

# Speaking for Ourselves

Masculinities and Femininities Amongst  
Students at the University of Zimbabwe



Edited by Rudo B. Gaidzanwa

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# *The Affirmative Action Programme at U.Z.: Gender and Equity Issues*

**IRVINE CHIVAURA**

### **Introduction**

The Affirmative Action Programme at the University of Zimbabwe was implemented in 1995 after a realisation of the gross inequalities that existed between male and female students in the University of Zimbabwe. Female staff and students were generally under represented across all faculties at the University of Zimbabwe, comprising only 25% of the total enrolment. In the science and technical faculties female students are grossly under represented and they comprise less than 20% of total enrolment in the sciences. This chapter will seek to discover some of the underlying reasons explaining the numerical inferiority of female students and suggest some intervention strategies aimed at encouraging or increasing the number of females entering the science and technical faculties.

### **Methodology**

Official statistics were used in this study for the purpose of establishing the sex composition of all the faculties at the University of Zimbabwe. The statistics were kindly provided by the office of the Assistant Registrar (Records and Registration). Unstructured interviews were used extensively to further consolidate the statistical information obtained. Among the people interviewed were the University's Administrative Staff in the Dean of Students's Office, the Assistant Registrar (Records and Registration). Lecturers in the academic departments of several faculties were also interviewed.

Relevant information was also gathered during workshops hosted by the Gender Studies Association with students with disabilities and students from physiotherapy. Another workshop for administrators, was hosted by the Gender Studies Association.(GSA). It included faculty administrators and personnel from the Administration and Admissions office and staff from the Dean of Students' Office. The workshops were held in September 2000.

The opinions of students were also sought through small focus group discussions, usually of about 3 to 4 students. Individual students were also interviewed. The researcher was able to interview 40 students who voluntarily participated in the interviews. The selection procedure used by researcher was a stratified random selection whereby 20 male students and 20 female students formed the basic categories. All these students were in different academic years and all the students were based in the science faculties. All students and staff interviewed voluntarily participated after informed consent was sought. The students wished not to be

identified by name and the staff members agreed to be identified only through their offices.

## Background

In the early 1980s, the gross racial imbalances in student enrolment were addressed through the implementation of the black advancement programme by the government of Zimbabwe. This program aimed to increase the black student population at the University of Zimbabwe. Prior to independence the U.Z, then called the University of Rhodesia, had been constructed exclusively for the white students in Zimbabwe then Rhodesia. A very insignificant number of black students, mainly male, had the privilege to access university education through bursaries and scholarships, which were awarded by mission schools and some philanthropic bodies. At the inception of independence in 1980, government adopted a policy of education for all and made efforts to facilitate the advancement of black students in all areas previously dominated by whites. The black advancement programme was used as a vehicle to affirm the previously disadvantaged black population in institutions of higher learning. The programme was very successful insofar as it facilitated an increase in the number of black students accessing university education.

In *apartheid* South Africa, the white supremacist government had established a differential education system, which segregated the white and black schools. The white schools were well funded and had more superior resources than the non-white schools. The advent of black majority rule in 1994 necessitated the removal of legal and political obstacles, which had been in place thus expressing the desire for equal opportunity and equal access to education for all races. Black South African women had been doubly disadvantaged by apartheid and patriarchal stereotypes, which discriminated against the girl child's education.

Similarly in the United States of America (USA), prior to the Civil Rights Acts of 1944, 1972 and 1992, the black minority groups and other minorities who are non-white and the disabled persons, had been discriminated against and their access to education had been severely restricted by legal mechanisms.

In South Africa, the African National Congress (A.N.C.), when it come to power, adopted a gender policy which acknowledged the government's intention to eradicate racial discrimination of all forms and to address the gender inequalities in access to professional occupations and educational institutions. In 1994, a national gender policy was formulated with a legal clause on equality stating that:

Women shall have equal rights in all sphere of public and private life and the state shall take affirmative action to eliminate inequalities and discrimination between the sexes (Murray, 1994: 47).

In the USA, the idea of affirmative action was based on the logic of providing appropriate remedies to individuals and groups of minorities who had been victims of discriminatory legal and quasi-legal mechanisms. The programme of affirmative action in the USA sought to enable black minorities, non-white minorities and the

disabled to be accorded affirmative action in an effort to redress the inequalities which had been manifested in the world of work and education and the economy. However, after realising that women had generally been disadvantaged and doubly marginalised, the USA and Britain passed sex discrimination legislation. The legislation in the USA and Britain, allowed affirmative action to positively discriminate in favour of women where the women were underrepresented in educational systems. In most education programmes and degrees where women and men were underrepresented in those programmes and in other professional occupations, remedial action was to be taken to address historically based injustices against women and minorities..

