

Sex Roles in English Language Textbooks in Nigerian Schools

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ABSTRACT

Educational materials, school organisation, school contents and structures among other elements of education process and practices are said to play important role in socialising learners into different sex roles. This position has been supported by some studies especially those that examined gender representations in learning materials within essentialist theory of gender. In this study, I used content analysis to uncover how female and male roles are represented in selected English Language textbooks for Junior Secondary School students in Nigeria. Findings indicate that while women are over-represented in roles confined to the home domain – childbearing, caring, and home chores, males are over-represented in roles in public sphere in highly professional skills. These findings suggest perpetuation of sex stereotypes and traditional roles that reflect neither the current lived experiences of males and females in society nor support the objectives of the national gender policy that are geared towards achieving gender equality for national development.

Keywords: sex roles, educational materials, representation, Nigeria, in/equality

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Some important elements of the educational process and practice have been identified in the literature. Amongst them are educational materials, school organisation, school contents and structures, to mention four. These elements play their parts in the process of socialising individual learners into different sex roles. Some studies, (operating with the essentialist theory of gender) have shown that educational materials through their representations contribute to this process. Thus, there has been a call to reform gender-biased learning materials that perpetuate traditional stereotypes sex roles. This is to ensure that these learning materials play their part in the achievement of gender equality and equity goals. As there appears to be dearth of studies in this area in West Africa (Nigeria), to the best of my knowledge, this study examines selected English Language textbooks used for Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria in order to identify (i) the representation of males and females roles in the home domain and outside home domains in order to determine whether it is gender-sensitive or gender-biased); and (ii) assess whether this representation is in congruence with the achievement of gender equality and equity in and through education that the policy aims to achieve.

The study is significant as the Federal Government of Nigeria's main machinery for implementing its National Gender Policy, i.e., the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is seeking for practical ways of integrating gender sensitivity (not as 'add on' activities) into the education sector. This paper is divided into five sections – background, data, method, analysis, findings and discussion, and conclusion.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development with the mandate of the Federal Government of Nigeria, has identified the education sector as one of the areas that

should incorporate gender issues not as an ‘add-on’ but as an integral part of the system because of the significant place education process plays in the formation of gender relations. Thus, the Ministry has mandated the National Education Research and Development Council and the Ministry of Education to reform primary and secondary schools curricula in line with gender equality and equity goals.

This position is in line not only with best practices in other nations such as Norway, Sweden and Finland (to mention three) but with what scholars in the area have recommended in their works. For example, Stromquist, Lee & Brock-Utne (1998) noted that “educational institutions are powerful ideological institution that transmit dominant values, and function as mechanisms of social control...schools transmit values that not only reproducesocial class but also main gender structures...the formal school system contributes to the reproduction of gender inequalities through such mechanisms as selective access to schooling, the content of what is being taught and what is not and how it is taught and the kinds of knowledge men and women (and boys and girls) get” (p. 83).

Stromquist, *et al.* (1998) claimed that the formal curriculum covers the knowledge and skills school officially seeks to transmit via their program of studies, courses and textbooks. To them, not many studies have explored the effects textbooks have on learners; consequently they call for longitudinal research tracing influences over time. They concluded that observers and educators acknowledge that textbooks and curricular content leave lasting influences in our memories, as phrases and stories heard, read and written about men and women condition our minds (pp, 83-97).

Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind (1991) identified some objectives, amongst them is to produce gender-balanced curriculum/textbooks (which required collaborated effort and co-operation) that alter the contents of the present gender-biased curriculum/textbooks so that students/learners (males and females) can see each other as sources of help and support, share their learning experiences, and learn to be responsible for one another's learning. In this paper, we shall focus on the educational materials that are used in learning environments.

