



An Analysis of Gender Representation in Thai Primary School Health and Physical Education Textbooks

Kijponphol, W.¹, Trinan, K.², Seelaboot, S. & Witoon, S.³

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand

¹E-mail: wachiraporn.k@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated the way gender was portrayed in four Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks and examined the extent and types of gender bias in the textbooks. The textbooks were widely used in Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand and were written in Thailand for grade 2 students. The study adopted the qualitative-quantitative approach in examining the following categories: gender visibility in texts, firstness, and domestic and occupational-role representations. The results revealed that the textbooks seemed to feature both genders. However, the males appeared more frequently than females in the texts. The firstness issued that males were mentioned first, followed by females. For the domestic and occupational-role representations, females' occupations were less diverse than males' and were restricted to stereotypical types. The findings were expected to raise awareness regarding gender stereotyping and sexist practices in primary school material developers, teachers and learners.

Keywords: gender, gender bias, gender representation, health and physical education textbooks, stereotype



1. Introduction

Textbook is one of many materials which is most frequently used in the teaching-learning process. It is one of the knowledge sources which is the easiest to obtain and becomes one of many aids to assist the students in acquiring clear concepts of subject matter. Instructional materials in the form of the textbooks are very important for both teachers and students. First, textbooks provide a variety of learning resources because they are often accompanied by workbooks, videos, and comprehensive teaching guides, providing a rich and varied resource for teachers and learners. Second, textbooks may also serve as a form of teacher training. For example, they provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons and provide support and security for new inexperienced teachers who have low confidence. Moreover, Bahaya et al. (2008 as cited in Tarrayo, 2014, p. 28) stressed that, textbooks play a critical role in the formation of cultural and social values as far as gender relation is concerned, therefore, it is important for the researcher to investigate the textbooks used for the primary school level in order to develop gender understanding of young students at an early age.

Nevertheless, a textbook has some weaknesses which sometimes sexism and gender bias are perpetrated and reproduced. Many studies suggested that they still exist in children textbooks. For example, the content of gender stereotypes according to which women should display communal/warmth traits (e.g., being nice, caring, and generous), and men should display agentic/competence traits (e.g., being efficient, agentic, and assertive). Likewise, Tajeddin and Enayat (2010) mentioned that if gender inequality appears in textbooks, EFL students will be led to identify themselves with gender bias. In addition, plenty of researchers highlighted that one of the elements in EFL/ESL textbooks which have gained attention and has been found to contribute to gender bias and stereotypes are the visual element. As a result, having students use materials with textual and visual elements like these in class can reinforce stereotypes about gender roles in society.

While in Thai society, most of the men are commonly known as a leader, working outside the home, but women are known as a follower, taking care of children and doing household chores. Even if nowadays the western culture makes Thai women have more freedom in human rights, working more outside the home, getting more opportunities in education, being more powerful, and influential in politics and economics but because of the old cultures and Thai society; men still have more effect and power and still have more advantages than women.

Health and Physical Education Course

Health and physical education is education about health with the aims of maintaining and strengthening health and sustainable development of quality of life of individuals, families, and communities. The learning area for health and physical education includes the following bodies of knowledge:

1. Human Growth and Development



2. Life and Family
3. Movement, Doing Physical Exercises, Playing Games, Thai and International Sports
4. Strengthening of Health, Capacity and Disease Prevention
5. Safety in Life

The Hidden Curriculum

Jerald (2006 as cited in Alsubaie, 2015) noted that the hidden curriculum is an implicit curriculum that expresses and represents attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, which are conveyed indirectly by words and actions that are parts of the life of everyone in a society. Similarly, Islam and Asadullah (2018) stated in their research that the hidden curriculum is one of the current controversial curriculum issues. Many hidden curricular issues are the result of assumptions and expectations that are not formally communicated, established, or conveyed within the learning environment. Islam and Asadullah (2018) highlighted that there are two reasons why education materials succeed in instilling values and attitudes in the minds of young students. First, students accept what is imposed on them and are less critical about it. Second, in Asian countries, textbooks play an important role in the education system: the common perception is that whatever is printed in the textbook must be practiced.

