



The Role of Males and Females in Text Books

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1. Objective

The role of males and females (or men and women) depicted in text books is researched for the purposes of finding out the frequency and the manner in which they are portrayed, which might influence the students' thinking.

2. Introduction

This research was done at the request of Hope for Women (a non-governmental organization working for the advancement of women) who wanted to review the school text books of Dhivehi, English, Islam, and Social Studies, to assess the existence of gender-stereotyping. The need for such a study resulted from the organization's belief that it is absolutely necessary to remove stereotyping from all text books, since messages enhancing stereotyping in books will influence children's thinking and contribute to perpetuating patriarchy in the society.

The research is done by reading and assessing written text, sketches, photos and other materials, to consider how the roles are explained or demonstrated in the government schools' text books. Although not specifically requested to do so by the Consultant, gender disparity and inequality are highlighted, as these two aspects are closely associated and inter-connected with gender roles. I believe that this, slight, deviation will facilitate and, further, enhance the work of the association.

Most of the text books did not show that much of gender roles. They were, mostly, discussions and writings of general topics. However, the Islam and Dhivehi text books alluded to more gender roles. Out of these, the books assigned to the upper secondary grades included more materials. This could be because the writing and explanations are more profuse and elaborated, as to be expected.

In the attempt to acquire the text books, some difficulties were encountered, such as confusion with the school authorities as to what was requested, lack of interest in assisting and lack of text book-availability for external borrowers.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted by reading all the available text books for Grades 1-12 of government schools for the subjects of English, Dhivehi, Islam and Social Studies. The exception is Grades 6-7, whose books could not be obtained from schools nor privately.

For this study, books from Aminiya School, Centre for Higher Secondary Education (CHSC), and Jamaluddeen School were borrowed. Other schools approached were Majeediya School, Kalafaanu School, and Iskandar School. However, for different reasons, the borrowing service was not extended by these schools.

Teachers were not interviewed as this would take up much more time than assigned to this project. The examples and referred materials are taken from only those texts that had been found to be of significance. Hence, there are no examples or significant material in all the texts of all the classes.

4. Subjects

a. Dhivehi

i. Primary School

In the lower primary classes of grades 1 and 2, roles of sexes are not well-defined as the content is mostly of sketches, words and pictures. But, one can deduct the roles by the sketches. For example, in the Grade 2 text book, a sketch of the water queue consisting of only females show the children that bringing water is mostly a woman's job. In the same text, the story of "Nadiya's Cat" shows that girls are more likely to care for pets. Another sketch showing a picnic trip entitled, "Dhathuru Dhiyun," shows the girls cooking, Keyolhu Adam catching fish and the men playing drums for "*bodu beru*," and dancing. All these, very clearly, demonstrate the roles assigned to men and women. That is, cooking is for women, and fishing and drumming for "*bodu beru*" are for men.

The Grade 5 text book includes sketches of men felling trees, working as black smiths, and attending meetings, which are all assumed to be men's skills, jobs, and occupations. But women are shown cooking porridge (*kandhi*) and attending to and caring for patients and the elderly. Caring for children as women's role is demonstrated by a drawing of a woman picking up a child from the ground. These are the very traditional roles of women in the Maldivian society.

ii. Secondary School

As compared with the primary school books, in the secondary school text books, the role of men and women is demonstrated much more specifically and with more elaboration, as these included more writing and prose. It is also worth noting that the selected materials mostly deal

with famous men or famous writers. Historically, the number of males in these categories are, definitely, greater. However, we cannot ignore the fact that there are/were very famous poets and song-writers amongst the female population of the Maldives. But, none of these is included in the readings.

