
Promise and performance of gender mainstreaming at a Zimbabwean agricultural training college

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality in education and training can be achieved only if curricula at every level of the system become gender-sensitive. The present study examines the extent to which the milieu at one agricultural training college in Zimbabwe promotes the implementation of gender-sensitive training. The main investigative question posed was as follows: To what extent is the agricultural education and training curriculum used at the college gender-sensitive? By responding to this question, the study provided some response to the performance, challenges and prospects for gender mainstreaming in the college's agricultural education curriculum. Data for this study were generated by document analysis of policy, curricular and instructional documents, interviews with 12 college lecturers, four college administrators and selected final year students, and by lesson observations. The study revealed that while government, and to a lesser extent college policies, articulate the need for gender equality, little attention is paid to these invocations in practice. Likewise, agricultural education and training curricula, training techniques, learning-support materials and out-of-class activities reflect minimal attention to issues of gender equality. The article concludes by discussing possible interventions that correspond to these findings.

KEYWORDS

Gender equality, gender-sensitive curriculum, agricultural education and training, gender mainstreaming, learning support materials

Introduction and background to the study

The participation of women in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is reported to be fraught with challenges, which have earned this sector the label ‘the leaky pipeline’ to symbolise the likelihood of women dropping out of higher academic and technical–vocational studies compared to the retention record of men (Bohmer & Schinnenburg, 2018:63). This is especially so for countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region (UNESCO, 2006). The drive to provide gender-sensitive curricula and instructional practices for TVET courses as possible solutions to this problem is a growing concern in both the global south and the global north. Dickens, Nhlengethwa and Ndhlovu (2019) maintain that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly through SDG 4, seek to ensure that inclusive and equitable quality education and training in all TVET learning institutions is the norm, not the exception. Specifically, SDG 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as it does for all men and boys (Dickens, Nhlengethwa & Ndhlovu, 2019).

Historically, in Zimbabwe, agricultural education and training has been the preserve of males (Mdege, Mdege, Abidin & Bhatasara, 2017). The post-1980 policies of expanded educational provision and global pressures for gender equality led to the increased participation of women in TVET programmes. The promulgation of the National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2004 and its subsequent revision in 2017 created a legal impetus for gender equalisation efforts. Consequently, this research examines how national efforts towards gender mainstreaming have been taken up in the curricular practices of one Zimbabwean agricultural training institution. The college is one of the many TVET colleges established by the government of Zimbabwe and administered by the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate, Fisheries and Rural Resettlement, and it is situated in a rural setting. The college is a stand-alone institution, providing on-campus accommodation for all the 120 students, who comprise 60 males and 60 females when enrolled to full capacity. The college offers agricultural education and training to students in crop and animal husbandry, agribusiness management and agricultural engineering; it produces graduates destined to offer agricultural extension and technical services to farmers across the farming sector and other agro-enterprises. The students exit with either national certificates in agriculture after 18 months of training or national diplomas after three years of training. In this study, some sub-questions were also posed: What policy stipulations guide gender mainstreaming in agricultural education? What kinds of curriculum content and learning-support materials exist to support gender mainstreaming? How well do the instructional milieu and practices promote gender-sensitive training? Finally, do out-of-class student activities reflect gender equality? Each of these questions is responded to in this article.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Internationally, there is a growing corpus of scholarship that speaks to the issue of gender mainstreaming at the TVET and tertiary level, (Gollifer & Gorman, 2018; CUQAA, 2019).

However, few studies have examined the agricultural education curricula in sub-Saharan Africa in order to ascertain how well they do in fostering gender equality (Matenda, 2020).

A number of concepts central to this study need to be explained contextually as guided by the extant literature. The term ‘gender’ refers to ‘roles and responsibilities of women and men that are socially rather than biologically determined’ (Government of Zimbabwe and UNDP, 2009:vii). The notions of gender are context-specific and vary from society to society since different societies view gender through different lenses. Although gender is about women, girls, men and boys, the concern in sub-Saharan Africa and Zimbabwe, as in many patriarchal societies, has had to do mainly with girls and women who have historically been disadvantaged in many spheres of life. Another key concept is that of gender mainstreaming, which Frei and Leowinata (2014:108) describe as:

a process of assessing the implications for women/girls and men/boys of any planned action – including legislation, policies or programmes – in all areas and at all levels. This includes creating and sharing knowledge, awareness [of] and responsibility for gender equality. It is also a strategy for including the concerns of girls/women and boys/men in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education policies and programmes so that girls and boys, women and men benefit equally.