However, in the USA, the affirmative action policy was challenged in the Supreme Court on the basis that it discriminated between the sexes and contravened equality of treatment as women are accorded special treatment. The Supreme Court, in the Weber case of 1979 and the Griggs decision, ruled that affirmative action was not discriminatory as it sought to redress inequalities in access to opportunities.(Howard and Lockwook 1979). In Zimbabwe the implementation of the black advancement programme was a form of affirmative action for black students who had previously been disadvantaged by the political and legal system, which restricted access to education by the black majority. The black advancement programme expanded access for black students to progress with university education with government funding through loan and grants.

The University of Zimbabwe implemented the staff development programme. This programme aimed to affirm black students in postgraduate studies, through funding and almost secure hiring on completion of their post-graduate studies. This programme enabled these black staff development fellows, to take over lectureship positions, which were being vacated by or had been previously monopolised by white lecturers. It is therefore apparent that many current male lecturers, are beneficiaries of affirmative action, which was then referred to as a black advancement programme and eventually, the staff development programme.

Unfortunately the black advancement and staff development programmes benefited mainly the black male post-graduate students while the female post students' population remained static. A study by Gaidzanwa (1989) indicated that the overall percentages of female students at U.Z remained static at an average of 25% between 1979 to 1989 and in the science faculties of Agriculture, Engineering, Medicine, Veterinary Science and Science General averaged 18% of the total students enrolled in the science faculties in 1989.

It is against this background that the affirmative action was officially implemented in 1995 to increase the number of female students accessing university education particularly in the scientific and technical faculties.

### **The Affirmative Action Program on undergraduate student enrolment**

Affirmative action involves setting differential cut off points for admission in various programmes at the University of Zimbabwe. The cut off points for the admission of

female students are 2 points lower than those for their male counterparts. Other forms of affirmative action for enrolment include mature entry, which are 25 years for females and 30 years for males with relevant work experience. The differential cut off points for female students were determined on the understanding and realisation that females, in their educational lives, are constrained by gender roles at home in the form of domestic chores performed at home. These chores such as childcare and home management, reduce the opportunities available for them to pursue education in general unlike male students, who are not, to a large extent, disadvantaged by domestic chores at home. Therefore, male students have more time to study and pursue careers in their lives. The objectives of the 1995 affirmative action programme were to increase female first year intakes to at least 45% of the undergraduate enrolment by the year 2 000.

A follow-up study by the Affirmative Action Programme in 1997 revealed mixed results in those faculties, which had implemented the affirmative action. In the Arts and Social Science programs, an analysis of enrolments indicated that equity in access to programmes had made substantial progress with females making up between 40% and 45% of the student population in these faculties. At least 27% of females in the B.A. General degree programme had been admitted through the affirmative action. In the Social Studies faculty, female students comprised 45% of the first year intake without applying affirmative action measures.

In the Science faculties, the numbers of female students had not increased significantly as indicated by the registration figures obtained for the February and October 1999 academic years.

The February 1999 intake indicated the same trend as the 1997 intake. However a sharp contrast between the Science faculties and the Arts, Social Studies, Commerce and Education faculties is evident. The Humanities exhibited an increase in the numbers of females whereas the Science faculties showed very little change, in female enrolment.

**Table1a: Statistics for the February 1999 intake**

Faculty	Males	Females	Total	%Females
Agriculture	76	26	102	25
Engineering (Electrical, Mechanical, Civil, Metallurgy)	144	9	153	6
Medicine (Medicine, Surgery, Pharmacy, Lab Science, Nursing, Occupational Therapy)	197	83	280	30
Science	145	61	206	30
Veterinary Science	25	7	32	22

Source: Assistant Registrar, Records and Registration.

The five Science faculties mentioned had a total enrolment of 773 students and the total number of females in these science programmes was 186. Females made



up 24% of the Science faculty. 32% of the females in the Science programme were admitted through the Affirmative Action Programme.

In the faculties of Arts, Social Studies, Commerce, Education and Law equity in gender representation in enrolment had made substantial progress but in the sciences, very little progress had been made.

**Table 1b: Statistics for the February 1999 intake**

Faculty	Males	Females	Total	%Females
Social Studies	197	159	356	45
Education	185	77	262	30
Law	44	42	86	48
Arts	180	161	341	47
Commerce	169	75	244	31

Source: Assistant Registrar, Records and Registration.

