

## Content analysis on the gender-fair language used in primary textbooks

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine the gender-fair language used in primary school textbooks. Moreover, the study also looked at widely used terminology, gender roles depicted in textbooks through pictures, and teachers' perceptions of the concept of gender-fair language. Content analysis of the selected Science and English textbooks used by the primary teachers was the corpus of the study. The researcher also conducted interviews with the selected participants through purposive sampling to determine their concepts about gender-fair language. Based on the data gathered, it was found that the textbooks employed terminology that might be classified as neutral, feminine, or masculine. While pictures depicted people according to their distinct physical characteristics, certain roles were also shown. Finally, it may be noted that there were gender biases in the assessment. Primary teachers have significant perceptions on the concepts of gender-fair language. Some of these teachers employed these concepts in the teaching-learning process. However, based on the interview, it could be observed that these perceptions were based mainly on their readings and they had minimal understanding of the concepts, especially in integrating gender-fair language in the classroom. Thus, based on the findings of the study, it is highly recommended for the school administrators, through their respective gender and development coordinators, to consider holding a series of seminars, conferences, and trainings with emphasis on mainstreaming gender-fair language in creating teaching-learning instructional materials.

**Keywords:** Gender-fair language in primary textbooks, gender-fair language perceptions, gender-fair language in the teaching-learning, gender-fair biases, concepts on gender-fair language

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender-fair language strives to eliminate disparities between how women and men are addressed and referenced, for instance by utilizing both masculine and feminine pronouns and replacing masculine forms with gender-neutral ones (Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser, 2016). According to Stahlberg et al. (2007), gender equality in society may be related to how gender is encoded in a language. It was also discovered that masculine generics cause readers or listeners to see male rather than female exemplars of a particular human category, evoking a male bias in mental representations. In certain contexts, gender-neutral language is already prejudiced.

Whether and how the usage of gender-fair language is connected to linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic disparities between nations with grammatical gender languages is the subject of a 2017 research by Hodel et al. It was discovered that gender-neutral job names were more prevalent in nations with better socioeconomic levels of gender equality than they were in nations with a higher tolerance for hierarchies and inequities. Additionally, jobs with gender-specific titles prevailed. Then, compared to a male-dominated branch, gender-fair job titles were more common in a female-dominated branch and a gender-balanced economic branch. As a result, using language that was gender-neutral in work titles or personal descriptions also had some drawbacks.

A research on how English language instructors traverse the challenging and ideologically charged terrains of GFL in the classroom was undertaken in the Philippines. Based on the findings of the qualitative investigation, it was determined that GFL supports inclusion, increases gender visibility, and opposes ingrained gender asymmetry norms. Similarly, the instructors noted that integrating GFL into ELT promotes an inclusive learning environment and aids in the development of students' social skills (Tarrayo, 2022). As a result, the learner was significantly impacted by the incorporation of GFL in the teaching-learning process.

Researchers claim that gender-fair language has the potential to significantly reduce gender discrimination and stereotyping (Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser, 2016). Thus, a research was emerged to determine the gender-fair language was included in primary school textbooks. The study also looked at widely used terminology, gender roles depicted in textbooks, and primary teachers' attitudes on gender-fair language principles.

### Statement of the problem

The major goal of the study was to determine whether primary teachers' instructional texts employed gender-fair language. It specifically aimed to respond to these questions:

1. How are the concepts on the use of gender-fair language presented in primary textbooks in terms of terms used, pictures included, and assessment components?
2. How are the concepts on the use of gender-fair language perceived by primary teachers?
3. What action plan can be proposed based on the data gathered from the study?

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative methods specifically content analysis design (Krippendorff, 2018). This study design was used to find out whether supplied qualitative data (such as text or images) contained particular words, themes, or concepts. The researcher can measure and examine the existence, meanings, and connections of particular terms, pictures, or concepts by employing this design. The research's principal goal is to ascertain if gender-fair language is used in primary teachers' textbooks, hence the design is appropriate for the

study. The researcher also defined and examined terms, pictures, and other representations of concepts and ideas linked to gender-fair language. Finally, primary teachers discussed how they view the idea of gender-neutral language in the teaching-learning environment.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to select the study's participants. The following criteria were utilized by the researcher to identify the chosen participants: the instructor had to be assigned to the elementary level (Grades 1-3), they had to teach either science or English, and they had to use textbooks to do so. Eight elementary educators voluntarily agreed to take part in an interview.

