

# Gender Awareness in Restructuring the English Courses in Nepal

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**Abstract :** The courses and curricula get changed with the changes occur in the society which cause the change in the objectives and aims of studying the courses. This paper is based on the content analysis of the BBS First Year English course of Tribhuvan University of Nepal from feminist perspective. It intends to raise gender awareness in teachers, students and course designers as well. I have tried to analyse the recommended reading texts in the course from feminist viewpoint. In fact the textbooks provide guidelines for both teachers and students and play a vital role in shaping students' behaviors and ideology. So, the textbooks should be analyzed to explore the potential impact they make upon students. The study was executed to explore the representation of males and females in terms of status, roles, occupations and activities in BBS first year English textbook of TU which was revised and implemented from this year. For this the texts were studied and analysed from the feminist viewpoint. The results showed that the newly revised course of BBS first year English was, to some extent, successful in maintaining gender balance by selecting reasonable number of female writers and the text elated to female issues. There are texts which advocate the females' issues in the society, their problems and rights etc. The texts raise the messages against different social evils and problems.

**Key Words:** Gender awareness, Content analysis, Gender balance, Gender representation, Textbooks, Feministic perspective

## Introduction

Gender awareness is an awareness of the differences in roles and relations between women and men. It recognizes that the life experiences, expectations, and needs of women and men are different. It is thus related to the attitude of human beings towards the male female and third gender persons. Normally people are not aware of respecting the lifestyles, thinking patterns and beliefs of all gender persons and only feel that the things they believe are better than anything else others have and others do. We should be

aware of the things that can help everyone of any gender feel that we are unbiased towards their gender and race. The various issues related to gender are crucial issues that have been explored and analyzed in many studies in social, political and education sectors including English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula in the world scenario at present. The studies show that curriculum needs to be inclusive regarding gender issues for maintaining equality and equity in education that further contributes for the development and reconstruction of the societies. Therefore, the selection of the

contents of reading materials in a course are very important as these are believed to be the most potential instruments that can help students and teachers build desirable attitudes and work as change agents in the societies. Specially, the courses for the future managers, businessmen and entrepreneurs need to be designed with much caution so that the reading materials impart in them with positive attitudes towards the gender balance in their behaviors.

Gender awareness raising aims at increasing general sensitivity, understanding and knowledge about gender (in)equality which aims to promote and encourage a general understanding of gender-related challenges, for instance, violence against women and the gender pay gap. It also aims to show how values and norms influence our reality, reinforce stereotypes and support the structures that produce inequalities. Education plays very important role to raise gender awareness in the learners. The roles of curriculum framework, courses and texts recommended are very important to the students. The English textbooks for the management students and other students influence them and society by transmitting the inherited biases. In fact, textbooks are not the only sources of information for people but they are a vital means of mass media in the society (Kobia, 2009). According to Mkuchu (2004) textbooks shape attitudes by transmitting a society's culture. Gender images and roles are essential parts of any culture, hence, the manner in which the genders are depicted in the textbooks play a part in building the image of male and females in a learner's mind. Sabir (2008) presents the viewpoint that most often textbooks are the most formal material the learner is exposed to, which depicts the

“norm”, to be transmitted. They can prove to be one of the most powerful tools to influence the outlook of the learner about human rights, values and gender equality. The publisher Macmillan (1975) affirmed this, quoted by Evan and Davies (2000), children are not simply being taught mathematics and reading; they are also learning sometimes subliminally, how society regards certain groups of people. The message delivered by the content of the textbooks shapes the opinions of the students in a subtle manner. Inclusive content in terms of gender will lead towards the development of the aware citizen where equality is celebrated and gender specific supremacy is deterred.

