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Original Research Article

An Analysis of Bangladeshi Primary School English Textbooks from Feminist Perspective

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Abstract: This paper aims at exploring the ways the authority designs English Textbooks of Primary School with the roles, profession, social status of men and women and shows how the process of this setting causes gender discrimination, and promotes unjust treatments between men and women in Bangladesh. This paper scrutinizes the primary school's English textbooks from class 1 to class 5 and brings out all the aspects of them by using the lenses of feminism. To achieve the goal of this study, a mixed-method approach is followed. As language is a prime source of exercising power, the uses of languages in these books are also taken to be considered as a focused point of this paper. Using Lazar (2007)'s four key theoretical framework, this paper critically analyses the collected data. It discovers a little gender discrimination, and patriarchal mentality of the book writers. A large number of gender imbalanced tools that were present in the previous texts are not found in present revised texts in 2026. The authors use a conscious attempt to represent a discrimination free atmosphere that can shape the children's mentality in a positive way. Here, besides male, female characters are also visible and play different roles in the society. But some gender stereotypical ideas are presented by the repeated representation of women with household activities and by the commodification of them. The conclusion of the paper hopes for the textbooks written in a more balanced and equal way making both the male and female students feel equal.

Keywords: Textbooks, Gender representation, Sexist language, Gender equality, Primary Education, Feminism.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Preliminary Discussion

Generally a textbook is a book which is used as a teaching learning material. It is actually a guideline both for teachers and students. (Awal, 2024) says, “textbooks are an essential educational resource that facilitates learning in academic institutions.” Based on a learning plan and objective, a textbook is designed with related contents, activities, exercises and tasks which are widely used in schools, colleges and any educational institutions. In this sense, a textbook plays a crucial role in shaping students’ mentality, behavior and ideology. Therefore, it is necessary to mention that a well decorated textbook is helpful for both students and teachers as it provides outlines and develops ideas.

Actually a textbook is designed with an aim of providing learners with some specific amount of knowledge, language skills and information regarding different fields. Concerning the English language text-book, it provides a good exposure for learners since it can be used as a source for presentation of language materials; as a source of activities for learners practice and communicative interaction; as a reference material for grammar, vocabulary etc.; as a source of stimulation and ideas for classroom language activities; as a syllabus; as a resource for self-directed learning and self-access work; as a good resource for less experienced teacher Cunningsworth,(1995). To make the learners understand about the influence of English textbook Sheldon (1988) defines textbook as a published material specially design to help language

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learners to improve their linguistic and communicative abilities. Again, Ur (2009) writes textbook as a framework which leads learners and teachers in a specific direction. She also says that textbooks are roadmap through which both the teachers and the learners come to know what they are learning and what they want to accomplish from the course. According to Wikipedia, "A textbook is a book containing a comprehensive compilation of content in a branch of study with the intention of explaining it. Textbooks are produced to meet the needs of educators, usually at educational institution." Now, the primary school's English textbooks are the preliminary books which build the basic foundation of learning in the learners. Ferdus, (2021) says, "In second language learning, textbooks play a vital role as these English language textbooks are important and common sources learning English as a foreign or second language" Therefore, the decoration of these books is very necessary. The lesson plan, context, illustration, gender role etc. should be sincerely made. That's why, to explore all of these, this present study takes primary school's English textbook into consideration. It focuses the uses of language in presenting gender and their roles and activities. (Ferdus, 2021) says, the uses of language helps to create the identity of being male and female. Traditionally and culturally Bangladesh has a history of patriarchy. Now-a-days, women in Bangladesh contribute a lot in different sectors. But, a number of pictures can be found where patriarchal practices, discriminations are continued. Sultana (2010, cited from Suchana, 2024) says, "though women in Bangladesh are supposed to enjoy gender equality by the general law and constitution of Bangladesh, patriarchal explanations and interpretations of the law paves the way towards practicing patriarchy." Ansary and Babaii (2023) mention that the study of sexism has been started since 1970 but the uses of gender biasedness in language are still present in the textbooks of different countries. Even, some issues are found in the textbooks in Bangladesh when they are analyzed from a feminist perspective in this study. Actually, feminism is the concept or belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes. Smriti (2026) says, feminism is a platform from where a feminist, both male and female, can raise his or her voice against gender discrimination and focus the light on the equality of the gender. Lazar (2007) states that "The central concern of feminist critical discourse analysts is with critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order – relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group" In this sense, the primary school's English Textbooks in Bangladesh have some matters to be pointed out and analyzed in this study so that it can help to identify how social awareness about gender equality can be raised.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As the primary school's textbooks have a great impact on shaping a student's mentality, these books are very much significant. Mills (1995) says, learners' ideas are shaped through language. But the unjust representation of these books promotes social discrimination. These books can develop the students' biased attitudes between men and women that men are superior and they have enough opportunities to enjoy every step of their life, on the other hand, women are inferior and they have less opportunity. These practices in the textbooks remain unnoticed. But, the brain of the students of primary school is almost like a blank slate. They practice those ideas throughout their whole life what are installed and inserted in their mind / brain. Porreca (1984) expresses his concern about the children who have quick integrating quality. They can easily develop the partial attitudes as their values. So, as a platform of building attitudes, perspectives of the children, care should be taken in the decoration of textbooks which should be free from any kind of discrimination.

