

## Analyzing Curriculum Materials from a Gender Perspective: Grade Eight English Textbook of Ethiopia in Focus

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine the place of some gender issues in curriculum materials of Ethiopia. To achieve this purpose, a qualitative content analysis was made on the country's Grade Eight English textbook. The analysis was conducted on two interrelated categories: nature of narrations and sensitivity of illustrations. In doing so, a nine-stage content analysis model, developed by Frankel and Wallen (2006), was employed. The analysis revealed that in all of the evaluation criteria, the textbook was gender-biased favoring the male gender. For instance, most of the passages and stories presented in the textbook were narrating the fame, contributions, and achievements of the masculine gender. The study also revealed that the great majority of the role models in the textbook under consideration were representing the male gender. Besides, most of the illustrations presented in the textbook were male-dominated that convey unequal power relationships between the two genders. Overall, from the findings of the present analysis, it was understood that some gender issues that need to be considered while writing a language textbook were not adequately addressed. Finally, the implications of these findings for future research and policy initiatives are briefly indicated.

**Keywords:** content analysis, gender analysis, gender bias, narrations, role models, illustrations

## INTRODUCTION

Since long ago, education has been considered as a means of combating poverty, ensuring sustainable development, and bringing about social change. The role it plays in improving social relations and facilitating economic, social, and political developments is also highly recognized (Reeves & Baden, 2000; Arbache, Kolev, & Filipiak, 2010). However, this role of education is less likely to be realized if many decisive issues are not addressed first. For instance, education cannot play its role in social transformation and socio-economic development if issues such as gender inequality, bias, and stereotype are addressed in society.

Thus, narrowing gender disparity has become an important agenda for governments and international organizations that work in the education sector (Arbache, Kolev, & Filipiak, 2010; UNESCO, 2000, 2009). For this purpose, several international educational declarations were announced. Women's Educational Equity Act (declared in 1974), World Declaration on Education For All and the Dakar Framework for Action are some of the declarations that make girls' education and gender equality at the top of international educational agenda (Enguday,

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2008; UNESCO, 2000, 2004, 2009). In these international legal instruments, the role of curriculum materials in relieving gender bias and stereotype was given a substantial place.

Gender-responsive curriculum materials play an important role in helping students become gender sensitive. To play this role, they should present a balanced and fair view of the roles and responsibilities of the two genders. Unfortunately, by omitting or inadequately representing girls and women, curriculum materials in many countries have been perpetuating gender bias and inequality (Enguday, 2008; UNESCO, 2008, 2009). As Enguday (2008) stated, the problem arises when sexist social perceptions, values, and expectations that reflect gender bias, but perceived as normal, are included in the curriculum. Gachukia and Chung (2005) on their part contend that gender bias in schools emanates from the unintentional acts of teachers and the instructional approaches they employed. Though the bias could be for both genders, as many studies reported, most frequently it is against the female gender.

As curriculum materials, play decisive roles in realizing formal educational goals, their role in shaping students' attitudes towards the cultural practices of their society is worth mentioning. Their impact on students' perceptions towards gender and gender equality / inequality is also important (Gachukia & Chung, 2005). Hence, textbooks prepared for instructional purposes must treat both males and females with fair contents and illustrations. This is because the images presented in textbooks will have strong impact on students' perceptions of gender and gender equality (Jasmani et al. 2006). Therefore, it was with this idea in mind that the present study was conducted.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Gender equality has been at the top of both national and international educational discourses, policy documents, conventions, and declarations. However, many studies conducted in different parts of the world explored that curriculum materials have been suffering from the problem of gender inequality, bias, and stereotype.

For instance, the UNESCO (2008) reported that in the textbooks of many countries, women and girls were depicted in highly stereotyped roles. This study further explored that girls and women were mostly portrayed in domestic and traditional occupations while boys and men were depicted in exciting and worthwhile occupations. Likewise, based on her international study conducted in Chile, Georgia, Pakistan, and Thailand, Blumberg (2008) reported that though policy reforms which intended to reduce gender bias in textbooks were attempted, the results achieved hitherto were unsatisfactory. According to her report, gender bias in textbooks was an invisible obstacle that daunted females' equality in education and beyond.

Similarly, a number of studies that aimed at investigating gender representation in *English as Foreign Language* (hereafter EFL) textbooks have been conducted in different parts of the world. Most of these studies explored that EFL textbooks used for instructional purposes were not gender responsive. For instance, the study conducted by Amini and Birjandi (2012), with the aim of examining Iranian high school EFL textbooks focusing on the criteria of visibility, firstness, generic masculine, and sex-linked occupations, reported that in all of these

criteria there were evidences of sexism and gender bias. The study conducted by Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012), focusing on the criteria of visibility and occupational roles, also reported that women were less visible than males both in the texts and pictures of EFL textbooks.

