

Feminization of Primary School Teaching: A Societal and Cultural Limitation to Boy-Child Education

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Abstract

The rate at which public primary schools are becoming increasingly dominated by female teachers in all parts of the globe is quite alarming. News headlines such as: No Male Teachers in 4,500 Primary Schools, A Quarter of All Primary Schools Have No Male Teachers, Women Teachers Dominate in Congo Brazzaville Schools, and Primary School Teaching: A Woman's World, are eloquent testimonies that there is currently a severe gender-imbalance issue among public primary school teachers that is gradually wiping men out of the system, the world over. This paper is a conscientious attempt to highlight the reality of this predicament, investigate the causes, assess the impact of same on pupils (especially boys), and proffer solutions for it. It found, among other things, that the dominance of female teachers in primary schools leaves boys with inadequate male role models, affects school discipline, hampers pupils' moral development and concludes that it will be impossible for a fully socialized adult male to emerge from a socialization process that featured too few or no adult males. In view of this, affirmative action on the part of government to ensure that a fixed quota of public school teaching staff are filled by men and an upward review of teachers' remuneration are recommended, in the hope of motivating more men to return to public primary school classrooms.

Keywords: *Feminization, Culture, Socialization, Education, Primary School, and Boy-child.*

Introduction

The socialization of children is a cardinal goal of education everywhere in the world, especially at the primary school level. Many believe that primary schools afford the society the best platform to lay a solid foundation that would enable the child to become successful and productive as an adult member, the rest of his or her life.

For this to be realized, however, discipline and character-building must be taken serious in the educational process. This is the reason why an educated man or woman is not characterized by mere possession of knowledge and skills, but more so by the manifestation of civilized and acceptable patterns of living. It is important to note that the standard for determining what is acceptable, in terms of the way of life, is defined largely by the culture of the society that is socializing the child; it goes without saying, therefore, that education is expected to serve the interest of the society in raising individuals who not only possess a cultural-know-how but are equally compliant to societal norms. Hence, any process or system of education which does not take the culture of its subjects into serious consideration is not worth the name.

The main contention here, in view of the foregoing, is that since culture manifests itself socially in the different attitudes, behaviours, interests, and roles exhibited by men and

women, feminization of public primary schools is a major departure from cultural reality – which occasions the misrepresentation of the society in the eyes of pupils and results in their under-socialization.

Clarification of Concepts

Culture

Although scholars define culture in various ways, each one of them agrees that it has to do essentially with all the influences that characterize the predominant way of life of any people. Hornby (2010:357) opines, for instance, that culture comprises “the customs, beliefs, behaviour and material objects that constitute a people’s way of life.” Similarly, Fafunwa in Okeke (2016:131) posits that culture is “the way of life of a people exemplifying their accumulated wisdom, knowledge, and skills which are passed from one generation to another.” Another interesting definition comes from Santrock in Okeke (2016: 131) who considers culture as “all the products of an interacting group of people, including their patterns of behaviour and beliefs, all of which are transferred from one generation to another.”

The clearly outstanding idea in all the definitions above is that of the aggregate of all factors that shape the lifestyle of any particular people. It will therefore be logical to describe culture as all the ingredients of living that make social life both livable and worth living. To illustrate the extensiveness of these ingredients, Gonzalez-Mena (2008:7) quips:

the term culture includes the way lives are influenced by race, gender, age, abilities and disabilities, language, social class, including status and economic level, education, religion and / or spiritual practice, geographical roots of the family and present location as well. Sexuality, including sexual orientation is also part of the picture.

Believing that the list is endless, Tischler in Dienye (2012:83) extends it to include “all that human beings learn to do, to know, to produce and to believe as they grow to maturity and live out their lives in the social groups to which they belong”.

