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Analyzing Gender Performatives in Urdu Text Books of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study aims to examine stereotypical textual depictions of both males and females in Urdu textbooks of Punjab board schools through Judith Butler's postulates of performativity aspects of gender, presented in her famous book, *Gender Trouble* in 1990. In the selected textbooks, men and women are portrayed in terms of their leadership roles and as followers of one another. The mother is typically portrayed as a stay-at-home mom who cooks and cleans. The study was carried out using Punjab Urdu textbook used to teach the students of classes (1-8). The researchers chose twelve highly relevant texts from different chapters in these books, which reflect gender stereotypes. The finding had been categorized on the basis of representing power-relation patriarchy, gender stereotype in profession and gender stereotype in behavior. The findings reveal male's dominance over females, since males are depicted as more responsible, career oriented, involve in intellectual activities while females are more involve in domestic activities. It is rigorously found that textbooks in Pakistan are prejudiced in their portrayal of citizenship and gender identities, encouraging boys and girls to identify with the gender roles that are assigned to them.

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks in particular are effective educational resources that shape young brains by reflecting and imparting social ideals. The way gender roles are portrayed in textbooks can have a big impact on how students perceive their own social positions and possibilities in Pakistan, where gender inequality is still a major problem. Although research across the world emphasizes the negative effects of gender discrimination in educational materials, little is known about the precise ways that patriarchal ideas may be reinforced in Pakistani elementary-level Urdu textbooks.

It is noteworthy that children formulate gender constructions and identities since their early childhood (Askari et al., 2022). Therefore, the ways the gender formulations and identity constructions among males and females as they are portrayed in textbooks is of fundamental importance. The cognitive and behavioral effects of textbooks on students' learning have been shown in several studies. Studies pertaining to gender and education have underscored the significance of textbooks in a child's socialization journey. The most vulnerable groups to the harmful effects of gender discrimination are women and girls (Ali et al., 2022). It includes limited access to education, a low social standing, and restricted ability to make decisions for oneself and one's family. Similar to this, gender discrimination affects a significant number of Pakistani women and is one of the country's human rights concerns. In Pakistan, almost 50% of women do not possess a basic education (Ali et al., 2022). This study aims to close this gap as the primary education is crucial for creating early perceptions of one's own identity and social expectations. This study further aims to scrutinize the textual representations of the gender-based stereotypes in Pakistan as it is reflected in the texts in Punjab Textbooks of Urdu at the elementary level in Pakistan by applying Judith Butler's postulates of gender performatives presented in her famous book, *Gender Trouble* (1990).

Perkins (2022) quotes Nelson Mandela, who stated, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" Schools are also viewed as entry points for laws, morals, and models of appropriate social behavior because of the representations they contain. There has also been a claim made that school textbooks that regulate individuals have an effect on students' motivation; additionally, they can influence socioeconomic power and gender biases (Ali & Hussain, 2019). The content of these textbooks plays a vital role in building a mindset of young ones as in future they are going to build new social orders (Askari et al., 2022). As a result, it is crucial how gender and identity are represented in textbooks. Numerous studies have

demonstrated the intellectual and behavioral effects of textbooks on students' learning. Research on gender and education has emphasized the role textbooks play in a child's socialization process (Niemi et al., 2022).

In Pakistan, all children get their primary education but the textbooks in Pakistan are gender biased in which they show females underrepresented and it gives the least impression in a student's mind forever (Agha et al., 2018a). As textbooks are the most integral part of Pakistan's education system, instructors and teachers depend entirely on the information they contain. They spend most of the class time reading them and use them as the primary, and frequently the only, learning resource (Hastam et al., 2021). Additional studies should be conducted on instructors' perspectives regarding using textbooks in the classroom to understand these contextual challenges better (Jan & Karikari et al., 2017). But given its serious consequences, we contend that gender bias in textbooks is a substantial issue. Young minds might be permanently impacted by textbooks (Agha et al., 2018a). In the textbook, men and women are portrayed in terms of their leadership roles and as followers of one another. The mother is typically portrayed as a stay-at-home mom who cooks and cleans. The father leaves for work every day, returns home, and unwinds after a demanding workday (Hastam et al., 2021). The placement of gendered roles impacts young students' thinking, and they internalize the concept that these roles are a natural extension of who they are. Furthermore, the books depict a reality more oriented toward men, whereas the female representation does not dominate (Alam & Badshah et al., 2022).

