

JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Gendered Representation in Pakistani English Language Textbooks from a Multimodal Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Language textbooks play a significant role in shaping students' perspectives by promoting particular social and ideological viewpoints. This study conducts a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the latest eight secondary-level Pakistani English language textbooks to examine the visual and verbal representations of gender. Grounded in Sunderland's (2004) framework of gendered discourses and van Leeuwen's (2008) social semiotic inventory, this study investigates how linguistic and visual modes jointly construct gender meanings. While previous studies have primarily focused on textual gender bias, limited attention has been paid to multimodal representations in the Pakistani context. Extending a previous study, this research identifies additional gendered discourses within the same context. The findings reveal inequality in gender depictions in both texts and images, particularly regarding "educational opportunities, heterosexuality, men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, the privileging of appearance in women, and the use of masculine generics". Females are predominantly represented in traditional and dependent roles. By systematically analysing textbooks using a multimodal framework, this study provides context-specific insights. This study supports policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators in critically evaluating gender representation in ELT materials in Pakistan.

Keywords: textbooks, social actors, gender, multimodal, textual and visual analysis

Received: 13 February 2026, **Accepted:** 31 March 2026, **Published:** 30 July 2026

1.0 Introduction

Pakistan's current position is ranked 148th out of 148 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report and is among the lowest-ranked countries in terms of gender equity (World Economic Forum, 2025), emphasising enduring structural inequalities in women's access to economic opportunities, social awareness and rights, and political representation. Several factors cause gender inequality in Pakistan, such as the misinterpretation of religious teachings, illiteracy, and rigid cultural norms (Agha & Shaikh, 2023; Bhattacharya, 2014; Tabassum, 2016). These differences start at home and are also noticeable in the community, media, workplace, and educational materials (Agha & Shaikh, 2023; Dilawer & Tareen, 2022; Mahmood et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2024).

Education is a crucial setting where power dynamics and discourse can be easily observed, and it is one of the factors that enable the establishment and maintenance of these power inequalities (Luke, 2018). According to Sunderland (2004), textbooks and educational settings can legitimise and disseminate traditional and conservative gendered discourse. This can also be observed in the Pakistani context, where, despite the development of new educational technologies over the last two decades, textbooks continue to be the main medium of instruction (Mahmood, 2014, 2021; Mahmood et al., 2015; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). Textbooks are considered authentic sources that provide different types of knowledge, such as cultural context, class, race, gender, and linguistic proficiency (Chisholm, 2018; Mahmood et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2024). According to Kaur (2018), textbooks and teaching materials play key roles in implementing the syllabus and representing gender, which can significantly influence students' perceptions of gender.

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing literature. First, it conducts a qualitative analysis of the textual content and images in textbooks, a dimension that has not been comprehensively examined at the secondary level across all four provinces of Pakistan. Second, it focuses on the currently used English language textbooks 2026 in all provinces. Third, this study combines specific analytical strategies from two models of van Leeuwen (2008): the Social Actor Network Model and the Visual Social Actor Network Model, adapting them into a unified model. Moreover, extending a previous study (Mahmood et al., 2024), this study identifies additional gendered discourses within the same textbook context, such as equal opportunities in education, heterosexuality, male as breadwinner and female as caregiver, privileging of appearance in women, and masculine generic discourses. The following research questions were derived from the identified gap:

1. How are male and female social actors represented in the textual data of Pakistani secondary school ELT textbooks?
2. How are male and female social actors depicted in the images in Pakistani secondary school ELT textbooks?

2.0 Literature Review

Research on language and gender has shifted from treating gender as a biological category to understanding it as a socially and discursively constructed concept (Sunderland, 2004; Weatherall, 2002). Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), gender identities and roles are created and reproduced through institutional discourse, including educational materials and course textbooks. Therefore, educational materials are not genuine pedagogical tools but sites where power relations and social standards are legitimised and naturalised (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). By foregrounding ideology, CDA enables an examination of how language contributes to the maintenance of gender hierarchies.

Based on social semiotics, multimodality extends this link by recognising that meaning is constructed not only linguistically but also visually (van Leeuwen, 2008). In textbook analysis, this approach allows researchers to examine how images, layout, framing, gaze, and the positioning of social actors interact with written language to reinforce or challenge gender ideology (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007). Textbooks are increasingly based on verbal and visual content; analysing the content alone provides only a partial account of how gendered meanings are constructed in them.

