Gender Stereotypes in Current Children's English Books Used in Elementary Schools in the Republic of Macedonia

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Abstract

Textbooks used in schools take up a significant role in educating children; they are sources of information and in the same time create an image of what is tolerable in a society. This assumption about books makes everything presented in books be the most appropriate one. In view of that, English textbooks are considered to be the major sources in schools thus, it is important taking into account the ways males and females are presented in the textbooks, and if they have impact on the specific vocabulary used by male and female students who learn English as a foreign language. This study was carried out with three different textbooks used for beginner, pre-intermediate and intermediate level students, which analyzed the ways they present males and females in terms of professions, appearance, sport/hobbies, personality traits, family roles and housework. . Its intention was to evaluate whether these textbooks consist of any gender stereotypical elements that may affect students' assumptions and development. The results of this study will raise awareness of English teachers in reconsidering gender stereotypes represented in children's textbooks and their role on students' vocabulary.

Key words: stereotypes, textbooks, gender, vocabulary

Introduction

Textbooks used in schools take up a significant role in educating children; they are sources of information and in the same time create an image of what is tolerable in a society. According to Sumalatha (2004): "Textbooks are the most potential instruments, which help in building up the desirable attitudes in children" (p.57). This assumption about books makes us understand that everything presented in books children are mostly exposed to, will affect their beliefs about certain things and make them behave in a way that is considered to be the most appropriate one, for the reason that day after day they come across "acceptable" images created in the books they read . In view of that, textbooks are considered to be the major sources in schools where children learn how to conduct themselves, thus, it is important taking into account the ways males and females are presented in the books used in schools, because that is how our children will form their own images as male and females in the society. Based on Petra Holmqvist and Liselotte Gjörup (2006):

> The atmosphere and way of thinking in the classroom is often a reflection of what goes on in the world outside; therefore it is important to bring issues of gender biases to the surface in the classroom. Teachers must be aware of their huge responsibility when it comes to their choice of textbooks and other materials, because the teaching materials used will influence learners (p.6).

If teachers are aware of the materials they use, and bring up gender stereotype issues in the classroom, it will help learners create their own views and make their own judgments without being affected by the books.

Gender stereotyping

People act in a particular way because of the views they often stick to, thus, if we believe that a woman will clean the house and a man cut the grass, this is how we will expect to perform one woman or man everywhere.

Accordingly, "gender stereotypes are widely shared beliefs about males' and females' abilities, personality traits and social behavior" (Weiten, Dunn & Hammer, 2012, p.339). Still, by differentiating between suitable characteristics for males and females, we also diminish people's privileges to form their own diverse human character. Furthermore, gender stereotypes make people consider that the characteristics related to one gender are proscribed to another. According to Schneider (2005) "many people think that females are not only more nurturant than males but that it is their job to be so, and that males not only are but should be competitive and emotionally strong" (p.443). There are a number of distinctions individuals make among males and females, however, the aim of teachers should raise learners' awareness of these distinctions and create settings where appreciation of diversities, tolerance and respect towards others replaces the stereotypes, prejudices and bias.

Gender stereotypes in textbooks

Gender stereotypes used in textbooks are facts that need to be discussed when taking into consideration children's development. They have a significant influence on children's gender role development outside the family environment, for the reason that the literature children read contains many gender stereotypes (Parke & Stewart, 2001, p.348). Accordingly, stereotypical views of both men and women emerge in pictures, texts and vocabulary. We can often notice in children's books a policeman, being represented as a man, in both visual form (pictures) and lexical structure, formed as a compound of police and a man. "According to Kabira and Masinjila (1997) 'writers of textbooks create a human world in which children learn about what people do and how they relate to one another." (as cited in Mkuchu, 2004, p.13). As a result, by being represented to the police as a male, children will always expect males to be those that become police and not females. Therefore, stereotypical images of both men and women need to be reduced in order to give opportunities to males and females to choose by themselves what they want to be.

