

EFFECTS OF GENDER ROLE PORTRAYAL IN TEXTBOOKS IN KENYAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, ON PUPILS ACADEMIC ASPIRATIONS

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Abstract

The researcher aims to investigate the effect of gender role portrayal in selected textbooks in Kenyan primary schools on pupils' academic aspirations. The study explored participants' perceptions of what academic levels they wanted to attain and whether their aspirations and expectations were partly a product of the influences in their textbooks. The research was guided by the following objectives; to establish the gender roles portrayed in the pupils' textbooks and their effect on pupils' academic aspirations, determine gender attributes suggested through the statements and their effects on pupils' academic aspirations, and to establish the presence of appropriate textual role models and its effects on pupils' academic aspirations. The research addresses the following research questions; What are the gender roles that male and female characters are portrayed in?, What gender attributes are suggested through the statements in the textbooks and what appropriate textual female role models are present in the pupils' textbooks? The paper was based on a study undertaken in Dagoretti District in Nairobi County, Kenya. The target population was 88 pupils and 60 teachers. The sample was selected through random sampling for the teachers and stratified random sampling for the pupils. Descriptive statistics was used in data analysis. The data was collected by use of interview guide, a questionnaire and content analysis of 40 text books in class one to three. The results show that gender stereotypes had an effect on pupils' academic aspirations as pupils tended to mostly identify with characters of their gender in the textbooks. The study recommends for intervention by the stakeholders in the education sector in order to improve gender aspirations by including a variety of activities and illustrations in the textbooks for both boys and girls.

Key words: *gender stereotypes, textbooks, gender portrayal pupils aspirations.*

Introduction

In developing countries as in advanced ones, a subtle inculcation of roles from early childhood builds the woman's sense of dependence on man. Various studies worldwide (White, 2011; Ceci, Williams & Barnett, 2009; Sutter & Rutzler, 2010) have revealed the depressed status of women and girls in relation to men and boys. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Cited in Wallace, 2005) in his writings perpetuated gender imbalance in education when he argued that the whole education of women should be relative to men, to please them, to care for the old, to advise them, to console them, to make life agreeable and sweet to them-these are the duties of women in every age and that is what should be taught to them at their infancy. Gender bias which denies equal opportunity to girls is to be found in textbooks, teaching methods, classroom processes, curriculum content, and guidance for the selection of study careers (Blumberg, 2007).

Since 1969, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has undertaken studies of promoting equality in education for girls and women in various countries (Blumberg, 2007). The fact that books are image-forming and sources of information

on social norms is no longer in doubt. Books shape attitude and they shape content (White, 2011; Tietz, 2007). Textbooks and school curricula can help to alter or reinforce stereotypical patterns. The evidence at hand suggests that teachers as well as teaching materials in the past have tended to reflect cultural stereotypes.

According to Lloyd (2005) the manner in which gender is represented in children's textbooks impacts attitudes and perceptions of gender-appropriate behaviour in society. Sexism in textbooks can be so insidious that it quietly conditions boys and girls to accept the way they 'see and read the world' thus reinforcing gender images. This reinforcement predisposes children not to question existing social relationship. In spite of all the efforts that have been made to promote gender equality throughout the world, gender bias is still a very big issue in the world (Tso, 2010). According to Stromquist (2007) less progress has occurred in the funding and development of the content favourable to creation of positive identities among women in textbooks in developing countries.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. Establish the gender roles portrayed in the pupils' textbooks and their effect on pupils' academic aspirations.
2. Determine gender attributes suggested through the statements in the textbooks and their effect on pupils' academic aspirations.
3. Establish the presence of appropriate textual role models in the textbooks and their effect on pupils' academic aspirations.

Methodology of Research

The target population was 88 pupils and 60 teachers. The teacher sample was selected through simple random sampling and the pupils sample was selected through stratified random sampling. This was to have a sample that was representative of both female and male pupils in the study. The data was collected through an interview guide for the pupils and a questionnaire for the teachers. A content analysis guide was used to collect data on the textbooks. This consisted of Mathematics, Kiswahili and History and Civics primary school textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education textbook guideline (2001) for use in standard Two and Three in Kenya. The total number of textbooks recommended during this year were 40: 14 in Mathematics, 14 in Kiswahili (text), 25 Kiswahili (readers) and 4 History and Civics textbooks (Ministry of Education, 2001). The target population also included Standards Two and Three pupils and their class teachers in primary schools in Dagoretti District, Nairobi County, Kenya. Class one to three pupils were appropriate for this study since they were at the formative stage of their academic life and they would tend to believe everything they come across in the textbook. At this level, the learners mostly internalise what they learn from the textbooks.

