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## **Confronting Cultural Constraints: A Solution to Gender Inequality in Practical Subjects in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The government of Zimbabwe has made a highly commendable effort to ensure equal access to education for boys and girls in schools. However, evidence still points to the fact that gender equality in practical subjects is far from being achieved. The study used a qualitative methodology to explore learners' opinions, sentiments, and attitudes regarding practical subjects. This study was conducted in two secondary schools in Bulawayo-Mpopoma and Msiteli, with 350 and 225 questionnaires distributed, respectively, and 90% of the questions answered. The Msiteli surveys were completed first, followed by the Mpopoma after a two-day lull. This work discovered that, although students are willing to go through the process of selecting practical subjects, there are still elements of stereotype among boys and girls, as well as pressure from home and school, highlighting the need to confront a culture that prevents students from pursuing their desired practical subjects. Further, gender discrepancies in choosing practical disciplines exist in both schools, according to this study, as shown through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. This paper argues that gender inequality in schools is "structural violence", which has a greater impact on learners' career opportunities. A practical, holistic approach that encompasses all stakeholders is recommended in order to achieve gender equality in practical subjects.

**Keywords:** Gender inequality; practical subjects; structural violence; culture; schools.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender inequality in Zimbabwe is a long-standing culture that stretches as far back as pre-colonial times (Mupfuvi, 2014). Although the government of Zimbabwe has made a lot of effort to curb gender inequality since independence, research evidence still points to gender inequality in access to education, especially with regard to practical subjects, due to gender stereotyping. Based on a school violence survey carried out at two schools in Bulawayo, Msiteli and Mpopoma, followed by focus group discussions, the findings

have revealed that the selection of practical subjects, despite the fact that learners have a right to choose, is still gendered. Girls are pressured to pursue practical subjects that are stereotypically assigned to them, while boys are confined to “boys” practical subjects.

A broader view of all the factors that tend to perpetuate gender inequality in practical subjects in Zimbabwe is taken into account in this work. These include the fact that practical subjects were first taught along gender lines, the colonial legacy, the nature of practical subjects themselves as compared to other academic subjects, the selection of candidates for practical subjects, the behaviour of some potential employers, and many others. Despite these constraints, the paper views practical subjects as being crucial in providing life skills to learners, considering that the Zimbabwean economy has gone largely informal. If girls are sidelined from pursuing some practical subjects that are crucial to the economy, they end up being spectators instead of players in the Zimbabwean economy. Practical intervention in curbing gender inequality is called for through a shift in research methodology that results in action being taken on the ground instead of passing mere recommendations. Radical confrontation from the government, the teachers, the learners themselves, and their parents or guardians is called for, and an insight on how this can be done practically is provided.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study took a largely qualitative approach as it sought the views, feelings, and attitudes of learners towards practical subjects. The initial survey carried out through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions has confirmed the existence of gender inequality in both schools when it comes to choosing practical subjects. Three hundred and fifty-six (356) questionnaires were distributed at Mpopoma and two hundred and twenty-five (225) at Msiteli, with 90% response rates among Form 2 students. There was a gap of two days, with the Msiteli questionnaires being the first to be filled in, followed by the Mpopoma High ones. The high response rate was due to the fact that collective administration was used where I had a captive audience (students in a class). The questionnaires were administered with the help of teachers. These questionnaires were followed by interviews with five teachers from each school. In addition, two separate focus group interviews of 10 boys and 10 girls were conducted after the interviews.

This initial survey proved that gender inequality does exist in the area of practical subjects. As shall be discussed below, though the survey was for school violence in general, the selection of practical subjects showed a challenge gender-wise. The survey found that the learners were fully aware of all the practical subjects from which they were free to choose. Through a follow-up focus group, the learners revealed the challenges they faced when they tried to cross floors in terms of choosing subjects, which included discouragement from teachers of the practical subjects, disapproval by peers, as well as discouragement from parents and guardians.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

