

Does Classroom Interaction Encompass Gender Stereotyping? The Practice among Teachers in Kenya

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Abstract

Gender and language studies have evolved from findings that exposed sexism in language to studies that consider paradigms such as dominance, difference and diversity in assessing the linguistic gender stereotypes in language. Research has established that there are certain stereotypes in language use which can be identified when males and females use language. This study set out to establish the extent to which these stereotypes are prevalent among Kenyan high school teachers and how it affects teaching and learning. The study adopted the qualitative research design. Schools, from where the teachers were sampled were identified through cluster and simple random sampling. Teachers were purposively sampled. Lesson observation which included recording, and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The researcher attended classes where the sampled teachers were teaching and recorded the lessons. The focus group discussion involved all the teachers in the sample. Data was analyzed using descriptions. One finding was that teachers frequently use stereotypical language in class. Another finding was that the gender stereotyping by teachers did not greatly impact teaching and learning, however, there could arise isolated cases where students were psychologically affected and could not do well in class.

Keywords: Gender, Stereotype, Language, Teaching, Learning,

1. Introduction

Gender studies in language have brought forward many language characteristics which were hitherto ignored. Language use at times can be termed as attributed to a certain gender and this translates to a stereotype. A stereotype can be an opinion, a belief, or a conception which is usually attributed to members of a group or society. A stereotype gives information which may be verifiable or not. The stereotype may have a positive or negative connotation. Most stereotypes focus on groups rather than individuals, (Akulicheva, 2010). These can be tribes, sex, race or ethnic groups. The study of gender stereotypes brings out important aspects of societal language use which can be used to understand language areas such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and even anthropological linguistics. The features of the discourse give revelations that can also aid scholars in understanding diverse areas of language.

Gender stereotypes have been perpetuated in society, either intentionally or unintentionally. Most stereotypes are based on societal norms, expectations and beliefs about males and females. A stereotype can lead to discrimination and false assumptions about groups of people or individuals. There are language aspects that are deemed to be depicting males and females in terms of language use. The stereotypes are present in both spoken and written language. They also range from morphological to semantic and pragmatic levels. Non-verbal linguistic aspects are also included, based on the fact that language can be verbal or non-verbal.

Studies on gender stereotypes in language have been done, mainly by western scholars who include Labov(1972), Lakoff (1975), Tannen (1990), Cameron (1995) among others. From their studies, it has emerged that gender stereotypes in language use may affect the way people relate, understand or even interact. These stereotypes are present in society and Kenya is no exception. Teachers in Kenya interact with learners in the process of teaching. They use language as a medium of instruction in their teaching subjects. The language stereotypes might emerge in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom and sometimes in their social interactions. If the teachers use the gender linguistic stereotypes negatively, they are likely to affect the teaching learning process (Ngoma, 2016). The negative stereotypes can have a negative effect on the learners in terms of their performance, relationships or general self-esteem. This is due to the fact that most stereotypes are negative in nature. This stereotyping may be consciously or unconsciously done in the process of teaching or interaction. Some of the stereotypes may also be ethnic specific and may involve words which portray gender in a particular ethnic community in a particular way.

Gender stereotypes in language use by teachers can interfere with learning and can distract the teacher and thus make it impossible to achieve the set lesson objectives. Both the teacher and student can create a communication barrier due to the use of linguistic gender stereotypes. If, for example a teacher, whether male or female uses too many hedges or many tag questions, it might make the learners lose track of the lesson or misunderstand him/her as lacking knowledge or confidence. The linguistic stereotypes may vary from one teacher to another and from one gender to another. There may be instances when the learners also portray elements of gender stereotypes which can interfere with learning. The use of the stereotypes may also enhance learning if the teacher positively uses them to make a concept understood. A teacher may use tag questions to

find out if learners have understood the concept or to emphasize the knowledge. This may be of benefit to learners.