Gender and Gender Roles

The terms “sex” and “gender” merit clarification because both are used interchangeably. Sex refers to the biological distinctions between males and females, most often in connection with reproductive functions. Gender, by contrast, emphasizes the socially constructed differences between men and women that give rise to masculinity and femininity. Therefore, gender used to define the characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of women and men that are different in each context of the society which can be changed according to conditions of that society at that time. The difference between women and men that the society determines to affect the relationship of both genders, access and use of resources. Besides, gender roles in society mean how we are expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. For example, girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing while men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold. On the whole, people are classified in different ways, yet the easiest and oldest way is to categorize them into man or woman. For the longest time, stereotypes have developed about genders, such as approved appearance, patterns of behavior, speech, and ways to express feelings and emotions. These stereotypes act as standards by which each individual is judged by members of the social group to be gender appropriate or inappropriate. As new facts were added to the stereotypes based on what members of the social group believed to be true about the differences of the sexes, beliefs about approved patterns of behavior for the two sexes covered more and more aspects of their lives (Tarrayo, 2014).



Social Structural Perspective

As Shelton (1992 as cited in Eagly & Wood, 1999) proposed, in contemporary American society, women have less power and status than men and control fewer resources. This feature of the social structure is often labeled gender hierarchy, or in feminist writing, it may be called patriarchy. In addition, as the division of labor is realized in the United States and many other nations, women perform more domestic work than men and spend fewer hours in paid employment. From a social structural perspective, the underlying cause of sex-differentiated behavior is this concentration of men and women in differing roles.

Sexism in the Images

Reflection of sexism in textbooks is the portrayal of males and females in occupational roles. The occupational role, for instance, for females are less diverse and are restricted to stereotypical types of occupation/profession while male occupations show a wider range, thus, providing them with more options than females. Women and men tend to be found in different occupations that men are represented in far more types of occupations than women are (Benokraitis & Feagin 1995 as cited in Alksnis, 2000). Similarly, females are more particularly represented in indoor activities i.e. household chores. Wilson (2000) highlighted that visuals can be used to help describe the message which are conveyed by the speakers through the use of paralinguistic cues.

Gender Stereotype in Textbooks

A stereotype is a widely accepted judgment or bias about a person or group that can cause unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's gender. In addition, Eagly et al., (2000 as cited in Menegatti & Rubini, 2017) explained that gender stereotypes are beliefs about the attributes of men and women and produce expectations about what they are like and should be like. For example, women are often expected to be accommodating and emotional, while men are usually expected to be self-confident and aggressive.

According to OHCHR (2019), gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives. Harmful stereotypes can be both negative and seemingly benign. Also, it is said that women should take care of children, cook food and clean their houses, while men should take care of finances and do home repairs. Then some people are rush to assume that teachers and nurses are women, and pilots, doctors, and engineers are men. Wood (1994) noted that while in children's books have made a limited attempt to depict women engaged in activities outside, there has been little parallel effort to show men involved in family and home life. According to the social role theory, gender stereotypes originate in the gender-typical social roles and reflect the sexual division of labor and gender hierarchy of the society. Men and women have historically held different social roles (as cited in Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). Moreover, reinforcement male dominance with stories of courage and bravery revolving around male characters while relegating women to the domestic sphere has been found in various illustrations and chapters in Hindi and



English revised textbooks (Bose, 2016). In the new Hindi textbook, ‘Games’ for the class III students had three pictures showing only boys playing games and indicating that sports were only for boys. These reflected male dominance and a woman’s job was to bear children.