Purposive sampling was used whereby all the Six Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) authored textbooks; 2 in Mathematics, 2 in Kiswahili and 2 in History and Civics were used because they are widely used in primary schools in Kenya. The books from private publishers that are also widely used were six: 2 from East African Educational Publishers, 2 from Longhorn Kenya Limited and 2 from Focus Publications. There were a total of 12 textbooks in this study. Data was collected through a questionnaire administered to the teachers, an interview schedule for the pupils and through a content analysis guide.

Research Results

Participation of Women and Men in Productive Work Both Inside and Outside the Home as Portrayed in the Textbooks

A content analysis of participation of women and men in productive work both inside and outside the home found out that there was over representation of women performing domestic functions such as cooking, housekeeping, child rearing or they were engaged in feminine occupations such as nursing or as petty traders. On the other hand, in Kiswahili Book 2 (KIE, 2000), men are mainly engaged in salaried occupations. Professions requiring higher education are reserved almost exclusively for men as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Male and female occupations in the textbooks.

Male	Frequency	Female	Frequency
Professional		Professional	
Teacher	17	Teacher	12
Doctor	16	Nurse	2
Policeman	8	Reporter	1
Reporter	2	Chef	1
Soldier	2	Business	
Chef	2	Petty Trader	3
Pastor	1	Tailor	1
Business		Semi-skilled	
Tailor	6	House girl	1
Farmer	6	Traditional midwife	1
Barber	2	Unremunerated	
Shopkeeper	2	Cooking at home	1
Bee keeper	2	Subsistence farming	1
Laundry	1		
Semi-skilled			
Driver	6		
Watchmen	2		
Trades			
Carpenter	6		
Painter	2		
Leadership			
Politician	2		
Chief	2		

A qualitative analysis of Table 1 shows the gender linked job possibilities in the society in which female and male characters are portrayed. Male Characters are portrayed in professional occupations as teachers, doctors, policemen and reporters. These professional occupations are varied and out numbers those of the female characters. Female characters are mostly portrayed in the teaching profession. Male characters also dominate the business sector where they appear in varied businesses as shopkeepers, tailors, bee keepers and large scale farmers. Female characters on the other hand are portrayed as petty traders and tailors. They are also found in

semi-skilled occupations as house girls and traditional midwives and in the unremunerated occupations like traditional subsistence farming and cooking for the family. Female characters are missing in leadership occupations like chiefs and politicians. This analysis reflects the same trend as in other textbooks analysed in this study. In these books young girls have limited occupations to identify with while offering boys a wide range of occupations. The occupations mentioned are also stereotyped in the traditional gender roles.

In History Combined Book 3 (KIE, 2000), out of 26 occupations in the book female characters are only represented in two occupations. The male characters are represented in a variety of occupations namely a) leadership positions as: presidents, provincial commissioners, district officers, heads of district development committees, chiefs, assistant chiefs, district commissioners, chairmen of committees and imams. b) Professional occupations such as: pilots, train drivers and agricultural officers. c) Businessmen: as traders, carpenters and fishermen. d) Semi-skilled occupations such as: matatu drivers, boat rowers, postmen, hunters, travellers, poachers and medicine men. Female characters are presented in two occupations: as an agriculture officer and a medicine woman. The results show that female characters are restricted to certain occupations, where they might not be involved in making major decisions. The world of women that pupils were exposed to revolves around their homes and careers pursued outside the home are seen as an extension of their domestic functions. That is why women are mainly presented in careers like nursing and teaching. Men on the other hand are in occupations that are involved in making major decisions in the society.

