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Abolaji Samuel Mustapha¹

1) Department of English, Lagos State University, Nigeria.

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Dynamics of gender representations in learning materials

Abolaji Samuel Mustapha
Lagos State University

Abstract

The concept of representation has been taken up in many disciplines, largely, in visual arts, music, media studies, feminism, gender studies among others. The particular interest that researchers in gender and education studies have taken in gender representation has yielded many studies that have in turn reported interesting findings that are instrumental to revision of learning materials and education process/programmes in line with gender fairness demands in some countries. This paper sheds light on the importance of gender representations in textbook studies by explicating on the concept of representation and its dynamics through learning materials in order to stress a need for more studies especially in under-researched sites. It is anticipated that scholars and researchers who do not share this orientation, and whose take on the concern with gender representation in learning materials studies is that it is a nonessential issue in education might be able to appreciate both the undertakings and the findings of studies on gender representations in textbooks.

Keywords: representation, gender equality, socialisation, learning materials, education

Representaciones de las Dinámicas de Género en los Materiales Educativos

Abolaji Samuel Mustapha
Lagos State University

Abstract

El concepto de representación se ha tenido en cuenta en diversas disciplinas, en artes visuales, música, estudios de los medios de comunicación, feminismo y estudios de género entre otros. El interés particular que los investigadores en género y educación han tenido en representación de género han generado diversos estudios que concluyen resultados interesantes que son útiles para revisar materiales educativos, procesos y programas en el ámbito del género. Este artículo da luz a la importancia de las representaciones de género en el estudio de los libros de texto a través de explicar el concepto de representación y sus dinámicas a través de los materiales educativos. Se menciona también la necesidad de que las y los investigadores que no comparten esta orientación deberían tener en cuenta los resultados de los estudios sobre las representaciones de género en los libros de texto.

Palabras Clave: representación, igualdad de género, socialización, materiales de aprendizaje, educación

In this paper, I argue that one of the ways to appreciate gender representation in learning materials studies and acknowledge its place in the achievement of gender equality in and through education programmes (quality education) is to explore the concept of representation and its dynamics in socializing learners into gendered identities. This position is opposed to the stance which calls for de-emphasizing gender representation in learning material studies for a preoccupation with 'talks around the text' orientation that has been argued to be more rigorous, insightful and rewarding.

Background

The concept of representation and how it has been explored in visual arts, print and non-print media, especially in learning materials has been taken up by many researchers in gender and education. According to Sunderland (2000) studies and critiques of gender representation in textbooks blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s and into the early 1990s, (e.g. Cerezal, 1994; Cincotta, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Myers 1992; Peterson and Lach, 1990; Schmitz, 1975; U'ren, 1971; Whyld, 1983) together with analytical frameworks. The acknowledgement that educational materials are key mechanism of socialization that instills values and attitudes in young people, including differentiated gender roles (Lee, 2011) is one of the motivating factors for many of these studies.

However, after Sunderland's (2000a) state of the art article was published, more studies have been done and more are still being carried out on the same subject (e.g. Ansary and Babaii, 2003; Birjandi & Anabi, 2006; Gharbavi and Mousave, 2012; Gooden and Gooden, 2001; Hamdan, 2010; Khurshid, Gillani & Hashmi, 2010; Lee and Collins, 2008; Leskin, 2001; Madu and Kasanga, 2005; McKinney, 2005; Sabir, 2008; Zhang, 2003; Zhao 2002). The general finding is that the kind of gender bias in texts is inimical to gender equality in the education of learners and it will impact negatively on their development. In fact, the kind of gender unfairness in texts does not only present inequality in the representation of members of sex groups, especially women, but puts a particular sex group on the other side of the bright light. Thus the overwhelmingly poor representation of female characters in terms

of visibility, subordination, stereotyping of personality traits and occupational roles (including illustrations), and derogatory treatment that [Sunderland \(2000b\)](#) reported over a decade ago is re-echoed by [Lee \(2011\)](#) as common features in contemporary learning materials.