In highlighting the men's role, one of the stories dealt with, in the Grade 11 and 12 text book is the story of "***Bodu Thakurufanu Vaahaka***," written by Hussain Solahuddeen. In this, perhaps unintentionally, the part included in the text for reading depicts men as being strong, defying, courageous and religious. Strength and courage is indirectly displayed by mentioning that the brothers left with guns and swords. The religious nature of the men is shown by the text mentioning that the brothers and their followers were praying and reciting the Yaseen Surath from the Quruaan, requesting to be saved from Andhiri Andhirin. The text stresses that particularly strong and courageous were Mohammad and Hasan Thakurufaanu, who dared to kill Andhiri Andhirin.

On the other hand, text books from the same grades, narrates "Dhiyo Raivaru" by Bandeyri Hassan Manikufaanu, a story of two beautiful sisters who are in two different parts of the world. One is in Southern India and the other in Mozambique. Both wanted to be the queen of the world. To achieve this ambition, they even fought against English fighters, with 50 ships, and defeated the English. Contrary to most of the writings as men being rulers, this gives the females a different perspective and a role; the role of a man.

In the same grade's text, women's role is also seen by the short story of Muhusin who was trained by his mother to be well-behaved. This shows that it is the mother's responsibility to bring up children with good discipline.

Another example of women's role is seen in a grammar exercise in which a woman, Dhondeedhi, makes wax gourd preserve (***fufulu murubba***) and puts them in jars with the domestic's help. Here, the women's role is seen as cooks and organizers of the household. Additionally, she also looks after a boy, Hasan. Again, it is the woman's role to look after children, even if they are not their own.

Women as mothers is shown in a sketch for an exercise where a woman, standing by the beach, holds a baby. The caption introduces a story that the students are given to write.

The "Thiladhunmathee Dhathuru", by Mohamed Jameel, describes an incident in the island of Nolvivaranfaru where the angry mob was shouting at Mohamed Jameel and Malin Mohamed Didi, who were sent by the government to appease the people. One of the leaders of the crowd said in a threatening fashion, "Go! Act like men (***Firihen gothugai kanthah kollasheve***)." This command was to encourage and make the mob attack the boat (***dhoni***), which shows that it is the men who dare to act, and be violent and rough, if necessary.

The text on “Thoddu Trip” shows a father being disappointed in his son’s choice of studies – Agricultural Studies as opposed to Business Studies. This underlines the important expectations of specific roles for boys on the opposite end of the career spectrum – Farmer or Businessman.

There are other stories or parts of prose where the highlight is on depicting various aspects of boys. For example, there is Hiyala, attending to normal female-type chores like cleaning rice and talking to her son, who does not do any work as he is spoiled by his mother. There is a similar story in “Olhun Bolhun,” which also highlights a boy. Both these narrations indicate the belief that boys are special.

In the Grade 9 text, the short biographies selected for the text, praising men are all males like Mohamed Ameen, Sultan Mohammad Imadudeen, Sultan Ibrahim Kalafaanu, and such like.

b. Islam

It is important to note that there are overlaps of subject matter in grades 8-10 and grades 11-12, although in different depths. This minimizes the availability of different information discussed, as one topic is discussed in two or three different text books.

In the syllabus for Islam, there is a lot of very noticeable differences between men and women and their social status, as well as their roles such as the laws regarding inheritance. But these are not dealt with in this report, as the laws are derived from Sharu’ee law.

i. Primary School

Islam in most of the primary grades consists of pictures and short articles and explanations of Islamic beliefs and practices, such as the existence of God, Prophet Mohammad and simple definitions of concepts. Most of these do not define the role of males and females clearly. In fact, except in a few cases, the books mention gender in a broad context. But assumptions can be made from these. An example of this is found in Grade 1 text in a sketch where there is a woman standing by a dining table, which alludes to the role of women in charge of food and food-related activities..

However, a clear example of women’s subservient status can be seen in the Grade 4 text where it discusses “Jama’th Prayers”, which explains that men should be in the front row behind which the children must stand. The women’s place is at the back of everybody else; the last row. This is the place for women in a mixed Jama’th Prayer.

ii. Secondary School

Contrary to the Primary School text books, texts in the secondary grades give more complicated and abstract information, especially the Grade 11 and 12 books. They depict the role of males and females and their status more clearly.

