

## Primary school teachers' views of the use of gender-neutral language to enhance gender equality in schools

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### ABSTRACT

Language plays an important role in shaping, and directing behaviour. Feminists argue that the use of gendered language has consequences for relations, and relative status of male and female learners in the education system because it is used to maintain, and reinforce sexism. Language can, therefore, be used to influence gender status. Schools are linguistic environments flooded with gendered language that can influence the development of gender roles. Teachers as key players in this environment play a very important role in cultivating gender equality values through using, and teaching, gender-neutral language. This study explores views by primary school teachers on the use and teaching of gender-neutral language as another frontier that can be used to promote gender equality values. The study is a descriptive survey which used questionnaires and interviews to collect data from 30 randomly sampled primary school teachers in Gweru urban district (Zimbabwe). The results showed that most teachers were not aware that a language is a strong tool which can be effectively used to influence gender equality. However, they supported the use of gender-neutral language as an effective tool in promoting gender equality. The study recommended that teachers should be exemplary in their use of gender-neutral language, and should encourage learners to use gender-neutral language. It is further recommended that gender-neutral language should be a component of language teaching in schools, and that primary school text books should also be conscious to gender-neutral language too.

### KEYWORDS

inclusive education, professional, standards, visual impairment

### 1. Introduction

We preface this paper by giving an incident portraying the effects of using gendered language witnessed during field work:

One afternoon, a teacher wanted 20 desks and 20 chairs be moved from a class to a hall in preparation for examinations, pencilled for the next day. The teacher instructed the class thus:

*“Boys! Could you carry the desks and chairs in this class, and put them in the hall.”*

The concerned class had ten boys and 25 girls. The ten boys took time to complete the task of ferrying the desks and chairs to the hall. One girl whispered:

*“The teacher should have requested all of us so that the task is completed quickly”*

By the time the ferrying of desks and chairs was over, the boys were tired, and complained of unequal treatment.

The incident prompted researchers to pose and ask whether the girls would not have participated in carrying the desks and chairs if the teacher had said, “Class carry these desks and chairs to the hall?” which, given their number, the class would have done the task quickly with little effort while demonstrating equality. Researchers reflected on the use of the lexical item /boys/ which had a strong bearing in what happened. Choice of diction in this regard was gendered, making the linguistic experience gender-exclusive. If the teacher had used the words like /class/, all the learners would have participated in ferrying the desks and chairs. The use of the word /class/ would have made the instruction premised on gender-neutrality, prompting all learners to take part.

The aforesaid is, thus, the motivation of this study wherein exploration of the use of gender-neutral language in gendered societies. This is assumed to be another frontier, if pursued, will enhance equality between men and women in society, however, by first focusing on learners.

## 2. Background

A number of multifaceted and intersectional approaches have been used to promote gender equality. These include legislations, feminist movements, constitutions, and use of non-sexist child rearing practices (Chinyani 2010, Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No 20 2013, Enyew and Mihrete 2018, Mhembwe 2019,). Very little attention has been given to the use of gender-neutral language in society, particularly in schools, as a way to instil gender equality values in children. Schools are centres where languages are formally taught. Language plays an important role in the development of gender roles. Specific words used in life help to reinforce and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Jakiel and Ozier (2017) argue that gendered language assign nouns to distinct sex-based categories. In each country, there is a native gendered language which is biased towards a particular sex (Jule, 2004). Thus, language use has created historical patriarchy which has existed in various societies and has been a norm for centuries.

Lexical items, or words, are important tools for social identification (Nwala & Harry, 2017). They have power, and their use on masculine generics like /he/ evokes mental images of male. Similarly, the use of /she/ evokes mental images of female. The consequences of the mental images are a manifestation of attitudes and behaviours in accordance to the gender so labelled.

Language is the most powerful means through which sexism and gender discrimination are perpetrated, (Manegatti & Rubini, 2017). It has power to shape and direct behaviour of an individual. Language produces societal asymmetries which are based on status. Feminists argue that the use of gendered language has consequences for relations and relative status for boys and girls in the education system. Gendered language can be used to magnify, or diminish gender; maintain and reinforce sexism.

