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Do textbooks reflect learners' diversity? A case study of Grade 4 English and life skills textbooks

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Textbooks socialise and legitimise cultural norms, and therefore, learners' social worlds should find expression in their textbooks. In the study reported on here we examined how Grade 4 English First Additional Language and life skills textbooks reflected learner diversity in South African schools as manifested in their racial, gender, occupational, ability and geographical profiling in the textbooks. Content analysis was used to systematically identify instances of diversity representation in Grade 4 English First Additional Language and life skills textbooks. Quantitative content analysis accounted for the ubiquity of human characters' reflection in textbooks on the diversity variables in question. Qualitative analysis focused on the depiction of characters' gender roles. Quantitative data suggest that learners' social worlds were generally represented in the selected textbooks. However, males enjoyed greater visibility than females, and the visibility of disabled people was low. The 2 life skills and 1 English textbook portrayed both urban and rural settings. The qualitative analysis uncovered some gender stereotyping, where, for example, women were depicted in lower positions compared to men's high-paying vocations like judges, scientists, or doctors. Boys were depicted receiving prizes for their Matric achievements. Implications for publishers and writers commissioned to write textbooks include the need to consider representation of learner diversity in textbooks. The Department of Education should develop guidelines that promote such representation.

Keywords: content analysis; diversity; gender; gender representation; gender stereotyping; inclusive education; learner; social world; South Africa; textbooks

Introduction

The history of South African publishing shows that Black South Africans mainly read books aligned to the lived experiences of the West and lacking in own personal realities. During the apartheid era, only English and Afrikaans were recognised as official languages (Publishers' Association of South Africa [PASA], 2014). Most of the content in the textbooks dealt with European experiences which reflected the colonial view of the times, and the books only represented a certain group of people (Kantey, 1990). The publication of material in English and Afrikaans far outweighs the publication of works in the other official languages of South Africa (Möller, 2013). There is, thus, limited reading material published and available in the home languages of the majority of South Africans (Möller, 2013). The majority of the population is excluded from reading in their home language. The Black child cannot find his/her identity, experiences, social world and everyday thoughts in books. The dominant language put the speakers in a position of power, and in the process, the African language literature suffered (Van der Vlies, 2012). The main cause for this was that most mission presses closed down under the rule of the National Party, which was not in favour of the education of Black South Africans. Language boards addressed indigenous languages and suggested the prescribed books to be used by the education departments (Swanepoel, 2012).

After 1994 reforms took place and the publishing industry has since grown in terms of number of people buying and reading books. There has been an increase in the number and variety of texts published. This has been accompanied by an increasing number of book sales and a greater turnover for publishers and printers (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology [DACST], 1998). Currently, in terms of languages, English and Afrikaans still dominate, although the figures vary due to changes in demand (Munyai & Phooko, 2021). Books are published in African languages, but it is mostly for the schoolbook market and not for general consumption.

In 2011 the process of textbook production was centralised, with potential publications submitted to a central body (Möller, 2013). Textbooks which complied with the body's criteria were selected for retail in the country (Möller, 2013). The criteria for the textbooks related to, among others, the use of appropriate language and the illustration of South Africa's diverse population (Möller, 2013). The publishing sector, therefore, became very competitive. South Africa's competitive publishing industry, with an estimated 150–200 publishers, resulted in an increase in the quality and a decrease in the cost of books (PASA, 2014). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has developed a national catalogue that provides a choice of eight textbooks for each subject and grade. According to PASA (2014:19)

[a]n education system in an open, free, fair, nonracist, and democratic society must offer a diversity of materials to all learners. There is no rainbow with one single colour. A national catalogue with diversity of content, methodology and approach offers diversity and fosters innovation and creativity. A multi-text environment is educationally richer, offering different points of view and different content, teaching students to discriminate between texts.