1.1 Problem Statement

The time has come when doing research in language and gender and mediating it to the public is considered worthwhile, in contrast to some years ago when it would have been considered an unworthy, if not a frivolous subject of academic debate. Although gender stereotyping still exists, more and more women appear to have cultivated elements of what some refer to as 'powerful' language, related to level of attainment rather than gender determined

In the process of teaching and social interaction, a teacher of any gender may use language that may be in line with what is termed stereotypical. Sometimes this may impact on the service delivery in teaching and learning. The context may also play a role in the level and degree of conformity. This is because the learners may also contribute to the use of the linguistic stereotypes in the teaching process. This study focused on the use of linguistic gender stereotypes in the classroom and if the use had any impact on teaching and learning among Kenyan students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Stereotypes

There is considerable divergence between conventional stereotypes and the reality of speech. The linguistic stereotypes seem to impact negatively on women, thus confirming the conventional stereotypes which exist in communities about the inferior place of women. Africa has many societal stereotypes about gender different ethnic groups. These can also be manifested in the linguistic interaction in schools especially when learning is taking place. This finding is relevant to this study because female teachers may generally use language in the way that is socially accepted or to portray their role as the inferior gender. This may extend to the classroom and it may impact negatively on the students and their contribution in class activities. This study focused on Kenyan teachers, the nature of the linguistic stereotypes that are present and how they impact on teaching and learning.

Tannen (1990) examines the difference between men and women's language. Her study discusses interruptions and attests that they are associated with women. This study popularized the 'differences' approach. The differences approach establishes the two-culture model of men and women, where children are socialized within two separate groups. A situation which Tannen (1990) suggests can lead to mis-communication. This study used the differences approach ideology with a view to getting information on the language differences between males and females as manifested in classroom and social interaction.

Two weaknesses are very glaring in the differences approach, though. First, although Tannen says she understood the ideology through her own and others' research, much of her book is based on personal, anecdotal and fictional evidence, demonstrating the initial weakness within the 'difference' approach. She uses terminology such as 'a man I had just met at a party' (Tannen, 1990), 'most women' and 'a woman who was telling me' The differences approach may be difficult to determine what the linguistic gender stereotype is among Kenyan teachers because they have no relationship and again they are involved in teaching and learning. However, the study controls for this because each of the linguistic stereotypes which will emerge will be considered in isolation. The teachers will to be used are in different fields and different schools. The study focuses on the use of the stereotypes as they emerge in the process of teaching and learning.

Second, Tannen's work seems to be her own projection of results without empiric support; she uses small scale studies and evidence from couples to make generalizations about 'men' and 'women'. In a small survey of six people, Tannen cites the responses of the four men and two women as evidence for the statement that for women's independence is not as significant as that of men (Tannen 1990). This study considered the classroom interaction between teachers and students. The interactions by different teachers with their students shows the use of language in different classroom context. Different classes in different schools were part of the study and while some showed some deviation from the gender sensitive language, the differences approach was not explicit.

One strength of Tannen's work, however, is provided in her attempt to offer alternatives to issues within the dominance approach; for example, her response to women's indirectness is presented not as a result of subservience but of sensitivity. Tannen's difference approach aims to engage with and benefit from the emotional investment maintained within heterosexual relationships. Therefore, a study which highlights differences between the hetero-sexes, and moreover offers answers in order to assuage those suggested differences, is more suited to generate more attention and more revenue than one which posits parity. In the context of teaching, the participants in the classroom are bound by professional and moral ethics. The nature of the language should be tailored to suit their teaching and learning needs. If there is conformity to stereotypes in the teaching process, then there must be a motivating factor for the use of the linguistic stereotypes, either individual or societal. Getting to find out the frequency and reasons for the use of the stereotypical language is necessary and is addressed in this study.

Tannen's argument within the popular science genre is about essentialist binary opposition, a notion which the 'Discursive' approach seeks to investigate. Her study however does not involve audio recording but uses only conversations. Some of the conversations can be biased, depending on the language users. She expounds on miscommunication between men and women by separating their sub-cultures.

