
UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN BIAS: EXAMINING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract: *Every child has the inherent right to an education as a fundamental part of their human rights. It is commonly known that doing so is beneficial to individuals and suitable for developing nations. Education broadens the horizons and the options available to young men and women throughout their lives. When all children are provided with access to a rights-based, high-quality education that is founded on the principle of gender equality, a ripple effect of opportunities is established that will have an effect on generations to come. This paper investigates the problem of gender bias in education in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing primarily on the problem of gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices. The literature review reveals that gender bias is widespread in our educational institutions, which can result in inequality in the educational system. This paper examines the factors that contribute to these biases and discusses their effects on educational institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the final section, the paper discusses some measures that Sub-Saharan African governments can take to eliminate gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices. In conclusion, the paper offers some potential suggestions for the next steps in research about this vital topic. The overarching goals of this paper are to increase awareness of the ubiquitous nature of gender prejudice in education and to create an educational system that is more equal and inclusive.*

Keywords: *Sub-Saharan Africa Education, Gender bias, Gender Stereotypes, Textbooks gender bias, Teaching Practices, Sub-Saharan Africa education, Gender bias effects, Gender bias strategies, education stereotyping, Sub-Saharan Africa stereotyping*



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INTRODUCTION

The perpetuation of gender bias begins in our households and continues once children enter the educational system. Caroline Criado describes how men were seen as the human default and how this was fundamental to the structure of human society in her

book "Invisible Woman: Data Bias in a world designed for Men." In the book, she explains how gender bias was an old habit that began a very long ago in our history (Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men - Caroline Criado Perez) This practice of gender bias goes deep in our institutions, and the fact that we transmit it to our educational systems demonstrates how this tendency can be seen in this text.

According to the global gender report 2022, which the World Economic Forum published, gender bias has become an issue worldwide. There is a gender bias in every industry, including leadership, political representation, wealth accumulation, care work, the labor market, and stress levels. One example of a field where there is no gender bias is stress levels. According to the report, the region that has made the most progress toward eliminating the gender gap in North America. This is followed by Europe, Latin America, Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and South Asia. In last place is South Asia.

According to the report, women continue to be overrepresented in degree subjects related to education, health, and welfare compared to men. At the same time, they are underrepresented in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). This trending issue of gender bias worldwide has been an ongoing concern. The gender gap is especially pronounced in the medical and technology areas. When all types of graduates are considered, the percentage of women who graduate with degrees in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is 1.7%. In comparison, the percentage of males who graduate with degrees in this profession is 8.2%. The exact numbers hold for Engineering and Manufacturing: men make up 24.6% of the workforce, while women make up only 6.6%. It is vitally important to address the problem of gender bias in education, particularly in textbooks and teaching practices since doing so fosters an equal learning environment for every student, regardless of gender identity. The problem of gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices has led to the underrepresentation of certain groups in specific sectors and disciplines, damaging individual career prospects and society as a whole (Global Gender Gap Report 2022, 2022).

The perpetuation of damaging stereotypes among students and the dampening of their aspirations can both result from gender bias in textbooks and practices as well as in classroom instruction. Gender bias in textbooks has four main characteristics: it is important, near-universal, remarkably uniform and persistent but virtually an invisible obstacle on the road to achieve gender equality in education, and this is a very important issue because textbooks and teaching practices occupy almost 80% of the classroom time and if not solved it may lower the achievements of the female students especially in countries that have weak education systems, (Blumberg, 2008). Gender bias in

textbooks is not only a problem in Sub-Saharan Africa but also in developed countries like Hongkong, where some stereotyped images of the two genders and portrayals of women in a more limited range of social roles are perpetuated than men. The 'male-first' phenomenon and the visual and textual under-representation of women were still prevalent in contemporary textbooks (Lee, 2014); Japan also faces the same challenge whereby the 'male-first' phenomenon is still prevalent in contemporary Japanese textbooks, suggesting the secondary status of women, (Lee, 2018), most of the textbooks in Japan have stereotypical images, in forms of female invisibility and male firstness, (Lee, 2018) We should make sure that all kids have access to the same opportunities and that gender biases do not hamper them. As a society, we need to erase this cancer of gender bias in our educational resources and teaching materials. This is a disease in our society. This will assist in establishing a more just and equitable society by promoting greater diversity and inclusivity, and it will also contribute to the promotion of greater diversity.

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This paper focused on uncovering the hidden bias in terms of education based on gender stereotypes. Through the uncovering process, the paper focuses on the following aspects: understanding gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, ways in which gender bias manifest in textbooks and teaching practices in sub-Saharan Africa, the effects of gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices in Sub-Saharan Africa and finally, strategies for removing gender bias in education materials and teaching practices in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Understanding Gender Bias in Textbooks and Teaching Practices in Sub-Saharan Africa

There are different definitions of gender bias, and the Oxford Dictionary describes 'gender bias' as favoritism towards or prejudice against a particular gender. Jennifer Rothchild (2007) describes gender bias as a behavior that shows favoritism toward one gender over the other and that, most often, gender bias favors men or boys over women or girls. *Gender bias* is the systematic unequal treatment based on gender (Moss Racusin et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2019). Having discussed the different definitions of gender bias, the paper's definition of gender bias is the systematic and often unconscious ways society privileges or disadvantages individuals based on gender.