The place of textbooks in socializing learners cannot be overemphasized, especially as textbooks are often viewed by learners as authoritative, and therefore have the potential to influence a significantly large and impressionable audience (Foshay, 1990; Robson, 2001; Westbury, 1990). In addition, Sileo & Prater (1998) noted that it serves as a "means to facilitate the integration of content about ethnically, racially and culturally diverse populations (p, 5). Similarly, Mukundan & Nimehchisalem (2008) noted that the textbook young people focus on repeatedly during the classroom practice, follow-up assignments or projects, and preparation for examination exert influence on the learner in terms of the quality of education they receive, their understanding of social equality and national unity. Thus, the role that textbooks play in educating learners has attracted the attention of many researchers and there are studies that have highlighted grey areas that are not gender sensitive in the education process.

For example, Tietz (2007) examined the representation of gender in introductory accounting textbooks and found that women and men are represented very differently throughout the textbooks, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes and gender role stratification. In their poster presentation on gender representation in Japanese EFL Textbooks, Sano, Iida & Hardy (2001) found that although gender-imbalanced language has been substantially eliminated from EFL textbooks since 1990 in terms of the number of chapter topics, more males are referred to or engaged in actions, and reading through the texts reveals prominence in the

number of features focusing on male characters. Messner (2007) reported that sports media are highly gendered sites: they are often male-dominated and tend to represent stereotypical femininity and masculinity. Tominari (2009) provides a detailed systematic linguistic analysis of sports media to explore the construction of masculinity and sports heroism.

In their study of gender representation in Hong Kong English textbooks, Lee & Collins (2008) found that women are still commonly associated with housework and the home and men with paid work outside; women are weak, and men are strong; women are more passive, and men are more active; women are less frequently mentioned than males in both the written and visual modes. Stockdale (2006) examined gender representation in an EFL textbook and found that males are still dominant in the amount of talk; men's names are more than females' and titled names, full names, and colloquial terms of address exhibited a frequency bias toward males. Mukundan & Nimehchisalem (2008) in their study of gender representation in Malaysian secondary school English Language textbooks found and reported that there is an absolute gender bias which discriminates against women although it also found that males were discriminated against in their representation as those with most of the negative traits. Mustedanagic (2010) looked at textbooks used in Swedish schools in order to discover the extent to which values of equality are upheld in textbooks and how males and females are represented in non-stereotyped ways and as equals. It was found that the textbooks from the 1980s that still contain very stereotypical views on gender roles are still in use in some schools and that occupations held by women and men in the texts, and the distribution of males and females in the illustrations show that there is a tendency to promote males and to diminish females.

Ansary & Babii (2003) score the point that the stereotypical role of women as mothers and homemakers is still being perpetuated in many current language textbooks where substantial sections of their societies presented in those textbooks are underrepresented or ignored. Similarly, Otlowski (2003) investigated current English Language textbook used throughout (Expressway A) for the way gender-bias was depicted and found that the text still depicts women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society. While some texts represent the dominant culture in their societies others misrepresented what holds in their societies maybe for certain reasons.

Thus many studies (Cerezal, 1994; Cincotta, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Hingley, 1983; Myers 1992; Peterson & Lach, 1990; Schmitz, 1975; U'ren, 1971) acknowledge that educational materials are key mechanism of socialization that instils values and attitudes in young people, including differentiated gender roles Lee (2011). In fact, the kind of gender unfairness in texts does not only present inequality in the representation of members of sex groups but put a particular sex group on the other side of the bright light, especially the women. Thus the overwhelmingly poor representation of female occupational roles that Sunderland (2000) reported a decade ago is still being reported in recent works (see Lee, 2011) barring works from Nigeria, a gap that this study seeks to fill.

4.0 DATA

I selected seven English Language textbooks for Junior Secondary School level. This level is the terminal point for Nigeria's Universal Basic Education Scheme (UBE). Some of the English Language textbooks are said to have been developed in consonance with the UBE scheme thus they are tagged (UBE Edition) e.g., *Junior English Project for Secondary Schools: Students' Books 1, 2, and 3*. The other English Language textbooks selected are

Intensive English for Junior Secondary Schools, New Practical English for Junior Secondary School.

Pictures of males and females used for illustration were identified together with names of characters in public and private domains. These helped to identify their roles in the various environments in the textbooks.