To reduce the inequalities, the Government of Pakistan also took some initiative to launch the program. Through curriculum reform and eliminating gender stereotypes, the National Plan of Action for Women formalized the means for enforcing compulsory education and closing the gender gap at all levels. In this context, promoting a favorable image of girls and women was given particular focus. Reducing gender disparity and bias in schools was the primary goal of the National Plan of Action. National educational policy is also formulated to ensure the equal participation of women in every field of life (Ajaz & Zakir et al., 2018). At every educational level, the goal is to close the gender gap and increase equal chances, thanks to the Education Sector Reforms of 2001–2004. It also aimed to implement curriculum modifications and concentrated on various activities and textbooks promoting equality (Jabeen et al., 2014). Moreover, Gender equality has been emphasized in Punjab province's provincial plan for action by formulating EFA 2003–2015 and Punjab Education Sector Reform Program 2003–05. However, despite introducing education reforms, the policies have not been implemented correctly, and there is a lack of support for female

empowerment and equal opportunity. English textbooks show that 62.5% of females are taking part in outdoor activities and doing jobs (Nandi et al., 2024). In comparison, Urdu textbooks show that 66.7% of females play stereotypical roles doing indoor tasks like domestic work (Nandi et al., 2024), and this shows the manipulation of a language that males are more important in the larger public world (Khan et al., 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

GENDER CONSTRUCTION THROUGH DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

The concept of ideological dilemma enables the resolution of conflicting notions such as the nature of the individual ('we are all different'), equality ('we are all the same'), the nature of the social group in terms of categories 'men' and 'women', and fairness through 'equal treatment for equal cases' (Benschop et al., 2001). This Patriarchal culture in Pakistan expects women to contemplate the potential impact of their decisions, especially professional choices, on the family Honor as perceived by the patriarchs. Women know that defying these social norms could damage their family's reputation. Due to cultural traditions that oppress them and a lack of education, women in Pakistan struggle to integrate successfully into cities and become employed. Young girls should marry, have children, be obedient wives, and live in isolation (Ali et al., 2023). These conventions are still followed by a small minority of people who think they are outdated and ridiculous (Dashtaki et al., 2022). Most of the women conceal their identities and are supposed to be obedient and subservient. Even with the burqa, many women still experience abuse and harassment from sexually repressed men, as well as acid assaults from spouses and their families.

There are myriad studies of women harassed in markets, public places and even in well reputable educational institutions (Yaseen et al., 2019). The discursive practices that shape the notion of equal opportunities have received less attention, despite the fact that language is a primary focus of inquiry in Urdu textbook studies on gender. Discourse analytical approaches, however, may be especially useful when concentrating on difficulties, as in sameness and difference feminism. Discursive psychology research has amply demonstrated that people who converse in daily life employ complicated, sometimes contradicting narratives rather than just expressing solitary emotions (Lazar et al., 2007). Women's full involvement in all spheres of life is guaranteed under the legal framework. However, many women experience social injustice and gender discrimination, particularly those who come from upper middle and lower-middle-class backgrounds (Broker et al., 2018). She puts forth much effort at work but receives little pay. Even highly educated women have fewer opportunities for promotion than their male coworkers.

Therefore, enacting laws alone is insufficient. The key to enforcing them is based on attitudes (Tahir et al., 2020).

STEREOTYPICAL GENDER ROLES

Stereotyping refers to judging an individual based on their association with a particular group. It is the unconscious or conscious application of accurate or inaccurate knowledge of a group in judging a group member (Agars et al., 2004). According to (Bell et al., 2007), stereotype is a belief that is considered by individuals or a group of people, which leads to a broad generalization of the characteristics often associated with that group. People are categorized by the qualities that they share via the process of stereotyping. These shared characteristics include age, gender, ethnicity, race, cultural background, and other factors. Stereotyping is closely associated with prejudicial judgment in social communication. This judgment is categorized by rigid and unreasonable generalizations about an entire group of people. To be more explicit, gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained conceptions of the traits of males and females that serve to maintain the continuation of specific gender roles (Suter et al., 2006). Parents share their ideas about boys and girls with their kids as they grow up. This affects how children see what jobs they can do when they are older. Kids whose parents believe in fairness between genders are likelier to think they can do any job, even ones that might be seen as more for boys or girls. However, suppose parents stick to old-fashioned, stereotypical ideas about what boys and girls should do. In that case, their children might think the same way and only consider jobs that fit those stereotypical ideas. When parents believe in equality, few differences exist in what jobs their kids want to do when they grow up (Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson et al., 2008; Tenenbaum & Leaper et al., 2002).

