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## CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Factors affecting the participation of rural male students in two vocational subjects in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** This study focused on the factors that affect rural male students' participation in Fashion & Fabrics and Food & Nutrition in Zimbabwe. The qualitative research design grounded in the interpretive paradigm was used to generate relevant data. The three data generating instruments used were interviews and observation guides as well as document analysis. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. It was found out that male students have negative perceptions, which emanate from peer pressure. They also lack interest in the subject because the way they are socialized forces them to think that these practical subjects are feminine; there are no male teachers who teach the subject who would act as role models to the students; and parents and siblings do not support them as they consider the subjects to be expensive. It is recommended that responsible authorities are to erect suitable infrastructure for practical subjects and carry out fund raising activities in order to raise money to purchase practical subject materials. Workshops, seminars and career guidance are to be carried out to educate the students on the importance of these practical subjects in order to increase male students' participation.

**Subjects:** Education; Educational Research; Classroom Practice; Curriculum Studies



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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anna Gudyanga: Research interests: Gender Issues, HIV/AIDS Education, Curriculum Issues in Science Education, Education and Transformation, Socialization in Children, Identity Formation and Adolescent Development

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Fashion and Fabrics (F & F) and Food, and Nutrition (F & N) enable students to be job creators and not seekers. In an effort to abate unemployment among school leavers, the Zimbabwean government reviewed the vocational programme making it skill-intensive to produce a multi-skilled workforce capable of working in teams for servicing the development needs of society. F & F enables development of skills in designing, construction and caring for clothes; entrepreneurship and draft patterns; apply skills in the construction of well-finished garments. F & N develops skills that encourage conservation of food nutrients in preparation of balanced meals. Students creatively use available traditional foods; prevention of deficiency diseases prevalent in Zimbabwe; plan, prepare and serve balanced meals, including special diets, for all stages of human development and for specific occasions; apply management and organisational skills to food preparation. Hence, rural male students should equally participate in these subjects.

| **Keywords:** factors; participation; fashion & fabric; food & nutrition; rural

### 1. Introduction

There is a low participation of male students in Fashion & Fabrics (F & F) and Food & Nutrition (F & N). F & F and F & N are some of the practical subjects done in Zimbabwean schools starting from grade five (primary level) until university level. These are some of the vocational subjects that were advocated by various commissions (e.g. Phelps-Stroke Commission in the 1920s and the Nziramasanga Commission of 1999) in the education system of Zimbabwe to address skills' gaps at various stages in the history of the country. A review of recommendations demonstrate how vocational education has taken center stage in the education system of the country.

F & F is one of the vocational subjects done in Zimbabwe. It is an area of Home Economics, which deals with the study of fashion, clothing, fibres and crafts. According to the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) (2018), this subject imparts an understanding of the various clothing needs of the Zimbabwean population and is a foundation for further studies related to textiles and textile technology. It is a gateway to many professions in the textile industry and develops skills for self-reliance and consumer competence. This subject stresses the use of locally available materials in the construction of garments and other household goods. F & F enables students to develop: skills in designing, construction and caring for clothes and household goods; entrepreneurship and managerial skills; design and draft patterns; the application of the knowledge and skills acquired in the course in the construction of well-finished garments; and, finally, the ability to explain the efficient use of locally available resources in an income generating scheme.

F & N is also one of the vocational subjects done in Zimbabwe. It is an area of Home Economics, which deals with foods and their nutritive values. According to the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) (2018), this subject creates an understanding of the various nutritional needs of the developing Zimbabwean population and promotes self-reliance in food-related activities. It gives a strong foundation for further studies in food-related disciplines and is a gateway to many professions such as catering and nutrition services. It stresses the use of indigenous and other locally available foods. F & N students explain the cause and prevention of deficiency diseases prevalent in Zimbabwe as well as planning, preparing and serving balanced meals, including special diets, for all stages of human development; plans and prepares meals for specific occasions; prepares, cooks and serves nutritious and attractive dishes using indigenous and other locally available foods; and applies management and organizational skills.

The idea of vocational education in Zimbabwe was first suggested by the Phelps-Stroke Commission in the 1920s. The Commission made numerous recommendations for improving access and quality of education for black Africans. It recommended, among other things, that vocationally oriented education was best suited for the blacks' socio-economic backgrounds (Norrag, 2010). Even though the recommendations of Thomas Jesse Jones, the then president of the Commission, were ignored, it laid a solid foundation for the advocacy of vocational education in colonial Zimbabwe. Several other commissions that followed (Kerr and Judges Commissions) reiterated the need to vocationalize the education system (Nziramasanga, 1999).

