

Female Students' Perceptions of Gender and Academic Achievement: A Case of Sixth Form Girls in Zimbabwean School

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ABSTRACT In this paper we report findings from a study that sought to explore girl students' perceptions of gender and academic achievement in the Zimbabwean schools. The study adopted a qualitative approach in which focus interviews with female high school learners were conducted. Data was analysed through content analysis as emerging key issues led to themes that were best analysed by this means. The study found that female students believe that they were not on par with boys in terms of treatment. Their treatment in schools, at home and in society led to under-achievement. The study concluded that female high school students held certain perceptions which they believed negatively affected their academic achievement. The study recommends that gender sensitivity should be taken seriously in schools and in homes as well as in society at large to ensure that female students have positive self-concepts which, invariably, lead to better performance and improved academic attainment.

INTRODUCTION

Background Context and Theoretical-Conceptual Framework of Study

Despite calls for equality world-wide, and despite Zimbabwe's assumed democracy, women remain marginalized in education and career decision-making structures in this country. In the Zimbabwean context, we are faced with the challenge of incorporating gender discourse into the mainstream political, educational and occupational landscape. As we strive to achieve total democracy, we do so with the full realization that among the myriad of exploitative structures that we are fighting, is an ideological impediment to the liberty of women. Such an implementation finds fertile breeding grounds in patriarchy and other masculine practices in our educational, occupational and political structures that have fostered male hegemony as an instrument of exploitation in the country (Gramsci 1994).

Despite women constituting more than 51% of Zimbabwe's total population (Nhundu 2007; Machingura 2006), the masculine nature of the Zimbabwean educational, occupational and political structures manifests itself in a number of ways as evidenced by the literature from research studies by Nhundu (2007), Machingura (2006) and Jansen (2003) who concluded that the Zimbabwean educational and occupational landscape lacks gender sensitivity despite previous initiatives by governmental and non-governmental organizations towards gender equity, equality and other forms of prejudice reduction in these spheres. Women still constitute only 25% of the paid labour force and are still overburdened with domestic and reproductive roles traditionally expected of them by society (Kwinjeh 2007; Machingura 2006; Gaidzanwa 1997). Thus they are still under-represented in many occupational sectors of the economy especially in the public sphere in areas such as politics, engineering, science and technology in general (Jansen 2003). This is in spite of the fact that Zimbabwe itself boasts of having one of the highest literacy rates among countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Jansen 2008). Apart from documenting issues of women's lack of political participation, feminists in Zimbabwe have also voiced concerns about the marginalization of women in social, economic and

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educational spheres and their efforts have resulted in some positive strides in the fight for equal recognition to their male counterparts. Legislative reforms such as the Legal Age of Majority Act have been effected to recognize women as adults who can vote, open bank accounts and even marry whom they choose to, none of which was previously possible without the consent of a male connection- brother, father or uncle. Prior to the enactment of the Legal Age of Majority Act, women were regarded as perpetual minors (Ministry of Education and UNICEF 2000). The second Act to recognize women was the Matrimonial Causes Act which now recognizes women's rights to own property, independent of their husbands or fathers (Ministry of Education and UNICEF 2000).

In terms of previous initiatives towards gender sensitivity, it is undoubtedly true that the issue of sexual equality of educational opportunity has been receiving some attention in Zimbabwe (Jansen 2003; Machingura 2006; Kwinjeh 2007; Mawarire 2007). In particular, emphasis has been placed upon equality of access to schooling for girls, and more recently, upon the influence of gender role stereotypes in higher dropout rate for girls (Gordon 1995). Little attention has, however, been given to what happens to girls in the schools, that is, to the 'in school factors' or the treatment experienced by girls within the schools (Machingura 2006). Equality of educational opportunity involves not only equal access to schooling, but also equal treatment of boys and girls within the school itself (Dorsey 1996; Gordon 1995). It is with the experiences of girls in the schools that this study is concerned.

