TEACHER ATTITUDES ON TEACHING ABOUT GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM AND THEIR INTERPRETATION AND TEACHING OF *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract

This research report examines whether English teachers believe that gender-related issues should be dealt with in the classroom. It is also concerned with what the relationship is between their beliefs and their interpretation and espoused teaching methods for Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. The study stemmed from an interest in teachers' perceptions of gender-related issues and whether their teaching materials (such as the novel in question) and feminist theories and pedagogies could be used as a means to promote gender equality. Five teachers were interviewed in one-on-one semi-structured interviews and asked to provide the researcher with the classroom activities and formal assessments they use when teaching the novel. Data from the interview transcripts and formal assessments suggested that there was a relationship between the teacher's beliefs about gender and their espoused teaching practices. Data from their classroom activities showed that in general, teachers aimed to help the learners to remember and understand key events in the novel as well as the main character, Okonkwo. It seemed that teachers chose to deal more closely with the themes of the novel in their essay questions rather than the classroom activities. It was difficult to determine the nature of the relationship between each teacher's beliefs and their classroom activities because they did not create the activities themselves. Most of the teachers simply used existing questions found in the version of *Things Fall Apart* used in their schools. It is recommended that teacher training should include training pre-service teachers to use feminist pedagogies in addition to the other types of methodologies they are already being taught to use. Workshops are recommended for in-service teachers.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education by coursework at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

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Phiwe-inhlanhla Nozipho Zungu

_____day of _____in the year _____

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter outlines the scope of this study. The aims of the research are given as well as the main research question and sub-questions. The rationale outlines the reasons this research project is important.

1.1 Introduction

This study stems from an interest in issues of gender inequality and male dominance in South Africa. One of the ways in which gender inequality manifests itself in a South African context (although this may apply to other contexts as well) is through gender-based violence. Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) defined gender-based violence as any harm that is perpetuated against a woman, girl, man or boy that has a negative effect on the physical, sexual or psychological health, development or identity of the person. This definition suggests that men also experience gender-based violence; however, in most cases, it is males that are violent towards women and children. For instance, statistics show that in 2009 56% of women killed in South Africa were killed by their male partners, while about 25% to 40% have experienced violence from males in some form (SaferSpaces, 2018).

The high occurrence of violence against women and children makes it important to try to find solutions that might help decrease this injustice, whose root cause is gender inequality. One of the ways we can try to address the issue of gender-based violence is through schools. According to Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) there are two ways in which education can play a role in remedying gender inequality. Firstly, it was found that education increases women's employment opportunities as well as their socio-economic status, which in turn reduces the unequal power relationships between men and women. It is, however, important to ensure that the learners are educated in environments that truly promote gender equality, as Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) argue that schools themselves can be spaces where violence is normalised, especially if authoritarian pedagogies and corporal punishment are used.

The second way Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) propose that education can play a role in the prevention of gender-based violence is by encouraging changes in education that strengthen gender equality in the entire education system. One way this can be done is by introducing interventions that include gender theories and tools that teachers can use to promote gender equality. These interventions can involve providing both pre-service and in-service teachers

with training on how to use gender-sensitive pedagogies and conducting lessons from a gender perspective (Fergus and Van't Rood, 2015). It is for this reason that this research project is concerned with the role of teachers in promoting gender equality.

1.2 Aims

The first aim of this research project was to investigate whether teachers think gender politics should be dealt with in the classroom. This is because it is likely that successful teacher intervention would partly depend on whether the teacher believes the issues in question have a place in their classrooms. Their beliefs and attitudes about gender may also influence whether debates about gender are likely to occur in their classrooms or not. It is important to determine whether they are willing or even able to talk about gender-related issues, because if they do not recognise the gender politics of the novel, teachers may miss opportunities to have discussions about women's rights and their subordination as well as discussions which may help the learners to envision a different society to what is currently the norm.

The second aim was to explore the relationship between their attitudes and beliefs about gender and their interpretation and teaching of Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. Teachers who do not recognise or perceive gender inequality as being an issue may not see the masculinities and femininities depicted in *Things Fall Apart* as being problematic. They may interpret the gender issues that arise in the novel in a variety of other ways that may not be meaningful enough to help learners deconstruct gender stereotypes. They may also focus on interpreting and thus teaching the novel only as postcolonial African literature which might lead the teacher to not teach about the problematic gender constructions in the novel.

1.3 Research Questions

Given the above aims, the main research question is:

What are teachers' beliefs about teaching about gender in the classroom and what is the relationship between their beliefs and their interpretation and teaching of *Things Fall Apart*?

1.4 Sub-questions

1. What are teachers' beliefs about the (un)importance of teaching about gender-related issues in the classroom?

2. To what extent are the participants able to identify and speak about issues of gender in *Things Fall Apart*?
3. What is the relationship between their beliefs about gender and their espoused teaching practices, classroom activities and assessments?

1.5 Rationale

It is often the case that women and men usually do not recognise female oppression because, as Fonchingong (2006) argued, women are indoctrinated into envisioning the world from a patriarchal perspective, meaning they too come to see the dominance of men as natural and a given. Becker (1999) wrote about patriarchy as a social structure that is male-identified, male-controlled, male centred and thus values masculinity and masculine traits. She did, however, argue that patriarchy is not a conspiracy among men because they too are collectively subjected to this social structure. Although as a group they are not oppressed and are often in a position of privilege, individual men who fall into marginalised subgroups such as homosexuals, particularly in Africa, can experience oppression from within this social structure. Although this is the case, it still remains that patriarchy is deeply misogynistic and in this kind of social and political system, women cannot protect their bodies, meet their basic needs or participate fully in society (SaferSpaces, 2018).

SaferSpaces (2018) is an online knowledge hub on community safety and violence prevention in South Africa. According to them, gender-based violence occurs as a result of gendered power inequality which is rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined by them as a social and political system that treats women as inferior to men. Gender-based violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, financial and structural with the most common being sexual violence, including various forms of intimate partner violence. The statistics of gender-based violence are shocking, especially when one considers that they do not include cases not reported for a number of reasons. For instance, in 2016 the World Health Organization (2016) found that globally, 38% of murdered women were killed by their male partners while one in three have experienced gender-based violence in some form.

Violence has negative consequences for women and children. According to the World Health Organization (2016) it can affect women and children physically, mentally and sexually. It can affect women's reproductive health, increase their vulnerability to HIV/Aids and result in lower education levels. It can expose children to abuse, violence between parents, and lead them to

accept violence and gender inequality as the norm. This shows that the effects of gender-based violence are dire; therefore, there is a need to create interventions that can help to decrease the occurrence of gender-based violence.

Some of the strategies that have been used by the World Health Organization (2009) to try to prevent and respond to gender-based violence are through school programmes. One such programme targeted either young boys alone or young girls and boys together. The aim of the intervention was to increase their knowledge of intimate partner violence, challenge gender stereotypes and reduce the level of dating violence. Another program targeted 13- to 15-year-old boys and girls. The program included a 10-session educational curriculum, a theatre production, a poster contest, training for providers of community services and support for learners who have been affected by gender-based violence. Although more research still needs to be done, the intervention programs described above have been shown to be effective in high-income settings. It still remains to be seen if they would be effective in low-income areas such as South Africa where a similar program was conducted and is still being evaluated.

As it is still unclear whether such interventions can be effective in low-income settings, perhaps then we can turn to teachers and what they can do in the classroom to contribute to teaching about gender inequality, as most children have access to free basic education. Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) propose that teachers can be trained to use feminist pedagogies which can help promote gender equality in their classrooms as well as in the school. It should be noted, however, that teachers do not operate in a vacuum and are bound to experience both internal and external constraints. It is for this reason that Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) further argue that the entire schooling system would have to employ the necessary changes in schooling structures and educational policies if schools, and thus teachers, are to be successful in addressing gender inequality.

Another problematic matter which contributes to gender inequality is the conflation between sex and gender. Morris (1993) argues that sex is a biological category in which one is either born male or female. Gender, on the other hand, is socially constructed and refers to feminine or masculine qualities. We tend to conflate sex and gender, which results in associating feminine characteristics with females and masculine qualities with males. This conflation is both inappropriate and inaccurate because gender identity is often complex and fluid. Although sex is not tied to gender, in some parts of South Africa, traditional gender roles are still prevalent, which is why females are still often associated with feminine qualities and duties

such as looking after the home and the family and why men are still associated with masculine qualities and duties such as leading the family and providing most of the financial support. Schools can be spaces in which learners are taught the difference between the two terms in order to help learners gain a better understanding of how gender identities are constructed.

The introduction of *Things Fall Apart* as part of the English curriculum came as a result of the call to introduce African literature for the benefit of learners. This change was meant for transformative purposes and has probably achieved some form of transformation in as far as teaching African children about their complex past. It is then disappointing that this particular novel, as well as other African literature texts, have problematic representations of women, as noted by Fonchingong (2006). Although the representations are problematic, they are to some degree true representations of society and can thus be used to show how society is structured in ways that marginalise and subordinate women. It might then be useful to think about how literature can be used to teach about gender-related issues in the English classroom.

This research is important because literature plays a large role in the English curriculum and it matters how it is taught, because of its potential to teach about social issues that affect the learners. This study is also important because it is concerned with whether teachers currently can use the English classroom as spaces to teach about gender-related issues and if not, how they can begin to do so. This is so that we can begin to imagine ways in which we can bridge any gaps that may be found from conducting the study. The next chapter, which is the theoretical framework, deals more closely with how feminist theories as well as pedagogies can be used by teachers to promote gender equality in their classrooms using texts such as *Things Fall Apart*.

CHAPTER TWO – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter begins by discussing how some postcolonial African literary authors wrote their novels with the intention of redressing the image of 'African' as a place where people were savages with no customs and religions of their own. Some of the novels such as *Things Fall Apart* were successful in redressing the image of African; however, they also have problematic representations of women which need to be addressed in spaces such as the classroom. A feminist interpretation of *Things Fall Apart* is presented in order to highlight some of the gender-related issues that arise in the novel. The notion of discourse and its role in the construction of subjectivities and texts is discussed and linked to how teachers and learners can work together to deconstruct and challenge dominant discourses.

2.1 *Things Fall Apart* as Postcolonial African Literature

Jeyifo (1993) and Strong-Leek (2001) both state that postcolonial African literature came about as a response to colonialist representations of Africa which positioned it as a place with people without motive, forethought or knowledge. Thus, African literature writers such as Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o wrote their novels within this context. To this, Powell (2008) and Peterson (1984) add that the wave of African writing that began in the 1960s restored a sense of pride to Africans because it showed the outside world and the youth that Africa's past was orderly, dignified, complex and a worthy heritage. We can therefore see that postcolonial African literature is predominately about reconstructing the image of a particular place, its people, its culture, history and traditions into a more positive and 'accurate' image.

Focusing on recapturing Africa's past from an African perspective has, however, had some negative consequences when it comes to gender representation. Fonchingong (2006) argues that the texts are mostly male centred, they favour masculine traditions and they have poor representations of female characters as they are often seen in roles such as reproduction, honouring their husbands' bed, cooking the family meals, and either battling infertility or receiving abuse because of it. That being the case, some male authors are now making an effort to rectify the fragmented representations they gave to females in their earlier novels.

One of the authors that attempts to redress the representation of women in African literature is Sembene Ousmane in his 1970 novel *God's Bits of Wood* (Fonchingong, 2006). It depicts women taking up leadership positions in a world that is male oriented and male dominated. He

uses the character Penda to defy the stereotype that women cannot be leaders and that they do not have the ability to be organised. This kind of representation of women can be seen as providing readers with an alternative discourse about what it means to be a woman and what they are capable of doing. Unlike *God's Bits of Wood, Things Fall Apart* is an example of African literature that has poor representations of women. These representations can, however, be used to address gender inequality in the classroom. In the following section, we look at some feminist interpretations of the novel which may help us understand why the novel has the potential to teach about gender inequality.

