



“The Students Work, the Teacher Guides”

Aida Zhupa

High school "Hospitality & Tourism" (Albania)

aida_zhupa@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article discusses the importance of the teaching methodologies in students' education, given the aim of these methodologies in the development of the critical and creative thinking skills and abilities of the students, from problem solving and making decisions in real life, to social roles within the group and between groups of different cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this article is to present some of the methods that enable teachers to improve the interaction of students with textbooks, to promote critical analysis and enable a study strategy as well as the perfecting of teaching methods. The main focus will be in the social subjects which can provide a multi-dimensional education for students, but without excluding also other subjects of the formal curricula, containing within itself the possibility for new dimensions of education. This article will focus on the important role of teachers which with their formation and personality have a direct impact on students. Every teacher should select those methods and techniques which encourage discussion, debate, reflection and evaluation of various social situations, adapted to the cultural level and age of students. Teachers, along with textbooks should fulfill better the noble mission of education, of spiritual emancipation, material progress and the social development of students as social individuals. Teachers should try hard to encourage problem-solving learning, through the development of a classroom structure, based on a harmonious combination of discussions, explanation, and elaboration of concepts.

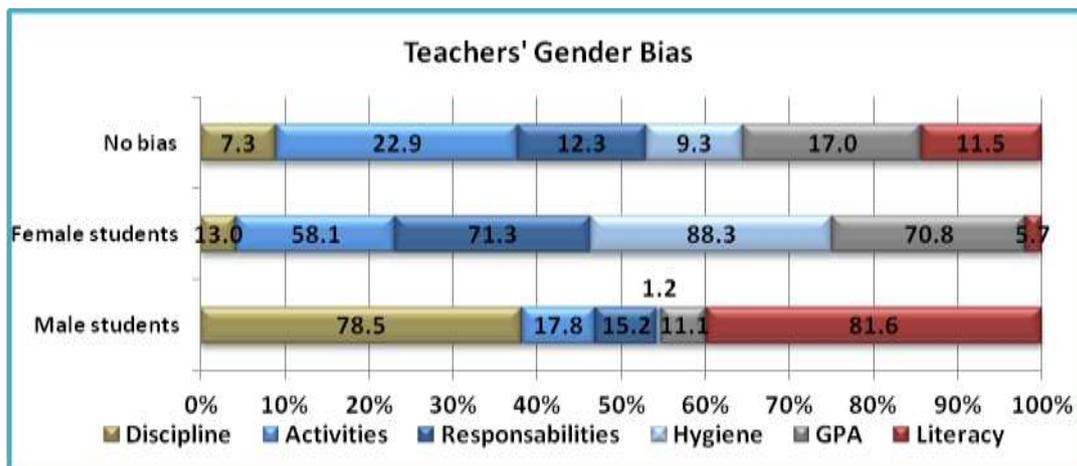
Keywords: teaching methodologies, interactive teaching, students, education system, textbooks.

1. Introduction

The role of education is essential to the social and cultural development of a democratic and progressive society. Through education, individuals have the opportunity to develop themselves and improve their economic and social status, independently of their gender. Nowadays, it is a necessity to remove any racial, gender or cultural prejudice from students' education to ensure solid foundations for a civil, open and global society (UNESCO 2003). The education institutions must contribute in the formation of the personality of the individuals, by creating the necessary space for the individual to overcome any hurdle or social prejudice and to construct his/her future independently of the expectations of the society, family, community, etc. (Zhupa, 2015). Education systems are a reflection of a society's culture - as such, these education systems unavoidably inherit a variety of problems and prejudices that inherently exist in a society. A simple analysis of the schools' environment, of their textbooks and their teachers' awareness, shows that the education process in Albanian schools presents significant problems. Continuous observations of different teaching processes in Albanian schools revealed that teachers need newer and more efficient methods as well as higher proficiency in both theoretical and practical aspects of their subjects to teach successfully their areas of expertise. Teachers need to employ innovative strategies in teaching so that students can gain new knowledge and learn the practical applications of it so as to put the knowledge into everyday use (ibid). The new teaching methods should aim at developing individual skills and at promoting the active involvement of students in the learning process, which means a student-centered learning. It is certainly true that the development of students' critical thinking should be one of the primary goals of the education institutions and all related elements such as plans, programs, textbooks and methodologies, i.e. of the whole education curricula at all levels. Teachers should be made aware of the great responsibility they have in the students' education and in the way students think and reason. Teachers should realize that their role is not just to convey knowledge, but also to educate and guide.

