

A content analysis of gender representation in primary school Heritage-Social Studies textbooks in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study explores gender representation in grades 4 to 7 Heritage – Social Studies textbooks available to teachers, and learners in Zimbabwe Primary Schools. The feminist theory, which questions gender inequality and injustice through challenging the hegemony of patriarchy, formed the basis of the study. The qualitative study engaged the tenets of content analysis in its analytical framework. The analysis was based on language use and pictures in the textbooks studied. A purposive sample of four Heritage – Social Studies textbooks was selected to investigate the phenomenon of gender representation. Five units of each of the four textbooks were the focus of the study. The findings in the study show that textbooks studied are gender biased, as men and boys dominate the first position in nouns and pronouns. Picture presentation in analysed textbooks was biased towards men and boys thereby depicting an inclination towards patriarchy. The positively skewed picture representations biased in favour of men and boys impact on school learners differently. The study indicated that imbalanced representation in HSS textbook discourse continues unabated. Stakeholders in the textbook production need to ensure that Heritage – Social Studies textbooks are devoid of gender bias and gender discrimination. This is possible if government, through the Ministry of Education put in place guidelines for gender representation in textbook writing. Gender fair language on which both masculine and feminine generics promote the visibility of both men and women as well as boys and girls should characterise HSS textbooks. The textbooks produced should have gender-balanced pictures in order to undo stereotypical portrayal of females as inferior beings and males as dominant beings.

Keywords: Gender, representation, gender discrimination, gender bias, Heritage-Social Studies; textbooks, gender equality