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The gender sensitivity of Zimbabwean secondary school textbooks

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Abstract

This article examines the extent to which four O-level English textbooks currently used in Zimbabwean schools are gender sensitive. The article begins with a review of the literature on the different manifestations of gender stereotypes as exhibited by the representation of female characters in texts. Using feminist theory and content analysis of four textbooks the article shows that women are largely invisible in the texts, as manifested by the titles of passages, pictures and illustrations, extracts of passages and poems, in all of which a male perspective was dominant. Where women featured, they were, in most cases, portrayed negatively.

Keywords: gender-sensitive textbooks, sexist textbook content, gender stereotypes, female representation, power relations, Zimbabwean education

Introduction

The period of the 1960s and onwards was marked by a virtual explosion of research into gender issues, with scholars exploring the subject from different angles. Some work has been done in Southern Africa, but one area has been glossed over or given a superficial examination: gender stereotypes as depicted in students' textbooks. The article focuses specifically on Zimbabwe, where the discrimination and marginalization of women was recognized in the National Gender Policy for the Republic of Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe 2002). The Gender Department of the Ministry of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation observed in 2002 that '[d]espite the fact that 52% of our population are women, men continue to have a higher human development index as compared to their female counterparts' (Government of Zimbabwe 2002: 1). This 52% of women translates to 7 280 000 of a population of approximately 14 million Zimbabweans. The secondary school population is unfortunately not reflective of this demographic profile, with male students outnumbering female students. This anomaly persists despite Zimbabwe having sign-

ed, ratified and acceded to several declarations, conventions and protocols the sole aim of which is the creation of an enabling environment for the realization of equity and equality between the sexes. According to the National Gender Policy (Government of Zimbabwe 2002), the adult literacy rate is 86% and the second-highest in the region, and yet women constitute 30% of the illiterate adult population.

- The United Nations, UNICEF, SIDA and the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture have made attempts to ensure gender sensitivity. Whether the textbook industry has taken a cue from this growing concern on gender issues is what this article addresses. It seeks to interrogate the claim made by the then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture that the Curriculum Development Unit '... is now more conscious of gender issues regarding materials they produce and textbooks they recommend for use in the schools' (Dorsey 1996: 36).

The research was conducted within a feminist theoretical framework. Feminist theory has many variants: liberal, radical, socialist, cultural, womanist and Marxian feminism. Unger and Crawford (2004) regard these as different lenses through which women's experiences can be viewed. Despite the plurality of perspectives, a common feature of the viewpoints is their women-centeredness. Feminism values women's worth as human beings and recognises the need for social change if women are to realize their true potentials. Locks (1984) in Unger and Crawford (2004: 8) defines feminism as a '... movement to end sexism and sexist oppression'. This article is largely informed by feminist theory, since it seeks to unearth and challenge sexist tendencies in English texts that Zimbabwean O-level students currently use. The article is more inclined towards liberal feminism, which is a theory of gender inequality stemming from a patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labour (Unger and Crawford 2004). It views inequalities between the sexes as social constructions, which have no basis in nature. From this perspective, the reduction of bias in language is a prerequisite for the reduction of discrimination and inequality of the sexes.

The focus here is on textbooks as basic carriers of sexist content. Two important aspects that merit detailed scrutiny are raised. The first is the issue of representation or invisibility of female characters in texts. The second is the negative portrayal of the few female characters in the few situations involving them. Feminist theory posits that men and women are situated in society not only differently, but also unequally. Specifically, women get less of the material resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualization than their male counterparts sharing their location, whether based on class, race, ethnicity, religion, education, nationality or any intersection of these factors (O'Connell 1994; Gerda 1986). They are, therefore, situationally less empowered than men intellectually, conceptually, institutionally and at almost every other level. Men in patriarchy tend to be depicted in a wider range of social roles than women. Desirable attributes that bring with them success in life are assigned more to men than women. These include decisiveness, confidence, ambling, leadership

and rationality. whereas emotionality passivity, dependence and submissiveness are the preserve of the women (Strong et al. 1983). Another manifestation of these unequal power relations is where women are made to serve men as sex objects. hotel receptionists. secretaries or flight attendants. This reduces women to subordinate positions in relation to men, which justifies Weiner's (1990: 46) conclusion that '… the masculine stereotype is almost always regarded as superior. desirable or normal'. These. among other forms of negative portrayal, should be identified in our textbooks. It is also important to review literature showing various forms in which female invisibility in textbooks can be made manifest if one is to establish the extent of female representation in the O-level English textbooks currently in use.