This diversity in the country accounts for the multiple publishers and textbooks on the market in an effort to accommodate the diverse needs in the country. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) aligns with the Constitution of the Republic of South African, 1996 (hereafter, the Constitution), when referring to diversity as, among others, “poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, and disability” (DBE, RSA, 2011a:5, 2011b:5; RSA, 1996c). The definition of diversity in the CAPS aligns with that in the Constitution and was therefore considered in this study. It is important to know whether authors of textbooks respond to this challenge in terms of developing texts that cater for diverse learners.

In South Africa a few studies have been done on the level of inclusivity reflected in the country’s school textbooks. No previous study has investigated the extent to which current English and life skills textbooks at the Grade 4 level represent diverse learners in the South African context. In Grade 4, learners’ minds are still impressionable but they have started to read for meaning and understanding (reading to learn). As a result, with this research we investigated whether current Grade 4 English and life skills textbooks accord equal opportunities or equally represent learners within a diverse context. The textbooks were designed based on the CAPS document with the promotion of a democratic, socially just, and non-discriminatory focus that favours equality and equity (DBE, RSA, 2011a, 2011b).

In this study we considered the occupations, roles, actions or duties performed by different genders – identifying the possible gender stereotyping or bias in the visual and written texts that were examined. The depiction of careers in textbooks have the potential to indoctrinate males and females towards gender specific occupations (Griffith, 2010).

With this study we sought to answer the following research question: To what extent are the selected Grade 4 English and life skills textbooks currently used in South African schools reflective of the diversity of Grade 4 learners in the schools?

A literature review follows this introduction. The research methodology then explains how the study was undertaken. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. This culminates in the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study and suggestions for further research.

Literature Review

Studies conducted internationally and in South Africa are underpinned by ideologies that strive to accommodate diverse societies (Bowen & Hoper, 2023; Niehaus, 2018). South Africa is nicknamed

the “Rainbow Nation” due its multiculturalism and diversity. Race, gender, marital status, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth are all included in the Constitution’s definition of diversity (DBE, RSA, 2011a). The mid-year population estimate for 2022 indicated South Africa’s demographics as Black South Africans at 81.0%, Coloured South Africans at 8.8%, White South Africans at 7.7%, and Indian South Africans at 2.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

Transformational efforts to build an equal and inclusive South African society continues (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The equality and inclusivity are not only limited to socio-economic dimensions but also extend to the education system, which should accommodate the diversity among learners. In this study we focused on the following aspects of diversity: race, gender, disability, and geographic location. We support McKinney’s (2005) view that the lived experiences of learners should be reflected in the textbooks that they are meant to learn from. The inclusion of all learners in the education system is a major research topic which reveals that significant gender bias favouring males still exists (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Aguilar, 2021; Bothma, Gravett & Swart, 2000; Óskarsdóttir, Donnelly, Turner-Cmucha & Florian, 2020; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Sulaimani, 2017).

McKinney (2005) reports on a comprehensive South African study in which 61 widely used textbooks were analysed to examine whether they accommodated diversity and represented all learners in South Africa. The findings show that there was unequal and underrepresentation in relation to poverty, gender, rurality and differently abled people (McKinney, 2005). We similarly investigated the representation of learners on a small scale – in four textbooks widely used in South Africa.

In another South African study, Engelbrecht (2006) analysed Afrikaans and history textbooks to examine the representation of learners in those textbooks. It was revealed that the issue of racial stereotyping was at the time resolved in Afrikaans language textbooks, but that no transformation had occurred in history textbooks. According to Islam and Asadullah (2018), although official pronouncements and declarations by governments to commit to gender equality, textbooks used in schools still under-represent, negatively represent, and misrepresent women relative to men. An evaluation of diversity in textbooks by the DBE (2017) revealed equal representation of race and gender when compared to South Africa’s demographic. Different class groups were, however, disproportionately represented with the middle class represented more in textbooks than other groups.

