

Post-Passage Discourse Analysis of Ghana's Affirmative Action Bill: Media Representations and Public Reactions

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<p><i>Abstract</i></p> <p><i>This paper conducts a discourse analysis of the Affirmative Action Bill passed by the Parliament of Ghana on July 30, 2024, and received presidential assent on September 19, 2024. The legislation aims to address gender disparities and enhance women's participation in governance. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Theory, the study examines public and media reactions, revealing themes of celebration, skepticism, political will, cultural resistance, and economic implications. It situates these discussions within the framework of international gender equality protocols, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focusing on gender equality. The findings highlight the complex socio-political dynamics and cultural attitudes affecting gender equality discourse in Ghana. The research emphasizes the importance of sustained political commitment, public education, and institutional readiness for effective implementation of the bill, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in advancing gender equality through legislative means in Ghana.</i></p>	<p><i>Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)</i></p> <p>Vol. 16 Issue 2 (2024) ISSN(p) 1597-9385 ISSN (e) 2814-1091 Home page https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds</p> <p>ARTICLE INFO: Keyword</p> <p>Affirmative Action Bill, Gender equality, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Feminist Theory, Women's participation</p> <p>Article History Received: 16th August 2024 Accepted: 18th October 2024 DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v16i2.8</p>
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1. Introduction

The trajectory leading to the passage of Ghana's Affirmative Action Bill into law has been marked by significant legislative and socio-political evolution. The imperative for such a legislative framework was first articulated in the 1990s, following Ghana's ratification of key international instruments aimed at advancing gender equality, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995).

The drafting of the Affirmative Action Bill commenced in 2011 under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, with the primary objective of establishing a statutory framework to mandate gender parity in governance and public decision-making (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2011). Despite this progressive step, the bill encountered substantial impediments, including political inertia, fluctuating governmental priorities, and entrenched cultural norms. Persistent advocacy from women's organizations and civil society groups played a pivotal role in maintaining momentum for the bill, despite numerous delays and setbacks (Ghanaian Parliament, 2024). On July 30, 2024, the Ghanaian Parliament passed the Affirmative Action Bill, marking a landmark achievement in Ghana's legislative history (Ghanaian Parliament, 2024).

This legislation seeks to address systemic gender disparities and enhance female representation in governance, aligning with Ghana's commitments under international gender equality frameworks, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, n.d.). SDG 5, lays more emphasis on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (United Nations, n.d.). Specifically, SDG 5. aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in political, economic, and public spheres. Hence by passing this bill, Ghana is making a significant stride towards realizing SDG 5. The bill also indirectly supports other SDGs, including SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), by fostering social inclusion and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), by promoting inclusive and representative decision-making processes. Therefore, the Affirmative Action Bill represents a crucial legislative advancement in Ghana's efforts to address gender imbalances and promote women's participation in governance.

Again, it must be stressed that Ghana's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 underscores its commitment to ending discrimination against women. The passage of the Affirmative Action Bill aligns with CEDAW's Article 4, which advocates for the adoption of temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women. However, the passage of the bill, ignited extensive discourse among diverse stakeholders, including politicians, activists, media, and the public. These discourses reflect a range of opinions and sentiments, underscoring the complexities of implementing such transformative legislation.

This study conducted a discourse analysis of the public response and reactions to the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill by the Ghanaian Parliament on July 30, 2024, in the media landscape.

It examined how media narratives shape and reflect public discourse and reactions to the Affirmative Action Bill after its passage, providing a clear focus on the social implications and gender dynamics involved. Analyzing these discourses is crucial for understanding the socio-political dynamics and public sentiment surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill. Bill's passage

2.Review of Related Literature

Affirmative Action as a Global Catalyst for Gender Equality

Globally, affirmative action policies have emerged as essential tools for addressing gender disparities across various sectors. Countries like Norway and Rwanda stand out for their successful implementation of such policies, which have significantly enhanced women's representation in politics and public service. In Norway for instance, the introduction of gender quotas in 2003 required at least 40% of board members in publicly listed companies to be women.

