

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN SRI LANKAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

N. S. Adjumain

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

shinyadjumain@gmail.com

Abstract

Gender stereotyping is common in cultural products such as children's books and textbooks. Gender representation in textbooks is critical because it plays a role in fostering gender roles in children. Although gender equality was introduced in Sri Lankan education reforms in 1999, it is unclear how completely these changes have been incorporated into textbooks ever since. Thus, this study aimed to examine the gender representation and gender stereotypes in English-language textbooks used in state-owned schools in Sri Lanka since the education reforms of 1999. Three eighth-grade textbooks published between 2001 and 2015 were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively for textual and visual information. The information from the three books was then contrasted to comprehend how gender representation and stereotyping have changed over time. The findings confirmed that stereotyping and negative discrimination against women are prevalent in Sri Lankan English-language textbooks. The masculine presence is dominant in both the images and the texts, and the women's representation depicts stereotypical gender roles. Despite the 2001 textbook's initial attempt to reduce stereotyping and demonstrate gender equality, stereotyping, and gender representation have not changed positively over the last two decades. As a result, stereotypical elements were much more prevalent in recent textbooks. This unfavorable result appears to have been influenced by the absence of gender equality concepts in national educational goals as well as prevalent but unacknowledged gender perceptions in society, and this situation requires further research.

Keywords: ESL, gender representation, stereotyping, textbooks, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Education in Sri Lanka has a long history. Pre-colonized Sri Lanka had an extensive system of indigenous schools conveying both the Buddhist and Hindu heritage (Cummings, 1992, p. 9). However, history does not provide much evidence of women being educated in a formal institution. Females were gradually introduced to institutionalized formal education with the introduction of missionary schools in Sri Lanka. Yet, most of the public did not receive the opportunity to pursue any kind of literacy. The first formal authority in the Sri Lankan education system was established in the 1840s and by 1843,

a grant-in-aid system was established to encourage the growth of English-language education.

In the late 19th century, Sri Lanka's adult literacy rate stood at a mere 22%, with a stark gender disparity of 35% for men and 7% for women (Aturupane and Little, 2019). Recognizing the need for inclusive education, the Free Education Act of 1945 was enacted, allowing the majority to attend English-medium schools from kindergarten through university without cost. Post-independence reforms led to the government taking over many supported schools,

marking a significant shift in the education system. Textbooks, a major tool in ESL education (Sherman et al., 2016; Hadar, 2017, as cited in Mithans & Grmek, 2020, p. 202) were first introduced to Sri Lankan ESL classrooms in 1982, carrying the curriculum and playing a dominant role in teaching and learning. Despite periodic curriculum reforms every nine years, it remains essential to examine how gender portrayal in English Language textbooks has evolved over the past two decades.

Sri Lanka has made notable progress toward gender equality, ranking as the least unequal South Asian nation according to the Gender Inequality Index (Asian Development Bank, 2016). However, gender stereotyping persists in Sri Lankan society, albeit undergoing a transformative shift in recent decades. While societal attitudes have evolved, Ariyaratne & Karunanayake (2013) argue that naive ethnic stereotypical attitudes still prevail. In this context, English Language textbooks can serve as powerful tools to challenge and reshape stereotypical norms imposed on the younger generation. Despite these societal shifts, it remains unclear to what extent men are stereotyped in the Sri Lankan education system. This study aims to assess the portrayal of gender in English Language textbooks, evaluate gender representation equality, and explore potential changes in gender portrayal over the last 20 years.

Education reforms in Sri Lanka since 1998 have emphasized gender equality, with recommendations to integrate concepts of peace education, national harmony, democratic principles, human rights, and environmental conservation into the curriculum (National Educational Policy, 1997). Despite these efforts, it appears that insufficient attention has been given to determining if both genders receive equal representation when challenging stereotyped gender roles in textbooks. The study seeks to address this gap by examining the extent to which English Language textbooks in Sri Lanka perpetuate or break gender stereotypes, evaluating gender equality in representation, and exploring changes in gender portrayal over the

past two decades. Understanding the dynamics of gender portrayal in educational materials is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment in Sri Lanka (Liyanage, 2014).

Literature Review

In the 21st century, gender studies has gained prominence, focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment in educational policies. Extensive research explores gender representation and stereotyping in various educational elements, including classroom language, textbooks, and syllabi. Recognizing gender as a social construct acquired during childhood, the literature review highlights historical interest in understanding how children form gender identities. The review sets the stage for the current study, examining the evolution of gender representation and stereotyping in Sri Lankan English-language textbooks since 1999. Emphasizing the significance of psychological theories in addressing adolescent development, the study specifically targets users within this age group, emphasizing the interconnectedness of social and mental development with the research objectives.