While learning materials in some countries might have undergone reforms in order to bring about fairness in gender representation, based on the literature available to the writer, similar success is yet to be recorded in other countries such as Islamic countries and many parts of Africa. In fact, some societies are yet to transform their talks about the subject matter of gender equality to 'walking the talks' in their programmes as gender bias still characterises the learning materials that they use in their educational system. This stresses the view that studies are still being expected in those countries. In fact, [Sunderland \(2000a\)](#) observed that there are under-researched sites as regards gender and language learning in developing countries in Africa, Islamic countries, Eastern Europe, South America, and China. While researchers have responded to this dearth in China, ([Ross and Shi, 2003](#); [Zhao, 2002](#); [Zhang, 2002](#)) and in some Islamic countries ([Gharbavi and Mousavi, 2012](#)) and Eastern Europe barring South and East Africa and Central Africa ([Page & Jha, 2009](#)), it does not appear that researchers have seen the need for similar studies in sub-Saharan Africa.

However, while studies in these under-researched sites are still ongoing, [Sunderland \(2000b\)](#) suggested that this undertaking might be at the very peripheral area in gender and language education. In fact, [Sunderland](#) observes that such undertaking might lead at times to viewing gender in an outdated way in language education, resulting in oversimplification and unproductive generalizations, in particular, women and girls are sometimes simplistically represented as victims of gender bias in language textbooks, and of male dominance in the classroom. This picture, [Sunderland \(2000b\)](#) noted is far from being the full one, does little, I would argue to help female students, and may mislead teachers (p. 149).

[Sunderland \(2000b\)](#) concluded that studies that had been based on the assumption/definition (representation of gender in textbooks) of genders as 'culturally-shaped group of attributes and behaviours given to the female or the male' and recognized that these phenomena and the

language (representation) through which they they are realized may be gendered in the additional sense that they may play a role in the further gendering of students. In other words, in shaping their masculinities and femininities (Humm, 1989) textbook studies may have been useful once, but ten years later sounds crude. The point at which Sunderland (2000b) noted that the preoccupations inherent in much of the past work on gender and language textbooks should now be left behind and went further to illustrate one way in which this is happening to our understanding in this paper might be controversial. In fact, after her proposal, many works have been done and more are expected to fill the gap in under-researched countries.

There is no doubt, that in communities where the first generation studies (Cerezal, 1991; Cincotta, 1978; Hartman and Judd, 1978; Porecca, 1984; Poulou, 1997; Talanasky, 1986) had accomplished a measure of success and the second generation studies in the same communities (e.g., Blumerg, 2007; Carlson, 2007; Chandran and Abdudllay, 2003; Healy, 2009; Sano, Ida & Hardy, 2001; Seng, 2003; Zittleman and Sadker, 2002) have attested to that success; new understandings of gender - seeing "gender in language education in new, non-deterministic ways" should be embarked upon. In other words, these new ways, in these communities, Sunderland (2000b) says, should lead the way into research on gender and language teaching that avoids the pitfalls of representing teachers as predictable, willing, unquestioning textbook users, and of female learners as passive victims, and can engage with the notions of flux, agency, diversity and individuality (p. 150) but should not discredit previous undertakings.

Studies in gender representation in learning materials

It might be the case that studies in gender representation in language textbooks (using content and linguistic analysis) might have declined in frequency in the 1990s (Sunderland 2000b) in the West but this is not the case outside Western countries. For example, Tietz (2007) examined the representation of gender in introductory accounting textbooks among ...and found that women and men are represented very

differently through out the textbooks, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes and gender role stratification.

In their poster presentation on gender representation in Japanese EFL Textbooks, [Sano, Iida and Hardy \(2001\)](#) found that although gender-imbalanced language has been substantially eliminated from EFL textbooks since 1990 in terms of the number of chapter topics, more males are referred to or engaged in actions, reading through the texts reveals prominence in the number of features focusing on male characters. In their study of gender representation in Hong Kong English textbooks, [Lee and Collins \(2008\)](#) found that women are still commonly associated with housework and the home and men with paid work outside; women are weak, and men are strong; women are more passive, and men are more active; women are less frequently mentioned than males in both the written and visual modes.