The influence of gender stereotypes in textbooks on children's attitudes

Everything we read affects the way we think, considerably, the texts children are exposed to, have a big influence on their thoughts and attitudes. "As children we grow up thinking about ourselves the way others think about us, and if the only books depict girls always in one role and boys always in another, our minds and our potentials will be restricted by these limitations" (Adell & Klein, 1976, as cited in Boster, 2005, p.1). Accordingly, these depicted roles make children control their behaviors that do not suit to their personalities and rather behave in a way that is considered to be "appropriate". More to the point, the content and illustration presented in textbooks may promote positive and negative thoughts about self, sex, occupations, life expectations and life chances (Mkuchu, 2004). For instance, if footballers are always presented as males in textbooks, this may negatively affect female children, and restrict their wishes to play soccer by believing that this occupation is more acceptable for males. Therefore, writers should consider excluding stereotypes from textbooks because the presence of stereotypical views can cause problems throughout children's development.

Literature review

The stereotypical characteristics assigned to different gender need to be discussed when considering school textbooks throughout which children are presented with "appropriate" behaviors. Since each student conveys different values, opinions and patterns of behavior, it is crucial for the teacher to create equality between genders in the classroom. Many theoretical agreements by researchers suggest that stereotypical images can and do influence children and their development. According to Sternberg and Williams (2002) cultural and social attitudes and stereotypes that shape how a girl grows into a woman and how a boy grows into a man are everywhere in our society. Little boys and girls are treated differently. Hence, a huge number of stereotypes are introduced in textbooks and they create beliefs that are learned as early as a child starts going to school. In view of that, the purpose of teachers in a school environment is not just to teach about the different subjects, but also to evaluate the literature they use with learners, choose the one that does not include stereotypes, and if they don't have rights to change the literature they use, at least, they should give children more knowledge about existing stereotypical issues and their relatedness to their future. Consequently, the goal should be to make students focused, motivated and engaged in the learning process, and this can be done only by providing them equal opportunities. Many researchers have tried to analyze how gender characters are represented in textbooks. Dominguez (2003) has done a similar study. She examined sexism in EFL textbooks "New Interchange Intro" written by Jack C. Richards (Cambridge University Press, 2000) used in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

The book she investigated comprises a series of three books from New Interchange Intro to New Interchange III, and it was intended for adults attending EFL classes. Her study was focused to examine the numerical weighing of male and female characters in text and illustrations, first place occurrence of males and females in conversations and how males and females were depicted in occupational roles in both text and illustrations. The data analysis showed that there was a balance between male and female representation in the text and in the illustrations. Then, occupations were assigned to male and females in non-traditional roles, thus, sexism was not discovered in texts. Men and woman had the same status in their conversations and equal importance was given to female-female, male-female, and female-male dialogues. As a result, her conclusions signified that the author in these textbooks did not include linguistic and visual bias, because he represented men and women fairly.

How is gender role depicted in children's literature?

Literature used in schools provides a great possibility to influence children's thoughts since as children start going to school the teacher and the literature are the first resources from which they get information and develop. Accordingly, it is significant evaluating the textbooks we use in schools and also being careful regarding the way we express ourselves in the classroom. "In the 1970s, feminists raised awareness about gender bias and stereotypes in children's books. Their studies allowed readers to see the many ways that books portrayed gender" (Salem, 2006, p.85). "Peterson and Lach (1990) discussed the importance of gender stereotypes in children's literature and pointed that 'male characters were more likely to be portrayed as positive, active and competent, while females were likely to be portrayed as negative, passive and incompetent"(as cited in Wolf ,2008, p.177). Even supposing that Peterson's and Lach's study was in the earlier years, it is important making known that as time passes, stereotypical images still exist in children's textbooks. "Kramer (2001) asserted that 'contemporary society often categorizes both genders with outdated and stereotypical images and biased language, all of which are considered problems in children's literature" (as cited in Tsao, 2009, p.110). Accordingly, these categorizations are seen as problems since they limit children's preferences and abilities.

> According to Rudman (1995): 'Books for children have reflected societal attitudes in limiting choices and maintaining discrimination. Most traditional books show females dressed in skirts or dresses even when they are engaged in activities inappropriate for this sort of costume. Illustrations also have conventionally placed females in passive observer roles, while males have been pictured as active' (as cited in Tsao, 2009, p.110)

Consequently, the teacher' job is to evaluate the textbooks children are exposed to, because learners often notice the classifications made between males and females.

