

# How Teachers of English in Central Region of Kenya Perceive Portrayal of Gender in Literature Textbooks.

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## ABSTRACT

Textbooks are an important socializing tool and play a crucial role in determining students' worldview of gender relations in society. Gender responsiveness is one of the emerging issues that have attracted major debates in various forums including in the education system in general and choice of textbooks in particular. This study examined the responses of teachers of English to gender issues in the following literature books; *The River Between*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The River and the Source* and *Coming to Birth* which were used as KCSE literature textbooks from 1999 to 2009. The study applied the Reader – Response theory which emphasizes the reader's role in creating meaning of a text and experience of a literary work. The findings indicated that the KCSE textbooks all had elements of gender bias, stereotyping of character and role, unequal representation of male and female characters and use of gender insensitive language. However, the study also revealed that some writers had made attempts to make the literature textbooks gender responsive. The teachers' responses revealed that the teachers were keen and enthusiastic about gender issues in textbooks despite the fact that they had no formal training on how to implement the gender policy in education. The study recommends closer scrutiny of literature textbooks, in-house training of teachers on gender responsiveness, sensitizing students on gender responsive textbooks, training of education stakeholders and providing checklists for identifying gender stereotypes and other relevant gender issues in textbooks. In addition, it also recommends the development of a more gender responsive curriculum in tandem with Kenya's developmental aspiration where men and women are viewed as partners in the development of all sectors of society.

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*Key words:* Gender, Gender responsiveness, Gender responsive pedagogy, literature textbooks

## Introduction

Textbooks are an important socializing tool and play a crucial role in determining students' worldview of gender relations in society. As Obura (1991) observes, textbooks are key instructional materials and occupy a unique place in the instruction of the students. In addition, Njoroge (1978) argues that literature books are a powerful image forming force whether they are meant for children or adults. They are the most potent instruments which help in building up desirable attitudes in children (Sumalatha, 2004). Teachers and students view textbooks as sources of authority.

Generally, in Africa and Kenya in particular where the reading culture is wanting, the text book is a highly prized source of information and has commensurate influence on the learner. The text book is therefore among many of the socializing agents in the lives of the learners especially in Africa. It presents models of people that the learners may try to emulate and presents behaviour and thoughts which the text book may imply are good to follow (Obura, 1991). Learners' exposure to textbooks and other learning materials through years of schooling serves as a powerful medium of socializing young people into dominant patterns of gender relations and gendered behaviour which they will carry with them to adult life (Gathu, 1997; Leach, 2003; Medway, 1987). Mkuchu (2004) argues that textbooks shape attitudes by transmitting society's culture. Gender images and roles are crucial aspects of any culture, therefore, the manner in which male and female genders are portrayed in textbooks contribute to the type of images that learners develop of male and female in society.

Various declarations and resolutions have been made and conferences held; all aimed at promoting gender equality in the school system. For instance, the Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) have all expressed great concern on gender equality in different aspects

of development including education. In addition, Kenya subscribes to international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), implying that it is committed to adhere to the UN Charter Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and is also a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) whose goal number three on education stipulates that countries should have eliminated gender disparities in primary and secondary schools by 2005. Kenya has also participated in several international conferences (World Women Conferences in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) e.t.c., which are all concerned with gender equality which binds it to implement their declarations. One of the issues discussed in those conferences and which is significant to this paper was gender equality in relation to textbooks and other curriculum materials used in schools. Closer to home, there have been numerous calls for a gender responsive curriculum at all levels of education in Kenya.

Despite the above resolutions, aspects of gender inequality continue to be manifested in school textbooks as confirmed by studies such as Obura (1991) and Kobia (2009) among others. The school system is one of the important socializing agents in sensitizing learners about gender equality whereas textbooks are vital tools for propagating a society's values and aspirations. It is against this background that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) through the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) incorporated gender responsiveness as one of the emerging issues to be addressed by the school curriculum through textbooks in all subjects (KIE, 2002).

The critical role that literature plays in implementing the goals of education in Kenya cannot be underestimated. In Kenya's education system, literature is integrated with English language which is a core academic subject and the official medium of instruction in all subjects except Kiswahili, French and other languages. The subject aims at enabling students to appreciate literary materials and to foster understanding among people. Therefore, literature textbooks are important agents of socialization and the images of men and women in

them shape the perception of the learner on the expectations and roles of each gender in the society.