[Stockdale \(2006\)](#) examined gender representation in an EFL textbook and found that males are still dominant in the amount of talk; men's names are more than females' and titled names, full names, and colloquial terms of address exhibited a frequency bias toward males. [Mukundan and Nimehchisalem \(2008\)](#) in their study of gender representation in Malaysian secondary school English Language textbooks reported that there is an absolute gender bias which discriminates against women. However it also found that males were discriminated against in their representation as those with most of the negative traits. [Mustedanagic \(2010\)](#) analysed textbooks used in Swedish schools in order to discover the extent to which values of equality are upheld in textbooks and how males and females are represented in non-stereotyped ways and as equal. It was found that the textbooks from the 1980s that still contain very stereotypical views on gender roles are still in use in some schools and that occupations held by women and men in the texts, and the distribution of males and females in the illustrations show that there is a tendency to promote males and to diminish females.

[Ansary and Babii \(2003\)](#) stated the point that the stereotypical role of women as mothers and homemakers is still being perpetuated in many current language textbooks where substantial sections of their societies presented in those textbooks are underrepresented or ignored. Similarly,

Otlowski (2003) investigated current English Language textbook used throughout (Expressway A) for the way gender-bias was depicted and found that the text still depicts women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society. While some texts represent the dominant culture in their societies others misrepresent the true happenings in order for some reasons.

Therefore, even in the communities where gender-fairness has been enforced in their learning materials, one might still find that the 'traditional' concept of gender is still a dominant culture with pockets of enlightened citizens being wary of the wave of feminism and its tenets and tolls on their societies. This suggests that in our new understandings of gender, some measure of our old understanding of gender should be accommodated. Therefore, although some theoretical developments may suggest that the text may not be the most appropriate focus of study and bias may be found somewhere other than in the text (Sunderland 2000b), there is still a significant place for text studies in our concern for gender equality in and through education. It has been reported in studies that bias still exists in texts (Gharbavi and Mousavi, 2012a; Lee, 2011) thus gender bias in textbooks does matter and is worthy of investigating in gender and language education studies.

Therefore, I argue that while Sunderland's (2000b) proposal might be valid in communities where preliminary studies on texts have occasioned revision of gender biased texts, the proposal is difficult to extend to sites where learning materials are still laden with gender bias that go unnoticed or unquestioned. A further consideration of the mechanics/dynamics of representation in texts and how artists/authors explore and exploit them in their works even in advanced countries still stress a need for more studies on textbooks.

Perspectives of representation

Exploring the concept of representation in texts and its dynamics in the literature suggests that it is a potent socializing agent in gendering learners into gendered persons that might be difficult to undo in their future adult life. Serge Moscovici (in discussion with Markova, 1998) stated that "a social representation is not a quiet thing". Thus, the theory

of social representations was first formulated by Serge Moscovici (Hoijer, 2011). A pedestrian definition of representations says that it is simply a re-representation of what is real. In that sense, representations from viewers and readers' point of view are secondary source, the primary materials being what we have in the real world. This definition is close to a perspective which sees representation as a re-enactment or re-construction or creation of what existed before or still exists in its original form. These definitions suggest that the representations we have in textbooks are not neutral and should not be taken as original - reality. These views of representation are similar to the idea that representation is that which stands in for something else.

Looking at representation from another perspective, Hall (1997) opines that representation is simply meaning creation - representation conveys meaning about reality to the reader/viewer so that representation that are presented in codes/texts are meaning loaded. Therefore, to represent is to depict something that stands in for reality...thus meaning is given to the things which are depicted that is close to the reality. In other words, representation might mean meaning giving. Based on this notion, Hall (1997) offers three approaches to representation - reflective approach, where representations simply reflect reality), intentional approach, where our understanding of reality is created by representation (the opposite of reflective) and constructionist approach, where representations create, or construct meaning which is based on a material reality (a mix of the reflective and the intentional approaches).

For Ferdinand de Saussure (1983) language does not reflect reality but meaning is constructed through language. Therefore, we make meaning through the creation and interpretation of signs and signs can be words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts, objects and so on. He postulated formula to illustrate his concept of representation. To him, signifier and signified give us sign, where the signifier is the form which the sign takes, and signified is the concept it represents and the sign is the total meaning that results from associating the signifier with the signified. Thus to him, representation, at a very basic level is the way in which signs are used to construct meaning.

What might be deduced from these definitions among others are what

readers and viewers take away from the codes and texts which are not the reality but works of re-creation, re-enactment. This view is closer to the idea of reflection that has been distinguished from representation. To some scholars, the use of reflection implies that there is a direct correspondence between phenomena (events, people, things) in the real world and their appearance in texts. One idea that this perspective suggests is that "... some kind of modulation or interpretive process has been involved in re-presentation". In other words, some manipulation or transformation is unavoidable in representation so that even photographs are reflections, which we learn to read and interpret in many different ways.

