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The Impact of Change in Fashion and Fabrics Coursework Requirements at Ordinary Level: A Case Study of Lower Gweru Schools in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of change in Fashion and Fabrics coursework requirements from two garments to one at Ordinary Level. The study was done in 2011. A case study of four schools in the Lower Gweru cluster in the Midlands province in Zimbabwe was used to ascertain how the change has affected time usage, content coverage and skills exhibited by pupils. The one garment policy was introduced to reduce material costs paid by parents and to lessen the work on pupils. However the benefits of the policy have not translated and to a rise in the number of students registered for the subject. The descriptive survey design was used to collect data from eight teachers, four school heads and four classes of pupils. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. The results indicated that the one garment policy has brought with it benefits such as reduced costs, ample time to finish the coursework garment and time to concentrate on other components of the syllabus. The misconception noted on the requirements of the policy was that pupils were not being exposed to adequate practical work. It is recommended that teachers should increase the number and types of garments made by pupils from Form one to Form four. Parents should also provide practical requirements on time so that pupils and teachers alike may enjoy the benefits of the one garment policy.

Key words: coursework, materials, Fashion and Fabrics, practical skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

It has been the tradition of the Fashion and Fabrics Ordinary Level ('O'Level) syllabus in Zimbabwe to require two coursework garments from each candidate for skills assessment (Syllabus 6051, 2003-2007).In 2008 this requirement was changed by the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC to one garment to fit the candidate) (Syllabus 6051, 2008-2012).

Curriculum changes whenever there is important change in the social conditions of the society. Curriculum change may be a means through which education authorities seek to adapt to situations (Petrina, 2006). The change of policy from two garments to one was driven by factors such as the need to reduce expenditure for parents who were facing constraints in securing materials for the two garments, to avoid the repetitive nature of processes in the two garments and the need to impart better quality skills to pupils. The ZIMSEC (2007) report on examinations highlighted that schools submitted unfinished garments and this adversely affected pupils' coursework marks. The coursework, Paper 3 constitutes 20% of the examination. Candidates are assessed on such processes as seams, openings, fastenings, hems, disposal of fullness, pockets, armhole finishes and neckline/waistline finishes. When candidates submitted two garments, there was a high rate of repetition of processes, such as the same type of hem being worked on the two garments. The two hems would then be marked as one process leading to the loss of marks for the candidate. The construction of two garments also made it difficult for the candidates to complete their coursework in time for submission. This was partly due to the numerous processes worked.

The National Education Advisory Board (N.E.A.B.) report of March 2010 revealed that Fashion and Fabrics is one of the subjects that have maintained a drop in both the pass rate

and in the number of candidates registering for 'O'Level examinations. The Fashion and Fabrics syllabus'6051' provides for the development of practical skills as its assessment includes two practical papers, Paper 3 which is the coursework and Paper 2 which is a practical examination These two papers constitute 60% of the final examination mark, while Paper 1 constitutes 40%. The syllabus therefore promotes the development of garment making skills but it has been observed that pupils generally lack mastery of these practical skills.

In implementing policies that aspire to achieve greater ideas, teachers and learners encounter different limitations such as limited resources and poor dissemination of information. Since learning resources facilitate and encourage transmission and acquisition of knowledge, shortage of these materials is demotivating and may contribute to high failure rate in examinations. There is need for a firm foundation in learning practical skills and this can only be achieved when resources are made available (Hurlock, 2005; Manyere, 1995). Poor performance by pupils in practical subjects could be because of lack support from their parents and school administrators in acquiring learning resources for their practical lessons on time (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). The problem is more prevalent in Zimbabwe rural schools where most parents are poor. Zvobgo (1999) concurs when he states that quality education can only be brought about when resources are made available. In the absence of minimally adequate workshops, equipment and consumables, practical subjects like Fashion and Fabrics easily degenerate into being taught theoretically with inadequate attention to the learning of practical skills (Lauglo, 2004; Moyo, 1995).

