

# 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper. The article focuses on a particular institution in Zimbabwe; however, the topic that deals with (gender equality in HEIs) is very relevant worldwide. Additionally, local research is needed in order to understand this phenomenon in its complexity.

However, in my opinion there is a number of issues that the author should work on, in order to improve the paper.

Structure-wise, I suggest integrating the introduction and the theoretical grounding section. Some of the concepts are repeated in both sections. In addition, I consider that placing the research objectives right before the methods section would improve the readability.

Regarding the research objectives, I am not sure if the general goal was achieved. It is not totally clear to me which are the specific relationships between gender and the sustainable development competences: are male and female staff members aware of them (and which of them?), do they express different challenges in developing them, are they assessed in a different ways for male and female counterparts...?

Moreover, I recommend splitting the results and the discussion sections; in some cases it's not clear if what is presented are participants opinions, or the author's interpretations. For example, in the sentence at page 14:

"Given that the majority of respondents indicated a gender-blind curriculum,*it becomes the responsibility of the institution's leadership and academics to infuse gender mainstreaming and inclusivity principles into the curricula and programmes*".

Whose recommendation is it? If it is the author's, a justification should be provided.

Another example would be this sentence: "It was disturbing to find out that the two female academics were grooming male academics instead of their female counterparts. A disconcerting revelation emerged that these two female academics were predominantly mentoring their male counterparts, rather than collaborating with their female colleagues.". I think words such as "disturbing" or "disconcerting" do not enrich this section and do not add useful information. Do we know why this happened? And how the situation evolved?

Moreover, I missed a clear definition of many of the concepts that are dealt with throughout the paper: mostly, I think it is necessary to clarify which are the sustainable development competencies, and the concept of gender mainstreaming.

Another of the main issues of this paper is the methodological explanation, which lead to a sometimes confused results section. I highly recommend:

1. To frame this research as a case-study (and consequently, provide more information about this particular HEI;
2. Include more information about the data collection. The reader should know the type of questions posed, the response options, who the interview was developed... It is also not clear if the deans were also sent the questionnaire; and how the questionnaire and the interview are related (in terms of timing, definition of questions, variables or categories for analysis...).
3. Include an analysis subsection. It is imperative to know how data was coded and analyzed. For the qualitative data, you should provide the category system with definitions and the frequency of coding (at least).

In the results section, I strongly think that the author should provide more data. The reader does not have enough information to know if the conclusions are data-driven. Other than the participants' profile and some quotes, few evidence is show to back up some of the conclusions and recommendations. For example, it is stated that "Data from the online questionnaires showed that the University did not adequately support staff development": which data? In which categories? Can you provide some direct quotes, or/and an overall descriptions of these results from the questionnaire?

An important issue that I find in terms of methodology is also the difficulty to read the women's voice in the results section. I understand that only 7-8 women were surveyed/interviewed; however, their particular opinions in this very gender-sensitive research topic should be highlighted. The author could consider, additionally, survey female students or non-academic staff; or focus more in-depth on the qualitative data gathered from women; or discuss these results in a participatory session with female academics of this and other institutions in order to gather a deeper understanding and more grounded conclusions.

Finally, these are my observations on some minor issues:

- In the abstract it is stated that "Most female academics in the institution lacked critical competencies in research and innovation, interdisciplinary thinking, and granting writing". It is not clear how these competencies where assessed, or if this is an observation directly provided from all the surveyed women.
- Similarly, in the instruction it is stated that "in the Netherlands, as of 2018, only 24.2% of full professors were women (LNVH, 2020) because they lack the critical competencies and exposure to hold such positions". It is not clear to me if it is the author who draw this conclusion, or LNVH.
- The manuscript would benefit from a language revision (there are some repetitions – the expression "seasoned academics", double parenthesis, etc.)
- Around Figure 1: the description is both before and after it. There is a blue square in the graph.
- In Table 1: it would be clearer to include all positions, including junior positions.

