# GENDER REPRESENTATION IN TEACHING MATERIALS

**Narine Avanesyan** [*]
*https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7626-4614*
*Pyatigorsk State University, Russia*
**Anna Knyazyan** [**]
*https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6880-9549*
*Yerevan State University, Armenia*
**Luiza Marabyan** [***]
*https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3761-8521*
*European University of Armenia, Armenia*

The portrayal of gender in teaching materials still mirrors deep-rooted stereotypes even with progress towards equality. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report emphasizes that women and girls remain underrepresented in textbooks and are portrayed in stereotypical roles. These biases influence motivation, self-worth, career decisions and familial responsibilities impacting all genders. The article examines techniques for recognizing and assessing gender stereotypes and biases in textbooks and additional resources. It explores how gendered language and imagery reinforce stereotypes, addresses long-term impacts and provides guidelines for producing equitable content. Building on theories of gender and language, it highlights the significance of inclusive teaching resources to promote diverse notions. Suggestions involve the use of gender-neutral language, steering clear of job-related stereotypes and broadening character diversity. The paper seeks to educate teachers on methods for fostering gender equity in classrooms by analyzing course books and ensuring that learning resources promote empowerment and inclusivity.

**Keywords**: *gender and language; gender identity, gender discrimination, perception of gender roles, teaching materials, stereotypes, critical discourse.*

## Introduction

Gender bias in teaching materials has been a persistent issue in academic research especially in relation to its impact on students' views and perceptions. Textbooks, being key sources of knowledge, frequently reflect societal values and norms, which may

[*] narine narinka-08@mail.ru
[**] annaknyazyan@ysu.am
[***] marabyanliza@gmail.com

strengthen conventional gender roles. The UNESCO 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report shows that, despite advancements, gender inequality abides in educational resources (UNESCO 2020). Women and girls are often portrayed in traditional roles, whereas men and boys hold roles of power and authority.

Images in textbooks often show girls engaging in domestic or caregiving activities, while boys are portrayed in active and intellectual roles. Language bias further exacerbates these inequalities with male characters often introduced first, assigned leadership positions or given dynamic verbs, while female characters are described through their relationships or appearance. Such depictions shape students' self-perception, aspirations and understanding of gender roles.

Research indicates that exposure to gender stereotypes during formative years influences long-term decisions. Studies have shown that 51% of individuals feel their career choices were affected, with 70% of women aged 18–34 experiencing restricted aspirations ("Unlimited potential?", 2019)**.** Personal relationships and caregiving responsibilities are also impacted reinforcing unequal social norms.

This paper investigates gender representation in course books focusing on visual and linguistic analysis. It outlines strategies for evaluating and revising teaching materials to ensure inclusivity and balance. By addressing biases in education, educators can empower students to challenge stereotypes and envision diverse futures.

The article provides a comprehensive evaluation framework for identifying and addressing gender bias and stereotypes in course books and supplementary materials combining theoretical insights with practical strategies to promote inclusive education. The purpose of the study is to analyze gender representation in textbooks and teaching materials, assess their impact on students' perceptions and choices and provide educators with tools to recognize and counteract stereotyping and bias in educational resources.

### Language and gender: early theoretical contributions

A key theoretical approach to gender representation in language originates from Robin Lakoff, who states that linguistic patterns help to reinforce gender hierarchies (Lakoff, 1975). Lakoff's studies indicate that women's language typically includes elements of politeness, hedging and uncertainty; the attributes that she believes mirror societal expectations regarding women's submissive roles and lower status. These linguistic traits are not innate but are socially developed through language interaction supporting the notion that women are perceived as less authoritative, less self-assured and less capable of being assertive than men. Lakoff argues that the language linked to women acts as a mechanism for reinforcing their subservience and restricting their social influence (Lakoff, 1975).

 In the realm of teaching materials, these linguistic patterns can carry significant consequences. Textbooks can mirror and sustain these gender-based speech trends,

depicting male characters as self-assured, assertive and skilled, whereas female characters are often illustrated as caring, submissive or doubtful. This variation in language usage not only strengthens gender stereotypes but also restricts students' outlook on their possible roles in society based on their gender.

## Language, power and social inequalities

Norman Fairclough offers a broader theoretical framework for grasping how language functions not merely as a form of communication but also as a mechanism for sustaining social inequalities, such as gender discrimination (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough contends that language both influences and is influenced by power dynamics, which consequently maintain structures of social hierarchy. Textbooks illustrate gender roles and professions in a manner that mirrors the power dynamics present in society. For instance, when women are mainly depicted in caregiving jobs (teachers or nurses) while men are portrayed in authoritative roles (doctors or engineers), it reinforces the social framework that prioritizes male dominance while relegating women to subordinate positions. Fairclough's model highlights that language, via both explicit and implicit methods, strengthens and legitimizes these gender-based divisions. In textbooks, this is frequently accomplished through recurring patterns of gendered depiction, where female characters are linked to domestic or supportive roles, and male characters are tied to leadership or intellectual occupations. The visuals and texts in these resources act not merely as neutral transmitters of information but also as instruments that support and validate gendered power dynamics in society.