Vocational education is defined as an organized educational program offering a sequence of courses, which are directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment, and it has become an imperative part of the education curriculum in Zimbabwe and the world as a whole. Vocational education is skills training aimed at producing workers who can use their minds and their hands. In other words, it is training designed to advance individuals' general proficiency in their occupations. It is instruction intended to prepare persons for industrial and commercial occupations (Gudyanga, 2014). Vocationalization is efforts by the education system "to include in its curriculum those 'practical' subjects which are likely to generate basic knowledge, skills and

dispositions that prepare learners to become skilled workers or to enter the other manual occupations” (Museva, 1989 cited in Gudyanga, 2014, p. 104). Vocational education therefore refers to the teaching of procedural knowledge based on manual or practical activities totally related to a specific trade or occupation. The student learns to participate actively in doing things through experience acquired through training.

It is this type of training which contributes to the creation of a pool of vocational manpower necessary for economic development and international competitiveness. The researchers argue here that vocational training should be related to job availability and assessed needs. Vocational education in Zimbabwe is designed to relate to the skill requirements in the labour market and to develop competences and entrepreneurial attitudes. Vocational education is a vital tool for personal development and is a preparation and training for useful employment in trade, industries, agriculture, business and home making which emphasizes preparing one for self-reliance (Azubuike, 2011).

A number of factors, which include a predominantly informal economy in the country as well as the world of work’s emphasis on technically able employees, made it necessary to vocationalize the education system. However, it seemed there is gender stereotyping when it comes to choosing of vocational subjects, especially F & F and F & N, by students. These practical subjects are mostly done by female students at the expense of male students. Normally, in F & F and F & N classes the number of male students may range from zero to three out of a total class of between 16 to 30 students. We have observed this trend from our time as students at O Level, about twenty years ago, to the present time.

Table 1 shows that the participation of male students in F & F and F & N is very low. There are very few male students, especially in rural areas, who are taking up vocational subjects, especially F & F and F & N, yet the reality in the world of work is that both men and women have been employed alike in the clothing and textiles industry (Azubuike, 2011).

Against this background also lies the reality that the school curriculum inherited by the post-independence government of Zimbabwe was modelled on the British system of education. According to Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2013), Zimbabwean girls were being educated for domesticity whilst boys were prepared for employment. Boys and girls were taught different practical and vocational subjects with boys having to study technical subjects such as metalwork, woodwork, agriculture, technical graphics and agriculture and being encouraged to pursue science subjects whilst girls were offered domestic science subjects like F & F, F & N, typing and shorthand (Nziramasanga, 1999). Thus, the education system carried with it an air of gender segregation that was perpetuated by societal beliefs (Nziramasanga, 1999). The choice of practical subjects that students did was determined by those undeclared beliefs that existed in societies, in families and even at school (Kamadza, 2011).

There are a lot of males employed in the clothing industry and restaurants (Azubuike, 2011). However, at secondary school, especially in rural areas, few male students opt for either F & F or F & N (Table 1). The researchers were therefore prompted and motivated to carry out this study to find out the factors causing the low participation of rural male students in F & F and F & N in secondary schools, in Zimbabwe.

### **1.1. Rationale and research questions**

F & F and F & N are examples of Home Economics subjects. Home Economics is the study of the relationship between people and aspects of their environment such as clothing, housing and finance. Okpack (2005) describes Home Economics as a skill-oriented, decision-making subject that equips learners with skills and knowledge to enable them to be self-employed and at the same time contribute effectively to socio-economic development of the family and society at large.

The aim of F & F and F & N at secondary school was to teach the learners how to strategically plan and used available resources in his/her environment and improved his/her home, family and

**Table 1. Participation of male students in F & F and F & N in Zvimba District**

Year	Form	Number of students doing F & N	Male students	% of male students	Number of students doing F & F	Number of male students	% of male students
2017	4	20	2	10	22	2	9.1
	3	22	1	4.5	12	1	8.3
	2	24	2	8.3	18	2	11.1
	1	21	1	4.8	20	0	0
2016	4	26	0	0	18	0	0
	3	24	2	8.3	16	1	6.3
	2	25	0	0	23	2	8.7
	1	21	1	4.8	19	1	5.3
2015	4	19	2	10.5	22	2	9.1
	3	26	1	3.8	26	3	11.5
	2	24	2	8.3	21	1	4.8
	1	26	0	0	23	2	8.7
2014	4	19	1	5.3	16	0	0
	3	21	2	9.5	22	2	9.1
	2	26	1	3.8	19	1	5.3
	1	23	1	4.4	22	2	9.1