5.0 ANALYSIS

I used content analysis to identify the sex roles depicted in pictures and passages in the textbooks. I analysed the data using quantitative method which appears to be common in this kind of research. For example, Stockdale (2006) used mechanical method (numbering or counting the number of images and reading their perception or representation and their impact values). Others have used different methods, for example, Glasche (2000) introduced the use of Fairclough's (1989) technique called critical image analysis which addresses three aspects of images - description, interpretation and explanation which according to Dominguez (2003) is a useful tool to analyze positioning in EFL/ESL books.

For this study, I used the mechanical approach because of its simplicity and verifiable qualities. In addition, it is thought that stakeholders in the education sector who might not be familiar with rigorous analysis (e.g., critical image analysis) might find it easier to read and digest the outcome of this study. Thus, female and male roles (stereotypes) were manually counted from pictures of males and females and their roles were grouped into two - those confined to the home and those outside the home. In other words, our content analysis indicates the sex group that is underrepresented or overrepresented in certain roles. The foci of content analysis are to highlight gender bias or fairness in the representation of females and males.

Representation of Gender roles in the Textbooks

Table 1: Gender roles in Practical English 1

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	2	11	13
%	15%	85%	100%
Outside Home	19	4	23
%	79%	21%	100%

In *Practical English I*, far more females (n = 11) are found in home domain roles than males (n = 2) which is 18:100 (male to female) (15% to 85%); while the reverse is the case in roles outside home domain where male are far more represented (n = 19) than females (n = 4) which is 27:100 (21% to 79%) female to male. (Fig. 1 illustrates the results.)

Fig 1: Gender roles in *Practical English Book 1*

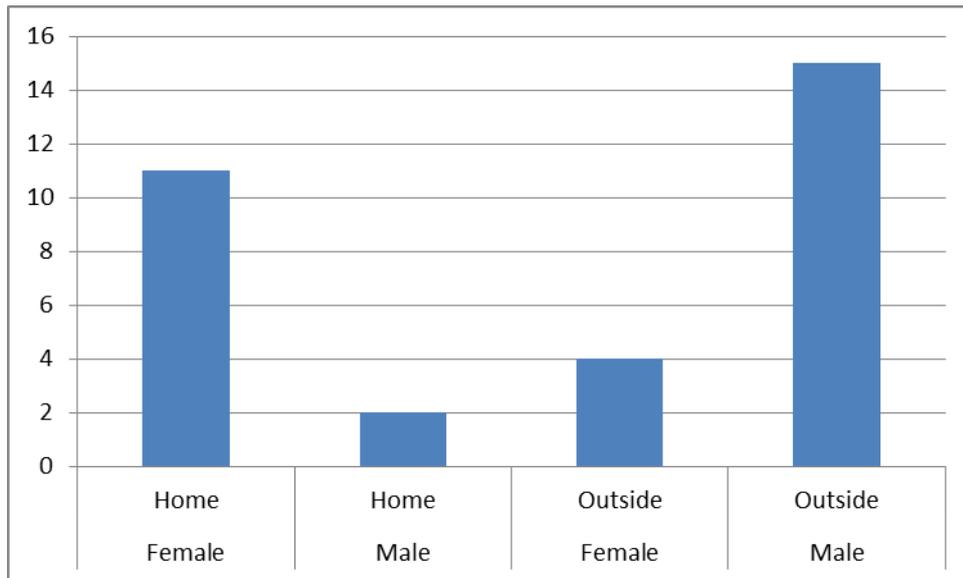


Table 2: Gender roles in *Practical English 3*

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	2	4	8
%	33%	67%	100%
Outside home	18	2	20
%	85%	15%	100%

In *Practical English 3*, female representation (n = 4) in home domain doubles that of male (n = 2) which 100: 49 (67% to 33%); just as far more male (n = 18) are represented in domain outside the home than female (n = 2) which is 100:18 (85% to 15%). Fig. 2 illustrates the pattern that I found.

