

Gender Politics and Zimbabwe Universities: Facets, Contexts, and Consequences

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of female middle managers of academic faculties at three universities in Zimbabwe to ascertain their lived experiences, feelings, opinions, and views regarding gender equality in the discharge of their duties. Open-ended, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews were employed for data collection. This method enabled the female deans to describe and reflect on their experiences. Engagement with the female deans of academic faculties revealed that: a) Promotion of women into deanship positions did not translate into eradication of gender-based discrimination against them; b) A lack of a broader vision of gender equality was observed which limited conscious efforts to address all facets of gender equality. Gender equality, as enshrined in some of the universities' mission statements, remains just rhetoric rather than reality; c) No gender training, sensitization, or awareness was conducted at the institutions; hence a culture of conscious gender inclusion was not cultivated; d) The mainstream attitudes and relations that once kept women at bay were never interrogated when these female deans were hired. This indicated that the integrationist strategy of mainstreaming women into leadership lacked a transformative ethic or revolutionary potential e) Gender inequality tended to lower self-esteem, productivity, and efficiency of the female deans. This study concluded that hegemonic masculinity was very alive, strongly felt, and experienced by women deans despite the strides to achieve gender parity. This article—which brings out the nature, context, and consequences of the exclusionary tendencies towards female deans—ends by providing a prescription that could see universities' aspirations for gender equality turned into accomplishments and excellence as far as middle-level leadership is concerned. This prescription is the novelty of the study.

Keywords: Gender equality, Gender mainstreaming, Higher education