However, it should be noted that in most of the writings, the difference between the sexes is not mentioned, but it shows in the selection of materials for the book (contents). For example, in the grade 11 and 12 books, the section dealing with famous Islamic scholars like the Ashabs are almost all males. Among those who analyzed the Quruan, there are also only men such as Ibn Abbas and Imam Sobri. Additionally, the most recognized scholars of Hadisi Knowledge (knowledge of the Hadis) are also all males. These include Al Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim, Al Imam Tharmmuzee, Imam Abu Daud, Al Imam Ibn Majid, Imam ahmed bin Hanbal, Imam Malik and Ikam Daarmi. This means that the early Islamic scholars were known to be only men.

This gender gap among scholars, however, may be due to the intellectual status of the early Islamic scholars, which finds a parallel pattern in all the other religions as well.

Grade 11 and 12 text books note that there is a noticeable difference in the rules between men and women travellers. This difference is clear from the requirement for females travelling for 24 hours, needing a male companion (Muhuram). The same requirement is not asked for men. The difference can be explained in the belief of the status of the female being physically weak and defenseless.

Ruling a group is purely the role of the male. Therefore, becoming a ruler is outside of women's boundary. But, there are exceptions to this rule, in that only the descendants of Rasoola's daughter, Fathimath, have the right to be a ruler (Grade 11,12).

When talking about competitive sports, it includes activities only suitable for men of early Islamic period, such as horse-riding, throwing bows and arrows, and activities in preparation for wars or coup d'état. Navigation and air force activities are also mostly for men.

Although not relating to roles, but a gender disparity can be seen in the number of animals that should be slaughtered on the 7th day after a child is born. Slaughtering one animal is considered good for baby girls, but slaughtering two animals for baby boys are considered to be the best (Grade 11,12).

The punishment or the life-repayment (*maruge dhiya*) for killing a woman is half that for killing a man. This shows that the woman is of less worth. The text book of Grades 11-12, in explaining the pattern of life-repayment in Islamic history, further notes that during Rasoola's time, life-repayment for a freed Muslim man was 100 camels. Later, during Umar's time, for a man's life, it was 1000 Dinars or 12,000 Dhirhams. But the payment for a freed Muslim woman was 500 Dhinars or 6000 Dhirhams. If one wants to analyze this, one can say that the life of a woman is worth half that of a man. This principle applies to the case of a mistaken killing of a woman, and also payment required for a woman's limbs. In both cases, the payment is half that is required for a man. The justification given in the text for this difference is that life-repayment is taken from one's property. In Islamic Shariya, property received by women is half of what a man receives. This is said to be just, because when the responsibilities of both men and women are considered,

the women do not have equal responsibility. This, according to the text, means that they are not responsible for looking after other people. But, in effect, this means that legally women do not have to provide for others.

Although pregnancy cannot be compared, it is worth looking at the pregnant woman's status or the status of the fetus. If a pregnant woman's baby dies because of an attack on the woman, the life-repayment is a Muslim slave without any disfigurement. If a slave is not available, 5 camels will meet the cost. But if it is by mistake, the repayment is not specified, but the amount considered to help the victim and to maintain assistance to the victim. Same consideration is given to pregnant women and a fetus in that intimidating the mother, thereby aborting the fetus also need repayment.

In the Grade 8 text book, when discussing cleanliness, it is explained that the urine of the baby boy, whose food is only the mother's milk and who is less than 2 years old, is cleaner. Because of this, the urinated spot can be cleaned by only sprinkling water, whereas to wash a baby girl's urine, the spot has to be washed. In explaining this, the author quotes Hadis. To clean "the baby boy's urine, sprinkle water. (To clean) the baby girl's urine, wash." This, very clearly, shows the girl's urine is dirtier than the boy's even though they are both babies and consume same food.

