• House-Maid</li> <li>• Doctor</li> <li>• Poetess</li> <li>• Embroider</li> <li>• Tennis star</li> <li>• and 8 more.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctor</li> <li>• Teacher</li> <li>• Researcher</li> <li>• Journalist</li> <li>• King</li> <li>• Scientist</li> <li>• Prime Minister</li> <li>• Ambassador</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Businessman</li> <li>• and 13 more</li> </ul>

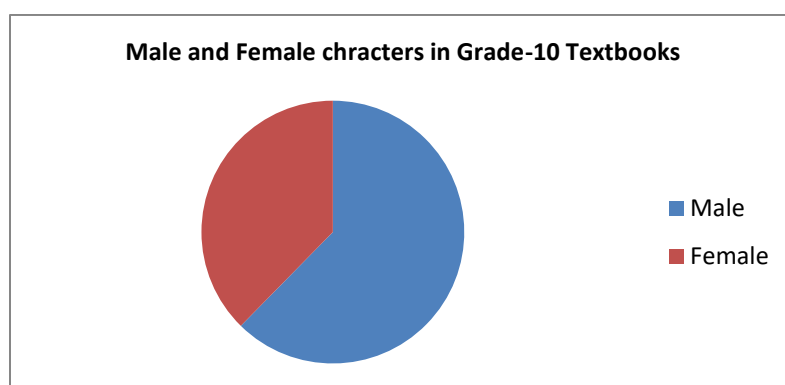
**Table 4.3 Professions for men and women assigned by OUP writers**

#### Man/woman in Characters

The men and women represented in the characters are given below in the figure:



**Figure 4.5 The Ratio of Male/Female in Characters in Grade-9 Textbooks**



**Figure 4.6 The Ratio of Male/Female in Characters in Grade-10 Textbooks**

### **Phrase and Sentence Level Analysis**

#### **Ready –Made Phrase**

There are many ready –made phrases in the textbooks of OUP of grade-9 and grade-10. The majority of times man was prioritized over woman. The following are some of the ready-made phrases used in OUP textbooks:

- No papa or mamma ( class-9, p.72)
- He or she (class-9, p.105)
- My master and mistress ( class-9,p.73)
- Man and woman (class-10,p.3)

#### **Transitivity**

A transitivity choice is made by authors in which they portray what is done to others by whom. It is the choice of writers to suggest and assign content and roles to both of the genders. But here again we analysed that male is favoured by writers, as in most of the novels and dramas, male is shown to be goal-minded and determined in comparison to it female is mostly visible with multiple emotions and appearance. The following are the statements taken from OUP, where we can see transitivity choices made by authors:

- The women weave carpets all day long. (Grade-9,p.62)
- Generally, she believes that women find it easier to cope with the stresses of the Antarctic conditions than men do, and she certainly thrives there, even if it is the toughest place on earth to study. (Grade-9,p.69)

#### **Discourse Level Analysis**

In this level word and phrases are linked together in order to investigate bigger notions in textbooks in regard to structure and context. Here are discourse-level analyses given in the following section:

#### **Character**

Mills (1995) stated that characterization of characters is done through facial expressions and looks, and their analysis is also done by looks and nonverbal expressions. The following are the data taken from OUP textbooks in terms of characterization of characters done by the writer while depicting male and female genders:

- My grandfather is a tall, distinguished man with a bald head. He wears a white short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers (class 10, p.30).
- She is dressed like a cleaning woman: rubber gloves, apron, scarf over her hair ( class 10, p.30)
- She stood there dazed, her eyes fixed on the snake and her heart burning for the baby daughter who brought so much happiness to her life (class 9, p.4).

#### **Male/Female in Central Roles**

OUP textbook of grade-9 and grade -10 has ten lessons, but OUP grade-09 has 37 lessons; out of them, thirteen lessons are about men in key characters, while only seven lessons are with women in key characters. Similarly, in grade-10 there are 34 lessons in which males are in a key role in ten lessons, while females are visible in eight lessons.