The inclusion of gender issues in the mainstream development paradigm has been well focused and tested through various development policy and institutional framework in the world over the last three decades (Sijapati, 2014). Sex and gender are often taken synonymously in academia which causes misunderstanding in gender inclusion. The term gender inclusion, as Oakley (1972) highlighted, is the concept of gender through the conceptual difference between sex and gender. He explained sex is connected with biology whereas the gender identity of men and women in any given society is socially and psychologically determined. Further, Reeves and Baden, 2000, (cited in Sijapati, 2014) highlight gender issue by explaining men and women have different needs, preferences and interest. They argue gender inequality as outcomes of different treatment of men and women. They also advocate gender justice. In fact, gender equality demands the true representation of both sexes in the texts. According to the Council of Europe (2008) gender equality signifies the empowerment,

reflectiveness, and involvement of all members of society irrespective of their gender in all domains of public and private life. Therefore, gender equality is not only pivotal for women empowerment but for the welfare of the entire human kind. It is the way forward to the civilized society as well because where there is no any biasness in the society it ultimately develops in a civilized place to live.

Traditionally the English textbooks in Nepal used to be slightly male dominated as these were not able to represent the females and female issues properly and only described males as the major characters in the texts, only male examples for good things done in the society and the description of the male braveness and ownership in good deeds used to be reflected in the English courses recommended to the bachelor level students. There has been too less attention and care towards the gender related issues and respecting the females with proper respect. The courses for different levels of education seem to be neglecting the emerging issues like maintaining gender balance in the texts as well as inclusion of female issues while imparting knowledge. It is high time to study the gender balance and female issues in the courses of different subjects of different levels and recommend how these can be best incorporated in the textbooks of different types of courses.

Thus the main objective of this paper is to analyse the gender balance and female issues inclusion in the first year English Course of BBS and to recommend the ways of maintaining the gender balance in the texts. The study will contribute to the syllabus designers, textbook writers, researchers and future teacher trainers for developing some

insights related to these issues and help learners learn with pride and the feeling of ownership on gender balancing and female issues. For this, the recommended revised texts of BBS first year were studied and analysed. The female representation in the textbooks and the occurrences of females and males in teaching text materials, the inclusion of female writers in comparison to male writers, male firstness, noun and pronoun system, and discourses of gender roles in the texts were analyzed. The study is significant mainly because of the fact that the course analyzed is designed for the youngsters entering the university education. If they are aware of these issues, the knowledge they receive will be more effective for developing positive attitudes in them and bringing the change in societies.

### **Literature Review**

With the changes in time and tradition, the way of thinking and doing many things has been changing gradually and thus the male domination in every aspects of the societies and cultures has been changed. The educationists, scholars and social scientists have started to conduct researches related to gender balance, women empowerment like areas which shows the gradual increase of gender awareness in them. There are a lot of research works accomplished in the area of women and gender issues in Nepal and everywhere in the world as the men and women are supposed to be equally treated in the society and academia. In Nepal, the female issues have been increasingly studied in the recent years as the government policy itself is positive towards females and there are many NGOs established in the name of empowering the females in the Nepalese society. This has increased the number of studies related

to females and female issues. Some of the research works related to this paper are mentioned in this paper as well.

Education to the females is really important to the development of children, family and the whole society. Jannati,(2015) mentions that educating women is the most; female should have equal access of learning opportunities. Educational system in any country is shaped and affected by the prejudices, values, and traditions held by the society, which are reflected in course books. Therefore, our present curriculum should represent gender issues, female participations and their constructive roles as one of its major agenda of education to change gender discrimination. UNESCO (2015) describes that a quality curriculum must necessarily include gender equality as an outcome of teaching and learning. Then only it is possible to achieve gender equality in education through education. Scott, Foresman & Company (1972) provide guidelines for the involvement of the image of women in textbooks. General guidelines for the text and illustrations of textbooks demand the recognized actions and achievements of women; same respect for women and girls as men and boys; and abilities, traits, interests and activities assigned not on the basis of male or female stereotypes.