Source: Statistics from two of the sampled schools in Zvimba District

societal needs (Osifeso, 2004). Practical subjects in the school curriculum also provide students with an apprenticeship. F & F and F & N, if properly implemented, would equip learners with strategies for earning income in the future (Mberengwa, 2004). The aim of these practical subjects is to enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques for meeting their personal and societal needs. Therefore, Home Economics can generally be described as a group of subjects that equip learners with knowledge and skills that enable learners to be self-employed or effectively participate in the industries for family and/or societal benefits. Furthermore, when students have acquired the knowledge and skills of these practical subjects they would be able to earn a living and sustain their families through sewing the clothes for their families or even selling the clothes they made. If rural male students participate in large numbers in doing F & F and F & N, then rural to urban migration that is rampant in Zimbabwe may be minimised since students who acquire these skills would create jobs.

According to Ukpore (2006), food and clothing are some of the basic needs of people, which influence an individual's health, wellness and status. The aim of F & F (Clothing and Textiles) is to help learners acquire knowledge, skills and techniques for meeting personal and societal clothing needs. When one has failed academically, one could make use of the practical subjects learnt at school to earn a living for one's family. Through the subject of F & F, students would be trained for home making and employment in textile mills and clothing factories (Zimbabwe School Examination Council, 2018). The learners are equipped with the knowledge for home making or employment in any clothing factory. If one is knowledgeable about home making one would be able to do work like cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing or selling clothes to earn a living.

F & N is a skill oriented, decision-making subject that equips learners with the skills and knowledge which help them to be self-reliant. It contributes effectively to the socio-economic development of the family, society and the nation at large (Kamadza, 2011).

There is also the tendency that the rate of acculturation will be enhanced with the study of clothing and textiles. For instance, the massive increase in tourism has led many foreigners to have an interest in buying traditional Zimbabwean textiles and artefacts (Nderezina, 2012). We believe that when F & F is enhanced, domestic earnings are increased. The effectiveness of the textiles industry in the country as one of the economy's means for survival can improve if students at secondary schools—both boys and girls—are encouraged to do F & F. A holistic approach towards this subject could also stop the smuggling of second hand clothes (*mazitye*) into the country.

There is also a campaign dubbed the “Buy Zimbabwe Initiative” which is encouraging Zimbabweans to buy locally manufactured goods so as to retain the little forex we have instead of importing those products we can manufacture locally (Majaka, 2015). This is also being done to encourage Zimbabweans to be self-reliant and be able to manufacture goods for export purposes as well. To achieve this, students should be encouraged to do vocational subjects at school, F & F and F & N, included.

At the moment we have observed that in Zimbabwe formal employment is hard to come by since most factories and industries have closed down. The few that are surviving cannot absorb all the graduates and school leavers lined up for the job market (Majaka, 2015). Therefore, the only solace is self-employment, which would be possible only if relevant practical skills were learnt at school. Given this reality, both male and female students should be encouraged to participate in equal numbers in vocational subjects, F & F and F & N in particular, regardless of gender.

It is hoped that this study will help more boys to participate in F & F and F & N at rural secondary schools and in the country as a whole. The study will also enable teachers, parents and school administrators to encourage more male students to take up F & F. The study is also very important because it will help the policy makers and curriculum developers to make all technical and vocational subjects gender-sensitive and accommodative.

The study was guided by the following research questions: -

- (1) What are the perceptions of male students towards F & F and F & N?
- (2) What are the attitudes of male students towards F & F and F & N?
- (3) What are the other factors that cause low participation of male students in F & F in schools?

### **1.2. Theoretical perspective**

Social Learning Theory (SLT) is premised on the fact that learning is a social commitment and that learning within a Community of Practice (CoP) “shapes not only what we do but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). This implies that the development of one's identity either as male or female is closely integrated with the learning that takes place as a result of one's participation in a community. A CoP is a social group with a shared history, mutually engaged in a practice on an ongoing basis to advance the goals of some shared enterprise (Wenger, 1998). For individuals like male students, it means that learning is an engagement, which is situated within a specific culture and is a contribution to the practices of their communities. Wenger's (1998) social theory posits that individual learning is the development of modes of participating with others in society. Communities of practice are, therefore, a specific type of community that constitutes the most important arenas in which individuals learn. SLT is built on four assumptions about what matters in learning and about the nature of knowledge and knowing, including:

- *Humans are social beings* (a central aspect of learning);
- *Knowledge* is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises;
- *Knowing* is a matter of active engagement in the world; and

- *Meaning* is our ability to experience the world and to engage with it in a meaningful way (Wenger, 1998, p. 4).