Teachers on the other hand are key facilitators in disseminating content in books. They are enablers who create opportunities for the student to learn and discover the wonders of the text on their own (Widdowson, 2000). Teachers are also important agents of change because of the key role they play in the processes of education as major executors of the teaching and learning process (Cooperation on Teacher Education, 2005). Since the teacher is central to the teaching and learning process, his or her understanding and awareness of gender responsiveness is key to the effective participation of boys and girls in the learning process. Gender responsive teachers understand and respond to the specific needs of boys and girls in the teaching and learning process (FAWE, v).

Teachers also play a very important role in reinforcing gender roles in the different expectations they have for boys and girls. Teachers can therefore create a learning environment in which boys are encouraged to succeed whereas girls are left to fail. More importantly, many teachers may be completely unaware that they treat girls differently (Anita, Nargis & Yasmin, 2010). Since teachers play this significant role in the early development of the student, their ideas and beliefs can change the thought patterns of young students. A teacher must therefore be constantly aware of the fact that his or her actions, attitude, behavior, outlook and mind set help to shape a student's gender role.

Teachers are therefore required to be serious about gender issues in textbooks and other curriculum materials. On the other hand, for teachers to bring about a change in the student, they should be given enough knowledge on gender. Teachers need not only a gender sensitive curriculum and textbooks, but also gender equality in education so that they can serve as role models for students. However, it is important to note that mere acquisition of knowledge on gender equality is unlikely to change teachers' attitudes as regards its implementation. What is needed is to enlighten them on the moral grounding, thus, going

beyond 'cognitive understanding' and addressing the affective domain (Chinyani, 2010).

Although a great deal of scholarly work has been done on portrayals and images of men and women in textbooks, little research has been done on the learners' perception of such images in textbooks and teachers' perception of gender portrayals in textbooks. This study therefore sought the perception of gender by teachers of English as portrayed in *The River Between* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen which were Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) literature set books in 2012.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study was guided by Reader-Response Theory (RR) which emphasizes the reader's role in creating meaning of a text and experience of a literary work. RR is based on the idea that every single reader of a text interprets the text based on experience and personal associations. In this regard, the study used unstructured questions based on the tenet that readers, in this case teachers of English, should be allowed to freely respond to the texts and reflect on what emotions and experiences the texts bring forth. This gives them an environment where they can interact with the texts and respond freely. However, personal factors certainly will inevitably affect the relationship between the text and the reader. The teachers' earlier experiences and current interests can actively affect their interpretation of the text. Sometimes they will lead to deep and balanced reflections, however, sometimes they will limit and distort the interpretation (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Researchers have used this perspective of the theory. For instance, Karin (2006) used the theory to examine what happens with individual reader's understanding of a text if several other readers and their interpretations of the same text influenced the reader. Some of the conclusions reached were that a group discussion can clearly give the individual reader another perspective of the same text, and sharing these experiences and consequently being influenced by other people's individual reflections help readers widen their imaginations and subsequently receive a larger

understanding of the complexity of literary texts. The present study, however, focused on teachers' individual responses in regard to the extent to which the texts were gender responsive.

## **Research Methodology**

The target population for this study was teachers of English in secondary schools in Central Kenya. However, since it was impossible to get responses from all this population, we had to settle for the accessible population. The accessible population is similar to the target population in its most general characteristics such as gender, education background and in all the specific features that are known to be significantly related to the items included in the questionnaires (Robson, 2002; Dornyei, 2003).

The selection of Central Kenya for this study was therefore based on the assumption that public schools in Kenya, in any part of the country, have similar characteristics such as the age bracket (roughly 14-18 years) of the students, and that the teachers in those schools are mainly trained in government institutions, private universities and colleges. In addition, the schools use the same curriculum prescribed by the MoEST. In this context, all students are required to read the compulsory literature textbooks, hence all teachers of English must also teach the same books. However, the study notes that there may be differences in the provinces due to socio-economic factors and individual idiosyncrasies among other things.

The study sampled one thousand, four hundred and seventy (1,470) form four students from 12 public secondary schools distributed over 12 districts in Central part of Kenya using stratified and purposeful sampling methods. Schools with one hundred (100) and above student enrolment were selected in order to have a wide selection of respondents. Durrheim and Painter (2006) point out that stratified sampling is used to establish greater degree of representativeness in situations where a population consists of sub-groups or strata. Purposive sampling was also used to select all teachers of English in the 12 sampled schools. A total of 51 teachers of English from the sampled schools were therefore picked

because they had the required information with respect to the objectives of the study. A purposeful sample is obtained when a researcher uses his or her own expert judgement and purpose to decide whom to select into the sampling (Peter, 2004). The study used a questionnaire with open ended questions to elicit individual responses to the textbooks.