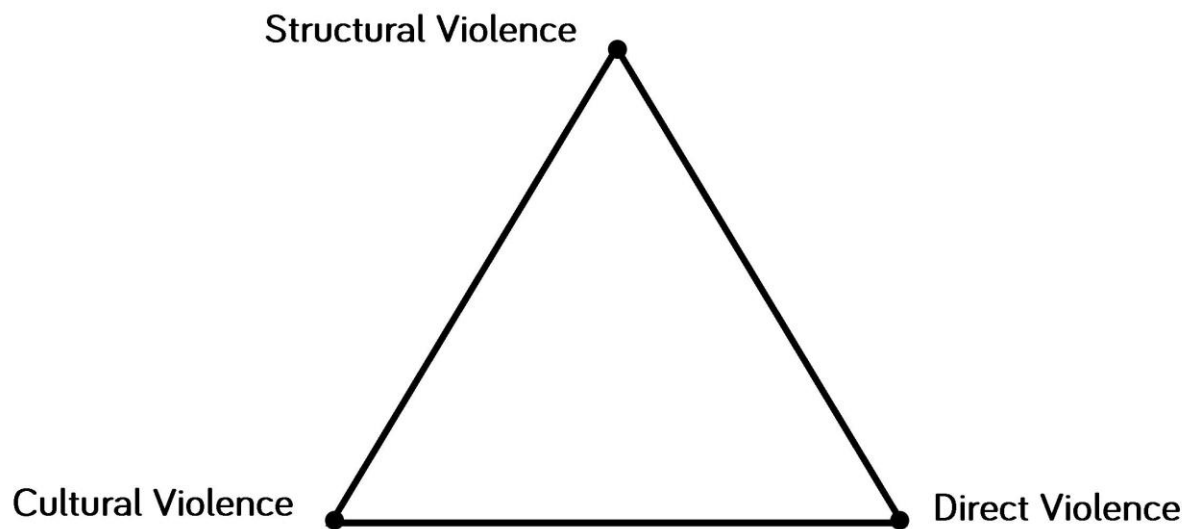
#### **Galtung’s Theory of violence**

According to Galtung, violence is the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able

to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible. He also added that the threat of violence is also violence (Galtung, 1993). Galtung's definition thus implies that, unlike conflict, violence can be avoided. In fact, people are presented with the opportunity to be violent or not. This definition is similar in meaning to the broader definition of violence offered by another peace scholar, Reychler (2005).

According to Reychler, violence is a situation in which the quantitative and qualitative life expectancies of a particular group(s) within a community, state, region, or the world are significantly lower than those of other groups. This is due to one or more of the following sources of violence: physical, structural, cultural, psychological, bad governance, organized crime, and extra-legal activities (Reychler, 2005). Gender inequality is a form of structural violence that needs to be focused on. The temptation is to look at physical violence, which is easy to observe, yet other forms of violence that are far more detrimental might go unnoticed.

**Figure 1: Galtung's triangle of violence**



There are three types of violence according to Galtung, as shown in Fig 1 above which are cultural, structural and direct or physical violence. The forms of direct violence are easily recognizable. Direct violence, which can be divided into verbal and physical, includes the use of force, for example, beating, killing, and maiming. Within a school environment, direct violence might manifest in the form of corporal punishment, rape, assault, fist and gun fights, painful postures, and hard labor as punishment. Structural violence, where gender inequality lies, is subtle and hidden in structures. It can be structurally economic in the form of exclusion or structurally political in the form of oppression (Galtung 1996). It is very difficult to detect because it is not perpetrated by an individual or individuals. Galtung (1993) cites the worldwide trade in goods as an example of structural violence that creates more and more starving people every year. In a school setting, the rules and regulations as well as how power is distributed might lead to violence. This violence will thus manifest itself in the form of an unequal distribution of power and unequal opportunities. It is also manifested when some groups, classes, genders, and nationalities assume they have more access to resources and opportunities than others. Within a school

setting, structural violence can be seen in the way girls and boys are assigned roles according to gender stereotyping. It has been observed that in most schools, girls are cultured to do duties and tasks that are mostly domestic, such as cleaning the classroom, washing utensils, and preparing food, while boys dominate in tasks that require occupying public space, e.g., ringing the bell, raising flags, giving speeches, and carrying heavy staffs. In the long run, girls may not be able to fully reach their potential, for example, in leadership, where they are not given space, as noted below.