Gender Ideologies in Educational Material

The realm of gender studies, particularly in education, has witnessed a surge in scholarly attention, driven by concerns for gender equality and women's empowerment in educational policies. Studies delve into the manifestation of conventional gender roles and stereotypes across various educational levels, with a focus on the influential role of textbooks. The research scrutinizes textual and visual content, unraveling how these materials shape perceptions of gender and perpetuate or challenge societal norms.

Most existing studies predominantly concentrate on male-dominated societies, with results often reflecting textbook content favoring male representation. Notably, the gender portrayal in nations with lower Gender Inequality Index scores remains unclear. Abeysekara's (2008) study on "Gender Ideologies in Selected Secondary Textbooks" examines Sri Lankan textbooks, emphasizing their role as influential

transmitters of societal norms. The research aims to investigate patriarchal ideologies, identity construction, the portrayal of gender relations, reinforcement or challenge of gender-role stereotypes, and depiction of the gender division of labor across English, History, Citizenship Education, Geography, and Health and Physical Education textbooks. Findings reveal a tension between patriarchal ideologies and feminist principles, with male counterparts receiving favorable treatment, dominance in narratives, and inconsistent use of gender-neutral language.

Wijetunga's (2017) study on "Sexism in Textbooks: A Case Study of G.C.E. O/L Textbooks" reinforces concerns about sexist language perpetuating gender disparities in Sri Lankan society. Medawattegedera's (2018) exploration of English teaching materials in Sri Lanka emphasizes the role of educational videos in shaping gender ideologies. The "Speak English Our Way" campaign aimed to redefine English as a useful skill, yet gender biases persisted, limiting female roles to traditional stereotypes.

Narahara's (1998) early exploration of gender stereotypes in children's books identified a decrease in stereotyping over time but noted reversals in folklore. Sovic & Hus (2015) extended this focus to Slovenian textbooks, revealing pervasive gender stereotypes where males dominate active roles. The Iranian study by Bahman & Rahimi (2010) on "Gender representation in EFL materials" used statistical analyses, exposing sexist language and imbalances in male and female character representation in Iranian English textbooks. Cocorada's (2018) study on Romanian school textbooks unveils prevalent gender stereotypes that perpetuate historical sexist beliefs.

Lee's (2014) comparison of Japanese EFL textbooks highlights female underrepresentation and male supremacy. Durrani et al.'s (2022) analysis of Kazakhstani textbooks unveils gender dichotomies perpetuated through fixed male/female roles and ideals.

In essence, these studies collectively illuminate

the pervasive nature of gender biases in educational materials across diverse cultural contexts. Despite efforts to challenge stereotypes, textbooks continue to shape and perpetuate societal norms, reinforcing the need for ongoing scrutiny and reform in educational content.

Gender & Adolescence

Gender theories, evolving since Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) seminal work "The Second Sex," challenge the notion that individuals are born as men or women, emphasizing the acquisition of gender traits shaped by societal influences. Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theory, focusing on erogenous zones and childhood experiences, posits the development of gender identity during the phallic stage. Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory suggests that gender roles are acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Sandra Bem's (1949) Gender Schema Theory (GST) asserts that children learn gender roles from their environment, forming cognitive frameworks that influence behaviors. The Gender Intensification Hypothesis proposes that adolescence, influenced by societal pressures, leads to more stereotypical gender roles. Hill & Lynch (1983) argue that gender differences become more pronounced with age. Starr & Zurbruggen's (2016) review assesses the broad reach and evolving impact of GST, revealing its influence on diverse topics and a global, cross-disciplinary audience. The study underscores the continued relevance of GST in explaining stereotypical behaviors, especially in the context of child development.

Methodology

The Methodology used in the study is a comparative analysis. The goal of the study is to assess gender representation in three English-language textbooks. Thus, both textual and visual data from the three textbooks were analyzed separately, with an emphasis on the frequency of occurrences and stereotyping elements. Next, the data gathered from the three books was compared against each other to understand the evolution of gender representation and stereotyping over the years.

The research design is both quantitative and qualitative, as statistical data, visual data, and textual data were analyzed through close observation of content.

The comparative part of the study was designed mainly around two hypotheses.