The theoretical views of scholars such as Atkinson et al. (1998), Jansen (2003), and Nhundu (2007) will be used to support the views expressed in this account. To begin with, in discussing curricula influences of the colonial educational legacy of Zimbabwe, Atkinson (1993) concurs with Gaidzanwa (1997), Jansen (2003), Machingura (2006) and Nhundu (2007) that the colonial history of Zimbabwe left an indelible legacy on her political, economic and educational systems. For example, Zimbabwe's school curriculum has, for a long time, been inextricably linked to the patterns of European colonization in the region and the dominant role of the British settler regime (Mavhunga 2009; Jansen 2003). As mentioned earlier, the curri-

culum inherited by Zimbabwe at independence was modeled on the English system (Wolpe 2006; Gordon 1995). As in Britain, girls in Zimbabwe were educated for domesticity, whilst boys were prepared for employment, the role of family head and breadwinner (Gordon 1995:13). Mechanisms, including the curriculum, for the structuring of gender roles in schools were similar to those in Britain (Mavhunga 2009). The curriculum for boys and girls differed. Boys and girls were offered different practical and vocational subjects with boys being channeled into technical subjects such as metal work, wood work, agriculture, technical graphics and building as well as being encouraged to pursue science subjects. Girls were offered domestic science subjects along with typing and shorthand, and were encouraged to pursue the arts.

The legacy of the colonial school curriculum is often reflected in the curriculum scholarship by not only Zimbabwean writers, but Southern African writers in general (Jansen 2003; Atkinson Agere and Mambo 1993). In extrapolating themes from the curricular literature of Southern African scholars, and relying on his own research findings, Jansen (2003) notes in particular emerging themes in curriculum literature on Zimbabwe since independence. One such theme is what Atkinson et al. (1993) regard as a reflection of the influence of the colonial settler government. According to this view the colonial settler officials tended to visualize girls and women in terms of a Victorian image of what a woman should be (McClintock and Gilbert 2008) instead of observing women's actual capabilities and functions alongside their male counterparts. They understood men to be breadwinners and thus recruited them for highly esteemed and paying technological jobs, which often took them away from the homes, farms and rural areas, then called tribal trust lands (Atkinson et al. 1993; Mavhunga 2009). This trend continued with the expansion of an international market economy with men migrating to work in the mines, plantations and towns (Chengu 2010). Men were thus favoured for education, employment and access to resources. Even land settlement schemes gave title deeds to men (Chengu 2010). This meant they had automatic rights to the proceeds of the land, including the products of women's labour. So the colonial period can be viewed as having set the scene for unequal educational and career aspirations between

males and females and their subsequent unequal access to economic sustainability (Zvobgo 1999).

The above issues find expression within the Zimbabwean school subjects by focusing on their nature, design, organization, effects on learning and teaching, and attitudes among various categories of learners through colonially influenced lens or perspective (Marira 1991; Nyagura and Riddell 1994; Gordon 1995). This implies that although schools may offer girls and boys the same subject choices, girls still tend to opt for the subjects perceived as feminine and formerly offered to girls only (Gordon 1995). Jansen (2003) asserts that in Southern Africa, school subjects remain a powerful organizational reality in post-colonial institutions despite various initiatives for integration of subjects or inter-disciplinary curricula. This is because studies of school subjects are often fragmented and proceed with the insular discourses of the discipline. These studies also tend to be conservative, focusing on technical limitations or deficiencies in teaching, learning and curriculum and assessment within the context of a particular school subject or discipline (Nyagura and Riddell 1994; Nziramasanga 1999). Examples of topics within this theme include the gender-typing of school subjects and their comparative importance and suitability for boys and girls, and how this sets the stage for the perpetual gender stereotyping of occupations. Other themes in curricular literature also include content and discourse analyses of gender stereotypes (Nhundu 2007), racial and colonial content embodied in school text books (Gati et al. 1995) among syllabuses that define school subjects in Zimbabwe (Marira 1991). Thus, in Zimbabwe certain subjects are deemed to be male or female domains. Gordon (1995) and Dorsey (1996) concur that in Zimbabwe the general perception among educators on the nature and power of subjects is that mathematics and science subjects are a preserve of boys while languages and humanities are considered a female domain.

Goal and Research Questions for the Study

The aim of this study was to explore girl students' perceptions of gender and academic achievement in the Zimbabwean school context. In doing so the study was guided by the

following research questions: What impact, if any, does gender have on girls' academic achievement in schools? How do the girls themselves explain their academic performance in schools?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative approach involving focus group interviews as the instrument for gathering the necessary data. As an exploratory case study, the research's rationale was premised on the epistemological position that using focus group discussions to gather the views of sixth form girls about their perceptions of in-school factors affecting their education and choice of careers would enable group interaction and result in a wide range of responses by activating details of perspectives and releasing inhibitions (Dzvimbo et al. 2010). A focus group interview as described by McLafferty (2004) cited in Dzvimbo et al (2010), 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.