The use of gender-neutral language (henceforth GNL) can be a strong intervention strategy to address gender norms and values. Gender-neutral language does not specify any gender. It avoids bias towards a particular sex. GNL helps to avoid choices which may be considered biased, discriminatory and demeaning of by implying that one sex is superior to another, (European Parliament, EP, 2008). The

language can contribute to reduction of gender stereotyping and discrimination, and can act as a barometer for change (Sczesny et al., 2016). Schools are the best formal settings where language can be used to instil gender equality norms and values. Gender-neutral language creates an inclusive space for both the girl child and boy child. The use of gender-neutral language is one of the best ways of creating a gender responsive environment by a teacher. Schools can teach children gender-neutral language before gender attitudes, and behaviours, are deeply ingrained in them. Schools are important contexts for gender socialisation because children spend most of their time interacting with peers and teachers. Early childhood education can be the foundation of the male –female polarity. At this stage, children develop their understanding of being a boy or a girl, and act according to the behaviour expected of them. The use of words like /boys/, and /girls/, by teachers create boundaries that are stereotypical, and shape children's gender identities. During play, children can negotiate the messages about gender they receive from their teachers, and make decisions on how to develop their gender. This is common during early childhood education games and plays (Vasileva, 2018). Language can be one of the socialising inputs that can lead the young into actively socialising themselves along gender differentiated pathways. It embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings.

Teachers' use of gender to label and organise class activities has a bearing in instilling gender values and stereotypes amongst learners (Bigler, 1995). Their use of linguistic space in the school environment plays a crucial role in moulding behaviour and perceptions in learners. Their use of language in academic documents is extremely influential and provides models for learners and society. Language and thought are intimately connected. Zlatev and Blomberg (2015) argue that the thought cannot exist independent of language. One's thoughts, and views, of the social world is expressed through language. Teachers are significant others, and their use of language can affect the genders perceptions of their learners. Their choice of words usually reflects their thoughts about gender roles.

In the same manner, teachers have the potential to make conscious effort not to use language that stereotypes, constrains and excludes others. They have power to remove gendered-language which directly or indirectly creates gender dichotomy in children. Teachers also have power to influence the school and society to adopt gender neutral language. The use of words like /policemen/ gives the impression that all people who work in the police force are men and this has a far-reaching impact on a generation of female children. They feel excluded and are rendered invisible in society. There is no need to specify the sex of a person when stating job titles like /postman/, /chairman/, /businessmen/. It is within this context that the study elicits the views of primary school teachers on the use of gender-neutral language, and how it promotes values of gender equality. It explores the challenges that teachers face in their attempt at instilling gender neutral values into their students and how such challenges can be eradicated.

### **3. The power of language**

Language has the capacity to produce asymmetries of power and status which favour men and women; boys and girls, and attaches corresponding social roles. It is a very powerful tool through which sexism, and gender discrimination is produced. The use of gendered language has a bias towards male gender. The words which children hear, and learn, affect their cognitive concept of gender in various activities, and careers. Schools are linguistic environments where appropriate gender equality values can be cultivated and teachers can be entrusted by the community to effect language change. However, the use of gendered-language in schools continues unabated, and teachers are not taking action. It is, therefore, important to explore their views on the use of gender-neutral language as another frontier to cultivate gender equality values in children. This study explored views of thirty primary school teachers from Gweru urban, (Zimbabwe) on the use of gender-neutral language to instil gender equality values in learners.

#### *Schools and gender-neutral language*

It is important to point out that in terms of studying gender-neutral language in Zimbabwean schools is not that popular. In related studies, Chinyani (2010) explored the schools' potential in spearheading changes in gender equality in Zimbabwe. Questionnaires were used to elicit data from secondary school pupils and their teachers. Furthermore, document analysis and lessons' observations were also used to collect data. The study envisaged that teachers were not fully knowledgeable about gender issues which were likely to have an effect on gender mainstreaming.

The study further noted that the school system was doing little to foster gender equality issues amongst pupils. Bondai, Gora and Muchenje (2012) used social feminist theory in their detailed analysis of the relationship between language and gender. The study claimed that education could be used as a tool in the "deconstruction of gender stereotypes about women in the use of language" (Bondai, Gora & Muchenje, 2012 p.13). The scholars emphasised that derogatory and undignified linguistic terms should be avoided both within and outside schools.