Socialization

The definitions of culture discussed above give a clue that culture is both learned and transmitted. One of the processes by which people learn the culture of their society is socialization. In view of this, Anthony (2001:87) writes that socialization is “the process through which the culture of a society is transmitted to its new members.” Onyido (2016:36) concurs that it is “the process through which new generations learn the necessary skills, morals, and philosophies that will aid them in becoming productive citizens of tomorrow.” In Dienye (2012:98), socialization is considered as “the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them integrated members of the society,”

Many scholars hold the view that socialization transforms the individual from a mere biological being to a typical social being, which implies that it replaces their animalistic tendencies with human inclinations (Onyido, 2016; Dienye, 2012). Corroborating this view, Maccionis in Dienye (2012:98) defines socialization as “the life-long social experience by which individuals develop their human potential and learn patterns of their culture.”

Education

The term “education” is really not an easy concept to explain. In the first place, education has the attribute of growth, like a living organism, which makes it amenable to changes in

response to changing times and circumstances. Secondly, many people look at education from different perspectives – sociological, humanistic or ethical. Again, the term “education” is inseparably linked to the way of life and core beliefs of any community where it is practiced; since no two cultures or societies are exactly the same, education means different things to different groups of people and, therefore, consistently defies attempts to squeeze it into a single, universally satisfactory definition. In spite of its volatile nature, scholars have made numerous commendable efforts to define education instructively. This paper will, however, highlight the sociological views only, due to space constraint.

Nwangwu in Nwanna-Nzewunwa (2001:24) is of the opinion that education is “the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills, and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage, in order to foster continuously the well-being of mankind ...” O’Connor echoes the idea that education is a machinery of the society, affirming that it is “the process by which societies through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmit their cultural heritage” (Okoh & Omordu, 2013:14; Osaat, 2010:21; Dienye, 2012:94). These sociological definitions strongly emphasize that education is a cultural activity which basically serves the interest of the society. Kohlberg and Mayer (1987:48) put this fact succinctly by noting that “educating consists of transmitting knowledge, skills and moral rules of the culture” adding that, though the rules of the culture may change or remain static in the course of time, education remains “the transmission of the culturally given.”

Modelling

As a derivative of the word ‘model’, the term ‘modeling’ applies both to teaching (exemplifying, demonstrating or showing to others how to behave) and learning (emulating or copying from others how to behave). From the point of view of copying behavior, modeling means patterning one’s behaviour or lifestyle after those of another person that one esteems and wants to be like. To Strong and De Vault (1989) it is the act of imitating the behaviour of influential people. In this regard, Wikitionary (n.d) explains that modeling is the act of acquiring novel skills by simply imitating others. From the perspective of setting examples of good behaviour, modelling speaks of consistently portraying desirable attitudes and behaviours for someone else (particularly, a younger fellow) to copy. Hence, Gallimore and Tharp in Umeasiegbu (2014) picture modelling as the intentional or unintentional display of worthwhile or desirable manners, behaviours, etc. in a way that influences the behaviours of others. Similarly, Gonzalez-Mena (2008:152) states that modeling is “a teaching device and guidance tool in which an adult’s attitude or behaviour becomes an example the child consciously or unconsciously imitates.” She points out that whether or not they know it, adults are constantly modeling for children (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). More or less, therefore, modeling is an educational process that not only makes it possible for children to pick up and re-enact behaviours but also enables them to inhibit or drop certain others (Wikipedia, n.d).

The Boy-Child

This paper focuses on the male child of primary school age, between six and twelve years. The primary school age is a period when children grapple with the challenge of personality development. They experience what psychologists call ‘gender consistency’ – the realization that sex and gender are invariant and permanent (Kohlberg, 1987; Lippa, 1990; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007). Relating what happens from the time children achieve gender consistency, Shaffer and Kipp (2007:536) write:

And when they finally understand, at the age of 6 or 7
that their gender will never change, children begin to

focus less exclusively on gender schemas and to pay more and more attention to same-sex models to decide which attitudes, activities, interests, and mannerisms are most appropriate for members of their own sex.

To confirm this from a boy-child's perspective, Kohlberg (1987:536) recapitulates:

To prefer the same sex in a consistent or categorical manner required conceptual growth and the development of fixed logical classes. For boys under 5, liking the same sex applies only to peers. By age 6 or 7 it applies to both father and strange adults. At this age, measures of preference and imitation for the father over the mother indicate the first gender cross-over to same-sex preference. Thus, what is often called father-identification, as well as what is called masculinity of values, grows with and out of the cognitive growth of a boy's gender identity.