In using focus group discussion as a data collection tool, insights of Geertz (1993), who asserts that this technique is capable of unearthing crucial issues regarding a people's culture or systems of beliefs and practices embedded in their structured human social relations, were drawn upon. Such a method helped elicit thick descriptions (Geertz 1993) as participants tended to build on each other's ideas and comments to provide in-depth and value-added insights on their perceptions of factors affecting their educational and career trajectories upon graduating from schools. Participants in the focus group interviews were 20 sixth form schoolgirls, a category that represents the school-leaving General Certificate of Education at the Advanced Level of study in Zimbabwe (GCEAL). They were drawn from 4 schools randomly selected as the sites for the study. They were then organized into 4 focus groups of with each being interviewed for about 30 to 45 minutes. Focusing on the curriculum as what Pinar (2004) describes as a 'complicated conversation' that occurs in classrooms to reflect how, where, when and why helped expose the norms of

conduct informing teachers' behaviour. The evidence was then drawn on to discover (Merriam 1998) how their attitudes and expectations nudge or predispose wittingly or not, girls into a gendered occupational world.

Sampling

In terms of the sample, the study utilized a stratified and convenient sample size of 20 participants chosen as a cross-section of the larger target population of sixth form girls in the province. Firstly, all 6th form schools in the district were identified and classified in terms of type (rural or urban). By means of stratified, purposive and convenient sampling techniques, they (schools) were categorized in order to ensure that the sample was representative of the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the research population, capturing variables such as location and socio-economic status as determined by parental occupation and residential areas of the participants. They were then systematically arranged in alphabetical order and coded from 1-40 on the sampling frame with codes assigned to each one as a sampling unit and chosen in multiples of 10 to ensure that each and every sampling unit has an equal chance of being included in the study.

Among the modalities used in drawing up the sampling frame were the uses of postal code, address files, class registers, or the students' social records kept by their form teachers. These considerations partly helped in establishing the students' socio-economic backgrounds as a variable considered important in this study. The girls within these schools were divided according to socio-economic status to ensure that the resultant stratified sample represented their diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This modality helped to control the variables that were be fundamental for the study (Hesse-Biber 2004). The research community chosen for this study's population was well placed to provide insights about how the curriculum presented to girl children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds draws them towards particular careers. It was able to provide useful evidence, as it is within a district in which the diversity of the Zimbabwean society is represented. As one of the industrialized provinces of Zimbabwe, the research population consists of people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, working,

middle and upper classes. The schools in the district are also positioned to cater for children from the diverse socio-economic backgrounds. There are private schools meant to serve children of the affluent middle and upper classes and governmental and mission schools, which normally serve children from the lower and or non-affluent social classes. The study thus utilized a combination of systematic and stratified random sampling techniques (Clark and Creswell 2008) to identify girl participants in the selected schools. The systematization of the sample was in the way the schools themselves are selected and ensure that the sample was truly representative of the target population. Special attention was given to ensuring that the chosen schools reflected the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the research participants.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers had to obtain all the necessary ethical clearance for the permission to conduct the study from the provincial education department, district and school principals before going into the schools as part of advance protocols. The interview proceedings commenced with the researchers assuring participants that their responses would be treated with the strictest confidentiality and that they have a right to withdraw from the interview at any time without a penalty should they find it necessary to do so. Nonetheless, there were no withdrawals from the interviews. The purpose of the research and the interview were also made clear to participants so as to give informed consent. The participants had to be at ease before the interview proceedings commenced, especially since an audio recorder was used to record the data.

Data Management and Analysis Process Adopted for the Study

Guided by Dey's (1993: 10) assertion that data management and analysis in case study research ought to be done in terms of meanings mediated through language and action tied to a particular context, a descriptive and interpretive mode of data presentation and analysis was adopted. This involved data presentations using excerpts from interviews, voice or tape recordings, narrative vignettes and direct quotes.