1.3 Justifications

The function of a textbook is to guide the teaching and learning of the curriculum in a particular subject. That is, textbooks are a way to distribute the essential content of a class to a massive group of students in a way that is standardized and economical. It helps the learners' growth of knowledge (Hagstrom, Mc Gehee, Aslin and Baker, 2008). It also increases social, cooperative, skills and group cohesiveness. Through the textbooks, learners learn how to enhance their knowledge in a particular field, get a meaningful experience and improve their creativity. At the same time, the students are able to develop higher order thinking as well to individual and social values to improve their harmony in life. Therefore, it has a great importance in designing a textbook with gender free language, images and illustration with equal roles and professions between men and women etc. Rifkin (1998) says, to understand the target language and its culture the presence of women in textbooks has a great impact. For this reason, this study is essential. Although, there have been some researches on textbooks, there are, to researcher's knowledge, no investigations about the contents and decorations of primary school's English Textbooks in Bangladesh in 2026. Due to this gap, this study aims at collecting the information about the use of language, information etc. in primary school's English textbooks. Therefore, the result of this study will provide learners with more suitable information. It has important implications for gender and education policies in Bangladesh as a developing country.

1.4 Objectives

The aims of this paper are given below:

- To examine the use of language in the primary school's textbooks in English, whether it is gender biased or not.
- To reveal the gender discrimination in the planning of the textbooks as per the assigned roles, professions, social status and actions of men and women.
- To investigate how this representation of books help creating and promoting stereotypes and ideologies about men and women

- To explore what the appropriate mode of representation will be and how a neutral and balanced society can be presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Though primary school's English textbooks have great importance as the foundation of learning the language, the researchers have a little interest in this field and there has not been enough critical exploration. Very few researchers conduct studies on this very subject. As English is a dominant language all over the world, the present researcher expresses concern about its representation in the textbook. Before arranging the analysis of this study, a short review on what has been conducted in this context has been illustrated.

Srivastava (2006), in her paper, says that because of the excessive focus on creating a national identity through textbooks, issues like gender are often bypassed by the authority in charge of textbook development. The available evidence is mostly qualitative. The findings indicate that women are given limited space, and their contribution is disregarded in the textbook. Khalid and Ghania (2019), in their study, find discrimination in EFL textbooks in Algeria which representation can create a biased outlook in learners mind and it can demotivate the learners' moral values. Antiksari, (2011) finds gender disparities in her studies on the textbooks in Indonesia. Ahmad & Shah (2019) explore the stereotypical gender roles presented in the Pakistani English language textbooks. (Tarrayo 2014) in his study, shows how Philippines textbook illustrates women in a small number where males are highly presented. Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj (2018) highlight the discriminatory picture of male female representation in the textbook. Bahman & Rahini (2010) find an unfair manifestation of men and women in the textbooks of Iranian high school where the presence of male is more highlighted than that of women. Hameed (2012) finds gender biased issues and hopes deconstruction is needed in organizing textbooks. Nagatomo (2010) reveals a gender balanced picture in the EFL textbooks where a conscientious effort is made to counterbalance gender stereotypical ideas.