In another study, Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) unmasked factors within the school curriculum in Zimbabwe that prepared girls to follow different careers from boys. Using observations, and focus group discussions, the study concluded that whilst the education curriculum might seem to be gender neutral, "the hidden curriculum reflected teachers' attitudes and influence that contributed to girls' career aspirations and choices" (Mutekwe & Modiba, 2012 p.279). What this means is that whilst on paper there are efforts to promote gender parity, the situation is different on the ground, thus there was need to establish whether the language used by teachers is gender-neutral or not, given that teachers are influential (Mutekwe, Modiba & Maphosa, 2011). Thus, if they use gendered-language it will have a negative impact on pupils as they will take it as the norm.

Stahlberg et al. (2007) made a typology of gender types. They identified three types of gender-language namely; grammatical gender-language, natural gender-language, and genderless language. The grammatical gender is associated with gender inequality with the nouns, and adjectives affecting the way objects are perceived. The nouns are either masculine, feminine or in some cases neuter. Grammatical language is also used to describe professions like /policemen/, /postmen/ and so on. Gender natural language has been used to reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination in society because it is gender-neutral, Sczesny et al. (2016) argue that two principles have been used to make gender fair language and to make symmetrical treatment of men and women. The principles are neutralisation and feminisation. During neutralisation the male-masculine, terms like /chairman/, /policeman/, should be replaced by gender unmarked forms /chairperson/, /police officer/ and so on. This is an effort to reverse the traditional gender hierarchy which empower, and give men higher social status than women (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Feminisation involves using feminine terms to make female referents visible in society.

#### **4. Language and gender roles**

There is a close link between language and gender roles, (Giuliano & Nunn, 2013). Language has power to influence and alter people's views. The use of the male generic /he/ evokes mental images of male to a female. The image has effects on the female and studies have shown that women are less likely to pursue a job if it is described using a masculine generic like /policeman/. For this reason, feminists of 1970s advocated a wholesome change from the use of generic /he/ to the use of /he or she/. However, the word order in conjoined phrases played a fundamental role in gender balance. In many cases, the female is often placed in secondary position to male for example /he/ or /she/, /kings/ and /queens/. This had communicational consequences since order can indicate relevance. It can evoke the belief that males are more important than females. In the spirit of cultivating gender equality values, the use of man first in written and spoken language must be removed. The ideal approach was to use gender neutral words like adults, children.

##### *Grammatical gender*

Grammatical gender is a system in which all nouns are classified as belonging to a

specific gender (masculine or feminine). Habitual use of grammatically gendered language affects the speaker's thinking and categorisation, (Davies, & Davidoff, 2000; Boroditsky et al., 2003). Grammatical gendered-language promotes sexist attitudes to those who speak and use it. At school, children learn language with grammatical gender systems, and this makes them notice the relationship between gender and sex.

Grammatical gender is often used in schools. It is spoken by teachers and learners. Written materials used by teachers and learners use grammatically gendered-language. Kurinski & Sera (2011) and Belacchi & Cubelli (2012), argue that the effects of grammatical gender and implicit knowledge of grammatical gender knowledge is acquired as early as three. Because cognitive concepts of gender are already formulated, the effects are limited at adult age. From this argument, it is, therefore, important to cultivate cognitive concepts of gender which are not biased to young children. Schools are the most suitable linguistic environments where cognitive gender concepts are created and teachers play a fundamental role in the process.

Some occupational jobs, and titles, which end with /-man/ obscure the presents of women in such professions (Lei, 2006; Hellinger, 1980). These include /policeman/, /craftsman/, /fireman/, /postman/, /spokesman/, and /chairman/. The use of gendered nouns is also common in stating occupations. Gender neutral terms can be used to portray gender neutrality like /police officer/, /craft worker/, /post officer/, /spokesperson/ and /chairperson/. Lei (2006) goes on to say that compounds with man like sportsmanship, manpower, manmade can be replaced by gender neutral words like /fair play/, /human resource/, and /artificial/.

A survey by Thompson (2016) indicated that there is a very strong gender binary culture that most educators grew up in. Gender inequalities have been going on unchecked in classroom activities, text and topics (McKibben, 2018). Teachers are likely to pass on this culture to their learners.

A study carried out by Hilliard and Liben, (2010) showed that language has direct impact in kids' behaviour. The study illustrated that the use of the words such as /girls/ or /boys/ at a pre-school by teachers evoked gender stereotypes amongst learners. The words group children, and they become aware of the implicit and explicit categorisation and differences between. They begin to attach meanings to the labels 'girl' and 'boy'. The study further revealed that the language which one uses shows a lot about how one feels. The study recommended the use of gender-neutral language. The use of word like /class/ instead of /boys/ and /girls/ could be used to create a gender inclusive space in the class. Hilliard and Liben (2010) further revealed that children in gendered-language engaged less in gendered play (boys playing with girls). The children also invoked less in gender stereotypes related to gender neutral language groups. The study demonstrated that language can shape the behaviour of children.