2. Data analysis

The majority of 900 surveyed students from various high schools in Tirana admit that their teachers show various prejudices and biases such as: racial, gender, cultural, etc. Gender bias has been reported to occur mostly and prejudice students' behaviors. The graph below illustrates the survey results regarding gender bias.

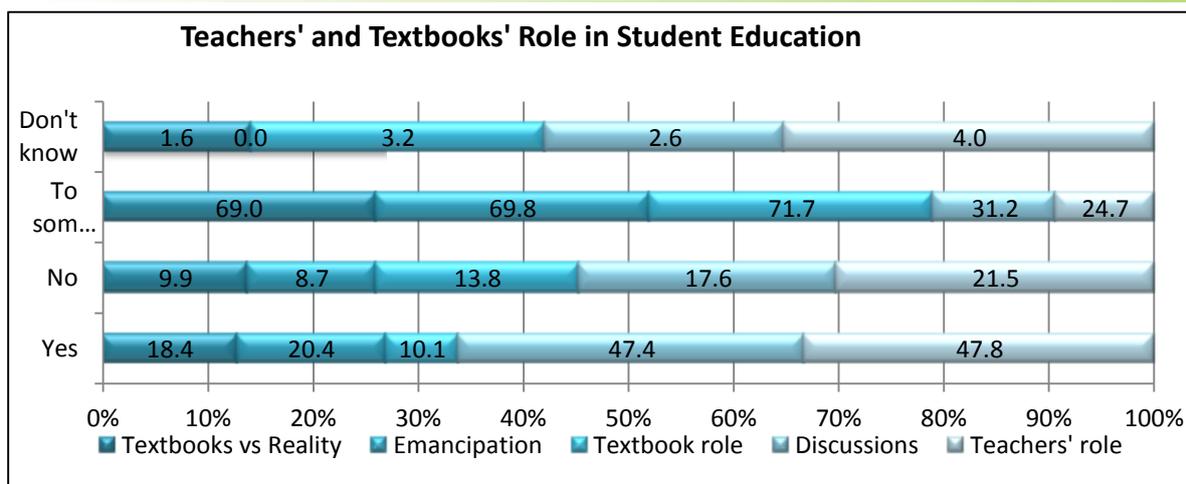


Graph nr.1: Teachers' gender prejudices

The survey results indicate that male students are most prejudiced by their teachers, with respect to discipline (78.5%), literacy and language (80%), and with respect to participation in school organized activities where male students are involved only in 17.8% of the population. Female students on the other hand are prejudiced and discriminated with respect to responsibilities and duties provided to them by their teachers (71.3%), with respect to hygiene and maintenance of the schools' properties (88.3%) and to a lesser extent also to language and literacy.

Textbooks also play an important role, alongside that of the teachers'. It is important to understand whether a textbook promotes personal and interpersonal values. Both the text and the teacher should help students build the "meaning for their own self". For this reason, teachers must also be trained to avoid contributing to the transmission of representations that convey inequality, whatever textbook is used. Interviews with 200 teachers of Tirana high schools (same high schools of the student survey) showed that teachers are aware themselves that they carry inherently different prejudices, which often manifest themselves as they teach. Teachers often restrain from discussing subjects related to inequalities in everyday life, even though there is immense interest for these subjects from the students.

