



## AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL GENDER POLICY IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

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### ABSTRACT

*The study sought to evaluate the implementation of the 2003 National Gender Policy in teacher education colleges in Zimbabwe. A survey design was employed. Five teacher education colleges inclusive of their principals, 16 Heads of Departments and 10 Student Representative Committee members constituted the study sample. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Principals, Heads of Departments and Student Representative Council members responded to the questionnaires. 15 of these respondents were also interviewed. Findings revealed that teacher education colleges do not have own college gender policies, had not engendered their curricula as well as their budgets. Female students far outnumbered male students. Males dominated decision-making positions at student, lecturer and non-lecturing levels. The study concluded that teacher education colleges as part of the education and training sector had not fully implemented the National Gender Policy. It is recommended that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education through teacher education colleges should gender mainstream all their policies, programmes and activities.*

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**Keywords:** Gender, Gender policy, National gender policy, Gender responsive.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1980 Zimbabwe set up a government based on egalitarian ethos with a view of transforming the nation through a policy framework underpinned by the essence of 'Growth with Equity'. Although efforts have been made in the past 25 years to attain equity, equality and social justice in all sectors of society, women still lag behind men in, among others, politics and education, ([Zimbabwe Millennium Development Goals., 2004](#)). Gender equality therefore remains a core development issue, and a development objective in its own right. With this in mind the Zimbabwean government came up with the National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2003. The goals of the NGP are to eliminate all negative economic, social and political policies, cultural and religious practices that impede equality and equity of the sexes, to mainstream gender in all aspects of the development process and to ensure sustainable equity, equality and empowerment of women and men in Zimbabwe in all

spheres of life (The National Gender Policy., 2004). The Ministry of Gender used the sectoral approach as a strategy to implement the NGP. It therefore became officially incumbent on the various government sectors to pursue gender specific policies and programmes. The NGP identified the potential in the education and training sector in the eradication of gender imbalances and inequality since it is the foundation of economic and social development. Within the education and training sector, teacher education colleges were expected to be on the forefront and should have, three years after instituting of the NGP, come up with gender specific policies and programmes. Furthermore if gender sensitive teaching and analysis skills become an integral part of teacher education, qualifying teachers could become a bridge between those already in the service, pupils and the community in terms of promoting knowledge and behavioural change on gender equity as well as staff development at local levels (Runhare and Gordon, 2004). The study therefore sought to evaluate the implementation of the NGP in teacher education three years after the policy was instituted.

For this purpose, the study adapted Tyler's objective oriented evaluation model. The main contribution of the model is that education activities need to be organized around certain goals, (Guba and Lincoln, 1988). Goals are critical because they are the basis of planning and they serve as criteria for selection of materials, recruitment of staff and students and development of instructional procedures. In this regard Tyler (1950) sees evaluation as the process of determining to what extent the goals are actually being realized. In the same vein, the NGP formulated goals or strategies for the education and training sector to guide institutions in eradicating gender imbalances. For the purposes of evaluation, the study used the same strategies to formulate guiding questions.

The study was guided by the following questions:

- i) Do teacher education colleges (TECs) have their own policies on gender?
- ii) Have TECs incorporated gender issues in their curricula?
- iii) Are TECs providing equitable educational resources to female and male student teachers?
- iv) What efforts have been made by TECs to eliminate all forms of discrimination in Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) subjects?
- v) Is there gender balance in decision-making positions in TECs?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey design was used to evaluate the implementation of the NGP in teacher education. Five of the 13 teachers' colleges were randomly sampled using the hat system. Two questionnaires were designed, one for five principals or their representatives and the other one for 26 heads of various departments (teaching, non teaching and student representative council) within the colleges. The questionnaires were designed with the intention of collecting gender disaggregated data as well as

information on gender related issues in the curricula and on day to day activities in colleges. Questionnaires were physically administered to TECs. All in all 31 questionnaires were completed.