2.2 Okonkwo's Masculinity

One of the reasons *Things Fall Apart* has the potential to be used to teach about gender issues is that it can be read as depicting Okonkwo as being extremely masculine. In other words, the text constructs Okonkwo as subscribing to the hegemonic masculinity of the time. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity refers to the currently most favoured way of being a man and although it is required that all men position themselves in relation to it, very few men actually live up to a hegemonic masculinity. A few examples of some of the traits a 'real man' in *Umuofia* would have had at the time would be the ability to provide sufficient, healthy yams for his many wives and children; he would need to have titles; he would need to be strong and brave during a war; and he would need to be able to wrestle well. Okonkwo does his best to fit into the hegemonic masculinity of the time, which is the reason why he works hard to provide for his family and why he rejects his father and son, whom he believes are too feminine.

According to Ratele (2008) hegemonic masculinity is often associated with negative characteristics such as being abusive and having dominance over females. It is evident that Okonkwo does show these negative masculine traits. It should be noted, however, that the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity can and do change. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) believe that it would be possible to have a hegemonic masculinity which is not considered toxic. Okonkwo has the strong desire to conquer, subdue and control women, as is noted by Powell (2008). Indeed, Okonkwo states that one is not a man if one cannot control 'his women'. This need for control is extended to his children as well, and one of the ways he tries to do this is through frequent beatings. He beats Nwoye in order to try and make him more masculine. He beats Ikemefuna when he is told that the boy refused to eat. He also threatens to

beat up Ekwefi if he catches her giving Ezinma eggs, because they were considered to be a delicacy.

There are numerous other instances of violence from Okonkwo, but the beating received by Ojiugo (his third wife) is most significant because of the attention it receives from the community. The problem is, however, as Strong-Leek (2001) notes, that it only receives attention from the community because it happened during the week of peace and not because the community necessarily thinks it is wrong to beat women. This is something that teachers can unpack with learners to try and determine how such acts have contributed towards the ongoing abuse of women and children, and how this can be changed.

In addition to rejecting everything his father stood for and aiming to be the exact opposite of whatever is feminine, Okonkwo is also said to repress memories of his mother who, as Jeyifo (1993) stated, is not even named in the novel. One of the things that shows Okonkwo's disregard for his mother is how he quickly dismisses a memory about a story she once told him about why mosquitoes always go for the ear. He says the story was 'as silly as all women's stories' and because he immediately goes back to sleep after recalling the story. Jeyifo (1993) argues that this supresses the mother's story and reinforces the idea that the story is unimportant, even though a closer analysis of the story itself suggests otherwise.

2.3 Nwoye's Relationship with Okonkwo

Nwoye is a character of interest because he is central to the story and, as Jeyifo (1993) shows, his relationship with his father Okonkwo is foregrounded while the relationship between Okonkwo and his wives is in the background. In addition to getting beaten for showing so-called feminine characteristics such as crying and being lazy, Nwoye only begins to receive partial acceptance from his father when Ikemefuna helps him display more masculine characteristics. Later in the novel, Nwoye loses Okonkwo's acceptance when he finds out that he has joined the new religion. After Nwoye leaves his family, we see a troubled Okonkwo questioning whether he is truly his son because it is not possible that a man like him could be a father to a son who is so much 'like a woman'.

Jeyifo (1993) states that we can see Nwoye as embracing femininity because unlike Okonkwo, he only pretends to accept a rigid masculine identity while he privately still longs for his mother's gentle stories as opposed to Okonkwo's stories of war and bloodshed. In this, we see

that while Okonkwo suppresses the feminine influences in his life, Nwoye yearns for and holds on to them and it is for this reason that he is drawn to the new religion which seems to him to identify with the unprotected in his community such as the twins that are left in the evil forest to die after they have been born. It is interesting that Okonkwo becomes extremely masculine to avoid becoming like his feminine father while Nwoye remains feminine despite the beatings and rejection he gets from his father. Perhaps it is because he too does not want to become like his father.

2.4 Ezinma's Relationship with Okonkwo

Ezinma is Ekwefi's only surviving daughter, whom Okonkwo admires because she has the 'right spirit' (to be male). Instead of appreciating her for the woman that she is, Strong-Leek (2001) noted that Okonkwo is saddened by her being female. There are instances where Okonkwo thinks of how much better it would be if she were a boy. This shows that Ezinma is simply not good enough and is somehow lacking because she is a woman, even though she possesses the characteristics her father approves of. Thus, Nwoye is not good enough because he has feminine qualities even though he was born the 'right sex' and Ezinma is not good enough even though she has so-called masculine qualities because she was born the 'wrong sex'.

It should be noted, however, that Nwoye still benefits from being male even if he does not, in Okonkwo's view, live up to the ideal masculinity. He benefits from being male in that he still has access to male privileges such as getting a title if he chooses to do so and he would be allowed to speak in communal meetings or become one of the *egwugwu* in future. These are some examples of things women would not be allowed to do. Connell and Messerschmidt (2008) stated that men like Nwoye who benefit from being male even though they do not live up to the hegemonic ideal can be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity.

Ezinma is an important character because she can be used to highlight the faults in Okonkwo's views and because she can be used to show that females are capable of conquering obstacles. For instance, Ezinma leads the village in a roundabout way when looking for her *iyi-uwa* before finally returning to where they had initially begun. She does this despite Okonkwo's threats of violence and in finding her *iyi-uwa*, she triumphs over death because finding it means she has put an end to her cycle of birth, death and then re-entering her mother's womb (Osei-Nyame, 2009). In other words, finding her *iyi-uwa* means she will no longer die to be born again, which

is what she had been doing as an *ogbanje.* It is significant that she does this on her own and is not intimidated by Okonkwo's violent threats.

Osei-nyame (2009) and Salamone (2009) both argued that the scene in which Ezinma is fetched by Chielo and taken around all the villages on a dark night is an indication of how there can be space for women to defy male dominance. This is because in that event, Ekwefi follows Chielo despite Okonkwo ordering her to stay at home. She braves the night with nothing to defend herself with even though she is afraid of spirits that might harm her and the possibility that the oracle might strike her for following Chielo to the cave. It is significant that events linked to the empowerment of Ekwefi and Ezinma both involve ignoring Okonkwo's violent threats because it suggests that in ignoring male authority, it is possible for the women in Okonkwo's life to live freely and decide for themselves the best course of action even if it is only for a short while.

It is also significant, as Osei-nyame (2009) showed, that Okonkwo himself is powerless in this instance because he takes with him his machete when he goes to the cave. Although it is a symbol of his power and masculinity, it would be useless against the spirits which are a threat at this point. This incident (in addition to the one when he is troubled after killing Ikemefuna) also shows that Okonkwo is capable of 'feminine' emotions such as grief and worry, even though he can hide them well. This shows that not even he can really fully live up to a hegemonic masculinity even though he tries very hard to do so.

2.5 Umuofia's Perspectives of Women in the Society

The Umuofian community does not see women as equal members of society and it is quite clear that Okonkwo is not represented as deviating from the norm in this respect. Rather, his perspectives on women and patriarchy are in some ways typical of the clan. According to Fonchingong (2006) women have no say in communal matters because they are excluded from communal meetings even though whatever will be decided there will also affect them. For instance, when Uzowulu, Mgabafo's husband, is brought before the *egwugwu* by her brothers, Mgabafo does not speak at the meeting along with the other women who stand at the periphery of the meeting as outsiders. This is despite the fact that whatever is decided will affect her directly, and indeed she is ordered to return to her abusive husband who only has to take a pot of wine to his wife's family and beg her to return home. No one considers that Mgabafo may not want to return to her abusive husband

whether he begs her to do so or not. She simply has to accept the ruling without having a say in the matter.

Another practice that shows that the opinion of women does not matter is when the bride price is being discussed. Firstly, there are no women present at these discussions and secondly, the woman whose bride price is being decided on has no say in the negotiating process. It is only men who have the power to decide the value of women without their consent. The very idea of a bride price suggest that women can be bought which objectifies them. The notion that women are equated to property in Igbo communities as imagined by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* is supported by Powell (2008). Okonkwo is said to have 'titles, a barn full of yams, three wives and many children' which suggests that he owns the women and children in the same manner as he owns his yams, titles and children.

Although the Igbo community is indeed guilty of the marginalisation of women and children, their collective understanding of masculinity is much more relaxed than that of Okonkwo (Osei-nyame, 2009). For instance, when Udo's wife is killed, they do not immediately decide to start a war which would be the masculine thing to do. Also, when the missionaries begin to become more problematic, war and violence do not seem to be a solution they consider and this frustrates Okonkwo, who frequently uses violence to assert his dominance. When Okonkwo tells Osugo, who is of a lower rank than him, that he should not have an opinion because he does not have a title, he is reprimanded by the clansmen and has to apologise. It is then evident that the society, in general, do not subscribe to the same kind of hegemonic masculinity as Okonkwo.

Using a feminist lens to read *Things Fall Apart* shows that there is a wealth of issues that can be discussed in the classroom. To give a few examples, one of them can be Okonkwo's approach to masculinity especially in relation to his father. The issue of Ojiugo's beating during the week of peace can also be discussed as well as how Ekwefi and Ezinma are able to defy male authority in some instances. In the next section, the notion of discourse is discussed. Discourse is an important concept because it foregrounds the constructed nature of subjectivity and texts. In addition to that, it provides a way in which this same subjectivity and texts can be deconstructed through the introduction of alternative discourses.

2.6 Discursive Practices and their Role in the Construction of Subjectivity and Texts

There are numerous feminist theories which teachers and people in general can use in order to gain a feminist understanding of the world and texts such as novels. Poststructuralist theory was chosen for this study because some of its central claims have the potential to help teachers and learners understand how subjectivity and texts are constructed. Understanding the constructed nature of subjectivity and texts would also come with the understanding that alternative discourses are available and that people have the option to choose these alternative discourses. Knowing this might help to influence a change in the teachers' and learners' understanding of the world and their subjective realities.

Kress (1985) in Davies (1994) defines discourse as a systematically organised set of statements which express the meanings and values of an institution. Kress (1985) in Davies (1994) further argues that it defines, describes and delimits what is possible to say and what is possible to do or not do. This implies that we do not simply come to think of women and men in particular ways by chance. We come to think of them in those particular ways because of how they are spoken about, how they are represented in media, in texts and in the way our social institutions are structured. For instance, for Foucault (1981) in Weedon (1987), part of the reason why women are subjected to patriarchy came as a result of the way in which women's bodies were given meaning by modern science at the beginning of the 18th century. Due to the nature of their bodies, they were constructed as 'nothing but wombs' and were said to be better suited for the family life and looking after children by virtue of a biological moral responsibility.

It is argued that discourse plays a role in the construction of the 'self' or rather, subjectivity, the term employed by poststructuralist theorists such as Davies (1994). She argued that subjectivity is made possible through the discourses a person has access to throughout their lives. This suggests that the 'self' is shaped by the discursive practices that one encounters during the course of their lives. Discursive practices can be thought of as ways of thinking and talking about objects and phenomena we encounter in the world 'out there'. Thus, if we are constantly confronted with talk, texts and images that construct women as inferior to men, that is how we are likely to think of women and men. Weedon (1987) further argues that discourses create the 'nature' of the body, the unconscious and conscious mind as well as the emotional life of the subject they govern. In other words, discourses shape how people think of themselves and others physically, mentally and as emotional beings.