In the faculty of Social Studies, Law and Arts, an analysis of the gender distribution in enrolment shows an almost equitable representation of both male and female students. In the Social Studies, all students were admitted with equal points. In the faculty of Commerce, male and female students had almost equal points and only a few females were admitted on affirmative action. In the humanities, the faculties of Law and Commerce are the programmes with the highest demand and the first preference for students applying for admission. Therefore, these programmes are able to fill their places for females without need for affirmative action since most females with the highest points are able to gain admission. Despite being able to fill their places for female students without necessarily needing to apply affirmative action in the faculty of Law, affirmative action remains contested and the faculties across the university are still dominated by male academic staff.

The policy faces severe criticism as the male staff members argue that it defies the notion of equal opportunities and equal treatment for both sexes. They argue that it inherently accords preferential and special treatment to the female student, while disadvantaging some male students who may be rejected because their places would have been given to some female applicants. However, female lecturers in the faculties of Agriculture and Science generally argue that the reluctance to admit females on affirmative action is meant to maintain and perpetuate the domination of male students and male staff members, thereby keeping the university a masculine institution.

In the total enrolment for the 10 faculties, the total students' population for females was 700, representing only 34% of the total first year intake of February 1999. Approximately 16% of the female students were admitted on the bases of affirmative action in all the faculties. The October 1999 intake exhibited a general decrease in the percentage of female students enrolled despite the general increase in total number of students enrolled in the October 1999 intake.

**Table 2a: Statistics for the October 1999 intake**

Faculty	Males	Females	Total	%Females
Agriculture	109	29	138	21
Engineering	187	14	201	7
Medicine	258	88	346	25
Science	297	85	382	22
Veterinary Science	22	5	27	19

Source: Assistant Registrar, Student Records and Registration.

The faculties in the Sciences had a total enrollment of 1094 students and the total number of females in the Science programmes was 221. Females made up 20% of the enrolment in the science faculties. This is a 4% decline in female student enrolment in the science faculties compared to 25% in February 1999. 39% of the female students were admitted through the affirmative action measures across the science faculties.

In the Faculties of Arts, Social Studies, Commerce, Education and Law, there was a decrease in the numbers of female students enrolled in comparison to the February 1999 intake.

**Table 2b: Statistics for the October 1999 intake**

Faculty	Males	Females	Total	%Females
Social Studies	392	224	616	36

The intake in this faculty increased from 356 in February 1999 intakes to 616 in October 1999, representing a 73% increase in the first year intake in the social studies. However, the percentage of females declined by 9% from 45% in February 1999 to 36% October 1999. Students were enrolled with equal points and no affirmative action measures were taken to increase the proportion of female students enrolled.

**Table 2c: Statistics for the October 1999 intake**

Faculty	Males	Females	Total	%Females
Education	188	78	266	29
Arts	270	135	405	33
Law	56	31	87	36
Commerce	183	64	247	30

Source: Assistant Registrar, Records and Registration.

The combined 10 faculties had a total female population of 753 representing 30% of the total first year intake of October 1999. 19% of the female students were admitted

through the Affirmative Action Programme. Whether discontinuing the affirmative action measures is a university policy, is not clear. However, the intake statistics show that faculties are choosing to apply or not to apply affirmative action measures and the university authorities are not taking any consistent action to ensure that the policy is implemented consistently across faculties and intakes.

The low female students enrollment especially in the Science and Technical programmes had been attributed to two main factors, which will be explored in detail.

In general, there are fewer females who apply for admission into the science programmes in relation to male applicants into the same science programme for each academic year. This can reasonably be construed to imply that female students tend to study arts and commercial subjects at advanced level. However, this factor applies to both male and female applicants because of the very high points required for entry at U.Z. The inflation of academic qualifications applies to both male and female applicants so it is not clear why there is a decline in the enrolment of female students in relation to males.

Many students, with the encouragement of school heads and teachers, tend to take up subjects at 'A' level, which they perceive to be less tough and in which they think they can score very high points. This choice of subjects results in some students taking subject combinations, which are not suitable for the programs for which the students intend to enrol.

For instance, the department of Medicine and Surgery requires at least an 'A' pass in Chemistry and Mathematics and the third subject has to be either Physics or Biology. So if a student has an 'A' in Physics, Biology, Maths s/he is unlikely to be admitted into the Medicine and Surgery programme. Other departments in the Science faculty will only consider her if they still have places vacant after considering students who would have indicated the Medicine and Surgery programme as their first preference.

Kajawu (2 000) noted that the under representation of females can be traced to the pattern of secondary school enrolment of male and female students. She noted that 5% of females at 'A' level achieve the passes necessary to proceed to university compared to 11% for male 'A' levels students who achieve passes necessary for admission. This gender disparity translates into the gender inequalities in representation of females prevalent in institutions of higher learning.

