



The contribution of the hidden curriculum to gender inequality in teaching and learning materials: Experiences from Tanzania

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the contribution of the hidden curriculum to gender inequality in teaching and learning materials. 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. The study examined the content and portrayal of males and females in primary school social studies textbooks. The study used a qualitative research approach and the documentary review method was used to gather information from books, published articles, and policy documents. The findings show that there was an improvement in addressing gender inequality in textbooks and learning materials. The findings show that the visibility and representation of females in textbooks have increased. However, gender roles were portrayed in stereotypical ideas and images that encourage gender bias. The study concluded that teaching and learning materials encourage a hidden curriculum that facilitates the underrepresentation of females and males in textbooks. Therefore, the Government in collaboration with the relevant authorities should ensure that the development of teaching and learning materials considers gender-responsive content and gender balance in role allocation. There is a need to increase awareness among reviewers and book authors on gender sensitivity in the preparation of teaching and learning materials in order to ensure adherence to gender equality principles.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Hidden curriculum, Learning materials, Official curriculum, Tanzania.

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Contents

1. Introduction	55
2. Conceptual Framework	55
3. Methodology	56
4. Findings and Discussions	56
5. Conclusion and Recommendations	57
References	57

Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study examined the contribution of the hidden curriculum to gender inequality in teaching and learning materials. The study examined the content and portrayal of males and females in social studies textbooks for Tanzania's primary schools that have not been examined previously in the literature.

1. Introduction

The curriculum is one of the important policy areas for the 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 including 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 (Boyle & Charles, 2016; Osaki, 2000; Schneiderhan, Guetterman, & Dobson, 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 guide learners. However, they greatly encourage gender bias through roles, visibility, and occupations for male 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 (Osipov & 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 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2000, 2011). In addition, the Tanzania Education Policy also targeted to ensure gender equality in education and training (United Republic of Tanzania, 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 (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, Ehsangar, & Izanloo, 2020). The existing stereotypes and attitudes still favour more education for boys than it is for girls. Moreover, there are pedagogical aspects that continued to impede gender equality in education (Global Partnership Education, 2019). Likewise, inadequately trained teachers on gender issues, gender-biased curricula, and social and cultural values limit girls' education (United Republic of Tanzania, 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 School Social studies textbooks.

1.1. Gender Inequality in Teaching and Learning Materials

The Education Agenda 2030 insisted on equality for all learners 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, 2022). However, gender inequalities are encouraged through power relations, pedagogy, and stereotypical portrayal of male and female roles in curricula, textbooks, and learning materials. Females and males 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. Textbooks that are produced still portray gender-based stereotypes and few references to women and girls. For example, despite textbook revision which was done in Ethiopia, stereotypes persisted in textbooks due to a lack of training during text review and development. Likewise, the same was observed in Comoro due to inadequate training and sensitization among textbook developers. Thus, women and girls are still portrayed as passive, dependent and in traditional roles (UNESCO, 2020, 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 while learning in school (Chapin, 2021).

The hidden curriculum is within the structure, process and content of education. Figure 1 shows the place of the hidden curriculum in the 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 that the government through the Ministry of Education and other bodies want students to learn (Kelly, 2004). Moreover, an informal curriculum involves activities that are carried out voluntarily 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).