This legislative move contributed to a notable increase in women's presence in corporate leadership roles, thus demonstrating the impact of affirmative action on gender parity (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). Similarly, Rwanda has achieved remarkable results in political representation, with women constituting over 60% of the parliament, a direct outcome of gender-sensitive policies and strong political commitment (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022).

Affirmative Action in Africa: Advancing Gender Equality Amidst Challenges

In the African context, affirmative action remains a critical strategy for promoting gender equality. One of the countries in Africa that is celebrated for having the highest female parliamentary representation globally is Rwanda, with women constituting over 60% of its parliament. This success is attributed to robust political will and gender-sensitive policies (Bauer & Burnet, 2013).

Countries such as Uganda and Kenya have also made giant strides through affirmative action policies, although they continue to face challenges. Uganda's quota system, for instance, reserves a certain number of parliamentary seats for women, significantly enhancing women's political participation despite persistent patriarchal attitudes and political dynamics (Tamale, 2016). Also, Kenya's constitution mandates that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender. Although this policy has increased women's representation, enforcement and cultural resistance remain substantial challenges (Nzomo, 2018).

However, the picture is different from the Ghanaian perspective. Ghana's journey toward gender equality was gradual. The Affirmative Action Bill, initially drafted in 1998, was finally passed in 2024 and subsequently assented into law in the same year. The bill aims to address gender imbalances in political, economic, and social spheres by ensuring women's fair representation in decision-making processes.

Affirmative Action Journey: Navigating the Path to Gender Equality

Historically, Ghana's previous efforts and initiatives to promote gender equality included the establishment of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection and the implementation of various gender-sensitive policies. Despite this effort, women's representation in decision-making processes remained limited (Tsikata, 2009). The discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill highlights deep-seated socio-political and cultural dynamics that challenge gender equality. These include patriarchal attitudes, political resistance, and logistical challenges related to the bill's implementation.

While existing literature provides insights into affirmative action and gender equality, there is limited research on the discourses that emerge post-legislation, particularly in Ghana. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the aftermath of the Affirmative Action Bill's passage and the diverse narratives that emerged.

Discourse, Power, and Gender Equality: Analyzing Affirmative Action in Ghana through Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Theory

This study employed a Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Theory to understand the socio-political dynamics and public sentiment surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana. It employed CDA to explore how language interacted with power dynamics and societal structures. This multidisciplinary approach was particularly valuable for examining how language reflected and reinforced social inequalities, especially concerning gender (Gee, 2014; van Dijk, 2015).

Utilizing a range of sources, including the Ghana News Agency, Myjoyonline, Daily Graphic, and Citionline news, the research explored how various stakeholders such as policymakers, journalists, and activists constructed and negotiated meanings surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill. As Phillips & Jorgensen (2006) argued, "discursive practices contribute to the construction of social identities and relations," emphasizing that discourse constitutes and is constituted by social practices.

CDA stresses that language is not just a means of communication but also a tool for social action (Wetherell, 2001; Richardson, 2007). By analyzing news articles, public statements, and social media commentary, the study uncovered how different narratives about the Affirmative Action Bill are constructed, contested, and validated.

In conclusion, the study employed CDA to critically analyze the discourse surrounding the passage of Affirmative Action in Ghana into law, illuminating how language shaped perceptions of gender equality and power dynamics. This approach underscored the importance of discourse in influencing social change and fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in achieving gender.

Feminist Theory as a Lens for Understanding Gendered Discourses: The Case of the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana

Feminist Theory provides a critical lens for examining gender inequalities and the socio-political structures that perpetuate them. It emphasizes the importance of considering women's experiences and voices in the analysis of social phenomena (Butler, 1990). In the context of this study, Feminist Theory served as a foundational framework for understanding the gendered dimensions of the discourses surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana.