Generally, while textbook contents have often been manipulated by successive governments for political purposes, gender biasness in the curriculum and learning materials remains an overlooked topic. Lee (2018) explores inequalities in Japanese EFL textbooks. Sulaimani (2017) detects the same features of biasedness between man and women in the textbooks of Saudi Arabia.

Islam and Asadullah (2018) find a high degree of gender stereotypes in the form of exclusion and the quality of representation in all the sample textbooks. Moreover, female characters were mostly associated with traditional and low wage occupations as well as more passive personality traits. Though the extent of stereotypes varies across countries, all show stereotypical ideas more or less.

The mindset of a child is developed through primary level of education. In this level, education policy should be developed its curriculum in a gender freeway. Kabir (2015) in his study finds on equality in the representation of men and women in the textbooks when he takes a critical analysis on the textbooks of secondary level in Bangladesh. Suchana (2024) makes a study on the discourse of EFL textbooks in Bangladesh where she finds an imbalanced picture of gender and patriarchal dominance.

3. METHODOLOGY

To study the primary school's English textbooks in Bangladesh in 2026, a descriptive approach has been applied in this research. The textbooks are critically analyzed based on four CDA frameworks: feminist analytical activism, gender as an ideological structure, complexity of gender and power relationship and discourse in the (de)construction of gender (Lazar, 2007). Feminist critical approach offers a wide range of tools and strategies for detailed analysis of contextualized uses of language on texts and raises the voice against patriarchal society and male stereotype culture and raises awareness. Actually, feminism is a problem-oriented discipline as it focuses on gender problem. While analyzing a text from feminist perspective, language is critically analyzed together with other semiotic modalities like visual image, gesture and so on, and it also critically analyzes the gender biased language i.e. sexist language used in the text. It tries to seek how females are treated and how they should be treated. So feminism is concerned with the marginalization of all women. It is commonly found that the language in CDA research is increasingly critically analyzed together with other semiotic modalities like visual images, layouts, gestures, and sounds, which makes for an enriching and insightful analysis (Lazar, 2007). This study was based on the secondary data which was obtained from the contents of the textbook. The data were described both quantitatively and qualitatively. The data were collected through self-observation and focused reading. The pictures and images were critically observed and also counted them. To analyze the textbook, the content and language used in the textbook was read and re-read. In the first part, the data were analyzed using quantitative data analysis procedure and presented in figures -statistically, and in the second part, the data were critically analyzed, described and interpreted.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained from the textbook, findings and discussion have been drawn.

4.1 Order of Presentation and Character

Primary school's textbooks are the books which introduce the students with the ABC. In this sense, they generally include normal conversation, way of initiating a conversation, continuing it etc. A close observation of the texts find that in most of the cases males are presented prior to the females in the textbooks. There are a few instances of female being referred to first in a sentence and conversations. In the book of class one, nearly 32 conversations or conversational illustrations, greetings are found and among them 22 conversations are initiated by the teachers, almost 8 conversations are initiated by boys and approximately 12 conversations are initiated by female students. Similarly in class two, 10 conversations are there, among them 3 conversations are started by female students, 3 by male students, and rest of the conversation are initiated by the teachers. In the book of class 3, 15 conversation are there where 3 conversations are started by female, 8 conversations are initiated by male students and rest of the conversation by the teachers. In class 4, one male to male and one female to female conversations are there. But besides, there are other 8 conversations. 1 conversation is initiated by female and 5 conversations by male and 2 conversations are started by teachers. In the book of class 5, 6 conversations are found where, 3 are initiated by male and 3 by female characters. It shows the stereotypical gender roles where the females are mentioned in reference to the male characters in some cases. And also, it finds females are designed with less speech, not supposed to speak first, rather they are supposed to speak only after listening males. Furthermore, it can be interpreted as females should speak less and listen more. But, in some books, they are equal in their activities that can create a positive outlook. The conversation initiated by males and females can be clearly understood by the following chart:

Table 1: Number of male female conversation

Books	Conversation initiated by female	Conversation initiated by male
Class one	12	8
Class two	3	3
Class three	3	8
Class four	1	5
Class five	3	3

