

# A Qualitative Analytic Case Study of Subliminal Gender Bias in Japanese ELTs

SAGE Open  
July-September 2016: 1–8  
© The Author(s) 2016  
DOI: 10.1177/2158244016653437  
sgo.sagepub.com  


Ian Clark<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Bias is communicated via the “hidden curriculum”—the vehicle for the unspoken academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school. Revealing the hidden curriculum in English language textbooks (ELTs) entails an analytical and holistic approach to the content of the text and images appearing in school textbooks by connecting corresponding examples of subliminal bias which may be many pages apart. This article reviews existing Japanese and international literature on the gender bias created by the hidden curriculum before going on to present a Japanese case study of an ELT in widespread use in Japanese public junior high schools. It was found that while males and females are represented equally in terms of quantity, there exists a remarkable subliminal gender bias that affects young learners’ worldviews of female and male roles in society.

## Keywords

ESL/EFL, language teaching, language studies, gender bias, hidden curriculum, Japan, economy, Asia, economic development, educational administration, leadership, policy

The hidden curriculum is a global phenomenon of significance to educators around the world because school textbooks play a crucial role in shaping students’ worldviews of female and male roles in their respective societies. The author of this article applied a qualitative case study research method (Yin, 2009) to the first book of the *New Crown* series, which was examined for gender bias—the depiction of women in subordinate roles or engaged in stereotypical activities. A previous study on Japanese English language textbooks (ELTs) conducted by Otlowski (2003) emphasized that “a number of textbooks, and especially textbooks published in Japan fail to represent accurately the substantial role women . . . play in the make up and workforce of modern societies” (p. 7). The task of reform is very challenging, and differs according to national and cultural circumstances. The overarching task is one that entails changing the cultural definition of masculinity to include equality with and respect for females. The explicit purpose of this article is therefore to explore the following question: Has subliminal gender bias been eliminated from Japanese ELTs? This case study finds for a negative response to this question, and verifies earlier research on this issue in the Japanese context.

*New Crown*, first published in 2002, is currently on its fourth edition (2014). The focus of this article is placed upon the first book (in a series of three) which provides extensive examples of gender bias, and concurs with prior research on this issue in the Japanese context. The *New Crown* series is

designed for junior high school students (seventh-ninth grades) who typically utilize one book for each academic year. An extensive team of writers contributed to the series published by the Sanseido Company Ltd. As one would expect, the language level is basic. The conversations are short (typically four lines), and the grammar is highly structured for repetition. The most recent statistics made available by the Collaborative Reference Database of the National Diet Library (2008) show *New Crown* to comprise nearly a quarter of ELTs being used in Japanese public schools at that time (21.6%).

## United Nations Criteria

Based on the United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted 1979), and the Beijing Platform for Action (adopted 1995), textbooks promote gender equality if they meet the following criteria: (a) females are protagonists, (b) females and males are not described according to a stereotypical sexual

<sup>1</sup>Nagoya University of Commerce & Business, Aichi-ken, Japan

### Corresponding Author:

Ian Clark, Nagoya University of Commerce & Business, Nisshin Kaguyama Hananomachi 14-402 Kaguyama, 4-201-2 Nisshin-shi, Nagoya, Aichi-ken 470-0134, Japan.  
Email: clarki@nucba.ac.jp



division of labor, (c) ways of living free of conventional ideas of femininity and masculinity are described positively, (d) topics encourage students to think about sexual discrimination and gender equality, (e) topics encourage students to reconsider various issues close to them from a gender perspective, and (f) topics encourage students to think about female's human rights as a global issue. In the case study of *New Crown*, it will be seen that the textbook fails to deliver on any of the above criteria. A system of education is a product of collective thought, reinforcing and reflecting the social and cultural context of specific nations.