Previous studies

Many researchers worldwide have shown interest in the study about men and women and gender bias in various forms. The first study is a study on the structure of and stricture on TV Commercials in Iran conducted by Babaii and Ansary (2001, as cited in Ansary & Babii, 2003) demonstrated that in Iranian TV advertisements, women are present but to qualify and strengthen the traditional patriarchal morality which women are expected to cook, wash the dishes, and do the housework. They added that this can be taken as a covert practice of sexism. Also, Ansary and Babaii (2003) explored manifestation of subliminal sexism in two current ESL/EFL textbooks. They reported that the roles represented women in textbooks were stereotypical and women often appeared less visible than men. In social activities, women were shown more passive than men and were placed in traditional roles.

Next, a study by Otlowski (2003) investigated ethnic diversity and gender bias in EFL textbooks. The study examined two criteria: gender bias and ethnic group portrayal. His findings showed that the conversations and illustrations under study still depicted women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society. Then, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) studied the representation of gender in some English language textbooks in Malaysia. The results indicated significant gender bias against both sexes with males outnumbering females in texts and illustrations. Further, certain nouns referring to males precede those referring to females; however, males mainly associated with negative traits.

Moreover, Porreca (1984 as cited in Ghorbani, 2009, p. 5-6) analyzed how sexism was manifested in ESL textbooks over 15 most widely used ESL texts and collected empirical evidence through investigation in six categories: 1) Omission (the ratio of females to males) in texts and illustrations, 2) Firstness, 3) Occupational roles, 4) The frequency of male nouns to female nouns, 5) Female-exclusive, masculine generic constructions, 6) The types and frequency of adjectives for men and women. She concluded that evidence showed that sexism continued to flourish in ESL textbooks.

Based on the explanation, it was interesting to analyze the contents and illustrations of the selected primary school textbooks as to whether those textbooks dealt with both gender equally or not.

Research Questions

1. What are the patterns of gender representation in the Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks?



2. How is gender bias portrayed in the four Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks based on the following categories: gender visibility in texts, firstness, and domestic and occupational-role representations?

2. Method

Analytical Framework

The present study intended to analyze the representation of gender in the textbooks using the models of study applied by Ansary and Babaii (2003), Otlowski (2003), Kobia (2009), Tarrayo (2014), Porreca (1984), and Birjandi (2012). This study is on the basis of three categories: 1) gender visibility in texts, 2) firstness, or masculine-word first and 3) domestic and occupational roles representation.

Research Materials

The four Thai health and physical education textbooks for grade 2 students were chosen to serve as the corpus of the study. Moreover, there were two reasons why these textbooks were analyzed. First, Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks were widely used in public schools. Second, there were few previous studies which analyzed the contents in subject-specific textbooks, health and physical education written in Thai. The names of the textbooks were as follows.

1. Health and Physical Education Textbook, by Mr. Chuchat Rodthaworn and Mr. Passakorn Boonniyom. Published by Aksorn Press, Reprinted Edition.

2. Health and Physical Education Textbook, by Mr. Agarin Srimahasarn, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ruji Khusara, and Mr. Susorradit Thongprem. Published by Aksorn Press, Reprinted Edition.

3. Health and Physical Education Textbook, by Dr. Prakrit Hong Sanyatham and Asst. Prof. Wanna Pitaksan. Published by Korn Patanaying Press.

4. Health and Physical Education Textbook, by Ms. Ranumas Ma-oon and Ms. Khemruthai Wannarodsapak. Published by Institute of development.

In addition, each of the textbook was allowed to use in schools in the 2015-2019 academic year and divided into five units: unit one, human growth and development; unit two, life and family; unit three, movement, doing physical exercises, playing games, Thai and international sports; unit four, strengthening of health, capacity, and disease prevention; unit five, safety in life.



Data Collection

The data collection was carried out by counting words, images, and male/ female referring terms, such as the name of characters from texts, illustrations and short reading passages. Then, the domestic and occupational roles for females and males were identified. Meanwhile, the illustrations related to each short reading passage were examined in terms of stereotypical views of men and women.

Data Analysis

The textbook analysis was carried out based on content analysis. It combined both qualitative and quantitative research method and examined the primary school textbooks by restricting the analysis to a single-subject textbook, as well as from a single grade.