Fig 2: Gender roles in *Practical English Book 3*

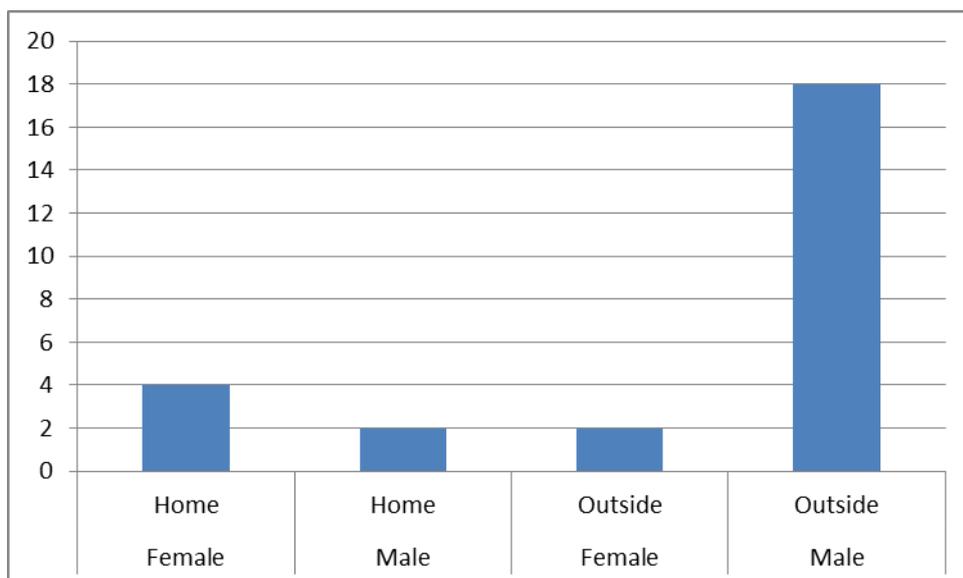


Table 3: Gender roles in Intensive English 1

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	2	8	10
%	20%	80%	100%
Outside home	30	7	37
%	81%	19%	100%

Intensive English Book 1 reveals far less female (n = 7) in domains outside the home than male (n = 30) which 23:100 (19% to 81%); but more female (n = 8) are depicted in the home domain than male (n = 2) which is 100:25 (80% to 20%). Fig 3 illustrates these findings.

Fig 3: Gender roles in *Intensive English Book 1*

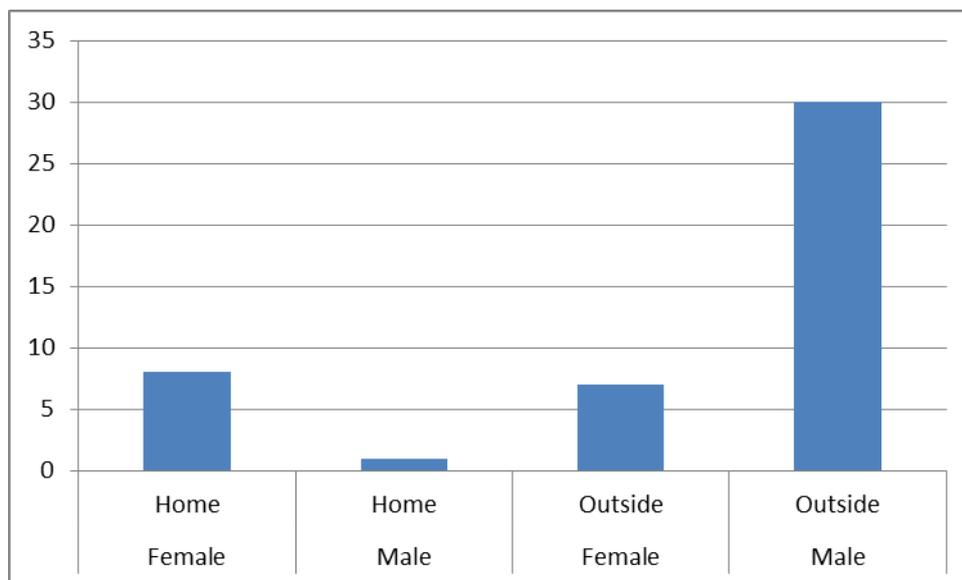


Table 4: Gender roles in Intensive Book 2

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	2	3	5
%	40%	60%	100%
Outside home	25	7	32
%	78%	22%	100%

In *Intensive Book 2*, I found that male (n = 2) are less represented than female (n = 3) which is 67:100 (40% to 60%) in home domain. This is not the pattern outside the home more where male are far more represented (n = 25) than female (n = 7) which is 100:28 (78% to 22%). (See Fig 4 for the pattern).

