

GENDER EQUITY DILEMMA AND TEACHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE: THE QUEST FOR GENDER JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

The Zimbabwean government through its different arms has enacted different policies in response to the United Nations initiatives to close the gender gap in social institutions. The question to be asked now is whether teacher education is doing enough in Zimbabwe to prepare teachers to be gender justice and gender equity agents in the education system into which they are going. Are they prepared enough to be agents of social transformation which they should be? This paper argues that teachers' roles in schools are significant for educating children who would establish a gender equal society in the 21st century. It clarifies the perspective of education that aims at a gender-equal society. This research followed the qualitative research paradigm. It is grounded on critical pedagogy. Both primary and secondary data were utilised in the research. Secondary data was gathered from existing literature on researches on gender equity in education management in Zimbabwe. Primary data was gathered through semi structured and unstructured interviews. Gaps that need to be filled in advancing gender equality and equity in education management in Zimbabwe were identified. Recommendations were given to close the gaps identified.

Key Words: Gender, gender equity, gender equality, teacher education, transformation, culture.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nicola Slee (2003) asserts that human community is characterized by a basic structural injustice, a distorted relationship between the sexes such that men as a group have power over women as a group. Due to such a distortion, women face varied problems in the Zimbabwean context. These problems are gender based and they arise from gender based socialization, gender based stereotyping, gender based violence as well as gender based discrimination in all spheres.

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Cunningham and Hamilton (2000) point out that many societies are in a state of transition regarding the status of women; hence many women in the world are facing a dilemma of identity. This calls for concerted effort to address the issue of gender inequalities in the Zimbabwean society. Thus, this paper interrogated teacher education in Zimbabwe in the light of the gender debate.

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

2.1 The Shona culture and issues of gender equality

The Zimbabwean community is quite patriarchal in nature. Patriarchy is a male ruled system where masculinity is upheld above femininity. Feminist philosopher, Gillian (1992) argues that the ages between twelve and sixteen are crucial to girls' formation of identity. However it is the time girls are taught to silence their inner moral intuitions. Gillian found out that in adulthood women are encouraged to resolve the crisis of adolescents by excluding themselves. As a result women's adolescent voices of resistance become silent and they experience a dislocation of self, mind and body. Culture, during the socialization process, imparts some gendered misconceptions about males and females. It is these misconceptions that have to be allayed to unveil the truth about the physical, mental, emotional and psychological attributes of males and females. Munroe (2001:9) says,

over centuries societies all over the world have developed ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman. These resulted in the loss of some fundamental truths about the inherent make up of women and replaced them with distorted views.

A critical look at the Shona culture shows some of these misconceptions. Rutoro (2012) in her doctoral dissertation found out the following about gendered misconceptions in the Shona culture.

Table 1 Misconceptions about the physical makeup of males and females

ASSUMED MALE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS	ASSUMED FEMALE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS
Strong	Weak
Fast in doing their things	Slow in doing things
React urgently to important things.	Take their time. Do not take things with the urgency they deserve
Concerned with constructive issues. Not concerned with outward looks.	Too smart. Concerned with trivial things
Always occupied in constructive talk	Gossipers
Gain humanness and maturity with age	Childish regardless of their age
Proactive	Reactive

TABLE 2 Illusions about the intellectual makeup of men and women

Illusions about men's intellectual makeup	Illusions about women's intellectual makeup
Good decision makers	Poor decision makers regardless of age
Good judgment	Poor in making judgment
Fast thinkers. Problem solvers	Slow thinkers. Poor at problem solving
Rational	Irrational
Visionaries. They think ahead.	Think of just the present
Planners. Good strategists.	Poor planners or strategists
Think before acting	Do things in a rush
Good organizers	Poor organizers
Insightful	Surface thinkers

TABLE 3 Illusions about the emotional and psychological makeup of males and females

Illusions about men's emotional and psychological makeup	Illusions about women's emotional and psychological makeup
Emotionally strong	Cry over petty issues, emotionally weak
Controlled by reason	Controlled by emotion rather than reason
Principled	Less principled
Cannot be easily controlled	Can be easily controlled
Not very spiritual	Too spiritual
Driven by a desire for success	Driven by a desire to please the husband
Less need for affection	High need for affection

