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# THE TEACHING OF TEXTILES IN LESOTHO SCHOOLS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lesotho is a least developed countries (LDC); her economy is richly contributed to by the textile industry. This is expected to continue into the future, as more foreign investors take advantage of the affordable labour Lesotho offers and the peaceful worker's unions. Few Lesotho schools offer Home Economics/ Consumer Science, most students in these schools opt for Food and Nutrition instead of Clothing and Textiles. The latter does not seem to be acknowledged for the vast contributions and opportunities that it comes with for the country and her people. Interestingly, most people operating small businesses in apparel did not go through the relevant schooling, but later take it up to make a living. The large apparel factories also do not employ trained appropriately trained staff. Most factories follow the modular production system, where a person does one or two processes so no highly skilled labour is required. This article explored possible factors contributing to the disfavour. Focus group discussions and interviews were used to collect data from the teachers and Principals respectively. The qualitative thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Textiles component appears to be less favoured by the students and some schools are facing out the Home economics to avoid the textile component in the new curriculum. Principals find textiles expensive; teachers confessed incompetence which contributed to the negative attitude imparted to the students. It is therefore, new approaches are recommended and tertiary institutions

encouraged to emphasise on the opportunities and value of Textile into national economy, in-service training and motivation are also recommended for the teachers. Professionals in Textiles and Apparel to take the lead in reintroducing the concept.

Key words: textiles component, teaching, schools, economy, job opportunities, future, curriculum, attitudes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Lesotho is an underdeveloped country listed as a Least Developed Country (LDC); the developed continue to take advantage of the country. Her economy is richly contributed to by the local textile industry. This situation is expected to continue well into the future, as more foreign investors continue to take advantage of the affordable labour that Lesotho offers as well as the relatively peaceful worker's unions. It is worth noting that the development of a national economy and the wellbeing of the nationals in such a country economically, is deeply rooted in the transformation in production to manufacturing and services (Medhi, 1995, Suphat 1995, Pasuk and Samart, 1993). Skills development and entrepreneurial training in Clothing and Textiles has a potential to facilitate the transformation spoken about above. Not all Lesotho schools offer Home Economics, also known as Consumer Science, and out of these schools most students opt for Food and Nutrition (F

&N) instead of Clothing and Textiles as it is called at that level.

The teaching of the clothing and textile component of home economics in the local schools does not seem to be acknowledged for the vast contributions and opening of opportunities that its t is capable of doing for the country and her people. Interestingly, most people operating small businesses in apparel (mostly fashion), did not go through the relevant schooling, but later take it up to make a living. In addition, the large apparel factories do not even employ trained human resource who went through the clothing and textiles curriculum. Most apparel and textile factories follow the modular production system, where a person does one or two processes and in this case there is no need for highly skilled labour in garment construction. The major problem therefore remains: The skill required for professional and competitive garment construction does not seem to be developed where it is expected, in secondary and high schools. Yet after completion most people resort apparel manufacture/garment construction to earn a living. As a result, they are likely to do it at a sub-standard level until such a skill develops with experience. This situation could have been avoided by taking Textile and clothing as a subject in school. The reason behind the disfavour was investigated in this study. This article therefore, explored the possible

contributing factors in the bias seen as the textile component is taught in Lesotho schools, and recommend possible remedial measures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally, education and training for productive employment and job creation is crucial for economic growth and social development in developing countries (Pavlova, 2014). According to ADB, (2009), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is regarded as a means for enhancing productivity and poverty reduction. The textiles and clothing/apparel industry plays a notable role in the national economies of both developed and developing countries. In India the textile industry employs about 35 million people and its contribution to the GDP is estimated at 4% over and above the 14% value Addition it contributes to the entire manufacturing sector as a whole (Dhanabhakyan and Shanthi, 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the exports by the Indian clothing industry to other countries of the world. This is indicative that the industry also contributes in attracting foreign currency into the country. This is one of the potential benefits the textile and apparel industry has in Lesotho if proper planning and preparation of the personnel to service and run the industry is taken seriously and implemented.