Gender analyses of EFL textbooks conducted in other Asian countries also explored that most EFL textbooks were not gender-responsive. In line with this, Shah (2012) who investigated the nature of English textbooks in Pakistan focusing on the omission/visibility and role model representation reported that in both criteria the textbooks favored male characters. The study conducted by Sano, Iida and Hardy (2001) on Japanese EFL textbooks also came up with findings that confirm gender bias in the country's EFL textbooks.

The problem of gender bias in textbooks is universal that prevails almost in all parts of the world. The study of Pesikan and Marinkovic (2006) conducted in Serbia is a good example in this regard. This study reported the following problem.

... boys were the main exponents of intellectual activities; they were shown as more intellectually inclined, physically more active, .... boys were the active ones, girls following them and watching what they were doing. Boys were the ones who took part in sports and intellectual activities; they did research, made experiments and were involved in all the dangerous situations and in situations where there was a problem to be solved. In the family contexts, mothers and daughters were laying the table while fathers and sons waited at the table; a child in the street was held by the hand only by its mother, etc. (pp. 400-401).

In sub-Saharan Africa too, some studies explored the prevalence of gender bias in English textbooks. For instance, Mustapha (2014), who studied the representation of female and male roles in selected English textbooks of Nigerian junior secondary schools, explored that while women were over-represented in roles confined to the home domain, males were over-represented in roles in the public sphere and in highly professional skills. The same problem was also reported in Zimbabwe. In this regard, Nyevero and Memory (2014) explored that primary school English textbooks of that country were not in line with the major principles of gender-responsive curriculum material.

Coming to Ethiopia, textbook evaluation in general and gender analysis of textbooks in particular, is a neglected area of inquiry. Though, some gender-related studies have been conducted in the country, they tend to focus on girls' academic performance and participation (e.g., Enguday, 2008; Genet, 1991), the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and strategies (e.g., Alemayehu, 2015), gender inequality in higher education institutions (e.g., Molla & Gale, 2015), and other related issues. As of my best knowledge, only Solomon (2014) had conducted a full-fledged gender analysis on an Ethiopian EFL textbook. This study, which was conducted as a fulfillment for an MA degree at Haromaya University, Ethiopia, had thoroughly analyzed Grade 11 English textbook for gender representation. In this study, the researcher generalized that the textbook was not gender-sensitive as girls and women were represented less than boys and men both in the texts and illustrations of the textbook.

The above review of studies confirm the rightness of Blumberg (2008) who unambiguously asserted that gender bias in textbooks has been a universal problem that persists quite in a similar pattern. These general milieus, both at national and international levels, and particularly the dearth of adequate textbook evaluation in general and gender analysis of textbooks in Ethiopia, were the main reasons to conduct this study. The present study, therefore, aims to analyze the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook to understand whether it is a gender-responsive curriculum material or not. More specifically, this study aimed to scrutinize the nature of narrations in passages, stories, role models, and the sensitivity of illustrations presented in Grade Eight English textbook vis-à-vis the basic principles of gender responsive pedagogy.

In line with the abovementioned purposes of the study, the following research questions were formulated. To what extent are *narrations* in Grade Eight English textbook gender responsive? To what extent are illustrations gender-sensitive in terms of occupational roles and power relationships?

### **Gender Analysis Framework**

According to Kabira and Masinjila (1997), the aim of gender analysis in textbooks is to understand the gender dynamics of the textbook and to arrive at conclusions concerning its gender responsiveness. Many scholars contend that language textbooks, in general, and EFL textbooks, in particular, have the possibility of depicting imbalance representation of the two sexes (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Tahan, 2014). They may also present stereotyped examples and sexist language which could affect students' future lives. These ideas imply that gender analysis in EFL textbooks is quite necessary.

The methodology and components of gender analysis studies are shaped by how gender issues are understood (Reeves & Baden, 2000). In the literature, there are different gender analysis frameworks. Of course, the purpose of the analysis determines the analysis framework. For instance, if the researcher wants to analyze a textbook's illustrations, she/he may frame her/his study focusing on illustration criteria. On the other hand, if the researcher aspires to investigate many other issues of a textbook, she/he is expected to have a broader gender analysis framework (Gachukia & Chung, 2005; Kabira & Masinjila, 1997).