The process of dissemination of information on processes to be covered and marking guides was not done properly when changing from two garments to one garment. This resulted in some schools not getting the guides for the final coursework garment such that examination requirements were not adequately met thus disadvantaging the candidates. Gwarinda (1985) stated that while curriculum inevitably changes with changes in the conditions of society, it is imperative that teachers should be involved in curriculum innovation so as to produce the required outcome. Teachers are more assured and confident when they know the correct requirements of examination boards (Laffitte and Hall, 1993). The successful implementation of an innovation depends on the successful dissemination strategies adopted. The Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture uses the power coercive strategy in the management and dissemination in the policy change in Fashion and Fabrics requirements (Valverde and Schmidt, 2000; Stevenson and Baker, 1991). This strategy involves the implementation of change on the instruction of a central authority. Kelly (2006) says teachers' lack of clarity about the innovation, the inevitability of required instructional material and lack of teacher involvement are some of the barriers to the successful implementation of an innovation

The change from two garments to one required for Fashion and Fabrics O' Level coursework was not accompanied by teacher orientation. Teachers were left to interpret the new policy as well as mark the coursework garments without prior induction and training. This has led to variety in interpretations of the requirements ranging from one garment in four years to four garments in four years with some having two garments in the four years. This has had an impact on the content coverage, time usage and the variety and quality of skills exhibited by pupils in the subject. The study looked at whether teachers were trained and whether there is uniform conformity to the new policy.

The N.E.A.B. 2010 report highlights that the number of students registering for 'O' Level Fashion and Fabrics has gone down. Wright (1998) in a study done in Sierra Leone found out those pupils who said they paid least attention to practical subjects did so because they failed to see where these subjects lead them. He also noted in his study that pupils are motivated by the end product hence students need to work and finish garments. Pupils like being treated as individuals and as such need to be offered choice in garment making and making a garment one is not interested in especially if it is spread over many weeks can have disastrous repercussions (The Schools Council Curriculum Bulletin, 1994).

In a study done by Lauglo (2004) in SADC countries, he found out that a subject will be attractive to students when they have a good chance of doing well in it, for example, passing the examination and getting a good grade. Students shun subject options in which they think they will likely fail and gravitate towards those in which they hope to do well. The Namibian study confirmed that student shun

courses in which they think the chance of passing is low by reporting that enrolment in Fashion and Fabrics declined in schools where 'O'Level results had been poor the previous year. The N.E.A.B. 2010 report notes that when a subject has no intrinsic appeal to the child it has little educational value even if the pupil passes an examination on it. The study also revealed that when pupils pursue practical subjects with little appeal they seldom sit for the examination, for example, in 2009, 22% of the sample of form four pupils who studied Fashion and Fabrics only 8% actually wrote the examination.

According to Marshal (2007) attitudes of parents towards the utility of what is learnt at school affect the way children approach school. Parents attach different degrees of importance to different subjects in the school curriculum. Technical subjects lack attraction to students and parents because they lead to manual jobs. As vocational subjects are perceived as being mainly suitable for the academically challenged, parents whose children are performing better in academic subjects discourage them from pursuing vocational subjects (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). In the study done by Lauglo (2004) it was noted that in Zimbabwe, responsibility for facilities, equipment and consumables in practical subjects was shifted over to parents. As a result these resources have become extremely meagre. Lauglo comments that only schools run by non-governmental organizations sometimes have their own sources of funding and tend to be better equipped. The study also found out that making parents responsible for equipment and consumables creates uneven implementation and widespread under provision of basic teaching necessities. Some schools charge a separate fee for Fashion and Fabrics and the pupils end up dropping out of the subject if their parents cannot afford to pay. Pupils end up not doing any or doing limited practical work.

1.2. Aim

The aim of this study was to look at the impact of policy change in 'O' Level Fashion and Fabrics coursework requirements.

1.3. Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

(i) to establish the benefits and limitations of the one garment policy,

(ii) to establish how teachers are adapting to the new syllabus,

(iii) to determine the skills acquired by pupils quantitatively and qualitatively and,

(iv) to identify possible solutions to the problems that arose as a result of the introduction of the one garment policy.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive survey design given the need to study many respondents dispersed over a wide geographical area. Data were collected through questionnaires and structured interviews.

The population for the study comprised twenty six (26) secondary schools in Lower Gweru District in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The schools are grouped into five clusters, namely A, B, C, D and E. In these schools, there are twenty six (26) school heads, forty (40) Fashion and Fabrics teachers and fifty two (52) form three and form four Fashion and Fabrics classes with a total of three hundred and thirty eight students (338) (Figures provided by the Education Officer for lower Gweru, September, 2011).