1. Gender stereotyping has decreased in every new publication.
2. Gender representation of women has increased over the years in every new publication.

The data collection for this study involved the application of a predetermined criterion, developed by the researcher and referencing checklists from prior research. The framework for textual analysis drew inspiration from "Gender Stereotypes in Children's Picture Books" (Narahara, 1998), with criteria derived from studies such as "Gender Representation in EFL Materials: An Analysis of English Textbooks of Iranian High Schools" (Masoumeh & Rahimi, 2010), "Sexism in Textbooks: A Case Study of G.C.E. O/L textbook" (Wijetunga, 2017), and "Gender Ideologies in the School Curriculum: A Textual Analysis of Secondary School Textbooks" (Abeyasekera, 2008). The analysis employed numerical data to assess the distribution of male and female characters, professions, activities, and the use of gender-associated adjectives. Emphasis was placed on discerning how stereotyping manifested in lexical choices and character distribution within the texts. Concurrently, a conscious observation of reading texts identified elements of stereotyping and instances of breaking stereotypes, which were then compiled for analysis. Visual analyses, inspired by Sovič & Hus (2015), focused on colors, sizes, and placements of characters in textbook images associated with reading texts. The criteria for picture analysis included the depiction of professions and the portrayal of gender-specific instrument use (Narahara, 1998).

Criterion for the Analysis of Textual Data

1. How many female and male characters are present in each text?
2. What is the distribution of gender in each textbook?

3. What professions are assigned to male and female characters?
4. What are the activities that the characters in the texts are involved in?
5. What is the frequency of stereotyping in the actions of characters in texts?
6. What are the adjectives used for each gender?

Criteria for the Analysis of Visual Data

1. What is the frequency of gender in pictures?
2. What colors are used for each gender?
3. What are the activities that the characters in the pictures are involved in?
4. What are the instruments the characters use? (If any)
5. What are the professions the characters in the pictures represent?

This study, spanning 1999 to 2016, analyzed gender portrayal in Grade 8 English textbooks. Extracting data directly from three selected textbooks, the sample was chosen purposively due to time and resource constraints. The study aligns with the Gender Intensification Hypothesis (Hill and Lynch, 1983) and was prompted by the 1997 Education Policy's emphasis on gender equality.

Results

The findings of the study are presented in three parts. The first part contains the findings of the textual content analysis, which addresses the first and second objectives of the study. The second part contains the findings of the visual content analysis, which also addresses the first and second objectives of the study. The third part compares the gender representation of the three textbooks, and it addresses the third research objective.

Textual Analysis

Distribution of Characters

The pie chart illustrates gender distribution in Grade 8 textbooks across publication years. In 2001 and 2016, about 75% of characters were male, while 25% were female. However, the 2008 publication showed a more balanced ratio between male and female characters.

Figure 1: Distribution of characters in 2001

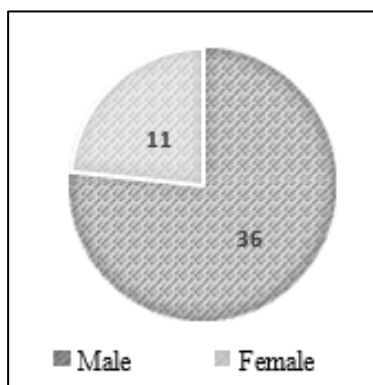


Figure 2: Distribution of characters in 2008

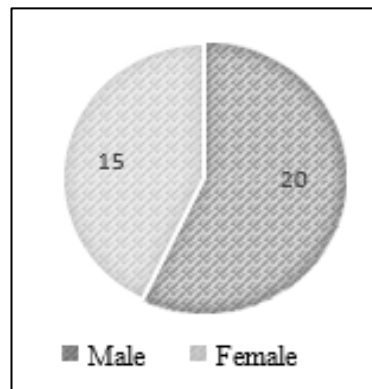
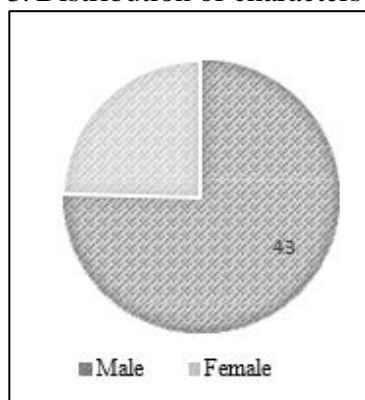


Figure 3: Distribution of characters in 2016



Professions Assigned According to Gender

The professions assigned to each character in the reading texts were listed according to gender in an attempt to address the study's first objective.