In the same text, just as a baby girl's urine is dirtier, it explains other aspects of a woman's life which are considered unclean. For example, menstruation is depicted as being an extremely unclean phenomenon. This is why, during this period, the woman is prohibited from doing any religious performances such as fasting, praying, touching and reciting the Quruan. Other prohibited activities include sexual intercourse, staying in a mosque, and going around K'aba (*thowaf*).

Regarding extra-marital sex, it is assumed that it is more of a sin for women than for men as women should not display their beauty in front of men. No such commands for men are given in the text. So, the role of men in extra-marital sex is more acceptable than that of women.

The role and status of the sexes differ when eye-witnessing a crime is involved, as women witnesses are not accepted in some types of crimes. For example, when considering witnesses in a case of extra-marital sex, it requires a minimum of 4 men to prove the crime. Along the same line, in sodomy of a woman, the crime has to be proven by 4, male witnesses. Again, in theft also women cannot be witnesses (Grade 8). This shows superiority of males.

Another area where the mental state of a male is considered to be higher is concerning the observation of the moon at the onset of Ramazan. It is only men who could observe and decide if the month has begun.

c. English

i. Primary School

Practically all the primary school text books consist of pictures, educational reading and language exercises which do not show any gender differences.

Grade 1 and 2 books, in the form of a conversation, discuss male and female jobs. It acknowledges that labor-intensive occupations like fire-fighting, and construction work are non-traditional jobs for women. It also discusses scientific and technical jobs as being male-oriented. The women-oriented jobs are in the field of education, especially nursery- and primary-age teaching, and the health industry. But, this is mostly stating the reality than advocating one or the other.

ii. Secondary School

Grade 11 and 12 text books discuss the theory of inequality, explaining how historically the gender differences were viewed. For example, mind was supposed to be a masculine phenomenon, whereas nature was a feminine one. Therefore, women are not equipped to do science. But, it was believed that women have access to some other form of knowledge, which was thought to have obtained from the devil. This article explains the historical angle of gender differences, but the exercises relating to it do not attempt to get answers that categorize male and female phenomena. In fact, the author is aware of the stereotype of the gender roles. To elaborate this, the book quotes that Mathematics go “beyond the strength of a woman’s physical power of application.”

Different proses or stories are given to elaborate this further. One is the “The Handmaid’s Tale,” which shows that men have total power over women, and that women were not allowed to read, leave home without a permit, and are kept in submission, among others.

The other passage (name not given) deals with a bunch of rowdy men. The scene is described thus: “...the atmosphere suffused with the reek of beer and cigar smoke.” Here, the patrons are mostly young men. The significance is that it is the behavior of the men to be drunken, smoking and unruly.

A short story, entitled “Baby Doe,” narrates the story of a woman who seduces rich men, indicating that it is more of a woman’s role to seduce the opposite sex. From the success that the heroine had, one could assume that women are successful at doing this.

Grades 11 and 12 text called “Coming of Age” showed cultural differences practiced by the sexes in the coming of age performances. For example, boys have to prove their manhood and the right to be called warriors, by climbing and also attacking wasp’s nests, among others.

5. Summary

The study found that out of the subjects dealt with, English has the least amount of materials relating to gender roles. In fact, in most of the books, there is hardly any. Most gender-related content is found in Dhivehi and Islam book of which the secondary school books included more gender-stereotyping. On the whole, the material is not too clearly defined or explained. Therefore, a lot depends on the teacher's conveyance of the subject matter. The danger lies here.