## **Gender and subject choice in secondary school**

In the United Kingdom, over a period of decades, girls and boys have continued to make differential choices of subjects to study, even when they are ostensibly equally free to choose any of the subjects on offer. This clearly has direct consequences for higher education and for occupational opportunities. The introduction of a National Curriculum meant that up to the age of 16 – 17 years all students take the same subjects with English, Maths and Science being compulsory and at least a practical subject at GCE 'O' level. However, immediately after they are free to choose

preferences immediately become apparent. Ann Colley (1998) explored some of the possible reasons for this, paying particular attention to adult social roles of men and women, the abilities that are considered typical of these roles, and the consequent gender related stereotypes of academic subjects. According to the study by Colley, some subjects are more appropriate for males and some for females. Therefore, subjects take on a masculine and feminine identity.

The choice of educational routes and achievements in different subject areas by males and females is influenced by a number of factors. Perceptions of what males and females are good at, which are influenced by stereotypes of males and females' abilities and roles, educational factors include school environment, teacher's beliefs and behaviours and gender stereotypes. The most fundamental of these are perceptions of male and female attitudes, beliefs about what males and females are good at and the level of the individual and his or her identification of how gender roles and their stereotypes are learned and internalised. The gender roles and stereotypes are generated through the socialisation processes, which prepare children for future adult roles by encouraging appropriate behaviour and interests.

Theoretical approaches to understanding gender role socialisation include the social learning theory by Bandura (1977) and the cognitive developmental theory by Kohlberg (1966). The theories have focused upon modelling and reinforcement and active acquisition of cognitive structures to make sense of the world. In the former the child's attitude and behaviour are moulded by the environment, parents' behaviours and negatively reinforce inappropriate behaviours.

In the latter, the child, as an actor within a social environment, assimilates and internalises information, which is crucial to understand and act within that environment. In both, albeit with different emphases, childrearing practices provide an important context for presenting the information to be internalised and the roles of parents and teachers is, therefore, central. According to Bem's Gender Schema theory, it is proposed that the degree of gender stereotyping acquired during socialisation determines the extent to which gender is used as a construct to differentiate behaviours in others. Gender stereotyping also acts as a basis for classifying one's attributes of relevance to educational choices of subjects. Thus, the gender stereotyping of subjects is an attraction and deterrent to some pupils and not others.

In Zimbabwe, context socialisation begins at home, with parents being largely responsible for transmission of gender roles at home. These gender roles are positively and negatively reinforced at home. For instance, the boy child may be encouraged to play with toys and mechanical devices while the girl child is encouraged and socialised to take on the gender stereotyped domestic chores and play with dolls. These practices of early childhood socialisation are later perpetuated and reinforced in primary and secondary schools as observed by Dorsey (1995). In primary schools girls are taught practical subjects like needlework, domestic science or cookery, while boys are taught woodwork. This point is supported by Kajawu (2 000) in another chapter in this volume, in connection with a secondary school in peri-urban Harare.

These early practises in primary schools are fundamental in creating gendered mental constructs of what girls and boys are able to do well. These mental constructs are internalised by the pupil, which in turn leads to subject stereotyping in secondary schools. The practice of creating a gendered pattern of practical subjects such as: Fashion and Fabrics, Food Nutrition, Metal work, Woodwork, Building, Agriculture, Technical Drawing is prevalent in Zimbabwean secondary schools. The subjects are patterned along gender lines and school authorities reinforce these gender stereotypes by encouraging girls and boys to take up practical subjects, which are consistent with their gender role socialisation.

While some secondary schools are now actively trying to break the gender stereotypes of practical subjects by encouraging boys to take up Fashion and Fabrics and Food Nutrition, and girls to take Metal Work and Woodwork and Building, it is apparent that male and female students still regard the practical courses along gender lines. Students view the subjects as either masculine or feminine and thus not consistent with their socially constructed gender roles. This masculine and feminine stereotyping of practical subjects by students has a bearing on vocational courses later because vocational choices may still reflect the gender patterns reinforced at school. Equity in accessing vocational training in artisanship and apprenticeship may continue to reflect the gender imbalances, course enrolment and subject preference of male and female students as they persist in following the stereotypes of academic disciplines. Some 'A' level subjects and courses have consistently been stereotyped as masculine and feminine.

Weinreich and Haste (1979; 1981) conducted a study in British schools where they asked secondary students to rate subjects on several scales such as masculine-feminine, difficult-easy, interesting-boring, complicated-simple, about people – about things. The researchers found that of academic subjects rated, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics were perceived as the most masculine subjects. French and English were rated as the most feminine subjects.

