

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.

I had the opportunity to review your article, which is on a topical issue that requires further explorations. The article is well written, especially the background and theoretical framing and literature sections (except for a few referencing and grammatical issues I picked up and included in the review). The Methodology and Findings and Discussion sections would, however, need some improvements. Below are my observations and comments, following the structure of your article. Content in italics is directly taken from your article.

Abstract

Denying nearly half of the world's population, which constitutes approximately 49.72% of women, equal access to resources'. What does 49.72% of women mean? Do you mean 49,72% of world population or of women? If it is of women, which women are 49,72%? The statement needs rephrasing to make meaning clear.

..... a case study was conducted using mixed methods, There is no indication of quantitative data analysis in the Findings and Discussion section. The study looked purely qualitative.

Considering the article is on a gender topic, it may add value indicating the proportion of women from these 43 academics.

Would grant writing not be better applicable compared to *granting writing*'?

Introduction

I believe authors used for the first should be written in full, unless they are more than five. Oláh et al (2018) has three authors and should all be included in the first use. Other references such as Musasa, Nhekede, and Koke (2022) were written in full, as such, all other similar references has to follow similar style. These include references such as Wittenman et al; Bedi et al; Van Dijk et al; and Zvavahera et al amongst others.

((Rosa, Drew & Canavan, 2020; Adelabu & Adepoju, 2007)). One of the opening brackets needs to be removed.

HEIs play a vital role in shaping future leaders and change-makers Showunmi (2020) and Nichols and Stahl (2019). The referenced authors and years should all be in brackets.

The following section provided an **over** of gender equality in HEIs. 'over' should be overview.

Objectives

'Proffer recommendations to policymakers'. I believe all studies should provide some form of recommendations and as such, it may not be necessary to include them as study objectives. To support my point, you did not include this objective in your Findings and Discussion section.

An Overview of Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions

General observation in the introduction: The authors put the blame of the status quo on males but not highlighting the potential other women in positions of power can do to help in redressing the situation. If they are unable to, authors might need to indicate why these women in high positions are unable to.

The Zimbabwean Context

According to Van Veelen and Derks (2021), female academics Considering that the heading is on the Zimbabwean context, it would be better to stay within the Zimbabwean context. If an external reference is to be used, it should be supporting the Zimbabwean case, otherwise its linkage to the Zimbabwean situation has to be highlighted.

Methodology

Whilst there is a discussion on the qualitative approaches used in the study, nothing much is said about the quantitative data analysis. There is no mention of how the questions were designed and how issues of reliability and validity were considered.

Findings and discussion

There is no indication of the response rate to self-administered questionnaires.

The three Deans were identified as Dean 1, Dean 2, and Dean 3, with Dean 1 being female and Deans 2 and 3 being male. I am not sure if this does not compromise the anonymity of participants. Although no name of institution is given, it is better not to indicate which Dean is female/male to improve anonymity.

Seventy-five percent (75%) of the respondents were male, 17% were female, and 8% were anonymous about their gender (see Figure 1). 50% of the respondents Including the absolute number of respondents, in addition (in brackets) to or as a substitute of percentages, will make understanding of the story (analysis) easier.

Based on the background data, a significant 75% of the respondents were male academics, while female academics constituted only 17%. 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 proportions of females to males for academics does not necessary translate to authority positions. It may add better insights to indicate the ages, qualifications and experience according to gender. I suggest a figure or table that exhibits all details of the respondents which could help to explain why

there are fewer women in higher academic positions. Below is an example of a suggested table.

Gender	Female	Male	Anonymous	Total
Age				
31 – 50 years				
50 years and above				
Qualifications				
Masters degree				
PhD				
Experience				
Below 5 years				
Between 5 and 10 years				
More than 10 years				

Table 1 illustrates the gender-based distribution of senior positions, revealing a rather somber scenario with 21 male academics and only 8 female academics occupying such positions. Rather include all respondents, the heading/objective talks about gender in the institution and not managerial positions which you focussed on.

I think including professorship in Table 1 for senior positions does not reflect on the requirements for the position. One does not have to be female or male to achieve it unless minimum requirements are met. It would make a strong case for argument if there were many PhD women who were denied the opportunity to become professors for no valid reasons. Unlike other senior positions, it doesn't seem professorship can be occupied by any person unless they meet the minimum requirements.

