

Effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity: views of senior learners from selected schools of Lundazi district, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Language users differ in the degree to which they employ gender distinctions between male and female pupils in school. Speaking a gendered language may highlight gender roles and this in turn is associated with a greater gender gap in education attainment. This study, therefore, was based on an analysis of gendered language in selected co-education Day Secondary Schools of Lundazi District. It sought to determine the contributing factors to gendered language in schools; its effects on Educational inclusivity between male and female learners; and how learners could avoid using gendered language that affects educational inclusivity. The study was conducted on 80 learners from 5 Secondary Schools, (8 boys and 8 girls) from each school that were purposively sampled. The study was based on a qualitative approach informed by the descriptive research design with narrative forms. Focus group discussions were used as a method of data collection. Data was analysed thematically. The study, based on the speech Act Theory, revealed the importance of being culturally sensitive to gender norms and language conventions that could damage and hinder success in children's education attainment. The study indicated that gendered language had a negative effect on educational inclusivity. It then recommended that the government, through the Ministry of Education, should include in the curriculum, topics on gendered language and its effects on learners in order to equip the public with information on the effects of demeaning gendered language and narrow the gender gap in education attainment.

Keywords: Gendered language, education, educational inclusivity, gender gap

INTRODUCTION

Language is very important in education. This is so, in that it facilitates communication among different stakeholders in one's education attainment. The kind of language focused upon in this study is a gendered one. Gendered language as defined by Lakoff (1975) is language that has a bias towards a particular sex or social gender. In the light of this therefore, this study assumed that gendered language affects

education, and that the interface of the two could be better understood in sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is the relationship between language and society (James and Malande, 2012). This relationship as recorded by Wardhaugh (2006) can be understood from the perspective that language affects the behavior of people in a particular society. In the use of language, Sociolinguistics emphasizes the importance of context. Context according to Rondell and Fox (2006)

is the general situation in which something happens, which helps explain it. In this situation, the context of use for language is interaction that school going children have with parents on one hand, and with teachers on the other. The field of Sociolinguistics also looks at how the language of a people controls their view of the world they live in and this is usually influenced by the cultural beliefs of a particular society. From this perspective, it is important to carry out a study on the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity in selected schools of Lundazi District. It is important to mention at this point that the educational inclusivity being discussed in this study is exclusively in the context of male and female learner access to education.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to establish the contributing factors to gendered language in schools and the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity between male and female learners.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify some of the contributing factors to gendered language in schools
2. To establish the specific effects that gendered language has on male and female pupils in school.
3. To establish how learners can avoid using gendered language that affects educational inclusivity between male and female learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory

This study is anchored on the Speech Act Theory, a branch of linguistic and philosophical analysis by J. L. Austin which was later expanded by John Searl in the middle of the 20th century. This analysis focuses on the various ways in which people use language to perform various speech acts, like making statements, asking questions, giving commands, making promises, and

expressing intentions. As held by Austin (1962), speech acts are in three types and these are Locutionary acts, Illocutionary acts and Perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is what is said, the actual, specific utterance made. It is the act of saying something. In the classroom for example, if the teacher says "John and Mary go in front," the production of this utterance is a locutionary act. An illocutionary act is performed in saying something. It is internal to the locutionary act in that if the conditions are appropriate, once the locutionary act has been performed, or the utterance made, the locution is transformed into the illocutionary force which immediately results in the accomplishment of the illocutionary act (Crystal, 1992). An illocutionary act is mostly realized through performative verbs such as promise, warn and encourage among others. For example a teacher may say "I promise to award any girl who gets a distinction in the test." In making this locution, the teacher has performed the act of promising. The act of promising in this case is an illocutionary act brought about by the illocutionary force contained in the word promise.

The perlocutionary act is external to the locutionary act. It is the effect of the utterance (Locution) on the thoughts or the actions of the hearer (Crystal, 1992). For example, a parent's negative statement towards the poor performance of the learner has an effect on the learner. That very effect brings about a particular thought or action which is a perlocutionary act.

When people use gendered language, they also express functions of language depending on the context at hand. There is a relationship between gendered language and the Speech Act Theory which manifests in its ability to influence and reflect the performance of speech acts, especially in shaping communicative intentions, performativity, and social roles. The major meeting point of speech acts and gendered language is not merely in conveying information but in also performing actions. Gendered language always reinforces gender roles and stereotypes, affecting the

performativity of speech acts. A good example is where gendered language is used to perpetuate traditional gender norms in society.