Archer and Macrae (1991) also came up with the same findings where Physical science, Mathematics, Design and Technology were considered masculine while Religious Education, Typing and Home Economics were rated as significantly feminine. These findings by the British researchers are very useful in the Zimbabwean context as they shed some light on the attitudes, perceptions and stereotyping of academic subjects at 'A' level. Consequently, the university's programmes may also be stereotyped because the Zimbabwean education system is patterned on the British system.

Using this line of reasoning, it becomes clearer why girls under perform in Mathematics and Science subjects. The research findings also explain why girls are reluctant to take up physical sciences and maths at 'A' level. Since girls have a mental schema or mental construct of which subjects are consistent with their socially constructed roles and abilities, the physical sciences are viewed as masculine and difficult for girls. These perceptions are internalised and girls opt for the arts, which are considered to be feminine. In Zimbabwe, physics, mathematics and chemistry

are considered to be a superior 'A' level combination and masculine. Arts subjects such as Shona, Ndebele, Divinity and History, are considered very feminine and are lowly rated.

These perceptions of masculinity and femininity are also carried forward to university where programmes such as Engineering, Medicine and Law are considered to be masculine and the Social Sciences and Arts are considered to be very feminine and ideal for most females. If the University of Zimbabwe is serious about realising equity in access to all university programmes and for proportional representation of both males and females in all university faculties, it has to deal more seriously with the issues of gender in Zimbabwe. If affirmative action for girls is to be successful in increasing the intake of females in programmes like Engineering, Agriculture and other technical faculties, initiatives have to be developed to encourage girls to take up science subjects at 'A' level. This would contribute to the destruction of the stereotyping of subjects as either feminine or masculine.

In England in the early 1980's, such initiatives as the Women In Science and Engineering (W.I.S.E.) and the Girls In Science and Technology (G.I.S.T.) were developed. In these initiatives, practising engineers and female engineers made contacts with teachers and encouraged children at school to take an active interest in engineering as a possible career. The WISE and GIST initiatives helped to dispel and change the attitudes of students, parents, teachers and the general public, that girls could not be engineers.

In Bulgaria, this initiative was very successful and managed to increase female undergraduate enrolment in science and engineering programmes by at least 50%. This was referred to as 'the feminisation of the intelligentsia'. Lightbody and Durndell (1998). It is suggested that if such initiatives are tried in some Zimbabwean schools during career, parents and prize giving days; where women who are successful in science and technology are present, these initiatives could go a long way in encouraging girls to take up science and overcome the stereotypes.

As things stand, female students lack appropriate role models in science subjects as indicated by Kajawu (2000). Kajawu (2000) points out that in Zimbabwe, female teachers who instruct Mathematics and Science make up only 22.9% of science teachers. Of the teachers in Technical Drawing, Building and Agriculture, female teachers comprise only 8% of the teachers. In the general arts, female teachers make up 65% of the teachers. This situation tends to reinforce the gender stereotyping of academics.

## **The teaching and learning environment**

There are many false claims made about the performance and participation of girls in classroom. These false claims are embedded in the beliefs that girls are less likely to participate in classroom activities thus they take a passive role in the learning process. In primary school, Blackstone (1976: 203) argues that girls perform better than boys. Blackstone's research findings are also confirmed by a study by Dorsey (1996) who found that in primary school in Zimbabwe, girls' performance is better

than boys'. However, differences in performance between boys and girls start to emerge in secondary schools. In a study by Kajawu in 2 000, she discovered that boys are active in class discussions, dominate the classroom and library environment and participation while girls are content to be silent. Kajawu found that teachers encourage the participation of boys and let girls take the backseat in class discussions. This affects the level of confidence fostered in students. Kajawu also cited teachers as contributing to the non-participation of girls through passing discouraging remarks to girls who are active in class. Girls who participate often are labelled as masculine and male students may avoid and feel threatened by the performance of such girls.

Blackstone (1976) also states that girls find it more difficult to compete for academic success with boys than with other girls because they fear that, unconsciously, academic success may be threatening to the boys who may, consequently, reject them as potential mates.

Oakley (1976) observed that the content of the curriculum and the way textbook and educational materials are presented, affects the perception of a female in the education system. Schoolbooks portray the girls as passive, obedient and docile while boys are portrayed as aggressive, adventurous and ambitious. This reinforces the sex stereotypes in the education system. Oakley argues that the content of the school curriculum and text materials be revised to remove the portrayal of girls as unambitious and present the girls as active actors. This will capture the interest of girls and motivate them in education in schools.