These four assumptions conceptualize learning as an inter-play of four components mediated by social participation, namely: meaning (learning as experience), practice (learning as doing), community (learning as belonging) and identity (learning as becoming) (Wenger, 1998, p. 5).

## 2. Research methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design, which situates us, as the researchers, in the world of the participants in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Situating this study in a qualitative research design requires that the research process takes an insider perspective (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Henning, Van, and Smit (2004, p. 5) state that the qualitative researcher wants to “discover how human interactions take place, and why these interactions happen in the manner in which they do in certain situations.” Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and is primarily interpretive (Creswell, 2007, 2013).

The ultimate aim of the interpretivist research is to offer a perspective of the situation and to analyze the situation under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This provides insight into the way in which a particular group of people makes sense of their situation or the phenomenon they encounter (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Interpretive research does not seek to generalize settings to a broad population; rather the intention is to understand deeper structures that can be used to inform other settings (Spillane, 2000).

Purposive sampling was used to select two school heads, two F & F and two F & N teachers, ten O-level male students doing the two subjects and ten male students not participating in the subjects. The participating students were asked to narrate their life stories and experiences at home and at school in relation to their participation or non-participation in F & F and F & N. Participants shared their personal stories with us during interviews. They expressed their lived experiences and explained how they viewed themselves vis-à-vis their participation in F & F and F & N and what it meant to them to be part of a CoP. They did this by expressing their feelings, thoughts, aspirations, attitudes and perceptions about their reality.

Semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). The twenty-six participants were interviewed individually and the interview sessions, which were audiotaped, were at most thirty minutes each. The purpose of the individual interviews was to allow the students to unfold their narratives about their experiences with practical subjects in general and F & F and F & N in particular. The setting allowed the students to express themselves without interruptions. As researchers, we had room to explore participant responses by asking for clarification or additional information. We also had the freedom to be friendly and sociable.

Observation is a systematic process of recording the behavior and patterns of participation without necessarily questioning or communicating with the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). As a qualitative data generating technique, observation was used to enable researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being observed (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The risk is that observation by its very nature is highly selective and subjective since researchers focus on specific events or objects within the whole, thereby cutting them off from the whole (Creswell, 2007; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The risk of observation was minimized by formulating an observational schedule which was then used during the data generation process. Observation provided us with an insider perspective of the group dynamics and behaviors in different settings. Observation allowed us to hear, see, to begin to experience (observation) and reflect on (which is part of the interim data analysis) how setting is socially constructed in terms of “power, communication lines, discourse and language” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 84).

Tuchman (2011) says document analysis involves scrutinizing relevant documents, written or printed matter, verbal or in pictorial form. The document analysis was used as a data generating technique to analyze the respondents' perceptions, attitudes and responses about the challenges. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which the document is interpreted by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). It is a social research method and a vital tool used by researchers to interpret data. It is a systematic review of documents used in combination with interviews and observations. This was a low cost method of attaining data, unobtrusive and nonreactive.

We got ethical clearance from both Midlands State University and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. This enabled us to carry out our study in selected schools. Information provided by the respondents was confidentially kept or identifiable participants were held anonymous. By maintaining privacy, this helped to protect participants from potential harm or unpleasant experiences, such as psychological harm like embarrassment or distress. The participants were kept away from harm until the end of the research.

Data analysis is a process of inspecting, transforming and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, suggesting conclusions and supporting decision-making (Jack & Norman, 2009). The researchers used thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The generated data were categorized and tabulated according to the respondents. Data analysis in research mainly consists of preparing and organizing data (i.e. text data as in transcripts, or image data as in drawings or photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or in a discussion (Creswell, 2013). The goal in analyzing qualitative data was to summarize what we had seen and heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that aided our understanding of that which was emerging (Creswell, 2007; Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

### 3. Analysis of results and discussion

Table 2 indicates that there is a gender balance between heads of schools from the sample selected and no gender balance in students and their teachers. The students need guidance from their teachers. Teachers are mature enough to help the students and the heads of schools are also mature and well experienced to supervise their teachers and to guide the students.

#### 3.1. Perceptions of male students towards F & F and F & N

All the ten students not doing the subjects, all the five male students doing F & N and three out of five students doing F & F said that they have negative perceptions towards F & F and F & N as illustrated below:

Student 3 *I believe that these two practical subjects are supposed to be done by females since they help them to carry out household duties.*

Student 6 *All my friends laugh at me because I am doing F & N, which is supposed to be done by girls.*

Student 9 *My friends always say to me that I am a greedy person that is why I opted for F & N but when I come with what we have cooked; they would start to ask for some.*

Only two out of five students doing F & F said that they had positive perceptions towards the subject. Both heads of schools and all the four teachers agreed with what students had said, i.e. they have negative perceptions towards the subjects.