The study employed discourses related to the Affirmative Action Bill and how they are often shaped by underlying societal norms and power relations that marginalize women's voices. By applying a feminist lens, the research illuminated how the language used in media coverage and public statements both reflect and reinforce existing gender biases. Butler (1990) assessed that language plays a crucial role in constructing social realities, including gender identities and power dynamics.

In conclusion, Feminist Theory not only provides a framework for understanding the complexities of the discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill but also helps illuminate the critical implications for women's rights and gender equality in Ghana. By linking the findings to feminist perspectives, the study emphasized the necessity of challenging patriarchal narratives and promoting a more inclusive dialogue that prioritizes women's experiences and contributions in shaping policies that directly affect their lives.

3 Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative discourse analysis approach to purposively sample online news articles and editorials in the context of public statements and reactions to the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill into law by the Ghanaian Parliament on July 30, 2024. The selected sources which include Ghana News Agency Online, Daily Graphic Online, Joy News Online, and Citi Online were chosen for their extensive readership and influence in shaping public discourse. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, narratives, and rhetorical strategies present in the discourse surrounding the bill.

Data Collection

The study employed targeted online searches using search engines like Google and Yahoo, with specific phrases aimed at retrieving relevant material about the bill and its implications for gender issues in Ghana. In other words, data was collected from news articles and editorials that documented statements made by politicians, activists, and other stakeholders regarding the implications of the Affirmative Action Bill. This included tracking the immediate responses and ongoing discussions in the media, particularly from the aforementioned sources. Boolean operators were utilized to refine the search results, allowing for a more focused collection of data that directly

pertained to the objectives of the study. The selection process aimed to capture a comprehensive view of the varied reactions to the bill's passage, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the discourse on gender equality in Ghana.

4.Data Analysis

Utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Theory, the research explored the thematic landscape of celebration and optimism, skepticism and concerns, political will and leadership, cultural and traditional resistance, and economic implications that emerged following the bill's enactment. The analysis revealed the intricate socio-political dynamics and cultural attitudes that shape discussions on gender equality in Ghana.

CDA was employed to dissect news articles, public statements, and media commentary, identifying how different stakeholders construct and negotiate meanings surrounding the bill. The authors implemented a systematic approach to data analysis, incorporating manual coding, thematic analysis, and comparative analysis. On manual coding, the texts were meticulously examined to identify and code recurring themes and narratives. This step was essential for understanding the prevalent discourses surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill. Following manual coding, the researchers analyzed the data to uncover dominant discourses and their implications for women's rights and gender equality. This analysis highlighted how language both reflects and influences societal attitudes. The authors compared discourses across the selected news sources to identify similarities and differences in their coverage of the bill. This comparative approach provided insights into how various media outlets framed the subject matter and contributed to the overall discourse on gender equality. In summary, this methodology facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the complex narratives and power dynamics surrounding the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill, illuminating the critical implications for gender equality in Ghana.

Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher utilized data from multiple sources. This approach provided nuanced perspectives on the societal implications of the Affirmative Action Bill, enriching the analysis with firsthand accounts and contextual understanding.

5.Findings

The study revealed several key themes, including themes of Celebration and Optimism, Skepticism and Concerns, Political Will and Leadership, Cultural and Traditional Resistance, and Economic Implications.

Celebration and Optimism

Public statements in news articles expressed a strong theme of celebration and optimism regarding the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill. Stakeholders highlighted the bill as a historic

achievement for gender equality in Ghana. Celebratory narratives emphasized the potential for increased women's representation in politics and other sectors, aligning with international commitments to gender equality.

A notable example from the Ghana News Agency emphasizes this theme: "The Affirmative Action Bill Passage: Coalition anticipates an increment of female MPs to 30% by the year 2026" (GNA, 2024). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) described the bill as a historic milestone in Ghana's journey toward gender equality. One representative stated, "This is a victory for all women in Ghana, and we look forward to seeing its positive impact on our society. By empowering women and ensuring their full participation in all aspects of society, Ghana can build a more inclusive and prosperous future for all its citizens," adding that "gender equality is closely linked to economic growth"(GNA, 2024)

The representative continued, "We are elated that the Bill has been passed because the drafting started in 2011 and went to Parliament once but wasn't processed. The Coalition was set up in 2019 to put efforts together to have it passed, and we are expecting that the Bill receives Presidential assent to become a law and then, the great step begins" (GNA,2024).