The following are text and pictures taken from the OUP textbooks of grade-9

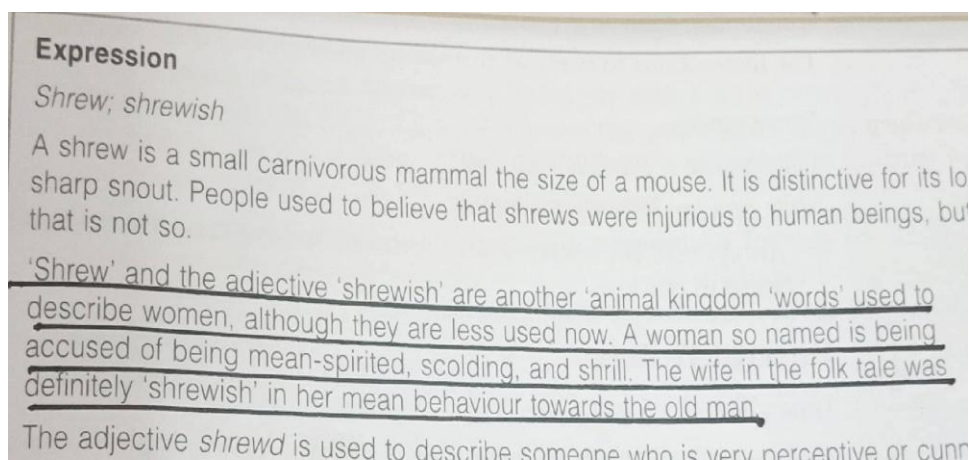
- And voices in me said, if you were a man, you would take a stick and break him now & finish him off.



- The man came out of the shack, followed by a woman carrying a baby.
- J.K Rowling, author of the Harry Potter stories, is the first writer in the world to earn a billion dollars.



**Photograph 4.7 Male and Female in the OUP textbooks of grade-9**  
**Depiction of Female Image**



**Photograph 4.8 Depiction of a female image in the OUP textbook grade-10**

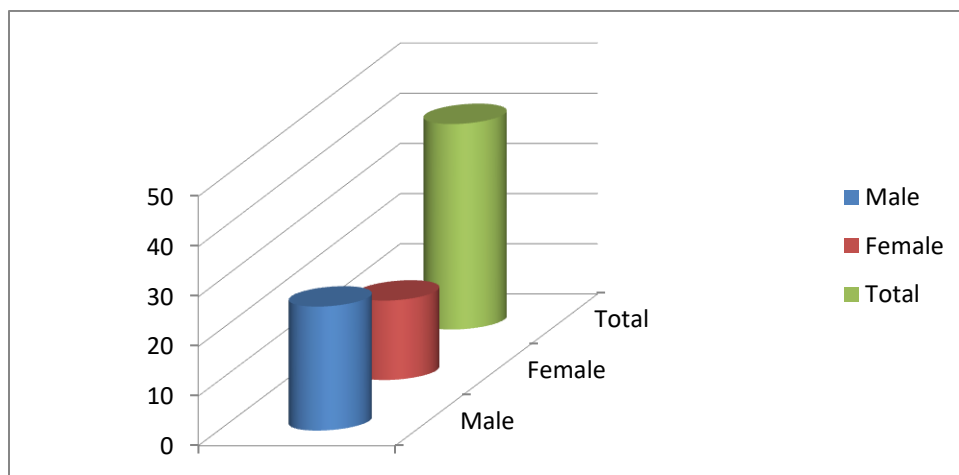
## **DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Discussions at the Naming/Word Level**

Women are given conventional roles and appear more in homely activities than in outdoor activities, according to Otlowski (2003). At the naming level, these categories are analyzed: generic masculine nouns and pronouns, professions for man/woman and male/female in characters or key roles. The generic masculine nouns and pronouns can be seen in Oxford University Press textbooks in both grades 9& 10.