Graham (1975) observed that school environment was also dominated by male as the dominating speakers or characters in the text books. There was limited depiction of women in dominating roles other than homemakers and mothers' roles. In a document analysing of seventeen illustrations which depicted working situations, Otlowski (2003) observed that 12 were men and five were women. This reflected that there was unequal gender representation. It was further observed that the dialogues which took place outside the home modelled, and to a large extent, represented male characters. Text books pictures in schools also perpetuated gender bias (Donie, 2006). Sexist language prevailed and dominated classroom discourse. Sunderland (1992) argues that classroom practice can be categorised into the three namely, teacher-student discourse in the whole class, learners-learner discourse in pairs and group work. Most of the discourses are teacher-initiated. /She/ or /he/ has power to control the interaction activities (Hassaskhah & Zamir, 2013). In a study on the roles of student gender in teacher-initiated interactions, Jones and Dindia (2004) established that across 127 empirical studies, it appeared that female, and male teachers tended to have more interactions of all kinds with male students than with female students.

In 2012, Sudene et al. (2015) carried out a study in Sweden on the effects of introduction of gender fair language and a third gender neutral pronoun (hen) was proposed in addition to Swedish pronouns 'he (hon)' and 'she (han)'. 'Hen' was used

to describe any person regardless of gender. It was argued that children who were exposed to non-gendered-language became disoriented because they could not know their gender (Milles et al., 2012). Luggewill (2012) argued that, being called /boy/ or /girl/ was something which children were proud of. The word /hen/, thus, became controversial and was dropped.

### 5. The school and cultivation of gender-neutral Language

A Community of Practice (COP) theory can be used to explain human linguistic behaviour. A COP is defined as an aggregate of people coming together around mutual engagement in some shared endeavour (Büyükhıska, (2011). It is characterised by a Social Contract in which members of the community define how the members must behave. This includes how one talks, their belief systems, and how they value power relations. This makes it different from a traditional community. Echert and McConnell-Ginnet (1992) used the COP to explore the relationship between language and gender, and concluded that one can acquire sociolinguistic competences by being a member of a COP. Members of the COP observe, and imitate, and adjust, their behaviours according to the group's expectations. These include specific language structures, discourse and patterns of interactions (Büyükhıska, 2011).

A school is a typical example of a community of practice where learners can acquire gender-neutral linguistic competencies. The teachers, and learners should work together towards achieving the vision of using gender neutral language in society. The use of gender-neutral language can be adopted as a social contract which both teachers, and learners, can adopt in order to cultivate a culture of gender-neutralisation. Arguing from Thomas Hobbes' point of view, Boucher and Paul (2005) assert that, in a social contract, members agree to give up or limit their natural rights and freedoms in exchange for some kind of benefit. In this case, members in the school community of practice agree to replace gendered language and replace it with gender neutral language in all language structures, and interaction patterns within the school. The titles, labels and language structures used verbally and in text can be revised and made gender neutral.

### 6. Methodology

The study on gender-neutral language unpacks ways of reducing stereotyping and discrimination in language. It also leads to abolition of asymmetries used in addressing 'men' and 'women' in society, and 'boys' and 'girls' in schools (Maass et al., 2013). The study unpacks ways to avoid reinforcing gender binaries and biased gender identities that are present in curriculum and teachers' practices (Sunderland, 1992). There is little scholarly attention given to the use of gender-neutral language in enhancing gender equality, and the study can add literature on how the use of gender-neutral language in schools can be a strong frontier which can be used to enhance gender-neutrality.

The study can also help to influence policy to enable the use of gender-neutral language in schools, and audit of the curriculum to ensure that all voices (male and female) are being represented. Teaching materials, used in schools, can be analysed in order to remove over and underrepresentation of 'men' and 'women', 'boys' and 'girls'. This will help in the viewing of teaching materials with gender conscious lenses and promotion of gender responsive learning environments in schools.

The study, therefore, adopted a mixed method approach. A mixed method approach is a methodological approach which focuses on collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative, and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A sample of 15 female and 15 male primary school teachers were randomly selected from a cluster of six primary schools in Gweru urban (Zimbabwe), to responded to questionnaires. A Likert scale was used to explore teachers' views on use of gender-neutral language in schools.