Notable examples from the *Ghana News Agency (GNA)* include headlines such as "Passage of Affirmative Action Gender Equity Bill is historic - Coalition," "Affirmative Action Bill: A boost for gender equality," and "Parliament hailed for passing Affirmative Action Law" (GNA, 2024). These phrases depict the theme of celebration surrounding the bill's passage.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Myjoyonline.com, which featured the headline "Passage of Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana commendable – Josephine Oppong-Yeboah" (Myjoyonline.com, 2024). Another headline from the same source, "Passage of Affirmative Action Bill: UN Special Representative commends Ghana," further reinforces the celebratory tone (Myjoyonline.com, 2024) Citi Online News also contributed to the celebratory narratives with the headline "Shamima Muslim hails passage of Affirmative Action and Gender Equity Bill 2024." The Gender Advocate, who is also a politician and media practitioner, stated, "Congratulations, the Affirmative Bill has been passed today. So finally, we have the Affirmative Action Bill; it is no longer an equality bill. I think there've been a few amendments, and so it's the Affirmative Action, Gender Equity Bill. In the coming days, we will get the final bill that was passed, and then we'll begin public education" (Citi online news ,2024). Overall, these headlines and news stories reflect a widespread recognition of the bill's significance and its anticipated positive impact on gender equality in Ghana.

The theme of Skepticism and Concerns

Despite the celebratory tone, narratives of skepticism and concern were also prominently reported by the Ghanaian media. Some stakeholders questioned the government's commitment to effectively implementing the bill. Concerns were raised about potential challenges in enforcement, the adequacy of resources, and the need for continuous monitoring to ensure the bill's objectives are met.

Additionally, legal professionals sought to address the skepticism surrounding the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill. For instance, legal expert Francis Sosu was quoted in a Myjoyonline article titled “Conception that the Affirmative Action Bill will displace men is erroneous – Sosu.” He clarified that the passage of the bill would not displace men in the decision-making process, stating, “It will be an erroneous conception to think that the Affirmative Action Bill seeks to displace men. You know, we have a historical wrong, and when laws are going to be made, you first want to identify the mischiefs the law seeks to cure.”

Lawyer. Sosu highlighted existing gender disparities, noting that although women outnumber men in Ghana, they still lack equal representation and decision-making power. He further explained, “This problem is cultural, historical, and social. And the only way we can resolve this problem is by legislation” (Myjoyonline, 2024). This skepticism underscores the complexities surrounding the implementation of the bill and the need for ongoing dialogue and education to address misconceptions.

In addition to the above skepticism, former Minister for Gender, Children, and Social Protection, Nana Oye Bampoe Addo, expressed her disappointment regarding the lack of provisions reserving parliamentary seats for women in the Affirmative Action Gender Equity Bill. She stated, “I’m disappointed parliamentary seats aren’t reserved for women in the Affirmative Action Bill. Women’s representation in Ghana’s Parliament currently stands at 14.5 percent and less than five percent in the District Assembly System. The situation is similar in terms of ministerial, ambassadorial, and board appointments made by the government” (Myjoyonline, 2024).

Another theme of skepticism was expressed by the general public, with sentiments such as: “While we celebrate this achievement, we must remain vigilant. The passage of the bill is just the first step; its implementation will require strong political will and adequate resources to ensure that its objectives are met” (Citinewsroom, 2024).

The Speaker of Parliament, who played a significant role in the bill's passage, also conveyed similar concerns about future commitments. He remarked, “Don’t just celebrate and don’t put in place the vision that we have created for the country. More importantly, I hope that members will commit themselves to the constitutional reforms. We need to do more to create this free and just society we are looking for to liberate more of our women to support the development of Mother Ghana” (Myjoyonline.com, 2024) These expressions of skepticism highlight the complexities surrounding the implementation of the bill and the urgent need for continued advocacy and reform to address the systemic barriers women face in political representation.