This indubitable fact of life is further reiterated by Spock **and Rothenberg** (1985) who **observe** that the actual source of the boy-child's strong sex identity **are** not the toy cars and trucks or cowboy suits he gets from his parents, but essentially the positive relationship he has from early childhood with his father, which inspires him to want to become exactly like him. **They** quickly **clarify** that those who lack a father have a way of creating one in their imagination out of the pleasant qualities they see regularly in friendly men. A group of scholars led by Luecke-Aleksa in Shaffer and Kipp (2007) found that even while watching television, they pay more attention to male characters than to females. In essence, not having enough male teachers in primary schools amounts to leaving boys behind, thereby making schooling less interesting to them. It is more like watching Real Madrid Football Club play a crucial match without Ronaldo or Barcelona FC, without Messi. Their real fans will feel unenthused and dissatisfied, though the teams have a complete eleven-man squad of capable players on the field of play; they want to see that star-player who does differently the same thing the other players are doing. Boys look-out for male teachers the same way ardent football fans lookout for their play-maker. In fact, the boy-child is naturally hardwired with an intrinsic and desperate yearning for adult male influence and inspiration as a model.

Feminization of Schools

Bradley in Flynn (2010) extensively addresses the issue of feminization of school environment and curriculum, which he believes is impacting the boy child negatively. The tendency for teachers to select books, materials, and activities that suit the feminine gender will definitely be very high in schools where all or an overwhelming majority of the teachers are females; this makes boys feel that education or schooling is a female enterprise (Flynn, 2010). Even when there happens to be an activity that boys like, the way 'aunties' control it, like: 'don't shout', 'don't push one another', 'no competition', 'there are no winners and no losers' all contradict the boy-child's gregarious and competitive nature and therefore, makes it uninteresting to him. Bradley notes that this is like preventing boys from actually being boys or from behaving as such (Flynn, 2010). In effect countless thousands of primary school boys struggle through school with rising class-work and little or no competitive, physical activities among themselves (Paton, 2011). News reports evidence that this is happening in all parts of the world today.

In England, for instance, no male teachers were found in 4,569 (27%) primary schools (Paton, 2011). The Telegraph has a similar report captioned, “Male Teacher: a Most Wanted Man” in which it describes male primary school teachers as an ‘endangered species’ and cites a survey conducted by the Training and Development Agency (TDA) which found that about 50% of primary school pupils in England have never been in contact with a male teacher (Westland, 2009).

In the Republic of Ireland, 1,417 primary schools (43.1%) had no male teachers as at March 2004 and in Scotland, the General Teaching Council (GTC) raised a shocking alarm that women constituted of 92% of the 2002 / 2003 set of probationary primary schoolteachers (Carr, 2004). The story is the same in Canada where a notable scholar laments that a lot of children could now go from nursery to high school without ever interacting with a single male teacher in some parts of Quebec (Flynn, 2010). In Ontario, another Canadian state, one primary school teacher in every five is a male (Carr, 2004).

An eloquent observation from a daily that male teachers are gradually heading for extinction is a confirmation that, even in far-away Australia, male teachers are phasing out fast. Describing the situation as ‘chronic’, a news reporter points out that about 90 public primary schools in a particular province do not have any male teachers. In confirmation of this report, Opie (2016) laments that male primary school teachers are now very hard to come by in Australian public schools. She expresses fear that, with the constant recession in the number of men who apply for studies in education, male primary school teachers may soon become history.

Africa is not left out of this evolution. Congo Brazzaville’s public primary schools are overwhelmingly dominated by female teachers who constitute 82% and are said to be given the priority over men (Africa Review, 2013). A study conducted in Aba-North Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria revealed that five of the eleven schools surveyed had one male teacher each, while the remaining six had no single male teacher at all (Okenwa, 2012). A recent study conducted in the neighbouring Rivers State shows there is a serious problem of gender-imbalance among public primary school teachers with women being a whopping 63% majority (Okenwa, 2018).