Across diverse contexts, studies have consistently reported gender disparities in English language textbooks. Females are frequently underrepresented or confined to domestic and supportive roles, while males are associated with authority, professional occupations, and agency (Kostas, 2021; Lee & Collins, 2009; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016). Although some contexts, such as the UK, demonstrate a relative numerical balance (Jones et al., 2010), global patterns indicate persistent asymmetrical portrayals embedded in both textual and visual representations. Multimodal studies further reveal that even when numerical representation appears balanced, visual positioning, role allocation, and symbolic attributes often reproduce subtle forms of male dominance (Elmiana, 2019; Goyal & Rose, 2020; Lee & Chin, 2019; Mahmood et al., 2024).

In the Pakistani context, research similarly identifies stereotypical constructions of women in limited social and occupational roles (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2021; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). However, much of this work relies on frequency-based or textual analyses. Visual components are either marginally addressed or examined through simple quantitative counts (Agha et al., 2018), leaving the interaction between verbal and visual modes under-explored. Moreover, systematic multimodal investigations covering secondary-level textbooks across all provinces are limited.

Consequently, there is an inadequate understanding of how text and visual resources jointly construct gender ideologies in English language coursebooks currently used across the country. Addressing this gap, the current research adopts a multimodal critical discourse analysis framework grounded in van Leeuwen's (2008) social semiotic inventory to analyse the eight textbooks used in Pakistan. By applying textual and visual analyses within a unified framework, this study offers a detailed account of gender representation and extends existing research beyond frequency-based approaches.

3.0 Methods

3.1 Analytical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study integrates van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Network and Visual Social Actor Network models with Sunderland's (2004) Gendered Discourses Model to form a multi-model analytical framework. Consistent with Wodak's (2001) CDA perspective, this mixed analytical approach enables more comprehensive insights than relying on a single model.

3.2 Gendered Discourses Model

This study adopts Sunderland's (2004) framework to identify and categorise gendered discourses in texts, focusing on how male and female social actors are represented and how discourses reinforce or challenge social power. Observed discourses include descriptive (e.g. classroom, courtroom), interpretive (analyst-defined), equal opportunities in education, women as caregivers/men as breadwinners, compulsory heterosexuality, Privileging of appearance in women, and masculine generic constructions (Jones et al., 2010; Porreca, 198; Rich, 1980; 4; Sunderland, 2004).

3.3 Visual and Social Actor Network Model

Van Leeuwen (2008) presents a socio-semantic approach (see Appendix A) to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for analysing the representation of social actors in discourse. His framework proposes a "network" of transformations, deletion, rearrangement, and substitution that highlights the inclusion or exclusion of actors, assignment of roles, and representational shifts. He identified 22 linguistic forms for representing social actors, which are divided into 20 inclusion categories and 2 exclusion categories. The Visual Social Actor Network (see Appendix B) model extends this approach to examine gendered representation in images, focusing on actors' presence or absence and their relationship with the viewer, including distance, angle, and gaze.

The representation of social actors can be categorised into functionalisation (roles or activities), identification (who they are), and appraisal (evaluation as good/bad or admired/pitied). Identification includes classification (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.), relational identification (kinship or work relations), and physical identification (distinctive features). Activation depicts actors as active participants in processes, whereas passivation represents them as recipients who are subjected to or benefit from actions. Actors may be individualised (named) or assimilated (grouped), with nominations realised formally, semi-formally, or informally. Exclusion occurs either through suppression, where social actors are absent or through backgrounding, where social actors are present but relegated to the background and are textually realised through passivation, non-finite clauses, participles, infinitives, or nominalisation.

3.4 Integration of Both Models

This study employed an integrated analytical framework by combining gendered discourses identified by Sunderland (2004) with van Leeuwen's (2008) visual and social semiotic models to analyse both

verbal and visual data in order to answer the research questions. Firstly, the textual data were screened to identify both male and female actors, who were then coded for inclusion/exclusion, activation/passivation, appraisal, identification, functionalisation, and backgrounding. The gendered discourses identified by Sunderland (2004), such as compulsory heterosexuality, traditional gender roles, and equal opportunity in education, were applied concurrently to categorise them. Subsequently, the images were analysed using the same social actor categories, with additional attention to semiotic features such as angle, distance, framing, gaze, and salience. Each visual was linked to the corresponding gendered discourse, allowing cross-modal comparison. Finally, counts and patterns were aggregated at the unit and coursebook levels, ensuring a systematic and replicable analysis of the entire dataset.

