Gender Inclusion: A Neglected Aspect of the English Textbooks in Pakistan

By

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Abstract

The research paper aims to investigate the gender inclusion in the textbooks used for teaching English language at the secondary level in Pakistan. The issue is important keeping in mind the central role played by the textbooks in the Pakistani education system. The approved textbooks have been called the 'pillars of quality' (Aly 2007, p.17), by the ministry of education Pakistan and the textbooks in the state schools are published by the government which are compulsory for all students. The findings of this research paper are based on the content analysis of the three English language textbooks published by the Punjab textbook board, questionnaire and interviews. The paper argues for a broader understanding of the issue and its importance in the Pakistani society as the results indicated that English teachers at the secondary level see the textbooks inclusive in gender terms, however the content analysis and interviews has portrayed a different picture. The curriculum of English language at the secondary level in Pakistan has stressed that along with the functional competency the inclusive aspects of education need to be reflected in the textbooks. As, the message delivered by the content of the textbooks shapes the opinions of the students in a subtle manner. Inclusive content in terms of gender will lead towards the development of the aware citizen where equality is celebrated and gender specific supremacy is deterred.

Keywords: *Textbooks, gender, inclusion, English curriculum, Equality.*

1. Introduction

Education performs a vital role in nation building and the attention paid to the education sector by any government shows the amount of commitment of that government to its people. Pakistan is a developing country and faces many challenges for example, economic depression, terrorism, energy crisis, and education is one of them. Education in Pakistan is under evolution. There are issues of quantitative expansion as well as qualitative assurance in the educational system of Pakistan. One of the qualitative concerns is the alignment between the curriculum and the textbooks. Textbooks are the most common teaching material used in the classrooms. The textbooks are published by the respective textbook boards of all the provinces and are approved by the Curriculum wing of the Ministry of Education. The government schools are supplied with the textbooks published by the textbook boards and the external examination, conducted by the boards of intermediate and secondary education are also based on these textbooks. To assure that the curriculum is completely articulated in the textbooks, alignment between the curriculum and the textbooks is imperative. This research in its broader framework has investigated the alignment between the English language textbooks and the curriculum at the secondary level in Pakistan. The alignment study has been conducted concentrating on all the aspects of the language curriculum including the inclusive aspects of education. This research paper focuses on the gender inclusion in the English language textbooks in Pakistan.

According to the Human Development Report 1994 (cited in Khurshid et al. 2008) women perform approximately two-thirds of the world's work but control only ten per cent of the world's income and one per cent of world's land. With the passage of time, however, the role of women is increasing in different fields of life and women are proving themselves to be comparable with men.

"About 30 per cent of higher education's senior managers, from vice-chancellors to deans, are women, says the paper Management, Leadership and Gender Representation in UK Higher and Further Education." (Newman 2009, html doc).

According to WIDNET (2007) the number of female teachers in the UK at primary schools is 82%, at secondary schools is 61% and at tertiary level is 40%. The above statistics depict the role that women are playing in the mainstream education sector in the UK. The statistics of 2007 show that in Pakistan, the total number of female teachers in the public, private and other public sector is 652,404, which is the 51% of the total number of teachers in Pakistan(GOP 2008). Women are 22% of the total labour force in Pakistan (GOP 2011) amongst which 73% are associated to agriculture section and the rest are associated with all the other sectors. 65 % Women contributing in the labour market are 'contributing family workers' and not the independent working person. Among the total labour force comprising women only 21% comes from the urban areas and the remaining 79% belong to the rural areas. In Pakistan the rural women bear the responsibilities of farming along with the sole responsible of the household. The statistics depicts that women who make more than 50% of the total population have not yet been in the main stream most of them work as contributing workers and are not independent. The statistics above related to the number of teachers in Pakistan also show that most women are working in the education sector. The reason behind this had been identified by Kazi and Raza (1991) in the following words,

"The demand for women in these categories [education and medicine] is itself the result of segregation in society and the subsequent need for female teachers for girls' schools and lady doctors for female patients (p. 734)".

The mainstreaming, equity and the access issues in the society also demand that the feminine gender is given due representation in the textbooks and their role and contribution in the society is not undermined.