This depiction of gender mainstreaming emphasises the need to integrate a gender-equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programmes and projects such as needs analysis, planning, designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation with regard to how these affect men and women (Nabbuye, 2018; CUQAA, 2019; Chidarikire, Muza & Beans, 2021). In education and training, gender mainstreaming encompasses issues related to curriculum content selection, content delivery, organisation of teaching-learning processes, seating arrangements in classrooms, teacher attitudes, language use, teaching and learning materials, and assessment in the context of gender (Nabbuye, 2018).

Other terms that refer to gender mainstreaming include gender perspective and gender-responsive pedagogies, which relate to the adoption of practices attuned to the needs of girls/women and boys/men in education and training. CUQAA (2019:18) aptly sums the meaning of these concepts as follows:

[W]hen applied to teaching, ... [these concepts imply] ... a process of reflection which affects the design of the competences and skills in the programme’s curriculum, the design of courses, including learning outcomes, the content taught, examples provided, the language used, the sources selected, the method of assessment and the way in which the learning environment is managed.

The view of gender mainstreaming informing this study is of a liberal feminist extraction, given that the gender policies which express or espouse gender equality in Zimbabwe are

essentially liberal in outlook. Liberal feminists seek to equalise educational and training opportunities and provisions between males and females (Graham, 1994; Munsaka & Matafwali, 2013). The major assumption behind liberal feminism is that such equal access to education and training would eliminate the inequalities between males and females. This viewpoint stands in contradiction to that of radical feminists, who advocate an overhaul of the underlying socio-economic structures which they see as the cause of gender and other socio-economic inequalities (Graham, 1994). In educational provision, the liberal feminist perspective is therefore essentially seeking to equalise the former unfavourable provision of education and training for previously disadvantaged groups such as females. The possible foci of gender mainstreaming from this body of literature guided the conceptualisation of a theoretical framework highlighting four areas that can be targeted for gender mainstreaming in the TVET agricultural colleges' training curriculum and context, as shown in Figure 1.

