

Contribution of the Holy Cross Sisters to the Educational Empowerment of Women in Western Province of Zambia

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Abstract

This article is a report on a study that assessed the contribution made by the Holy Cross Sisters (HCS) to the educational empowerment of women in Western Province of Zambia. It sought to analyse the views of stakeholders on the contribution made by the HCS to the educational empowerment of women in the Western Province of the country. The study was guided by Creswell's (2007) constructivist approach. A qualitative approach to data collection was used with the One-on-one interview method being the main data collection instrument. The population consisted of all the stakeholders of Holy Cross Secondary School (HCSS). Analysis of data revealed that the Holy Cross Sisters contributed to the educational empowerment of women by construction of HCSS. However, there were also barriers arising from traditional attitudes towards women, which were a hindrance to the attainment of educational goals and completion of education among girls.

Key Words: Contribution, Education, Empowerment, Stakeholders

Background and Context

The history of the HCS dates back to their founder, Fr. Theodosius Florentini (1808-1865) who was of Swiss origin. Fr. Theodosius drew up a plan to counteract anti-Christian education in schools by means of a Catholic Christian education that would prevent rationalistic treatment of the poor (Unitas, 1994: 7). He believed this could be done by a religious congregation which

operated on the principles of Catholic Christian faith and Christ-like loving care and administration, but also adapted to the needs of the country. Unitas (ibid) further asserts that Fr. Theodosius wanted religious congregations who could engage in active social service outside of the strict confines of a convent. He needed women who had the courage to walk new ways; women who lived in faith and were open to people and their needs. Such women were found to be the HCS under the leadership of Mtr. Bernarda Heimgartner (1822-1863).

Thus the presence of the HCS in Africa dates back to the year 1883 when the pioneer Sisters from Menzingen, Switzerland, arrived in Umtata, Transkei in South Africa, which was the focal point of administration (McDonagh, 1983: ix). In the latter years, administrative congregations of the HCS were started in other areas of Southern African countries including modern day Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. In Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) the Sisters established their first station at St. Francis' Barotse Church and School in Livingstone in 1936. They continued providing education to women at different stations until in January 1963 when they finally settled at Malengwa where they opened Holly Cross Secondary School (HCSS) opposite Malengwa Primary School, about five kilometres north of Mongu Town.

HCSS, which was a boarding school until 1989 when it was turned into a day school due to the need to assist school going boys in communities surrounding the girls school, was established specifically for the advancement of the girls' education as the HCS' *charism*, 'Education of the girl child', entailed. The term 'charism' refers to "the ability to see the need, to follow or keep the vision or passion for the founder," (Unitas, 1994: 2). The closest equivalent term is 'motto'. In this case, the HCS, through the vision of the founders, Fr. Theodosius and Mtr., Bernarda, saw the need for the education of the girl child. It was, therefore, necessary for us to carry out the study so that we could assess the contribution of the HCS to the educational empowerment of women in Western Province. This assessment was largely based on the views of the HCSS stakeholders.

Clarification of Key Terms

The word 'education' has sometimes been used in a broad sense to designate "the totality of influences that nature or other people are able to exercise on our intelligence or on our will" (Durkheim, 2006: 76). This definition of education shows that both nature and people are involved in the process of education. In a broad sense, education designates the influence that people are able to exercise on other people's intelligence or will. Taneja (1990: 4-14) observes that "the term education has different meanings and it might be difficult to give its very precise definition". Biologists, teachers and lecturers, priests, philosophers, merchants and even shopkeepers and marketeers might give varying meanings to the term education, if asked to define the term. Thus, Taneja (1990) gives different meanings of the word education. Some of the meanings he gives are that: education is an attempt to develop human beings; it is the modification of behaviour; it is an act of training; it is direction; it is integrated growth; it is continuous re-organisation and integration of activities and experiences; it is influence and emancipation.

Two of the above definitions appropriate to this article are that education is emancipation; it is the lifting of the mind out of blind alleys, and the 'influence of the environment upon the individual.'

Such influence caused by the environment brings change in the habits, behaviour, thoughts and attitudes of the individual. When the individual has been changed by the environment, he or she is emancipated from the bondage of 'dust', as Taneja (1990) himself puts it. In the same vein, education could also mean the ability to change the environment so that the world becomes a better place to live in.

With regard to formal education, Kelly (1999: 1) defines it as "the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded system that runs from primary school to university or other forms of education." The ultimate aim of formal education is the proper actualisation of every learner's potential capabilities, attitudes and good behaviour. Additionally, factors that may influence the development of positive attitudes and behaviour among learners include a good learning environment in which there are enough teaching and learning materials and competent teachers. However, not all schools may help pupils, especially girls, to develop skills that will empower them to live positively in their future lives. It is the impact of the particular school upon a pupil that makes the difference; this impact in turn depends largely on management. From this viewpoint, it may be stated that the empowerment of women is enhanced or negated depending on the particular school they attended.

In this article, we use the term 'education' to refer to preparing learners, especially girls, who are capable of doing new things in life based on what they have acquired from the education they received within the context of the school they attended. Pupils who have undergone formal education should be seen to be creative and innovative 'discoverers' (Chizelu, 2006: 18). We took into consideration the HCS' observation stated on page two of this article: "We would like to accompany youths in their search for sound values, help them to live a lifestyle which counteracts life-threatening forces of our times: the destruction of creation and the manifold forms of injustice" (Unitas, 1994: 2). In line with the HCS' charism, formal education should enable learners to seek values which may help them to live a lifestyle which counteracts life-threatening forces such as social forms of injustice, lack of assertiveness and not being aware of individual rights, among others (Unitas, 1994). This kind of education is what we call education for empowerment.

In their efforts to empower women educationally in Zambia, the HCS ensure that also comply with the role or requirements of Catholic education and the Ministry of Education recommendations that school education should help learners to develop life-skills "which equip them for positive social behaviour and for coping with negative pressures" (MoE, 1996: 43).

Statement of the Problem

Since 1936, the HCS have provided important education to girls/women in the Western Province of Zambia. However, we do not know whether this education was empowering to the women as it is not every form of education that is educationally empowering to girls and women.

Objectives

In line with the foregoing problem statement, the objectives of the study were:

- i) To establish the views of parents on the contribution of the HCS to the educational since 1936.

- ii) To examine the views of school administrators on the contribution made by the HCS.
- iii) To analyse the views of stakeholders on the contribution made by the HCS to educational empowerment of women in Western Province.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the social constructivist theory. According to Creswell (2007: 21), social constructivism is a worldview in which:

Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live by relying as much as possible on the participants' views for subjective meanings of the situation which are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in the individuals' lives.

From this perspective, it was necessary that we interacted with the participants so that we could collect as much information on the problem as possible. By using the social constructivist theory, we sought to fully understand the information collected from the respondents we interacted with. In using this theory, the assumption is that “society is actively produced by human beings, social worlds being interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups” (Marshall, 1994: 484). By use of social constructivist approach, we generated meanings from the different stakeholders who interacted with the HCS and pupils at HCSS.

It was most appropriate for us to use qualitative interview research methods administered using open ended questions, so that respondents could share their views and experiences on the problem being investigated. It was, therefore, essential for us to use the social constructivist paradigm because of the nature of the study. This meant that what we generated regarding empowerment was a reflection of how we made sense of the stakeholders' views. As a result of this position, we held the understanding of empowerment of women who were taught by the HCS in “a much more lightly and far less dogmatically, historically and culturally effected interpretations than absolute and eternal truths of some sort” (Crotty, 2013: 64). This was at the recognition that other contexts had different views on the contribution of other providers of education to the educational empowerment of women.

Literature Review

In line with the main objective (of assessing the contribution of the HCS to the educational empowerment of women in Western Province), with specific reference to the views of stakeholders, we reviewed related literature which was mainly on the education of women. Assadi (2001) carried out a study which investigated the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the education of females in Iran. The focus was to find out whether the status of women in education had been elevated or depressed as a result of the Revolution. Assadi's (2001) study analysed the views of parents (among other respondents) on the education of women in Iran. Additionally, the study touched on policies instituted by the Republic of Iran to support the education of females. According to Assadi (ibid: 53), some of the policies were:

- i) *Free education for everybody from primary to tertiary level.*

- ii) *Building of more schools in rural areas to reduce the distance from home to school.*
- iii) *Single sex schools for girls.*
- iv) *Employment of single teachers in girls' only schools.*
- v) *Educating mothers about the importance of education for girls.*

Assadi concluded that policies increased the participation rates of females in education. However, he did not state whether the girls completed school or not. Our study was therefore justifiable as it went further to state that the education provided by the HCS helped the girls not only to have access education but also to and complete their secondary education.

In her study entitled 'Contribution of the Congregation of Immaculate Conception (CIC) to Women's Education', Ranjitham (2008) found that rural students who were brought up in such a manner as to have the sense of freedom and interest in learning and improving oneself in life, showed better leadership skills than urban students. She further stated that day scholars showed better leadership skills than boarders because they observed and experienced the leadership qualities of their parents and others at home. However, it depended on the nature of leadership qualities of the parents and others at home. Some parents' and guardians' leadership skills were poor or they might not possess any leadership abilities at all. Moreover, some parents and guardians rarely stayed at home so that their children might not imitate their skills but those of their friends' parents. Day scholars might acquire skills from their teachers and other members of staff in the school.

Ranjitham's study was carried out in India, so the findings were more applicable to that country than to Zambia. However, it was relevant to the current study in that it dealt with religion and the education of women. Since HCSS was a day school, Ranjitham's findings were useful to the current study, especially since both studies sought to establish the contribution of religious organisations to the education of women.

According to Snelson (1974: 1), traditional education is "a condition of human survival and is the means whereby one generation transmits the wisdom, knowledge, and experience which prepares the next generation for life's duties and pleasures." Taking Snelson's definition into consideration, it can be argued that there was education in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) which had been in existence from time immemorial. According to Snelson (ibid), although traditional education varies from one ethnic group to another, it had the following five common elements across ethnic groups: instruction in the history of the clan and the tribe, apprenticeship in practical skills, social obligations and the inculcation of good manners, religious teaching centred on the Supreme Being and initiation 'schools'. Children are taught the religious aspect of life in their communities. Mwanakatwe (2013) underscores the gender separateness of the traditional education system. According to him, in traditional pre-colonial Zambia, boys and girls were brought up together for up to about the age of five. Thereafter, gender roles would be emphasised and they would receive education from two different 'curricula'. Boys, were not too closely monitored as they were allowed to roam crop fields, rivers or canals, forests and cattle-grazing fields or swamps and other places where they could spend their leisure time on their own. However, during some 'special sessions' specialists would teach them practical skills, hut-building, net making, carving, pottery or even doctoring (ibid).

With regard to formal education, Christian missionaries played a significant role in bringing Western education to Northern Rhodesia, presently Zambia. Gadsden (1992) asserts that the opening of a large number of bush schools in Northern Rhodesia was as a result of the large number of missionary societies and the competition among them. Interdenominational wars continued to be fought, especially between Catholic run missions and some Protestant missions, forcing the government to develop alternative institutions open to all pupils. For example, the arrival of Tyndale-Biscoe as director of African education in 1936 saw the birth of the idea of Native Authority Schools (Carmody, 2004). The schools were built and operated by local authorities who would receive grants straight from the colonial government.

Additionally, missionaries regularly protested against the atrocities perpetrated by some British South African Company (BSAC) officers (Gadsden, 1992). Nevertheless, the missionaries preached values which helped to strengthen and facilitate the European presence and administration. However, they complained about the difficulty either of attracting students to their schools or of sustaining their interest (Rotberg, 1965). In its endeavour to initiate a relevant and meaningful system of education paying particular attention to democratisation and the education of girls, the Zambian government through the Ministry of Education, continued to work hand in hand with different Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs).

Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) provided skills education to 2,166 female learners as opposed to 707 male learners (Kasanda *et al.*, 2005). This showed that the churches' contribution to the education of girls in Zambia was quite high. Despite this, the majority of women were impoverished educationally as they faced challenges that often compelled them to stop school. While the situation of women in Zambian society had greatly improved, especially through the influence of those who were educated and associations such as National Women's Lobby Group, Women for Change, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Catholic Women's League, notable discrepancies in education between women and men still existed.

Methodology

The study used case study design. The population included all parents whose daughters went to HCSS, all PTA members, head teachers of HCSS and Education Secretaries at the Catholic Secretary. Qualitative interview method was used to gather information from three parents who had daughters who had attended school at HCSS. The sample also consisted of the sitting HCSS Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) Chairperson, the sitting head teacher and one former head teacher of HCSS, one former teacher at HCSS, and the Acting Catholic Education Secretary at the Catholic Secretariat. A small sample was chosen to allow for the use of in-depth interviews meant to capture the real perceptions of the stakeholders. Information was collected from the respondents on a one-on-one basis using a semi-structured interview guide.

Findings

Provision of Secondary Education

As stated above, different stakeholders were interviewed in order to get their views on the contribution of the HCS to the educational empowerment of women in Western Province. According to the PTA Chairperson, the HCS contributed to the educational empowerment of

women by constructing HCSS itself, ensuring that the pupils (girls) were confined within the school boundaries or learning environment, and that they adhered to the learning programme. The PTA Chairperson stated that the HCS ensured that pupils attended all the lessons in the school. According to him, the HCS inculcated good morals and ideals in the learners. He further stated that the Sisters instilled discipline in the pupils. Additionally, the PTA Chairperson observed that the good behaviour of the lay teachers and the Sisters also contributed greatly to the educational empowerment of women because the girls imitated the teachers' good conduct and concentrated on their education. "Though some parents feel that the HCS are too strict, it is a good thing; the girls grow up to be responsible members of the communities they serve," said the PTA Chairperson.

The Chairperson further stressed the importance of education for empowerment which the HCS inculcated in the pupils. He stated that the HCS wanted to protect and train the emotions of the girls so that they could handle any losses and overcome existential crises they might encounter in real life. The PTA Chairperson further asserted that traditional attitudes regarding the expectations of women sometimes made it difficult for them to attain education for empowerment. With regard to discipline, the PTA Chairperson explained that the HCS instilled discipline in the girl learners by explaining to them why discipline was important in a person's life. They interacted with them in a kind and generous manner; they always attended to the learners' problems immediately so that no further problems could arise as a result of delays.

The responses by the three parents indicated that they sometimes helped their daughters to qualify to HCSS by giving them less work to do at home. The findings further indicated that the HCS contributed to the education of women in Western Province by constructing and running (with government help) HCSS and ensuring that the infrastructure was well cared for. However, the parents observed that the performance of HCSS pupils in terms of Grade Twelve results had gone down in recent years because of three main problems, namely, the school having been turned into a day school, transport problems faced by pupils, and lack of accommodation for pupils who did not have relatives in Mongu.

Advancement of Girls' Education

In answer to the question on whether the HCS had done a good job in the advancement of girls' education, the Acting Catholic Education Secretary observed that the Sisters had actually done a very good job to open a secondary school in Western Province. She further observed that the HCS had done a lot for the advancement of girls' education by insisting in the past that HCSS remained a girls' school only despite the community calling for the school to be turned into a co-education institution. She added that the behaviour of the HCS was exemplary to the girls. The Education Secretary further explained that HCSS had produced a lot of graduates working in different parts of the country as teachers, education officers, engineers, bankers, NGO leaders, doctors, nurses, school boards management members, maids and lecturers. She wished to see a situation where there were more boarding schools for girls because they seemed to do better when they were left alone. She also indicated that boarding schools were the best means of ensuring that more girls completed school.

Education for Life

In his responses, the former head teacher indicated that the education received from the HCS by women in Western Province had enabled them to stand for their rights and to openly speak about the general injustices women were subjected to. He stated that the HCS helped their former pupils to be able to manage their affairs properly both at home and work place as the education they gave the girls liberated them to be independent thinkers as women. The respondent stressed the point that the HCS endeavoured to provide education which empowered women so that they could make appropriate decisions without depending on male counterparts for advice, as was the case in traditional Zambia. He bemoaned the lack of role models for girls in Western Province.

The two head teachers concluded that though the HCS endeavoured to empower women educationally, most women in Western Province were still lagging behind to their male counterparts in access to and completion of school education. They observed that this was mainly because schools were constructed far apart, hindering some girls' access to school.

According to the former HCSS teacher, who was also a Holly Cross Sister, in their efforts to empower women educationally, the HCS cooperated with inspectors of schools and they enjoyed teaching subjects like Civics which helped them know more about the civic life of the Zambian people. The former teacher stated that the HCS spent their free time listening to the news and reading local newspapers in order to get acquainted with the affairs of the country. The Sisters felt that if they did not read newspapers, they would be lost in terms of what was happening in the country. According to the former teacher, the pupils saw what the HCS did and imitated them by reading lots of books from the library. She further stated that the pupils did not spend time on things which would not benefit them in future but took to reading any books and magazines they found interesting.

She said, "I met this student, and I was surprised she had read this book called 'The Calling'. The book had 600 pages!"

The former teacher indicated that she was impressed with the extent of reading by the HCSS pupils as some of the girls were even able to quote views from some of the books they had read.

The former teacher further stated that although the initial purpose of educating women was to prepare them to be good wives for the catechists, the education they provided helped to empower women so that they could be employed or take proper care of their children and other members of their families. She said that she had been in contact with many of the former pupils of HCSS and that the women were empowered as they were not only in good jobs but were also using the skills acquired from the Sisters and HCSS education for the betterment of their families, community and the nation at large. She added:

Women who have been educated by HCS exhibit good qualities such as hard work and commitment to social and spiritual issues. As such, even if they failed to complete school in one way or another, they still found something to do in order to sustain their lives.

As far as she was concerned, the HCS followed the Ministry of Education (MoE) designed curriculum and the religious and moral conduct found in the Bible. She stated that a curriculum which helped pupils to remain focused in life and helped them (especially women) to be good citizens, was something that every country would like to achieve. The former teacher concluded by saying that attending a school such as HCSS was one way in which women could be recognised and be given leadership positions in Zambian society.

From the foregoing data, stakeholders were of the view that the HCS contributed to the educational empowerment of women by establishment of schools. The only school for girls in the Western Province of Zambia was established and run by the HCS. Many of the former HCSS women were generally doing well in their lives. The girls were, therefore, partly empowered through their HCSS education.

Discussion

The role of Religious Congregations in the Catholic Church

Vatican Council II (1975: 546) states that “before all else religious life is ordered to the following of Christ by its members and their becoming united with God by the profession of the evangelical counsels”. Religious congregations, therefore, play a pivotal role in the Catholic Church. They are organised into small communities with resources of their own and they live among the people they serve. So they understand the people’s concerns and challenges more than any other group. Religious congregations are involved in various apostolate activities according to their order and constitution. In an informal interview held at Xavier house in Lusaka, Fr. John Moora, one of the Jesuit priests, stressed the point that Catholic Sisters were committed to education and provision of health services to the people in their communities and beyond. Apart from advancing education, they treat sick people by giving them love and tender care. They do this because they have dedicated and committed their lives to God and the service of the people, especially the poor majority. Before joining a particular religious congregation, one has to undergo training and later make vows of service to the Church. This acquaints them with the life they are going to lead as members of religious congregations. The vows taken have to be lived by. As such, the religious congregations are pioneers of the spread of Catholic evangelisation. Since members live within the community, they are well vested in the people’s affairs and can report to the Church authorities which activities need improvement.

Through the exemplary life and service of religious congregations such as the HCS who derive their strength, effort and courage from God and the Holy Spirit, the local people, as they interact with the members, understand and practice the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Church and the Zambian nation should be greatly indebted to the efforts of the women in these religious communities, spread throughout Zambia, whose efforts in the area of education continue to lead to the empowerment of women in the country.

Discipline

The HCS contributed to the educational empowerment of women in Western Province because they instilled discipline among the pupils through their good classroom management skills.

According to Rothstein (1990), classroom management refers to a broad range of techniques used to facilitate instruction, constructive behaviour and thus handling of discipline problems. Rothstein (ibid: 28) further observes that

classroom management is essential to effective teaching because the more time you spend teaching, the more likely your students are to learn. If you spend most of your time handling (or mishandling) discipline problems, you are cutting short your teaching time.

Since HCSS pupils were disciplined, the teachers did not have to spend much time on handling major discipline problems but on teaching. Generally, the HCS managed to instill discipline among the pupils partly by using group activities such as debates on particular issues affecting them. This made pupils enjoy a sense of belonging. One particular issue that the HCS paid attention to was the importance of family. So the girls usually developed topics related to family life and debated these topics in order to identify means to mitigate social problems in general.

Command of Authority

Farrant (2008) observes that every head teacher should command authority in his or her school and that every teacher should possess the same in his or her classroom. Added to this is Henze's (2000) observation that discipline, conformity, solidarity, obedience, uniformity and correctness are the virtues inculcated by mission schools. The HCS managed to instill discipline among the pupils because they worked hand in hand with the teachers. They were also firm, consistent and methodical. By firmness, we mean that the HCS spoke to the pupils in a language and tones that showed that they expected obedience. Moreover, they were consistent and methodical in that they enforced discipline justly, fairly and efficiently. The Sisters were aware that 100 per cent control of the emotions was neither possible nor desirable, but that it was necessary to train the emotions so as to make them secure and lucid (Cury, 2007). So the HCS explained to the pupils the reasons for punishing them. They also administered the discipline without delay so that the pupils could clearly understand why they were being corrected.

Opportunities

The study established that the HCS provided opportunities for all pupils to deal with low self-esteem and experience success by pointing out the success they achieved and encouraging the pupils to try other avenues so as to increase on their own success. They mainly did this on Open Days, Sports Days and at assemblies. At times, pupils were rewarded for their outstanding performance in a test. Dobson (1975) asserts that the adult who felt unloved as a child developed low self-esteem and would never fully forget the experience, as 'the tongue always returns to the site of a missing tooth'. Thus, the HCS provided coping responses to low self-esteem among pupils. Pupils with low self-esteem are usually shy learners. These were encouraged by the Sisters to participate in different activities including religious ones. Most importantly, pupils were openly acknowledged when they behaved well. These modes of instilling discipline encouraged pupils with bad motives to change. One might argue that all schools try to instill discipline among their pupils. However, the question is whether the form of discipline is effective or not. Pupils should understand why they are punished and the punishment should not be enforced suddenly. Rather it

should be a gradual process. The punishment meted out on HCSS pupils by the HCS also helped them understand the nature of their personalities and, thus contributing greatly to their welfare.

Society might blame the Sisters for being too strict, accusing them of censorship, instilling a stultifying self-styled moral code among the pupils, resisting new ideas and having no appreciation of aesthetics. The HCS did not like to see the pupils dressed in flamboyant attires (as artists do). In line with their mission statement, the HCS were not training the girls to become dormant citizens but to be mindful of evolving modern life styles which could corrupt their minds morally and distract them from school work. The HCS nurtured democratic values, such as human dignity, love and care for one another, among HCSS pupils. Jotia (2011) observes that democracy is about issues that affect one directly, the community and the nation at large. Thus, democracy is not only about voting, but rather it is a way of life which is based on the notion of community involvement. The girls were also prepared to be mindful of vices in society, that is, despicable acts ranging from wife battering to child defilement, mostly perpetuated by men against women and girls. If women were to counter these vices effectively, they needed to have sound school education at secondary school level so that they could speak boldly against such vices, instead of keeping quiet as was the case in the traditional set up. They also need a form of education which could make them “realise that they would occupy positions of authority in the future where their courage and expressive ability would be required” (Falola, 2000: 54).

The study further established that former HCSS pupils were involved in different community activities due to the training they received from the HCS. The moral code also helped the former pupils to take up responsibilities in the different organisations they worked for.

One might argue that since former HCSS pupils interacted with different people such as the family, peers and fellow workers, these might have contributed to sharpening the skills the former pupils acquired. Nonetheless, we should take note of Ezewu’s (1983: 17) views regarding interrelated features of interaction:

Interaction can be historical in the sense that every individual develops to a greater or lesser degree the awareness of a recent or more remote past, which, when consciously experienced, affects individual interaction in the present.

So past experiences could have greater influence in the way one currently interacts with other people. It is for this reason that the HCS, through provision of education at HCSS, had greater influence in the lives of former pupils than any other group. Added to Ezewu’s views above is Datta’s (1988) observation regarding the school as a major socialising agent in the life of a child. Datta states that as a socialising agent, the family operates vigorously at the earliest stage of a child’s life but later the school gains at the expense of the family. Datta (1988) further observes that in many African societies many parents were not in a position to guide their children in academic and vocational matters. The teacher has thus to take the role of a counsellor, heightening, thereby, the importance of a school. It is thus evident enough that the HCS, being teachers at HCSS, contributed much to the skills development by the former pupils.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the HCS have contributed to the educational empowerment of women in the Western Province of Zambia through hard work, good discipline and moral conduct and good infrastructure encompassing classrooms, library and religious place of worship. Since the country appears to have many educated unemployed who have little or no practical skills, society might have misgivings about the HCS being so tied to the academic system that failed to provide skills training and opportunities to the learners. However, this should not be the case since this study/article has established that the HCS provided skills which pupils applied later in real life. This agrees with Creswell's (2007) Constructivist theory that subjective meanings of the situation are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives.

In order to strengthen the move taken by the Sisters to provide education to women in the Western Province, the study makes the follows recommendations:

1. Projects such as brick making could be started by the parents living in Malengwa Township. The bricks could be used to construct a private hostel for the pupils who could afford to pay for it instead of living in town, further away from the school.
2. Holy Cross Secondary School should revert to boarding school status.
3. The government should construct more boarding schools in Western Province and other provinces in Zambia.

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