TABLE 4 Illusions about the leadership attributes of males and females

Illusions about men's leadership attributes	Illusions about women's leadership attributes
They were born to be leaders	They were born to be subordinates
They have the ability to control subordinates	They cannot control subordinates
They can make decisions which are binding	They cannot make sensible and binding decisions
They are strategists	They cannot strategize
They can withstand leadership pressures	They cannot withstand leadership pressure
Men are self sufficient as leaders so they can lead without any problem	Women need men to lead them in order for them to function properly thus they cannot lead
Men use facts in their leadership	Women depend on gossip in their leadership
Men enter leadership through their ability	Women need men to enter leadership

NB* Tables adapted from Ester Rutoro's doctoral thesis (2012: 221,224,226 and 230)

These misconceptions are held as truth in the Shona culture, thus they affect the perceptions of people on the ability of males and females. Higgs (1994) postulates that cultural illusions are of interest to education because they are constraints that hinder the achievement of national goals and hinder the possibility for transformation. Illusions are false ideas about something. They may seem sensible and true to the senses but in actual fact they are wrong and false. This then leads to problems like gender stereotyping, gender based socialization, gender based abuse in all its forms and language and discourse which reinforce these misconceptions. Hadebe in Hadebe and Chitando (2009:10) says,

Culture and religion are the key factors in defining and regulating gender relations in most communities in Africa. All questions regarding the welfare and status of women in Africa are explained within the framework of culture.

On a similar note Kanyoro (2002) in Hadebe and Chitando (2009) further notes that,

Culture is the most important authoritative canon to the African worldview and any form of liberation will have to come to terms with culture. It is essential that African people learn how to question, examine and scrutinize culture. Such a process has a potential of opening the way for a critique of other systems - social, religious, economic and political.

In Zimbabwe there are certain gendered choices available to a person from the time of one's birth (UNICEF: 1994). The socialization process is the root of gender based challenges societies are facing today. Due to the gender based socialization, girls are socialized for a low status in life and boys are socialized for a higher status. NAPH (1998:20) says that for girls this is done, "through restricting girls' activities to such an extent that their social development and exploration instincts

are curtailed." This affects the girl's choices even in later life as a grown up woman. It is within such a framework that we find the Zimbabwean teacher education system enshrined.

2.2 Reaction towards gender inequalities

After gaining political independence in 1980 the Zimbabwe government took a proactive approach to addressing women's issues and problems. Pressure to address gender disparities was a historical product partly as a result of women's involvement in the struggle for national liberation in Zimbabwe and throughout Africa (Makombe and Geroy, 2009). The Zimbabwean National Gender Policy Implementation Strategy and Work Plan (2008– 2012) asserts that Zimbabwe has signed and ratified the protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1986) on the rights of women in Africa. It has also signed the solemn declaration on gender equality in Africa. Zimbabwe has also signed, ratified and acceded to United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality and women empowerment.

Zvobgo (1996) posits that at independence the Zimbabwe government had the task of transforming the education system to abolish the colour and gender band in the provision of education. Some of the education aims of the new government were to:

- Establish a system of free and compulsory primary and secondary education;
- To abolish sex discrimination in the education system;
- Orient the education system to national goals; and
- Place education in the category of basic human rights and strive to ensure that every child had an education opportunity to develop his/her mental, physical and emotional faculties (Zvobgo, 1996).

The implication of these aims was to abolish inequalities between boys and girls in the provision of education. Would this fully empower the girl child to compete in the world of work if the teacher factor was not included in the equation for empowerment? Teachers were to be the main medium of transmitting gender equity values to the pupils. The fruit of this was an increase in the enrolment of girls in both the primary and secondary schools. But the problem remained of attitudes and gender prejudices which are quite difficult to eradicate. The new Constitution of Zimbabwe (Final Draft: 1 February 2013) shows that the new constitution is premised upon a number of values and principles, gender equality being one of the principles. It states that the state must promote full gender balance in the Zimbabwean society. The question remains: To what extent are teachers in the Zimbabwean primary school teacher education system equipped, to complement this government effort? The following section explores the role of teacher education in social transformation.

