

Gender Responsive Language Use and Students' Participation in Learning in Tanzanian Secondary Schools

Mariana Manyus Mhewa

Faculty of Education, Mkwawa University College of Education (a Constituent College of the University of Dar es Salaam), P.O box 2513, Iringa, Tanzania

Abstract

The study investigated teachers' level of knowledge on gender responsive language and how they apply in teaching and learning process to enhance equitable participation in learning. The study was conducted in Monduli district and Mbulu town council from Tanzania mainland. The study adopted a mixed methods research approach following concurrent embedded design. Eight schools were selected from which 146 teachers and 220 students were sampled to participate in the study. Data were collected through questionnaire, interviews and classroom observations. Then, thematic content analysis technique was used for qualitative data while descriptive analysis was conducted for quantitative data. The findings show that secondary school teachers had limited knowledge on gender responsive language which constrained their ability to use gender responsive language in classroom. Teachers were observed to use gender neutral language and sometime they used phrases which perpetuate superiority and inferiority between boys and girls respectively. The study recommends for extra efforts to raise teachers' knowledge on gender responsive language so that none of the student would be denied learning chances because of the gender irresponsive language.

Keywords: gender sensitive language, gender inequality, students' participation in learning

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1. Introduction

Gender inequality in education and in the broader community has been a worldwide problem. As such, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) together with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) urge Tanzania and other United Nations (UN) member countries to strive towards achieving gender equality and equity in education. In respect of that, Tanzania like any other country developed the National Strategy for Gender Development (NSGD) of 2005 which identified a number of barriers constrain the achievement of gender equality in education, including; gender insensitive school management practices, gender insensitive learning environment, limited number of teachers trained on gender issues and gender biased curricula. Then, the 2014 Education and Training Policy targets to enhance equal access to education between boys and girls through gender responsive teaching and learning (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), 2014a; 42-43). In reality, the education and training policy was planned to extend efforts beyond achieving gender parity in education by enhancing implementation of gender responsive teaching to offer equitable participation in learning.

However, gender inequalities in education is rooted on the long established masculinity and femininity societal norms and attitudes which in most cases affect girls learning chances. In respect of that, school as a socialising agent has significant contribution towards persistent gender inequality or transformation since students continue to develop gender identity. Based on that, efforts have been made to ensure that all school aged children get access to primary and lower secondary education (UNESCO, 2015a). Unfortunately, being in school is not enough as far as achieving equality and equity is concerned. In other words, there might be gender parity in access to education yet, with persistence of gender difference in learning because of gender biased practices. Indeed, once the school environment are not favourable for both boys and girls then some students are likely to attend school but could not effectively engage in learning which in turn results to poor academic performance and/or dropout. The Forum for African Women Educationist (FAWE) (2006) once commented that what happens in schools and classrooms in particular, plays a significant role in determining how well girls and boys participate in education. This cement on the need to consider gender equality and equity beyond access by reviewing the school and classroom processes to enhance equity in student's participation in learning process.

One of the initiatives to redress the school and classroom practices towards equitable participation in learning was to advocate implementation of Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP). According to the MoEVT (2009) GRP encompasses the gender-sensitive curricula, teaching and learning materials, instructional and classroom management practices, examinations and school management. In this case, gender responsive pedagogy intends to transform curricula and classroom practices in favour of both boys and girls needs. Aikman and Unterhalter (2007) argue that success in getting girls into school may be sustained if schools could be transformed with positive changes in approaches to teaching and learning and in the curriculum. The curriculum is expected to avoid affiliating certain subjects and/or content to students' sex and portraying positive roles for both boys and girls. Also, teachers should alter teaching and learning approaches to ensure that all students regardless of their sex have

fair learning opportunities. Equitable participation could be made possible through the use of student-centred teaching approaches and equitable opportunities for contribution, teacher attention and the use of gender sensitive language and instructional materials.

Additionally, in 2009 the government of Tanzania through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) prepared a national education strategic plan which among other things had a commitment to review the curriculum to reflect gender responsive pedagogy. In response to that, the curricula and educational materials have been reviewed to remove gender stereotypes in language use and examples which reflect male domination and female inferiority to ensure that they reflect gender sensitiveness (MoEVT, 2014b). However, effective implementation of the gender responsive curriculum depends much on how it is understood by teachers. The FAWE (2005) acknowledged that, teachers' knowledge on gender responsive pedagogy is essential towards fair participation of girls and boys in the learning processes. In this case, lack of gender responsive knowledge among teachers could result to perpetuation of masculinity and femininity attitudes which may have adverse effects on student participation in learning. In other words, inadequate knowledge on gender responsive pedagogy among teachers has a significant influence on teachers' personal behaviours and of their students. Indeed, teachers who are not knowledgeable on gender sensitive practices and the benefits it has to students are likely to contribute in widening gender gap.

