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FACULTY OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED EDUCATION

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INTERPRETATION OF
LITERATURE PERPETUATES GENDER IMBALANCES

BY
MOYO THUBELIHLE
R147182Q

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APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to the Midlands State University, for the acceptance, as a dissertation entitled: An investigation into the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances submitted in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of education Degree in English.

SUPERVISOR.....DATE.....

COORDINATOR.....DATE.....

CHAIR PERSON.....DATE.....

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF STUDENT

MOYO THUBELIHLE

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PERMANENT ADDRESS

**3890 CowdrayPark
P. O. Luveve, Bulawayo
ZIMBABWE**

ABSTRACT

This study was an investigation of the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances. Most teachers promote and reinforce gender stereotypes through different ways in which they interpret literature. The evaluation of one's personality is normally done on basis of their sex. In most cases, inferior language is used to describe women, while superior language is used to describe men. As a result learners are conditioned to a belief that females are less more important than males. Moreover, such a belief may be so rooted into the learners' minds such that at times it becomes very difficult to break. This study focused on how teachers guide 'O' Level students in the interpretation of literature. The study was guided by the following research questions; 1. How does the interpretation of literature perpetuate gender imbalances? a. What theories underpin the interpretation of literature? b. How do teachers perceive male and female characters in texts being studied? c. what symbols of male characters do male learners identify with in texts being studied? d. what symbols of female characters do female learners identify with in texts being studied? e. What can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances? The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect data for the study. The questionnaires were administered to learners while teachers were interviewed. The population sample consisted of 39 respondents drawn from three different schools in Hwange district. This sample consisted of thirty learners, six teachers and three Heads of English Departments. Probability sampling techniques were employed in the selection of the population sample. Through investigation, it was revealed that classrooms may be sources of gender stereotyping. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to desist from reinforcing gender stereotypes on their learners. Teachers should also try to convince writers and curriculum planners to provide material that is gender responsive to learners.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the Moyo family and friends for the financial, emotional and moral support rendered during my studies.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.0.Introduction

The way we socialise our children today will determine their view of the world in the long run. From birth we socialise our boys and girls to take on different gender roles. The school further, reinforces those gender roles. This study aims to investigate *the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances*. This study mainly focuses on how teachers guide learners to interpret literature. This chapter deals with the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, de-limitations and definitions of terms.

1.1.Background to the study

Literature is a mirror of society. It is a vehicle for social change. Literature is, in fact, the product of best thinkers in society. It is presented to the reader to convey different meanings. The reader makes literature meaningful through interpretation. Hence, suffice to say the interpretation of literature is of paramount importance.

The sources of gender perpetuation are many and varied. One of the most critical sources of gender perpetuation is male dominance. According to Williams (2008), most women in Sub-Saharan Africa are under the authority of their fathers or husbands in everything. On the same note, Mvududu (2001) has it on record that most families here in Zimbabwe are dominated by males. Indeed, this is a gender gap that must be closed. There is great need to abolish the patriarchal structures of our societies so as to create gender equality.

According to Modiba (2012) Parents, teachers and the media also perpetuate gender imbalances. It is mainly these agents that socialise children into two different ways. Whereas

the girl child is socialised in terms of femininity, the boy child is socialised into masculinity. Thus, children are faced with gender and unfair social practices at birth (Girl child Network, 2000). Moreover, the girl child is usually a victim of gender stereotyping and; this is because the world is generally viewed from a masculine point of view. Indeed it is a pity.

The school literature also perpetuates gender stereotyping. According to Modiba (2012) the school literature is loaded with gender stereotypes. Most writers tend to be very biased when handling the subject of gender. Females are usually portrayed negatively while, males are portrayed positively. Males are usually portrayed as good thinkers, investors of technology and good political leaders. This is, to a larger extent, a gross perpetuation of gender imbalances and; it may affect how learners perceive the world around them.

According to Thornharm (2000), the negative portrayal of women in literature mostly, affects the girl child. The girl child may feel very inferior to her male counterparts by merely seeing the way her colleagues are portrayed in books.

As noted above, there are many practices that may perpetuate gender imbalances. This study reveals that among many undesirable practices that may perpetuate gender imbalances, the interpretation of literature and the way learners are guided by their teachers to critique the works of art, has been found to be another way through which gender perpetuation may be accelerated.

1.2. Statement of the problem

According to Stockdale (2006), gender stereotyping cements gender role socialisation. When the teacher guides learners to view a particular gender as weaker than the other they are doing more harm than good on the learner. In instances where females are described negatively, a boy may feel much superior to girls while, a girl may feel much inferior even, unto herself. Hence, as they develop, the young boys and girls learn to live in two different worlds. That is,

the world of masculinity and the world of femininity. At adulthood, these children hand over these gender matters to their next and next generations. As a result, the gender imbalances remain perpetual. This study attempts to investigate the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances.

1.3. Objectives

The study, thus, seeks to:

- Indicate the way the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender issues;
- Explain what can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances.

1.4. Research questions

To what extent does the interpretation of literature perpetuate gender imbalances?

Sub- research questions

- What theories underpin the interpretation of texts studied at 'O' Level?
- How do teachers perceive male and female characters in the texts being studied?
- What symbols of male characters do male students identify with in texts being studied?
- What symbols of female characters do female students identify with in texts being studied?
- What can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances?

1.5. Significance of the study

The study of gender issues is of interest to policy makers and society at large. The study evaluates and investigates the portrayal and interpretation of gender issues in literature. This study should inspire other researchers to do further inquiries related to literature and gender matters. The study should also help to build a consciousness of gender issues that has an influence in the education of children. Furthermore, the study should help teachers, parents and writers to promote gender sensitivity, equality, equity and responsiveness.

1.6. Assumptions

- Literature is a mirror of society. It also plays the socialising role.
- Literature is a vehicle through which gender stereotypes may be transmitted to children at school.
- Generally, women are treated unequal to men.

1.7. Limitations

There are limited studies that have been carried by other researchers in this area. Therefore, this has great impact on the literature review chapter. Despite the fact that gender issues are more inherent in many literature books, the researcher struggled to find sources that provide a direct link between the subject of gender and issues of the interpretation of literature.

Acceptability of the researcher in schools- some schools received the researcher with suspicion. This in turn, threatened the reliability of research findings. To minimise suspicion, the researcher sought permission from Hwange district education office, Mat North to carry out the study in three secondary schools. The researcher also used some school authorities as research assistants.

Nature of the study- to some this study seemed to threaten patriarchal structures of society. Hence, the study evoked some endless debates among some male participants. As a result the

acquisition of data from such people was compromised. However, the researcher tried to explain the purpose of the study in order to gain confidence of the participants.

1.8. Delimitations

The study focused on the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances. It also highlights how one's socialisation affects the way they interpret literature. The study limited itself to the study of the interpretation of literature in three secondary schools in Hwange district, Mat North. The study also focussed on how students learn Literature at 'O' Level.

