

Little Girls and Big Stories: A Thematic Analysis of Gender Representations in Selected Asian Room to Read Storybooks

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Abstract : Room to Read is an international nonprofit organization aimed at empowering young readers through literature and literacy education. In particular, the organization is focused on girls' education in schools and bettering their social status through crafting stories and making sure that these stories are accessible to them. In 2019, Room to Read visited the Philippines and partnered with Philippine children's literature publishers Adarna House, Lampara Books, Anvil Publishing, and OMF-Hiyas with the goal of producing contextualized stories that Filipino children can read. The result is a set of 20 storybooks developed by Filipino writers and illustrators, the author of this paper included. The project led to narratives of experiences in storybook production from conceptualization to publication, towards translations and reimagining in online repository, storytelling, and audiobook formats. During the production process, we were particularly reminded of gender representations, child's rights, and telling stories that can empower the children in vulnerable communities, who are the beneficiaries of the project. The storybooks, along with many others produced in Asia and the world, are available online through the literacycloud.org website of Room to Read. In this study, the goal is to survey the stories produced in Asia and look at how gender is represented in the storybooks. By analyzing both the texts and the illustrations of the storybooks produced across Asian countries, themes of portrayals of young boys and girls, their characteristics and narratives, and how they are empowered in the stories are identified, with the goal of mapping how Room to Read is able to address the problem of access to literacy among young girls and ensuring them that they can do anything, the way they are portrayed in the stories. The paper hopes to determine how gender is represented in Asian storybooks produced by the international nonprofit organization Room to Read. Thematic textual analysis was used as methodology, where the storybooks are analyzed qualitatively to identify arising themes of gender representation. This study will shed light on the importance of responsible portrayal of gender in storybooks and how it can impact and empower children. The results of the study can also aid writers and illustrators in developing gender-sensitive storybooks.

Keywords : room to read, asian storybooks, young girls, thematic analysis, child empowerment, literacy, education

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