

An Evaluation of the Gender Sensitive Nature of Selected Textbooks in the Zimbabwean Secondary School Curriculum

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ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to evaluate the gender sensitivity and balance of selected textbooks in the Zimbabwean school curriculum. An evaluation instrument was designed to evaluate the books and focus group interviews were carried out with a purposive and gender stratified sample of students. The data management and analysis procedures adopted covered both the content and discourse analyses of selected history text books in addition to the interpretations of participants' verbatim statements from the focus group discussions. The study revealed that a great deal of patriarchal values and ideologies are embodied in the textbooks. The textbooks analysed were found to contain gender biases, imbalances and stereotypes. The interviews' carried out revealed that students were overtly and covertly affected by the gender representations in textbooks. In depicting traditional gender stereotypes, textbooks shaped students in particular ways and affect their academic achievement and career choices. The study recommends that textbooks in schools should be carefully selected to avoid those that are full of gender biases or stereotypes. Where possible textbooks could be rewritten to ensure gender sensitivity in order to avoid producing and peddling gender role ideologies and stereotypes that differentially reinforce boys and girls for not only different but highly gender polarized social roles.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Maluwa-Banda (2004) contends that education is generally viewed as an effective way to address gender-related issues in a society. It is believed that education empowers women by enhancing their competencies and preparing them to participate actively in social or economic activities. Educational materials such as textbooks define gender roles in students' minds and as a consequence those images are practiced in society. It is, therefore, imperative that textbooks need to be reviewed with the gender perspective in mind in order to provide a balance and gender-sensitive education to all children. The writers of textbooks to be used in schools have to be aware of the lasting effects of stereotypes found in their books and in other related teaching and learning material.

Oyebela (2003: 43) argues against books that promote gender differentiation and reveal that

such books negate efforts to promote gender equality;

Gender differentiation has.....helped perpetuate the unpleasant consequences of sex-role stereotyping and gender-role stereotyping. Gender stereotypes are rigidly held and over simplified beliefs that males and females possess distinct psychological traits and characteristics they can be unfair and tend to generalize.

What is clear is that gender stereotypes and sex-role stereotypes result in a mind set in learners that negatively affect their life horizons. Areo (2001) argues that textbooks should not contain gender stereotypes as negative gender stereotypes affect a child's aspirations and abilities. Useful and ideal textbooks should therefore contain;

- ♦ Gender balanced coverage
- ♦ Gender appropriate illustrations
- ♦ Gender fairness in language
- ♦ Gender fairness in illustrations
- ♦ Gender fairness in content (Maluwa-Banda 2004)

The influence of books in propagating the patriarchal ideology in Zimbabwean is often compounded by teacher attitudes and expectations towards their learners (Odaga and Heneveld 1995). Nhundu (2007) and Meyer (2008) writing

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from a feminist standpoint epistemology share these sentiments maintaining that the patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum make girls as a whole to be disadvantaged compared to boys as a whole. In concurrence with them the researchers add that in Zimbabwe, boys generally have access to all the *educational goodies*, or relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990) that are systematically denied to girls largely because of the ideology, which are systematically denied to girls largely because of the ideology of patriarchy embedded in the curriculum especially in text books and teachers' attitudes and expectations of pupils' gender roles, which this study argues is compounded by the portrayal of males and females in textbooks such as the history textbooks purposively sampled for this study: *People Making History Books 3 and 4; Dynamics of History Books 3 and 4; Focus on History Books 3 and 4 and History of Central Africa Books 3 and 4*. The issue of the socialization of students into gender role stereotypes is aptly expressed by ZINEC-ANIMA (2002: 3) who notes that:

Textbooks have a major socialization role in the development of children. They convey important messages to the young on how relations in society are to be organized and which value system they should adopt.

Therefore, the socialization at home coupled with the pervasive and biased nature of textbooks used in schools tend cement children gender role socialization while engendering and entrenching gender role stereotypes especially the patriarchal ideology.

