

**HIGH FEMALE DROPOUT RATE FOR ART AND DESIGN: A CASE OF
ORDINARY LEVEL CLASSES IN MASVINGO URBAN, ZIMBABWE**

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Abstract

This study interrogates the circumstances surrounding high female dropout rate from Art and Design at O' level in Zimbabwe. Many studies have long established that there are perceived gender disparities between boys and girls in academic pursuits but little or no attention had focused on examining the un foreseen power forcing girls' high dropout from Art. The case study exploited the interpretive research philosophy as a relevant empirical method for this study which attempts to unearth and understand present status of a social phenomena from how O' level girls from Masvingo urban schools have interpreted the circumstances in Art learning and the value of Art education for themselves. The results showed that various pedagogical, economic and socio-cultural factors militate against girls pursuing Art. This study has therefore advanced knowledge establishing circumstances in the secondary schools which favour boys in pursuing Art and encourage high girls' dropout rate. The study revealed that in addition to pre-conceived gender inequality attitudes and identities held by learners, the teachers' methodological approaches and attitudes also offer an unseen force against girl learners' artistic persuasions. Therefore, the study recommends teachers to critically reflect on the need for active learning which emphasizes on less teacher talk and more student participation, that is, a child centred approach as motivational strategy to generate esteemed feminine gender perception and self-initiated interest in Art. The subject teacher is recommended to employ several tactics which motivate and promote equal opportunities for the girl learner in Art.

Keywords: Gender, Dropout, Art, Stereotyping, Patriarchy

Introduction

Year after year in Zimbabwe more girls than boys register to study Ordinary level (O' level) Art from form 3 level but worryingly fewer girls write the O' level examination at the end of the two years. As a result there are fewer female enrolments into art related programs at tertiary levels and beyond. Many studies have shown that there is gender discrepancy in female representation at tertiary level, but little focus and attention has been given to

investigate when, where and why along the learning continuum did the proportion tilt in favour of boys. This study therefore interrogates the circumstances surrounding the high female dropout rate from Art particularly at O' level in Zimbabwe which is the initial benchmark between high school education and tertiary education.

BACKGROUND

The enrolment in Art before and at form three levels has always shown no gender misrepresentations much as at O'level examination and beyondⁱ. Boys and girls normally have equal representations in the art classes with girls in most cases constituting a greater proportion. However ironically at the end of the O' level two years there is a glaring misrepresentation of girls in the total number of candidates who register to write the final examination. For Art, girls normally constitute just above 15% of the total candidature. This is an alarming high dropout rate from an average 50% representation and has prompted this investigation for girls at O'level in Masvingo urban, Zimbabwe. The intention of this study is to examine girls' attitudes towards Art and the factors leading to the high dropout at O'level in a quest to find solutions to curb this phenomenon which has devastating effects to the development of art on gender equity terms beyond the secondary education.

Many studies have to date established that there is a glaring gender equity discrepancy in art and other professions and practice (Mahlomaholo, 2011; Mutekwe&Modiba, 2012; Mupondi, 2015). Very few girls (females) are engaged in art related professions and activities after high school (Mupondi, 2015) yet evidence shows that graphic development and expressions from childhood are not indexed to gender. Boys and girls have similar passions for doing and expressing art from childhood though with evidence of varying displays (Dziwa, 2013). Somewhere in between the continuum of childhood to adulthood the passions and interest by girls in the art subject vanishes and creates an alarming high dropout rate which has generated interest and focus for us the researchers as art educators.

A snap survey by the researchers has shown that the initial major discrepancies occur at O'level but mystery still surrounds the factors which leads to this high dropout by girls at this stage of their art learning. Are there gender biased factors inherent in the content and Art curricula which inhibit art learning by girls at O' level? To what extent is the high drop out by girls is gender indexed? What socio-cultural factors influence the girls' high dropout from Art? The study was therefore guided by the quest to solve and answer these research

questions to establish factors influencing the girls' high dropout at O'level in Zimbabwe focusing on Masvingo as case study.

