



‘A teacher is no politician’: Stereotypic attitudes of secondary school teachers in Kenya

Line Kuppens^{a,b,*}, Arnim Langer^{a,c}, Sulley Ibrahim^a

^a Centre for Research on Peace and Development (CRPD), KU, Leuven, Belgium

^b Institute of Development Policy (IOB), University of Antwerp, Belgium

^c Alexander von Humboldt Fellow, University of Heidelberg, Belgium



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Stereotyping
Teachers
Inter-group attitudes
Kenya
Peace education

ABSTRACT

More than affecting their academic performance, teachers' stereotypic attitudes may impact society at large by shaping pupils' inter-group attitudes. Whereas particularly teachers in post-conflict and divided societies may have negative inter-group attitudes, extremely little research has been conducted in these contexts. Based on a large-scale survey of secondary school teachers (N = 925) and 68 in-depth follow-up interviews in Nairobi, this paper aims to address this void by examining teachers' inter-group attitudes in Kenya, an ethnically divided society. While their attitudes appear to be stereotype-congruent, we find that Kenyan teachers seem careful of not letting their own stereotypes influence their teaching practices.

1. Introduction

Stereotypes about ethnic groups are very prominent in the diverse society of Kenya, which is home to more than 40 ethnic groups among which the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba are predominant (e.g. Branch, 2011; Ishiyama et al., 2016). Stereotypes are over-generalizations of character traits to group members (Allport, 1958; Hamilton et al., 2009, p. 179). Often heard stereotypes in Kenya include the exploitative money-loving Kikuyu; the intelligence, as well as the aggressiveness of the Luo; and the stereotype that Maasai value nothing more than they value cattle and grass (Hornsby, 2013, p. 788; Ndonye et al., 2015, p. 47–48). Whereas stereotypes are commonly used to make jokes, they have become entrenched within Kenyan politics and have been used as a tool to fuel ethnic hatred, as was the case during the 2007–2008 post-electoral violence. Violence erupted after opposition leader Raila Odinga, a Luo, contested the electoral victory of incumbent president Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, and largely opposed the ethnic following of the two leaders (HRW, 2008; Ndonye et al., 2015, p. 48; Yieke, 2008).

Stereotypes can be random and meaningless, but they may also foster prejudice, a generally negative evaluation of, and/or attitude towards members of a group (e.g. Albarracín et al., 2008, p. 19; Allport, 1958, p. 8; Beelmann and Heinemann, 2014; Stangor, 2009, p. 2). Such negative inter-group attitudes are associated with diverse social problems, such as

social exclusion and discrimination, and can even contribute to inter-group conflict, of which the Kenyan post-election violence is an example (e.g. Beelmann and Heinemann, 2014, p. 10; Brown and Bigler, 2002, p. 79; Reyna, 2000, p. 86). To avoid these vices, researchers have studied ways to improve inter-group attitudes, including inter-group contact (e.g. Allport, 1958; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011).

Many prejudice-reducing interventions are set in a school context given that schools play an important role in shaping the political and social attitudes of young people (e.g. Jennings and Niemings, 1974; Torney-Purta, 2002). Examples range from integrated schooling, bilingual education, multicultural education, and training on social-cognitive skills and role-playing (Aboud and Levy, 2000; Beelmann and Heinemann, 2014). Peace education, likewise, seeks to improve inter-group attitudes and perceptions, and to foster greater tolerance between (formerly) opposing groups in divided and post-conflict societies through school (e.g. Salomon and Nevo, 2002). In Kenya, a Peace Education course was introduced at the primary and secondary level in the aftermath of the post-electoral violence to ‘equip young people with requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for building peace as well as values for constructive intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup relations at the national and international levels’ (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2014, p. 2).¹

These interventions commonly target pupils. Teachers may have negative inter-group attitudes too, however. Like their pupils, teachers

* Corresponding author at: Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp, Prinsstraat 13, 2000, Antwerpen, Belgium.

