

Teaching in Zimbabwean Schools: An Exploration of the Manifestations of Gender Insensitivity in the Curriculum

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore some of the manifestations of gender insensitivity in the school curriculum. This study was part of a larger research on the impact of the school curricula on career aspirations and choices made by girls in a patriarchal society, Zimbabwe. The main research question guiding this study was what are the manifestations of gender insensitivity in the school curriculum? In pursuit of answers to these questions, a purposive sample of 40 participants comprising 20 teachers and an equal number of girl pupils was used. The design adopted was an exploratory case study and the methods for data collection used were focus group discussions and individual face-to-face interviews with teachers and pupils respectively. Data analysis was done using discourse analysis techniques. The study revealed that a great deal of patriarchal values and ideologies are embedded in the curriculum and these tend to polarize the educational and career aspirations of pupils as boys and girls. It also emerged from the study that schools continue to play a role in the structuring and reproduction of gender role stereotypes and disparities. The study's recommendations were that the Zimbabwean school curriculum needs a complete overhaul if it is to promote learning equity. Educators also need to refrain from the use of biased, sexist, stereotypical and prejudicial discourses in their interaction with learners.

INTRODUCTION

Existing literature on gender imbalances in the Zimbabwean school curriculum tends to point to the influence of books in propagating the patriarchal ideology (Dorsey 1996; Gordon 1995; Odaga and Heneveld 1995; Nhundu 2007). According to Nhundu, in the Zimbabwean school context this situation is often compounded by teacher attitudes and expectations towards their learners. According to this view, teachers are among the culprits who tend to produce and peddle some of these gender role stereotypes. Meyer (2008) writing from a feminist standpoint epistemology shares these sentiments maintaining that the patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum make girls as a whole to be disadvantaged compared to boys as a whole. In the researchers' concurrence with him, they add that in Zimbabwe boys generally have access to all the *educational goodies*, or relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu 1992), which are systematically denied to girls largely because of the ideology of patriarchy embedded in the curriculum especially teacher attitudes and expectations of pupils' gender roles.

The study is informed by not only the feminist discourse that there is a need to challenge the patriarchal nature of societies the world over (Gaidzanwa 1997) but also draws from Gramsci's notions of hegemony, ideology and common sense to account for the domination and subordination of females to the patriarchal ideology embodied in the school curriculum, which produce biases, stereotypes and prejudices that culminate in gender insensitivity in the school curriculum (Christie 2008). As an action-oriented ideology which seeks to advocate equality of opportunities between males and females in society, feminism therefore emphasizes the belief that women and men are equal and should be equally valued, as well as having equal rights (Odaga and Heneveld 1995; Oshako 1995). As a movement it seeks to create an awareness of the fact that women are oppressed, devalued and dominated by men and that the structural arrangements that initiate, support, and legitimate that systematic oppression, constitute patriarchy. As an ideology, patriarchy is premised on the supremacy of males over women which enables the former to dominate the latter (Hartmann 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Extrapolating from Henslin's (2008) assertion that every theoretical effort is like a building block that is added to other blocks to build a

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house, the literature review in this study was conducted in an eclectic way, drawing from, amongst others, a range of theoretical perspectives including the feminist and Gramsci's notions of ideology, hegemony and common sense as well as Mead's symbolic interactionist perspectives to view the problem of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean school curriculum. Adopting Gramsci's theory this study posits that the problem of patriarchal values embedded in the Zimbabwean school curricular (Gordon 1995) stems from the hegemonic, ideological and common sense perspectives of the dominant social groups of that country. In fact it is important to note that Gramsci's social and political theories have particular pertinence to this study of the content of education, both in its institutional forms (schools), and in its purposive concern with the individuals and the social consciousness of those who pass through its structures as students or as teachers.