(Ruble et al., 2010) state that Gender Stereotypes and ideologies about how males and females should act hold an influence. It impacts various aspects of our psychological processes, such as how we see things, memorize them, our social behaviours, personal interests and how we perceive our competencies. Gender stereotypes mainly highlight the physical appearance of girls and women and how they look, whether they are beautiful or thin. These factors are essential in their lives, and there are many examples shown in the tween programs where female characters are shown to be more attractive and are more concerned about their physical appearance and more likely to listen to comments on their beauty than male characters (Rousseau et al. 2018).

According to (Sink & Mastro's et al., 2017) analysis of prime-time television, male characters tend to be more assertive and decisive. However, feminine characters tend to be more well-organized and more prevalent. Numerous research studies have examined how gender roles function on social

media platforms and how they support specific gender ideas. Many social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., show and might spread ideas about males and females and how they should act, and these platforms are those where people can resist and question the ideas because the users create the content. There is gendered self-expression through profile pictures on social media (Alvares et al., 2018, Green Wood et al., 2016 & Butkowski et al., 2020).

According to (Hines et al., 2010) and (Knisel et al., 2009), males are more involved in sports games than females. It is evident that males are more motivated than females in any sports activity and perform very well in any sports task than females. (Dufur & Linford et al., 2010) states that the involvement of females in sports is increasing daily. From 1972 to 2007, female athletes in the United States rose from 294,015 to 3,665,367.

(Abdul et al. 2015) conducted an analysis that revealed that the majority of research on gender disparity has been focused on rural regions, particularly among uneducated people, where gender equity standards remain non-existent. However, this study explicitly examines the highly populated urban districts of Punjab in Pakistan, which have a higher concentration of educated individuals and the country's highest literacy rate, 61%, in 2014. They have access to modern resources and are well-equipped, representing the knowledgeable subjects for this study. (Nisa et al., 1989) highlighted research from Pakistani school textbooks that depicted female characters in stereotyped and traditional positions. (Khurshid, Gillani & Hashmi et al., 2010) analyse that in English and Urdu textbooks at the secondary level, where several male characters are superior to female characters. Feminine predominantly shows conventional and stereotyped roles. (Jabeen, Chaudhary & Omer et al., 2014) observed that texts published by the Punjab Textbooks Board for elementary level education have the same patterns and trends. (Ullah, Ali & Naz et al., 2014) analysed children's literature in Pakistan and arrived at the same conclusions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach of this research is qualitative. Since the material being examined was taken from the Urdu texts books of Punjab Board at elementary level. The study looked at how women are underrepresented in the content and how most characters showed that the financial support is the department of men only. In contrast to men, women work in domestic structures and cared for their kids. This is how gender role specification is embedded in textbooks for male and female students, molding their personalities accordingly (Adminlp2m, 2020).