Table 1

Sample Data from the Dataset

Text/Image (Source)	Social Actor	van Leeuwen (2008) (Representation)	Sunderland (2004) (Gendered Discourse)
Image: Unit “ <i>Patriotism</i> ” (BTB, p.67)	Male students	Activation, Functionalisation (students engaged in learning)	Men dominance in education
Image: Unit “ <i>Nursing</i> ” (BTB, p.79)	Female students; and a male teacher	Women: Functionalisation as students; Male: Authority role	Women in subordinate learning roles
Image: “ <i>Media and its Role</i> ” (BTB, p.35)	Father, mother, children	Relational identification, Assimilation into the family unit	Compulsory heterosexuality
Text: “ <i>Everyone loves his country</i> ” (Book 09, BTB, p.32); “ <i>A patriot loves his country... countryman</i> ” (Book 09, PTB, p.13); “ <i>skilled craftsmen</i> ” (Book 09, STB, p.45)	Generic citizen / craftsmen	Nomination through masculine generics (his, countryman, craftsmen) leads to the backgrounding of female actors	Masculine generic discourse

Table 1 presents an illustrative account of the coding procedure, showing how the verbal and visual datasets were examined by applying both analytical models.

3.5 Data Collection

Eight English textbooks prescribed by the Pakistani Ministry of Education for secondary school education were used in the analysis, published between 2019 and 2026; the latest editions are currently in use. These ELT textbooks are based on the National Curriculum (2006), which is currently implemented from Grade I to XII, and are used across Pakistan in all provinces for Grades 9 and 10 (Waqar & Ghani, 2019). According to Piaget’s (1960) formal operational stage of cognitive development, it is very significant for learners aged 13–16 as they start thinking abstractly and identity formation, including gender knowledge, is the foremost.

Table 2

Secondary Level English Language Textbooks

Category	Description
Total Number of English Language Textbooks	8 English Language Textbooks
Educational level	Secondary school level grades 9-10
Publication years	2019-2026, currently in use
Curriculum Basis	National Curriculum (2006), implemented Grades I–XII
Publishing Boards	Baluchistan Textbook Board (BTB); Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board (KTB); Punjab Textbook Board (PTB); Sindh Textbook Board (STB)
Target Age Group	13–16 years (Formal Operational Stage)

The textbooks were published by four provincial boards: the Baluchistan Textbook Board (BTB), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board (KTB), Punjab Textbook Board (PTB), and Sindh Textbook Board (STB) (Mahmood et al., 2024). The corpus consists of 1,120 pages across 126 units of analysis. As gender discourse is not confined to discrete units, all units were analysed, including reading texts, dialogues, listening transcripts, vocabulary sections, and exercises. Gender-related discourse was identified in 97 units of analysis. The textual dataset defined a social actor as any person, group, or institution mentioned in the transcripts whose identity or role was clearly recognised. Each mention of a social actor was counted once for each unique reference in each context. Repeated mentions of the same social actor within the same utterance were not counted multiple times to avoid inflating the data set. If a social actor appeared across multiple units or parts, each appearance was counted separately to record their recurrence in different units and contexts. Aggregated totals were then calculated for each unit and for the dataset as a whole. This procedure was consistently applied to all verbal data to ensure transparency and replicability in the counting of social actors.

The dataset collected from the selected textbooks contained 210 images. All visuals were screened to identify those containing identifiable human participants, enabling a meaningful interpretation of gender depiction. Images were classified as gender-related if they represented male and/or female figures whose roles, social positions, or activities could be examined. Images containing only objects, animals, symbols, landscapes, or decorative elements without human representation were excluded from the dataset. Following this screening process, 77 visuals were selected for multimodal analysis, including 50 images representing men only, 14 representing women only, and 13 representing both men and women. A total of 133 images were excluded because they did not contain human subjects. The selected dataset was systematically compiled in Excel and Word files, and both verbal and visual elements were subsequently coded and examined by applying the socio-semantic inventory proposed by van Leeuwen (2008).

Table 3

Corpus Composition and Analytical Scope

Category	Description
Total pages	1,120
Total units	126
Unit analysed	All units (reading texts, dialogues, listening transcript: vocabulary sections, exercises)
Units contain gendered discourse	97
Total images in corpus	210
Images Depicting Males Only	50
Images Depicting Females Only	14
Images Depicting Both Genders	13
Total gender relevant images analysed	77
Excluded Images	133 Images not relevant to gender representation (e.g. objects, landscapes, abstract visuals)

4.0 Results

4.1 Results on Textual and Pictorial Representations of Female and Male Social Actors in Equal Opportunities in Education

The following section reports on the textual and visual depictions of female and male social actors and their actions regarding equal opportunities in education, compulsory heterosexuality, women as caregivers/men as breadwinners, privileging of appearance in women, and masculine generic constructions.