Representation in learning and support materials (textbooks) as teaching resources

Textbooks are immensely influential in socialising children in schools and legitimising cultural norms, as well as ideology of politics and education (McKinney, 2005; Pillay & Maistry, 2017). Sulaimani (2017) argues that English textbooks acquaint learners with the nuances of the language to be learnt. Children learn about their culture and other people's cultures through reading school textbooks (Oates, 2014). According to the South African curriculum, the aim of education is to equip learners with democratic values and inclusivity, which are central to educational institutions (Makoelle, 2012). It is crucial that learners' textbooks, which socialise them accurately, represent all learners. Considering South Africa's developing democracy, learners should be able to relate their lived experiences to the world portrayed in their textbooks (Bezemer & Kress, 2016).

Barton and Sakwa's (2012) study of English language textbooks used in Uganda revealed that the textbooks still maintained the traditional depiction of gender roles characterised by women's silence, invisibility, domestic roles, and a negative rendition of their emotional state. Similarly, Cook (2015) analysed textbooks for English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The analysis revealed that the representation of males outweighed that of females in textbooks.

Textbooks should partially represent reality, since ideal situations (equally illustrating gender diversity in career paths and race diversity when depicting children) may not be practical (McKinney, 2005). Children and adults in textbooks should at least mirror the diversity of South Africa's populace. Diversity in terms of race, gender, rural or urban locations and various abilities (disabilities) for example, should be evident in teaching and learning resources such as textbooks (Canale, 2019). It is, therefore, necessary to examine and consider whether textbooks are inclusive of the diverse learner population that they are meant to serve.

Jensen, Herrebrøden and Andreassen (2023) highlight the importance of disability portrayal because the inclusion of differently abled persons in meaningful roles can motivate and inspire differently abled learners. Textbooks show a limited portrayal of people living with disabilities (Jensen et al., 2023; Martínez-Bello & Martínez-Bello, 2016).

One aspect that is important in textbook writing is the setting, whether rural or urban. Children need to feel represented in the settings they read about. Silva and Cardoso Filho (2018) note that the rural context in textbooks is in most cases minimised, highlighting difficulties, a difficult life, hard work, and low remuneration. However, the urban setting is overvalued and considered a natural environment where there is unique development, economic success, and progress.

Stereotyping in textbooks

According to Amini and Birjandi (2012) and Sulaimani (2017), many textbooks are gender biased and impact learners' career choices as well as their personal development and self-worth when gender roles are stereotyped (Aguilar, 2021). Sulaimani (2017:44) notes that some behavioural stereotypes in textbooks are "women depicted as passive, dependent, generally weak, and physically attractive, but men as active, independent and strong." Lesikin (2001:282) states that "studies on gender and language have found that gender bias and gender stereotypes in written text and pictures have deleterious effects for female students."

Textbooks typically associate a specific gender with a specific occupation. An example of this is portraying men as drivers and women as teachers (Aguilar, 2021; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Yang, 2014). Stereotyping of male and female roles and the limited representation of females are common in textbooks (Aguilar, 2021; Aljuaythin, 2018). Gender-biased textbooks cause discouraging feelings for females and increase feelings of isolation and self-doubt (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012).

Variation in textbook content

Textbooks receive more discussion and funding than any other teaching material and are frequently used as a political tool (Mackenzie & Steinberg, 2015). Wager (2014) notes that many different organisations provide funding for the publishing of textbooks and many additional potential customers employ persuasion to affect the content during the publishing process. Because they are for business, textbook publishers and editors are easily influenced by enormous marketplaces and by teachers, interest groups, political groups, and major state consumers (Wager, 2014). The information offered in textbooks is modified by textbook publishers and editors to satisfy the consumers. This is a tactic to maintain ethnocentrism in culture which excludes specific populations from textbooks, and to also satisfy larger buying groups as many textbook publishers want to avoid controversy (Wager, 2014). All the above account for the variation we find in the textbooks that are meant for the teaching of the same curriculum.