The premise that discourse is what shapes subjectivity is not at all negative, as it also means that subjectivity can be reconstructed with the introduction of alternative discourses. Indeed, Davis (1993) argues that subjectivity is neither fixed nor coherent. People are not simply passive receptors of 'input'; therefore, they have the ability to resist dominant discourses and choose from other available options (Weedon, 1987). Challenging dominant discourses is, however, complex because resistant discourses have to at least be in circulation in order to have a personal or social effect (Weedon, 1987). This suggests that in order for teachers and learners to be able to challenge the discourse that says, 'women are not equal to men', they have to hear or read about one that says 'women and men *are* equal (for the following reasons)' in the first place.

Challenging dominant discourse is not only dependent on the introduction and circulation of alternative discourses. The power relationships between different discourses count as well. Weedon (1987) argued that not all discourses have the same amount of social power and authority therefore even if alternative discourses are available, they do not always have the social power to be recognised in institutions. For instance, feminist discourses have existed for many years yet they are still not always recognised in social institutions such as schools. Weedon (1987) argued that despite this, the existence of alternative discourses is still very useful as it weakens the dominant discourse and offers individuals a discursive space from which they can reposition themselves. This 'new' positioning might help them view texts and images in a different light.

Texts, like subjectivity, are constructed through discursive practices, which means they too can be deconstructed and challenged. According to Davies (1994) by looking at texts such as *Pretty Woman,* one is able to see how readers use their subjective realities to understand a text. This suggests that readers understand a text from their subjective realities but at the same time, readers can reposition themselves when they gain access to a different set of discourses. In the same way that people can use alternative discourses to reposition themselves, Davies (1994) argued that by employing multiple readings of a single text, teachers and learners would be able to see how the texts are constructed. They would also be able to look at the political nature of the different readings of the text to see, for example, how power might be working through discursive practices to maintain the dominance of one gender over another.

As in the case of challenging dominant discourses to allow learners and teachers to reimagine their subjectivity, the deconstruction of texts is complex and challenging as it requires a

different type of pedagogy which repositions the teacher as joint learner with the learners rather than the usual authoritarian teacher. Teachers may not always be willing to give up their authority because it may threaten the completion of the curriculum. This is because when the teacher is not recognised as the authority in the classroom, learners may come to see the teacher as a friend and change the topic of the lesson to one they prefer (Davis, 1994). Below we discuss some of the feminist pedagogies which can be used by teachers in the classroom to promote gender equality. The main idea is that teachers can use less authoritarian teaching strategies in order to talk about some of the issues related to gender that arise in *Things Fall Apart.*

2.7 Teaching Using Feminist Pedagogies

Feminist pedagogies are concerned with teacher authority because the emphasis is on self and social empowerment and the erasure of multiple forms of oppression; thus, current authoritarian pedagogies need to be questioned and dismantled. In Perumal (2007) an examination of the central claims of critical and feminist pedagogies shows a common concern for democratic schools and societies. To move towards pedagogies which might promote such schools and societies, Davies (1994) argues that poststructuralist theorists might begin by deconstructing the binarisms that inform authoritarian pedagogies such as teacher/student, adult/child, mind/body, nature/culture and knower/known, to name a few.

According to Davies (1994) the binarisms mentioned above are what hold together discourses of pedagogies as we know them, which is why they need to be challenged. She argues that such binaries need to be challenged because they do not only underpin our understanding of what pedagogy is, some of them also inform and maintain the female/male dualism. It is for this reason that she posits that if the binarisms and their resultant implications are not questioned, the authority of teachers and texts will remain unchanged, as well as gender relations as we know them. In addition to this, Kenway and Modra (1992) argue that the top-down power structures of schools and classrooms are disempowering, which is why feminist pedagogies tend to recast the teacher as joint learner with the students. This means it would then be necessary for the teacher to let go of some degree of control over the teaching and learning interaction in the classroom.

From what is argued in the previous paragraph, it is clear that feminist pedagogies imagine schools where teachers are not the authority figures in the classroom but rather, should be

learners along with the children. Teachers can be thought of as learning along with the learners because they too would need to reframe their thinking around gender to accommodate ideas of equality. Using feminist pedagogies presents the potential risk of teachers and learners not being able to meet the objectives of a lesson. For instance, Chas, who was a teacher attempting to teach a primary-school study group (using a feminist pedagogy) to use poststructuralist theories to read and write, found herself struggling to meet the objectives of her lesson (Davies, 1994). This was because she was not using the usual authoritarian pedagogies: therefore, the learners did not see her as a 'real teacher'. Consequently, there was a shift in their power relationship as the learners constantly refused her tasks and often changed the topic of the lesson into one that they preferred (Davies, 1994).

Given the potential results of what might happen when teachers act as joint learners rather than the authority in the classroom, it is possible to see why teachers might not be open to the idea of using more feminist pedagogies. Firstly, teachers do not operate independently and are regulated in that they have to cover the curriculum within a given time frame. For instance, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements document is prescriptive in that it stipulates how much time should be spent teaching each subject as well as how long they should focus on the different aspects of the subject. English is allocated four-and-a-half hours per week. Furthermore, over a period of two weeks, teachers need to plan their lessons so that they spend an hour on listening and speaking, four hours on reading and viewing and four hours on writing and presenting (Department of Education, 2011).

In addition to operating under time constraints, teachers are also held accountable to teaching the content through the requirement of formal assessments and the allocation of marks and summative reports to learners and parents at the end of the term. That being the case, it is then possible to see why teachers might be wary of using pedagogies that might make it difficult for them to cover the curriculum. This is why, once more, we can argue that there is indeed a need for the entire educational system to change if educational institutions are to be transformed. Given this potential risk for teachers, a possible solution is that teachers can constantly switch between teacher–learner, learner–teacher, learner–learner stances in order to allow different classroom dynamics and voices to emerge within the classroom space (Schoeman, 2015). To do this, the teacher would have to constantly switch from being the authority in the class, to letting the learners be the authority and also being a learner along with them at times.

If the teacher can read and interpret the novel from a similar perspective as the one employed at the beginning of this chapter, they would be able to talk about the gender-related issues that arise in *Things Fall Apart.* To discuss these themes and topics with the learners, the teacher can switch between the different forms of authority as is prescribed by Schoeman (2015). At times, the teacher would be the one leading the discussions or asking relevant questions in order to get the learners thinking about a particular issue. At other times, the teacher would have to allow the learners to be doing the asking and controlling the topic of discussion as long as it is relevant to the objectives of the lesson. At other times, the teacher would be a learner along with the learners. In this way, teachers might feel less intimidated by the prospect of giving up their authority because they can always use it when they need to refocus the conversation in the classroom.

The next chapter describes the research design of this project.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research design of this study is outlined. It was qualitative research, which used nonprobability, purposive, focused, judgement and convenience sampling to select its participants. The participants were five English teachers from different schools in the Johannesburg southern suburbs who were currently teaching *Things Fall Apart* to Grade 11 learners. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used to find out about the teachers' beliefs and interpretation and teaching of the novel. Thematic content analysis was used as the method of analysis for the data that was collected from the teachers.

3.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative research because it is centred upon the subjective realities of the research participants and it has the intention to 'see from the inside' while recognising that the researcher is part of and not separate from the topic being investigated (Scott & Morrison, 2006). In education, qualitative research has been used to investigate on a small scale; therefore, this research report acknowledges that this has influenced the generalisability of the study especially in comparison to quantitative research which focuses on a bigger scale. Qualitative research was also chosen because it allows the researcher to explore details about human behaviour, patterns and beliefs, which is what this study aimed to do (Scott and Morrison, 2006).

3.2 Sampling

Five English teachers from five different schools who were teaching *Things Fall Apart* to Grade 11 learners at Home Language level in the year 2017 were selected. To select these teachers, nonprobability sampling was used, because not everyone had an equal chance of being selected. It was purposive, focused and judgement sampling because the selection was theoretically informed by who the researcher wanted to include in the sample (Scott & Morrison, 2006). The teachers were chosen because they were teaching *Things Fall Apart* in the same year the study was being conducted, meaning they were more likely to remember how they taught the novel. At the same time, it was likely that they would still have the classroom activities and formal assessments they used during the course of the year.

The English teachers selected were from high schools in the Johannesburg southern suburbs because it is in the same area in which the researcher works, which also makes it a form of

convenience sampling. Because of this, only five schools were approached by the researcher while looking for participants. Each school had two English teachers, meaning there were 10 potential participants. Of those 10, only two were male and only one of these males agreed to be a participant. This created a gender imbalance. It is possible that this gender imbalance is a result of there being fewer English male teachers than there are female teachers in the teaching profession in general. Alternatively, it might be a result of only considering the five closest schools out of the many other schools in Johannesburg.

3.3 Participants

Of the five teachers who were selected for this study, four were females and one was male. This is because there was only one male teacher who agreed to be interviewed from the initial list of identified teachers. They were all interviewed in one-on-one semi-structured interviews which varied from 35 minutes to an hour long. All the interviews were done when they had finished teaching and assessing *Things Fall Apart* for the year. The teachers were contacted by visiting the different schools and then dates were set up for when they would be interviewed. They were asked to bring the materials they used to teach the novel, such as worksheets, as well as both the formal assessments they used over the terms to the interview. This was so that the researcher could get a better understanding of their teaching practices as no classroom observations were done. The classroom activities and assessments were compared to data from the interviews to see if there were relationships.

3.4 Interviews

Interviews were chosen to collect data because they are suitable for topics that are personal or may evoke negative feelings because the person feels strongly about the topic. Interviews also have a higher response rate in comparison to questionnaires (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). In addition, interviews are useful because the interviewee's responses can be probed, clarified and elaborated upon. Nonverbal behaviour can be noted during the interview and there is the opportunity to motivate the respondent. Also, because the study aimed to identify attitudes and interpretations, and these are subjective and personal, they are best accessed through extended one-on-one and face-to-face discussions. Because interviews can be recorded, the researcher can listen to the responses as many times as needed and does not need to rely on the memory of the interview as some important data may be lost.

3.5 Focus of the Interview

The interview began by gathering some contextual information about the teacher and the school. The second part of the interview focused on the teachers' personal thoughts and attitudes towards teaching about gender-related issues in the classroom as well as their interpretation of the text. The third part focused on their espoused teaching practices. An extract from *Things Fall Apart* was selected and used as a basis to discuss teachers' perceptions of the abuse that occurs in the text. However, as these were semi-structured interviews, the structure was not fixed and follow-up questions were asked depending on the participants' responses. Because the focus was on teachers' attitudes and approaches to the text, there was no need for classroom observations and their classroom activities and formal assessments were used instead to explore the relationships between their beliefs and what they said they did in the classroom.

3.6 Method of Analysis

To analyse the interview transcripts, thematic content analysis was used. According to Anderson (2007) thematic content analysis is a descriptive presentation of data in which the researcher attempts to identify the common themes in the texts provided. To conduct the thematic content analysis, six steps were followed as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006). The first step was to become familiar with the content of the transcripts after the interviews had been transcribed. To do this, the transcripts had to be read and the audios had to be listened to. At this stage, notes of the initial ideas that arose from the data were made.

The second step was to identify preliminary codes which were the features of the data that appeared interesting or meaningful. The third step was to group the preliminary codes according to the themes identified. The fourth step involved reviewing the codes and themes. At this point, initial themes had to be combined, refined, separated or disregarded to ensure that the data and the themes cohered together in meaningful ways. The fifth step was to rename and define the themes and the final step was to write a report that used extracts from the interview transcripts to present an analysis of the data. The next chapter focuses on the findings that emerged from the analysis described above.

CHAPTER FOUR – DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter begins with a presentation of the data collected in the form of a table to give the reader an overview of the data that was collected. It then focuses on presenting and analysing data from each participant, one at a time, in order to enable the relationships that emerged between the participants' beliefs about gender and their interpretation and teaching of *Things Fall Apart* to become visible. Pseudo surnames were created for the participants to protect their true identities.