Some scholars introduced different frameworks of gender analysis. For instance, Kabira and Masinjila (1997) have introduced a comprehensive framework in their publication entitled *ABC of Gender Analysis*. Their framework is somewhat all-inclusive having two major interrelated parts: *text* and *illustration* parts. The first part focuses on the investigation of the nature of *narrations*, *activities*, *locus* (place of activity), *power* (decision making), and *language use* (naming, use of nouns and pronouns, use of generics and other language issues). The second part, i.e. the illustration part, on the other hand gives attention to *activities*, *visibility*, and *power relationship* of both sexes (Kabira & Masinjila, 1997). Gachukia and Chung (2005) also came up with a somewhat similar gender analysis framework. According to these scholars, a gender analysis of textbooks should focus on the following five criteria: *narration*, *speech*, *language use*, *power control*, and *illustration*.

Some researchers, on the other hand, use narrower gender analysis frameworks. For instance, Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) investigated EFL textbooks on the basis of two criteria: visibility and occupational roles. In somewhat a narrower approach Mustapha (2014) and Pesikan and Marinkovic (2006) analyzed textbooks using only one criterion, i.e., *occupational roles* and *illustrations* respectively.

In this study, an adapted gender analysis framework, which is the synthesis of the ideas of the above scholars, was used. To be specific, the present study attempts to analyze the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook focusing on the following two major evaluation criteria: nature of *narrations* and sensitivity of *illustrations*. In the first criterion, attention was given for issues of gender *visibility*, *image* and *hegemony*. Similarly, in the second criterion, *occupational roles* and *power relationships* were emphasized. In order to examine the place of these sensitive gender issues, a thorough analysis was made on phrases, statements, paragraphs, passages, stories, dialogues, and illustrations included in the textbook under consideration.

## **METHOD**

As indicated earlier, this study is concerned with the analysis of Grade Eight English textbook used in the Ethiopian upper primary schools. To achieve this purpose, a qualitative content analysis method was used. Content analysis, with a focus on identifying patterns in texts, is one of the widely used methods in the social sciences (Krippendorff, 2004; Frankel & Wallen, 2006). Qualitative content analysis is concerned with the exploration of the meanings of underlying messages.

Different scholars suggest different steps that need to be followed in the process of content analysis. In this study, a due attention was given to the steps and procedures recommended by Frankel and Wallen (2006, pp. 485-491). According to these methodologists, content analysts are expected to pass through the following nine major steps. These are; (1) determining objectives, (2) defining terms, (3) specifying unit of analysis, (4) locating relevant data, (5) developing rationale, (6) developing sampling plan, (7) formulating coding categories, (8) maintaining reliability and validity, and (9) analyzing data. In the following paragraphs, a brief description of these steps in the context of my study is presented.

### **Determine Objectives**

Like any research design, the process of content analysis begins by clearly determining the objective of the analysis. In this regard, the present study aimed to analyze whether the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook is a gender-responsive curriculum material or not. More specifically, it aimed to scrutinize the passages, stories, role models, and illustrations presented in the textbook vis-à-vis the basic principles of gender responsive pedagogy.

### **Define Terms**

According to Frankel and Wallen (2006), important terms of the research problem should be clearly defined either beforehand or as the study progresses. Bearing this idea in mind, the following key terms were defined before the actual content analysis process begins.

Gender	It refers to the social expectations, rules and norms attached to femininity and masculinity.
Gender Analysis	The systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and social relations in order to identify, understand and redress inequities based on gender
Gender Bias	A strong feeling in favor of or against one gender, often not based on fair judgment.
Gender Equality	It refers to the provision of equal conditions, treatment and opportunity for both men and women to realize their full potential, human rights and dignity.
Gender Responsiveness	It refers to taking action to correct gender bias so as to ensure gender equity and equality.
Gender Sensitivity	It is the ability to recognize gender issues. It is the beginning of gender awareness.
Gender Stereotype	A fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular gender, but which is often not true in reality.
Illustrations	Pictures, photos and related visuals found in a textbook.
Patriarchy	Systemic societal structures that institutionalize male physical, social and economic power over women
Text	The main printed part of a textbook, not the pictures.

### **Specify the Unit of Analysis**

The units to be used for conducting and reporting the analysis should be specified before the beginning of the analysis (Frankel & Wallen, 2006). The units of analysis used in this study were words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, passages, stories and illustrations that embody message about gender representation, role models, occupational roles and power relations.

### **Locate Relevant Data**

This is a step where the researcher selects the material to be analyzed. As already stated, the material selected for this gender analysis was the Ethiopian Grade Eight EFL textbook. The textbook was developed and distributed by the fund that the federal government received from the World Bank through the *General Education Quality Improvement Program* (GEQIP). The book was published by the Kampala based *MK publishers Ltd.*, Uganda. It was authored by both Ethiopian and expatriate English language experts.