According to Montgomery (1995), Tannen makes stereotypical assumptions and some of the differences are exaggerated. It is however true that there are differences in the way men and women use language but there could be exaggerations depending on the context. Cameron (1995) bashes the difference hypotheses and suggests that men and women could be made less damagingly alien to each other without undermining the concepts of masculinity and femininity (pp203). These differences may exist and any of the gender may be predisposed to use them. This may depend on the talk exchange. For example, the use of question tags. A teacher in a class where learners are not answering questions may find themselves using tag questions even when they are male.

Koch et al. (2005) concentrates on the questions of the thrust of gender as a male in identity crises and opts to incorporate female power. The use of stereotypes of language among men and women is an aspect of diversity but this concept has not yet been fully expounded. This is because diversity portrays men as homogeneous group and the same applies to women. Gender researchers consider each gender as a diverse group that can be influenced by factors such as ethnicity, clans, education and sexual orientations (Mills 1995:4). This is a major focus in the current study because both teachers and learners in Kenya have different backgrounds and the way they use language in the process of learning may be influenced by their backgrounds.

2.2 Gender and Language

The job of an individual, their geographical location, their origin for example, can lead to diversity in language use. From a socio-cultural perspective, the characteristics ascribed to men and women are generally related to the social roles that members of each sex occupy. The social role theory. Talbot (1998) maintains that gender stereotype contents are derived from observations of women and men in sex-typical domestic and occupational roles. This is in agreement with the principle of correspondence bias. Social perceivers infer that there is a relationship between the behaviors people are engaged in and their linguistic characteristics. Thus, the assertive, task oriented behavior required of men's typical occupations and authority roles favor inferences that men are generally assertive and linguistically biased than women.

The person-oriented, nurturing behavior required by women in their female-typical occupations, domestic roles, or child care roles may lead people to reason that women possess poor communication characteristics (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). As teachers interact with learners in schools, there might arise cases where language use is deemed sexist or stereotypical. Sometimes, it might be derogatory and other times it might be merely to intimidate the female gender. This may not apply to all teachers and all situations. It may not also apply to both gender. In Kenya, language and gender stereotypes may not be easily identified though they might be widely in use both in class and outside. The current study therefore aimed at bringing out the aspects of language and gender stereotypes and how far they are manifested in learning.

Beliefs about women's and men's characteristics are assumed to be related to how the group has been or will be positioned in the social structure over time; analogously, sex-stereotyped personality traits of women and men are likely to change along with their societal roles. Men and women are trained for different roles in life and then move on to perform those roles; thus, when their roles change, so should gender-role attitudes and the expectations for girls and boys. Language is an important factor in bringing about the self-esteem needed. The aspect of stereotypes may negatively impact on the personal and group traits thus leading to low performance.

2.3 Gender Linguistics

The concept of gender linguistics is a new approach which has been put to focus as the rise in feminism and scientific gender studies attract greater attention (Akulicheva, 2010). Akulicheva's findings reveal that overall, there are a number of stereotypes which have emerged from studies by Lackoff (1975), Tannen (1990) and Tannen (1994). These include; women talk more than men, men talk more than women, women are less assertive and direct, women use direct language, women prefer standard language, men break rules more than women and that women are linguistically polite than men, women use hedges more often than men and women use tag questions because they are uncertain.

These stereotypes were found to exist in linguistic interactions. Eagly and Steffen, (1984). claim that, perhaps the most common stereotype about women's speech is that women talk a lot. There seems to be no study which supports this belief while there are several which just show the opposite. This assumption applies in the current study because the type of classroom interaction will provide information on who contributes most and how frequently stereotypes are used. The classroom context can reveal who gives more contribution and in which areas the different gender are able to express themselves.

The stereotypes about men and women's speech are many and they may have historical connections. Graddol and Swami (1989) state that they can be perpetuated through jokes, journalism, literature and even

language scholars. Through these stereotypes, women are portrayed as gossips, nags and charter boxes that are kept in check by men who are silent. Stereotypes may barely be transferred to individuals who may just take them without necessarily considering whether they apply or not. Milroy (1980) supports this statement by implying that although very few actual cultural differences in the speech of males and females are empirically documented, there is a persistence of stereotypical assumptions, perception and expectation concerning linguistic behavior of sexes. This is more so tied to cultural values and beliefs. In the Kenyan situation, teachers and learners come from a cultural background which is male oriented, however, it does mean that the language in the classroom depicts the societal gender differences. There may be some instances when this may happen although it may be a one-time event. The current study focused on the nature and type of linguistic stereotypes used by teachers and learners in class and in their social interactions. This study brought out the language and gender stereotypes in the learning environment with a view to explaining the motive behind their use.