Data was analysed using mean of responses from the questionnaires. Ten teachers participated in interviews which explored their views of the use of gender-neutral language in schools as another way of enhancing gender equality. The

interviews were carried until data reached saturation stage. The use of two methods of collecting data helped to secure an in-depth understanding of the study. Denzin

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breadth, complexity, richness and depth to enquiry.

## 7. Results and Discussion

A decision to determine the teachers' views on gender-neutral language was determined by the mean responses of the questionnaires. Nominal values of Strongly Agree, (SD) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagrees (SD) 1 were calculated as follows:

$$\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.5$$

Responses for each opinion were multiplied as per rating then divided by total number of respondents. Responses of 2.5 and above were considered as agree and those below 2.5 were considered as disagree. The Tables 1 and 2 below shows the results:

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Σ	$\bar{X}$	Decision
Gendered language influences gender role development	25	5	-	-	30	3,8	Agree
We use gendered language unconsciously	20	-	5	5	30	3,2	Agree
It is possible to unlabel and relabel gender-related nouns or adjectives seems	12	1	2	15	30	2,3	Disagree
Teachers play a major role in cultivating gender neutral language	17	5	3	5	30	3,1	Agree

Table 1: Teachers' views on the use of gender-neutral language N=30

Source: Researchers, 2021

The results showed that teachers agreed that gendered-language influenced gender role development, and gender identity. Racoma (2010) supports this view by saying language plays an important role in defining gender as it affects gender roles in society. In a study on language environment and gender identity, Guiora et al., (2006) also concur that sex-determined grammatical gender loaded in language has an effect in the development of gender identity. Armed with this knowledge, teachers should take into account gender perspective in teaching, and be able to avoid gender discrimination.

Table 1 also shows that teachers agreed that the use of gendered-language had an effect on the development of gender identity. Through interviews, teachers indicated that they just used gendered-language unconsciously, and they were used to it as indicated by the following remarks:

I am used to the use of gender related nouns and adjectives and it is relabelling and *unlabelling* nouns and adjectives that attracts attention and are time consuming.

I feel like doing the unusual when using gender neutral language. After all, gendered-language

is used in most written material we use daily.

Noteworthy from these remarks is the fact that teachers are accustomed to the use of gendered-language, and they find it difficult to switch to gender neutral language. The prevalence of gendered language in textbooks, which are used by teachers and learners daily, also makes the teachers feel innocent. The use of the words /man/ and /he/ was dominant in the materials daily used by teachers, and learners. Such material portrayed that society was male dominated and women were invisible (Giuliano & Nunn, 2013). The use of the words by teachers who are significant others in society has a lasting effect on development of the learners' gender identity. Learners believe that whatever the teacher says is true and correct. It is, however, important to note that teachers felt that they were able to cultivate gender-neutral language in the same manner as they had been cultivating gendered language.

Another set of results regards the barriers encountered in using gender neutral language

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Σ	$\bar{X}$	Decision
Culture is laden with values of masculinity and femininity	30				30	4	Agree
Lack of knowledge of gender neutral language	14	4	2	12	30	2.6	Disagree
Teaching and learning materials used are not gender neutral	21	5	4		30	3.6	Agree
Informal interactions used gendered language	25	5			30	3.8	Agree

Table 2: Teachers' views on the barriers faced in using gender-neutral language. N=30

Source: Researchers, 2021

Table 2. shows that all teachers agreed that culture played an important role in enhancing gendered language. Every culture prepares boys to adopt particular masculine roles and girls feminine roles. It establishes the cognitive and affective behaviour of an individual (Kuo & Lai, 2006). Language is a product of culture which helps people determine how individuals encode messages. It represents culture in the minds of the speakers. Language conveys what is expected of boys and girls. Interviewed teachers cited some of the effects through the following sentences:

[S1] [A boy must be brave.]

[S2] [A girl should do household chores.]

The above are instances of the cultural linguistic statements that are normally shared in Zimbabwe. The words in the sentences confer different gender roles to boys and girls. Implied in the first sentence [S1] is that boys should be brave while girls should not. This explains the reasons why girls seek protection from boys because culture says boys must be strong. A gender-neutral language approach or interpretation [INT 1] and [INT 2], when talking to boys and girls would then be:

[You should all be brave].

[You should share household chores].

