Stereotypical Representation of Women in Junior High School Textbook: A Study of the Textbook "English" Published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press

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Abstract: Supervised by SDG goals (Gender Equality and Quality Education) and renewed national standards, China is performing an ongoing reformation of education curriculum, aiming to eradicate gender discrimination of all kinds—including the omission and stereotyped representation of females in textbooks. To undo the historical preconceptions towards females and build impartial cognition in students, this paper demonstrates a critical approach to exam and refine the acclaimed textbook English (SFP Oxford Edition). The research adopted data collected by Sheng to testify the low participation of female figures in this textbook, and by deep down analyzing the contents of all six textbooks, the prescribed occupation for women, the inadequate representation of motherhood and heroine, and the omission of minority groups have been revealed. This research deconstructed the widely-used textbook in China, raised and categorized problems on equal and precise gender representation, which will guide and facilitate the development and iteration towards ideal textbook.

Keywords: EFL education (English as a foreign language), textbook studies, stereotypes, junior high school

1. Introduction

Gender Equality and Quality Education—set as two different transformative and ambitious targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—conjoined in one mainstream idea: detach educational curriculum from gender disparity and discrimination of all forms. Supervised by the SDGs agenda, China is addressing ongoing education reform comprising the refreshment of the textbooks, to rectify the entrenched gender asymmetry inherited from the patriarchal order. The dismissal of timeworn images, along with the onboarding of more female characters has pervaded nations' textbooks development since 2002, questing after equality in females' amount, appearance, abilities, and so forth.

Official regulations have been sketching out the characteristics that an ideal textbook should be endowed with—the arrangement of textbooks shall be scientific and reasonable, abide by national laws on the protection of human rights, and shall not discriminate against ethnic groups, ages, regions, occupations, or sex (Ministry of Education [MOE] of the People's Republic of China).

Hence, numerous studies were done for textbook perfection so as to approach this ideal and sustaining version, including the unveiling of the forming and norms of gender stereotypes in China, sorting out the revamp of female image, and conducting assessments for the modern textbooks—mostly quantitative analysis of the data on male-to-female characters ratio(in illustrations, texts, dialogues) [1-9].

Although a balanced occurrence of female and male was proven to be the majority of research outcomes—with different textbook versions (e.g. Go for It and Junior High English) and those for different grades tested to confirm the validity—it only scratches the surface of equal gender representation [10-12]. These statistics may be the primary evidence to convince that females "have" equal space for their representation, whereas, unable to inform "how" they are portrayed in the books—they fell short of disclosing how arguable these portrayals are. This research, going underneath the surface, conducted an in-depth analysis of junior high school textbook contents (English by SEP), outlining its avoidance of inserting real female figures and their achievements, the idealistic expression of maternalism, and the fixed allocation of women characters' occupation, etc.

By digging and listing out inappropriate and stereotypical representations of females in this widely-used textbook, the research can act as a heads-up of deficiencies in the textbook for textbook editors to work on, as a reminder for teachers to be cautious about their teaching materials, about the way they treat these sensitive contents, and as an emphasis on the importance of proper character shaping in textbooks—once negative gender stereotypes get to the children with its great influence, "it may exert harmful impacts on students' cognitive development and choice of career" [13].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical Background: A Long-lasting Dilemma

China was a long-standing patriarchal society, in which the role of males was vital and reinforced by the division of social labor 4000 years ago back then. Agriculture, which is related directly to the rise and decline of the nation, was dominated by males that carry greater physical strength. Females at that time were unable to provide an equal contribution to social production, considering their inferior physical fitness and the assigned "duty" of procreation. Therefore, away from field labor works and being liable for pregnancy, the representation of women tended to be domestic, men-reliant economically, converse to outdoorsy, and self-supporting which was the image of a man [14-16]. Different proverbs like "贤妻良母"(virtuous wife and devoted mother) and "热血男儿"(warm-blooded and passionate men) are able to reflect this kind of diverse perception of gender roles.