Lakoff's (1975) Dominance Theory

The other theory by which the study at hand is underpinned is the Dominance Theory. This is a theory, which is also referred to as Social Dominancy Theory. It is as espoused by Queen (2022), a way of looking at societies that attempt to explain institutionalised inequality. This approach was initiated by Lakoff in his publication of 'Language and Women's Place' (1975). Other linguists who support this idea believe that social inequalities exist between the roles that men and women play in society. The way male and female learners use language within and outside the school environment is the meeting point between the Dominance Theory and gendered language. Under the dominancy theory, proponents argue that the difference in the manner males and females use language is evidence enough to prove that men dominate women. Fishman's (1983), and West and Zimmerman's (1975) studies show that the language of men holds more power than that of women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviewed some of the available relevant scholarly contributions to the study of the *effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity in selected schools of Lundazi district* and linked the findings of the related literature to the present study. It must be mentioned at this point that the gap to be filled is "how gendered language affects educational inclusivity."

Zimmerman and West (1975) conducted a study on everyday conversations between males and females. Their study reinforced the dominance model, finding that in mixed sex conversations males interrupted females more and tended to dominate them where decision making is concerned. In the study by Zimmerman and West (1975), it was found out that mostly the language used by males in conversations with females favoured

themselves more than the later. It is important to appreciate the study by Zimmerman and West (1975) in that it talks about the difference in language use between males and females in conversations and that female talk is not considered in important decision making situations. However, their study did not talk about the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity which is the gap to be filled by this study.

In her book "Man Made Language" Spender (1980) discussed the concept of language use between males and females in conversations. According to her, language is man-made, it is created by males and is primarily under male control in all sectors of human endeavor. An important contribution is gotten from Spender (1980) in that males are seen to be in control of language compared to females even where education is concerned. That being the case though, the study does not talk about the effects of gendered language on educational inclusive, which is the matter the current study wishes to address.

Gumperz (1982) carried out a study in response to the difference theory by examining the differences in cross-cultural communication. According to him, while the difference theory deals with cross-gender communication, the male and female genders are often presented as being two separate cultures where language use is concerned. This means that schools are not an exception as they have both genders. It is necessary to agree with Gumperz (1982) that males and females in society in general and in schools in particular use language differently because they are considered to belong to different cultures. Nevertheless, it is also important to point out that the study by Gumperz (1982) does not talk about the effects of gendered language on educational inclusive. Hence, the current study finds it necessary to fill the stated knowledge gap.

On the other hand, Baxter (2002) did a study on Post Structural Discourse Analysis between girls' and boys' talk in a secondary school classroom. The study revealed a link between the more powerful discursive

position of boys, and the extent to which they were rated more effective than girls in public speeches. In addition, it was found out that the way the two genders were addressed showed that boys held a more powerful position in the classroom as compared to girls. Baxter's (2002) study contributes positively to the current study in that it talks about gendered language positioning boys as being more powerful as compared to girls in the classroom. However, the study did not talk about the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity in schools of Lundazi District, which is the gap to be filled by this study.

In his book, "Things Fall Apart" Achebe (1996) talked about the dominance of males in a patriarchal Igbo traditional society. According to him, males are more powerful than females in all aspects of human endeavor and because of that females are equated to property to be owned by males. It is necessary to point out that Achebe (1996) contributes positively to the study at hand in that it talks about males being dominant to females in many areas of human endeavor, education included. However, Achebe's text does not talk about the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity which is the gap to be filled by this study.

In addition, Tannen (1994) conducted a study on gender and discourse. According to her study, it was found out that male and female students use language differently especially where sentence construction is concerned. According to Tannen (1994) it was found out that mostly females used interrogative type of sentences while males used imperative type of sentences in their language use. From this perspective, it can be stated that in terms of language use, females are seen to be more polite than males which confirms that the latter are portrayed to be more powerful than the former. In line with the study at hand, one can say that Tannen's (1994) study provides necessary information in that it is made clear that males and females use language differently in schools. However, the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity was not

discussed by the document, which is the area of focus for this research.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was based on the descriptive research design. It used qualitative methods in which 80 school-going children from 5 secondary schools were engaged through focus group discussions on the factors that contributed to the use of gendered language in schools, the impact that gendered language has on them, and the effects of this type of language on educational inclusivity since the researcher sought to use a descriptive research design with narrative forms. This research design was used because the gendered language was being described. On the other hand, narrative forms were used in order to have cross-checked information from different respondents. The intended use of this type of research design was consistent with that of Kombo and Tromp (2006) who pointed out that a descriptive research design is used to describe the state of affairs in detail. Hence, an in-depth analysis of the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity was conducted.