During lesson observation, the male students with negative perceptions did not participate during the lesson. They were making a noise while the teacher was teaching, and not following the instructions, which the teacher was giving. They did not write their classwork and were frequently going to the toilet. The behavior of male students with positive perceptions was better because they were trying to follow exactly what the teacher instructed them to do. They were obedient and did

**Table 2. Biographic data of the participants**

Category	Students	Teachers	School Heads
<b>Gender</b>	20 males	4 females	1 male & 1 female
<b>Age</b>	. 8 students 16 yrs. . 8 students 17 yrs. . 4 students 18 yrs.	. 35 years . 41 years . 28 years . 46 years	. male 52 years . female 46 years
<b>Experience</b>		9 years 12 years 2 years 13 years	20 years 14years
<b>Qualifications</b>	All doing form 4	All Diplomas in Education	Male, Masters in Education Female, Bachelor of Education Degree

their work. During observation we noted that there were no male teachers for the subjects. This strengthens the perception that the subject is for female students. Enrolment record books for both schools for 2016, class attendance registers and students' examination registration registers had far more female students, supporting the perception that F & F and F & N are feminine subjects.

The document analysis showed that eight of the ten male students doing the subjects with a negative perception frequently absented themselves from school. They do not do their work following the teachers' instruction. Their work is untidy and presented in a haphazard manner. They were not serious about their work. The two out of ten students with a positive perception tried their best and showed commitment with the way they presented their work, although they were not very good in the subject.

All the ten student doing the subjects and all the ten students not doing the subjects said that parents and peers are the ones who contribute a lot to their negative perceptions towards F & F or F & N as practical subjects. Both heads of schools and all the four teachers supported what the students had said.

All the twenty students said that their parents, siblings and their peers demotivate them from doing the subjects. One was quoted saying:

*F & F and F & N are feminine subjects.*

Student 7 said: *My friends as well as my brothers and sisters discourage and mock at me because of the fact that I am doing what they call a feminine practical subject.*

Some parents think that F & F and F & N are subjects done by incompetent students (Gordon, 2008). That is why they do not motivate their children to do the subjects. Gender stereotype has affected males' perceptions towards F & N and F & F at school (Okeke, 2006). Their parents and relatives still have a mentality of gender stereotype due to mythical beliefs. Male students do not regularly attend practical classes because of their myth and stereotypical beliefs that these practical subjects are feminine (Gordon, 2007). This myth was indicated by male students that stated that these practical subjects are feminine. Nowadays there is gender awareness aiming at gender equality, that is all children should be treated the same. Henceforth, if students opt to do either of the practical subjects, whether male or a female, they should be treated the same and their choices respected by parents, peers and relatives (Gordon, 2007).

The society gives different roles to children according to their sexes. Haralambos and Holborn (2008) opine that parents are the first and most important agents of children's behaviours,

followed by the school, church, public media and peers. Once stereotype characteristics are embedded in the children's minds, they are hard to erase. Hence, their perceptions towards the subject are negative. Chauraya (2012) states that gender stereotypes are socially constructed ideas or beliefs about men and women, which are not necessarily true but taken as true by society. Children do things by imitating what adults do. By not having male teachers in F & F and F & N departments sends wrong signals to the male students who might want to do the subject since they often emulate their teachers as their role models. The negative perception towards F & F and F & N is one of the factors causing low participation of rural male students in the subjects.

### **3.2. Attitudes of male students towards the practical subjects**

During interviews, only two out of twenty students (10%) had positive attitudes towards F & F and F & N. All the ten students who were not doing the subjects, all the five male students doing F & N and three out of five students doing F & F (eighteen out of twenty) said that they have negative attitudes towards the two subjects. They said that the subjects are meant for physically weak students and that the subjects do not require much effort, hence, female students are the right ones to do them since most boys despise the subjects.