## Gender as a performative act

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet present a performative outlook on gender (Eckert, 2003). They claim that gender is not a stable characteristic but a social enactment influenced by language and interactions in particular settings. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet assert that textbooks function as arenas for gender performance, exposing students to specific gendered behaviors and roles that they are prompted to adopt in their own lives. They argue that textbooks offer frameworks for students' gender identities, which students subsequently internalize and imitate (Eckert, 2003). They also emphasize the significance of examining textbooks as a location where gendered expressions are constracted and represented. The material and visuals in textbooks do not merely depict current social structures but actively influence and define gendered behaviors for young students. In educational settings, this implies that textbooks not only mirror gender norms but also play a role in shaping gender by providing role models for students to imitate. For instance, if textbooks mainly depict women in caregiving positions and men in academic or leadership positions, they are subtly teaching students about the expectations tied to their gender. Consequently, the portrayal of

gender in textbooks pertains not only what is represented but also what is excluded or downplayed, such as the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles or men in nurturing positions.

## The UNESCO report on gender bias in textbooks

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report presents empirical proof of the ongoing gender disparities in textbooks delivering a modern perspective on the theoretical framework of gender representation ("Global Education Monitoring Report", 2020). The report emphasizes the ongoing underrepresentation of women in textbooks, where women are typically portrayed in nurturing roles such as teachers, nurses or mothers, while men are more commonly depicted in professional or leadership positions such as doctors, engineers and authority figures. The report indicates that despite some advancements in recent decades, gender stereotypes are still firmly rooted in educational resources globally. Manos Antoninis, a co-author of the UNESCO report, emphasizes the psychological effects of these distorted representations, highlighting that they influence girls' motivation, self-worth, and engagement in school ("Global Education Monitoring Report", 2020). By primarily viewing themselves in caregiving roles or as passive members of social or professional life, girls might absorb the notion that their potential is confined to these areas. Conversely, boys are prompted to seek more assertive and combative positions, strengthening conventional ideas of masculinity. Antoninis states that ongoing gender bias in textbooks fosters a cycle of inequality, causing girls to be less inclined to aim for leadership positions or participate fully in academic and professional activities ("Global Education Monitoring Report", 2020). On balance, textbooks serve as cultural artifacts that reflect and perpetuate gendered power structures within society. The psychological effects of these representations are extensive, influencing not just students' self-perceptions but also their future goals and job selections.

## Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a methodological approach for examining how language shapes and upholds social norms with a particular focus on gender dynamics (Van Dijk 1993). CDA aims to reveal the power structures embedded in discourse and provides methods for recognizing and dismantling ideologies that lead to social disparities. In the realm of textbooks, CDA can illustrate how language shapes gender identities and upholds conventional gender roles. By utilizing CDA, educators and researchers can investigate the visual and textual elements of textbooks, exploring how gender is represented and formed. CDA prompts educators to scrutinize the apparently neutral language and imagery in textbooks, analyzing the ways these resources help maintain gender stereotypes. For instance, CDA might be employed to

evaluate if male and female characters appear in similar quantities and in diverse roles or if specific occupations are designated for one gender. Through the perspective of CDA, educators can examine the text and images to recognize biases and create tactics to counteract them. CDA equips educators with the tools to critically assess textbooks and create more equitable resources that encourage gender inclusiveness and question conventional gender norms.

## Discussion

Gender stereotyping in textbooks has significant effects that go beyond the classroom, shaping students' conception of themselves, their future jobs and interpersonal relationship. The representation of gender in educational materials affects students' perception of gender roles and may restrict their opportunities by upholding conventional, frequently outdated, societal norms. The discussion will examine the presence of gender stereotypes in textbooks and the enduring effects these biases impose on both individuals and society at large. We will explore methods by which educators can actively confront these stereotypes to promote a more inclusive learning environment.

### Gender stereotyping in visual representations

One of the most immediate and noticeable forms of gender bias in textbooks is found in visual representations. Illustrations are often more striking and memorable than text making them powerful tools for reinforcing gender stereotypes. Textbooks frequently depict girls and boys in distinct, stereotypical roles that perpetuate traditional expectations about what is "appropriate" for each gender. For example, consider the three images presented over two pages of a course book (Let's speak English 1): (See Picture 1)

- First Image: Six very young children are sitting on the floor. Two girls are playing with dolls, while three boys are playing with a plane, a train and a lorry. One girl watches the boys play, seemingly detached from the action.
- Second Image: A girl is holding a doll and dreaming of a wedding.
- Third Image: A boy is studying and dreaming of being a doctor.