The stereotypes may be present in some interactions or may not, however, the overall gendered assumptions may have an effect on perceptions about the language of males and females. Eagly & Steffen (1984) explain about the pressure exerted upon individuals due to the prescribed ways of linguistic behavior. Other proponents also assert that women and men belong to different subcultures. This study may not be solely focus on this area but will have input based on the nature of linguistic interactions that will be brought to focus.

There are features that may be associated with male speech styles and female speech style. These may apply to some societies but may not apply to all. Generally, these are the stereotypes being referred thus because they have been over generalized. They may be important in establishing why male and female talk the way they do. Stereotypes may bring about constraints about what is a normal linguistic style for a man or woman. Romaine (1999) states that 'stereotypes about how men and women speak reveal insights into our attitudes about what men and women are like or what we think they are supposed to be like'. There are still existing questions as to what is referred to as the normal linguistic styles expected of men and women. Teachers and learners in Kenya are no exception. The study considers the impact the gender linguistic stereotypes have on teaching and learning. Learners may not be in a position to understand the content being taught by a teacher just because of the use of certain aspects of stereotypical language, for example, hedges.

This study was, therefore, informed by Romaine because the fact that stereotypes exist may lead to certain linguistic behavior that reveals the attitude that males and females holds against one another. The fact that language is used in a particular way may have an implication of a certain attitude. This may apply to some situations and geographical areas but not to all due to the existence of several factors which affect language use. Hall and Bucholtz (1999) comment that there is no single feature, verbal or non-verbal that characterizes women's speech across different cultures. Although the stereotypes have idly propagated, perhaps it might be impossible to pinpoint a particular feature which can be associated with a particular gender and is generalizable. There could be conformists who may also not be keen on the existence of stereotypes. This will be tested through the use of focus group discussions to establish the level of understanding and implications of gender stereotypes in teaching and learning.

2.4 Standard and Non-Standard Language

Studies by Strand (1999) and White (2004) address the issue of language and gender with their assertions regarding the role of stereotypes in language use. A submission by Holmes (1992) identified the deviation from standard language. The findings were that women use more standard forms as they are more status-conscious than men and are aware that their speech signals their social class background and so they strive to appear to have a higher social status than they actually do. Other reasons given were; women's role in society, women's status as a subordinate group and variations in the function of speech in expressing gender identity, especially masculinity. The standard or non-standard language use in the classroom is an aspect that is relevant under the causes of gender language stereotypes. The teacher or learner may use the language the way they do due to the fact that they may be used due to the social class of the teachers or learners.

2.5 Language and Linguistic Sub Culture

People are socialized to have certain sub-conscious expectations of how men and women should talk, (Strand 1999). The main objective of this study is to find out whether people conform to the stereotypes as perpetuated by Lackoff and supported by Tannen and Cameron. Cultural implications in language will therefore feature due to the fact that language and culture are intertwined. Strand (1999) therefore confirms this thesis because listeners use stereotypes which are cultural bound to differentiate between masculine and feminine language. This is because the use of language is also related to the expected behavior of males and females. This differs from culture to culture.

Givon (1997) describes the two-culture approach, which proposes that talk between women and men might be full of misunderstanding just the way cultures may differ. This idea shows that men and women have their own sub cultures which are different, in White (2004), there is a suggestion that every aspect of personality,

motivation and language is polarized. Example is how women use indirect language and euphemisms while men use direct style. She further claims that Coates (1986) women can adopt strategies to fit in the male subculture to fit in the male sub-culture. These include lower voices, use of swearing and an assertive style. Coates also stresses that masculine qualities such as aggressiveness and competitiveness are not always socially functional. This can differ from society to society. Dennison (2006:11) asserts that voice qualities such as lack of enthusiasm and emotion are considered masculine whether they occur in men or women. Higher pitch is a feminine aspect. These linguistic sub cultures may not however be ultimately different otherwise it would be impossible to envisage a situation where they could ever communicate. (Johnson &Meinhof, 1997).