4.1 Presentation of Data

Table 4-1: An overview of data collected from the participants

Teacher	Length of interview that was transcribed	Classroom activities	Formal assessments
Ms Zach	31:53	Questions for Chapters 1–18 adapted from X-kit Achieve! Literature Study Guide: Things Fall Apart	1 literary essay question 1 exam: essay and contextual question.
Ms Radebe	37:45	Questions for Chapter 1–25 from *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe Notes and activities by Belinda Retief	1 literary essay 1 exam: essay and contextual question
Ms Dlamini	44:08	Questions for Chapter 1–13 from *Macrat Success Series Study Manual*	1 exam: essay and contextual question.
Mr Moyo	1:18:08	Questions for Chapter 1–25 from *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe Notes and activities by Belinda Retief	1 exam: essay and contextual question
Ms Motha	31:50	Questions for Chapter 1–25 from *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe Notes and activities by Belinda Retief	1 exam: essay and contextual question

Table 4-1 is a summary of the data that was collected from the teachers. It shows the length of each participant's interview, which on average, was about 35 minutes long. It also shows the sources of their classroom activities and which chapters the questions were related to. One is able to see from that section of the table that the activities given by Ms Zach were missing questions for Chapters 19–25 while the ones given by Ms Dlamini were missing questions for

Chapters 15–25. For the formal assessments, all the teachers gave in the essay and contextual questions they used for their exams but only Ms Zach and Ms Radebe also gave in the literary essay questions they used in the first term. The table also shows that the teachers had very similar teaching materials. This could be because all the schools selected belong to the same district; thus, they received the same teaching resources when they attended English workshops and meetings. Each of the data sets was analysed to gain an understanding of the teachers' beliefs and their espoused teaching practices. The next section is an analysis and discussion of what was found from Ms Radebe's data set.

4.2 Ms Radebe

One of the sub-questions of this research project asks whether teachers think gender-related issues should be dealt with in the classroom or not. When Ms Radebe was asked this particular question during the interview, she was one of the teachers who agreed that gender issues should be dealt with in the classroom. There was a relationship between that belief and her interpretation of some of the events in *Things Fall Apart* as she spoke in great detail about the gender-related issues that emerge in the text and she had relatively strong opinions about those matters. There was also a relationship between her beliefs and her espoused teaching practices as she described numerous lessons related to gender that had occurred in her classroom. Her formal assessments, which were mostly in the form of essay questions, were structured in a way that would allow the learners to think about some of the gender politics of the novel.

Ms Radebe spoke about the gender issues in the novel in great detail and her personal opinions were quite detailed. For instance, she was asked whether she agreed with the statement made by Strong-Leek (2001) that the community in Umuofia only paid attention to Okonkwo beating his third wife, Ojiugo because it happened during the week of peace and not necessarily because they thought the beating was wrong. She stated that she agreed with her and below is her justification for why:

> **Ms Radebe:** He hit his other wife after the week of peace but that is not given as much attention as the incident during the week of peace. And more disturbing actually is the fact that he hit her. Okonkwo gets meals from each one of his wives and he hit her because she wasn't there to prepare his meal but he has two other meals so, it makes him seem unreasonable. And it is quite abusive. He owns this woman. He owns her time and she needs to report to him whenever she wants to go somewhere and in which case I don't think he would have allowed her to go anywhere even if she had told him where she was going. So I do think that the reason why it was such a terrible thing for

> the community is because it was during the week of peace. Because it is implied that at any other time it would have been okay. That he would have got away with it like he got away with it when he hit his second wife and even shot at her. People just minded their own business because he is a man and is allowed to do it.

In this response, we see that Ms Radebe has strong feelings about the matter and draws on a number of examples and opinions to support her point of view. One of the examples she draws on to support her argument is that Okonkwo got away with hitting and shooting at Ekwefi because it did not occur during a time that would have attracted the attention of the community. In so doing, she is not only highlighting the role of the community in enabling the continued abuse of the women in Umuofia, she is also showing that the abuse was not a single occurrence. Furthermore, her opinion of the abuse itself being disturbing is an indication of a strong concern with the issue. It is possible that Ms Radebe may have these beliefs because she is positioned within a discourse that is more aligned with feminist perspectives on gender-based violence.

One of the aims of this study was to explore whether there was a relationship between the teachers' beliefs about gender and their espoused teaching practices. To do this, the teachers were asked whether they could describe lessons related to gender that evoked heated debates in their classrooms. Ms Radebe described three lessons in detail which may suggest that since she believes in the importance of teaching about gender-related issues in her classroom, she does do so. One of the lessons described was not related to *Things Fall Apart* but was about a comprehension in which they discussed why it is that men's achievements were more celebrated than women's achievements.

The other two lessons were related to the novel. One of them was about polygamy in which the girls argued that they do not find it attractive, while some of the boys argued that it was an acceptable cultural practice. When describing this lesson, Ms Radebe does not state which part of the novel was being discussed; however, the response of one of the boys to the topic was that he would prefer his future wife to not work because his own mother does not work. Below is the outcome of that lesson:

> **Ms Radebe:** And then the girls got quite upset because that is primitive thinking. It's 2017 and when we get married we will be in the 2020s probably and you want a woman who is going to be kept. And one girl even said this girl can't even buy a piece of chewing gum with her own money because she is so dependent on you. And her being dependent on you makes her susceptible to abuse from you. And it just became a thing

> and ultimately, he cried. He came to me after the lesson and said before today I didn't realise how big an injustice it is. Because his mother is not allowed to work.

It is possible that the class was able to have a discussion of this nature because Ms Radebe stated that she preferred to let the learners express their opinions and she would facilitate the discussions rather than imposing her own beliefs on them. This is in line with some feminist pedagogy theorists such as Perumal (2007) who argued for a less authoritarian approach in the classroom in order to encourage the kinds of learning environments that might help teachers and learners address gender inequality. It appeared then that Ms Radebe was able to create such an environment because she did not use her position of authority to shut down the debate. In this way, the boy was introduced to an alternative discourse which challenges what he perceived to be the norm and was thus able to reposition himself within a discourse that sympathises with the situation women like his mother may be in.

To further explore the relationship between the teachers' beliefs and their espoused teaching practices, teachers were asked to provide the formal assessments they used when teaching *Things Fall Apart*. Ms Radebe's literary essay question began by highlighting how Okonkwo's life was dominated by the fear of failure and weakness and how this fear is linked to him not wanting to resemble his father in any way. The learners were then asked to discuss how this fear causes his downfall. The essay question was structured in a way that would require the learners to think critically about the theme of masculinity and femininity. This particular essay may have been chosen because she believed that this is an important theme for the learners to think about.

Included in the assessment was the rubric which she would use to mark, and a very detailed guideline for the learners on what they could include in their discussion. Some of the things the leaners had to include in the body of their literary essays were Okonkwo's attitude towards his father, his warped value system, his inability to understand or accept Nwoye because he is different to him, Okonkwo breaking the week of peace, beating Ekwefi during the New Yam Festival and killing Ikemefuna. Although this may appear to be prescriptive and thus authoritarian, it provided learners with a guide on what to include which could be useful in helping them to structure their thinking and writing.

It was shown how there seemed to be a link between Ms Radebe's beliefs about gender and her espoused teaching practices. This was because of the ways in which she spoke

about some of the gender politics of the novel and the ways in which her pedagogy seemed to allow for useful debates to occur during her lessons. Her formal assessments also indicated an interest in highlighting the femininity versus masculinity theme because she thinks it is important. Mr Moyo, the teacher who will be discussed next, also believes that gender-related issues should be taught in the classroom. Similar to Ms Radebe, he also spoke in detail about the gender politics in *Things Fall Apart*. He described a number of lessons related to gender that occurred in his class and his formal assessments deal with the notion of patriarchy in quite a direct manner.

4.3 Moyo

Mr Moyo, like Ms Radebe, spoke in detail about the events concerning gender in the novel. He was asked the same question as Ms Radebe which was whether he agreed or disagreed with the statement made about Strong-Leek (2001) about the people in Umuofia only reacting to the week of peace incident because of the time in which it happened. Below is his response.

> **Mr Moyo:** I think the beating in all should be focused on and not because of the time in which it took place. We have to strongly disapprove of the beating of women at all. Your learners need to understand the various ways of dealing with issues instead of using your hands … What makes this beating a very terrible one? Obviously, learners are going to say, because it's during the time of peace, but then you say do we pay particular attention to your beating because it was on your birthday? Then learners would say no. Then you're able to say, now let's revert back to this kind of a beating. Is this justifiable on any grounds? All of us have human rights and a right not to be beaten. If you're beating me, you are not respecting me. We look at how men exercise their authority through the use of abuse and how women sometimes don't report it. To some degree we may look at it as if she believed it was the right thing to be done. Why did I go and have my hair done when I was supposed to be cooking? So, I was irresponsible and therefore deserved such a beating. We should distance ourselves from such thinking.

From his response, we are able to see that like Mrs Radebe, he had strong feelings about the issue of abuse. He mentioned that it should be strongly condemned and that we need to distance ourselves from thinking that blames the victim for the abuse. Mr Moyo went a step further to explain how the matter would be dealt with in the classroom. In this imagined lesson, he would ask the learners whether it would be appropriate for people to pay attention to them getting a beating only because it happened on their birthday. In this way, he would be inviting the learners to imagine how they would feel in a situation that

is similar to Ojiugo's. After listening to their responses, he would then link them back to the novel by asking if what happened to Ojiugo was justifiable on any grounds. By linking the incident in the novel to the learners' lives, he was using literature as a means of teaching about social issues which affect them.

It seemed that Mr Moyo did indeed prefer to ask learners questions that help them link the themes in the literature to their own lives in order to discuss the topic at hand. When asked if there were lessons that were related to gender that had occurred in his classroom, Mr Moyo mentioned numerous discussions. He stated that they discuss femininity versus masculinity and the exclusion of women from communal meetings. They also discussed misogyny, Okonkwo's interpretation of masculinity as well as the gender roles in the text. When dealing with the latter, below are some of the comments he made with regard to the topic as well as the questions he asks the learners:

> **Mr Moyo:** So, these [gender roles] are very important to deal with in our presentation of the book. To show your learners what used to happen and then you bring it back home. You start with the dishes at home. Who does the dishes and why is this person doing the dishes? Who is cleaning the bedroom? Which bedroom? Our mothers' bedroom is cleaned by them but I do a lot of cleaning in the house because I'm a female. I do a lot of gardening outside because I'm a man. So, these are the things that we have to put right when we deal with this theme.

Here, Mr Moyo was using questions to facilitate an in-depth discussion about gender roles because he did not only ask who is doing what, he also required the learners to think about why the person does those things. 'Why' questions are important because they can help learners begin questioning and deconstructing social norms. Using feminist pedagogies, this can be taken further by Mr Moyo by asking the learners if the reasons for the designation of certain tasks are appropriate, which might help them think about which discourse is informing their understanding of what women and men are supposed to do (Davies, 1994). Furthermore, it might help them to question and imagine if there are different criteria that can be used to decide who does what at home.

It appeared that Mr Moyo's identity as a man may have positioned him in a way that resulted in him interpreting *Things Fall Apart* as representing the women as being lazy. He was asked which social issues arise from the novel, to which he responded gender stereotypes, gender roles and gender inequality. While elaborating on what kinds of gender

stereotypes there are in the novel, he mentioned that the women were presented as people who were lazy and always at home waiting to receive something from their husbands.