Crag Owen (1950-1990) noted that representation is not neutral; it is an act of power in our culture. Thus dichotomy exists between high and mass culture which one can see privileges, the masculine over the feminine...the high culture (masculine) are represented as production, work, intellect, activity, writing; while the mass culture are characterised by consumption as opposed to production, leisure in place of work, emotion instead of intellect, passivity in place of activity and reading rather than writing.

For Baudrillard (1998), the entire concept of representation is problematic especially in the media, for media representation are simulations of realities that do not exist, thus they are hyperreal. This view of representation is captured in his first order, second order and third order. At the first order, you have signification (signs which imitate real things) this is where reality is constructed through simulation e.g., representation in maps, paintings, etc; the second order simulation - reproduction (signs to refer signs representations of reality which imitate real things reproduced by mechanical technology e.g., films, printing. Third order simulation - simulation (signs no longer represent as there is no connection between real things but serve to mask this reality and representation - absence of reality instead we have hyperreality.

Marxism with its ideological framework has a hegemonic view of society, which has to do with fundamental inequalities in power between social groups where groups in power exercise their influence culturally rather than by force. For example, Marxism opines that representations

are encoded into mass media texts in order to enforce dominant ideologies in society (Althusser, 1971). According to Levi-Strauss (1958) all representations are encoded into texts and others are left out in order to give a preferred representation (the preferred syntagm).

As a movement, feminism questions the position of women within patriarchal society and the private sphere of home, children and domestic bliss among others. Feminism in the 60s and 70s served to uncover, challenge and eliminate oppression and dominant gender imagery - representations. It has witnessed debates on the narrow range of stereotypes present across all media, such as women as virgins, mothers or promiscuous, sex objects, as inferior to men as objects to be seen rather subjects who perform. The theoretical perspectives of radical feminism ---advocates the opposite of our society now, where women are the more privileged, powerful, prestigious society. It says that men's reason was created to emphasise masculine control and that it is not as good as women's intuition. Liberal feminism clamours for equality that cannot be obtained only through legal, political, constitutional amendments only but must be social too. It emphasizes equal rights for women; women can and should be treated the same as men and this leads to equality. Socialist feminism is of the idea that equality and feminism could be achieved through socialism. Post-feminism – idea that after the feminist movement, we don't need feminism any more. Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and these are represented in texts and/or images. Thus, gender and ideology – ideas about gender are produced and reflected in language (O'Sullivan et al, 1998).

Representation in various forms is also used to engender stereotypes. Dyer (1982) argues that stereotypes are a way of reinforcing differences between people, and representing these differences as natural. As an ideological term, stereotype is a means by which support is provided by one group's differential against another. Thus stereotypes about men and women reinforce the idea that they are very different. However, this view has been criticized for misrepresenting the real world e.g. reinforcing that the (false) stereotype that women are available for sex at any time and for being too close to real world e.g., showing women in home servicing men, which many still do (Barker, 1989).

One area of study that has contributed much to how representations function to reinforce differences between people is social theory of representation (Duveen, 2000; Farr and Markova, 1995; Jodelet, 1991; Joffe, 2002; Gervais and Jovchelovitch, 1998; Howarth, 2002). According to Duveen (2000) (cited in Howarth 2006:07) social representations of gender reproduce gendered identities and gendered relations which serve to maintain and defend gendered differences in the social order. This works by conversion: "...we convert these social representations into a particular social reality, for others and for ourselves" (Philogene and Deauz, 2001). This view stresses Moscovici's popular sentence

a social representation is not a quiet thing" in that "it is not that social representations simply reflect or inform our reality, but that in doing so they become what reality is intersubjectively agreed to be. What is critically significant here is that different representations compete in their claims to reality, and so defend, limit and exclude other realities (Howarth, 2006, p. 8).