In the analysed ELT textbooks, 77 social actors were included in the equal opportunities in education discourse in the analysed ELT textbooks. Male actors (56) outnumbered female actors (21), reflecting their unequal representation. Male actors were depicted in higher education contexts, with five instances as university students, individually nominated and functionalised (van Leeuwen, 2008). For instance, Allama Mohammad Iqbal is functionalised and nominated as a university graduate, thus stressing his rational achievements and matching the traditional gendered representation in Pakistan.

Table 4

Distribution of Social Actors in the “Equal Opportunities in Education” Discourse

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male social actor	56	72.7%
Female social actor	21	27.3%
Total social actors	77	100%

Note. The table explains the numerical data.

On the other hand, female social actors were functionalised and individualised, primarily shown in secondary school contexts, as illustrated in the textbook instances: “Hina is a good student” (Book 09, BTB, p. 63), “Sabiha was studying very hard” (Book 09, STB, p. 206), and “Maryam finished doing

her homework” (Book 10, PTB, p. 47). Such instances depict the limited inclusion of women, indicating that equal educational opportunities remain constrained. Overall, both males and females have been included, but males were represented as having higher academic success, whereas females were restricted to lower educational levels in the textbooks. This mirrors persistent gender discourses and emphasises the need for broader inclusion of women in higher educational contexts to encourage fair opportunities (Sunderland, 2004).

In the visual analysis, the first picture from the unit Patriotism (Fig. 1, BTB, p. 67) portrays male learners as dominating the classroom setting. It employs a high-angle perspective and vertical relationships, positioning male learners as active agents engaged in studying, while the absence of female students renders them socially deleted from the scene (van Leeuwen, 2008). The framing and composition centre on male actors, with salience given to their activities through their proximity to the teacher and their positioning in the foreground, reinforcing their visibility and authority within the classroom. Female learners are absent, which constitutes suppression and symbolically rejects female participation in formal education. Such representation reflects broader gendered power relations and hegemonic norms in Pakistani education, where men are depicted as the primary participants in learning, while female agency and presence remain limited (Shah, 2012; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Figure 1

Book BTB, p. 67



Note. The teachers teach in the best possible ways, and the students study devotedly and realise their responsibilities.

This image was taken from the unit *Nursing* (Fig. 2, BTB, p. 79). Female students are sitting in the classroom, while a single male teacher is positioned at the front of the class. The picture uses horizontal framing, centring the female students in the composition, which functionalises them as students engaged in learning. In contrast, the male teacher is positioned slightly above and at the front of the group, indicating a hierarchy of power and authority. The line of sight and gaze are directed toward the teacher, reinforcing the teacher’s authority and female students’ subordinate learning roles. Dress codes provide additional semiotic information, reflecting the religious and cultural conventions that shape participation and social behaviour in educational settings. Such a formation highlights the persistent gender hierarchies in the educational profession, illustrating the limited depiction of females in authoritative roles. Visual features such as gaze, positioning, and framing relate to the social roles represented in the image, and the image represents how coursebooks visually reinforce gender norms within educational settings.

Figure 2

Book BTB, p.79



Overall, in the images, it has been revealed that male social actors are linked with high-status educational roles, and on the other hand, female social actors are present but mainly restricted to specific contexts and controlled positions. Such instances establish partial resistance to the pro-women discourse of fair educational opportunities in ELT textbooks.

4.2 Results 2 on Textual and Pictorial Representation of Female and Male Social Actors in Compulsory Heterosexuality Discourse

Table 5

Distribution of Social Actors in the “Compulsory Heterosexuality” Discourse

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male social actor	86	65.6%
Female social actor	45	34.4%
Total social actors	131	100%

Note. The table explains the numerical data and argument about gender disparity.

In this section, the visual analysis indicates traces of compulsory heterosexuality in some sample pictures. Seven images in the dataset were identified as related to this discourse. In one picture from the unit “Media and its Role” (Book 09, BTB, p. 35), a family is depicted watching television: a male and a female adult (presumably the father and mother) are seated together with three young boys, while additional children are shown using a computer.