4.2. Images and Visibility of Male and Female Characters

In terms of images and visibility of the characters, a little discrimination is found in these English textbooks. Though there is not equal representation of male and female characters in the text and images, in most cases same sexes are presented in the images. By this, it can be understood that besides males, female characters have been included in the concept to change the perspective which is a good sign for developing a gender free society. In spite of this, males have been more prioritized in the portrayal than females. And this can lead humiliation and inferiority to female students and demotivate them to read the text. The data of female and male are presented by showing a chart below:

Table 2: Visible images of male and female

Books	Number of female images	Number of male images
Class one	160	154
Class two	75	110
Class three	121	181
Class four	119	106
Class five	44	138

4.3. Roles, Activities, Occupations and Position Assigned to the Males and Females

The data show that males are presented as rational, strong, powerful, proactive and independent and females as powerless, dependent, weak emotional and nurturing. In the textbook, males are presented in doing wide range of activities. Males enjoy the occupational roles which are higher in status like doctor, researcher, scientist, bard, teacher, farmer, fisherman, post master, engineer, reporter, photographer and so on. On the other hand, females' occupational roles are conventional, nurturing and caring jobs like teacher, doctor mother and housewife. For example, in the book of class 5, Upala meets a male reporter on page 24, on page 30, a post master is shown, on page 61, a shopkeeper of a grocery shop is found, a male teacher Mr. Khan is presented on page 40, but no woman with profession is shown in this book except teaching on page 42 with a small illustration. Again, in the book of class 4, a female teacher is found on page 4, Aliya, a student of class 4, is presented as a little doctor on page 13, and, on page 29, Rahat's mother is shown as a worker of Upazila Family Planning Centre and father as a owner of a grocery shop. In the book of class 3, a male teacher is there on page 8, a shopkeeper is on page 9, a bard is on page 56, a librarian is on 68, a fisherman is on 72, but female is only shown as a teacher on page 34 and housewife on 97. In the book of class two, a male scientist is found on page 21, a man as a

farmer is on page 79, but female is presented just as a teacher and health worker as usual. Throughout the book of class 1, female is found as a teacher only, but male is found as teacher, fisherman etc. By all these data, it can be inferred that males are considered superior in terms of works, activities, occupations and positions, which clearly injects the male dominant tendency into the readers' minds.

Likewise, there are two stories named "Osman's village life" and "Oyshi's city life" on page 72 and 76 respectively in the book of class 3 where Osman is presented as an independent boy who goes and comes from school alone without any help, plays with his friends in the playground and sometimes goes to fishing with his father. On the other hand, Oyshi is presented as a dependent girl who goes school with father, comes with mother, and plays with her brother, even sometimes helps her parents in rooftop gardening. It means that females are weak, insecure and cannot take care of themselves. But males are strong, independent and secure in the society and can handle the difficult situation being patient and calm.

Similarly, in the texts, while portraying a successful and renowned person, male characters have been presented. Upendrakishore Roy Chowdhury, Zainul Abedin, Sukumar Roy are portrayed on page 19 in the book of class 5 to describe Kishoreganj district. But, Chandrabati, Sitara Begum, they are not picturized. Beside these, the authors could exemplify any women with their portrait who are successful in their life. It can make an equal sense and motivate female students to go forward in their life. Rather, now, it can be guessed that there are only males who are successful in the world. Even, in any books from class 1 to class 5, no story is found where a woman is represented as a self-dependent, brave woman.

On page 64 in class 4, a poem is presented which is written by Abdullah Al-Mamun, a male author. In class 5, on page 52, again a poem written by a male author, Robert Louis Stevenson, is inserted. Here, in the same book on page 79, the authority includes a poem of female writer, "The Secret Song" by Margaret Wise Brown. It shows that woman's contribution in literature has taken into consideration. Literary works written by female authors are not excluded from literary canon. But, this ratio can be interpreted as women's works are not given as much importance as that of male. Women are secondary in literature.