3. Results

Gender Visibility in Texts

The study conducted an analysis of the gender representation in terms of the number and frequency of female/ male characters. For instance, when females do not appear more often than males in the text, this implied that women seem to be not that important enough to be included (Tarrayo, 2014).

Next, the numbers of female and male characters in the texts of each textbook were presented in table 1. The numbers showed the occurrences and the parentheses indicated the percentage of female and male characters.

Table 1: *Numbers of female and male characters in the texts*

Textbooks	Texts		
	Male	Female	Total
TB 1 Published by Aksorn Press	32 (47%)	36 (53%)	68
TB 2 Published by Aksorn Press	46 (55%)	38 (45%)	84
TB 3 Published by Korn Patanaying Press	27 (43%)	36 (57%)	63
TB 4 Published by Institute of development	80 (72%)	31 (28%)	111

As indicated in Table 1, it was found that textbook 1, textbook 2, and textbook 3 were almost equal at a balance level of presenting female and male characters in their texts. On the other hand, textbook 4 had the highest level of representing male characters in its texts. The total number



of occurrences of females and males in texts in the four textbooks were 68, 84, 63, and 111 respectively (see table 1). In addition, out of 326 mentions in texts, 185 (57%) for males and only 141 (43%) concerned females.

Besides, the number of male and female mentioned in texts could be identified with the total number of male and female nouns [e.g. father (พ่อ), mother (แม่)] and names or proper nouns [e.g. Sairung (สายรุ้ง), Ton (ตัน), Kullasatree (กุลลสตรีย์), and Somsak (สมศักดิ์)].

The names were coded according to their appearance in the text. If the name appeared more than once on the same page the name was counted as one. However, if the same name appeared on the next page, it was counted afresh. The data in Table 1 reveal that there are more female names mentioned in texts compared to the male names. Generally, out of the 28 names identified in two out of the four Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks, women names constituted 54% (15 names) compared to male names with 46% (13 names).

Firstness

Firstness refers to pairs of words where both male and female words occur in pairs and one of them comes first. These pairs can be pairs of pronouns (he and she, him and her), pairs of nouns (uncle and aunt, mother and father, Ying and Dong, etc) and titles such as Mr. and Mrs. Smith. The researcher discovered that when a male and a female are mentioned, the male is almost always put first. To analyze gender firstness in the textbooks, all the instances in the four textbooks were investigated. Firstness or masculine- words first that were found were pairs of noun such as boys and girls (เด็กชายและเด็กหญิง), grandfather and grandmother (คุณปู่คุณย่า/คุณตาคุณยาย), men and women (ผู้ชายผู้หญิง), uncle and aunt (ลุงป้า), gentleman and lady (สุภาพบุรุษสุภาพสตรี). Father and mother (พ่อกับแม่) pairs were more frequently occurred than others in the four textbooks. While only a few examples of female firstness can be found [e.g. Somying and her male friend (สมหญิงและเพื่อนผู้ชาย)]. Such subordination of females as mentioned earlier was deeply rooted in the Thai culture. The results of firstness were presented in table 2.

Table 2: *Numbers of firstness appeared in the textbooks*

Textbooks	Firstness		
	Female	Male	Total
TB 1 Published by Aksorn Press	2 (9%)	21 (91%)	23
TB 2 Published by Aksorn Press	7 (22%)	25 (78%)	32
TB 3 Published by Korn Patanaying Press	3 (12%)	22 (88%)	25
TB 4 Published by Institute of development	2 (7%)	25 (93%)	27



In terms of firstness as shown in Table 2, males appear before females more often (M:F=93:14), with a difference of 74%. The total percentage of first mentions of males is 350 (87.5%), there is only 50 (12.5%) first mentions of females. This could imply that the textbooks seem to favour males, thus, appearing to be sexist. The following are other examples of the “firstness” issue:

1. พ่อและแม่มีหน้าที่อบรมสั่งสอนลูกให้เป็นคนดี (health and physical education textbook, 2nd grade, textbook 2, p. 31)

Translate: The responsibility of parents is rearing and instructing their children to be a good person.