What's more, previous education and works of literature also added to the rolling of these stereotypes. As proclaimed in the research of Wang, the Chinese are deeply influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes the inequality of men and women, with men being considered superior to women. A "strict and harsh ethical system" was advocated by the Confucian indoctrination to women—known as "the three obediences (obedience to her father before marriage, obedience to her husband during married life and obedience to her sons in widowhood), as well as the four virtues (fidelity, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work)" [17-19]. It was prevalent and worshiped by the patriarchal society, inculcated as the norms and tenet of all females, even those in the classic novels. Like widows in Shuihu Zhuan and The Golden Lotus—if is unfaithful to her dead husband, the woman will definitely get criticism and be obliged to do self-punishment to redeem herself. On this account, not only were females restrained and blocked,

but also trained to recoil from their individuality, having no chance of rewriting their negative images.

Nevertheless, the dreadful situation didn't last forever, the role of females constantly changes in the wake of social development. "Beginning in 1911, the Qing government permitted joint attendance by both boys and girls in junior elementary schools, marking the first time Chinese females obtained rights of school attendance equal to those of males [4]." It was a change in governmental strategies by the influence of liberal tendency—to advise all young girls to be educated, avoid ignorance, and in turn enlighten more maidens to strive for personal equality and a change of the unfair social norms [6]. Even so, under the influence of the enduring patriarchal gender system [20], the permission to be educated didn't fully guarantee the willingness of the girl's family to let her be educated. The marginalization and forced "silence" of women continued until 1949.

2.2. Women's Liberation in China

Stepped into the new millennium, the country has ripened economically and politically stable [21]. "Cultures then moved ahead from the survivalist orientation (supportive of familiar, traditional values, settle down to the security it provides), to a self-expressive orientation, which features liberal attitudes, and which presumably leads to egalitarian views about gender roles [21]." Females' rights were under the protection of laws (e.g. The First Constitution of 1954) and with the decrease of patriarchal families, of womanless occupations, and of inequality in the educational industry, females, and presumably males who appreciate the notion of gender equality gradually came to understand that fairness in education is far more than ensuring sameness—it is to carry out education that is catered to the needs of everyone, regardless of religion, color and particularly, gender [22-24]. Increasingly, the innovative spirit was making its way into the teaching materials of the 20th century, causing not only the removal of contents that bear or bring about gender stereotypes and discrimination (e.g. tagged girls with long hair and skirts; presumed fat boys to be sloppy and ignorant; …), but also the increase in female roles and their "growing tendency toward richness and plurality" [4]. Based around the idea of the fundamental education curriculum implemented in 2001, the evolution and supervision of textbooks go on, with renewal syllabi and updated versions of English textbooks released. The elimination of conventional ideas and the accurate handling of inequalities of all forms are, and always will be ongoing considerations—the modification of the teaching materials will react and cater to the request of the human race ever-faster.

2.3. The Introduction of Textbook

Schooling is built from three critical and interacting elements: the teacher, the learning environment, and learning materials. Teachers are as the courses' initiators and supervisors, environments as the setting to keep learners focus or interactive, and learning materials as the medium for preaching and consolidating knowledge, where a great deal of demonstrative information awaits. Back in China, in 1949, the intents in textbooks were literacy and political advocacy, whereas progressively, their significance of impacting learners both cognitively and behaviorally stands out [25,26]. Lee and Collins asserted that "Learners, who generally attach great credibility and authority to educational materials, tend to absorb and assimilate the materials in minute detail without comment, and to be susceptible to their influence. [12]" Therefore, the selection and compilation of textbook content shall be scientific and reasonable, in line with academic consensus, and nurture students' cognitive development [27]. Especially, when manifesting the gender norms of a given society, the teaching

materials should be realistic and unequivocal, being conducive to gender socialization and mutual understanding [28].