## Politics and History: The Japanese Context

It is in this context of stereotyping at Japanese schools that Skelton (1997) asked the question “do current conceptions of curricula reflect and anticipate the challenge of living in a world which is rapidly changing and becoming ever more complex?” (p. 177). This is a question of some extreme relevance to Japan facing a very uncertain future, both socially and therefore economically, due to its aging population and difficulty in recruiting and retaining women into a declining labor pool. In response to these issues in 2013, Prime Minister Abe announced a surprising move away from earlier conservative policies (i.e., females should remain at home and raise children) toward a policy called “womenomics.” This policy aims not only at increasing the number of women in employment but also, and more radically, at increasing the number of women in management roles—currently only 6.6% in 3,873 companies (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Pamphlet, 2014). In all, 42.5% of Japanese women have some post-secondary education—among the most educated in the world—yet only 67.5% are gainfully employed, part-time work included (Auslin, 2015). Even then, many are in temporary employment until marriage and leave work to have children as indicated by a sharp drop in the employment rate among women aged between 35 and 39 (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012). The Meiji Yasuda Institute for Life and Wellness (2014) conducted a survey ( $n = 3,616$ ) finding that 73% of female respondents left work after marriage or childbirth, only 14.7% continued to work after marriage, and only 13.6% returned to work when their child reached middle-school age (an age deemed fit by many Japanese mothers).

This may be traced back through Japan's complex history to the notion of “Good Wife, Wise Mother” (Fukaya, 1988). This social policy originated during the Meiji period (1868–1912) and became increasingly institutionalized in the early 1920s. The emergence of the nuclear family in Japan meant that by the 1920s, the modern gender division of labor that assigned work to men and domestic duties to women began to be reflected and driven by a rapid growth in the number of “practical” middle schools for girls. The term *practical* referred to home economics (e.g., housekeeping and sewing),

and by 1925, the number of students enrolled in girls' middle schools had exceeded the number in co-educational middle schools, and continued to rise (National Institute of Educational Policy Research [NIER], 2014).

Rigid family roles and relationships have therefore been the “backbone” of Japanese society. However, this perspective began to change due to Japan's aging population, delayed marriages, and a fallen birthrate, which has fallen below the level needed for replacement (Rebick & Takenaka, 2009). In response, provision should be made in public school ELTs (and more generally) for young learners to understand the economic impact that female participation may have. In 2010, a Goldman Sachs report estimated that if women in Japan were employed at the same rate as men (about 80%), economic output would grow by up to 15%. This was corroborated by a 2014 article in *The Economist* that stated raising female labor participation to the level of males could add eight million people to Japan's shrinking workforce (predicted to decline by 40% by 2050), and again predicted a potential increase in GDP by as much as 15%. It seems unlikely that these targets will be met unless Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT) addresses Skelton's question to be found at the beginning of this section.

## Theoretical Perspectives on the Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum is that set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes . . . and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way. (Skelton, 1997, p. 188)

There are various perspectives on the hidden curriculum. First, the functionalist perspective, as seen in the foundational work of Parsons (1959), focuses on schools as vehicles through which students learn the social norms, values, and skills they require to function and contribute to the existing society (Giroux, 1983). This is a positive account which postulates the need for social control to ensure social success. It is this macroscopic perspective that Japanese policy adheres to most closely, hence the reproduction of stereotypical gender roles in *New Crown* Book 1. Second is the liberal perspective. Liberalists take a microscopic view by examining the internal structures and processes of schooling as opposed to how schools exercise control to create and maintain the social and cultural status quo. It considers the hidden curriculum to be those practices of school life that take on an appearance of accepted normality through their daily production and reproduction. Many liberal critiques of schooling set out to expose those unquestioned and therefore “hidden” aspects of school life such as school rules and codes of discipline, learning organization (e.g., streaming and mixed ability), and teacher–student relationships/interactions. They seek to make explicit the assumptions on

which everyday practices come to light and describe the process of how these practices are created and maintained in classrooms. For example, Hargreaves (1967) found that once streamed into their respective ability levels, students allocated to lower streams assumed the learning identities of students of lower ability.

A third perspective is the critical perspective. The key problem for critical research is a critical-Marxist analysis of the hidden curriculum to address how schooling functions to reproduce various inequalities in society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). It “recognises that ‘official’ or formal curriculum statements of schools support notions to those hidden or unintended consequences of schooling which lead to social injustice” (Skelton, 1997, p. 181). There is a body of foundational work from the critical perspective by feminist researchers that demonstrates that schools, despite assumptions to the contrary, do not support outcome equity and therefore create social asymmetry. In a feminist critique of reality, the norms, values, expectations, and practices of schools reproduce patriarchal relations in society (McDonald, 1980; Spender & Spender, 1980). Furthermore, contributions by researchers such as Apple (1986) reveal the “hidden curriculum” of schooling as a middle-class, male-dominated phenomenon, which consequently leads to inequality and injustice in society.