Female representation in texts and language use

There is a small body of literature on representation of females in textbooks in Africa and in Zimbabwe. All agree that women are represented from a male perspective. that they are generally under-represented and that there is a preponderance of male characters. an imbalance that is not reflective of the numbers of females in the world vis-à-vis their male counterparts (Eichler 1988: 5). In a related article, Chitsike (1995) observes that most textbooks used in Zimbabwe's schools are biased towards male pupils because they contain messages, depictions and illustrations that tend to favour boys by highlighting men's achievements and ignoring women's. Gaidzanwa (1985) focuses on characters found in textbooks in Zimbabwe and observes that not only are textbooks dominated by male characters, but also that where women feature, they are mainly in the domestic sphere. where they appear to be serving men. Marira's (1991) article, which also concerns textbooks. concludes that women are underrepresented and that textbooks reflect a male gender bias, with schoolchildren in Zimbabwe getting a very high dose of that male-gender bias. Brickhill et al. (1996: 10) have this to say on Zimbabwean textbooks:

> Books do not represent the reality of the diversity of male and female headed households. women in professional. entrepreneurial or cultural pursuits. or males in a domestic role or taking responsibility for children…

Commenting on the gender sensitivity of textbooks elsewhere in Africa, Brickhill et al. (1996) observe that in Mozambique's textbooks. the visibility of women is generally poor. with the use of masculine pronouns being standard. In Nigeria, Oyedeji (1996) finds, Mathematics textbooks in use in schools contain higher percentages of male-related tasks than female-related ones. The researcher notes that

> Most of the items that are male-related are observed to present men in engineering, big businesses. architecture. navigation. surveying, and piloting, while most of the items that are female-related showed women in the market or supermarkets or interacting with children at home. (Odeyeji 1996: 50)

In Kenya, Abagi (1998) observes that education is being used to perpetuate gender inequity and patriarchy through a gender-stereotyped curriculum and gender-biased

teaching methods, with textbooks appearing to have been written from a man's perspective. The researcher notes that, for example, women are generally portrayed as not owning property, dependent and homemakers, while men are seen as independent breadwinners, superior, owners of property and decision-makers.

McKinney (2005) analyse textbooks in use in South African primary schools. Selected textbooks included Grade 1 reading schemes (51 readers, 111 stories) and ten Grade 7 Language and Natural Science books. The analysis revealed inequity in gender representation among the Grade 1 readers under scrutiny. In addition, Grade 7 Language textbooks also manifested gender inequity, with males generally over-represented. Representation in relation to gender among other aspects was generally better in the Grade 7 Natural Science texts than in Language texts. Stromquist (1997: 40) observes that the issue of gender insensitivity in textbooks is a global phenomenon common in both industrialized and developing countries and laments that

> School textbooks transmit messages and illustrations that present women in predicable situations: playing domestic roles and being passive, emotional, weak, fearful, and not being intelligent. Men by contrast are portrayed as assertive and intelligent, and as taking on leadership roles and being open to multiple occupational roles.

Despite our article not taking a comparative approach based on subject areas, such findings merit attention, since they provide insights on what has been established elsewhere in the region and abroad. Our work intends to cast further light on these issues by examining a relatively under-researched area, that of Zimbabwean textbooks. For the purpose of this article, texts by authors of both sexes will be investigated. The English language itself needs to be investigated for sexism, since aspects may be manipulated in ways that circumscribe women.