2.3 Role of teacher education in social transformation

During the last century and even today fast moving social, political and economic changes have transformed the structure of our societies. This has a profound effect on the nature of the education system which should be remodelled to suit the demands of the present societies. It is in this vein that the teachers' roles are seen as facilitators in imparting knowledge, culture and life skills. This summary of the wide array of the teachers' roles translates into one simple phrase – they are the key agents of social transformation. Teachers are responsible for the major changes that take place in learners – social, attitudinal, emotional and psychological. They can dictate the students' worldview. Teachers should therefore be educated to address global and local concerns in the classroom. Giroux and McLaren (1996) argue that transformation begins in the classroom and then moves outward as students live beyond the classroom. Schools have the power to examine and change the unjust societal norms. Teacher educators are therefore faced with the task of preparing

teachers who can in turn be equipped to teach children to fit effectively in the continuously changing world and who will actively challenge existing social injustices. It is thus critical that we view education as the tool to empower students to become critical citizens. This undoubtedly begins with teacher education where teachers who can view the world from a critical perspective are developed.

3.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS

3.1 Gender

Different people put different meanings to the concept gender. It describes the differences between women and men which are based on socially defined ideas and beliefs of what it means to be a man or a woman. It is important to note that sex refers to a person's biological makeup and gender describes their social definition. Gender is thus culturally constructed and gender roles are socially prescribed and not given by nature. Gender is thus one's social identity.

3.2 Gender equality

This is the ability of men and women, boys and girls to enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their potential to contribute to the wellbeing of their community and country at large. Gender equality according to Billing (2009) rests on five pillars namely:

- men and women have the same intrinsic value;
- men and women are equally valuable to society;
- men and women should have equal rights and responsibilities;
- there should be no discrimination on the grounds of gender; and
- equality needs not translate into sameness.

This research is thus based upon these convictions.

3.3 Gender Equity

McMahon and Geske (1982) see equity as encompassing justice, equality, humanity, morality and right. They go on say that the goal of equality is a basic standard against which equity is judged. Thus gender equity is more than just equality as it is founded on the precepts of justice. Whereas equality conveys an element of prescription and measurability (McMahon and Geske: 1982), equity according to Kant in Moris (1971) is founded not on any principle of beneficence, benevolence or charity but upon right. Thus gender equity has a broader meaning and greater implication than gender equality

4.0 THE ZIMBABWE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The research showed that all the Zimbabwe Primary Teacher Education Colleges which formed the sample of this study teach the following as core subjects: Theory of Education (Sociology of Education, Philosophy of Education, Psychology of Education), Professional Studies Syllabus 'A', Professional Studies Syllabus 'B' (this includes all the subjects taught at primary school i.e Mathematics, English, Shona, Environmental Science, Social Studies, Religious and Moral Education, Physical Education, Art Education and Music) other subjects taught to enhance skills acquisition which helps the teacher to survive in the changing world are: Health and Life Skills, Information and Communication Technology and National and Strategic Studies. The student then chooses a subject for in-depth academic study among the subjects offered as Professional Studies syllabus 'B' subjects. There is a gap that exists on the issue of addressing the issue of gender in depth in the curriculum. This is in spite of the fact that it is the teacher who socializes the delicate mind of the young child. It is in the hands of the teacher that the child now grows especially with

the introduction of education from 0 years. Rutoro (2012) found out that the gendered realities teachers face after completion of their teacher education courses include the highly patriarchal societies which are characterised by gendered moralities, gendered language and discourse, gendered traditional philosophies and all have a bearing on the gendered curriculum. There is need to transform the primary school teacher education system to be more gender inclusive which would subsequently have an impact on attitude change on teachers and the young primary school children. Freire (1970) in Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) proposes an emancipatory education system based on liberatory pedagogy which would enable students to transform their societies. It is from this perspective that this paper is grounded on critical pedagogy as the theory guiding the research.

