

REPRESENTATION OF INCLUSIVENESS IN THE CLASS VII ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

In a narrower sense, inclusion in education is often considered to be placing only students with disabilities in general education classrooms. But more broadly, it is about creating an all-inclusive school culture that supports all students, regardless of their differences. This school culture embraces adapting the curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Here the researchers tried to figure out the inclusive representation of these differences in the content of the Class VII English language textbook of the Government of West Bengal. Inclusive representation in textbooks represents people of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, religions, languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. There are many reasons why inclusive representation in textbooks is significant. First, it helps students to see themselves reflected in the materials they are learning from. Second, inclusive representation helps students to develop a more accurate understanding of the world around them. The main objective of the study was to explore this inclusive representation in the content of the Class VII English Language Textbook. As for the methodology of the study, the researchers selected the said textbook purposively and the content analysis technique was employed by them as it was the most applicable design for this kind of research. Three types of inclusive representations were considered for analyses. These are Minorities, Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities, and Disabilities, which were suggested by UNESCO regarding inclusive representation of textbook analysis. The systematic database was first compiled by selecting valuable textbook segments, including words, phrases, activities, and pictorial illustrations. With the disassembling process, thorough analysis and interpretation were done. The full paper with its analyses and interpretations will be able to make a superior understanding regarding inclusive representation in the content of that said book. It can also convey a strong message to the stakeholders about the status of inclusive representation in one of the textbooks in the Government of West Bengal curriculum.

Keywords: Inclusiveness, English Language Textbook, Class VII, Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Inclusiveness is a practice that ensures that everyone is welcomed and respected, regardless of their gender, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or other personal characteristics. It means creating an environment where everyone feels valued and supported and has the opportunity to participate and succeed. Inclusiveness is important in all aspects of life, including in the workplace, in schools, in communities, and society as a whole. Not only to maintain its importance but it should also be adapted in all areas of life, from personal to professional. It is about making a conscious effort to include everyone and to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable and valued. Academics are also a vital part of it as the children are involved in it. A very mindful effort is being made to maintain an inclusive school culture in our society, but whether the inclusive representation is followed in their curriculum or more specifically in their textbooks has also to be addressed. Inclusive representation in textbooks is the practice of representing people of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, religions, languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. There are many reasons why inclusive representation in textbooks is significant. First, it helps students to see themselves reflected in the materials they are learning from. Second, inclusive representation helps students to develop a more accurate understanding of the world around them.

As UNESCO uttered, “With regard to the general aim of inclusion and inclusive education, school curricula and textbooks are crucial in several relevant aspects. The modes of representation within textbooks and curricula should appropriately reflect the diversity of different groups of individual students. Curricula and textbooks should include the representation of diverse identities and be free from divisive stereotypes and prejudices” (Paper commissioned for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, Inclusion and Education, 2020).

Sleeter and Grant (2003) analyzed 47 Art, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies textbooks, applying pictorial and textual analysis to map disability-related content. It was found that disability issues were seldom mentioned in the textbooks. Storylines ignored people with disabilities. The pictorial analysis revealed that people with disabilities were almost absent. An evident difference between male and female illustrations in the case of intellectual qualities was found by Kumari (2014), where less than 10% of female illustrations were shown to portray their cognitive abilities while more than 90% of the male illustrations were shown to do the same. Research by Pudas (2013) revealed that in Finland, school textbooks had led to an increase in racism in Finnish schools. The research also found that the required association between pedagogy and textbooks does not promote Global Education in the classroom. Another study by Ahmad & Shah (2019) showed that the content of 5th Grade English Language Textbooks was highly gender biased which represented males more than females. It also revealed that the textbook had been designed to keep male dominance in implicit as well as explicit ways.

OBJECTIVES

O1: To explore Inclusive Representation in the Class VII English Language Textbook content regarding ‘Minorities’.

O2: To explore Inclusive Representation in the Class VII English Language Textbook content regarding ‘Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities’.