Gender stereotyping and children's performance

Numerous studies signify that gender stereotyping has an influence on children's performance. "The basic argument has been that parents, teachers, schools and societies treat boys and girls differently, and as a result, children learn to 'do gender '" (Lippa, 2002, p.145). This is understandable, because as long as we raise children by presenting them to male and female characteristics, their minds will nurture by recognizing those distinctions and they will classify themselves to one or another sexual category. However, it is important taking into account how these classifications negatively impact learners' development. "Egan and Perry (2001) argue that feeling strong pressure for gender conformity is generally harmful (rather than beneficial) to mental health because of the limitations that are imposed on possibly fulfilling opinions, which weakness feeling of autonomy and puts children under stress" (as cited in Franz, 2009, p.6). For instance, if girls tend to act in a different way from expected female behavior, they may stop and feel under stress because they might not express themselves freely, or vice versa.

> Aronson & Steele (2005) point out that in the past decade, over hundred studies have been conducted to test the effects of stereotype threat on performance. In general, these studies have found that stereotyped groups tend to perform worse than their non-stereotypes counterparts only in the situations in which the negative stereotype was activated" (as cited in Miller, 2008, pg. 17).

Still, although these studies signify that in cases when negative stereotypes are visible, individuals perform worse, it cannot be said that other stereotypical elements do not have an influence on children.

Let's assume that the stereotype that girls play with dolls does not have any negative label, it still prevents boys from playing with these toys. Hence, if a male person likes playing with dolls, his wish may be restricted because of the existing belief that "dolls are only for girls". In spite of classifying stereotypes into positive and negative elements, we should keep in mind that "adolescents become increasingly sensitive to others' opinions and standards and use them as information sources for developing their own attitudes" (Harter 1999, as cited in Martinot & Desert, 2006, p.458).

Research design and Methodology

This study is mainly a descriptive research based on the content analysis of three English books used in Macedonian primary schools including qualitative investigation of the gender characters. The present study is conducted in order to evaluate the kind of gender roles the books promote and measure how much of gender stereotypical images the authors present. Moreover, the books selected for this study are purposely chosen because they are assumed to be books that children are mostly exposed to in the present time. Thus, the first part of this section presents the research instruments of this study which include three English textbooks for the fourth, sixth and seventh grades of primary school.

The first book "Welcome 1" is written by two native speakers of English, Elizabeth Gray and Virginia Evans intended for beginner-level students, and it is published in 1999 by Express publishing, in Newbury. It consists of fourteen units of six pages each, with songs, pronunciation twisters, games and projects. Each unit is divided into three lessons where all four skills are thoroughly practiced. The language is always presented in context, either through dialogues or texts. New vocabulary is presented at the beginning of each lesson accompanied by pictures. There are four *Revision* sections that recover vocabulary and grammar, at the end of the book there is a *Photo File Section* for pupils to decorate their projects (Gray&Evans, 1999). Each two first lessons start with the presentation of new words and each word is presented through a picture. Afterwards, a dialogue preceded by a listening activity follows. The dialogues are as well accompanied with pictures. Each dialogue is followed by a structural exercise which recycles vocabulary and grammar structures presented (Gray&Evans, 1999). Next, lesson three revises the vocabulary and the grammar structures that have been presented in the first two lessons of each unit followed by text-based exercise, projects, twister, games and songs (Gray& Evans, 1999). There are four *revision sections* in the book set out after each three units, and two extra units at the end of the book (Gray& Evans, 1999). Besides, a short *play* is also included at the end of the book, which brings learners an opportunity to take roles and act out a short story which recycles language and songs already taught (Gray & Evans, 1999).