Target Population

A target population according to White (2003) is the universe of units from which the study sample is selected. In this study, the target population was learners from coeducation secondary schools in Lundazi district. This is the best group to use because it was perceived that they would provide the required information in accordance with the objectives of the study at hand.

Study sample and sampling technique

The study had a sample of 80 learners comprising 40 males and 40 females. The learners (senior) were randomly sampled. It was deemed necessary to pick senior learners because it was assumed that they were the best group to give detailed information on the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity.

Data collection

The study used focus group discussions to collect data from 80 school-going children and the instrument used to collect the said data was a focus group discussion guide. As the study had a huge sample, it was necessary to use focus group discussion because it was easy to have primary data in that the sample was easily divided into 10 groups of 8 members each. The use of a focus group discussion guide gave the researcher the flexibility to pose more enhanced questions with a view to collecting more detailed information about the study at hand.

Data analysis

In this study, data analysis was done qualitatively using simple descriptive analysis thematically. The study used this type of analysis because the gendered language recorded was being describe.

FINDINGS

Of the 80 secondary school learners that were involved in the focus group discussions on the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity, 40 were males and the other 40 were females. The results were recorded and transcribed. Although on rare occasions, some learners were recorded quoting their parents speaking in Tumbuka language, it must be mentioned at this point that the gendered language analysed is from the perspective of the learners and not from the parents' and teachers'. Since Lundazi is a Tumbuka speaking district, some parents could express themselves exclusively in Tumbuka language to their children (learners). Therefore, in order for non-speakers of Tumbuka, to get the meaning of the data, the utterances were glossed into English as presented in brackets. It must however be mentioned that the English equivalents are not representational of the diction and structure of the Tumbuka utterances but simply the meaning.

Factors contributing to gendered language in schools

These factors were divided into three (3) parts which were (a) how parents and teachers reacted to the underperformance of learners in school assessments, (b) how parents and teachers reacted to the good performance of the learners in school assessments and (c) the factors that made parents and teachers react like that to the performance of learners. Both categories of learners were involved in the discussions. From the 80 learners that were involved in the discussions on contributing factors to gendered language, in line with part (a), it was found out from all the discussants representing 100% of the study sample, that both parents and teachers reacted negatively to the underperformance of learners in school assessments. One girl-child was even recorded quoting her father who was reacting to her mathematics performance by saying "utengwe waka chifukwa utaya nyengo, ufeluka nyango zose" (just get married, because you are wasting time, u are failing all the time). In subjects like mathematics and science where boys seemed to be very good, it was found out from the female learners from all the groups, representing about 50% of the study sample, that teachers liked making male learners group leaders during discussion time. Prior to the group presentations, some teachers, as stated by the female respondents could be heard saying among others "Mark and your group go in front and present, after which it should be George and your group... at the end, monitor and monitress ensure that you collect all the books and take them to the office for marking." About 45% of the male respondents said that it was true that males were mostly given leadership roles in classes. Only about four learners representing 5% of the sample expressed lack of knowledge of this matter.

In addition, it was found out from male learners that at some point, in reacting negatively to the performance of the boys, a teacher was heard saying "as a boy you are not supposed to get this mark in science." Part (b) of the first objective sought to address the reactions of parents and teachers towards the good performance of

the learners. In line with good performance by a girl-child, one respondent said that a certain parent was heard saying “kuba mwana mwanakazi, wakwela makola mwana wane” (as a girl-child, u have passed very well my daughter).

In addition, about 30% of the boys said that teachers would give equal congratulatory remarks when both males and females passed the test even though the latter did not match the former in grades. For example, as stated by one of the respondents, a teacher was heard using the expression ‘*very good, keep it up*’ in line with performances by both girls and boys despite the difference in terms of passing levels.