O3: To explore Inclusive Representation in the Class VII English Language Textbook content regarding ‘Disabilities’.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What is the status of Inclusive Representation in the Class VII English Language Textbook content regarding ‘Minorities’?

RQ2: What is the status of Inclusive Representation in the Class VII English Language Textbook content regarding ‘Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities’?

RQ3: What is the status of Inclusive Representation in the Class VII English Language Textbook content regarding ‘Disabilities’?

METHODOLOGY

As part of the methodology of the study, the researchers purposefully selected only the Class VII English Language Textbook to use in this qualitative research. The name of the book was ‘Blossoms’; Eleventh Edition: December 2022, which was the latest printed textbook at this level, published by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE), Government of West Bengal. The book has 13 lessons or chapters and one revision lesson. The present researchers reviewed all those lessons. The content analysis under the qualitative research technique was used as it is the most applicable design for this type of research (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967; Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990).

The UNESCO identified 5 guiding areas as of inclusiveness for analysis in the textbooks, namely ‘Human Rights & Citizenship’, ‘Minorities’, ‘Gender & Diverse Sexual Identities’, ‘Disabilities’, and ‘Socially Underprivileged Groups’, as a global mapping of the inclusiveness of textbooks in its Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020. This study was delimited to the 3 areas only namely, ‘Minorities’, ‘Gender & Diverse Sexual Identities’, and ‘Disabilities’. The area, ‘Minorities’ reflects whether and how these are represented in the textbooks, on various phenomena and forms of inclusion and exclusion. The area, ‘Gender & Diverse Sexual Identities’ refers to the aspects of an equal and suitable representation of males and females, focusing on depicting and evaluating their active roles and participation in society. The area of ‘Disabilities’ assists in investigating whether, how, and to what extent persons with disabilities are represented and given consideration (Paper commissioned for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, Inclusion, and Education, 2020).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic database was first compiled by selecting appropriate textbook segments, including words, phrases, activities, and pictorial illustrations. These appropriate selections were made based on some pre-determined catalogue of questions, suggested by the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020. These segments were considerably grouped and enumerated. With the disassembling process, thorough analyses were done with the help of Categorizing, Coding, and Memoing.

O1 & RQ1: Analysis & Discussion Regarding Inclusive Representation of the 'Minorities'

As per the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020, it was suggested to focus on the following catalogue of questions in assessing the textbook regarding the inclusive representation of 'Minorities' like:

- Whether different minorities are represented or not,
- Which kinds of minorities are represented? e.g., ethnic and racialized, religious, or other minorities,
- Are they represented stereotypically?

The analysis regarding the first objective exhibited that diverse minorities (e.g., ethnic and racialized, religious, or other minorities) are seldom represented in that book. A sum of 136 occurrences was noticed by the researchers where the 'minorities' aspect came in the book. However, only the religious instances were depicted and the three major religious examples were only found, i.e., Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, though the representation of these religions was not alike. The adjacent figure (Figure 1) shows a quick look at it, where it is seen that quite half of the instances were found in Hinduism (47%). The rest is of Christianity (35%) and Islam (18%).

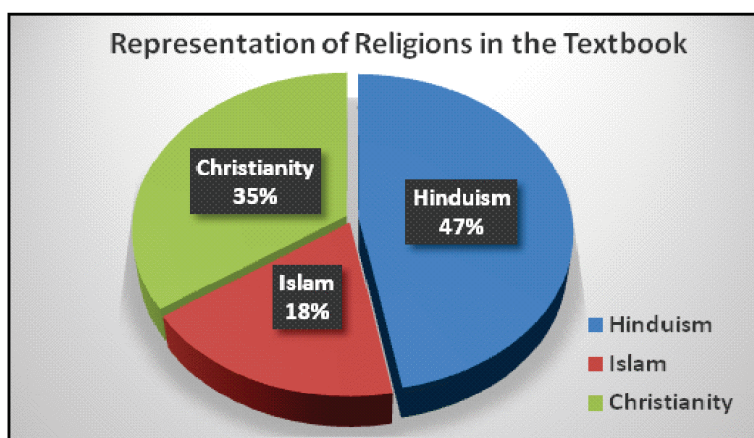


Figure 1: Representation of Religions in the Textbook

The depicted religions were observed in a normal manner with the content of the text. No such stereotypical pieces of evidence were noticed by the researchers, where one religion was glorified or the other was condemned.

