



A Survey of Gender Representation in Social Studies Textbooks of Ethiopian Primary Schools

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to investigate and analyze gender representation in second cycle (grade 5-8) primary schools Social Studies textbooks. For this purpose, four Social Studies textbooks which are in use in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 were investigated thoroughly. The content analysis method was employed. The results revealed that there is no fair representation of females and males in some gender related characteristics. The supremacy of males over females was observed in terms of names ($X^2 = 122.64$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$) and pronouns ($X^2 = 46.76$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$) and it was suggested that reconsideration Should be made in revising and/or producing new textbooks, if necessary, in the future.

Keywords: Gender representation; textbook; social studies; gender equality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Education enables girls and boys, women and men to participate in social, economic and political life and is a foundation for the development of a democratic society (SADE [1]).

According to Tantengco [2], the 21st century requires education to be transformative meaning a systematic and conscious process of moulding students into a conscious, active citizen who are committed to social transformation. It covers the whole process of providing social awareness, social conscience and social commitment in order to develop the youth as responsible, committed citizens for social transformation. Tantengco further explains that the goal of transformative education is to equip the learners with relevant knowledge and skills for critical and creative thinking, and to make them socially aware about the need to transform the values and institutions to effect genuine democracy and development.

Aikman and Unterhalter [3] considered development of freedoms of all individuals i.e. "freedom to attend school, to learn and participate in safety and security, to develop identities that tolerate others, and to enjoy economic, political and cultural opportunities" as necessary for the achievement of gender equality in education. They concluded that putting gender equality in place in the classroom is a key to connecting schooling and citizenship with human rights. However, it is well documented that, throughout history, women have been considered inferior to men to the extent that the roles which were attributed to them were also considered as trivial.

Khurshid, Gillani, and Hashmi [4] stated that women are treated as inferior being as compared to men and they are given few positions of importance throughout all walks of life. Women have been seen as inferior to men in terms of their qualities, capacities and their roles in society. Women perform approximately two-third of the total world's total work but only ten percent of the world's income and one percent of world's lands (UNESCO as cited in Khurshid et al. [4]).

Since education systems are embedded in the broader social context, they reflect the inequalities that exist in society. The structure

and content of schooling – textbooks, curricular choices, sex distribution of teachers and administrators, teachers' attitudes and behaviors, classroom and discipline practices, and the presence of violence – reflect discriminatory and harmful social norms about the appropriate roles and opportunities for boys and girls (Connell as cited in Levtoy [5]).

Emphasizing Connell's notion, GCE [6] stated that the pervasive denial of the human right to education experienced by women and girls across the globe – as shown, for example, by the fact that two thirds of the world's non-literate adults are women – is a striking example of gender discrimination.

SADE [1] argues that quality education embraces education as a process aimed at transforming society, promoting social change and building a democratic society. Maintaining gender discrimination makes quality education impossible. Quality education cannot be achieved without gender equality and equity. SADE further elaborates that quality education includes awareness of gender inequalities and addresses in teacher training, teaching and learning practices, curriculum and textbook content, school management, student-student and teacher-student relations, stakeholder involvement, etc. and, not the least, in national policies and strategies.

Consequently, women's emancipation and empowerment have become the focus of international programs and conferences for purposes of integrating them into the development process on an equal basis with their male counterparts (Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta & Bhukuvhani [7]). This is why within the past four decades, series of conferences on women empowerment slogan were organized by the United Nations in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

For instance, the 1995 Beijing Declaration, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, reaffirmed the commitment to ensure "the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (Tantengco [2])." Inherent in all these assertions are, the right to education as access to education is a prerequisite for achieving equality and other basic human rights. To this end, all those international movements on women have been

complemented by calls for promoting gender sensitivity in the school curriculum (Brugeilles & Cromer [8] and Tantengco [2]). In particular women's organizations as well as mainstreaming the curriculum, according to Gudhlanga et al. [7], were identified as key elements in achieving the UN Global Platform for Action agreed at Beijing, China.