Another important body of literature to consider is that which examines language that promotes gender stereotypes. As Eichler (1988) has argued, the English language itself can denigrate and debase women – this is especially the case when it treats them as exceptions. For instance, a male is a 'real' poet, whereas a female is a poetess, thereby trivialising female gender forms. This equally applies to 'hero' and 'heroine', where the former suggests a greater measure of courage and contribution than does its female equivalent. Deriving the feminine form from the masculine suggests women are mere extensions and appendages of men. This extends even to names like Georgina, Francisca, Henrietta, Josephine and others, which are derivations from George, Francis, Henry and Joseph. Unger and Crawford (1992: 21) present another anomaly when they allege that '... there is a tendency for words referring to females to acquire negative or debased meanings while their counterparts referring to males retain their original meaning'. They go on to authenticate their assertion using the words governor/governess and lady lord as examples. A 'governor' wields immense power in political administration, whereas a 'governess' cares for small children while she is employed by their wealthy parents. 'Lord' on one hand refers '... to the deity and a few Englishmen, but anyone may call herself a lady' (Crawford and Unger; 2004: 54).

'Sir' and 'madam' are both respectable, but 'madam' can also refer to a brothel-keeper, whereas one can never call a pimp 'sir'. This shows how much female terms have been debased to assume sexual connotations. The same is applicable to pairs like master/mistress, bachelor/spinster and king/queen, among others.

Eichler (1988: 137) states that '[a]nother form of sexism in language occurs when males and females are referred to by non-parallel terms in parallel situations, such as in the expression 'a man and his wife'. 'Man' parallels 'wife'. The order of the combination should be reversible without upsetting the meaning. Gender marking is another form of stereotype, where terms like 'female doctor' and 'male nurse' are used. This suggests that the prototype doctor must be male, hence the specification of sex for the female. Asymmetry is also a manifestation of gender stereotypes, as in the case where people are quick to refer to unwed mothers but not unwed fathers. On a similar note, Hudson (1996: 102) also finds fault with '... the English distinction between Mrs and Miss which is not paralleled by a pair of male titles showing whether or not the bearer is married'.

A minor but irritating form of sexism observed by Eichler (1988: 137) '... occurs when one sex is consistently named before the other, and when such sequencing takes on the characteristic of a grammatical rule'. Examples, which easily come to mind, are 'ladies and gentlemen' or 'boys and girls'. These and other biases point to the need to revolutionize the language and as textbooks are a major embodiment of the language, the need for a gender-sensitive textbook industry cannot be overemphasized. This explains why a content analysis of the English texts was undertaken in this article.

Research design

The methodological orientation employed in the analysis of the selected textbooks was both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data was collected in the exploration of the portrayal of female characters in texts, which was then used to generate quantitative data with a view to extending and validating the qualitative findings. The actual technique used was content analysis, which enabled the examination of gender-bias in O-level English textbooks. Content analysis was employed because it allowed the systematic analysis of the four selected texts. The term 'content analysis' refers to a more sophisticated level of investigation, concerned with the identification of the more significant dimensions into which a given phenomenon can be analysed (Mouly 1978: 213).

Content analysis operates from the premise that reducing a text to its smaller components and systematically analysing it enables one to understand inter-relationships within the text and their underlying implications. As Kabira & Masinjila (1997) point out, the aim of the systematic analysis is to bring out as objectively as possible the gender dynamics in a text so as to draw conclusions. Content analysis was quantitatively used in analysing female representation through counting the number of

illustrations/pictures, words, authorship of poems/letters/passages, known personalities according to sex, and occupations by gender. Content analysis was also qualitatively used in identifying and discussing the negative and positive portrayal of males and females through determining the gender perspective of selected poems, passages, their register, use of gender-insensitive language, use of male generic terms and word order where both sexes are mentioned. The portrayal of the sexes is quantified in different analytical categories. Quantitative data is used alongside qualitative analysis that seeks to explain the phenomenon under discussion. Data collected was initially categorized into its constituent sections mostly in tabular form before an analysis of the facts and figures was made.

The selection procedures employed considered the population of all seven Form 4 textbooks recommended for use in schools by the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) in Zimbabwe. English textbooks were selected because of the potential of English as a carrier of gender stereotypes. Only O-level Form 4 textbooks were used, as this is the level at which the majority of students leave school and make career choices on the basis of, among other things, the socialization they would have got from the textbooks. From this population, only four textbook were purposively sampled and put to the test. Selection was purposive in the sense that only current textbooks were considered. Realizing the fluidity of the term current, it was operationalized to mean those textbooks published from 1990 to date.