In line with Tesch's (1990) advice that one of the most important tasks of data analysis is the identification of patterns, commonalities, differences and processes, the focus was on breaking down the data into separate parts, examining it and making comparisons between emerging themes from the pupils' perceptions of factors that influence their educational achievement and career prospects. This was done in an effort to detect patterns of similarities or consistencies and differences in the gathered data. The analysis of participants' views was carried out according to the themes emerging from their responses as apparent in the discussion and analysis of results below.

RESULTS

Girls' Academic Underachievement

In the academic context of Zimbabwe, the term achievement is commonly used to denote a level of attainment measured by some form of objective test, for example, ordinary level examinations. On the contrary, underachievement denotes a level of attainment below a given or set standard which is considered acceptable and may be measured in a number of ways. Most commonly in Zimbabwe this term describes a level of attainment below the level set as a pass mark in an examination or test. An underachieving pupil may thus be the pupil who scores lower than the acceptable score in a test or examination and whose performance is described as below standard. Eleven girls (55%) from the focus group interviewees cited underachievement as the reason why some of the girls dropped out of school prematurely. Nine respondents (45%) pointed to the problem of sexual harassment of girls in the schools as one of the reasons some girls have abandoned school prematurely.

Sexual Harassment of Girls in the School

The results of the focus group interviews held with sixth form girl participants in this study showed that 10 respondents (50%) were of the opinion that the sexual harassment of girls in the co-educational schools studied accounted for a large number of the high school dropout rate for girls. The 10 girl interviewees (50%) who cited the sexual harassment of girls as one

reason why girls abandon school prematurely also claimed that there is rampant sexual harassment of girls in the co-educational schools they attend. Asked to elaborate their claims the girls said the harassment takes a variety of forms from the verbal to the physical, and occurs at several levels: harassment by boys and harassment by male teachers. Furthermore, the sexual abuse of girls by male teachers is also not an infrequent occurrence, particularly in rural and township schools. A large number of girl interviewees (75%) cited teasing, humiliation, verbal bullying or assaults and the unnecessary ridicule of girls by boys as a major impediment to girls' education and career aspirations. According to the 20 participants interviewed, the harassment occurs both within and outside of the classroom. The following are sample responses from the participants on the question of their sexual harassment:

Interviewer: *Tell us some of the things that the boys and male teachers you mentioned do which you can say affect your schooling.*

Respondent 1: *The boys can laugh at you if you fail to answer a question. Some boys just criticize us girls telling us that we are useless in school. Then we just keep quiet in the classroom not participating.*

Respondent 2: *The boys can make you shy by making comments about your structure, about your body. The boys will be watching you at break time. They will talk loudly and laughing saying which girls is beautiful and which girls are ugly.*

Respondent 3: *You know if you are menstruating the boys will know it, sometimes they will see the blood on your skirt. Then they will laugh at you and tell their friends to look. And they will mention it for a long time after that.*

Asked to state what some teachers do which girls consider as harassment the following, the following were some of the responses given by the girls during the focus group interview sessions:

Respondent 4: *One of the big problems we face is teachers proposing love to us girls. If you say no he can make you fail the subject, make you hate school or dropout of it. Teachers proposing love to us girls make us to be shy in class. You must be very quiet so that he will not notice you.*

Respondent 5: *Some of the young teachers will say because they are in love with you so*

they will ask you to clean their houses, wash their clothes but when you fall pregnant they will leave you to drop out of school and suffer. It happened to two of my friends last year at this school.

When asked what the teachers do if boys unnecessarily laugh at or ridicule them in the classroom, a large number of girls (13) representing (65%) percent of the sample claimed that some of the teachers laugh with the boys or just ignore them. Probed further about whether or not they report incidents of sexual harassment and abuse to other staff members, particularly to female teachers, 13 of the 20 girls in this study (65%) indicated that reporting cases to teachers would in fact do more harm than good. One girl interview respondent had this to say:

Respondent 6: *If you report it, no, that is not good. You will be on tight. The teacher will say that you are a prostitute and you were attracting the man. You cannot tell the lady teacher because she may be very angry with you alleging you are to blame. The lady teachers may say a teacher will not propose love to you if you did not entice him. May be he rejected you that is why you are reporting him.*

The above responses indicate that some of the teachers instead of reducing the dropout rate for girls potentially contribute to it. According to the girls interviewed the male teachers tend to collude with the male pupils in the verbal harassment of girls in the classroom, either by omission or directly while female teachers ignore appropriate reports of harassment.