## RESULTS

### Institutional Policies on Gender

On the existence of the NGP, all the 31 respondents indicated an awareness of its existence. 24 of the 31 respondents indicated that they had not yet read the NGP. Lecturing staff disaggregated data, in Table 1 below obtained from the five colleges shows that the 168 male lecturer population (68%) far outnumbers the 78 female lecturer population (32%). Non-teaching staff composition of 45 males (57%) to 34 females (43%) also shows lack of gender balance. All respondents however concurred that gender was a factor considered in the recruitment of students. Male students numbering 617, constituting 37% of the student body as compared to 1041 females constituting 63% of the same student body in the five colleges is far outnumbered by female students. On having more females as compared to male students, one principal explained that this was done:

*To keep in tandem with the national population ratio of 52% female to 48% male*

The male to female student percentages given above indicate that the national population ratio has been exceeded in favour of females. TECs have managed to positively redress gender imbalances in female student enrolment. However there is a possibility of male students being discriminated against entry into primary and secondary teacher education training.

**Table-1.** Gender *Disaggregated Data*

Category	Total	Males	%	Females	%
<b>A. Decision Making Positions</b>					
Principals	5	5	100	0	0
Heads of Departments	11	7	69	04	31
Lecturers in Charge	29	26	90	3	10
Academic Board Members	75	60	80	15	20
Chief Wardens	3	2	66.7	1	33.3
Librarians	3	2	66.7	1	33.3
Bursars	3	3	100	0	0
<b>B. Academic Staff</b>					
Lecturing Staff	246	168	68.3	78	31.7
Lecturers in Science, Maths and Computers	37	29	78.4	8	21.6
Lecturers in Practical Subjects	44	24	54.5	20	45.5
<b>C. Non Teaching Staff</b>					
Librarian staff	13	10	77	3	23
Accounts	5	3	60	2	40
Receptionists, Typists and Secretaries	9	3	33	6	67
Wardens	20	11	55	9	45
Cooks	32	18	56	14	44
<b>D. Students (two colleges)</b>					
Student Board	1658	617	37	1041	63
Student Representative Council	39	30	77	9	23

### **Colleges Mechanisms to Deal with Gender-related Abuse and Pregnant Students**

Respondents concurred that colleges do not have mechanisms in place to deal with gender-related abuse at lecturer-lecturer, lecturer-student as well as student-student levels. Public Service policies and regulations informed colleges on how to deal with such abuses. It was also indicated that college administration handled such matters in the way they deemed fit at their levels.

The five colleges do have guidelines on pregnant students. Apparently the policy guidelines are derived from the Ministry policy. Pregnant students are allowed to go on maternity leave for a full month. If pregnant students are in college residence, at 4 months of pregnancy, they become non-resident. This policy guideline has to some extent removed discrimination against female student teachers that fall pregnant. Prior to this policy guideline, pregnant students were deferred for a year.

### **Staff Development**

Staff has been sensitized on gender issues through staff meetings and college based workshops. Indications from principals and HODs were that sensitization does take place but not on a deliberate, systematic and sustained basis. There was no established quota system for female and male staff that goes on staff development in all the five colleges. Staff development related to undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes was based on first come first served. Gender balance therefore is not yet a critical consideration in staff development matters.

### **Incorporating Gender Issues in the Curricula**

The gender component in teacher education curricula of the five colleges was found in National and Strategic Studies, Social Studies, and the HIV/AIDS Education programme. There were also snippets of it in Theory of Education and Professional Studies syllabus A. One college has a module on gender within Family Health and Life Studies. Education represents an opportunity for the inclusion of a new value system much earlier in the lives of children and young people, with immense intergenerational effects and benefits. The critical issue here is how colleges can create the framework for integrating gender issues in teacher education curriculum in a more comprehensive manner.

### **Provision of Educational Resources**

Interviews with principals and HODs revealed that textbooks and other resources in the library were to a large extent gender insensitive. These resources were purchased at a time when gender was not considered a critical issue in the teacher education curriculum. Principals of these colleges revealed that shortage of finance is a challenge that constrains colleges in their desire to purchase textbooks and journals, let alone gender sensitive textbooks and other gender sensitive resource materials. Sport infrastructure at the five colleges is biased towards males. Soccer, rugby and cricket pitches are available in colleges. However boys are said to be using these facilities more than girls for their sporting activities. By and large netball is exclusively for females whilst soccer is a preserve for males. One college Head of department indicated that former male dominated

major games are now open to females but females do shun these major ball games. Budgetary allocations for sport are not gender responsive. One student council president interviewed revealed that funds allocated for sport are directed towards male dominated sporting activities and yet there are fewer male students as compared to female students in the college. It is imperative that gender responsive budgeting has to be exercised in TECs given that it tracks how budgets respond to gender equality and female students' rights requirements (Maruzani *et al.*, 2012) .