Meanwhile, the middle school period is special for students' English learning, as it is more comprehensive and systematic (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, and culture knowledge)—further down what is learned in primary school, and fuels what is necessitated in high school. Thus, endeavors carried out at this time will be a source rectification of gender asymmetry. Besides, just like any other subject, English learning was an input of a designated sphere of information and concepts [29]. But beyond that scope, the humanistic role of English also stresses that young students should "understand the diversity of the world and develop their views of the world, life, and values through EFL learning" [27]. Therefore, considering the difficulties of distilling worldwide customs, and possible idealism and omission it may lead to, careful investigation and revision of EFL coursebooks must be taken place.

"English" published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press (SEP Oxford Edition) was chosen to be the research object, which has six volumes, 46 units in total. Each unit includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities as the main part, with Grammar, Culture Corner, etc. as supplements. A wide range of cultural contents and intriguing figures are brought together in this set of English textbooks, orderly arranged under topics that reach the requirement of the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standard (2011). It was officially produced and recommended for Compulsory education by the MOE, acclaimed by junior high schools across Shanghai. Apart from its dominance in Shanghai province, it even reached out to Guangzhou and Shenzhen—altogether three vital metropolises in China are under its guidance. Consequently, this set of textbooks, with their strong influence and intriguing contents, is worthwhile investigating.

3. Method

3.1. Quantitative Approach

The adoption of the quantitative method in EFL textbook research is a common practice, where the researchers counted the number of male and female characters and worked out its ratio to illustrate the allotment of fictional characters. (Abidah & Sutama, Barton & Sakwa, Canale & Furtado, Lee, Wang Weighed the characters' numbers, some textbooks are testified to feature the absence and exclusion of female characters. But still, the majority of research, with subjects from different countries and learning periods, upholds the tendency of equal attendance by its credible ratio—effectively evidence the uprise of women's right to be included and portrayed in textbooks [7,12,17,30-33].

Accordingly, in this research, the quantitative data are introduced as a preliminary analysis and introduction to the six textbooks of SEP Oxford Edition for junior high school. The total number of female and male characters was elaboratively gathered by Sheng in his research, including figures both in texts (covering all reading passages, leading questions, communication dialogues, and exercises) and in illustrations (covering prefaces, chapter headers and all anthropomorphic characters in each unit) [1]. The numbers as secondary data will be presented and used to evaluate whether female characters have equal occurrence frequency as male characters. Since it is unlikely for a book to present two genders at exactly fifty-fifty each, a criterion used by Witjatmiko is developed to help with the evaluation [7]. Counting the existence of the percentage gap, a span between 0%-15% is still considered as 'balanced', a 16%-25% gap as 'fairly balanced', and disparity >25% will be assumed as 'somewhat imbalanced'. Furthermore, since the reading text in each unit account for intense and major moral demonstration, the gender of their leading character(s) will be charted for comparison.

3.2. Content Analysis

However, as Porecca indicated, the method tended to be superficial, "failing to reveal how males and females are presented" [12]. Necessarily, content analysis, as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use", will be adopted as a succeeding means to further the evaluation [34]. Granted that the ratio of male and female characters is balanced, an analysis of EFL textbook contents can reassure, digging out stereotyped representations inherent in texts and the biases of all forms. Scholars such as Lyu [29], Wen [13], Canale and Furtado [30] adopted this method in their research, systematically expounded the gender discrimination in EFL textbooks, mainly from typical aspects—the speaking order, the job allocation of characters, how the figures describe their activities, etc.

Therefore, aiming at thorough elaboration, the research sets up a framework to deconstruct the whole set of textbooks. This framework of content analysis combines two categories from Barton and Sakwa [12]: omission in the text and occupational visibility, with two more, the representation of motherhood and heroes, devised for statement. Altogether four categories will instruct the content investigation of the six textbooks of SEP Oxford Edition and classify the research findings as well. In order to observe gender representation comprehensively, the followings are the features of gender description suggested by Brugeilles et al. [35], which will be used as a reference in the textbook criticism:

(1)Character type: individual or group ("children", for example); (2)Educational function: "companion figure" supporting the pupils through the textbook, "pictogram" helping pupils to find their way around the textbook, or "substitute" representing teacher or pupil in the illustrations; (3)Role: "hero" or minor figure; (4)Social, occupational and/or family functions, shown by the way in which a person is designated (first name, surname, family relationship, status, occupation, and so on); (5)Gendered attributes in terms of hairstyle, adornments such as jewelry and make-up, clothes, and so on; (6)Attributes in terms of physical characteristics or items; (7)character and personality traits; (8)Activities and actions; (9)interaction with other characters; (10)Geographical and cultural areas and places in which character is set;

4.   Results and Discussion

First and foremost, the quantitative data collected by Jiawei are presented in Figure 1 to display the occurrence frequency of different gender in texts and illustrations [1]. Carefully counted, there are 123 female characters in English (SEP Oxford Edition), taking up 37.16% of the total number. Similarly, females comprise 36.87% of the appearances in illustrations while males take up 63.13%. Whether in texts or in illustrations, the number of females is inferior, accounting for barely one-third of the total number. Moreover, adopting the criterion by Witjatmiko to evaluate the percentage gap between 37% and 63%, the disparity of approximately 26% makes it clear that the occurrence frequency of male and female characters is 'somewhat imbalanced'. It was also the case with the gender of the main character(s) in the Reading part of each unit—the people counting in Table 1 (if a female character is found in the reading article, I will plus one to the total number; if a male character is found, then I will minus one) of all six books added up to be a minus eighteen, showing the higher frequency of male in large blocks of text. In both pieces of research, males are compiled in the book in an evidently leading number, which signifies the imbalanced participation of different gender. In consequence, the English (SEP Oxford Edition) textbooks are proven to restrain females' frequency of representation.
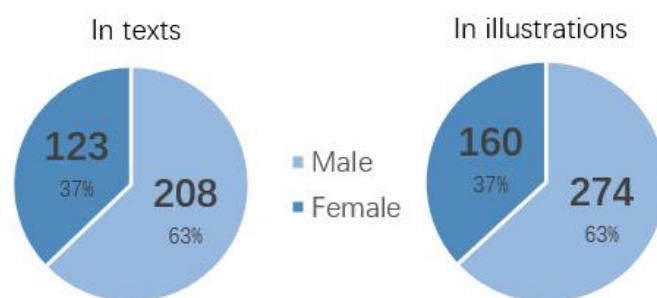
Note: The data was collected by Jiawei.

Figure 1: Male and Female occurrence frequency in texts and in illustrations [1].

Table 1: Main character(s) of the "reading" part of each unit [owner-draw].

Unit	Topic (Title)	Main character(s)	Gender
Book 1			
Unit 1	Making friends (Anna's bolg)	Anna	Female (+1)
Unit 2	Daily Life (A day at school)	Sam	Male (-1)
Unit 5	Visiting the Moon (A trip to space)	Jerry	Male (-1)
Unit 7	School clubs (The clubs fair)	Linda, Leo, a boy, a girl	Females (+2) Males (-2)
Unit 8	Collecting things (Unusual Collections)	Grandma, Grandpa, Sam, Helen	Females (+2) Males (-2)
Book 2			
Unit 1	People around us	Grandma, Alice, Mr.Li	Females (+2) Male (-1)
Unit 3	Our animal friends	Jogn Dancer	Male (-1)
Unit 4	Save the trees (Trees in our daily lives)	Dr Jones, Rebecca	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Unit 5	Water (water talks)	Dora	Female (+1)
Unit 6	Electricity (Electricity all around)	Daisy, Benny Dad, Mum	Females (+2) Males (-2)
Unit 7	Poems	Dad, the old newspaper seller	Males (-2)
Unit 8	From hobby to Career (My lifetime hobby-studying stars)	Patrick Moore, his mother	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Book 3			
Unit 1	Encyclopedia (Look it up)	Leonardo da vinci	Male (-1)
Unit 2	Numbers (The King and the rice)	The King, A wise old man	Males (-2)

Table 1: (continued).