The textbooks also show the presence of males on sports. On page 83, in the book of class 3, the boys are shown playing football in the playground, swimming in the pond. But girls are absent in any playground. In class 2 on page 39, boys are seen as playing cricket, and on 96, boys in a group play with frogs. Just in the book of class 1, one picture is found on page 14 and 20 where boys and girls play together.

4.4. Use of (Sexist) Language

Sexist language refers to the use of male dominant language. Male dominant vocabulary can be found in different books and writings, for example, headmaster, policeman, chairman, housewife, postman, boatman, spoke-man etc. But, it finds few uses of sexist language in the texts, which is one of the positive aspects of the books. Yet, the uses of Mr. Shape in the book of class on page 69, the repeated uses of the word 'man' in the same book, and, the practices of pronoun 'she' for an ant and 'he' for grasshopper in the book of class three, unit -8 "Facts and Fables" can be changed for creating a biased less environment.

4.5. Image Analysis

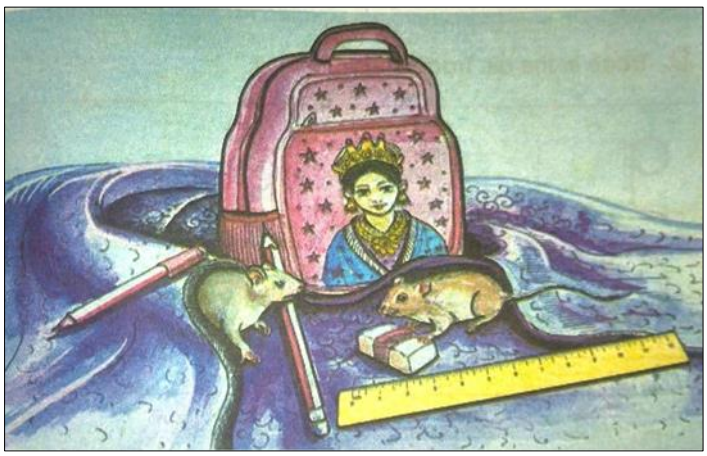


Figure 1: [English for Today for Class One, Page number:51]

In the picture, some objects are presented. With these, a female body is also objectified. Here, a female body is treated as a physical commodity like the scale, bag, eraser etc. This representation of dehumanization of women in this book teaches the learners about the objectification of women that is not fare. Women are not a product of advertisement.



Figure 2: [English for Today for Class four, Page: 9]

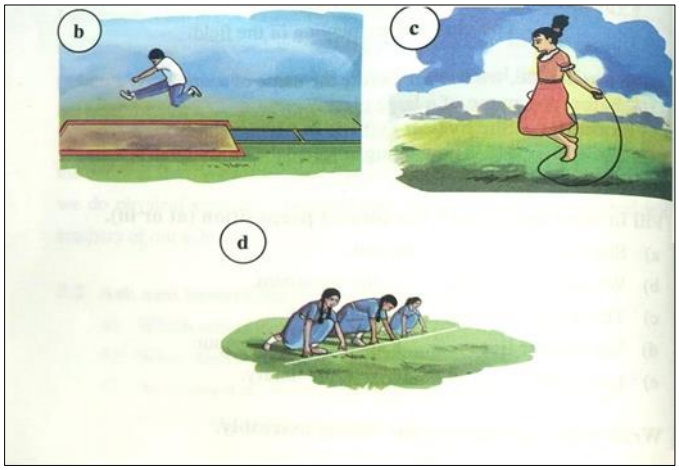


Figure 3: [English for Today for Class three, Page: 29]

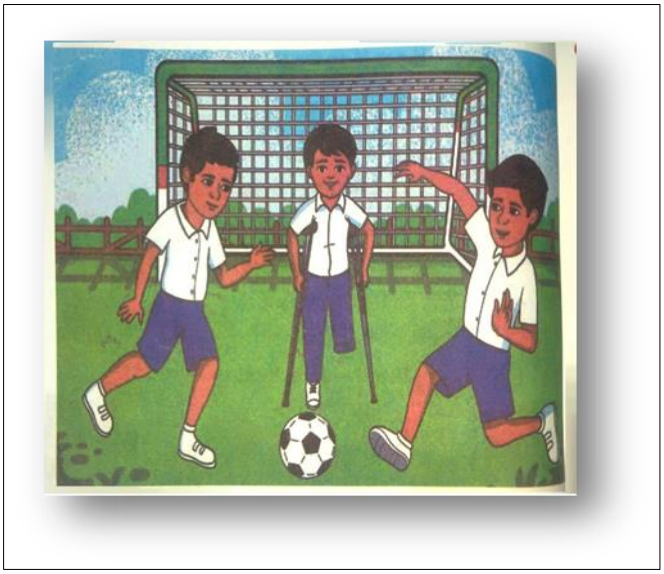


Figure 4: [English for Today for Class two, Page: 39]