### **Develop a Rationale**

The reason to select English textbook for my study was due to the fact that language textbooks which present many gender related issues, both in their texts and illustrations, are suitable for gender analysis. The reason to select Grade Eight, on the other hand, was due to lack of gender analysis studies on primary school EFT textbooks of Ethiopia. Though not adequate, an attempt was made, by Solomon (2014), to analyze Grade 11 EFL textbook at the secondary school level.

### **Develop a Sampling Plan**

The widely used sampling method in qualitative content analysis is purposive sampling (Frankel & Wallen, 2006). In the case of this study too, the textbook under consideration was not sampled in terms of chapters, passages, stories, and illustrations. Instead, all parts of the textbook were taken into consideration. The number of units, passages, stories, role models and illustrations included in the Ethiopian Grade Eight EFL textbook were 14, 16, 4, 10, and 27 respectively. All units, passages and stories of the textbook were thoroughly investigated in line with the basic issues of gender responsive pedagogy. The same was true for illustrations of the textbook.

### **Formulate Coding Categories**

Category formulation is at the heart of any content analysis. Categories flow from the research questions anchoring review of relevant literature. In this study, the following categories of analysis were formulated: nature of *narrations* and sensitivity of *illustrations*. Within the first category, issues of gender visibility, image and hegemony were given due consideration. Likewise, in the second category, emphasis was given to occupational roles and power relationships.

### **Reliability and Validity**

As Frankel and Wallen (2006) posited, one mechanism to ensure validity in content analysis is checking the manifest content against the latent content. This idea was well reflected in this study. That is, after understanding both the manifest (surface) and latent (underlying) contents, attempts were made to compare and contrast the meaning of the two types of contents. Besides, both formal and informal discussions were made with curriculum experts on the gender analysis framework and the data gathering and analysis methods of the study. These tasks were found to be valuable in enhancing the validity of this study.

### **Analyze Data**

In this study, qualitative data analysis techniques were used. The analysis was undertaken using two themes and six sub-themes that reflect the purpose and research questions of the study. Underneath each theme and sub-theme, qualitative data analysis methods, such as description, narration, and direct quotation were used.

## **RESULTS**

## Nature of Narrations

The first major purpose of this study was to examine the nature of narrations in the paragraphs and stories of the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook. In the textbook, a total of 26 passages or stories were presented. Of this number, 11 were gender-neutral as they were dealing with non-human beings. The remaining 15 passages or stories, however, were gender-related. In this section, therefore, the results on the nature of the 15 gender-related passages or stories are presented under the following three sub-themes.

### *Less-visibility of girls and women*

As indicated above, in the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook, 15 gender-related passages or stories were presented. However, the majority of the passages or stories were narrating about the male gender (see Table 1).

Table 1

### *Visibility of the two genders in passages and stories*

Passage or story	Gender Narrated	Page (s)
The Flying princess	F	12-13
Story about Alem	F	19
Story about Hajera	F	21
An Encounter with bullies- Part I	F	24-25
An Encounter with bullies- Part II	F	26-27
An Encounter with bullies- Part III	F	28
Story about a father	M	48
A boy who loved school	M	54-55
Bilharzias is a deadly disease	M	66
Story about Albert Einstein	M	73-74
Invention of the Radio	M	160-161
World's Great Leader	M	170
Story about Afework Tekele	M	174
Biography of Mr. Kofi Anna	M	176
The Hare and Monkey	M	182-183

As can be seen from Table 1, out of the 15 passages or stories presented in the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook, girls and women were represented only in six of them while boys and men were represented in the remaining nine passages or stories. Though the difference might not be considered as such exaggerated and making an exact ratio of the two genders could be difficult, however, from these data, it is possible to understand that girls and women, as



compared to boys and men, were found to be less-visible in the passages and stories. Besides, from these data, it is possible to discern that the majority of passages and stories presented in the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook were gender-insensitive. This is because they did not narrate the stories, works, and achievements of girls and women equally and fairly as their boys or men counterparts. As presented in the following sections, many other gender-related problems were also identified in the different paragraphs and stories of the textbook.

### *Negative feminine image*

In the textbook under investigation, girls and women were not fairly treated in most of the passages they were presented. To be specific, out of the six passages that narrate about girls and women, it was only in two that they were described positively (see Table 2).