1.9. Definition of terms

Gender: refers to socially constructed traits, roles or behaviours that distinguish males and females (Fawe, 2002). It refers to socially determined roles for males and females.

Gender sensitivity: refers to fairness in language use of illustrations, content and balanced coverage (Houghton, 2006).

Gender bias: refers to the preference of one gender above the other.

Gender equality: refers to the same valuation of men and women and sameness of enjoyment of rights, power, opportunities, treatment and control of resources between males and females in society (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004).

Gender stereotypes: are socially constructed ideas or beliefs about men and women which are not necessary true but taken as truth by society (Tsanga, 2003). Stereotypes are maintained, perpetuated and transmitted from generation to generation through social institutions such as the school, family, religion and media.

Gender discrimination: it is an act of unfair treatment directed against an individual or a group on basis of their gender which denies them the rights, opportunities or resources

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). When schools lower entrance units for form one female students only, (what so ever the reasons may be) they will be discriminating against male students. Gender discrimination propagates differential treatment between males and females.

Feminism: according to Moi (2010) it refers to a doctrine advocating the granting of women equal opportunities as are granted to men. Simply put, it is advocacy for equality of sexes.

Patriarchy: According to Engels (2011), it refers to a theory that propagates male dominance in society. Patriarchy implies absolute power of the male head. It describes a society headed by men.

Gender roles: Peters (2007) defines gender roles as roles or behaviours that a person learns as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms. Gender roles are societal expectations for males and females in society.

Literature: Littlejohn (2000) defines literature as writings in which expression and form, in connection with ideas of permanent and universal interest are characteristic or essential features. All literature seeks to develop new ideologies in a person.

1.10. Summary

This chapter was an introductory chapter. The chapter focused on the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations and definitions of key terms in the study. The research problem was clearly stated in this chapter. The background to the study provides basis of the research problem. The objectives of the study and research questions were clearly stated in this study. The limitations and delimitations of this study were also explicitly stated. The limitations and delimitations suggest barriers and boundaries of this study. Scholarly definitions provided explanations of key terms in this study. The next chapter deals with the review of related literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the review of literature related to this study. It also deals with the conceptual analysis of gender. The literature review was guided by the following research questions: a) what theories underpin the interpretation of texts studied at 'O' Level? b) How do teachers perceive female and male characters in texts being studied? c) What symbols of male characters do male students identify with in texts being studied? d) What symbols of female characters do female students identify with in texts being studied? e) What can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances?

2.1 Conceptualising the perpetuation of gender imbalance

The sources of gender stereotyping are many and varied. Among many, some of them include; parents, teacher- student relations, school textbooks, media; both print and electronic media. To begin with; parents perpetuate gender imbalances in many ways through socialisation. Parents usually compare boys and girls and treat them differently. This does not go down well with Long (2011) who strongly feels that when the lives of young boys and girls are compared a critical difference is noticed. According to Long, parents would normally have high expectations for boys while over protect the girl child. As a result the young ones tend to accept these stereotypes and are stereotyped to view themselves as unequal. Thus, teachers must always be alert to destroy those stereotypes that children bring from their homes. However, it is regrettable that, most teachers further reinforce gender stereotypes in students.

The teacher- student relations may indicate how teachers handle the issue of gender in classrooms. Eitzen (2000) observes that girls and boys are sometimes taught differently, even in the same class. Teachers tend to give more attention to girls than boys. Treating students this way may reinforce a stereotyped belief (that girls are a weaker sex) among students.

The literature that students are exposed to may, also, perpetuate gender stereotypes among students. According to Eitzen (2000), parents here play an active role by selecting picture books that represent males and females differently. Most of these books depict female characters as passive while males are depicted as highly active. According to Fox (1993) what people read construct them and assign them gender roles. In most books boy names appear more frequently than girl names (Williams, 2008). Therefore, we must be always on guard so that we do not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Rather, as educators we must avoid drawing examples from gender irresponsible texts to aid our teaching. According to Witenberger (1980) some literary books are 'rich' in content that may harm a child for life. Fox (1993) indicates that about 80% of books published in 1973 depicted males as main characters. Teachers must select content that does not raise eyebrows when learners interpret it. Moreover, to avoid gender perpetuation, teachers should realise that stereotypes are available in many books and; they must seek to deconstruct them. Fox (1993) observes that in many books women are portrayed as less active. On the same note, Davis (1984) observes that boys and girls are portrayed differently; whereas boys are depicted as adventurous, fighters and rescuers, girls are depicted as less active. Books provide societal values. Some of the societal values may have stereotyped beliefs (Rudman, 1995). The implication is that, since the teacher is at the receiving end, they must do something to stop all the stereotyped beliefs that are found in books. Teachers must lead their learners to understand that there are facts and mere stereotypes that may be found in books.

According to Fox (1993), what people read make them who they are. Arburthnot (1984), also suggest that books present societal beliefs and values. Most teachers grow up in traditional societies where they experience gender stereotypes being perpetuated. As a result, they further hand down these stereotyped beliefs to their students. This is supported by Ifegbesan (2010) who postulates that the teacher's stereotyped beliefs affect their attitude in the classroom. On a similar note, Sadker and Sadker (1982), conclude that teachers have preconceived ideas about boys and girls in relation to gender. The implication here is that the preconceived ideas that teachers have constrain them to view boys and girls differently. Thus, gender imbalances remain perpetual.

According to Fox (1993), teachers reinforce stereotyped beliefs on children. Teachers are condemned for their use of language that is not gender neutral (Ifegbesan, 2010). Therefore, teachers must promote gender neutral language when they describe characters in literary texts. Fox (1993), pities most teachers and asserts that most of them are not aware when they propagate gender differentiation. He suggests that they must be made aware so that they learn to make gender neutral labels. Goody (1968), states that literature is inherently social. He further explains that it communicates meaning. Dyson (2006) observes that meaning making solely depends on one's individual experience and opinion. In other words, the implication is that teachers interpret literature basing on their personal experience. Blackburn (2005), maintains that gender is a cultural construct. It is promoted through repeated social practices and performance (Goodley, 2004). Therefore, when teachers repeatedly describe one gender as inferior to the other, they reinforce gender imbalances between sexes. Connell (1996) echoes the sentiments that there is global dominance of males over females. Literature and its interpretation may further perpetuate this dominance. Thus, Goodley,(2004), hammers that by studying certain classroom activities (such as the interpretation of literature) and performances, we can understand how meanings they convey serves one sex above the other.

He further suggests that rather than using literature to reinforce gender stereotypes we must use it as a tool for deconstructing gender stereotypes.

According to Chavez (1999) comic strips were also found to be a medium through which gender imbalances may be carried and perpetuated. He further testifies that comic strips depict both sexes wrongly. Whereas the roles of males may be overstated, females' roles are swept under carpet. Therefore, Chavez forbids teachers not to use any material which may seem to reinforce gender imbalances in their teaching.