Simple random sampling was used to select one cluster, comprising one mission secondary school and six government schools. Of the seven schools, only four were used because the other three government schools do not offer Fashion and Fabrics. All heads of the four schools and eight teachers teaching Fashion and Fabrics from those schools automatically became part of the sample as they are the people directly involved in the policy implementation. Four classes amongst Form threes and fours, one from each school, were randomly selected using the fish bowl method. All the thirty one (31) students participated in the study. These were chosen because they are the ones affected by the policy change in coursework requirements (Chiromo, 2006; Sidhu, 2003).

Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from school heads and teachers. The questionnaire for school heads sought to collect data on issues such as funding of the subject, time allocation, and selection of candidates and size of classes. The content domain for the questionnaire for teachers

covered issues such as content coverage, time usage, skills imparted to pupils, orientation and dissemination of information on the policy. Structured interviews were used to collect data from students. The interview sought to collect data on issues such as skills acquired, coursework items constructed, competence in garment construction processes.

Verbal consent was obtained after explaining the objectives of the research to the participants. No names were written on the questionnaires therefore anonymity was assured.

The data were presented on pie charts and bar graphs. Data from both interviews and questionnaires were quantitatively analysed through calculating percentages and descriptive statistics.

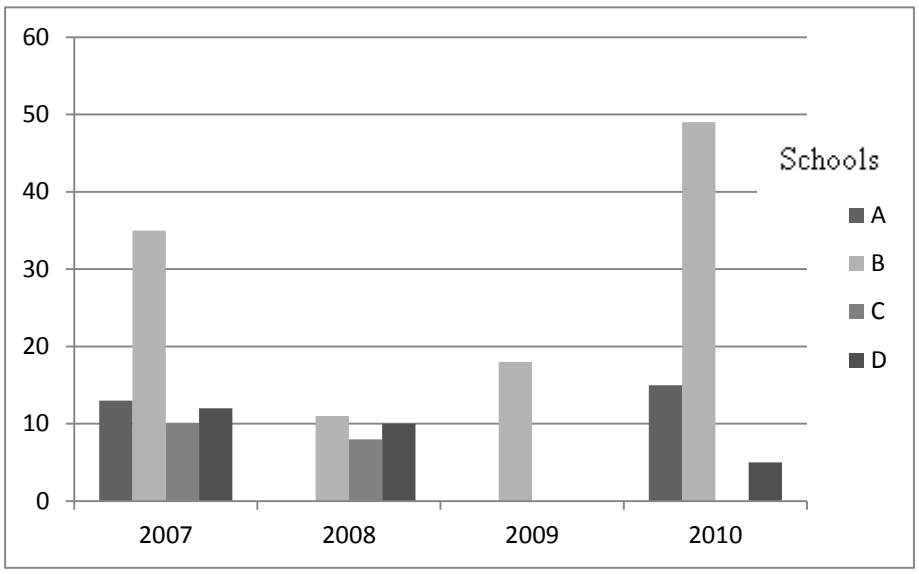

Fig. 4: The pass rate from 2007 to 2010

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The twelve questionnaires distributed were completed and returned. Interviews were conducted with the four classes as planned. The high response rate from the questionnaire could be attributed to the fact that the researchers personally distributed and collected questionnaire.

3.1. Benefits of the one garment policy

Seven teachers and three school heads cited reduction of costs as one of the major advantages of the one garment policy. Responses from focus group discussions revealed that this was an advantage only to those pupils whose parents had money as the poor ones were still unable to provide material in time. Two teachers from two schools stated that their pupils were submitting complete garments and on time. Two teachers and one school head were encouraged by the neatness of garments their students were submitting to ZIMSEC. This could be attributed to the practice pupils are getting before working on the final garment. The benefits of the one garment policy are likely to spur pupils to be motivated to register for Fashion and Fabrics at 'O' Level. Wright (1998) in a study done in Sierra Leone noted that through practical learning students can be motivated by the end products and also the possibility of passing the subject.