Participation of Women and Men in Administrative Roles in the Selected Textbooks

A content analysis of GHC Combined for standard Three (KIE, 2000) reveals that no single female character was given a leadership role. The above analysis shows that women have been marginalised from leadership roles in the textbooks. The results also strengthen the patriarchal beliefs in that women are expected to cook, wash dishes and do the housework. According to Beauvoir (1974) and Blumberg (2007) girls from an early age are brought up knowing that men are supposed to be leaders in society. In GHC comprehensive book 3 (Kanjoya & Ogula, 1998), a girl is illustrated being trained in household chores by her mother while a boy is learning from the father on how to protect the family. In the same book, male characters appear in eleven leadership positions while female characters appear in none. Male characters are shown as District Officers, Agriculture Officers, Health Officers, Police Inspectors, Councillors, Chiefs and Imams. The same scenario repeats itself in GHC Combined Book 2 (KIE, 2000) and GHC Comprehensive Book 2 (Kanjoya and Ogula, 1998). In leadership roles, female characters have been marginalised as shown on analyses of selected textbooks. There are more male characters depicted in leadership roles than female characters. The pupils were therefore presented in class with societal roles that limited their aspirations to stereotyped gender roles in society. A study of the selected books shows that women are either absent or underrepresented in the administrative roles. Male characters emerge as the leaders both at home and outside the home. Male characters were portrayed in 14 different administrative positions while female characters are not portrayed in any.

Gender Attributes Suggested through the Statements in the Textbooks

Content analysis of statements used in the textbooks found out that most characters are referred to as male apart from a few instances when we have a reference to female characters. A qualitative analysis of Mathematics Book 3 (KIE, 2000) found out the following statements.

- A farmer had 835 sheep. **He** sold 402 of them. How many sheep remained (KIE, 2000 p. 18)

- A farmer has 965 cows. **He** sells 546 of them. How many is **he** left with (KIE, 2000 p. 18).
- The teacher walks from **his** desk to the nature corner and back.
- A farmer owned 925 sheep, **he** sold 502 how many were left (KIE, 2000 p. 45)

Content analysis of these statements shows that the reference to a farmer or a teacher refers to a male character. Female characters are rarely referred to in these statements. Pupils then tend to identify these occupations with men. It would be inferred from these statements that teachers would also identify these roles as belonging to men in their classroom presentations. The statements in these texts directly refer to male characters.

An analysis of Comprehensive GHC Book 3 (Kanjoya & Ogula, 1998) produced the following results:

- The D.O controls the work of the chiefs. **He** tells people what the government wants them to do. **He** ensures that there is peace in the division. **He** ensures in the division that people build schools, health centres and dips (Kanjoya & Ogula, 1998 p.7).
- The area education officer takes care of schools. **He** ensures that children get a proper education (Kanjoya & Ogula, 1998 p. 6).
- The assistant Agriculture Officer advises farmers on how to grow crops. **He** also tells them how to take care of the crops (Kanjoya & Ogula, 1998 p. 7).
- The healthy-health officer advises people on how to keep their homes clean. **He** ensures that hotels are clean (Kanjoya & Ogula, 1998 p. 8)
- The police officer prevents crime and ensures that people obey laws. **He** arrests people who do bad things

The analysis of these statements shows that certain roles are attributed to men. There is a high concentration of masculine male generic language in the textbook. Pupils reading this book will definitely associate the role of a D.O, Education Officer, Health Officer and Police Officer to a man. Male characters are depicted in all spheres of society in the textbooks. Men are shown to be more dominant in society and women are shown to be absent from the world dominated by men. Men are the decision makers, they are wise and they are managers of people. The results show that the roles mentioned can only be associated with male characters. According to Carter (2009) and Stanley & Sturm (2008) in most cultures the most important method and effective way of transmitting values and attitudes is through storytelling, and in literate cultures, this process includes children's books. They further argue that children can recognize and interpret images in books. Boys are then able to identify with these roles more than the girls. A learner may think that a chief, a police officer and elders in society can only be men and not women.

Presence of Appropriate Textual Female Role Models in the Selected Textbooks

Content analysis of the books analysed show that females were the least depicted of all human categories. Table 2 shows the analysis of the named characters in class two and three textbooks. Characters in each textbook were identified and tabulated. The female characters' percentages were calculated against those of the male characters.

Table 2. Named male and female characters in the textbooks.