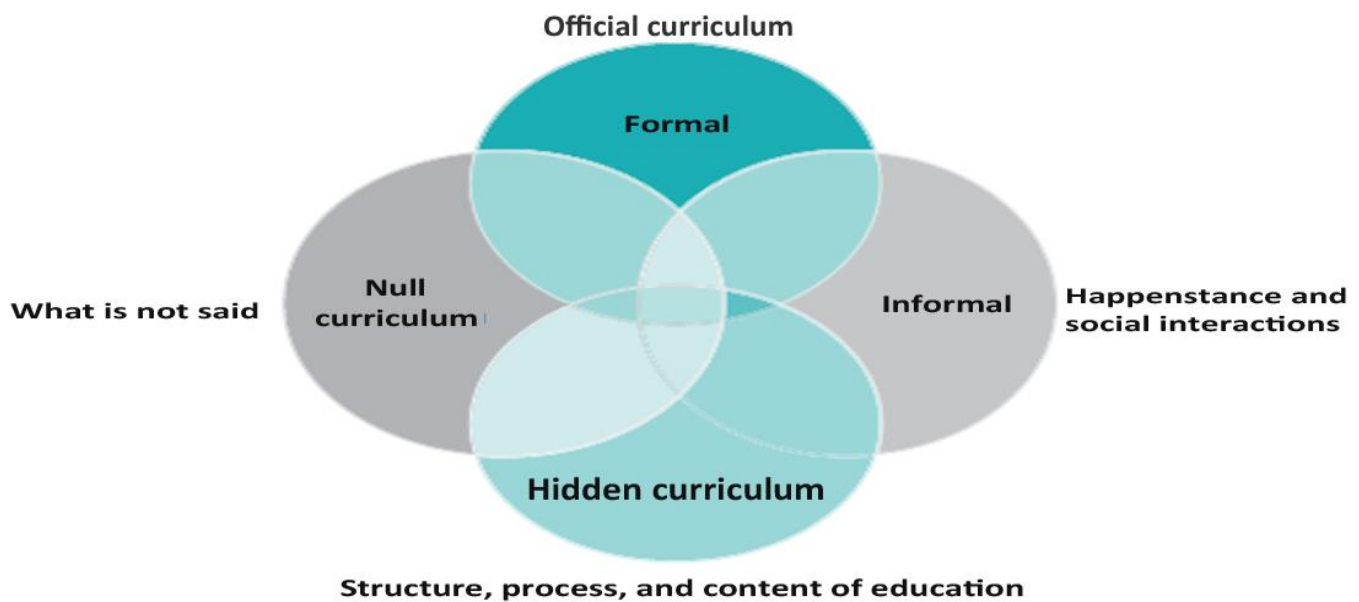


Figure 1. The place of the hidden curriculum in the structure, process and content of education.

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 collect information. 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 a 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 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2018, 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, 2021). These findings suggest that there is an improvement in addressing gender stereotypes 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 females and males in some textbooks. The activities assigned to boys and girls reflect traditional gender roles. This continues to encourage gender stereotypical ideas, perceptions and attitudes towards male and female gender roles in society.

Furthermore, there is imbalanced representation in roles related to professionalism and leadership role. The findings show further that males were portrayed as experts in environmental conservation. Likewise, male elders were portrayed in leadership roles. It can be argued that balancing 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 irrespective of the gender of an individual.

In addition, actions that show good relationships 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. 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 quarreling while fetching water in the well. 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 females were portrayed as engaging in small entrepreneurial activities. They earn a living by engaging in poultry keeping and selling eggs, poultry meat, and fish. However, males were portrayed as doing mining and fishing activities. 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 whose 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 males and females encourage gender bias and thereby encourage female underrepresentation. Other scholars also found that male characters were dominant in textbooks while females were invisible or portrayed in minimalist roles (Phan & Pham, 2021). In addition, women are less frequently portrayed in professional capacities compared to men. Studies have shown further that gender bias in the 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 females can perform well when they are given opportunities (International Bureau of Education, 2017; Lee & Collins, 2006; UNICEF, 2021).

4.2. Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality in Curriculum

Different factors contribute to gender inequality in curriculum development and implementation. These include gender stereotypes in curriculum and teaching, Teachers' inadequate knowledge of gender issues, and school culture.

4.3. Gender Stereotypes in Curriculum and Teaching and Learning

Gender stereotypes are reflected in gendered school subjects, and teaching methods, with boys being considered as good in Mathematics and Sciences while girls being considered as good in arts and humanities subjects. In addition, textbooks portrayed gender bias through the ratio of males and females in textbooks, illustrations, occupations and the frequency of adjectives for men and women (Morris, 2016).

Textbooks encourage a hidden curriculum which facilitates the underrepresentation of females and males in textbooks and pictures. Females are portrayed in domestic and indoor activities like playing mothers and caregivers. They are less frequently portrayed in their professional roles compared to their male counterparts. Likewise, values, norms and belief systems are transmitted through the hidden curriculum. The existing stereotypes and attitudes still favour education for boys not girls. Hence, females 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 (UNESCO, 2020; United Republic of Tanzania, 2000). Textbooks can also encourage stereotypes through inappropriate images and descriptions that can make learners feel uncomfortable and misrepresented (Kian et al., 2020; Nashriyah, Maulida, Ningsih, & Yusuf, 2020).

4.4. Inadequate Knowledge of Gender Issues

Inadequate knowledge among teachers and other educators on gender issues is still limiting the effective implementation of gender equality in schools. Teachers' attitudes, practices and relationships with 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, Unterhalter, Márquez, & Chelstowska, 2015).

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

4.5. School Culture and Cultural Norms

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

However, cultural norms affect girls' active participation in school activities as well as their school achievement. 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, and ensure overall well-being of staff members, and learners, cohesiveness, predictable routines and a sense of control (Nashriyah et al., 2020; Osipov & Sargizova, 2015).

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 have increased. However, gender bias still exists in textbooks. The findings show that textbooks encourage a hidden curriculum which facilitates the underrepresentation of females and males in textbooks.

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

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