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The Contribution of the Hidden Curriculum to Gender Inequality: Experiences from Tanzania

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Abstract

Curriculum guides schools in implementing teaching and learning. It determines the content, structure, teaching process, and learning materials. However, the hidden curriculum continued to influence educational practices leading to gender inequality. It contributes to the formation of attitudes, perceptions, and social norms that lead to imbalanced gender representation in teaching and learning materials. This study examined the content and portrayal of males and females in Primary school social studies textbooks. The findings show that visibility and representation of females in textbooks have increased however gender roles were portrayed in stereotypical ideas and images that encourage gender bias. There is a need to increase awareness among reviewers and curriculum developers on gender sensitivity in the preparation of teaching and learning materials. The portrayal of males and females should adhere to gender equality principles.

Keywords: *Hidden curriculum, gender inequality, learning materials, Tanzania*

1. Introduction

Curriculum is one of the important policy area for promotion of gender equality. It guides schools in implementing teaching and learning from pre-primary, through primary, secondary, tertiary, and non-formal education (Osaki, 2000). It plays a key role in the production of competent skilled and knowledgeable citizens. It also shows what a learner is expected to learn and achieve such as skills, knowledge, and understanding. Thus, it helps to meet social and economic development in a particular society. Moreover, it describes teaching and learning aspects including learning strategies, assessment methods, and intended learning outcomes. It, therefore, includes the learner, the teacher, learning methods, expected and unexpected experiences, outputs, and outcomes within the learning process (Osaki, 2000; Boyle, 2016 & Schneiderhan *et. al.*, 2019).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action insisted development of curriculum, textbooks, and teaching aids that are gender sensitive at all levels of education (UNESCO, 2020). However, Gender equality has not been adequately reflected in school textbooks and school culture. The hidden curriculum continued to influence educational practices leading to gender inequality and imbalanced gender representation in school textbooks. Textbooks are important in the teaching and learning process. They are the source of information and they guide learners. However, they greatly encourage gender bias through roles, visibility, and occupations for males and female characters. Hence, they contribute to the formation of attitudes, perceptions and social norms for male and female students. They determine behaviours sought to be appropriate for males and females (Osipoy & Sargizova, 2015).

The achievement of gender equality in education has been given priority by the Tanzania government. Policies at the national level consider gender equality as an important aspect of ensuring access to education for all. The Tanzania national strategy for gender development and women and gender development policy aims to achieve gender equality and equity in Tanzania (URT, 2000; URT, 2011). In addition, the Tanzania Education Policy also targeted to ensure gender equality in education and training (URT, 2014). The Tanzania Education Sector Development plan 2016/17 – 2020/21 also aimed to ensure equity by ensuring equal access to knowledge and vocational skills and quality learning opportunities among out-of-school children, illiterate youth, and other vulnerable groups (URT, 2018; URT & UNICEF, 2021).

Despite the efforts to have an official curriculum through school textbooks and learning materials. The hidden curriculum continued to encourage gender inequality through teaching and learning materials and social-cultural norms. It transfers values, attitudes, and skills to learners (Kian et. al., 2020). The existing stereotypes and attitudes still favour education for boys than girls. Moreover, there are pedagogical aspects that continued to impede gender equality in education (GPE, 2019). Likewise, inadequately trained teachers on gender issues, gender-biased curricula, and social and cultural values limit girls' education (URT, 2011). The main objective of this study was to examine the contribution of the hidden curriculum to gender inequality in teaching and learning materials. The specific objective was to analyse the visibility and portrayal of males and females in Primary Schools Social studies textbooks.

Gender Inequality in Teaching and Learning Materials

The UN Education Agenda 2030 insisted on equality for all learners in order to ensure that every individual had access to education. Likewise, Sustainable Development Goal 4 targeted to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning for all (UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). Among the priority areas for gender equality in and through education is the use of gender-responsive pedagogical practices and textbooks. However, gender inequalities are encouraged through power relations, pedagogy, and stereotypical portrayal of male and female roles in curriculum, textbooks, and learning materials. Female and male are presented in gender-stereotyped roles that disadvantage girls. Also, teachers' beliefs and expectations of girls and boys limit gender equality in school practices and teaching and learning processes in particular.

Textbooks give a lot of information to students through the contents. However, they unconsciously lead to gender bias (Blumberg, 2014). Textbooks that are produced still portray gender-based stereotypes and few references to women and girls. For example, despite textbooks revision which was done in Ethiopia, stereotypes persisted in textbooks due to a lack of training on gender awareness during text review and development. Likewise, the same was observed in Comoro due to inadequate training and sensitization among textbook developers. Women and girls are still portrayed in passive, dependent, and in traditional roles. The challenges to gender equality and awareness involve persistent and harmful gender stereotypes, conscious and unconscious gender bias (UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

2. Conceptual Framework

The hidden curriculum as a concept emerged in the twentieth century. It was based on the argument that educators tend to bring their personal cultural biases and social norms into education content and context. It is a very powerful force affecting learners and the learning process. Its effects are positive or negative depending on the teaching and learning environment. The hidden curriculum involves unintended lessons and perspectives that learners acquire them while learning in school (Chapin, 2021).

