Analysis of Gender Representation of Grade Eight English Textbook

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze gender representation in Grade Eight English textbook. For this purpose, all the units of Grade Eight English textbook were thoroughly investigated. The content analysis method was employed. The results revealed that there is no fair representation of females and males in some gender related characteristics. The supremacy of males over females was observed in terms of names (54.77%) male and pronouns (52.97%) male were observed and it was suggested that reconsideration should be made in revising and/or producing new textbooks in the future.

Keywords: Gender representation; textbook; English; gender equality.
Introduction

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Education enables girls and boys, women and men to participate in social, economic and political life and is a foundation for the development of a democratic society (SADE, 2011) cited in Dejene, 2017).

Education holds the power to form the understanding, attitudes and the behavior of individuals. It is used as a tool for the promotion of national identities and can enhance the privilege of certain groups in the society (Smith, 1991), including men's power over women. Gender roles and inequalities are reproduced, formed, defined, strengthened and promoted by educational institutions through implicit and explicit means.

While research has focused on unequal access to education and differences in enrolment rate for girls and boys, the way curriculum and textbooks can position boys and girls unequally and constructs them as gendered subjects must be explored as well (Durrani, 2008). Textbooks signify what it means to be a child in a specific context, which encompasses learning gender identity through socialization (Kereszty, 2009). Textbooks at elementary level are particularly crucial as they shape the factual knowledge of skills children are supposed to acquire, which can be different for girls and boys and can set the base for gender stereotyping (Kereszty, 2009).

Worldwide demographic data show that women make up more than half of the world’s population. This numerical power, however, has not guaranteed their participation and positive representation in many spheres of life. Their lives are often shaped by the patriarchal rule with specific gender roles and relations and their potential and roles in many productive and reproductive areas of life have been degraded for a longer period of time. Among a lot of other areas, the writing of textbooks, mostly in their depiction of stereotyped gender roles and behaviors, have been mentioned as the one that indicates lack of proper or equal gender representation (Kenaw, 2006).

In the ancient times, men and women had very distinct roles in life, when their principal aim was to stay alive: women were physically able to bear children whereas the bodies of men were suitable for hunting as well as defending their kind and attacking the enemy. Thus, the biology and physical characteristics decided the roles of men and women. This distinction seemed harmless and natural and it passed from one generation to the other. Moving on to the modern times, the traditional gender roles became more and more questioned and criticized. The gender role equalization process, to the present day, can be seen as a progressive empowerment of women, and only quite recently, has the discussion turned to the delimiting roles of men.

When studying a language or any other subject at school, we seldom pay attention to the attitudes and opinions presented in the material because we are focused on the contents of the subject. Yet, besides learning the contents, we may also acquire attitudes and opinions on various topics. So, language textbooks do not only teach as vocabulary and grammar along with knowledge about various themes ranging from environmental issues to multiculturalism, but also attitudes.

The biased construction of gender in English as a Foreign Language textbook has been an invisible obstacle to equality in educational context. This discrepancy in gender could, though unwittingly, lead to a narrower understanding of the social roles that females play and to fewer chances for female students to practice the target language than male students (Nagatomo, 2010). Turner-Bowker (1996) suggests that textbooks teach children what behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate and that they serve as a source that children acquire gender stereotypes from. The government’s intensive efforts made to bridge the gap between males and females are clear
in a variety of domains such as politics and economy. Hence studying gender issues is timely and essential to bridge the gap observed.

Statement of the Problem

The work for gender equality is work against the traditional ways of gender categorization. As human beings, we have a tendency to categorize our knowledge about the world in order to build our individual perceptions of both the concrete objects and the abstract concepts that surround us. These processes of categorization and pattern formation then help us to memorize and make use of the information that we have acquired. The concept of gender is a basic example of categorization, as people have traditionally been put into two groups according to their biological features.