Speaking on the impact of gender-imbalance among primary school teachers, Strong and De Vault (1989:91) observed that:

The effects are surprisingly rapid; simply by moving in a particular area and giving attention to a particular type of play, a teacher, within minutes, can eliminate sex differences in play patterns that were “obvious” all semester ... the fact that such behaviour can be eliminated quickly shows **the** enormous impact of the environment – including the teacher – on children’s day-to-day conformity to sex roles.

Some Factors Responsible for the Feminization of schools

i. Low Status / Pay

Teaching is rated lowly among other professions, almost everywhere in the world. Many think the teachers’ working conditions and pay are considerably poor, in comparison with those of some other professionals. A research conducted by Men Teach, reportedly suggests that low status and pay discourage men from going into teaching (Snyder, 2010). Alluding to

this, Nelson (2011) and James (2013) argue that, as primary bread-winners, most men would naturally feel emasculated to engage in such a lowly-paying job. Stated in clear terms, therefore, men have abandoned teaching because of its loss of prestige. Boys now opt for science-oriented disciplines that would lead to high-paying jobs; others simply go into business because it offers quicker and greater rewards (Pech, 2011; Carr, 2014). Even the few who venture into teaching consider themselves as passers-by taking primary school teaching jobs as a stepping stone to some other better-paying jobs (Aminigo, 2003).

ii. Stereotype that Teaching is Women's Work

There is a wide-spread misconception that the primary school teaching job is a women's preserve (Rich, 2014). People who hold this erroneous view try to justify it by arguing that women are naturally more nurturing than men and therefore more suited for the job. This stereotype is partly the mistake of equating the primary school with early childhood care development and educations where care-giving are nurturing are the main objectives. The truth, however, is that the primary school differs from early childhood care centers in the sense that it begins at just the very point (age six) when children generally grapple with gender-typing challenges and, therefore, need same-sex models.

iii. Discriminatory Policies

It is unfortunate that in some places, men who indicate interest in teaching primary school pupils are turned down or discriminated against. A teacher in Florida discloses that some school administrators now have a policy of never hiring a male teacher in order to completely avoid issues of paedophilia (Paton, 2011). Reacting to this, Habor in Snyder (2008) argues that the bias against male applicants is very unfair, since men are not the only people who commit paedophilia. He reveals that as at May 2010, all eight of the teachers arrested for involvement in sex with students in Florida were female.

Not long ago, a discriminatory policy to hire only women for teaching in public primary and secondary schools became effective in a certain Pakistanian province (Ullah, 2017). The gender-imbalance among male and female teachers will continue to worsen unless discrimination against male applicants is nipped in the bud.

Consequences of the Feminization of Schools

i. Boys' Loss of Interest in Schooling

The Telegraph reports an alarming rate of truancy lately, with boys being the notorious culprits. This frightening disclosure was made amidst apprehensions that boys now find school repellent due to shortage of positive role models (Paton, 2011). It does appear that the hyperactive nature of the boy-child requires lots of psychomotor engagements to satisfy; the school can hardly hold any attraction for him as long as it fails to make adequate provisions for this.

ii. Boys' Academic Under-achievement

Sequel to their loss of interest in school, as a result of disinteresting school environment and curriculum, boys end up performing badly in academics. Levin in Paton (2011) reportedly feels that the education system is to blame for this situation. Admitting that there is a serious problem of boys' academic under-performance in many places, he regrets that the increasing feminization of schools is not giving them a fair bargain.

iii. Alarming Rate of Indiscipline

Scholars have found that the under-representation of any gender among teachers is capable of eliciting deviant behaviour in learners of that particular gender (Okeke, 2016). There is no

gainsaying the fact that indiscipline has assumed an alarming proportion in primary schools today, especially among boys. A confirmation of this comes from Paton (2011) who cites a government source which laments that pupils' unruly behaviour is discouraging many professionals from remaining on the job. Pech (2011) noted that most young pupils from poor backgrounds, who feel strongly about traditional stereotypical gender roles, readily resist the female teacher's authority. Figures from England show that assaults on teachers reached a five-year high in 2010, with forty-four seriously injured persons rushed to hospital (Paton, 2011).