Table 2

#### *The image of girls and women in passages and stories*

Passage or story	Description
The Flying princess	A paragraph narrating the brilliant achievements of a famous Ethiopian athlete and Olympic double medal winner.
Story about Alem	A story about a girl focusing on her mistakes and weaknesses.
Story about Hajera	It is a story that narrates the mistakes and weaknesses of one girl
An Encounter with bullies- Part I	A passage that narrates the story of one girl being perpetrated by three boys
An Encounter with bullies- Part II	A passage narrating the story of one girl being perpetrated by three boys (continued)
An Encounter with bullies- Part III	A passage narrating the victory of a girl over the three perpetrators.

As presented in Table 2, only the first and sixth passages were describing a woman and a girl respectively with a positive image. In the first passage, the success story of the famous Ethiopian athlete, Tirunesh Dibaba, and most importantly the implications of her victory for national pride and image were vividly narrated. In the sixth passage too, a story of one girl who was able to revenge three boys who committed perpetration on her was attractively narrated. Nevertheless, in the second, third, fourth, and fifth passages/stories, though the stories of girls were presented, the feminine gender was not narrated in a positive manner. The following specific examples taken from these four passages, I believe, could strengthen this finding.

In some passages and stories of Grade Eight English textbook, females were described as forgetful, coward, cruel, and weak. For instance, in the second story presented in Table 2, the female character named Alem was described as doing mistakes. The following story quoted from page 19 of the textbook epitomizes this contention.

One night, Alem forgot to close the main gate at night. She also forgot the clothes hanging on the line to dry. Since no one asked her about the clothes, she went to sleep anyway. When she woke up the next day, the clothes had been stolen.

In this story, the female character was depicted as forgetful. Due to this ‘problem’ of the girl, the clothes of the family were stolen by thieves. From this passage, therefore, students might consider females as negligent and wrongdoers.

In another story of the textbook (a story about Hajera), a female character was depicted as coward. The following excerpt is a good evidence for this.

It was midnight when Hajera woke up from her deep sleep only to hear sounds coming from the living room. She was scared. There were people talking. She thought they were thieves so she grabbed her mobile phone and called the police. The policemen arrived in ten minutes and by then, Hajera was hiding under her bed. The doors were locked. They looked through the windows and listened. The only sound they heard was from the TV Hajera had left on (p. 21).

From the above story, Hajera, was described very frightened and “ridiculous”. She was also depicted as silly and uncritical who could not differentiate the sound of a TV from the sound of real men (thieves).

Some passages of Grade Eight English textbook also show females as cruel and fault finder. A good example in this regard is the following excerpt taken from a story titled An Encounter with bullies- Part I.

... My aunt was very cruel and she always found fault with me. She was extremely harsh. Whenever she found out that I wasn’t doing my chores, she would yell at me and order me to work in the garden for long hours. Each time she yelled, her face turned fierce like that of a crocodile. To escape her wrath I would extend my time in the garden, under the hot sun... (p. 24).

In these statements, the aunt was described as cruel, faulty, and harsh. The authors of the textbook even tried to compare her with a crocodile. All these descriptions may lead students to develop a negative image for females.

### ***Male hegemony***

In many stories and passages of the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook, boys and men were described as courageous, inventors, scientists, and leaders (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Male hegemony in passages and stories*

Passage or story	Description
Story about a father	Narrates story of a man.
A boy who loved school	It is a passage that narrates the story of a boy.
Bilharzias is a deadly disease	Narrates the story of a famous Ethiopian scientist.
Story about Albert Einstein	Narrates the story of Albert Einstein.
Invention of the Radio	Narrates the story of Guglielmo Marconi.
World's Great Leader	Narrates the story of the late Nelson Mandela.
Story about Afework Tekele	Narrates the story of a famous Ethiopian painter.
Biography of Mr. Kofi Anna	Narrates the story of Kofi Anan.
The Hare and Monkey	Passage narrating the ability of two male animals to trick

As indicated in Table3, out of the 15 passages and stories presented in the textbook, nine of them were narrating the stories, encounters, fame, contributions, or achievements of the masculine gender. In these passages and stories, men and boys, both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian nationals, were given prominence. For instance, in the third passage presented in Table 3, the story of a famous Ethiopian male scientist, Aklilu Lemma, is narrated. His professional competence, particularly his ability of critically observing things, is described. Besides, the scientist's contribution to the advancement of his profession and indeed to the peoples of the world is vividly narrated.

In the same manner, the fame, talent, and contributions of some prominent men such as Albert Einstein (the renewed German scientist) and Guglielmo Marconi (inventor of the radio) are given much attention. Unfortunately, in the passages and stories of the textbook, one cannot get the narration of a female scientist. From this approach of presenting passages and stories, therefore, students might implicitly learn that only men are capable of making scientific discoveries/inventions and becoming a scientist.