The hidden curriculum is within the structure, process and content of education. Figure 1 shows the place of hidden curriculum in the structure, process and content of education.

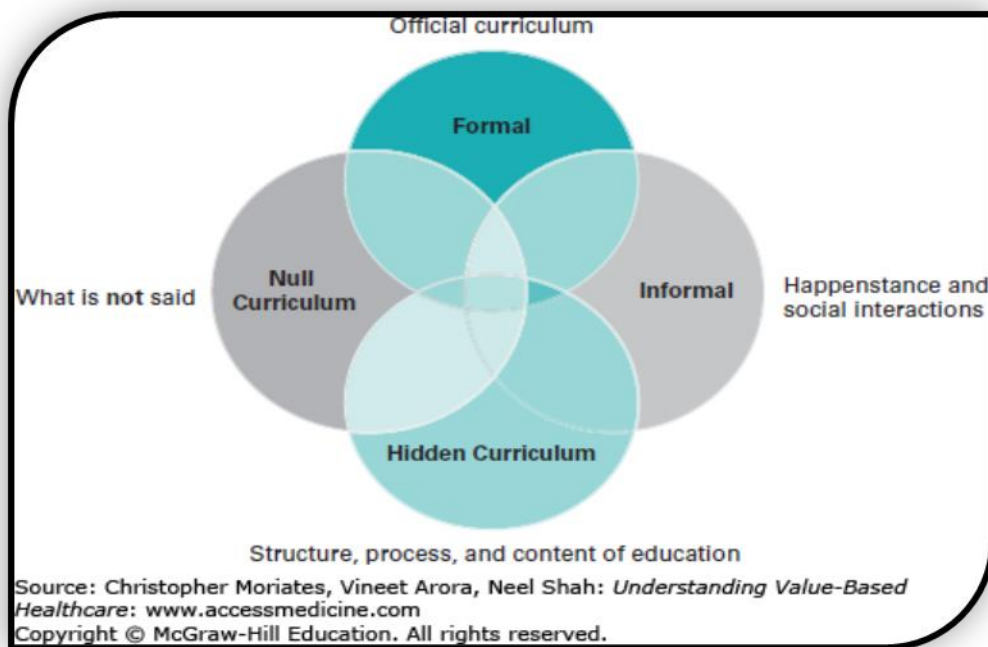


Figure 1: The place of the Hidden curriculum in structure, process and content of Education.

Figure 1 shows that formal curriculum, informal curriculum, and hidden curriculum involve activities that are shared during their implementation. A formal curriculum involves formal activities that are allocated in a school timetable and that are taught in specific subjects according to allocated periods for teaching and learning in a school programme. In addition, it is an officially selected body of knowledge which government through the Ministry of Education and other bodies wants students to learn (Kelly, 2004). Moreover, an informal curriculum involves activities

that are carried out on a voluntary basis. For example after school hours, lunch times, or during holidays (Kelly, 2004, Morris, 2016). Thus, a hidden curriculum is considered a means for gender socialization within schools as it reflects what learners are taught from an early age. It involves perceptions of the roles of males and females within the family and school. It encourages stereotypical attitudes that indirectly shape female learners to consciously or unconsciously accept disempowered roles (Chapin, 2021).

3. Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach to examine the contribution of hidden curriculum to gender inequality in teaching and learning materials. The study used the documentary review method to gather information from educational literature such as books, published articles, and policy documents. In addition, official information from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology and other Government institutions were also consulted. Both written and electronic materials were used to realise the study's purpose and objectives. Content analysis was done and the information obtained from various sources was coded and organised into themes based on the study objectives. A gap analysis was done for further research in the future.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 The Integration of Gender in the teaching and learning materials

Tanzania through the Ministry of Education has shown commitment to ensuring gender equality in education. The National Curriculum Framework, Education Sector Development Programmes, and reforms in primary and secondary schools targeted gender equality in education (URT, 2018; URT, 2019). However, the integration of gender into teaching and learning materials continued to be a challenge. Textbooks continued to portray gender bias and stereotypes.

The analysis of Social Studies textbooks for primary school show that there was equal representation of female and male in some textbooks (TET, 2021a; TET, 2021d & TET, 2021e). These findings suggest that there is an improvement in addressing gender stereotypes in order to ensure gender equality in textbooks and learning materials. However, gender bias remains a challenge and it still exists in schools textbooks. The study findings show further that there was inadequate gender sensitivity in the content and portrayal of female and male in some textbooks (TET, 2021b; TET, 2021c). The activities assigned to boys and girls reflect traditional gender roles. This continues to encourage gender stereotypical

ideas, perception and attitudes towards male and female gender roles in the society.

Furthermore, there is imbalanced representation in roles related to professionalism and leadership role. The findings show further that male were portrayed as experts in environment conservation. Likewise, male elders were portrayed in the leadership role (TET, 2021b). It can be argued that balancing of the roles can reduce bias and encourages learners to pursue different subject areas of their dreams. It also teaches learners that it is possible to practice different roles despite their gender.