Since education systems are embedded in the broader social context, they reflect the inequalities that exist in society. The structure and content of schooling – textbooks, curricular choices, sex distribution of teachers and administrators, teachers’ attitudes and behaviors, classroom and discipline practices, and the presence of violence – reflect discriminatory and harmful social norms about the appropriate roles and opportunities for boys and girls (Connell as cited in Levtov 2014).

Emphasizing Connell’s notion, GCE (2012) stated that the pervasive denial of the human right to education experienced by women and girls across the globe – as shown, for example, by the fact that two thirds of the world’s non-literate adults are women – is a striking example of gender discrimination.

SADE (2011) argues that quality education includes awareness of gender inequalities and addresses in teacher training, teaching and learning practices, curriculum and textbook content, school management, student-student and teacher-student relations, stakeholder involvement, etc. and, not the least, in national policies and strategies. Consequently, women’s emancipation and empowerment have become the focus of international programs and conferences for purposes of integrating them into the development process on an equal basis with their male counterparts (Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta & Bhukuvhani 2012). This is why within the past four decades, series of conferences on women empowerment slogan were organized by the United Nations in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

For instance, the 1995 Beijing Declaration, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, reaffirmed the commitment to ensure “the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (Tantengco, 2014).” Inherent in all these assertions are, the right to education as access to education is a prerequisite for achieving equality and other basic human rights. To this end, all those international movements on women have been complemented by calls for promoting gender sensitivity in the school curriculum (Brueilles & Cromer 2009) and Tantengco (2014). In particular women’s organizations as well as mainstreaming the curriculum, according to Gudhlanga et al. (2012), were identified as key elements in achieving the UN Global Platform for Action agreed at Beijing, China.

In Cognizance of this, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has declared its explicit commitment to the development of women with the announcement of the National Policy on Women in 1993 (referred to as women’s policy), and the promulgation of the new constitution in 1995. In addition, the government has taken-up the need to mainstream gender in all educational, political, economic and societal spheres (ESPS, 2005).
Accordingly, the government has recognized the curriculum as a means of transformation in terms of realizing human rights and the international development agenda of “Education for All” and the MDG’s call for gender equality in education by 2015. For this purpose, the government has committed itself towards the achievement of greater level of gender justice and human rights through the periodic review of the primary and secondary school curriculum. It is indicated in the policy document that education would be geared toward reorienting society’s attitude and value pertaining to and contribution of women in development (MOE, 1994).

It is evident that, in education, the curriculum serves as the connection between national education policy objectives and the delivery of education services. In other words, the curriculum should be a vehicle to promote what is intended i.e. positive message about equality between women and men. Textbooks, as an integral aspect of the curriculum, according to Levtov (2014) and Chinyani (2010), are one of the first places-and most formal artifacts that demonstrate what educational “norms” are intended to be transmitted in the classroom.

Results from studies across many countries were remarkably consistent in terms of the representation of gender: women and men have been treated quite differently (or discriminately) much in favor of males. For example, numerically, there are fewer images of women and girls compared to men and boys (Porecca, 1984); men also appear to have more text space devoted to them through longer stories about men; the presence of men was more highlighted than that of women regarding names, nouns, and pronouns (Bahman & Rahimi2010); contributions of important women (as well as minority groups) were ignored or given less consideration (Blumberg, 2007).

As far as the knowledge of the researcher is concerned, no studies have been conducted to examine gender representation in the new primary school English Language textbooks which have been in use in Ethiopia since 2011. To this end, this study was designed to see how gender representation looks-like in Grade Eight English textbook. For this purpose the following research questions were raised.

1. How is gender represented in Grade Eight English textbook?
2. Are both genders given an equal amount of visibility in the textbook?
3. What kinds of roles are given to men and women?

