The Influence of Secondary Schools Teachers’ Distribution of Student Responsibilities on the Learners’ Perception of Gender Equality in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya

Alice Limo and Shadrack Kipruto Morogo


Corresponding Author: Alice Limo

Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between secondary school teachers’ distribution of student responsibilities on the learners’ perception of gender equality. It is based on a study conducted in Uasin-Gishu County in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between the hidden curriculum and gender equality amongst secondary school students. The authors adopted a survey research design. The target population consisted of the accessible population was the selected students in sampled mixed schools in the area. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 21 schools. Stratified random sampling based on gender was used to obtain the representative sample of 271 participants. The authors used questionnaires and document analysis as the main tools for collection of data. The collected data was coded using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and then presented using descriptive statistics. It was found that the teachers failed to promote gender equality amongst the students in assignment of responsibilities and rather believed that certain duties were masculine while others were feminine responsibilities, a situation that further promoted gender inequality amongst the students. As such, it was recommended that teachers be sensitized through seminars and workshops on the need to provide equal opportunities as well as the need to change attitudes towards girls, especially as regards girls’ interest and performance in Mathematics and Technological subjects. Schools must focus on reversing the traditional allocation of responsibilities and roles to girls and boys in order to build and shape them towards equality. The study is important both scholars and general readers as it sheds light to teachers and aids in understanding the effects of the attitudes, assumptions and expectations that may be placed on the students and therefore cause the gender gap.

Keywords: influence, secondary, schools, teachers, distribution, student, responsibilities, learners, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION
Gender issues have continued to play a key role in the formulation of public policy, not least in the education sector, where the gender gap in many developing countries remains a challenge (Sifuna et al., 2006). It is, however, important to understand the process of policy formulation because it is crucial to the final outcome of its implementation. In contemporary educational theory and practice, feminist thought provides invaluable direction on gender policies that seek to enhance inclusiveness and equality in education (Sifuna et al., 2006). The Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 (GoK, 2005) points to the support and implementation of affirmative action in secondary education to address the needs of the marginalized and/or those in difficult circumstances and the need to ensure that the school environment is gender and special needs education responsive.

Sifuna et al. (2006), however, point out how education policies reveal the absence of comprehensive gender policy with specific Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines. Further, the Kenya Government hardly provides effective guidelines on how to ensure that schools are, not only, learner-friendly, but also that girls are made to feel safe at school. Further, unless the policies are explicit on girls’ educational needs, the gender gap would continue to be skewed in favour of the boys. There is therefore need to address gender issues within the broader policy concerns and in the context of the global focus of EFA, the MDG’s and other international conventions and treaties that advocate equal education for every person.

Some of the key international treaties, according to Chege et al. (2006), include:

(a) The international Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which was adopted in 1966 and came into force 10 years later in 1976, albeit with a limited coverage of gender and education issues.
The philosophy of education, as stated above, is also spelt out in Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African socialism and its application to planning in Kenya, which calls for political equality, human dignity, social justice and equal opportunities for all citizens (Masiga, 1994). Based on the philosophy of equal opportunities for all citizens, the broad educational policies reiterate the national goals of education which state that: education should promote social equality and foster a sense of social responsibility within an educational system which provides equal educational opportunities for all (boys and girls, men and women). Another goal of education states that education should provide equal opportunities for fullest development of the individual talents and personality. It should help every child to develop his/her potential interests and abilities. The policy on equal opportunities does not discriminate against girls and women (Masiga, 1994).

The Role of Teachers in Promotion of Gender Equality

Challenging the issues of sexism in schools is of crucial importance, especially when we consider that a person’s early experiences can be vital in determining her or his later attitudes and expectations. Weiner (1985) points out factors that contribute to sexism in schools. It is argued that children are born into a sexist society, where women do not have equal opportunities and therefore, girls and boys have different experiences and expectations of themselves, which are formed by society’s attitudes as to what is appropriate for girls and boys. Weiner (1985) further argues that “these attitudes lead to male and female stereotyping. There is a strong pressure on both sexes to conform to these stereotypes even if they lead to conflict in their own lives” (p. 134).

The female stereotype holds that girls and women are passive, nurturing, emotional and impractical. The characteristics of male stereotype are activity, aggression, dominance and technical proficiency. Female exclusion from science and technology, even if it is apparently by girls’ own choice, also means that, as citizens, their ability to understand and control their environment will be limited (Whyte, 1985). Nevertheless, most schools feel they are already providing equal opportunities by neutral treatment of the two sexes (Bloomfield, 1984). In effect ignoring the effects of gender in this way merely reinforces stereotyping because it does nothing to challenge the definition of certain aspects of the curriculum as masculine or feminine. An Action research in Great Manchester in Britain that involved 8 co-educational institutions, dubbed ‘Girls Into Science and Technology (GIST)’, has revealed how ‘Teachers and boys seemed to be unthinking collaborating to construct science as an area of masculine endeavour, excluding girls who quickly took the hint (Kelly, as cited in Whyte, 1985). The GIST interventions strove to redress the numerical imbalance by offering female role models of practicing scientists and establishment of single sex classes among other issues (Whyte, 1985).

