

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN THREE CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY BARBARA KIMENYE

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Abstract: The study sought to critically analyze the representation of gender in three selected children books by Barbara Kimenye; Moses in a Mess, Moses on the move and Moses and the Raffle. Children's books act as socialization agents. They transmit social customs, and replicate the morals of a community. However, the representation of gender in numerous books of children is imbalanced. This is most likely to negatively affect children's character and perception of character that is acceptable for their gender in the community. Objective of this study examined how female and male characters have been represented in children's books. The study analyzed children's books for ages 10 and 16. The study sought to create awareness to parents and teachers on the importance of identifying books that are not gender biased and that are not gender imbalanced. This research study is thus a useful material for reference to other researchers and readers. The study was guided by Sandra Bem's Gender Schema theory: The concept of Gender-Typed Knowledge. The study was conducted through descriptive research design. The three children's books were selected from the target population using purposive sampling technique. The researcher used contextual analysis as a method of qualitative analysis in order to analyze the selected sample. The study provided enough and viable information on improving the quality of children's books which have a positive impact in children's holistic development.

Keywords: Gender, Stereotypes, Descriptors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study will be guided by Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981). It holds that young ones acquire and assimilate knowledge gradually depending on gender types understanding. This theory believes that young ones develop cognitive schemata of gender which they get from the rules of their society. The theory holds that young ones learn roles of female and male from the Society they grow in. Children, according to the theory, rectify their conduct to conform to the rules set by their culture since they are still very young. Bem suggested that the cognitive development of a child cumulated with influences of the environment heavily affects the way a child thinks (schema) which determines female and male characteristics. When children interact with the people around them, they observe how male and female genders behave. These interactions cognitively influence them on how males and females behave and they implement this behavior. They classify themselves as either male or female and form behavior along these categories. The sex roles that the young ones implement are formed from these categories.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used contextual design to analyze the representation of female and male characters in three books of children by Barbara Kimenye.

FINDINGS

The research findings indicate there was unequal and imbalanced representation of gender in the books analyzed. Male characters were far more than female characters.

GENDER REPRESENTATION

Every book a child reads influences either positively or negatively the kind of thought a child gets. Books also have a huge inspiration on the child's views and outlook. The information and illustrations represented in these books may affirm good and bad news about individuals, gender, job, and future aspirations (Aliu, 2013). Children's literature acts as a mirror, reflecting the happenings of a particular society. For this reason, writers of children's books ought to be careful on the kind of message they convey. In this study, the researcher showed how boys' and girls' characters in books of children are represented.

A study by McCabe found that male individuals are the main characters and female characters are very few. These differences in gender representation in books of children point to the erasing of girls and women, indicating to children that those females are of little significance compared to the male counterparts. The disparity in numbers of men and boys as protagonists may make children to accept the latency of girls and women.

Hamilton et al, (2006) conducted a study on children's illustration books issued in the late 90's. It was established that the male characters featured two times as female characters. They pointed out that the underrepresentation of female characters would lead to a negative impact to children's growth and this will restrict their career ambitions, mold their assertiveness towards the future as mothers and fathers and also affect their character features. Children's books ought to be realistic with the message that they pass across, so as to prevent the young ones from getting wrong and outdated knowledge of the surrounding Society (McAdams, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The study analyzed gender representation in three selected children's books; *Moses in a Mess*, *Moses on the Move* and *Moses and the Raffle* by Barbara Kimenye. The study found out that there was significant under representation of female characters in the books analyzed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While addressing the issue of gender representation, it is expected that the researcher will inform the Ministry of Education in recommending children's books that do not portray biasness in gender. Basing generalizations on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that there is need to educate parents and teachers to use books that have well-rounded male and female characters.

Secondly, teachers should look actively for books portraying girls and women in a positive light with active and dynamic and numerous roles. Also, the authors and publishers need to be very sensitive to avoid gender stereotyping in children's books that they write and publish. They should publish children's books that have equal number of female and male characters and illustrations as well.

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