Unit 4	Inventions (Great inventions)	Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison	Males (-2)
Unit 5	Educational Exchanges (A exchange visit is educational and interesting)	Sarah, Eric	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Unit 6	Ancient stories (The Trojan horse)	The captain and a soldier	Males (-2)
Unit 8	English week (English: fun for life)	Amy, the headmaster	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Book 4			
Unit 1	Helping those in need (Voluntary work)	Betty, Mark, Annie	Females (+2) Male (-1)
Unit 2	Body language	Mr.Yang, Simon, Debbie	Female (+1) Males (-2)
Unit 3	Traditional skills (Fishing with birds)	Wang Damin	Male (-1)
Unit 6	Pets (Head-to-head)	Emma, Matt	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Unit 7	The unknown world (Aliens arrive)	Tina, Tom, Dad, Mum	Females (+2) Males (-2)
Book 5			
Unit 1	Wise men in history (Archimedes and the golden crown)	King Hiero, Archimedes	Males (-2)
Unit 2	Great minds (Two geniuses)	Elbert Einstein and his driver Hans	Males (-2)
Unit 3	Family life (Family life in cities)	Emily, Jerry	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Unit 4	Problems and advice (Aunt Linda's advice page)	Anna, Peter, Simon, Julie	Females (+2) Males (-2)
Unit 5	Action! (Superises at the studio)	Doris, Samuel	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Unit 6	Healthy diet (What's a balanced diet)	Tina, Tom, Dad, Mum	Females (+2) Males (-2)
Unit 7	The adventures of Tom Sawyer (Tom Sawyer paints the fence)	Tom Sawyer, Ben, Billy, Johnny, Aunt	Males (-4) Female (+1)
Unit 8	Surprise endings (The gifts by O. Henry)	Jim, Della	Male (-1) Female (+1)
Book 6			
Unit 1	Great explorations (The voyages of Zheng He)	Zheng He	Male (-1)
Unit 2	Culture shock (Living in another country)	Brad Li	Male (-1)
Unit 5	Sport (Skiing: An unforgettable experience)	Vanessa	Female (+1)
Total			-18

Note: Character having its own dialogue are considered as main character. The gender of these characters is well-stated in conversations or in illustrations. Each female participant will be denoted as (+1) and male as (-1). Units without main character(s) are not included.

Frankly speaking, the fact that more males than females are arranged in the textbooks is insufficient to convince us that there are gender discrimination and stereotyping involved. Though minor in numbers, the textbook can still be considered agreeable if females are presented veritably and enlightening. Therefore, the next stage of the investigation tracked down the content of textbooks and the analyzed discoveries as follows:

4.1. Occupational Stereotype

The description of characters' occupations is commonly carried out within the topic of self-introduction, family life, or hope for the future. Through textbook scanning, the diversified occupations attached to the grown-ups are listed in Table 2, among which Teacher, Scientist, Company employee, and Actor (Actress) enjoy high popularity. In an overview of the table, fewer forms of jobs are assigned to women, and those characters are blocked in areas that are conventionally attached to them (such as Teacher and Company employee). Furthermore, positions that require greater physical strength (e.g. Athlete, Fisherman) and leadership (e.g. Director, Company director) are affiliated with male characters. The textbooks even narrow down the subject that women teachers teach. Especially in book 1 (pages 3, 9, 12, 20, 26, 90) and book 2 (page 3), female teachers are depicted to be teaching English or Art, whereas males are responsible for Geography, Math, or PE (physical education), the subjects that treasure logical thinking or strongness. Although on page 9, some girls' dream is to be Scientist or Engineer, the reality is that "sentimentality" and "humanity concerns" are still stereotypically considered as women's characteristics, thus confining the renderings of female occupation. "This tells young learners that men are the main characters in social and historical development and contribute more, while the contribution of females is marginalized or ignored." [27].