Teachers are faced with the challenge of identifying common experiences of discrimination against girls. There is also need for practical ideas of offering girls equality through own teaching and working on projects that deliberately raise and challenge the issue of sexism (Weiner, 1985). A survey of teachers’ attitudes on equal opportunities in British schools revealed that men were more likely to be opposed to promoting equal opportunities than women but that differences in subjects taught were more important than the sex of the teacher (Whyte, 1985).

The conditions for a girl-friendly school may be more difficult to bring about, for it would seem that teachers must be openly and visibly concerned about equality before pupils will change their choices; schools with traditional norms, limited or formal communications channels, with few women in senior positions will be much slower to adapt to changed female expectations” (Whyte, 1985, p. 90).

Chege et al. (2006) observe that the teachers’ influences at school have been found to be a hindrance to girls opting for science and
mathematics. Studies have shown that teachers tend to carry the societal expectations of girls into the school, and therefore treat boys differently from girls. Some teachers are said to actually discourage girls by uttering statements such as “mathematics and science are not meant for girls” (Wamahiu et al., as cited in Chege et al., 2006). A survey of co-educational schools in Britain revealed how many teachers paid insufficient attention to the ways in which boys dominated the classroom. Teachers in mixed schools tended to assume that the presence of girls and boys ensured equal opportunities. In this regard, many mixed schools failed to tackle equality issues and did not take advantage of the opportunity they had to bring boys and girls together in discussions about shared and differing expectations (Riley, 1994).

Frith and Mahony (1994) point out how it is much harder to elicit reasonable behaviour from pupils who perceive one (teacher) to be of low status. “This is part of a much wider problem to do with how boys (and perhaps some girls, too) perceive women, outside of the exceptional power relationships within the classrooms, and any action should certainly attempt to address the wider issue through work with pupils as much as with adult members of any society ” (Frith & Mahony, 1994, p 70).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Since education is recognized as a tool for achieving social mobility, it should endow individuals with the skills and qualifications to take up social responsibilities, without any bias in regard to gender. Examination results in Uasin Gishu District reveal how girls continue to perform much lower than the boys. Girls in mixed school set-ups do not feature as top performers as already mentioned. The study therefore was focused on assessing how the teachers’ distribution of responsibilities amongst students sends messages to the students in regard to gender equality in mixed schools in Uasin-Gishu County.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
During the study, the authors noted the respondents’ unwillingness to freely comment about the school administration. This posed a danger on the reliability of the study findings as some might distort information to play safe within the strict school rules. The authors however assured them of the confidentiality of the research process. In addition, perception is an issue that is influenced by a set of factors including formal curriculum and co-curriculum, apart from the hidden curriculum. The study focused only on the aspect of teachers’ distribution of responsibilities to students as part of the hidden curriculum. Other factors may also influence students’ perception of gender equality. Nevertheless, the study sheds light on the importance of the hidden curriculum aspects to students’ life both in and after of school.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
This study was carried out in Uasin-Gishu County, Rift Valley Province in the Republic of Kenya. The authors adopted a survey research design in investigating the relationship between the aspects of hidden curriculum and gender equality. The authors used this design to study the relationship between staff distribution of responsibilities to students and gender equality in mixed public secondary schools. The target population consisted of the accessible population was the selected students in sampled mixed schools in the area. All the respondents were either day scholars or boarders. The respondents in selected schools engaged in co-curricular activities apart from pursuing their academic studies. They comprised all students from form one to form four in the selected schools.

Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 21 schools from the seven divisions, namely Soy, Turbo, Kaptagat, Kesses, Kapsaret, Ainakboi and Moiben. The sample was drawn from 21 schools spread across 7 divisions. Stratified random sampling based on gender was used to obtain the representative sample of 271 participants. The authors used questionnaires and document analysis as the main tools for collection of data. Apart from that, minutes that showed composition of Board of Governors for the purpose of detailed analysis and interpretation were looked at. The authors also examined the schools’ organization charts or school hierarchical structures to determine staff distribution. The collected data was coded using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and then presented using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The main research objective was to determine how teachers distribute responsibilities to students and its effect on students’ perception on gender equality. The authors asked the respondents to answer six questions on a Likert-type of scale to assess the teachers’ distribution of responsibilities. The alternative response questions were asked as well as an open-ended question to determine gender equality perceptions amongst the students.

