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. I suggest you move "The study illuminates the ways in which gender influences the acquisition, growth, and utilisation of sustainability knowledge and skills among academic staff in HEIs." to the beginning of the abstract. You could replace "Denying nearly half of the world's population, which constitutes approximately 49.72% of women, equal access to resources and opportunities means depriving them of the chance to contribute to the sustainable development of the global economy." with the former statement since abstracts tend go straight to the point about what the study is, how it was conducted, what was found and the implications. So the beginning of the abstract could read "The study centres on the ways in which gender influences the acquisition, growth, and utilisation of sustainability knowledge and skills among academic staff in HEIs. A case study design was used..."

Introduction

The introduction provides a lot of information and data about the challenges women face in academia, which is valuable. However, I believe that each paragraph needs a clearer focus. For instance, both para. 1 and 2 discuss the gender disparity in universities in a global context. Nonetheless, contextualising the problem within the global context could be achieved in the first paragraph while the subsequent paragraphs zoom in on the issue in the African context, with each paragraph discussing a key theme of your work (intersectionality, sustainability competencies, etc).

It is also apparent that the introduction focuses too much on establishing a broad context of the problem, with relatively little attention to the Zimbabwean case. I suggest you centre more on what the situation is like in Zimbabwe. You can look at gender disparities in multiple fields before narrowing in on Zimbabwean education industry and the specific problems that exist (thus, informing the statement of your research problem and research questions).

You also loosely mention sustainable development competencies without fleshing out what these competencies are. I suggest that you highlight some of the sustainable competencies explored in literature and address them in the context of your problem statement.

Also, be mindful of the tone and perspective used in the introduction. While it's important to highlight the challenges

women face, also emphasize the potential for positive change and the importance of the research in addressing these challenges.

Finally, you are using a theory that is befitting for your study, which is pleasant to see. I suggest that you integrate this theory into the introduction, giving readers an idea of the theoretical tenets underpinning your study. Although one could argue that the lengthy discussion about gender disparities in your introduction is suffice to present the idea of intersectionality, briefly establishing elements of the theory within the introduction would be a better approach in my opinion. I am aware that you have an entire section on intersectionality theory; it would still be beneficial to briefly establish the theory in the introduction section so that it does not surprise readers in the succeeding sections.

Intersectionality Theory

You have done a good job of showing how the theory intersects with the phenomenon you are studying. I suggest you polish this up by using more current references to support your statements. Moreover, Crenshaw who is at the forefront of the intersectionality discourse as the proponent of the theory has been sparsely cited in your work. Other authors like Patricia Hill Collins whose work on intersectionality in the context of feminism and race could prove useful.

Methodology

Good job on your methodology!
Just a few pointers: I suggest that you stick to one concept – sustainability competencies or sustainable development competencies. Using these concepts interchangeably throughout the article could confuse some readers.

I can see that the methods of data collection and analysis have been outlined in the text, albeit not categorically. I suggest you inform readers that both quantitative and qualitative methods were used since your research design was mixed-method (adequately citing relevant authors). It would also be helpful to group your approach to the data collection and analysis under each category, giving the readers a clearer understanding of the strategies that fall under each method. For instance, collecting data using in-depth interviews would be qualitative while using semi-structured interviews to gather close-ended responses would lean more towards quantitative methods. Similarly, using tables and graphs to present your data, like you have stated, would be considered more statistically descriptive (quantitative) than narrative (qualitative), signifying an absence of type of analytical approach you adopted for the qualitative. Did you use a thematic analysis? Narrative approach? You would have to state which analytical approach you used and why it was deemed the most appropriate choice.

Findings and Discussions

I suggest you title the first Figure in the block text – "Figure 1. Responses by Gender" – then add a source (which will most likely be "Field Data (2023)") this will afford readers an understanding of where the data was sourced and when. This applies to other sections.

Again, to sound more diplomatic, I suggest replacing "Disturbingly, the study's responses indicated the absence of gender

mainstreaming in the university's programs and projects." with something like "the study's findings reveal room for improvement in terms of incorporating gender mainstreaming into the university's programs and projects."

I would like to commend your integration of the intersectionality theory into your discussions. In my opinion, it would have been a more fluid read if the analysis and discussions were separated. It is difficult to determine what your main findings were and where the discussion of these findings begin since both findings and discussions have been combined. Using subheadings to separate the two could provide a clear distinction between the two, and potentially create room for a clearer understanding of your findings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion and recommendations are well-written, straightforward and understandable. In my opinion, most of the recommendations are directed towards institutions. It would be interesting to see what suggestions you have for policymakers and other relevant government authorities. For instance, intra and inter-department collaboration (within ministries and governmental departments) responsible for education could go a long way to address systemic gender disparities, like it has in countries like Sweden, Canada and the United Kingdom; maybe there are lessons to be learnt from these countries? Could the solutions educational institutions and relevant governmental agencies adopt be inspired by success stories from developed and developing countries? You can look into that.

Well done and keep up the good work.