The understanding was that these might exhibit more gender sensitivity than their predecessors, since gender issues have been increasingly debated over the years. This eliminated two of the seven possible texts, which had earlier publication dates, leaving five texts, three by male author and two by female authors. One text by a male author was dropped to strike a balance between texts by male and female authors, at the same time analysing texts by two different publishers. This was meant to ascertain whether gender bias or sensitivity was characteristic of certain authors, sex or publishing houses. The criterion used for dropping the fifth text was date of publication, which was earlier than the other three. Using this criterion, the following texts were studied.

- Chinodya, S. (1993). *Step Ahead 4*. Harare: Longman.
- Dawson, D. (1990). *Structures and Skills in English 4*. Harare: College Press.
- Pfende, E. (1997). *Focus on Communication and Register*. Harare: College Press.
- Nineham, J. (2000) *Focus on English*. Harare: College Press.

The main questions asked were whether titles of passages in the textbooks were gender sensitive or biased, whether pictures, illustrations, occupation titles and the general use of language reflect gender sensitivity, whether the amount and the nature of portrayal of male and female characters were similar in the textbooks and whether extracts of passages and poems were taken equally from both male and female authors.

Data collected was coded and categoriz d into themes. A qualitative data analysis method, typology. which is a classificatio i system using patterns. themes or groups of data. was used. Categories of data were resented in tabular form making use of descriptive statistics. The data was then analysed by descriptive means. For the purpose of this article. a visibility scale was used to determine whether female visibility in a particular aspect is high. moderate or lo . The scale is as follows:

Very high	Female portrayal exceed male portrayal by 80-100%
High	Female portrayal exceed male portrayal by 55-79%
Moderate	The difference between female or male portrayal is 46-54%
Low	Female portrayal is lower than male portrayal by 31-45%
Very low	Female portrayal is lower than male portrayal by 16-30%
Overshadowed	Female portrayal is lower than male portrayal by 0-15%

The visibility scale was applied through a painstaking count of the variables under scrutiny, whether pictures. words. number of passages, poems or others. The figures were converted to percentages, by counting female portrayal over the possible total multiplied by 100. Percentages were calculated to three significant figures.

Pictures in textbooks

The study looked at illustrations, pictures and any other representations in the form of drawings within a text. This is because they tell a story on their own and also in conjunction with the written text. Illustrations also present in pictorial form a powerful image of what may be contained in words. In most cases the learners' opinions and attitudes are shaped by illustrations ever before reading or being introduced to a text, hence their indispensability in an article such as this. Only pictures depicting human beings were used. The percentage of female representation over the possible total excludes pictures depicting both sexes. The representation of pictures according to sex for each text is indicated in Table 1.

In terms of female representation in pictures, only in one textbook did female portrayal exceed male portrayal, with the other three registering low female visibility.

Table 1: Pictures in textbooks

Text	Males	Females	Total	Pictures depicting both sexes	Percentage of female represent-ation	Female visibility
Focus on English	18	10	28	19	35,7	Low
Step Ahead	17	10	27	25	37,0	Low
Focus on Communication and Register	4	6	0	12	60,0	High
Structures and skills	13	11	24	14	45,8	Low

Ironically, the text that has high female representation devotes three pages to illustrating females asking for directions while males show the way. This is despite the author being female. This depiction of females in subservient roles runs through all four texts. In most instances males are doing things and females either watching or helping and the activities that bring with them prominence and status are almost always assigned to males. Another anomaly is that where pictures depict both sexes, males are always in the majority and are the centre of attraction.

Poems and passages: Authorship

This component focused on who tells the story in an extract or poem, in other words who vocalizes and whether they are male or female. Extracts whose authors' sex could not be established were not included. Of the 35 passages and eight poems in *Step Ahead*, 24 were used. From the 28 passages and one poem in *Structures and Skills*, ten were used. Of the 19 passages and five poems in *Focus on English* 17 were used. *Focus on Communication and Register* had no extracts or poems.

