

EXAMINING GENDER DISPARITY OF MALE UNDERGRADUATES IN TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL: THE CASE OF TWO UNIVERSITIES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined why gender disparity of male undergraduates taking Textile Technology and Design continues to exist at university level in Zimbabwe despite policies that have been put in place. Data were collected from 30 Textile Technology and Design lecturers and undergraduates pooled from two universities. The study embraced the interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach and the case study design. It used open-ended questionnaires, face-to-face semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Data were analysed thematically. The study found out that gender disparity continued to exist in universities as a function of, among other things, gender stereotypes, gender irresponsive teaching and learning materials, lowering the cut-off entry points for females and lack of motivation for males. The major recommendations were the need for the Government's intervention in funding male undergraduates in order to motivate them, lowering males' cut-off entry points, conscientising communities on the importance of Textile and Technology Design and using gender responsive resources and environments that are free from gender discrimination.

Keywords: gender disparity, inequality, Textile Technology and Design, policies, exist

INTRODUCTION

This paper examined reasons for the continued existence of gender disparity of male undergraduates taking Textile Technology and Design (TTD) at university level in Zimbabwe despite policies that have been put in place. Its aim is to deliberate on why gender inequality of male undergraduates taking TTD continue to exist at university level despite policies in place in Zimbabwe and to reveal the measures that could be put in place to reduce gender inequality among male undergraduates taking TTD at university level. A study of this nature is critical given that gender dissimilarities in life in general and in education in particular have been a topic of serious concern for a long time (Akala & Davila 2016). While Zimbabwe aims to promote females in education, males have been left behind in many institutions of higher learning (Forum for African Women Educationist Zimbabwe (FAWE), 2017). It is imperative to take cognizance of distinctive gender disparities related to males in education systems and that male undergraduates are needy too in education (Hightower 2009). It is of paramount importance that this study be conducted given gender concerns dominating national and global debates in many countries. It might cultivate gender awareness in universities in Zimbabwe and hopefully, this might bring about gender parity in both education and in life in general.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The roots of TTD (formerly known as Cutting and Design) in Zimbabwe could be traced to early colonial settlers and missionaries in the then Rhodesia. TTD was introduced to women as handiness training of slavery for domestic helpers for the white population as well as for improving sewing skills of villagers (Pendergast 2015). In the 1980s, Cutting and Design was re-named Fashion and Fabrics (FF) (American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) 2016). It was practically-oriented and aimed at developing home administration and occupational skills (Nhundu 2007). It was then named TTD after the introduction of technology to the subject, positioned at the periphery of the curriculum and no emphasis was given to it. It also suffered image problems of being designated as a subject for the less academically-able. TTD is now part of a repertoire of technical subjects that are well positioned in the curriculum, emphasised and valued for its role in developing technical and entrepreneurial skills essential to economic revolution, but suffering misery from gender inequality (Mberengwa & Johnson 2012).

The Zimbabwean education legislation paved way for equality and equity between girls and boys, and women and men as they all could access education without discrimination (Gordon 2016). The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, (MICS) (2014) showed the disparities between males and females in education at university level. According to MICS, a total of 9 % females and 1% of males enrolled for TTD in 2014. The same report noted that the percentage of females in total enrolment of Home Economics was at 65 % and males was at 35% respectively. Thus, compulsory education in Zimbabwe indicates equal numbers of males and females completing education, but by the time they graduated to university, females overshadow males in TTD.

Gender disparity continues to exist in Zimbabwe regardless of the restless efforts by the Government to overcome it. Female undergraduates continued to out-number and out-perform their male counterparts at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) in the Department of TTD (Murphy 2008). The total enrolment of the female undergraduates was at 97% and males at 3%, leaving the total enrolment dominated by female undergraduates in 2015/16 academic year (Murphy 2008). For Chiyevu (2013), in 2012/13, male undergraduates were under-represented in Home Economics (HE) such that they were at 1% while their female counterparts were at 99% in the Department of Clothing and Fashion Design. In the academic year 2013/14, the figures were even worse as no male was enrolled for that Department (UNESCO 2018). In the academic year 2015/16, again no male was enrolled in TTD, though, females were enrolled in big numbers. In addition, in 2017/18, the same Department suffered again in terms of gender disparity of male undergraduates as none of them joined it.