The belief that men should be the heads of families and the bread winners appeared to influence the career prospects of girls interviewed and this contributed significantly to some of the lower achievement motivation in both their educational and career aspirations. This inference was arrived at following the participants' responses to the question of what careers they wish to pursue upon graduating from school. Their responses appeared to be a product of the gender role stereotypes peddled in the general society that males should be the breadwinners while women should be home makers whose duties should be associated with domesticity (Gordon 1995; Dorsey 1996). These findings are consistent with the literature by Baly (1989) and Osgood et al. (2006) who pointed out that parents do not only wield a lot of influence over

their children's work experience, but also that strong respect, obedience, and desire to conform to conform to one's parents and family traditions often deter children from families or social groups that uphold collective social values from pursuing careers that they have been brought up to accept as appropriate for the other sex. Such an idea entrenches patriarchy in society (Gordon 1996; Gaidzanwa 1997).

Theoretical Perspectives Used as the Lens for the Study

The study utilized not only the feminist approach but also Gramsci's (1994) notions of ideology, hegemony and common sense as well as Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionist perspectives to view the problem of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean school curriculum. Adopting Gramsci's theory this study posits that the problem of patriarchal values embedded in the Zimbabwean school curricular (Gordon 1995) stems from the hegemonic, ideological and commonsense perspectives of the dominant social groups of that country. In fact, it is important to note that Gramsci's social and political theories have particular pertinence to this study of the content of education, both in its institutional forms (schools), and in its purposive concern with the individuals and the social consciousness of those who pass through its structures as students or as teachers. From a Gramscian perspective therefore, the problem of constraints in a people's life is located in his idea of hegemony, a concept he develops to refer to forms of supremacy obtained by some social groups (males or men in this case) primarily by consent rather than coercion, by moral and intellectual leadership rather than by domination (Christie 2008). He recognizes that the power of a leading social group is maintained by a combination of consent and coercion; however, consent through ideological justification is the normal form of hegemonic control in capitalist society, with coercion visible only in moments of particular crisis (Gramsci 1994).

In its broadest sense, hegemony is a relational concept that includes consideration of relations of coercion as well as consent in the maintenance of control. In this study the problematic aspect of the school as an institution is that it serves as an agent of the dissemination of hegemonic ideologies such as gender and patriarchy,

which are embodied in the curricula in both the formal and hidden forms (Gramsci 1994). Hegemonic consent is not always strong or committed on the part of the persons in the mass. Girls or women may for example, support the existing gendered occupational stratification or arrangements from a sense of active commitment, or because they are unable to conceive of an alternative (Christie 2008).

In the latter sense, hegemony expresses the limits to the conceivable, the boundaries of common sense (Gramsci 1994). In considering ideology, Gramsci asserted its materiality and its integral association with economic structures within the historical bloc. He thus distinguished between organic and arbitrary ideologies, viewing the former as necessary in a given structure. For Gramsci, organic ideologies organize people and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their social position, or struggle among other things. In this sense organic ideologies are part and parcel of the exercise of hegemony by male social groups. Since individual consciousness is a social construct (Christie 1990) and that individuals are formed by an ensemble of social relations, some necessary, some voluntary, and all formed over time, people acquire their consciousness of the structure and its conflicts with agency (Giddens 2001) on the terrain of ideology. This means that a people's consciousness is developed by the ideology disseminated in the structure in which they exist (Giddens 2001). This study argues that the ideology embedded in the school curriculum and expressed by educators through the hidden curriculum is partly the organizer of the pupils' actions or agency towards their gendered adult roles. This idea is aptly expressed in Gramsci's notion that organic ideologies are developed and spread in the historical bloc by intellectuals and a range of institutions and cultural organizations, including the church, schools and the media. While Althusser would argue that institutions such as the school and mass media are ideological state apparatus, Gramsci regards them as institutions for the spread of organic ideologies as an important part of hegemonic consensus (Christie 1990) to promote social order. It is apparent from the aforementioned that the concept of ideology is particularly useful in explaining relations of power, gender and domination in social institutions and in the explication of issues of inequality, injustices and oppression