This study informs this research because teachers comprise of men and women and they are able to use language as they deem appropriate. The concepts posed in the stereotypes can be prevalent in classroom communication or not. The linguistic sub-cultures that have been posited by the other the researchers may or may not be clearly manifest in the use of language by Kenyan teachers. This is because the social culture and the linguistic culture may come into play in the process of communication, both in and out of the classroom, thus affecting the inclination to certain aspects of language use. This study therefore revealed some linguistic aspects which express this concept by use of observation and Focus Group discussions.

2.6 Stereotypes as Social Phenomena

Yoshihisa et al. (2008) note that stereotypes are realized in context, namely; in social interaction and communication. As a social phenomenon, it is not easy to just identify stereotypes they occur as remarks, observations, and comments in routine daily exchange in the activities people are involved in. Whichever form the expression of stereotypes takes, as social phenomena stereotypes are manifested in terms of verbal exchanges or statements from which we infer what is termed a 'stereotype,' irrespective of whether such images actually exist. Thus, the proper place for examining stereotypes is in situated communication contexts. The parties to such contexts can be varied, in terms of different types of group membership (supporters of two football clubs, gender membership, proponents of different political parties, members of different social, racial classes, and so on). The point is that discrimination and prejudice are conveyed by communication, and on some occasions, this can rely on extremely subtle linguistic cues, such that one may not be able to put one's finger on why one is feeling somewhat isolated or offended. It has taken more sophisticated forms of expression and occurs in subtler and less detectable ways (Romaine, 1999). Such subtle expressions lead to the experience of feelings of proximity or distance, without knowing precisely why we feel as we do. The expression of such prejudice can take a number of different forms (Coates, 1986)

An examination of stereotypes among teachers in effect means studying everyday social situations where the stereotypes are likely to be used, subtly or otherwise, and systematically investigating their nature and frequency. This type of research strategy, while maintaining the wealth of the natural expression of stereotypes as used by individuals, makes it somewhat easy to determine the stereotypes, their use and their frequency, with a view to determining if they are really applied in the Kenyan learning situation.

A possible experimentally appropriate approximation to such situations is to dissect such social situations to precursors to the expressions of stereotypes in the society and also the consequences of such expressions to the receiver of such messages. Such a situation means that it is possible to tell whether the Kenyan public also conforms to the stereotypes because teachers are members of the society. Moreover, having discovered the systematic properties of language, the study analyzes the talk exchanges recorded and follows with a focus group discussion to find out if they are one-time events or are the norm. Such a step, albeit an approximation, is a possible systematic way to the investigation of the way stereotypes are manifested in the public domain, namely in the composition of messages teachers use with learners in the process of teaching and learning.

2.7 The Dominance Hypothesis

This hypothesis portrays language as reinforcing the male superiority stereotype in the society. Givon (1997) states that men and women are fitted to misunderstand each other unless they recognize their deeply socialized differences. The study acknowledges the fact that these differences tend to determine the way males and females talk. Tannen distances herself from the Dominance approach by eliminating blame through taking a cross-cultural approach to male-female conversations without accusing anyone of being wrong or crazy (Tannen 1990, p 47). In the preface, Tannen sets out her thesis, 'There are gender differences in ways of speaking' (p17).

The current study brings out aspects of language that teachers use in the classroom. Recordings reveal the nature of the language and the talk exchange that is considered. Teacher of any gender may use stereotypical language and so the dominance hypothesis will be considered in the light of the Kenyan situation. Learners also belong to either gender and they are also in a position to use language to communicate with teachers in the process of teaching and learning. This language and gender hypothesis was considered in the light of the Kenyan situation to establish the state of affairs and if it has an impact on the teaching

3. Materials and Methods

The qualitative design was adopted in this research. This is because the research required in depth descriptions about the nature of conformity to stereotypes. Using the qualitative approach, it was possible to analyze the opinions and information about language gender stereotypes. Qualitative design is applicable when phenomenon under observation requires a clear description of the characteristic done. This brings out an in depth understanding of the characteristics. It does not generate discrete numerical data, therefore, it is a suitable design when observing a phenomenon in the natural setting. This research focused on the extent of conformity to language and gender stereotypes in the teaching and learning environment.