The final, and most abstract perspective, is that of the post-structuralists. Although post-structuralism (as seen in the work of Foucault) grew from structuralist perspectives, it rejects the use of sweeping totalizing theories—those ideas which set-up monolithic opposing forces, for example, Marxism versus capitalism. For post-structural philosophers, social power is multifarious and multi-located. Thus, the power behind social reproduction through the hidden curriculum cannot be reduced to a conspiratorial group or entity such as “class interests,” “the state,” or a “patriarchy.” Naturally then, critical theorists, of the third perspective stated earlier, would critique post-structuralists for under-emphasizing the role of asymmetrical power relations. Foucault (1981), however, does acknowledge the overt and covert influence of power and knowledge over individuals. Institutions, such as schools, direct power and knowledge to facilitate the imposition of disciplinary practices that reduce individuals to passive recipients. Post-structuralists see power as being circulated through discourse. In recent years, it has been recognized and emphasized that mutual and equal classroom interactions are at the core of learning and, depending on the learning environment (Clark, 2014), can either facilitate or frustrate “good learning” (Clark, 2011; Toussaint-Clark & Clark, 2008). The post-structuralist view is therefore the most removed from the functionalist perspective paralleled by Japanese policy on education because it emphasizes the examination of the democratic values of equality and representation, and advocates for viewpoints that challenge the status quo (Clark, 2011). The unfortunate consequence is

that there are very few active researchers who take a post-structuralist approach to curricula at Japan universities or policy bureaus. A rare exception is Professor Masahiro Arimoto of the Graduate School of Education at Tohoku University (see Arimoto, Clark, Yamamoto, & Shinkawa, 2015). It is worth noting that a perspective inherently contains internal differences (sub-perspectives) that overlap or complement each other to some degree. To conclude, while delineating perspectives conveys central ideas, it remains an exercise in reductionism which oversimplifies social reality. The key point therefore is to not become a “slave” to any particular perspective on the hidden curriculum.

## Comparative Studies

### *Inequity in International Contexts*

A significant body of research which focuses on ELTs has been produced by various nations around the world. For example, a recent Iranian analysis found that only 18% of females were portrayed in occupational roles, whereas for males, this was 82% (Gharhavi & Mousavi, 2012). In a Greek ELT, only 13.6% of women were portrayed as paid workers compared with 53% of men (Deiyanni-Kouimtzi, 1992). A Jordanian study (Hamdan, 2010) found that males were shown to be the major element in the labor force in society, filling 79% of the occupational roles. This finding is paralleled by a Malaysian study (Kumarid, 2002), which found males were engaged in a greater variety of occupations and the active participants in many outdoor activities. In contrast, females were limited to a small range of occupations and engaged in passive indoor activities. Similarly, in Pakistan, a study (Mattu & Hussain, 2003) emphasized that textbook publishers are “resistant to women’s rights and believe in the status quo” (p. 91). The study noted that girls are portrayed as unobtrusive, while boys are curious, active, and ready to take the initiative.

Even in nations with a national commitment to gender equity, there are no guarantees. For example, in Sweden, Holmqvist and Gjörup (2006) found that most occupations that were held by men and women were described without an occupation or with a stereotypical one. Such problems do not necessarily recede with the passage of time. For example, Lee (2006) analyzed ELTs in Hong Kong across a period of some 30 years, and reported that there had been no discernible improvement across this time. This finding is well supported by the bias and inequality found in the Japanese context.

