

Sex role representation in selected primary, secondary and high schools textbooks in Swaziland

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ABSTRACT

The overall objective of the study was to determine the existence of sex-role representation in selected primary, secondary and high school textbooks in Swaziland. The specific objectives of the study were to identify the textual and illustrative messages in primary, secondary and high school Social Studies, History, Agriculture and Home Economics textbooks and to describe how textual and illustrative form of messages portray boys and girls in primary, secondary and high school Social Studies, History, Agriculture and Home Economics textbooks.

The study was descriptive. The research techniques employed in the study were content analysis and Focus Group Interview. The content analysis focused on primary, secondary and high school textbooks being used in Social Studies, History, Agriculture and Home Economics in Swaziland. Only prescribed textbooks for each of these subjects were studied. The Focus Group Interview involved only teachers responsible for teaching Social Studies, History, Agriculture and Home Economics. Sixteen (16) schools offering Primary, Junior Certificate and Ordinary Level Social Studies, History, Agriculture and Home Economics were purposively selected for this study. The location of the schools covered a fairly broad geographical representation of the four administrative regions of the country. The choice of Social Studies, History, Agriculture and Home Economics was based on the premise that these subjects, in one way or another, address human phenomena and therefore amenable to stereotyping. Moreover, in most cases, textbooks used for these subjects were written by local authors on their own or in collaboration with authors from outside, implying that they contain a substantial amount of local socio-cultural influence.

The findings indicated that in primary schools a majority of the topics in Home Economics, Social Studies and Agriculture textbooks did not have gender reference that is neutral in the way the topics were stated. In Home Economics textbooks, the use of female proper nouns, nouns, pronouns and verbs consistently outnumbered those of males whereas in Social studies and Agriculture textbooks the reverse was true. The frequency of adjectives used to describe males and females in Home Economics textbooks was equal: in Social Studies the frequency of males far outnumbered those of females whereas in

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Agriculture there was none for both sexes. The frequency and types of adjectives describing males and females in all subjects in ranked order showed that there were almost twice as many adjectives describing males than females the frequency for males was higher than females.

The frequency and types of activities in the text by subject showed that in Home Economics textbooks there was a tendency to describe female mainly in household related activities, in Social Studies the description for both sexes was almost at par while in Agriculture, there was no description for both sexes. There was a tendency to associate males with different occupations more frequently than females in all textbooks. The occupation descriptions associated females were more of the traditional nurturing and service types and less frequently. Although there was an attempt to depict both male and female in household-related activities in Home Economics and Social Studies textbooks, in cases where only male or female was depicted, there was higher frequency for female. The picture activities in Social Studies and Agriculture textbooks depicted males as mainly active but mainly passive in Home Economics. Males were depicted as traditional in Agriculture and Social Studies textbooks and mainly modern in Home Economics and Agriculture. In the case of females, they were depicted as mainly active and modern in Agriculture and Social studies textbooks, while in Home Economics they were depicted as passive, with regard to both sex activities by subject, females were depicted more active in Home Economics textbooks whereas in Social Studies and Agriculture males were depicted more active while both males and females were depicted almost equally as traditional in Home Economics and Agriculture textbooks and equally modern in Home Economics.

In secondary and high schools, there was substantially more gender referencing for both sexes in Home Economics textbooks, while in History there was mainly male referencing in subject topics. In Home Economics textbooks, the use of female proper nouns, nouns and verbs consistently outnumbered those of males, however, the use of male pronouns outnumbered females. The frequency and types of adjectives describing female and males in all subjects in ranked order showed that the number of adjectives describing females far outnumbered those of males and more frequently. However, the adjectives used to describe female were mainly the feminine and subservient type emphasizing the social and biological role of women in society. There was a tendency to associate males with different types of activities; with different occupations more frequently than females in all textbooks. The occupation descriptions associated with females were more of the traditional nurturing and service types and less frequently. It was evident that there was an attempt to have more unidentified sex pictures and illustrations in Home Economics and Agriculture textbooks. The male picture activities in Home Economics and Agriculture textbooks depicted males as passive yet in History they were mainly active and with regard to both sex picture activities by subject, they were non-existent in Home Economics textbooks, whereas in History males were portrayed as passive and traditional, while females were depicted as active and modern. Findings from the Focus Group Interview were consistent with the content analysis of textbooks.