iv. Dearth of Adult Male Role Models

Another major effect of the gender imbalance among primary school teachers is that positive role-models for boys are fast disappearing. Boys, regrettably do not have easy access to positive role-models as do girls. A lot of factors have combined to make single parenting rampant and mothers are usually the custodial parents in families where parents are either separated or divorced. In many homes fathers spend long hours daily at work and other social engagements. Now, primary school teachers who are supposed to offer pupils wholesome socialization, on behalf of their parents and the entire society, are now being dominated by female teachers, thereby leaving boys with no choice than to resort to weak, passive, and immoral role-models who dominate the entertainment industry (Briggs, 1975). The bottom line is that the society pays dearly for this in the long run in form of high crimes rate. This is the very point that gives these writers the greatest concern.

v. Under-Socialization of the Boy-Child

It is important to keep in mind that schools are institutional arrangements put in place by every society to ensure the successful and complete socialization of their children; teachers serve as socializing agents representing the society, to make sure that this is achieved. However, the feminization of primary schools hinders the full realization of this noble objective, on the part of the boy-child.

The point is that the feminization of primary schools undermines the fact that the society (which teachers represent) is populated by men and women and that the culture of every society (which teachers are to transmit) manifests or expresses itself socially by means of the varied roles men and women perform. A situation where male teachers are either grossly under-represented or totally non-existent in a school setting presents an unwholesome, distorted picture of the society to pupils; it particularly puts a limit to the adult male way of life the boy-child sees and imbibes. This is so because there is limit to the degree of masculine habits, traits, behaviours, attitudes and characteristics that female teachers can practically and effectively exemplify for the boy-child. Boys are, in effect, being under-socialized in most schools, as it is impossible to expect a fully socialized adult male to emerge from a socialization process that featured too few or no adult men.

Conclusion

Culture sees individuals everywhere as either males or females and assigns different roles to them accordingly. Since the transmission of what obtains in a people's culture is a manifest goal of their education, the feminization of primary schools poses a societal and cultural limitation to boy-child education by preventing him from seeing the male perspective of life in his culture which he is expected to copy or emulate.

The lingering debate on whether or not the teacher's gender matters to pupils' educational development has polarized scholars for too long; while some believe it does, others think otherwise. However, considering the fact that meaningful education, as all scholars admit,

develops pupils mentally, morally, and physically, it appears logical to reason as follows:

- i. That, as for pupils' mental or intellectual development, the teacher's gender may not matter at all, since much of what are required for effectiveness are the teacher's level of knowledge of the subject matter and his / her ability to communicate or impart same to pupils.
- ii. That, as for pupils' moral and physical developments, the teacher's gender does really matter, since so much will depend on how the teacher manages or handles both pupils, activities and situations, as well as how practically effective the teacher is at performing certain physical, social and cultural roles, rather than how much knowledge he or she possesses.
- iii. Given that education, more than simply taking care of pupils' mental or intellectual development, is concerned with their moral and physical development both of which men and women naturally handle or manage differently, owing to their varied psychological and physical make-ups; to contend that the teacher's gender is inconsequential to pupils' educational development is to hold a narrow and illogical view of education and is, therefore, not true.

Recommendations

Considering the fact that men, as primary bread-winners, generally find it extremely difficult to stay on low-income / status jobs, it is strongly recommended that government should effect an upward review of primary school teachers' remuneration, in order to make teaching at that level more attractive and comfortable for men.

Based on the fact that most scholars view a gender-balanced teaching corps as the best arrangement for enhancing pupils' education, it is recommended that government should take affirmative action to guarantee that public primary schools are henceforth staffed by equal numbers of male and female teachers.

In view of the fact that unless more young people pursue degree programmes in teaching, the number of male teachers will continue to decline, it is recommended that government should motivate more young men to go in for education courses at the university / college level by granting them scholarship.

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