The textbooks become sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they degrade women by using patronizing language, or if they show women only in stereotyped roles without including human interests, traits, and capabilities. Furthermore, the contributions of women to politics, social reformation, arts, science and technology should be presented and explored. Although women were regarded as inferior in the past,

they were not and are not inferior human beings. While compiling or revising texts, the editors should purposefully search for materials written by female writers. Moreover, female writers' voices on gender issues might be more justified to bring the change in a real sense. Many researchers have conducted studies to examine gender representation in school and university level textbooks employing content and discourse analysis methods on texts as well as illustrations. Shah (2012) conducted a study on the gender inclusion in the textbooks used for teaching English language at the secondary level in Pakistan. The findings showed that the English language textbooks under investigation were not aligned with the curriculum with respect to inclusion of gender related issues. The representation and the characters allocated to the females were not proportionate to the male characters. The roles assigned to the females were very orthodox. This stereotypical representation of the gender in textbooks certainly leaves an ill remark to the mind of the students regarding females and their status in the societies. In the same way, Hartman and Judd (1978) in their survey of textbooks of the USA also discovered that women were less visible than men. For example, in one textbook the ratio of visibility male to female was 63% to 37%. Weitzman et al. (1972) for example, examined picture books for pre-school children in the USA and found that women were, "simply invisible... they were underrepresented in the titles, central roles, pictures and stories of every sample...".

The representation of the females and males in the texts the learners also has much effect in their concept formation and behaviour shaping phenomena. In this regard, Jannati, (2015) conducted a study on 'Gender

Representation in EFL Textbooks: A case of ILI pre-intermediate series' to define how social gender identity is reflected via adjectives and pictures in order to facilitate cross-cultural comparison of gender roles and shed light on the perception about and significance of gender as reflected in textbook images of the target language. The researcher used a combination of content analysis and social semiotic approach to examine the representations of gender in the textbooks. The results revealed the existence of gender bias and stereotyping in the ILI pre-intermediate series through linguistic and semiotic analyses. This paper is basically the content analysis of the BBS first year English course which was recently revised and the study is focused in the texts included in the course to be taught to the students of BBS. The text are analyzed in terms of the inclusion of the female issues like the inclusion of female writers, female issues in the texts, female-male representation, appearance of male females in the texts, use of gender biased language in the texts and other issues etc.

### **Methodology**

As this paper is just the content analysis of the textbook recommended for the bachelor level students of management stream in Tribhuvan University, I just collected the texts from various sources and tried to study the texts keeping the female issues in mind. I counted the texts written by the females, issues raised in the texts, counted the names of the females and males and studied that whether females are mentioned first or males when they both come together like 'Ram and Sita or Sita and Ram'. Not only this I also tried to study and analyse how the females are represented in the texts, like whether the females are represented for good things

or bad, brave or coward, positive character or negative character, main character or subordinate character. These all reflect the gender awareness of the policymakers and course designers.

### **Findings and Discussions**

After the systematic analysis of the texts in the selected course, the major findings and discussion have been presented in this section. The course is boarder in nature as it needs to include and represent wider themes like human life to animal kingdom, environment to technology, education to literature, and the entire cosmos. Among them human beings are mainly interested and concerned in exploring human related issues. But the bitter truth is that the world is still dominated by the men though there is existence of more than 50% of women throughout. As a result, we see less inclusion of gender based issues related to women in comparison to men in the courses worldwide. Similarly, human beings are found to be more interested in the knowledge of the advanced lives. Therefore, as per the purpose of the study, I have only analyzed the course from gender inclusion perspective only. This part is divided into following sub sections to clearly present and discuss the issues presented in the prescribed course.

### **Inclusion of Female Writers of the Texts**

The selection of the writers of the different texts is very important and it matters much in the minds of the readers. This helps developing some kind of attitudes towards the males and females. As in case of the BBS first year textbook, the writers of the texts were found to be selected carefully, may be the course designers were careful about including more female writers than male writers.

There are twelve texts selected for the BBS first year students to read in English apart from other grammatical and theoretical parts. Among the twelve writers of the twelve texts selected in the course, there is inclusion of eight female writers which is about 67 percent. Not only this, there are only four male writers' texts have been included in the course. This ratio of the male female writers of the texts looks nice as the females have been dominated by males in the society and the newly revised course seems to be trying to convey the message that there are a lot of female writers which need to be read academically as well. This also conveys the message that the female writers also can write good texts and they are not weak. Moreover the inclusion of more female writers can be beneficial for the teachers to teach the texts being aware of the gender issues and being unbiased in the classes.

