

## GENDER REFLECTIONS IN THE ENGLISH COURSEBOOKS OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF IRAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of present study is to investigate gender reflections in English course books of the Junior high school level in Iran. A systematic content analysis was carried out with regard to (a) gender representations in both texts and illustrations and (b) men/women theme arrangement in dialogs and reading passages and (c) presentation of gender with regard to jobs. In order to analyze the content of the course books and gathering the required data, content analysis and library and documentary techniques were used respectively. In addition, in order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics (frequency, percent) and inferential statistics (Chi-Square test) were used. The results of this study shows that there is a significant difference between the number of pictures, names, pronouns, and jobs used by men and women ( $P < 0.05$ ). This issue shows gender inequality in English course books of the Junior high schools.*

**Key words:** Gender, English Course books, Junior high schools, Iranian context

### INTRODUCTION

Children gain understanding toward their gender category, roles and behaviors from infancy. However, their gender identities develop very slowly (Jackson & Warren, 2000; Gooden & Gooden, 2001). There are different viewpoints toward gender. Some researchers believe that gender differences are reflective of social and biological differences that not only shape the main foundation of social constructions of every society but also develop the inner social system of society. From the traditional point of view, gender roles are the result of natural work distribution e.g. child birth, child breeding, and housekeeping which are assigned to women. From the sociological point of view, there is no difference between gender work distributions with biological differences, but it is the society that has assigned these roles. In spite of the fact that there are differences in attitudes regarding the factors involved in gender role, most of the experts believe that formal education and school atmosphere can influence the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of people (Brint et.al, 2001; Collins, 1977). As such, school and its factors can be influential in creating and changing individuals' attitudes toward the role and position of gender.

Teaching gender roles and behaviors can be considered as one of the important components of education and pedagogy. However, the content of the course books tend to visualize men and women more in roles that conform to the traditional cliché related to the past than roles related to present or future (Measor et al., 1996). As a result, one of the most obvious branches that gender discrimination can come into view is to write and schedule course books in a biased manner. Textbooks that are presented to children as referential and authentic sources play a key role in forming the students' attitudes toward social world (Mc Donald, 1976). Textbooks are not the only tools that reflect social

realities, but they also can question and weaken the existing clichés (Law & Chan, 2004). Through visualizing gender differences that are present in social roles, social status, and personality factors they give a special perspective as to social life to students that one of the most important ones is the trend to support the legitimacy of the status quo (Witt, 1996; Evans & Davies, 2000). Textbooks form considerable part of the educational system activities, including transfer of social roles and value learning at school. Hence, the content of the textbooks is important from different perspectives.

Students at school learn roles and values that are in the textbooks. One of the most important roles is the gender. As such, the governing viewpoints on educational system can influence the number of pictures, names, pronouns and jobs as to gender mentioned in the textbooks. In order to become familiar with the governing perspective on Iran's educational system regarding gender, it is applicable to deal with textbook analysis including English textbooks for Junior high schools. Scientific reference for the students' learning on the one hand and distribution of them at a high and massive level especially in centralized educational system on the other hand, have changed the content of textbooks into an important subject. The theoretical importance of the investigation of gender reflection in textbooks is due to the role that educational contents perform in forming the students' viewpoint in reproduction and transfer of cultural and social values.

Different gender ideologies dominate academic systems of different countries that can be understood through the number of pictures, names, pronouns, and jobs about gender used in course books and also those working in academic system. The content of English course books of the Junior high school in Iran along with other course books can be a reflection of dominating perspectives on academic system as to gender.

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted on the differences between men and women. Foroutan (2009) believes that in all the textbooks, names and pictures related to men have priority over those related to women. Parallel to increase in educational level, this gender bias reflects more in names and pictures of the textbooks. The gender bias is also noticeable in key words related to male and female gender even. The presence of girls in athletic areas is limited and is not varied, but boys and men attend in a large variety of authentic activities. Parallel to increase in educational level, the presence of girls and women in athletic arenas of the course books decreases obviously and in fact, in higher educational levels, girls and women will be eliminated from athletic arenas of the course books. Gender roles inside and outside the homes have been assigned to women and men respectively. In comparison to men, women have less presence in all the course books than men. This issue is limited to the traditional roles (Foroutan, 2009). Course books even discriminate between girls and boys in increasing curiosity and awareness; because most of the questions that the girls pose in the course books are at the level of science and the questions posed by boys are at higher cognitive levels (Mojtahedy, 2001). At the level of family, in terms of the number of girls and boys, equality has been observed, but in the remaining dimensions, there is discrimination and more over the superiority of the males (Foroutan, 2009).