Head Teachers’ Preference of Head Boy
The authors sought opinions of respondents to the statement: “The Head Teacher Would Easily Pick On the Head Boy to Address an Important School Function”. A total of 266 participants responded to this item, while the remaining 6 skipped it. A total of 266 students responded to this item out of which the highest majority of 79(29.7%) agreed that the head teacher can easily pick on the head boy to address important school meetings. The second highest category strongly agreed with 65(24.4%) respondents the rest of responses were 52(19.5%), 55(20.7%) and
15(5.6%) for strongly disagree, disagree and undecided respectively. The results above depict the head teacher’s confidence in the head boy and how he is allowed to interact with the outside public in preparation for equivalent roles after school. The head girl’s position, on the other hand, is down played in the quest to unknowingly or unconsciously teach her, her position in the social world. The authors therefore noted that head teachers, majority of who were male, were promoting gender inequality in the mixed school set up.

Preference of Head Boy to Head Girl
The authors assessed the preference of the head boy over the head girl in addressing of school meetings by asking for opinions regarding the statement: “The Head Boy Is Often Asked By Teachers to Address Important School Meetings than the Head Girl”. The authors wished to check whether or not the teachers discriminate between the two genders in terms of the opportunity to address school meetings. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: Teachers Speech Address Assignment to Head Boy Compared to Head Girl

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Response</th>
<th>Frequency by Gender</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest group of respondents was those who disagreed, 74(27.9%), followed by those who agreed, 69(26.0%). It must be noted that the difference between those who agreed and those who disagreed is generally insignificant. The difference between the respondents who accepted or agreed to this item and those who disagreed is quite insignificant, even though a simple majority disagreed.

Boys and Cleaning Assignments
The authors sought opinions on whether or not the teachers would easily assign boys any cleaning assignments, by asking the respondents to give their opinions on the item: “Teachers would easily ask boys to clean tables in the staff room.” A total of 267 students responded to the item, the rest having skipped it. A total of 267 respondents gave answers to the item. A clear majority of 125(47.0%) Strongly Disagreed with the item. The second highest category is those who Disagreed having been 74(27.8%). The rest of the respondents were 26(9.8%), 18(6.8%) and 23(8.6%) for Undecided.

These results clearly depict the extent of latent discrimination in mixed school set-ups. It so appears here that teachers already have firm ideas about the respective roles of students in life and what they could be unconsciously doing is reaffirming the responsibilities to the learners who may have also developed the attitudes at an earlier age. These teachers’ attitudes and tendencies towards students work to promote gender inequality amongst students in mixed schools.

Cars Asking Girls to Clean Tables
The authors sought to find out whether or not the belief that certain duties such as cleaning were still in the domain of girls by asking for views on the statement: “Teachers Can Readily Pick On Girls To Do A Cleaning Assignment.” Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2: Perception of Cleaning Assignment to Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Response</th>
<th>Frequency by Gender</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the John Rawls Theory of Justice, there is a need for equality of opportunity within the school system. In this case, basic rights and duties should be assigned to all individuals without any bias as regards gender. When respondents were asked to respond to the item on assignment of responsibility of cleaning to girls, a clear majority of 75(28.2%) Strongly Agreed. The second highest category Agreed with 73(27.4%) respondents. The rest of the respondents were 34(12.8%), 67(25.2%) and 17(6.4%) for Strongly Disagree, Disagree and Undecided respectively.

When the item on assignment of cleaning to boys is compared with the one on assignment of cleaning to girls, it comes out clearly that cleaning is within the domain of girls. The mixed school set up is therefore clearly seen to be perpetrating the traditional sexist culture. In order to change the perceptions of the students we therefore must begin by helping the teachers to overcome their well-documented unwillingness to transcend the discriminatory practices of culture.

Girls Offloading Heavy Laboratory Equipment
The authors wished to find out whether or not teachers felt that both boys and girls could do hard tasks without any discrimination by asking for opinions on: “Teachers Can Ask Girls To off Load Heavy Laboratory Equipment from a Vehicle”. When asked whether or not girls could offload heavy laboratory equipment from a vehicle, 187(69.5%) respondents Strongly Disagree. This very strong,
and almost unanimous disagreement, points out the soft treatment that girls receive in a mixed school set-up. Weiner (1989) warns about soft treatment that girls could receive in a mixed school set-up. The principle of equality of opportunity should allow every group to do even heavy tasks without any bias as regards gender.