The girl-child in sub-Saharan Africa is the most disadvantaged regarding access to schooling. According to statistics released by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2020), 12 out of 17 countries in the world that have not yet reached gender parity in primary education are located in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 15 out of 20 countries have not reached gender

parity in secondary education. This was not the case at the beginning of the 20th century; gender bias in education in sub-Saharan Africa was much lower than even regions like the Middle East, South Asia, and even North Africa.

Gender bias in education is high in Sub-Saharan Africa because educational progress is slow in general; bias in education is an insidious problem that causes very few people to stand up and take notice; over a long period, there has been an uneven distribution of teacher's time, attention, and talent in the sub-Saharan African community with the boy child getting the lion's share. Renowned author and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her book 'We should all be Feminists, underscores how African education systems have reinforced gender biases and discrimination towards girls. We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls; you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you would threaten the men, Writes Chimamanda (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2012). This type of gender bias in our African schools is an extension of what we think in the family, in society and the communities; it is a part of the hidden curriculum of lessons taught implicitly to students through the everyday functioning of their classroom. The following part this paper will discuss ways in which gender bias manifest in textbooks and teaching practices in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ways in Which Gender Bias Manifest in Textbooks and Teaching Practices in Sub-Saharan Africa

Underrepresentation, stereotyping, teaching language, teaching content, and the way students are treated in educational facilities are all diverse manifestations of gender bias that can be found in textbooks and teaching practices. In terms of underrepresentation, the textbooks concentrate primarily on the accomplishments of men rather than women; a good example of this can be found in the textbooks used.

The Ugandan Ministry of Education has endorsed the textbook "English in Use" for use in Uganda. The book is meant to meet the requirements of secondary school pupils, particularly those getting ready for the Ugandan Certificate of Education. (Barton & Sakwa, 2012) used the book as a study tool and discovered a lack of female characters, with women making up only 35.7% of the appearance and men 64.3%. Their study was based on the book's first nine units.

Given that women make up 51% of Uganda's population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014), this textbook does not adequately address the issue of gender equality. One paragraph in the textbook discusses school bullies, an issue that both girls and boys deal with. A male speaker narrates the story, and no female characters are in it. Females

frequently need a voice even when they are represented. All the female characters in one scene—where the female-to-male ratio is 1:1.5 are mute compared to the four male characters. Only the boy talks in another, where the only two characters are a woman and her young son. Women make up 20.7% of the book's illustrations, while men make up 79.3%. This underrepresentation of women is likewise true of the illustrations.

The images depict women in stereotyped roles consistent with the text's theme: a man doctor and a female nurse, a male party guest, and a female waiter. Like in the text, there are more women than men in the images depicting household tasks like caring for children or carrying water. Even in the pictures, where women occasionally appear, men typically outnumber them and occupy passive or servile positions. There are 1:1 female-to-male ratios in one unit. Though presumably receiving criticism from her spouse, the woman is shown acting out her stereotypically traditional duty as a mother in a household environment.

In addition to the portrayal that women do not receive any public recognition, they are also shown to have poor experiences when attempting to gain economic autonomy. Moreover, the joke's punchline is almost always a woman, even in the stories that are supposed to be funny. On the other hand, guys of all ages are demonstrated to be strong, with more vigorous mental tenacity and moral fortitude than females. Furthermore, boys are shown to participate in various fascinating activities. The vast majority of the studies concluded that textbooks do not accurately portray the variety of roles that women play and their vocations in the actual world. Images that discriminate against women continue to be prominently featured in school textbooks worldwide (Jassey, 1998). In Syria, a researcher known as Alrabaa (1985) analyzed 28 textbooks from grades 8–12 and found that they were male-biased in content and language; females were disparaged and victimized. These findings were published in a study that was published in 1985. The biased texts were used by half a million pupils each year and covered all major academic areas. This went against the government's plans from 1965 and 1973, which were intended to provide a curriculum and textbooks that promoted gender equality in roles.

In terms of stereotyping, teachers in schools may unknowingly perpetuate these assumptions by calling on male students to answer questions more often, providing them more attention and feedback than female students, and doing it in a way that is gender biased. Another way is the adjectives used in the textbooks to describe women and men, Tanzania's secondary school English language textbooks (Pangani, 2022) investigated English textbooks published between the years 2005 and 2014; the Feminist CDA theory and the Fairclough three-dimensional framework was used as the analytic tool; Pangani found that women and men are perceived differently in terms of

number and types of adjectives attributed to them despite similar attributions, and also found out that there are more adjectives describing men than women and that women are described primarily by physical characteristics adjectives than other personalities. This study clearly shows that adjectives used to describe women and men in Tanzania's English language textbooks portray a sexist attitude towards women.