Political Will and Leadership

The theme of political will and leadership emerged as a critical factor in the discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill. Analyzing speeches by political leaders revealed mixed reactions; some leaders were praised for their roles in passing the bill, while others faced criticism for previous resistance and delays. These narratives underscored the necessity of sustained political will to ensure the successful implementation of the bill.

Ms. Josephine Oppong-Yeboah, in a media interview following the bill's passage on July 30, 2024, emphasized its significance: “The adoption of the Affirmative Action Bill is a major achievement and demonstrates Ghana’s commitment to achieving gender equality in both the public and private sectors in the exercise of power and decision-making. By empowering women and ensuring their full participation in all aspects of society, Ghana can build a more inclusive and prosperous future for all its citizens,” she stated, adding, “Gender equality is closely linked to economic growth” (Graphic Online, 2024)

Similarly, Leonardo Santos Simão, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), commended the adoption of the bill during its passage. He remarked, “The adoption of the Affirmative Action Bill is a major achievement. It demonstrates Ghana’s commitment to achieving gender equality in both the public and private sectors in the exercise of power and decision-making, which will contribute to consolidating social justice and development in the country” (Graphiconline, 2024). This aligns closely with the theme of political will and leadership in the legislative process.

Furthermore, a poignant reminder of the challenges ahead was articulated by Shamima Muslim, who noted, “While we celebrate this achievement, we must remain vigilant. The passage of the bill is just the first step; its implementation will require strong political will and adequate resources to ensure that its objectives are met” (Citinewsroom, 2024). This sentiment reinforces the critical need for ongoing political commitment and leadership in the implementation of the Affirmative Action Bill.

Cultural and Traditional Resistance

Cultural and traditional resistance to gender equality emerged as a recurring theme in the discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill's passage into law. Many narratives reflected deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and beliefs that continue to impede the full realization of gender equality. These discourses underscored the pressing need for comprehensive public education and awareness campaigns aimed at shifting societal attitudes and fostering support for the bill's objectives.

A legal professional highlighted this issue during a media encounter shortly after the bill's passage, stating, “As we speak today, women are more than men in Ghana, yet they don’t have an equal stake when it comes to decisions that concern them. This problem is cultural, historical, and social. And the only way we can resolve this problem is by legislation. The Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana aims to address these historical gender inequalities by promoting the active participation of women in decision-making roles across various sectors”(Myjoyonline, 2024)

Moreover, another excerpt from Myjoyonline illustrates a hopeful outlook regarding the implementation of the law: “We are very hopeful that the law will work and make a difference with inclusion in line with the 1992 Constitution, Article 17 (2), which states that ‘A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status.’ Article 17 (4a) further asserts: ‘Nothing in this article shall prevent

Parliament from enacting laws that are reasonably necessary to provide for the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at redressing social, economic or educational imbalance in Ghanaian society” (Myjoyonline, 2024).

The theme of Economic Implications

Discussions surrounding the economic implications of the Affirmative Action Bill were prominent in the media narratives. Proponents argued that increased women's participation in decision-making would foster more inclusive and sustainable economic development. They emphasized that empowering women can significantly contribute to a more economically prosperous future for all citizens in Ghana.

Ms. Josephine Oppong-Yeboah articulated this perspective during a media interview following the bill's passage on July 30, 2024. She stated, “By empowering women and ensuring their full participation in all aspects of society, Ghana can build a more inclusive and prosperous future for all its citizens. Gender equality is closely linked to economic growth. The economic benefits of increased women's participation in decision-making are clear. However, we must also consider the short-term economic costs and ensure that institutions are ready to accommodate the changes mandated by the bill” (Graphic Online, 2024)

While the long-term economic benefits of the bill were widely acknowledged, some stakeholders expressed concerns about the immediate economic costs and the capacity of institutions to adapt to the changes required by the new legislation. This dual perspective highlights the complexity of implementing the Affirmative Action Bill within Ghana's socio-economic landscape.