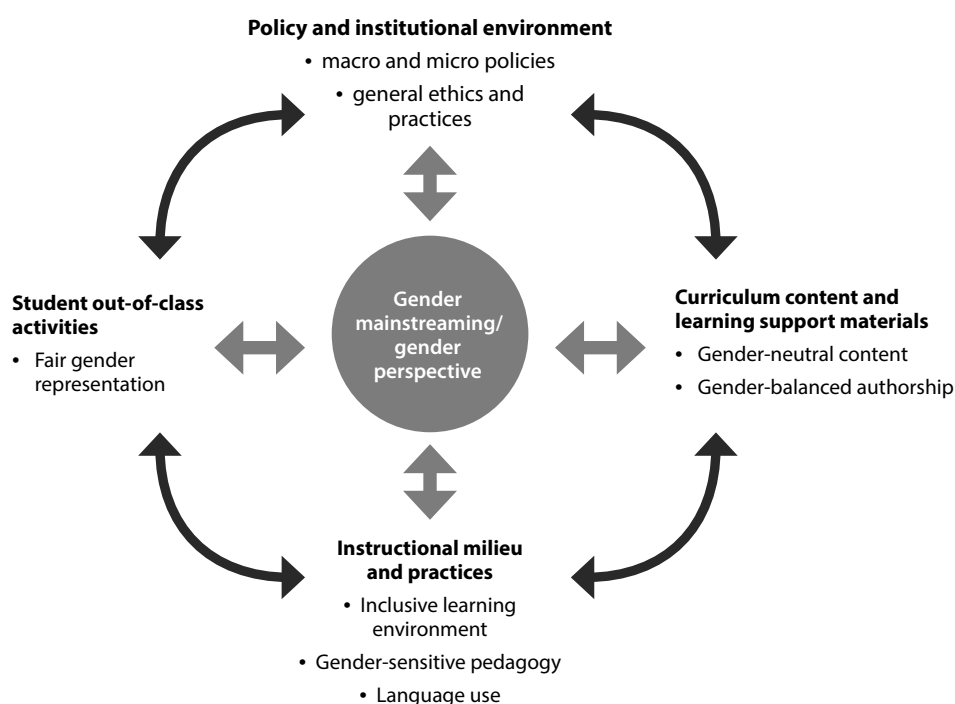


Figure 1: Framework for mainstreaming gender in TVET institutions (own elaboration)

The framework suggests that the gender mainstreaming process can target four interlinked areas in TVET, namely:

- the policy and institutional environment;
- curriculum content and learning support materials;
- instructional milieu and practices; and
- out-of-class student activities.

This organising frame was used to guide the research with regard to issues concerned with gender mainstreaming processes, and this article reflects this framing. To illustrate, in the area of curriculum content the specific agricultural topics or agricultural science disciplines which the cohort of students in the study had covered or were being taught would have to be investigated. Such disciplines, as advised by the Women's and Gender Research Network (Patel-Campillo & Reyes, 2015) could include horticulture, forestry, environmental science and farm management content. For this study, the disciplines were the eight modules studied by the final-term student cohort at the time of the study, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Potential of infusion of gender issues in study modules (adapted from Chinyemba, Muchena & Hakutangwi, 2006; Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate, Fisheries and Rural Resettlement, 2012)

MODULE STUDIED	POTENTIAL GENDER ISSUE FOR INCORPORATION (AS IDENTIFIED IN EXTANT LITERATURE)	INFUSION OF GENDER ISSUES FOUND
Land-use Planning	Need for engendered extension services that are female-centred and biased towards female enterprises. Skewed allocation of resettlement land, e.g. in 2003 only 12% of A2 (around 300 ha farms) farmers were female, while in 2014 only 20% of A2 farms was reserved for females in Zimbabwe. By 2018 only 10% of all the land under the land reform programme went to women, falling short of the 20% quota stipulated in Zimbabwe's Constitution (IFAD, 2018).	Only passing reference to gender ratios in land resettlement process.
Project Development	Need for appropriate and gender-sensitive enterprise ownership, e.g. from 2000 onwards around 17% females had access to credit lines compared to 68% males.	No reference found.
Oil Seeds	Some oil seeds are home-processed into oil and foodstuffs by females, i.e. value-addition and household food security. <i>Women as farm managers, food producers, but little recognition.</i>	No reference found.
Plantation Crops	Females tend to be squeezed out through commercial crop production and land tenure considerations. Appropriate and gender-sensitive extension services, financing and marketing services are needed. <i>Women as farm managers, food producers, but little recognition.</i>	No reference found.
Farm Machinery	Appropriate gender-sensitive technologies and training. Most technologies are based on masculinity, so women cannot easily use them in agriculture. More than 50% of agricultural tasks are done by women – a case for labour-saving technologies. <i>Women as farm managers, food producers, but little recognition.</i>	Reference made to female dominance in communal agriculture only.

Table 1: Potential of infusion of gender issues in study modules (adapted from Chinyemba, Muchena & Hakutangwi, 2006; Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate, Fisheries and Rural Resettlement, 2012)

MODULE STUDIED	POTENTIAL GENDER ISSUE FOR INCORPORATION (AS IDENTIFIED IN EXTANT LITERATURE)	INFUSION OF GENDER ISSUES FOUND
Irrigation	Allocation of irrigable land favours men or male-headed households, and the control of land in turn means control of water resources for agriculture. <i>Women as farm managers, food producers, but little recognition.</i>	Technical issues covered such as types, physical conditions for irrigation.
Beef Production	Cattle ownership remains the preserve of men and this means men control the wealth, means of production and decision-making. Women should benefit from the government's restocking initiatives through bank loans to enable them to own cattle.	Little reference to female participation in beef production.
Ranch Land and Wildlife Management	More women should be assisted financially to venture into wildlife farming and to acquire foreign currency.	No mention of gender issues.

