ZJER

ZIMBABWE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Volume 27 Number 1
March 2015

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

Volume 27, Number 1, March 2015
ISSN 1013-3445

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Effectiveness of Gender Policies in the Promotion of Women Leaders in Universities: A Case of Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study assessed the effectiveness of gender policies in the promotion of women leaders at Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, in 2013. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Data were collected through key informants' interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and document analysis. A comparative analysis of female representation in various university structures and committees in 2005 and 2013 was done. A total of one hundred and thirty-four (134) respondents participated in the study. Generally, this study found that leadership and decision-making have remained male dominated despite having the gender policy in place. Therefore, among other recommendations, the study recommends that the University Academic Appointment Board, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, should increase the annual incremental rate of deployment to allow more women to be appointed to leadership positions in the university.

Background to the study

The international community has made numerous commitments to promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women (Bacchi & Eveline, 1999). To promote gender equality, the following are some of the instruments that have been put in place:

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Millennium Development Goals Summit (2000). The Beijing Platform for Action considered the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels as one of the critical areas of concern for the empowerment of women (Women Watch, 2000). Most governments have signed the Beijing Platform for Action that endorsed a policy to promote gender equality and empowerment of women (Moser, 2005). Gender mainstreaming was identified as the most important mechanism to reach the ambitious goals laid out in the Platform for Action (Moser, 2005).

At regional level, efforts to address gender inequalities in Southern Africa have resulted in the instituting of a number of instruments that emphasize gender equality. These include the SADC Declaration on Gender and Equality, signed by SADC Heads of State and Governments in 1997. This instrument commits to ensuring the equal representation of women and men in the decision making of member states. The African Union Protocol on African Women's Rights adopted in 2003 by African Union is another measure aimed at rectifying gender inequalities between men and women in various aspects including leadership.

Zimbabwe, as a signatory member to a number of international and regional gender instruments mentioned above, responded to addressing gender inequalities by coming up with a National Gender Policy as well as a National Gender Policy Implementation Strategy and Work Plan which sets out priorities for gender mainstreaming and empowerment for the period 2008-2012.

In an effort to redress gender inequity, universities have put in place affirmative action, equal opportunity regulations and adopted programs designed to increase the number of women in leadership in universities (Ampofo et al., 2004). Similar to other universities in the region, Midlands State University developed a Gender Policy in 2006 to guide its operations in addressing issues related to gender. Midlands State University is a state university established in 2000. It has set itself to promote gender equality and this is enunciated in the University vision, mission and core values.

Case study of gender policy

In response to the magnitude of gender inequalities in the university and society at large, Midlands State University formulated and introduced its own gender policy in 2006. Some of the goals of the policy include: To mainstream gender in the University; and to eliminate practices impeding equality and equity of sexes (MSU- Gender policy, 2006, p.3). On the same note, some of the objectives are: To ensure gender balance in recruitment, promotion and retention of staff by 2010; and to ensure that at least 50 percent of decision makers at all levels are female by December 2010 (MSU- Gender Policy, 2006, p.3). The gender policy highlights that the increased participation of women in leadership and decision-making bodies would be achieved through employing a number of strategies which include; advocating for increased recruitment, promotion and retention of female staff; equitable funding for staff development of female and male staff members; formulating gender- sensitive policies (MSU Gender Policy, 2006, p.5-6). Other strategies outlined in the policy include; redressing gender imbalances through affirmative action and empowerment; and

training the University community to implement the University Gender Policy, monitor and evaluate its impact. The gender policy was meant to ensure gender balance in recruitment, promotion and retention of staff among other things.

However, since the enactment of the policy in 2006, there has not been any study to assess its progress in realisation of its objectives of increasing women representation in leadership positions in the university. This study therefore, sought to establish the effectiveness of the gender policy in promoting women leadership at Midlands State University.

Objective underlining the study
To assess the effectiveness of the gender policy in the promotion of women leaders within the university

Specific objectives
The study sought to:

i) *Establish how the gender policy is being implemented to promote women career growth and leadership. Assess the extent to which the gender policy has*

ii) *realised the intended results in the area of leadership.*

iii) *Identify the limitations and challenges faced in implementing the gender policy in the University.*

iv) *Identify solutions to limitations and challenges that will contribute to the improvement of women's representation and participation in leadership in the university.*

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the liberal feminist theory. This theory is based on the idea that women and men are equal and therefore have equal rights, as well as equal access to and equal representation in public life (van den Brink et al., 2010). The liberals believe in human rights, gender justice or sexual equality, equal opportunities, equal access to resources, that is, males and females are equal and no-one should be discriminated against.