1. Discussion

The discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana reflects a multifaceted landscape characterized by celebration, skepticism, and nuanced concerns regarding its implementation. This analysis underscores the divergent perspectives held by various stakeholders, including gender-focused civil society organizations, women's advocacy groups, politicians, and international development partners. The passage of the Bill has largely been met with optimism, as many stakeholders commend its potential to enhance gender equality and align Ghana with international gender protocols.

Proponents of the Bill argue that its enactment signifies a critical step toward mitigating the persistent disparities and discrimination faced by women within Ghanaian society. They posit that the Bill is instrumental in fostering women's increased representation in public and political spheres, with a target of achieving at least 30% female participation by 2030, following the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Such progressive legal frameworks are viewed as vital for addressing the entrenched patriarchal norms that have historically marginalized women in both economic and leadership roles.

However, the analysis also highlights significant skepticism surrounding the Bill's practical implementation. Concerns have been raised regarding potential cultural resistance that may hinder

its efficacy. Stakeholders fear that deep-seated traditional values could obstruct the intended impact of the legislation, undermining its goal of transforming socio-political dynamics in favor of gender equality. This skepticism necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the cultural landscape, as well as strategies for engaging communities to foster support for the Bill.

Additionally, the insights provided by key figures, such as Mr. Stephen Ofori, underscore the Bill's potential to enhance women's participation in national discourse and decision-making processes. By ensuring compliance with international human rights obligations, the Bill not only aims to uplift women but also positions Ghana as a progressive actor in the global human rights arena.

The findings from this discourse analysis bear significant implications for future policy-making endeavors related to gender equality and affirmative action in Ghana. They elucidate both the challenges and opportunities that may arise in the implementation phase, thereby informing strategies that policymakers can adopt to effectively navigate the complexities of cultural resistance and ensure the successful operationalization of the Bill.

In conclusion, while the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill is a landmark achievement for gender equality in Ghana, its true impact will depend on the collective efforts of stakeholders to address cultural resistance and foster an environment conducive to women's empowerment. Continued engagement and advocacy will be crucial in translating this legislative milestone into tangible outcomes for women in Ghana.

6. Theoretical Implications

The application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in this context reveals the intricate ways in which language, as utilized in media narratives and public statements, not only reflects but also reinforces existing power dynamics. The prevailing celebratory discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill illustrates a concerted effort to align national policies with international gender equality standards, thereby bolstering the perception of the government's commitment to these ideals. However, alongside this positive framing, skeptical and resistant narratives expose deeper power struggles and societal tensions that persist within Ghanaian culture. CDA serves to elucidate how language functions as a double-edged sword: it can empower certain voices while marginalizing others, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political landscape surrounding gender issues.

Through CDA, the study revealed how these discourses shaped public understanding and attitudes toward gender equity, highlighting underlying power relations. As Phillips & Jorgensen (2006) argued, "discursive practices contribute to the construction of social identities and relations," emphasizing that discourse constitutes and is constituted by social practices.

CDA emphasizes that language is not just a means of communication but also a tool for social action (Wetherell, 2001; Richardson, 2007). By analyzing news articles, public statements, and

social media commentary, the study uncovered how different narratives about the Affirmative Action Bill were constructed, contested, and validated.

Despite encountering a significant amount of unrelated literature, key sources emerged, providing essential insights into the discourse surrounding the Affirmative Action Bill. These sources were carefully selected to align with the study's focus on gender and social equity, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the current discourse.

Additionally, to maintain the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher validated the data from multiple sources. This provided nuanced perspectives on the societal implications of the Affirmative Action Bill, enriching the analysis with firsthand accounts and contextual understanding.

7. Conclusion

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to critically examine the discourse surrounding the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana. It illuminated how language shapes perceptions of gender equality and power dynamics, underscoring the vital role of discourse in influencing social change and enhancing our understanding of the complexities involved in achieving gender equality.