E-mail addresses: line.kuppens@uantwerpen.be (L. Kuppens), arnim.langer@soc.kuleuven.be (A. Langer), sulley.ibrahim@kuleuven.be (S. Ibrahim).

¹ While a separate course was introduced at the primary level, content on Peace Education was integrated in other courses, such as life skills, religion, social studies, and history and government at the secondary level (Smith et al., 2016, 71).

belong to cultural communities that define their identity, views, and attitudes, which in turn influence their behaviour (see Horner et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2015; Kuppens and Langer, 2016). Large-scale research on teachers' stereotypes in Western settings has shown, for example, that teachers' inter-group attitudes inform their behaviour and, by consequence, impact pupils' academic achievement and wellbeing in the classroom (see e.g. Chang and Demyan, 2007; Tenenbaum and Ruck, 2007). Yet, to our knowledge, there are no large-scale studies that have analysed teachers' inter-group attitudes in post-conflict and divided societies. Teachers in these contexts would, nevertheless, be much more likely to harbour negative inter-group attitudes as they have experienced inter-group tensions, and, possibly, violence (e.g. Bentrovato et al., 2016; Zembylas et al., 2016). Likewise, their negative inter-group attitudes may be considerably stronger than those of teachers living in relatively peaceful societies. On top of affecting the wellbeing and achievement of pupils, such negative inter-group attitudes could, if left unaddressed, compromise the peace education and prejudice-reducing programs in these countries: Instead of acting like role models who exemplify positive inter-group attitudes (Bar-Tal, 2002), teachers portraying negative inter-group attitudes could stimulate rather than dissuade prejudices and stereotypes among their pupils (Bekerman & McGlynn, 2007, in Zembylas et al., 2012, p. 1073; Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Zembylas et al., 2016).

The current article examines to what extent these concerns are empirically supported by analysing the inter-group attitudes of secondary school teachers in the divided society of Kenya. The analyses are based on a sample of 925 secondary school teachers collected by the authors between April and June 2016 in 64 secondary schools in Nairobi, as well as in-depth follow-up interviews with a subsample of 68 teachers. While the survey shows that they do have stereotypical attitudes, teachers attest in the in-depth interviews that they are careful not to let such attitudes inform their behaviour.

The article will proceed as follows. First, we briefly review the theory on stereotypes (Section 2), and discuss why teachers and their inter-group attitudes matter to the success of peace education and prejudice-reducing programs (Section 3). Section four, next, introduces the case study of Kenya, while Section 5 presents the data and methodology. Afterwards, we analyse and discuss the results of the survey. Section six concludes.

2. Stereotypes

People inevitably think in groups or categories in order to simplify and anticipate an otherwise overwhelmingly complex social environment (e.g. Allport, 1958, p.19; Devine and Sharp, 2009, p.61; Reyna, 2000, p.92). Once these groups are formed, they tend to be very stable given that people are attentive to differences between groups, while minimizing within-group differences (Brewer and Miller, 1996). Stereotypes, then, are the sets of knowledge, beliefs and expectancies that we attribute to social groups, and that we apply to all group-members irrespective of their individual differences (Hamilton et al., 2009, p. 179; Reyna, 2000, p. 92). They are overgeneralizations of character traits to group members (Hamilton et al., 2009, p. 179) or 'exaggerated beliefs' about those group members (Allport, 1958, p. 187). Stereotypes are closely interrelated with prejudice and discrimination – the three components of inter-group attitudes. Whereas stereotypes represent the cognitive component of inter-group attitudes (attributing a characteristic), prejudice and discrimination respectively represent the emotional (e.g. antipathy or dislike) and behavioural component (e.g. excluding, insulting) (e.g. Beelmann and Heinemann, 2014; Devine, 1989).