In Cognizance of this, the Government of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has declared its explicit commitment to the development of women with the announcement of the National Policy on Women in 1993 (referred to as women's policy), and the promulgation of the new constitution in 1995. In addition, the government has taken-up the need to mainstream gender in all educational, political, economic and societal spheres (ESPS [9]).

Accordingly, the government has recognized the curriculum as a means of transformation in terms of realizing human rights and the international development agenda of "Education for All" and the MDG's call for gender equality in education by 2015. For this purpose, the government has committed itself towards the achievement of greater level of gender justice and human rights through the periodic review of the primary and secondary school curriculum. It is indicated in the policy document that education would be geared toward reorienting society's attitude and value pertaining to and contribution of women in development (MOE [10]).

It is evident that, in education, the curriculum serves as the connection between national education policy objectives and the delivery of education services. In other words, the curriculum should be a vehicle to promote what is intended i.e. positive message about equality between women and men. Textbooks, as an integral aspect of the curriculum, according to Levtov [5] and Chinyani [11], are one of the first places-and most formal artifacts that demonstrate what educational "norms" are intended to be transmitted in the classroom.

Results from studies across many countries were remarkably consistent in terms of the representation of gender: women and men have been treated quite differently (or discriminately) much in favor of males. For example, numerically, there are fewer images of women and girls compared to men and boys (Porecca [12]); men also appear to have more text space devoted to them through longer stories about

men; the presence of men was more highlighted than that of women regarding names, nouns, and pronouns (Bahman & Rahimi [13]); contributions of important women (as well as minority groups) were ignored or given less consideration (Blumberg [14]).

As far as the knowledge of the researcher concerned, no studies have been conducted to examine gender representation in the new primary school Social Studies textbooks which have been in use in Ethiopia since 2011. To this end, this study was designed to see how gender representation looks-like in Ethiopian primary school textbooks. It aimed to evaluating current second cycle (grade 5-8) primary school Social Studies textbooks for gender balance. For this purpose, a research question was raised:

- Are male and female represented equally in second cycle Ethiopian primary school Social studies textbooks?

2. TEXTBOOKS AND GENDER EQUALITY

A strong education system, in line with the principle of non-discrimination, is a key for redressing gender injustice in wider society, and for overcoming social and cultural norms that discriminate against girls and women (GCE [6]). Today the goal of Education for All and the priority given to girls' education make textbooks even more important (Brugeilles & Cromer [8]).

Many scholars in the field of education firmly believe that the school curriculum/textbooks can provide a fix to societal problems (Banks [15], Chinyani [11]; Brugeilles & Cromer [8]). Brugeilles and Cromer [8] further underlined that, in any particular society and across the world, textbooks have an impact far beyond the immediate confines of school and learning. They see textbooks as a basic learning tool for pupils and teachers; a tool of negotiation between the various actors involved in its production and use; and an element of communication within families, especially for values.

Brugeilles and Cromer [8] again highlighted that textbooks are powerful levers of social change in propagating universal values. They further stated that not only do textbooks contribute to learning through dissemination of knowledge, but they also play a role in children's upbringing by directly or indirectly transmitting models of social behaviour, norms and values. Textbooks are

therefore a tool for both education and social change.

This is based on the views of Chinyani [11] that once something becomes school knowledge its implementation is legitimized and is deemed worthwhile knowledge. The school system cannot be a solution unless it offers the right curriculum as Gordon cited in Chinyani [11] argues, —An important aspects of education, which channels children into gender roles, is the curriculum that they are permitted to study.

Aikman and Rao as cited in Levtoy [5] argues that textbook is an important and influential tool through which children are exposed to ideas about gender. Thus, unequal treatment of women and men in textbooks would be reflected on the learner's thinking and her/his daily activities in the society. According to Chinyani [11], Levtoy [5], Bruegilles and Cromer [8], it is through textbooks that learners' ideas and thoughts are shaped. Therefore, creating a textbook is tantamount to choosing the values, norms and representations that underpin hopes of maintaining social cohesion and harmonious relationship between human beings and institutions.