Sexism and Language

Different authors have approached sexism differently. Holmes (1996, p.336) sees sexism as "the way in which language conveys a negative attitude to women." Spender (1985) argues that sexism depicted in the language is one of the major reflection of a patriarchal society. She believes that in a male dominating society the language represents male superiority and undermines the females. Scott, Foresman and Company (1972) cited in Sakita (1995, p.5) think that:

"Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language or if they show women and men only in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interest, traits and capabilities."

Lakoff (1973) is of the view that language is the mirror of the society and all the values one adheres to are reflected in the language used by individuals and groups. The language we use carries attitudes and referential meanings. The choice of our language is guided by our thoughts and the way we conceive the world. Sapir (1949, cited in Montgomery 1995, p.223) argues that,

"we see hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation."

Frank and Treichler (1989) supported the view that language proves to be influential on and reflective of our thoughts and perception and, in turn, our behaviour. Therefore, according to Holmes (2008, p.339), "speakers of different languages and cultures may 'filter or cut up reality differently." In the case of Pakistan, where male dominance is culturally accepted, the language also embeds masculine superiority which has been assimilated in the day to day routine and hardly gets noticed. Moreover, this superiority is often interpreted as real too, In the context of Pakistan, the day to day language use reflects that power and superiority lies in the males and the textbooks under investigation are not an exemption (figure no 1 below is an example of it).

Language plays a vital role in socialisation, as Sunderland (1992, p.86) asserts,

> "TV, films, videos, computer games, newspapers, and children's books can have an unconscious influence on audiences as agents of socialization, so presumably, can EFL materials".

This implies that just like the mass media and other authoritative resource build and shapes the opinions of the masses, similarly the English textbooks seen as an authority also influence the students and society by transmitting the inherited biases. Sexism is a major problem because

> "Sexism is an unconscious cultural bias, expressed in and reinforced by the language people learn from childhood on" (Florent and Walter 1988, p.180)
> and because

"linguistic sexism is much more deeply rooted and far more subtle" (Porreca 1984, p.705). Lakoff (1973, p.48) states that:

> "The overall effect of 'women's language' - meaning both language restricted in use to women (and) descriptive of women alone - is this: it submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly... the ultimate effect of these discrepancies is that women are systematically denied access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior along with other aspects of their behavior."

It can be argued that women are considered weak and the terms associated with women are detrimental that females are weak and males are strong. This supports the point made by Spender that in the societies which are dominating by males, the patterns of behaviour are explicit in the language and most of the time these are the acceptable norms. In the context of this study, it can be argued that this is one reason that gender discrimination is widely seen and largely accepted by the people. Hence, in order for women to play a full role in society, gender discrimination needs to be abolished in line with commitment in the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 (UNESCO 2000).

The international declaration was from the World Education Forum: the Dakar framework for Action. Goal 5 of this framework was a commitment to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015. The focus is to ensure that girls have full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education of good quality. Gender equality demands the true representation of both sexes. According to the Council of Europe (2008) gender equality signifies the empowerment, reflectiveness, and involvement of all members of society irrespective of their gender in all domains of public and private life.

Textbooks are not the only sources of information for people but they are a "vital means of mass media in the society" (Kobia 2009, p.57). According to Mkuchu (2004) textbooks shape attitudes by transmitting a society's culture. Gender images and roles are essential parts of any culture, hence, the manner in which the genders are depicted in the textbooks play a part in building the image of male and females in a learner's mind. Sabir (2008) presents the viewpoint that most often textbooks are the most formal material the learner is exposed to, which depicts the "norm", to be transmitted. They can prove to be one of the most powerful tools to influence the outlook of the learner about human rights, values and gender equality. The publisher Macmillan (1975) affirmed this, quoted by Evan and Davies (2000, p.1),

> "children are not simply being taught mathematics and reading; they are also learning sometimes subliminally, how society regards certain groups of people".

2. Methodology

For the investigation of the gender inclusion of the English language textbooks at secondary level in Pakistan, the research used mixed-method approach and collected quantitative as well as qualitative data. The data was collected using the questionnaires distributed to secondary school English teachers; interviews were also conducted with curriculum experts and educationists from Pakistan. Along with that

the content analysis of the textbooks of English implemented at the secondary level was carried out. The content analysis is subjective in nature and tells the clear standpoint of the researcher. The data collected provided a clear view of the situation regarding the gender inclusion.