People rely on stereotypes to judge members from other groups and to anticipate their behaviour. They do so particularly when group membership – often ethnic or religious group membership (see McKown and Weinstein, 2008, p. 238), is the only information they have about a person or whenever they are not interested in getting to know the person better (Glock and Krolak-Schwerdt, 2014, p. 590; Stangor, 2009, p. 10). Stereotypes thus raise expectations that, in turn,

inform our behaviour. As such, stereotyping has consistently been found to lead to out-group discrimination (Brown and Bigler, 2002, p. 79; Reyna, 2000, p. 86; Stangor, 2009, p. 5).² Discrimination can take many forms, ranging from exclusion of out-group members, to the absence of showing positive affect towards the out-group, such as sympathy and trust (Brewer and Miller, 1996, p. 75), or the withholding of prosocial behaviour, such as helping and cooperation (Brewer and Miller, 1996, p. 5).

While group-membership automatically activates stereotypes, people can 'correct' for their bias towards other groups if they are aware of its existence. Indeed, while attitudes usually spontaneously guide behaviour, people can deliberately take into consideration their attitudes and their behavioural consequences and decide not to act in conformity (e.g. Devine, 1989; Fazio, 1990; Wegener & Petty, 1995 in Olson and Kendrick, 2008, p. 120). Merely holding stereotypes, hence, is not necessarily problematic, yet applying them is (Stangor, 2009, p. 5).

3. Why teachers matter

Like anybody else, teachers rely on stereotypes. This can be problematic in a classroom setting. Pupils' group characteristics may activate stereotypical information that, if not corrected for, will trigger stereotype-congruent expectations and behaviour on behalf of the teacher (Reyna, 2000, p. 87). This phenomenon is commonly known as the 'Pygmalion effect', named after the seminal study on the effects of interpersonal expectations in the classroom by Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968). The effects of interpersonal expectations have been studied widely ever since. Teachers were found, for example, to expect less from students belonging to stereotyped groups than from pupils from non-stereotyped groups with a similar performance record (McKown and Weinstein, 2008; Glock and Krolak-Schwerdt, 2014; van den Berg et al., 2010; van Ewijk, 2011); to evaluate their performances poorer (e.g. Guttmann and Bar-Tal, 1982; Jussim and Harber, 2005; Riley and Ungerleider, 2012); to punish them more severely (Dunkake and Schuchart, 2015); and to have less supportive relations with pupils from stereotyped groups (Thijs and Fleischmann, 2015). Even small cues, such as students' names, were found to cause such effects (Figlio, 2005; Riley and Ungerleider, 2012). Often presented as dramatic and ubiquitous, it is important to note that these effects are generally small, though significant, and vary depending on the context (i.e. location), the information teachers have acquired about their learners (increasing as teachers get to know their pupils), as well as by pupils' and teachers' group membership (e.g. Jussim and Harber, 2005; Tenenbaum and Ruck, 2007; Dunkake and Schuchart, 2015). Nor do all teachers hold differential expectations and act accordingly, but mainly those with negative prejudiced attitudes (van den Bergh et al., 2010).

Pupils, in turn, are likely to sense teachers' expectations and internalize them, which may decrease their self-esteem and affect their performances (e.g. Agirdag et al., 2012; McKown and Weinstein, 2008). More generally, when pupils are confronted with a situation to which a stereotype applies, they fear to conform to the existing stereotype or to be judged accordingly. Steele (1997) accurately defined this phenomenon as the 'stereotype threat', or 'the threat that others' judgments or their own actions will negatively stereotype them in the domain' (Steele, 1997, p. 613).

In this way, teachers' expectations, notwithstanding their accuracy, are likely to trigger the behaviour they anticipate, thereby perpetuating and cementing existing stereotypes (Gershenson et al., 2016; van den Bergh et al., 2010): When teachers' stereotype-congruent expectations are based on false conceptions and cause a new behaviour, expectancy effects act as self-fulfilling prophecies. Whenever stereotype-congruent expectations are based on 'real' differences, on the other hand, they perpetuate low

² Out-groups comprise all categories different from the categories the perceiver belongs to, which are called, by contrast, the in-group(s) (Brewer and Miller, 1996, p.6).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841088>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841088>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)