The cultural use of gendered-language creates gender binaries which become part and parcel of children's lives. Children come to school imbued with these beliefs. It then becomes very difficult to implement gender-neutral language at school when at

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below:

It is very difficult to undo what children learn from home.

It appears as if we now challenging tradition.

Notable from the remarks is that the use of gender-neutral language culture should not only be advocated for at schools only, but also at home. This is so because cultural practices at home fosters-gendered language. Teachers disagreed that they lacked knowledge of gender-neutral language. Most of them were aware that they could substitute gendered-language with gender-neutral language. They gave the following reasons:

It is a matter of habit which has developed into a culture.

We are able to switch to the use of gender-neutral language. We only need to get used to it.

The reasons given indicated that culture took precedence but teachers were able to switch to gender-neutral language. In the same manner that they are used to gendered language, they can also adopt gender-neutral language and get used to it. It is, therefore, necessary to put in place a policy to enforce them to adopt the use of gender-neutral language

Table 2 indicates that teachers agreed that teaching, and learning materials they used, were not gender responsive. In other words, the language used on teaching, and learning materials was not gender neutral, thereby perpetuating gender bias and stereotypes. Interviewed teachers argued that the words /he/, /man/ dominate in most written texts giving the impression that the male are more important than female characters. Female teachers argued that they use gender-neutral language in materials which they individually design. They felt there was need for specific training on the use of gender perspective when teaching. This was an important measure to ensure gender responsive teaching.

Gendered written material used by teachers play a major role on promoting development of gender identity. What learners read, and see, on written text largely affect development of gender identity. Teachers need to analyse the teaching and learning material which they use in order to assess the gender responsiveness of the materials. Where the materials portray gender-bias and stereotyping, the teachers should replace gendered language with gender-neutral language. Teachers should produce their own teaching and learning materials so that they have the opportunity consciously factor in gender responsive language in materials they use (Saitualribar et al., 2018).

Furthermore, other media like televisions, magazines and electronic graphics which teachers have no control over, can militate against their efforts to cultivate gender-neutral language in learners. These play important roles of enforcing gendered language during informal interactions which learners engage in. A multi-sectoral approach in which print and electronic media, family and family relationships, and the schools, should make concerted effort to use gender-neutral language.

It is important to note that teachers are gendered beings, and this explains why some of them support continued use of gendered-language. They are products of society and they carry with them gender norms which they can apply at school for the better or for worse. While effort is made in catalysing gender change in learners, the missing key point is self-reflection by teachers on gender sensitisation.

There is need for in-service training on use of gender-neutral language by teachers. Most teachers had no training in gender issues in education. There is a need for a gender conscious curriculum and teacher training in order to enhance gender responsive environments in schools (USAID, 2007). Since women do not

benefit from the existing gender disparity, it is most advisable that female teachers take a leading role in the use of gender-neutral language. Teachers should mainstream gender in teaching and learning because a teacher who takes into account gender perspectives in teaching is able to avoid gender discrimination

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language and social interactional patterns which are gender neutral.

## 8. Conclusion

Language is an important vehicle for socialising learners' gender attitudes and behaviour. Although most of the Gweru urban teachers are not aware of the impact of gendered-language on children, they have the potential to use language to cultivate gender fair language in children. There is need to relook at gendered-language which is upheld by culture because it militates against ensuring gender equality. Gendered language endorsed by culture should be replaced by gender-neutral language in order to instil gender equality values in learners. Teachers need to analyse materials which they use for teaching and learning in order to assess the gender responsiveness of the language used. They should replace gendered language with gender-neutral language. Furthermore, teachers should be models of using gender neutral language since they are entrusted by the community to effect change in learners. Further, studies can be done on monitoring how recommendations from this study are implemented.

## 9. Recommendations

The researchers made the following recommendations:

1. Teachers should give learners the opportunity to cross gender boundaries' by using gender neutral language and encourage them to do opposite sex activities during learning in order to enhance gender-neutrality.
2. Teachers need to examine the language and materials offered to learners and decide the changes which need to be made if one gender dominates the other in order to remove gender stereotypical ways in which they are used.
3. Gender-neutral language should be a component of language teaching in schools in order to instil gender-neutral values amongst learners.
4. Schools should form communities of practise which enforce use of gender-neutral language.
5. Teachers should not use verbal and written language to engender gender divide in education. They should endeavour to use gender neutral language in order to promote equality.

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