All three texts that had extracts showed a gross under-representation of works by female authors. This has two implications; it suggests either that women are not accomplished writers or their works do not merit consideration. Either way, their visibility is diminished or their worth compromised.

Poems, letters, passages: Male or female perspective

The actors' perspective in passages, poems or letters is important in determining the gender responsiveness of a text. The increase in the totals for these passages is accounted for by the fact that all passages with a notable perspective are included, unlike in Table 2. As in the preceding table, *Focus on Communication and Register* has no passages or poems, as shown in Table 3.

In all three texts, passages, poems and letters are written more from a male point of view than from a female viewpoint, which goes to show how trivialized women are. For the few passages and poems with a female perspective, a common trend was that the

Table 2: Poems and passages Authorship

Text	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of female represent- ation	Visibility
Focus on English	14	3	17	17,6	Very low
Step Ahead	20	4	24	16,7	Very low
Focus on Communication and Register		–	–	–	–
Structures and skills	8	2	10	20,0	Very low

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Poems, letters, passages: Male or female perspective

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Focus on Communication and Register	-	-	-	-	-
Structures and skills	8	2	10	20,0	Very low

Table 3: Poems, letters, passages: Male or female perspective

Text	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of female representation	Visibility
Focus on English	14	10	24	41,7	Low
Step Ahead	24	8	32	25,0	Very low
Focus on Communication and Register	—	—	.	—	—
Structures and skills	11	4	15	26,7	Very low

locus was usually the home setting, which gives the impression that women's roles are confined within the domestic domain.

Known personalities according to sex

Inclusion of known personalities is instrumental in shaping our attitudes towards characters in a text. In the study, the influential characters that were named are identified. These included statesmen (itself a male generic term), sports personalities, musicians, authors, actors, politicians and those who have made names for themselves in other fields. Table 4 shows the findings made in regard to this aspect.

Three texts had very low female representation, with *Focus on English* having a slightly better visibility, although it still fell within the low range of the scale. Prominent female personalities are fewer than their male counterparts, which gives the erroneous implication that not many women have distinguished themselves significantly enough to merit any consideration. The identified female personalities included Doris Lessing, Miriam Makeba, Madonna and Mother Theresa. Few local personalities whom the students could take for the role models were used. A balance between international and local celebrities and personalities could have been made.

Examples from register and language items according to sex

Step Ahead has 216 pages of material from which examples relating to register and

Table 4: Known personalities according to sex

Text	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of female representation	Visibility
Focus on English	6	5	11	45,4	Low
Step Ahead	17	4	21	19,0	Very low
Focus on Communication and Register	3	1	4	25,0	Very low
Structures and skills	10	3	13	23,0	Very low

Table 5: Examples from register and language items according to sex

Text	Male perspective	Female perspective	Total	Percentage of female representation	Visibility
Focus on English	152	139	291	47,8	Moderate
Step Ahead	111	66	177	37,0	Low
Focus on Communication and Register	135	152	287	53,0	Moderate
Structures and skills	57	14	68	19,7	Very low

language items were taken. *Structures and Skills* has 184 pages from which examples were taken. *Focus on English* has 201 pages and *Focus on Communication & Register* has 139 pages. From these volumes of pages, the data in Table 5 was established.

It is only in *Focus on Communication and Register* that female visibility exceeds male visibility, although *Focus on English* has moderate representation of females in terms of visibility. Examples from the other two texts show language and register items more from the male than the female perspective. This constant reference to males has the effect of implanting males uppermost in the young readers' minds, at the same time relegating females to the background.

Occupations held by males and females

This aspect shows the differential power relations of the sexes. Gender social relations are sustained by the prevailing power structures, which are clearly manifested in texts. An insight into such relations was noted in the portrayal of the occupations held by males and females, as shown in Table 6.