5.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hadebe in Hadebe and Chitando (2009:10) says, “There needs to be recognition that the African context is diverse and that each context has its own particular challenges. Hence it is important to identify and describe oppressive cultural and religious practices in each context.” Based on this assertion, this paper is thus grounded on the tenets of critical pedagogy. The three tenets are as follows: (a) reflection upon the individual’s culture or lived experience, (b) development of voice through a critical look at one’s world and society, which takes place in dialogue with others, and (c) transforming the society toward equality for all citizens through active participation in democratic imperatives (Aliakbari and Faraji: 2011). For critical pedagogues, the purpose of education is for social transformation toward a fully democratic society, where (a) each voice is shared and heard in an equal way, (b) one critically examines oneself and one’s society and (c) one acts upon diminishing social injustices. (Lynne A. Bercaw and Lisa M. Stooksberry: 1992). Burbules and Berk (1999) argue that critical pedagogy represents the reaction of progressive educators against institutionalised injustices. They assert that it is an effort to raise questions about inequalities of power; about the way belief systems become internalized to a point where individuals abandon their aspirations. In critical pedagogy educators should not only be adept at identifying social injustices but they should also be enthused to change it. Thus in critical pedagogy students should think critically against false, misleading and partisan beliefs and be inspired to act against the preservation of an unjust status. Freire (1970) alludes to this fact by saying that “the greatest barrier against the prospect of liberation is an ingrained, fatalistic belief in the inevitability and necessity of an unjust status quo.” Teacher education should therefore embrace critical pedagogy which goes beyond a ‘language of critique’ towards a ‘language of possibilities.’ (Giroux: 1983) Thus this paper argues that teacher education should offer solutions to the problem of gender inequities in the Zimbabwean society.

6.0 METHODOGY

This research is based on the qualitative research paradigm. UNESCO (2005) says that qualitative research is the process whereby we try to understand the context in which decisions, actions and events occur. This research is guided by the following tenets as stipulated by UNESCO (2005):

- We look for reasons and assumptions – the ‘why’ behind what people say and do in respect of a particular situation or decision;
- We look for the processes – the ‘how’ of an action by exploring the interaction between people and their environments or between an intervention and its setting;

UNESCO (2005) asserts that therefore qualitative research is the process whereby we try to understand the context in which decision, actions and events occur. In the context of this research, qualitative research was important in that the researcher had to interrogate the real contexts in which decisions are implemented. Although gender supportive policies are there, but teachers’ colleges are

autonomous in the choice of what to add to the basic curriculum expected for the training of teachers. Thus attitudes and perceptions which guide decision making at micro level were interrogated.

6.1 SAMPLING

The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling. Accessibility to the researchers was the mainly factors which influenced the selection of colleges studied in this research. Three teachers' colleges were used in the research. Their curriculum was analysed to identify how they are responding to gender issues. Issues of gender in schools were got from teachers who were purposely sampled. Both male and female teachers and lecturers were used as research participants. Teachers were sampled from different year groups of experience i.e. 0 – 5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, 11+ years of experience.

6.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data was collected using interviews, questionnaire and document analysis for triangulation purposes. Two types of interviewing were used namely unstructured and semi structured interviewing. The researchers got their data from interviewing lecturers, student teachers and also practising teachers. The researchers also got data from document analysis. The researchers critically analysed curricula of three teachers' colleges to identify the gaps that need to be filled in promoting gender sensitivity in schools.

7.0 DATA PRESENTATION

7.1 Inclusion of gender issues within curriculum of primary teachers' colleges

The data presented in this research is based on interviews, questionnaires surveys and document analysis from three primary school teachers' colleges in Masvingo region. The curricula of the three colleges are basically the same as curriculum from all other teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe as shown earlier in this paper. It was noted that of the teachers' colleges under study gender studies is absent from the curriculum. However gender issues are dealt with in other subjects and it varies from college to college as colleges are autonomous on what content to teach in subjects. Thus inclusion of gender issues is dependent on the college. Responses showed that gender issues are included in subjects like Health and Life Skills, Theory of Education and Social Studies. It was however evident from interviews held that the issues are not dealt with in depth, but just as minor topics. One respondent said "*we look at these issues in passing as we have other major topics to cover.*" On time put aside for the teaching of gender issues, most respondents showed that they were not able to specify the real number of hours as they are issues infused within other issues.