Gender issues are everywhere. The above discussion is not exhaustive of all the ways in which gender imbalances may be perpetuated. At workplaces, at the market, in universities and in all our day to day lives there are gender messages going on. However these messages may be very detrimental to our students. Our students are shaped by these messages to become man or woman. In other words, no one is born man or woman; but rather, they are made to be.

2.2 The teachers' perceptions of female and male characters

Literature (also referred to as literary texts in this study) was, over the years, viewed as acts of reading and writing print-based texts (Goody and Watt, 1968). Recent studies have shown that literature interpretation is very crucial. According to Davies (2003), the interpretation of literature may be influenced by social backgrounds such as one's gender. One's social background influences them on how they view the world (Fox, 1993). Thus, in most cases we interpret reality basing on what our social background has taught us. The interpretation of literature helps people to construct meanings of social practices that surround them using texts. According to Tema (2015), the interpretation of literature helps one to learn deep mysteries of society. One gets acquaintance of love mysteries, hate mysteries, death and

controversies between people and societies. In other words, literary interpretation helps an individual to make meaning of their world.

According to Fox (1993) our social backgrounds shape the way we interpret literature. Most teachers are armed with an African social background that has underprivileged women in terms of their status. Since there is scarce scholarly literature which supports how teachers view different genders, the researcher makes an assumption that most teachers view genders differently. Males are viewed superior while females are viewed inferior. This may not have a scholarly support but it is indeed a fact. Assignment of negative labels on females is very detrimental to female learners. This is supported by Thorne (1993) who declares that labels that adults (in this case being teachers) assign to characters in any studied text perpetuate a physical separation among boys and girls. Physical separation entails being confined to certain gender roles that are considered different from those of the opposite sex. According to Blackburn (2005), most teachers create gender borders through the way they teach. Gender borders may refer to stereotypes that teachers perpetuate. According to Blackburn (2005), there is need to cross gender borders. Crossing gender borders means a situation whereby all genders are treated equally. Therefore, teachers must encourage their students to cross gender borders by treating fictional characters equally.

2.3 Symbols which male and female students identify with in texts

There are limited studies that have been found in this area. Some minute pieces of information were gleaned from the works of Savitt (2016), George (2005), Wirtenberg et al (1980) and Goodley (2006). According to Savitt (2016), female characters are usually depicted as a weaker sex in many literary texts. This is supported by Wirtenberg et al (1980) who postulates that most of the written literature features women and girls as dependants and domestic workers. In sharp contrast, male characters are frequently represented under themes

that demonstrate bravery, creativity, perseverance, achievement, adventurousness, curiosity, autonomy and self- respect (Wirtenberg, 1980 et al). This view is supported by Fox (1993) who states that our society views females as less active. As a result, females feel very inferior to males.

Males identify with symbols of masculinity while, females identify with femininity. According to George (2005) females identify with femaleness and they take pride in that. This implies that, a literary text in which female characters are portrayed positively is often likable to female learners. The opposite may be true, where male characters are depicted more positively than female characters. However, according to Savitt(2016), masculinity is special and both males and females want to associate with it. Savitt (2016) advances the claim that the world is generally defined from a masculine perspective. Hence, everybody would want to associate with masculinity, including females. Surprisingly, there are no males who would want to associate with femininity.

Generally, the bulk of literary texts portray male characters positively (Goodley, 2016). Thus, many male students feel highly 'active' while girls feel too 'passive' during the interpretation of literary texts.

In conclusion, writers must learn to portray both genders positively. Sex is nothing, but, only a biological distinction. Teachers must lead learners to understand that no gender is inferior to the other. Teachers should further create more practicable experiences. For example, girls should also be promoted to leadership positions within the school. This will help learners to understand the issue of equality of sexes.

2.4 Literary theories used to interpret texts at 'O' Level and their treatment of gender

There are many theories that can be used to interpret Literature at 'O' Level. According to Biddulp (2002) there are four major theories of literary criticism; and these are: Marxist

theory, Feminist, Reader- Response and Formalism. Selden (2005) also, suggests that other theories may include structuralism and post-colonialism. For the sake of this study, the researcher discussed only four theories, these are: feminist, Marxist, reader-response and formalism. According to Selden et al (2005), Feminist literary criticism, refers to a theory that attempts to reject the naturalised patriarchal notions. Biddulph (2002) also, views feminism as a theory that gives an account of all the experiences of females. It is a theory that attempts to empower women. Employing a feminist theory is important when analysing literary texts where gender issues are more vivid. This assertion is supported by Debbie (2013) who posits that the feminist theoretical frame work helps to address gender- power relations, inequalities and violence vividly present in a literary text. Therefore, teachers must embrace the feminist theory as it helps to deconstruct gender stereotypes embedded in many literary texts.

The Marxist theory mainly focuses on class conflicts, representation and reinforcement of class differences (Haglund, 2017). It is a theory that was coined by Karl Marx (Selden et al, 2000). Simply put the Marxist theory deals with class struggles between an upper and a lower class in any society. This theory views literary works as works that represent social institutions from which they are drawn (Stones, 1998). Stones further states that a Marxist teacher can assess the political tendency of any studied text. In other words, the Marxist theory can help the literature teacher to know the history, current political and economic situation of any text. Teachers must embrace this theory as it may help them to understand the effect of class struggle on gender differentiation.

The Reader Response theory helps the reader to make meaning of a text studied. According to Haglund (2017), there is an attachment that develops between the text and the reader; hence the name reader-response. This theory may help learners to think critically. Teachers are encouraged to use this theory as it may help the learners to be critical even unto the issues to do with gender.

The formalist theory focuses on the structure of a literary text. According to Haglund (2017), this theory focuses on how a text is 'dressed'. Selden et al (2005), states that formalism is most helpful when analysing poetry. He further advances the claim that this theory helps the teacher to evaluate the text by the use of literary devices. From another view, Stones (1998) highlights that the formalist theory may also provide a story biography and cultural contexts of the text. Therefore, teachers must not only rely on this theory (as they normally do) since it has got many weaknesses than strengths. Though this theory may, at times, provide the background of a text being studied, it may also omit some of the very pertinent issues such as gender among many.

In conclusion, teachers must encourage students to have a test of all the above stated theories. This will help students to discover gender issues embedded in texts, become critical so as to understand the background of texts being studied; their political and economic background and effects of these on gender differentiation.

2.5 What can be done to make sure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances?

Teachers, writers and parents need to be very gender responsive. According to Kolbe and Voie (1981), books should represent egalitarian gender roles. This is supported by Rudman (1995) who observes that authored texts should present gender neutrality. There must not be any scenario where one gender is depicted as weaker than the other. According to Gwirai (2010), gender stereotypes are perpetual in children's picture books and textbooks. Therefore, the upcoming writers should seek to represent all genders equally. Also, there is need to provide gender neutral picture books to children. By so doing the more perpetual gender stereotypes will be deconstructed.