According to Tong (2009) the liberal feminist theory has been criticised for failing to change the structures which remain male dominated. This theory is criticised for maintaining the status quo and failing to transform the lives of women. The women remain discriminated in the workplace and are excluded from leadership and decision-making despite having the gender policy in place. The liberal feminist theory advocates for equality between males and females in all economic, social and educational sectors but fails to come up with systems and processes which advantage women.

Women like their male counterparts are supposed to enjoy the same opportunities, benefits, rights and privileges. If males remain in power it means that they have the prerogative to control resources, formulate policies and make decisions. Women continue to occupy a subordinate position and their needs are likely not to be addressed. According to Moser (1993) women have practical and strategic gender needs which have to be addressed. If more women are appointed to leadership positions, the assumption is that they would work towards addressing the needs of women.

The theory was used to make a critical analysis of representation and participation of women in university leadership from 2006 to 2013. Attention was drawn to the extent to which the theory parameters explain the situation in Midlands State University in relation to the policy for promoting women leaders. The researcher examined how resources are allocated and whether males and females have equal access to leadership positions, power and decision making, grants, scholarships and staff development. The theory provided a context in examining the power, rules, people, activities, and resources in the institution and one established who has power over what resources, access and control over resources, who makes decisions, who benefits and who losses.

Methodology

The study adopted a case study design. The case study design was appropriate given the need to interrogate the systems and structures of the institution and assess the effectiveness of the gender policy.

Population and sampling

The study population was made up of 504 academic and administrative staff at Midlands State University. The sample was made up of the four key informants from the top administrators in the university, one hundred and twenty-eight members of staff (80 males and 48 females) randomly selected; two female officials, one from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and one from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development. Altogether, one hundred and thirty- four respondents participated in the study. The researcher utilized two sampling procedures in selecting the sample of the study, namely, stratified random sampling and purposive sampling.

Data collection methods

The study applied both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Primary data was solicited through in-depth interviews, the structured questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGDs). Secondary data was secured from document analysis.

Findings and discussion

Research objective 1

Establish how the gender policy is being implemented to promote women career growth and leadership

The study investigated the effectiveness of the strategies employed in recruitment, promotion, retention, staff development, research grants and scholarships.

The key informants explained that the university had a target of attaining 50: 50 gender parity by 2015 at an incremental rate of 8% per year in order to increase the number of women. They indicated that out of the 96 management positions women constituted (28%) and males (72%). They mentioned that the university was employing a number of strategies to increase women in leadership, these included; making use of affirmative action policies, encouraging women to attain higher degrees, encouraging women to apply when there were vacant posts, having staff development programmes, having leadership training programmes for women, deliberately selecting the female candidate if a male and a female candidate attain the same score in an interview, adverts having a rider that encourages women to apply. It was also mentioned that recruitment is guided by recruitment policies which are based on a ratio of 60% to 40% in favour of women. Similarly, they

explained that staff development fellowship (SDF) was also based on a rate of 60% to 40% in favour of women.

While the key informants were convinced that a number of strategies were in place to promote women leadership, the beneficiaries, indicated that a lot more needed to be done by the university to improve the situation of women. The male respondents made it clear that it was a management issue and they were not aware of the strategies used. Similarly, the female respondents in FGDs indicated that nothing much was being done to promote women in leadership.

The findings revealed that although the gender policy advocates for increased recruitment and promotion of female staff, first and foremost, the women must be qualified and should have the minimum requisite qualifications for the job. Secondly, the women must be able to perform in the interview. Both recruitment and promotion are based on merit and qualifications and not gender. This means that in reality women are not advantaged in any way since the recruitment and promotion processes and procedures have remained gender insensitive and fail to regard women as a disadvantaged group. Furthermore, retention, research grants and staff development did not have any special schemes to improve the situation of women.

Research objective 2
Assess the extent to which the gender policy has realised the intended results in the area of leadership

Another key indicator of the effectiveness of the gender policy that the study examined was the representation of women in leadership and

decision making bodies in the University including; council, senate, university committees, administration, academic staff and student leadership.

The study analysed female representation in council, senate and various university committees in 2005 and 2013. The analysis in Table 1 indicates that the female representation in the Council increased slightly by (15.6%) from (21.9%) in 2005 when the gender policy was adopted to (37.5%) in 2013. In the Senate, females increased slightly by (8.6%) from (16.7%) in 2005 to (25.3%) in 2013. These gains are minimal and females remain under represented in almost all the committees with the exception of the Marketing and Public Relations committee where females constitute (50.0%) and ICT Purchasing which has (54.5%) females respectively.

The key informants attributed the slight gains to the positive influence of the gender policy. On the contrary, the female and male respondents in FGDs indicated that women were not visible in most university committees.