Despite the variations discussed above, the DBE in South Africa has tried to tackle diversity issues in textbooks and instructional materials, particularly considering the nation's history of apartheid and the necessity of rapprochement and representation of many cultures and perspectives. A ministerial committee conducted research in 2016 to examine sexism, racism, and other types of prejudice in textbooks. It was discovered that textbooks generally adopt a mildly inclusive approach to diversity (DBE, RSA, 2017, 2019). The National Education Policy Act of 1996 (RSA,

1996a) and legislation such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) are intended to increase women's position and promote gender equality but a lot still needs to be done to achieve this commitment in the provision of textbooks.

Methodology

Research Design

The aim with this study was to establish the extent to which Grade 4 English and life skills textbooks represented learners' diversity, identify any patterns or biases in the representation, and understand the implications of the findings. A mixed methods research design was used. The qualitative research design was used to delve deep into the content of the textbooks and understand how they reflected diversity. The quantitative research design focused on systematically collecting and analysing numerical data in the form of frequencies to provide statistical insights into the representation of diversity in textbooks. To provide a thorough and all-encompassing grasp of a research issue, this mixed methods research methodology was applied within a single study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Content analysis was used to systematically examine the representation of diversity. Quantitative analysis was done to capture the frequencies of occurrence of specific features. Human characters were identified and counted according to their race, gender, disability, and occupation. A coding scheme that categorised different types of diversity representation was developed, and it considered the number of male and female characters disregarding some characters that reappeared in the texts. The settings (whether rural or urban) in which the stories in the books took place were considered. Characters were identified in the following categories:

- 1) all human characters and images in the book;
- 2) the number of male and female characters;
- 3) different occupations and the gender represented by them;
- 4) the number of characters with disabilities;
- 5) the setting of the stories.

A qualitative analysis of the occupations, roles, actions or duties performed by different genders was done to determine whether instances of gender stereotyping or bias existed in textbooks. The analysis involved both visual and written text for all textbooks. The analysis portrayed a representation of the social world in which the learning material was produced and used. It was meant to represent the social world of South African learners, together with what they valued and promoted.

Textbook Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used to select the four textbooks that were used to teach English and life skills at Grade 4 level. These textbooks were all learners' books, aligned with the CAPS, and used in

South Africa. Grade 4 is the first grade in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6, approximate ages 10 to 12 years old) that learners embark on after completion of the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3, approximate ages 6 to 9 years old). A significant change occurs when learners transition from the Foundation Phase (FP) to the Intermediate Phase (IP). During the FP, the basics of learning to read are addressed. From the IP onward, learners are expected to learn from the textbooks that they read in the various subjects (Muschkin, Ladd & Dodge, 2015). It is, therefore, necessary that the textbooks that learners use provide them with the proper socialisation that is free from stereotypes and discrimination.

In this study, two English First Additional Language (FAL) and two life skills textbooks were selected. The majority of South African learners are registered for English FAL. According to the DBE (2011a), the FAL is not learners' home or first language, but could, however, be used as the language of teaching and learning in the school setting. For this reason, English FAL textbooks were selected for this study.

Life skills, as a subject in schools, has been developed to transform "traditional education systems", positively socialise learners and promote democracy (World Health Organization [WHO], 1999:2, 4). In South Africa, the teaching of life skills attempts to promote democracy as enshrined in the Constitution (Jordaan & Naudé, 2018). This encourages the inclusion of all despite differences such as race, gender, ability, or culture. For this reason, life skills textbooks were selected for analysis. It was interesting to see to what extent the ideals of inclusion were addressed in the selected life skills textbooks. The two researchers taught English and life skills and that was another reason why the textbooks of the two subjects were selected.

Entering the description, "most purchased Grade 4 life skills textbooks in South Africa" on a search engine revealed seven learner books for life skills. The same was done for Grade 4 English FAL learners' books, and four textbooks were revealed. In total, two English FAL and two life skills textbooks that we could obtain from local primary schools were selected for analysis. The selection of the four textbooks was, therefore, determined by availability and accessibility. Although the search engine revealed more textbooks, some of them were not accessible or available to us and were excluded.