6. Recommendation

- To tap into the subject of gender roles further, it is recommended that the Environment Studies text books be included in future studies. Another recommendation would be to observe, if possible, and interview the teachers who are assigned to teach these subjects. However, interviewing in this type of study will be very difficult and achieve little as no one will admit to passing on gender-biased information. But, it is worth a try.
- It is also recommended that the text books include materials that is free of gender-stereotyping or at least, less gender-biased. To do this, the Curriculum Development section of the Ministry of Education has the primary responsibility, as they are the government officials in charge of the final selection of materials for the text books.
- Although the Ministry of Gender is the main government entity in charge of gender-related matters, in this case, it plays a very important secondary role. However, it must be a strong advocate of gender-stereotyping-free text books in schools.
- The Maldives National University, Villa College and other tertiary institutions which train teachers must pay attention when they train teachers.
- It is strongly recommended that teachers be advised and, in fact, even be warned by the Ministry of Education, school principals and supervisors, not to express their personal gender-biased beliefs when teaching; especially bringing in content that is outside of the curriculum should be prohibited.

7. Post-Presentation Audience Feedback

A power-point presentation of the report was done for an audience consisting of the Ministry of Education, UNDP, UNFPA, Hope for Women, and some teachers, among others. The following are the highlights of the feedback:

- Most agreed with the findings and felt that an effort must be made to rectify the situation. However, one person was very defensive, and justified the content by pointing out that the examples given from the text books were the authors' opinions or writings. In doing this, she overlooked the important fact that the final decision of the selection of materials rest on the shoulders of the Ministry of Education;
- The audience also believed that change comes gradually and therefore, work must start now;
- One audience member explained the difficulty in changing the content in Islam text books such as Hadis, and posed a question as to what we think could be done about this. The explanation given in our response was that it is not the changing of Hadis or the verses from the Quran that was needed, but an explanation of why it was done in the early days of Islam. For example, in climates like Saudi Arabia with dust and no rain, why a certain practice was carried out. The important responsibility of the teacher is the task of explaining and pointing out what is relevant and what is not relevant to our country;
- All agreed that what needed to be modified most was the teacher's deliverance of the subject matter.

8. Text Books

a. Dhivehi

Ahmed, Mohamed Amir. (2006). Dhivehi. Grade 5 (3rd print) Dharivarunge Foijy. Male: Educational Development Centre.

Ahmed, Mohamed Amir. (2012). Dhivehi. Grade 2 Dharivarunge Foijy. Male: Educational Development Centre.

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Nizam, Hasan (2011). Dhivehi. Grade 4 Dharivarunge Foiy (ha). Male: Educational Development Centre.

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Nizam, Hasan. ((2006). Dhivehi: Grade 11 and 12: Dharivarunge Foiy. Male: Educational Development Centre.

b. English

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Nadia, Fathmath. (2013). English for Us: 1A. Male: Educational Development Centre.

Nadia, Fathmath. (2012). English for Us: 1B. Male: Educational Development Centre.

Proficiency Masterclass: Student's Book. (date unknown). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

a. Islam

Abdul Rahman, Yaugoob; Moosa Nizar; Ibrahim Ahmed. (2013). Islami Tharubiyathu: Dharivarunge Foiy, Grade 9 and 10. Male: Educational Centre.

Educational Development Centre. (2006). Islami Tharubiyathu 4: Dharivarunge Foiy. Male: EDC.

Educational Development Centre (EDC). (2010). Islami Tharubiyathu: Dharivarunge Foiy, Grade 12. Male: EDC.

Educational Development Centre. (year unknown). Islami Tharubiyathu: Dharivarunge Foiy, Grade 11. Male: EDC.

Educational Development Centre. (2009). Islami Tharubiyathu: Dharivarunge Foiy, Grade 8, 3rd print. Male: EDC.

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Mohamed, Abdul Majeed; Moosa Nizar Ibrahim; Ahmed Fahmi Didi; Ali Riza Ahmed; Ahmed Abdul Kareem; Yaugoob Hussain Yousuf. (2006). Islami Tharubiyathu 5: Dharivarunge Foiy, 2nd print. Male: EDC.

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