Reading the novel from any of the available perspectives, including a feminist one, would not support the view of women being constructed as being lazy. This is because there is a wealth of evidence to support the argument that women had responsibilities that required them to work. They worked on the farm just like the men, planting what was considered to be the 'women's crops'. They looked after the livestock such as the goats and chickens. They looked after the children, they kept the home clean and they prepared all of the meals for their husbands and children. It is possible then, that Mr Moyo may have interpreted the women as being lazy and passive because they did not do the kinds of work that is valued by men and society in general. It is not the novel that presents the women as waiting to receive, it is him that ignored what they do while the men go to the farms because he perceived the work men do to be what provides livelihood for the women and children. This is what makes their work 'real' work.

Mr Moyo's exam essay question was similar to Ms Radebe's literary question because it required the learners to discuss how Okonkwo's fear of becoming like his father or appearing weak causes his downfall. Although he did not have an explicit guideline like Ms Radebe, the question was asked in a manner that would allow the learners to explore the theme of femininity and masculinity. In the same exam paper, the learners had a choice between answering the essay question described above or answering the contextual questions. The contextual questions consisted of extract A and B, which were extracts from the novel followed by the questions they would have to answer. The second half of extract B was taken from Chapter 10 (p. 77) and it reads as follows:

> *It was clear from the way the crowd stood that the ceremony was for men. There were no women present but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders. The titled men and elders sat on their stools waiting for the trial to begin.*

The choice he made in the selection of this extract was well thought out and deliberate as the first question requires the learners to explain the order and structure found in the Igbo society while the second one asks the learners to discuss the notion of patriarchy in the text as well as how it is different to modern society. He also asked the learners what the first line in the extract suggested about the position of women in the society.

In his contextual questions, we see a deliberate attempt to help learners think and write about the gender politics of the novel. If we assume that Mr Moyo used similar teaching strategies when dealing with the topics he wanted the learners to engage with in the essay and contextual questions, then it was possible that the learners would be able to answer the questions critically. It should be noted, however, that learners do not simply absorb whatever is said during classroom interactions and also, Mr Moyo's interpretations of the novel may sometimes have not been pro-feminist, especially in the instance when he viewed the women as being lazy because they did not do 'male' work.

The relationship between Mr Moyo's beliefs about gender and his espoused teaching practices is similar to that of Ms Radebe. He uses questions to help learners discuss the gender politics of the novel. Some of the questions he said he asked show that there is an attempt to link the literature to the learners' lives, as well as help learners think about the constructed nature of their gender roles. His formal assessment also shows that the gender politics of the novel were taken seriously in his classroom.

The next participant to be discussed is Ms Dlamini. When asked whether she believed that gender-related issues should be taught in the classroom, she said yes. Although she believed that she should, it seems as though she was unable to do so because she perhaps did not know how it could be done. It also seemed as though she was positioned within discourses that encourage and reproduce gender inequality rather than those that challenge it.

4.4 Ms Dlamini

Ms Dlamini was one of the teachers who believed that gender-related issues should be taught in the classroom, arguing that this is because we no longer live in a society where one is supposed to be stereotyped according to their gender. She also believed that *Things Fall Apart* could be used to address gender-related issues. When she was asked how this could be done, she began explaining that the novel discriminates between women and men and that the women have no voice while the men rule. She also added that the only woman who is respected is Chielo. This is because she is the only one who can speak to the oracle, which then accords her a status in the community despite being female.

Because her response did not explain how she could use *Things Fall Apart* to teach about gender inequality, she was asked whether the things she had mentioned above were discussed in the class. She said that they were, but it became apparent that in the relevant lesson, the focus was not on women not being respected, it was about people in general only being respected when they have some sort of social status. Below is a quote of what she said was said to the learners and the questions she asked while they were talking about why Chielo was respected.

> **Ms Dlamini**: I say to the learners this thing of status. It always come back to that. If you have got something you are respected. If you don't have anything, you are not respected … Just imagine. If an ordinary woman came here and said Grade 11s, I want you to help me to carry these things to main street. Just an ordinary woman. I believe you guys will say no. But if someone like the First Lady says Grade 11s can you help me carry these to main street, you are going to fight to help the First Lady. You see that Unoka was not respected. He was playing music, enjoying laughing and sharing jokes with people but because he did not have titles, he was not respected.

From the examples she draws on, we are able to see that she is not thinking or talking about women not being respected. She is talking about how people in general, with some sort of status, are respected in comparison to those who do not have some sort of social status. What this seems to show is that even though she believed that she should be teaching about the gender-related issues that arise in the novel and is able to pinpoint some of them, she is not able to translate these into her lessons. This could be because even though she has the desire to do so, she does not necessarily possess the knowledge or pedagogy that would help her be able to speak with the learners about the issues which are related to gender.

Similar to her response when she was asked how she could use the novel to teach about gender inequality, when she was asked to describe lessons that were related to gender that had occurred in the classroom, the lessons she described were not related to gender. One of the lessons she said evoked powerful emotions in the learners was centred around poverty and the other was about being an orphan. A lesson that was somewhat related to the novel (because she uses a term that is used in the novel) was when she mentioned that she gives motivational talks in the class every day in the morning.

> **Ms Dlamini:** I don't only motivate girls because when we talk about gender, it does not mean that it only affects girls. Boys are also affected. I try and make it a point that when I do motivational talks about gender, I don't end up concentrating on girls only. Boys are also stereotyped. It’s only that the society thinks that the only person who can be

> disadvantaged is a girl child, but boys are also disadvantaged in other ways. At the end of the day though I will be trying to motivate them. I say guys, do you want to spend the rest of your life being an *agbala*? Then the boys will say no ma'am.

The statement above is reasonably true because as Becker (1999) notes, boys are stereotyped as they too are subjected to a patriarchal social system and are thus judged according to those standards. It is also true that sometimes they are disadvantaged because even though as a group they are not oppressed, individual men or men falling within marginalised social groups may experience negative stereotyping and thus be disadvantaged, even though they are male (Becker, 1999). In the last part of her response, it is interesting that by not wanting to only focus on girls, she actually ends up focusing particularly on the boys, as the question 'do you want to be *agbala* for the rest of your life' is being addressed to them. Consequently, she is motivating boys to not want to be like women which is reminiscent of a discourse that tells us that it is undesirable to be like a woman. Thus, even though Ms Dlamini has the desire to teach about gender inequality, it seems as though she is still positioned within a discourse that encourages negative ways of thinking and talking and women.

Ms Dlamini made a link between gender-related issues and the institution of marriage and relationships but did not necessarily focus on individual gender identities. After Ms Dlamini had admitted that she does not usually deal with gender-related issues in the classroom, she stated that she would now begin doing so as the children she is teaching will be married in the next five years, making it important to teach them about issues of abuse and violence so that they are able to speak out against it when it happens. She argued that this would help to stop the cycle of abuse.

It seems that for Ms Dlamini, the importance of teaching about gender-related issues would be so that learners would be able to speak up should they find themselves in abusive relationships or marriages. This may be because she recognised these institutions as spaces where most of the abuse happens, as statistics provided by SaferSpaces (2018) show that 56% of murdered women were killed by their male partners in 2009. They also argued that the most prevalent form of gender-based violence is intimate partner violence.

Like Ms Radebe and Mr Moyo, to try to get a sense of her interpretation of some of the key events in *Things Fall Apart*, she was asked whether she agreed with the statement about the week of peace made by Strong-Leek (2001). She stated that she agreed that the community

only paid attention to the beating because it happened during the week of peace. Below is her justification for agreeing that this is the case. When looked at carefully, we see that the response has two main ideas, which are that the people of Umuofia believe that women should be disciplined and that they only concentrate on that beating because of the time in which it happens.

> **Ms Dlamini:** According to the people of *Umuofia* I think to them if you are a woman or a wife, you are considered to be a child. You need to be disciplined. To them Okonkwo beating the third wife, they don't see it as a problem because he was disciplining the wife. The problem that they have is that he has to do it during the week of peace. I think that in this book they are concentrating on the wife being beaten during the week of peace. It is because Okonkwo did not obey that week of peace. But he was right beating the wife. That means they agree that the wife needs to be disciplined. Which is wrong.

Unlike Ms Radebe and Mr Moyo, the only personal opinion or statement she had on the matter is that it is wrong. Most of the statement is devoid of her own thoughts and feelings about the matter. It is only clear what the people of *Umuofia* as imagined by Achebe think of women. This could be because even though she believes that gender-related issues should be taught in the classroom, she does not necessarily have strong feelings about the matter. Perhaps, like the people in *Umuofia,* she perceives this incident as being somewhat normal. This is also another aspect that shows that Ms Dlamini still thinks and talks about gender in a manner that matches the dominant discourses about gender that feminist theories and pedagogies seek to challenge.

The classroom activities provided by Ms Dlamini were from *Macrat Success Series Study Manual*. The questions were placed in the different categories according to the content the leaners would have to draw on in order to answer the questions. Questions placed under ‘details about the novel’ were questions that required learners to remember or understand details about events in the novel. Questions placed under ‘Okonkwo’ were mainly focused on getting the learners to remember or understand details about his character or events related to him. Questions under ‘relationships between characters’ were questions that required learners to understand what those specific relationships were like. Questions placed under the ‘Igbo way of life’ were questions that asked about the beliefs of the Igbo people and some of their cultural practices.

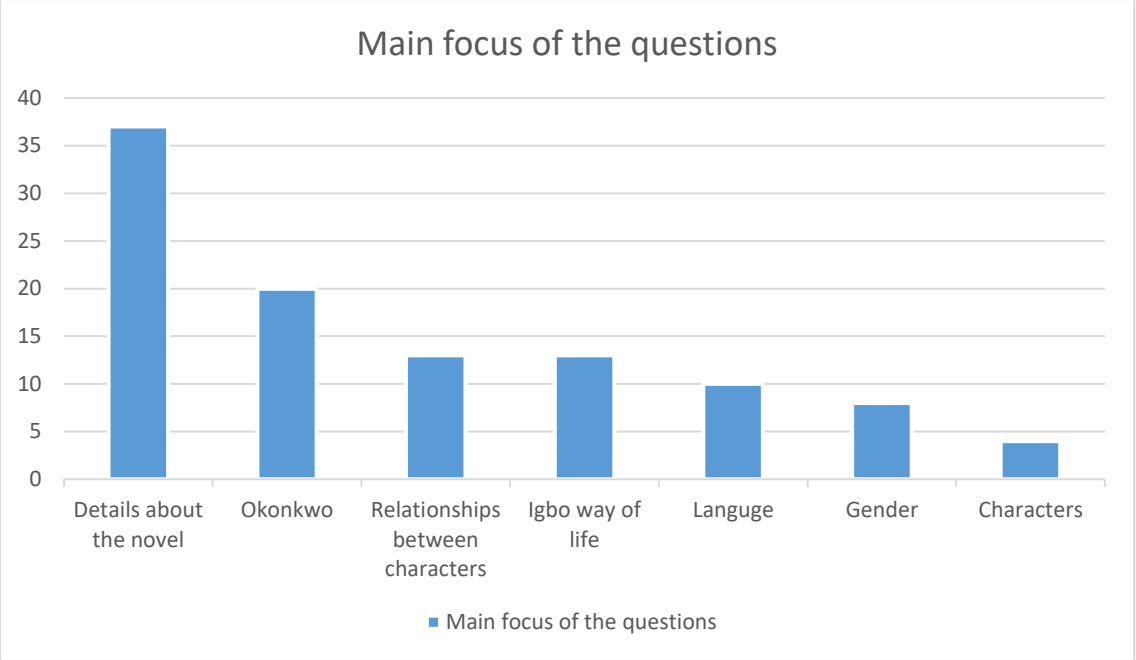

Figure 4-1: Main focus of questions: Ms Dlamini

Most of the questions provided by Ms Dlamini seemed to fit best in the category of questions that required learners to remember the details of the novel. The second most popular questions were questions about Okonkwo's character or events related to him. There were few questions related to gender, and there were consistently fewer questions under less dominant categories as well such as the 'language and characters' category. This might be because the classroom activities were being used to help the learners remember and understand details about the text and Okonkwo rather than helping them to explore the themes in the novel which appeared to be left for the essay questions.