The gender biases in teaching and learning are portrayed through the kind of language teachers' use among others. In turn, gender biases and stereotypes lower student confidence and self-esteem leading to being a mere observer rather than active participant of the teaching and learning process. Students choose to be passive learners once notice that a teacher ignores or little is expected of them. Lorber (2001) put forward that the existing gender difference and inequalities can only be resolved once there is adjustment of individual attitude and knowledge, structure of the social institutions and behaviour. Unfortunately, gender sensitivity training in Tanzania is reported to have been a weak component of the pre-service teacher education curriculum (Thomas & Rugambwa, 2013). Hence, the Tanzanian Ministry of Education in collaboration with other education partners invested on raising teachers' knowledge in applying gender responsive pedagogy in schools and classrooms in particular through in-service trainings. However, since then little is known concerning teachers knowledge on gender responsive language and practices because the available studies focused on classroom interaction (Zilimu, 2014; Kahamba, Massawe & Kira, 2017), lesson planning (Kahamba, Massawe & Kira, 2017), classroom set-up (Zilimu, 2014) and instructional materials (FAWE, 2006). Therefore, it is high time to uncover what teachers knows about gender sensitive language and how it is practised in secondary school classrooms.

2. Literature Review

Examining the language use in teaching and learning process in gender perspective is significant for equitable students' participation in learning. The significance arises from the fact that, boys and girls are likely to be in the same classroom but are not equally learning because of the biased language teacher use. Indeed, because of gender biased language among other things some students are likely to be denied learning opportunities while being in the same class. As such, to avoid the setback of gender biased words and/or phrases teachers are urged upon using descriptive instead of judgmental language when applying gender responsive pedagogy (UNESCO, 2015b). Also, they need to bear in mind the effect of any communication patterns chosen before are used in classrooms. As the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) (2018) put forward that certain words or use of the masculine and feminine language can contribute to stereotypes and sometime make women's roles and needs invisible leading to produces and reproduces of sexist and biased thoughts, attitudes and behaviours. In this case, gender sensitivity should be considered in words and phrases used during instructions so that none of the student could feel his/her capabilities are undermined. In respect of that, FAWE (2009) made an alert that constant use of harsh, abusive and threatening language may instill fear in the pupils and hinder learning process. By contrast, encouraging and inclusive language enhance active participation with improved academic performance. Based on that, teachers are expected to embrace gender sensitive language to allow all students benefit from the provided education.

Gender responsive language use in the classroom is the kind of language which treat boys and girls as equal partners and provides a conducive learning environment for both. In other words, the classroom could be a conducive place for both boys and girls only if the language used and other classroom processes takes into consideration the fact that most girls are shy and once efforts are not taken they are likely to remain silent throughout the lesson. On the other hand, boys are talkative and can easily 'chip in' than girls even when are not selected by teachers to contribute (Howe, 1997). According to EIGE (2018) gender sensitive language shows how boys and girls would be represented while avoiding the use of; exclusionary terms, and stereotypes which are likely to produce and reproduce sexist thoughts and attitudes. On the other hand, gender-neutral language is not gender specific and does not make reference to women and men hence it ignore the fact that the two sex have different learning needs. FAWE (2005) argued that language which is not gender sensitive may reflect the traditional belief that girls cannot perform as well as boys and that boys should not allow to be outperformed by girls academically or in any other way. In turn, this does not only affect students learning process but also future societal gender roles,

relations and career development. Therefore, the use of gender sensitive language is emphasised to offer conducive environment for all student to confidently participate in learning.