The figures in the table do not include the frequency with which a particular occupation was assigned to a specific sex. Had the frequency been considered, the figures would have been overwhelming in favour of males. The figures in Table 6 give the impression that working women are the exception, except for *Focus on Communication and Register*, where a balance was struck between male and female

Table 6: Occupations held by males and females

Text	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of female representation	Visibility
Focus on English	33	15	48	31,2	Low
Step Ahead	59	14	73	19,1	Very low
Focus on Communication and Register	15	15	30	50,0	Moderate
Structures and skills	26	12	38	31,6	Low

occupations. Another bias that was noted was that the prestigious occupations were assigned more to men than women in all the texts. This demonstrates the aspect of power relations alluded to above. The visible power has to do with decision-making and ability to influence the actions of others which an occupation-holder possesses. Language is one of the most important and subtle ways of portraying gender biases, which are seen through conventions of speaking and writing. Its influence is wide-reaching, since everyone grows up and is socialized within a language tradition. This language use was analysed in terms of word order, use of male generic terms and the use of neutral terms.

Word order where both sexes are named

In analysing word order, where feminine and masculine terms were used together, the order of their occurrence was noted and counted. The frequency with which a particular occurrence was noted was considered, but entered as one occurrence. Had frequency been considered, it would have weighed heavily against the female-first occurrences. The outcome of the analysis is given in Table 7.

In all texts, there is bias towards the male-female order rather than vice versa. Only *Focus on English* has moderate representation according to the visibility scale, although in actual counts male-first occurrences outnumber female-first. There is also greater interchange of word order in *Focus on English* than in the other texts, for instance occurrences like 'boys and girls' and 'girls and boys' are both found, as is use of he/she and she/he. Having the masculine form always preceding the feminine gives the impression of males being primary and more important than females. Closely related to the aspect of word order is the use of male generic terms.

Use of male generic terms

Generics are meant to be gender neutral. The reason for analysing their use in a text is to establish whether they are used to achieve neutrality. Some generics compromise their neutrality by having a clear male stamp in other forms of speech. Examples that

Table 7: Word order where both sexes are named

Text	Male first	Female first	Total	Percentage of female representation	Visibility
Focus on English	7	6	13	46.2	Moderate
Step Ahead	9	3	12	25.0	Very low
Focus on Communication and Register	15	6	1	28.6	Very low
Structures and skills	6	2	7	28.6	Very low

quickly come to mind are 'mankind' and 'manpower'. These refer to men only in their gendered form but include women in their neutral usage to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to determine in what sense they are being used.

The figures in Table 8 do not include the frequency of occurrence of each term in a text. Envisaging humanity from a male perspective denigrates the value of women. *Focus on Commun- ication an Register* should be applauded for sometimes using the singular 'they' instead of the generic 'he'. Despite the overwhelming presence of male generic terms, one should not lose sight of the neutral terms occasionally employed in the text.

Neutral terms

These are terms with no gender marking, like 'officer', 'person' and singular 'they', among others. These help pupils to appreciate people of both sexes as equals. The frequency of occurrence of each was not taken account of.

Step Ahead lags far behind in appreciating the need for gender-neutral terms, as indicated in Table 9. Although the attempts by the other three texts to introduce neutral terms are commendable, it was disturbing to note for example that a single text that uses the term 'school head' would later revert to 'headmaster' as a generic term. This shows how deeply ingrained stereotypes can be.

Before concluding, it is important to establish how the women characters presented in the texts were portrayed in relation to their male counterparts.

Positive portrayal of both sexes

The portrayal of the sexes was grouped according to various attributes, for example their contribution, knowledge and skill, and ratios established as indicated in Table 10. The portrayal is also based on what the characters do and say, what others say about them, and their attitudes and beliefs.

All the texts portray males in a more positive light than they do female characters. Females supposedly lack the attributes of a positive nature as far as the texts are concerned, whereas males seem to have positive attributes generously bestowed upon them.

Table 8: Use of male generic terms

Focus on English	8
Step Ahead	16
Focus on Communication and Register	4
Structures and skills	17

Table 9: Neutral terms

Focus on English	8
Step Ahead	0
Focus on Communication and Register	7
Structures and skills	6

Table 10: Positive portrayal of both sexes

Text	Male:female ratio
Focus on English	7:4
Step Ahead	10:5
Focus on Communication and Register	3:2
Structures and skills	4:3

Table 11: Negative portrayal of both sexes

Text	Male:female ratio
Focus on English	4:1
Step Ahead	9:22
Focus on Communication and Register	2:17
Structures and skills	8:7

Negative portrayal of both sexes

The same pattern as in Table 10 emerged when attributes were categorized and converted into male: female ratio as shown below.