The second "Messages 1", written by Meredith Levy and Diana Goodey, is aimed for pre-intermediate level students, and it is published by Cambridge University Press, in Cambridge in 2005. It consists of six modules of two units each. The units are divided into three steps. Each step takes students through a series of related activities (Goodey & Goodey, 2005). They each consist of *module opening pages* which contain a selection of visuals for the coming units. The units present students with the new vocabulary accompanied with pictures and matching activities. Further, there is a wide variety of presentation texts and dialogues which present the new grammar points in context and focus on the vocabulary within them (Goodey & Goodey, 2005). Besides, there are also pronunciation practices, speaking, writing, listening and reading activities along with pictures. At the end of each module extra exercises are provided for students to review the learned things, and extra readings sections on Life and Culture provide students with reading resources. After each unit there is a continuous story accompanied by a puzzle in the book with background information and comprehension questions (Goodey & Goodey, 2005). *Reviews* at the end of every module contain grammar and vocabulary summaries, consolidation exercises, study skills and progress check. Than *Coursework* activities on a connected team follow, where students build up portfolios of work (Goodey & Goodey, 2005). Finally, at the end of the book there is a reference section that contains grammar index, communicative function index, wordlist, spelling notes, lexical sets, song lyrics, and phonetic symbols.

In addition, the third "Dream Team 2" by Norman Whitney, is intended for intermediate level students, and it is published in 2001 by Oxford University Press, in Oxford. It contains of six units divided into four lessons. The first lessons are presented in the context of a Presentation story. This story is episodic, each episode is in a form of a dialogue accompanied by pictures and followed by Comprehensions in which there are two exercises. These exercises are followed by two or three Communication exercises, in which students listen to then practice the main language function in the unit (Whitney, 2001).

The second lessons consolidate students' grammatical knowledge with explanation, rules, tables, dialogues, texts and pictures. At the end of this lesson there is a *study skills* section that shows students how to develop language learning techniques that they can use in the class or at home (Whitney, 2001). The third lessons contain two sections: Vocabulary and English across the curriculum or Cultural studies. In the vocabulary section, vocabulary is organized by pictures, texts or dialogues and practices through a range of activities. In the English across the curriculum section students use English to read and talk about familiar topics and themes (Whitney, 2001). Further, the cultural studies section encourages students to compare life in the UK, USA, and other countries around the world with their own lives. The third lessons contain three sections: Skills work, Song, and Progress review. The skills work pages provide students with practice in reading, writing, listening and speaking. There is also a song based on the grammar and vocabulary that has been covered in the unit. The Progress review gives students a checklist so they can assess what they know (Whitney, 2001). Besides, after each two units there are revision units for students to get prepared for the test. Finally, at the end of the book, there are bonus units, projects works, optional stories, grammar help section and word lists.

These books are intentionally chosen because of the differences in years published, in order to see how gender roles are presented throughout different generations. With the aim to answer the research questions, code the depiction of gender roles in English textbooks and test the hypothesis, this investigation uses the following methods and measurements. First qualitative data is used, where an investigation of the gender characters is presented across six categories: professions, appearance, sports/hobbies, personality traits, family roles/housework.

Profession
A profession can be defined as a choice for education made either by males or females that categorizes the work they accomplish for living. In view of that, the intention of this investigation is on the professional activities males and females do and whether there is stereotypical labeling of what should a man's or a woman's profession be. Thus, in order to find out whether a certain gender has been categorized by the "gender appropriate" profession (e.g. policeman, teacher), the research considered analyzing the kinds of professions assigned to men and women in these three books.

Appearance
Given that many of the adjectives present males as physically strong and females as weaker human beings it is significant taking into consideration the way textbooks for children represent males and females' physical appearance based on which children make judgments about their own personal appearance. Therefore, this category takes account of the images and adjectives that describe males and females.

Sports/Hobbies
Free time activities are generally performed by males and females to lighten up them. Some of these activities include playing soccer, dancing, reading for pleasure, etc. Therefore, this study investigates whether such activities are related to one gender more that to the other, and whether the activities represent "gender suitable" sports or hobbies such as males playing soccer or females playing with their dolls.

Personality traits
Taking into consideration that many researchers discuss that men are always represented as humans who do not cry, who are emotionally stronger and sometimes illogical and women as nurturant and emotionally weaker, under this category the investigation seeks to examine how the authors represent men and women's personality and whether there is a classification in terms of gender personality.

Family roles/Housework
The study also investigates domestic roles performed by man and women and whether these roles are always associated with one gender over another. For instance, we can often come across beliefs that women are those who are expected to clean the house, take care of children or do the laundry and man are expected to cut the grass, make household repairs, wash the car and make family based decisions. Thus, it is important how the authors of the books investigated represented these kinds of roles and whether they show both males and females doing these jobs or they classify them based on gender.