Conversely, the study's corpus consisted of English and Science textbooks. The researcher chose these textbooks because English is the most common language utilized in them. Four textbooks met the criteria for content analysis.

The researcher examined data from the textbooks from page to page where objective one is answered with the terms, pictures, and assessments. To examine the primary textbooks, the researcher used the English and Science textbooks from a public school where the researcher borrowed the books from each school. Then, researcher examined first from the start of the page to the last part of the books, how the researcher finds the analysis of the textbooks.

Furthermore, the researcher used thematic analysis a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns and themes within data. It involves a process of coding and categorizing data to identify common themes or patterns. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that included open-ended questions about participants' experiences of accessing mental health services. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data analysis involved a thematic analysis approach, using the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase involved familiarizing oneself with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful units of text that related to the research question. In the third phase, codes were reviewed and refined to create categories. In the fourth phase, categories were reviewed to identify themes. In the fifth phase, themes were defined and named. In the final phase, the findings were reported.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the data generated from the study in direct relation to its objectives. The study involved eight elementary teachers handling Grades 1 to 3 as participants and four primary level textbooks used in English and Science as the corpus of analysis. A qualitative research approach employing a content analysis design was used to examine gender-fair language in instructional materials, while teachers' perceptions were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their assignment to the elementary level, their teaching of English or Science, and their regular use of textbooks in classroom instruction. Textbook data were analyzed through systematic page-to-page content analysis focusing on terms, pictures, and assessment components, while interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke. All interpretations in this section are grounded strictly on the data gathered and are discussed in direct alignment with the objectives of determining the presence of gender-fair language in primary textbooks and understanding how such language is perceived by elementary teachers in the teaching-learning process.

The analysis of gender-fair language presented in primary textbooks in terms revealed distinct patterns in the use of masculine, feminine, and neutral terminology across the four textbooks examined. In Textbook 1 in English, masculine terms included father with a frequency of 12 and boy with a frequency of 18, while the feminine term mother appeared with

a frequency of 21. Neutral terms were more frequently used and included teacher with a frequency of 28, children with a frequency of 54, child with a frequency of 06, and classmates with a frequency of 20. In Textbook 2 in English, the masculine term boy appeared with a frequency of 12, while the feminine term mother appeared with a frequency of 20. Neutral terms included teacher with a frequency of 25, friends with a frequency of 20, friend with a frequency of 18, and classmates with a frequency of 20. In Textbook 3 in Science, masculine terms included father with a frequency of 05 and boy with a frequency of 05, while feminine terms included mother with a frequency of 16 and girl with a frequency of 05. Neutral terms in this textbook included children with a frequency of 21, classmates with a frequency of 17, and teachers with a frequency of 16. Across these three textbooks, neutral terminology appeared more frequently than gender-specific terms. In contrast, Textbook 4 in English utilized fewer neutral terms, indicating comparatively less emphasis on gender-neutral language. Overall, the frequent use of the terms, teacher, friends, children, and classmates suggests an effort toward gender neutrality, although masculine and feminine terms such as father, mother, boy, and girl remained consistently present.

The analysis of pictures in the textbooks revealed how gender roles were visually represented through reproductive, productive, and community roles. Pictures categorized under reproductive roles consistently portrayed the mother as responsible for house chores and caring for her daughter, with the girl shown helping her mother inside the house. Pictures categorized under productive roles consistently depicted the father as the head of the family who works to sustain the basic needs of the household. These visual representations showed that reproductive and productive roles followed the same traditional pattern of mother and father roles across textbooks. In the category of community roles, fewer pictures were observed in Textbooks 1, 2, and 3, while Textbook 4 showed representations of gender equality in work based on community roles. This indicates that although traditional gender roles were dominant in reproductive and productive depictions, there was evidence of more balanced representation in community roles, particularly in Textbook 4.