Part (c) of the first objective sought to address the factors that contributed to gendered language in schools. About 75% of the respondents said that among other factors that contributed to gendered language in schools were cultural beliefs, gender roles, poverty and lack of exposure. In line with cultural beliefs, about 30% of the female respondents would excuse themselves from the discussions stating that they needed to reach home in time. One female respondent was heard saying “in our culture, men are supposed to find women at home... as girl children we were taught that we are expected to be home before it gets dark... it is so because as future wives, we are expected to put the house in order so that as our male counterparts (future husbands) come, they find that everything is in place.” To this statement, one male respondent was heard reacting that, “it is true because, being in a patriarchal set up, us boys can reach home any time as we are portrayed as leaders as compared to girls.”

In line with gender roles, about 40% of the male respondents said that it was a share waste of time educating girl-children. According to them, it was like that because girls, being prospective wives have a sore-responsibility of taking care of the boys (future husbands) in among other areas, fetching water and cooking for the households. A male respondent was heard

saying “as boys, we are being prepared to take leadership roles in homes by working extra hard at school so that we support our families in future.”

Poverty as defined by Rundell and Fox (2006) is a situation in which someone does not have something, such as money in order to cater for their basic needs. About 80% of the female respondents said that girl-children are married off earlier because of poverty in families. This is so because they are taken as a source of money by their parents during time for marriage. A female respondent was heard quoting her father telling her to say “we cannot manage to pay school-fees for you and your brother, and at the same time buy food at home. It is better you get married so that we use the money to educate your brother and buy other home needs.”

Lack of exposure to policies, theories and organisations supporting education for all is another factor that has contributed to the use of gendered language in Lundazi society. In line with this factor, one orphaned girl-child was recorded quoting her guardian saying “since we do not have money to pay for you, you should stop going to school. Get married so that you look after your younger brothers and sisters.” This statement was said out of ignorance of a number of programs among which include Keeping Girls in School (KGS) and Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) that have been brought on board by the government in order to support the education of girls and other vulnerable children respectively.

Effects of gendered language on male and female pupils in school

Question two focused on finding out the specific effects of gendered language on the education of male and female learners. The question was divided into three parts (i) the effect of words used by parents and teachers when learners underperformed (ii) the effect of words used by parents and teachers when learners performed well (iii) the effect of the words used by teachers and parents when addressing learners in general. Both categories of respondents were involved in

the focus group discussions on the effects of gendered language on educational inclusivity and the general response in line with (i) was that when the learners underperformed (either boys or girls) the effect of the words from the parents and the teachers was negative. Almost all the discussants in the groups said that parents and teachers reacted negatively to the underperformance of the learners. For example, one male respondent was recorded quoting his father who was comparing his pass rate to his sister's "upenjeka kupulika soni, ndiwe mwana Mwanalume koma kaphasilo kopambana na kuphasa kwa m'dumbu wako" (you have to be ashamed of yourself, as a male child, your pass rate cannot be compared to that of your sister).

In line with part (ii) of the second objective, about 100% of the respondents said that when learners got good results, the words from both parents and teachers had a positive effect. As said by one male respondent, his mother was quoted congratulating him and his sister (two siblings in the same grade but different classes) "Mwaphasa makola mose kwene iwe mwanalume wapenjekanga kuphala mwanakazi osati nthene yai" (both of you have passed well, although you the male needed to perform better than your sister and not vice versa).

Generally speaking, it was found out in line with part (iii) of the second objective that the words used by the parents, teachers and fellow learners on the school-going girl children had a negative effect on them. This is so because the use of certain words made the girls feel less important in the school environment. When being addressed, such expressions as '*boys and girls*', '*John and Mary*', '*Mark and your group*' and '*he or she*' among others were used.

How learners can avoid using gendered language that affects educational inclusivity between male and female learners

Question three looked at how learners can avoid using gendered language that affects

educational inclusivity for both male and female learners. 10 groups of 8 members each were involved in focus group discussions on how they could avoid using gendered language that affected educational inclusivity for both male and female learners. It was found out that learners could avoid using gendered language:

- If society removed cultural barriers that affected one's access to different activities, education inclusive because of their gender
- If teachers and parents embraced diversity and individual differences.
- If school authorities encouraged their full participation.
- If school authorities encouraged group-work so as to bring about collaboration among learners of different genders.
- If learners were made to know that regardless of their background or gender in the school environment, they are all treated with the same amount or recognition, respect and dignity.