5.2 O2 & RQ2: Analysis & Discussion Regarding Inclusive Representation of the ‘Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities’

As per the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020, it was suggested to focus on the following catalogue of questions in assessing the textbook regarding the inclusive representation of ‘Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities’ like

- Whether the texts are appropriately gendered or not,
- Whether a balanced representation of gender (male and female) in pictures and illustrations is maintained or not,
- Are there any elements of stereotypical representations of gender biases in the text or images that favour one sex over the other?

This textbook was prepared by the Experts Committee under the Textbook Development Committee of West Bengal. There were 10 members of the committee. It is to be mentioned that among those 10 members, there were only 3 female members as experts on the committee. The textbook was enriched with the works of various writers and poets. There were 13 lessons or chapters in that book. While discussing on second objective, it was firstly found that the selection of authors and poets of those 13 lessons was not appropriately gendered. There was only an 8% representation of female authors in the textbook, with the rest of the lessons being contributed by male authors (Figure 2).

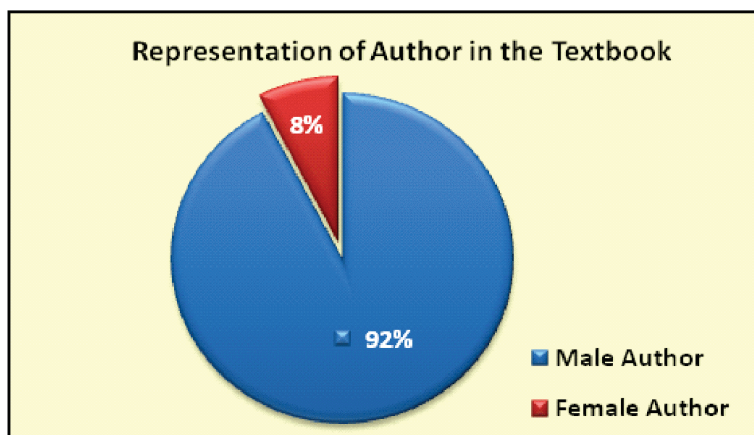


Figure 2: Representation of Author in the Textbook

While analyzing the 'Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities' in the texts of the book, it was found that more than 60% of characters were of male identities (63%), while 36% of characters were of female identities. No character was found as other diverse sexual identities or so. The adjacent figure (Figure 3) shows a quick look at it.

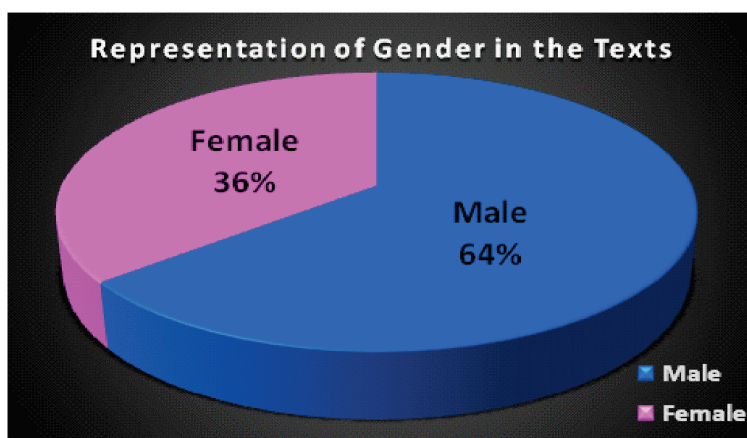


Figure 3: Representation of Gender in the Texts

All the images or pictorial illustrations were also analyzed by the researchers. It was found that there was a total of 31 images in that book. Out of those, there were 4 images with no characters, and 27 images had some characters in the image. Out of those 27-character images, the researchers got 12 images that were of male characters and 5 that were of female characters. And, when we considered 10 common pictures, male characters appeared 33 times while female characters appeared only 8 times. Now, if we consider all the images of the book, including single images as well as common images, it was seen that 45 male characters and 13 female characters were there, which is shown in Figure 4.