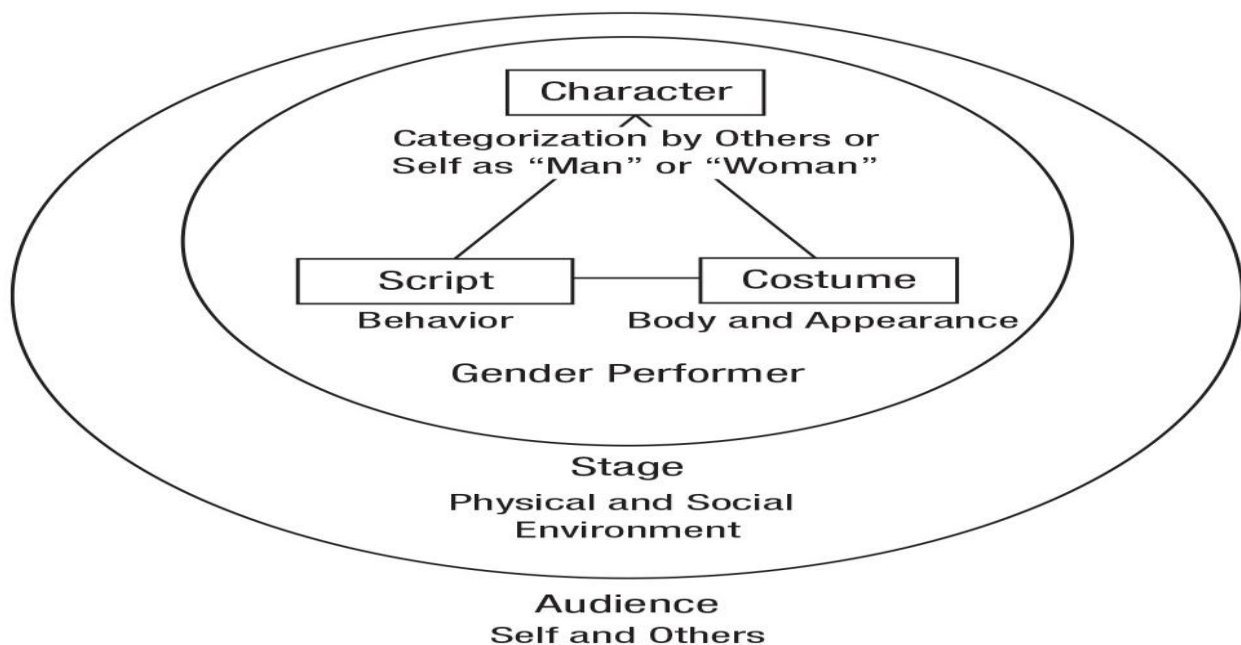
The research utilizes a purposive sampling approach, focusing specifically on Urdu textbooks from grades 1 to 8. This selection provides a comprehensive view of how gender roles

are represented across the stages of elementary education. This emphasis on early-grade textbooks is purposeful, as primary education materials lay the foundational framework for children's understanding of gender roles and societal expectations. whether the instruction focused on a male or female character, how frequently those characters were quoted in the text and how this reinforced the gender stereotypes (Malik et al., 2021).

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The theoretical framework of Judith Butler's theory of gender performatives, which is based on Austin's notions of speech acts as well as socio-political notions of Michel Foucault, Hegel and Althusser, etc. is used in this study. She illustrates that it is through language that people induce gender norms in individuals in order to formulate the specific characteristics of men or women accordingly. In *Gender Trouble*, she describes that "within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative, that is constituting the identity it is purported to be" (pp. 24- 25).

FIGURE 3.1 : *JUDITH BUTLER'S THEORY OF GENDER PERFORMATIVES*



TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The first tool created for this purpose is textual analysis. The text could be used to assess how a textbook represented different genders. These included whether the lesson's focus was on a male or female character, the number of male and female characters in the lesson, and the frequency with which those characters were cited in the text (Malik et al., 2021).

EXCERPT 1

حامد صاحب اپنے بچوں کو قریبی پارک میں سیر کے لیے لے گئے

(Mr. Hameed took his children to the nearby park for a walk.)

The narrative of "حامد صاحب" (Mr. Hameed) walking his kids to the park is presented in an uncomplicated manner in the text. It is brief and does not provide a specific description beyond the main action. In terms of language, the text is simple and direct; it lacks any complex vocabulary or rhetorical tactics. "حامد صاحب" (Mr. Hameed) and "بچوں" (children) to denote specific gender roles and family members. The use of "صاحب" (Mr.) before Hameed's name conveys a sense of respect and authority typically associated with male figures. The attention is entirely on Mr. Hameed's actions, with no indication of the other family members or their roles, a clear indication of a one-sided decision-making process. The syntactic structure reinforces patriarchal ideas about male authority and leadership within the family unit.

EXCERPT 2

یہ ہیں رضا صاحب اور یہ انجینئر ہیں

(This is Mr. Raza, and he is an engineer.)