In developing social training course books of Junior high school, only in the course book designed for first year, attention has been given to the equality of gender identity between girls and boys, but the authors of the above mentioned course books have tried to eliminate the girls' gender identity in the second and third year of Junior high school (Sheykhavandi, 2006). The mentioned studies show the gender reflections in the Persian course books of the primary education and the social training of the Junior high school. However, gender reflection has not been investigated in English course books of the Junior high school yet. The aim of the present study is to fill this gap and to investigate gender reflections in the English course books related to three years of Junior high school.

### Research Questions

1. Is there a significant difference between men and women's assigned pictures in the English course books of the three years of Junior high school?
2. Is there a significant difference between names and pronouns used for men and women in the English course books of the three years of Junior high school?

3. Is there a significant difference between women and men's assigned jobs in the English course books of the three years of Junior high school?
4. Is there a significant difference between the number of dialogues in the English course books related to men and those related to women?

## METHODOLOGY

### Procedure

Before explaining the procedure, the structure of the English course books of the Junior high school in Iran is presented. The English course book of the first year of Junior high school has 66 pages. As the starting point, the student becomes familiar with the letters and alphabet. From unit 5 onward the structure of every unit consists of dialogue, some patterns, and a number of classroom exercises. New words can be seen at the end of each unit. In all, 122 new words can be taught to the learners. English course book of the second year of Junior high school consists of 10 units, 65 pages, and 227 new words. The content of the book includes every day dialogues. English course book of the third year of Junior high school consists of 85 pages and 314 new words. Each unit includes a dialogue, some patterns, some class exercises, and a reading passage.

The required data of the present study were gathered through library research. The content of the materials and pictures of the English course books of the Junior high school have been analyzed through content analysis in order to investigate the position of gender reflection in pictures, names, pronouns, jobs and dialogues analytically.

## RESULTS

This section of research reports the findings of content analysis. The first part is related to gender reflection in English course books with emphasis on pictures

**Table1: Descriptive statistics and Chi-square as to gender in terms of the pictures of the English course books**

Gender Level	Male		Female (F)		Total		Chi-Square	df.	P	Gender Priority
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent				
First	59	62.1	36	37.9	95	23.4	5.568	1	0.018	M>F
Second	113	60.1	75	39.9	188	46.3	7.681	1	0.006	M>F
Third	78	63.4	45	34.6	123	30.3	9.475	1	0.002	M>F
Total	250	61.6	156	38.4	406	100	27.675	1	.000	M>F

As table 1 show, the distribution of the pictures in English course books of the Junior high school based on gender discrimination shows that the total ratio of pictures related to the males is more than those related to females. That is, the ratio of the use of pictures related to males is 61.6 percent (250 pictures) while female pictures 38.4 percent (156 pictures).

English course books of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Junior high school with 46.3 percent (188 pictures) gained the highest number from among the total pictures related to men and women. In addition, in the English course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Junior high school 2, 17, and 11 compound pictures have been used in the English course books of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of Junior high school respectively. The compound pictures have not been mentioned in the table.

The highest percent of the pictures related to males has been mentioned in the course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Junior high school with 62.1 percent (59 pictures) and the highest percent of the pictures related to females have been presented in the course book of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Junior high school with 39.9 percent (75 pictures). The results of Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) show that there is a significant difference between the number of men and women's pictures in the English course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Junior high school ( $\chi^2= 5.565$ ;  $P= 0.018$ ) and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Junior high school ( $\chi^2= 5.681$ ;  $P= 0.006$ ) and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Junior high school ( $\chi^2= 9.475$ ;  $P= 0.002$ ).