Student 1 said: *I do not enjoy doing the subject.*

Student 5 *I do not enjoy doing F & N especially the cooking part because it is only supposed to be done by girls and women. More so, girls make fun of us saying that we are greed that is why we chose to do F & N as a practical subject.*

Student 4 said: *When I want to participate during question and answer sessions, our female counterparts laugh at us.*

One of the students not participating in the subjects said:

*Most of the pictures in the textbooks depict women either sewing or cooking and there are very few pictures found in recent books which show males doing practical work in both F & F and F & N as subjects.*

They added that the way a child is brought up determines his or her choice of practical subjects at school, sighting stereotyping to be the culprit in this regard. All the four teachers supported what students said. Two out of four teachers added that students lack vision when choosing subjects. They need guidance otherwise; their attitudes would remain negative towards F & F and F & N. One out of the four teachers cited lack of appropriate materials for the teaching and learning of the subject makes it unattractive to male students. The last teacher was of the opinion that male students prefer outdoor vocational subjects like Building and Agriculture, which require much physical effort compared with F & F and F & N. For example, she said:

*Boys always need labour intensive jobs so girls should do sewing and cooking.*

One out of two school heads stated that stereotyping was the major cause of male students' negative attitudes towards the subject because, when growing up, each child has his/her gender roles assigned to him/her according to their sexes, while the second one suggested lack of role models.

The negative attitudes of the male students were confirmed during lesson observation. School A revealed exactly what the interviews had shown that all the five students have negative attitudes towards the practical subjects. These male students sat in the corner of the classroom or at the back, not paying attention, busy making a noise, not ashamed that there was a visitor in their classroom. To emphasize their lack of interest in the subject, one of the researchers noticed that male students did not ask for permission from the teacher to go out of the classroom and took time to return for the lesson. Only two out of five male students at school B doing the

practical subjects showed an interest in the subjects. They attended their lessons on time, wrote notes, participated and concentrated in a pleasing manner.

During classroom observation, we noted that one book was being shared amongst three students at school A while at school B one book was being shared among six students. Not only were the books scarce, even the sewing machines and stoves were not enough. At school A, four students were using one sewing machine, one ironing board, one charcoal iron, three pairs of scissors, two sewing threads and a tape measure, while at school B a sewing machine was being used by six students, as well as one iron, one ironing board, one tape measure, one pair of scissors and a sewing thread.

In document analysis, teachers' registers showed that there is a lot of absenteeism by male students, especially for theoretical lessons, but few for practical lessons. They do not write most exercises and tests, especially if the teacher announced that they are having a test. They would then abscond the lesson, while their exercise books were not even covered, had torn pages and were badly presented with few notes. Their exercise and test books had a lot of zeros recorded clearly showing that they had a negative attitude towards the practical subjects. The teachers were urging them to write corrections but they did not show any efforts to do so. The converse was true for male students with positive attitudes. Fashion & Fabrics timetables were seen in both schools. Each lesson has thirty minutes. These are double periods for theory and four periods for practical. Students' performance record books were seen with five exercises and six tests, three practical and three theory exercises. Exercise books for both schools were analysed. We noted that male students were not doing corrections.

The students, teachers and school heads all alluded to stereotyping. Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) stated that boys and girls were taught different practical subjects. Subjects like Agriculture and Woodwork were labelled "masculine" while F & F, F & N were labelled "feminine". Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2013) postulates that some families and even teachers hold on to their traditions, thereby affecting practical subject choices made by students. Marshal (2007) observed that the attitude of parents towards the utility of what is learned at school affects the way children approach school work. In this regard, some parents do not want their children to do F & F and F & N at school. Students also succumb to peer pressure. When they see others not doing it they follow suit. Mwamwenda (2005) states that a student tends to learn better from another student because both students are open to each other and are free to reveal to each other their mistakes and their ignorance. So, when a subject is not attractive to some male students, others are eventually influenced.

Some male students like to do the practical subjects but due to lack of confidence they end up doing other practical subjects such as Agriculture or Building. They lack confidence because of the textbooks, which depict females more than males cooking and sewing garments. The study revealed that male students should not be blamed for showing negative attitudes towards the practical subjects because the society where they are groomed does influence their attitudes. Anene-Okeakwa (2002) observed that male students have a negative attitude towards F & F and F & N in the school. Some have little interest in the subjects and they drop them half way into their studies mainly because of general societal attitudes that see these vocational subjects as subjects for the under achievers who they believe are girls. The male students' responses towards the practical subjects indicated that they are mostly influenced by peer pressure and family background. Therefore, peer pressure and family background have a great influence on the male students' negative attitude. Students listen to their parents more than anyone else. Therefore, parents should be the ones encouraging their children in the taking of the practical subjects. Children need to be encouraged, especially from home, although the teachers should also motivate them.

From our experiences as mothers, children are supposed to obey their parents in the Zimbabwean tradition. This means that the male students are not 'free' from the influence of

their parents to explore alternatives as individuals. Their choices are generally negotiated with their parents, who are highly influential in the choices they make (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). They have to adopt what is grounded in the fabric of the community's culture.