Cultural violence has been defined as those aspects of culture that can be used to justify or legitimize the use of direct or structural violence (Galtung 1993). It includes prevailing attitudes and the belief that people are taught them from childhood into adulthood and that they are part of their daily lives. Included in this category are symbols, hymns, military parades, hate speech, etc. In schools, the cultural views of the roles of men and women are also reflected (Yta 2016; Yta 2017; Yta 2020), as noted above; culturally, men are assigned heavier and riskier tasks than women, and both teachers and students may find it difficult to move away from this view. Thus, in a school setting, the definition and typologies of violence according to Galtung are very relevant.

The interrelatedness of these types of violence is explained by what is popularly known as Galtung's triangle of violence. On Galtung's triangle, direct violence, or physical violence, is visible as behavior; cultural and structural violence cause direct violence, while direct violence reinforces cultural and structural violence. Hence, there is interdependence among these forms of violence. Understanding the interdependence of these forms of violence will go a long way toward understanding violence in general in a school setting.

### **Efforts Made By the Zimbabwean Government to Curb Gender Inequality**

The government of Zimbabwe has made a highly commendable effort to curb gender inequality. This is evidenced by its being a signatory to a number of international conventions that support gender equality, as well as the passing of pieces of legislation that call for gender equality. The international conventions to which Zimbabwe is a signatory include, among others, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1991), the Beijing Declaration on the Platform for Action (1995), the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), the Equal Remuneration Convention, the Convention on the Prohibition of Discrimination in Occupations, and the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (National Gender Policy 2013–2017). Highly commendable efforts have also been made at the national level to fight gender inequality, as shown by pieces of legislation passed that include the Matrimonial Causes Act (1987), the Maintenance Act (1999), and the Domestic Violence Act (2007). Moreover, the 2013 Constitution has been hailed for its commitment to gender equality and the right to education for all. The Zimbabwe Education Act of 1987, Chapter 25/4, Part II, Section 4, gave every child, irrespective of gender, the fundamental right to education. Despite all these efforts, the culture of gender inequality still persists due to a number of factors, as noted below.

### **The Selection of Practical Subjects along Gender Lines in Schools**

Research has pointed to the fact that practical subjects are being selected along gender lines in Zimbabwean secondary schools (Nani et al., 2019; Mapuranga et al., 2015; and Chiweshe et al., 2013). This is so regardless of the fact that the government is fighting very

hard to encourage boys to venture into what have been previously designated girls subjects along gender lines, and vice versa. Although Nani et al. (2013) have pointed to a shift in paradigm where boys are now venturing into food and nutrition and girls are also taking metal work, there is still male dominance in metal and wood work. The same authors have hailed the efforts by the government to demystify the belief that there are some subjects boys cannot do and others girls cannot do, but the author feels the change is rather slow and insignificant, hence the need to take a more radical stance in order to break this constraining culture.

## **FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST GENDER EQUALITY IN ZIMBABWE**

### **1. The first practical subjects were taught along gender lines.**

Practical subjects have been defined by Wanyama as subjects where a student uses both the hands and the brain to acquire lifelong skills. They are meant to equip learners with knowledge and skills to create their own self-employment (Nani et al., 2019). History points to the fact that these subjects have always been viewed and taught with a gender bias. Practical subjects are generally an integral part of the human race because people need to produce goods for their own survival.

As a result, practical subjects date as far back as pre-colonial times in Zimbabwe, where fathers and mothers would pass practical skills to their children, and in those days they were the teachers. Unfortunately, fathers taught boys and mothers taught girls, and the training was along gender lines (Chiweshe et al. 2013). Boys were taught to hunt, carve, construct houses, do blacksmithing, and rear livestock, whereas girls were taught domestic work, weaving, and pottery. This thus shows that practical subjects have been taught along gender lines since time immemorial and contributes to the way boys and girls are viewed in terms of practical subjects.

### **2. The Colonial Legacy**

In the colonial era, practical subjects were formally introduced in schools. The system was a discriminatory one where there were F1 and F2. F1 was meant for a few academically gifted learners, and F2 was a purely practical system for the majority who were declared not suitable for the F1 system (Chiweshe, 2013). This approach led to the stigmatization of practical subjects in the sense that those who did them were seen as less gifted academically.