The results indicate that, while male characters are depicted as having multiple professions, female characters have few or none.

Table 1: Professions Assigned According to Gender

2001		2008		2016	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Project Officer	Primary school teacher	Police officer		Farmer	Librarian
King				Painter	
Workman					
Policeman				Bus conductor	
Student				Security guard	
Press Officer				Principal	
Water work					
Engineer					
School					
Inspector					
Editor					

Activities Involved According to Gender

In an attempt to address the study's first objective, which was to determine whether the

portrayal of gender in English Language textbooks is stereotypical or non-stereotypical, the activities engaged in by each character in the

reading texts were listed according to gender. The results indicate that, while male characters engage in more activities outdoors, female characters engage in domestic activities.

Table 2: Activities According to Gender

2001		2008		2016	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Conducting a survey	Participating a survey	Gardening		Preparing invitation	Preparing invitation
Jumping	Scolding the children			Sound arrangement	Costume designing
Drilling walls	Sitting by the fire			Decorations	Decorations
Tells stories of one's travels	Preparing dinner		Making a speech		Advising Kids
Maintain road safety			Horse riding		Preparing dinner
			Farming		Serving snacks and tea
			Watching TV		Playing Netball
			Painting		Sweeping the garden
			Building Construction		Lending books
			Ruling a country		Arranging Dolls
			Casting spells		Hiking
			Serving the king		
			Jumping on the bed		
			Playing cricket		
			Borrowing books		
			Flying kites		
			Fetching sheep		
			Conducting an interview		
			Boat riding		

Occurrences of Stereotyping or Breaking Stereotypes

For the study's first objective, the reading texts in the three textbooks underwent detailed scrutiny to identify instances of stereotyping and breaking stereotypes. Results were categorized by publication year, revealing that both the 1999 and 2016 books exhibited stereotypical elements. Notably, the 2016 publication made efforts to break stereotypes in certain aspects.

2001

1. Let's make something beautiful: The interviewee is at home even though she is wearing a saree.
2. Together we stand: The king of the jungle is the lion and all the animals are depicted as males. The meekest animal among all the animals in the text, the rabbit is depicted as a

female.

3. Surrounded by noise: There are two occurrences of stereotyping. Both males and females are stereotyped. 'Brother jumping on the bed' and 'workman drilling the road' and the mother's shout is stated as an explosion.
4. We are with you: The image shows newly introduced acquaintances shaking hands. The pairs are matched based on gender.
5. From place to place: The mother prepares dinner while the uncle and children keep talking.
6. Use of Public property: All the professionals in the lesson are male.
7. Use of Public property: The women at the public faucet are depicted as having forgotten why they were there and were instead more interested in gossiping while the water is overflowing.

2008

1. Activity 3.11: The hobbies of boys are collecting stamps, reading, watching TV, and gardening. Hobbies of the girls are dancing, handwork, cooking, flower arranging, and shopping.

2016

1. Activity 1.1: The mother receives the son’s friends at home and helps the children with their homework. In the same activity, the English teacher is depicted as a Female.
2. Activity 1.5: The mother gives instructions to the children on how to pack bags for an outing.
3. Activity 2.1: A girl’s ambition is to become an ornithologist.
4. Activity 2.9: Building construction work is done by a male.
5. Activity 3.1: A boy and the bus conductor both help an old lady. The mother does not initiate to help.
6. Activity 3.5: A male-dominant text with no female characters. The ruler of the country, the wisest man in the kingdom, and the wizard all are males.
7. Activity 3.9: A Jumping in the bed.
8. Activity 5.1: The mother has difficulty in

making calculations so turns to her husband’s help. Further, the mother in the activity was absent-minded and some recent incidents had to be reminded by the child. The father is the text volunteers to help the mother to prepare dinner.

9. Activity 6.1: The mother is dressed in a saree, and prepares and serves food to the kids. When the kids call her to play a game she rejects claiming she has to cook lunch.
10. Activity 6.3: The boy jumps out of bed.
11. Activity 7.4: On children’s day Japanese boys fly carp-shaped kites which symbolize courage and energy. Girls arrange the traditional dolls that signify the Japanese royal family.
12. Activity 9.6: The first Sri Lankan to reach the summit of Mount Everest is a woman.