The prevalence of sexual harassment and male teachers engaging in love relationships with under-age female students in secondary schools is a thorny issue, which affects the performance of girls. It disturbs the concentration of female students in their schoolwork. The classroom situation is thus made hostile to some female students and this distracts the attention of female students and negatively affects the performance of the girls in the education system. Since Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society, the school environment is masculinalised and in the home, the boy child's education takes priority over that of the girl child. The difference in the performance of girls and boys is also a manifestation of the social construction of the classroom environment and schools as masculine as observed by Gore and Chagonda in this volume.

## **Students with disabilities**

The University of Zimbabwe has students with disabilities. The disabilities range from physical, visual and hearing impairments. These students are admitted on affirmative action measures. In a quest to create a more egalitarian society, which offers equal opportunities to all students and a chance for self-actualization, students with disabilities are admitted on affirmative action so that they are not perceived as social welfare cases. Their need for affirmative action is justified as their disabilities which disadvantage them a great deal from accessing vital information, which can be sourced fairly easy by other students without disabilities. For instance, of the 36

students with disabilities, 26 are visually impaired. Thus, they need specialised equipment such as the Braille machines, which are aids for reading and writing. Students with disabilities rely on electronically recorded lectures and on friends to read vital textbooks, which are often not in Braille form.

Despite the disabilities they face, students with disabilities strive to produce good academic results on the same bases as most students without disabilities. Students with disabilities therefore deserve to benefit from affirmative action because there are very few primary and secondary schools with any facilities for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities normally have to overcome immense discrimination to pass their 'A' levels or to amass enough work experience or equivalence with 'A' levels to qualify for enrolment at university.

### **Students' socio-economic class and equity in access to higher education**

The total student population at the U.Z can be stratified into three distinctive classes linked to socio-economic background. The classes identifiable at U.Z, according to Gaidzanwa (1993), are students from peasant families called 'severe rural background', students from working class, 'born locations' and students from relatively affluent families 'nose brigades'. Currently, at the U.Z, students from working and peasant class are in the majority (95%) and depend entirely on government funding for their university education. There is a class dimension to accessing some programs such as the Sciences, Engineering and Medicine at the UZ. Students who attended the group 'A' schools, which were whites only schools prior to independence and had good laboratory equipment, had a better start than other students. These group 'A' schools are relatively high fee schools, like most boarding schools. The students from peasant and poor backgrounds may be forced to enroll at schools, which are less expensive and have poor laboratory equipment. Some rural schools are less expensive and have poor laboratory equipment. Some upper top schools do not have the facilities necessary to teach 'A' level science. Thus, some students study arts at 'A' level simply because they have attended poorly resourced schools with few or no laboratories or equipment.

Those students, who attend poorly resourced schools, may be disadvantaged by the poor equipment, such that they fail to produce the required points for programmes such as Engineering and Medicine. Programmes such as the B.A. Honours in Modern Languages such as French, Portuguese or German, also reflect a class dimension. Only those students who attended expensive schools, had opportunities to study French and other modern languages at 'A' level while students from poor backgrounds fail to access these programmes because the schools they went to did not offer French or other modern languages as subjects at 'A' level. Poor schools tend to offer subjects with minimal requirements such as books and teachers while more endowed schools have a greater variety of subjects.

The introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1992 by Government resulted in the government gradually withdrawing subsidised



education. This has had negative effects on the poor, mainly in the working and peasant classes in rural areas. This is due to the escalation of school fees beyond the means of the poor. Linked to this, is the inflation and the economic problems the country is experiencing. The local currency has been devalued and the shortage of foreign currency is acute. These issues have a bearing on poor secondary schools as the costs of textbooks is rising sharply, making essential imported text books and imported school equipment, very expensive.

This negatively affects poor students who may fail to produce competitive results because of the shortage of educational resources for their schools. The sharp rise in school fees in primary and secondary schools has also resulted in students from poor backgrounds dropping out of school. Girls are not spared either because they are usually the first to be withdrawn from school by parents when scarce resources have to be allocated. Parents usually prefer to educate the boy rather than the girl child in patriarchal societies. This situation complicates affirmative action for girls since some bright female students fail to proceed to 'A' level because parents cannot afford to pay the required school fees. The social welfare and social dimension funds are chronically depleted and cannot suffice to cater for needy students. Under these circumstances, education for all and equity in access to higher education by students of both sexes and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, may become only an intellectual and policy ideal. The need for political and financial commitment in order to redress the gender imbalances at the institutions of higher learning cannot be overstated.