According to Sadker and Sadker (1994) students receives praises as positive feedback, remediation for a student to correct or expand the answer, criticism for incorrect response and acceptance for acknowledgement. Unfortunately, teachers as part of the wider community holding strong patriarchy attitude has continued to offer feedback to express difference in expectation they have towards boys and girls students. Literature shows that the use gender biased language make the classroom environment unfavourable for some students leading to inequitable participation. A study by Arif, Hubeis, Ginting, Purnaningsih and Saleh (2014) on teacher communication behaviour in Indonesia revealed that the use of negative, positive and degrading words among teachers had psychological effect to students and in turn it affected academic performance. Negative and positive language use is one of the ways teachers use to express their feelings over certain behaviour. In turn, negative and degrading statements inflict inferiority and fear while positive words bring superiority and confidence among students. Similarly, Ulug, Ozden and Eryilmaz (2011) argue that teachers degrading comments towards student negatively affect student social and academic progress while supportive teachers play a significant role in students' engagement in the classroom. Therefore, offering comments based on sex is an obstacle towards achieving equitable participation as those who consistently receive negative and degrading feedback could think that little is expected of them hence chose to remain silent. In support of that, FAWE (2006) reported that the language which consider girls as weak and cannot compete with boys or they cannot take science related subjects affect much girls' classroom engagement and participation is learning process. Thus, GRP require teachers to avoid gender stereotyped words and statements that inflict superiority and inferiority among boys and girls respectively so that none of the student could be denied learning opportunity.

Indeed, gender biased language lower students confidence to participate in the lesson hence leading to unequal participation. Inturn, the difference in participation may result to gender difference in academic performance. For instance a study by Ngware, Ciera, Abuya, Oketch and Mutisya (2011) on the factors for gender gap in mathematics academic achievement among primary school students in Kenya reported that gender gap in performance is a function of many factors including gender inequalities in instructional practices. It was found that, boys received encouraging feedback than girls when answered correctly verbal question and higher proportion of girls received encouraging feedback when made a correct demonstration. However, both boys and girls were equally receiving negative feedback for incorrect answers and of teacher's intervention. It was further reported that boys were the only who received very discouraging feedback when they provide incorrect response. This indicates that teachers had high expectations to boys than girls. As such, based on the expectations teachers' had to boys and girls the classroom practices were made to perpetuate gender difference hence widening the gender gap in performance rather than bridging.

Difference in the kind of feedback students receives in classrooms based on sex were also reported by other studies. According to Sadker and Sadker (1994) boys are more likely to receive praise or remediation while girls are more likely to receive acknowledgement feedback from a teacher. In this regard, based on the expectations teachers normally have with boys they are more likely to get praises once offered correct response and given an opportunity to correct or expand the answer than their counterpart. On the other hand, girls are more likely to get acknowledgement for their response only because little is expected of them. Therefore, based on the kind of feedback boys receive it is clear that they might be more encouraged to consistently participate while girls made to be passive listeners knowing that little is expected of them. Hence, encouraging and discouraging language may result to inequitable participation in the lesson. On similar vein, Ameri (2011) a study on perception of education stakeholders on integrating the national gender policy into Ugandan secondary school curriculum revealed tension between the traditional patriarchy and modern relations theory. Ameri noted that, teachers in Uganda secondary schools were still using gender stereotyped language. In most cases, the language used was hostile for girls leading to maintenance of male controlling disposition. Indeed, traditional norms have significant influence on teachers' language use which in turn affects boys and girls engagement in the lesson. Hence, the need to challenge teachers' knowledge and attitudes on gender sensitive language and other instructional processes was inevitable for effective implementation in classrooms.

The in-service training on GRP was considered significant for raising knowledge among teachers towards effective implementation of gender sensitive teaching. Initially, the training was conducted by FAWE to teachers from nine secondary schools from Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda, three from each country (Wanjama & Njuguna, 2015). Other facilitators who conducted training to teachers include UNICEF, Save the children and the Ministry of Education. The GRP in-service training was meant to challenge traditional patriarchy attitudes and raising knowledge on classroom set-up, lesson planning, teaching methodology, language use, teaching and learning resources, and institutional management (FAWE, 2009). Hence, pave the way for effective implementation of gender responsive teaching to offer equitable opportunity for learning. Indeed, the in-service training conducted in pilot schools showed significant impact on teachers' competencies and practice. Wanjama and Njuguna (2015) put forward that as a result of in-service training, assessment of GRP best practices in six African countries

including Tanzania revealed a significant improvement in knowledge and attitude among teachers (Wanjama & Njuguna, 2015). Teachers were found to be more gender responsive after realising that for a long time they have been an obstacle for students learning through negative attitudes which led to gender irresponsible actions. However, full integration of GRP in classrooms was difficult because some teachers were not committed and continued to hold traditional values. In this regard, the in-service training conducted by diverse facilitators might have had significant contribution in addressing gender inequalities in classrooms.