Use of Adjectives

To address the study's first objective, adjectives associated with each gender were compiled. The findings reveal a proliferation of adjectives describing females in all textbooks. Interestingly, the number of adjectives for males has increased gradually over the years. Notably, adjectives for females primarily centered on outward appearance.

Table 3: Use of Adjectives According to Gender

2001		2008		2016	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Smart	Creative	Old	Young	Great	Younger
Young	Artistic	Sad	Old	Brainy	Sweet
	My	Strong	Lovely	Kind	Old
	Little	Happy	Cute	Honest	Little
	Old		Chubby	Wise	Dwarf
	Blank		Slimmer	Old	First
	Empty		Thinner	Young	Great
	Foolish		Pretty	Healthy	Fearless
	Teenage			Strong	Methodical
				small	
				Well	
				mannered	
				Brave	

Visual Analysis

Distribution of Characters

The pie chart depicts the gender distribution in

textbook pictures across publication years, aligning with the study's second objective to assess gender representation. Characters from all

picture illustrations in the three books were listed by gender for a comparative analysis. These findings also contribute to addressing the third objective, examining changes in gender portrayal over the past 20 years.

Figure 4: Distribution of Characters in 2001

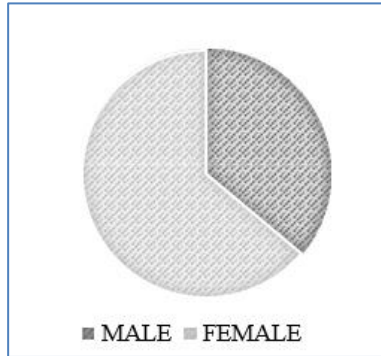


Figure 5: Distribution of Characters in 2008

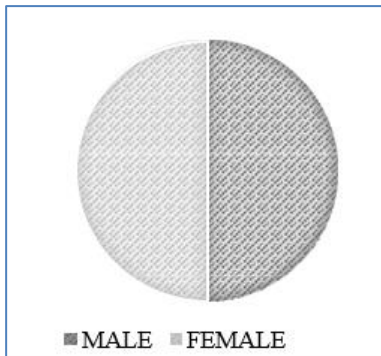
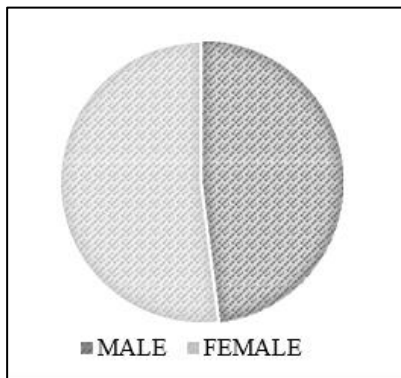


Figure 6: Distribution of Characters in 2016



Distribution of Colors Between Genders

To address the first objective of assessing gender portrayal in English Language textbooks, character dress colors in pictures were analyzed by gender. The findings reveal a disparity in color usage between genders, with certain colors more prevalent in males and less prevalent in females, and vice versa.