Supporting the intersectionality theory, this study highlights how gender interacts with other social categories, leading to specific experiences of privileges and discrimination. In this case, male academics enjoy privileged positions while female academics face obstacles resulting from deeply-rooted inequalities within families and institutional cultures. The results are not really showing this. Are female academics being discriminated or they do not meet the minimum requirements? Are you saying not meeting the minimum requirements is a form of discrimination? If so, why? If they do not meet the requirements, would you say there is discrimination or there are structural problems making females unable to meet these minimum requirements? Should these requirements be changed so that females become appointable?

The promotion of equity, justice, and sustainable practices, therefore, depends on the inclusion of gender mainstreaming and sustainable development capabilities in HEIs Ilagan (2019). Reference to be in brackets.

Institutions of higher education should challenge gender stereotypes, empower female academics and promote an egalitarian society by incorporating gender issues in projects and programmes, giving equal access to resources and opportunities. Developing sustainable competencies in female academics and gender mainstreaming both seek to advance social justice and equality in HEIs and this is supported by Rosa, Drew, and Canavan (2020). You haven't provided enough evidence to show that there is no equal access to resources and opportunities. I am of the opinion that

equality is there but equal treatment perpetuates years of repression. Should you not recommend making requirements lenient for females considering the unequal conditions?

We need equal opportunities in staff development programmes, research, and related initiatives. It would have made a strong case if you could specifically identify development programs that discriminate against women.

The University under the study painted a somber image because the majority of senior posts were held by male academics, leaving little room for female academics to occupy positions of authority. It is important to explain if this less representation is because of policies that do not support women. There is need for that evidence which proves that gender mainstreaming is responsible for the present situation.

Leadership in this university did not place a high premium on gender equality. Is this claim based on composition of senior managers? I did not (maybe missed) the evidence for this claim.

In this case, male academics enjoy privileged positions while female academics face obstacles resulting from deeply-rooted inequalities within families and institutional cultures. Is this coming from the study findings? If so, those findings need to be discussed.

It was also noted that only 2 female academics had funded projects across the entire university. How do these numbers compare to males?

It was revealed by Dean 1 that only 5% of academic staff was actively engaged in research and 1% were female academics, highlighting the disparity in research competencies. If one is to use the relative figures (female academics = 17%; female professors = 20%) then there is no disparity. There are less females leading to less research engagements. Based on that, one could argue that the engagements are relatively representative of the demographics.

As per the insights shared by the Deans, numerous partners were supporting university initiatives encompassing programmes, projects, innovations, and research. Nevertheless, a noteworthy observation emerged: male academics were spearheading these initiatives, while their female counterparts assumed subordinate positions with limited impact.

Dean 2 had this to say:

The institution has the best malaria laboratories in the country, and it is recognised as the Centre for Malaria Research in the country. We also have an innovation hub where academics and students should assist with innovative ideas and develop them into successful enterprises or solutions to the current challenges facing the world. Academic staff and students are unable to fully utilise the innovation hub due to a lack of resources due to lack of support. This does not say anything about females being side-lined yet it comes soon after that claim – them being subordinates.

Denying almost half of the country's population, which constitutes 22% of women,This is not clear, 22% of women? This is similar to the percentage in the Abstract section, which talks about 49,7% of all women.

This contrasts with the findings of (Schiltmans & Davies, 2023), whoOnly the year should be in brackets.

Staff development Denying almost half’ were found to be lacking competencies in most critical areas.I did not see any reference of this section to the data from respondents and participants.

Consequently, female academics face obstacles in developing sustainable competencies due to male-dominated institutional cultures Practical examples from the selected institution and coming from your respondents may add value the narrative.

With reference to intersectionality theory, leadership in the University lacks appreciation of gender issues leading to Social injustice and equality) (Schiltmans & Davies, 2023; Crenshaw, 1991). Bracket before opening bracket needs to be deleted.

This study investigated the connection between gender and sustainable development competencies within a university operating in Zimbabwean. in Zimbabwe

Collectively, the Deans agreed that the limited capacity impeded the involvement of only a handful of academics in impactful research endeavours. The meaning is not clear – did limited capacity impede a handful or many?