For ease of reference, the two textbooks for English FAL are hereinafter referred to as TB1 and TB2. The life skills textbooks are referred to as LS1 and LS2. All the passages from the textbooks were considered for analysis. In this study, a passage in the English FAL textbook refers to a short story, a poem, speech, piece of music, or a dialogue. Passages in the life skills textbooks were case studies and short stories. Visual texts (photographs

or illustrations representing human beings) in all textbooks were also analysed.

Findings and Discussion

Visuals in the four books were counted to determine the number of human characters and to find the representation of different genders, races, people with disabilities, and rural or urban settings of the stories.

Table 1 Racial representation in the four textbooks

Book	TB1	TB2	LS1	LS2
Visuals with human characters				
Number (No.) of topics per book	72	18	26	16
Characters in visuals:	219	138	532	246
Race	No. of human characters in selected visuals, according to four race groups (in SA). Visuals include animated drawings and photographs of individuals and groups of people.			
Black	107 (48.9%)	56 (40.6%)	232 (43.6%)	107 (43.4%)
Coloured	50 (22.8%)	35 (25.3%)	85 (16%)	67 (27.2%)
White	30 (13.6%)	14 (10.1%)	205 (38.5%)	65 (26.4%)
Indian	32 (14.6%)	33 (23.9%)	10 (1.8%)	7 (2.8%)

In relation to race, the quantitative data correlate with the demographics of South Africa. In TB1 and TB2, the White characters were the least represented, with 13% and 10.1% images of all characters. Taking the demographics of South Africa into account where Black South Africans make up 81% of the population, Coloured South Africans, 8.8%, White South Africans, 7.7%, and Indian South Africans, 2.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2022), White representation could have been higher than Coloured, to align with the percentage population in the country.

Black characters were dominant in the English language textbooks. In LS1 and LS2, Indians were least represented with very low percentages of 1.8% and 2.8% respectively. Like in the English textbooks, Black South Africans had the highest representation. The LS textbooks represented reality in relation to the demographics. Considering reality, the Black population in South Africa is eight times more than the White and Coloured population and almost 30 times more than the Indian population. However, the representations in the textbooks were not like that. What is important though, is that learners relate to the characters, settings and life worlds reflected in the textbooks they use (McKinney, 2005). The representation of males and females was also considered and the results are presented in Table 2.

Racial Representation in the Textbooks

When analysing the representation of different races in different textbooks, all visual images of human characters were counted, and the representations of different races were noted. Table 1 shows the racial representations in the four textbooks.

Table 2 Representation of male and female characters

Book	TB1	TB2	LS1	LS2
Total	219	138	437	251
characters in visuals:				
Males	143 (65.2%)	83 (60.1%)	217 (49.6%)	132 (52.6%)
Females	76 (34.7%)	55 (39.8%)	220 (50.4%)	119 (47.4%)

The findings in Table 2 indicate that in TB1 and TB2, 63% of characters were illustrated as male while 37% of characters were female; the portrayal of male figures thus outweighing that of female characters by 26%. The average representation of gender in the LS textbooks indicates that, on average, 51% of characters represented males, while 49% represented females, thus 2% more male than female characters. There is a greater over-representation of males in the English language textbooks than in the LS textbooks. This correlates with Cook’s (2015) findings that more male characters than female characters are still portrayed in language textbooks. This is despite there being more females than males in the South African population with a ratio of 95 males to 100 females (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

Bearing in mind that we have differently abled learners in schools, it is important that they too

should be represented in the textbooks that they use to learn from. Table 3 shows the results of the analysis done on the representation of people living with disabilities in the textbooks.