These results depict the hidden discrimination that girls receive in the school system. Eventually, the girls will lose interest in heavy assignments and certain careers that require the physical strength such as engineering, architecture and other science related courses. Weiner (1989) points out how it may take the experience of a mixed educational school to firmly instil social training to students. Eventually, the social injustice of systematic discrimination against women will become accepted as normal.

Girls Often Asked To Construct Tents for School Functions

The item “Girls Are Often Asked To Construct Tents for School Functions.” was meant to test whether or not teachers believed that the two genders are equal and should be treated equally. Table 3 presents the findings.

A total of 146(54.7%) students strongly disagreed with this item. The second highest percentage was those who disagreed, constituting a total of 61(22.8%) respondents. The rest of the responses were 19(7.1%), 18(6.7%), 23(8.6%) for Undecided, Agree and Strongly Agree respectively.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Their Responses to Girls Construction of Tents for School Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 3 clearly depict a school system where certain duties are seen as masculine and others feminine. In such a situation of gender differentiation, the students’ very capacity to learn, and in particular, their construction of social representation of gender which value things masculine more than things feminine, is the ultimate undoing for girls. This finding is definitely supported by Kelly (as cited in Lloyd et al., 1992) who points out that girls learn that they occupy an identifiable and different place in an educational system to that of boys.

Teachers’ Assignment of Differentiated Responsibilities

The question “Do You Think Teachers Assign Differentiated Responsibilities Such As Cleaning Or Construction To Boys and Girls In This School?” was meant to see the role the school system through its teachers play in promotion of gender equality amongst the students. This was an alternative response question where a significant majority of students, 160(59%), accepted that teachers did assign differentiated responsibilities according to the learners’ gender. A total of 110 respondents (41%) said that the responsibilities were similar. Although there were no significant differences between the males who said ‘no’ or ‘yes’, it is the significant majority of females who noted the discrimination that the teachers made in this case. A total of 90 female students accepted that there was discrimination compared to 40 who said there was no discrimination. It is quite clear that teachers in mixed schools discriminate against students in assignment of responsibilities, thus promoting gender inequality.

Details of Differentiated Responsibilities

The authors sought to establish the kinds of responsibilities that teachers assigned to each gender. Some of the students pointed out that boys generally managed the ‘heavy’ duties. This group consisted of 151 respondents. Another group of 148 identified fencing and gardening being done by the boys’. Fetching water and transportation of heavy things was also pointed out by a significant number of students as boys’ assignments. The responsibilities pointed out for girls included cleaning classes and toilets as pointed out by 153 respondents. Some of the respondents pointed out kitchen work as a domain for girls. Girls were also supposed to ensure cleanliness of the compound as reported by 147 respondents.

It may be concluded here that the female students are keener and sensitive to any differences in the activities they do. Lloyd et al. (1992) are quick to warn that the girls’ capacity to learn the social representation of gender, which values things masculine more than things feminine and which place men in more privileged positions, is the ultimate undoing for girls.

Boys’ Willingness to do Girls’ Responsibilities

The question “If Teachers Assign Differentiated Responsibilities, Do You Think Boys Would Be Willing To Do the Responsibilities for Girls?” was used to survey the students’ attitudes towards female students’ responsibilities. Table 4 illustrates the findings.
Table 4: Boys’ Willingness to take up Girls’ Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Response</th>
<th>Frequencies by Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authors wished to investigate whether or not the respondents had attained a level of gender equality where a responsibility would not be looked down upon on the basis of association with gender. This was an alternative response question. It was found out that the boys were unwilling to do girls’ assignments. A majority of students, 173(64.8%), mentioned this unwillingness. The other 94(35.2%) respondents said the boys were willing to take up girls’ responsibilities. Table 4 depicts how both male and female students think that boys are not willing to take up girls’ responsibilities. The study established that the mixed school system served to reinforce the social trends about men’s and women’s responsibilities.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the study, it was established that the teachers failed to promote gender equality amongst the students in assignment of responsibilities and rather believed that certain duties were masculine while others were feminine responsibilities, a situation that further promoted gender inequality amongst the students. Over half of the respondents believed that teachers never assigned similar responsibilities to male and female students.

It is therefore recommended that teachers be sensitized through seminars and workshops on the need to provide equal opportunities as well as the need to change attitudes towards girls, especially as regards girls’ interest and performance in Mathematics and Technological subjects. Schools must focus on reversing the traditional allocation of responsibilities and roles to girls and boys in order to build and shape them towards equality. The authors feel that the school system must reverse the social trends about men’s and women’s responsibilities or at least change the image towards masculine/feminine activities so that students should not look down upon any of these activities.

**REFERENCES**