According to Taylor (2003) books (including literary texts) are a cultural mechanism through which gender roles are taught. In other words, a lot of them are, indeed, endowed with gender stereotypes. Teachers use gendered material to further reinforce stereotyped beliefs in the minds and hearts of their students.

According to Kolan (2015) gender stereotypes need to be deconstructed. He further advances the assertion that teachers should select literature that describes characters as distinct individuals regardless of their gender. He also stresses the idea that writers should desist from depicting women as a weaker sex. Depicting women as a weaker sex has a greater impact on the female learner since she may feel very inferior to her male counterparts.

According to Kittelberger (2002), teachers should combine traditional and non- traditional books when they teach. Singh (1998) further explains that the combination of both traditional and non- traditional texts promote class discussions that help to evoke a gender neutral atmosphere. Teachers are also encouraged to avail counter sexist literature to their students.

Singh (1998) maintains that the bulk of literature in schools indicate unfairness to different sexes. Therefore, educators must select set books that indicate fairness in both sexes. Moreover, writers should create picture books that do not portray traditional gender roles (Kolbe and Voie, 1981).

According to Kolan (2015), teachers should collaboratively work with students in selecting gender responsive texts to be studied. Gender responsive texts may refer to texts that deconstruct gender stereotyped beliefs; for example the belief that women are a weaker sex. Kolan (2015) also observes that learners should be given tasks that enable them to critique the existing gender stereotypes.

According to Witt (1997), female students should also be encouraged to write novels of their own. However, teachers must help them so as to produce gender balanced work as well.

Besides only encouraging their students to write their own novels, teachers should also familiarise with female authored texts (Kolan, 2015).

2.6 Summary

This chapter was a review of literature. The chapter focused on the views of different scholars in relation to gender perpetuation. The researcher discovered that the studies that directly deal with the teachers' perceptions of different genders; and symbols that students identify with in literary texts are still scanty. Hence, he seeks to add to this knowledge, through research, on the few studies that have been conducted in this area. The next chapter focuses on research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research design, sampling methods, research instruments, data collection and data analysis plan employed in the study. The chapter provides a detailed description of what the researcher accomplished in order to collect data for the study. The study was mainly concerned with finding out the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances. Therefore, this chapter examined the appropriate research design that was useful in gathering data on this topic.

3.1 Research Design

According to Copper and Schindler (2006) a research design is a laid down procedure that can be used to investigate the problem under study. In simpler terms, the research design can be explained as a road map that the researcher follows so as to collect, analyse data and provide solutions to the research problem. In this study the researcher used a descriptive research design.

3.2 Descriptive design

According to Robson (2002), a descriptive survey is a survey that helps the researcher to describe an accurate profile of people, events or situations. The descriptive survey enables one to give their individual interpretation of things or events as they take place. White (2005) explains that the descriptive survey also helps the researcher to understand a social phenomenon from the participants' points of view. According to Bush (1999), a descriptive survey is much concerned about explaining, recording and analyzing data so as to make it

more meaningful. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive survey to make his findings more meaningful.

According to the Research Method Glossary (2001), a descriptive survey enables one to describe a social phenomenon that exists. It also involves a systematical collection of data from the participants' point of view. In this study the descriptive survey helped the researcher to establish meaningful results from the views of the participants. The questionnaires and interviews were used to gather primary data from the participants. According to Leedy (2000), a descriptive design may be helpful to ensure that what is found in one situation is relevant to another. Therefore, the findings of this study may be applicable to other situations where the social conditions are similar. According to Robison (2002), the descriptive design enables the researcher to collect data from participants that are directly affected by a particular social phenomenon. In this study the researcher gathered data from literature students who may be directly affected by the problem under study. The researcher wanted to find out how teachers interpret literature and how the way they interpret literature perpetuates gender imbalances.

According to Gay (1981), the descriptive design helps the researcher to understand a social problem so as to provide solutions. Thus, in this study the researcher gathered data so as to provide solutions to the problem of the interpretation of literature. Individual views were captured through interviews and through the use of questionnaires. In this study the questionnaires were distributed to learners while the teachers were interviewed.

3.2 Target Population

According to Malhotra (1996), the target population refers to a population of things that share similar characteristics and they are a target of study. Hute (2009) describes a target population as a total number of the population from which the researcher chooses a sample. In this study,

the schools from which the study was conducted may be termed a population. The target population consisted of learners and teachers. The total number of Literature teachers and learners at Hwange is too big. Hence, it was necessary for the researcher to choose a representative group through sampling.

3.3 Sampling

According to Borg (1993), sampling is a process of selecting a population sample. A population sample represents the characteristics of a population from which it is drawn. In this study the population sample consisted of 39 respondents from three different schools. The sample consisted of thirty (30) learners, three (3) Heads of English Language Departments and six teachers (6) respectively.

3.3.1 Sampling Techniques

According to White (2000), two ways may be used when choosing a population sample. When choosing a population sample one can use probability or non-probability sampling techniques. In probability sampling, individuals have equal chances to be selected. On the other hand, non- probability sampling is much dependent on the researcher's own personal judgement. In this study the researcher used probability sampling to draw a population sample.

Probability Sampling Techniques

In this study the researcher used stratified and simple random sampling techniques. According to William (2004), stratified random sampling involves grouping population into different homogeneous groups. The researcher divided his population into two large groups on basis of their sex. Moreover, the researcher used simple random sampling to select a population sample from each stratum. This was accomplished through a hat system where some pieces of paper labelled a 'yes' and 'no' were deposited in a hat and shuffled carefully.

With eyes blinded, each individual was given a chance to pick a paper from the hat. The participants who picked a 'yes' from the female group were combined with those who picked a 'yes' from the male group. Those who were selected, they were 39. Hence, the 39 became a population sample for the study. The stratified and simple random sampling techniques helped the researcher to acquire a proportional number of male and female participants. This was very necessary so as to capture the views from both males and females.

3.4 Data collection methods.

The researcher gathered data from the two major sources of data and; these are primary data sources and secondary data sources.

3.4.1 Secondary Data Sources

According to Wegner (1993), secondary data is the data which the researcher collects before they start carrying out their own study. Zikmund (1991) posits that secondary data is readily available, highly accessible and is not costly to gather. The researcher began by a review of literature related to this study. The secondary data was sourced from the text books, journals and internet. The researcher gathered secondary data so as to identify the research gap. The findings of the secondary data were compared with those of the primary data so as to establish the depth of the research problem.

3.4.2 Primary Data

According to Williams (2004), primary data is original as it is collected from the actual site where the events are taking place. Contrary to the secondary data, the primary data may be very expensive to collect. In this study the researcher gathered primary data from Literature in English teachers and their learners through the use of interviews and questionnaires. The researcher sustained financial costs in the production and distribution of research instruments to the respondents. The researcher also, experienced other costs when he travelled to and

from schools where the study was being carried out. However, despite all the costs sustained in gathering primary data, the researcher was able to collect actual and original data from the respondents.