### **Gender Discrimination in Science, Mathematics, Technology and Practical Subjects**

On steps taken by teacher education colleges to do away with gender discrimination in Science and Mathematics responses were many and varied. Some of the responses captured were:

*Some quota system to ensure that both boys and girls do Science and Mathematics is in place at the college. The college ensures that in each cohort more than 30% of recruits into SMTs are females. Students make free choices based on their abilities and taste. Female students are encouraged to major in Science and Mathematics. Entry grades into Science and Mathematics are lowered for females in order to have some girls in these subjects.*

Statistics on Sciences and Mathematics lecturing staff (Table 1) shows 29 males (78%) and 8 females (22%). This staffing situation shows gender imbalance. Statistics on lecturing staff in Practical subjects in Table one above also shows that there are 24 males (55%) and 20 females (45%). Percentages in this regard are quite deceiving. The impression given is that there is a move towards gender balance in practical subjects staffing. Male lecturers are dominant in Physical Education, Computer Science and Art and Craft, whilst female lecturers are dominant in Fashion and Textiles and Food and Nutrition. These subjects are traditionally perceived as masculine and feminine respectively. On the deployment of students into practical subjects, HODs and Presidents of SRCs indicated that colleges do not have restrictions based on gender lines with regard to entry into practical subjects; however students tend to select what practical subjects to do basing their selection on the gendered nature of the subjects.

### **Gender Balance in Decision-making Positions**

Women are heavily underrepresented in all categories of employment in teacher education colleges as is shown in the disaggregated data in Table 1 above. At the net level of decision-making there are no female principals. At the HOD level women constitute 31%. Furthermore only 25% of Academic Board members are female. Amongst students in the SRC only 23% are female.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Institutional Policies on Gender**

Teacher education colleges do not have own college gender policies written in black and white. The NGP document is not available in some colleges. A few college decision makers have read the document. Some college decision makers have not seen the document let alone read it. College

decision-makers are leaders in the implementation of National policies as well as initiators of college-based policies. Absence of awareness of the existence of the NGP or not being aware of its contents by initiators of college-based policies makes it difficult if not impossible for the education and training sector to implement the NGP. The fundamental question that begs an answer in such a scenario is 'How can TECs come up with own policies derived from the NGP when their decision makers are not aware of the existence of such a policy let alone its contents?' The five colleges do not have college-based gender policies derived from the NGP. In the absence of college-based gender policies it becomes very difficult for college staff and students to have a shared understanding of gender issues. Colleges deal with young teachers who soon graduate into the world of work, and who will pass their system and attitudes on to younger people. Some TECs encourage female students to take on Science and Mathematics subjects. Guidelines on what female students should do when they fall pregnant are clear. However male students who may want to do Fashion and Textiles or Food and Nutrition are neither encouraged nor discouraged to do so. Recruitment of students appears to be biased in favour of females. The country's population is about 48% males as compared to 52% females and yet disaggregated data in Table 1 shows 37% male students as compared to 63% female students. The possibility is that primary school teaching will ultimately be viewed as a female domain. Males who may want to join it may either shun it or may be denied the opportunity to do so.

### **Incorporating Gender Issues in the Curriculum**

Efforts to incorporate gender issues in teacher education curricula are haphazard and negligible. Each college is doing what it deems fit in their own situation. Whilst colleges should have some autonomy in designing their own curriculum, there is need to incorporate gender issues in the teacher education curriculum in a more coordinated, robust and organized way. Education represents an opportunity for the inclusion of a new value system much earlier in the lives of children and young people, with immense intergenerational effects and benefits. The critical issue here is how colleges can create the framework for integrating gender issues in teacher education curriculum in a more comprehensive manner. May be there is need for developing a gender education training package for teacher educators. Alternatively, there may be need for integrating gender education into the existing college curricular in all subject areas.