Literature Review

Gender Equality in the Educational Field

As stated in the introduction, gender equality is especially important in the field of education because it reflects and affects the current situation as regards the social and occupational fields. As Lahelma states It [the school system] is an important transmitter of culture. It is not irrelevant, what kind of image of masculinity and femininity is imparted to the students. In fact, schools are obliged to promote gender-equality and have great possibilities to do so. The students spend a significant amount of time at school during a period during which has a great effect on the development of their world view. (Lahelma 1989)

Lahelma (1989) also specifies that presenting the two genders differently leads to inequality on the working field, as masculine qualities tend to be more valued than feminine qualities. This has a significant effect on salaries and leads to male- or female-dominated working fields. She emphasizes the importance of educational environments as a highly influential and one of the crucial stages during one’s intellectual growth. Therefore, as an opportunity which should be used for our advantage, i.e. presenting values that promote equality and a wide range of opportunities for both men and women. Lahelma (1989) also stated that while the starting point has
traditionally been improving the status of women in society, this movement has later been reinforced by paying attention to the biased view of masculinity.

In the field of education, gender (and biological sex) has traditionally had an explicit and implicit role. As Palmu, (2001) stated, girls and boys are often expected and assumed to possess stereotypical desires, needs and knowledge, and even though attempts are being made to “vanish” and hide gender ideas, schools still often operate in a controlled and regulated way in which gender has a systematic role. It is considered normal procedure, mostly due to familiarity and a simple habit to address students by their gender without paying attention. Delamont underlines the opportunities of the school environment as regards gender issues:

Schools develop and reinforce sex segregations, stereotypes and even discriminations which exaggerate the negative aspects of sex roles in the outside world, when they could be trying to alleviate them. (Delamont 1990).

Palmu (2001) also points out that in school environments, gender is often seen as a clear binary concept, and the all pupils are expected to possess the same qualities according to their gender group. According to Tainio & Teräs (2011) it is especially important to provide pupils in the comprehensive school with a open-minded view of the working life, as the attitudes they adopt reflect on their future careers. Once these pre-assumptions are acquired, it is much more difficult to alleviate later in life, which leads to segregation between the two genders.

According to Delamont (1990), it can be concluded that the seemingly innocent reference to the students as members of a specific gender can therefore be seen as a reinforcement of the differences between genders, which should not be downplayed and disregarded. By using these gender-specific address terms, as harmless as they might seem, we are constantly re-establishing the gap between the two genders. The behaviour learnt at school is then transferred to everyday life outside of the learning environment. In order to develop the society closer to equality, it is not sufficient to only aspire to passively avoid segregations, but to actively participate in alleviating the gender gap.

The Importance of Studying Gender in Textbooks

Julia Penelope (1988) discusses the ability of a human being to interpret discourse. However, she states that “not all discourse is equally amenable to successful interpretation, and syntactic rules can be manipulated to force the reader/hearer to provide spurious information, in the absence of help from the writer, or to make the reader think that s/he has read in the text what s/he has, in fact, supplied out of her/his own linguistic experience. The interpretation process is therefore formed in the receiver’s mind: it is a combination of the received information and the existing knowledge and personal views of the receiver. The content can also manipulate the reader/hearer without their realization. Therefore it is important to closely examine these explicit and implicit messages conveyed by the textbooks, as they can be considered the only obligatory texts that everyone is required to read during their lifetime.

Textbooks, in addition to teaching and other learning material, are central sources of information on cultural ideas and perceptions, and the teachers interviewed by Palmu cite the contents of the learning material, and the decisions of inclusion and omission of contents, as a transmitter of gender ideas (Palmu 2001).

Richards (The role of textbooks in a language program) comments on the importance (or unimportance) of textbooks and mentions one factor that is closely linked to gender issues. He states: “They [textbooks] may distort content. Textbooks often present an idealized view of the world or fail to represent real issues. In order to make textbooks acceptable
in many different contexts controversial topics are avoided and instead an idealized white middle-class view of the world is portrayed as the norm.”

Textbook analysis is an important practice as teaching materials in developed countries are often highly regulated and compiled according to the hegemonic world view, and in order to develop teaching materials along with the society, textbook analysis is needed. The view of the world might not be explicitly stated in the book, but it is clearly there (Huchinson & Torres (1994). Hence, to make the textbooks representative and free of gender bias analyzing the textbooks is essential since they help learners to visualize themselves in the different stories and illustrations used.