Discourse content analysis which is a type of qualitative analysis was adopted to explain the nature of conformity to language and gender stereotypes by Kenyan teachers. Discourse content analysis is the systematic qualitative and description of the composition of the objects or materials of the study. Discourse content analysis involves observation and detailed description of objects or things that comprise the sample (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The current research generated data from respondents through observed and recorded class interactions, and focus group discussions. The teachers and learners, in their classes and social interaction were subjected to observation and recording in order to bring out the extent of conformity to the stereotypes as posited by Tannen (1990). As a qualitative design, discourse content analysis was used to determine the presence of certain stereotypical words or phrases in the language used by teachers while teaching.

Seliger and Shohamy, (1989) have brought forward the pragmatic component analysis whose emphasis is why something was said. This can aid in understanding the reason behind use of some linguistic items used by teachers. Some aspects of pragmatic content analysis were employed, especially when teachers said a word with a connotative meaning. The spoken language of high school teachers was contextually analyzed to establish the nature of the stereotypes that it conforms to. The units of analysis were the particular language items which conform to the existing stereotypes about gender and language. The focus group discussions gave information about the pragmatic aspects of the language used by teachers among other aspects of stereotypical language use. The impact of the stereotypes was considered in the light of whether it affects teaching and learning positively or negatively.

This research study involved 4 teachers from public mixed secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. Two were female teachers in humanities and science departments while two were male participants in languages and technical departments. Class observation, which involved audio recording and transcription were used to record and analyze the teacher's language interaction in class. A small and relatively unobtrusive recorder was used, and the first five minutes of the conversation were not analyzed as the awareness of being recorded could arguably be at its strongest and have detracted from the naturalness of the teaching process. The audio recording lasted for 30 minutes in each lesson because the last five minutes were also not recorded as already the interaction then is arguably minimal and the gist of the lesson has slowed. The teachers then participated in a focus group discussion in one school. Narrative descriptions were used to analyze the data from the two instruments.

4. Data Analysis

The data illustrates some of the ways in which the influence of stereotypes relates to teaching and learning. Teachers allude to gender stereotyping in the meanings of words and terms used in class. Meanings of words are informed by the different values and roles that the stereotypes assign to the two sexes. Two male teachers and one female teacher admitted that the issue of gender sensitivity does not arise when they are using language. All the teachers stated that they use gender stereotypes in the classroom for instructional purposes, to control student behavior, and to negotiate relationships.

The female participants noted that they often reprimand students using gender stereotypical language to an extent, if behavior became destructive. All the participants stated that they unwittingly contributed to students embodying stereotypes through the way they praised and policed students.

Asked what they thought could be done to avoid gender stereotyping when teaching, one female participant stated:

“Sometimes when we praise a boy for being clever or for solving a problem or we praise a girl for a new dress or for the way that they look, we are reinforcing these ideas that a girl's role is to look nice and a boy's role is to be clever”.

From the recordings, some common classroom practices, such as getting student attention by calling out “boys and girls,” implicitly reinforced the idea of the gender binary. When using such binary terms, the teachers can imply certain gender stereotypes in their actions and the meanings of their words.

The recorded data shows that secondary school teachers endorse some culturally dominant stereotypical beliefs which differentiate their students, girls and boys. In their use of language, they imply that boys are different from girls in terms of ability. In the recording, one male teacher says that:

‘if you are a man, you should prove your worth.’

This was said after it emerged that only girls were answering questions during the classroom interaction.