According to research conducted by Blaikie, Schönau, & Steers, (2003) on General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced or O' level assessment results in Britain between 1997 and 2001, females outnumber males by almost two to one and that girls are better oriented to portfolio assessment; they are better prepared; have better work habits, and achieve better results in portfolio assessment in Art than boys do. This implies that girls have equal opportunity with boys to study art at O' level in Britain. In Zimbabwe particularly in Masvingo province from a snap survey conducted, a lot more girls than boys at ordinary level are dropping art such that the resultant number of learners who sit for the subject reflect a huge discrepancy in gender proportions on the number of girls who enrol for secondary education in art and subsequently in higher education art. Nelson & Watson (1991) suggests that there are significant gender differences existing with regards to equality of access and performance out- comes due to gender role socialisation and identity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the SADC gender equity in education memorandum (2004) and the UN (1996) Beijing declaration of action promoting gender equity. Thus guided by these regulations education content and instruction strives to ensure equal access to educational opportunities and resources. The art content cannot be an exception to provide content repelling the involvement of girls without causing an alarm.

Most studies on gender and assessment attest that currently, female students are achieving better results than males in school (Blaikie, Schönau, & Steers, 2003; Bowden, 2000). This is also confirmed by the large-scale study on gender and assessment in education undertaken by Willingham and Cole (1997) in Blaikie, et al (2003) who concluded that females have stronger academic work habits and more positive indicators of attitude and effort. According to Garber (2003) literature does not reflect the gender diversity as it continues to perpetuate the gender discrimination which inculcates in students that males hold the hierachical power and have made almost all the important decisions, creations, innovations and discoveries.

Researchers have asserted that subject preference results from gender role socialisation (Duncum, 1986; Flannery & Watson 1995). Flannery and Watson argue that boys' drawing content reflects a socialized interest in fantasy and violence that extends

beyond their everyday life experience, whereas girls' drawing content appears to be more realistic and tranquil and to relate to their everyday experience. Duncum (1986) suggests gendered content is a reflection of children's early gender socialisation, as they are initiated to identify self and conform to roles and stereotypes thereof.

Gender socialisation in Zimbabwe differentiates girls from boys from an early age and influence dichotomous attitudes, interests and pursuits in life (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2009; Kambarami, 2006). The average age for form three learners in Zimbabwe is 15 years +. According to Kambarami (2009) socialisation for girls in Zimbabwe from this age is directed towards their ability to be housewives and how they will manage their homes. This is very critical in shaping attitudes, preferences and desires for the girls even in academic pursuits. Gender-specific roles, as defined by societal norms, are exhibited in the behaviours and activities and choices of young children (Mahlomaholo, 2011; Gerber, 2009). Lobel and Menashri (1993) also concur that differences between girls and boys in toy preference and behaviour are related to their gender polarisation precepts as dictated by sex role socialisation (Chabaya and Gundyanga 2007; Kambarami 2006). Attitudes are to large extent formed and shaped by socialisation experiences and that these attitudes, in turn, provide motivation for behaviour (Morris & Stuckhardt, 1977).

Social theories of personality formation give particular attention to the social context of human development and provide insight into the ways in which experience and attitude can be interrelated (Bandura, 1999). This view of personality development describes the formation of "self" as a product of social relations, and that social relations are characterized by that which influences human consciousness: practical activity, communications, symbols, language, culture, and values (Burkitt, 1991). Identity of the self is the idea that can only develop if individuals can experientially get outside themselves in such a way as to become an object to themselves (Mead, 1934). Mead distinguished between the 'me' and the 'I' in the development of identity (*ibid*). 'Me', is one's definition of him or her in a specific social role while the 'I' implies one's opinion of him or herself as a whole. It is the 'I' which represents an individual's self-concept (Mead, 1934). Mead argues that the 'I' can exercise a considerable influence over one's behaviour, choices and gender polarisation. The self-concept is thus not inborn but a product of one's enculturation from childhood (Ballantine & Spade, 2004). The development of a conscious self is an essential part of the process of having an identity. Thus the girls probably do not see themselves as capable artists, future art specialists, or professionals through the socialisation they go through and

the self images they acquire. Smithers & Zientek (1991) suggests that there needs to be an avoidance of situations where learners unnecessarily 'write themselves off' from activities and other things simply on the grounds of gender. Without an awareness of the self, the individual cannot direct perceptions to be negative and withdrawal from participating in curriculum activities designed without gender discrimination.