within the social structures of human existence. It is in this sense that the notion of ideology is used in this study.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The researchers designed a qualitative research project to establish how the school curriculum orients students to specific careers by disseminating gender biases and patriarchal ideologies to young learners through the images of men and women as portrayed through their school text books. The research participants came from four secondary schools randomly selected as a cross section of the target population. They held focus group discussions with fifteen girls and an equal number of boys to establish their perceptions of the impact of their school text books on their aspirations. The researchers questioned both categories of participants about understanding of gender roles, career preferences, the motivations for their aspirations and the relationship between those aspirations and the images of men and women as derived from their school text books. They also explored participants' perceptions of what careers are considered appropriate for boys and girls and whether their aspirations and expectations were partly a product of the influence of their text books' portrayal of men and women in society. Finally, they analyzed six different history text books randomly selected from participants' classrooms to determine how texts and images portray boys and girls or men and women in society. In terms of the data analysis, the use of content and discourse analyses helped us to interpret the data gathered from the focus groups, interviews and texts. This approach helped the researchers explore and unmask gender role biases, ideologies, and stereotypes that polarize the educational and career aspirations of learners along gender lines (McRobbie 1982).

The motivation to adopt a qualitative design for this study was derived from Merriam (1998) and Lincoln and Guba's (2002) advice that qualitative research is ideal especially where the use of various data collection strategies is adopted to enhance trustworthiness through the triangulation of methods and data sources. This idea is also supported by Maree and van der Westhuizen (2010) who cite Agar as justifying the adoption of qualitative research on the grounds of the intensive personal involvement

and in-depth responses of participants it generates in data collection and the fact that it enables researchers to secure a sufficient level of validity and reliability as some of the major reasons why it should be adopted ahead of quantitative research.

Thirty ordinary level students were thus interviewed as focus groups comprising 10 participants in each group. The data gathered through this method was triangulated with that from the content and discourse analyses of the selected history textbooks. The motivation for these research methods were derived from the advice of Fairclough (2003) and Gee (2000) who contend that the latter two approaches have multiple functions: as methods of generating data and analyzing it as well as being theories in research.

Sampling

The study utilized a purposive and gender stratified random sample of 30 ordinary level participants distributed as 15 girls and an equal number of boys. To identify the actual school from which to draw participants, the study adopted a systematic sampling technique to ensure the schools identified for this study were representative of the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the target population. The list of schools offering history as a subject (purposive sampling) were systematically arranged in alphabetical order of names and coded from 1-30 on the sampling frame with codes (numbers) assigned to each one as a sampling unit to be chosen in multiples of 10 to ensure that each and every sampling unit had an equal chance of being included in the study. As a result, 3 schools were selected for the study with each contributing 10 participants to the sample thereby yielding a total sample size of 30 participants.

Goal of the Study and Research Questions

The study sought to examine the gender sensitive and gender balanced nature of selected textbooks in the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum and the impact the found gender representation had on students' on students. The study specifically addressed the question "To what extent are History textbooks at Ordinary Level gender sensitive and what impact does the current gender representation have on students?"

Ethical Considerations

The interviews sessions unfolded with the researcher clarifying the purpose of the research and the interviews so as to alert participants to the principle of informed consent as well as reassuring them of their rights during participation in the study. Participants were also assured of the confidential nature of their responses as well as their rights to withdraw from the research at any time should they deem it fit and that there would be no penalty should they decide to withdraw from the study. However, none of them withdrew. The researcher had to also obtain all the necessary ethical clearance for the permission to conduct the study from the various stakeholders: provincial and district education departments, parental consent as well as the participants' assent before going into the schools. These measures formed part of the researcher's advance protocols for the study. The participants had to be at ease before the interview proceedings commenced, especially in the face of a voice or audio recorder that was used to record the data for all the interview proceedings.

Focus Group Interviews

A focus group interview as a research technique implies a semi-structured group discussion, moderated by a discussion leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of obtaining information by means of group interaction on a designated topic (McLafferty 2004). Through the use of focus group interviews we were able to explore and generate a widening of responses activating details of perspectives and releasing inhibitions might have otherwise discouraged participants from disclosing important information (Dzvimbo et al. 2010). The type of questions used comprised both structured and unstructured forms. The objective was to allow respondents an opportunity not just to respond in short but also to provide more explanations, justifications and evaluations of issues contained in the interview questions (Maree 2010). This method produced data rich in detail that is often difficult to achieve with other research methods, because participants built on each other's ideas and comments to provide in-depth and value-added insights (Dzvimbo et al. 2010; Meyer 2008).