The secondary sources consisted of KCSE literature textbooks approved for study by the MoEST from 1999 to 2009. The ten year period was chosen to give the researcher a wider selection of literature textbooks. The textbooks selected were the compulsory ones.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to analyze the data. The qualitative aspect was intended to capture the responses of the individual respondents in order to understand their attitude, beliefs and knowledge (Frankel & Wallen, 2000). On the other hand, the quantitative data was utilized to capture the statistical aspect of the study. The responses obtained from the teachers are presented, analyzed and discussed. In an attempt to address any possible bias in the interpretation, examples of the teachers' responses were frequently used in the interpretation of the data to illustrate the types of responses that were allocated each category.

The study used four KCSE literature textbooks approved for study by the MoEST from 1999 to 2009. The ministry gives two categories of books: the compulsory and the optional. The compulsory ones are prescribed for all schools while individual schools select those on the optional category. The books under study were selected from the compulsory ones. Gender was also a factor in the selection of the textbooks. Since there were only two textbooks by women writers, *The River and the Source* and *Coming to birth* were purposively selected for the study.

This study examined the extent to which teachers of English pay attention to gender in literature texts books. To get this response, the teachers were asked questions relating to how the following texts; *Coming to Birth*, *The River and the Source*, *The River Between* and *An Enemy of the People* were gender responsive, in other words, are there any indications of efforts by the writers to correct gender imbalances? Secondly, the

teachers were asked how their students responded to gender issues addressed in the texts. Thirdly, the teachers were to indicate why they thought high school students should be sensitized about gender issues addressed in literature textbooks. In addition, the study attempted to find out how teachers sensitized their students about gender issues in literature texts. Finally, the teachers were to indicate whether they were aware of the Gender Policy in Education and the Gender Responsive Pedagogy and how they were implementing them in the teaching of literature.

A total of 51 teachers from the selected schools were interviewed using an unstructured questionnaire with open ended questions in order for them to provide free responses. The first part of the questionnaire contained items on the teachers' qualifications and teaching experience.

### **Teachers' academic and professional experience:**

This section investigates the background information of the respondents. It consists of demographic information including gender and teachers' academic and professional experience in teaching literature. Teachers' academic, professional experience and preparedness are important as predictors of the quality of teaching because the essence of effective teaching lies in the ability of the teacher to set up desired educational outcomes (Bogonko, 1992). Well trained teachers can encourage their students to get interested even in matters outside curriculum but which are beneficial to their lives outside school.

*Table 3: Academic qualifications of teachers of English.*

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
M.Ed	3	3	6	12%
MA	0	0	0	0%
B.Ed	5	22	27	53%
BA	1	1	2	4%
S1/Diploma	5	6	11	22%
PGDE	0	4	4	8%



Other	0	1	1	2%
Total	14	37	51	100%

The above data shows that the majority (53%) of teachers interviewed hold a Bachelor's degree in education, 22% hold a Diploma in education, 12% hold a Master's degree in education, 8% hold a post graduate diploma in education while 4% hold a bachelor's degree in arts while 2% hold a master's degree in leadership. The study reveals that 98% of the teachers who participated in this study are qualified enough to teach Literature in Kenyan high schools, with the majority 53% being holders of a bachelor of education degree.

The next step was to find out how long the teachers had taught English in high school. The results are presented in table 4

*Table 4: Professional experience of teachers of English.*

<b>Years of teaching</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
1-5 years	3	4	7	14%
6-10 years	5	10	15	29%
11-15 years	2	4	6	12%
16-20 years	3	9	12	24%
21-25 years	1	8	9	18%
Did not indicate	0	2	2	4%
Total	14	37	51	100%

The above data shows that 29% of teachers had taught for 6-10 years, while 24% had taught for 16-20 years. This was followed by 18 % who had taught for 21-25 years. 14 % had taught for the shortest time, that is, 1-4 years while 12% had taught for 11-15 years. Lastly, 4% female teachers did not indicate how long they had taught. The study therefore reveals that all the interviewed teachers had considerable experience in teaching literature in Kenyan high schools.