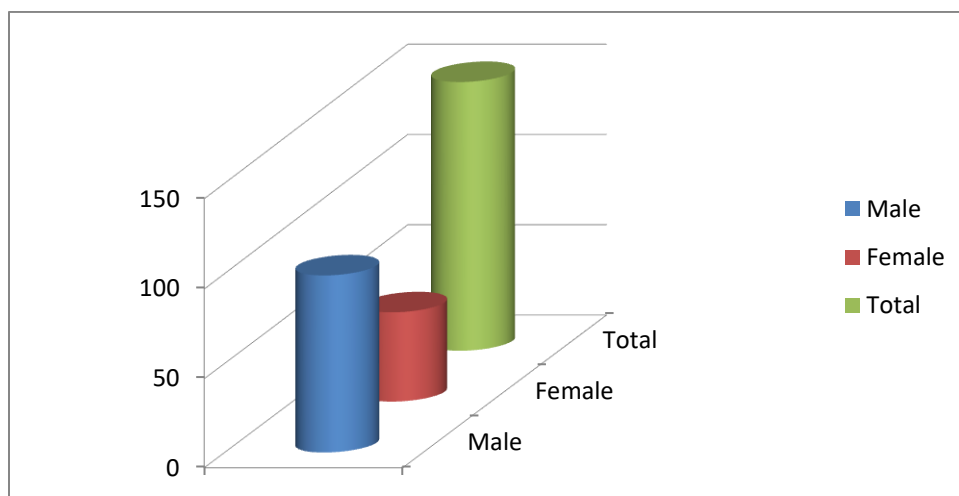
1. *'The working men in the basti. (Grade-9, p.68)'*

Men here are used to indicate both genders. According to Burchfield (1981), the term '*they*' is mostly used for both male/female, and most commonly *he* is also used to represent male/female more frequently. Likewise, watchman, lady doctor for female doctor, while for a male doctor, mankind, menfolk, and others are commonly used in OUP textbooks. For professions majority of occupations were for the male gender than females. Here is the ratio given for male/female professions by OUP writers:



**Fig. 5.1 Profession Ratio for men and women in the OUP textbook**

Here, it can be seen that the ratio of males is more than that of females in terms of assigning professions. The following is given another figure, which indicates the total number of male/female books:



**Fig. 5.2 Man/Woman ratio in characters**

In characterization and in occupations, we can see clear discrimination in favor of males over females. Men are everywhere in content and in illustrations outnumber the female gender, with a majority of males in character and in occupations in grade 9 & 10 OUP textbooks.

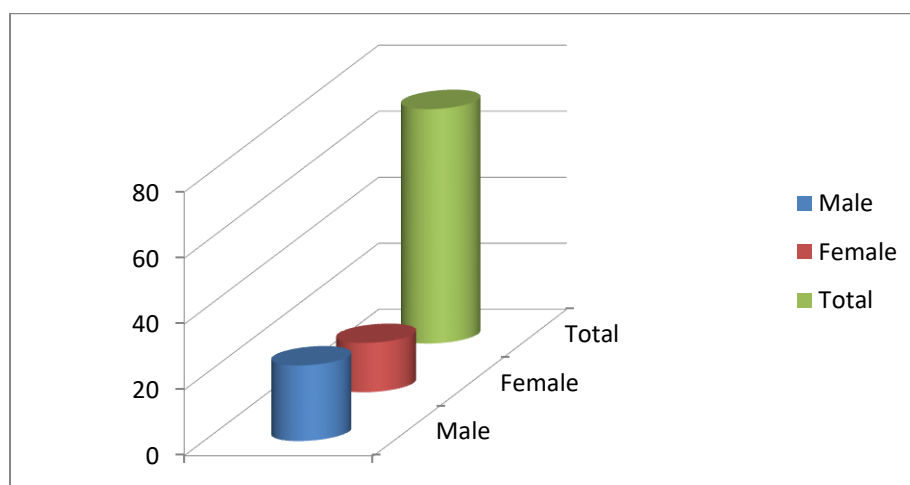


### Discussion at Sentence/Phrase level

Manion (2016) stated that girls'/women's education is an important issue that must be talked about, as we can see gender bias in educational course books, females are less represented with stereotype image. This study investigated the ready-made phrases used by OUP textbook writers, such as Papa or Mamma, man and woman, a very poor brother and sister, and many more, which prioritize male over female. The use of transitivity choices by textbook writers also shows that there are few roles accredited with females, like cooking, stitching, and homely chores, which shows gender bigotry. Hightower (2003) revealed that females as a set are at a disadvantage in terms of economics, politics, and culture around the globe.