### **Opinions of students and staff on affirmative action**

The implementation of the affirmative action programme in 1995, aimed to increase female students' access to university education. The program has generated varied perceptions and opinions from students and staff at the University of Zimbabwe. Male students in B.Sc Agriculture, second year and B.Sc Engineering, third year expressed strong feelings against affirmative action, arguing that females should not expect preferential treatment but should work equally hard and earn their places like anybody else if they are to be respected as accomplished hardworking academics.

Members of S.E.C (Students' Executive Council) and B.A. students who were interviewed dismissed the argument that girls' achievement is constrained by gender roles in the form of domestic chores at home and discrimination in the school system. These students argued that a significant number of females who come to U.Z., were in boarding schools where they were not constrained from achieving highly in their secondary schooling. However three students admitted that affirmative action was necessary insofar as it sought to increase female access to university education, especially in the science faculties. However, they pointed out the stigma attached to gaining entry 'through the back door', as they characterised it.

Mature students in the Bachelor of Education program are stigmatised as 'old men of the amnesty' (*Madhara e AMNESTY*) meaning they were enrolled through some concessional arrangement. The Deputy Dean of Students responsible for

Campus Affairs, referred to affirmative action for females as an admission that females are less intelligent and less competent than their male counterparts. Two lecturers in the Department of Electrical and Civil Engineering stated that students enrolled through mature entry and affirmative action generally perform as well as other students because they work hard. A lecturer in the Physics department expressed negative views about students enrolled through affirmative action, arguing that it tends to lead to incompetent students being enrolled and lowers the high academic standards at the U.Z.

Students who have benefited from Affirmative Action have described the negative sentiments and the stigmatisation associated with being a student admitted through affirmative action. The students with disabilities are often withdrawn and isolated and argue that they suffer discrimination from fellow students. However, the discrimination against students with disabilities is associated with their disabilities rather than with their mode of admission into the university.

Some lecturers are not sensitive to the plight of students with disabilities. For instance, visually impaired students use typewriters which are noisy and some lecturers and other students are not tolerant of this and urge them to use tape recorders, which are expensive. The students with disabilities report that they are generally made to feel that they are less intelligent and are of low status. These perceptions about the disabled students end up being internalised and affect their perceptions of themselves. The students with disabilities reported that they are made to feel less equal to other students and are not suited for university education. This affects the quality of their academic experiences.

However a visually impaired student in the Faculty of Law argues that he has managed to assimilate well with able-bodied students and is accepted as normal. The fact that he benefited from affirmative action does not make him feel less equal since his performance is actually better than that of other students in the faculties which are dominated by male students and male lecturers.

Female BSc. General students who benefited from affirmative action lamented the fact that the teaching and learning environment is skewed against them. They reported that male students refuse to accept their performance as equal.

Notshulwana of the University of Port Elizabeth argues that measures such as affirmative action, may stigmatise beneficiaries if disadvantaged groups perpetuate beliefs that they receive different treatment, not because of their qualifications or merit but because they are disadvantaged groups and beneficiaries of affirmative action. The dilemma of difference expresses a concern that affirmative action measures may allow stereotypes and perceptions about difference to become more entrenched. These measures may succeed in having members of disadvantaged groups internalise messages about their supposed lack of merit and perceive inferiority and oppose measures designed for their benefit.

Notshulwana (2000) suggests that there is need on the part of beneficiaries of affirmative action not to view themselves as lacking in merit but to accept affirmative action as a vehicle for achieving equal access to opportunities, which were previously

denied to disadvantaged groups. The then Dean of Students at the University of Zimbabwe, argued that affirmative action disadvantages male students and that female students should be competitive enough and achieve the points required and compete on an equal footing with other students.

It should be noted that according to U.Z. prospectus, two "A" Level passes, namely two 'E' passes, which are equal to two points, are sufficient to gain entry at a state-funded university in Zimbabwe. However, because of the shortage of opportunities to study at universities in Zimbabwe, and the high demand for places, there has been inflation in the qualifications and number of points required to secure places for study. Thus, female students who enter U.Z. on affirmative action are not under-achievers but are in fact qualified to study because they have more than the two points required to enter university. In most cases, they have more than eight points.

The reluctance by some Faculty Deans and Chairmen to implement or accept affirmative action is meant to preserve the University of Zimbabwe as a male territory and to maintain the masculinity of the institution. In the faculties of Engineering, Agriculture and other Sciences, male lecturers and students dominate the faculties. All the Deans and chairmen are male. Thus, the concept and practices of affirming female students in these faculties are contested, resisted and where they are realised, this is usually done reluctantly because the majority of the male staff hold deeply entrenched beliefs that science programs are for males. Thus, the masculinity of the faculties of science is maintained through these beliefs and practices, which are hostile to women as students and staff.