Table 3 Representation of characters with disabilities

Characters with disabilities	TB1	TB2	LS1	LS2
Male	1	1	0	1
Female	1	1	0	0

People living with disabilities were largely under-represented in the textbooks analysed in this study. There were around 90 reading passages or topics in the two English FAL textbooks but only four images of disabled people – two images of people with crutches acting out a play in TB1. The

illustrations suggested leg injuries and not necessarily people living with disabilities. TB2 depicted a girl in a wheelchair who was the highest achiever in mathematics in KwaZulu-Natal. The other one shows a man in a wheelchair who won the 2016 Paralympic Games. There was no representation of people with disabilities in LS1. One male using a wheelchair was portrayed in LS2. The accompanying text described him as a champion wheelchair racer who earned an award as sportsperson of the year. This confirms the finding by Jensen et al. (2023) that very few school textbooks represent learners with disabilities. Although learners with disabilities were under-represented in textbooks, the positive was that they were presented as great achievers, not as people who were constantly dependent on others.

Table 4 Representation of setting of stories

Urban or rural setting	TB1	TB2	LS1	LS2
Urban setting (considered to be in a city/town or suburb of a city/town)	7 (38.8%)	9 (56.2%)	25 (14.7%)	13 (10.8%)
Rural setting (considered to be a farm setting/village away from city/town)	6 (33.3%)	5 (31.2%)	6 (3.5%)	2 (1.7%)
Urban or rural (not clear)	5 (27.7)	2 (12.5%)	138 (81.7%)	105 (87.5%)

Table 4 shows that in both English textbooks the urban settings outnumbered rural settings, despite the majority of learners living in rural areas of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces. Although the two settings were represented, this did not make up for the fact that children living in rural areas seldom saw their own environments represented in the textbooks they read. This confirms Silva and Cardoso Filho's (2018)

finding that rural settings were under-represented. Some settings were not clearly presented as urban or rural, for example, where vegetable gardens and football fields that can be found in both settings were depicted. LS1 and LS2 respectively contained 81.7% and 87.5% settings that could be either urban or rural. This is good because such settings cater for all learners who use those textbooks, and find their environments represented in what they learn.

Table 5 Representation of male and female occupations

Occupations	TB1	TB2	LS1	LS2
Females	4	0	3	3
	Teacher (3)		Nurse (1)	Teacher (3)
	Nurse (1)		Teacher (1)	
			Athlete (1)	
Males	8	7	5	4
	Ranger (1)	Teacher (1)	Teacher (2)	Wheelchair racer (1)
	Soccer player (1)	Athlete (1)	Artist (1)	News reporter (1)
	News reporter (1)	Astronaut (1)	Soldier (1)	Artist (2)
	Medical doctor (1)	Soccer player (1)	Dentist (1)	
	Disc jockey (DJ) (1)	Photographer (1)		
	Nurse (1)	Artist (2)		
	Police officer (1)			
	Pastor (1)			
Total	12	7	8	7

Two findings from the analysis are interesting. Firstly, in Table 5, the English textbooks show 15 occupations for males compared to four for females. The LS textbooks show a total of nine occupations for males compared to six for females. Secondly, in the four textbooks only teaching, nursing and athletics are attributed to both genders. Interestingly, only three males are associated with teaching

compared to seven females. This aligns with literature that indicates that more females than males are portrayed as teachers in textbooks (Aguilar, 2021). Male occupational roles included in the analysed textbooks were news reporter, police officer, pastor, photographer, medical doctor, artist, soccer player, DJ, ranger, teacher, and astronaut. The career choices depicted for males, unlike those

for females, were diverse, fun, energetic or contained insinuations of excitement and danger. Examples are soldier, soccer player, DJ, racer, and astronaut. The analysis further shows that, within the context of health care, females are more likely to be portrayed as nurses and males as doctors. These findings are affirmed by Aguilar (2021) that explains that traditional, stereotyped gender roles continue to be portrayed in textbooks.