Content and Discourse Analyses

According to Fairclough (2003), discourses always involve more than language and encompass coordinating language with ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing and feelings. As such in this study the researchers took them to include representations of how things are and have been as well as how things might or could be (Gee 2000). In this study discourses were considered as occurring at three levels: action, representation and identification. Using Fairclough's conception of texts, the discourse analysis employed in this study focused on texts as encompassing both the spoken and written modes of communication. This means that even the data from focus group and individual face to face interviews was also subjected to discourse analyses with a view to establishing the hidden culture curriculum (Barrow 2005).

RESULTS

Through this study, the researchers identified several images of men and women as portrayed in text books that engender patriarchy in Zimbabwean society and limit students' educational and career aspirations. For example, it was evident from the participants' responses as well as from the content and discourse analyses made that textbooks do propagate patriarchal ideologies, while teacher attitudes and expectations compound these texts' influence. These findings are consistent with those of Meyer (2008), who found that patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum disadvantage girls as a whole compared to boys as a whole. Their analysis of textbooks also revealed that boys generally have access to an array of *educational goodies*—or relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu 1992)—that is systematically denied to girls. This cultural capital is conferred to boys through the patriarchal ideology embedded in the curriculum and in propagated through the educational literature used in the classroom, especially textbooks, pictures, and wall charts as well as through the sexist discourses or language and actions peddled by teachers and students (Nhundu 2007; Gordon 1995). Teacher attitudes and expectations about 'appropriate gender roles' for boys and girls further compound the effects of text books as they often portray males and females in gender-differentiated situations. Like the texts the

researchers examined, teachers tended to categorize subjects as either 'feminine' or 'masculine' and this tends to entrench patriarchal tendencies in the school curriculum.

School textbooks analysed were found to be gender insensitive for they peddle gender biases, stereotypes and prejudices typical of the broader Zimbabwean society. As a consequence, these gender biases have a negative impact on female students' self-concept and on their academic and career aspirations. This was evidenced in that a significant number of the interviewed girls attributed their limited educational aspirations to gender role discrimination reinforced through images of men and women as portrayed in their text books. They cited the gender discrimination rampant in the structures of their society as the culture cherished, portrayed and encouraged through school text books. It was also revealed that the stratification of school subjects studied and the attitudes of the teachers towards what they consider as feminine and masculine social roles in the occupational world have an enormous impact. These attitudes also tend to buttress the stereotypes and prejudices portrayed through text books. The students' own perspective of the school curriculum is that it should be reviewed so as to deconstruct the gender biases embedded in it. Many girls indicated that the school text books used in their schools need a complete overhaul so as to render them gender neutral or conducive to equal competition for both boys and girls as opposed to being laden with patriarchal values.

DISCUSSION

As can be discerned from the results of the content and discourse analyses of text books examined (Table 1), textbooks have disseminate gender biases in male and female social roles or career. They generally portray men in superior positions to those of their women counterparts. As a consequence this subtly or directly influences girls' and boys' educational and career aspirations. For instance, by portraying women always at the kitchen sink, the books give the impression that not many women engage in paid work outside the home. This finding is similar to Maluwa-Banda's (2004) observation that there was a real gap in the way curriculum materials represented women. On interviews carried out female students appeared concerned about the

Table 1: Images of men and women's roles as portrayed in History text books: A content and discourse analysis