A number of terms that are frequently used in this work require contextualised explanations; they are in the main guided by the meanings given by the European Institute for Gender (EIGE) (nd). The term 'gender issue' refers to aspects and concerns related to women's and men's lives and situation in society with regard to the curriculum of agriculture disciplines at the relevant college. Examples are the participation of women and men in forestry, crop production or land ownership and how they access and use resources such as land, irrigation water and agricultural finance. A gender-sensitive curriculum is one that considers the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, with the aim of eliminating inequalities and promoting gender equality – such as equal distribution of agricultural resources between the genders. The concept 'gender-neutral' relates to agricultural training processes such as content, language or media use that are not associated with either women or men.

Research methodology

A qualitative case-study design was used in controlling the research situation and for generating data at the agricultural college that is the subject of this study. The data-generating techniques considered apposite for studying the college's gender mainstreaming efforts were observations, document analysis of policies, curriculum and instructional materials and informant interviews. Each of these techniques is now described.

Observations

Participant and non-participant observation was used as a way of generating data. Part of the observation was from a participant 'insider position' by one member of the research team, who was a senior member of the college management committee at the time of the research. This 'insider position' allowed a degree of what Davies (1999) calls 'reflexive ethnography' that generated emic views on gender mainstreaming in administrative activities, out-of-class student activities and classroom transactions at the college. Participant observation was augmented by non-participant observation of training sessions. This offered opportunities to witness and understand underlying attitudes, behaviours and communication related to classroom interactions.

Document study

Document study allowed for various written documents to be analysed with a view to teasing out their coverage of gender mainstreaming. The studied documents included the National Gender Policy (NGP), syllabi or trainers' course outlines, content modules, and other learning support materials (LSMs) such as textbooks. An analysis of these documents made it possible to establish the extent to which gender mainstreaming is supported and promoted by the institution and its programmes.

Interviews

Another method used to generate data was interviews with key informants, namely, the college principal and the vice-principal and three of the 12 lecturers, who were conveniently chosen as information-rich sources. Furthermore, informal interviews were conducted with two other lecturers and five student trainees. Informal interviews sought to solicit the views of lecturers and students on certain observed issues. The use of informal interviews or unstructured chats was considered to be a means through which trustworthy information could be obtained by a member of the research team who was working at the college. It was therefore possible to triangulate data from a variety of sources and interventions, such as observation and document study.

Ethical issues

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate, Fisheries and Rural Resettlement with the mandate to train agricultural extension personnel. Informed consent was then sought and granted by the college administration, the teaching staff and the student trainees prior to their participation.

Research findings

In presenting and analysing the research data, evidence from several data-generating tools was brought together to deal with each of the four sub-research questions framing the research. This use of multiple sources of evidence afforded the researchers a measure of data triangulation, which in turn strengthens the trustworthiness and soundness of findings. The data are presented as descriptive accounts backed by supportive excerpts and figures, where this is possible.

Policy stipulations that guide gender mainstreaming in Zimbabwean agricultural education

The study scrutinised documents relating to a number of policy stipulations so as to assess how such stipulations created a predisposing policy milieu for gender equality at the agricultural college being studied. In all, four types of documents were analysed, namely: (i) Zimbabwe National Gender Policy (ZNGP), (ii) the college's course syllabi, (iii) the study modules taken by the student cohort under study, and (iv) texts and sources, course outlines and trainers' or lecturers' teaching-learning materials, where these were available.

National gender policy

From a study of the NGP, a number of requirements emerged on gender mainstreaming in Zimbabwe generally. The NGP was first launched in 2004 and subsequently reviewed in 2017. A study of the NGP highlights strategies for gender-sensitive practices and a reduction in gender inequalities in education and training. The NGP fosters a coordinated policy implementation approach. In a speech to launch the 2017 edition of the NGP, on 16 July 2017, the then chairperson of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission stressed the need to 'ensure that the issues raised in the revised national gender policy are implemented by all relevant government ministries, parastatals and departments' (UNDP, 2020:np). This call was an open invitation to all and sundry in Zimbabwe to mainstream gender in their activities. The strategies proposed for gender mainstreaming in the education and training sector policies and programmes apply equally to agricultural education and TVET. The strategies put forward by the NGP (2004) require action in the following six thematic areas (GOZ & UNDP, 2009):