3.2. Limitations when making garments

Three school heads felt that the policy short changes the fast pupils as they become idle after completing the one garment. Results from three focus group discussions indicated that their schools did not have adequate equipment for practical lessons and that they started work on coursework garments late. Seven teachers indicated that acquisition of material at different times presents a challenge in planning as pupils will be working on different processes at one time. The shortage of materials coupled with lack of equipment in schools results in low level instruction and low

level skill acquisition. This concurs with Petrina (1992) and Zvobgo (1999) who observed that material resources limit what any teacher can do in teaching.

The average pass rate of the 4 schools was 37% in 2007, 10% in 2008, 7% in 2009 and 17% in 2010(Schools examination analysis documents). The average pass rate was highest in 2007 before the introduction of the one garment policy. The pass rate nosedived in 2008 and 2009 but showed some improvement in 2010. In this light the one garment policy seems not to be having a positive effect in examination performance. There is need therefore to evaluate the three components of the examination to determine whether the low pass rate could be attributed to more than poor performance in coursework.

noted that Fashion and Fabrics is one of the subjects that has maintained a drop in the number of candidates. The 2011 increase could also be due to improved economic environment that had a significant improvement in 2011.

3.3. Teaching experience

Of the eight teachers, six indicated that they have more than six years' experience in teaching Fashion and Fabrics. Their experience in teaching of the subject makes them better able to assist pupils in their practical work. It could be assumed that their experience in teaching Fashion and Fabrics makes them more competent in the teaching of garment construction.

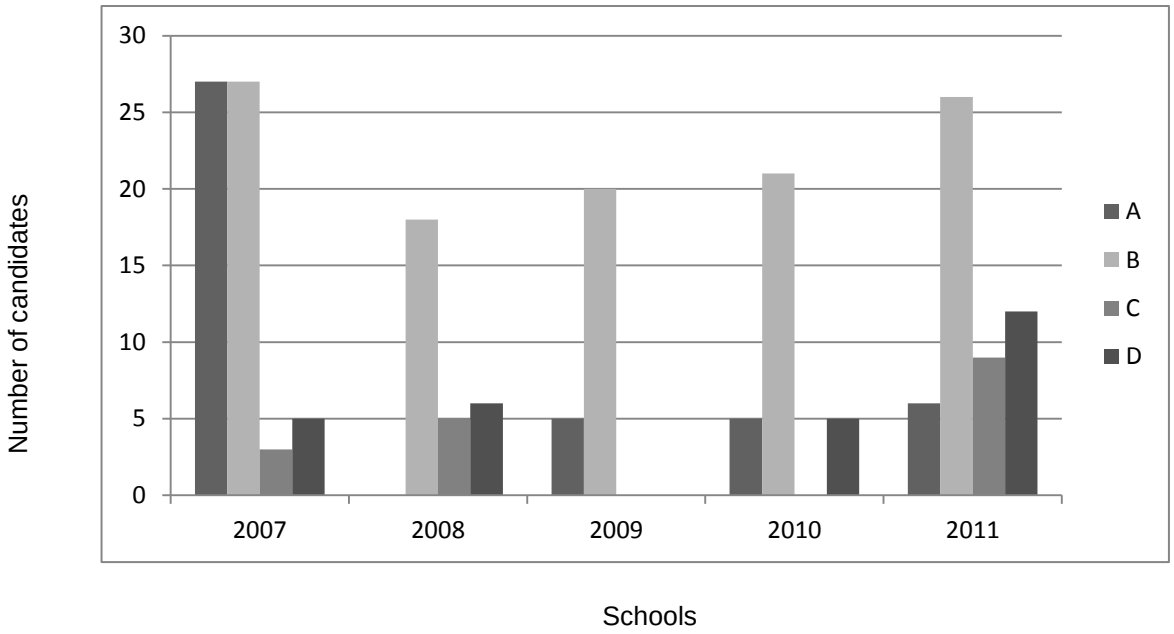

Fig. 3: Number of candidates registering for Fashion and Fabrics.

In 2007 school A had 27 candidates registering for Fashion and Fabrics, this reduced to 17 in 2008, 0 candidates in 2009 and 2010. In 2011 the figure rose to 6. This trend of a sharp drop in the number of candidates can also be found in schools C and D. Only school B which is a mission school, has consistently had candidates sitting for Fashion and Fabrics from 2007 to 2011. Pupils are allocated the subject and materials are provided. All the 4 schools show a slight increase in figures in 2011. The picture is consistent with the N.E.A.B. 2010 report that

3.4. Training on the use of the marking guide

Three schools admitted to having a ZIMSEC marking guide. Schools A and D acquired the marking guide in 2008 and school C in 2009.