### **Possibilities for intervention**

In primary and secondary schools, students should be encouraged to take at least one practical, technical subject in the areas dominated by sex stereotypes. For example, girls could be encouraged to study wood and metal work and boys also encouraged to study female dominated practical courses such as Fashion & Fabrics and Food and Nutrition. This will help to remove and break the traditionally held views of gender-appropriate technical courses.

The Students' Affairs department responsible for career guidance should intensify its outreach programme to secondary schools and produce brochures informing students of the programmes available at the university. The students' department, in collaboration with the appropriate academic departments, could outline the appropriate subject combinations required for the programmes. The Gender Studies Association can also help this initiative by liaising with the Headmasters and teachers in secondary schools about the appropriate subject combinations or different degrees. This can help shift the emphasis of school authorities, many of which emphasise high points without paying attention to the subject combinations. The university should also provide secondary schools and local libraries with the university prospectus, which adequately informs Headmasters, teachers and students, of the point requirements and appropriate subject combinations required for different degree programs.

It is also necessary to encourage female students in secondary schools to take an active interest in science and technology and to study science subjects at "A" level. Providing female role models who have been successful in scientific and technological careers during career days, parents' days and prize giving day can help dispel the sex stereotype and gender appropriate subject mentality prevalent amongst students. Female students studying science and technology degrees can also help this initiative by visiting their former schools, through old students associations, to encourage other female students to take up science subjects, thereby acting as role models. The science subjects can also be made appealing to female students if the teaching styles and textbook materials are also revised to appeal to females and males equally and to show females as active scientists.

The government should improve the subsidies to primary and secondary schools especially the poor rural and poor council schools. The government should allocate more qualified and science teachers to these schools and shift the costs of education to those classes and groups that least need the present government subsidies. This will enable government to continue subsidising the neediest primary and secondary schools and upgrade educational facilities like laboratory equipment and textbooks.

Companies in Zimbabwe should be encouraged to be good corporate citizens and plough back part of their profits into human resource development by awarding bursaries and scholarships to intelligent female pupils who fail to proceed to "A" Level because of financial problems. Private companies and many non-governmental organisations and foreign missions, who are already actively engaged in providing scholarships and bursaries, should ensure that female students are affirmed in the awarding of bursaries thus guaranteeing that both sexes have equal access to the scholarships. The government can also initiate fiscal incentives such as reducing corporate tax by a reasonable percentage, for companies involved in community school development and providing scholarships to needy students. This incentive could help entice some companies into upgrading the poorer rural schools.

The Gender Studies Association and women's pressure groups involved in advocacy activities in education, should take initiatives to engage in dialogue with school headmasters and teachers to educate them of the effects of the teaching and learning environment in the secondary schools, on the performance of students. The Ministry of Education should mete stiff penalties to teachers who sexually abuse school girls and boys and if need be, the perpetrators should be expelled from the teaching profession.

The Gender Studies Association should spearhead the formulation of a national gender policy, which focuses on addressing the issues, which militate against women and girls' education. The gender policy should also emphasise affirmative action for the disadvantaged groups like women and the disabled persons, in accessing equal opportunities in access to education and in the professions and occupations. The national gender policy should also focus on the sexual harassment of females and males in the education system in Zimbabwe.

## Conclusion

The chapter has evaluated the affirmative action measures that have been implemented at the University of Zimbabwe. While the program had nearly achieved its objectives in increasing the enrolment of female students in the Humanities faculties by 1998, there was steady erosion of the gains made by female students from 1999 onwards. The programme was not accepted in most of the science faculties and enrolment of women students has never gone beyond 30% except in the Faculty of Medicine. The faculty of engineering has consistently enrolled the lowest proportions of females in the whole university.

The opposition of some chairpersons of department, deans and other university personnel, has also contributed to the uneven application of the affirmative action measures. Some sections of the male student population have also contributed to the stigmatisation of the affirmative action policy. It must be noted that the policy has class dimensions and some sections of the staff and student body who are privileged, have no qualms about stigmatising the beneficiaries of affirmative action. These beneficiaries are usually young women from under-resourced schools and backgrounds. The university authorities must take a more serious stance on implementing the affirmative action measures and monitor their application across the board.

While the university can deal with some of the problems generated by the patchy adoption of the affirmative action program, it is also important to note that the general problem of gender inequality in accessing education cannot be resolved only at the university level. The university can help to increase the pool of educated women who can teach in schools and work in industry and the professions. However, a broader social program is necessary to tackle gender inequalities in Zimbabwe in all walks of life.

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