Figure 7: Distributions of Colors in Picture 2001

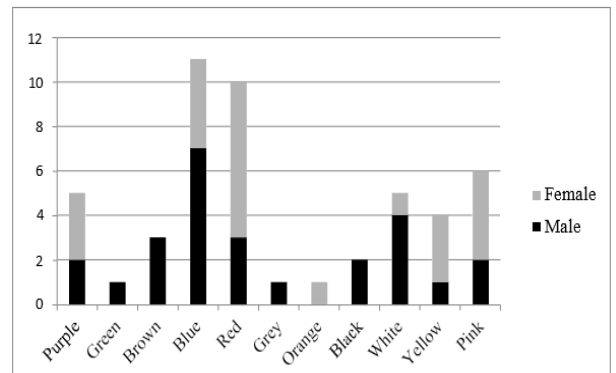


Figure 8: Distributions of Colors in Picture 2008

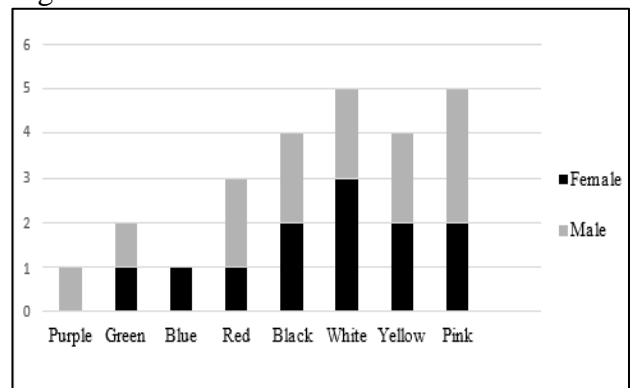
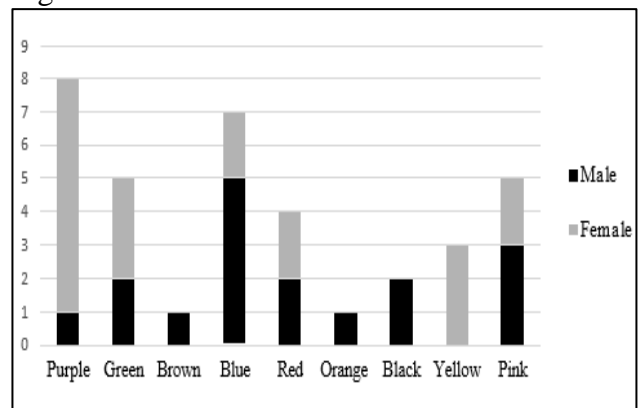


Figure 9: Distributions of Colors in Picture 2016



Activities Involved According to Gender

In an attempt to address the study's first objective, which was to determine whether the portrayal of gender in English language textbooks is stereotypical or non-stereotypical, the activities engaged by each character in the pictures were listed according to gender. The results indicate that, while male characters engage in more activities associated with professions, female characters engage in domestic activities.

Table 4: Activities Involved According to Gender

2001		2008		2016	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Reading	Speaking	Eating	Gardening	Painting	Making a checklist
Speaking	Attaching a flower to hair	Exercising	Reading a newspaper	Helping elders	Instructing a child
Painting	Walking with an elder	Gardening	Eating	Casting Spells	Helping elders
Greeting each other (Handshaking)	Sitting by the fire	Sailing	Swimming	Ruling the country	Going to school
Offering a seat to an elder	Listening what others say	Swimming	Playing Cricket	Guarding	Lending books
Offering flowers	Washing hands	Playing Cricket		Going to school	Borrowing books
Exercising	Exercising			Playing	Dancing
Eating	Checking a patient			Borrowing books	
Prescribing medicine	Counselling				
Cleaning	Cleaning				
Diagnosing a patient	Getting details of patients				
Giving advices	Gossiping				
Reflecting					
Maintaining traffic					

Use of Instruments According to Gender

To address the first objective, assessing gender portrayal in English language textbooks, instruments and objects used by characters in pictures were categorized by gender. The findings

reveal a notable discrepancy, with male characters depicted using a diverse range of instruments and objects, while female characters are limited to a few.

Table 5: Use of Instruments According to Gender

2001		2008		2016	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Books	Garden fork	Newspaper	Newspaper	Paint brush	A note pad
Greeting Cards	A Flower	Bat	Bat	A spear	Walking stick
A file	A Bag			Bat & ball	books
An Easel	Walking Stick		books		
A Flower	Ekel broom				
A bag					
A stethoscope					
A hoe					
A whistle					

Distribution of Professions

To address the study's first objective on gender portrayal in English Language textbooks,

character professions in pictures were assessed by gender. The results highlight a disparity, with male characters shown in various professions,

while female characters have limited or no specified professions. Notably, the 2008

publication, with few pictures, lacked individual preferences for characters.

Table 6: Distribution of Professions

2001		2008		2016	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Policeman	Nurse			Painter	librarian
Doctor	Counsellor			King	
Water-work engineer				Ministers	
School Inspector				Guard	

Comparison of the Three Textbooks

The study's final objective is to explore changes in gender portrayals over the last 20 years by comparing findings across the three books. The first bar chart illustrates the evolution of characters in textbook textual content based on gender.