However, the available studies shows persistent gender difference in classrooms portrayed through gender irresponsible classroom set-up, lesson plan, biased classroom interaction and instructional materials (Zilimu, 2014; Kahamba Massawe and Kira, 2017; FAWE, 2006). Zilimu (2014) noted persistence of gender difference in mathematics classrooms in northeastern Tanzania which was a result of poor classroom set-up and interaction. It was noted that, the classroom was organised in a traditional way, seat arranged in neat rows straight to the teacher which in turn adversely affected student interaction and teacher's movement around the class. Under such situation, teachers were observed to interact more with boys who are believed to much more confident and talkative than girls who are brought up to be shy. Similarly, Kahamba Massawe and Kira (2017) reported limited knowledge on GRP among academic staff at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) in Tanzania despite long time of sensitization efforts. Limited knowledge made most academic staff unaware of the practical methods and strategies for gender responsive practices in classrooms. Hence, they continued to behave irresponsible which in turn made boys and girls have differentiated learning opportunity. On the other hand, the analysis of textbooks in sub-Saharan Africa revealed the presence of different gender stereotypes portraying boys as powerful, aggressive, intelligent and leaders while girls as passive and submissive (FAWE, 2006). In this regard, little is known concerning teachers' knowledge and the use of gender responsive language for equitable participation in secondary school classroom.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted at Monduli distret and Mbulu Town council located in Arusha and Manyara region respectively. The districts were selected based on the GRP in-service training conducted by diverse facilitators namely; African Initiative and the Action Aid in collaboration with Maarifa ni Ufunguo. The GRP was replicated in secondary schools through a project on equal rights to quality education and the implemented the project on Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT) by the African initiatives and Action Aid together with Maarifa ni Ufunguo respectively. The study employed concurrent embedded design under mixed method research approach. It was concurrent embedded because qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed concurrently though with different weight. In particular, the qualitative data had higher weight than quantitative data hence the design stand to be QUAL + quant.

3.1. Participants

A total of eight secondary schools were sampled based on their participation in a gender related in-service training; four schools for each facilitator. Through convenient sampling technique a total of 146 teachers participated by filling a questionnaire targeting their level of knowledge on GRP. Then, out of 146 a total of 27 teachers were purposively selected for classroom observations and interviews to check how gender sensitive language was applied to offer equitable participation in teaching and learning process. Out of 146 teachers, 67.1% were males and 32.9% were females. The difference in percentage reflects the reality that most schools have many male teachers than females. It was further noted that most teachers were holding bachelor degrees (69.9%) while 26% had a diploma in education and only 4.1% had Master degree. Then, most teachers (80.1%) had 1-10 years of working experience. The diversities in sample composition give confidence that the study on gender sensitive language has been done in its completeness. With regard to students, a questionnaire was administered to 220 students to complement on what was observed based on their experiences.

3.2. Data collection

A number of tools were used to gather data for this study. A five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree were used to capture teachers' level of knowledge on gender responsive language and students classroom experiences. On the other hand, qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations and face to face interviews. The interviews were an opportunity for the observed teachers to clarify and comment on whatever the researcher had failed to make sense during observation. All the tools were developed by the researcher after thorough literature review.

Thereafter, a pilot study was carried out with teachers from three secondary schools in Mafinga town council, Iringa region. The Town council was selected because of the continuous GRP training conducted to teachers from Mungai secondary school which is among the three FAWE's centres of Excellency. Hence, Mungai secondary school and other two nearby schools were considered potential to determine the reliability of the instruments to be used for data collection. Information obtained from the pilot study helped to identify ambiguities in the questionnaires and modify them to reflect the objectives of the study. The reliability coefficient was found to be

0.51 and 0.71 for teachers and students scales respectively. However, after rephrasing ambiguous items the reliability for teachers' scale rose to 0.72. Therefore, the two scales had an acceptable value as it was above 0.6 which is often considered sufficiently reliable for the newly developed instrument (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

3.3. Data analysis

The study adopted thematic analysis technique to make sense on the qualitative data collected through classroom observations and interviews. The analysis process followed six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), namely; data familiarisation and organisation, creating initial codes, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes then findings presentation and interpretation. With regard to quantitative data, descriptive analysis was conducted through SPSS version 21 to determine frequency, percentages and participants' level of knowledge on gender responsive language.