This line was taken from Punjab Urdu text book for class 3 Urdu book chapter "Hum sab hain khas," which means we all are unique. This text talks about the 'یہ ہیں رضا صاحب' as 'He is Mr. Raza'. The word یہ is a demonstrative noun to introduce Mr. Raza as "engineer", and the reverent phrase "Sahab" suggests that men are suited for this line of work. The first clause represents Mr. Raza, and the second represents him as an engineer. Mr. Raza is shown working in an engineering environment as an architect, contributing to the stereotype of engineers as exclusively male. The narrative quietly promotes accepted gender norms by giving a male character the title and occupation without mentioning any female engineers.

EXCERPT 3

محمد انیق صاحب ایک مصروف شخص ہیں۔ وہ شام کو کمپیوٹر پر کام کرتے ہیں۔ وہ اسٹاک ایکسچینج میں کام کرتے تھے۔ انٹرنیٹ کی مدد سے وہ اپنے گھر بیٹھے ہی کریانے کی اشیاء خرید لیتے ہیں۔ وہ بجلی، پانی، گیس، اور ٹیلیفون کے بل انٹرنیٹ کی مدد سے جمع کروا کر اپنا قیمتی وقت بچا لیتے ہیں۔ ان کی بیگم بھی کبھی کبھار سودا سلف انٹرنیٹ کی مدد سے منگوا لیتی ہیں

(Mr. Mohammad Aniq is a busy person. He works on the computer in the evening. He works in the stock exchange. With the help of the internet, he buys groceries while sitting at home. He saves his precious time by paying the electricity, water, gas, and telephone bills through the internet. His

wife also occasionally orders groceries online.)

The text has been taken from Punjab Urdu text book for class 5. The first sentence is simple declarative, presenting Mr. Aniq respectfully and showing that he is a busy man and works in the stock exchange. The following sentence “مہ شام کو کمپیوٹر پر کام کرتے ہیں” (He works on the computer in the evening) shows his daily routine. The following complex sentences س ے وہ اپنے انٹرنیٹ کی مدد گھر بیٹھے ہی کرانے کی اشیاء خرید لیتے ہیں۔ وہ بجلی، پانی، گیس، اور ٹیلیفون کے بل انٹرنیٹ کی مدد سے جمع کروا کر (With the help of the internet, he buys groceries while sitting at home. He saves his precious time by paying the electricity, water, gas, and telephone bills through the internet.) represent the facilities provided by technology and how it eases the life of every individual.

EXCERPT 4

شہریار کو جب بھی پڑھائی میں کوئی مشکل پیش آتی ہے، یا اسے کسی موضوع پر معلومات درکار ہوتی ہیں، تو انٹرنیٹ اس کا کام آسان کر دیتا ہے۔ اس کی بہن ملائکہ مختلف کام کے کھانے پکانے اور آرائشی اشیاء بنانے کا شوق رکھتی ہے۔ وہ اپنے اس شوق کو انٹرنیٹ کے ذریعے سے ہی پورا کرتی ہے۔ گھر والے بھی ملائکہ کے ہنر کی تعریف کرتے ہیں (Whenever Shehryar faces any difficulty in his studies or needs information on any subject, the Internet makes his task easier. His sister Malaika has a passion for cooking different types of food and making decorative items. She fulfills her passion through the Internet. The family also appreciates Malaika's skills.)

This excerpt has been taken from the class 5 Urdu textbook chapter titled “Duniya ap ki muthi main”, which means “The World is in our hands” for textual analysis of the abovementioned text. - کسی شہریار کو جب بھی پڑھائی میں کوئی مشکل پیش آتی ہے، یا اسے، Malika as girl and Shehryar as boy, This is conditional sentence in which Shehryar as first person here who use internet ‘whenever’ he faces difficulty in learning. This word emphasizes the condition that if he faced difficulty, he used the internet. The second sentence ‘اس shows a simple sentence which indicate the interest of Malika. this is dependent clause which represents that Malika fulfill her interest by using internet. The last clause is simple structure sentence which shows the appreciation of Malika’s Family when she fulfils her hobby.

The chapter is about the advancement of technology and the introduction of smartphones and laptops with internet connections that connect the world with just one touch. In this sentence

structure, the author talks about a brother named Shehryar and a Sister named Malaika. The brother took help from the internet if he faced any problems in his studies, while the sister took help using the internet to cook and learn different household activities.