DISCUSSION

Factors contributing to gendered language in schools

In line with factors contributing to gendered language in schools, it was found out that parents and teachers reacted negatively to the underperformance of the learners in school assessments. This is so in that the parents on one hand thought that they were wasting resources on the underperforming girl-children, instead of them benefiting from the money that would be timely raised when the latter got married as the prospective husbands would be expected to pay for the marriage. One girl-child was recorded quoting her father who was reacting to her mathematics performance by saying "utengwe waka chifukwa utaya nyengo, ufeluka nyango zose" (just get married, because you are wasting time, u are failing all the time). This finding is very much in line with Spender (1980) who talks about language being primarily under the control of males and that males can use language in any way to females as it is believed that it

was created by them. Besides that, the finding is also seen to be very much in tandem with Achebe (1958) who believes that society is controlled by males and that females are equated to property owned by males. In line with the topic at hand, this finding really affects educational inclusivity on the part of girl-children because it makes them believe that only boys should get educated while girls should be married and act as helpers for the former.

As it was found out that in subjects such as Mathematics and Science where boys seemed to be very good, teachers liked making male learners group leaders during discussion time. Prior to the group presentations, some teachers, as stated by the learners could be heard saying among others “Mark and your group go in front and present, after which it should be George and your group... at the end, monitor and monitress ensure that you collect all the books and take them to the office for marking.” This shows that males dominate females in society. It is important to point out at this point that this finding is in line with Zimmerman and West (1975) who argue that males dominate females where decision making is concerned and that females are there to play a subordinate role in society.

In reacting negatively to the underperformance of the boys, a teacher was heard saying “as a boy you are not supposed to get this mark in science.” The teacher said so because he believed that boys dominated girls in the task at hand and that indeed a difference was expected in terms of performance. Rebuking though the quoted statement may seem, it is important to understand it that it is positively presenting the male learners in class while at the same time presenting the females negatively. This is so, because it creates a picture that it is acceptable for the latter, but not the former to underperform in the named subject. This shows that boys are seen to dominate girls in terms of educational inclusivity and this finding is in tandem with Tannen (1994) who talks about males dominating females during conversations. In addition, the finding is also

very much in line with Lakoff (1975) who was working on the principle that women’s actions and speech patterns are worse than men’s in that they confirm women’s subordinate social status and prevent them from being treated as equals.

Additionally, parents and teachers reacted positively to the good performance of the learners. For example, a good performance by a girl-child receiving this remark from the mother “kuba mwana mwanakazi, wakwela makola mwana wane” (as a girl-child, u have passed very well my daughter) aligns with the Speech Act Theory. This is so, in that, one can see that the words spoken by her mother created a performer in the girl child agreeing with the tenets of the Speech Act Theory that explain that language performs actions.

The statement ‘*very good, keep it up*’ used to both boys and girls having good performance despite being different in grades, has an effect on the hearer for whom it is used and in this case it brings about a perlocutionary act (Austin, 1962). This is so, because it creates a somewhat strange feeling in the learners by making them believe that it was fine even when girls performed less than boys in different academic tasks. Furthermore, such a statement was understood to be erasing a feeling of competition between male and female learners in class. From these findings, one can say that girl-children are negatively affected in terms of educational inclusivity because society looks at them as being weaker beings compared to their male counterparts (Baxter, 2002).

According to both male and female discussants, the factors that contributed to gendered language in school are cultural beliefs, gender roles, poverty and lack of exposure to current theories and policies on education for all.

Cultural beliefs

As Lundazi is a patriarchal society, as stated by the learners, boys were rated higher than girls in many endeavours, education included (Zimmerman and West, 1975). This

is in line with Achebe (1958), who talks about males being dominant to females in a patriarchal society, to the extent that as a way of showing power and authority, a man is obliged to marrying more than one woman because the latter are seen to be part of a man's possessions. From one group of discussants for example, two respondents were heard saying "since it is late, we would like to start off because if we reach home late, our mothers usually report us to our fathers and we usually get beaten when they come back from work." To this statement, almost all the group members agreed and on that particular day the discussion was cut short. It is important to understand that this statement has a connection to the Speech Act Theory. This is so, because the whole utterance is transformed into an illocutionary force which immediately results in the accomplishment of the illocutionary act (Crystal, 1992). In making this locution, the learners performed the act of fearing. The act of fearing in this case is an illocutionary act brought about by the illocutionary force contained in the phrase '*report to our fathers*'. In line with the study at hand, one can say that this statement had an effect on both male and female learners. On the part of the females, it made them think that education was a share waste of time because theirs was a subordinate and supportive role to the males later in life. On the part of the males, it made them think that they had a responsibility of looking after both the wives and the children later in life and because of that they needed to work extra hard at school. From this, it can be said that cultural beliefs are a contributing factor to society's use of gendered language thereby affecting educational inclusivity.