These images reinforce rigid gender roles, where girls are linked to domesticity and caregiving (through dolls and dreams of weddings), and boys are associated with intellectual ambition (through study and aspirations of becoming a doctor). The first image, for example, illustrates the widespread assumption that girls should engage in nurturing activities while boys are encouraged to play with toys that symbolize movement, power and achievement. The second image reinforces the idea that girls should aspire to marriage, a traditional role that limits their personal and professional aspirations. In contrast, the third image positions the boy as someone who dreams of

being a doctor, an ambitious and respected career, while the girl's dreams are tied to domesticity.

These visual representations can have significant psychological effects on young learners, who may internalize these gendered roles as the only acceptable paths for their futures. The depiction of girls primarily in passive or caregiving roles encourages them to associate their worth with appearance, family and caregiving rather than intellectual or career achievements. Conversely, boys are often shown as active, ambitious and career-oriented reinforcing societal pressures for them to adopt traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness.

The consequences of these biased representations extend far beyond childhood. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, persistent gender bias in textbooks can sap girls' motivation, reduce their self-esteem and limit their participation in school ("Global Education Monitoring Report", 2020). These effects can last into adulthood, as women and men internalize these narrow views of gender roles. Girls may feel discouraged from pursuing certain career paths, while boys may face social pressure to suppress emotions or adopt traditionally masculine behaviors.

**Picture 1:** Gender roles through the visual depiction of play and dreams in coursebook images.



### Gender bias in language

Although images are the most apparent expression of bias, the language used in textbooks is another domain where gender stereotypes are frequently upheld. Language is an intricate yet influential instrument that influences our perceptions of the world and the roles individuals have within it. Textbooks that maintain gender bias often utilize language that mirrors and strengthens the notion that specific behaviors, roles and careers are naturally male or female.

A prevalent example of gender bias in language is the employment of gender-specific job titles. For instance, words such as *businessman*, *stewardess* and *fireman* distinctly link particular jobs to a certain gender. These expressions imply that men are better qualified for leadership roles, whereas women are assigned to supportive roles. A *businessman* is typically regarded as a dominant presence in the corporate sector, whereas a *stewardess* is viewed as taking on a supportive position in the hospitality industry. These gendered titles reinforce the belief that men are more inclined to occupy esteemed and authoritative positions, whereas women are anticipated to assume more caregiving or lower-status roles.

Furthermore, textbooks often introduce male characters first, subtly reinforcing the hierarchy of importance between genders. For instance, when multiple characters are introduced, the male character is typically named or described first, even in contexts where the female character may be equally important (Kalman ,2014). This not only reinforces the assumption that males are dominant, but also suggests that their actions and perspectives are more significant or valuable.

The terminology employed to portray characters in textbooks is often gendered as well. Male characters are frequently depicted as confident, determined and aspiring, whereas female characters are generally characterized as supportive, compassionate and submissive (Rivers, 2009). These depictions reinforce gender norms and limit students' understanding of what it means to be male or female. For instance, a male character might be referred to as a *courageous hero* or *self-reliant thinker*, whereas a female character could be labeled as *compassionate* or *caring*. This not only lowers the perceived worth of female characteristics but also limits both boys and girls regarding their ability to express themselves and the roles they can assume. For instance, the word *manageress* suggests that a woman in management is unusual or distinct rather than a normal continuation of a manager's duties. In the same way, the term *businesswoman* unnecessarily highlights the individual's gender implying that a woman in business is in some way distinct from a man in the same profession. To address this bias, textbooks ought to utilize gender-neutral language which do not perpetuate conventional gender stereotypes.

### Long-term effects of gender stereotyping

The long-term effects of gender stereotyping in textbooks can have profound consequences on individuals' lives and the broader society. The UNESCO report highlights several troubling statistics related to the impact of gender bias in education ("Global Education Monitoring Report", 2020). For example, 51% of people reported that gender stereotyping in childhood affected their career choices, with 70% of women aged 18–34 acknowledging that gender bias restricted their career aspirations. This is particularly concerning, as career choice plays a crucial role in shaping personal identity and contributing to individual fulfillment. Moreover, 54% of women over the

age of 35 reported that gender expectations shaped their decisions regarding caregiving roles within their families. Interestingly, 38% of men in the same age group agreed, suggesting that the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles extends beyond childhood and continues to influence individuals in adulthood. These long-term effects are not only personal but also societal, as gendered expectations can contribute to the persistence of gender inequality in the workplace, the family, and beyond.