All the texts portray females in a more negative light than their male counterparts although *Structures and Skills* attempts to strike a balance in the negative portrayal of the sexes. Had the trend for positive portrayal remained consistent in the negative portrayal, a balance would have been maintained. This is not so, however, as, in an unprecedented U-turn, all the texts portray females in more negative ways than males.

Discussion

The results above indicate a lack of gender balance in the portrayal of the sexes in the texts under consideration. Even illustrations in pictorial form rendered females invisible. The few women pictured in the texts do not take central roles. Despite there being sufficient literature by women writers from which to extract poems and passages for use in the texts, there is a greater focus on works by male writers and poets. The same is true of passages, poems and letters, all of which have males as central characters and females as auxiliary, subordinate figures who watch things happen while men make them happen.

Prominent and well-known female personalities who have made history by becoming the first Zimbabwean women or first black women in particular fields like medicine, aviation and politics abound in Zimbabwe. However, they are outnumbered and overshadowed by prominent male personalities. Even where authors wanted to exemplify a particular language structure, they did so from a male rather than female perspective.

The fact that women have risen to prominence over the years through occupying high positions and occupations is not reflected in the textbooks, which seem to suggest that the lot of women is in the home, in childbearing and rearing. There are an abundance of generic terms the frequency of which was best left unconsidered. This is in sharp contrast with gender-neutral terms, which are lacking in the texts. Women are neg-

atively portrayed when they are incorporated into the texts. Examples that come to mind are how females are portrayed as witches, prostitutes, feeble, dependent, insecure and needing men more than men need them, among a host of other negative portrayals.

Conclusion

The data presented, analysed and discussed points to the absence of gender sensitivity in the textbooks under investigations, which could be reflective of all the textbooks used in the schools across the school levels and subject areas. There is a heavy bias towards males, despite some of the texts having been authored by females. These findings agree with those of other researchers on the subject, whose studies focus on Zimbabwe, other African countries and the world such as Chirsike (1995), Gaidzanwa (1985), Brickhill et al. (1996), Oyedeji (1996), Abaji (1998) McKinney (2005) and Stromquist (1997). The irony that female authors are no different in their represent-ation of gendered roles suggests their compliance with the dominant power relations that have persisted over the years. Differences of publishers do not affect gender sensitivity at all, as there are no marked differences between the different publishers. Marira (1991: 118) is justified in concluding that '[t]he Zimbabwe Ministry of Edu-cation, Sport and Culture through its Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) which approves all textbooks used in the primary and secondary schools, has not sufficiently used its role to influence publishers to reflect a gender balance in these texts'. Texts thus continue to pigeonhole women and men into separate domains.

In view of the foregoing, it is possible to concur with Bellany (1999: 56), who observed that [a] gender aware approach must, therefore, inform decision making at every level of the system'. Following Stromquist (1997 41), we propose the identification of sexual stereotypes in stories, arguments, examples and illustrations and removing them from textbooks, such as is being done in Chile and Guatemala 'where the governments intend to eliminate sexist content in textbooks and have developed guidelines for editorial houses to be considered in the production of textbooks'. Authors should be encouraged to avoid sex stereotyping and promote gender sensitivity in their texts. Authors should be conversant with the manifestations of gender stereotypes. Publishers could produce bias guidelines listing words, phrases and images that should be avoided and to which authors would conform prior to the publication of their works. This would compel authors to produce gender-sensitive materials. Before publication, all the manifestations of gender stereotypes noted in this article and many others should be scrutinized. Texts found wanting should be revised. Specifically, the Curriculum Development Unit's (CDU's) role in the adoption of textbooks in schools is pivotal. No texts should be recommended for use in schools unless they have been censored and rid of sexist attributes. Had this been practised, current texts would have no or fewer manifestations of gender stereotypes than they currently have. Considerations of cost should be subordinated to those of gender

neutrality in the selection of core texts at particular schools. The coinage of new words is a step in the right direction as a way of breaking male control of language, which inevitably leads to the unlearning of patriarchal ways of thinking.

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