As Zvobgo (1994), cited by Chiweshe (2013), noted, whites did not do practical subjects in the same manner as blacks. Practical subjects for blacks were rudimentary, preparing them to be exploited as cheap labor, whereas practical subjects for whites had a strong scientific foundation. This has resulted in resentment toward practical subjects, especially among black people. Other countries ended up rejecting them in their curricula, though Zimbabwe has strongly held onto the idea of teaching practical subjects.

### **3. Continued resentment of practical subjects after independence, 1980**

Realizing the importance of practical subjects in schools, the government of Zimbabwe made great efforts to promote practical subjects in schools after independence. Unfortunately, damage had already been done to the way parents viewed practical subjects; as Chiweshe et al. (2013) noted, parents after independence took these practical subjects for granted. First, they viewed these practical subjects lightly, thinking, for example, that home economics is only about cooking and sweeping, therefore it is for girls.

Even the practical subjects taken by boys were not looked at positively, as shown by how they generally referred to them, e.g., those doing building were referred to as “Mabhiridha” and those doing agriculture were referred to as “Madhomeni,” a term derived from demonstrators in agriculture. These were used in a rather derogatory manner. As a result, parents focus more on academic subjects, even when they are consulting, than practical subjects.

The practical subjects were upgraded after independence: Fashion and Fabrics was now called Textile Technology and Design at A Level, Food and Nutrition was now called Food Science at A Level, Agriculture retained its original name, and together with Technical Drawing is being offered at A Level. Despite these improvements, the attitude towards practical subjects did not change much.

#### **4. The extra costs of practical subjects**

Other factors that emanate from the culture surrounding practical subjects in Zimbabwe have continued to make parents view practical subjects negatively. These include the fact that practical subjects carry an extra cost, which is a deterrent factor for parents and guardians. As the economy melts down, most practical subjects are facing challenges in having enough material to carry out the practicals. Parents are often made to pay extra for materials for practice before examinations are written, leading to resentment of the practical subjects.

#### **5. The culture of using some practical subjects as a way of punishing offenders**

To make matters worse, some practical subjects are being used negatively as a way of punishing offenders; for example, in some instances, the garden is used as a form of punishment for those who break school rules, leading to resentment of this particular practical among learners (Chiweshe et al. 2013).

#### **6. The behavior of the donor fraternity**

The behaviors of the donor fraternity as well as the current job recruitment practices by potential employers in Zimbabwe have further aggravated the people’s views on practical subjects. It has been observed that in 2012, all Zimbabwean secondary schools received books from a non-governmental organization (NGO), but no practical books were donated. It could have been because practical books are difficult to handle, but this did not help the situation.

#### **7. Recruitment practices by some potential employers**

Some potential employers have developed a certain tendency to publicly declare that certain practical subjects are not relevant when they are recruiting. This has been noted in the Sunday Mail as a certain tendency to publicly declare that certain practical subjects are not relevant when they are recruiting. This has been noted in the Sunday Mail of January 6, 2013, where certain health institutions, while advertising for a nursing training program, specified that passes in woodworking, fashion and fabrics, and metalworking were not requirements. Chiweshe et al. (2013). The same applies to some government departments, like the security sector. This has a negative effect in the sense that learners would view these practical subjects as useless and, given a choice, would not want to pursue them. As a result, a few learners would pursue practical subjects up to A level.

## 8. **Some practical subjects end up at O level.**

As Chimwayange (2005) noted, some practical subjects are offered only up to O Level and do not proceed to A Level, thereby creating a gap between tertiary institutions and the schools. Those who wish to pursue these studies further find no purpose in pursuing a subject that one then has to drop at O-Level. This has led many learners not to pick up such practical subjects.

## 9. **Assigning practical subjects to those who would have failed grade 7**

Some schools, when assigning students subjects in Form 1, tend to assign practical subjects to those learners who would not have performed well at Grade 7. This has two effects. First, it perpetuates the colonial legacy that practical subjects are for those who cannot perform well in academic subjects. Secondly, it also leads to poor results in practical subjects, leading to further resentments toward these subjects and thereby perpetuating the hatred of practical subjects. All these factors have led to a strong culture of inequality and resentment of practical subjects in secondary schools in Zimbabwe, thereby strengthening the culture of gender inequality.