Teachers' knowledge level on gender responsive language use was measured through 9 Likert scale items. Teachers were asked to rank the level of agreement for each item ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). In this regard, a scale had a minimum score of 9 and 45 scores as maximum. Then, the researcher had to find respondents total scores which was then categorised into three groups representing low, moderate and high level of knowledge. The score categories were determined by dividing the maximum score which was 45 by three (levels required). Thus, the three scale scores categories generated were ≤ 15 , 15.01-30 and >30 indicating high, moderate and low level of knowledge on the appropriate language for GRP respectively.

3.4. Ethical Statement

Before the collection of data, the researchers sought a research clearance from the responsible authorities starting with the University of Dar es Salaam through Heads of the participating schools. Then, the overall objective of the study was explained before questionnaires were distributed as well as before selecting participants for observations and interviews. Participants were clearly informed that their participation in the research was voluntary; and each could decide not to participate whenever he/she felt uncomfortable. However, they were informed that their participation will be appreciated for the sake of accomplishing the study. Finally, respondents were informed that the information collected would be used for the study purposes only and will be kept confidentially and anonymously so that none of them would suffer because of taking part in the study.

4. Findings

The findings are presented based on the research questions, namely; what is the level of teachers' knowledge on gender responsive language? and how gender responsive is the language teachers use during teaching and learning process?

4.1. Teachers' level of knowledge on gender responsive language

The findings showed that, most teachers are aware on the prerequisite for a gender responsive language use in classrooms to allow equitable participation in learning. It was found that, 60 (41.1%) teachers demonstrated high level of knowledge while 82 (56.2%) and 4 (2.7%) teachers had moderate and low level of knowledge respectively. Meaning that, 97.3% of teachers are knowledgeable on the gender responsive language hence could easily act accordingly in classrooms for equitable participation among boys and girls students.

The level of knowledge demonstrated by majority was reflected in the percentage of teachers who agreed or disagreed on the scale items concerning gender responsive language. Most teachers agreed that gender responsive language could enhance equitable participation and once it is not effectively embraced in teaching and learning process the classroom environment becomes unfavourable for some students leading to inequitable participation. It is further clear that, teachers are aware that the use of words portraying superiority and inferiority together with harsh and discouraging may inflict fear and lower student confidence to participate hence giving chance the other sex to dominate. In this regard, majority disagreed on the items showing gender biased language has nothing to do with students participation in the lesson. Table 1 summarises the percentage of teachers who agreed on the items showing benefits of gender responsive language and shortfall once it is not embraced.

Table1: Percentage of teachers agreed on the gender responsive language items (N=146)

S/N	Items	%
1	The use of positive language enhances participation among boys and girls during any instruction	82.9
2	Some gestures and body language can affect student participation in the lesson	61.7
3	There is no problem with the use of language which reflect superiority and inferiority among boys and girls respectively	21.3
4	The use of discouraging words leads to some students fear to participate during instructions	82.9
5	A teacher who treats boys and girls as equal partners provides conducive environment for learning to both	84.9
6	Teacher should make an effort to use the pronouns he and she so as not to exclude one sex.	74.6
7	Language which reflects male dominance and females inferiority impedes girls participation in learning	78.1
8	Language which assume certain behaviour is for a boy or a girl inflicts superiority and inferiority among students	76.8
9	Harsh words inflict fear hence affect participation of some students in the lesson	87.0

The findings in Table 1 shows that majority of teachers are knowledgeable on the gender responsive language as the percentage of those who agreed on the statements were above average. However, the percentage of those who disagreed could not be undermined as it represent many others who knows little about gender responsive language and did not participate in the study.

4.2. Gender responsiveness in the language used in teaching and learning

Analysis was made on the observational and interviews data to ascertain how gender responsive is the teachers' language and whether it promotes equitable students participation in the lesson or perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes and inequalities. The analysis was done through thematic analysis technique. In this case, the unit of analysis ranged from a single word to a sentence. Hereunder are the sub-themes that had emerged with their respective voices.