## Elements of gender responsiveness in the selected textbooks.

As observed earlier in this study, teachers play an important role in students' achievement in schools. They are crucial enablers in matters relating to students' interpretation of gender issues in literature textbooks, among other issues. Being responsible for promoting learning in schools, teachers contribute in translating curriculum materials into practicalities (Anita et al., 2010). As shown in table 1.3, 59% of the teachers considered the textbooks gender responsive.

*Table 5: Teachers' responses to gender responsiveness of textbooks.*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	12	18	30	59%
No	2	19	21	41%
Total	14	37	51	100%

The teachers advanced several reasons to support their stand. For instance, male and female teachers concurred that though the traditional society used to belittle women, authors have attempted to portray some female characters positively. In *The river between*, Muthoni is portrayed as courageous whereas Paulina in *Coming to birth* emerges courageous, assertive and strong, albeit through sheer determination in very challenging circumstances. This is one point of consensus where even students felt the same way.

However, the teachers felt that the girl child should be given more chances to express her mind without victimization. The male and female teachers further noted that the role of the female is over emphasized in *Coming to Birth* and *The River and the Source* where the writer of the latter seems to imply that society can survive without the boy child.

However, some male teachers noted that despite a few characters being positively portrayed, male chauvinism eclipses development of female characters especially in politics as demonstrated in *An Enemy of the People*.

In addition, both male and female teachers pointed out that *Coming to Birth* and *The River and the Source* highlight plight of women and elevate female characters while *The River Between* and *An Enemy of the People* elevate the male. It is like a battle of the sexes; males elevating males and females elevating females. The teachers noted that this is not a positive development of gender responsiveness. Sometimes, in the process of elevating male characters, texts like *The River Between* bring out biases against women.

Another aspect of gender responsiveness noted by the male teachers was the deletion of the following sections in the later editions of *The River Between* which they considered gender insensitive. “You could more readily trust a man than a kihii, an uncircumcised boy” (p. 38) and “A day would come when all these ‘irigu’ (uncircumcised girls) would be circumcised by force to rid the land of all impurities” (p. 117). The teachers argued that this was an attempt by wa Thiong'o and the publishers to be gender responsive and they should be commended for it.

On the other hand, 41% of teachers strongly felt that the texts are not gender responsive. Male teachers argued that the textbooks have portrayed female characters negatively in several ways. For instance, there are fewer female characters compared to the male which tends to deny women visibility. When teaching a textbook with over representation of male characters, teachers will need to develop awareness in their learners to discuss and consider gender roles and representations. Any imbalance in textbooks may lead to the assumption that this is how women should be treated in real life (Jones, Kitemu & Sunderland, 1997).

In addition, female characters like Paulina are subjected to domestic violence while others are denied leadership positions. Female characters are generally confined to reproductive roles which are not rated highly as compared to male characters who are depicted in leadership positions both in public and private arenas. Textbooks with this kind of representation perpetuate inherent gender bias by assigning traditional roles to men and women, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes. Male

characters operate in spaces that are traditionally and socially public and participate in outdoor assignments that project them in stronger roles such as engineers, lawyers, professors, pilots, mechanics and so on. Women and girls on the other hand are shown as passive observers where boys and men are performing important experiments (Bakt, 2003).

On the other hand, some male teachers felt that the way the textbooks are written is a true reflection of the cultural set ups of the respective societies and they should remain so. They argued that there should be no question of gender responsiveness if the texts are portraying the reality in those societies. These types of responses echo Gordon's (1995) observation that teachers are products of societies that raised and socialized them. Therefore, the way they handle gender issues is a function of the values they were socialized into. In this case, they are likely to perpetuate values of gender differentiation. In school, teachers are important role models and if they are not gender sensitive, their students are likely to imitate them.

Female teachers had several reasons why they thought the textbooks are not gender responsive. They noted that the textbooks are generally set in traditional times when women in many communities were relegated to inferior positions in almost all spheres of life. For instance, female characters are given minor roles and are not expected to question anything and those who do so like Muthoni are punished severely. This negative portrayal of females does not provide proper role modeling for female students.

Teachers observed that “despite the fact that over the past few years women have risen to prominence in various sectors, some textbooks still continue to depict men in prestigious positions. Women are portrayed as feeble, dependent, insecure and in need of men more than the men need them” among a host of other negative portrayals. Such texts, the teachers note, ought not to be taught in schools, or if they are, the teacher must be at pains to explain the context in which the text is set. As Iqbal (2005) observes, such texts that may legitimize and reinforce

repressive and retrogressive ideologies ought not to be taught in schools especially in view of the fact that the prevalent teaching methodology may be subscribing to an uncritical acceptance of the validity of the ideas inherent in a text.