3. METHODOLOGY

Visibility is one of the means through which a textbook can be evaluated for the extent to which it is gender sensitive (Porecca [12]). Visibility refers to the relative numbers of males and females characters appearing in textbooks in terms of noun (names), pronoun, common names and images. Visibility is one aspect of gender balance to be examined. He strongly argues that one of the most widely examined manifestations of gender discrimination is omission. When females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women's accomplishments, or women as human beings, are not important enough to be recognized.

Accordingly, this study was conducted to find out whether women and men were represented (appeared) equally in the Social Studies textbooks of Ethiopian second cycle (grade 5-8) primary schools. Content analysis was employed. It involved qualitative and quantitative approaches in which frequency counts of occurrences of words attributed to females and males i.e. nouns (names), pronouns (she, he,

her, his etc), common names (boy, girls, men, women etc), and images were examined. Tabulation of the raw data were done and then converted to statistical data. Percentages and Chi-squares were used to get the frequencies of the raw data statistically. In addition to the textbooks mentioned, an interview was also conducted with 7 (seven) experienced teachers who are teaching using the textbooks in order to compliment the data collected through content analysis of the textbooks. The semi-structured questions used for the interview were related to how men and women represented in the textbooks and what problems are reflected in the textbooks in terms of gender representation. Colleagues of the researcher are contacted to comment on the appropriateness of the interview questions. The units of analysis used in this study include words, phrases, and pictures. Frequencies, percentages and chi-square are employed to analyze the data collected.

4. RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to examine the Ethiopian second cycle primary school Social Studies textbooks for gender representation. In other words, the study examined whether both sex i.e. male and female represented equally in the textbooks. For this purpose, gender representation was analyzed in terms of noun (name), pronoun, common nouns, and pictures. This section presents analysis and interpretation of the data.

As shown in Table 1, there is a significant difference in representation of gender with regard to nouns (names). The chi square test between males and females representation in terms of noun was statistically significant at $X^2 = 122.64$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$. There is no fair distribution of male and female names in the textbooks. This shows that male names are represented more in the Social Studies textbooks than female counterparts. In other words, female names are underrepresented in the textbooks. Teachers interviewed were also attested this. They reported that only histories of African kings, male freedom fighters, and leaders were entertained in the Social Studies textbooks. The teachers further explained that females who have been actively involved in the struggle for independence were forgotten. It teaches students as if only males made this world.

As clearly indicted in Table 2, there is a significant difference in representation of gender

in Social Studies textbooks in terms of pronouns (e.g. he, she, her, etc). The chi square test between male and female pronouns was statistically significant at $X^2 = 46.76$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$. This shows that male still outshined in representation than females in terms of pronoun. To put it differently, the Ethiopian primary school social studies textbooks are male dominated with reference to pronouns.

As shown in Table 3, the results of the chi square test clearly demonstrated that there is a significant gender representation difference by common names in the textbooks. The chi square test was found to be significant at $X^2 = 7.85$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$. This shows that in terms of common nouns (girl, boy, women, man, etc), females are more represented than males.

As indicated in Table 4, the results of the chi-square shows that there is no significant difference among the frequency of pictorial representation of males, females and both in the second cycle primary Social Studies textbooks. The chi-square test found to be not significant at $X^2 = 3.44$, $df = 2$, $p > 0.05$. This result shows that there is no significant gender representation

difference by pictures among male, female or both groups in the Ethiopian second cycle primary level Social Studies textbooks.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are that in most gender related characteristics, male dominated the textbooks and that females were underrepresented. For instance, female pronouns constituted only 24.86% of the total pronouns in Social Studies textbook from grade 5-8. Their representation in the textbooks was lower than the male representation. These were in lines of the findings of Blumberg [14], Jabeen et al. [16], Engebretson [17], Keene [18], and Sumalatha and Ramakrishnai [19] that females are underrepresented of misrepresented in textbooks.