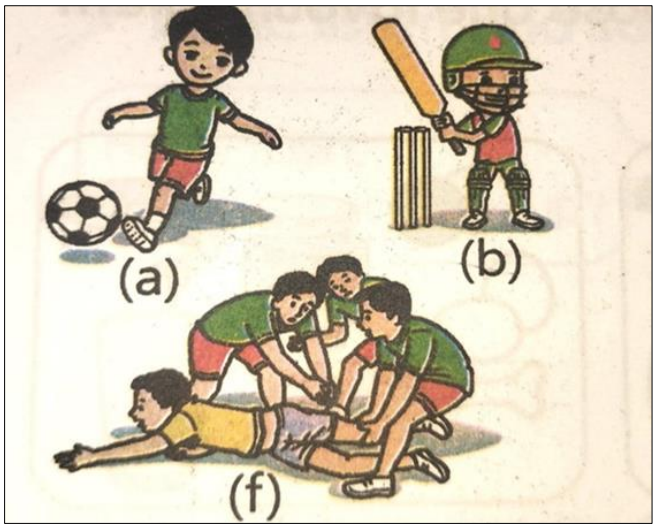


Figure 5: [English for Today for Class three, Page: 83]

The above pictures are all about sports, where players are playing football, cricket and flying kites. In the surface level, nothing wrong is found with it, but a critical observation can smell the gender biasness. In all the pictures, they are male players as if females did not know how to play those games. There are only two pictures of female players which indicate that women have not enough access to play any types of games. It tries to categorize the games for female and creates discrimination. The authority can represent a number of female players as equal as male players that can motivate the learners.

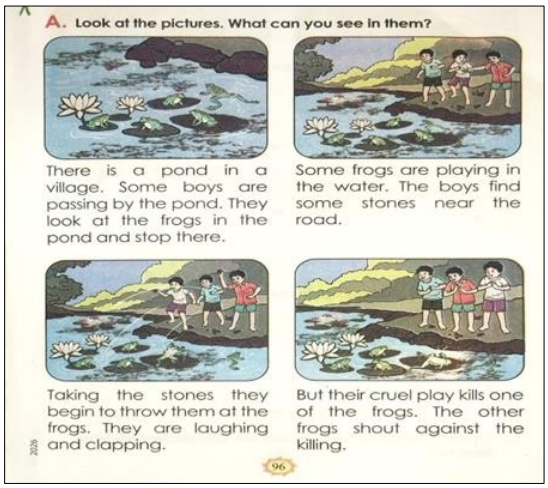


Figure 6: [English for Today for Class Two, Page: 96]



Figure 7: [English for Today for Class Two, Page: 19]

At the same time, it is seen that the boys in the picture, play, run, move around the village, bank in the pond or river, throw stone to the frog in the pond, fly kites, swim in the pond, catch fish, make fun with friends, and so on, while girls do not have freedom to do the same things. It shows that the family brings up female child within restriction without any kind of freedom while, a male child is brought up with all kinds of freedom.