Finally, some female teachers noted that gender responsiveness should not be just about women. One teacher said, “if it is about elevating the woman, I feel we are doing a disservice to the boy child – it leaves the man / boy no longer sure of his position in the society”. As Crouch (2005) observes, gender issues should be balanced and not be seen as if writers are favouring one gender over the other. An ideal textbook represents girls, boys, women and men in such a way that they are on equal terms in language, illustrations and narration. This is one way in which textbook writers can contribute towards the establishment of a society free of gender bias and where issues of human rights are upheld and respected.

In addition, Rudman (1995) and Simpson and Masland (1993), note that textbooks should portray women and girls in a positive light and with active dynamic roles. They should not portray either gender in a stereotypical manner. Teachers should therefore encourage their students to read gender neutral books which:

1. Portray individuals with distinctive personalities irrespective of their gender;
2. Do not evaluate achievement on the basis of gender;
3. Portray occupations as gender free;
4. Do not portray females as always weaker and more delicate than males;
5. Portray individuals who are logical or emotional depending on the situation;
6. Use gender neutral or gender sensitive language.

## Teachers' responses to students' perception of gender

The data in table 6 shows that 86% teachers indicated that their students respond to gender issues addressed in literature textbooks.

Table 6: Teachers' responses to students' perception of gender.

Responses	Male	Female	Total	%
Yes	12	32	44	86%
No	2	5	7	14%
Total	14	37	51	100%

Male teachers noted that through class debates and discussions, students point out where there is gender bias, inequality, discrimination and other gender related issues in the textbooks. For instance, they ask questions on portrayal of female characters. The female students are particularly very vocal on issues touching on women and girls. For instance, they admire positive portrayals of women, for example, Mrs Stockmann's nurturing role as a model mother, and home – maker but also pointed out that her moderate approach to political issues is not admirable; and that she should be more vocal in matters that she feels are not going right. Others admire Muthoni's and Nyambura's courageous and rebellious nature in confronting the traditional status quo.

On the other hand, female teachers note that their students respond to gender issues enthusiastically by asking gender related questions and commenting on incidents both in the texts and in contemporary life that bring out gender issues like subordination of women. The students vehemently argue for gender parity.

In addition, female students are very sensitive to any issues touching on their gender. They appreciate the great role that women play to bring sanity to society and so wonder why women are presented so negatively in some texts. The students are usually very excited by writers who attempt to address gender imbalance.

The teachers reported that male students on the other hand keep wondering why male characters in *The River and the Source* keep dying

while in *Coming to Birth* they are either depicted negatively or not developed fully. They argue that there is need for each gender to be portrayed positively and to assert itself. Lastly, male students are excited to identify with courageous and prosperous male characters as their role models.

14% of teachers said that their students do not respond to gender issues. They attributed this partly to students' poor understanding and interpretation of the textbooks. Secondly, they take the texts as just fictional. This response correlates with the responses of students discussed earlier who indicated that they were not interested in portrayal of men, women, boys and girls' characters and other gender issues in *The River Between* and *An Enemy of the People* because they considered those textbooks as just fiction with little to do with real life.

Other students appeared complacent with the situation in the textbooks and therefore accepted the status quo, while others were only interested in items that would only help them pass KCSE. Some, especially, males, do not appear to be very enthusiastic about gender imbalances and discrimination. One respondent noted that the students were not keen to discuss gender issues in class and eschewed such discussions by emphasizing how impractical it is to practice gender equality at school and in the wider society since it is at "variance with cultural norms, values and practices".

However, such students should be made aware that culture is dynamic and gender is a human rights issue and that no country or community can craft its own human rights that are not universally applicable (Chinyalu, 2010). Teachers handling students with this kind of mindset should also be encouraged to develop the critical and analytical faculties of their students and encourage them to think for themselves so that they may be able to reflect insightfully upon social, cultural, ethical and other issues with unprejudiced clean minds (Iqbal, 2005).

## **Why it is important to create gender awareness among students.**

First, the teachers noted that many societies in the world today, Kenya included, have undergone a huge change in the traditional views regarding men and women. However, issues of gender including how men and women relate, remain a thorny issue in the African continent and beyond. “Students should therefore be sensitized about their rights in regard to gender. Each should enjoy equal rights regardless of their gender”.