The teachers' language used in all the recorded lessons all generally implied that boys have better problem-solving capacities and strategic thinking, and they are more objective, rationalistic and synthetic compared with girls. Male teachers directed the seemingly difficult questions to boys and one stated that the question was too easy for a boy to miss. Although they encourage all the students to work hard, the student asked if they understood the concept was a girl, meaning that girls had to work harder to compete with boys. The feedback given by teachers when students successfully or unsuccessfully respond to a question can impact negatively on the learners. The participants stated that sometimes teachers call students stereotypical names like calling a boy, the lion or calling a girl a chicken. The term lion relates to strength while chicken relates to weakness.

During the focus group discussion, the male teachers admitted that they constantly remind girls of their different statuses either through directly use of language in instruction or from the social meanings that emerge from their everyday interaction. They did not do it intentionally and only used language the way it is used socially. Gender stereotypes are embedded in the meanings and use of Kamba words, and speakers appear to be creating and adding new sexist terms to the already existing ones. The teachers identified proverbs as containing much gender stereotyping. Gender stereotyping in proverbs may be said to reflect beliefs and values about males and females from the past, as proverbs are always attributed to the ancestors, however, the evidence that stereotypes are recurrently being created is a reflection of a society whose view that males and females are different, and unequal continues to be propagated through their language. All the four teachers concurred that at times, the language use affected the students and they would even develop an attitude towards a subject based on the teacher's language. On taking charge when there are cases of indiscipline, the teachers agree that:

“When students lack class control, often, our first instinct is to maintain control in the classroom by suppressing physical outbursts from students, and when more outbursts come from boys, we fall into the unfortunate role of perpetuating gender stereotypes by our choice of words.”

Statements which assign strength and courage to the male, and weakness and lack of courage to the female, are some of the meanings of all words associated with the two sexes. 3 teachers stated that they could comfortably use the stereotypical labels to describe males and females that we find the most egregious forms of linguistic stereotyping and discrimination and against the female. Different standards are used to judge the two sexes. The female is categorized and evaluated on the basis of her conduct and performance of her roles as a mother or wife, but the male is judged on the basis of his physical strength or on his relationship with females. One teacher stated that:

‘Naturally, when a boy displays anxiety, I tell him not to behave like a girl. I don't even think about it, I just find myself saying it.’

Asked if students react to stereotypical language, two, one male and one female participants stated that the students were not aware of gendered language while the other two explained that the reactions of the students sometimes showed that they understood that the language consisted of stereotypes. Sometimes students would try and conform to the teacher's stereotypical expectations, but it would at times create a rift among the students. In the discussion, all the teachers concurred that they propagated negative gender stereotypes at one time or another during teaching and learning and were guilty of gender-stereotypical practices in schools although male teachers were more affected. One female teacher said:

‘The problem is that we talk first and then think about what we have just said, which might be too late to revert.’

The society does not recognize gender stereotyping and even when it seems overt, it is not an issue, and no one really notices it. One female teacher stated that this is the way it has always been, gender roles defined by language and sexual orientation. It seemed as if teachers were unaware of the impact of gendered language use in the classroom and so they end up perpetuating biased perceptions of males and females in the course of teaching. From the class observations, gendered language is commonly used in the classroom and the learners hardly seem to notice it even when the teacher uses terms like ‘lion’ for males and ‘chicken’ for females. Societal gender stereotyping is the norm and no one even feels the impact, not even the students. The teachers agreed that currently, gender stereotyping is not an issue in schools and learners are not affected by gender stereotyping, performance wise or otherwise.

5. Findings

Teachers' classroom language has a lot of similarity with the stereotypical language used in the society. Sometimes they use proverbs which may not have a direct meaning but have connotative meaning. At the word level to the pragmatic level, the language has a lot of stereotypes associated with males and females. There is a lot of use of figurative language in the classroom and also in the social interaction in school. When referencing gender, at times teachers use words and phrases which denote weakness, cowardice, incapability when referring to females and the opposites when referring to boys.