In the passages of Grade Eight English textbook, the success stories of male politicians, diplomats, and leaders were also given a substantial place. In this regard, the works and contributions of the late Koffi Annan (a Ghanaian diplomat and former Secretary-General of the UN) and the late Nelson Mandela (a South African freedom fighter and leader) are very important. However, the story of a single female leader or diplomat was never presented in the passages of the textbook. From these passages, therefore, students may learn that positions like political leadership and diplomacy are reserved only to men. The stories about Afework Tekele (a prestigious Ethiopian painter), Mengistu Lemma (a known Ethiopian writer), and Sebat Gebregziabher (a famous Ethiopian writer) are among the stories that could imply occupations related to art and literature are reserved for men.

To sum up, many of the passages and stories presented in the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook were not gender-sensitive. In most of the passages and stories, girls and women were not represented. To make things worse, some passages and stories depict them as weak,

cruel, and powerless while treating boys and men as courageous, innovators, professionals, and leaders.

### ***Uneven role model presentation***

In different parts of the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook, ten role models were presented. However, eight of the role models were representing the masculine gender (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Role models presented in different parts of the textbook*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Sex</i>
Tirunesh Dibaba	Athlete	<b>F</b>
Dr. Aklilu Lemma	Scientist	M
Albert Einstein	Scientist	M
Mengistu Lemma	Author	M
Sibhat Gebregziabher	Author	M
Dr. Wangari Maathai	Scientist	<b>F</b>
Nelson Mandela	Leader and freedom fighter	M
Kitaw Ejigu	Scientist	M
Afewerk Tekle	Painter	M
Kofi Annan	Leader and diplomat	M

As it can be seen from Table 4, it is only two of the role models, i.e. Tirunesh Dibaba (an Ethiopian athlete) and Dr. Wangari Maathai (a Kenyan scientist) that represent the feminine gender. This finding entails, in terms of role model presentation, the textbook under consideration was not a gender-sensitive curriculum material.

### **Sensitivity of Illustrations**

The Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook is rich in illustrations. In the textbook, 57 illustrations depicting 141 individuals are included. Besides, 19 illustrations that are not related to gender, i.e. pictures that show non-human beings, are also presented. In this part, therefore, an analysis of the latent messages of these illustrations is presented. The data collated and the findings obtained in this regard are presented under the following three sub-themes.

### ***Stereotyped occupational roles***

In many illustrations of the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook, females were portrayed performing different traditional activities. Some pictures taken from different pages of the textbook confirm this contention. For instance, out of the total number of traditional activities (25) depicted in various pictures, 16 of them were assigned to females. It is only in nine pictures that men were shown doing traditional activities. In these illustrations, most of the traditional activities such as washing clothes, fetching water, and pottery were assigned to females. The illustrations depicted on pages 62, 105 and 136 (a, b & C) of the textbook are good examples in this regard.

On the contrary, from the total of nine modern professional activities shown in the illustrations, only one picture shows a woman performing a professional activity, i.e. painting. In the remaining eight pictures, men were shown as a scientist, leader, and the like. For instance, on page 61, four pictures showing a scientist performing different professional activities are presented. In addition, four pictures showing the late Nelson Mandela doing different works of a leader are shown. Unfortunately, in the textbook, one cannot get a single picture showing a woman doing the work of either a scientist or a leader.

### ***The home-public dichotomy***

Out of the 34 activities depicted in the illustrations of the textbook, half of them (17) were domestic/home work while the remaining 17 were outdoor/public activities. However, out of the 17 domestic work, 15 of them were held by the females. It is only in two pictures that men were depicted performing domestic work. In most of these pictures, indoor activities such as child caring, cooking, and coffee preparation were shown as the responsibilities of girls and women. The illustrations depicted on pages 43 (right), 70 (D), and 105 (A, B, C, D) of the textbook are good examples in this regard.

However, the reverse was true for outdoor work. That is, out of the 17 out-door work; 15 of them were assigned to the males, while the remaining two were to the females. The pictures presented on page 54 (a boy working on a farm) and page 81 (two men in a shop), for instance, could imply that boys and men are responsible for outdoor activities.

### ***Patriarchal power relationship***

Another problem reflected in some of the illustrations of the textbook was *an imbalance of power relationship*. In the textbook, pictures showing unfair relationships between the two genders are depicted. In this regard, at least two illustrations could be mentioned.