Figure 10: Evolution of Gender Representation in Textual Content

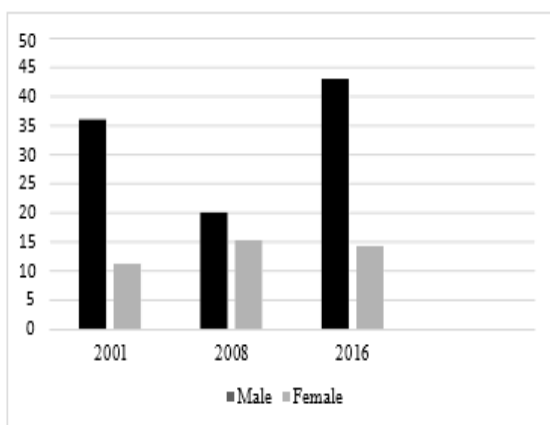
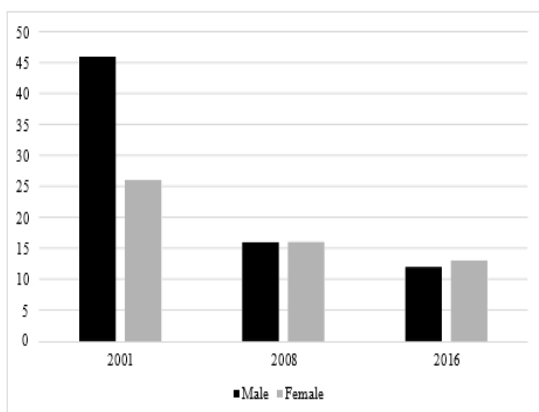


Figure 11: Evolution of Gender Representation in Visual Content



The research findings reveal a gender bias in character distribution, with the 2001 and 2016 publications favoring men, while the 2008 publication maintains impartiality. Stereotyping is more pronounced in the 2016 textbook compared to its predecessors, but it also introduces instances of breaking stereotypes not found in earlier publications. Professions assigned to female characters remain consistent over the years, with roles such as teacher, nurse, and librarian persisting even in the 2016 textbook. Additionally, women's activities in the 2016 edition closely mirror those described in the 2001 textbook.

Figure 12: Activity 5.1 (2016)

Activity 5.1
Act out

Lahiru's pen friend is *Kenta Akimoto*. Lahiru and his family are eagerly waiting to welcome the *Akimoto* family.

Mother: Son, what time will they leave Japan?

Lahiru: They would have left by now. They live closer to Nagoya airport.

Mother: That's good. Let me think... Nagoya to Sri Lanka... (puzzled)

Father: It's nearly 6,500 km from Nagoya to Sri Lanka.

Mother: Really? How long will it take?

Father: It will take about eight and a half hours.

Mother: Are there any direct flights?

Father: Yes, I checked, and they are taking a direct flight to Colombo.

Discussion

The analysis of three textbooks exposed significant insights into gender representation and stereotyping, which were then evaluated in relation to research objectives. Surprisingly, the findings contrasted with expectations, as the prevalence of gender stereotyping increased in the 2016 textbook compared to the 2001 edition. This outcome was unexpected given the societal advancements for women in Sri Lanka. The 2008 publication contained minimal stereotypical content, but its overall content and human presentation were comparatively limited compared to the other two textbooks. These results are then compared with studies conducted in other countries.

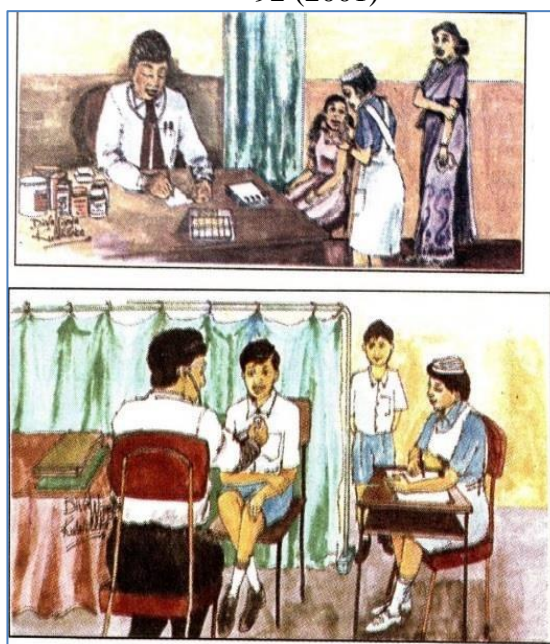
Curriculum developers in Sri Lanka tend to favor content that is either culturally relevant to the country or reflects classic Western literature, often resulting in male-dominated or highly stereotypical narratives. Notable examples include the male-dominant extract from Gulliver's Travels in the 2008 textbook and the reading text of activity 3.5 (The Magic Words) in the 2016 book. Historical elements in textbooks, such as the 2008 activity 2.15, consistently overlook women, with all content on inventors, scientists, or historical figures exclusively featuring men. This gender bias in educational materials mirrors findings in Khazakh history textbooks, where women are essentially erased from the national narrative, as noted by Durrani et al. (2022, p. 7).