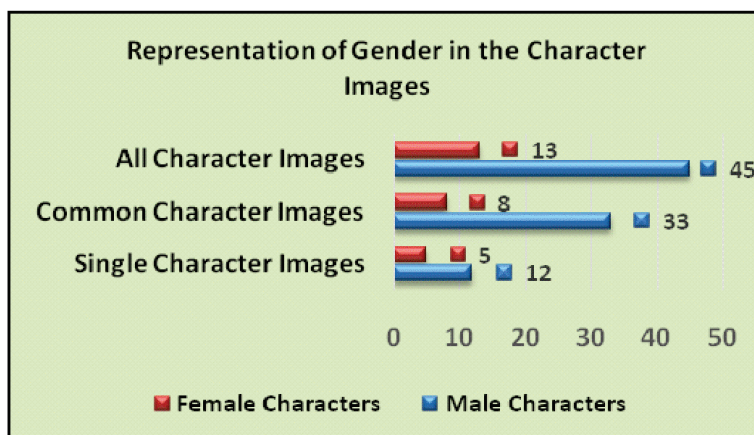


Figure 4: Representation of Gender in the Character Images in the Textbook

The inclusive representation of Gender was followed in some of the images in the book. The image (Figure 5) below shows that kind of representation.



Figure 5: Inclusive Representations of Gender in the Textbook



Figure 6: Stereotypical Representations of Gender in the Textbook

However, there were elements or portrayals of stereotypical representations of gender in the text as well as in the images (Figure 6) that favour one sex over the other. The male dominances were very clear regarding occupational roles, outdoor activities, and indoor activities. Though in some of the instances, stereotypical representations are absent, it is prevalent in most of the cases. While analyzing the content texts of the book, the following categories were concluded from the derived codes through the content analysis process, which are shown below (Table 1). Later in this section, each category is discussed in brief keeping in mind the stereotypical representations of gender in the textbook.

<i>Table 1: Generated Codes and Categories Regarding Stereotypical Representations of Gender in the Textbook</i>		
Sl. No.	Generated Codes	Generated Categories
1	Mother's Cooking	Activity Orientation
2	Father's Chatting	
3	Father's Secured Job	
4	Charwoman	
5	Mother in Home	
6	Higher Job of Man	
7	Cart-man	
8	Father is Out of Town	
9	Male Gardener	
10	Tree Hacking by Men	
11	Outside Work by Females	
12	Girl's Grace	Physical Portrayal
13	The Long Hair of the Girl	
14	Beauty of Girl	
15	Good looking Girl	
16	Handsome Prince	
17	Charming Woman	
18	Fair Daughter	
19	Beautiful Cheeks of Girl	
20	Thick and Curly Hair of Girl	
21	Jewellery for Woman	
22	Girl's Singing	
23	Girl's Dancing	

24	Boy's playing in the Field	Representative Roles
25	Diary Writing by Women	
26	Outdoor Games by Girls	
27	Boy's Singing	
28	Loud talking of Man	Distinctive Associations
29	Fast Running by Girl	
30	Fuss by Woman	
31	Sports loving Man	
32	Liking of Fast Cars	
33	Risk Taking	
34	Girl, Facing Challenge	
35	Brave Girl	
36	Lovable Girl	
37	Honest Man	
38	Nine Gems of Akbar	

● **Activity Orientation:** This category was developed by the derived codes, which were similar regarding the work or job or the associated activities. It was seen that, in most of the cases, the male characters were shown in outside activities and/or laborious actions whereas the female characters were seldom shown in that manner, otherwise, they were shown in domestic efforts or lingering in the home situation. It surely and positively represented the gender stereotypical position in the book.

● **Physical Portrayal:** Quite outrageously, a large number of the female characters' portrayal was presented in a bodily custom. Though those were adoring their beauties, at the same time, no such parallel presentation was found by the researchers regarding their merit. A few male characters' bodily portrayals were also there.