4.2.1. Gender neutrality and encouraging language

The findings show that, most teachers assumed that all boys and girls are students who need to learn the subject matter without making reference to their sex. As such, most of the time teachers used specific student names and not referring to as a boy or a girl. However, some encouraging words or phrases were used when one sex seemed to be passive. Mostly noted words were "it's your turn now..., hey ... (*mentioning sex*) wake up and try". During interview teachers confirmed that the use of encouraging words and/or phrase was very useful in enhancing equitable students participation in the lesson. One teacher had this to comment "*if boys are silent then I may say hey boys try do it do not worry even if you are not sure of your responses, then I stick to them until they raise up hands though not all but at least few of them tries*"

Gender neutral language was also noticed on the kind of feedback students received upon their responses. The findings show that, students received feedback based on their responses and not sex. Indeed, both boys and girls got praise once has provided correct response while encouraging words like good try, keep it up was followed any incorrect answer. In respect to that, all students had an opportunity to receive any feedback based on his/her response. This shows that, teachers are aware that all students regardless of their sex deserve appreciations and acknowledgement whenever tries to contribute during the classroom discussion.

4.2.2. Perpetuation of superiority and inferiority complex

Despite most teachers to have used gender neutral language, yet there were some words and/or phrases which perpetuated gender stereotypes and superiority. The observation data revealed that, in some cases teachers used language to denote boys are superior to girls. Also, some comments made students to believe that some professions/occupations are meant for either boys or girls only. For instance, an English teacher from school 'A' when teaching the rules to change direct speech into indirect speech to Form Two students made a comment showing that only girls/women can work as typist. This was noted when a student used pronoun "he" referring to the typist and a teacher said *No, the typist is a woman so use 'she' and not 'he'*

This implies that, a teacher assumed some professions and/or occupations are gender specific. As such, he made students to believe that only girls/women are expected to be typists. This kind of statements may affect student career aspirations and choice as they are likely to avoid joining certain profession thinking that it is meant for a certain sex. During interview, a particular teacher had this to say when asked why he asked a student to use 'she' instead of 'he' referring to the typist "we often believe that only women works as typist...for instance at our school for a long time we never had a men working as typist that's why I asked him to correct"

The language portraying superiority and inferiority was also noticed during English lesson at school 'H' when a teacher noticed boys were passive participants of the lesson. It was observed when the teacher asked three students to volunteer to read and analyse a poem in front of the class. The teacher was surprised to find that only girls volunteered. Hence, a teacher used a phrase which denotes that boys are superior to girls and should not allow

being outperformed. A specific teacher said, I think boys are very strong cannot be defeated, cannot fear...ooh! Yes, according to our traditions the boys are hunters and are ready to face anything.

This shows that the teacher encouraged boys participation in the expense of girls. Also, it reflects high expectations a teacher had to boys compared to girls. In reality, the expectation teacher had to boys is a reflection of pastoral norms and traditions. In pastoral societies a boy is considered more superior and confident than girls and so, the teacher expected such confidence to be reflected in classrooms. During interview a particular teacher had this to comment “among the Maasai it is believed that the brave and serious boy is the one who kills the lion, that’s why I referred boys to hunters to mean they can even face dangerous animal. So they have to be with confidence and active participant in the lesson”. The teacher went further to show that, there are other statements that he normally uses to encourage boys participation in the lesson. He said; Aaaa! Sometimes I use spiritual words quoting even from Genesis like the man was the first one to be created, so a man should not fear anything ...by doing so some boys can say ooh! So we are able.

In support of the foregone scenario, during interviews other teachers confirmed that they normally employ diverse measures to empower boys once girls were observed to be more active. In reality, there is no problem with teachers encouraging either of the sex to become active member of the lesson, the problem arises when teachers encourage one sex by undermining the other. Indeed, most of the initiatives mentioned undermined girls capabilities in favour of boys. Hereunder are some quotes showing how boys were encouraged in the expense of girls;

I do ask boys, why girls are doing better than you? You have to work hard so that you outperform them (Mathematics teacher, School B).

Eeh! How comes you allow girls to outperform you? You know men should always be on top and not girls (Physics teacher, School C).

Sometime I choose boys to answer questions even when they did not raise their hands and once they fail I do use some jokes like “aah! Look at him... a man wants somebody to help...” (English teacher, School E).