Secondly, the teachers argued that students need to realize that when it comes to ability and responsibility, gender does not matter. This is important so that the boy child does not “internalize the misconception that the girl child has no say in society as some of the literature texts tend to portray”, among other prejudices acquired at home and elsewhere. Since societies are changing, gender roles included, the traditional male attitude towards women should also change. As Anita et al. ( 2010) argue, to minimize contentious issues in gender relations, we need to start changing the mindsets of the younger generation of society as they are the ones who can bring about further change in society, with their “innovative ideas, thoughts and practices”. To this end, we need good educated teachers who have a sound knowledge regarding gender issues.

Thirdly, the teachers concurred that the gender issues highlighted in the textbooks also happen in real life since ‘literature is about life’. Students should therefore be equipped with the knowledge and skills to help them handle issues arising in their circumstances.

The other reason why students should be sensitized about gender issues in literature textbooks is that of promoting the image of the woman. Teachers argued that students need to see women as important forces that contribute to societal growth. It will also encourage the girl child who is usually the victim of gender discrimination. This will in turn enhance gender balance and help the students to see that “both genders compliment each other physiologically and in gender based



orientations". This will also encourage male and female students to work together and respect each other.

Finally, the teachers agreed that students should be sensitized in order for them to be able to pick out elements of gender bias, prejudice and stereotypical portrayals among other gender issues in textbooks and other learning materials. They added that "in order to have a balanced society, we should use everything possible, textbooks included, to take care of the boy and the girl child. Writers who promote gender bias should be shunned when selecting KCSE textbooks".

Female teachers also noted that many students take it as if the gender issues addressed in the textbooks reflect who is better between a boy and a girl; there is therefore need to correct this mindset; that it is not about gender competition. In addition, it is important for learners to be encouraged to have liberal ideas and realize that there is no gender that is more important than the other - this would enhance equity in all areas. This would in turn enhance liberal ideas and sensitivity to gender issues such as equality in all matters affecting society. The students should also be encouraged to avoid stereotyping of genders and make them aware that societal views are not necessarily correct.

The male teachers on the other hand also noted that gender issues are real issues that touch on human relationships. Therefore, it is important to create gender awareness in the students for better male/female relationships. This awareness will enhance gender harmony and enable students to think independently and respond to gender issues logically. In addition, it will help narrow the disparity between men and women by according women equal opportunities as men.

### **How teachers create gender awareness among students.**

Liselotte (2007) notes that teachers have a responsibility of making learners aware of gender issues and helping them towards becoming critical respondents to textbooks. In addition, teachers must also bear in mind that they have a huge responsibility for providing a more versatile view on gender representation than is provided in the textbooks (Iqbal,

2005). The male and female teachers in this study explained that they use the following methods to sensitize their students about gender issues addressed in literature textbooks:

1. Giving assignments and questions for discussion on gender discrimination, gender bias, gender equality and other gender related issues;
2. Encouraging debates on gender related issues by highlighting specific gender issues as they arise in the textbooks and giving students a chance to discuss or debate what they feel about such issues;
3. Relating gender issues in the textbooks to the students' immediate environment and other real life situations;
4. Identifying female success in the textbooks in relation to successful female personalities in real life and quoting role models that students would like to emulate;
5. Encouraging students to look at females as persons who can help men grow, and vice versa – and explaining that men and women work together to develop the fictional plot as well as real plot in life;
6. By illustrating specific points with positive character traits – capitalizing on the strengths and showing students how they can correct the shortcomings or weaknesses portrayed in the textbooks and in real life;
7. Encouraging students to develop a positive attitude to and opinion on gender relations and ensure mutual respect for all. Similarly, encouraging each gender to fight for their rights while respecting the other gender, and at the same time emphasizing that each gender is important;
8. Exposing and correcting gender biased views and opinions about gender in textbooks and real life situations;

9. By emphasizing the importance of gender balance and faulting the negative treatment given to women in some textbooks;
10. By giving equal opportunities to boys and girls to participate in the class and school environment;
11. By asking students to be practical by asking themselves if they would like to see their own relatives such as mothers, sisters and girlfriends mistreated; and asking them to adopt the opposite sex's point of view on specific gender issues;
12. By using a variety of material on gender issues in addition to textbooks in class;
13. Explaining terms such as gender, gender equality, gender bias, gender parity among other gender related terms so that students understand what gender is all about and correct any misconceptions they may be having regarding gender;
14. Using gender neutral and sensitive language and encouraging learners to do the same;
15. Sensitizing girls about their rights;
16. Showing students the importance of giving equal chances and opportunities to either gender both in school and in their communities;
17. Teaching positive and negative aspects of either gender.