Moreover, in the textbook, it is noticeable that boys are presented with doing various activities like playing football, cricket, running, climbing tree, being winner and so on. But females are mostly presented with reading, writing, cooking, taking care of others, sitting and gossiping etc. It shows females are passive or less active in comparison to males, they are inferior to and capable of doing only some limited easy tasks. As for example, we can notice the following picture:

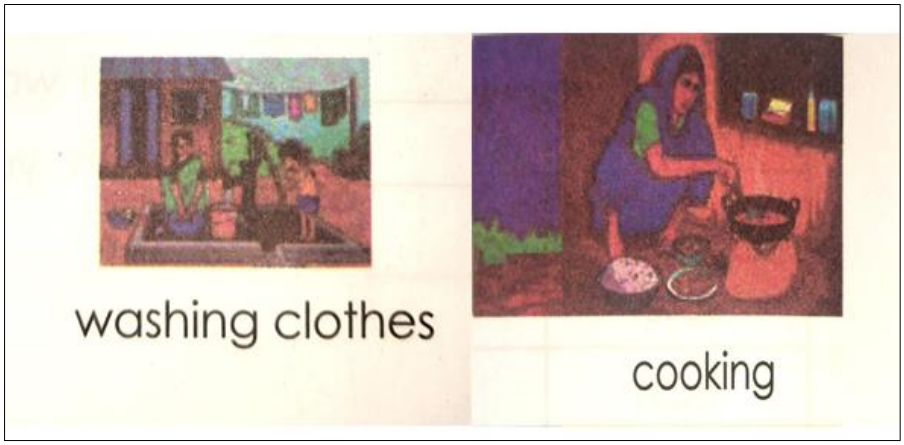


Figure 8, 9: [English for Today for Class Three, Page-97, 101]

From the above figures, it is seen that a mother is cooking and washing. This type of contents can influence the mindset of children. They will start to think that only the girls can work in the kitchen, not the boys, whereas, both boys and girls can work in the kitchen side by side.



Figure 10: [English for Today for Class Two, Page-77]

Here, the researcher finds a short text heading "My mother" where Rahela Khatun, a health worker, rides a motorbike. Beside the household activities, she works for society, monitors the health of women in a village. It brings a positive outlook in readers' mind.

5. Suggestions and Personal Opinion

The contents of the textbooks help to reinforce gender as a social division and perpetuate inequalities between men and women. At the same time, these contents can create an equal atmosphere which helps the learners think as equal citizen in a society, Therefore, the content of the textbooks, the issues, sentence models and examples must be represented in such a way that both male and female learners feel that they are equally valuable for society. Textbooks should not impose on the readers the idea that male students have more social prominence than females. However, if we glance at the current EFL textbooks in Bangladesh, it is found that there are a few gender-biased elements in the design of the textbooks. There seem a little balance and equality between male and female characters in the content of the textbooks. By observing

this, my opinion is that, our current education system is somehow satisfying. Comparing with previous years' education policy, current education policy is a lot more standard. The English text books (EFT) are now less gender biased. Women are represented in a positive way. Their roles in country's progress and development are highlighted. But still, there are some things which can be changed or improved. Like:

- It would be better if the gender biased words can be replaced by common words that can represent male and female equally.
- More lessons about historically famous women should have come to the textbooks.
- Male and female can be depicted with the same task.
- Instead of 'man', human being or a person can be used.
- Almost all the athletes are male. More female athletes can be enlisted in the books to encourage the girls in sports and physical recreation.
- In some cases, if a girl's photos are used with a lesson besides the boy's photos, it will have been less gender biased. Now-a-days most of the lessons do this.
- If the father and mother are shown as the helping hand of each other in more contents, it will be better.
- Women's life can be presented in a brighter way that can feel them confident in a society.

6. CONCLUSION

Academic education, more specifically, primary education is very important in our lives. This level of education creates the mindsets of every child as a foundation. A child's ethical standpoints, his/her moral values, perspectives and goals of life are set during this period of education. Therefore, if we want to create a less gender biased generation, we have to be very careful with our education system. Our little inconsiderable behavior can spoil the whole generation and we might be deprived from a very potential and bright generation. So, for a better future of the country, a more improvised, modern and developed education policy and academic curriculum should be built and implemented in the practical life. From this analysis, it is highly notice that, the policy makers and educators are concern about these issues. Instead of one or two cases such as objectification of women, males' spontaneous presence in different sports and professions, they try to minimize the representation of discriminations in the text book. In some contents, women are portraited with some nurturing job such as serving health, teaching, nursing, cooking, sewing etc. But, both man and woman, that means, all the human beings can be presented side by side with more influential activities that can represent their equal contribution in the society so that they can lead a life with same respect and freedom.

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