For complementarily purposes, a questionnaire with 5 items on gender responsive language use was administered to the selected students for them to rank their level of agreement based on experiences. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students responses on teachers’ gender responsive language use

Statements	Responses by Schools (%)								Average
	D	C	F	E	G	A	B	H	
1. Teachers provide positive or negative comments based on the response and not being a boy or a girl	66	6.7	73.3	46.7	25	65	55	50	50.9
2. Teachers use words/phrase showing boys are superior to girls when teaching	10	3.3	20	00	15	15	00	30	10.9
3. Most positive comments are given to boys than girls	6	3.3	23.3	10	05	25	00	30	11.8
4. Boys do receive more negative comments than girls	14	13.3	20	6.7	25	30	05	15	15.5
5. Most teachers use language which shows boys and girls are prepared to take different roles in the society	38	14	43	34	30	35	25	25	30.5

The findings in Table 2 shows that, majority of the students (>50%) from four schools (A, B, D and F) agreed that teachers provide positive or negative comments based on the responses and not being a boy or a girl while only few (<50%) from the other four schools agreed on the same. This indicates that, teachers from school C, E, G and H do not comment on student responses based on entirely nature of response but also student sex. Additionally, only few students (<50%) from all schools agreed with the statements number 4 and 5 which presuppose that teachers use language showing superiority and inferiority among boys and girls students respectively when teaching. Student’s denial of the use of language portraying superiority and inferiority for boys and girls respectively despite being observed by the researcher within short time shows that they have limited knowledge on gender responsive language. Hence, it is not easy for them to notice whenever has been used.

The findings indicate that, students had varied experiences from one school to another. Based on student experiences, it was evident that some teachers were using language which shows equity among boys and girls while others were in favour of one sex. However, majority of students denied the use of language which portrays superiority and inferiority among teachers. This contradicts with the observational data as the researcher noticed phrases which carried superiority and inferiority between boys and girls students respectively. Hence, it can be

argued that, most students do not understand the kind of language which perpetuates superiority and inferiority complex hence teachers' language of such went unnoticed.

It was further found that, only few students ($\leq 30\%$) from all schools agreed that boys receive more negative and positive comments than girls. This is in line to the observational data where comments were in respect to the response not individual sex. Moreover, only few students ($< 50\%$) from the sampled schools agreed that teachers use language showing boys and girls are prepared to take different roles. This presupposes that, students are prepared to take any profession based on interest and performance regardless of sex. However, the little number of students affirming that teachers use language to denote boys and girls cannot go for similar profession cannot be ignored as the observation data showed such kind of statements are made though rarely.

Generally, most students (50.9%) agreed that teachers provided comments based on the nature of response and not individual student sex. Moreover, only few students from the participating schools confirmed existence of boys' superiority, girls' inferiority and inequality in terms of comments provided. In respect of that, student responses signify that most teachers were using gender neutral language during teaching and learning process which could offer equitable opportunity for participation in the lesson. However, gender neutral language may sometime limit participation of one sex, especially girls because of shyness and thinking that they are not part of whatever is directed to the whole class.

5. Discussion

The study findings show that, secondary school teachers are knowledgeable on gender responsive language. However, their knowledge seems to be limited as majority demonstrated moderate level of knowledge. Having moderate level of knowledge implies that, some of the issues concerning gender responsive language are not understood by majority. Hence, with the partial or insufficient knowledge teachers are likely to perpetuate stereotypes and biases through gender irresponsible language. In turn, stereotypes and biases may result to unequal participation in classroom discussion as some students feels ignored and/or little is expected from them. Insufficient knowledge on gender responsive teaching was also reported by Kahamba Massawe and Kira (2017) among academic staff at the University of Agriculture (SUA) in Tanzania. Kahamba et al. (2017) reported partial knowledge among academic staff despite long time of GRP sensitization. It was found that, academics at SUA were not aware of the appropriate teaching methodologies for a gender sensitive teaching. Likewise, Nabbuye (2018) found that, many teachers in Uganda do not have sufficient knowledge of gender sensitivity as an approach for equitable students' participation in learning. Having insufficient knowledge may inhibit teachers' ability to embrace gender sensitive language in teaching and learning process. Consequently, teachers persistent of use of gender stereotyped and biased language denies equitable participation in learning. Hence, the school environment becomes uncondusive for some students as it limits their learning chances and dropout becomes the only option. Also, teachers with limited knowledge on gender responsive teaching are more likely to ignore sex specific learning needs hence failing to enhance equitable participation in the lesson. Chikunda (2013) reported that, most of science teachers in Zimbabwe were not aware of the gender responsive classroom practices hence assumed that inducing gender issues into classroom is all about giving favour to one sex. Indeed, teachers with insufficient knowledge on gender responsive language can never be conscious with the choice of words. In other words, having insufficient knowledge may result to the use of language which favour or ignore one sex. Hence, students who are observers of the classroom process are likely to be ignored and considered as lazy.

