

IMAFREDU

IMage of AFRica in EDUcation

The impact of the portrayal of the African continent in textbooks on racism against students of African ancestry in German schools

State of the Art

The portrayal of the African continent in German textbooks and curricula has been critically analyzed since the 1970s (Diestel, 1978; Guggeis, 1992; Sollinger, 1994; Poenicke 1994, and references therein). The prevailing image of Africa and the Africans in textbooks, as well as in the media and in the literature, was found to be based on racial stereotypes which could be traced back to the colonial era, when the dehumanisation of African people served to justify colonial crimes and slave trade (Fremdgen, 1984; Bechhaus-Gerst, 2006; Borries, 1986; Arndt, 2006 and references therein). According to new studies these colonial perspectives are still persistent in German schools albeit in a more subtle form (Poenicke, 2001, 2003 and 2008; Pingel, 2001; Kerber, 2005; Jünger, 2007). History is being taught from a Eurocentric perspective – African history seems to begin with the “discovery” by the Europeans (Poenicke, 2008). The organisational forms of pre-colonial African societies are either not taught, or are only briefly mentioned in the context of colonialism (Poenicke, 2008). German colonial crimes are either completely omitted, or the colonised societies are presented as if on a lower stage of the historical evolution (Kerber, 2005). Some textbooks even suggest that Africa has benefited from colonialism (Poenicke, 2003). The modern image of Africa is dominated by poverty and catastrophes (Arndt, 2004). As a result of this presentation, German students assign hunger, war and loss to the experiences of their African peers as Reichart-Burikukiye (2002) stated in his study. The interviewed students rank their (European) culture as intellectually and materially superior to the African culture. A similar enquiry by Schmidt-Wulffen (1997) found that in the interviewed students’ perception there is a subtle causal relationship between poverty and skin colour. A quite shocking result from the educational point of view was the often-repeated statement: “We haven’t learned anything about Africa in school”.

The IMAFREDU project investigates the impact of the racist image of Africa on the treatment and assessment of students of African ancestry by fellow students and teachers. Researching racial discrimination in German schools became politically relevant since the publication of the PISA study in 2001. Different aspects of racial discrimination have been since investigated in several research studies (Gomolla and Radke, 2002; Gomolla, 2003 and 2005; Lüddecke, 2007 and references therein, Flam, 2007; Michelin and Quell, 2008).

Following attitude research, racist prejudices are composed of a cognitive, an emotive and a conative components (Lüddecke, 2007 and references therein). The cognitive component refers to the assumed knowledge about the group against which the prejudices are expressed. The project examines to which extent can racism in schools be combated on a cognitive level by correcting the distorted image of Africa.

Much of the research on integrating minority groups into the German educational system is based on interculturalism (Gogolin et al., 2001; Lanfranchi, 2002; Rösch, 2003) and multilingualism (Gogolin, 1994; Gogolin and Neumann, 1997; Gogolin and Neumann, 2009). These approaches are unsuitable for many students of African ancestry, for whom it is solely their

physical appearance that distinguishes them from the others (Ogunoye et al., 1986; Massingue, 2004; Sow, 2008).

A comparative study on the portrayal of Africa in textbooks in UK will be conducted in order to put the research results in a broader European context. The similarities and differences of the colonial and postcolonial histories and the history of immigration in these three countries have an immediate impact on the state of the art of the racism discourse. In Germany, the colonial past have been overshadowed by the crimes of the NS-Regime; the research of racism could only begin to establish in the 1990s (Rommelspacher, 2009; Mecheril and Melter, 2009). UK on the other hand has a political instrument to combat racism since 1965 (Race-Relations-Act); immigration and racism research has a long lasting tradition here (Gomolla, 2005; Gillborn, 1995, 2005, 2008, 2009; Pilkington, 1999; Graham and Robinson, 2004). I examine the impact of a long-standing scientific discourse on racism in general and racism in the educational system in particular as manifested in the presentation of Africa in the curriculum, on students' and teachers' image of Africa and on racial discrimination in schools. The comparative textbook analysis will be the subject of an international workshop. Cooperation with the Georg Eckard Institute for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig, Germany, is anticipated.

Objectives

- Examining the relationship between the racist presentation of Africa in textbooks and racial discrimination of students of African ancestry in schools
- Developing a new unbiased tutorial on Africa and implementing it in real school lessons
- Investigating the cognitive and holistic approaches of antiracism measures in German schools
- Analysing the presentation of Africa in textbooks in a European context

Preliminary hypotheses:

1. The image of Africa in textbooks and curricula is rooted in colonialism; it has an impact on discrimination of students of African ancestry by fellow students and teachers. The stereotypes "wild" and "exotic" result from the afro-romantic view of Africa (Seukwa, 2009), the afro-pessimistic view produces the stereotypes "needy", "lazy", "uneducated", "not intelligent".
2. The simplified image of Africa as one single country with uniform language and culture promotes racial prejudices.
3. Teachers undervalue students of African ancestry producing social injustice.
4. Racial discrimination against students of African ancestry counteracts their identification with Germany as their country.
5. The portrayal of Africa in teaching materials reflects the racial stereotypes of the European colonial past. Despite different colonial and post-colonial histories in UK, Spain and Germany, common stereotypes dominate.

Goals:

- To deepen our understanding of the causalities between the presentation of Africa in the educational context and the production and/or amplification of racial prejudice in Germany in particular and in Europe in general
- To further develop techniques and research methods in racism research in education
- To establish the effectiveness of cognitive measures in combating racism in schools
- To develop unbiased tutorials on Africa and to produce a set of guidelines for textbook authors, publishing houses and curriculum developers as well as policy recommendations
- To investigate similarities and differences between Africa's portrayal in Europe by comparative study with UK

- To establish a European cooperation in this field of research; and in developing unbiased teaching materials on Africa

The project goes beyond criticising racist contents of textbooks as has been done by several authors to actually developing and probing a new tutorial in real school lessons. Existing approaches to introduce unbiased knowledge of Africa in schools reproduce the same subtle racial prejudice they are trying to correct, because they don't examine the roots of the bias, employ the same Eurocentric view and neglect the African perspective, as described by (Oprong' Spenner, 2008). All this will be taken into account for in the IMAFREDU project.

The presentation of Africa in Europe has an immediate impact on European-African relations in terms of Education, Policy, Economy, Science and Culture. Hence every contribution to improve the European image of Africa has important educational, political and societal impacts in the global society.

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