"Teachers avoid such debates by not allowing them, by circumventing them or by putting them out altogether, because they can't manage them", admits one of the interviewed teachers. Often by being indifferent to such debates, or even worse, by applying a wrong management to such subjects, teachers don't achieve the aim of their own profession – educating new generations. Lack of experience, lack of professional education in teaching and lack of properly using appropriate and effective teaching methods can severely damage students' engagement and interest in learning. The results of the survey indicate that 69.8% of the respondents somewhat accept the emancipating role of the textbooks, whereas only 20.4% affirm this role. When asked if the characters and themes depicted in these textbooks comply with real-life situations, 69% of the respondents answered "to some extent", showing the textbooks detachment to real-life situations and social reality. 71.7% of the respondents in the students' survey indicated that the textbooks concerned do not help in solving difficult situations.



Graph nr. 2: Teachers' and textbooks' role in student education

3. Teaching methodologies and student education

The relationship between a teacher and a student is the key to success for an effective teaching and learning process. A teacher's personality and his professional and social/cultural background become crucial in educating students with contemporary values and principles. A teacher's role, thus, cannot anymore be a traditional, totalitarian role, but more of an educator and guide. Within such role, teachers should be aware of their importance in molding a student's personality away from prejudice and stereotyping, and of the inherent risk there is that the teacher can influence, even unconsciously or unwillingly, the formation of such stereotype and prejudice. To avoid the latter, teachers should carefully look deep within themselves to understand their own prejudice and to educate themselves to avoid such prejudice from manifesting during teaching. Treating students fairly and unbiasedly is an important factor that leads to a well-run education process and avoids the formation and manifestation of discriminatory and prejudiced behaviors. The role of an educator is to create an environment of trust and mutual respect, where everyone can express himself freely, without being prejudiced or discriminated. One of the goals of teaching is to maintain a balanced teaching process and avoid misunderstandings and misleads. It often happens that teachers are carriers of various prejudices due to their social and cultural backgrounds, due to their upbringing and uppartenance and even due to behavioral models exhibited and learnt in their own families – such prejudice can cause a disbalanced teaching and learning process and cause significant damage to a student's personality formation. "Teachers should be aware of their own prejudice and bias, but at the same time they should be open and willing to change their own behaviors and convictions" (Erden, 2009: 410).

"The new social reality and contemporary knowledge demand a change in the role of a teacher, as an educator and even as a counsellor to students in helping them with life and career planning" (Negovan et al., 210: 1730).

4. Critical Approaches towards Textbooks: Active Reading

"The main purpose of education is to mold individuals who are capable of novelty and innovation, not simply repeat what previous generations have done- individuals that are creative, inventive and innovative. The other purpose of education is to mold critical minds which question everything and don't simply accept whatever they are fed" (Ficher 1995). It is certainly true that the development of students' critical thinking should be one of the primary purposes of education institutions and all other education tools and aides such as plans, programs, textbooks and methodologies, i.e. the whole education curricula at all levels (Mirza 2004). Developing critical thinking is strongly related to the development of understanding and it starts with mindful reading, meaning that students should not just focus on reproducing the information provided in the textbooks, but instead focus in understanding it. Understanding the information provided, in turn, depends on many factors such as individual factors (previous knowledge, interests, wishes and inclinations), from the textbook characteristics (language, structure, imagery, etc.), but also from the methodologies used by the teacher to build the understanding of the information in the textbooks. The process of reading is much more complicated than it was previously thought. Recent studies show that not all readers get the same message by a specific text, even when these texts involve the same paragraphs (Musai, 1999). One of the methods