Further examination of pictures based on physical appearance revealed consistent gendered patterns. Pictures were categorized as masculine, feminine, and neutral and were presented either as single individuals or groups. Masculine pictures typically showed a boy and a father, while feminine pictures commonly combined a daughter and a mother depicted together in various contexts. In these images, mothers and daughters were frequently shown working and performing housework together. Based on the pictures, it was physically apparent that male figures, particularly teenagers, had short hair, wore shirts, and were not engaged in any housework or job. Neutral images included representations of a family, boy and girl together, and girl and boy combined in one picture. These neutral depictions reflected some level of inclusivity, although traditional gendered visual cues remained evident.

The assessment components of the textbooks further reflected patterns in gender-fair language use. Neutral terms appearing in assessments included friends and teacher. Feminine terms included mom, mother, Karen, Maria, and Ate Bebung, while masculine terms included boy, boys, father, Kuya Rey, Onyok, and Pilo. The data showed that Textbook 4 utilized more feminine terminology in assessments, whereas Textbooks 1, 2, and 3 used fewer feminine references. Across all textbooks, assessment language frequently employed gendered proper nouns. Male proper nouns included Dan, Ben, Alan, Peter, Kuya Rey, and Onyok, among others. According to the data, there was no gender-neutral proper noun representation for feminine characters, and feminine references were limited to pronouns such as “she” and terms such as “mom.” Assessment scenarios also revealed that male characters were commonly portrayed as engaging in play, picnics, having pets, traveling with friends, and participating in leisure activities. In contrast, female characters were frequently depicted as performing housework or domestic roles, as shown in examples such as “Peter’s mom prepares food for

their picnic.” These patterns demonstrate that while some neutral language appeared in assessments, traditional gender role representations persisted.

Teachers’ perceptions of gender-fair language were analyzed through thematic analysis, resulting in four major themes: equality, role identity, proper use of gender-fair language, and awareness. Under the theme of equality, teachers described gender-fair language as a means of eliminating gender bias and discrimination. Participants stated, “Gender-fair language is allowing both you and your reader to focus on what people do other than on which sex they happen to be” (P1), “The gender-fair language suit is fair in the work” (P2), “My perception of gender-fair language is to eliminate gender-discriminating language or sexist language in documents, business communication, and information materials” and “From my perception of gender-fair language let a collective perceive mental language as something that is unbiased” (P3), and “Aims at reducing gender stereotyping and discrimination” (P6). These responses emphasized fairness, inclusivity, and the reduction of discriminatory language. This understanding aligns with UNESCO’s definition of gender equality, which states that “women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their human rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results.”

The theme of role identity highlighted how teachers observed gender identification and interaction among learners. One participant explained, “Kanang, maka identify sila kay tungod sa ilang sinulti-an, the way he talks na bayot hiya, then interms of grading period lahi-lahi ilang seat, kay kung close na sila kayo the more noise sila sa tanan, so ig routine nako karon, lahi na sad ang row 1, row 1, akon ig lahi tungod sa ilang ka talkative, and closeness, the more quarrel ug mag sinombagay na sila” (P1). Another participant stated, “They can identify the gay gender in the classroom” (P3), and further added, “They using, separate the boy and girl in our daily activities” (P3). These responses demonstrate how teachers recognize gender identity and expression in classroom dynamics and how such recognition influences classroom organization, interaction, and routines.

The theme of proper use of gender-fair language focused on classroom practices that promote inclusivity and respect. Teachers expressed the importance of neutral expressions and fair addressing of learners through statements such as “I think we will use neutral expressions rather than specific ones in phrases and occupations” (P1), “Ma’am: amh, important pud na sa ila kay para na ay awareness, in these new generation, ig ana ang pag address, dlil na ig lain lain, boy, girls, dapat fair na, dili pareha sa una na boys, diri, girl diri: ako: karon mam, bisag asa lang sila mo lingcod; Ma’am: Ou, ako na sila pa sagdan kung asa sila mo lingcod kung asa sila comfortable” (P2), “It is important in teaching elementary gender-fair language because some pupils can identify with their classmates if it is gay, as they interact” (P3), “Be in a logistic way of addressing a person, or calling pupils in the classroom while we are in the process of implementing gender-fair language” (P6), and “I incorporate in my classroom through a proper seating arrangement that no gender fair in the tables or chairs they want to sit down” (P7). These responses illustrate teachers’ deliberate efforts to apply gender-fair principles in classroom communication and management.