The composition positions the adults at an oblique angle, emphasising their relational roles as parents, while the children are framed collectively and assimilated into a single unit. The gaze, spatial arrangement, and proximity highlight shared activities and relational bonds within the nuclear family. Applying the socio-semantic inventory, adults are individualised actors, but their roles are defined as relationally as parents. Children are grouped and functionalised according to their social positions within the family unit. The framing, angle, and salience reinforce a conventional heteronormative family structure with clearly defined gender roles: the father and mother are positioned as central adult figures performing normative parental functions, whereas the children are positioned as dependent learners. Such examples reflect how coursebooks visually reproduce compulsory heterosexuality by presenting a man–woman parental unit as the normative family structure. There is no depiction of

alternative family structures or non-heteronormative identities in the book. Such discourses normalise conventional gender relations and heteronormative family roles, showing how visual semiotic features work to sustain the dominant social discourse.

Figure 3

Book BTB, p. 35

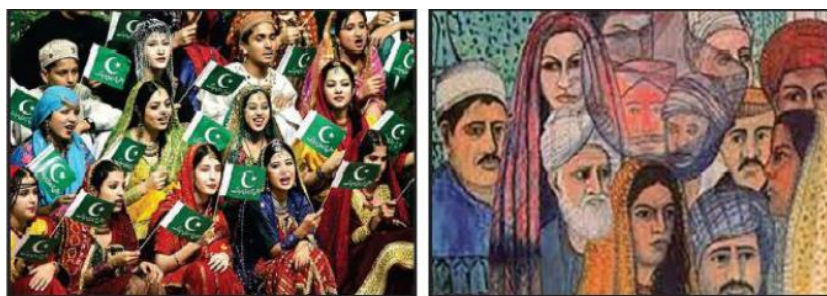


The other picture (Book 10, BTB, p. 59; Fig. 4) depicts social actors wearing conventional Pakistani dress, with women covering their heads and men wearing turbans, signalling regional and cultural identities. The spatial positioning and framing of social actors signify their roles in the cultural scene. These are adults and individualised actors performing gendered roles that conform to conventional norms, while alternative gender expressions and non-heteronormative presentations are absent.

These visual depictions support binary gender distinctions, as clothing, posture, and spatial arrangement communicate the socially expected roles for males and females. By omitting cross-gender dress, gender-neutral representations, or LGBTQ identities, the image functionalises actors according to traditional gender norms and situates them within culturally sanctioned behaviour. These examples highlight how coursebook visuals simultaneously promote cultural pride and national identity, while the exclusion of alternative gender expressions aligns with the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality, demonstrating how visual semiotic features encode conventional gender norms.

Figure 4

Book BTB, p. 59



4.3 Results on Textual Representations of Female and Male Social Actors in Men as Breadwinners and Women as Caregivers

Table 6

Distribution of Social Actors in the “Men as Breadwinners and Women as Caregivers” Discourse

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male social actor in caregiver role	0	0%
Female social actor in caregiver roles	28	62.2%
Male social actors in provider roles	17	37.8%
Total social actors	131	100%

Note. The table explains the numerical data and argument about gender disparity.

One of the central discourses identified in this study is “Men as breadwinners and Women as caregivers” interpreted through Sunderland’s (2004) Gendered Discourses Model. Across the analysed Pakistani secondary-level English language textbooks, 45 social actors were found to align with this discourse. A total of 28 excerpts presented female social actors in caregiver roles, whereas males were shown more frequently in provider roles in the textbooks. It has been observed that no excerpt in the textbooks depicts male social actors as engaged in domestic caregiving.

Based on van Leeuwen’s (2008) social actor framework, male actors identified relationally as “father” are functionalised through material processes associated with provision and earnings. For instance, “My father sells newspapers” (Book 09, STB, p. 113) and “Father said, ‘I am going to the office’” (Book 10, BTB, p. 137) indicate that males are represented as economically active agents in the ELT textbooks. Likewise, in another example, “Father said, ‘I am going to the office’” (Book 10, BTB, p. 137), the father is positioned as the active purchasing agent, while the daughter is beneficialised as the recipient of his economic action. In contrast, female social actors are functionalised through domestic processes, such as “Mother washes dishes” (Book 10, BTB, p. 136) and “Mother said, ‘I am going to prepare lunch in the kitchen’” (Book 10, BTB, p. 120). In these examples, mothers are activated in caregiving roles, confined to the domestic sphere. The regular assignment of economic roles to men and domestic tasks to women, along with the absence of male participation in caregiving activities, reinforces the conservative gender binary and normalises the discourse of men as providers and women as caregivers within the Pakistani sociocultural context.