Textbooks and Gender Equality

Textbooks are important socializing agents. They present a world from which girls and boys adopt respective role models that influence their thoughts, attitudes and life aspirations, and relations with the opposite gender.

A strong education system in line with the principle of non-discrimination is a key for redressing gender injustice in wider society, and for overcoming social and cultural norms that discriminate against girls and women (GCE, 2012). Today the goal of education for all and the priority given to girls’ education make textbooks even more important (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009).

Many scholars in the field of education firmly believe that the school curriculum/textbooks can provide a fix to societal problems Banks (2010), Chinyani (2010); Brugeilles & Cromer (2009). Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) further underlined that, in any particular society and across the world, textbooks have an impact far beyond the immediate confines of school and learning. They see textbooks as a basic learning tool for pupils and teachers; a tool of negotiation between the various actors involved in its production and use; and an element of communication within families, especially for values.

Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) again highlighted that textbooks are powerful levers of social change in propagating universal values. They further stated that not only do textbooks contribute to learning through dissemination of knowledge, but they also play a role in children’s upbringing by directly or indirectly transmitting models of social behaviour, norms and values.

Textbooks are therefore a tool for both education and social change.

This is based on the views of Chinyani (2010) that once something becomes school knowledge its implementation is legitimized and is deemed worthwhile knowledge. The school system cannot be a solution unless it offers the right curriculum as Gordon cited in Chinyani (2010) argues that an important aspects of education, which channels children into gender roles, is the curriculum that they are permitted to study.

Aikman and Levto (2014) cited in Dejene (2017) argues that textbook is an important and influential tool through which children are exposed to ideas about gender. Thus, unequal treatment of women and men in textbooks would be reflected on the learner’s thinking and her/his daily activities in the society. According to Chinyani (2010), Levto (2014), Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) cited in Dejene (2017) it is through textbooks that learners’ ideas and thoughts are shaped. Therefore, creating a textbook is tantamount to choosing the values, norms and representations that underpin hopes of maintaining social cohesion and harmonious relationship between human beings and institutions.

METHOD AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Visibility is one of the means through which a textbook can be evaluated for the extent to which it is gender sensitive (Porecca, 1984). Visibility refers to the relative numbers of males and females characters appearing in
textbooks in terms of noun (names), pronoun, common names and images. Visibility is one aspect of gender balance to be examined. He strongly argues that one of the most widely examined manifestations of gender discrimination is omission. When females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women’s accomplishments, or women as human beings, are not important enough to be recognized.

Accordingly, this study was conducted to find out whether women and men were represented (appeared) equally in Grade Eight English textbook. It involved qualitative and quantitative approaches in which frequency counts of occurrences of words attributed to females and males i.e. nouns (names), pronouns (she, he, her, his etc), common names (boy, girls, men, women etc), and images were examined. Tabulation of the raw data were done and then converted to statistical data. Percentage was used to get the frequencies of the raw data. The units of analysis used in this study include words, phrases, and pictures. Frequencies and percentages are employed to analyze the data collected. In addition to content analysis semi-structured interview was also made with Grade Eight English teacher to supplement the data.

Results and Discussion
The purpose of this study was to critically examine the gender representation of Grade Eight English textbook in terms of names, pronouns, pictures and illustrations.

The Textbook
Grade Eight English textbook was published in 2003 by Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education. It contains about fourteen units. The units are divided into two semesters. The first seven units are for the 1st semester and units 8-14 are allotted to the 2nd semester. It has about 204 pages including the appendices.

When we see the textbook starting from its cover page it is coloured and has different pictures. The pictures on the cover page indicate the images of two females and two males which indicate equal representation of females and males as observed from the face validity of the textbook on the cover page.

Each parts of the textbook from unit one up to unit fourteen are analyzed by reading each sentence, word, phrases and stories one by one in order to see the representation of males and females based on the constitutional and educational conventions and policies that Ethiopia has signed on different agreements (both national and international).