From a Gramscian perspective therefore, the problem of constraints in a people's life is located in his idea of hegemony, a concept he develops to refer to forms of supremacy obtained by some social groups (males or men in this case) primarily by consent rather than coercion, by moral and intellectual leadership rather than by domination (Christie 2008). He recognizes that the power of a leading social group is maintained by a combination of consent and coercion; however, consent through ideological justification is the normal form of hegemonic control in capitalist society, with coercion visible only in moments of particular crisis (Gramsci 1994). In its broadest sense, hegemony is a relational concept that includes consideration of relations of coercion as well as consent in the maintenance of control. In this study the problematic aspect of the school as an institution is that it serves as an agent of the dissemination of hegemonic ideologies such as gender and patriarchy, which are embodied in the curricula in both the formal and hidden forms (Gramsci 1994). Hegemonic consent is not always strong or committed on the part of the persons in the mass. Girls or women may for example, support the existing gendered occupational stratification or arrangements from a sense of active commitment, or because they are unable to conceive of an alternative (Christie 2008).

In the latter sense, hegemony expresses the limits to the conceivable, the boundaries of

commonsense (Gramsci 1994). In considering ideology, Gramsci asserted its materiality and its integral association with economic structures within the historical bloc. He thus distinguished between organic and arbitrary ideologies, viewing the former as necessary in a given structure. For Gramsci, organic ideologies organize people and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their social position, or struggle among other things. In this sense organic ideologies are part and parcel of the exercise of hegemony by male social groups. Since individual consciousness is a social construct (Christie 1990), and that individuals are formed by an ensemble of social relations, some necessary, some voluntary, and all formed over time, people acquire their consciousness of the structure and its conflicts with agency (Giddens 2001) on the terrain of ideology. This means that a people's consciousness is developed by the ideology disseminated in the structure in which they exist (Giddens 2001). This study argues that the ideology embedded in the school curriculum and expressed by educators through the hidden curriculum is partly the organizer of the pupils' actions or agency towards their gendered adult roles. This idea is aptly expressed in Gramsci's notion that organic ideologies are developed and spread in the historical bloc by intellectuals and a range of institutions and cultural organizations, including the church, schools and the media. While Althusser would argue that institutions such as the school and mass media are ideological state apparatus, Gramsci regards them as institutions for the spread of organic ideologies as an important part of hegemonic consensus (Christie 1990) to promote social order. It is apparent from the aforementioned that the concept of ideology is particularly useful in explaining relations of power, gender and domination in social institutions and in the explication of issues of inequality, injustices and oppression within the social structures of human existence. It is in this sense that the notion of ideology is used in this study.

In examining the notion of gender stratification in the curriculum of Zimbabwe as a patriarchal society we drew on Gramsci's notion of commonsense, which he employs to discuss people's conceptions of their social world. Gramsci distinguished between philosophy and commonsense arguing that the latter refers to a pattern of common thinking in a particular time and

place (Gramsci 1994). According to Gramsci every social structure has its own common sense and its own good sense, which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind sedimentation of common sense as the document of its historical effectiveness. It is this common-sense as ideology in the curriculum that this study assumes predisposes girls and boys to particular subjects, careers or occupations. It is the common sense ideology embodied in the curriculum which this study posits is sometimes prejudicial to girls' schooling because of its gender biases, which manifest themselves through school curricular, both the overt and covert forms. The gender biases typical of the Zimbabwean school curricular thus invisibly shape human relationships, gender roles and behaviours and the overall life chances of males and females (Gordon 1995). In this sense, schools tend to empower boys more than they do to their girl counterparts. Such a view of the role of the schools as agents for the dissemination of the dominant ideology is also shared by Althusser (1971) who regards the school as having a dual role as an ideological state apparatus and as a repressive state apparatus, where the latter is summoned when the former fails to yield acceptable results.