Table 1

Gender Distribution in University Committees 2005 and 2013

Committee Name	2005				2013			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Council	7	21.9	25	78.1	12	37.5	20	62.5
Finance	3	30.0	7	70.0	3	30.0	7	70.0
Academic Staff Promotions and Tenure	4	23.5	13	76.5	4	23.5	13	76.5
Non- Academic Staff Promotions and Tenure	4	44.4	5	55.5	4	44.4	5	55.5
Academic Staff Appointment Board	3	37.5	5	62.5	3	37.5	5	62.5
Non-Academic Staff Appointment Board	1	20	4	80.0	1	20.0	4	80.0
Salaries and Conditions of Service	3	30.0	7	70.0	3	30.0	7	70.0
Fundraising	3	42.9	4	57.1	3	42.9	4	57.1
Building	3	25.0	9	75.0	3	25.0	9	75.0
Risk Management	6	25.0	18	75.0	6	25.0	18	75.0
Continuation of Employment Beyond Retirement Age	3	42.9	4	57.1	3	42.9	4	57.1
Farm Management Board	2	22.2	7	77.8	2	22.2	7	77.8
Planning	2	28.6	5	71.4	2	28.6	5	71.4
Budget	2	33.3	4	66.7	2	33.3	4	66.7
Marketing and Public Relations	4	50.0	4	50.0	4	50.0	4	50.0
Tender Adjudication	4	26.7	11	73.3	4	26.7	11	73.3
Senate	7	16.7	35	83.3	19	25.3	56	74.7
Academic Board	3	17.6	14	82.4	3	17.6	14	82.4
Work Related Learning	-	-	-	-	5	25.0	15	75.0
Research and Post-graduate Studies	-	-	-	-	7	31.8	15	68.2
Library	4	40.0	6	60.0	4	40.0	6	60.0
Research Board	5	35.7	9	64.3	5	35.7	9	64.3
Student Travel Fund	3	27.3	8	72.7	3	27.3	8	72.7
ICT Purchasing	-	-	-	-	6	54.5	5	45.5
Graduate Employment	3	33.3	6	66.7	3	33.3	6	66.7
Open Day	-	-	-	-	5	45.5	6	54.5
Editorial and Publication	4	36.4	7	63.6	4	36.4	7	63.6
Campus Security	3	23.1	10	76.9	3	23.1	10	76.9
Quality Assurance	6	27.3	16	72.7	6	27.3	16	72.7
Health and Safety	7	35	13	65.0	7	35	13	65.0
Termination of Studies Appeals	4	44.4	5	55.6	4	44.4	5	55.6

(Academic Registrar's Office 2013)

The results indicated that women increased slightly in the Council, Senate and various university committees.

Academic staff by gender 2005 and 2013

The study analysed the trends of the gender distribution amongst academic staff in 2005 and 2013. Academic staff combines both the administrative positions which include; principal officers, deans, deputy deans/ directors, chairpersons and academic categories such as lecturer, assistant lecturer, professor and associate professor. Results are presented in Table2.

Table 2

Academic Staff by Gender 2005 and 2013

	2005				2013			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Principal Officers	4	80.0	1	20.0	3	60.0	2	40.0
Deans/ Directors	5	71.4	2	28.6	17	85.0	3	15.0
Deputy deans/ Directors	-	-	-	-	5	55.6	4	44.4
Chairpersons	24	77.4	7	22.6	33	75.0	11	25.0
Lecturer	74	74.7	25	25.3	284	70.1	121	29.9
Assistant Lecturer	53	76.8	16	23.2	20	57.1	15	42.9
Professor	2	100	0	0	4	100.0	0	0
Associate Professor	0	0	1	100.0	5	83.3	1	16.7
Total	**162**	**75.7**	**52**	**24.3**	**371**	**70.3**	**157**	**29.7**

(Academic Registrar's Office 2013)

The gender analysis presented in Table 2 revealed a slight increase of (5.4%) for females from (24.3%) in 2005 to (29.7%) in 2013. However, it was observed that leadership and decision making positions had remained male dominated as in 2005 however, slight improvements in favour of females were noted at the principal officer level which was

now at (40.0%) from (20%) in 2005 and chairpersons increased slightly from (22.6%) in 2005 to (25.0%). A greater number of women's representation in leadership was observed at deputy dean / director level where females accounted for (44.4%) while males accounted for (55.6%). However, at dean/ director level, females decreased from (28.6%) in 2005 to the present (15.0%) while males accounted for (85.0%). Similarly, males accounted for (100.0%) at professor level and that was the situation in 2005; for associate professor, representation was (16.7%) females against (83.3%) males. Females have remained under represented as professors and associate professors despite having the gender policy in place. Some slight gains were noted at principal officer level, deputy dean/ director and chairperson level.