Research Sample:

Four cities of Pakistan (Rwawalpindi, Islamabad, Mirpur AK and Murree) were selected and all the English language teachers at secondary and higher secondary institutes were the convenience sample. There has been an issue of generalizability with this sampling technique but Bryman (2004) suggests that while using these sample a pilot study is highly recommended and the pilot should be administered to the group which is not part of the main sample of study. In addition to it the textbooks from one textbook board of Pakistan were selected, that is the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB). This selection was made for several reasons. First, these textbooks are used in the federally administered schools which have been established across the country as well as in the foreign countries especially the Middle east countries. Second, these textbooks are also used in the school of Azad State of the Jammu and Kashmir, which has the population of more than 3.8 million (GOAJK 2009 html). Thirdly, these textbooks are used in the Punjab province of Pakistan which comprises more than 60 per cent of Pakistan's total population. Hence, the selection of these textbooks was done after deliberation as they are used in the majority of the country's schools.

Limitation of the study:

As the sample of the research participants was not random the researcher does not claim generalizability of the findings. However, this research is illuminative and highlights the aspects which can be researched in detail at national level.

Findings from the Content Analysis of the Textbooks:

In the textbooks in Pakistan especially in English 9 and 10, published by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB), there is a widespread discriminatory representation of women. Gender inequality has been explored at different levels by the researcher and one of the areas in this regard is "**Omission or Invisibility**" (Florent et al. 1994, p. 114). Porreca (1984, p. 706) has fully explored this aspect of discrimination. The idea is,

> "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 that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included".

Hartman and Judd (1978, p. 384-85) in their survey of textbooks of the USA discovered that women were less visible than men. For example, in one textbook the ratio of visibility male to female was 63% to 37%. Weitzman et al. (1972, p. 1128) for example, examined picture books for pre-school children in the USA and found that women were, "simply invisible... they were underrepresented in the titles, central roles, pictures and stories of every sample... ". Scott (1981) also explored the invisibility of women in two elementary reading series in the USA, Kyle (1978) on pre-primers and six grade readers in the USA and Abraham (1989) on mathematic course books in the UK.

In the textbooks, under evaluation, the researcher has found that representation of women is low. Out of the 22 lessons of English Book 9 only two lessons "Women Arise" (p. 18) and "Ladies park a shamble" (p. 23) fully revolves around the role and problems or issues surrounding women in Pakistani society. Other than these references the other entire lessons ignore the existence of women completely. It may be considered that they have specifically given place to the issues related to women but it does not fulfil the requisite of fair representation and it can be seen as "tokenism" (Hall, 1996). Sunderland (1992, p. 87) asserts that,

> "It is noteworthy that gender as a topic has not been ignored in textbooks, but has in the past rather been singled out for special treatment, These attempts to include the female sex and contemporary gender-related issues may be well meaning, but they are no substitute for a

realistic distribution and qualitatively fair representation of female characters throughout the book. "

All the other texts in the books under evaluation mentioned the female gender five times and that mention is not of prominent nature. In the English Book 10, out of 21 lessons only one lesson, i.e. Lesson 5 "Hazrat Ayesha (R.A)" (Book 10, p. 16), talks about a famous female character from Islamic History, the wife of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Just like English book 9, English book 10 mentions the female gender just twice. This shows how women have become invisible and their contribution is completely ignored.

Other examples of omission are seen in English Book 10 where in two poems, "A Nation's Strength" (Book 10, p. 28) and "The Character of a Happy Life" (Book 10, p. 42), females are excluded from the notion of being a nation and that high character and values are only present in men. The poem "A Nation's Strength" and the extract from the poem "The Character of a Happy Life" will explain the whole scenario.

