

Gender Stereotyped Images of Occupations in Malaysian Primary English Textbooks: A Social Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

A number of researchers in the past have highlighted on portrayals of stereotyped gender roles in textbooks, but little has fully explored on how social semiotic meanings are used for identifying occupational gender roles. Social semiotics places an importance in this current research of images on textbooks due to how it visualises the existing society. The main objective of this study is to uncover images of gender-stereotyped occupations from primary school English textbooks and uncover gendered attributes from these images. Images in the textbooks are investigated based on how images with agentic and communal qualities reveal representational, interpersonal and compositional meaning. This activity of collecting images involved framing the gender with visual elements through connecting or disconnecting them to the illustrations. This study found 126 images represented in professional occupations and 81 images represented in non-professional occupations. Results showed that occupational images of males were linked to more self-assertive and agentic qualities while females were portrayed with more caring, communal qualities. Social semiotic analysis revealed that more males were shown as professionals such as architects, and doctors, whereas females were more portrayed with professional occupations such as nurses and teachers. Non-professional males were also included with agentic qualities, portrayed by farmers and firefighters. The implication of the study adopts a gender perspective to semiotic theory through tying meaning with gendered images, culminating semiotic and gender inclusivity in educational materials.

Keywords: *agentic, communal, gender-stereotyping, social semiotics, textbooks*