It is perhaps for the above reason that Remillard and Heck (2014) argue that the teaching materials used in TTD for learning activities, cultivated gender disparity through their pictures and the use of 'she'. All the material and physical means teachers use for the instruction of undergraduates to facilitate their attainments focus only on a single sex (females). These properties facilitate gender disparity by focusing on one gender (Amadioha 2015). Having undergraduates use materials like these in class can reinforce stereotypes and gender roles in societies (Ricardo, Nascimento, Fonseca & Segundo 2010). Basically, all printed resources that are used in TTD to help the teacher teach undergraduates, are gender-biased.

In the present writers' view while the two philosophies of gender stereotypes within an educational institution, namely, social cognitive theory and hidden curriculum theory exist, the patriarchy times are still existing and are responsible for gender inequality that is evident in

schools and universities. They enforce environmental settings, including curricula and the class environment that are all forced upon a learner, regardless of his/her personal preferences (Jones & Kahn 2017).

In as much as schools and universities serve as the dominant institutions for transmitting social knowledge, norms, values and attitudes and facilitating social change, some of them consider higher enrolment of girls as a way to reduce gender inequality in society. They use a broad range of indicators by shifting social attitudes in favour of women, creating a gap such that males are left under-represented (Nakale 2018). Male undergraduates continue to be socially- downgraded and understated within Food and Nutrition (FN) and FF developments because of their social norms (Charles 2014). This contributes to lack of improvement in men's socio-economic status and the perseverance of male-female gap in life chances, hence, restricting their aptitudes and benefits of opportunities in many developing countries in FF (Peter 2016). It was against this backdrop that this study was conducted to examine the reasons why gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD at university level continues to exist in Zimbabwe.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Feminist theory and gender theory, which underpin the current study, indicate the foundation of gender inequality, its pervasiveness and the different feminist political solutions and remedies based on these theories. Each perspective has made important contributions to improving women's status, but has limitations to males (Rose 2018). The main point feminists have stressed on gender inequality is that it is not an individual matter, but is deeply ingrained in the structure of societies. Gender inequality is built into the organization of education, families, work, economy, politics, religions, the arts, other cultural productions and the very language we speak (Wood & Eagle 2005). To this extent, making women and men equal, necessitates socially-based and not individually-based solutions (Carlson 2013). Thus, gender dissimilarity is observed in work places, homes and schools through ethnic norms and values that spread it to choices of occupations, with reference to male undergraduates taking TTD at university level in Zimbabwe. Thus, the knowledge of gender equality and inequality creates the awareness of how gender and its remains develops and cultivates a wide range of questions about societies that are intended to provide insight on gender roles, accountabilities and gaps that exist.

Evenness and difference discourses come into play in engagements with the constituents of gender and its various interpretations (Aikman & Unterhalter 2005). A gender sameness perspective strives to extend to women the same rights and privileges that men have through identifying areas of unequal treatment and eliminating them via legal reforms (Pilcher & Whelehan 2004). Emphasis is placed on sameness in terms of social status and lawful and political rights commonly associated with gender equality (Lorber 2012). The Feminist theory has offered a major criticism of gender equality. In the 1960s and 1970s, gender equality was regarded as "uncritical equality" because of the uncritical way in which women were positioned in a masculine pattern of life (Hughes 2002). The assumption was that equality could be achieved through gender neutrality. Therefore, a form of gender equality that works in terms of only dominant groups can be a form of gender inequality for minority groups.