Gender roles

It was found out that gender roles are another contributing factor to the use of gendered language on the learners. Gender roles as defined by Talbot (1996) are roles that society attributes to people because of their being male or female. Generally, those considered to be hard to achieve tasks like building, thatching and providing for the family among others for example are

considered to be roles for the males in society, while lighter tasks like cooking and looking after children are considered to be feminine roles. It was discovered that males are seen to be very much appropriate beings for education attainment compared to females. This is because of the understanding that education would prepare boys, being prospective husbands for their roles as family providers. On parents' reaction to the underperformance of the learners, as stated by the respondents, at some point, a parent was heard saying "as a boy, you are not supposed to perform like this in class." This shows that society looks at boys to be dominant over the females at school-work and that it is not acceptable for a boy to underperform in class assessments. This statement is very much in tandem with Lakoff (1975), in whose Dominance Theory, he asserts that as portrayed by society, males dominate females at different tasks. In addition, the statement is also in line with Austin's Speech Act Theory. This is so, because the statement comes out as a commissive, in which case society has naturally committed the males to be stronger than females at different tasks education inclusive. As a result, males are seen to have an upper hand in terms of educational inclusivity as compared to females.

Poverty

Due to poverty as stated by almost 60% of the respondents, many parents used gendered language on their school-going children. Though the current government policy demands that at secondary school, learners be learning for free, education is still seen to be expensive at tertiary level. Because of this, some families in rural Lundazi are seen to prefer educating boys to the exclusion of girls as they feel it would be expensive to educate both. In line with this, one male respondent was heard saying according to what some parents say, "girls become arrogant and uncontrollable when they get educated, thereby forgetting their wifely roles when they get married. Because of this, it would be better to educate a boy with the limited resources available." Because of poverty, it is understood from this

statement that parents used gendered language in favour of boys having access to education as compared to girls. This is in line Lakoff (1975) who says that because of gender differences, males and females use language differently and their speeches display different degrees of power and authority.

Exposure

Lack of exposure to current theories and policies supporting education for both girls and boys is another factor responsible for the use of gendered language among different language users. It is important to understand that 'the use of gendered language on school going children' has the capacity of making an affected gender drop-out of school. A number of organizations among which include Programme for the Advancement of Girl-child Education (PAGE) and Keeping Girls in School (KGS) have come on boarding advocating for girl-children to have as much access to education as their male counterparts. However, because of lack of exposure to such, it was discovered that in many rural areas, girls are suppressed in terms of education attainment as they are seen not be equal to boys in that regard. For example, one female respondent who is also a double orphan was heard saying that her uncle told her to stop going to school, stating that it was necessary to get married earlier so that she could look after her younger sister. However, the respondent thanked an organization responsible for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in school for coming to her aid. This meant that both the respondent and her younger sister continued schooling because of the OVC. In line with the study at hand, it can be said that due to lack of exposure, a number of school-going children especially girls have little or no access at all to education.

Effects of gendered language on male and female pupils in school

As was found out, teachers' and parents' words had a negative effect when learners underperformed. This was so because they regretted the performance of the learners. On the other hand, parents' and teachers' words

had a positive effect on the learners in line with their good performance because they felt encouraged. This finding is in line with Gumperz (1982) who talked about discourse strategies and their effects on the interlocutors. In addition, the finding is also in line with the Speech Act Theory by Austin (1962) in that the performance by the learners made parents and teachers to react accordingly. This is so because their reactions are a result of the effects of the learners' performances.

When being addressed, the use of such expressions as '*boys and girls*', '*John and Mary*', '*Mark and your group*' and '*he or she*' among other phrases that reflected gendered language, showed that boys were being addressed first as compared to girls. In addition, it showed that the language users had a bias towards the boys as a result, the girls felt not only less important but also less included in educational affairs. This finding, is in tandem with Tannen (1994) who talks about conversational styles, particularly on forms of addressing participants in communication. Tannen (1994) says that, gendered language in the form of he or she, men and women, and managers (to mean both men and women) among others, has a negative effect on the female participants in that conversation. This is so, because this form of address makes them feel second to males. In the perspective of education therefore, this in itself showed that boys are portrayed as being more important than girls and because of this, girl-children feel less included in the education activities.