The above data illustrates that teachers interviewed in this study are keen and enthusiastic to create gender awareness in their students and encourage them to practically apply the positive ideas they learn in school and from textbooks. Their responses correlate well with Lawrence's (1995) and Rudman's (1993) suggestions that teachers can sensitize their students about gender issues in textbooks by:

1. Raising questions about character portrayal;
2. Encouraging learners to use gender neutral or sensitive language;

3. Asking learners to adopt the opposite sex’s point of view about a gendered issue among other strategies.

The responses of teachers interviewed in this study also seem to validate FAWE’s intervention efforts to train teachers in order to make them more gender responsive. As FAWE (1997) notes, the teachers who have gone through their training have been empowered as agents of change. This has resulted in teachers paying attention to gender issues within the school plans and processes, and support to needy girls and boys. The teachers interviewed in this study may not have gone through any such training or even possess that kind of empowerment and mandate to deal with gender issues in textbooks and the school environment, but they have shown great enthusiasm and keenness in dealing with gender issues in literature textbooks.

**Status of teachers’ interaction with gender policies.**

The Gender Policy in the Kenyan education system was developed in 2006 as a response to the MoE’s recognition of the fact that the national education system had been characterized by gender disparities at the national level, and between the various regions, in favour of males (Gender Policy in Education, 2007). The development of this policy was an effort towards addressing this gender disparity. One of the specific objectives of this policy is to “ensure that the curriculum design, development and implementation, pedagogy, and teacher training processes as well as curriculum materials are gender responsive”. At the secondary school level, one of the strategies in the policy involves undertaking continuous review of the curriculum to ensure gender sensitivity. It is in this regard that the study sought to find out if teachers of English in Kenyan high schools are aware of the existence of the Gender Policy in Education and if so how they were implementing it in the teaching of literature. The findings are illustrated in table 7.

*Table 7: Teachers’ awareness about Gender Policy in Education*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	11	23	34	67%

No	3	14	17	33%
Total	14	37	51	100%

The above data in table 7 shows that 67% of the interviewed teachers indicated that they already know about the existence of the gender policy in education. This comprised 45.2% female and 21.8% male. The teachers' responses revealed that most teachers seemed to have a good understanding of gender equality but were not quite sure how best to handle it in their pedagogical practice since no training had been offered towards this end. All interviewed teachers therefore indicated the various ways in which they were trying to implement the policy as shown below:

1. Treating both girls and boys in classroom situations and other areas equally in addition to encouraging students to learn through the example and treat each other with respect;
2. Using gender sensitive language in the classroom situation and outside and encouraging students to do the same;
3. Sensitising students about gender equality and explaining why each gender should be given equal opportunities in every area of their lives;
4. Encouraging both boys and girls to respect each other and ensure none takes advantage of the other;
5. Taking every opportunity to promote the education of the girl child to attain the level of that of the boy;
6. Highlighting the role played by female characters in the prescribed textbooks and other literary materials while at the same time giving equal attention to male characters as well. This is very important especially in a mixed school so that none of the genders feels isolated;
7. Sensitising students about gender issues such as female circumcision (popularly known as FGM) which mostly affect girls. Sensitizing girls on the issues that affect them and how they

can fight discrimination. Raising other emerging gender issues as they teach.

In addition, male teachers indicated other ways in which they are attempting to implement the gender policy.

1. Trying to dismantle any myths, beliefs, biases and any misconceptions which have been constructed around sex/gender and which may also be portrayed in literature textbooks;
2. Initiating debates on issues concerning the plight of women in some African communities and expressing the need to deal with it.

The female teachers indicated that they also express the need for women empowerment and go ahead to “compose songs and poems on women empowerment” while encouraging students to do the same.

Finally, some of the teachers, however, indicated that they are in the process of learning how to implement the policy. They expressed enthusiasm and readiness of implementing the policy as soon as they are sure of how to do it.

33% of the teachers said that they had not heard about the Gender Policy in Education. One male teacher said “I am not bothered about gender issues. My job is to make students pass KCSE”. The rest just said ‘no’ but did not offer any explanation.

The teachers were also asked to explain their interaction with the gender - responsive pedagogy. The findings are illustrated in table 8.