In accounting for the development of self-concepts in children, founding fathers of the interactionist perspective, Mead, Thomas and Blumer reject the notion of biological determinism in the shaping of human behaviour and argue that meanings arise from the process of interaction rather than simply being present at the outset and shaping future action (Blackledge and Hunt 1985). By placing particular emphasis on the notion of the self, they suggest that individuals develop a self-concept, a picture of themselves, which has an important influence on their resultant actions. A self-concept develops from interaction processes, since it is in large part a reflection of the reactions of others most notably significant others, towards the individual. This explains why Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) coined the term *looking glass self* to denote the view that individuals tend to react in terms of their self-concepts as communicated to them by others especially their significant others (Mead 1934). Therefore the meanings that individuals come to perceive themselves in terms of are a social construct. Through role

taking, individuals develop a concept of self and by placing themselves in the position of others they are able to emulate others and reflect upon themselves. For Mead the idea of self can only develop if the individuals can get outside himself or herself experientially in such a way as to become an object to himself (Mead 1934). To do this they must observe themselves from the standpoint of others, their looking glass self. Therefore the genesis and development of the concept of self lie in the ability to take the role of another. Mead thus distinguished between two aspects in the origin and development of the self, the 'me' and the 'I'. The former is one's definition of himself or herself in a specific social role while the latter implies one's opinion of himself or herself as a whole. It is the latter, which represents an individual's self-concept (Mead 1934). It is built up from the reactions of others to one's actions and the way one interprets those reactions. The 'I' can exercise a considerable influence over one's behaviour. For instance, an individual who perceives himself as cowardly on the basis of the self-concept he has built up will be unlikely to act bravely in dangerous situations. The self-concept is thus not inborn but a product of one's enculturation from childhood. It is developed as the child takes the role of a make-believe other (Ballantine and Spade 2004). The development of a conscious self is an essential part of the process of becoming a socially acceptable human being. It provides the basis for thought and action as well as the foundation for human society since without an awareness of the self; the individual cannot direct actions or respond to the actions of others. By becoming self-conscious people can direct their own action through thought and deliberation. They can set goals for themselves, plan future actions, aspirations and consider the consequences of alternative courses of action.

Goals of the Study

The goals of this study were to identify factors in the school curriculum that promoted gender insensitivity and to determine how teacher attitudes and expectations in their interaction with learners as boys and girls engender insensitivity or gender biases. The hope was that an understanding of the impact of these factors would provide insights to drawn on in future attempts to reform curricula aimed at achieving learning equity.

Problem Statement

In spite of the fact that in Zimbabwe schooling is structured to provide education that fosters freedom or autonomy to all pupils by offering subjects and equipping them with skills deemed necessary for them to take charge of their own destiny, this structure and the curricula offered within it restrict girls' aspirations and choices. Despite having received what is purported to be one of the best education on the African continent (Zvobgo 2004), the sexist stereotyping and prejudices embedded in the school curriculum often hamper the realization of the learners' rights to social justice or learning equity.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions: What factors contribute to gender role insensitivity in the Zimbabwean school curriculum? What role do teachers play in promoting gender insensitivity between pupils? How do teacher attitudes and expectations influence girls' development of biased gender roles and stereotypes?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In this qualitative study we employed the case study as design genre to develop an understanding of the prevalence of patriarchy in the Zimbabwean school curriculum. The motivation to adopt a qualitative design for this research particularly the case study derived from our desire to examine phenomena in their natural setting (Leedy and Ormrod 2009) and to understand the meaning of participants' lived experiences. Since the purpose of our study was to explore learners and educators' views of curricular values and ideologies that impinge upon learning equity, we employed focus group discussion sessions (FGDS) and individual face-to-face interviews as instruments for data collection from our target population of educators and learners from 4 Zimbabwean schools.

Population and Sampling

A purposive sample of 40 participants, comprising 20 teachers and 20 sixth-form girls as the population was drawn from four schools in

the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe to be used as the participants in the study. The sample of teacher participants comprised 10 males and an equal number of females for purposes of wanting to achieve a gender sensitive or balanced. The district was chosen because it is well placed to provide insights from girls belonging to diverse socio-economic backgrounds. As one of the industrialised provinces, its population consisted of a variety of classes that provided a cross-section of girls whose views on factors in the curriculum that promote sexist, gendered, stereotypical and prejudicial or biased images of boys and girls were explored. This made sampling both purposive and stratified (cf. Odimegwu 2000; Fayisetan 2004).

Research Methods

The study was conducted for two months. Its duration was influenced by the time of the year we were allowed into schools. It was a time just before the commencement of the year-end examinations, during which time we could not collect more data without disrupting the pupils. This proved an opportune time as the sixth form girls were consciously thinking of what to do after graduating from their schools.