4.4 Results 4 on Textual Representations of Female and Male Social Actors in Privileging of Appearance in Women

One of the consistently recognised discourses in this research is the “privileging of appearance—in women” (Sunderland, 2004). Of the 28 social actors identified in the Pakistani secondary-level English textbooks, 19 were female and 8 were male, reflecting a greater textual emphasis on women’s physical appearance. Both genders were sometimes represented in physical terms; however, the physical characteristics assigned to each gender differed significantly.

According to van Leeuwen’s (2008) social actor framework and Halliday’s (1985) transitivity model, males are referred to mainly by the neutral and quantifiable aspects of their physical appearance, for example, by their size and height: “Ali, a fat boy, is playing down at the bottom of the playground” (Book 09, BTB, p.71) and “He is the tallest boy in his class” (Book 09, PTB, p.41) both describe male social actors without offering any type of beauty evaluation. However, females seem to be described mostly or exclusively by their beauty-related evaluative markers, as seen in the examples “She is a very beautiful girl” (Book 09, STB, p.103) and “He has just married a very beautiful young Punjabi girl” (Book 09, KTB, p.104). The description of a woman’s body as beautiful is used to represent what it means to be a woman. There is an asymmetrically identifiable pattern that was not noted for men when defining men with any visually appealing attribute (handsome, etc.). As explained earlier, a man’s visual

appearance may be defined, but a woman's appearance is highlighted and presented positively. This creates an agenda that reinforces how "Appearance is Privileged-over women", and how women are described within the socio-cultural framework of Pakistani textbooks as they relate to beauty, and hence the gendered expectations of femininity are established.

4.5 Results on Textual Representations of Female and Male Social Actors in Generic Construction

Another discourse identified in the analysed textbooks is Masculine Generic Discourse (Porreca, 1984). Porreca defines masculine generics as the use of terms such as *man*, *mankind*, and masculine pronouns like *he* or *his* to refer to people in general, assuming that the context clarifies inclusivity. However, such constructions often centre on male identity linguistically while rendering females invisible. In the analysed Pakistani SSC-level English language textbooks, 38 instances were identified where masculine generic forms were used to address both genders, yet they linguistically prioritised male social actors. Although the revised Sindh textbooks (Sindh Textbook Board, 2020a, 2020b) show some improvement in gender-neutral language, masculine generics persist across provincial textbooks.

Drawing on van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor framework, these instances reflect the nomination and functionalisation through gender-marked lexical choices. For example, "Everyone loves his country" (Book 09, BTB, p.32) employs the possessive pronoun *his* as a generic reference to all citizens, thereby foregrounding the male norm. Similarly, "A patriot loves his country... the word patriot comes from the Latin word 'patriota' which means countryman" (Book 09, PTB, p.13) reinforces male-centred linguistic representation through both the pronoun *his* and the noun *countryman*. In another instance, "There were skilled craftsmen who made things from gold, silver and ivory" (Book 09, STB, p.45), the term *craftsmen* functions generically yet semantically encodes maleness. In these examples, female social actors are backgrounded and excluded through lexical choices that equate human beings with maleness. Consistent with Sunderland's (2004) Gendered Discourses Model, such patterns sustain androcentrism by positioning males as the linguistic default, thereby normalising masculine identity as universal within the socio-cultural context of Pakistani textbooks.

5.0 Discussion

Grounded in a post-structuralist and CDA framework, this study demonstrates that Pakistani secondary-level English language textbooks do not merely reflect social reality; they actively construct and normalise particular gender ideologies. Consistent with Sunderland's (2004) argument that gender is discursively produced rather than biologically fixed, the findings reveal that textbooks systematically reproduce hegemonic discourses that regulate masculinity and femininity through textual and visual modes.

First, the persistence of the discourse of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers confirms patterns identified in earlier Pakistani studies (Agha et al., 2018; Ahmad & Shah, 2019), this study extends the literature by demonstrating how this discourse operates multimodally. Men are commonly portrayed as working in finance or business, while women are primarily represented as caregivers or homemakers (i.e. teachers and nurses). Even when women are depicted in full-time employment, their professions often align with caregiving stereotypes, reaffirming the term 'companion discourses' (Sunderland, 2004). The fact that nearly all caregiving is carried out by women, and that there are very few female breadwinners, demonstrates a pattern of exclusion (van Leeuwen, 2008). Exclusion is ideologically important; it legitimises patriarchal family arrangements and limits students' ability to envision viable futures for men and women.