### **Provision of Educational Resources**

The issue of purchasing gender sensitive textbooks and materials has not been viewed as a critical issue by TECs. The current economic environment may militate against purchase of gender sensitive textbooks and gender sensitive materials. However, whatever limited funds are availed to the libraries, librarians in TECs if made aware of the need for purchasing gender sensitive material, should of necessity take this consideration on board. Budgets for sport in TECs are biased in favour of male students. It is interesting to note that male student population stands at 37% in the five colleges and yet males benefit more from the budgetary allocation for sport as compared to 63% females. The need to have a gender responsive budget in this situation cannot be overemphasized.

Given that its not just a question of participation but also acquiring a body of knowledge that will be used by teacher graduates when they go into schools, it becomes incumbent upon college officials to take it upon themselves not to deny more than half of their students an opportunity to leave college with skills to pass on to pupils in the schools.

### **Gender Balance in SMTs and Practical Subjects**

The imbalance in male (78%) as compared to female (22%) lecturing staff in Science and Mathematics as well as 54% males and 45% females in practical subjects is quite a challenge to TECs. The need to address this issue at the stage of recruitment of lecturers into colleges cannot be emphasized. Female role models are needed in SMTs, whilst male and female role models are also required in practical subjects. Furthermore encouraging female students to major in SMTs or practical subjects, hitherto a preserve for men, is also not enough. Being silent about male students taking on subjects, hitherto a female preserve, is again not enough. There is need to come up with a policy that will guide recruitment of female lecturing staff into subjects still dominated by men as well as men into subjects still dominated by women. Female student teachers should also be guided into taking subject areas that have been hitherto a preserve for men. There is also need to engender the college curriculum component of SMTs so that in their practice after graduating, teachers can fight against the obstacles that hinder girls from studying these subjects.

### **Gender Balance in Decision-making Positions**

There were no female principals in the five TECs and yet this is the net level of decision-making at college level. There were a disproportionately large number of males at HOD level as compared to females. The same scenario obtains at the Academic Board level. Gender imbalance in decision-making positions in teacher education is disproportionately tilted in favour of men. In the colleges under study, men were making decisions affecting female students who happen to be the majority in TECs. The scenario portrayed is that females teach and learn whilst men teach and make decisions in TECs. In the Student Representative Council females are far outnumbered by males. The bottom line is that there is gender imbalance in decision-making positions amongst students in TECs. Male students dominate decision-making positions although they are in the minority within the student body. It would appear that female students vote for male students into SRCs instead of female colleagues. They do not seem to believe that they, as females, can partake in decision-making together with males. Female students appear not to be gender empowered at all in this regard.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The five colleges do not have their own gender policies to guide in the realization of gender balance and gender equity in education and training. What they do have in practice are guidelines on some gender related matters. Very little has been done to make the teacher education curriculum more gender responsive in the colleges studied. Furthermore sport facilities and the sport budget

benefit male students more than female students and yet female students are in the majority. A lot therefore still needs to be done to bring about gender balance and gender equity in this regard. SMTs lecturing staff is male dominated. Female students doing SMTs are very few. Practical subject teaching is gendered with female lecturers teaching Fashion and Textiles whilst male lecturers are teaching Physical Education and Art and Craft. Male and female students taking these practical subjects reflect the traditional male and female choices. Gender imbalance exists in decision-making positions in TECs, as there are no female principals, very few women HODs as well as few women in the academic board. Amongst students, males dominate the SRC whilst they are far outnumbered by females in college student populations. All in all there is no gender balance and gender equity in TECs. The NGP has yet to be implemented in letter and spirit in these institutions. Not implementing the NGP in TECs reflects low prioritization of the project. Implementation of the project will help to change attitudes, beliefs and values of both staff and students and bring about equity and equality between female and male student teachers.

In view of findings and conclusions made in this study, the following recommendations are made:

- The Ministry of Higher Education should organize a teacher education conference specifically focusing on how the NGP should be implemented in TECs.
- TECs should come up with their own gender policies drawn from the NGP.
- TECs budgets should be gender responsive.
- There is need to mainstream gender in all TEC programmes, projects and activities.
- Staffing in TECs should be gender balanced with more females taking decision-making positions.
- Gender balance in student population should reflect the national population. Currently it is tilted in favour of female students.
- Teacher education curriculum (formal and informal) should be gender responsive.

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