7.2 Reasons cited for marginal treatment of gender issues in teachers' colleges

The reasons cited by respondents on why gender issues are treated as marginal in teachers' colleges were:

- lack of knowledge among lecturers of what to teach under this subject. Some lecturers were quite open and one said, "*we hear about the gender rhetoric on a daily basis. What we are aware of is gender activism, but gender education in colleges and schools is something we really do not know. It's easy to be a gender activist, but a gender educator may be something else.*" From discussions with both male and female lecturers, it was surprising to note than the gender debate is not understood in its correct perspective by even learned people. Most lecturers showed that their understanding of the gender debate is limited to gender equality in the workplace only. The issue of culture remains a bone of contention. Other issues on gender remain hidden.

- Lack of awareness on the importance of inclusion of gender issues in teacher education to the whole gender equity debate. Some lecturers showed surprise as they had never thought gender education was of importance in teacher education. This showed that gender issues are not thought of with the seriousness they deserve in the implementation stage of policy.
- The patriarchal mindset was also seen as a hindrance to the implementation of policy on gender in teacher education. Some participants showed that they do not think that having gender education as a separate subject was important as the issues are dealt with in other subjects. This was in spite of the glaring gaps in teacher education curriculum and the importance the government of Zimbabwe is putting on dealing with gender inequalities.

These are some of the major reasons cited for the supposedly lack of will in dealing with gender issues in teachers' colleges and consequently the developing of teachers who are poorly equipped to deal with gender issues in the education system. This is shown in the next section.

7.3 Female/male lecturers' participation in gender equity activities

In all the three colleges there is no evidence of active participation in gender equity initiatives from both sexes. It's only in one college where a female lecturer has proposed gender equity initiatives which have not yet borne any fruit. Apart from the peripheral treatment of gender issues in a few subjects, gender remains a silent issue in all colleges studied.

7.4 Student teachers' knowledge on pertinent gender issues

It was clear that student teachers' lack adequate knowledge to address gender issues in schools. Most said that their experience of teacher education does not really prepare them adequately for the gender challenges they face as individuals and also those faced by their students and the communities they find themselves in. Newly qualified teachers showed that they have not been adequately prepared to tackle gender based challenges in their profession.

7.5 Perceptions of qualified teachers on the effectiveness of teacher education in preparing teachers to be address gender issues they face in schools and communities

There were varied responses on teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of teacher education in preparing them to address gender issues. Those who said teacher education was adequate for them referred to the issues they discussed in Theory of Education and also in Health and Life Skills. However most respondents showed that they required a more in depth approach to gender education so as to equip them to face the gender based challenges.

7.6 Importance of teaching gender education in teacher education institutions

All the participants showed that it is imperative to include gender education in teacher education curriculum. However the degree of inclusion differed as some thought that it should be included within other subjects, while the majority thought that gender education is quite important that it should be a standalone subject. The following were the reasons cited for inclusion of gender education:

- To empower both female and male teachers to face the challenges of changing socio-cultural environment;
- So that the teachers will be gender sensitive in their teaching and to impart the same attitudes to their students;

- So that the teachers can be effective agents of changing perceptions and hence transform society's gender perspectives through changing attitudes and perceptions of young children;
- To enable teachers to cultivate gender sensitivity in the young children who are growing up in a new social order;
- Raise self esteem of both female and male teachers in taking up the same opportunities as they enter the education system;

From the list above the researchers saw that lecturers and other teachers in the field see the area of inclusion of gender education in primary teachers' colleges curriculum as a grey area which requires urgent attention.