Table 2: Occupations of female and male characters in SEP textbooks[Owner-draw].

Male	*Teacher*, Company employee, Actor, Company director, Fisherman, Photographer, *Director*, Police officer, Athlete, Engineer, Pilot, Astronaut, Scientist (Inventor), Artist, Self-employer, ancient figures (King/ Prince/ Soldier/ General)
Female	Teacher, Company employee, Actress, Housewife, Scientist (Inventor)

4.2. The Representation of Motherhood

Of all the life scenes in SEP textbooks, great emphasis is placed on mirroring domestic bliss and family bond. Observing student characters' interactions with his/her family, portraying the mother as "child-centered, taking over cooking tasks, and coaching children on homework and emotional problems" is consistent throughout the six books. In the first place, the illustrations of the mother in the teaching material are much similar (see Figure 2), wearing aprons to remind readers that mother is responsible for the bothersome household chores. Secondly, there is unequal participation between mum and dad in household life scenes. While mothers are constantly satisfying demands from their children, and solving these or those problems, the fathers are either absent from the scene

or be the superior guides that can solve any problems with their intelligence and confidence. Although having more time to spend with the children, "their images are unitary and their status is basically that of a 'nursemaid' or a 'children's governess'.

Note: All pictures are clipped from the textbook.

Figure 2: Mothers in apron.

4.3. Missing of Great "Women"

As mentioned in the previous research findings, in the Reading parts of the textbook, which fundamentally support the conveying of topics in each unit, there are generally more male characters than females. Especially in "Great Invention" (Book3 Unit4), "Wise men in the history (Book5 Unit1), "Great minds" (Book5 Unit2), and "Great explorers" (Book6 Unit1)—chapters about the world-changing, contributing people, the females' number is far behind. The reason for this situation may be the limited space to include so many celebrities; may be the urgency to tell stories of people that are awarded, with greater fame and achievement; may be the leak of breakthroughs and participation for women, particularly women from China. But to my knowledge, there absolutely are Great "Women" like Marie Lavoisier, Liu Hulan, Jane Austen, etc. For certain reasons, they were deleted from the passage, and omitted to be mentioned.

4.4. Omission in the Text

Overall, the whole set of textbooks is filled with make-up stories and fictional characters, escape educating through real stories and human beings to establish emotional bond. Even when representing celebrities or life-long stories, the textbook either uses their achievements or their cartoon images instead. Animated characters indeed effectuate students' attention, engagement, and alleviating learning anxiety [36]. Under other conditions, however, impersonal representations are unsound and mindless, lacking the ability to convince and bond with learners—for they make it quite clear that the experiences and stories are all fake. Additionally, most figures in the book are well-built and convey a sense of optimism. It has been trying to varnish over the facts, to have minorities like the disabled, the poor, the ill, and the ethnic and religious minorities kept in silence. The omission of real people, real circumstances, and real problems can only blind students' cognition and detach them from the living.

5. Conclusion

The research was conducted to analyze the stereotyped representations of women in SEP Oxford Edition. The data conducted in the research attested to the low occurrence frequency of female in textbook, furthermore, through content analysis, features of phantasm, idealism, and symbolism was

discovered in the representations of female, including assigning women characters with confined occupations, illustrating motherhood and heroine in a dissatisfactory way, and avoiding the partaking of minority groups. The investigation revealed that this EFL textbook series is still carrying stereotypes in favor of the male-dominant culture and will add to the regularize of such inequality. Through textbook analysis and criticism, we are able to deeply modify the portrayal of female characters, rectify the delusion and get down to real circumstances.

The results of my research throw light on future textbook development and evaluation, may precast the teacher on these inappropriate contents, and enhance the attention of the "silence" females are having. Because of space limitations and the inability to find the older textbook version, the research is insufficient to present the variation of the SEP Oxford Edition textbook. Moreover, the textbook assessment should be updated and in accordance with version evolvement and cultural backgrounds. Renewal research on gender representation in SEP textbooks is anticipated to be conducted in the future.

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