### *Inequity in Japanese Contexts*

There is a long historical background for gender inequity in Japanese ELTs that foregrounds the existence of a “hidden curriculum” in the textbooks of today (Kato, 2002; Lee, 2014; Otlowski, 2003; Sano, Iida, & Hardy, 2001;

Sakita, 1995). Some 15 years ago, Sano et al. (2001) gave a presentation on a range of Japanese junior high school ELTs (including *New Crown*) at which they presented various characteristics of bias. These characteristics included the empowerment of males as deciders and choosers, that remarks made by males had more substance, and chapter themes focused on male characters. Similarly, Otlowski (2003) found that women were portrayed as homemakers and mothers, a bias reinforced by a general lack of women in the workplace. Women were seen to participate in and oversee domestic duties such as laundry, shopping, and food preparation. In contrast, situations outside the home were the domain of male characters. Otlowski's study parallels an earlier Japanese study by Sakita (1995) which found that males were depicted as mountaineer, sailor, colonel, priest, and carpenter. Females filled occupations such as student, maid, actress, ballet dancer, and mother. Topics on gender (e.g., women's movements and female protagonists) were (and still are) a rare inclusion in Japanese textbooks, "and only three women—Marie Curie, Mother Teresa, and Helen Keller—appeared frequently" (Kato, 2002). In a recent study of Japanese textbooks conducted by Lee (2014), it was found that "general disparities in the forms of female invisibility, male firstness and stereotypical images are still prevalent in the textbooks examined" (p. 1).

The findings of Sakita (1995), Sano et al. (2001), and Otlowski (2003) were published many years ago. These background studies indicate that the Japanese education ministry's mission to propagate gender equality through education has not been put into practice by textbook writers and publishers. As Lee (2006) noted, one should not be surprised that gender inequity exists even when considering that the fourth edition of the *New Crown* series was published as recently as 2014. The textbook under review contains numerous examples of thematic bias, specifically themes of silence, compliance, subordination and the social status, occupational roles, and activities in general of women vis-à-vis those of males.

## Qualitative Analysis

The previous section presents a number of international and Japanese-based studies which found that females are underrepresented in ELTs. However, this was not found to be true in the case of *New Crown* Book 1. There are 315 illustrations of males and 303 of females (3.9% more males). However, it is worth noting that some pages do feature males only, while this is never the case for females. For example, there are 11 male images on page 80 and 23 on page 105, yet there are no females. The closest corresponding page is page 81 where only two of the 12 images are of males. In general, it is not the quantity of males and females that creates bias; it is the qualitative aspects of their lives as they enact their respective social worlds in words and pictures. They are seen to engage

in differing activities, which present them in ways suggesting biased social categorizations.

### The Front Cover

"Male firstness" (Lee, 2014) begins on the front cover. The cover presents an illustration of a boy and girl in a countryside setting. The male is the dominant figure, large, and in the foreground. He is dynamic and active, riding his bicycle at high speed as indicated by his hair flying behind him. He is waving his hat in the air. We may also imagine that the boy is shouting to his female friend who stands in the distance as a shadowy and silent figure. His female counterpart is standing still, and there is no suggestion of movement or speech. She is waiting for him in the shade, a distant, passive, and obscure figure. The cover may be found at [http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4385588678/ref=pd\\_lpo\\_sbs\\_dp\\_ss\\_3?pf\\_rd\\_p=187205609&pf\\_rd\\_s=lpo-top-stripe&pf\\_rd\\_t=201&pf\\_rd\\_i=4385701881&pf\\_rd\\_m=AN1VRQENFRJN5&pf\\_rd\\_r=0T95AE9S8BHWWDMMM0SD](http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4385588678/ref=pd_lpo_sbs_dp_ss_3?pf_rd_p=187205609&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=4385701881&pf_rd_m=AN1VRQENFRJN5&pf_rd_r=0T95AE9S8BHWWDMMM0SD)

While the first book of the series is the focus of this case study, the front cover of *New Crown* Book 2 exhibits similar favoritism toward males. In that case, a boy and girl are in a hot air balloon soaring over the countryside. The boy is empowered by the possession of a telescope so that he may see further and with greater clarity.

### Sport and Leisure

Sports can be used to present males and females differently. For example, an illustration of an aggressive looking male baseball player with his bat raised is paired with one of a girl in her school uniform smiling benignly. In basketball, there is a sense of non-stop action and the potential for bodily contact. Baseball uses a hard bat and requires the players to hit hard and slide aggressively. Tennis, on the contrary, is perceived as a relatively gentle game more suitable for less powerful females. Consequently, basketball and baseball are represented in the textbook as almost exclusively male activities. There are 12 illustrations of males playing baseball and 12 for basketball, whereas there is only one female baseball player and two female basketball players. For tennis, there are 15 female images and only three male tennis players.