From the foregoing, it emerged that teachers' explicit and implicit use of stereotypical language in and out

of the classroom does not have any explicit impact on the students regarding their academic abilities, personal competence, self-worth, and influences their attitudes, motivation and performance in learning, classroom interaction, curricular content choices, intellectual and socio-emotional development, future actions and choices in life. However, there could be some implicit impact that could be expressed through learner behavior and response. Because of the use of stereotypical language, the male students feel extra pressure not to fail in a situation where academic competence is relevant. As much as they used the stereotypical language to encourage students, the teachers are not conscious of the implications that could arise as a result of the use of the language. The fact that the issue of gender stereotyping in language, especially in an African setting has not been studied much means that there is general lack of awareness of the impact of gender stereotyping in classrooms. Male teachers use stereotypical language more often, do not take time to think of the implications of the language but only use language the way it is used in the society. At times, because they are male, they can impact negatively on female students, hence causing anxiety and inferiority complex which are implicit implications.

Conclusion

Teachers are very influential in the lives of students and so, as much as they propagate the stereotypes, they can influence students away from the stereotypical educational and life choices. The first important task is one of eliminating gender stereotyping in classroom talk. They must first ensure that in their own practice they are not reinforcing gender stereotypes by their use of words, phrases, proverbs and other language categories. Teachers also have a vital role to play in raising awareness about gender stereotyping, as it is in the classroom that stereotypes can be discussed, analyzed, and subjected to critique. They should encourage the students to be independent and resist pressures to conform to the dominant gender stereotypes, whether linguistically or practically. They can also provide learners with materials which, instead of presenting stereotypes, provide alternative views of masculinity and femininity to help students to develop themselves without focusing on what the society assigns to their gender. The relevant role the secondary school teachers play in shaping the future of their students argues for the necessity to include gender equality language in the classroom interaction.

Recommendations

Teachers can create an identity safe classroom. Steele (1997) observes that in safe classroom teachers use messages that do not border on gender stereotyping. Girls and boys may require different messages during classroom interaction and, students within the same gender may resent stereotypical messages based their appearance, character or actions. Studies have found that if teachers prime students at risk of stereotype threat with positive images and thoughts such as; 'you are intelligent' students often eliminate associations with negative stereotypes and perform at their potential (Ngoma, 2016).

Teachers should always use language that is gender neutral. Boys and girls should sit together in mixed classes and equal opportunity should be given to both boys and girls when participating in classroom activities. Instructional materials that are not gender neutral should be avoided during the teaching-learning interaction. Teachers should stimulate healthy competition among the sexes by using words that encourage all students irrespective of the activity being carried out.

Teacher education curricula, for both pre-service and in-service, must be permeated with opportunities to acquire gender sensitivity knowledge for use when undertaking school activities, disciplining and for classroom language during teachers- student interaction. Teachers must also learn to recognize and eliminate gender biased language in their students both within and outside the classroom. With the current global trends, there is no room for linguistic discrimination based on gender, race, class or otherwise.

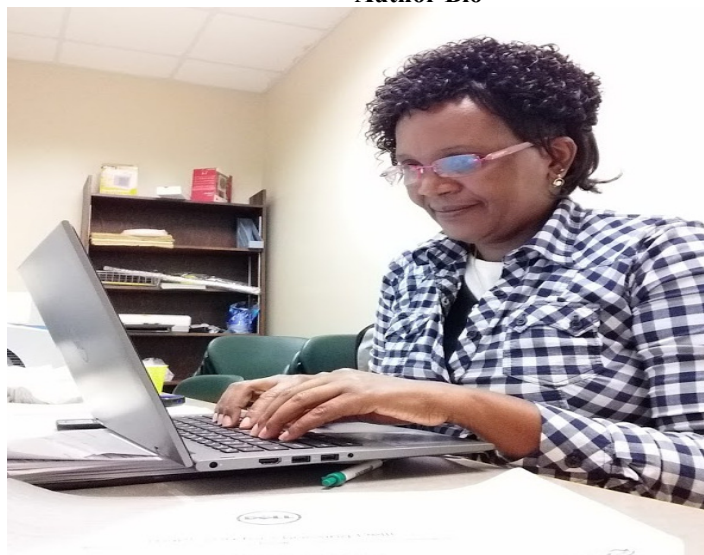
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