### Discussion at Discourse Level

The data analyzed at the discourse level is based on characters of male/females, gender biasness and key roles attributed to men and women. According to Bahman and Rashmi (2010), gender ideologies by nationalists in Pakistan were initiated by creating binaries such as strong/weak, powerful/powerless, male/female, and masculine/feminine. It is also observed that adjectives, nouns, and pronouns are more commonly used for males than for females. Most of the time, women are neglected in the entire topic, and data also highlights that the ratio of men in characters/key roles is quite higher than woman.



**Fig. 5.3 Key/ Central roles for man/woman in OUP textbooks**

One of the lines taken from the OUP Textbook is given below:

*“The old tradition of women staying at home and not going out to work is changing. (Grade-10, p.20).”*

This shows that the old traditions are now coming to an end, as somehow some issues are starting to communicate for women's rights. Even these days, women are working along with man and they are not staying at home only, but working and taking care of their families.

### CONCLUSION

School books always remains source of knowledge and form beliefs and norms among learners at an early age. The content provided by writers is playing a significant role in learners, and its impact is long-lasting. So, it is very important to design textbooks in a way which convey neutral and positive image of both genders. Many of the researchers as Koch, Liberman, Block, Merriweather, & Roberson (2011), revealed that women are treated as a minority and provided stereotype image which is based on the

societal roles given to them. The current study investigated gender representation in OUP textbooks, which are taught at private schools in Pakistan. The analysis was done at three levels based on Mills' model (1995). The levels were word level, phrase level/sentence level, and discourse level. It is also observed that the curricula committee has given policies for gender equality a long time ago, but still, those policies are not implemented by writers.

The findings of this research concluded that English language books of grade-9 & 10 of OUP publishers have not depicted both genders equally in terms of all three levels. It was also seen that male dominance was shown excessively in the textbooks. Barost (2012) notes that son is always prioritized over daughters in many of the countries, such as Pakistan, India, China, and many other countries. In the findings, it was also observed that key or main roles were held by the majority of male characters, and more professions were assigned with male gender not with females. Many of the women were shown as patient mothers, caring and loving wives, and indoor characters and occupations. The majority of ready-made phrases started with the male gender and were paired in a way that the dominant man is, as in 'Father and mother, Man and Woman, Mr. and Mrs., likewise. The professions with dominance, power, and economy were assigned to man not to women. Unfair portrayal of female image can be seen in the textbooks of OUP, male outnumbers female gender in content and in illustration, in occupation and character, and even economically and culturally.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The English language is considered to be one of the languages that is in demand due to its role as a lingua franca. OUP textbooks are taught at private schools to teach English in a native speaker's context and values. As textbooks play a very crucial role in building students' beliefs, they must be catering needs of all individuals, groups, and cultures. Language books are designed with multiple categories like characters, ideologies, themes, culture, and societal norms, which students go through for their learning. As it is a known fact that education is general for all, it must be treated equally for both genders. Male chauvinism is one of the most common and most talked issue in debates for ages, but still these things are not eradicated from educational manuals. This study suggests that textbooks should address norms and beliefs in a way which fulfil needs of both genders and propagates gender equality so that learners learn to respect both males and females equally. It's not about gender equality, rather gender neutrality, and this study does not emphasize a 50/50 ratio of men and women but a respectful and non-discriminatory role for both genders. There are some of the gendered terminologies that should not be part of the course books; instead, gender-balanced terms must be used.

### **GAP FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study focuses only on one OUP textbook of grades 9 & 10 of language for collection or source of data at the secondary level, so gender biasness further can be further analyzed in other fields and other levels with different languages. Policies of curricula and national standards must be researched in order to get knowledge about updated policies for gender fairness. Apart from it, males' depiction in textbooks should be investigated to know how men are portrayed in textbooks at different levels. Furthermore, interviews must be conducted with policymakers and authors of textbooks about the criteria for designing language textbooks by OUP publishers.

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