3.5. Research Instruments

The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect data for the study. The interviews and questionnaires were chosen so as to access data from large number of respondents within a short period of time.

3.5.1. Questionnaires

According to Borg and Gall (1993), a questionnaire consists of a list of questions that are used to acquire data for the study. The questionnaire provides important data for analysis. The researcher used the questionnaires to collect data from the learners. The learners' questionnaire consisted of both open and closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions required the respondents to provide brief and precise information, while the open-ended required respondents to provide detailed answers by making detailed explanations.

Justifications of using questionnaires

The questionnaires provided uniform questions to the respondents. It was then easy for the researcher to make comparisons of the findings. The questionnaires were also found to be time saving. They were distributed at the same time to all the respondents. The respondents managed to complete the questionnaires simultaneously. This was in unison with Malhotra (1996)'s claim that a questionnaire can help to collect large amounts of data within a short period of time. The questionnaires also, enabled the respondents to express themselves freely without fear of being observed by the researcher. The researcher asked the respondents not to indicate their names on the questionnaire. This also, helped the respondents to express

themselves freely. The language used in the questionnaire was simple to understand. Hence, the respondents did not face major challenges in interpreting questions. However, constructing a questionnaire took much of the researcher's time. This followed Punch (2009)'s assertion that more time is needed when constructing a questionnaire that is most accurate and reliable.

3.5.2 Interviews

The researcher used structured interviews to gather data. The interview guide of this study consisted of 7 questions. The first question ask which literary theories that teachers use to interpret literature. The second and third question asks how male and female characters are portrayed in texts being studied. The fourth question asks how teachers perceive male and female characters in texts being studied. The fifth and sixth question asks what symbols that learners associate with when interpreting literature. Finally, the seventh question asks what can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances.

Justification of Interviews

According to Leedy (2000), interviews provide a direct contact between the interviewer and interviewee. During the study, the researcher had an opportunity to engage into a face to face interaction with his respondents. The researcher created a friendly atmosphere in order to ensure that the respondents freely cooperate during the interview process. The researcher used probing questions in order to get more information from the respondents. The respondents were given enough time to express themselves. Moreover, the face to face interaction during the interview process helped the researcher to get instant feedback from the respondents. The information that was obtained from the respondents was recorded,

presented and analysed. The researcher used structured and unstructured interviews to obtain large amounts of data.

3.6. Instrument pre-testing

The researcher first submitted the research instruments to the supervisor for approval. The instruments were then administered to the schools where the study was not carried out. This was done so as to test the feasibility of carrying this study.

3.7. Instrument Distribution and Collection

The researcher first sought permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary education to undertake this study in the schools. After the permission was granted, the researcher visited the schools in which the study was to be carried out so as to introduce himself. The researcher further, asked for permission from heads of schools to carry out the study. The permission was granted. Researcher then introduced himself to the respondents in order to familiarise with them. He then, distributed the instruments personally. Each and every individual participant was given a questionnaire. The interviews were also conducted by the researcher in his individual capacity. In some instances the researcher used telephone interviews to collect data from the respondents. After completion of the questionnaires, the researcher personally collected back the instruments. The findings were then, recorded and analysed.

3.8 Data presentation and analysis

The researcher used different ways to present his findings so that they may be more meaningful to the reader. The researcher used graphs, charts and tables to present his data. The data was analysed in order to make it more meaningful. The data was also, analysed using frequent counts and percentages. The analysis of data helped the researcher to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

3.9. Validity and Reliability

Punch (2009) asserts that validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it is claimed to measure. According to Chiromo (2006) external validity is the degree to which conclusions can be generalised to a wider population. Having a true representative sample to the whole population, where each respondent has the equal chance of being selected and all subgroups (strata's) are represented. It allows findings to be generalised to a wider population with similar characteristics. Both males and females were represented as well as those who did Literature in English at 'O' level and those who did not.

Chiromo (2006) also, defines internal validity as the extent to which collected data is free from bias. The researcher ensured internal validity by doing a pilot survey which was carried out in other schools not the sample schools to ensure that questionnaires were clear and correctly phrased before administering them to ensure validity. Leading or suggesting questions were not used to avoid researcher bias. It implies that the instrument was valid.

Conner (1991) defines reliability as the reproducing ability of a set of questions. It is the consistence of a questionnaire to produce the same information when administered to a different group with same characteristics. This implies that the set of questions in the questionnaire are likely to collect the same information from all respondents in the same position, ensuring reliability of the instrument.

At least two methods of data collection were used that is questionnaires and interviews trying to ensure that information the researcher did not get through questionnaires could be extracted through interviews. The researcher is also concerned with the generation of both qualitative and quantitative data to do away with bias and to ensure validity and reliability is maximized.

3.10. Summary

The researcher used a descriptive survey in this study. This chapter focused on the target population, population sample, data collection methods, research instruments and the data presentation and analysis plan. In this chapter the researcher made a detailed discussion on how the study was carried out. The next chapter focuses on data presentation, analysis and discussion.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the research design, sampling methods, research instruments and data collection and analysis procedures. The main focus of this study was to investigate the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances. The study was guided by the following research questions: a) How does the interpretation of literature perpetuate gender imbalances? b) What theories underpin the interpretation of texts studied at 'O' Level? c) How do teachers perceive male and female characters in texts being studied? d) What symbols of male characters do male students identify with in texts being studied? e) What symbols of female characters do female students identify with in texts being studied? f) What can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances? This chapter seeks to address the above stated questions and other concerns of this study. The researcher used tables, charts and graphs to present the data. The last part of this chapter is a summary which highlights the concerns of the next chapter.

Questionnaire Response Rate

All the questionnaires that were distributed to the respondents were returned. The response rate on questionnaires that were distributed was 100%. All the questionnaires were completed. The questionnaires helped the researcher to capture the views of the learners. Respondents showed a positive attitude towards the study.

Response Rate on Interviews

The researcher managed to interview six teachers and three Heads of English Language departments from three different schools. The interview response rate was 100%. This also meant a positive attitude of respondents towards the study.