"Everyone should come back for Preventive Maintenance this afternoon. All boys should bring hoes and girls should bring sweeping brooms." Said one female respondent quoting a Preventive Maintenance teacher who was making an announcement. According to the female respondent, this statement pragmatically showed that boys are more powerful than girls. It was so because boys were being told to carry hoes as working tool which symbolize hard tasks awaiting them while girls carrying sweeping brooms symbolizes lighter work to be done. In line

with the study at hand this finding is very much in agreement with the Dominance Theory, where Lakoff (1975) talks about males dominating females at many tasks. In addition the finding really shows that females are there to play a supporting role to the males because they were to sweep what would be cleared by the males (Achebe, 1958).

How learners can avoid using gendered language that affects educational inclusivity between male and female learners

Ten (10) groups of eight (8) members each that were involved in focus group discussions indicated that gendered language that affected educational inclusivity for both male and female learners could be avoided:

- If society removed cultural barriers that affected one's access to different activities, education inclusive because of their gender
- If teachers and parents embraced diversity and individual differences. Within the school environment, this could be done by recognising and valuing learners as equal, whether from low social economic backgrounds, different cultural background, different genders or different learning abilities. By so doing, educational inclusivity would be achieved because many times learners imitate what elders do or say. At homes on the other hand, gendered language that affects educational inclusivity would be avoided if parents are made aware that every pupil regardless of their gender or social economic background should have access to education especially considering that the government has introduced a free education policy.
- If school authorities encourage their full participation. For educational inclusivity to be said to be there, classrooms and schools in general are supposed to be inclusive. This could be done by creating a learning environment where every pupil can participate fully. This includes an environment that takes into consideration, teaching methods, language used by authorities on male

and female learners, materials used and assessments to accommodate varying student learning styles.

- If school authorities encourage group-work so as to bring about collaboration among learners of different genders. This could also include alternating leadership roles between male and female learners. As the school has different stakeholders, collaboration among teaching staff and parents is also necessary as it is through this that diverse needs of pupils can be effectively taken into consideration.
- If learners are made to know that regardless of their background or gender in the school environment, they are all treated with the same amount of recognition, respect and dignity. It is through this that gendered language that affects educational inclusivity could be avoided.

It is important to mention that the findings on the third question are very consistent with Baxter (2002) who did a classroom analysis of boys' and girls' talk from a feminist point of view. According to Baxter (2002), it was found out that indeed there is a gender gap in terms of the way boys on one hand and girls on the other portray themselves. Girls were more on an inferior side as compared to boys. Because of this therefore, it is necessary to mention that girls are more likely to feel less important not only in the school environment but in society in general. Hence, bringing about a disparity where inclusive education is concerned between the two genders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study was guided by the following objectives: To identify some of the contributing factors to gendered language in schools; To establish the specific effects that gendered language has on male and female pupils in school; and To establish how learners can avoid using gendered language that affects educational inclusivity between male and female learners. All the study objectives were fulfilled and the qualitative findings indicated that among other contributing factors to gendered language in

schools were cultural beliefs, gender roles, poverty and lack of exposure to current theories and policies supporting education for all. The study indicated that gendered language had a negative effect on educational inclusivity. This is so because girl-children felt marginalized by the language as compared to boys. Even if they were praised at times for doing something good, the statements used had a latent implication which showed that girls were a weaker sex. The study also indicated that learners could avoid using gendered language if society removed cultural barriers in education; if parents and teachers embraced diversity and individual differences; and if school authorities encouraged full learner participation among others.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be helpful in ensuring that learners from different genders, ethnic groups and social economic background have equal access to education. This is so because if a majority of the citizens were educated the country would easily attain the desired developmental goals.

The limitations of the study were that the sample size of 80 and exclusively confined to senior secondary school learners of selected schools in Lundazi District could not be generalized to other schools in other districts. In addition, the gendered language whose effects were being investigated is that of the Lundazi speech community and not anywhere else. The study wishes to suggest the following:

- i. Further research be conducted on the influence of cultural beliefs on educational inclusivity.
- ii. Effects of gender roles on educational inclusivity
- iii. An investigation into the role of teachers in educational inclusivity.

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