Textbooks	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Mathematics KIE 2	12	60.0	8	40.0
Mathematics KIE 3	62	59.6	42	40.4
Math Comprehensive 2	31	55.4	25	44.6
Math Comprehensive 3	64	56.6	49	43.1
GHC Combined 2	33	50.0	33	50.0
GHC Combined 2	14	73.6	5	26.3
GHC Comprehensive 2	25	62.2	15	37.5
GHC Comprehensive 3	6	30.0	14	70.0
Kiswahili KIE 2	77	71.3	31	28.7
Masomo ya Msingi 2	60	68.2	28	31.8
Total	384	60.6	250	39.4

The results of Table 2 show that about 60.6 percent of the books analysed refer to male characters while only 39.4 percent refer to female characters by name. Male characters are clearly illustrated and explanatory notes given referring to them as male characters. Female characters are engaged in the traditional areas of petty trading, nursing and in unremunerated tasks around the home and in subsistence farming. The results then show that appropriate female role models are lacking for students to imitate and identify with. The unremunerated tasks that most female characters are depicted in, limit their participation in decision making professions that will finally lead to societal gender equity. Female characters should be seen participating in paid employment. According to Korinek (2005) the historical, cultural and traditional societal labour imbalances limit women's advancement in the labour market.

Compared with boys and men, women are mentioned less frequently in text and appear less frequently in illustrations and the roles assigned to them are more restricted and less varied. Their choice of role models is also limited and the examples and subject matter selected all indicate prejudice in favour of boys.

Effects of Gender Role Stereotyping on Pupils' Academic Aspirations

Pupils in this study were randomly asked to point out from the illustrations in the selected textbooks, which characters they would have liked to identify with. The pupils' gender was taken into account. The results show that 95.0 percent of the respondents indicated that they would have identified with characters of their own gender. Only 5.0 percent of the respondents indicated they would have identified with characters of either gender in the textbooks. This analysis indicates that pupils were more inclined to imitate characters and activities illustrated in the textbooks by people of their gender. According to Taylor (2003) children learn early in life on the society's expectations and standards for girls and boys. They also learn the gender code which is clearly embedded in the children's books that are used in class. This is what shapes children aspirations.

The pupils' were also asked to indicate the highest academic level they wanted to attain. The results established that 40.0 percent of the boys indicated that they wanted to attain college

education compared to 30.0 percent of the girls. The results then indicate that boys had high academic aspirations than girls. The analysis on Table 3 show the various reasons given by the students why they thought role models in the text books would give them higher academic aspirations.

Table 3. Pupils' responses on whether the characters portrayed in the textbooks inspired them to higher academic aspirations.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Those who wanted to be like the role models portrayed in the textbooks	18	47.4
Those who were attracted to particular occupations portrayed in the pictures in the textbooks	9	23.7
Those who indicated that education was valuable	6	15.8
Those who felt that they would be inspired to leadership roles in the textbooks	4	10.5
Those who felt that they were attracted to better paying occupations in the textbooks	1	2.6
Total	38	100.0

The results of Table 3 show that about 47.2 percent of the pupil respondents felt that they wanted to be like the role models portrayed in the textbooks, 23.7 percent indicated that they were attracted to particular occupations portrayed in the pictures in the textbooks, 15.8 percent indicated that education was valuable, 10.5 percent indicated that they would be inspired to leadership roles in the textbooks and 2.6 percent indicated that they were attracted to better paying occupations in the textbooks. The results indicate that role models in the textbooks could inspire pupils to higher academic aspirations.

Teachers were asked through a questionnaire to indicate their responses on the impact of gender representations in the textbooks on pupils' academic aspirations. Table 4 shows the responses of teachers on the impact of gender representation in textbooks on girls and boys academic aspirations.

Table 4. Teachers' responses on the impact of gender representation in the textbooks on pupils' academic aspirations.

Response	Frequency	Percent
It had a positive impact on boys	34	43.6
It had a negative impact on girls	15	19.2
It had a positive impact on girls	12	15.4
It had no effect on both boys and girls	8	10.3
It had a negative impact on boys	7	8.9
It had a positive impact on both boys and girls	2	2.6
Total	78	100.0

The analysis according to Table 4 show that 43.6 percent of the teacher respondents felt that textbooks had a positive impact on boys and only 15.4 percent felt that those textbooks had a positive impact on girls. The results show that textbooks were more favourable to boys than they were to girls. Most of the textbooks portrayed a negative stereotyped image of female characters, which did not inspire girls to academic excellence compared to boys.