There is a chapter themed around wheelchair basketball, a choice of sport that suggests an overtly male theme. However, the writers/publishers do appear to have made some effort to redress the male versus female inequality in terms of relative quantity. Page 82 features 12 illustrations, of which 10 are of females. Yet, even in a chapter devoted to basketball, none of the images on this page portray females as basketball players. While girls are never illustrated as basketball players, there is a photograph of four female players on the final page of the chapter; however, this is counterbalanced by four illustrations of males on the same page, one of which is a game official.

### Employment and Social Activities

The social and economic supremacy of males is clearly evident on pages 14 and 15. Of the 19 illustrations, only 5 are girls. So, while the overall number of appearances in the textbook is quite balanced, there is a very clear imbalance on these pages devoted to occupations and activities. The pages feature males engaged in adventurous, superior, or “cool” roles: astronaut, doctor, administrator, vet, father, and pop singer. Males are also depicted as engaged in various activities that reinforce positive aspects of maleness: (a) opening a box in a way that suggests curiosity and risk-taking, (b) playing with a yo-yo skillfully and dynamically, (c) eating lunch with a large confident grin, (d) a boy with his mouth wide open in an exaggerated manner suggesting great confidence, and (e) one of the main male characters writing his name on the classroom board, a further indication of the academic hierarchy in schools. In contrast, of the five girls, none are shown to be economically productive. Instead, they are shown to be (a) looking pretty while silently drinking juice, (b) holding up a plate of food that we must assume she has prepared, and (c) asking a question, which can only suggest a gap in her knowledge. We know she is asking a question and not answering one because of the large question mark in the picture. The corresponding image appears on page 121. Here, a boy has his hand raised to answer a question. We understand he knows the answer because the (male) teacher is pointing at him to elicit it from him; (d) taking direction, albeit from an older female. The fifth illustration is of a girl, simply standing there and doing nothing at all; the very example of passivity. There are two small illustrations of a woman in a laboratory coat (p. 54), but rather ironically, it serves to remind the reader of the remarkable paucity of such images. Another female is shown as working at a museum. She is on reception, her sole purpose to receive and support others. Predictably, the uniformed authority figure of the town (a police officer) is male.

### Female Passivity

It has been found that girls are often depicted exhibiting “healthy” behaviors typical for girls and not boys. They are “silent, compliant, gentle, helpful, neat and polite” (Irby & Brown, 2011, p. 22). Irby and Brown (2011) emphasized that “the lessons of the hidden curriculum teach girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue” (p. 244). This is reflected in the composition of the *New Crown* textbook under review here.

Much of what happens in the textbook occurs at an imaginary school. Several pages into the textbook (pp. 6-7), the reader is presented with a plan view of the town in which the school is located as a double page feature. The main characters are depicted, as are other uncredited characters, all of whom are engaged in various activities around the town. Boys are more active: running, riding bicycles, and walking dogs. The theme of female silence and reception is first

encountered in this section of the textbook. A girl sits quietly at an ice-cream stall whereas her male companion speaks, his mouth wide. While there is only one instance of female silence on this page, it indicates why it is necessary to avoid a reductionist approach. Illustrations that reinforce the theme of silent girls listening to “chatty” boys recur throughout the textbook. For example, on page 70, a boy speaks as a girl listens and takes notes. This is consonant with the Foucauldian perspective on “hidden curriculum”: Boys are seen to have ownership (power) over the text (knowledge) rather than sharing it. They have preferential access, holding the books and pointing to them while the girls stand passively at their side. In terms of numbers, there are precisely no instances of females taking a dominant discursive role unless they are performing stereotypical domestic duties. When taken collectively (as a whole), the images (illustrations and photographs) and discourse reveal asymmetrical power relations.

Two of the girls in the town are demonstrating compliance as they walk across a pedestrian crossings obediently. The corresponding male image is of a handicapped boy in a wheelchair. These forms of subliminal bias are difficult to discern unless one takes a holistic approach, but when taken together, individual images create a whole image that reinforces girls for compliance and suggests that less able boys behave in the same way as girls.