Procedures of the Analysis
The analysis was done by categorizing the gender representation by names, pronouns, possessions, etc by counting the frequencies of names (male/female), pronouns (she/he) and possessions (his/her, him)

The frequency of each category was critically analyzed and presented using table.

Table 1. Gender representation by Name, Subjective and Possessive pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As it can be seen from the table the percentage of the representation of females by name in the majority of the units is low but the representation of males is high where male domination is observed from most units (3, (88.2%), 4(65.4%), 5(67%), 6(65%), 7(53.3%), 11(57.1%), 12(71.4%), and 13(84.4%).

In the subjective pronouns, it can be observed from the table that high male domination is clearly seen in most of the units (3(100%), 4(62.5%), 5(69.6%), 7(71.8%), 10(92.3%), 11(75%), and 13(90%). This can indicate that females’ representation is very low.

In the possession pronouns, when we see the percentage of the females’ domination is high in most of the units (1(95%), 2(88.5%), 4(53.3%), 9(100%), and 10(57.1%) but mainly numerical representation.

Table 2. Summary of Gender representation in terms of names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>44.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>55.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we see the total representation of females by name is 44.75% which is found to be low while the total representation of males by name is 55.25% which is higher than the females.

Table 3. Summary of Gender representation in terms of pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>47.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>52.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of females and males representation by pronouns it is found to be 47.03% and 52.97% respectively. This indicates that the representation of females is lower than males. Hence, the Grade Eight English textbook does not represent both males and females equally. This leads to unequal treatment of males and females which may cause inferiority over females.

Table 4. Gender representation in terms of pictures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female in picture</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male in picture</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it can be seen from Table 4 the gender representation in terms of pictures for females is low (46.37%) while the pictures representing males are higher in percentage (53.63%). This indicates that females’ representation in pictures is too low which shows unequal representation of females and males in pictures.

In the 1st unit, the pictures indicated that the participation of both females and males on different sports (page 1). This can tell us equal representation of both genders regardless of their sex without discrimination. The dialogue given on page 3 tells that Kenenisa as a hero (Abnet said “our hero, Kenenisa Bekele”. This indicates that still females are considering themselves as they are inferior by admiring men. But as it is known there are many female heroes in athletics in Ethiopia. So some of the words used mainly emphasize on the strong side of males as compared to females. This indicated that males are considered as superior.

The example given on page 10 about the qualities of a good football players are clearly shown by considering both male and female equally by putting as he/she. This equal representation is interesting and appreciable because both male and female are equally treated /represented/

The presentation of the picture on page 11 (Tirunesh Dibaba) and the reading passages on page 12 is interesting which indicates the strength of her as she is a famous runner equally with males such as Haile G/S, Kenenisa Behkele, Abebe Bikila and Mohammed Kedir where Tirunesh is expressed as having an extraordinary talent in athletics (running) which is explained as a world famous athlete.

The picture given on page 17 indicates how a mother gives advice for her children. She is telling a story to her children. This shows that telling story for children is essential to modify their behaviour. But, here the questions presented indicated that the mother is responsible to look after children according to the picture. On the contrary the father needs to share the treatment of children at home. Therefore, even though the mother is given chance to advice children it is clear that the duty to treat and look after children is given to the mother. This shows that mothers are overloaded by different domestic activities where looking after children is one. Hence, even though the picture representation seems that it gives chance for mothers, the reality at the other side of the curtain is the existence of high workload on females with many activities which are making females less paid and leads them to be economically dependent. As a result, it is possible to infer that representing mothers on pictures could be taken as a mere representation.

As can be seen from different stories, most of the females are in a serious problem. For example, the story on page 24 tells the relation of a girl with her aunt who is very cruel. She (the girl) went to her aunt due to the death of her mother at the age of four. But her aunt usually suffers her by finding fault. She (her aunt) ordered her to work in the garden for long hours. Besides this her aunt yelled her each time. This indicates that gender representation is mainly symbolic and their equality is not protected i.e., there is unequal representation of females in the textbook. In addition, this leads most of the girls not to attend school. Then, even though they are presented on pictures the examples given indicate their serious problem which violets their human rights.