The respondents also gave various reasons on why they thought textbooks had a negative or positive impact on girls and boys academic aspirations. The outcome was to help in determining whether pupils believed in what was written in the text. According to McCabe, Fairchild, Pescosolid and Tope (2011) books contributed to how children understand what is expected of women and men and shape the way children will think about their own place in the world. Textbooks form an important source of information for young children and they provide pupils with clues about life, and in particular about what goals and social norms are available and appropriate for members of their sex. Table 5 shows their responses.

Table 5. Teachers' responses on pupils reaction to what is written in the textbooks.

Reaction	Frequency	Percent
Pupils believed that what is written in the textbooks was always true/They always referred to textbooks to support their points	41	53.9
Pupils believed that some things written in the textbooks were not real	21	27.7
Pupils believed that teachers interpretation of the textbooks was always correct	14	18.4
Total	76	100.0

The results of Table 5 indicate that most of the teacher respondents (53.9 percent) indicated that pupils believed that what was written in the textbooks was always true and they always referred to the textbooks to support their points. Only 27.7 percent of the teacher respondents indicated that some pupils cited some images in the textbooks as unreal and 18.4 percent indicated that pupils believed that teachers' interpretation of the textbooks was always correct. The results then established that 72.3 percent of the pupils believed in what they read from the textbooks. This could have a negative effect on pupils' academic aspirations as it strengthened their belief in the gender stereotypes in the textbooks. This would then have a negative effect on girls' academic aspirations. Content analysis on the selected textbooks has revealed that female characters were marginalised and relegated to the background while male characters dominated. Boys had various societal role models and activities to identify with and imitate in the textbooks. These images then directed girls and boys to traditionally accepted occupations that gave boys dominance and leadership positions in the society.

Conclusions

This study found out that women are mainly described in terms of their role as housewives in family context; babysitting, doing household chores like washing, cooking or looking for firewood. Men on the other hand are mostly portrayed outdoors on salaried occupations. Male occupations are varied and most leadership roles in the textbooks are occupied by male characters. Male characters are also portrayed in the political offices where most decisions and policy issues that affect the society are discussed and agreed.

There is also gender role stereotyping in occupations that female and male characters are involved. Occupations that are related to services provisions such as teaching and nursing are in most cases the only main occupations outside the home that female characters are mentioned. All leadership roles are reserved for men and women are either absent or underrepresented in the administrative roles.

The absence of female models in textbooks was found to have a negative effect on the self-images, aspirations and motivation of girls who grow up reading and internalising these textbooks. Girl readers are deprived of adult role models to identify themselves with and imitate. Textbooks were found to uphold the idea of male dominance instead of advocating the message of basic equality. Textbooks should therefore be written in a way that they include role models that girls and boys can positively identify with and imitate in the changing modern society.

Textbooks should depict females and males in varied activities in society. Men should be portrayed as nurses even if there are very few male nurses in society to date. The aim is to suggest new career possibilities, which certainly exist. Equally, though there are few women plumbers, engineers, pilots and mechanics, it would not be realistic not to show women in these occupations. Women should also be portrayed as professors, politicians and principals of institutions, researchers, chiefs and provincial administrators.

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Appendix A Sample of Textbooks

Subject	Class	Title	Publishes	Author	Year of publications
Mathematics	2	Primary Mathematics	Jomo Kenyatta Foundations	KIE	2000
	2	Comprehensive Mathematics	Focus Publication	S. Njoroge	1999
	3	Primary Mathematics	Jomo Kenyatta Foundations	KIE	2000
	3	Comprehensive Mathematics	Focus Foundations	S. Njoroge	1999
Kiswahili (Texts)	2	Kiswahili Kwa Darasa 2	Kenya Literature Bureau	KIE	2000
	2	Masomo ya Msingi	East African Educational Publishers	Z. Zani	1998
	3	Kiswahili Kwa Darasa 3	Kenya Literature Bureau	KIE	2000
	3	Masomo ya Msingi	East African Educational Publishes	Z. Zani	1998
History	2	Comprehensive GHC-Our Location	Longhorn Kenya Ltd.	J. Kanjoya & P. Ogula	2000
	2	History GHC-Combined	Jomo Kenyatta Foundations	KIE	2000
	3	Comprehensive GHC-Our Location	Longhorn Kenya Ltd	J. Kanjoya & P. Ogula	1998
	3	History GHC Combined	Jomo Kenyatta Foundation	KIE	2000

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