Instrumentation

Through the FGDS with the girl pupils we were able to engage them in ways that enabled us to collect data that proved useful to answer the questions we had posed. The Individual face to face interviews conducted with the teachers facilitated an in-depth understanding of the messages conveyed to the girls in lessons and the meaning they attached to them (see Merriam 1998 on the significance of process, context and discovery when probing a phenomenon). The methods are discussed in greater detail below.

Focus group interviews as a research technique is a semi-structured group discussion, moderated by a discussion leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of obtaining information by means of group interaction on a designated topic (McLafferty 2004). Through the use of focus group interviews we were able to explore and generate a widening of responses activating details of perspectives and releasing inhibitions might have otherwise discouraged participants from disclosing important informa-

tion (Dzvimbo et al. 2010). This method produced data rich in detail that is often difficult to achieve with other research methods, because participants built on each other's ideas and comments to provide in-depth and value-added insights (Meyer 2008). Individual face-to-face interviews were held with teachers to solicit data for this study. The technique is described as a one on one question and answer session between the researcher and his subjects. Through the interview guide we utilized both structured and unstructured questions. The aim was to explore teachers' classroom practices, lived experiences, beliefs and attitudes on the prevalence of the patriarchal ideology in the school curriculum.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the research data we adopted the discourse analysis technique, which according to Fairclough (2003) always involves more than language to encompass coordinating language with ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing and feelings. As such in this study we took discourses to include representations of how things are and have been as well as how things might or could be (Gee 2000). In this study discourses were considered as occurring at three levels: action, representation and identification. Using Fairclough's conception of texts, the discourse analysis employed in this study focused on texts as encompassing both the spoken and written modes of communication. This means that the data from focus group and individual face to face interviews were subjected to discourse analyses with a view to establishing the hidden culture curriculum factors (Barrow 2005) that cause gender insensitivity in teaching and learning.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers dealt with the management of several methodological difficulties ranging from avoidance of interviewer bias, confidentiality of respondents, and data to the difficulty arising from distinguishing data from the researchers' interpretation of the data. The interviews were initiated by clarifying the purpose of the research and the interview as well as reassuring teachers of the confidential nature of the interviews, their right to withdraw from the study at any moment without penalty. None of

the participants withdrew, however. The participants also had to be at ease before the interview proceedings commenced, especially in the face of a voice recorder that was used.

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in accordance with the themes emerging from the research questions posed: curricular factors that contribute to the development of gender insensitivity; The teachers' role towards gender insensitivity in the curriculum and how teacher attitudes and expectations influence the development of biased gender roles and stereotypes.

Curriculum Factors that Contribute to Gender Insensitivity

In the results of the content and discourse analyses made of some curricular material, specifically the wall charts and pictures in some text books conveniently sampled from the libraries at each of the four schools constituting the sites of the study, the study established that a great deal of the curricular material is replete with gender insensitivities. For example, the wall charts on display and the textbooks used by both teachers and pupils generally tend to portray men in superior positions to those of their women counterparts. Our study interpreted this to be some of the ways through which girls' and boys' educational and career aspirations are subtly and directly influenced by the curriculum. A prominent example in one classroom was that of a chart on occupations available for men and women that portrayed the latter in the kitchen, at the kitchen sink and through discourse analysis we construed this as an example of gender insensitivity since it overlooked the fact that even men can also be found at the kitchen sink and in the kitchen. Such curricular materials disseminate the impression that not many women engage in paid work outside the home. As a follow up to the aforementioned discourse analysis, we engaged participants through focus group discussions to establish their perceptions of whether or not they thought their school curriculum is gender sensitive or neutral. What follows is a discussion of participants' responses to questions posed during the focus group interviews.