Form/ class	Publisher	Title	Author	Page	Gender ideology and biases disseminated
4	College	Focus on History 4	Mlambo AS	146	Rhodesian soldiers killed hundreds of Zimbabweans including women and children
4	College Press	Focus on History 4	Mlambo AS	32, 196 244	The whole book has 76 pictures, of these only 5 show women and the remaining show men. Of these five, 3 show starving women and children.
3	Zimbabwe Publishing House (ZPH)	People Making History 3	Barnes T, Mutwira R, Mvenge G, Pape J, Prew M	12	Women at the kitchen sink, cultivating , gathering, making baskets and fetching wood and water
3	ZPH	People Making History 3	Barnes T et al.	8	Women gathering fruits, cooking and cultivating and men heading cattle, black smiting, hunting and herding.
3	ZPH		Barnes T et al.	18	Women working hard in the fields and men chanting with friends whilst women working hard.
3	ZPH	People Making History 3	Barnes T et al.	37	Two circles showing male and female labour.
4	ZPH	People Making History 4	Barnes T et al.	124	Political Power was divided between chiefs, male elders, young men and finally women.
4	ZPH	People Making History 4	Barnes T et al.	123	African women of all ages were legally the same as children, could not make decisions on their own; own property in their names, their wages belonged to their husbands and could not open bank accounts in their names
4	ZPH	People Making History Book 4	Barnes T et al.	124	Thousands of women provided services to workers.
3	College Press	Dynamics of History 3	Mukanya S	30	Young women were handed over as wives to Zulu warriors who had distinguished themselves at the war front.
3	College Press	Dynamics of History Book 3	Mukanya S	186	Signing the March Agreement or 1978 pictures show men only, Rev Ndabaningi Sithole, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Ian Smith and Chief Jeremiah Chirau. Pictures of the Lancaster Conference 1979, no women representative.
4	Longman	History of Central Africa	Martin P and Birmin- gham D	279	Native registration Act of 1936 compelled every male African to have registration certificate and other passes but was silent about women

gender bias in their History textbooks. One interviewee said:

It appears history is written about men. You hardly read about brave and influential women especially in our Zimbabwean history. Apart from Nehanda who else can you talk about? It's really boring and you feel it is not true that women did nothing throughout history.

Analysis of textbooks also showed an imbalance in the representation of women in History books. The majority of the illustrations were those

of male figures with very few female figures. The finding is consistent with Oyebele's (2003) findings that gender imbalance on textbooks is very common in textbooks in upper primary school in Nigeria. In interview carried out some boys bragged about the gender imbalance in textbooks with one interviewee saying;

You cannot expect women to feature much in history books because history is mostly about disputes and wars fought to solve these disputes. War is for men while women are in the comfort

of the kitchen. There is nothing unusual about this.

However one female interviewee differed with this view and said:

Whatever role women played should be highlighted. In our History books women are treated as if they never existed. Some girls tend to be affected by this and feel they cannot compete with boys in any way, which is wrong. We are equal. We can even outperform some of the boys in school work.

The realization that there was an imbalance in the representation of women in History textbooks certainly affected female students as they could depict this subtle discrimination as some of the interviewees expressed.

The majority of illustrations found in the analysed History textbooks (Table 1) portrayed women in traditional gender roles. The portrayal of women in traditional gender roles is consistent with findings by Bason (1980) cited in Dube (2006) who states that stereotypes tend to set up a self fulfilling prophecy and often lead to females to behave as per expectation which in a way disempowers them and limit their ability to develop to full potential. In the textbook “*Dynamics of History Book 3*” by Mukanya young women were handed over as wives to Zulu warriors who had distinguished themselves at the war front. What could be imprinted in minds of girls is their need to be married to men even without their own consent. Female students in schools have to have their mind reoriented that their lives are not dependent on men and that they have rights to decide what they want in life. In the interviews the researcher inquired into the issue of marriage and some participant appeared ready to have their minds and world views affected by gender stereotypes some which are peddled through school textbooks and family socialization. One interviewee said:

It is very important to get married. Society expects us to get married and have children. If one stays as an old woman without getting married people will have a very negative view of her and may even call her names, some which are very derogatory.

While the issue of family socialization into gender stereotypes is evident in the above response, similar views are noticeable in the history textbooks analysed and this seems to confirm ZINEC-ANIMA’s (2002: 3) contention that:

Textbooks have a major socialization role in the development of children. They convey

important messages to the young on how relations in society are to be organized and which value system they should adopt

Therefore socialization at home coupled with the pervasive nature of books at schools cement children gender socialization on children and enhance gender stereotypes as well as the ultimate values children internalize.