In addition, out of the total names mentioned in the textbooks, females make up only 12.15%. Interviewed teachers also witnessed that history related parts of Social Studies textbooks totally emphasize histories of kings and male freedom fighters in different African countries and failed to mention the contributions of females in the

Table 1. Gender representation in terms of nouns (names)

Nouns	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	O-E	X^2	df	p-value
Male nouns	188	107	81	122.64	1	< (0.05)
Female nouns	26	107	-81			

$P < 0.05$

Table 2. Gender representation in terms of pronouns (she, her, his, he etc)

Pronouns	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	O-E	X^2	df	p-value
Male pronoun	134	85.5	45.5	46.76	1	< (0.05)
Female pronoun	43	85.5	-45.5			

$P < 0.05$

Table 3. Gender representation in terms of common nouns (boys, girls, man, woman, etc)

Common nouns	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	O-E	X^2	df	p-value
Male referenced	73	92	-19	7.85	1	< (0.05)
Female referenced	111	92	19			

$P < 0.05$

Table 4. Gender representation in terms of pictures (boys, girls, man, woman, etc)

Picture	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	O-E	X^2	df	p-value
Male in picture	21	15.3	5.7	3.44	2	0.18 > (0.05)
Female in picture	11	15.3	-4.3			
Both in picture	14	15.3	-1.3			

$P < 0.05$

struggles for independence. This confirms what has been found by Sumalatha and Ramakrishnaiah [20] who reported that Indian secondary level Social Studies textbooks are filled with names of famous men and authors. They found 95% of the names as male and it was difficult for girls to find names of women who were freedom fighters and active in times of national crisis.

Similarly, Bhusumane as cited in Gudhlanga et al. [7] found that historical parts of Social Studies textbooks in Botswana have more heroes than heroines. In the textbooks, students are exposed to male leaders of nationalist movements like Kwame Nkrumah, Samora Machel, Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela and Joshua Nkomo among others. Students also read about men of fame from other parts of the world. Shah as cited in Jabeen et al. [16] also reported that in Social Studies text book not a single woman has been included from history.

The work of Chick [20] also further echoes this. She found more males than females in the K-12 American History textbooks at all levels in both content and illustrations. The female images are mostly invisible in the illustrations as well as in the content. Furthermore, Tantengco [8] stated that textbooks often feature women as of lesser value compared to men. This can be seen, according to Tantengco, in not mentioning her direct and indirect contributions in history and science textbooks. She portrays second lead role and is often left behind in leading struggles and revolutions.

By presenting this kind of gender system, textbooks reinforce and legitimize gender inequality. If textbooks treat women and men unfairly, it will affect the thought and ideas of the learners (Brugeilles and Cromer [8]; Chinyani [11]; Levtoy [5]). Similarly, Porreca [13] argues that when females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women have no accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included. Gudhlanga et al. [7] also stressed that the implied devolution of the female and non-recognition of their contribution produces a low self-esteem and less respect in females.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By and large, this study revealed that despite the measures taken by the Ethiopian government in

general and the Ministry of Education in particular to provide high-quality education and promote gender equality, male and female representations are still 'problematic'. There is no fair treatment of females in these series of textbooks. The areas of difference found were names and pronouns. In the areas of names, males outnumbered females. Concerning pronouns too there was the supremacy of males over females. In general gender is still represented in a way that supports the status-quo.

If females are underrepresented in textbooks, there is, as teachers use textbooks mostly in their teaching, potential for females' perspectives and experiences to be forgotten. When the females' experiences are forgotten, the vision of social studies as educating students to live as citizens in a diverse and interdependent world cannot be achieved. Thus, based on the findings of the study and the conclusion made, the following recommendations are made.

- Female representation should at least be as the same rate as male representation across textbooks. Therefore, in the future, textbook authors shall consider this while revising and/or producing new textbooks. In addition, Ministry of Education should formulate national guidelines which will call for balanced representation of both men and women in textbooks to guide regional and national textbook writers.
- Teachers shall promote gender equality in their instruction. For instance, the contribution of women in a struggle for independence in international and Ethiopian context should be entertained in the history related sessions of the Social Studies class.
- A reexamination of the composition of the textbook writing and/or editing staff could be necessary for the staff's conception of male-female equality. The persons who have participated in the writing and editing of these second cycle primary level Social Studies textbook were all males. Participating females in textbook writing and/or editing should also reduce gender imbalances and ensure gender equality.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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