Fig 4: Gender roles in *Intensive English Book 2*

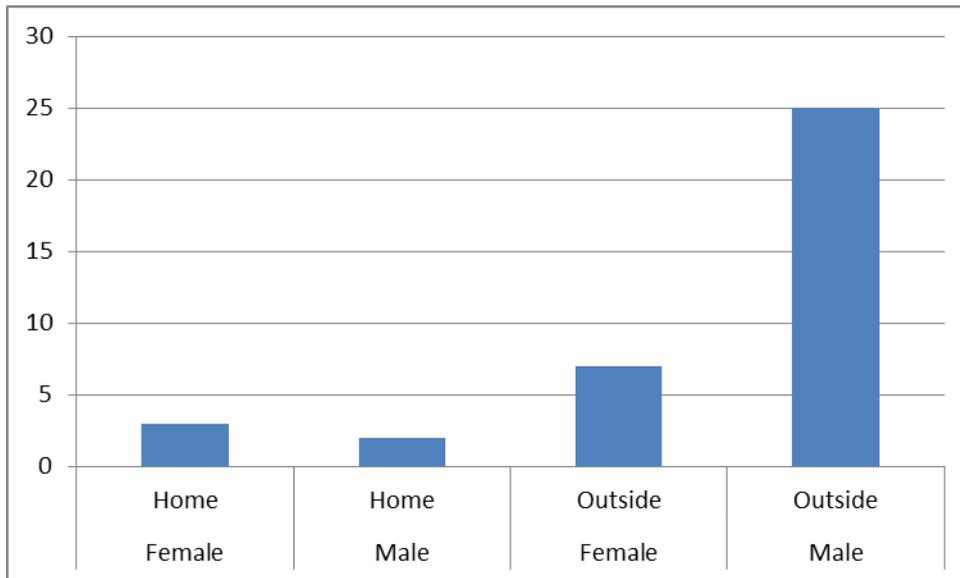


Table 5: Gender roles in English Project Book 1

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	2	10	12
%	17%	83%	100%
Outside home	18	5	13
%	78%	22%	100%

Far more female (n = 10) are represented in the home domain than male (n = 2) which is 100:20 (83% to 17%); the reverse is the case in domain outside the home in where less female (n = 5) are represented than male (n = 18) which is 28:100 (22% to 78%) in *English Project Book 1*. (Fig 5 illustrates the pattern).