In addition, actions that show good relationship and solidarity among people in society were portrayed by males. For example, such actions were portrayed by boys who were playing football and male who were doing fishing activities (TET, 2021b). The findings show further that "relationships in society" was portrayed by girls in their traditional gender roles. Surprisingly, the characters were portrayed in negative behaviour and actions as they (girls) were quarrelling while fetching water in the well (TET, 2021b). It can be argued that gender stereotypical ideas and perceptions tend to associate females with certain negative actions and behaviour. The concept could have been presented well without gender bias.

Furthermore, the findings show that female were portrayed engaging in small entrepreneur activities. They keep chickens so as to earn the living through selling eggs and poultry meat. They also sell fish. However, males were portrayed doing mining and fishing activities (TET, 2021c). It can be argued that the portrayal of females and males reflects activities that were perceived to be appropriate for females and males. Females were portrayed in traditional gender roles and their participation in professional activities was limited and such activities were perceived to be done by males. However, the intended topics could have been presented well with gender sensitivity.

Other studies also show that power relations and stereotypical portrayal of male and female encourage gender bias that encourage female underrepresentation. Other scholars also found that male characters were dominant in text books while female were invisible or portrayed in minimalist roles. In addition, women are less frequently portrayed in professional capacities compared to men. Studies have shown further that gender bias in textbook was in various categories such as visibility, roles, titles and order of appearance and representation of both genders

However, it was proved that even female can perform well when they are given opportunities (Lee & Collins, 2006; IBE, 2017).

4.2 Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality in Curriculum

There are different factors that contribute to gender inequality in curriculum development and implementation. These include gender stereotypes in curriculum and teaching, Teachers' inadequate knowledge on gender issues and school culture.

4.2.1 Gender stereotypes in Curriculum and teaching and learning

Gender stereotypes are reflected in gendered school subjects, teaching methods, boys being considered to be good in Mathematics and Sciences while girls are considered to be good in arts and humanity subjects. In addition, text books portrayed gender bias through the ratio of male and female in text books, illustrations, occupations and frequency of adjectives for men and women (Morris, 2016).

Textbooks encourage a hidden curriculum which facilitate underrepresentation of female and male in text books and pictures. Female are portrayed in domestic and in door activities like mothers and caregivers. They are less frequently portrayed in their professional roles compared to their male counter parts. Likewise, values, norms and belief systems are transmitted through hidden curriculum. The existing stereotypes and attitudes still favour education for boys than girls. Hence, female remained in more limited social roles compared to their male counterparts. It is emphasized that a gender-responsive curriculum ensures that teaching and learning materials do not perpetuate gender bias and discrimination in society (URT, 2000; UNESCO, 2020). Textbooks can also encourage stereotypes through inappropriate images and descriptions that can make learners feel uncomfortable and misrepresented (Kian *et al.*, 2020; Nashriyah *et al.* 2020).

4.2.2 Inadequate knowledge on gender issues

Teachers' and other educators' inadequate knowledge on gender issues is still limiting effective implementation of gender equality in schools. Teachers' attitudes, practices and relationships between learners increase gender inequalities indirectly. Teachers' expectations of girls and boys and teachers attitudes towards gender lead to gender inequality through the gender roles that tend to favour boys (Mc Cracken *et al.*, 2015).

Teacher inadequate knowledge and skills in integration of gender perspective into curriculum tend to encourage gender stereotypes and favour based on gender and sex. Equal teacher treatment of girls and boys in the classroom encourage practices that value and engage each learner in the classroom (Kian et al., 2020). Hence, Teachers' knowledge of issues that affects the lives of both boys and girls learners is of great importance.

4.2.3 School culture and cultural norms

Schools play a crucial role in curriculum development as they are involved in teaching and learning process and serve as institutions for transmitting social knowledge attitudes and social change. They (schools) also have the role to eradicate gender bias in teaching methods, curricula, teaching and learning process and to ensure equality in all educational matters. Moreover, school practices and activities are expected to encourage and promote self-esteem, respect and assertiveness among learners (Elwood, 2016).

However, cultural norms affect girls' active participation in school activities as well as their achievement in school. Cultural norms encourage traditional gender stereotypes such as teachers' attitudes and expectations of girls and boys that affect gender equality negatively. School- culture is expected to encourage a shared vision, ensure overall well-being of staff members, learners, cohesiveness, predictable routines and a sense of control (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015; Nashriyah *et al*, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The hidden curriculum continued to encourage gender inequality through teaching and learning materials. The findings show that visibility and the representation of females in textbooks has increased. However, gender bias still exists in textbooks. The findings show that textbooks encourage a hidden curriculum which facilitates underrepresentation of female and male in textbooks.

The study recommends that development of curricula and teaching and learning materials should put considerations in gender- responsive content and gender balance in roles allocation. Moreover, there is the need to increase awareness among reviewers and curricula developers to change attitudes and norms that encourage gender bias. The study recommends further research studies on other aspects of the hidden curriculum including the contribution of school culture and cultural norms to gender inequality.

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