### **The negative effects of the culture of gender inequality**

Many scholars have pointed to the effect of persistent gender inequality in the community (Chibaya et al. 2009; Maunganidze 2020; Nani and Radipere 2016; and Makwanise and Masuku 2014). The study by Chibaya et al. (2009) revealed that, due to a culture of gender inequality, women are underrepresented in school leadership positions. The study revealed that as of June 2004, there were 246 secondary school heads in Masvingo Province, but of these, 5.6% were female heads, and 3.25 were female deputy heads. In primary schools, there were a total of 693 heads, of which 9.81% were female and 8.08% were female deputy heads. This clearly shows that a culture of gender inequality has a negative effect that is far-reaching, despite the fact that they were more than qualified for the jobs. They cited gender stereotype reasons like family attachment, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and lack of support (Chibaya 2009). This study thus demonstrates that the issue of gender inequality is a form of violence that can ruin learners even in their adult lives.

Another study by Maunganidze (2020) demonstrated the negative effect of gender inequality in the lives of Zimbabwean women in the practice of law. Maunganidze pointed out that women in law practice have not been spared from the effects of a constraining culture. The study pointed out that 30% of practicing lawyers in Zimbabwe are women, despite the fact that law schools are enrolling more females than males. The nature of the legal profession has contributed to the work role stressors and the profit-driven focus of the profession; hence, married women find it difficult to copy. As a result of the patriarchy and gender traditional roles in Zimbabwe, these women are forced to adapt to the situation in four different ways, including by pulling out and conceding, thereby depriving themselves of what they can actually do. This is a form of violence against women. Thus, gender inequality has far-reaching consequences, hence the need to confront it in a more radical way.

Another long-term effect of gender inequality in practical subjects in secondary schools was revealed in a study by Nani and Radipere (2016), which showed that entrepreneurs were still aligned towards gender-based businesses. The study's findings

showed that more women initiated businesses in the previously female-dominated sectors, while more men initiated businesses in the previously male-dominated sectors. This again demonstrates the negative effect of gender inequality when it comes to choosing. The same trend manifests almost in every sector; even in agriculture, it was noted that 87% of the beneficiaries of the recent land distribution were men, and of the remaining percentage, part of it was co-owned and only a small percentage was allocated to women (Makwanise and Masuku 2014). Gender inequality is thus a subtle form of violence that can only be identified by its effect: women being absent from leadership positions, women being poorer than men, women not venturing into more profitable ventures. This calls for a more radical approach to confronting the culture of gender inequality.

### **The potential of practical subjects in Zimbabwe**

Practical subjects are really necessary in Zimbabwe because the economy has gone largely informal. There has been a lot of controversy over the unemployment rate in Zimbabwe, with some projecting it to be as high as 95% while others put it at 5.8% by the year 2020. The problem is the economy has shifted to being largely informal, with the government counting people like vendors in the informal sector as employed while other sectors consider only those formally employed and receiving payslips as being employed. Nevertheless, to survive, people in Zimbabwe need skills that can only be obtained through practical subjects. If girls continue to be sidelined in choosing practical subjects, this will have negative consequences in the future. The government of Zimbabwe has put a lot of emphasis on the importance of practical subjects, as shown by their presence in the recent curriculum. The minister of education has recently called for the commercialization of practical subjects in schools (Herald reporter 2020). The minister reiterated that agriculture is expected to be a key enabler in line with government policy. Another subject expected to revive industry was metal work, and the minister painted a vision of schools partnering with the private sector. If gender inequality in practical subjects persists, girls are likely to continue to be sidelined in the major sectors that drive the economy.

### **THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The survey done at two secondary schools, Mpopoma and Msiteli, revealed that students were aware that they had a choice, as per a ministry directive, when it came to choosing their own practical subjects. They were able to identify all the practical subjects being offered in their respective schools. These are: food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics, metal work, wood work, building, technical graphics, and agriculture.