The application of Feminist Theory added depth to the analysis, highlighting the gendered dimensions inherent in the discourse. By focusing on political will, leadership, and cultural resistance, the study reflected broader societal structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. Feminist Theory offered critical insights into these narratives, emphasizing the necessity for sustained advocacy and systemic change to realize genuine gender equality. Framing the discourse through a feminist lens allowed us to appreciate the complexities of power relations and the need for transformative approaches that address both individual and institutional barriers to women's empowerment.

The findings revealed that discussions related to the Affirmative Action Bill were often shaped by underlying societal norms and power relations that marginalize women's voices. The language used in media coverage and public statements both reflected and reinforced existing gender biases. For instance, certain news articles emphasized opposition to affirmative measures rather than advocating for women's rights, perpetuating a narrative of gender inequality. This observation aligns with Butler's (1990) assertion that language plays a crucial role in constructing social realities, including gender identities and power dynamics.

Moreover, while the Affirmative Action Bill aimed to address gender disparities, the discourse surrounding it was often contested and complicated by traditional notions of gender roles. Stakeholders frequently framed women's rights as secondary to broader political or economic agendas, suggesting that the fight for gender equality was sidelined. This framing diminishes the urgency of women's issues and reflects a broader societal tendency to prioritize male-centric narratives in policy discussions.

Through the application of Feminist Theory, the study underscored the need for inclusive discourse that amplifies women's voices and experiences. By centering women's perspectives, we advocate for a more equitable approach to policy-making that recognizes the unique challenges faced by women in Ghana. The analysis revealed that empowering women and ensuring their active participation in discussions about the Affirmative Action Bill is crucial for fostering genuine gender equality.

However, this study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the analysis primarily relied on online news sources, which may not fully capture the diversity of public opinion. Media coverage can be selective, often highlighting certain voices while neglecting those from marginalized or less accessible communities. This raises concerns about the representativeness of the findings and the potential exclusion of critical perspectives.

Secondly, the study examined reactions and discourse immediately following the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill, capturing only a snapshot of public sentiment at that specific time. This focus potentially overlooks long-term impacts and evolving attitudes that may emerge as the bill is implemented and societal dynamics shift.

Additionally, while the study incorporates both international frameworks and local contexts, the discourse analysis may not adequately account for the myriad cultural, regional, and socio-economic factors that influence perceptions of the Affirmative Action Bill. Variations across different regions of Ghana could significantly affect public opinion and, therefore, the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the media sources and public statements analyzed may exhibit inherent biases, reflecting particular political or ideological viewpoints, which could influence how the bill's implications are portrayed and interpreted.

Finally, the focus of this study is predominantly on the discourse surrounding the bill's passage rather than its practical implementation. Consequently, it does not provide a detailed analysis of the challenges and successes associated with enacting the provisions of the bill in practice. This limitation highlights the need for future research that examines the real-world effects of the legislation and the barriers to its successful implementation.

To ensure the effective implementation of the Affirmative Action Bill, several actions are necessary. Sustained political will and leadership from policymakers are essential for continuous monitoring and resource allocation to support the bill's objectives. Addressing cultural and traditional resistance requires comprehensive public education and awareness campaigns to shift societal attitudes and build broad-based support for gender equality. Institutions must also be prepared to accommodate the changes mandated by the bill through capacity building, training, and resource allocation.

Ultimately, the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana represents a significant milestone in the pursuit of gender equality. However, the discourse analysis highlights a complex interplay of celebration and skepticism, political will and cultural resistance, and economic implications.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the challenges and ensuring the successful implementation of the bill.

In conclusion, the theoretical frameworks of CDA and Feminist Theory provide valuable insights into the socio-political context and the gendered dimensions of the discourse. Moving forward, sustained political will, robust public education efforts, and institutional readiness will be key to realizing the full potential of the Affirmative Action Bill and advancing gender equality in Ghana.

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