Second, the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality plays a fundamental organisational role in representations, with families consistently represented as heterosexual nuclear families without alternative identities. This supports Coates' (2003) argument that hegemonic masculinity and femininity create the foundation for heterosexual norms. Textbooks, through the repeated normalisation of traditional family forms, become places of ideological reproduction, as described by Fairclough (2001), thereby preserving dominant socio-religious constructions of gender roles. The current study demonstrates that compulsory heterosexuality is represented textually and visually through the homogenised representation of family units and gender-segregated education settings.

Third, the ongoing use of masculine generic forms tends to establish maleness as the linguistic norm or "default". Despite a global movement toward the use of gender-neutral language, masculine pronouns and male-coded nouns are still used to refer to all people. As Porreca (1984) points out, these forms may be grammatically neutral yet carry ideological differences. The regular use of "he" in public, active, and authoritative contexts reinforces the notion of male centrality, whereas "she" most often appears in domestic and relational settings. Van Dijk (2000) makes the same observation regarding discursive patterns that produce cognitive models that shape readers' thoughts about social roles and power relations within society.

Fourth, the discourse privilege of appearance for women entrenches the hegemonic femininity. Female social actors are disproportionately judged by their physical (aesthetic) attributes, while men are judged by their physical descriptions which are viewed as non-evaluative (neutral). The asymmetry in this situation corresponds to findings from other international studies (Elmiana, 2019; Lee & Chin, 2019) but may have particular significance in the context of Pakistan, since beauty is traditionally defined by culturally shared norms in the country. By emphasising women's attractiveness while minimising their intellectual or professional abilities, textbooks contribute to what Kress and Hodge (1979) refer to as symbolic control through representation. Ultimately, these factors enhance the perception that gender differences are normal (natural), desirable, and socially regulated. These discourses are interrelated rather than isolated; they are interconnected through an overarching ideological network. The discourse of women as caregivers serves to reinforce men as breadwinners, both supporting compulsory heterosexuality and reinforcing the overall discourse of gender differences. Sunderland (2004) argues that gendered discourses co-exist, compete, and mutually reinforce one another within texts, resulting in interdiscursive layering. Consequently, textbooks are effective socialising agents that reproduce dominant gender hierarchies disguised as neutral and culturally appropriate texts.

While there are some indications of equity, such as the inclusion of female students in educational settings, these depictions remain limited to the conventional representation of women. Few women are depicted in science, technology, or leadership roles, and there is very little representation of female participants in higher education. These repeated omissions exemplify what van Leeuwen (2003) refers to as ideologically motivated exclusions. Textbook representations of female and male activities do not adequately represent the lived experiences of diverse gender identities, single parents, families of different types, or non-traditional masculinity and femininity in Pakistan.

From a sociopolitical perspective, the results of this study indicate that textbooks maintain patriarchal and heteronormative structures by establishing these structures as acceptable on both cultural and religious levels. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), discourse is both a product and creator of dominance: It represents dominant ideologies while also reproducing those ideologies in the public sphere. As textbooks are integral to shaping young children's perceptions of the world, they may reinforce, rather than challenge, structural gender inequality.

The present study builds upon the previous literature by offering a multimodal CDA of Pakistani ELT textbooks. The findings clearly indicate that interrelated gendered discourses exist across textual and visual modes of representation in the advertisements. The findings also highlight a clear need for gender-inclusive reform of textbooks, such as diversifying representations of professionals, reducing reliance on masculine generics, and including other gender identities and family structures. If reform does not occur, educational resources will continue to serve as tools for reproducing ideologies rather than promoting social change.

6.0 Conclusion

This study builds on existing scholarship by analysing, across the country, a multimodal critical discourse analysis of eight secondary school-level Pakistani English language textbooks that are currently in use. Van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework was employed to conduct textual and visual analyses. The research demonstrates how gender ideologies are not only linguistically present but also visually reinforced. The major findings reveal that gendered discourses operate in both modes to normalise inequality in power relations in the identified discourses.

The study implications are particularly significant given that secondary school students are between 13 and 16 years old and are in a formative stage of identity development. When educational materials consistently associate males with power, authority, and occupational domains while associating females with domesticity, beauty, and dependent relations, this contributes to shaping learners' perceptions of social possibility and gendered expectations. Through repeated multimodal presentations, such representations risk embedding asymmetry as common sense, thereby reinforcing hegemony, dominance, and heteronormative norms in educational institutions.