2. เอกภพช่วยรับน้ำหนักของ (health and physical education textbook, 2nd grade, textbook 2, p. 49)

Translate: Agapob helps carrying Rattana's belongings.

The findings showed a much higher tendency for males to be appeared and mentioned first. Similarly, Lee and Collins (2008) discovered a strong tendency for men to be mentioned first in single phrases in Hong Kong English textbooks. They suggested that some writers continue to perpetuate the stereotyped image of women as weaker than men. Also, the male-first phenomenon and the visual underrepresentation of women are still prevalent in recent textbooks.

Moreover, the results indicated that, while the four Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks' writers are conscious in representing females in the works, they often ignored the significance of the order mention in order to reverse the second-place status of females.

Domestic and Occupational Roles Representation

The descriptions were provided first, then the tabular form was shown with explanations. From one of the textbooks, the content of the texts showed that the male's role is that of breadwinner for the family as a whole, while the female's role is that of homemaker. In addition, women were expected only to help male's works in which male characters controlled the process of the works and handled the family's money.

The illustrations in the textbooks obviously showed that males enjoyed a more variety range of occupations than females. Also, the findings suggested the perpetuation of stereotypical roles for both women and men in society.



Table 3 *Numbers of domestic and occupational roles appeared in the textbooks*

No.	Domestic and occupational roles	Female	Domestic and occupational roles	Male
TB2 Published by Aksorn Press				
1	Mother/mom	8	Father/daddy	12
2	Wife	2	Husband	4
3	Homemaker	4	Uncle	1
4	Daughter	15	Son	22
5	Grand mother	5	Grand father	6
6	Aunt	2	Teacher	2
7	Student	25	Student	14
8	Teacher	3	Businessman	2
9	Market vendor	1	Police officer	1
10	-		Employee	4
11	-		Bus driver	1
12	-		Firefighter	1
TB 2 Published by Aksorn Press				
1	Mother/mom	4	Father/daddy	3
2	Wife	1	Husband	1
3	Sister	1	Brother	1
4	Daughter	2	Son	5
5	Grandmother	3	Doctor	2
6	Housewife	2	Teacher	1
7	Student	6	Student	8



8	Teacher	5	Businessman	1
9	-		Soldier	2
10	-		Police officer	2
11	-		Engineer	1
TB 3 Published by Korn Patanaying Press				
1	Mother/mom	8	Father/daddy	7
2	Wife	1	Husband	1
3	Sister	4	Brother	1
4	Daughter	5	Son	4
5	Grandmother	2	Grandfather	2
6	Housewife	1	Uncle	1
7	Aunt	1	Student	13
8	Student	10	Businessman	2
9	Market vendor	1	Bus driver	1
10	Office worker	1	Employee	2

Table 3 *Numbers of domestic and occupational roles appeared in the textbooks(cont.)*

TB 4 Published by Institute of Development				
1	Mother/mom	5	Father/daddy	6
2	Wife	2	Husband	2
3	Sister	1	Brother	3
4	Daughter	3	Son	2
5	Grandmother	1	Student	16
6	Homemaker	3	Police officer	1



7	Student	7	Teacher	1
8	Teacher	1	-	

The roles of female and male characters portrayed in the illustrations and texts of the selected textbooks are similar. In the domestic roles, people were family members of either gender. Males were usually fathers, husbands, and sons, whereas the major domestic role for females was as mothers or housewife. Other domestic roles portrayed for males included brothers, uncles, and grandfathers, and females were portrayed as sisters, grandmothers, and daughters. In addition, female and male characters were portrayed as students in many instances. In other words, in the occupational role, most mentioned were students that relate to the audience of the textbooks who are mainly primary school students. For teachers, the present study found that female teachers could be found more frequently than male.