In order to check how gender roles are depicted, the vocabulary, illustrations, texts and dialogues are investigated in these books. The second part of the research describes and compares the data quantitatively, where the three books used in this study are compared in terms of the occurrence of stereotypes in their content.

With the intention of finding out how all the above mentioned categories present men and women in these textbooks, the following steps are taken into consideration:

1. The vocabulary presented in books. The lexical structure of each new word presented in the textbooks is investigated and the study considered whether the new words present any stereotypical implication.
2. Each character in illustrations is examined. By illustrations are taken into account all the pictures, drawings and photographs.
3. Each text consisting of human characters investigated the ideas, views, and expressions of gender nature.
4. Dialogues which demonstrate most evidently the author's views about gender characteristics will be investigated.

Conclusions

The intention of this research was to investigate to what extent the English textbooks in Macedonia illustrate equality between men and women and compare those representations within these three books, because considering the fact that things improve throughout different generations, it was supposed that the latest published books made changes in gender demonstration and reduced stereotypes.

The findings of this study clearly show that all three authors of the books investigated expose children to biased information when considering professions males and females hold. In all three books females were seen in traditional professional roles such as: ballerinas, nurses, teachers, hairdressers, flight attendants, and other that could not be found in males. On the other hand, males were represented as soccer players, waiters, pilots, securities, guitarists and astronauts. Naturally, women could not be seen holding these professions. Based on these representations, it is clear that the authors are deficient in knowledge about the effect of stereotypes in children's development, and they do not consider excluding stereotypes. Silber (2007) points out that:

> Gender fairness is as important to a girl who dreams of becoming an astronaut as it is for a boy who wants to be an elementary school teacher. It reduces the gender disparities that are detrimental to classroom interactions and in testing; it encourages all students to pursue a variety of school subjects, putting no limit on what they can accomplish." (pg.74)

Not only professions were more dominant in terms of gender stereotypes in all three books, but there were also disparities when considering sports and hobbies. In every book investigated females could be seen in some fixed roles such as dancing ballet, playing with dolls, playing tennis, reading about fashion, sports and hobbies that males did not engage in. Whereas males could be seen playing soccer, reading motorcycle magazines, playing with robots, and playing the guitar. Yet again, these representations imply that the authors did not think about gender fairness, backing up Sternberg and Williams' idea that: "Cultural and social attitudes and stereotypes that shape how a girl grows into a woman and how a boy grows into a man are everywhere in our society. Little boys and girls are treated differently. They grow up exposed to different values, lessons, morals, encouragements, and expectations."(p.212)

Lastly, it appears to be sufficient confirmation to bring to a close that the textbooks examined demonstrate stereotypical representations of the two genders. The authors did not achieve in evading traditional roles and portrayed both genders in unfair manner. Also, this unjust presentation of gender characteristics may possibly restrict learners' abilities. In view of that, it is vital discussing with young learners the different items that a textbook might incorporate and hearten their progress through conversations, games or any other teaching means that persuade gender equality.

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Gender stereotypes compounded and intersecting with other stereotypes have a disproportionate negative impact on certain groups of women, such as women from minority or indigenous groups, women with disabilities, women from lower caste groups or with lower economic status, migrant women, etc. It seeks to raise awareness of, and encourage advocacy related to, judicial stereotyping in gender-based violence cases.

integration of these children within host. country schools and also maintain cultural. and linguistic links to the country of origin, so as to facilitate possible school reintegra-tion.â€Â tem of Republic of Macedonia. "Intercul-tural education happens naturally through the â€˜hidden curriculumâ€™ of the social and visual world within which the child lives." (Intercultural Education in the Primary School, 2005). In addition, preparing text-. books and workbooks which will incorpo-rate a higher number of topics and themesÂ 6. A STEREOTYPE is a simplified generalization of the characteristics of dif-ferent groups in the society (categorized according to race, ethnicity, gender, profes-sion, etc.) based without having enough information and without critical thinking. This usually has offensive connotation.