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ROLE OF GENDER IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF HOME ECONOMICS: A CASE IN MASVINGO PERI-URBAN

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Abstract

This study sought to find out the role of gender in the teaching and learning of Home Economics in Primary Schools with special reference to one selected primary school in Masvingo Peri-urban – Zimbabwe. A case study was used to get insight into the influence of gender role stereotyping on the development of attitudes towards Home Economics and the effect this has on the support of the teaching and learning of Home Economics. Interviews were the tools used to collect data. Forty parents of pupils from grade six and seven were randomly selected for the study sample. The two female teachers who teach Home Economics classes and are responsible for the laboratories were also part of the sample. The data was analyzed both quantitatively using percentages and qualitatively to establish emerging themes and reported in a narrative form. The study established that (60%) of parents had negative attitudes towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics that were influenced by gender role stereotyping while (40%) had positive liberal attitudes. The provision of resources by the parents was a problem especially among parents with negative attitudes. Pupils from parents who had a positive attitude were performing well since they had the support and encouragement. The study recommends that the headmasters, teachers and parents hold regular meetings that enable parents to appreciate the importance of Home Economics. Such meetings should be used by the school to create awareness among all the stakeholders on the need to adopt a non gendered approach to role socialization of children. Displays of well made artifacts should be done during open days as a way of emphasizing and highlighting the contribution of the subject to the children's education.

Background of the Study

Home Economics is one of the practical disciplines offered in the Zimbabwe primary school curriculum. The discipline constitutes the subjects in cookery, home management and needlework. The provision of resources is very critical in order to successfully teach the subjects. The parents and the primary school are both responsible for the provision of resources. The school is mainly responsible for buying and maintenance of equipment and tools for both cookery

and needlework laboratories. Parents on the other hand are responsible for buying all the needlework and cookery consumables.

Home Economics is a discipline that relies heavily on practical teaching and a good emphasis on the usage of resources in conjunction with the methods. Teachers employ a variety of practical activities to allow grasping of concepts. Practical activities done with adequate resources encourage involvement of all pupils. *Baker (1972)* encourages teachers to involve the pupils fully to enable them understand concepts easily. It is then important for the parents to support the teaching and learning process by providing resources.

Statement of the problem

The erratic and inconsistent response by the parents to the Home Economics needs for each term in Masvingo Peri-urban schools is a cause for concern. Most parents delay in the procurement of consumables hence the need to study the causes and attitudes behind such a problem. Teachers for needlework usually find it difficult to finish one article per year since some pupils bring the fabrics as late as third term.

Research Questions

The study's main concern was to unveil the influence of gender role stereotyping on the attitudes of parents towards Home Economics and how this in turn affects the support parents give to their children in learning Home Economics. In light of this the following questions were pertinent:

1. Does gender role stereotyping influence development of positive or negative attitude among parents towards Home Economics subjects?
2. How do these attitudes affect the provision of resources in the teaching and learning of Home Economics at Primary school level?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are intended to benefit the teachers, parents, pupils and headmasters as well as the community in general. Information of the impact gender role stereotyping has on the nature of attitudes parents have towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics subjects will enlighten all the stake holders on the negative effects which affect the pupils' learning and career life. Parents will gain knowledge that all subjects are important and beneficial in their own way to the child. The study will also add content to the discipline of Home Economics on the influence of attitudes to learning since attitudes of parents in the teaching and learning of their children has been given little attention. Most research studies have focused on the attitudes of pupils and not their parents.

Literature Review

The Influence of Gender Role Stereotyping on the Nature of Attitudes Parents have Towards the Education of their Children.

Theorists from various disciplines have attempted to describe the causes and nature of attitudes people have. Barzon and Heishomer et al (2005) took a behavioural stance and defined attitude as predispositions to act in a certain way. Attitudes can be reflected in different behaviour. Kaiser (1994:59) says that "attitudes are evaluative; they may either favourably or unfavourably predispose an individual to have preference for certain things". Attitudes towards Home Economics subjects for example, may cause the parents to favour or disfavour the subjects. Eagly and Chaitken (1995) also define attitudes as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with a degree of favour or disfavour. This psychological tendency from the feminist point of view is transmitted through the dominant gender ideology, values and norms emerging from the social and cultural aspects of the society. The dominant gender ideology assigns women a lower status than men and promotes male preferences in education, (Gordon 2006).