Domestic Roles

According to the illustrations in the textbooks, female characters are portrayed under the domestic sphere as the one who actively takes care of her family as can be seen in the evidence that she is carrying a baby not her husband. In addition, women were occupied with household tasks, such as doing iron, cooking and serving their children and husbands.

In the same way, the contents in the texts above reveal that female as mother was described to take care all kinds of housework. Her husband, however, only had a small portion of taking care the children because he worked from morning till night at his office. Thus, by this evidence, the depiction of female is mostly appeared under the domain of family in which women thoroughly dominate activities related to housework and have a role as family career.

Occupational Roles

The data revealed that females were less visible than men in occupational roles. In the four selected textbooks, the number of occupations allocated for males was higher than those of females. Moreover, the occupational roles for females were less diverse and were restricted to stereotypical types of occupation/profession, such as teacher or service jobs, such as housekeeper, office worker, and market vendor, while males occupied a large variety of different occupational roles. Of the 12 (not considering the number of times an occupation was repeated) occupations either mentioned in texts or illustrated in pictures in the textbooks, 10 different jobs such as student, teacher, firefighter, driver, employee, police officer, businessman, soldier, engineer, and doctor belonged to men. Also, previous studies conducted in this regard showed the same results (Ansary and Babaii, 2003; Porreca, 1984).



As previously explained, the findings of the study showed that those selected textbooks, Thai primary school health and physical education textbooks still depict women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

First of all, it was found that male and female characters were almost equally represented in the texts. Moreover, there were more women names 54% (15 names) mentioned in texts compared to the male names with 46% (13 names). Interestingly, the female invisibility which was a common phenomenon of the textbooks published in the early 1970s was more visible in the textbooks examined here with more female characters. In other words, these textbooks' authors attempted to reach a balance especially in language use, there was still much to be accomplished.

One area consistent inequality is in the order of mentions of gendered terms: in many instances, males were mentioned first (male firstness), followed by females, within a single phrase when two nouns were paired for gender, for example, father and mother, gentleman and lady, uncle and aunt. The findings revealed that men were overtly mentioned before women as is the case in the present Thai culture especially in traditional families. All of the four selected textbooks showed that males appear before females more often with the difference of 74%. This maybe because of the power traditional forms of expression which often put the male form before the female one. In other words, the issue is not necessarily conscious gender bias. The results of the study also supported Ghorbani (2009) who investigated ESL/EFL textbooks that sexism still appeared in ESL textbooks.

Thirdly, considering domestic roles, the roles of female and male characters portrayed in the illustrations and texts of the selected textbooks are similar. In the domestic roles, people were family members of either gender. Males were usually fathers, husbands, and sons, whereas the major domestic role for females was as mothers or housewife and the career of families. Then, considering occupational roles, gender inequality was perceived even more. As Wood (1994) mentioned, women are considered as primary caregivers and men as primary breadwinners. Today, women comprise a high percentage of the workforce, and a great number of women are involved in highly skilled, professional jobs. However, in four Thai primary school textbooks investigated, women were more visible in indoor passive activities. In addition, females were mainly illustrated in traditional sex-linked occupations such as teaching and doing household chores, such as cooking, ironing, and mopping the floor. This is slightly far from the reality and equity. On the other hand, the findings revealed that men occupied higher and varied range of occupations and were portrayed as leaders, while women are followers. Moreover, in the four selected textbooks, 10 different jobs such as student, teacher, firefighter, driver, employee, police officer, businessman, soldier, engineer, and doctor belonged to men and in only two women were stereotypically depicted either as teacher or market vendor.



Considering the extracted results, it can be concluded that although the contents of texts in four Thai primary health and physical education textbooks still present sexist views and stereotypical attitudes about females and males, the authors or those who involved in producing textbooks have been trying to avoid either gender being treated unfairly through language use and images as much as possible. Hence, these textbooks show a change in how genders are presented in textbooks in Thailand.

5. Suggestions for further study

This study was only carried out over the texts and illustrations of the four Thai primary health and physical education textbooks. For a variety of type of other studies, an analysis on different subjects such as Thai, social studies is recommended.

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