Gender Roles in the Textbooks

Gender stereotyping was visible in the portrayal of male and female genders' roles in the four textbooks. Gender stereotyping is portrayed in the representation of women as teachers and not any other highly paying jobs like judge, scientist, or doctor like we see in the male representation. The mother is depicted as the housekeeper who does the house chores, serves food, and takes care of the garden with a baby on her back and a head covered with a cloth (TB1). The mother is the one who causes water pollution by pouring dirty water that she has used into the river. Women are depicted having the common occupations such as teaching and nursing. In LS2, girls are depicted as being involved in conflict with each other, where they shout and fight. Another woman is shown using public transport because she does not have her own car. Another woman in LS1 is depicted firing pots using a traditional open fire, and this is done by the poor who earn their living through working with clay. According to Lesikin (2001:282), "studies on gender and language have found that gender bias and gender stereotypes in written text and pictures have deleterious effects for female students." In contrast, men are judges, scientists, and political leaders. Males are depicted as the ones who dream of going to space and eventually do (TB2). Examples of Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin are given as the first men to walk on the moon (TB2). In one newspaper article, two boys are depicted winning awards for being Matric achievers. They are portrayed as hard-working boys who studied till late at the night. Boys are portrayed as hard workers in a story where a boy cleans taxis and gets paid for that. LS2 shows boys as basketball players, not girls.

Stereotyping for boys is portrayed in LS2 where bullying is associated with boys. There is a story of Sam, a boy who bullied another boy by taking his lunch every day. Boys are depicted as the ones who get injured when they play, implying that they are not careful when they play. LS1 depicted boys as the ones who smoked and influenced others to abuse substances. Boys were, however, also depicted helping the mother in the kitchen (for example, doing dishes, while the girl cooks food on the stove). This implies a disruption of stereotyping gender roles which is acceptable among children, but not with adults.

In all the textbooks, although there was some stereotyping among the activities of girls and boys like the examples given above, in some instances activities were generally represented more equally. Examples are boys and girls playing soccer together at school (although some boys complained that they lost because they had girls on their team), where both boys and girls work in the garden together at home and sing together in a group at school.

The findings from our study support those of earlier research on how diversity is portrayed in South African textbooks, particularly with regards to the under-representation and stereotyping of women and the relative marginalisation of rural areas. These findings are as well, determined by an analysis of the data from textbooks that are produced, marketed, purchased, and distributed to South African schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

With this study we attempted to investigate the extent to which current English and LS textbooks at Grade 4 level were appropriate for the diverse learners in South Africa. Four textbooks from different publishing houses used in Grade 4 were analysed. The study was done on a very small scale, and it is recommended that such investigation be done on a larger scale, including many more different textbooks to check for any improvement in learner representation in textbooks. Significant differences between the four textbooks were revealed by the findings. These variations may be attributed to a combination of factors that influence the content of the textbooks. These may include the target audience as publishers are likely to tailor textbooks to different school markets which are in particular geographic areas, or the content of textbooks may be more strongly influenced by larger or more powerful markets. Publishers will sometimes choose to incorporate content that is relevant to the cultural background of the intended textbook market. Furthermore, textbook publishers may consider the socio-political and historical background of the people in various locations, leading to different levels of representation to avoid any controversy. Even within the same education system, or in the same curriculum, the various aspects integrated can lead to different content. Publishers and the writers commissioned to write textbooks should have more workshops among teachers, authors, and publishers to discuss issues of representations in textbooks. The Department of Education (DoE) should perhaps develop guidelines that take these issues into consideration. Based on the study findings and the goal of informing the policy guidelines of the DoE regarding diversity in textbook production and selection, some recommendations could be to emphasise the importance of accessibility in textbook design and production, including features such as alternative formats, language translations, addressing

entrenched masculinity that is presented in the patriarchal view, accommodations for learners with disabilities, et cetera. There could be a policy to review and revise the criteria used for selecting textbooks to prioritise diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations alongside educational quality and relevance. Furthermore, there might be some oversight of the use of diversity guidelines in the processes of producing and choosing textbooks, along with recurring assessments and feedback systems to address any inadequacies. Fostering a more representative and inclusive learning environment for learners from all backgrounds can be greatly aided by the DoE through converting these proposals into policy guidelines. The most persistent and entrenched stereotypes and omissions in these textbooks were in relation to people with disabilities and women.

Authors' Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to all the stages of the research and preparation of the article.

Notes

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