

Review of: "Exploring the Relationship Between Gender and Sustainable Development Competencies in Higher Education Institutions: Insights from a Zimbabwean University"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

- The abstract is well written except in some cases whereby the writer needs to use the write words. For example, "Most female academics in the institution lacked critical competencies in research and innovation, interdisciplinary thinking, and **granting** writing". The appropriate word should be '**grant**'.
- The methodology used to undertake the study is missing in the abstract. It is important that this is included.

Introduction

- The writer in the first paragraph makes reference to a study in Netherlands in 2018 by LNVH (2020). This acronym should be written in full since it is not initiated been referenced. Subsequent references could be in acronym.
- In the second paragraph, the authors zoom into the global space by making copious references to Europe and Asia. Given the nature of the study, a focus from the global to the regional, sub-regional and then national statistics/studies will give the study a logical flow.
- In the second paragraph, the authors note hence "The representation of women in higher academic positions remains relatively low in the European Union. Between 2016 and 2019, the proportion of female professors in the EU increased slightly from 24% to 26%". The second sentence should is an example. Hence, it could begin as **For instance**, between.....
- The authors make reference to the Zimbabwean constitution, specifically Section 17 subsection (1). What is clear is that the sub-sections (a, b and c) could all be embedded into the write-up/paragraph instead separating them.
- Reference is also made to Goal 5. The question is 'goal 5' of what? This should be made quite clear.
- In the objectives, the authors can easily make specific references to the institution in question. The same as the main objective or aim. But for the sake of anonymity? If so, this should clearly be stated somewhere.
- Objective IV does not constitute a goal. The study in essence, shall proffer recommendations, as noted in the abstract. It can hence be taken off since it will not in any way affect the study.
- The two paragraphs after the objectives are respectfully needless. They could be moved taken off or moved to their appropriate locations within the text.

Intersectionality Theory

- I think the authors are referring to ‘intersectional theory?’ However, if they prefer to use the word ‘intersectionality’, then the sub-title could read as ‘Theory of Intersectionality’.
- Authors should take note of the following:
 - The theoretical foundation of this study's literature is underpinned by the **Intersectional Theory** or **the theory of intersectionality**, which recognises that gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class, and ethnicity, leading to distinct experiences of privileges and discrimination.
 - “The rationale is that the theory assists in understanding the viewpoints of **marginalised** female academics and sheds light on the complex mechanisms at play”. Is it the case of being marginalised or underrepresented or disadvantaged? These words are quite different.
- To enhance a logical flow, the author can easily ‘collapse’ the bolded sub-headings into paragraphs. They are **Diversity and inclusiveness, Enhanced understanding of gender issues, Social justice and equity, Research and curriculum development, Engagement and advocacy and Policy formulation.**

An Overview of Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions

- Given the focus of the paper, this area should be broadened; possibly, global, regional and national perspectives could be helpful.

The Zimbabwean Context

In the first paragraph, the authors write; “By achieving Goal No. 5, a significant impetus will be generated to tackle other development goals (Doroh, 2017). Authors need to be specific here. What and which Goal 5?”

Methodology

- The methodology section as it stands, is sketchy. It hence needs to be broadened. Are the authors arguing that purposive sampling was used to select participants in the case of the qualitative aspect of the study? How many people, aside the Deans, were purposively selected for the interviews? How were the interviews conducted? What about interview dates and venues? How many males and females took part? How did you ensure that answers given were probed for clarity, factuality and crosschecking? These questions need to be answered by the methodology.

Findings and Discussions

Gender Distribution and Work Experience

- “50% of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 50 whilst another 50% were above 50 years of age”. Since this is a sentence, ‘50’ should be written in words and the figure put into parenthesis. This applies to the subsequent sentence.

- The authors stated that only 5% female academics had PhD. They are however silent on the gender distribution in relation to the other qualifications, especially those with master degrees. Is it the case because PhD is the highest qualification? If so, this should be clearly stated and/or justified, otherwise gender specific distribution is required for all the other qualifications.
- Part of paragraph two read “Based on the background data, a significant 75% of the respondents were male academics, while female academics constituted only 17%”. Is it possible to refer to previous situation of the school, say in the past 5 or 10 years? The intention will be to help paint a picture of whether or not these percentage figures are significant, and also to showcase whether or not some progress have been made over the years.
- Part of the second paragraph reads “This suggests a potential disparity in the distribution of authority positions within the institution, with men **possibly** dominating the majority of such roles (see Table)”. The word ‘possibly’ is to be avoided since the research work has been conducted already.