Figure 1: Example of apparel exports by India in 2007, (Dhanabhakyan and Shanthi, 2007).

According to Kim, et al (2006), the textile and apparel industry is the opening of choice for most developing countries in their pursuit to stride into industrialization. The ease of entry into this field and the abnormally high wages in developed

countries have created favourable conditions for the manufacturing and the exportation of textile and apparel derivative products. At the same time, this unique situation has provoked a fierce competition among the many actors while driving a forceful isolationism in many developed countries where the export markets are found.

In many ways there are efforts made and initiatives taken by countries to promote social and environmental sustainability within the global textile industry as seen by some recycling projects in some of these countries. However, the role of education seems to be left further away and yet education can act as a key enabler of change in a number of ways that will even contribute towards the attitude of ownership and aid the society through the professionals to embrace the change voluntarily. In agreement to this perspective, Morris (2019), stated that many stakeholders operating in the textiles and fashion industry aspire to promote high levels of social sustainability and these efforts to do so are often delayed and sometimes fail. It is believed that without education and understanding the need, the stakeholders themselves may not be able to convince the general society not to mention making them embrace the change. In agreement to this, Pavlova (2014), state that any economic change initiated by green reshuffle should be supported by human resource development that results in substantial impact on skills. This is more relevant and vital if the change is to be sustainable.

## ***MATERIALS AND METHODS***

Statistical information from the examinations council of Lesotho and the National Curriculum Development Centre was used to determine the eligible schools for the study. A descriptive research

design was followed; focus group discussions were used to collect data from the Home Economics teachers and interviews with the Principals and students in twenty schools offering Home Economics subjects in Lesotho. The data were analysed through qualitative thematic approach subjected the data to content analysis where themes were generated as they came from the discussions of the participants, then concepts drawn from all the themes for each question and objective addressed by such a question. This way the richness of the qualitative data is maintained.

## ***RESULTS***

The textile component appears to be less favoured by the students, and this is seen in the comparatively smaller numbers in students enrolling for this section as a preferred area of study in Home Economics practical option students have in local high schools. This situation has continued to an extent that some schools that were initially offering Food Preparation component alone faced out the entire subject altogether as the textile component was introduced the new localized integrated curriculum. It was discovered that the schools' principals find the textiles component expensive to start; most Home Economics teachers with a general Home economics qualification confessed their incompetence in the component, this result in a negative attitude and they pass it on to the students.

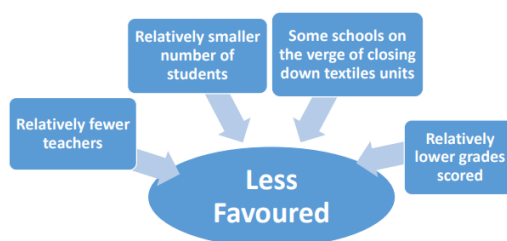


Figure 2: Preference of Clothing and Textiles to other subjects

One outstanding theme that became apparent from the study is the fact that Clothing and Textiles is less favoured in comparison to the other subjects offered in high school as indicated by the fewer numbers of students enrolling in the subject component. The concepts that contributed to this conclusion include the relatively smaller numbers of students enrolled in the subjects and the even smaller number of teachers to teach the particular specialisation. This situation has been a cause of concern in other countries either for Clothing and textiles specifically of TVET education generally, and the small numbers were also noted by earlier researchers such as Tashie, (2016) and Ameleke, (2015). In other studies, the TVET education in general was deemed inferior (UNESCO- UNEVOC, 2006 and Oketch, 2007). Furthermore, there were also schools that were considering facing Clothing and Textiles out, in their schools. Probing further into the less favoured nature of the subject, respondents gave the contributing factors to the present situation in their perspective. The factors illustrated in Figure 3 were derived after lengthy discussions mostly with the teachers who are understandably more knowledgeable in the field than the students (learners) and the principals of the schools.