Attitudes that later impact on Home Economics subjects for example, are both psychologically and socially constructed and are learnt through gender role socialization. Schott Foundation (2010) - Gender Equity in Education <http://www.schottfoundation.org/gender.html> suggests that the social construction of gender roles affect the physical and psychological development of both boys and girls. The social learning theorists believe that children acquire attitudes by learning appropriate gender roles and identities from their parents. Male parents treat a boy child as they have learnt from their parents while female parents treat a girl child the way they were also treated. Female children are treated differently from male children, hence they acquire roles and identities that are different by virtue of gender role socialization. Eagly and Chaitken (1995), state that those, reflections they identify themselves with, portray the attitudes parents have for the different gender. Gender role socialization is also pivotal in creating attitudes one has towards school subjects.

The Platform for Action, (2010) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/frame.htm> notes that in most societies there are clear patterns of "women's work" and "men's work," both in the household and in the wider community. Most parents find it inappropriate to have a male child prepare and serve food while the girl child is playing. Cookery and Needlework lessons should be for girls while brickwork and woodwork are for boys. Gomez, Elsa (2009), states that gender roles that create social differences between males and females are labeled as gender stereotypes. Parents who still have this mentality are bound to be quite negative. These gender stereotypes are also building blocks of attitudes, (Park 2007) www.existentialbooks.com

Gender role stereotyping, values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations associated with the dominant gender ideology influence the choices and decisions made by parents about the education of their children, (Gordon 2006). The attitudes of parents in turn affect for example, both the teaching and learning of Home Economics in that teachers fail to achieve their set objectives when they do not get enough cooperation from both parents and pupils.

The Effects of Parents' Attitudes on Provision of Teaching and Learning Resources.

Parents' knowledge and participation in the provision of resources affect teaching and learning. The value of resources in the teaching and learning has long been recognized with research findings from other studies pointing to the effectiveness of the teaching materials. A study carried out by Chirove (1994) revealed that the quality of teaching and learning is adversely affected by the shortage of resources and other instructional materials. Availability of resources promotes effective teaching and learning of different concepts and skills. Weiten (1989) holds the view that teaching and learning materials have a strong bearing in execution of concepts. Home Economics for example, is a subject that heavily depends on resources in order to do the practical activities and achieve real teaching and learning.

Parents and the school play a major role to ensure that practical activities are done properly and at maximum level using all the required resources. The way the parents respond when resources are required reflect the value or attitude they have on the subject. Swift responses are well accepted and produce good results since both the teacher and the pupil get on to do their work as early as possible. Practical activities require adequate resources to be meaningful and a success. Farrant (1990) point out that it is essential for the child to bring required resources to school. When parents provide required resources for their children this indicates great support and a positive attitude. Johnson (1989) stresses that if parents view some subjects better than others, they tend to supply resources to those subjects they think are important. Therefore, parents who think that practical subjects are gender stereo-typed find it difficult to support the subjects. The amount of information parents have about the subject affect their participation in the provision of resources. If for example, parents think that cookery lessons are just as good as cooking food at home and needlework as mere sewing, parents tend to be negative since they say that these duties can be done at home and are gender specific. Parents should therefore be given the opportunity to be involved in school activities so that they will understand that Home Economics subjects are not an extension of household chores. Farrant (1990) suggests that schools should encourage parents to take part and show greater interest in the school and get a better understanding of what is going on in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A case study was used as the research design. The case study was best since this was an exploratory study and therefore confining it to one school (case) was ideal. Understanding the nature of attitudes the parents have towards Home Economics subjects also required the two researchers to interact with the participants.

Population and Sample

The population was comprised of 126 parents of Grade six and seven pupils in the peri-urban center surrounding the primary school.

The sample comprised of 20 parents of grade six and 20 of grade seven pupils who were selected using a random sampling method. Two female teachers from the selected school who teach the Home Economics classes, were also chosen. These specialist teachers where responsible for the Home Economics laboratories.

Instruments

In-depth interviews were used as the primary method of data collection. The interview was used because it is a direct approach of gathering data on a person's likes and dislikes, values, thoughts attitudes, interests and experiences. Interviews were conducted with both parents and teachers.