Mukoni (2015) views gender inequality as the different valuation of men and women and different enjoyment of rights, power, opportunities, treatment and control of resources between males and females. It is the presence of discrimination and bias of the society towards

gender roles that tends to influence subjects that males and females choose at school. These different practices of gender discrimination are found across many spheres, including education, life expectancy, dispositions, benefits, family life, careers and political attachments. Males and females are directed to different trails before they are able to choose their own owing to the influences of gender roles and gender stereotypes. These paths were set by parents or other adult figures in the child's life, leading to differences in personality, career paths or relationships. As a result, a study examining gender inequality of male student taking TTD at university level in Zimbabwe is perhaps long overdue. The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine the reasons for the continued existence of gender inequality of male undergraduates taking TTD at university level despite policies in place in Zimbabwe.
- Establish measures that can be put in place to reduce gender disparity among undergraduates taking Textile Technology and Design at university level.

METHODOLOGY

The current study engaged the interpretive paradigm. The paradigm believes that there are multiple realities or interpretations to a single event or thing. Reality is subjective and socially-constructed. Given the above, the researchers in this study took into account the fact that lecturers and undergraduates involved in this study would see and interpret the continued existence of gender disparity in TTD differently but these ideas put together will give us reality.

The interpretive paradigm was thus chosen given that it stresses the idea of truth that is socially constructed by the participants and it allows researchers to probe into subtle issues expressed by the participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Berger & Luckman 2014; Anderson, 2014; Argyris, Putnam & Smith 2015). The paradigm was thus appropriate for the current study because it helped the researchers to understand the views of the participants from individual perspectives. The study adopted a qualitative approach, which was primarily exploratory. It was aligned well with the interpretive paradigm in using non-quantifiable data, was appropriate in gaining an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations that lecturers and undergraduates had regarding the problem of why gender disparity among male undergraduates continues to exist in TTD at university level. A descriptive case study, which has a significant impact on the reliability of the results given its concentration on few cases, was used in this study. The current study involved only two universities and this permitted a deep examination of the reasons why gender disparity continues to exist in TTD and what measures could be put in place to curb the continued existence of gender inequality. 6 female lecturers, 23 female undergraduates from different levels of their studies and 1 male student who happened to be the only one studying TTD were purposively selected from the two universities involved in this study. For Creswell (2008), careful sampling improves the validity of research results and enhances the credibility of research results.

A semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended items, semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were employed to solicit data. As the study used a qualitative approach, it gave the researchers a wide choice in instrumentation, hence, the avoidance of the drawbacks of one instrument. Susan (2018) contends that the finest expectation for understanding fairness in qualitative approach is through triangulating instruments. The semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions generated qualitative data. For Pring (2002), open-ended questionnaires can be engaged for gathering data and motivating participants because of their anonymity and are suitable for collecting

information on sensitive issues such as people's opinions, attitudes, views, feelings etc. The study adopted focus group discussions were held to establish the participants' perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards the concept of gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD. Michael (2003) argues that the strength of the focus group discussions relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other, providing an insight into how a group thinks and the range of opinions, ideas or attitudes about the question raised by the facilitator. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were also conducted to probe into subtle issues raised and to have incomprehensible and unexpected responses clarified. They were held with 6 lecturers and they helped to see the inspirations of the lecturers and their facial expression during the process. This permitted a profounder and more expressive scrutiny of outcomes.

Validity and Reliability of Questionnaire

Since the effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction of an instrument is in a specific context of use, validity and reliability of a questionnaire is defined with respect to the extent to which it can be used by specific users to achieve specific goals. (Birt, Scott & Caver 2016). The questionnaire for this study was given to 6 raters to check for its suitability (validity) and to rate it (out of 10) as a measure of people's opinions. The ratings were correlated and a correlation coefficient of 0.6 was yielded, indicating that to a large extent, the raters agreed that the questionnaire was reliable. The questionnaire was then test-run with 4 teachers who were not going to participate in the study to see if it worked as intended. After minor modifications, the questionnaire was adopted for use with the sample of the study.

Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

To guarantee the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, there was member-checking, which involved participants reviewing their reports for correctness. There was also prolonged engagement in the field where the researcher spent extended time with participants in their native culture. The triangulation of the different data collection instruments also ensured the trustworthiness of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire with 26 items was the principal data collection instrument and was designed to examine the prevalence of gender inequality, the reasons why gender inequality of male undergraduates taking TTD continues to exist at university level in Zimbabwe despite policies in place and the measures that can be put in place to curb gender inequality of male undergraduates taking TTD continues at university level. The questionnaire was designed to address both the research objectives and the research questions.

For this study, the questionnaire items were open-ended and in some cases, participants were asked to give reasons for their answers. Follow-up interviews and focus group discussions were used to reinforce / contest findings from the questionnaire. The data were mainly descriptively analysed with thematic interpretation as needed to clarify major observations. It is also important to note that the researchers presented and discussed the data immediately thereafter in order to avoid the repetition that is often seen in work where data presentation and discussion are separated.

The participants were first asked if gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD was evident at universities and they were asked to give reasons for their answers. The majority indicated that gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD was prevalent to a large extent. Very few males opted to do TTD because of reasons such as the continuity of gender stereotypes and gender roles, gender irresponsive teaching and learning materials, attitudes, norms and values, lack of motivation, lack of funding, lack of appropriate career guidance etc. Literature reviewed earlier in this study also indicates that gender disparity in TTD is typical of many universities globally. In 2008, females doing TTD accounted for 69% in Zimbabwean universities (Vincent-Lancrin 2008). In a number of countries, ten females graduate for every male graduate in TTD because of the different local factors that may drive it (Schmidt2010).

Interviews and focus group discussion data revealed that due to the nature of TTD, people still believe that it is a female course and should be done by women only. This was noted during the colonial time when it was introduced as a female subject that was meant to develop girls to be helpers. During interviews, one Lecturer remarked: *The subject was introduced for the poor girls who were not educated and were seen as useless people in society. Girls were not sent to school during patriarchy time when they only recognised boys as people to be educated, so girls were sent to vocational training centres where they learnt sewing, cooking and secretarial. This is the time people viewed TTD as a female subject.* The above sentiments indicate that gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD has been in existence since the introduction of the subject during colonial times. For Sheehan and Welsh (2012), discrimination against either women or men also involved subjects that were considered as feminine or masculine. One Lecturer said: *Gender stereotypes are still continuing in the communities, such that the families that were blessed by male children without a female, tend to hire house helpers to come and assist in doing house chores such as cooking and cleaning, even sewing the boys' torn clothes. The boys from such families say sewing is for girls. Therefore no boy will recognize TTD as a life skill subject that can be taken to greater heights.*

Coffman (2018) argues that men make up more than half of the labour force and earn almost 60% of advanced degrees, yet they bring home less pay and fill fewer seats in the Fashion Industries than women, particularly in female-dominated professions. Therefore, it would appear that the gender disparity is due to gender stereotypes in part, with females taking up careers that pay higher wages than men in Textile Industries. Males lack confidence in their ability to compete in fields that females are stereotypically believed to perform more strongly.

With regard to the above observation, it could be assumed that the reason why gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD continues to exist at university level is because of how males and females were socialised. For Wood and Eagle (2012), societal beliefs about a natural fit of women in careers in more expressive and human-centred fields and men in technical and math-intensive fields contributes decisively to the persistence of horizontal gender inequality in educational and occupational fields.

The current study also noted that parents tend to choose subjects for their children, because they want them to grow up into what parents want and not what undergraduates want, leading to subject choices that are not in line with what the student wants. Most male undergraduates are forced to do Science. For Nascimento (2015), parents are solely responsible for sponsoring academic knowledge, hence, to a great extent, influence learners' reception to learning and career choices. This influence of parents in the learning process partly explains the low involvement of male undergraduates in TTD. Rose (2018) postulates that in the eyes of parents, gender has a huge role to play in many major milestones or characteristics in life;

like personality and one's chosen profession. Males and females are led on different paths due to the influences of gender role expectations and gender role stereotypes before they are able to choose their own.