The insufficient knowledge demonstrated by most teachers may be attributed to a number of factors; including, inadequacy of gender related content in teacher education curriculum and little attention on gender responsive language during in-service training. Inadequacy of the gender related content in teacher education was also noticed by Wanjama and Njuguna (2015) who found that only four African countries have managed to implement GRP in the pre-service teacher education. This has resulted into limited knowledge on gender issues and gender responsive language among most teachers as they were not exposed to it during their teacher education. Similarly, Nabbuye (2018) reported lack of training as one among many other factors resulted into many teachers having limited knowledge on gender sensitivity in Uganda. Therefore, the findings presuppose that the teacher education curriculum and in-service training should be more informative on how teachers can use gender responsive language to enhance equitable participation.

The level of knowledge demonstrated by majority was reflected in the actual teaching and learning process through the use of gender neutral language with some sort of biases. Gender neutral language is the one which does not make reference to any sex. In other words, all learners regardless of their sex were considered as students. The implication of using gender neutral language is that, some students are more likely to remain silent thinking that they are not part of whatever is directed to the whole class. Perhaps, girls could be the most affected since they are brought up to be shy while boys being talkative and aggressive. Indeed, the superiority and inferiority complex between men and woman among pastoral societies is rooted on the prestige attached to a boy and a girl child. Mlekwa (1996) put forward that in pastoral societies girls are considered less capable and have nothing to contribute on the betterment of the family compared to their counterpart boys. As such, since teachers are also part

of the wider community they fail to be considerate on the fact that boys and girls learn differently. In reality, teachers need to make extra efforts to enhance girls' participation and one teachers are not knowledgeable on possible measures including the use of gender responsive language girls are more likely to remain as observers. This is in line to Lorber (2007) argument that the social construction of gender inequality continues to manifest in schools if teachers are not knowledgeable enough to challenge it. In this regard, limited knowledge demonstrated by majority resulted to the use of language which carries societal gender biases and stereotypes.

It was further found that, despite teachers having limited knowledge yet they provided feedback to student based on response and not sex. In other words, both boys and girls received similar comments and feedback whenever they provided incorrect and/or correct answer. This is in line with what was found in Kenya by Ngware, Ciera, Abuya, Oketch and Mutisya (2011) that in primary schools both boys and girls were equally receiving negative feedback for incorrect answers and of teacher's intervention. Provision of feedback based on response create a sense of belongingness and each student feel as part of the class which in turn motivates all students regardless of their sex to continuously participate in classroom discussion. Indeed, once feedback is not gender biased it enhance equitable participation in learning.

Different to the current study, it is believed that most teachers tend to offer differentiated feedback to boys and girls responses based on the expectations they have to each. Meaning that, the higher the expectations the teacher has to certain sex the higher the chance for being considered as superior to others. This was confirmed by Ngware, Ciera, Abuya, Oketch and Mutisya (2011) who reported that, primary school mathematics teachers in Kenya had high expectations to boys which resulted into boys receiving very discouraging feedbacks when they provided incorrect response. Also, in America Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that girls received less feedback, more interruptions and fewer non-verbal indicators of support such as head nodding compared to boys during classroom practices. In other words, teachers were much more concerned with boys' participation in learning than girls. In turn, girls tend to lower self-esteem and confidence to participate in the lesson as they notice that teachers are less concerned with their participation and little is even expected of them. In support of that, Ameri (2011) had found in Uganda that secondary school teachers were still using gender stereotyped language which was hostile for girls leading to maintenance of male controlling disposition. Also, thinking that boys are superior to girls made teachers to use different words and/or phrases to encourage boys' participation in the lesson than girls. Based on that, biased language might have triggered girls' passiveness hence giving chance for boys to get more chances for participation in the lesson.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that secondary school teachers have insufficient knowledge on the prerequisite requirement for a gender responsive language and the benefits it has on students' participation once it is effectively embraced in teaching and learning process. The insufficient level of knowledge on gender responsive language can partly be attributed to the inadequacy of gender sensitive coverage at both pre- and in-service training. As such, majority of teachers continued to use gender neutral language with some words and/or phrases showing superiority and inferiority between boys and girls respectively. In turn, gender insensitive language resulted to perpetuation of stereotypes and biases which might have contributed to unequal participation in classrooms. The study recommends that, the ministry of education and vocational training to continue investing on gender related training to teachers, specifically on how gender sensitive language can be embraced in teaching and learning process. Also, school managers are encouraged to strengthen the school-based in-service training covering gender responsive teaching.

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