7.8 Proposed topics from participants to be included in gender education in teacher education institutions

Participants showed that the treatment of gender issues in subjects in teachers' college curriculum is inadequate. They showed that if gender education is to be treated fully to complement government effort towards a gender blind society, the following topics should be included in the subject:

- What is gender? This topic was seen as important as people confused the terms gender and sex. This would inform teachers on gender roles and sex roles within the society.
- Gender theories
- HIV and AIDS and gender
- Marriage and gender relations.
- Masculinity and femininity issues.
- Gender and economic development
- Gender and society
- Gender and culture
- Gender and politics
- Gender and religion
- Gender and education
- Gender and leadership

These are just some of the topics that came up during the research. The essence of this is that for a holistic understanding of gender issues; for teachers to be effective agents in social transformation, gender education should be a fully fledged subject in teachers' colleges.

7.9 Preparedness of lecturers to teach gender education

Most lecturers interviewed showed that they are prepared to teach the subject as they see its importance. They proposed that they be staff developed so that they may be able to tackle the subject from a correct perspective. Most lecturers proposed that any initiative to develop gender education should start with the lecturers themselves as just a few participants showed that they were exposed to gender education at university.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

From this research we arrived at several conclusions:

- It was found out that although there are disciplines that look at issues of gender, they do not do it in depth. The researchers concluded that the issues are included to show the policy makers that they are implementing their policies. In one college just three hours are devoted to the teaching of gender issues during the whole course in Sociology of Education. In another college in Health and Life

Skills. the syllabus does not stipulate any topic on gender although the lecturers say they infuse gender issues in their teaching on sexuality. The questions that remain are: Is teacher education in Zimbabwe really committed to addressing the gender challenge? Are primary school teachers' college really complementing government effort to close the gender gap in Zimbabwean society?

- Culture is contributing a lot in the inadequacies which are being faced on gender issues in teacher education. The Zimbabwean society is quite patriarchal and gendered. This results in a form of 'blindness' when it comes to issues of gender equality. The questions raised by the researchers are: Is teacher education really conscious of the seriousness of gender based discrepancies in the Zimbabwean landscape? Are primary school teachers' colleges really conscious of the important role they can play in addressing these discrepancies? To what extent is teacher education prepared to critically challenge culture in the Zimbabwean context in order to unveil the real foundations of gender injustices and challenges in Zimbabwe?
- Policy implementation is weak. Although Zimbabwe is a signatory to many international conventions on gender, the problem remains on implementation. The questions raised are: Are teacher educators themselves adequately trained to effectively operationalize gender policies in order for them to assist in the empowerment of student teachers to go and address gender issues in their schools? Is there political will to enforce gender policy implementation in Zimbabwe's education system? To what extent are policy makers aware of the importance of teacher education as a key contributor to eradicating inequalities within the society, gender injustices being one?

9.0 WAY FORWARD

Freire (1970) saw teacher education programmes as just imparting professional knowledge to the aspiring teachers. It is such an education system which he sees as creating teachers who are knowledge transmitters rather than being transformative agents. Teacher education should be transformed to develop intellectuals who are able to critically examine the world and thus transform it. Thus the writers of this paper propose that there be:

- **Improved policy framework on gender equity in teacher education institutions.** Intentional policies to enforce gender inclusion in teacher education colleges should be formulated and implemented. Kawana (2009) argues that in order to eliminate gender bias in school education, it is important to foster gender sensitivity among students during the process of teacher education. It is imperative therefore that teacher education considers the issue of gender, not just as a peripheral topic in some subjects, but as a stand-alone subject where qualified personnel are employed to equip the teacher to handle gender issues correctly as they deal with children from 0 years up to high school. Teacher education is a critical area in the creation of a gender just society. The question is: What role can teacher education play in promoting gender justice in Zimbabwe? We want to ensure that our new teachers leave college not only with the required qualifications but also with social skills they will need throughout life. It is thus central that the teachers are sufficiently in touch with the needs of the society. A lot of changes are taking place. Among these are a change in curriculum and also a paradigm shift in socio-cultural systems practices. We cannot forget these factors as we plan the future of teacher education. We cannot continue as if nothing is happening. Everything we do must be geared towards making every child's educational experience a better one, fitting the child better to be a responsible adult. This undeniably starts with teacher education.