**Class practical class products not readily consumable**

The students shared their dissatisfaction about the fact that the products made in Clothing and Textiles class cannot be consumed immediately and they were outright not so much appealing. Here

Clothing and Textiles was compared with Food and Nutrition where the students can eat the food immediately after class every time they have practical lessons. Clothing and Textiles on the other hand takes a long time before the garment is complete and can be enjoyed. While one would think that this is not such a serious issue, it raised concerns as it communicated the desire for immediate benefit or reward.

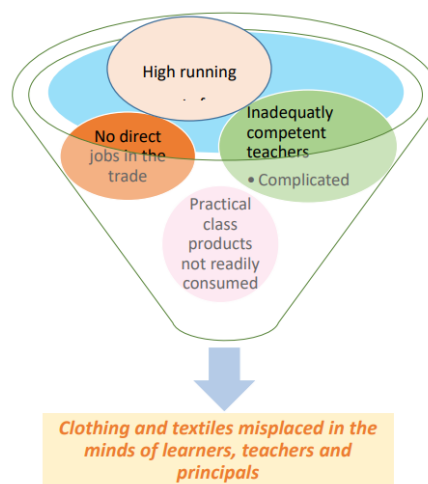


Figure 3: Factors contributing to the current bias

**No direct professional jobs**

As mentioned earlier, the apparel manufacturing jobs in Lesotho firms which are mostly foreign owned; offer very low paying and mostly entry level

jobs which do not require the amount of training the students go through. On daily basis there are multiples of unskilled people queuing at the gates in most of these firms waiting for an opportunity to be employed even if it is just for that day, when one employee reported sick or for some reason did not report on duty that day. The salaries are also very low, taken by the desperate ones mostly. This emanates from the perception of training for employment, as some see it TVET brings about technological advancement aimed to fit the new manpower for employment (Roland, 1995). However, this is the case when job creation is neither considered nor facilitated.

#### **High running costs**

The honest fact that is also common knowledge is that garment production programmes are expensive to set up. The running costs can however, be manageable with proper and careful planning and intelligent sourcing of raw materials. This is why funding is usually marshalled for setting up, and many donors offer sewing equipment (mostly sewing machines) because they are not affordable to the people who need them the most. Some principals complained of the cost of sewing equipment and raw materials used for student who usually are not able to produce wearable garments which end up being thrown away. While this is true, the materials are not entirely wasted as they facilitated learning and skill development for the students. Indeed, Clothing and Textiles is relatively expensive but it pays off as soon as skills are developed and proper production starts.

#### **Inadequately competent teacher**

A notable number of teachers indicated a level of competence that is not satisfactory, according to these teachers the incompetency dates as far back as their times in school and college. There has always been the bias between Food and Nutrition and Clothing and Textiles among Home Economists/Consumer

Scientist. And is deeply rooted in the attitudes that they subconsciously impart to the students they teach. This has been a concern also for other researchers who reported that teachers may be shocked in the field upon realisation that they may not have acquired everything they need to teach Clothing and Textiles comfortably, the problem here is that the students notice when a teacher enjoys and when she/he does not enjoy the subject and develop attitudes from that observation, it is detrimental. According to Uwaifo, (2005), teachers are pivotal to the success of any program as it revolves around proper delivery of the set curriculum especially in TVET because it deals with skill development.

#### **Complicacy of Textiles**

The students also indicated that the level of complicacy is high in Clothing and Textiles relative to Food and Nutrition. It is worth noting that the curriculum followed at lower secondary school exposes all Home Economics/Consumer Science students to both sections namely; Food and Nutrition and Clothing and Textiles. It is from this background that most learners were able to compare the two sections. Clothing and Textiles as a skills oriented subject requires some scientific background to successfully select suitable fabrics for the finished products (Uwaifo, 2009). In addition, a lot of concentration and patience is essential in skill development. This seems to be a relatively difficult objective for students to achieve. However, this concern on the part of the students is understandable since textiles are relatively foreign to Basotho children, especially the synthetics. The fact that the apparel manufacturing firms in Lesotho do not really train Basotho to construct garments does not help the situation, rather they train them to perform one process that contribute in the completion of a garment as most firms follow the progressive bundle system, where a garment is gradually assembled

through sub-assemblies of processes each done by one person until all processes are complete (Cooklin, 2000). A person in this kind of manufacturing cannot really put a garment together alone with ease. The scientific nature of the textiles also contributes to the complicity of the subject.

## ***CONCLUSIONS IMPLICATIONS***

## ***AND***

According to the results, there is indeed a bias contributing to the disfavour of Clothing and Textiles in Lesotho schools, this was evident as seen by the relatively low numbers of students, as well as incompetent teachers and unhappy principals wanting to face it out. The study results further showed that the bias is a result of perceptions and assumptions of the students, teachers and principals. The high cost incurred when setting up the Clothing and Textiles laboratory/studio, the invisible job market, and the unforeseen benefit on the immediate instance, all contributed negatively to the negative bias of teaching and learning Clothing and Textiles in Lesotho schools.

The perceptions were found to be deeply rooted and there is need to start at an early stage of Basotho students to eradicate these negative perceptions about Clothing and Textiles completely.

Lesotho is a Least Developed (LDC) country, with a population generally based in the rural areas and mostly living in poverty. There is hope; Clothing and Textiles absorbs a large number of unskilled labour typically from the rural households (Branton and Hoppe, 2007). Drastic majors need to be put in place if the local textile industry is to grow; develop and become an active player in the global economy for which it is well capable; it is international common knowledge that textiles and clothing play a major role in the development and

industrialisation process of countries and their integration into the world economy (WTO, 2006). Clothing and Textiles are basic needs that will continue to be needed for a long time, in addition clothing alone is a key manufacturing export product for many developing countries including Haiti, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lesotho, Macao in China. The countries listed here have their economies heavily dependent on clothing exports (Keane and Velde, 2008).

Apparel in general is a human basic need that will continue to be consumed for a very long time; if not forever, fashion makes apparel even more interesting and continuously create a new need even for the people who already have enough to wear. When done properly in approach and day to day running; this industry is worth more than a gold-mine. The multitudes employed in this industry are evident to the fact that the textiles and apparel/clothing industry has a huge potential for job creation; economic growth and poverty alleviation. Suffice it to say then that, it is wisdom for developing, less and least developed countries to consider channelling resources towards the building and development of the industry in question in order to explore the potential stated above.

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore, recommend that Lesotho introduces new approaches to include clothing and textiles in the curriculum on a basic level and that tertiary institutions offer textile courses with an emphasis as they contribute directly to the economy of the country. Most importantly work out means of attitude change towards Clothing and Textiles for Basotho to reap the benefits of this lucrative industry, free their creativity and participate in job creation. It is essential to offer clothing and textiles together with entrepreneurship since there is a notable scarcity of jobs readily available in the field, and yet the profession has indicated a potential to

grow the national economy and offer jobs to the people that need them the most. Job creation upon completion is highly recommended. The local institutions of higher learning are encouraged to marshal financial resources to embark on incubation projects where the capable and willing students can be incubated into start-up business ventures upon completion of their programs. And it is also recommended that the already professionals in clothing and textiles embark on the in-service training to address problematic areas. Collaboration between the teachers (all educators), researchers, apparel manufacturers (private sector) fashion designers and tailors for ground breaking exhibitions nationally that can grow the profession into the creative fashion industry and lucrative business opportunity it has a potential to do.

The National University of Lesotho has already started by establishing the research and Innovation hub within which a Textiles start-up business has been set up. With the guidance of the University experts which include the researcher of this study; the business has been able to generate jobs, promote and is advocating for recognition of Clothing and Textiles as a career major. Exhibitions are being held to showcase the products and the potential in the industry. More can still be done as more research continues to explore potential products to develop with the locally produced textile fibres namely Merino wool, Mohair, hemp and kapok. An injection into this kind of research is highly recommended since the Covid-19 era taught the nations the value of a notable level of self-sufficiency in developing countries for survival.

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