Data from interviews and focus group discussions also revealed that gender disparity of male undergraduates leads to drop outs, idleness of males, drug abuse and increase in crime in the country. It also emerged from the study that gender disparity of male undergraduates in TTD also reduces economic growth. One FDG participant remarked: *Gender disparity of male undergraduates causes idleness of males after schooling years that leads to abuse of drugs and alcohol that will reduce critical thinking because the individual will be addicted to drugs forcing them to steal and be involved into inhuman acts such as crime, illegal drug deal, illegally border-jumping to the neighbouring countries to smoke cocaine that destroys lungs and other parts of the body. Thus, problem-solving skills will be destroyed to the affected individual.*

The above sentiments indicate that idleness of males, drug abuse and increase in crime in the country increases gender gap and decreases economic growth. Under-representation of males in education may be due to harassment because of studying subjects like TTD which are viewed as basically feminine.

Interview data also revealed that gender inequality of male undergraduates in TTD results in many male undergraduates developing negative attitudes towards the subject. Values, self-confidence, enjoyment, motivation and anxiety surrounding the subject will all be reflected in the undergraduates' attitude (Kennedy2017). Thus, gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD may result in negative attitudes that can affect behaviour, cognition, intention and gender equity in education as a whole.

Many participants castigated the Zimbabwean National Gender Policy which focuses on promoting females at the expense of males. As it is, males are not benefiting much from the policy. Millar, Tiberghien and Le Maréchal (2002) argue that the Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (2013-2017) aims to eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres education, life and development yet, very little is done to eradicate and to address the shortcomings of the policy as it relates to subjects like TTD where we have very few males.

It was also established that the methods of teaching TTD should be gender responsive to cater for male undergraduates in TTD. Equipping teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes to empower them to respond adequately to the learning needs of both males and females is indeed what is needed. One Lecturer remarked: *Providing gender responsive infrastructure, including residential facilities in case of long distances from the institution, is needed The university should carry out activities to promote the participation of males in Textile Technology and Design and establish a gender responsive management system that ensures gender equality in the governance and operation of the university.*

The teaching and learning materials of TTD are not gender- responsive, hence, do not support equal treatment of male and female undergraduates in that Department. In fact, many classroom materials, especially those that are older, may contain gender bias activities, photos or words (Jones & Kahn 2017). Providing gender- responsive learning material and management, promoting males' participation in TTD etc. helps to narrow gender gap evident in the TTD Departments.

The study revealed that, apart from financial support that the males can be given, it is important to consider emotional support which they need, by giving them encouragement so that they can realize the importance of taking the subject to university level. Such measures may help to increase the number of males doing TTD. One FDG participant noted: *Considering*

gender-responsive pedagogy in the teaching of the subject, desisting from the tendency of using abusive language on male undergraduates and labelling them according to their performance, instead by treating them equally as female undergraduates and assisting them where necessary, helps to attract more of them to TTD.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study point out that there is gender disparity of male undergraduates taking TTD at university level in Zimbabwe that continues to exist despite the policies that are put in place. Among the reasons identified are the continuation of gender stereotypes and gender roles, lack of financial and moral support, lack of exposure, background of the undergraduates, the prevailing technology and external forces from parents, patriarchal ideology and socialization. It was noted that some of these factors demotivate and discourage male undergraduates from taking TTD. Given that gender disparity of male undergraduates is prevalent in TTD, some of the measures suggested to reduce the continued existence of gender disparity include the need for community involvement, financial and moral support and gender responsive teaching materials and pedagogy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Given that the reasons for gender disparity among male undergraduates taking TTD continues to exist at university level in Zimbabwe despite policies that have been put in place, the Government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development should avail funds to support male undergraduates who wish to take TTD to ensure that there are no school drop outs.
- There is need for the Government, through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development to initiate community involvement by sponsoring sewing projects that will involve all young males who are out of school because of different reasons.
- There is need for the production of gender responsive teaching and learning materials and the Government through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development develop teachers in gender responsive pedagogy and classroom management.
- The Government should increase VTC with subsidised fees where TTD will be a dominating course so that others may develop interest and pursue it at university level.

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