Klapps (1962) distinction between stereotypes and social types throws more light on the concepts. Klapp (1962) defines social types as representations of those who belong to society. They are the kinds of people that one expects, and is led to expect, to find in one's society, whereas stereotypes are those who do not belong, who are outside of one's society. One area where stereotypes have been investigated is in music where females and males are represented in binary identities such as:

- i. Men engage in significantly more aggressive and dominant behaviour;
- ii. Men are represented as independent, adventurous, unemotional and competent;
- iii. Stereotypical gendered occupations apparent (i.e. males as fire fighters/mechanics women as cheerleader/waitress;

- iv. Women are represented as objects of sexual advances or as sexual objects;
- v. Sex roles stereotyping and negative attitudes towards females;
- vi. Women are more likely to be presented in provocative or revealing clothing; and
- vii. Women are portrayed as decorative objects that dance, pose and do not play instruments

Another perspective of representation is sexual objectification and the male gaze [Mulvey \(1975\)](#) For example, voyeurism – erotic pleasures gained from looking at a sexual object who is unaware of being watched. The other representations include:

- i. Presence of women solely for the purpose of display rather than narrative function
- ii. Female on display is passive and objectified for a male gaze regardless of viewers gender
- iii. Women connote to-be-looked-at-ness and are the object of the male gaze.

On the other hand, men are represented to display ideal for body type, which can be unrealistic too. For example, aggressiveness and being in control of things fit into masculine ideal. Thus within stereotypes representation, representation has tended to focus upon the way in which different social groups are represented (gender, race, sexuality, social class, etc). As a postmodernist theorist, [Baudrillard \(1998\)](#) argues that our society has become so reliant on representations that we have lost contact with the real – we can no longer tell the real from the artificial. Reality is (now) determined by representation. There is no distinction between reality and representation, only the simulacrum (a copy that now has more reality than the object itself). [Baudrillard \(1998\)](#) discussed the concept of hyperreality – we inhabit a society that is no longer made up of any original thing for a sign to represent... it is the sign that is now the meaning. He argued that we live in society of simulacra – simulations of reality that replace the real. An application of

Baudrillard's claims suggests that representations are phony. This position supports the claim that the media do not reflect and represent the reality of the public but instead produce it, employing this simulation to justify their own continuing existence (Merrin, 2007).

We might deduce from these various perspectives that representations and reality are not synonymous...representations are farther away from reality. While representations tend to mirror what is real they should not be taken as kindred of reality, in fact, they are not natural. It might be added that realities and reflections are not the same though reflection is closer to reality than representation is to reality. Representation is farther from reality because what is represented is often coloured by the artists' ideological and social values, in other word, representation often reflects the dominant culture that the artist represents and tends to portray. The position that representations are deliberately constructed to serve certain purposes, e.g., to reinforce the dominant ideological views of individuals or groups of people summarise the dynamics of representations. Thus Lacey (2009) notes that societal ideological values are apparent in representations. Conventional representation may portray femininity and masculinity in a subversive way or otherwise. Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002) observed that representations always relate to something already existing, (but) they can all be seen as forms of recontextualisation. Thus Hoijer (2011) captures social representation in clear terms in the following quote:

social representations are about processes of collecting meaning-making resulting in common cognitions which produce social bonds uniting societies, organisations and groups. It sets focus on phenomena becomes subjected to debate, strong feelings, conflicts and ideological struggle, and changes the collective thinking in society. As communication it links society and individual, media and public (p. 3).

A more encompassing definition of social representations is that of Moscovici (1988) which says:

Social representations concern the contents of everyday thinking and the stock of ideas that give coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas and the connections we create as spontaneously as we breathe. They make it possible for us to classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviours and to objectify them as part of our social setting. While representations are often to be located in the minds of men and women, they can just as often be found "in the world", and as such examined separately. (p. 214)

Commenting on its functions, [Moscovici \(1973\)](#) is quoted in [Hojjer \(2011, p. 5\)](#) thus:

A social representation is a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual group history. (p. xiii).

[Moscovici \(1984\)](#) identifies two major functions of social representations

they conventionalize objects, persons and events we are meeting by giving them a specific form, localize them to a given category, and gradually establish them as distinct and shared cognitions ... they are prescriptive in the sense that they through social structures and traditions are forced upon us ...we incorporate them into our individual minds, as individuals we rethink collective cognitions...however, ...individuals and groups can rework and transform collective cognitions" (cited in [Hojjer, 2011, p. 6](#)).