The essay question in the exam paper given to me by Ms Dlamini read as follows: 'In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, the people of the Igbo culture respect their gods a lot and there is a lot of gender inequality. Write an essay of 400–450 words discussing about how they respected their culture and how gender inequality is shown.' This question is divided into two parts. The learners would first have to discuss how the people of Umuofia respected their gods and culture and then they would have to discuss how gender inequality is shown. It means then, that the learners would have to be able to make a link between the Igbo culture and gender inequality. This means that the teacher would have needed to have discussions with the learners that would allow them to make these links so that they can write about the gender inequality in the novel.

Given the evidence that Ms Dlamini did not use the novel to teach about gender inequality in a manner that would allow learners to understand gender inequality from a feminist perspective, it is possible that her learners would not be able to engage with this question in a critical manner. This is because instead of speaking about how gender inequality contributes to the lack of respect for women, they spoke about how social status in general can accord someone respect. In addition, instead of all learners being motivated to work hard and be successful, the boys were encouraged to want not to be like women if they wanted to be successful. Also, because she did not have strong feelings about the abuse in the novel, it may be that she did not facilitate discussions that would have helped the learners recognise the injustice in the way Mr Moyo had described his conduct of his lessons.

It was interesting that Ms Dlamini had more similarities with teachers that said they did not believe gender issues should be dealt with in the classroom than those who believed that they should. In the next section, the findings from Ms Motha's data set are discussed and analysed. She did not believe that gender politics should be discussed in the English classroom as she felt that it was a topic better suited for the Life Orientation classroom. It was then fitting that she did not speak in detail about the gender politics in *Things Fall Apart.* She also could not imagine how she could use the novel to teach about gender-related issues. Her formal assessments would, however, allow the learners to engage with the gender politics of the novel as it was very similar to the essay question used by Ms Radebe in her exam paper.

4.5 Ms Motha

Ms Motha's belief that gender-related issues should not be part of the English classroom did not prevent her from recognising some of the gender-related issues in the novel. She began speaking about the week of peace incident before she was asked if she would agree or disagree with Strong-Leek's (2001) statement about the week of peace. She explained why the community may have reacted the way they did and included an example from another incident in the novel which was also related to the abuse of women.

> **Ms Motha:** I think the community was influenced by the type of behaviour where they do not recognise women as strong or as people who must be given the respect that they deserve. I think all the incidents there are about women not being respected. On that issue of the woman who was being beaten by her husband, I believe there was this

> punishment where they said the man must go home and make sure that he does not beat his woman again. The punishment was not really convincing. It was not really relevant for that particular issue. I think that is a thing that shows us that the community was also being influenced by this way of treating women and children.

In this response, she was highlighting how the underlying issue is a lack of respect for women in society. She recognises that the community seems not to care about the actual abuse but the time in which it happens because their society is structured in ways that undermines the rights of the women. She further reinforced this point by pointing out how the punishment that was given to the man who had beaten his wife was not convincing. Thus, we see that Ms Motha recognised the real underlying issues even though she did not appear to have a particularly strong opinion about the matter.

The relationship that emerged between Ms Motha's beliefs about gender and her teaching practices relating to *Things Fall Apart* was that because she did believe it was important to teach about gender-related issues in the classroom, she did not. Ms Motha only cited one example where gender politics were discussed in the class and even in that instance, the opportunity to teach something meaningful about it was lost.

> **Ms Motha:** Okonkwo took manhood as a thing that will show his power, his strength to his wives. Even if Okonkwo was having that feeling of kissing or of taking care of one of this wives, he was feeling like shame when you act like that you are not man enough. You behave like a woman. So, you may find that when we come to that issue, children want to know more about love. Children will be saying mam, if you fancy someone else or you have a crush on someone else, as a girl, can I just say to the boy that 'I love you'? Then those questions, you may find that they are really interesting but as a woman and a teacher I may not feel free to talk about love. Because they will ask me questions about my relationship.

In the response above, it is evident that she was aware of the type of masculinity Okonkwo mostly identifies with, which shows that she could indeed interpret the novel from what we can take to be a feminist perspective. Because she did not think her classroom is the space to do so, she did not use the opportunity to discuss with the learners why Okonkwo feels it is not manly to show affection as well as that the reasons this are not appropriate. Furthermore, the opportunity to talk about this is lost because the learners want to know about matters of love which she was not willing to discuss because they would ask her about her private life. It is, of course, understandable why she would be reluctant to do so.

It was clear that Ms Motha did not feel it was appropriate to deal with gender-related issues in the English classroom; however, she was still asked whether she thought *Things Fall Apart* could be used to teach about gender inequality. Her response was that it was possible. She was then asked to give example of how this could be done. In her response, she did not give examples of how it could be done. Instead, the response was more characteristic of an interpretation of the text rather than describing how the lesson would be conducted. It is not clear whether she did not understand the question because of the way it was asked or if she could not imagine the lessons because she did not know how she could conduct one if she had to.

Ms Radebe, Mr Moyo and Ms Motha all said that they used the question from *Things Fall Apart notes by Belinda Retief* for their classroom activities. The questions mostly required learners to remember and understand events related to Okonkwo and his character. They also required the learners to remember details about the novel. It should be noted that in comparison to the questions used by Ms Dlamini and Ms Zach (she will be discussed in the next section), these were quite low-level questions that focused on the 'what' and 'who' rather than focusing on the 'why'. Because of this, the categories that arose were much fewer.

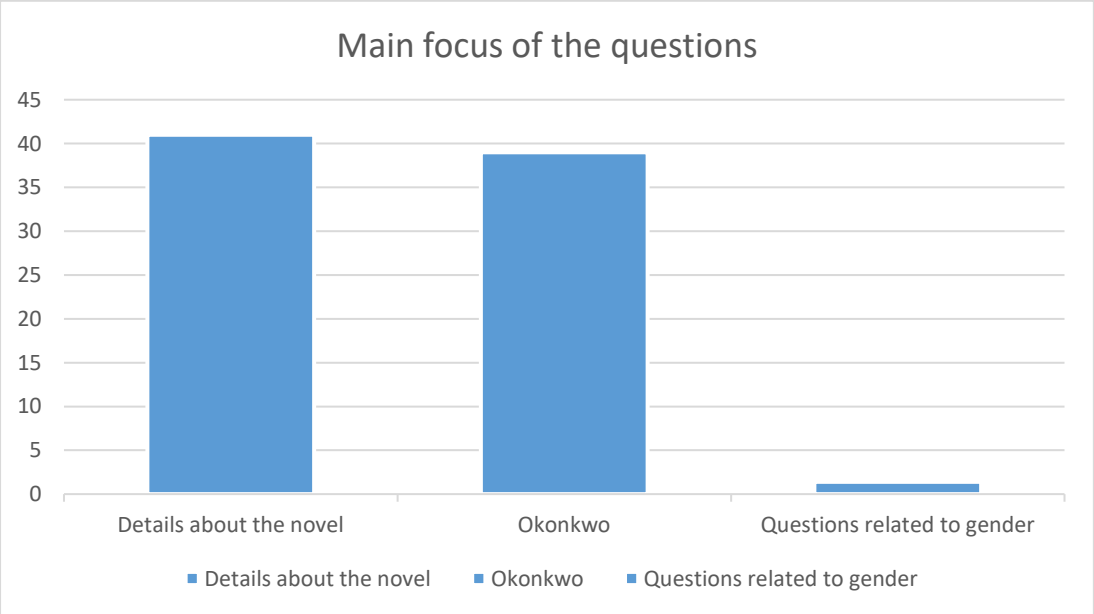

Figure 4-2: Main categories of questions: Ms Motha

Even though they cannot be considered to be higher-order questions, they did allow learners to think about some of the matters that arise in the novel when answering the questions. Of the 10 questions related to the gender politics of the novel, those which seemed particularly useful were: 'Give one word to describe Okonkwo's attitude towards women's crops.' We can assume that this question would draw attention to Okonkwo's negative attitude towards women. 'Explain why Ezinma may not bring her father's stool to the wrestling match.' Although this question only required them to explain why, there was also room to talk about the learner's opinion on the matter should the teacher wish to do so. 'Comment on what the *egwugwu*'s ruling in this case reveals about the status of women in the society' stands out as one of the questions that one can perceive as allowing the learners to think about gender inequality.

When Ms Radebe, Mr Moyo and Ms Motha's espoused classroom activities are compared to Ms Dlamini and Ms Zach's activities, it is clear that all the teachers' classroom activities had few questions that were related to the gender politics of the novel despite the teachers' beliefs about whether the topic was important or not. It is possible that the questions were used because they were readily available to all the learners as they are in the version of the novel all the schools involved in this study are using. Let us now look at the findings for Ms Zach, who is the last participant to be discussed.

4.6 Ms Zach

Ms Zach stated that she did not believe that gender-related issues should be taught in the classroom. Her reasons were that since they were dealing with learners who are modern and have been in co-ed schools since Grade 1, gender is not an issue. It was interesting that the learners being modern was the reason she felt they did not have to learn about gender-related issues, while for Ms Radebe, this was the reason she felt the learners had to engage with those issues. The relationship between her beliefs and her interpretation of the text was that because she did not believe the gender-related issues were important, she seemed to misinterpret some of the key events in the novel. There could, however, be a different reason for why she misinterpreted the events described below.

When talking about how the novel could be used to teach about gender, Ms Zach mentioned the event in which Ekwefi follows Chielo around the nine villages when she takes her daughter Ezinma to the caves during the night. While speaking about it, her response suggests that it is

Okonkwo who helped Ekwefi to make sure that Ezinma was safe. The statement 'When he helped her to look after … to go and make sure that the daughter is fine and safe.' shows that in her view, it is Okonkwo who helps Ekwefi. Theorists such as Osei-nyame (2009) would not agree with this particular interpretation as he is of the view that this particular scene shows that women have space to defy male authority. In the novel, Ekwefi actively follows her daughter and Chielo despite Okonkwo banning her from doing so. In addition, he was not there to protect either of them, and he only arrived with his machete at the cave when most of the danger had passed. Not only was the machete useless against the spirits or the wrath of the oracle, Okonkwo waited for a 'manly period' before following them which is the reason he did not know they had taken a detour and had not gone directly to the caves.

When Ms Zach was asked whether she agreed or disagreed with the statement made by Strong-Leek (2001) about the community only paying attention to the beating Ojiugo received because of the time in which it happened, she said that she did not agree. Her reason was that Strong-Leek (2001) made it sound as if it was customary for men to hit their wives. Ms Zach believed that it was not customary for the men to beat their wives and she cited the Yam Festival incident between Ekwefi and Okonkwo as proof of this. Her choice of example was somewhat contradictory because Okonkwo did actually beat Ekwefi when she had taken leaves from the banana tree because he was frustrated from having to be idle during the festival. It then seems as though her example would actually support the notion that it *is* customary for men to beat their wives.

Ms Zach also believed that Okonkwo did not beat Ojiugo when she went to get her hair plaited with the result that she was unable to prepare his supper in time. It should be noted however, that in the novel, Okonkwo does actually hit Ojiugo. It is unclear why Ms Zach thought he did not beat her. Perhaps she did not remember the details correctly because she did not see the violence as important or it may have been a simple human error. The effect, however, is that the seriousness of the violence is minimised because she does not think it happens all the time thus there is no need to worry about it. Teaching from a feminist perspective would require that she deal with the matter in a similar manner as Ms Radebe and Mr Moyo. The learners would have to have a discussion on the appropriateness of the abuse even if she is of the view that the incident was not something that would happen all the time.