Parental Attitudes

According to the interviewed girls, the belief that girls who are sexually harassed or abused by boys and teachers are to some extent responsible for their fate is fairly common amongst both parents and teachers. The girls cited this as one of the reasons why some of these parents withdraw their girl children from school preferring to have them married instead. Sixteen girl interviewees (80%) also lamented their teachers and parents' acceptance of the feminine role as primarily domestic and the belief that the man should be the provider, breadwinner and head of the family on the grounds that such a view obscures the protection they should be giving to the girl child in the school.

Asked to explain the different tasks allocated to them as girls and boys in the home, 8 out of the 20 interviewed girls (40%) claimed that they sometimes fail to submit assignments on time due to the role conflict of the home and school. At home they are expected to do basically all the household chores such as washing dishes and cleaning the kitchen after supper while their brothers may be working on their school work. Due to fatigue from too much work in the home they often fail to accomplish homework and consequently face harassment by their teachers the next morning for not having done their homework.

Participants also pointed out that within their homes there are tasks that are deemed men-only and others deemed women-only. Men-only tasks mentioned include herding cattle, woodcarving, building houses and cattle pens, whereas sweeping, cooking, doing dishes, laundry, sewing, and fetching water and firewood were considered women-only tasks. Many of the respondents shared these traditional gender role beliefs. The respondents also indicated that both the home and school tend to afford boys more opportunities for work compared to girls who are often pressed for time especially for homework. On the question of whether boys and girls should study the same subjects at school, 12 girls (60%) concurred that there is need for gender equity in all learning areas or subjects if the curriculum is to be rendered gender neutral. Eight girls (40%) argued to the contrary on the grounds that the notion of sexual division of labor needs to be upheld in all curriculum issues so that the status quo of the stratified nature of society is maintained. The following response came from one of the girl interviewees:

Respondent 7: *God created us differently and one wonders why people wish equalize what god has created unequal. Boys are different from girls and this justifies gender differentiated social roles in society. The school thus needs to observe this god given difference when allocating subjects to boys and girls. Girls should be allowed to follow subjects that are easy and that would give them a chance to be with the kids in later life. Boys as future bread winners need to make sure they do tough subjects so that they learn to be tough to be able to fend for their wives and kids as determined by society*

Almost all of the girls interviewed (90 percent) expressed happiness for being in co-educational as opposed to single-sex schools. Asked to motivate their responses, these girls argued that co-educational schools afforded them an opportunity to compete on an equal footing with their boy counterparts. However, they lamented the attitudes of some teachers who tend to discourage this healthy competition and to deny girls the chance for learning equity. On conditions at home, the interview participants revealed that they were involved in a lot of household chores at home. Some indicated that their brothers would always be reading or doing other forms of school work while they were busy with chores. One of the respondents said:

Respondent 8: *I have a twin brother at this school. When we are at home he has more time on his books compared to me. I do all the chores at home cleaning, cooking and laundry. I even cook for my brother, serve him food and clean the dishes while he does virtually nothing. I think that is why he is always performing better than me.*

The above view shows the differential treatment which is gender-based that takes place in homes which may affect the girls' attitude towards school and overall attainment.

DISCUSSION

It emerged from the study that eleven girls (55%) from the focus group interviewees cited underachievement as the reason why some of the girls dropped out of school prematurely. This finding confirms findings from an earlier study by Leach and Humphreys (2007) who argue that due to gender socialization girls may not achieve as much as boys in schools as the kind of socialization they have gives them an inferior position to boys.

The revelation in the study that girls' achievement in school was affected by sexual harassment of girls in the co-educational schools also confirms finding from Shumba (1999; 2001a; 2001b; 2002). Shumba highlights the different forms of abuse faced by students in schools which often lead to academic underachievement. Apart from physical, psychological and sexual abuse Shumba (2002) identifies what he calls 'hidden curriculum abuse' a form of abuse where school girls are involved in non-school related errands for teachers. Girls may be asked to sweep

teachers houses especially in rural schools or fetch water and firewood for teachers. This is all abuse that will in a way affect the girls' academic performance negatively. The study revealed that some boys in the school sexually harass girls and this also affects girls' academic performance. The belief that girls who are sexually harassed or abused by boys and teachers are to some extent responsible for their fate is fairly common amongst both parents and teachers (Chireshe and Chireshe 2009). The girls cited this as one of the reasons why some of these parents withdraw their girl children from continuing with school preferring to have them married instead.