Aguila and Krasny (2011, p. 219) note that a community is “a place of learning where practice is developed and pursued, meaning and enterprise are negotiated among members, and membership roles are developed through various forms of engagement and participation.” All twenty male participants, who were interviewed individually on different days, concurred that society confers a low status on F & F and F & N.

Lastly, one head suggested that possibly it is lack of male teachers as role models resulting in the teaching styles for the subject, which scare away male students. Chikowore (2012) adds that teaching styles in many schools remain traditional, teacher centered and rigid or even authoritarian. Thus, some students may hate the subject. When the researchers were doing observation at the two schools, they noted that students bought sewing materials and food stuffs on their own. This financial responsibility on the part of the parents may be another reason contributing to some parents having negative attitudes towards F & F and F & N. A perusal of the two schools' registers showed that in 2016 no male form four student ever enrolled or sat for an examination in F & F and F & N (see Table 1).

The data revealed that male students are not taking up these practical subjects. This implies negative attitudes. Lenchi (2004) notes that male students have a negative attitude in F & F and F & N. Myth stereotype seems to be the chief factor for their negative attitude in the said practical subjects. Male students think that these practical subjects are feminine subjects and as male students, they are supposed to do masculine subjects such as Metal Work, Agriculture and Woodwork (Lenchi, 2004). This is supported by Gordon (2007) when he said that male students do not regularly attend practical classes because of their stereotypical belief that these practical subjects are feminine. Okeke (2006) noted that negative attitude can drain one of enthusiasm and energy and can result in absenteeism and dodging.

Male students do not consider the study of F & F and F & N as important and they do not listen attentively during the lessons when they are being conducted (Gordon, 2007). We also noted this during the lesson observation because some of the male students would leave the classroom for about half the period accorded to the lesson on the pretext of visiting the ablution block, not paying attention during the lesson and some would be dozing or scratching each other. In concurrence, Okeke (2006) indicates that some students do not complete their practical assignments and projects because they take the practical subjects for granted.

In rural set-ups, where most schools are situated, money to send a child to school is a mammoth task for a parent let alone to burden them by telling them to buy materials for a subject. Lauglo (2004) noted that in Zimbabwe responsibility for facilities, equipment and consumables in practical subjects was shifted over to parents. This situation forces the parents to discourage their children—especially males—not to do the subject. They rather encourage them to do subjects like Agriculture and Woodwork. Vocational subjects by their very nature lack attraction to children because they lead to manual work, which is frowned at, by both the parents and children. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) postulate that parents whose children are performing better in academic subjects discourage them from pursuing vocational subjects. This group of parents think that F & F and F & N are subject for dull children whilst bright students should do subjects, which lead them to do office work or white-collar jobs.

The male students felt discouraged from doing these practical subjects due to the nature of teaching material used, especially the media. Instructional media used by teachers such as charts show women on sewing machines or cutting fabric. The pictures in their textbooks depict women either sewing or cooking and they are a great disappointment to the male students in that even

the classroom media should at least show males doing such activities so that they become encouraged. There is therefore a great necessity to ensure that the media used in the teaching of these subjects are not gender biased. By doing so, the perceptions of male students become positive and they feel involved and comfortable in learning F & N or F & F.

Furthermore, the study established that peer pressure is also accountable for student perceptions of F & F or F & N. This affects one's performance in other subjects since the nickname for example Jane or Susan given to one male student is now a label and is used by everyone at school. The male students are afraid of being laughed at by their peers and that is the reason they do not attend some of the F & N lessons. This results in them failing to register the subject for ZIMSEC final examinations due to fear of failure and segregation.

Nderezina (2012) blames socialization at home as the root cause of the trends that exist in secondary schools. Socialization has become a factor regarding male students' negative perceptions and attitudes towards the practical subjects. In the society where they come from, if people knew that one is doing any of these practical subjects they would practically demotivate one. Thus, society's point of view accounts for most of the male students' lack of self-commitment to these practical subjects. Students come from different backgrounds where they are groomed and socialized to different norms and values of their society (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). The study discovered that these stereotypes and labels made them feel out of CoP and erase all desire to attend lessons or actively get involved.

The quotes from the participants in the section above explicitly indicate that male students were culturally socialized to believe that the choice of F & F and F & N subjects at school is for female students only since they are not as intelligent as male students. According to Van Leuvan, "If the cultures of child-rearing practices are gender-stereotyped, then boys and girls will be brought up very differently from each other" (Van Leuvan, 2004, p. 249). People in the community are deeply rooted in their cultural beliefs and engage in practices, which reflect gender stereotyping, and gender-based role expectations. The parental resistance to male students choosing to study F & F and F & N seems to be culturally rooted in the fabric of society. Culture is "a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another ... the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 3).