Representations and their effects

These perspectives of representation offer insights into how representations work. Primarily, they suggest that certain representations are reflective of social reality or they are mere subversives serving certain ideological social leanings and/or reflecting the dominant ideological culture of society that artists/authors represent. The perspectives also suggest that representations may be very close to real life of a people at a given time or may be mere types or stereotypes. In fact, [Lacey \(2009\)](#) argued that (media) texts cannot show reality as it is; by their nature, they mediate: To her, "realism is a form of representation that has a privileged status because it signs itself as being closer to reality than other forms of representations such as genre texts. To [Lacey \(2009\)](#), all representations are the result of conventions produced at a particular time and place determined by the dominant ideology (p. 22). Thus what appeared to be realistic in the past is likely to appear contrived now; and that contemporary modes of realism are likely to be seen in this way by future generations.

These insights further suggest some pertinent questions which have been raised in the literature. Amongst them are: how is the text representing the world to us through the use of the technical codes? What does it suggest? Who is speaking? And for whom? What is represented to us? And why? What signifiers are used? What meaning is produced? What social groups are being represented? What is shown to be natural or deviant? Who constructed the representation? Why? Are stereotypes used? What effect do they have? Which characters are dominant? What characters are submissive? Who are the objects? Who are the subjects? What 'reality' is represented? How does the representation relate to reality?

Answers to these questions have been sought in textbook research and studies have reported insightful findings (answers) that have been instrumental to re-examination of the various representations in textbooks. However, what is more important to researchers is captured by [Moscovici \(1988\)](#) that social representations do influence our actions, particularly how we may explain our actions or the actions of others and that social representations are also contained within and developed through our social actions of our "social practices". [Howarth](#)

(2006) opined that we must see social representations as both influencing and constituting social practices (p. 15). This stance refutes the claim that social representations are ways of understanding the world which influence action, but are not themselves parts of action (Potter, 1996a, p. 168). In fact, Fiske (1996, p 214) says:

(...) representations are real in their effects; they produce what passes for real in any particular conditions.

Moscovici (1998) puts it strongly thus:

shared representations, their language, penetrate so profoundly into all the interstices of what we call reality, that we can say that they constitute it (p. 245). Representations not only influence people's daily practices - but constitute these practices (Howarth, 2006, p. 17).

Representations are products of many internal and external agents. Representations could be "external construction of the media" that are often held unto by many people but might also be rejected by another group of people; construction of individuals and collective representations of a group of people. Thus collective and individual representations have been distinguished in the literature. Durkheim (1898) identified a collective representation as a social fact which is imposed on us, difficult to challenge, static and uniform in its effects; while individual representations are the personal interpretations of distinct individuals (cited in Howarth, 2006, p. 11). Howarth (2006) quoted Moscovici's arguments that:

collective representations are more common in so-called traditional societies, where there is comparative uniformity in belief and knowledge. For in these societies there is "less scope of individuality - for original, unique, or creative thinking and behaviour" (Meed, 1972, p. 221) and therefore less opportunity of competing knowledge systems to development (p. 11).

It must be noted that the literature on representations is robust on how collective representations as 'hegemonic representations' (Moscovici, 1988) are subject to resistance by individuals and groups in our contemporary society. Thus Moscovici has been quoted to have noted that "in the process of formation of a representation there is always both conflict and cooperation" where the cooperation gives social agents a common code to discuss, debate and so constitute social realities (Moscovici, 1961/1976; Wagner, et al, 2000), while the conflict gives them something to debate about as different interests and relations of power compete (cited in Howarth, 2006:11). Lewis (1994) captures the variation and diversity of collective representations thus:

(Representational) meanings become a battleground between and among folk cultures, class, subcultures, ethnic cultures, and national cultures; different communications media, the home, and the school; churches and advertising agencies; and different versions of history and political ideologies. The sign is no longer inscribed within a fixed cultural order. The meaning of things seem less predictable and less certain. (p. 25) (cited in Howarth 2006:12).

In what follows we shall examine how representations in textbooks impact on learners and users of such texts.

Gender representation in textbooks

Gender representation in textbooks might be seen as either reflecting certain ideological values that society holds or a subversion of the cultural norms. Howarth's (2004) study within school exclusion illustrates the potency of representation where "young black pupils are detailed in dominant representations of 'troublesome black youth' that marginalize their position and restrict their potential at school". Howarth (2006) reports how the black pupils recognise and describe how these representations are institutionalised within the material and symbolic curricula at school and how the representations inform the realities they experience. According to Yaqin (2002)

books reflect the fixed views of a given social culture with respect to gender roles and contain definite gender characteristics patterns, all of which have an important influence on children and cause them to consciously or unconsciously imitate and learn from them (p. 14).