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test as to gender based on names and pronouns used in the English course books**

Gender Level	Male		Female (F)		Total		Chi-Square	df	P	Gender Priority
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent				
First	88	55	73	45	161	14	1.050	1	0.306	M>F
Second	253	65	135	35	388	34	35.887	1	000	M>F
Third	370	63	213	37	583	52	41.209	1	000	M>F
Total	711	61	421	39	1132	100	74.293	1	000	M>F

The descriptive statistics of table 2 shows that the number of men's names and pronouns in all the English course books of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Junior high school is more than that of women's. That is, 61 percent of the names (711 names) and pronouns have been assigned to males and 39 percent (421) to females. The highest number of names and pronouns related to males and females has been incorporated in the course book of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Junior high school, the males with 65 percent (253) has assigned the highest number of names and pronouns of the course book; but the females, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Junior high school with 35 percent has been assigned the lowest number of names and pronouns. From among the total number of names and pronouns used for women and men, the course book of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year with 52 percent and the course book belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> year with 14 percent have the highest and the lowest ratio respectively. In addition, the number of male names and pronouns in the English course books of the Junior high school has an ascending order.

The results of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) show that there is not a significant difference between names and pronouns belonging to men and those belonging to women ( $\chi^2= 1.05$ ;  $P= 0.0306$ ) in the English course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Junior high school. That is, gender equality in names and pronouns has not been observed. there is a significant difference between the number of names and pronouns used for men and women in the English course book of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Junior high school with  $\chi^2= 35.887$ ;  $P=000$  and the English course book belonging to 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Junior high school with  $\chi^2= 41.209$ ;  $P=000$  and in the course books of the 3 years of Junior high school with  $\chi^2= 74.293$  and  $P= 000$ . This issue is a reflection of discrimination between men and women in presentation of these textbooks.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics and Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) as to jobs with emphasis on gender in English course books**

Gender Level	Male		Female (F)		Total		Chi-Square	df.	P	Gender Priority
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent				
First	27	67.5	13	32.5	40	37.4	4.900	1	.0270	M>F
Second	26	74.3	9	25.7	35	32.7	8.257	1	.0040	M>F
Third	23	71.9	9	28.1	32	29.9	6.125	1	.0130	M>F
Total	76	71	31	29	107	100	18.925	1	000	M>F

The job distribution provided in the English course books of the Junior high school presented in table 3 show that a high percent of jobs has been assigned to men. In a way that, from among the total jobs mentioned in the English course books of the Junior high school, 71 percent (76 jobs) has been assigned to men and only 29 percent (31 jobs) has dealt with women's jobs. The highest percent of jobs related to males with 74.3 percent (26 jobs) is presented in the English course book related to the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Junior high school and the lowest of them is concerned with females.

Based on the descriptive statistics of table 3, as the level of education increases, the abundance of the number of jobs related to men and women decreases. In course books related to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of Junior high school 73, 29, and 12 jobs have been mentioned with emphasis on gender respectively. In addition, the results of Chi-Square test ( $\chi^2$ ) show that there is a significant difference between jobs related to men and women in the English course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year with  $\chi^2= 4.90$ ;  $P= 0.027$  and in the course book of 2<sup>nd</sup> year with  $\chi^2= 8.257$  and  $P= .004$  and in the course book of 3<sup>rd</sup> year ( $\chi^2= 18.925$ ;  $P= 000$ ).

**Table 4: Comparison of men and women based on job distribution**

Gender Jobs	Male		Female (F)		Total		Gender priority
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Teacher	31	73.8	11	26.2	42	29.3	M>F
Physician	16	50	16	50	32	29.9	M>F
driver	19	82.6	4	17.4	23	21.5	M>F
farmer	3	100	0	0	3	2.8	M>F
militant	7	100	0	0	7	6.5	M>F
Total	76	71	31	29	107	100	M>F

The descriptive statistics related to table 4 shows that from among the jobs mentioned for females, the highest rate belongs to medical job with 50 percent (16 medical jobs) and the lowest rate is related to driving job with 17.4 percent (4 jobs). Furthermore, in the course books of the Junior high school, there is no mention of jobs like agriculture and military for women. From among the men's job, the highest number of jobs has been assigned to teachers with 31 times and the lowest number of jobs to agricultural job with 3 percent (3 cases). The results of table 4 shows that there is gender discrimination between men and women concerning jobs in that from 107 jobs mentioned in the English course books, 76 cases were assigned to men and 31 to women.