The story continues that the girl’s aunt sent her to a market. Meanwhile, the girl was attacked by gang of boys and snatched her shopping basket. They also took the money and hit her by falling her to the ground. This story tells us that most girls are suffering with mistreatment of their caregivers or guardians. So, it is possible to say that most stories in the textbook indicate the superiority of boys and the inferiority of girls. Then they are not equally represented and treated. This story on page 26
also supports this reality. The gender representation in enrollment seems there is greater number of girls’ enrollment. But when we see the activities and different duties to the girls it is not more than a numerical representation. In relation to this the work of Chick (2006) also further echoes this. She found more males than females in the K-12 American History textbooks at all levels in both content and illustrations. The female images are mostly invisible in the illustrations as well as in the content.

The picture about the scientist on page 61 shows male domination. On page 62 females are fetching water while males are swimming and float on the lake by using locally made means of transport. From these pictures one can understand the existence of stereotypic role division by showing a picture of men as a scientist while women are fetching water and affected by Bilihariansis.

Even the questions (2&3) are gender biased showing male domination. (2. What is his profession? 3. Of what importance is his profession to our country?). Such questions indicate male dominant considering females as they cannot be scientists.

On page 69 of the exercises given question No. 10 “the doctor was very kind to us. He was wearing glasses”. In this exercise male activity is given which may lead someone to conclude the role given to males is being a doctor. On page 70 the picture under letter D show the women as she is cooking “wat” while the picture under letter C shows a man operating a photocopy machine and the picture under letter A shows a man listening to a radio and discusses with his colleague. So, one can understand that even though females are equally presented on pictures the role given is still considering women as the task in the kitchen is given to them and superior tasks are given to males.

On page 80 the sample dialogue between A & B starts by “she is stupid!” Such explanations undermine female students because the male is insulting the female student with such biased language which is indicating the power of males over females.

The different pictures, explanations, examples and exercises on pages 81, 83, and 86 are not representing females rather they are emphasizing on male domination over women.

For example, there is a passage about a girl (Mulumebet) who is working as a nanny. This exercise tells about one female who is employed to look after a child. This girl is not allowed to go to school. She is simply looking after a child which inhibits the equality of girls. So females are not equally represented in the textbook.

On page 95 Activity given in a table with job and activity division Shewit is assigned as housemaid and Kidist as a snak seller. Their daily earning is very small. Shewit gets 7 birr and Kidist gets 5 birr per day. They have eight hours and six hours of rest respectively. This shows that they are employed in a task which has low payment. Both are not go to school (no school). So, the task assignment and the amount of birr given to them is very small. Due to this they do not get chance to attend school. This shows that the role given and representation of females is still a domestic activity which leads them to be economically dependent. Therefore, there is gender bias in activity division and assignment to females in the textbook.

On page 130 an example is given which is a male dominated role which says “The Manager will possibly be in his office”. This example puts men at a manager position but in most of the textbook examples, represented females as mainly focusing on domestic activities such as nanny, preparing coffee, making “wat”, and acting as a housemaid where the equality of females is not yet practical. Similarly on pages 169-176, in a story about different famous people in Africa are listed in the textbook. All of them are males (N. Mandella, Engineer Kitaw Ejigu, Kofi Annan, L.M.A Afework Tekle, Mamo
Wolde, Haile G/S, Ali Bira and Prof. Aklilu Lema are listed in the reading passages and exercises to show famous, popular and successful people. But on page 175 there is a sentence which says “Hirut has chicken. She used to sell eggs in the market”. Such representations/explanations in stories and sentences indicate that females are still given a role which is domestic and have low economic status. The explanation in the textbook gives high power to men but not to women. But it is known that there are famous women in Ethiopia who played a leading role in the development of the country. For example, Etege Taitu Bitul was the founder of modernization in hotel and modern life.

On page 186 the examples given to teach Grammar are presented a biased form which does not treat male and female equally. The sentences read as

a) Ayda has lost her book.
b) Her brother works in the Bank.