"How happy is he born and taught
That serveth not another's will;
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill!" The Character of a Happy Life, (Book 10, p. 42)
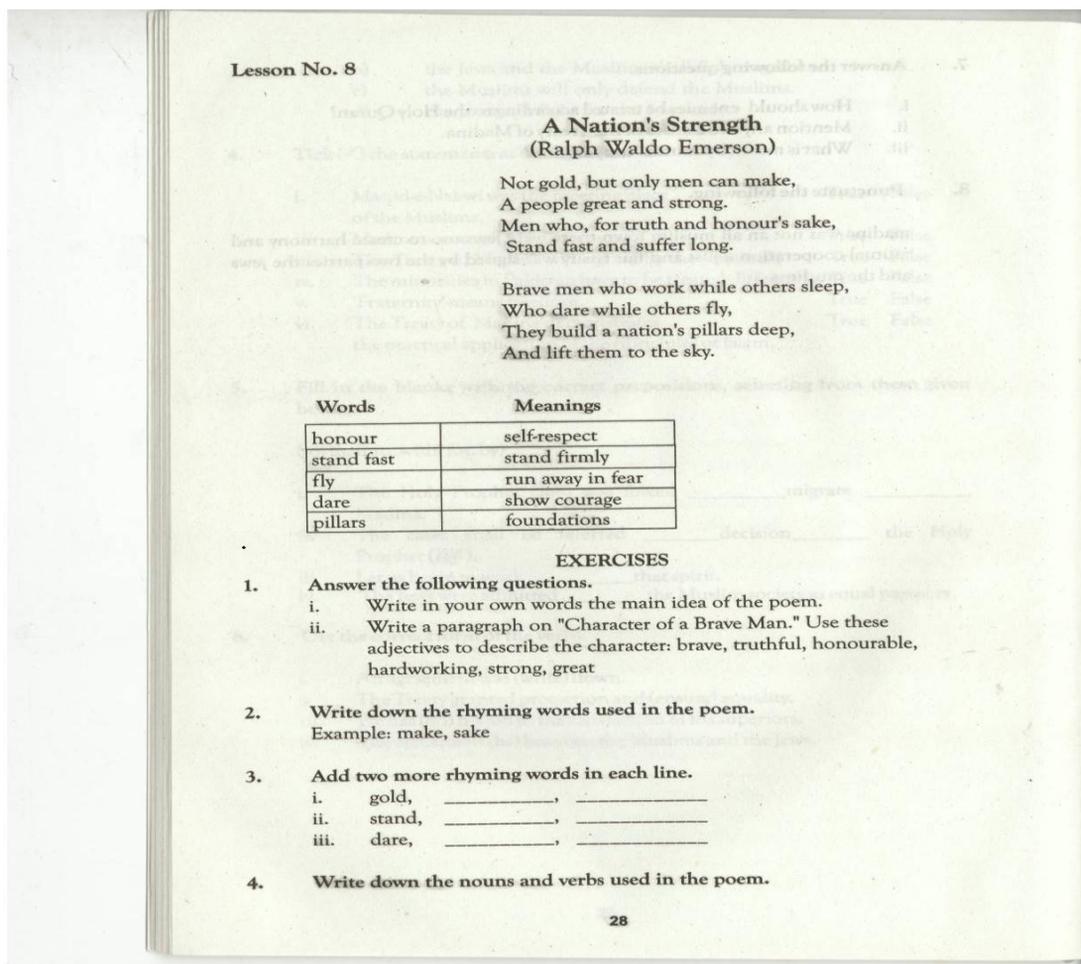

Figure No: 1 Book 10

These two extracts from the textbooks of English explain the type and level of omission of the feminine gender. It signifies that traits like strength, bravery, honesty and truth are the traits mostly attributed to male. So, it can be argued that ideas of patriarchy and how it function through language explored more than 25 years ago by Spender (1985) is still evident is Pakistan.

Related to omission is the order in which the gender is being mentioned, which is termed as "**Firstness**" (Porreca 1984, p. 706). Hartman and Judd (1978) focused on this feature. It was revealed that in English , given two nouns paired for sex, such as male/female, the masculine word always came first, with the exception of the pair ladies/gentlemen. This

> "reinforces the second-place status of women and could, with only a little effort, be avoided by mixing the order" (1978, p. 390).

Farooq (1999, p. 9), in his analysis of EFL textbooks in Japan, discovered that in total occurrences 83% were male first and 17% female first. There are many examples of 'firstness' in the books evaluated. Some examples from the text are as follows:

- "He made education compulsory not only for men but also for women" (book 9, p. 1)
- "Young boys play basketball and volleyball. Girls play netball . . ." (book 9, p. 28)
- "Dear Sir/Dear Madam" (book 10, p. 52)
- "There were over five hundred men, women and children gathered for that wedding" (book 10, p. 57)

Another angle of sexism is in the "**allocation of roles**". In his study, Kobia (2009) found that,

> "more men are depicted in prestigious occupations such as engineers, pilot, judges, dentists and masons. More women are portrayed performing less esteemed occupations as teachers, secretaries and farmers" (Kobia 2009, p. 66).