The findings have shown that the gender policy has been effective to a minimal extent. The University is still male dominated despite having the gender policy in place. These findings are similar to earlier findings by Kjeldal, Rindfleish and Sheridon (2005) who observed that after more than two decades of EEO legislation in Australia, women are still under-represented in senior academic positions. Furthermore, the study findings have shown that a significant number of women participate in leadership at the deputy dean/ director level. These findings affirm the findings by Chesterman and Ross- Smith (2006) who established that in Australian universities many of the women in administrative positions were concentrated in traditional pink ghettos such as human resources and the majority of them tended to be in assistant director positions rather than those of directors.

The gender policy has not been effective in transforming the disadvantaged situation of women that prevailed before the policy was put in place.

Research objective 3

Identify the limitations and challenges faced in implementing the gender policy in the University

Respondents were asked to identify some limitations and challenges to gender policy implementation in promoting women leadership. The responses are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Limitations and Challenges

	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Culture, Patriarchy, stereotyping and male resistance	23	28.8	8	16.6	31	24.2
Lack of pool to select women from	16	20.0	10	20.8	26	20.3
ZIMCHE standards	21	26.2	20	41.7	41	32.0
Lack of gender policy sensitization	15	18.7	7	14.6	22	17.2
Lack of funding	2	2.5	1	2.1	3	2.3
Lack of monitoring and evaluation	3	3.8	2	4.2	5	3.9
Total	80	100.0	48	100.0	128	100.0

Source: Fieldwork Findings

Table 3 presents some of limitations and challenges identified by respondents as hindering the implementation of the gender policy. More females (41.7%) than males (26.2%) identified the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) standards as a hindrance for women promotion; more females (20.8%) than males (20.0%) males observed that there was a lack of pool to select women from even if the institution wanted more women; more males (28.8%) than females (16.6%) identified culture, patriarchy, stereotyping and male resistance, more males (18.7%) than females (14.6%) indicated lack of gender policy sensitization, more males (2.5%) than females (2.1%) identified lack of funding, more females (4.2%) than males (3.8%) indicated lack of monitoring and evaluation.

The limitations and challenges hindering the implementation of the gender policy identified include; culture, patriarchy, stereotyping and male resistance; lack of pool to select women from; standards set by ZIMCHE; lack of gender policy sensitization; lack of funding; lack of monitoring and evaluation.

One of the problems identified relates to the pool to select women from. The results revealed that appointments in the University are based on qualifications and merit. Research findings in Table 2 showed that more males than females are professors, associate professors and PhD holders. This means that chances of males being promoted are higher than those of females. These findings are similar to what was established by the Gender Mainstreaming Division (2007) at Makerere University that promotions within the academy are linked to research and publications and it would appear that many women have not been able to do so and hence do not rise as fast as their male colleagues.

Culture, patriarchy, stereotyping and resistance were also identified as major challenges to policy implementation. Similar findings on the effects of culture, patriarchy, stereotyping and male resistance on women's access to leadership positions and decision making were observed by (Lindsay 1997). That study revealed that gender policies are not supported by males who resist change and fail to support women who aspire to be leaders. Unless the males are sensitized to support policies that aim to develop women, they pose a challenge to effective implementation of these policies.

The gender policy like other gender mainstreaming strategies faces resistance as a major challenge in its operations. Findings have revealed that the gender policy experiences some resistance especially from males who want to maintain the status quo and resist any policy changes. Unless the University administrators support the implementation of the gender policy, women remain marginalized and discriminated in leadership and decision making. The gender policy can yield positive results if it is well supported by management.

Recommendations

From the study findings, the following recommendations were made:

> The university should continue making use of affirmative action policies to address gender disparities in leadership. The incremental rate of 8% per year is too low to make any impact. The University should increase the incremental rate to a higher percentage of 20% so that more women can be appointed.

> The women should be supported by the university and embrace every opportunity to attain higher qualifications for them to compete with men for higher positions.

➤ A scholarship fund designed to enable women to pursue further studies and attain higher qualifications should be set up by the Vice Chancellor.

➤ The university should hold gender sensitization workshops and educate staff on the gender policy and its intentions.

➤ The Vice Chancellor should put in place a gender committee which is mandated to sensitize new members of staff on the policy and ensure its effective implementation. This committee should report directly to the Vice Chancellor.

Conclusion

Given the findings from this study, the gender policy has not made significant impact in promoting women leaders despite the university coming up with some measures to address the problem. Evidence has shown that women are still under-represented at various levels. Leadership continues to be male dominated as males occupy the top positions as principal officers, deans/ directors, deputy deans/ directors and chairpersons.

The university has not attained the 50% female representation in leadership and decision-making anticipated when the policy was formulated in 2006. The 8% incremental rate per year has not translated into any form of increase of women in leadership. The results have shown that leadership has remained predominantly a male domain and women are under-represented in all categories except for the deputy dean/ director level which indicated some upward growth.

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