From the above sentences one can understand that females are not given the opportunity to better position. Ayda was considered as she lost her book but her brother was considered as a bank worker. Hence, females are less treated as compared to males and the role given to males is superior and profitable as compared to females who are mainly given a domestic activity with very low income which may lead them to be economically weak and dependent.

Discussions

The representation of males by name and pronouns is found to be higher than females in the textbook. The gender representation in enrollment seems there is greater number of girls’ enrollment. But when we see the activities and different duties to the girls it is not more than numerical representation. The different pictures, explanations, examples and exercises are not representing females rather they are emphasizing on male domination over women. Teachers were not considering the question of gender representation except teaching the content of the textbook. Most domestic tasks are given to females (nanny, housemaid, fetching water, snack seller etc).

Hence, by such kind of presenting of gender system, textbooks reinforce and legitimize gender inequality. If textbooks treat women and men unfairly, it will affect the thought and ideas of the learners (Brugeilles and Cromer (2009); Chiniany (2011); Levtov (2014). Similarly, Porreca (2010) argues that when females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women have no accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included. Gudhlenga et al. (2012) also stressed that the implied devolution of the female and non- recognition of their contribution produces a low self-esteem and less respect in females.

In addition to the content analysis of the textbook, I interviewed the Grade Eight English teacher by asking a question. “Have you observed gender representation in the textbook while you are teaching?” The teacher replied the following.

“When I teach any topic in any part of the textbook, I did not remember and consider any gender issue. I simply teach the content based on my lesson plan. I also simply give chance for students to answer questions randomly without considering the balance between male and female students”. I further asked him that “how do you check whether the textbook is gender responsive or not?”

The teacher replied that

“I check the textbook and read it in order to know its coverage whether I can finish it on the given time or not. Except such issues I never consider and conscious of gender representation in the textbook”. This can tell us that teachers are not considering the question of gender
representation except teaching the content of the textbook. But teachers need to consider gender issues so as to treat all students equally without discrimination. This is because unless teachers consider the gender issues in the textbooks they may influence or abuse girls knowingly or unknowingly during the teaching learning process. They should also check each word, phrase and sentence including pictures and stories in the textbook whether they represent both females and males equally or not and the textbook is using language which is not gender bias.

In relation to the role of teachers in using the textbook, Sunderland (1994) argue that since reader response is unpredictable, the way teachers handle texts should be highlighted as it may impudence students' interpretation of the text. This is reiterated by Holmquist and Gjorup (2007) who urge that teachers to ‘bear in mind that they have a huge responsibility for providing a more versatile view on gender representation than is provided in the textbooks’.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

By and large, this study revealed that despite the measures taken by the Ethiopian government in general and the Ministry of Education in particular to provide high-quality education and promote gender equality, male and female representations are still ‘problematic’. There is no fair treatment of females in the textbooks. The areas of difference found were names and pronouns. In the areas of names, males outnumbered females. Concerning pronouns too there was the supremacy of males over females. If females are underrepresented in textbooks, there is, as teachers use textbooks mostly in their teaching, potential for females’ perspectives and experiences to be forgotten. When the females’ experiences are forgotten, the vision of textbooks as educating students to live as citizens in a diverse an interdependent world cannot be achieved. In general gender is still represented in a way that supports the status– quo.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion made, the following recommendations are made.

- Female and male representation should at least be balanced as can as possible across textbooks. Therefore, in the future, textbook authors shall consider this while revising and/or producing new textbooks.
- Ministry of Education should formulate national guidelines which will call for balanced representation of both men and women in textbooks to guide regional and national textbook writers.
- Teachers shall promote gender equality in their instruction.
- A re-examination of the composition of the textbook writing and/or editing staff could be necessary for the staff’s conception of male-female equality. The persons who have participated in the writing and editing of Grade Eight English textbook were all males.
- Participating females in textbook writing and/or editing should also reduce gender imbalances and ensure gender equality.

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