All the teachers indicated that they were not trained on the use of the marking guide and that they used the guide basing on their own interpretations. As advised by Redmann (2005) programme implementation greatly influences the curriculum offered, as such there is need to train teachers so that they are

sure of their roles. In this case training was not done and interpretation of the policy varied greatly, from making one garment in four years to making four garments in four years. Thus lack of communication between examination boards and teachers leads to non –conformity to new regulations (Kyriacaou, 1998; Kelly, 2006).

3.5. Acquisition of materials

Four teachers from two schools pointed out that their pupils do not get material requirements on time. This implies that parents do not provide money for materials on time. Fashion and Fabrics as a practical subject is capital intensive and its success hinges on the availability of resources. Quality education can only be brought about when resources are made available on time. Eight pupils indicated that they failed to register because they did not get materials on time. Although the policy has given teachers and pupils enough time, some pupils were still unable to complete their garments due to late acquisition of material. In cases where material has to be the same quality, parents contribute towards the purchase. This can cause delays in commencement of coursework as parents contribute at different times which means those schools with enough resources at the right time have their pupils making and completing coursework garments on time (Desforges and Abouchaar; Zvobgo, 1994).

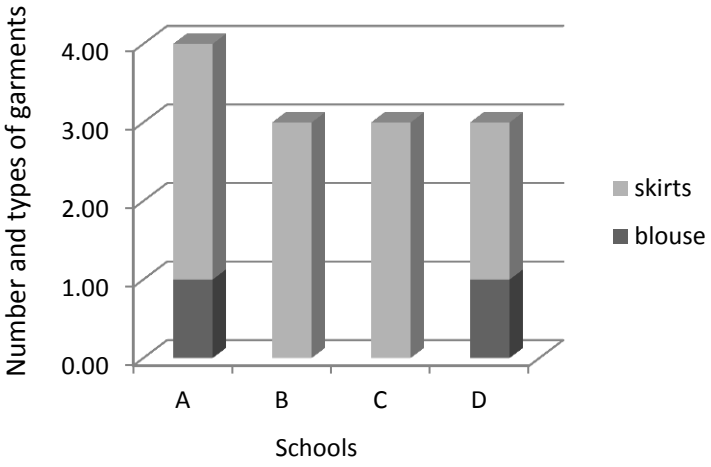

Fig. 1: The number and types of garments made by pupils

School A indicated that their pupils made three skirts and one blouse in four years. Pupils from schools B and C made three skirts each in four years and school D pupils made two skirts and one blouse in four years (fig. 1). This shows that pupils specialised in skirt making for the duration of their four years at secondary school. Pupils are therefore exposed to the same processes from form one to four. According to the teachers pupils acquired practical skills such as laying and cutting out, straight stitching, making seams, darts, waistbands, openings, hems and pressing. From the list provided it is clear that pupils lack skills in processes such as attachment of sleeves and collars. The Fashion and Fabrics syllabus lists processes to be covered without specifying the type of garment to be made and one type of garment cannot cover all the listed processes. The Schools Council Curriculum Bulletin (1994) stresses that practical subjects should provide opportunities to practice and acquire a variety of skills.

All the eight teachers indicated that their pupils made a skirt for the final coursework garment. The respondents indicated that by making pupils work on a similar garment, they would perfect their skills before making the final garment. It was noted that both girls and boys worked on skirts although the syllabus requires a candidate to make a garment to fit and boys do no wear skirts. When a subject has no intrinsic appeal to the child it has little educational value even if a pupil passes an examination in it (N.E.A.B. 2010 report; Lauglo, 2004).

During the interviews, one of the classes indicated that they started practical work at form three level, such that by the end of the four year course they would have made only one garment which also happens to be the final course work garment. Upon further probing pupils revealed that this was because their parents did not pay or buy enough materials for their practical lessons. The responses from pupils contradict information given by teachers on the number of garments made by pupils. When learners are not given the necessary materials on time they may fail to complete their garments on time. It was also noted that pupils lacked materials at form one and two levels yet at form three the materials were made available to them. This could be because Forms one and two students are not examined in the subject at national level.. The lack of materials impacts negatively on the teaching and learning process. This concurs with Manyere (1996) who stated that materials in technical subjects are of paramount

importance in the transmission and acquisition of knowledge.