that help the process of reading and understanding the meaning of a text is deliberate selection, which involves the intentional selection by the teacher of a particular text, which can be analyzed by the students during class through repetitive reading, highlighting, note taking, and by asking text related questions to the teacher and other students. Such methods help the process of understanding and interpretation of the information obtained and not merely its reproduction. Through studying the text and highlighting the main points made in the text, students carefully evaluate and analyze what is written. By approving, confirming and reinforcing what they already know, they clarify their ideas and select the most suitable; they analyze and evaluate their conclusions by discussing them with the teacher and other students. *The combination of methods* such as cooperative learning (teamwork), encouraging discussion (questions), interactive reading (with intentionally chosen text for a guided reading), etc., would be an appropriate strategy for an effective and active process of learning. It is important that students understand that textbooks do not represent the indisputable truth and that the authors may be unclear in what they write, or be biased in many cases, because authors may have a specific educational, cultural and social background. This shouldn't be grounds to blame all fault on textbook authors, but rather to raise awareness among students that it is the students' own responsibility to actively learn from the textbooks or challenge them (Musai, 2008: 160).

5. Conclusions

The authors of the textbooks play a decisive role with respect to the problems arising from the textbooks. Being individuals with a special intellectual capacity and experience, they unconsciously reflect in the textbooks the gender models they have learnt during their institutional education or been educated in their families (McQueeney et al. 1013). To avoid that, it is necessary that authors of textbooks and the entire staff of textbooks' publishers receive trainings with respect to gender issues to raise awareness for the risks associated with the stereotypes within their textbooks. Textbooks, especially social subjects' textbooks, should be free from any bias and prejudice. School and social environment is made of different individuals that often do not share the same ideas, views, beliefs, values, etc. Opinions expressed or implied in textbooks should not include racial, gender, religious, ethnical bias, or any other bias that may distort student personalities. The Albanian Ministry of Education has issued new standards for the 2014 – 2020 period, which mandate that qualifying textbooks should not only comply and be updated with the political, social, historical reality, but also have qualitative content and be free from social, ethnical, racial, religious, gender, geographical, age or any other bias. (MAS, 2014: 4; 15). Teachers play a cornerstone role in student education. To improve their guiding and educator's role, teachers should avoid manifestation of their own prejudice and bias, and encourage active involvement of students in discussing topics that may free students from bias and prejudice (Vu, 2008).

References

- [1] Negovan, V., Raci, A., Vlad, M. (2010). Gender and school – related experience differences in students' perception of teacher interpersonal behavior in the classroom. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* (5): 1731–1740.
- [2] Vu, Phuong Anh. 2008. *Gender Stereotypes in Story Textbooks for Primary School Students in Vietnam*. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research Faculty of Education.
- [3] UNESCO. 2003. *Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality*. EFA, Global Monitoring Report 2003-2004. Paris: UNESCO.
- [4] Zhupa, A. (2015). Gender Socialization in Albanian Schools: Reading the Texts, Listening to the Teachers. *The International Journal of Humanities Education*, Volume 13, Issue 2, pp.15-28
- [5] Mirza, Munawar. 2004. *Gender Analysis of School Curriculum and Textbooks*. Islamabad: UNESCO.
- [6] Musai, Bardhyl. 1999. *Mësimdhënia, modelimi dhe ndërveprimi mësues-nxënës* [Teaching, Modeling and Teacher-Pupil Interaction]. Tirane: CDE.
- [7] McQueeney, Christa, Matthew B. Ezzell, Kenneth H. Kolb & Sherryl Kleinman. 2013. "Sociologjia dhe studimet gjinore" [Sociology and Gender Studies], pp. 617-647 in Fatos Tarifa (ed.), *Shkencat e shoqërisë*. Tiranë: Onufri.
- [8] Musai, Bardhyl. 2008. *Modele për zhvillimin e të menduarit kritik të nxënësve* (Models for Developing Critical Thinking in Pupils). Tirane: CDE.
- [9] Ficher, Robert. 1995. *Teaching Children to Think*. 2nd Edition. Cheltenham (UK): Stanley Thornes.



- [10] Erden T. F.(2009) A course on gender equity in education: Does it affect gender role attitudes of preservice teachers? *Teaching and Teacher Education* (25): 409–414.
- [11] MAS. (2014). *Standartet për tekstet shkollore*. Tiranë: 3-7; 8-15;