The first illustration, which is found on pages 180-181, pictorially shows a popular Ethiopian (African) story about a wise man and a woman who thinks her husband does not love her. In those pictures, the woman is depicted passively requesting the wise man a solution for the problem she faced from her husband. In the pictures, the wise man was portrayed giving an advice and direction in support of this troubled woman. In one of the pictures, the woman is

portrayed reporting to the wise man how she had implemented the advice she received from him. The man is also depicted being proud of what he did for the woman. He is also shown giving another advice and direction to the woman. Generally, in the pictures the woman was depicted passively receiving advice and directions from the man.

Students reading this textbook, therefore, might interpret the message of these pictures negatively. For instance, they might construe that males are more knowledgeable and skillful than females in solving difficult societal problems. The pictures might also embody a message that women are dependents of men for their wise advice and assistance when they faced complex social problems. Surprisingly, a single picture that shows the opposite side of this story is never illustrated in the textbook.

Another illustration, which is found on page 105, also portrays an unfair message vis-à-vis gender equality. In that illustration, five interrelated pictures showing the process of a coffee ceremony is presented. The first four pictures depict only females preparing coffee for the family. The last picture, on the other hand, shows the male family members being served in the coffee ceremony. In that illustration, a total of 8 individuals are shown. Of this number, four individuals (three of them males) were around the table enjoying the coffee prepared by the females. These pictures might connote coffee preparation is the duty of females, and that serving the family is their responsibility. Of course, this message is consistent with the social reality of Ethiopia. In Ethiopia and many other African countries, coffee preparation and other domestic activities are reserved only for girls and women. Even though the authors had reflected the social reality of the country, through these pictures they were perpetuating this unfair and traditional practice of society. In other words, as many critical curriculum theorists assert, instead of transforming a society's culture, textbooks explicitly or implicitly reproduce social inequalities and injustices.

To sum up, though some gender-neutral and gender-sensitive illustrations were included in Grade Eight EFL textbook, some stereotyped illustrations were also found. In these illustrations, females were depicted performing traditional and domestic work. On the contrary, there was a tendency to show males working in outdoor and modern work. Besides, some illustrations that show uneven power relationships between the two sexes were explored. Overall, it could be concluded that illustrations that favored the male gender were dominant in the textbook under investigation. That is, in terms of visibility, activities and power relations, women and girls were not represented equally and fairly as their men and boys counterparts.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to many gender analysis studies, gender bias and stereotype are pervasive in the texts and illustrations of textbooks (Blumberg, 2008; Gachukia & Chung, 2005; UNESCO, 2008, 2009). As Gachukia and Chung (2005) stated, narrations and illustrations presented in textbooks explicitly or implicitly depict one gender passive, weak, and powerless while making the other active, strong, and powerful. It was, therefore, with this idea in mind that this study has

attempted to examine the Ethiopian Grade Eight EFL textbook's linguistic and non-linguistic features.

However, as already indicated, the textbook was not found a gender-responsive curriculum material. For instance, the great majority of the passages and stories presented in the textbook were narrating the fame, contributions, and achievements of the masculine gender. Stated another way, most of the passages were found to be gender-biased as they failed to narrate the stories, work, and achievements of girls and women fairly as their boys and men counterparts. This finding is consistent with many international studies that were conducted on the same issue. For instance, Blumberg (2008), Enguday (2008), and the UNESCO (2008) reported that many textbook writers presented girls and women with highly stereotypical and negative images. Tahan (2015), Mustapha (2014), and Healy (2009) too reported that textbooks used in many educational institutions were perpetuating male hegemony.

As many studies revealed, the number of *role models* presented in textbooks could favor only one gender. Furthermore, lack of role models in the textbook, for either gender, can affect students in terms of their achievement. As Jasmani et al. (2006) indicated, the frequency of male and female role models in textbooks has a far-reaching impact on students' learning. According to these scholars, students may feel that their textbook does not acknowledge their existence if their group is ignored or sidelined. In order to determine whether or not this issue has been addressed in Grade Eight English textbook, role models presented in the textbook were analyzed. Accordingly, it was explored that the great majority of the role models in Grade Eight EFL textbook were representing the masculine gender. This finding indicates that in terms of famous person or role model presentation, the textbook in focus was gender-biased.

In textbooks, especially in primary school textbooks, illustrations play an important role not only in presenting academic information in a vivid and concise manner but also in motivating students' interest of reading and learning. However, if they are not properly presented, illustrations will have a negative effect not only on students' present learning but also on their future social lives (Porreca, cited in Bahman & Rahimi, 2010). Supporting this idea, many studies reported that both the manifest and latent message of illustrations had enduring impacts on students' identity and their role in society (Blumberg, 2008; Gachukia & Chung, 2005; Kabira & Masinjila, 1997). The frequency and message of pictures, photos, or other images can demonstrate gender stereotyping (Blumberg, 2008; Gachukia & Chung, 2005; Kabira & Masinjila, 1997). In this regard, Porreca, cited in Bahman and Rahimi (2010), indicate that when there is female invisibility, the implicit message is that women are not as important as men, or that their contributions are not as worthwhile to mention as that of men's.