**Table 5: Reflection of gender role in English language dialogues**

Gender Level	Male		Female (F)		Total		Chi-Square	DF	P	Gender priority
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent				
First	4	14	7	25	11	19.6	0.818	1	0.366	F>M
Second	18	64	16	56	34	06.7	0.118	1	0.732	M>F
Third	6	22	5	18	11	19.6	0.091	1	0.763	M>F
Total	28	100	28	100	56	100	000	1	1	M=F

As illustrated by table 5, dialogues of the course books are related to males with 54.5 percent (6 cases) and the lowest role is allotted to 1<sup>st</sup> year with 36.4 percent (4 cases). Along the same way, the highest role related to female gender in the course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year with 63.6 percent (7 cases) and the lowest role in the course book of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year with 45.5 percent (5 cases) have been reported.

From among the English course books of the Junior high school dialogues, half of the dialogues belong to males and the rest to females. The frequency of the roles of males at the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> level has been more than the frequency of the roles of females at the same level in the course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year, the role of females is relatively superior to the role of males.

The results of Chi-Square test ( $\chi^2$ ) show that there is a significant difference between the roles related to women and the roles related to men in the dialogues of the English course books of the 1<sup>st</sup> year ( $\chi^2=0.818$ ;  $P=0.366$ ), the English course book of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year ( $\chi^2=0.118$  and  $P=0.732$ ), the English course book of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year ( $\chi^2=0.091$  and  $P=0.763$ ) and in all the course books of the 3 years ( $\chi^2=000$ ;  $P<0.05$ ). In the English course books of the Junior high school, the words 'father', 'mother', 'brother', and 'sister' have been repeated 42, 46, 26, and 31 respectively.

## DISCUSSION

The present study has dealt with the role of gender in the English course books of the Junior high school in the form of pictures, names, pronouns, and jobs. The findings showed that in the entire English course books of the Junior high school, the number of pictures related to males is more than that of females i.e. the males have been assigned 62 percent of the pictures. In other words, there is a significant difference between the number of pictures related to men and women in the English course books of the Junior high school. Gender reflection in names and pronouns shows that male gender has a more active role than the female gender. In other words, there is a significant difference between the

number of names and pronouns related to men and women in the English course books of the Junior high school.

Regarding the presentation of jobs, the findings show that the number of jobs related to men is twice more than jobs related to women. That is, there is a significant difference between the number of jobs related to men and women (with the priority of men). Based on diversification, the jobs related to women are limited to teacher, driver, and doctor. In addition to the above- mentioned jobs, the men appear in jobs like military and agriculture. In these course books, there are some jobs without mentioning gender i.e. neutral.

The findings also show that gender equality is followed in the dialogues of the English course books. In other words, there is not a significant difference between the number of roles related to women and those related to men in the dialogues of the English course books. From among all the dialogues, each gender's role is 50 percent although the women's role in the dialogues of the English course book of the 1<sup>st</sup> year is more than that of men. These findings are consistent with those of ( Afshani et al., 2009; Foroutan, 2009; Mojtahedi, 2001; Rahmatiyani and Atrashi, 2006; Sheykhavandi, 2006) in that the content of the course books include discrimination and lacks a systematic rule as to gender. In spite of the global movements toward gender equality, no modification has been made on the contents of the English course books of the Junior high school. It seems necessary to bring some changes to the content of the above-mentioned course books in order to be in line with political, social, and cultural movements toward gender equality.

Unfortunately the findings show that in the current period, there exist discriminations among genders even in the textbooks. This condition may indirectly influence students' ideas toward sexes in future. It is suggested that more items related to females be incorporated in the textbooks in order to avoid gender bias. Furthermore, it is suggested that teachers alleviate these problems to some extent through their teaching. Babai and Ansary (2003) believe that both students and teachers can question issues of language, power, discrimination, etc. However, the problem is that many language teachers believe in leaving their political proclivities and social ideologies outside. Furthermore, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other Asian countries in order to investigate the problem more deeply. Also further studies can contribute to the understanding of educationalists in different countries and contexts.



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