The depiction of the mother figure in English language textbooks has remained unchanged since the 2001 edition. Similar to findings by Medawattegedera (2018), young females are portrayed in somewhat empowered roles, but adult females, particularly after marriage, are consistently confined to the roles of mothers and housewives. This portrayal is reflected visually, with mothers consistently depicted in traditional attire and engaged solely in domestic responsibilities. The depiction of mothers in private, domestic spaces like gardens and backyards further reinforces their confinement within the home (Yasin et al., 2012, as cited in Medawattegedera, 2018). Additionally,

Wijetunga (2017) notes that grade 9, 10, and 11 textbooks portray outdoor activities as belonging to the male realm, suggesting a gendered division of activities.

Father figures in textbooks are infrequent and typically limited to decision-making roles. An example (2006, Activity 5.1) portrays a father helping the mother in meal preparation but reinforces stereotypical views. This perpetuates discriminatory notions against women, contributing to their absence in certain social spheres (Tisserant & Wagner, 2008, cited in Concorda, 2018). Mothers in textbooks adhere to traditional ideals, portraying them as vulnerable and dependent on masculine protection (Durrani et al., 2022).

Figure 23: Stereotyping Professions Page 91 & 92 (2001)



Despite evident stereotyping in the 2016 textbook (Abeysekara, 2008, p. 32), efforts are made to address it, notably with the inclusion of a reading text about Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala.

Adjective use reflects stereotypical perceptions, with a sudden increase in adjectives for men in 2016, although they align with typical Asian societal values. Adjectives for women also conform to expected stereotypical norms (Aydinoglu, 2014, p. 234). While most assigned professions for females are limited to teacher,

nurse, and librarian, men are assigned a diverse range of professions, not aligning with real-world statistics (e.g., in 2021, 64.6% of undergraduates were females).

The assignment of activities and the use of instruments also demonstrate gender-specific societal norms. Women were largely restricted to the domestic sphere and restricted to indoor activities. In Sri Lanka, subtle expressions of prejudice persist, as argued by Bowker (1996, p. 17), manifesting in ways that are socially acceptable and challenging to detect in textbooks. Despite the 1999 education reforms under a female president emphasizing gender equality, the 2001 textbook demonstrates deliberate efforts to avoid gender stereotypes. However, by 2016, the focus on gender equality seemed to have waned, resulting in more stereotypical content in the textbooks. This unintentional disclosure of gender stereotypes is particularly noteworthy given that a majority of textbook writers are women, reflecting the ingrained societal norms.

The study's second objective evaluates gender representation in English-language textbooks. The textual content shows an increase in the number of female characters from the 2001 to the 2008 textbooks, but a significant decrease in the 2016 edition. Conversely, the visual representation of women has improved since 2001, nearly achieving gender parity. Despite societal advancements for women, the investigation into whether gender portrayal has changed over the last two decades reveals persistent stereotypical depictions in textbooks. The absence of mention of gender equality in national education goals, notably in the 2016 textbook, underscores the need for renewed attention to address high levels of gender stereotyping in educational materials.

Conclusion

Textbooks play a pivotal role in English language classrooms in Sri Lanka, and this study focuses on the gender representation and evolution of gender stereotyping in English-language textbooks published since 1999. The first objective examines whether the portrayal of gender in textbooks is stereotypical, revealing

that the 2016 textbook surpassed the 2001 edition in gender stereotyping. Despite societal progress, textbooks still confine adult women to traditional roles, indicating a lapse in addressing stereotypes and promoting gender equality in textbook development.

The second objective evaluates gender representation, finding a decrease in female representation in textual content but a gradual increase in visual content until both genders were visually represented equally. However, the overall character distribution favored males. The third objective explores changes in gender portrayal over the last 20 years, uncovering limited positive changes. The 1998 educational policy under the first female president emphasized gender equality, but subsequent policy shifts led to biased textbooks, particularly in 2008 and 2016, as national goals did not explicitly mention gender equality. Adjective use in textbooks, reflecting stereotypical physical expectations, suggests the unintentional perpetuation of gender ideologies by predominantly female textbook developers.

While the study focuses on Grade 8 textbooks, generalizing findings to all English-language textbooks since 1999 may have limitations due to various developers. Acknowledging gender subjectivity, the study highlights the importance of evaluating gender by researchers of both genders. Despite ongoing stereotyping in textbooks, real-world statistics indicate women breaking societal norms, emphasizing the need to scrutinize educational materials' contribution to the gender gap in higher education and future gender inequality concerns.

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