

## Research Title

Gender representation in contemporary Grade 11 Business Studies textbooks in South Africa

## Abstract

School textbooks are a primary resource that is easily accessible for learners and teachers and recommended by the department of education. Textbooks are a dominant tool used to represent economic, political, and cultural ideologies. Therefore, textbooks can be considered as the main source of ideologies in the school curriculum. Importantly, there might be slight comprehension of ideologies that are embedded in school textbooks amongst teachers and textbook authors, due to limited awareness of the hidden grand narratives carried in textbooks. In addition, textbooks play a significant role in socialisation, they have the ability to construct and promote certain beliefs and attitudes about gender that learners often take to society.

The purpose of this study is to understand how gender is represented in three grade 11 Business Studies textbooks in South Africa and why gender is represented in this way by developing a theoretical explanation of the phenomena. The study has adopted the qualitative research method that is located in the critical paradigm and will use the tenets of critical discourse analysis as the method of analysis.

The findings expressed that textbooks are not neutral, they convey different representations of women and men that perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. This is evident because 'males' are put forth and pronounced first as 'businessmen' and 'females' follow. This endorses an idea of being superior, capable and masculine to the other. This representation also side-lines others who identify as gay men or lesbian women. Representations related to sexual diversity are absent, and intersectionality of gender, race is not promoted but rather idealises a male, heterosexual successful businessperson. In addition, occupational roles that are low-paid or domesticated are associated with women while occupations that are high paying with high status are associated with men. The three textbooks promoted Western grand narratives that perceive males as being naturally gifted in business.

Lastly, throughout the textbooks, the findings revealed the pervasive association of men with technology, as predominant users of technology and as being more competent than women.

Therefore, this study calls for awareness of education stakeholders to interrogate textbook content and avoid passiveness towards the underlying messages conveyed in School textbooks. There is a need for textbook writers to question their own ideological assumptions of gender. This demands a vigorous introspection of possible stereotypes and uncritical assimilation of gender ideologies that may be perpetuated. The possibility of implementing a gender-inclusive curriculum is through intensive critical reflection of oppressive gender norms. This research study aims to achieve this goal.