There are a number of illustrations that depict girls as passive recipients and boys as the dominant interlocutor during male–female interactions.

Even though the conversations in the text are very short, there are clear examples of the female characters taking a subordinate or caretaker role. On page 21, a girl compliments her male friend’s prowess (“You’re good Ken.”) at basketball before going on to ask him “Are you thirsty?” This question is reinforced through repetition further down the page by a different girl. Another example of a girl in a caretaker role is to be found on page 62 as she organizes the school bags of her male friends. A further example of girls supporting boys occurs on page 102. The girl provides the boy with the information he requires to make his decision on what they will do (“I see. Then today let’s take a bus”), and the conversation ends.

A conversation on page 23 opens with the girl apologizing to the boy without any particular reason or context for doing so (“Oh, I’m sorry”). She appears to be apologizing for being there at all. This is an example of those “healthy” behaviors that “ideal” (female) students should exhibit. That is, she is submissive and polite. Girls in the textbook are faced with an unfavorable discourse gradient in other ways:

Boy: I have a cat.

Girl: Really?

Boy: The cat is white.

Girl: Oh. (p. 125)

The girl, while responsive, is monosyllabic and receptive. This is also one of two examples of male ownership on this page without corresponding female examples.

There is a subliminal gender bias toward girls for linguistic competence (Emma: “I study Japanese before class.” p. 74) and against girls for the traditional male-dominated subject area of math. The same character (Emma) asks a male friend for help with her mathematics homework:

Emma: Can you help me with tomorrow’s math homework?  
(p. 90)

Both aspects conform to the widely held belief that girls are expected to be less capable than boys at mathematics, but more linguistically able than male students. However, there is no explicit suggestion that Emma is actually good at Japanese here, only that she gets up early to study it. However, we know that she cannot do math and that her male counterpart can.

### *Females as Domestic Technicians*

There is a general expectation that Japanese women will leave employment to organize and manage the household. In the case of the textbook, this is reflected in both words and pictures. On page 44, a boy and a girl are at the supermarket:

Emma: I have a shopping bag.

Ken: Good.

Even in this brief exchange, we see the female has organized for one of her primary functions—shopping—and we see the male reinforce her positively for that behavior. In the background of the same picture, two adult females are shopping in their roles as “good wives,” one of which is with a small child performing her role as the “wise mother.” As stated earlier, this is a social role of traditional cultural significance in Japan (Fukaya, 1988). The “healthy” female roles of shopping and food preparation are reinforced in the textbook. For example,

“How much is the blouse?”

“It’s 2000 yen.” (p. 141)

“Where is Mom?” (capital M in the original text).

“She’s in the kitchen.” (p. 142)

There are more vignettes that depict females as domestic managers who make cookies and go shopping (p. 107).

In this world, the domestic and social roles and behaviors are clearly demarked. In a further obvious example, a picture of a man dressed as a chef is paired with one of a

woman dressed as a housewife. She is portrayed so stereotypically that she actually appears to be wearing her apron as her uniform (p. 124). Such images offer proof that male cooks are engaged in more important bread-winning roles outside the home while females are subordinated to the domestic domain.

Even when males are shown to be actively involved in domestic work, it is the female who assumes some level of control:

Wait. Don’t wash the dishes.

Please use this paper. (p. 48)

In a different illustration (p. 104), a boy assists his mother in the kitchen. His mother is in control at the stove, reinforcing the stereotype that she has dominion over the kitchen as the “good wife” and over her child as the “wise mother.”

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this case study confirm those of the earlier Japanese and international studies introduced in the literature review of this article. It is of course perfectly acceptable to depict men as adventurous, confident, knowledgeable, and dynamic if textbooks then include corresponding images and conversations that elevate females to an equal status, and promote their learning identities beyond that of compliant caretaker. Unfortunately, the corresponding female vignettes are either absent or, where present, operate to exaggerate bias. There are very few positive accounts of boys taking some measure of domestic responsibility presented as singular instances of dishwashing and room cleaning. There is also one illustration of a girl taking out the rubbish. It is a rather ambiguous image as it may be seen as a foray into those duties typically performed by males, or as another domestic duty which females should take care to perform. There are other such examples; however, they are notably infrequent instances that provide only cosmetic attention to gender equality.