An interview guide was developed which contained questions meant to explore the parents' views on: their rating of subjects in the curriculum; preferred career choices for their children; assignment of household tasks in the home; perceptions of the Home Economics as a subject; the offering of Home Economics to both boys and girls; the support offered to teaching and learning of Home Economics. The two Home Economics teachers were mainly asked questions pertaining to their perceptions on the nature of support offered by parents to the teaching and learning of Home Economics.

Data collection Procedures

Parents were informed of their participation in the research using written letters and were invited to the school where the interviews took place.

Data Analysis Techniques

The presentation of the findings on the nature of attitudes parents have towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics subjects were summarized around the main two research questions- the influence gender role stereotyping has on

the nature of attitudes parents have towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics subjects and the effects of parents' attitudes towards the provision of resources for Home Economics subjects. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used. Frequencies and percentages were used to determine the number of parents who had attitudes influenced by gender role stereotyping. Information gathered from the interviews is presented in a narrative form and recurring themes identified from each research objective were used as a basis for discussion of findings.

Findings and Discussion

The parents involved in this study were between the ages of 30 and 50. Of the 40 parents, 29 were female and 11 were male. Their level of education was ranging from 'O' level, diplomas and degrees in various disciplines. Their marital status comprised of single parents, widows and couples. Twenty four (24) out of the forty parents (60%) had their attitudes influenced by gender role stereotyping and had negative attitudes. Of these parents 24 parents, 17 were female while 7 were male. Sixteen parents (40%) had positive and liberal attitudes. Of these 16 parents, 4 were male.

The Influence Gender Role Stereotyping has on the Attitudes Parents have Towards the Teaching and Learning of Home Economics Subjects.

The findings indicated that most parents (sixty percent) had their attitudes influenced by gender role stereotyping and had negative attitudes towards home economics subjects especially cookery, while forty percent of the parents had positive and liberal attitudes. This may be due to the fact that the nature of classes comprised mostly girls and this was an indication that the subject is treated along gender lines. One of the parents said;

Excerpt 1. The subject seems to be for females only since the subject teacher is a female and the pupils in this class are all females.

The parent said those words in a cookery lesson and the manner in which it was said was as if the subject was an extension of the home. Parents in this category (both male and female) were well above forty years. Hines and Bruce (2002) states that the behaviour of people reflects generations they were born in. These parents may have gone through school during the time (pre-independence) when practical subjects were negatively perceived. Their negative attitude was a reflection of the effects of the colonial era, thus their age may have had something to do with their attitude. The support they were giving to their children in Home Economics was very minimal. Subjects considered most important by these parents were Mathematics and Science and support for these subjects was quite high. Economic status seemed to worsen the situation since some of the parents

facing hardships were labeling Home Economics subjects as expensive subjects as reflected in the following statement from one of the parents:

Excerpt 2. We are willing to support the subject but due to financial problems we are failing to support these expensive subjects.

Economic hardships were common to even those parents who had a positive attitude since they would fail to provide the resources though they were willing to respond. Babbie (1998) suggests that children perform better because their homes provide a better match for the skills needed at school. Shortage of resources is a source of stress for both the teacher and pupils.

The parents' attitudes also reflect that they are gender-biased. They view Home Economics as a subject for the girl child. If boys are to do Home Economics, they would rather have them doing Needlework than Cookery. This view is reflected in the following statement:

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Excerpt 3 Hatidi vakomana vanobika kuda kusona hako (We do not want boys to do cookery, needlework is better)

The parent who made this statement was female. Such parents still hold traditional belief about perceived male and female chores. Spencer (2005) at <http://en.wikipedia/c/o.org/wik.com> elaborates that parents' attitudes towards gender roles and equity can affect their children's well being. Andrew (2003) also asserts such parental impressions, cause most children to conceptualize 'male' and 'female' tasks at a young age, thereby promoting gender differences. Andrew further argues that children are also disadvantaged in their right to choose. Anderson (2005) illustrates in his research that a parents' negative attitudes even affects the children's performance. Further to this, Anderson (*ibid*) stated that teachers also tend to give less attention to students who have a negative attitude towards a subject. Children on the other hand will also resort to truant behaviour when they dislike the subject.

The remaining 40% of the parents held non gender stereotyped attitudes towards Home Economics and were very positive towards the subject. Their attitudes were reflected through their positive responses to the provision of resources and their support and encouragement. Younger couples who were well educated were quite positive. This indicated that their age and level of education had an influence on their attitudes. Anderson (2005) indicated that the ultimate purpose of education is to promote families' growth and well-being. When parents are well informed they make decisions that are in most cases appropriate.