*Table 8*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	7	5	12	24%
No	7	32	39	76%
Total	14	37	51	100%

24% of the teachers indicated that they were already aware of the existence of a Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP). However, they

indicated that they were not sure how they could apply it in their teaching since they “did not have comprehensive knowledge about its applicability in the teaching of literature or the entire school system”. Some have barely heard about it and therefore need instructions on how to implement it. They further noted that the little knowledge they had about GRP was acquired from outside the school system; out of their personal interest and initiative. They lamented lack of education mechanisms to equip teachers with knowledge pertaining to gender.

Bridget et al. (2010) note that many well – intentioned teachers often do not have gender training and are not well informed to intervene or advocate on gender issues with students. This scenario may arise from the fact that most of the teacher training institutions in Kenya and elsewhere do not include training in gender responsiveness (FAWE, 2001). This results in teachers not addressing the specific needs of students, especially girls, since they are largely unaware of the issues facing them. However, the teachers’ responses in this study show that the teachers are open to ideas of gender responsive pedagogy but they need access to training and knowledge to become more effective actors of change.

The teachers in this study, therefore, were using their own interpretations to implement the GRP. Below are some of the ways they are using:

1. Teaching learners about gender equality;
2. Ensuring equal participation of both genders since there are many efforts to elevate the girl child, but also taking care that the male students are not sidelined in any way;
3. By emphasizing the need for girls to fight it out in academic circles so that they merit to be placed in positions of responsibility.

Research findings by Aikman, Unterhalter and Challender (2005), Challenges for Teachers’ Training (2005) and Mlama et al. (2005) indicate that teachers who receive training on gender issues are better able to address individual needs in the classroom and the school. In addition, FAWE’s Teachers’ Manual for Gender – Responsive Pedagogy suggests

that a teacher's interaction manner and pedagogy limits discriminatory non – verbal or verbal language, promotes equal questioning of boys and girls and highlights strategies for selecting gender neutral textbooks and other curriculum materials.

FAWE's training initiatives ensure that teachers are gender responsive. The training has empowered teachers as agents of change. In return, this has resulted in teachers paying attention to gender issues within the school plans and processes, including use of textbooks. A study done in the Centres Of Excellence (COEs) acknowledged that the learners confirmed that they were getting support from the teachers towards their academic performance and other important issues (FAWE, 2006). FAWE (2011) further indicates that from their experience, girls excel academically and are better equipped to overcome life's challenges when they have teachers who are trained to meet their needs, learning materials that portray them in positive and equitable ways, school environment that is welcoming and conducive to learning, and a community of adults that support them.

On the other hand, 76% of the teachers said they did not know about the Gender Responsive Pedagogy. They however, indicated interest and enthusiasm to learn about it so that they can begin implementing it in their teaching. Going by this high percentage of teachers who are in the dark concerning GRP, there is urgent need for the government to address the issue.

## **Conclusion**

The following observations were made from the teachers' responses.

- ❖ There is need to revise textbooks where the portrayal and role of the female is only confined to the domestic or private sphere. There is also need to include achievements and heroic instances of the female gender in equity to men.
- ❖ Teachers need to go through a gender sensitizing course that will train them to use a gender responsive pedagogy in relation to their



interaction with students in order to correct the misconception that females are inferior to males among other important gender issues.

- ❖ Students and teachers should be encouraged to read gender sensitive books and other curriculum materials in which women and men are portrayed positively, characters take active and dynamic roles as well as books in which individuals are portrayed with distinctive personalities irrespective of their gender.
- ❖ The MoE in collaboration with KIE should ensure choice of textbooks in which the language used in the text is gender neutral except where specific gender is required and occupations and roles represented as gender free and achievements are not evaluated on the basis of gender.
- ❖ Teachers have a responsibility to encourage boys and girls to express themselves freely and to facilitate critical thinking.
- ❖ Teachers should not demean the dignity of either boys or girls by word, action or gesture in their teaching.
- ❖ Publishers should be encouraged to publish textbooks which are gender responsive.
- ❖ Publishers can work closely with MoE to organize seminars and workshops in order to sensitize and encourage writers to be gender sensitive.
- ❖ Writers should strive to be gender sensitive by ensuring that the content and style in their writings reflect gender responsiveness by incorporating positive role models for both girls and boys in their textbooks among other steps.
- ❖ Combining of traditional and non – traditional books can be used in order to spark off discussions of how different sexes and genders are portrayed in different books.

However, as Fox (1993) suggests, the message of both genders should be subtly contained in the textbooks. It is important to avoid books that

have strident messages on gender equity because young readers tend to reject books that preach.

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