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendations

The following conclusions were made:

**4.1.** It is concluded that male students perceive F & F and F & N to be feminine subjects. This perception originates from the way children are brought up in their society. Gender roles are ascribed to children as they grow up, resulting in subjects being classified as feminine or masculine. Moreover, at home the job of mending or maintenance of clothes is done by females. Additionally, there are no male teachers who are seen teaching these subjects and who would act as role models to the students and parents and siblings do not support these subjects as they consider the subjects to be expensive.

**4.2** Male students have negative attitudes towards F & F and F & N. Gender stereotyping by their parents is the major cause of this. Other male students prefer outdoor vocational subjects like Agriculture to F & F since most Zimbabwean schools are in rural areas where people survive on agriculture. Lack of enough materials also contributes to the negative attitudes of the male students towards the subjects.

**4.3** Other factors that contribute to male students' low participation are the socialization in their families and peer pressure, i.e. male students' negative perceptions and attitudes emanate from peer pressure and siblings. Financial difficulties force parents to have negative attitudes towards

F & F and F & N since students are made to buy their own sewing and food materials. Some parents do not want their children to do these subjects because they think that they are for those students who do not perform well in other subjects. All these result in low participation of rural male students in F & F and F & N in Zvimba District.

Identity includes not only our knowledge and experiences, but also our perceptions of ourselves,<sup>1</sup> others' perceptions of us, and our perceptions of others' perceptions of us that develop as we participate in communities with one another (Van Zoest & Bohl, 2008). We therefore define who we are by the way we experience ourselves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify ourselves (Wenger, 2010). It is from observing others in a CoP that one forms an idea of how new behavior should be performed and later this coded information serves as a guide for action in their CoPs. As such, our identities do not exist only within ourselves, but rather are strung between us and the others with whom we interact. Our identities (Van Zoest & Bohl, 2008, p. 320) are the "vehicles from within which we participate with others in community—vehicles that provide both potentials for and limitations to our participation, and that are modified as we learn and grow through mutual participation in joint enterprises with others." Researchers stress that students are active participants and learners in many different CoPs, in which they have formal and informal apprenticeship opportunities to learn the common language, conventions, rituals, stories and histories valued within each community. Rural male students in Zvimba District do not identify themselves with F & F and F & N as they interact in their Communities of Practice resulting in their low participation in the subjects.

It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in schools should make awareness campaigns and communities, educating both students and parents on the importance of vocational subjects, especially F & F and F & N. Teachers and heads of schools should conduct career guidance to enable male students to choose these subjects. Schools should do fundraising activities in order to raise money to purchase practical subject resources, such as having variety shows at school, selling foodstuffs and stationery and also selling uniforms at school. Textbook authors should design their books in a way to cater for both sexes. Workshops and seminars should be carried out to educate the students on the importance of these practical subjects in order to increase male students' participation F & F and F & N

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#### Note

1. i.e. our values, beliefs, desires, motivations, and self-identifications.

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### Appendix 1

#### Interview Guide for Male Students Taking and Not Taking Fashion & Fabrics and Food & Nutrition

- (1) What are your perceptions towards F & F and F & N?
- (2) What are your attitudes towards F & F and F & N?
- (3) What are the other factors that cause your low participation in F & F in schools?

### Appendix 2

#### Interview Guide for F & F Subject Teachers and School Heads

- (1) What are the perceptions of male students towards either F & F or F & N?
- (2) What are the attitudes of male students towards either F & F or F & N?
- (3) What other factors cause low participation of male students in F & F and/or F & N?

#### Observation Guide

School: A/B

Date:

Time:

1. The researcher will take note of the reactions of the male students during the lesson.

Punctuality ... ..

Participation ... ..

Corrections being done?

.....

2. The attitude of male students towards the practical subjects

.....

a. Attendance of lessons by students

.....

b. Number of male students who were present during the lesson

.....

2. Factors causing low participation of male students towards either F & F or F & N

.....

b. The males' attitude during the lesson

.....  
.....

c. The number of male students who were participating during the lesson

.....  
.....

f. Male students' behavior during the lesson

.....  
.....

**Document Analysis Guide**

1) Class attendance register

.....  
.....  
.....

2) Marked exercises and tests

a) Exercise books- corrections being done?

.....  
.....

b) Performance

.....  
.....

c) Number of exercises done per week

.....  
.....

3) Sex of teachers teaching these subjects

.....

4) Pictures in textbooks used

.....

5) Charts and media used

.....



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