This is also supported by Erikson (1956) who concludes that psycho-social factors are important in identity development. Psycho-social thinking ushered in a transition from a preoccupation with personal identity, towards a recognition and understanding of the significance of social identity (Gerber, 2009). Identity from a socially determined position means that preferences about which subject to pursue needs to be made in line with key markers of culture, which specifically includes gender in this study (Hall, 1996, 1997; Wetherell, 1996; Alcoff & Mendieta, 2003; Kearney, 2003; Vignoles *et al.*, 2011).

Brown (1996) defined social identity as referring to an individual's knowledge of belonging to a certain social group. Building on this notion, Newman (2002) described identity as the individual's definition of the self in terms of social group and category membership. This definition is useful because boys and girls in the schools define their identity according to the character of the gender group they belong to, and become loyal to it by acting and making choices that align to the group such as not doing Art as a presumed masculine discipline. Norman (2002) maintains that the individual's identity consists of the traits ascribed to the members of the group, who is referred to as his /her gender group. Newman (*ibid*) contends that an individual's identity thoroughly affects everything an individual does, feels, says and thinks and we postulate that it does also include the choice of pursuing art as a study subject at O level.

Harro's (2000) theory of the *Cycle of Socialization* describes how socialisation begins when individuals are born into a particular set of social identities and are shaped into particular identities by already existing structures such as history, traditions, beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes, and influenced by powerful social, religious and cultural agents including schools and religious institutions. In support of this theory Marojele (2012:4403) contends that social constructionism brings into focus the role of discourse, or the historically constituted repertoires, systems of social relationships, belief or knowledge, which have implications for diverse gender roles and identities. Gender identity therefore has fluid dimensions inseparable from the social environment. Burr (1998) also elaborates that our [gender] identity therefore originates not from inside the person, but from the social realm,

where people swim in a sea of language and other signs, a sea that is invisible to us because it is the very medium of our existence as social beings. Thus sometimes girls follow the wind of trends not to pursue Art because it is a culture that has been set before them.

Patriarchal relationships from the family are reproduced in schools and in the workplaces (Lewis, 2004). Efland (1995) argues that teachers' belief about art and its value is likely to affect whether it is liked or not. This implies that art specialists and classroom teachers and the school principals hold the success in implementation of school-wide art education program. Attitudinal problems by the school authorities, the art teacher together with the female learner can compromise the potential growth of female artists in the country. Dalton cited in Blaikie, et al (2003) postulates that patriarchal power, like the power of multinational corporations, is invisible and distanced from ordinary people but affect their day to day decisions and activities.

A major concern for art educators has been male-dominated content. Blaikie, et al (2003) also laments that even if more recently published texts and documents are changed to become inclusive of females, the problem is far more entrenched. Collins and Sandell, (1996) addresses the important question asked in 1971 by Linda Nochlin: "Why have there been no great women artists?" Collins and Sandell, (1997) and Blaikie, et al (2003) concur that tradition, gender culture and economy have hindered most aspirant women artists from being able to produce art at all. In some cases, esteemed art works have been misattributed to male contemporaries instead of being recognized as the creation of a woman (Zimmerman 1981). For instance, a female artist Artemisia Gentilischi is often not recognised as the author of the painting *Judith slaying Holofernes* (1621) which portrays women aggression and subverts the norm of woman passivity and submissiveness (Gardner, Fred & Christin; 2013). The work is often attributed to her father Orazio Gentilischi who was also an artist. Females were only encouraged as art students or as a housewife and severely discouraged to persist beyond those levels (Whitesel 1975).