The theme of awareness emphasized the importance of gender-fair language in fostering inclusivity and preventing discrimination. Participants stated, “I have noticed to my pupils how act toward the female and male. To distinguish what they say to their classmates. So, I have a gay pupil, the way he acts or they say” (P1), “Ma’am; so far almost, ig update or updatonon pa jud siya para ma integrate ning gender-fair language, updatonon pa jud” (P2), “Para pud ta na ay awareness, in this new generation dapat gender far language na ang mga textbooks, para ig ana ang pag address” (P2), “Gender-fair language in teaching elementary pupils treats all students equally and recognizes and accommodates different learning” (P5),

“It prevents violence against women and girls and men and boys” (P6), and “Kanang, dapat kabalo jud ka sa igsulti kay para diri ka mag sipyat sa imong gi sulti, sa mga bata kay magyawyaw jud sila ug banha kayo” (P7). These responses highlight the perceived role of gender-fair language in promoting awareness, reducing bullying, and fostering a culture of respect and equality within the classroom.

In synthesis, the findings demonstrate that gender-fair language is present in primary textbooks but is inconsistently applied across terms, pictures, and assessment components. While neutral terminology appeared more frequently in several textbooks, traditional gender roles remained dominant in visual and assessment representations. Teachers demonstrated strong awareness of the importance of gender-fair language and actively attempted to implement inclusive practices despite limitations in instructional materials. These findings directly address the objectives of the study by revealing both the textual and perceptual dimensions of gender-fair language in primary education and provide a grounded basis for the development of an action plan in the succeeding section of the manuscript.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data gathered and analyzed, the study concludes that gender-fair language was commonly employed in primary textbooks, particularly in Science and English, which were used by elementary teachers in the teaching-learning process. The findings showed that neutral terms such as teacher, children, friends, and classmates were frequently used, indicating an effort toward inclusivity in referring to individuals. However, despite this presence of gender-neutral language, the textbooks also exhibited clear biases in terminology, images, and assessment components. Masculine and feminine terms such as father, mother, boy, and girl remained prevalent, and visual representations consistently reflected traditional gender roles, particularly in reproductive and productive contexts where mothers were portrayed as caregivers and fathers as providers. Assessment items further reinforced these patterns through the use of gendered proper nouns and scenarios that associated males with leisure and mobility and females with domestic responsibilities. These findings demonstrate that while gender-fair language exists in primary instructional materials, its application is uneven and often undermined by persistent stereotypical representations across textual, visual, and evaluative components.

The study also concludes that elementary teachers exhibited limited understanding and inconsistent application of gender-fair language in classroom practice. Although teachers recognized the importance of fairness, equality, and inclusivity, their perceptions revealed gaps in formal knowledge and systematic training on gender-fair language use. Teachers' reliance on prescribed textbooks constrained their ability to fully address gender bias, resulting in compensatory practices such as verbal explanations and classroom management strategies rather than deliberate linguistic reform. Taken together, these findings indicate a need for institutional and professional support to strengthen the integration of gender-fair language in both instructional materials and classroom practice. In light of these results, the study recommends that school administrators, in collaboration with gender and development coordinators, consider conducting sustained seminars, conferences, and training programs focused on mainstreaming gender-fair language in the development of teaching-learning materials. Teachers should likewise be encouraged to participate in relevant professional development activities that enhance their competence in using gender-fair language within the classroom. Furthermore, future research may extend the present inquiry by examining students' perceptions of gender-fair language or by exploring how gender-fair concepts are mainstreamed in higher education institutions. Collectively, these conclusions and recommendations underscore the importance of a coordinated approach to promoting gender

fairness in education and provide a grounded basis for advancing more inclusive and equitable teaching-learning environments.

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