EXCERPT 5

۔ ٹھیک ہے۔ میں تمہارے ابو جان سے کہتی ہوں کہ آج ہی ٹکٹ لے آئیں۔ اتوار کے روز ہم روانہ ہو جائیں گے
۔ امی جان نے مسکراتے ہوئے جواب دیا

(Okay. I will tell your father to get the tickets today. We will leave on Sunday.

Ami Jaan replied with a smile.)

The text has been extracted from the class 2 book, the wording of which is simple, which makes this present sentence simple. The clause presents the speaker as Ammi Jaan, who will convey the message of her children to their father. The following clause, “to get tickets today” (آج ہی ٹکٹ لے آئیں), shows the urgency and excitement of family to travel by train. The future action clause shows that “they will travel on Sunday” (اتوار کے روز ہم روانہ ہو جائیں گے). The closing sentence represents a mother speaking gently to their children.

EXCERPT 6

واپسی پر ابو جان نے بچوں کو آئس کریم کھلائی، فاطمہ کو گڑیا اور یاسر کو ہوابی جہاز لے کر دیا

(Abbu Jan treated the children to ice cream, gave Fatima a doll, and handed Yaser a toy airplane.)

The structure of this text is a straightforward narrative which depicts the interaction between the father and his children. This text consists of short sentences and everyday vocabulary. No direct speech is included in the text. Instead, the characters' actions are described in the third person, providing an objective account of the interaction. The language in the text is accessible, and the narrative unfolds clearly and concisely, allowing readers to visualize the interaction easily. No direct speech is included in the text. Instead, the characters' actions are described in the third person, providing an objective account of the interaction.

EXCERPT 7

امی جان، آپ جو پکائیں گی، ہم شوق سے کھائیں گے

(Mom, whatever you cook, we will eat it with pleasure.)

The text from the Urdu book chapter titled “Aj kia Pakain?” means “What to cook today?”. The first word, امی جان (Dear Mother), is used to call mother in a respectful and lovely manner, آپ جو (You) as singular noun address mother, جو (Whatever) as a relative pronoun and پکائیں گی (cook) as future tense that whatever you will cook. The last clause,

ہم شوق سے کھائیں گے, in which ہم شوق سے (with interest) represents the adverb of manner by showing the interest of children and کھائیں گے (will eat) as future tense. This chapter is about a mother who asked her children what to cook today. After a lengthy discussion, her son Arif said, “We will eat anything you cook for us.” The story narrates that it is women's only duty to discuss, decide, and cook for their families.

Portraying the female character like this in the book shapes the young mind. According to the social norms, promoting their firm belief compels students to think that men are not supposed to perform certain chores. Another chapter in class 4 illustrates the four stories that cover the themes of courage, power, wealth and intelligence. All the aspects of stories present males as role models that promote traditional gender norms and societal stereotypes. The biographies of men are demonstrated in two or three different chapters, with titles that highlight their efforts and show remarkable courage and compassion. The stories probably highlight their specific deeds and sacrifices, portraying them as heroic role models who substantially contributed to the country's contribution. Only one chapter on females is included in the textbook, and the two lines about Mariam Mukhtar are examples of bravery. This essential and minimal portrayal contrasts the detailed accounts of the two brave men martyrs. There is an apparent disparity in the way gender roles are portrayed—only two sentences are given to Mariam Mukhtar, while total pages and chapters are devoted to two brave male martyrs.

Through interpretative analysis of such textual representation in an Urdu textbook, we aim to find the in-depth meaning of the text and its message—the ability to see the hidden message in these texts through critical analysis. Analyse the promotion of gender-biased topics and perspectives impacts the young mind. Traditional gender norms remain in place, and the educational content in Urdu textbooks shapes students.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the gender-biased representation and embedded patriarchy in Punjab textbook Urdu through performatory aspects of language formulated by Judith Butler. The conventional structure of society was portrayed as adhering to gender norms and roles. Since these images and words perpetuate patriarchal beliefs, it is recommended that the textbooks be updated in light of the study's long-term effects. To understand this topic more deeply, further study in this field is needed. This includes analyzing more textbooks and examining how teachers and students view issues related to gender and citizens' rights. The underrepresentation of gender bias in textbooks can be attributed to the ongoing challenges the nation faces in ensuring universal access to elementary education. The results of this study could guide more inclusive and balanced curriculum changes, creating a learning environment that challenges gender stereotypes and supports gender equality.

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