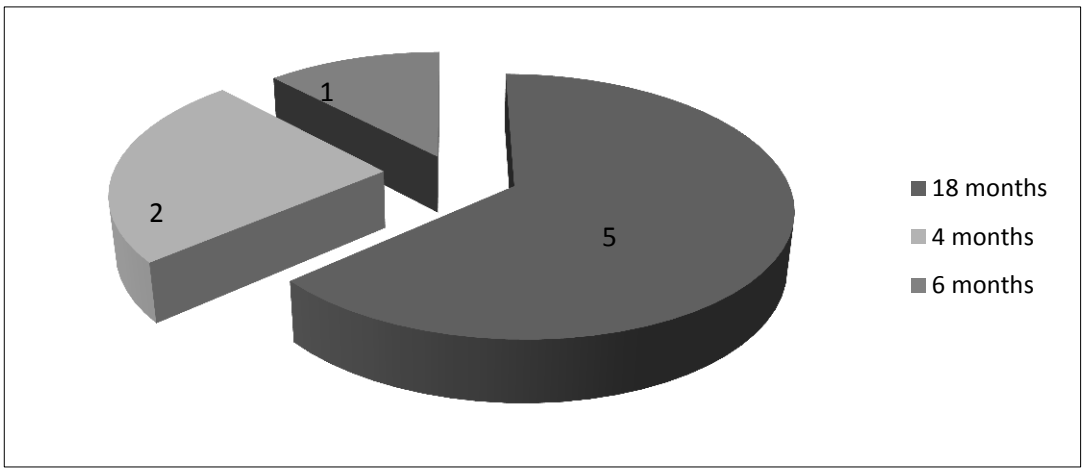

Fig. 2: Time taken by pupils to work on the final coursework garment.

Five of the teachers indicated that their pupils take 18 months to complete coursework, starting work on the final garment at form three. Two teachers said pupils worked on garments in 4 months because materials were supplied just before the examination. Only one teacher indicated that pupils worked on coursework garments over 6 months which is the expected time. This ensures that learners get adequate time to complete their garments. One major advantages of the one garment policy which was echoed by all the groups of respondents is that the policy has afforded learners ample time to work and complete their coursework garments. However, spending too much time working on one garment results in an untidy garment due to over handling. Often the garments are sewn and unpicked repeatedly such that they become dirty and this demotivates the learners. Taking close to two years working on one garment also translates to limited practical skills acquired.

3.6. Suggested solutions to the limitations

Six teachers and the four school heads indicated that there is need to encourage parents to increase the support they give to their children so that materials are bought on time. All the teachers suggested that school administrators should buy materials for pupils in bulk so that all the pupils can start practical work at the same time.

4. CONCLUSION

The introduction of the one garment policy brought benefits such as reduced material costs, submission of complete garments, and time for both teachers and pupils to work on other aspects of the syllabus.

The different interpretations of the requirements of the one garment policy has led to misconception that the policy only requires candidates to work on one garment only from form three to four resulting in pupils acquiring limited practical skills.

Teachers are now also teaching only for examination thereby focusing only on skills required to make pupils pass. Focus on a few unvaried garments (skirts) limits pupils' creativity, as well as their ability to compete in the world of work as they can only work a few garment-making processes competently. The fact that boys are also making skirts does not conform to the garment to fit aspect of the syllabus requirement and this demotivates the boy child

Even though the findings indicate an improvement in the coursework submitted by the candidates, the pass rate still remains low implying that Paper 01 (theory) and Paper 02 (practical examination) also require attention. The poor performance could also be attributed to the harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe at the time the research was carried out.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

i) The Ministry of Sport Arts and Culture should consider in-service training of Fashion and Fabrics teachers to orient them and facilitate the correct interpretation of the one garment policy.
ii) School heads in liaison with parents should establish mechanisms of providing materials and equipment to pupils on time, such as fund raising, so that they work on and complete a wider variety of garments.
iii) ZIMSEC should give attention to the other two components of the examination to ascertain how pupils are performing in them.
iv) A review of the Fashion and Fabrics curriculum and syllabus is necessary in order to adapt requirements to the current economic environment.

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