Data presentation and data analysis

4.1 Research question 1: How does the interpretation of literature perpetuate gender imbalances?

The researcher discovered that there are many variables that contribute to gender perpetuation during the course of interpreting literature. The findings are summarised in table 4.1

Table 4.1 Causes of gender perpetuation during the course of interpreting literature

Causes of gender perpetuation	Frequency
My teacher does not treat male and female characters equally	7
My teacher uses language that is gender biased when interpreting literature. My teacher uses examples that reinforces gender stereotypes	6
My teacher hero-worships male characters	8
My teacher overgeneralises. He regards male characters as cruel while female characters as polite	5
Authors do not portray both genders positively. The school curriculum is not gender responsive	4

The data presented in table 4.1 was captured from the learners' questionnaires. The data revealed that most Literature teachers perpetuate gender imbalances in their classes. Eight learners pointed that teachers hero-worship male characters, seven explained that teachers do not treat male and female characters equally, six explained that teachers use language and examples that reinforce gender imbalances, five explained that teachers uses language that generalises male and female characters and four stated that authors and the school curriculum are not, as yet, gender responsive. Looking down upon one gender above the other is inhuman. From the questionnaire findings the researcher discovered that most teachers described female characters negatively. The same findings, simultaneously, seemed to suggest male characters were more import. This is, nevertheless, a bad way of viewing gender. When one gender is treated more important than the other some stereotypes are generated. This is supported by Stockdale (2006), who observes that stereotyping may further reinforce role socialisation. In other words, describing female fictional characters as less human reinforces to the learners, the fact that females are more inferior to their male counterparts. Such a stereotype is very hard to break once it is handed to the younger generation. Therefore, teachers, writers and curriculum planners should be encouraged to portray both genders positively. Portraying one gender less human may lead to a self- fulfilling Prophecy on learners. Educators should select learning material that is gender sensitive so as to deconstruct the perpetual stereotypes within the education sector. Everybody should actively participate to eradicate gender stereotypes.

4.2 What theories underpin the interpretation of texts at 'O' Level?

Various theories can be used to interpret literary texts. According to Selden (2005), Haglund (2017) and Stones (1998), the following theories are useful in the interpretation of texts: Feminist, Marxist, Reader Response, Formalist and structuralism. At the time of the visit to the schools the researcher found that the teachers were using the Marxist, Feminist,

Formalism and Reader Response theories to interpret texts studied at ‘O’ Level. He then, focused on these four theories only. Through observation, the researcher discovered that teachers’ literary theory preference may lead to gender perpetuation. Fig. 4.2.1 shows teachers’ literary theory preferences and their treatment of gender.

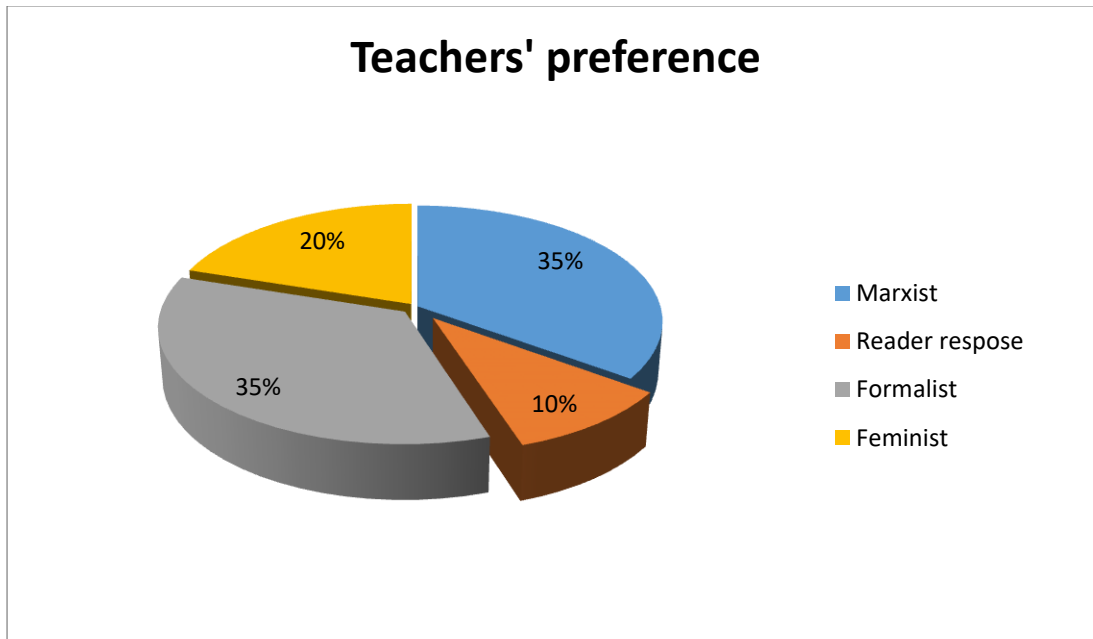


Fig 4.1 Teachers’ theory preference and gender issues

The findings show that only 20% of the respondents prefer a feminist approach when interpreting literature. The Marxist and Formalist theories preference constitutes 70%, with 35% each. These theories are mostly preferred above others. One of the respondents went further to explain that *the Marxist and Formalist theories were easy to use*. However, it should be noticed that the Marxist and Formalist theories may not be very ideal in interpreting feminist texts. Feminist theories must be used to interpret feminist texts, since they are most relevant in that area. The researcher also discovered that most educators do not prefer the Reader- Response theory. The reader –response theory constitutes only 10% preference. It is the least preferred and the cause of this may be that this theory is cognitively demanding. However, the reader-response theory is very important. It helps the reader to

develop thinking skills. Learners must be introduced to the reader-response theory. Teachers may combine the reader response and the feminist theories to help their learners view gender issues critically.

4.3 How do teachers perceive female and male characters in texts being studied?

At the time of visit to the schools the researcher found that learners were studying these two feminist texts: *She no Longer Weeps (Dangarembga)* and *The Sun Will Rise Again (Mujajati)*. These two texts became the main focus of this study. The researcher wanted to find out how teachers viewed male and female characters in the two afore stated texts.