- **In-service training of teacher educators on gender**

We challenge that the critical evaluation of self and society, are values worthy of pursuit in the foundations of a teacher education program. In order for teachers to be agents change towards making schools centres of social transformation, they must take a decisive standpoint and challenge existing norms. Teachers as agents of social transformation should combine scholarly reflection and practice. Thus it is imperative that teacher education equips teachers to be gender sensitive so as to ensure that they transfer the same attitude to their pupils. This begins with the teacher educators. Teacher educators should be involved in programs on gender equity in education to create a gender inclusive perspective in them. This will guarantee that the problem is approached in a holistic way. Thus it is fundamental to re-educate the educator on the contemporary global perspectives grounded on inclusion.

- **Reflection on teacher education curriculum with respect to gender issues**

This entails improving the curriculum to include course elements, which introduce a gender perspective, into mandatory subjects in courses of basic Teacher Education. We may go further by including gender studies as an elective subject in Teacher Education. Teachers need to be fully equipped to face the challenges of a transforming society. There is need to adequately equip our teachers with knowledge and skills to address gender issues in Zimbabwe's primary. Primary school teacher education should aim to:

- Develop a teacher who is sensitive to the gender issues faced in our educational, social, economic, political, religious, cultural environments.
- Develop a teacher with a holistic understanding of the gender issue – a teacher geared towards gender justice.
- Equip student teachers with the knowledge and skills to deal with gender based issues they will face in their practice as teachers.
- Complement government efforts of achieving gender impartiality in the Zimbabwean education system;
- Instil a sense of responsibility in the student teachers of their role as agents of social transformation towards a gender blind society;
- Enlighten the student teachers on the social, cultural, economic, religious, political and environmental implications of gender inequality in our society; and
- Sensitise the student teacher on the importance of gender equity to the world at large.

- **Encouraging voices of reason on gender issues in teacher education institutions.**

People who lobby for gender equity have not been taken as seriously as they should be especially considering the significance of this issue in the establishment of a healthy social fabric. There should be a perspectival shift in college governing bodies to position the gender question in its correct perspective. The gender rhetoric should not just end on paper in policies, but there has to be a pursuance on implementation of policies in all sectors. Primary school teacher education should also be put under the lens of gender policy analysis.

- **Gender sensitisation at colleges through workshops and gender forums**

There is need for well-developed teaching in order to improve gender equality through education. In order to give an opportunity to teacher candidates to critically think about the gender debate and to let them understand deeply by discussing current themes about equality in society, gender sensitization is imperative. This may then lead to developing awareness in teachers to think critically about the way they can teach gender content to school children depending on the level of their growth.

- **Gender focal persons at colleges**

It is important to convene a hearing with experts in the field of gender studies about the relationship between education and gender, or education and a gender-equal society. Such concepts regarding the way teachers are trained have rarely been discussed at teachers' colleges which were sampled for this study.

- **Gender forums at colleges**

These may act as pressure groups in colleges to move the gender debate forward and initiate gender projects at college level. Gender forums will advocate for a change in perceptions on gender issues at colleges. They may act as the indispensable voices of reason for gender equity at colleges.

- **Centre for gender equity**

These may be centres to initiate gender awareness within the communities. These should be situated at teachers' colleges. These may function as outreach projects for a college. It is imperative to include student teachers in such initiatives as a way of preparing them for practice when they are qualified teachers in their schools.

- **Gender based researches**

This is crucial so that actions on gender equity initiatives in primary teachers' colleges would be grounded upon informed decisions which crop from up to date researches. Colleges should have research desks which look at contemporary issues and how they can best be integrated into the existing curriculum.

10.0 CONCLUSION

From this research it is evident that primary school teacher education programs in Zimbabwe have gaps which need to be addressed urgently. It was seen that the area of gender equity in the curriculum is a grey area which requires critical consideration. Accordingly, it is expected that primary school teachers' colleges should take this concern with the seriousness it deserves, so that they can fulfil their obligation of empowering student teachers not just academically, but to make them suitable teachers for the contemporary society.

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