Sixteen (80%) of the twenty girl student participants concurred that the patriarchal values embedded in the school curriculum are propagated through the school's hidden curriculum. Their responses and the factors they cited showed the hidden curriculum has an influence in entrenching gender and or patriarchal ideologies in the school. They cited such factors as the gender typing of school subjects and occupations as prevalent practices that buttress patriarchal values. The girls interviewed concurred that boys tend to dominant numerically in the subjects traditionally stereotyped as masculine such as mathematics and natural sciences while girls dominate numerically in subjects associated with domesticity such as food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics and the arts. Other participants pointed to sexual harassment as one of the issues entrenching the patriarchal ideology as the following statement by one girl interviewee (G1) reveals:

G1: *One would expect lady teachers as our mothers and or older sisters to understand our predicament at the hands of boys and male teachers who harass us but to our disappointment they seem to share the same ideological sentiments as their male counterparts that as girls we are to blame for the sexual harassment that befalls us.*

Probed to elaborate how the issue of sexual harassment occurs in the school 15 out of 20 (75%) girl participants alleged that it takes a number of forms and occurs at several levels within and outside of the school from verbal to the physical and involves not only the harassment by their school boy counterparts but also by young male teachers and senior members of staff as well some members in the upper echelons of school management. Eighteen (90%) girls cited teasing, humiliation, verbal bullying and the unnecessary ridicule of girls by boys as some of the forms of sexual abuse they endure leading some of them to suffer withdrawal symptoms and consequently to underachieve academically. Among the responses (R2) given by girls was the following:

G2: *The boys will be watching you at break time. They will talk loudly and laugh, saying Which girl is beautiful and which is ugly. The boys can make you shy. They make comments about your structure, about you body. Then you can just keep quiet in the classroom, not participating.*

Fourteen girl interviewees (70%) alleged that some teachers collude with boys to sexually harass them in the school, either subtly, by omission or directly. Asked what the teachers do when boys laugh at girls or ridicule them unnecessarily in the classroom, 15 out of the 20 girls (75%) girls concurred that more often than not their teachers laugh with the boys or just ignore the situation. Asked whether or not they report incidences of sexual harassment by boys or other staff members particularly to lady teachers, eighteen respondents (90%) indicated that reporting such cases to lady teachers would instead of helping the situation, do more harm than good to the victim as embodied in the following responses by one interviewee (R3):

G3: *If you report it, you will be in big trouble. The teachers including female ones will say that you are a prostitute why were you seducing the boys or male teachers? In the end you will be to blame instead of receiving some sympathy. They will say a teacher would not propose love to you if you do not encourage him. May be he has rejected you that's why you are reporting him. If you are smarter or better fitted by clothes even your uniform than some of these lady teachers they accuse you of competing with them, making the whole case to crumble against you yet you are the victim. Sometimes the lady teachers may know about it but because they do not want trouble with their male workmates, they will tell you that they do not believe your story leaving you humiliated in the final analysis.*

While some of the above statements made by girls were collaborated by statements made by some of the interviewed teachers, others denied it outrightly. Those who confirmed the girls' claims argued that such cases had occurred in the past and attributed them mainly to untrained or temporary teachers. Much of the blame for the sexual abuse of girls by male teachers was placed on the girls as the following response by one teacher (T1) points to:

T1: *Personally I think during that time (at Forms 3 and 4) students are beginning to look more Beautiful and our boys do not hide their interest nor do male teachers. Some of them are really interested in these small girls, so sometimes the girls feel they can compete with the lady teachers and this often ignites tension between girls and the lady teachers leading to accusations and counteraccusations. Girls some-*

times want to attract boys and some male teachers by coming to school dressed to kill and as a result, some boys and young male teachers find their actions irresistible.

Seventeen teacher interviewees (85%) confirmed the above statements about sexual harassment of girls by their boy student counterparts in their schools. These teachers felt that it was proper for them to ignore such issues that they characterized as silly, immature or harmless and typical of boys and girls in schools the world over.