The current study also contributes methodologically by demonstrating the significance of multimodal analysis in unfolding subtle ideological processes that may otherwise be obscured by purely number-based or textual approaches. However, some excerpts of relative balance were observed; the overall patterns indicate that gender inclusion reform must move beyond frequency-based analysis to show how roles and agency are semiotically constructed.

Future research may analyse primary or higher secondary levels or even examine how students interpret and internalise these patterns and representations. Such studies would further highlight the link between textbook discourse and identity formation in teacher knowledge. As a result, meaningful curriculum reform requires not only gender-balanced language but also a reconfiguration of both textual and visual data through which gender is conceptualised in school textbooks.

Acknowledgement

This paper is derived from the author's PhD research conducted at Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Universiti Malaya for providing a platform to conduct this research and share the findings. The author also gratefully acknowledges the guidance and supervision of Professor Dr Surinderpal Kaur (Dean) and Associate Professor Dr Ali Jalalian Daghigh throughout the study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

SM: Conceptualisation, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation.
SK: Supervision, Review & Editing.

Funding

The authors received no funding for this research and publication.

Ethics Statement

This research did not require IRB approval because it used publicly available secondary data with no identifying personal information.

Data Access Statement:

Research data supporting this publication are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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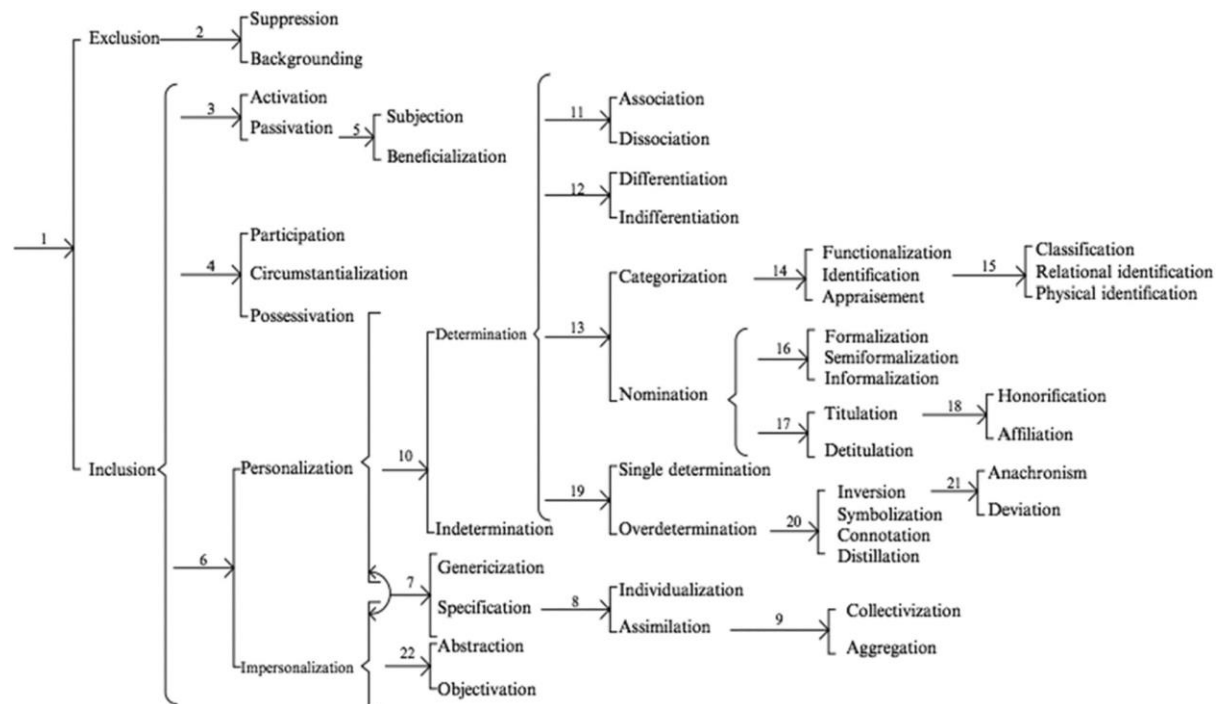
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APPENDIX A

Van Leeuwen's Model of Social Practice (Social Actor Network Model)



APPENDIX B

Visual Social Actor Network (Representation and Viewer Network)