Interviews with teachers at both schools have revealed that, thanks to a lot of hard work from the Ministry of Education, students are now allowed to choose the subjects they want to do. This comes from a background where boys were only allowed to do certain practical subjects; some were considered for girls only, which acted as a sort of violence since they could not pursue the careers they really wanted. This also applies to practical subjects, where girls are now encouraged to take up subjects such as metal work (MW) and wood work (WW), which were formerly dominated by boys, and likewise, boys are encouraged to take up subjects like fashion and fabrics (FF) and food and nutrition (FN), which were once dominated by girls. One interviewee from Mpopoma stated that there are some boys who are doing fashion and fabrics, food, and nutrition, while some



girls are now venturing into woodworking and technical drawing. However, despite the ministerial efforts, there are fewer boys in FF and FN compared to girls, and fewer girls in metal work, wood work, and technical graphics (TG) compared to boys. At Mpopoma, only a few defy the tradition by opting for these subjects, while others drop out along the way. One informant from the same school noted that boys who opt for FF and FN drop off down the line, while girls who opt for WW also, in the long run, drop these subjects. At Msiteli, one informant noted that in class they have equal opportunities and girls are even doing better in sciences than boys; however, the challenge lies with practical subjects. While there is a good response from boys opting to do FF and FN, girls are not willing to do metal work or wood work. Even the boys who attempted to do FF and FN are not many, not more than five per stream.

Two reasons have emerged as to why the students drop these practical subjects, one of them being the attitude of parents who discourage their children from crossing traditional lines. There is always a push from home and the community along gender lines to let them drop the subjects. One informant recalls how some boys in Form 2 opted for FF and FN but, due to discouragements from home, had to drop these subjects. As noted above, practical subjects have been culturally viewed from a gender perspective, and parents and guardians would disapprove if a child crossed floors in terms of choosing a practical subject. This is in line with the findings of Mahamood et al. (2012), cited by Chiweshe et al. (2013), who, in a study of parental aspirations in Malaysia, found that parents are important predictors of children's academic and social development, especially in making decisions about the children's education. Utterances that are negative concerning a practical subject will result in their children viewing that subject negatively.

Another reason is the attitude of teachers who teach these practical subjects. According to one informant, some teachers are not happy when girls attempt to do woodwork, metalwork, and technical graphics. These teachers at times tend to blame the girls for the low pass rates; hence, they have negative attitudes towards girls in these areas. When asked why there was a drop in the pass rate of a particular practical subject, one male teacher stated that

“How do you expect the results to improve when you are busy sending girls to do metal work?” As long as you continue sending girls to do this subject, don't expect the pass rate to improve.”

This comment alone speaks volumes as to the attitude of some teachers who teach these practical subjects.

One informant stressed the importance of marketing these subjects to the students, especially the girls, so that they can take them up. Students are willing to take up the subjects of their choice regardless of gender, but what is standing in their way is the tradition that is embedded in the attitudes of their parents and some teachers. A lot of effort is therefore required to change the attitude of the educators themselves towards these practical subjects. There is also a need not only to teach but to live gender equity. As Chiweshe et al. (2013) have observed, there are few female teachers in positions of leadership, and even among the teachers who teach practical subjects, in most cases those who teach metal work and wood technology are males while those who teach FN and FF are females.

### **FIGHTING GENDER INEQUALITY THE WAY FORWARD**

A lot of research has been done in the area of gender inequality in the area of practical subjects. The table below summarises some of the five selected researches done and the possible suggested solutions or recommendations

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Focus of study</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Nani and Sibanda (2019)	Whether choice of practical subjects was still a gendered phenomenon	-the need to intensify campaigns to demystify gender stereotyping -conducting school audits on practical subjects -the need to continue engaging various stakeholders
Chiweshe, et al (2013)	How history of practical subjects continues to cause practical subjects to be viewed negatively	-society should be sensitised about the importance of practicals in school and in life after school through regular and consistent career guidance -Ministry of Education Sports and Culture should consider offering all practical subjects up to A Level
Akpakwu et al, (2014)	Gender equity and its implications for the curriculum, teaching and classroom intervention	-There is need for teachers, NGOs and CBOs to work alongside parents and communities to think about the way they can support boys and girls to learn well(clubs have been suggested)
Mapuranga and Chikumbu (2015)	Low performance of girls in Zimbabwean schools	-There is need to resocialise families and communities into a new order where gender equality is the norm.
Chimwayange(2005)	Factors affecting fourth form girls' participation and achievement in design and technology subjects	-There is need by curriculum planners to overhaul the present design and technology and technical subjects curricula to make them appeal to both genders