The Teachers' Role towards Gender Insensitivity in the Curriculum

Generally the majority of teacher interviewees concurred that throughout their teaching they have always found the overall performance of girls not as good as that of their boy counterparts. Asked to explain what they attribute the discrepancy in performance to, sixteen respondents (80%) cited the girls' acceptance of the feminine role ideology as primarily domestic and the belief that a man should be the provider and head of the family as the major causes of the performance discrepancy between girls and boys in education. Probed further, fifteen of them (teachers) (75%) revealed that not only were teachers disseminating these stereotypical views through their teaching, but also that in their personal and family lives they were enculturating their own children into these gendered ideological values and roles. Twelve of them (60%) claimed that they often saw it as their duty to prepare their pupils for 'appropriate' gender roles in the wider society as the following response from one teacher respondent (T2) shows:

T2: I think it is part of my job as a teacher of Food and nutrition to prepare girls to be good wives. I prepare them in preparation for their gender role. Boys should learn Fashion and Fabrics so as bachelors they can look after themselves. After all, they will not have a wife immediately they leave school and they may be far from their mothers.

These findings revealed that by disseminating sexist, gender role biases and patriarchal ideologies and stereotypes some teachers contribute to the developing of gender insensitivity in the school curriculum.

The acceptance of the feminine role as primarily domestic and the belief that the man

should be the provider, breadwinner and head of the family was cited by 80 percent of the teachers interviewed. It became apparent from the responses given by these teachers that this belief is instrumental in the peddling of the patriarchal values and ideologies by these teachers. At no time during the study did teachers indicate awareness that they or the school curriculum may in a way influence the educational achievement and career choices of the girls.

Eleven teacher respondents (55%) attributed the girls' academic under-achievement and their gender biased career aspirations to the inadequacies of females in general, the girls themselves, their parents and home backgrounds and the culture of the broader society. Thus teachers in the main did not consider it their professional responsibility to initiate measures to help girls to overcome their limited agency (Giddens 2001) towards learning equity. There was a minority of respondents, 4 teachers (20%) of the teacher interviewees who recognized the need and felt they were doing all they could to encourage and motivate girls to strive for learning equity with their boy counterparts but their actions appeared to be limited to telling the girls that they should aspire to be on the same footing in class performance with their boy counterparts.

The teachers' perceptions of feminine and masculine gender roles within the family and world of work, and their beliefs and values about the hierarchy of power and authority in the family and the public sphere correspond, in the main, with those of their pupils. The following statements represent the views of 10 females out of 20 teacher participants in this study on the question of gender roles in the family and the wider public sphere.

T3: It is my responsibility as the wife to take care of the home and children while my husband provides for the economic needs of our family. As his wife I should do jobs in the home such cooking, ironing and looking after our children. A husband should be more educated than his wife in order for him to earn more money..

Such responses were typical of many girls' responses and this showed that most girls and some teachers perceive the role of women in the family as primarily domestic, caring for the physical and emotional needs of their husbands and children. Whilst 6 of the 10 teacher participants (30%) believed that their husbands would help them with some of the domestic chores, 4

of them (20%) agreed that it is the wife's responsibility to take care of the home and children and all the domestic chores while husbands' main responsibilities should centre mainly on fending for the family since they are the heads and bread winners of families. Responding to the question of cultural factors that affect girls' career aspirations 12 teacher respondents (60%) argued that in general girls' ideas of what it means to be a wife and mother closely correspond with those of their parents. As a result many of them often wish to follow careers that will not cause role conflicts and upset the social structure in which they exist.

How Teacher Attitudes and Expectations Engender Insensitivity in the School Curriculum

Many teacher participants claimed that their attitudes and expectations towards their pupils' gender roles are informed by the cultural norms and values of the society in which they live. The teachers pointed out that it is these norms and values that engender inequity in learning and the aspirations of boys and girls in society. They admitted that their attitudes and expectations of boys' and girls' roles certainly mirror society's gender role expectations of males and females. Among the cultural factors cited by the teachers as influencing the development of gender insensitivity in the curriculum were parental influence on girls' attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles. According to the interviewed teachers, parents in many patriarchal societies regard the primary role of girls or women as domestic. According to 13 teachers' responses, the belief that men should be the heads of families and the bread winners tends to influence girls' biased gender roles significantly. It was also apparent in the teachers' responses that the sexual divisions of labour which most girls anticipated to exist in their marriages reflected that which they witness in their communities and homes between their parents. Teachers admitted that they do try and promote this culture on the grounds that they do not wish to be in conflict with the demands of their society. As a result their attitudes and actions towards boys and girls tend to promote the anticipated sexual division of labour, which the girls' significant others (Mead 1934) cherish. These findings confirm Meyer's (2008) assertion that teacher atti-

tudes and expectations of their pupils' gender roles not only influence their pedagogical practices but also how they will guide these pupils towards gender roles upon leaving school. It was evident in the girls' responses in this study that their academic self-concepts and anticipated gender roles reflected the ways in which their teachers depicted them.