Despite the important role for working women, this case study revealed a “hidden curriculum” that communicates overt and subliminal gender bias, missing the opportunity to prepare young learners for a more economically viable future founded on equitable social and economic participation. When analyzed holistically, bias accumulates to form a pervasive counterproductive theme of social and economic inequality between females and males. In this particular case study, which concurs with prior research on ELTs and gender bias, it is apparent that despite MEXT’s stated intention of equality through education, Japanese ELT writers and publishers have fallen short of the United Nations criteria for gender equity, and those of the industrialized global community. What changes can be made to construct a learning environment that ensures outcome equity, and employment

opportunity based on ability rather than gender? First, teachers need to be made aware of their tendencies toward gender bias. Next, they need to be provided with in-service programs which help them acquire strategies that combat inequitable teaching styles. Finally, and as this article highlights, efforts need to be made to remove gender bias from educational materials. Teachers need to be aware of the gender bias embedded in educational materials and texts and need to take steps to combat this bias. An innovative approach is to plan classes that use biased texts to help students identify the gender bias inside them, and facilitate critical discussions about why that bias exists. Bailey (1992) identified six attributes that need to be considered when delivering a gender-equitable curriculum: classroom materials need to be (a) inclusive, (b) accurate, (c) affirmative, (d) representative, (e) integrated, and (f) weave together the experiences, needs, and interests of both males and females. McCormick (1995) echoed the findings of this analytic case study by emphasizing that

we need to look at the stories we are telling our students and children. Far too many of our classroom examples, storybooks, and texts describe a world in which boys and men are bright, curious, brave, inventive, and powerful, but girls and women are silent, passive, and invisible.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

### References

- Apple, M. W. (1986). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education*. London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Arimoto, M., Clark, I., Yamamoto, S., & Shinkawa, M. (2015). Cultural perspectives on classroom assessment: Towards the “Japanese Assessment for Learning Network. *Tohoku University Annual Bulletin, Graduate School of Education, 1*, 1-19.
- Auslin, M. (2015, February). Japan’s gamble on “Womenomics.” *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/michael-auslin-japans-gamble-on-womenomics-1424998266>
- Bailey, S. (1992). *How schools shortchange girls: The AAUW report*. New York, NY: Marlowe.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalistic America*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Clark, I. (2011). Formative assessment: Assessment is for self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology Review, 24*, 205-249. doi:10.1007/s10648-011-9191-6
- Clark, I. (2014). Equitable learning outcomes: Supporting economically and culturally disadvantaged students in “formative learning environments.” *Improving Schools, 17*, 116-126. doi:10.1177/1365480213519182
- Collaborative Reference Database. (2008). *National Diet Library*. Retrieved from [http://crd.ndl.go.jp/reference/modules/d3ndl-crdrentry/index.php?page=ref\\_view&id=1000046326](http://crd.ndl.go.jp/reference/modules/d3ndl-crdrentry/index.php?page=ref_view&id=1000046326)
- Deiyanni-Kouimtzi, K. (1992). Father is out shopping because mother is at work: Greek primary school reading as an example of educational policy for gender equity. *Gender and Education, 4*, 67-79.
- The Economist. (2014, March 29). *Holding back half the nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21599763-womens-lowly-status-japanese-workplace-has-barely-improved-decades-and-country>
- Foucault, M. (1981). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Fukaya, M. (1988). “*Good wife, wise mother*” (in Japanese). Nagoya, Japan: Reimeishoboo.
- Gharhavi, A., & Mousavi, S. (2012). A content analysis of textbooks: Investigating gender bias as a social prominence in Iranian high school English textbooks. *English Linguistics Research, 1*, 42-49. doi:10.5430/elv.v1n1p42
- Giroux, H. A. (1983). *Theory and resistance in education*. London, England: Heinemann.
- Hamdan, S. (2010). English-language textbooks reflect gender bias: A case study in Jordan. *Advances in Gender Education, 2*, 22-26.
- Hargreaves, D. (1967). *Social relations in the secondary school*. London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Holmqvist, P., & Gjörup, L. (2006). *The representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks* (Doctoral dissertation). Malmö University, Sweden. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2043/3426>
- Irby, B., & Brown, G. (2011). *Gender and early learning environments*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Kato, I. (2002). *English language textbooks and gender equality*. Osaka, Japan: Human Rights in Asian Schools, V, Asia-Pacific Human Rights Education Centre. Retrieved from [http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human\\_rights\\_education\\_in\\_asian\\_schools/section2/2002/03/english-language-textbooks-and-gender-equality.html](http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/2002/03/english-language-textbooks-and-gender-equality.html)
- Kumarid, S. (2002). *Gender bias in Malaysian English language textbooks used in secondary schools* (Unpublished master’s thesis). University of Putra, Malaysia.
- Lee, J. (2006). Gender representation in Hong Kong English textbooks. *Linguistics and Education, 1*, 23-36.
- Lee, J. (2014). A hidden curriculum in Japanese EFL textbooks: Gender representation. *Linguistics and Education, 27*, 39-53. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2004.07.002
- Mattu, A., & Hussain, N. (2003). Gender bias and stereotypes in school texts. In A. Mattu & N. Hussain (Eds.), *The subtle subversion: The state curricula and textbooks in Pakistan* (pp. 91-98). Islamabad, Pakistan: Sustainable Development Policy Institute. Available from [www.sdpi.org](http://www.sdpi.org)
- McCormick, P. (1995, February). Are girls taught to fail? *U.S. Catholic, 60*, 38-42.
- McDonald, M. (1980). Schooling and the reproduction of class and gender relations. In L. Barton, R. Meighan, & S. Walker (Eds.), *Schooling, ideology, and the politics of schooling* (pp. 123-154). Lewes, UK: Falmer Press.