In conclusion, it is inevitable to conclude that gender socialisation and identity to a significant extent informs individual's choices they make for or against pursuing certain subjects. The methodological approach adopted for this study to collect data follows next.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study exploited the interpretive-descriptive survey method because it is an empirical attempt to unearth and understand present status of a social institution from

how the participants have interpreted it for themselves (Sidhu 2003). Reality is constructed inter-subjectively through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). The study focuses on understanding the attitudes, interests, perceptions and values about art from the O' level participants view. The basic tenet of interpretivism is that the study of social phenomena requires an understanding of the social worlds that people inhabit, which they have already interpreted by the gendered attitude they exhibit towards art as a necessary part of their everyday choices (Roth & Metha, 2002). The study followed a more personal and flexible approach to probe sources of personal attitudes, perceptions and choices (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). These methods enhanced understanding of the origins of the gendered attitudes and practices which influence withdrawing from Art. Weedon (1997) suggests that interpretivist theory provides a contextualisation of ideological power. The high dropout of girls from art could be best explained from the emic views of participants in the schools under study. Thus the researchers were able to investigate and gain knowledge qualitatively on the reasons why the girls dropout from Art at O' level and their sources of the gendered attitudes towards Art at O' level through interviews, focus group discussions, documents analysis and observations.

Population and sampling

Gleaning from Crashaw and Chambers (2001) who refer to population as all the events, things or individuals to be represented this study focused on all Zimbabwean secondary school art pupils (boys and girls) as being of interest to the researchers. Boys and girls at O' level who have studied art and those still studying and intending to write the final examinations formed the focus population.

A representative sample from the entire population was purposively selected from the O' level (Form 3 and 4) art students and teachers from two schools offering Art as a subject in Masvingo urban, Zimbabwe. The participants were made up of six (6) art teachers and forty (40) pupils, (twenty (20) boys and twenty (20) girls).

FINDINGS

Peer pressure

The findings revealed that most pupils would submit work in groups which evidenced peer influence in terms of behaviour and attitude. Girls tend to present uniform behaviour such as late submission of work, presenting unfinished work and missing lessons in pair's or

as a group. The teachers confirmed that in terms of attitudes towards art, girls exhibited group attitudes against art while boys mostly displayed positive individualistic attitudes in art. It is most probable that decisions to dropout from art classes are peer influenced.

From the focus group discussion with pupils, the researchers discovered that 34(85%) of the pupils suggested that peer influence made them take -up art at O' level. Only 6(15%) confessed that they made individual decisions to study art at O' level. The few girls who are doing art concurred that they were doing art because their friends were also doing art rather than having a personal conviction and passion for it.

Peer influences were also observed from the portfolios presented during the time of collecting data. Girls' portfolios which have similar pieces had less work compared to that of boys and this reflects some sense of communal or cooperative working as peers. Boys' portfolios were beefed up with extra work and newspaper cuttings containing works of art done by other artists whom the boys used as sources of inspiration in their own practical assignments. While on the other hand girls had unfinished practical assignments, and their work was so identical in nature in terms of question choices, styles and skills, the work lacked individualism or self-expressionism. The researchers noted that peers had influence with regards to behaviour, attitudes and performance including subject choices. The peer influence had impact on girls' take up on Art at O'level and when girls choose to drop art they would do that as a group, they would affect each other in terms of behaviour and attitudes towards art education.

Scarcity of resources

Materials scarcity can grossly work against girls in any cultural setting especially in a patriarchal society like Zimbabwe. Bourdieu (2001) posits that men and women in doing gender generally accept a symbolic order which renders gender differences natural and eternal, and thereby justifies men's domination over women. From the schools studied it was noted that the appointed class monitors or leaders are only boys. The study revealed that girls are strongly challenged by boys physically in material distribution and this frustrates them and perpetually leads to girls missing out on practical lessons and activities. Materials availability is limited for art as observed in the schools studied. In addition to afore discussed impact, resources scarcity also limits on the topics which the teachers specialize on. The teachers tend to emphasize on teaching drawing and painting skills which boys articulate better than girls hence discouraging and demotivating for girls to pursue art at O' level. Thus teachers echoed lack of resources as hindrance to teaching all topics which might make art

more appealing to girls as well such as craftwork, textile designing and so on. Thus some participant mentioned that girls drop art for other practical subjects where materials are usually available such as fashion and fabrics.

Gleaning from the school syllabi, it was observed that some topics were left out when planning and scheming particularly the feminine activities such as fabric designing and computer graphic designing that is appealing to girls. The teachers also schemed and planned for the same topics which had more to do with drawing and painting. This contributed to gendered attitudes in art whereby boys were more comfortable with what they were being taught in art compared to girls. Teachers' record of marks clearly showed that boys were performing far much better than girls in art practical activities such as drawing and painting.