● **Representative Roles:** Some of the representative roles were identified and coded. It was analyzed and perceived by the researchers that, in this category, the representation of gender was maintained in the book. And no such stereotypical shreds of evidence were observed.

● **Distinctive Associations:** This is the category, which was developed through the analysis of various distinctive associations of both male and female characters portrayed in the textbook. More than ten codes were generated, where it is observed that both the male and female characters were represented in a risk-taking, challenging, and fussy situation. However, the representatives were not balanced. A

slight inclination of stereotype representation was detected by the researchers in favour of the male characters.

O3 & RQ3: Analysis & Discussion Regarding Inclusive Representation of the ‘Disabilities’

As per the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020, it was suggested to focus on the following catalogue of questions in assessing the textbook regarding the inclusive representation of ‘Disabilities’.

- Whether the people with disabilities are represented in the texts and visual material?
- Are they represented in a stereotypical way i.e., as dependent, less happy, passive, helpless?
- Whether the people with disabilities appear in everyday life or mainly in the context of care?
- Are different types of disability represented in the textbook?

In a quite shocking finding, it was observed that no single evidence of the presence of people with disabilities is present in the texts and visual material in the book. There were 13 lessons in that book. But there were neither any mentions nor any examples were portrayed in the book. The Storylines ignored people with disabilities. As a result, the researchers failed to categorize different types of disabilities and the stereotypical shreds of evidence in the textbook. In that sense, it can be alleged that inclusive representation of the Class VII English Language Textbook, published by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE), Government of West Bengal regarding ‘Disabilities’ was not maintained at all.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Several significant research findings regarding inclusiveness in textbooks emerged from this research of the Class VII English Language Textbook, published by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE), Government of West Bengal. These are briefly mentioned below.

- Different minorities (e.g., ethnic and racialized, religious, or other minorities) are hardly represented regarding the inclusive representation of the ‘Minorities’. Only three major religions were portrayed. However, those also were not balanced. No stereotypical representations regarding minorities were noticed by the researchers.
- The selection of the authors of the 13 lessons or chapters in the textbook is not appropriately gendered. A balanced inclusive representation was hard to observe between males and females in terms of ‘Gender and Diverse Sexual Identities’ in the content of the text and also in the pictures and

illustrations. There were elements of gender bias and gender stereotypes in the text and in the images that favour one sex over the other.

- There was no single evidence of the presence of people with disabilities in the texts in the book. Storylines ignored people with disabilities here. The pictorial analysis also revealed that people with disabilities were absent. So, there was no scope to find out different types of disabilities or stereotypical ways of their representation in the content of the text and the content of pictures and illustrations by the researchers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that there is a need for more inclusivity in the English language textbook of West Bengal. Students from all backgrounds deserve to see themselves reflected in the materials they use to learn. This is especially important for students who are often under-represented in the media and society. The study found that there was a significant lack of diversity in terms of 'Minorities', 'Gender & Diverse Sexual Identities', and 'Disabilities' in English language textbooks. This particular English language textbook had no single representation of Disabilities. It is very alarming and annoying. This lack of representation can hurt students' self-esteem and sense of belonging. The message it conveys can also imply that certain groups of people are considered less essential or valuable than others. Several things could be done to improve the inclusivity of these English language textbooks. The Textbook Development Committee can ensure that the textbooks feature a diverse range of characters from different backgrounds. Both male and female author's works should be included. Stereotypical representations of different groups of people can be avoided. The use of inclusive language can be promoted that does not discriminate against any group of people. Teachers can also play a pivotal role in promoting inclusive representation in the classroom. They can supplement textbooks with other materials that feature a diverse range of voices and perspectives. They can talk to their students about the importance of inclusive representation and how it can help to create a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment. It is recommended that textbooks should feature an equal number of male and female characters, both male and female characters should be portrayed in a variety of roles and occupations, including positions of power and authority and most importantly the representation of persons with disability should be encouraged. By improving inclusive representation in English language textbooks, we can help to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all students.

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