Yaqin (2002) further commented that books, as well as being reflections of socio-cultural influences, also tend to expand, reproduce, and strengthen society's gender biases and perceptions, all of which may affect the way children identify with and subject themselves to the gender role to which they belong (p. 22). As textbooks are often viewed by learners as authoritative, and therefore have the potential to influence a significantly large and impressionable audience (Foshay, 1990; Robson, 2001), their potency in socializing learners cannot be over-emphasized.

Similarly, Gullicks, Pearson, Child and Schwab (2005) noted that textbooks are often viewed by students as authoritative, and therefore have the potential to influence a significantly large and impressionable audience and that one function of textbooks is to serve as a "means to facilitate the integration of content about ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse populations" (Sileo and Prater, 1998). Treichler and Frank (1989) found that gender-biased materials affect the motivation of students who go through the textbooks. In the same vein, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) noted that the textbooks young people focus on repeatedly during the classroom practice, follow-up assignments or projects, and preparation for examination exert influence on the learner in terms of the quality of education they receive, their understanding of social equality and national unity.

In fact, Sileo and Prater (1998) noted that textbooks serve as a means to facilitate the integration of content about ethnically, racially and culturally diverse populations (p. 5). Mustedanagic (2010) explains how this is done. Whenever a text is read, an interpretation is made by the reader and meaning is constructed. Comparing language teaching with building a house, Mustedanagic (2010) noted that the text represents our materials...therefore, bad material, bad building. Thus linguistic sexism in textbooks creates deleterious real-world and damaging pedagogical

in textbooks creates deleterious real-world and damaging pedagogical consequences especially for women and girls (Poulou, 1997 and Treichler and Frank, 1989). Stromquist, Lee and Brock-Utne (1998) observe the impact that the school system has on learners and society at large thus:

educational institutions are powerful ideological institutions that transmit dominant values, and function as mechanism of social control...schools transmit values that not only reproduce social class but also main gender structures...the formal school system contributes to the reproduction of gender inequalities through such mechanism as selective access to schooling, the content of what is being taught and what is not and how it is taught and the kinds of knowledge men and women (and boys and girls) get (p. 83).

Stromquist, et al (1998) concluded that observers and educators acknowledge that textbooks and curricular content leave lasting influences in our memories, as phrases and stories heard, read and written about men and women condition our minds (p. 97). They further stressed that because the formal curriculum, through textbook content and instructional dynamics, continues to promote the creation of gendered identities of asymmetrical nature...textbooks should continue to be a prime target in strategies to modify the curriculum.

It is interesting to note that studies on gender in learning materials have been instrumental to the revision of gender-biased texts in many countries (US, UK, some parts of Europe, parts of Asia and others). Some of their findings and recommendations have occasioned follow-up activities that are contributing toward achieving gender equality in society and in effect, contributing toward national development which is the focus of the third UN Millennium Development Goals - gender equality.

Based on the importance of textbooks, the dynamics of text representation in socialising learners, and the contributions studies in the area have made to gender equality programmes one might be able to appreciate the reason why many studies have investigated the learning materials in the school system of their countries. These studies highlighted gender-biasness in learning materials and discussed some of

their consequences before calling for revision that will ensure gender-fairness in all its ramification in order to bring about gender equality in society and consequently national development.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it might be argued that studying gender representations in learning materials in order to highlight discriminatory representations that will obstruct the achievement of gender equality in and through education in society for national development is crucial. If gender-biased textbooks are ignored because of the focus on talks around the text in the classroom, we might be overlooking earlier corrective measures that would have addressed important issues that are germane to gender equality in and through education. Thus, more studies on texts should be done in developed countries while scholars in under-researched site are expected to fill the gap in the literature. Perhaps, a better line of action is to allow both orientations to go hand and hand complementing each other with more emphasis on textbooks.

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Abolaji Samuel Mustapha is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, Lagos State University in Nigeria

Contact Address: Direct correspondence to Department of English, Lagos State University, PMB 001, LASU Post Office, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. E-mail address: abolaji.mustapha@lasu.edu.ng.