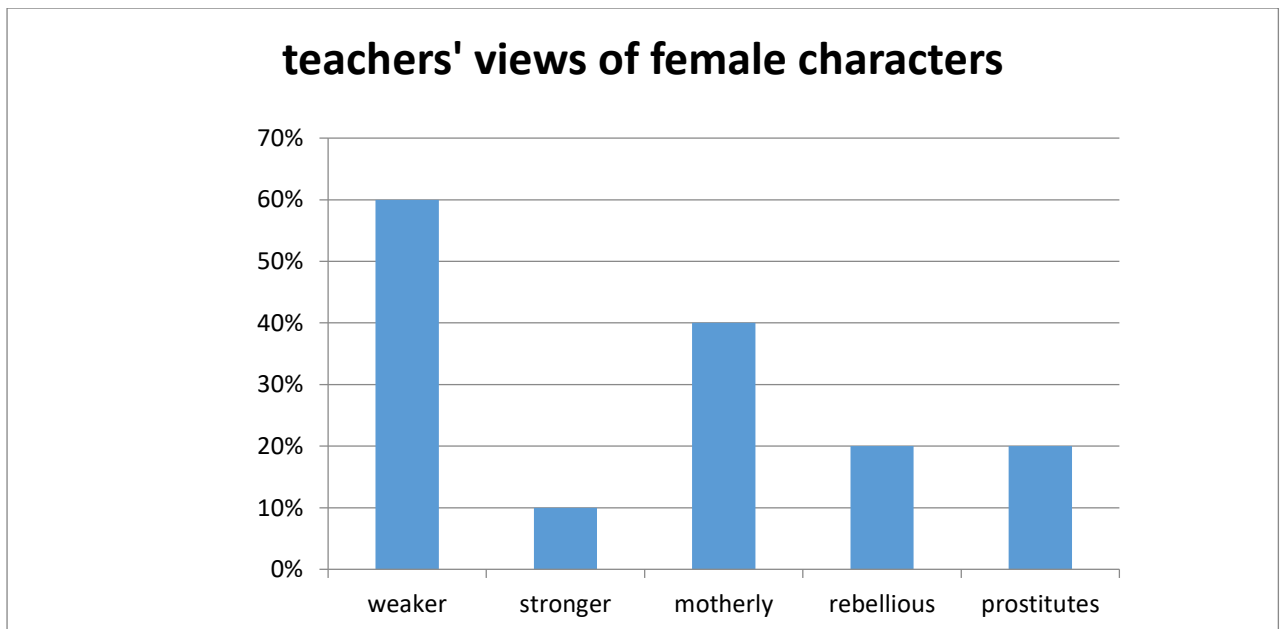


Fig 4.2 Teachers' views of female characters in texts being studied

The majority of teachers; that is, 60% perceive female characters as weaker, 40% stated that they are motherly, 10% perceive them as stronger, 20% described them as rebellious and 20% viewed them as prostitutes. These findings were also, supported by the information gathered from the learners' questionnaires. The findings suggested that females were being viewed as

less important than their male counterparts and this belief had been assimilated in learners. The teachers' negative perceptions of female characters had great impact on their learners' views of Martha (*She no Longer Weeps*) and Sofia (*The Sun Will Rise Again*). Fig 4.3.2 shows learners' views of major female characters in texts being studied.

Table 4.2 Learners' views of major female characters

Character	Description	No. of respondents
Martha	Weaker	30
	Prostitute	10
	Rebellious	30
Sofia	Prostitute	20
	Murderer	15
	Rebellious	20

Learners' views of major female characters in texts being studied

The learners stated that the female character, Martha in *She no Longer weeps* was described negatively by their teachers. Hence, they also viewed her in the same way. Thirty respondents described her as rebellious, thirty described her as weaker, and ten indicated that she was a prostitute. On the other hand, Sofia in *The Sun Will Rise Again* was also viewed negatively. From the findings, fifteen learners explained that their teachers described Sofia as a woe and blood-thirsty, while twenty indicated that she was rebellious. The above learners' views are generally tallying with those of their teachers. This may be implying that teachers shape the learners' view of the world. Therefore, educators must strive to make learners interpret the world correctly. Thus, there must not be an over emphasis of women's negative side over that of men.

Teachers' view of male characters in texts being studied

The majority of responses indicated that teachers generally view male characters more positively than female characters. Fig 4.3.3 shows teachers views of male characters in *She no Longer Weeps* and *The Sun Will Rise Again* (texts being studied at the time of visit to schools).

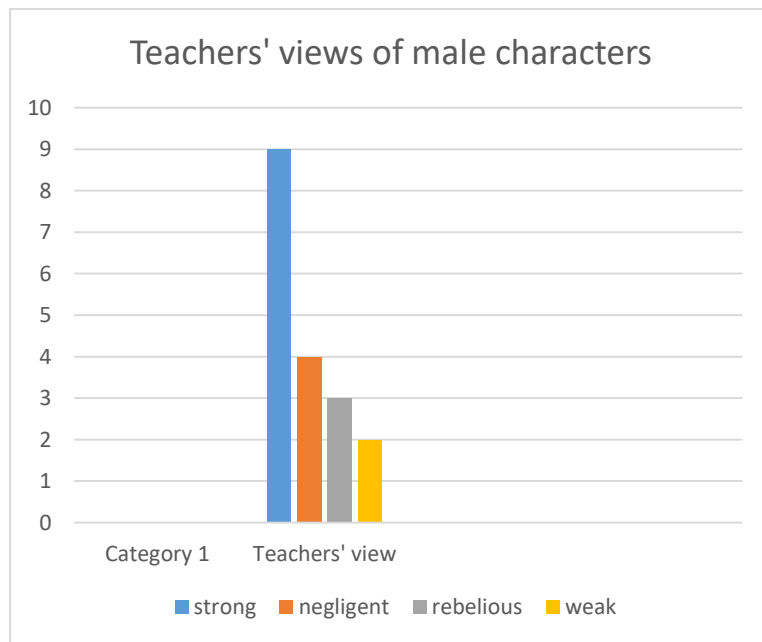


Fig. 4.3 teachers' views of male characters in texts being studied

From the findings two teachers described male characters as weak, three indicated that they were rebellious, four described them as negligent and 9 indicated that they are strong. This data proves it clearly that there are fewer negative stereotypes that our society associates with males. Perhaps, this is because the world is defined from a masculine point of view. However, portraying males more positively than females creates an unbalanced view of the world. Females must also be portrayed positively in order to create a balanced view of the world. Also, by portraying both genders positively we will promote gender equality.

4.4 What symbols of female characters do female students identify with?

Female students generally identify with symbols of femininity. This is supported by George (2005) who posits that females take pride in being female. According to George (2005) feminist traits are those that defines womanliness and these may include patience, love, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and gentleness, to say the least. The researcher asked each female learner to pick any of the femininity traits which they admired mostly in female characters in *She no Longer Weeps* and *The Sun will Rise Again*. Each learner was allowed to pick only one trait of their choice. Data was collected. Table4.4. shows symbols of femininity that female learners identify with.

Table 4.4 Feminine symbols

Respondents	Symbol of femininity
A	Empathy
B	Sympathy
C	Sensitivity
D	Compassion
E	Patience
F	Gentle
G	Sharing
H	Deference
I	Loving
J	Affection
K	Tenderness
L	Receptivity
M	Nurturing

N	Radiance
O	Flow

Fig. 4.4. Symbols of femininity that female learners identify with

Data in fig 4.1 shows that female learners identify with empathy, sympathy, sensitivity, compassion, deference, patience, gentleness, sharing, love, affection, tenderness, receptivity, nurturing, flow and radiance. According to George (2005), feminist symbols or traits are socially constructed; and are not biological. Hence, it is foolhardy to assume that the afore-stated traits are fixed in females. Teachers must explain to their learners that one's character is not determined by their sex.

4.5. What Symbols of male characters do male students identify with?

According to Savitt (2016), by the virtue of being male, male learners generally identify with masculine traits. During the study, the researcher asked male learners to pick any of the masculine traits they admired mostly in male characters in *She no Longer Weeps* and *The Sun Will Rise Again*. Each learner was asked to pick a single trait, and the findings were recorded. Fig 4.4.2 shows symbols of masculinity which male learners identify with.