		<p>-the culture of design and technology subjects should change to open itself more fully to girls so that they encounter the subject free of gender stereotypes</p> <p>-gender issues should be taught in schools to re-orient teachers, especially male teachers and boys on gender issues and appropriate conduct in mixed gender situations</p> <p>-there is need for policy change from prevailing notions of education for employment to education for empowerment</p>
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The recommendations passed above are very relevant, and most of them are to the point; however, there are a few challenges. One of them is the fact that in Zimbabwe generally, there is a low and slow uptake of research. It means most of the findings of research on critical issues find themselves gathering dust or even end up being thrown away. Even those research projects sanctioned by the government, e.g., the Nziramasanga Commission (1999), took more than a decade to be implemented. The author does concur with the recommendations to re-socialize families and communities into a new order of gender equity, as most of the authors above concur, but it takes more than a recommendation to fight a culture of inequality. I therefore propose a further step by first suggesting a paradigm shift in terms of gender research that allows for a practical solution in the form of action research focusing on gender inequality and a practical step-by-step intervention guide to fight gender inequality.

### **ACTION RESEARCH**

The origins of action research are uncertain, but generally scholars agree that it originated in the 1940s. The term action research was first used by a German social psychologist, Kurt Lewin, in 1946 (O'Brien 2001). Since then, Lewin has been regarded as the father of action research. Lewin had a special interest in social problems and focused on participatory group processes for addressing conflict, crises, and change generally within organizations. He believed that action research consisted of a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action.

Another major contribution from the immediate postwar era came from Eric Trist, a social psychiatrist who initially applied action research to the civil repatriation of German prisoners of war. He and his colleagues tended to focus on large-scale, multi-organizational problems (O'Brien 2001). Both Lewin and Trist applied their research to systemic change within and between organizations, emphasizing direct professional-client collaboration and affirming the role of group relations as the basis for problem solving. They were both strong supporters of the view that decisions are best implemented

by those who help make them. These views contain the fundamental doctrine of action research.

By the end of the mid 1970s, four main streams of action research had emerged; the traditional, contextual, radical and educational action research.

1. The traditional stemmed from Lewin's work within organisations, it encompasses the concepts and practices of field theory, group Dynamics, T-Groups and the clinical model. T-Groups also known as training groups were groups formed to encourage group discussion and decision making. In these groups, the participants could treat each other as peers. Likewise the clinical model involved practicing practitioners who would then exchange ideas and experience, the aim was to achieve job satisfaction. Due to the growing importance of labour relations management, action research was applied in the areas of organisational development, social technical systems and organisational democracy (O'Brien 2001). This traditional approach has a tendency of conservatism, tries generally to maintain the status quo with regards to power structures in the organisation.
2. Contextual action research emerged from the work of Trist on relations between organisations. It entails reconstituting the structural relations among actors in a social environment. It tries to involve all affected parties and from this approach came the concept of organisational ecology.
3. Radical action research is linked to Marxism, coming from the "Dialectical Materialism" and the praxis orientation of Gramsci. It has a strong focus on emancipation and the overcoming of power imbalances (O'Brien 2001).
4. Educational action research has its foundations in the writings of Dewey, the great American educational philosopher of the 1920s and the 1930s who believed that professional educators should become involved in community problem solving. This is often seen when university action researchers work with primary and secondary school teachers and students on community projects.

Thus the intervention I propose to retains some features of traditional action research in the sense that the structures are not going to be tempered with. There is a lot of contextual approach in the sense that everyone concerned from the pupils to the ministry of education will be involved and will have a say on the research. By virtue of the project looking at gender inequality in schools, it thus also typifies educational action research. The phenomenon under study is educational, students and teachers need to be involved. This research does not fall under radical action research; the aim is not to address imbalances radically though an element of transforming violence can be seen.