The language that is used in schools also plays an essential part in the promotion of gender bias. For instance, many instructional materials use male pronouns as the default, even when referring to a mixed group of students. This is one example of how language may be used to promote gender bias. The subject matter taught in our schools is another factor contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality. For instance, certain subjects make offensive comments about women, contributing to the perpetuation of gender-based violence and even encouraging gender discrimination. The treatment of male and female students in schools is also very different. Teachers are more likely to praise male students for being assertive while chastising female students for the same behavior. In addition, male students are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities than female students.

Effects of Gender Bias in Textbooks and Teaching Practices in Sub-Saharan Africa

Gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices comes with many negative consequences in our society, such as limited career opportunities. Gender bias in education can limit career opportunities for girls and women because they are not exposed to the full range of career options. Even sometimes, they are discouraged from pursuing specific fields, thus leading them to miss out on opportunities that would have been a good fit for their skills and interests; gender bias can limit career opportunities for girls and women because they are not exposed to the full range of career options and because female students in Sub-Saharan African countries are more likely to be exposed to textbooks that have a gender bias, this might harm their self-esteem and willingness to learn.

Biased textbooks and teaching practices towards one gender might perpetuate gender preconceptions about what men and women are expected to be excellent at. Gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices also leads to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. For instance, if professors and textbooks invariably depict men as the protagonists of history and science while portraying women as bystanders and supporting characters, this can perpetuate the misconception that males are inherently superior in these disciplines. When female students are subjected to gender bias, it has a knock-on effect on our economy. This is especially true in this age of the knowledge-based economy when countries require large amounts of human capital to foster innovation, which in turn fosters the economy's expansion.

Strategies for Preventing Gender Bias in Textbooks and Teaching Practices in Sub-Saharan Africa

The first step in implementing solutions that will assist in minimizing gender bias in textbooks and teaching practices is for educators and authors of textbooks to take responsibility for their work. Our educational program should encourage the use of language that is gender-neutral in our instructional materials. The pronouns "he" and "she" conjure up very different pictures in the minds of men and women, respectively. Males tend to conjure up ideas of other men rather than women, and these images are identical to those evoked when the pronoun "he" is used. Conversely, women are more likely to create depictions of other women and fewer depictions of men. Using "he" or "she" does not eliminate gender bias because men and women do not develop equal distributions of male and female pictures. Because "they" is a neutral pronoun and elicits an even distribution of male and female imagery, we believe it should be used to refer to nouns whose gender is not indicated. As a result, we argue for the usage of the singular pronoun they to refer to nouns.

The use of inappropriate images needs to be phased out in favor of those that are more suited to the purpose of eradicating gender bias and fostering an environment that is inclusive of all students. The substitution of positive pictures for objectifying ones is one strategy put forward in psychology as a potential solution. The placement of an empowering image, such as a woman holding a trophy, and the promotion of positive imagery of women have been shown in studies to have the potential to counteract existing trends in the objectification of women. Objectification of women may also be diffused by positive imagery of women. Also, when women are exposed to non-stereotypical images of women, such as women in positions of authority, they are more likely to have good thoughts and feelings about their gender.

The third approach to eliminating gender bias in educational settings is to question established social roles. Investigating the historical context in which gender stereotypes emerged is one strategy for combating them over the long term. According to Eagly's (1987) theory, gender stereotypes are rooted in traditional sex roles that have persisted throughout history. Organizations can do a few things to start chipping away at the thinking derived from social roles, even though organizations do not have the authority to rethink social roles completely. It is possible to help dismantle the perception that moms are the most prepared to care for children by instituting policies that allow both mothers and fathers to take parental leave.

CONCLUSION

There is mounting evidence that gender bias is still prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in textbooks and teaching practices. According to the findings of our

research, the effects of this prejudice are extremely detrimental in a variety of different ways. It is very important for Sub-Saharan African governments, as well as for us as individuals, to take proactive steps to identify, challenge, and change these biases. For instance, reviewing the contents of textbooks to ensure that they are inclusive, and governments should create an open and supportive learning environment for all genders without discrimination, are both good examples of proactive steps that can be taken. More study is required to investigate gender bias in other fields of education, such as STEM, and to identify potential solutions to the problems that have been identified. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done, and the only way this can be accomplished is if private citizens and public authorities are prepared to collaborate. Therefore we strongly recommend that governments in Sub-Saharan Africa can allocate funds and resources to support the research of gender bias in education and come up with programs that promote gender equity cross-nationals studies need to be conducted to see how other countries have managed to reduce gender bias in their education systems, it is only through these efforts that we the people and our governments can create an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

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