### Addressing gender stereotyping in textbooks

To address the widespread problem of gender stereotyping in textbooks, teachers should utilize a critical and reflective method when assessing course content. A useful approach for this is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), enabling educators to examine the visuals and language in textbooks for signs of bias. Teachers ought to query several inquiries while evaluating textbooks:

- *Are male and female characters equally represented?*
- *Are roles and activities balanced across genders?*
- *Is the language gender-neutral?*
- *Are job titles inclusive and non-gendered?*

By examining these factors, educators can pinpoint areas where gender bias might exist and implement measures to tackle it. For instance, textbooks ought to include varied depictions of all genders in numerous roles, spanning from caregivers to leaders and from scientists to artists. This guarantees that students can envision themselves in various careers and pursuits, regardless of their gender.

Moreover, teachers must be assured that the language found in textbooks is inclusive and devoid of stereotypes. This involves employing gender-neutral job titles (*firefighter* rather than *fireman*) and steering clear of gendered adjectives that bolster conventional expectations (*brave* for males and *caring* for females). By emphasizing these principles, educators can develop textbooks and educational settings that enable students to confront stereotypes and reach their complete potential, unencumbered by gendered expectations.

### Conclusion

The portrayal of gender in teaching materials greatly influences students' insight, aspirations and identity. Although advancements have been made, textbooks frequently perpetuate conventional gender roles via biased imagery and language affecting career decisions and societal norms. Women are frequently portrayed in nurturing roles, whereas men are illustrated in professional or commanding positions perpetuating stereotypes that constrain ambitions. It is crucial to update course books to foster gender inclusivity. Teachers can confront these biases by promoting equal representation and employing gender-neutral language motivating students to investigate a broader array of roles and identities. By promoting conversations about

gender equality and thoughtfully interacting with educational resources, teachers can cultivate a more inclusive classroom atmosphere. Future studies ought to concentrate on creating fair teaching materials that showcase varied gender representations. Highlighting gender equality in education is essential for creating a more inclusive and progressive society.

**Conflict of interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflict of interests in this research.

**Ethical standards**

The author affirms this research does not involve human subjects.

## References

Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender.* Cambridge University Press. United Kingdom.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power.* Longman. London.

Unlimited potential? Report on gender stereotypes and their impact on children. (2019). *Fawcett Society*. Retrieved December 17, 2024.

Kalman, B. (2014). *Community helpers then and now.* Ontario: Crabtree Publishing Company.

Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and woman's place.* Harper & Row, United States.

Rivers, S. (2009). *English Time 1: Student's Book.* Oxford University Press.

Wheeler, G. (1967). Let's Speak English. McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Gender Report – A New Generation: 25 Years of Efforts for Gender Equality in Education. (2020). *UNESCO Digital Library*. https://doi.org/10.54676/IBSP9880

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Principles of critical discourse analysis. Discourse & Society,* Sage publication, *4*(2), 249-283.

## ԳԵՆԴԵՐԱՅԻՆ ԴԵՐԵՐԻ ՆԵՐԿԱՅԱՑՎԱԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱԿԱՆ ՆՅՈՒԹԵՐՈՒՄ

Նարինե Ավանեսյան
Աննա Կնյազյան
Լուիզա Մարաբյան

Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է դասագրքերում գենդերային կարծրատիպերի վերհանման և գնահատման մեթոդներին։ Չնայած գենդերային հավասարության ուղղությամբ առաջընթացին, ուսումնական նյութերում արտացոլված են բազմաթիվ արմատացած գենդերային կարծրա-

տիպեր։ ՅՈՒՆԵՍԿՕ-ի զլոբալ կրթության մոնիտորինգի զեկույցը ընդ-
գծում է, որ դասագրքերում բացակայում է սեռերի հավասար ներկայաց-
վածությունը։ Կանայք և տղամարդիկ պատկերված են կարծրատիպա-
յին դերերում։ Ակնհայտ է, որ տղամարդիկ թվով գերազանցում են
կանանց՝ ներկայացվածության բոլոր ձևաչափերում։ Կանայք հիմնակա-
նում ավելի հաճախ ներկայանում են իրենց ընտանեկան, քան մասնա-
գիտական դերերում։ Այս կողմնակալությունը ազդում է կանանց
ինքնագնահատականի վրա։ Հոդվածի նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել դա-
սագրքերում գենդերային դերերի ներկայացվածության խնդիրը և մշա-
կել գործուն մեթոդներ և ուղիներ՝ մեր հասարակությունում հավասար
իրավունքներ և հնարավորություններ ապահովելու համար։ Հետևաբար
կարևոր նշանակություն է ձեռք բերում դպրոցական դասագրքերում
գենդերային դերերի ներկայացվածության խնդրի ուսումնասիրությունը։

**Բանալի բառեր**՝ *գենդեր և լեզու, գենդերային ինքնություն, գենդե-
րային խտրականություն, գենդերային դերերի ընկալում, ուսումնական
նյութեր, կարծրատիպեր, քննադատական դիսկուրս:*