DISCUSSION

The majority of teachers interviewed tended to subscribe to gender-stereotyped perceptions of men-only and women-only tasks in the home environment. This was perceived as a reflection of the resilience of socializing agents in perpetuating the gender role stereotypes acquired through years of socialization from early childhood, especially because gender role socialization takes place in children as early as preschool age (Gordon 1995; Shaw 1998). Even if career guides and counselors or occupational psychologists may try to deconstruct these gender role stereotypes, their effort may not be adequate to undo the effects of years of social conditioning, particularly in a social context such as Zimbabwe where collective social values are still prevalent (Dorsey 1996; Gaidzanwa 1997; Nhundu 2007). According to the interviewed teachers socializing agents, in particular parents and siblings not only condition children to gender-type certain activities as strictly boys' or girls' but also most likely to influence their children's aspirations. Most teacher participants also cited how girls learn from their parents and siblings by perceiving them as ideal or important role models (Bandura 1975). For some of the teachers interviewed, it is the gender role stereotypes acquired early in the girls' life that may obscure their openness to new roles or possibilities of new career horizons when presented by their teachers or occupational psychologists. This means that for some girls gender role development is a product of the direct and conscious efforts of parents in their quest to train their daughters in what they deem appropriate gender roles as a preparation for adult roles. The interviewed teachers also indicated that the girls' home environments often present important implications for aspirations or choices for girls who may be exposed to differential reinforcements that socialize them to accept the so-called gender appropriate careers early in their life course.

These findings are consistent with the literature by Baly (1989), Osgood et al. (2006) and Brown (2002) who pointed out that parents do not only wield a lot of influence over their children's work experience, but also that strong respect, obedience, and desire to conform to conform to one's parents and family traditions often deter children from families or social groups that uphold collective social values from pursuing careers that they have been brought up to accept as appropriate for the other sex. Such an idea entrenches patriarchy in society. The findings also resonate with those cited by Francis (2002) where participants expressed the traditional views that indicate some girls were prepared to work until they marry and thereafter, expected to cease paid work in order to become fulltime house wives and mothers or to assume the role of secondary breadwinners. It is in this sense that the results of studies such as the current one should be seen within the broader context of the gender role socialization of the home and society, which generally emphasize the parenting role of women and encourage girls to make career sacrifices for their families (Jozefowicz et al. 1993).

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that a whole range of curriculum selection seems to favour the interests of boys or men (patriarchy) in society. Although presented as unbiased, the interpretations and or portrayals of males and females in the curriculum provide a justification for patriarchal tendencies in the school curriculum because the ideological support for boys and men as a powerful social group dominates curricular material particularly through school textbooks and teacher attitudes and expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Teachers need to play an important role in closing the ranks and gaps created by the gender role stereotyping experienced by pupils in the home and those incorporated in textbooks and reinforced by the hidden school curriculum. Understanding both the overt and covert ways in which gender ideologies operate and are manifest in

the school curriculum is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for alleviating the effects of gender inequality and promoting learning equity. The curriculum, especially in the 21st century, needs to be gender sensitive or balanced as opposed to being gender blind to the plight of girls and women. To be able to empower girls to compete on an equal footing with boys for opportunities in life, sexism, gender stereotypes, biases and prejudices embedded in curricular material need to be eradicated. Because early aspirations formed as a result of gender role socialization ultimately affect the gender balance of higher education programmes and of the workforce, promoting gender parity from the earliest levels of schooling is critical. We hope that our study will draw attention to this important issue and bring Zimbabwe closer to achieving the gender equity to which it aspires.

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