Fig 5: Gender roles in *English Project Book 1*

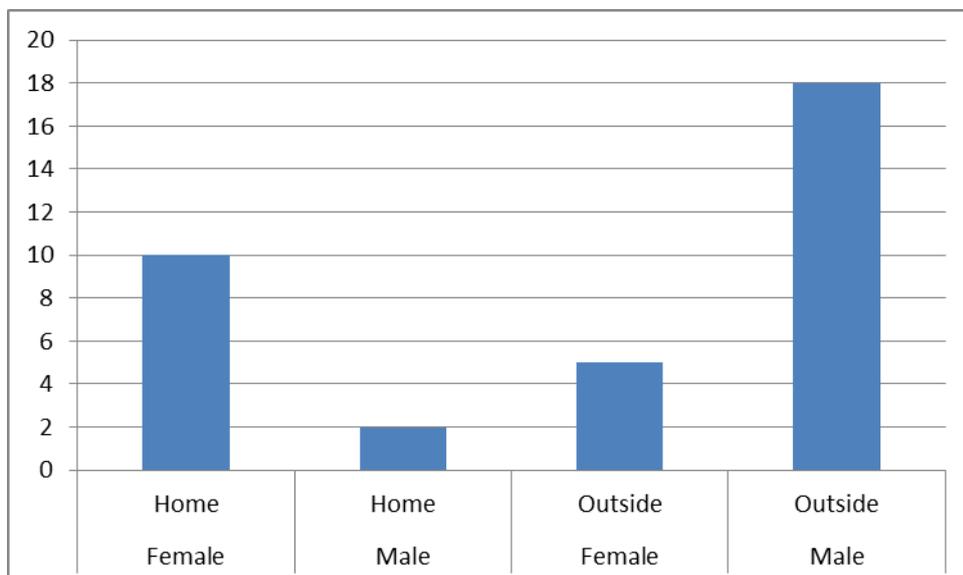


Table 6: Gender roles in English Project Book II

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	3	3	6
%	50%	50%	100%
Outside home	30	16	46
%	65%	35%	100%

According to my analysis, the pattern in English Project Book II slightly differs from the general pattern we found in other textbooks as both males (n = 3) and females (n = 3) have equal roles in home domain. However, males (n = 30) have higher representation in outside home domain roles than females (n = 16) which is 100:53 (65% to 35%). I noted that females' roles outside home domain in this textbook are far higher than in any other textbook. (See Fig 6 for the pattern)

Fig 6: Gender roles in English Project Book 2

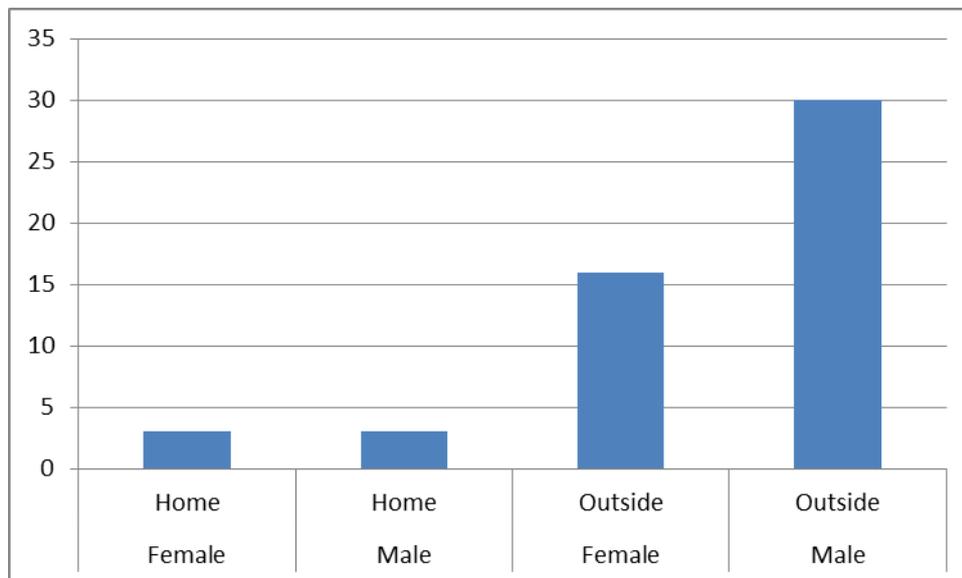
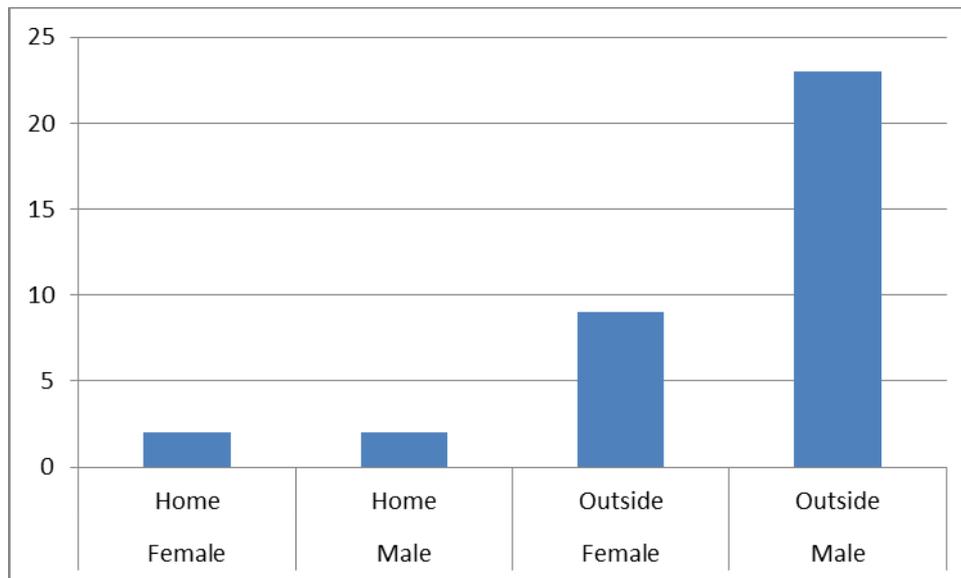