Apart from the abuse inflicted by Okonkwo, in Chapter 10 we witness Uzowulu, Mgabafo's husband, being brought before the *egwugwu* by Mgbafo's brothers to try and resolve the matter of the abuse that she has been receiving from her husband over a period of nine years. Odukwe, Mgabafo's brother, speaks on her behalf because she is female and is thus not allowed to speak in the communal meeting. He says: 'Uzowulu is a beast. My sister lived with him for nine years. During those years no single day passed in the sky without his beating the woman' (Achebe, 1958, p. 81) Of course, this does not prove that it was customary to hit your wife but it does show that there were men in Umuofia that did regularly beat their wives.

When there is an opportunity to deal seriously with the events that involve the abuse of women and children in the novel, it is unlikely that the learners would have an in-depth discussion about it. This is because in addition to not remembering some of the events correctly, Ms Zach also stated that in her classroom, there were no right or wrong answers. This could present a potential obstacle to teaching about gender inequality because there are in fact, right and wrong answers. For instance, she stated that the girls get upset and react verbally when there are beatings in the novel, while the boys have expressed the belief that all the other beatings in the novel were justified except for the one that occurred during the week of peace. It is difficult to imagine which justification might be considered to be correct for the abuse of anyone whether they are female or male.

When Ms Zach was speaking about some of the social issues the novel highlights, she argued that the women were made out to be nothing, but in other instances, they were lifted up. To support her argument, this is what she stated:

> **Ms Zach:** Enzimna was taken to *agbala's* cave and he helped her and stood by her. And how she ran away from her first husband to be with him. And he took her with open arms. Without *lobola* or anything.

The example that Ms Zach drew on suggested that one of the ways in which Achebe shows the importance of women is through their relationships with men. It appears that she is suggesting that Achebe is lifting women up because there is a woman who was accepted by a man even after running away from another husband. This particular interpretation may stem from the discourse that stipulates that women should aspire to marriage and are more valuable when a man has chosen them as a wife.

Ms Zach stated that she adapted her questions for her classroom activities from Chapter 1 to 18 from *X-kit Achieve! Literature: Things Fall Apart.* The questions would mostly require the learners to remember, understand or apply details and quotes from the novel in order for them to answer correctly. Below is a bar graph showing the content the learner would have to focus on in order to answer the question.

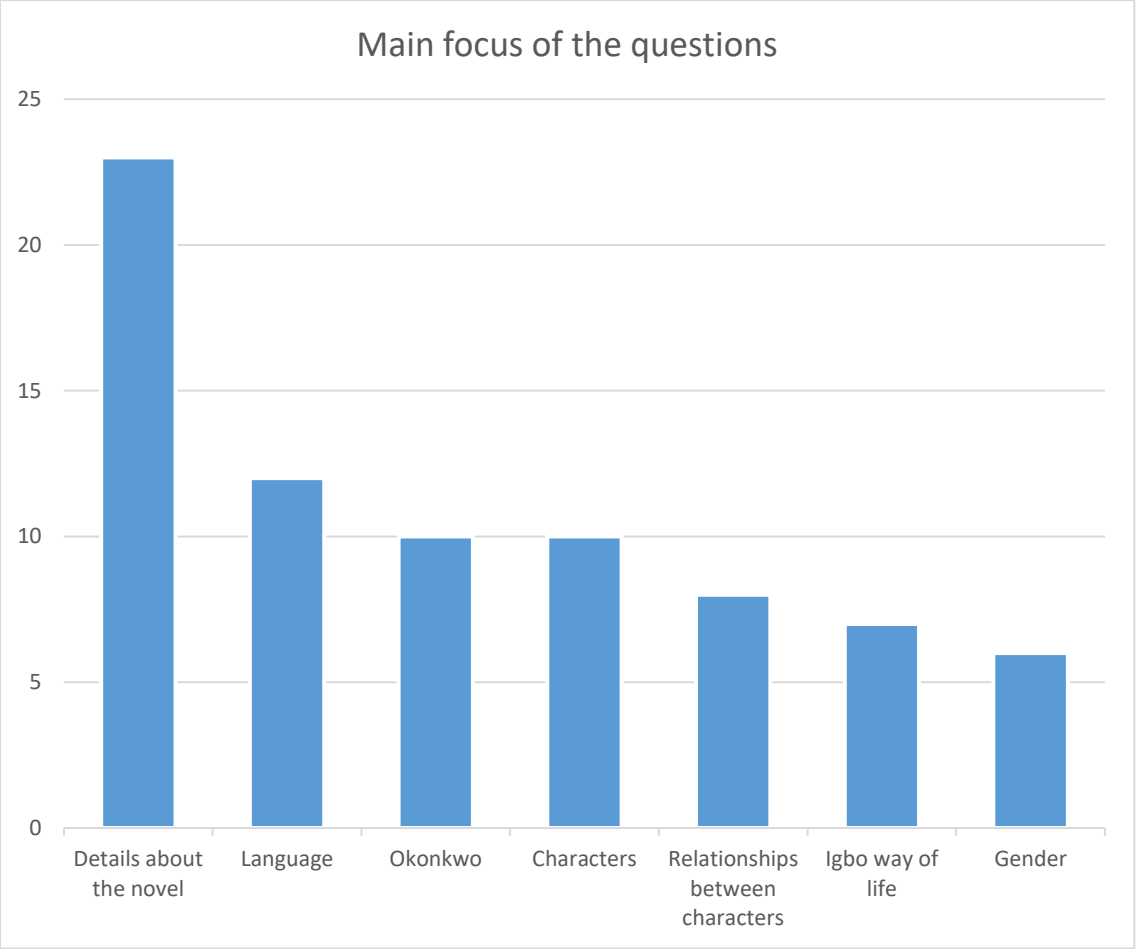

Figure 4-3: Questions derived from X-kit Achieve! Literature

Questions placed under 'details about the novel' were questions that required learners to recall or understand events that had occurred in the novel such as 'what is the attitude of the missionaries to the religion of the Igbo?' Questions placed in the language category were mostly questions that required learners to discuss how language was being used within the context of the novel. Questions placed under the category 'Okonkwo' were questions which were either about his characteristics or events that were related to him such as 'Why does Okonkwo feel a sense of personal dread when the dead man is named?'

Questions placed under the category ‘characters’ were questions about the characters in the novel. In Ms Zach’s case, four were about Ekwefi, another four were about Unoka and there was one about Ezinma and one about Chielo. For Ms Zach, of the eight questions placed under the category ‘relationships between characters’ four were about the relationship between Okonkwo and his father and the other four about him and his son. Questions placed under the category ‘Igbo way of life’ were questions aimed at helping the learners to think about or understand how and why people in Umuofia did things in particular ways. Questions placed under the category ‘gender’ were questions that were related to the gender politics of the novel or questions that would get learners thinking about the issue of femininity versus masculinity.

From the bar graph above, it is quite evident that there was little focus on the gender aspect of the novel; however, as was the case for Ms Dlamini, it is also evident that there is a similar number of questions in the other categories that are not dominant. Although the questions related to gender would not require the learners to think at a deep level, some of the questions were quite useful. For instance, one of the questions for Chapters 7 and 8 asked the learners to explain in their own words how Okonkwo defines manhood. To answer this question, the learners would have to understand Okonkwo’s view of masculinity and femininity. What is more difficult to know is whether this would help them think about whether this view of manhood is good or bad.

Another question related to the same chapters asks learners why Nwoye prefers his mother’s stories to his father’s violent stories. This is a question that would require them to think about masculinity and femininity; however, once more, it is difficult to tell how they would think about it especially when data from the interview transcripts suggested that Ms Zach did not pay attention to the gender politics of the novel in the classroom. Much like the other teachers, the themes of the novel where asked in the formal assessments. The second essay question from Ms Zach, which was the same in both the June and November exam papers, asked the learners to explain how Okonkwo was different from his father and then they need to discuss what the way Okonkwo deals with his father’s inability to provide for his family reveals about Okonkwo’s character.

For the contextual questions, the learners had to read the two extracts provided and answer the questions. Ms Zach, Ms Dlamini and Ms Motha used the same extracts. Extract A is taken from Chapter 2 in which the men of Umuofia meet to discuss on a course of action

as one of the women from their clan was murdered by a man from Mbaino while at the market. The second extract is taken from Chapter 11 when Ekwefi follows her daughter after she was taken by the priestess and is waiting for them outside when Okonkwo joins her. The first three questions asked in relation to extract A were also the same across all three teachers as they come from a common source (*Things Fall Apart with notes by Belinda Retief*, pp. 183–185).

Ms Dlamini and Ms Motha kept both the extracts and the questions as they were meaning all the learners who chose to answer the contextual question would have to answer the last question which required them to discuss the validity of the statement that 'Umuofia is a place in which men carry most of the influence and decision-making rights' by making close reference to the extracts. Their reasons for doing so may not be necessarily because they thought it was important that the learners answer that particular question so they can think about the gender politics of the novel. It may have simply been kept that way because it was convenient.

What was interesting, however, is that Ms Zach chose to replace the extract about Ekwefi waiting for Ezinma to emerge from the cave with one taken from the first three paragraphs of Chapter 1 which introduce us to Okonkwo. Because she changed the extract, it also meant she had to change the last few questions and in none of the questions with which she replaced the original questions were related to the gender politics of the novel. As it has been shown that Ms Zach did not think the gender politics of the novel were important and thus did not deal with them in the classroom, it is possible that she deliberately changed the questions to either avoid the topic or select one she felt was more important.

The main difference between Ms Zach and Ms Motha was that even though Ms Motha did not believe that gender-related issues had a place in her classroom, if she had the skill or desire to do so, her interpretation of the novel would allow her to teach about those issues. Ms Zach, on the other hand, had neither the desire nor the kinds of interpretations that would allow her to explore gender politics with the learners. Furthermore, it seems as though she makes an attempt to deliberately exclude the content in her formal assessments which may be because she does not feel it was important for the learners to engage with those topics. The next section focuses on some of the similarities among the teachers.

4.7 Similarities Among Teachers

This section aims to discuss some of the similarities among the teachers despite their beliefs about gender. All five teachers showed a concern with classroom control, especially when dealing with what they considered to be controversial topics. With regard to the interpretation of the relationship between Okonkwo and Unoka, all the teachers appeared to blame Unoka for Okonkwo's fear of failure and appearing weak. Only one of the teachers seemed to recognise some of Unoka's characteristics as positive. Some teachers also seemed to believe that it is women that need to acquire masculine qualities while none of them suggested that men need to acquire feminine qualities.

When speaking about their espoused teaching practices, all the teachers seemed to be concerned about classroom control and the management of discussions of what they considered to be sensitive topics. Ms Radebe, Mr Moyo and Ms Zach all stated that when dealing with sensitive topics, there was a need for the teacher to be balanced. It appears as though by balance, teachers meant that they had to be unbiased and not try to make the learners simply believe what the teachers believe in. Sometimes it also meant shutting down topics the teacher was not comfortable talking about.

For Ms Radebe, achieving balance meant that instead of indoctrinating the learners with her own views and beliefs, she thought it was better to let them express their own opinions and act as the facilitator of the discussion. For Mr Moyo, achieving balance meant being careful with your word choice, not showing your biases and dealing with the matters in such a way that did not result in one group of learners feeling torn and the other feeling more superior. To create balance in the classroom, Ms Zach thought it was best to avoid asking the learners about things that happened in the news because they often immediately take sides and it becomes a political thing. She also believed that religion and politics were topics that should be left out of the classroom.

Ms Dlamini's main concern seemed to be that the novel was difficult to teach because it brings up sensitive issues for the learners. She did not mention how she dealt with the matters when they arise. What she did mention was that the debates that happened in her class were calm and she added that they were meant for her to test learners' understanding rather than for them to talk about the social issues that arise in the novel. For Ms Motha, she felt that she needed to control the learners to not talk too much about the social issues that arise

in the novel because the learners tend to deviate from the topic. What we see here is that although the teachers have a common concern, they all have different ways of dealing with it.

