

Evaluating Gender Sensitivity and Policy: Case Study of an EFL Textbook in Armenia

Authors : Ani Kojoyan

Abstract : Linguistic studies have been investigating a connection between gender and linguistic development since 1970s. Scholars claim that gender differences in first and second language learning are socially constructed. Recent studies to language learning and gender reveal that second language acquisition is also a social phenomenon directly influencing one's gender identity. Those responsible for designing language learning-teaching materials should be encouraged to understand the importance of and address the gender sensitivity accurately in textbooks. Writing or compiling a textbook is not an easy task; it requires strong academic abilities, patience, and experience. For a long period of time Armenia has been involved in the compilation process of a number of foreign language textbooks. However, there have been very few discussions or evaluations of those textbooks which will allow specialists to theorize that practice. The present paper focuses on the analysis of gender sensitivity issues and policy aspects involved in an EFL textbook. For the research the following material has been considered – "A Basic English Grammar: Morphology", first printed in 2011. The selection of the material is not accidental. First, the mentioned textbook has been widely used in university teaching over years. Secondly, in Armenia "A Basic English Grammar: Morphology" has considered one of the most successful English grammar textbooks in a university teaching environment and served a source-book for other authors to compile and design their textbooks. The present paper aims to find out whether an EFL textbook is gendered in the Armenian teaching environment, and whether the textbook compilers are aware of gendered messages while compiling educational materials. It also aims at investigating students' attitude toward the gendered messages in those materials. And finally, it also aims at increasing the gender sensitivity among book compilers and educators in various educational settings. For this study qualitative and quantitative research methods of analyses have been applied, the quantitative – in terms of carrying out surveys among students (45 university students, 18-25 age group), and the qualitative one – by discourse analysis of the material and conducting in-depth and semi-structured interviews with the Armenian compilers of the textbook (interviews with 3 authors). The study is based on passive and active observations and teaching experience done in a university classroom environment in 2014-2015, 2015-2016. The findings suggest that the discussed and analyzed teaching materials (145 extracts and examples) include traditional examples of intensive use of language and role-modelling, particularly, men are mostly portrayed as active, progressive, aggressive, whereas women are often depicted as passive and weak. These modeled often serve as a 'reliable basis' for reinforcing the traditional roles that have been projected on female and male students. The survey results also show that such materials contribute directly to shaping learners' social attitudes and expectations around issues of gender. The applied techniques and discussed issues can be generalized and applied to other foreign language textbook compilation processes, since those principles, regardless of a language, are mostly the same.

Keywords : EFL textbooks, gender policy, gender sensitivity, qualitative and quantitative research methods

Conference Title : ICWEGE 2017 : International Conference on Women, Education and Gender Equality

Conference Location : Barcelona, Spain

Conference Dates : May 26-27, 2017