### **GOALS AND PRINCIPLES OF ACTION RESEARCH**

The goals of action research are clearly explained by Gaventa (1988: 7 cited by Hall 1993). According to Gaventa participatory action research attempts to breakdown the distinction between the researchers and the researched, the subjects and objects of knowledge production by the participation of the people-for-themselves in the process of gaining and creating knowledge. Thus in this process, research is seen not only as a process of creating knowledge but simultaneously, as education and development of consciousness, and of mobilisation for action. The same sentiments are echoed by Green *et.al* (2003) who define the process as systemic inquiry with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied for purpose of education and taking action or effecting a change. Thus the goals

of action research are to solve community problems while involving the people and learning in the process.

These goals of action research are in line with its principles or how it works. Israel *et.al* (1998) listed some of the principles of action research

1. It recognizes community as a unity of identity. It means action research works explicitly with communities whether geographical area or geographically dispersed but bound by a common feature.
2. It builds on strength and resources within the community. Research should explicitly identify, support and reinforce social structures, processes and knowledge already existing in the community that helps them work together and improve their lives.
3. It facilitates collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research. Community members should be involved in every phase they want to participate in. This includes but not limited to problem definition, data collection, interpretation of results and application of results to address community concerns. All parties should influence the whole research process.
4. It integrates knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all parties. All parties must have a commitment to applying the research results to a social change effort intended to benefit all parties.
5. It promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities. The inherent inequalities between researchers and marginalised communities should be recognised and there must be an attempt to address these by emphasizing knowledge of community members and sharing information, resources and decision making power
6. It involves a cyclical and iterative process. The research should involve trust-building, partnership development and maintenance in all phases of the research.
7. It disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners in respectful and understandable language that acknowledges all participants' contributions and ownership of the knowledge production.

## **PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS FIGHTING A GENDER INEQUALITY CULTURE**

Unless practical action is taken, gender inequality will continue to be the norm in the area of practical subjects in schools. The author therefore proposes the following step by step approach to intervention in schools;

### **1. Stakeholder Analysis**

As noted above most of the research is not all inclusive, it focuses more on girls and other stakeholders' views are absent. The first step therefore is the identification of all relevant stakeholders. These include the government, teachers, parents, learners, NGOs, CBOs, peers and any other relevant stakeholder depending on the nature of the school.

### **2. Selection of an Advisory Team**

The advisory team should be made up of different people from different stakeholders, teachers, government officials etc. as noted above. This is the team that will be working together for the success of the intervention project.

### **3. Survey of the issues involved in gender inequality**

There is need of carrying out a survey on the gender issues around practical subjects. This can be done in the form of distributing a well-crafted questionnaire followed up by focus group discussions by the volunteers.

### **4. Volunteers from different stakeholders**

For the intervention to succeed there is need for volunteers who are willing to take part. There is however need to limit the volunteers for the sake of progress and to ensure gender equality from the word go.

### **5. Deciding the way forward and Implementation**

The advisory committee, and the volunteers will sit down and pave the way forward in terms of whether a club should be formed which can only be done after thorough research this make action research a better option than the ordinary research which just suggest recommendations. The advisory committee basing on the results will decide what to be done and how it can be done, i.e. the intervention process.

### **6. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing process the idea is to monitor and see how the intervention is going as well as making adjustments where necessary. This process can be cyclical. The idea is to start with one school within a locality and then if there is success move on to another.

Intervention requires hard work and resources but it seems the best way forward to fight this constraining culture of gender inequality in Zimbabwean schools. Mere recommendations without proper action will not take us far there is a need to experiment with intervention programmes involving all stakeholders this might lead to the breakthrough needed in fighting gender inequality in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research done at two secondary schools in Bulawayo revealed that learners are still being pressurised to choose practical subjects stereotypically assigned to them according to gender. Due to the effort from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education learners are now aware of all the practical subjects being offered and their freedom to choose any practical subject. Unfortunately due to a culture of gender inequality those who attempted to cross the floor were forced to drop the subject. The author views this gender inequality as a form of violence which needs to be confronted practically. This calls for a paradigm shift in terms of research where action research intervention is advocated for. Although government effort is now paying dividend according to reviewed literature, the author feels the progress is too little and too slow hence the need for a suggested step by step practical approach to curb gender inequality in practical subjects in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

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