Table 4.5 Masculine symbols

Respondents	Symbols of masculinity
A	Freedom
B	Direction
C	Logic
D	Focus
E	Integrity
F	Stability
G	Passion
H	Independence
I	Discipline
J	Awareness
K	Strength
L	Love
M	Confidence
N	Bravery
O	Tactfulness

Table. 4.5 Symbols of masculinity which male learners identify with

Data presented in table 4.5 indicates that male learners identify with masculine symbols which include, freedom, direction, logic, focus, integrity, stability, passion, independence, discipline, awareness, strength, love, confidence, bravery and tactfulness. According to George (2005), the above stated traits define a man. Contrary, it is not logical to relate personality traits to one's sex. Gender symbols are social mere constructs that must not to be

equated to one's biological make up. Hence, there is need for people to desist from reinforcing these mere social constructs.

4.6. What can be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances?

This question is very important in this study. Answers to this question will equip the classroom practitioners with '*new insights*' about gender matters. Below are suggestions that were gleaned from the findings of this study:

Responses from teachers on what should be done to ensure that the interpretation of literature does not perpetuate gender imbalances.

- Teachers must help students to interpret literature correctly;
- Teachers should employ theories that address issues to do with gender when interpreting gendered literary texts.
- Teachers should treat male and female characters as equals;
- Teachers should avoid language that reflects gender bias when interpreting literature;
- Teachers should avoid over generalisation, for example to say females are polite while males are cruel; as this may strain teacher-student relations;
- Teachers should avoid hero worship of characters of a particular sex over others;
- Teachers should avoid using examples that may reinforce gender stereotypes (especially when illustrating explanations), for example to say 'father is drives while mother is sweeps'.
- Authors should portray both genders positively;
- The curriculum of the school must promote gender equality.

4.7 Discussions

How does the interpretation of literature perpetuate gender imbalances?

According to Davis (2003) most teachers perpetuate gender imbalances in many ways. This assertion came true in this study. According to the findings of the study, teachers perpetuated gender imbalances by making incorrect perceptions of male and female characters, literary theory preferences, unequal treatment of males and females, use of language that is gender biased, hero-worship of characters of one gender above the other, use of examples that reinforce gender stereotypes, and overgeneralisation of gender personalities.

Incorrect perceptions of male and female characters

Generally male characters are perceived more importantly by many. It may not be very ideal to say this conduct is only promoted by educators. Stereotypes are everywhere around the world. The teachers' backgrounds are 'rich' in terms of stereotyping. Hence, backgrounds affect how people view their world (Davis, 2003). Most teachers are from an African background which has made women under privileged over the years under the blessing of patriarchy. Therefore, by portraying women as inferior we are making it very easy to dominate them. However, other scholars like Blackburn (2005), strongly opposes the idea of treating women negatively. Blackburn, also observes that it is not only females that are stereotyped. Males may be stereotyped too. Hence, there must not be any bias when discussing gender matters. According to Blackburn, the gender stereotypes are undesirable walls that must be demolished. By demolishing gender walls, we are closing gender gaps that exist between males and females. There is great need for the educators to explain to the younger generation that the describing one's character or personality on basis of their gender is mere stereotyping.

The teachers' choice of literary theories

Teachers should make use of appropriate literary theories when interpreting literature. A feminist approach should be used to interpret feminist texts. This is supported by Biddulph (2000) and Debbie (2013) who maintain that the feminist theory is very helpful as it addresses gender power relations, inequalities and violence that is vividly present in many literary texts. Therefore, teachers should encourage their learners to be very critical when it comes to issues to do with gender. When gender issues are not viewed and dealt with critically, they will remain perpetual for time immemorial. Learners should, therefore, be encouraged to combine the reader-response theory with the feminist theory when interpreting feminist texts. The reader response theory helps learners to think critically. Therefore, when the two theories are combined, gender matters can be viewed from a sound perspective.

Use of language and examples that reinforce gender imbalances

The findings of this study showed that most teachers used language that reinforces gender imbalances. The language suggested that females are weaker than males. This is indeed, a gross perpetuation of gender stereotyping. Thus, educators should introduce counter sexist literature to their learners (Singh, 1998). They should also band writers to avoid producing gender biased literature. This is supported by Voie (1981) who postulates that material selected for children should represent egalitarian gender roles.

Overgeneralisation of characters' personality

Teachers normally, tend to overgeneralise when they discuss gender issues with their classes. Most of the discussions are sexist in nature; and they must be stopped. Misconceptions like thinking that females are more tenderly hearted while males are cruel and rude must be challenged. According to Kittelberger (2000) regarding male students as cruel may strain

teacher-student relations. Therefore, it is imperative to regard everyone more importantly. The differences in personalities must not be linked to one's sex.

4.8. Summary

This chapter dealt with data presentation, analysis and discussion. Tables, charts and graphs were used to make illustrations. From the analysis of the findings it was revealed that most teachers perpetuate gender imbalances in many ways. Discussions done were backed by scholarly views. The next chapter focuses on summarising, drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on obtained data.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on data presentation, analysis, and discussion. The data was presented in tables, charts and graphs. The main focus of this study was to investigate the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances. The study was conducted in Hwange district, Matabeleland North.

5.1 Summary

The main focus of this study was to investigate the extent to which the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances among pupils. The study was conducted in three schools within Hwange district. Hence, the findings may not be generalised to represent the whole nation.

The researcher targeted 39 respondents. Among the 39, there were 30 Literature students, 6 teachers and 3 Heads of English and Literature Department. The researcher used interviews and questionnaires as his major tools for collecting data.

In chapter 2 a review of relevant literature was done. The review of relevant literature was an attempt to answer the research questions of this study. It was noticed that there are a few studies that have been conducted by other researchers in this area. The researcher hopes that more studies will be conducted in this area in the long run. Chapter three dealt with research methodology. Chapter four dealt with data presentation and analysis while chapter five focused on summary, conclusions and recommendations.

5.2. Conclusions

It was revealed from the findings of this study that, to a larger extent the interpretation of literature perpetuates gender imbalances. It was also revealed that teachers are the chief perpetrators of gender imbalances at a school set up. Most teachers view female characters as more inferior than their male counterparts. Their choice of teaching methods, and the literary theories they employ when interpreting literature has, nevertheless, far reaching impacts. The researcher strongly feels that further research must be done in this study so as to answer many questions in relation to gender perpetuation. One example was to assess the impacts of home socialisation.

5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from this study:

- Teachers must help students interpret literature correctly;
- Teachers should employ literary theories that addresses gender issues when interpreting texts;
- Teachers should treat male and female characters equally;
- Teachers should avoid language that reflects gender bias when interpreting texts;
- Teachers should avoid overgeneralisation, for example, to say females are more polite while males are cruel. This may strain student-teacher relations in some instances.
- Teachers should avoid using examples that may reinforce gender stereotypes, (especially when making illustrations/explanations) for example to say, father drives while mother sweeps;
- Teachers should avoid hero worship of characters of a particular gender above another.
- Teachers should band writers to portray both genders equally.

- Teachers should ensure that the school curriculum promotes gender equality.

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