

Gender issues in children's literature

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Writers, publishers, teachers and parents need to closely scrutinise gender construction in children's literature so that young children are presented with stories that promote equality and respect for both sexes according to Ramesh Nair from the Academy of Language Studies.

In his research, Ramesh Nair explored the [construction](#) of [gender](#) in a selection of Malaysian children's literature texts written in the English [language](#). The aim was to examine the subtle gender-based messages that these texts inherently contain. The researcher aimed to examine surface level features and simultaneously scrutinised the way in which the various characters were constructed linguistically and through visual language.

For this reason, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was adopted as an approach to reading gender construction in Malaysian children's literature. CDA is an approach that looks at how power imbalances are played out through choices made in language use and other semiotic modes. Four methods of analysis were relied upon – a [content analysis](#), a lexical analysis, a transitivity analysis and a visual analysis.

The main findings of the research revealed significant imbalances which include:

- the outnumbering of females by males in both the roles they played and their appearances in the accompanying illustrations,
- practices of stereotyping in the distribution of the characters in

the various settings. While the home setting appeared to be established as feminine space, the workplace and outdoor settings were dominated by males.

- strong nuances of [sexism](#), revealing a weaker construction of females.
- deeply embedded linguistic structures that positioned males as predominantly more powerful than the female characters.
- visual language that accorded male characters the more important role of active doer and females the role of passive observer.

From the day we are born, we are besieged with messages about male and female gender roles and many of us grow up assuming that [gender roles](#) and stereotypes are natural ways of being or behaving. We rarely challenge them.

This study highlights serious concerns about the production of Malaysian children's literature and the findings serves to alert Malaysian writers, publishers of children's books, parents and teachers about the role of language in the construction of gender identity.

More information: [www.uitm.edu.my/index.php/en/r ... hildrens-literature-](http://www.uitm.edu.my/index.php/en/r...hildrens-literature-)

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