He discovered that 74% of men are pegged to productive roles as compared to 25.3% of women. Farooq (1999) identified that 66% of males were depicted in such jobs as compared to 34% of women, showing clear discrimination. In the English book 9 other than one lesson, "Women Arise" (Book 9, p. 18), which talks about the mainstreaming of women, the women are represented in very orthodox stereotyped roles as a mother or sister. No occupational roles are given to women in Book 9, and the same theme runs through Book 10 where other than "Hazrat Ayesha (R.A)" (Book 10, p. 16) female characters and their diverse roles are completely unacknowledged. A poem "My Mother" (p. 62) talks about woman but again only in a traditional role of a mother. By focussing only 3 lessons out of 43 lessons altogether on women the goal of inclusion has not been achieved; on the contrary, it shows how women are being excluded from the mainstream and are being portrayed separately and in a stereotypical way, rather than as fully integrated into society.

Porreca (1984) explored the use of "**masculine generic**", and stated,

> "It is assumed that masculine generic constructions, which include words such as man, mankind, and the use of masculine pronouns when the sex of the referent is unknown, refer to people in general and that the distinction between a sex-specific word (e.g. man as a male) and its generic equivalent (man as a human being) is clear from the context" (1984, p. 708).

The signifies that the male generics are used even if the whole population is referred to, which comprises of at least half of women. In this particular study women comprise more than half of the population of Pakistan.

The research by Carroll and Kowitz (1994) in their study of 'Excel in English' series printed in the UK, showed that sexism was present in EFL texts. They concluded that male pronouns were common ranging from 2.55-3.84 to 1. They also found that, in the 22 adjectives under study, fewer than 18 were used for men, whereas 9 were used for women and 6 were used for both sexes. The masculine generic is frequently used in the English books under evaluation. Some examples are:

- "Transport has made the life of man mobile…" (Book 10, p. 19)
- "The best and the easiest way of pleasing God is to serve mankind by wiping the tears of others…" (Book 9, p. 8)
- "When a ruler has learned to listen closely to the people's heart. … Only then he can hope to inspire confidence in his people (Book 9, p. 16)
- "Man is the central figure of the universe." (Book 9, p. 46)

The gender bias promoted by the masculine gender can be countered by de-gendering of the language, that is 'creating a new linguistic structure that places both the sexes on equal footing' (Renner 1997, p. 4), replacing the gender biased expression by 'un-gendered' terms. Renner gives the example of the male generic 'man', which can be replaced by 'humanity'. Pluralisation is another solution for avoiding male generics in the sentences.

Questionnaire & Interviews Findings:
The responses from the table and chart below show that, the majority of SSC teachers are of the opinion that content of the textbooks of English at the secondary level in Pakistan is not only inclusive in terms of gender but also represents the diverse aspects of gender inclusion discussed in the content analysis.

Summary of the Percentages of SSC teachers' data						
Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing Data
Textbook content represent women in productive roles.	18.8	57.4	10.8	8.1	2.7	2.2
Textbook content avoids using gender specific language.	17	50.2	15.7	9.4	2.7	4.9
Textbooks content avoid using masculine generics	17	47.1	15.2	14.3	2.2	4
Textbook content does not omit the feminine gender.	11.2	45.7	22.4	13	2.7	4.9
Textbooks promote the inclusion of feminine gender.	9.9	44.4	19.7	16.6	4.5	4.9

