

IMAFREDU Project

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The image of Africa in German textbooks and curricula is based on racist stereotypes, which can be traced back to the colonial era when dehumanisation of African people served to justify the colonisation of their continent. Poverty, violence and underdevelopment are the prevailing images of Africa in German history and geography textbooks. Pre-colonial African history, African cultures and philosophies are not covered by the Eurocentric curriculum. Classic and modern western literature is interspersed with stereotypes about African people; these stereotypes often pass uncommented by the teachers.

The IMAFREDU (IMage of AFRica in EDUcation) Project, University of Hamburg, funded by Marie Curie Actions program of the EU, investigates the portrayal of Africa in German textbooks and teaching materials and the impact of this portrayal on racism against the ethnic minority students of African descent in German schools. “Scientific racism”, as a legitimization for colonisation, exploitation and slavery, has long been disproved; however, it still remains an inherent part of today’s European portrayal of Africa. “Africa” is usually constructed based on European norms, refusing Africans and their descendants the reconstruction of historical facts. In constructing Africa, History, in its most human aspect, seems to be denied to Africans and their descendants who lack the essential attributes that define “Humanity” in “Western culture” in general and in “European culture” in particular. The “historical rationality” (Hegelian view) denying the Humanity to Africans can be found in the passages of many German textbooks subtly teaching students that Africans are “savages” with a “pre-logical mentality” living their “primitive life”.

An empirical case study in an urban school in Hamburg is carried out with 7th year students, their teachers and their textbooks using combined qualitative methods. Questionnaires examine students’ image of Africa and Black people. Interviews will be used to investigate their knowledge about “Africa” the sources of this information (school, mass media, family etc.). We are aiming at establishing the significance of school as a source of cognitive component of racial prejudice. Selected students (theoretical sample) are asked to identify subtly racist descriptions and images of Africa and Black people in textbook abstracts, advertisements of charity organisations, popular books and movies. Face-to-face interviews with teachers investigate teachers’ knowledge on “Africa” and their perception of ethnic minority students of African descent. During focus group interviews, students of African descent are asked to describe their perception of racism exerted by biased presentation of “Africa” and Black people in textbooks and lessons as well as their coping strategies.

The content of 6-8 grade textbooks in social science, languages and biology is analyzed in terms of their presentation of Africa and Black people, using predefined categories. We want to show that behind the explicitly professed anti-racist system, another system is concealed, albeit sometimes unconsciously and unintentionally, which serves as a vehicle of racist ideology and prejudice.

Our objective is to develop recommendations for a new unbiased tutorial on Africa. The aim of this tutorial will be not only to correct the biased information on Africa and to include missing knowledge, but also to support the students in developing a frame of reference and a conceptual basis for understanding and dealing with problems resulting from racism in the society and to help them develop the skills to distinguish between knowledge and propaganda.

Publications:

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