The revelation in the study that girls perceive other students and teachers as perpetrators of abuse is indeed worrisome. Such a revelation confirmed observations by Omara (2009) that teachers may fail to behave properly and in *loco parentis*. Teachers, therefore, should set proper and imitable behaviour standards. Ozogwu (2009) further notes that educators should not use their position to humiliate, threaten, intimidate, harass or blackmail any learner to submit to selfish motives or to engage in sexual misconduct, drug addiction and trafficking, cultism, human trafficking and other related offences (Sadker and Sadker 2003).

Teachers are imitated a lot by learners in the schools and the need for their proper conduct all the times is crucial. Teachers should not be anti-role models who behave so badly that they serve as good examples of what not to do (Orstein et al. 2003). In situations where male educators engaged in sexual and love relationships with female learners they set a very bad example as such moves are tantamount to abuse of office and they are gross acts of corruption and immorality (Thaw 2010). In order to perform to their full potential learners need appropriate role models in their teachers and not teachers who cause them to underperform in school or to even hate school.

It also emerged from the study that female students did not have adequate time to work on their academic tasks at home. This finding corroborates Mosley (2004) and Mwaba (1992) who contend that at home parents tend to afford boys more time and space for extra studies compared to girls who have to endure the dual burden of household chores and extra homework studies. Mosley for example, reported that in Ethiopia cooking, cleaning and fetching water

are considered feminine activities, whereas agricultural activities (mainly ploughing) are considered masculine roles. In another study Mwaba (1992) found that a sample of South African secondary school boys and girls characterized housecleaning, nursing, and all sweeping as predominantly women-only jobs. This kind of gender socialization invariably negatively affects girls' performance and ultimate attainment at school (Hurley and Pitamber 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there are a plethora of challenges facing the female students in schools. These factors affect their academic performance and career aspirations. It is in this light that many researchers (including Dorsey 1996; Gaidzanwa 1997; Gordon 1995; Mutekwe 2007; Nhundu 2007) on this subject are agreed that in Zimbabwe girls are educated for domesticity. According to the results of this study, the school curriculum should be the area responsible for the deconstruction of the gender roles and stereotypes embedded in it. 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 curricular and reinforced through the hidden curriculum of the school. It follows from this study that there is a serious need for educators, parents and older siblings and other significant others to bring the attention of children that the social behavior, roles and characteristics associated with boys, men, girls and women are nothing but products of gender socialization and that there nothing to stop them from venturing into any career field provided they have the interest, ability and opportunity. As pointed out by some participants in the focus group discussion, there is need for teachers and parents to refrain from using sexist discourses in the curriculum if gender sensitivity is to be accomplished in educational institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: teachers and parents need to constantly expose pupils to programme based on selected life stories and experiences of successful female role

models of relevant social and cultural backgrounds so that they can successfully alter the occupational aspirations of girls in favour of pursuing non-traditional gender based careers trajectories. Pupils, particularly girls themselves also have a responsibility of deconstructing the gender-based role stereotypes engendered by their families and peddled through their teacher attitudes and expectations. To do this they need defy the odds by taking up school subjects, careers or occupations traditionally stereotyped as masculine to prove to society that girls and boys or women and men are not intellectually different as such and that women and girls and men and boys can do equal jobs in society.

Although a large number of recommendations for this study are already implicitly embodied in the concluding section of this study, the following are some of the recommendations expressed by the research participants: Participants recommended a review of the teacher training curriculum towards gender sensitivity in teacher attitudes and expectations. This calls for improved gender training workshops and in-service programmes for teachers. Asked to make suggestions on ways to reduce the gender biases and prejudices prevalent in their school curriculum, participants made the following recommendations: Schools need clear cut measures to promote learning equity and reduce prejudices based on gender role stereotypes. The Ministry of Education needs to ensure that teachers who abuse girls are not only blacklisted, but that they are severely dealt with in accordance of the laws of the country since their actions amount to abuse of office. Parents also need to give ample time to their girl children at home so that they cope with school work as opposed to overburdening them with household chores at the expense of study time. Girls need to be encouraged to be able to realize their full potential as human beings along with their boy counterparts.

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