Focus group discussions revealed that gender stereotyped background also echoed gendered support for the children in terms of Art. The majority of the boys agreed that they usually got support from parents and would get materials bought for them because of their good performance in Art. Thus technical and material support discrimination actually starts from home before it is exhibited at school in the classroom.

The researchers noted with dismay that there was no art room or art studio at the schools. The researchers noted that only highly confident pupils mostly boys would not mind doing their work in the ordinary classroom blocks since other pupils would admire and comment positively on their work which increased their pride and for them it was more of showing off their skills in Art to other pupils who did not do Art. Girls on the other hand with their reserved nature wanted a secluded, private space where they could do and practice their work perfecting their skills without interference from other pupils. However, they could only access the art office when the teachers are present and this affected their work dismally as they would spend more time working on one piece failing to finish it in time. The researchers therefore discovered that lack of resources seriously affected girls' participation in art mostly than boys who seemed to manage well regardless on uncomfortable conditions.

Inferior perceptions about Art

Art is not a prioritized subject in the secondary schools. Lack of resources for Art such as an art studio as discussed above while all other practical subjects had permanent highly equipped base stations shows that somehow Art was not prioritized at the schools. Provision of resources among the practical subjects in the school showed preferential treatment. Other subjects in the schools studied are well resourced more than Art. Participants further revealed that resources allocation in comparison with other subject such as Home

Economics were not comparable as the other subjects are well resourced with physical structures, perishable goods, equipment including reading material in the library. Mupondi (2015) discovered that only 30 percent of the secondary schools in all provinces in Zimbabwe have proper art studios while 70 percent of the secondary schools did not have proper art studios with running water. Given a choice between Home Economics in such a scenario, it easily motivated girls to opt for Home economics more than Art. Boys on the other hand due to stereotyping they do not join Home Economics which is labelled a female domain and hence remain doing Art in big numbers.

Relating to art in the future

From the collected data, all the teachers confessed that they have never had a chance to career guide their pupils on benefits or career opportunities related to Art education. Teachers highlighted that girls have manifested negative attitude towards the subject at O'level since first and foremost, Art and Design O'level is not a prerequisite to enter Advanced level or tertiary education.

The majority of the pupils confessed that they were not well informed of career opportunities directly related to art education. The career opportunities available in art such as sculpturing, basketry, wood curving were not appealing and lucrative especially to females and that was the reason why most girls would drop art at O'level because career opportunities are too primitive for an educated person.

Models and discourse used in art text books was gender biased to instil impressions that art is a male domain which probably contributes also to the negative attitude and misconceptions that there are no career opportunities for girls.

Teachers vehemently agreed that art literature and history show explicit marginalization of women and this had some bearing on art being labelled a gendered subject though it is gender neutral in its nature. After being probed to further explain one teacher explained that in art appreciation in art theory there is less mention of women in art production, emphasis is on men in art production for example founders of art education in Zimbabwe, first generation artists are male and most art writings are by men (Joosten, 2001). Teacher particularly mentioned that, even if female artists are mentioned in art literature appreciating the likes of Grace Mukomberamwa and Agnes Nyanhongo, who are prominent visual artists, however, the credit is somehow accredited to the husband for the former and the father for the latter, that is Nicholas Mukomberamwa and Claude Nyanhongo. In the same vein, in western art history Artemisia Gentileschi (1621) as discussed above faces the same

fate among others Credit is given more to men who inspired these women rather than giving credit to the female artists as independent individuals. Credit for these women is overshadowed by men who inspired them, as they can never be mentioned without reference to their sources of inspiration who are men. Thus it seems like female artists' achievements are not being recognized and their works are not worth to be documented. The teachers acknowledged that such trends renders art to be like a gendered subject more appropriate for male students though in nature it is gender neutral.

The national art syllabus paper 1 theory objectives clearly states that, pupils should be able to identify local sculptural artists in our times like Nicholas Mukomberamwa, David Mutasa, Brighton Sango, Thomas Mkarombwa, Charles Fernando, Joseph Ndandarikwa etc.” without the mention of female artist insinuating that the student can still do well in theory without knowing any female artist in Zimbabwe.