### **Issues Discussed in the Texts**

The issues presented in the texts to be studied are really important as these play vital role to construct the attitudes and develop the perceptions of various things in the lives of students. The appearance of the male and female names is very important in any discourse, specially the textbooks have to be very much inclusive in matters of the appearance of the different kinds of human beings from the texts they include. Shah (2012) writes that in the textbooks in Pakistan especially in English 9 and 10, published by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB), there is a widespread discriminatory representation of women. Gender inequality has been explored at different levels by the researcher and one of the areas in this regard is Omission or Invisibility. He further quotes Porreca (1984) who has fully explored this aspect of

discrimination. The idea is, when females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is women's accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included. In fact, the dominant presence of male representation as writers and characters in the texts proves andro-centrism which is the conscious practice of placing a masculine view point at the center of one's worldview regarding history or culture and thereby marginalizing femininity culturally in the words of Liddell, Scott, Jones & Barber (1968). So the editors of the textbooks need to be careful about the selection of texts in which there is gender balance and respect the identity of both sexes.

The texts the BBS first year students have to study in English are of different varieties in terms of the issues raised in them. Most of the texts, as those were written by female writers, are about the feministic issues and they raise female voices this way or that way. Among the twelve texts to be studied, five texts are based on the different female issues which are common in the societies and the writers try to present them as the social evils. The story 'Only daughter' describes how difficult is it for the only daughter to grow in a family of six brothers. The male domination there makes the daughter lonely and she stays indoors reading books not playing childhood games. In the same way, 'My mother never worked' is an essay where the writer describes the poor situation of the females, specially housewives, who work all the time without being paid a single penny and labeled of not working by the society, government agencies, and even their husbands and they don't get any facilities from the government side. The text 'Why Chinese mothers are superior' also

presents how the Chinese mothers manage to raise their children apart from their regular tasks of their life. Likewise the text 'I want a wife' written by a female writer is about the things a lady does as a wife of a man. The wives support their husbands all the time and they have many responsibilities in comparison to their husbands but still the females are supposed to be the subordinates to males. In the same way the essay 'The wife beater' is against the physical violence against the females. Though it is a logo printed in the T-shirts, the text presents the situation of the society where some husbands beat their wives.

There are other issues raised in the texts prescribed in the BBS first year English course. The essay 'Rice' written by Jhumpa Lahiri describes about her father's skill of making Pulao in different parts of the world for special situations. Likewise, the texts 'The hidden life of garbage' and 'The case against air conditioning' describe the ecological situation and the environmental problems. In the same way 'The black table is still there' is an essay which describes the color discrimination in the American society whereas the essay 'Two ways belong in America' just describes the life in USA. The text 'The meat market' is about human organ transplantation and its problems and effects in the society. The text 'Let them drink water' presents a voice against junk foods and soft drinks which are very popular among the youngsters.

In this way, the twelve texts in this course have different issues to describe which include the female issues, discrimination towards females, environment and ecological awareness, human organ transplantation, color discrimination, indigenous knowledge, American life as an immigrant. Thus the issues

presented by the different authors of the texts show that the students can get sufficient ideas related to different aspects of their lives.

### Conclusions

The recently revised English course prescribed for BBS first year seems very nice from different perspectives. The texts which are about females, female issues and female discrimination seem to be in significant number. There are six texts i.e. 50 percent of the texts which include females and female issues as the main theme. So, from feministic perspective the course seems to be balanced. The course designers selected texts with much caution. In the same way the texts written by females are mainly about female issues, six texts i.e. 50% of the total texts are on female issues and there is a text about environment written by female and one on Indigenous Knowledge of preparing Pulao, is also written by female. Likewise no male writers have written about females and female issues in this course. Voices against color discrimination, problems of organ transplantation, message against junk foods and soft drinks and ecological issues like subject matter were focused by the male writers in this course. Thus, the texts in this course have been selected carefully keeping the half of the population in the mind. The course is expected to have positive impression on the readers and the teachers about respecting the females. The course introduces the various kinds of social issues to the future managers and business persons which will help them to successfully adjust in the civilized society. The gender awareness in the course designers is clearly reflected in the course as they have selected the texts with versatile social issues and gender issues. More detailed researches in and around this area will give better results to develop the human beings and society.

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