Table 7: Gender roles in English Project Book III

	Male	Female	Total
Home domain	3	3	6
%	50%	50%	100%
Outside home	24	8	32
%	75%	25%	100%

In English Project Book III, I found that both female and male are equally represented (n = 3) in the home domain although that pattern is not repeated in domain outside the home as far less female (n = 8) are represented there than male (n = 24) which is 53:100 (25% to 75%). (See Fig 7).

Fig 7: Gender roles in *English Book Project Book III*

6.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In terms of roles, female are consistently assigned more home-based roles than male in all the textbooks whereas males have far more roles outside the home than women in all the textbooks. Thus there is over-representation of males outside the home in economically well-paid work whereas women's roles are largely associated with housework which suggests perpetration of women as mothers and homemakers. This representation is gender-biased especially against women in terms of economically viable roles. It is also not gender-sensitive as the representation tend to portray women as the sex group whose contributions is limited to the invisible domain, that is, home domain. In other words, the textbooks tend to enforce stereotypes of gender roles that are typical of patriarchal society where men dominate the public life and women the private life.

These findings suggest that the gender representations that the textbooks portray tend to reflect a society (Nigerian society) that renders female invisible in public life thereby giving the impression that women have little or nothing to contribute towards national development. This position raises a number of questions. A pertinent question is whether these gender representations reflect the happenings in the present-day Nigeria.

Our observation is that there is a wide gap between the representations of the textbooks and the happenings (lived experiences) in the society Nigeria as there are many women currently serving as ministers, legislators, deputy-governors, commissioners at both federal and state levels of government. Government and non-governmental institutions have active women who are key players just as there are men in those sectors. What might be difficult to dispute is the gap in the ratio of women and men in the public life.

However, it might be the case that the textbooks depict traditional gender ideology that presents the domination of male in public life and female in private life for certain reasons. It must be noted that this representation is gender-wise asymmetrical and inimical to the building of a progressive society that is supposed to be characterised by gender equity and

equality. Gender-biased textbooks will breed inequality and contribute towards the disempowerment of female and male thereby hindering their contributions towards national development.

An assessment of this representation in the light of Nigeria's Gender Policy and the goals of the Implementation plan of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs shows that the representation is inimical to the goals and will hamper the achievement of gender equality and equity in and through education. In other words, if gender equality and equity is to be achieved in and through education, one of the tasks to be carried out by stakeholders is to reform educational materials that are gender insensitive and render gender sensitive.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the textbooks analysed are gender-biased in terms of gender roles, especially against female in the public life and against male in the private life. Therefore, I suggest that learning materials that are gender-blind at all the levels of education in Nigeria might be long overdue for reform in order to reflect not just the happenings in the contemporary Nigerian society but also gender fairness in all its ramifications/representations together with the drive towards achieving gender equality and equity in the country. Rendering these learning materials would help provide learners with quality education (equal education) that will prepare both male and female learners for useful participation in achieving gender equality and national development. To do this, some of the following suggestions might be necessary: (i) the provision of guidelines for the elimination of all gender discrimination for authors and publishers of learning materials; (ii) government agencies and ministry of education at the national and state levels might need to formulate policies that will ensure gender-fairness at all the levels of education processes and practices. It is also suggested that teacher-training programmes and their trainers might need to incorporate gender issues into their curriculum.

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