The belief that men should be the heads of families and the bread winners appeared to influence the academic achievement and career prospects of participants interviewed in this study. These findings are consistent with the literature by Baly (1989) and Osgood et al. (2006) who pointed out that parents do not only wield a lot of influence over their children’s work experience, but also that strong respect, obedience, and desire to conform to one’s parents and family traditions often deter children from families or social groups that uphold collective social values from pursuing careers that they have been brought up to accept as appropriate for the other sex. Such an idea entrenches patriarchy in society.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above findings the study concluded that what students learn at school therefore generally depends on ideologies about gender that are embedded in the curriculum in both explicit and hidden forms. The hidden curriculum includes gendered and patriarchal ideologies that schools subtly transmit to pupils. The most influential of these ideologies are not necessarily those formally acknowledged and publicly articulated through official documents, but rather those that are subliminally ingested as part of general or professional enculturation.

This study has also concluded that many school textbooks need to be reviewed along with the periodic curricular reviews in order to deconstruct the gender roles, ideologies and stereotypes embedded in them. In terms of how images of men and women in school text books orient learners toward specific careers, the study revealed that gender typing of roles is one of the major avenues by which text books channel learners into the occupational trajectories they ultimately follow. Prejudicial and biased social roles, attitudes and expectations and persistent cultural myths, misconceptions, and stereotypes inherent in many text books, about the position of girls and boys in society have a constraining

effect on girls' education and career aspirations. These factors inhibit gender equity in educational institutions and can actually exacerbate discriminatory tendencies. The result is a sustained institutional pattern of occupational disadvantage for girls, a pattern so complex that it seems intractable to those who might initiate changes in the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Teachers need to play an important role in closing the ranks and gaps created by the gender role stereotyping experienced by pupils in the home and those incorporated in textbooks and reinforced by the hidden curriculum of the school (Mutekwe 2007). In line with this view, teachers also need to bring it to the attention of their pupils that despite biases embodied in the curriculum and expressed through school text books, the social behavior, roles and characteristics associated with boys, men, girls and women are nothing but products of gender socialization and therefore as agents of change, they need to ascertain that their own thinking, attitudes, behaviors and mindsets are gender sensitive if they are to sensitize their pupils (both girls and boys) that there is nothing to stop them from venturing into any career field provided they have the interest, ability and opportunity.

Students, especially girls have a responsibility to deconstruct the gender-based stereotypes engendered by their text books, families and peddled through their teachers' attitudes and expectations of their aptitudes and abilities as well as through the gender typing of occupations in society. They can do so by defying the odds and pursuing school subjects and taking up careers or occupations traditionally stereotyped as masculine to prove that sometimes what men or boys can do, women and girls can do it equally well or even better. Although a large number of recommendations for this study are already implicitly embodied in the above concluding remarks, the next section attempts to summarize what the study considers the major recommendations for this study.

Curricular material for schools should be carefully selected so that gender sensitive materials are used in order to promote both gender equality and learning equity.

Textbooks may need to be re-written as continued use of textbooks that are not gender sensitive is harmful to the future of children particularly girls who end up internalizing generalized beliefs about their ability (stereotypes) which may not be true. Workshops on gender equity issues need to be planned and implemented for teachers and school textbook writers to infuse gender issues into the curriculum from an informed point of view.

It was also apparent in the results of this study that understanding both the overt and covert ways in which gender ideologies operate and are manifest in the school text books (as part of the curriculum) are a necessary but not sufficient condition for alleviating the effects of gender inequality in education and occupations. By adopting the following pedagogical strategies teachers' efforts may go a long way towards promoting gender parity not only in occupations but right from the grassroots levels of schooling: minimizing gender stereotypes among students, helping in the provision of ideal school textbooks containing gender balanced coverage, gender appropriate illustrations, gender fairness in language use as opposed to using sexist discourses, gender fairness in content. This calls for a careful selection of curriculum material in schools in order to ensure the adoption of equity pedagogy in the curriculum.

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