The Effects of Parents' Attitudes on the Teaching and Learning of Home Economics Subjects.

The findings indicated that both teachers and parents agreed in principle that the attitudes of parents whether positive or negative have

teaching and learning of Home Economics. Attitudes whether positive or negative affect the manner in which parents support Home Economics. Parents with negative attitudes influence their children's choice of subjects. They discourage their children especially boys from taking Home Economics subjects since they consider them as subjects for girls only. This situation is worsened when the school administration is seen to support some subjects more than others. Parents were critical of such a position as reflected the following comment;

Excerpt 4. The administration should not put in place policies that undermine other subjects but should encourage both boys and girls to do practical subjects. This kind of action tends to reinforce negative attitudes among parents and undermines the efforts of those parents who encourage their children to do practical subjects. Blumer (1999) suggests that parents look more critically at what is being taught and assess if it is important and helpful to their children. Parents will encourage their children to be in classes that offer subjects that have future benefits.

The teaching of practical subjects is not only affected by the availability of resources but also by the teacher's level of motivation. According to Chirove (1986) well motivated teachers can produce more. Teachers who had great support from both the administration and parents were bound to work harder in reciprocal of the good. The relationship between the teacher and the pupils was cited as being affected by that of the teacher and parent. Both teachers indicated that pupils with parents who have a positive attitude are obedient and forthcoming. The teachers also stated that even the less intelligent work hard in order to please both the parent and teacher. Barzan et al (2005) point out that good rapport between teachers, parent and pupils produces a positive learning environment. The teachers indicated that most parents were worried about the fact that the subject is being taught by female teachers who are also teaching girls. Thus, to them the subject is gender biased.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The main purpose of the study was to establish the influence gender role stereotyping has on the nature of attitudes parents have towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics subject. The impact their attitudes have towards the support given to the teaching and learning of Home Economics was also to be uncovered.

Most parents (60%) had their attitudes influenced by gender role stereotyping and had negative attitudes towards Home Economics subjects while (40%) of the parents had positive and liberal attitudes. Parents who had negative attitudes were having problems in responding to the needs of the subject. Their support was very mean, and favoured other subjects. A few of those parents labeled the subject as an expensive subject. On the other hand parents with positive attitudes were quite supportive.

The findings reflected that teachers do appreciate the support given by parents who have a positive attitude. The teachers also indicated that pupils with parents who provided resources adequately and timeously performed better. This motivated the teachers to perform effectively in their delivery of the subject matter. Teaching requires an individual who has all the faculties in sound state. The emotional, physical and psychological status of the individual affects their relationship with other people. Pupils also need to have sound faculties in order to relate to the teachers in a good way. When both teachers and pupils are getting enough support and encouragement, the teaching and learning will be quite effective. Parents in this case play a pivotal role in facilitating successful teaching and learning.

The provision of resources by the parents on time is quite important since the teaching of practical subjects is centered on resources. Imparting skills and acquiring of skills requires demonstration of the skills and practice of the same. Needlework and cookery lessons depend upon the provision of resources. Sewing and cooking are done using resources such as fabrics and food. When and how you get the resources becomes a cause for concern when the provision is done too late or a few weeks before the examination. Practice makes perfect and good products are fruits of experience. The nature of attitudes parents have has great influence on the teaching and learning of the subjects. Teachers and pupils are both affected and negative attitudes paralyze the whole process of teaching and learning.

Skills training and vocational subjects, in Zimbabwe have been given priority since they are the base of self reliance. Parents who have this knowledge encourage their children to do practical subjects. Teachers when supported try in most cases to create conducive environments for pupils to work effectively. Parents who are supportive in most cases are involved in school activities. The parents' involvement in school through the provision of resources indicates that they understand that successful teaching and learning of the subject depends entirely on the availability of resources.

It is recommended that the study of parents' attitudes towards the teaching and learning of Home Economics be done in more schools at national level in order to find out the general trend. Education Officers of Home Economics should be given the chance by the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture to hold workshops that involve parents so as to enlighten them on the importance of the subject. Such workshops should also be used to create awareness among all the stakeholders about the need to adopt non gendered approaches to role socialization of children. Parents should be given the opportunity to see displays of well made artifacts during open days as a way of highlighting the contributions of the subject to the children's education.

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