- Meiji Yasuda Institute for Life and Wellness. (2014). *Survey regarding attitudes towards child birth and child rearing among people aged between 20-40* (8th survey) (In Japanese). Retrieved from [http://www.myilw.co.jp/life/enquete/08\\_marriage\\_birth.html](http://www.myilw.co.jp/life/enquete/08_marriage_birth.html)
- Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Pamphlet. (2014). Retrieved from [http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/org/pamphlet/dl/pamphlet-about\\_mhlw.pdf#page=13](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/org/pamphlet/dl/pamphlet-about_mhlw.pdf#page=13)
- National Institute of Educational Policy Research. (2014). *Gender equality in education in Japan*. Retrieved from <http://www.nier.go.jp/English/educationjapan/pdf/201403GEE.pdf>
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2012). *Closing the gender gap: Act now*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/gender/closingthegap.htm>
- Otlowski, M. (2003). Ethnic diversity and gender bias in EFL textbooks. *Asian-EFL Journal*, 5, 1-15.
- Parsons, T. (1959). The school class as a social system: Some of its functions in American society. *Harvard Educational Review*, 29, 297-318.
- Rebick, M., & Takenaka, A. (2009). *The changing Japanese family*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sakita, T. (1995). Sexism in Japanese English education: A survey of EFL texts. *Women and Language*, 18, 5-12.
- Sano, F., Iida, M., & Hardy, T. (2001, May). *Gender representation in Japanese EFL textbooks*. PAC3 at JALT 2001 Conference Proceedings, International Conference Centre, Kitakyuushuu, Japan.
- Skelton, A. (1997). Studying hidden curricula: Developing a perspective in the light of postmodern insights. *Curriculum Studies*, 5, 177-193.
- Spender, D., & Spender, E. (Eds.). (1980). *Learning to lose: Sexism and education*. London, England: Hutchinson.
- Toussaint-Clark, C., & Clark, I. (2008). Exploring and exposing a gap in L2 research: How socio-linguistic roles and relationships facilitate or frustrate second language acquisition. *The Journal of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies (AEDEAN)*, 30, 101-113.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. New York, NY: SAGE.

### Author Biography

**Ian Clark** has been teaching and researching for 20 years. He holds PhD in education from the University of Washington in Seattle, USA. This article reflects Dr Clark's commitment to inter-cultural understanding and outcome equity in educational settings.