As already indicated, the majority of the illustrations presented in the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook were male-dominated. For instance, most of the illustrations that deal with activities portrayed women and girls performing traditional and domestic work while men and boys working outdoor and professional activities. Besides, illustrations that convey unequal power relationships between women and men were included. These findings are quite consistent with the findings of Blumberg (2008), Solomon (2014), Amini and Birjandi (2012), Bahman and

Rahimi (2010), UNESCO (2008) and Pesikan and Marinkovic (2006). In all these studies, patriarchal model of gender representation was explored in the illustrations of textbooks.

In developing countries like Ethiopia, life in society and the hidden curricula within schools implicitly or explicitly inculcate messages that force students to believe some occupations are to be held by a specific gender. In so doing, various traditional activities, especially those in the home domain, are treated as if they are the responsibilities of females while professional and public domain work for the males. This unfair and stereotyped gender role allocation should never be reflected in the texts and illustrations of textbooks if the problem is to be reversed through education. In other words, preparing textbooks by reflecting the unfair and stereotyped gender roles practiced by a patriarchal society implies perpetuating this unacceptable, undemocratic, and unjust traditional practice in society. For this reason, textbook writers need to be sensitive while selecting and depicting illustrations. In this regard, taking time to check whether there is a fair representation of the two genders and that the implicit message each illustration embodies is free from any possible gender bias and stereotype needs to be considered as critical.

To sum up, the findings of this study witnessed a substantial rhetoric-reality gap with regard to gender equality in the Ethiopian school curriculum materials. The study also confirms the idea that the formulation of smart gender policies and strategies at a macro level is inadequate to ensure gender equality in the education sector and beyond. In Ethiopia, gender issues were given a considerable attention in different policy documents and various national legal instruments. The country's constitution, education policy, and national policy on women are just a few of the documents in which gender equality was promised at a policy level. Nevertheless, as this study revealed, this national promise was not satisfactorily kept even at the curriculum (textbook) level.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study sought to examine the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook vis-à-vis the major principles of a gender responsive curriculum material. However, as the analysis revealed, in all categories of the analysis, the textbook was found to be gender-biased favoring the male gender. Most of the passages and stories presented in the textbook tend to narrate the fame, contributions, and achievements of only the masculine gender. The great majority of the role models presented in the textbook also favored the male gender. Besides, the majority of the illustrations presented in the textbook were found to be male-dominated conveying unequal and patriarchal power relationships between the two genders. From these findings, therefore, it is possible to conclude that some gender issues that need to be considered while writing a language textbook were not adequately addressed the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook.

This study has far-reaching implications for the textbook analyzed and beyond. As far as the Ethiopian Grade Eight English textbook is concerned, the study implies the need to revision as the illustrations and texts it presented are likely to perpetuate patriarchal beliefs among Ethiopian primary school students and perhaps in society outside schools. The findings of the



present study also suggest the need to conduct further research on more school textbooks. In so doing, it is advisable to incorporate the views of teachers, students, textbook writers, and other major stakeholders so as to develop a better and more comprehensive understanding on the issue at hand.

The finding of this study also implies the need to revisit the methods of gender mainstreaming in the education sector. As far as the process of textbook preparation is concerned, giving attention to the following issues, I believe, could contribute a lot in ameliorating the situation. As an immediate solution, the ministry of education needs to undertake some intervention measures that aimed at raising textbook writers' awareness and competence in relation to the preparation of gender-responsive curriculum material. Provision of training for textbook writers on diverse issues of gender-responsive pedagogy could be one valuable measure in this regard. Besides, involving both gender and curriculum experts in the process of textbook preparation could meaningfully contribute in mitigating the problem.

Finally, the present study implies the need to develop the culture of undertaking gender analysis on new school textbooks. In this regard, the ministry of education and regional education bureaus in Ethiopia need to take the initiative. Based on the findings of such analyses, concerned bodies need to take the necessary measures before full-scale distribution of textbooks. This, in turn, could play an important role in minimizing unnecessary financial, time, and energy wastages. Of course, such tasks, I believe, need to be conducted by professionals with adequate experience and expertise on gender, gender analysis, textbook preparation, and curriculum design.

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