Ms Radebe and Mr Moyo continued to have the discussions in their classes even though Ms Radebe stated that sometimes it was difficult to rein the children in especially when they were making offensive comments. Mr Moyo was also still willing to have discussions about controversial topics even though he said sometimes the leaners got very emotional. It may be that these two teachers were willing to discuss sensitive topics despite the resultant issues because they felt strongly about the issues that were being discussed. Ms Dlamini, Ms Motha and Ms Zach all seemed to avoid sensitive topics by either avoiding the topics or limiting the topics up for discussion. This could be because the teachers did not feel confident enough to control the discussion when it became out of hand. It could also have been that the teachers were concerned with completing the curriculum and felt there was no time to deal with the issues that arose.

It seems with regard to the interpretation of the relationship between Okonkwo and his father, the teachers generally blamed Unoka for Okonkwo's fear of failure and appearing weak. Mr Moyo and Ms Zach explicitly stated that Okonkwo was the way that he was because he did not want to be like his father. Ms Zach added that Unoka was the reason that Okonkwo grew up with a self-esteem problem and that the drive he had in him was for the wrong reasons, which is what made him irritated and aggressive.

Ms Radebe argued that Okonkwo aspired to a hard version of masculinity because his father ruined him and was not a good example to him. She does, however, acknowledge that Okonkwo could have chosen differently and did not have to become hard and strict. The only thing that Ms Dlamini said that alluded to Okonkwo and Unoka's relationship was that he worked hard so that he would not be called *agbala* like Unoka.

A question in Ms Zach's activities which was particularly interesting was a table that required learners to show the differences between Okonkwo and Unoka. See Table 4-2

Table 4-2: Table used by Ms Zach

Unoka	Okonkwo
Has no barn	Has two barns full of yams and seed-yams
Is lazy and cannot feed his family	
Has a bad *chi*, which he blames for his misfortune	
Has no titles	
Has no young wives to leave to his son	
Tries to encourage his son during the year of the terrible harvest	

This question is consistent with the view that most of the teachers focused mostly on Unoka's negative attributes. The only positive attribute that the learners would see here is that he tried to encourage Okonkwo when he was experiencing hard times, while Okonkwo would beat or reject his son during difficult times. The rest of the attributes actually create a binary between the two characters where we see Unoka as a lazy man with not enough wealth, wives or titles while Okonkwo is a hardworking man with wealth and titles. There is room here to add more positive attributes that Unoka has to show such as that he was good at playing music and he had a way with words. This would allow learners to see that both him and Okonkwo could have benefitted from having a mixture of the qualities and not necessarily one over the other.

Ms Motha was the only teacher who pointed out Unoka's positive attributes such as that he was gentle, he had a good spirit, he was good at comforting people and he loved music. It is possible that the teachers interpreted Unoka's character in a negative light because it is indeed true that Okonkwo became the man he was because he did not want to be like his father. What was missing from all the teachers' responses, however, was how they could show learners that Unoka did have positive qualities, despite how Okonkwo perceived him. They also did not say how it would be possible to use Unoka's character to show that it was acceptable to have feminine qualities and that it was not necessarily a feminine quality to be lazy and have no title. In the context of *Things Fall Apart,* women

did not have titles because they were not allowed to have them, not because they were lazy and irresponsible.

There appeared to be a general belief among some teachers that it is women that need to aspire to masculine qualities while there was an absence of the need for men to aspire to acquiring feminine characteristics. In her response about why she felt that it was important to teach about gender-related issues in the classroom, Ms Dlamini mentioned that she believes that girls can do what men can do and she believed that women need to be encouraged to be strong. Ms Radebe stated that boys needed to be taught that they need to be strong and to provide and that girls too needed to be taught to be strong and to provide. She added that girls could be submissive too if that is what they chose.

It should be noted that 'strong' was used by them as a characteristic that is masculine and thus belonging to men. The teachers may have felt that girls need to be taught to aspire to acquire masculine qualities because those are the qualities that are seen as desirable and might help females get the same respect as males. It seemed that none of the teachers thought it was important to teach boys to aspire to acquiring feminine qualities because like the qualities Unoka has, they are judged as being undesirable. This could be because, as Fonchingong (2006) notes, women too are indoctrinated into believing that men are superior. There is a need then to challenge such thinking in teachers because in order to promote gender equality, teachers and learners need to break down the dualism created between feminine and masculine qualities.

This sections shows that belief systems are complex because as Davies (1994) states, the discourses that shape subjectivity are neither stable nor coherent. This means that we cannot assume that because a teacher believes in promoting gender equality in their classroom, all their beliefs will be consistent with feminist beliefs and pedagogies. This suggests that even teachers who have strong beliefs about the importance of gender-related issues will sometimes have beliefs that seem to contradict with what we think they should believe as feminist teachers. In Chapter 5, the findings of the study are discussed in an attempt to consolidate and summarise what has been found through conducting this research report.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

Most teachers were able to speak about the gender politics of the novel despite their beliefs about whether the issues should be taught in their classrooms or not. However, at times teachers had problematic beliefs about gender that, when expressed during their lessons, would actually reinforce gender inequality. Teachers who believed that gender-related issues should be discussed in the classroom seemed to do so as part of their classroom practice. There was only one of these teachers who was unable to do so. This could be because she did not have the skills or knowledge that would enable her to deal with the issues in class. Teachers did not always set the classroom activities themselves which meant the learners possibly missed out on doing activities that could have helped them deal more closely with gender-related issues instead of this happening only during formal assessments. It is recommended that pre-service and in-service teachers should be taught feminist theories as well as feminist pedagogies during teacher training or teacher workshops.

5.1 Findings

The main research question of this study was 'what are teachers' beliefs about teaching about gender and what is the relationship between those beliefs and their interpretation and teaching of *Things Fall Apart*?' It was found that most of the teachers were able to identify and speak about the gender politics in the novel regardless of whether they thought it would be important to teach those issues or not. There were, however, instances when teachers had somewhat problematic beliefs about gender that would not help them to promote gender equality in their classrooms. For instance, the belief that it is girls that need to aspire to masculinity and the belief that men need to avoid being like women in order to be successful.

Both of the beliefs mentioned above stem from the kinds of discourses that further reinforce the gender inequality the teachers are seeking to eradicate. What this seems to suggest is that teachers need to be aware of their own beliefs and how they are making or breaking gender stereotypes. This can be done by teachers recognising that their subjectivity is made up of the discourses they have come across during the course of their lives (Davis, 1994). They then have to make efforts to reposition themselves and use language and examples that support feminist perspectives. This can be challenging because some beliefs are so deeply embedded in us that we do not even realise that they are

problematic or that we are expressing them. Teachers need to constantly reflect on what they are saying and doing in the classroom in order to try to adjust their teaching methods to be more gender sensitive.

It was also found that teachers who believed that they should deal with gender-related issues in the classroom were willing and able to do so. However, one of the teachers who believed so was not able to teach about the gender politics in the novel. This could be because she did not have the skills or knowledge of how this could be done. It seems then, as Fergus and Van't Rood (2015) have suggested in their own research, that there is a need for teachers to be introduced to feminist theories and trained on how to use feminist pedagogies. This can be done either during pre-service teacher training or through workshops for in-service teachers.

It was found that those who believed that it was important to teach about the gender politics of the novel used discussions and questioning techniques to explore the theme of gender with the learners. This was very useful as it seemed to create the kind of teaching and learning environment advocated for by feminist pedagogy theorists such as Perumal (2007). Those who did not believe gender issues should be dealt with in the English classroom opted for shutting down the topic or avoiding it. This was partly because they felt it was a sensitive topic and there was a general concern among the teachers on how to deal with controversial topics in the classroom. Once more, we can look to teacher training as a solution. Teachers need to be equipped with skills that can enable them to be confident with dealing with controversial topics so that they do not avoid or shut them down.

The teachers did not always choose the classroom activities themselves. Most of the teachers used the questions they found in the version of *Things Fall Apart* they are using at school with the learners. This may be because it was convenient or they used the same questions for the sake of consistency in a subject that they share with another teacher. Consistency among teachers may be good, but teachers need to be able to design new classroom activities to suit the objectives of their lesson. There was evidence, however, that some teachers could do this as we saw in the case of Ms Zach (even though she changed her activities to exclude the gender-related question). As there was a presence of questions related to gender in the classroom activities, perhaps then the teachers can work towards improving those questions to be more in depth. They can also include more of those types of questions in their classroom activities rather than leaving them for formal assessments only.

Most of the teachers' formal assessments were designed to allow learners to engage with the gender theme more closely including teachers who did not believe that gender-related issues should be dealt with in the classroom. The difference then, would be how well the learners would be equipped to respond to the questions. Given the complex nature of the different teachers' beliefs and ways of teaching content, it seems the learners who would be better equipped to answer essay questions related to gender are learners who have been taught by teachers who can help them to analyse the novel from a feminist perspective (along with other interpretations of the novel) and who have allowed them to have meaningful discussions about the issues that arise.

5.2 Limitations and Constraints

One of the limitations of the study was the sample size. Because only five teachers from five different schools were interviewed, it limited the generalisability of the findings. This is because the findings could only be generalised to the teachers who were interviewed and the number of patterns that emerged was also limited because of the limited number of participants. Another limitation of the study was that because no classroom observations were done, there was a need to rely on what the teachers said about their teaching. Classroom observations would have gleaned more accurate results of the teachers' actual teaching practices, which may have helped to achieve a more detailed understanding of the relationship between their beliefs and teaching practices.

Another limitation was that although the teachers were asked to prepare a pack of their activities and assessments prior to the interview, only one of the teachers did this. The rest gave in whatever they could find on the day of the interview. This resulted in the teachers giving in incomplete classroom activities and assessments.

5.3 Recommendations

Perhaps teacher training has a role to play in encouraging teachers to use more inclusive teaching methods that promote gender equality. Feminist pedagogies as well as feminist theories related to education should form part of teacher training in order to provided new teachers with yet another lens from which to view reality. Workshops can also be conducted for teachers who are already within the system. Teachers also need to be trained to deal with controversial topics in the classroom.

5.4 Possibilities for Further Research

As the interview relied mostly on the word of the teacher, future research would have to conduct classroom observations in order to get a more accurate idea of what teachers do in the classroom while teaching *Things Fall Apart*. A question that arises from this research is: 'How does the identity and educational history of a teacher play a role in their interpretation and teaching of *Things Fall Apart?*' (or any other literary work that can be used as a tool to promote gender equality). This is because the teachers' age, sociohistorical and educational background seemed to play a role in their teaching practices, as well as how they view the world.

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Appendix: Interview Schedule for Semi-Structured Interview

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. What is the school like in terms of resources?
3. To what extent do you think the English classroom is a space for confronting social issues?
4. Do social issues ever come up in your classroom? Can you give me some examples?
5. Do you think there is a need to teach about gender specifically in the classroom? Why/why not?
6. What do you think are the main themes of the novel?
7. Which ones do you focus on? How do you do this?
8. Which social issues does the novel highlight? Which one's form part of the curriculum you teach?
9. Do you think it is possible to use Things Fall Apart to teach about gender? Why/ Why not?
10. Strong-Leek (2001) argues that the community only pays attention to Okonkwo beating Ojiugo because it happened during the week of peace and not because they think the actual beating is wrong. Do you agree with this? Why/ why not?
11. Have you had lessons related to gender that resulted in a heated debate? Please describe the lessons?
12. What other themes / topics have resulted in heated debates?
13. Please tell me why you designed the teaching materials and assessments the way that you did.