Objective 1

- The authors did well by outlining the nature of leadership positions and how did impacts gender, and specifically, women’s participation in decision-making. What is missing is how people get to these positions. Do people get to these positions via selection and/or elections? If is it through selection, who does the selection? What is the gender of those who selects? Are their decisions influenced by their gender? Are they gender sensitive? Also, it is through elections, questions need to be raised regarding whether or not, by standards set, women are qualified to contest in the first place. Not forgetting the fact that are those qualified motivated and/or encouraged to avail themselves? Issues related to campaigns and matters therein, including general disadvantages of females contesting elections, need to be outlined, just like in other jurisdictions. What about the recruitment policies of the university? Are the recruitment policies gender sensitive? Is it also possible to consider possible low levels of higher education among females at the national levels, and how it impact leadership? Has it to do with general gender stereotype? What is clear is that it is not enough to draw conclusions based on the absolute percentage figures without identifying all the underlying issues raised above.

Objective 2

- The first paragraph reads “The following competencies were the emphasis of this objective: professional growth and networking; research and innovation; collaboration with stakeholders; outreach and education, **and** curriculum development; **and** institutional sustainability management gender mainstreaming”. The authors should take a second look at the paragraph again, with emphasis on the highlighted portions/words (bolded).
- “Additionally, it was revealed that despite the Human Resources Policy's clear career path and staff development, female academics felt prejudiced because promotion procedures **were being not followed**”. This sentence should be reconstructed.....should read ‘**were not being followed**’.
- The argument that male lecturers are not forthcoming in the area of collaborations needs to be elaborated further. To what extent have their female counterparts extended their hands for support? This information is quite mute in the analysis. Could this also be due to their lack of exposure, as initially highlighted in objective one? The arguments that

male members are leading projects also require further academic proof. Is it the case that the males are comparatively more in terms of numbers? Could this partially be the case? Even though these are not highlighted by this study, questions, indeed rhetorical questions need to be raised in this regard.

- **As an academic paper, the issues embedded in the following should be integrated. Alternatively, they can stand as sub-headings. They are ‘Innovation and research’, ‘Curriculum development’, ‘Outreach and education’, and ‘Gender mainstreaming’.**

Objective 3

- There are good attempts to identify some of the challenges, including funding challenges, work load, lack of gender mainstreaming and the inability or unwillingness of male staff to collaborate with their female counterparts. These challenges are common across many universities across especially the developing world. Quite a number of research works have been done in this area. Even though the authors made attempts to integrate some of these secondary literature, additional literature, just like the entire findings in general, need to be included to nuance the study so as to bring out the academic flare out of the paper.

Conclusions

- The title should be ‘**conclusions**’ not ‘**conclusion**’ since the study didn’t arrive at a single conclusion. Isn’t it?
- “A small number of successful female academics were found to be mentoring male academics, thereby diminishing the aspirations of many female academics to excel in their academic careers”. Did the study found this? Isn’t it the opposite? Hence, the failure of successful male academics to mentor their female counterparts.

Recommendations

- Generally, the authors have outlined very good recommendations. What is missing in the recommendations are issues related to female academics as assertive human beings; female agency. That is to say that initiatives, either at the individual or groups levels that female academics can adopt to assert themselves.

References

- Some of the references are not well stated. Example, authors should take a look at the first reference on the list. The title should be in italics.
- Reference should also be made to the dates particular references were retrieved in the case of internet sources.
Example: Besheer, M. (2023). *UN Chief Warns Equality Among the Sexes 300 Years Away*. <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-chief-warns-equality-among-the-sexes-300-years-away/6992262.html>

General Observations

- The paper offers good contributions to academic knowledge. However, the paper can be strengthened by:
- Integrating more secondary literature especially in the findings portions. This shall further nuance the study.
- The methodology section needs to be enlarged and specific issues raised addressed. As a primary study, the

methodology differentiates it from desktop review/works.

- As a research/academic paper, it should follow required standards and practices. Some highlighted portions hence need to be reworked.