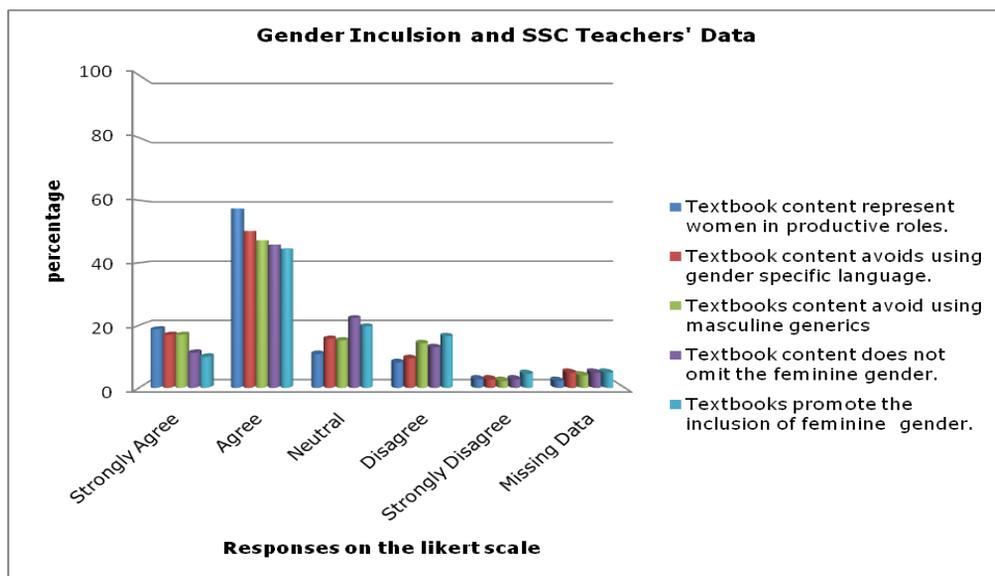
Gender Inculsion and SSC Teachers' Data

Chart No 1

It is also interesting to note that the percentages reveal that the number of teachers disagreeing and the neutral responses are almost equivalent though, it is still below those who have agreed and strongly agreed to the statement. The over whelming majority of the teachers agreeing with the statements in this section reflect that the non-inclusion in the textbooks has rather gone unnoticed due to the approved social norms. As discussed earlier, the content analysis depicts a completely different picture Teachers are also a part of the society and as students they have been taught and have assimilated the discriminatory messages conveyed in a very subtle manner. Most of them are unaware and in-sensitive of the non-inclusion of women in the textbooks. The data analysis of interviews also support the researcher's finding from the content analysis. The interviewees' views were quite similar that textbooks are discriminatory in terms of gender representation. The opinions given below explain this perspective.

> No 5: "Keeping gender bias out of the textbook should be the conscious effort of the expert and the writer."
> No 2: "Gender representation is less or it puts women down or it makes them invisible that is certainly a drawback in our textbooks I have also worked in this aspect. It is discriminatory against women."

> As it has been expressed that deliberate efforts should be made during textbook writing as well as teachers' training to make teachers' aware of the hidden curriculum which is conveyed unknowingly and how to create a more inclusive experience.

4. Discussion

The findings have made it very clear that the English language textbooks under investigation are not aligned with the curriculum with respect to inclusion of gender related issues. The researcher's content analysis is further consolidated with the findings of the interviews where the entire participant reasserted the researcher's findings about the gender inclusion. However, the majority of the SSC teachers who were the part of the survey sample believe that the textbooks are inclusive related to gender and the alignment between curriculum and textbooks exist in this aspect. One reason for the teachers perception on gender biased was expressed in interviews in the following words,

> "*Gender biases certainly exist in our textbook. Gender bias everybody will say they are there but somehow they are engraved in our culture and they keep to crop up here and there without us knowing that they are here.*" (Interviewee No. 5)

Gender inclusion in the English language textbooks at the secondary level in Pakistan is almost invisible. The representation and the characters allocated to the females are not proportionate to the male characters. The roles assigned to the females are very orthodox. More than half of Pakistan's population comprises of women but their contribution in the national stream of progress has been ignored completely. The female role models in the textbooks are in one way or another related to the religion of Islam. This is an example of the non-inclusion of the aspects discussed above in detail. Textbooks are the focal point of education in Pakistan. They not only deliver the essential skills and knowledge to the students but also inculcate in them values and attitudes, which shape their personalities as an individual and the society as a whole. The recognition of the feminine gender in the textbooks will make the students appreciate the contribution and worth of women as a productive and essential part of the society. A comprehensive study of all the textbooks taught in Pakistan should be conducted to ensure the inclusion of the feminine gender.

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