The teachers' objectives in the schemes were no difference from those in the national syllabus; pupils were to identify the above mentioned artists. All pupils answered the question with reference to male artists whom they were taught by their teachers. Thus it appears to them female artists have no future in Zimbabwe and hence perpetrating high female dropout from Art at O' level.

CONCLUSION

From the data discussed and analysed above the researchers made the following conclusions.

Gender dichotomy is evident in the way learners' access and perceive art education at O' level thereby stereotyping Art learning as a male domain.

The study also concluded that the gendered negative perceptions about the roles and attitude of girls in art education at O' level are motivated by the art world and the socio-cultural environment which negates the publicity of female artists in literature and art practice.

Lastly the study concluded that cultural perceptions about stereotypes, cultural capital and patriarchy pervades male domination even in art classes and resources distribution thereby relegating girls to be insignificant minors in the art field.

In a nutshell, the high dropout by girls from art at O' level is a result of several militating environmental factors and socio-cultural perceptions about the relevance of art in the life of girls and the relevance of girls in the field of art.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings made from the study, the researchers made the following recommendations

1. In a bid to make art more enjoyable and attractive to both boys and girls, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is encouraged to design syllabus and content that would equip both boys and girls with skills that are directly relevant to the prerequisites of the tertiary education, industry and commerce and society. The content in art education should also be gender balanced and relevant to both females and males. Availability and provision of material resources in art will make art more enjoyable to both boys and girls.

2. The subject teacher is recommended to employ several tactics which motivate the girl learner in art. Motivation is very crucial to encourage the girls to carry on undiscouraged in Art. Appropriate motivational strategies could be devised to boost their confidence and low perception about their ability in Art and Design such as creating prize categories specifically for girls and so on. Schools should increase rewards in Art and Design on schools' prize giving day such as rewarding performance in art in different categories including those which girls are most competent in, by so doing girls would also be awarded for their achievements in Art because girls usually outperform boys in theory aspect.

3. Teachers are also encouraged to critically reflect on the need for active learning which emphasizes on less teacher talk and more student participation, that is, a child centred approach. Teachers are recommended to persuade school authorities for field trips to art institutions like the national arts gallery, art industries and colleges in order for students to learn in a context designed to evoke curiosity rather than for teachers to relate information. The art teachers can also facilitate invitations of resource person (with gender sensitivity) such as prominent visual artists, to the school for career guidance and motivational dialogues with the pupils. In line with this recommendation, the regional and district educational offices can also organise a day of inter-schools Art and Design exhibition for students to present their works of art to evoke confidence, curiosity, constructive competition and creativity in schools.

Teachers and the school administrators should be best equipped to reveal career prospects in art and design in the creative industry so that pupils (boys and girls) can easily identify and appreciate the relevance of art education to their lives especially female pupils. This would help demystify outdated misconceptions being held by some students prompting high drop outs.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

In order to increase generalisability of the findings, the researchers recommend that further studies expand on the sample studied. This current study used a very small sample; the findings may not be used to make generalizations on all secondary school art pupils in Zimbabwe given differences in social, cultural, economic and geographical location factors. In this respect, future research studies of this nature are recommended to engage larger samples.

Similarly, future studies are recommended to test the conclusions drawn from this study in different settings. Thus increasing the generalisability of these findings again.

Future studies are also recommended to focus on gender disparities in other subjects at different levels of education.

SUMMARY

Though many studies have long established that there are perceived gender disparities between boys and girls in many varied aspects of social and academic life, this study focused on bringing to light the factors which lead to girls' high dropout from O' level art than boys. The results showed that various socio cultural factors militate against girls pursuing art at O' level in favour of boys. Thus this study has advanced knowledge firstly by means of establishing empirically through qualitative means of data collection the circumstances in secondary schools which favour boys in pursuing art at O' level and encourage high girls' drop out. Pre conceived gender attitudes also pervade the attitudes towards art learning by boys and girls.

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ⁱ A snap survey by the researchers of class registers from schools and tertiary institutes in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe.