



## **Integration of Gender Equality and Language Diversity in Zimbabwe Teacher Education Curriculum**

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**Abstract:** *This article explored the perceptions of lecturers on integration of gender equality and language diversity in Zimbabwe University teacher education curricula through the qualitative phenomenological design. Out of the population of forty lecturers from one State University and one church owned university in Masvingo Province, nine lecturers from the Department s of Educational Psychology, Educational Sociology and Special Needs Education were picked to participate in this study through Focus Group Discussion which was analyzed through the thematic approach. The study concluded that the challenges that face gender equality include lack of qualified lecturers to teach gender studies in universities, gender studies being elective at universities and lack of scholarly materials that deal with gender issues. These challenges negatively affect the goals of gender equality. The use of a variety of languages helps students and lecturers to socialize. However, some of the challenges that affect the effective use of a variety of languages as instruments of teaching and learning include inability of teachers to master and use all students' languages, the lack of university course textbooks in various languages and lack of reading materials that are in vernacular languages. The study recommends that lecturers should be trained in gender equality issues through staff development programs periodically. The compulsory teaching and learning of gender studies will equip students with relevant knowledge of gender equality. Institutions of higher learning should have clear and deliberate policies of promoting women to positions of authority as a way for women empowerment. Finally, scholars should write literature in vernacular languages to enhance the use of multiple languages in teaching and learning in Zimbabwe.*

**Keywords:** Integration, language, diversity, curricula, gender equality, teacher education

### **Introduction**

This study explored perceptions of lecturers on the integration of gender equality and language variety in Zimbabwean University teacher education curriculum. Reddy (2019, p.163) defined curriculum as “means by how and materials with which students interact to achieve identified educational outcomes. It is the total of experiences that are created or delivered to students through a systematic plan for teaching and learning.” In the context of this study, curriculum refers to what educators deliver to teacher trainees such as inclusive concepts, knowledge and skills. In this article, curriculum is referred to as Zimbabwean university lecturers' planned interaction with students reflecting the Zimbabwean political,

economic, social, cultural and other ideological influences and philosophical approaches to knowledge, teaching and learning. Commenting on the current state of universities' teacher education curricula, Chikunda, Chikunda and de Castro (2017) stated that there is need for gender and language responsive curriculum transformation in teacher training.’ Resultantly, this article dealt with two critical components: language and gender as key drivers of inclusive university education curricula.

### **The Concept of Language**

Language is a critical tool used to communicate in life aspects including education. Teachers and learners exchange views, knowledge and expertise through oral, verbal and sign language in teaching and learning environments (Moyo, 2019). Failure to

accurately use language as a tool to communicate causes communication breakdown and subsequently makes teaching and learning processes ineffective (Badza, 2000). According to Zimbabwe Education Act (2019), teachers should use learners' mother language when teaching at Early Childhood Development levels. However, some scholars hold that, it is impossible for the teacher to know and teach in all sixteen Zimbabwean official languages which are Shona, English, sign language, Ndebele, Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisian, Nambya, Ndau, Shangani, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa (Kelly, 2016). It has been observed that majority of Early Childhood Development Teachers end up using English language and their mother tongue in teaching learners and this may negatively affect learners who are not conversant with English language or teachers' language. On the other hand, Zimbabwe Education Act (2019) compels teachers at primary school to use English language from grade 4 upwards at the expense of indigenous languages which disadvantages learners who have not mastered English language (Nhago, 2013).

### **The Concept of Gender**

With regard to Gender in education, Zimbabwean university curriculum has covered a substantial ground in relation to gender based studies (Mutswetu, 2020). Gender is defined as the characteristics of male and females that are socially constructed based on norms, behaviors and roles (World Health Organization, 2020). University curricula should promote gender equality as a way of equally valuing females and males in all spheres (UNESCO, 2020). The exclusion of males or females has been evident in various areas (Chindanya, 2012; Zimbabwe Constitution, 2013). Some of the aspects of exclusion include educational textbooks written in a style that promote males over females. Another example is the use of pictures that show males working as medical doctors and females working in farms (Dakwa, 2014). These pictures create gender based stereotypes that males work more professional jobs whereas females work domestic jobs. Current literature indicates a need to unpack the challenges faced by males and females in accessing equal opportunities in education, employment, business and politics in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Gender Policy, 2014). Therefore, gender equality and equity may be achieved through robust research as well as designing and implementing appropriate curriculum that is gender sensitive at

universities. Hence, there is need to engage university lecturers who play a critical role in imparting knowledge to teacher trainees who in turn will teach in schools.

### **Literature Review**

This part presents the literature review that guided the study.

#### **Perspectives on Success Stories of Gender**

In America, Nestrova and Jackson (2018) found that, there is little gap between females and males in terms of equalities in universities where there is an increase access and inclusion of female students in tertiary education. Most American universities have managed to have equal enrolment of female and male students at undergraduate programs, even though males still dominate at the PhDs level. According to Yeung (2015), gender equality in Parkistan's universities is slowly being achieved after the introduction Asian University for Women in Bangladesh, which was founded with the aim of empowering the marginalized but talented women to access higher education. On the other hand, Flynn (2018) observed that in America, that there are women who are Deans, full-time lecturers and PhD holders in the faculty of Business, which was previously dominated by males. In addition, between the year 2012 and 2013, 36% of females earned Master's Degrees in Business studies at the University of California. This shows that, more females in developed countries are getting qualifications in fields where they were once excluded; this implies that women have capacities to achieve their educational goals. Sax (2007) found that, in many European countries most women have access to quality and equal education in colleges has been achieved to a greater extent as some universities.

Bawa (2016) found that 58% of students in South African universities are females while 42% are males. According to Paterson (2019), South African universities promoted a program by United Nations to increase the proportion of women in senior leadership positions by at least 20% by 2020 and to ensure that women reach senior academic positions. Two studies in South Africa by Bawa (2016) and Paterson (2019) show that South Africa is trying to promote females to leadership positions in academic circles. On the other hand, in Zimbabwe, Stewart (2012) found that there are more female than male law students at the University of Zimbabwe. However, these success

stories cannot be generalized. Therefore, there is need to explore the perspectives of Zimbabwe university lecturers on the achievements of gender equalities in the education system.

### **Challenges Faced in Achieving Gender Equalities in Universities**

One of the challenges that promote inequalities in education system in America is lack of financial resources by female students' parents who then fail to send their children to universities (Thompson, 2017). Some parents may end up sending male students to universities and disadvantage girl children on the premises that they will be married (Dakwa, 2014). Some students fail to enroll in universities because of entry requirements, since some Universities need distinctions and higher secondary school performance for one to proceed with higher education (Robinson, 2020). As a result, some female students may fail to get the required entry qualification and this may contribute to their academic gender inequality. In order to enhance equality, countries need to have deliberate policy that allows women with lesser points as compared to men to be for further studies (Dakwa, 2014).

In Pakistan, religion and cultural beliefs have been noted as drivers that hinder female students' access to tertiary education (Yeung, 2015). Some religious and cultural beliefs in the country favor males to proceed with their studies as males are regarded as breadwinners, who feed and support their wives. In other communities, religion and culture have been used as weapons to discriminate females in many spheres such as education, work and politics.

According to Paterson (2019), the South African national data on the male and female university academic staff positions show that in 2016, there were only 27, 5 % of females professors. The statistics further show that women academics are more at the lecturer position where they are 53.3 %. Therefore, majority of women occupied the bottom levels of lectureship positions. In Zimbabwe, female lawyers experience gender based discrimination at work due to cultural restrictions (Maungainidze, 2020). Therefore, there is gender disparities between male and females based on economic, culture, entry qualifications and leadership positions among other characteristics.

### **The Use of Multiple Languages in Education**

According to Chitiga (1994), some countries have successfully used both English language and local languages in their schools. Thondlana (2000)

recorded that Tanzania and Nigeria, for example, have successfully implemented teaching and learning using local languages. Learning local Japanese languages greatly assisted foreign lecturers to communicate effectively teach, understand culture and socialization with local community members (Deady, 2012). According to Galloway, Numajiri and Rees (2020), the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2020 gave a policy that English language should also be used in teaching and learning in Chinese universities as a way to enhance university education. Watchter, B & Maiworm (2014) found that European students who learn in international languages get lot of advantages such as international relationships through communication. Research studies have proved that the use of indigenous language have been very successful in countries such as Zimbabwe (Kembo, 2000). Therefore, language is a critical tool in advancing education, socialization, employment among other. Thus, there is need to engage in the current study to find out the lecturers' views on language as an integral part of university curricula.

### **Challenges in the Use of Foreign Languages**

Kuo (2011) found that, some international students studying in American colleges and universities have been struggling with English language proficiency. As a result, it is a policy that all international students in America should have a certificate of English competencies before joining the learning institutions.

Wan (2001) found that most Chinese students in international universities are having problems in articulating their academic issues in English language and as a result, they fail in their academic goals. On the other hand, Jerkins, Jordan and Weiland (1993) argued that, majority of foreign students in America pursuing science and engineering have failed their final year research projects because of English language deficiencies. Therefore, language is one of key challenges that face students.

According to Antanatis (1990), most Asian university students have language problems that affect their ability to engage in class oral presentations, writing assignments and note taking. The majority of African students studying in European universities are getting much stress due to their failure to participate in academic activities because of language barriers. A study on Indonesian students in Britain shows that the learners fail in their studies

because of language barrier (Mukminin, 2016). Soulingnavong and Souvannasy (2009) found that most Nigerian students at National University are struggling in teaching vocabulary because of their low proficiency in English language. In the context of Zimbabwe, students who are incompetent in English language are disadvantaged because it is the official language of teaching and learning in universities (Kadenge & Nkomo, 2011; Thondlana, 2000). Therefore, the use of foreign languages in teaching and learning activities is quite challenging.

## **Research Methodology**

This section presents the methodology that guided the study.

### **Research design**

This study adopted the qualitative phenomenological design. The phenomenological design helped the researchers to go into the deep issues relating to gender and language in Zimbabwean Universities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, it was necessary to explore the lecturers' perspectives on the integration of gender and language into university curricula.

### **Population and Sample**

The population in this study consisted of forty lecturers from two universities (twenty-one lecturers from one State University and nineteen lecturers from one Church University) in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. A sample of nine lecturers was selected as follows: three lecturers from the Department of Educational Psychology, three lecturers from the Department of Sociology and three lecturers from the Department of Special Needs Education. Five lecturers were from State University while four were from the Church owned University. Lecturers were further selected based on their gender and education qualifications. The usage of lecturers from two types of universities helped the researchers to have a variety of information from respondents. Furthermore, the two universities were selected because the church owned university and the state owned university may have different perspectives on language and gender issues, thus the diversity would increase the quality of study results.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data was collected through focus group discussions with nine lecturers from the two universities. During the focus groups discussions, the participants responded to two questions: (1) what are the challenges that militate against inclusion of gender

and language in university curricula? (2) What are the benefits of infusing gender and curricula into university curricula? The active participation of lecturers in these focus groups deliberations increased the quality and value of data as compared to face-to-face interviews (Creswell, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data was transcribed by two professional secretaries that were engaged by the researchers. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data generated from the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Grouping of data into themes helped the researchers to have deep insight and understanding of university lecturers' perspectives on the integration of gender and language into university curricula.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the two universities where this study was conducted. The researchers fully explained to the participants that the study was purely for academic purposes and participating in this study was voluntary (Dube, 2020). To enhance confidentiality, the names of respondents were not indicated in the findings (Chidarikire, Hlalele & Tarisayi, 2021).

## **Results and Discussions**

This section presents the findings of the study from the analysis.

### **Challenges Facing the Inclusion of Gender**

The participants established the following challenges: lack of trained lecturers in gender studies, gender course not compulsory at university and lack of reading materials with current gender issues. Some lecturers were not highly trained and consequently lacked expertise in gender studies.

Focusing on lack of gender knowledge among lecturers, one of the respondents argued that, "the majority of lecturers are not conversant with gender issues and we are not well trained in the current trends of gender in Zimbabwe and beyond. This negatively affects our contributions towards gender inclusive university curricula." On challenges facing gender integration in university curricula, another respondent opined that "At our university the program of gender studies is optional; as a result, some students and lecturers do not consider it important. Most students put more effort in courses they major in." The other respondent revealed that "The lack of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials that address gender issues negatively affect gender studies at our universities."

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that gender studies in Zimbabwean universities are not advancing as expected because the courses are not compulsory but they are elective. This concurs with Zvirevo (2014) who assert that, most students in universities study very hard courses that are compulsory in order to pass and complete their programs.

The importance of the compulsory courses such as gender studies among students is premised on its relevance to their program. On the other hand, lack of well trained teachers in gender studies in Zimbabwean universities has been reported as one of the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of gender studies. Chindanya (2012) argued that lecturers who are not trained in gender studies lack confidence in teaching the course and that some lecturers cannot articulate gender issues well, making gender studies boring and unattractive to students. Much as the success of any course depends on the availability of textbooks and other reading materials, the participants were of the view that lack of teaching and learning materials negatively affected the successful implementation of gender studies in Zimbabwean universities. According to Dakwa (2014), information sources are critical tools in advancing any course at any level of learning.

### **Challenges Facing Language Integration**

The participants highlighted that language integration in Zimbabwean university curriculum faced many challenges including lack of fluency in English language, which is regarded as official language to be used in all universities. In addition, the use of indigenous language for teaching and learning at universities has faced lack of resource related challenges. For example, there are no mathematics textbooks in indigenous languages. One of the respondents revealed that “the majority of lecturers and students at universities are not fluent and conversant with English language because it is not their mother.” Another respondent revealed that “our university has international students who are not aware of local languages just as we lecturers do not know their native languages.”

One more respondent added that lack of textbooks and reading materials written in indigenous is one the challenges that affects the use of local languages in teaching and learning at universities.” Therefore, effective implementation of English language in Zimbabwe universities curriculum is negatively affected by lack of teachers and learners’ English

language proficiency as well as inability to speak and write properly in English language. This is supported by Thondhlana (2000) who found that majority of students in South Africa struggled to write essays because they had limited English vocabulary. On the other hand, the use of local language in Zimbabwean universities curricula has faced many challenges including the lack of lecturers who are fluent in all languages since it is not possible to teach in all sixteen official languages because students come from various ethnic groups in the country (Kadenge & Nkomo, 2011; Kou, 2011). Furthermore, there are no textbooks and reading materials in local languages that have content of programs taught at universities. As a result, the desire to teach university students in local languages suffers (Soulingnavong & Souvannasy, 2009).

### **Benefits of Gender Equality**

Respondents gave various views on the significance of gender equality in university curricula. First, gender equality is a tool to increase women participation in academic leadership positions. This was cited by one of respondents who held that “Gender quality in tertiary institutions is important as it helps women to get into academic leadership position considering the fact that there are few women in high academic positions in Zimbabwe universities.”

Secondly, it was revealed by one of the respondents that gender equality helps to increase female students’ intake in all university learning programs: “In some university programs such as Degree in Mathematics, there are few females and in Early Childhood Development programs there are few male students. Gender equality may contribute to active participation of both male and female students in university programs.” Since few women held senior academic positions in universities, there is a need for universities to implement gender equality programs in order to empower women and create policies for female promotion in leadership positions. In South Africa, the universities have deliberately created policies and programs to advance female promotion into senior positions. As a result, there is an increase of female leaders in South African universities (Paterson, 2019). Studies indicate that the implementation of gender equality in universities promotes more female enrolment across university programs as in many countries where gender equality has been implemented, more females are doing universities programs that were

dominated by males and also males are doing programs that were historical regarded as female fields (Maunganidze, 2020, Flynn, 2018, Stewart, 2012).

The findings also suggested that gender is a vehicle to improve socialization as one of the respondents had this to say: "I am from South Africa; I had no friends and relatives around Zimbabwe. Some of the students and lecturers could not associate with me because of language barrier issues. I had to learn two local languages and now I have a lot of friends because I can interact with them."

### **Benefits of Language Diversity**

The implementation of teaching and learning using many languages in universities has many benefits including promoting socialization, improving students' educational achievements and making students suit in the international spaces. Language diversity helps in improving students' educational achievement as revealed by one of the respondents: "Students who struggle in using English language in their studies will be able to use vernacular languages in learning processes. They will find it easy to articulate academic issues in their own language." On variety use of languages as instrument to fit in international arena, one of the respondents observed that "ability to speak different languages helps the university students to learn, work and stay in different countries. For example, students who are able to speak and write French language can be able to work and study in France without any struggle in terms of language."

The benefits of using variety of languages in teaching and learning at universities in Zimbabwe were further noted by the participants. For example, the ability to speak and write in multiple languages assists the lecturers and students to interact with others in and beyond university walls. Learning in variety of languages plays an important role in facilitating the success of students in their academic endeavors. Participants argued that, some students fail in the studies because they lack mastery of English language that is being used in universities as mode of instruction. According to Mudavanhu (2019) and Zvirevo (2014), university students who use vernacular language in countries like China progress very well in their studies and many of them pass their modules with high marks. On the other hand, Chinese students who are using foreign English Language are having difficulties in their educational endeavors (Kou, 2011; Wan, 2001).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study came up with the following conclusions: The challenges that face gender equality include lack of qualified lecturers to teach gender studies in universities, gender studies being elective at universities and lack of scholarly materials that deal with gender issues. These challenges negatively affect the goals of gender equality.

The advantages of having gender equality in universities curricula include the promotion of female academics into positions of authority, increase of female students in male dominated courses as well as inclusion of males in female dominated fields.

The use of a variety of languages helps students and lecturers to socialize. However, some of the challenges that affect the effective use of a variety of languages as instruments of teaching and learning include inability of teachers to master and use all students' languages, the lack of university course textbooks in various languages and lack of reading materials that are in vernacular languages.

The researchers recommend that lecturers should be trained in gender equality issues through staff development programs periodically. This will help lecturers to enhance their knowledge and skills in gender issues. Secondly, gender studies modules should be compulsory across all universities' disciplines. The compulsory teaching and learning of gender studies will equip students with relevant knowledge of gender equality. Institutions of higher learning should have clear and deliberate policies of promoting women to positions of authority, as a way for women empowerment. Scholars should write literature in vernacular languages to enhance the use of multiple languages in teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. Finally, lecturers should use simplified English language when teaching. The universities should also provide funds and workshop to enable lecturers to master different languages; this will help them to master a variety of languages for teaching and learning.

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