

Sexual maturation and education processes: the exploration

Introduction and background of the problem

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Inadequate participation of women in economic, social, political and other critical spheres of life is a cause for serious concern. Gender imbalances that inhibit the full participation of women in matters that affect their lives are well documented. Tracking disparities in cognitive achievement in Zimbabwe at all levels since 1993 shows girls scoring lower than boys in the sciences and mathematics and tending to perform better in the arts, humanities and languages (SARDC, 1997; UNICEF, 1995). The performance is even lower in attitudinal attainment where, because of society's views, girls tend to have limited aspirations about their futures (SARDC, 1997). Girls tend to see themselves as seen by others – generally weak, not as strong, intelligent or capable of thinking and concentrating as boys, as if these are innate traits. Boys on the other hand express feelings of superiority to girls – saying girls have less brainpower (Gordon, 1995). Gordon's study suggests that girls are attitudinally disadvantaged compared to boys, implying a vicious circle where such negative attitudes affect their cognitive achievements, self esteem and career aspirations negatively. Such self-attitudes tend to reinforce society's negative attitudes about females. One of the factors that is not often considered is whether the process of sexual maturation has an impact on girls' attitude to and performance in school. This study seeks to explore how schoolgirls feel about sexual maturation and its impact on their learning and attitude to themselves.