- Amend all relevant education and legal instruments to promote gender equality and equity;
- Incorporate gender issues in all curricula at all levels of education;
- Eliminate all forms of discrimination against boys and girls in education and skills training, including in Science and Technology;
- Provide equal and equitable educational resources to women and men at all levels;
- Ensure that the sexes are equitably represented, including through the appointment of more competent women at decision-making levels in the education sector; and
- Introduce gender-awareness programmes in training courses.

The evidence from the study of the NGP and its stipulations, when juxtaposed against what was on the ground, is best represented in the following interview responses by senior college personnel. One line of enquiry pursued with the senior college staff was about their knowledge of the existence of the NGP. The vice-principal's response was:

Yes, we have heard of the existence of the NGP. However, at college level I can't say we are using it to influence our programmes. Our knowledge of what is required is not enough.

Asked about what the college was doing to mainstream gender issues in line with NGP imperatives, the college principal said the college was 'yet to be provided with a clear lead on this process' from the Department of Agricultural Education and Farmer Training. This department falls under the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate, Fisheries and Rural Resettlement, whose mandate is to review the agricultural education and training curriculum. These responses by local senior college personnel, when juxtaposed against the policy stipulations on gender as encapsulated in the NGP, led to two conclusions. First, although gender mainstreaming has been embraced at a policy level, it was yet to spread to the local level. Second, higher-level involvement is absent in processes such as staff induction to ensure that the policy is implemented at the lower levels.

Broad curriculum goals and course objectives

A curriculum document has, as part of its attributes, to state the broad purposes of a course in the form of goals. The attribute of objectives serves to make the goals implementable through specified actions that have to be performed in order to attain the goals. A document study of the recent eight modules taught and studied by the final-year student cohort during their January to April college semester showed that none had explicitly stated goals and objectives pertaining to gender. Their absence would, at best, suggest that content that is gender-neutral or which by any standard implies a measure of gender equity is not being considered or embraced, since there is no implied bias towards any particular gender. This lack of focus on specific gender issues was similarly confirmed through interviews with lecturers teaching these modules. In the words of lecturer 1:

We generally do not include gender-related goals and objectives since the course objectives do not explicitly require us to talk about gender issues [...] Thus, we only concentrate on achieving the intended objectives which are examined at the end of the course.

Although the lack of gender-related goals and objectives can be taken as *prima facie* evidence of gender equity or neutrality, we contend that it represents what Dorney and Flood (1997:72). have termed 'silences in the curriculum' on gender which vitiate a change of practices in line with the NGP requirements. These findings are in line with Verge, Ferrer-Fons and Gonzalez's (2017) analysis of the syllabi of all the courses of the BA Political Science

at the International University of Catalonia in Spain, which is that gender issues were dramatically absent from the curriculum as only three per cent of the courses listed in the syllabi dealt broadly with issues of gender. Any envisaged change of practices would have to be clearly articulated or enforced from above, otherwise lecturers simply do what is expected of them, that is, teach that which is to be examined at the end of the course.

College course materials, syllabi and study modules, other LSMs, texts and sources

The kinds of curriculum content and LSMs available to support gender mainstreaming for the final-year student cohort targeted by the study were scrutinised. The study of the availability and adequacy of gender-sensitive content in course materials was also supplemented by interview data from lecturers and students. Gender-sensitive materials or practices are taken to be gender-neutral content or practices that refrain from discriminating against or stereotyping students on the basis of sex or gender. It is important to note that traditional subject curricula may contain ‘silences’ on gender which the teacher needs to be able to question.

Table 1 illustrates aspects of the content which the eight modules studied could have touched on in specific lessons or lectures. They are based on suggestions by Zimbabwean scholars in the area of gender and agriculture such as Chinyemba, Muchena & Hakutangwi (2006). The ‘Infusion of gender issues found’ column refers more to practices to do with the incorporation of gender issues into some module lessons. This column summarises the overall verdict of the interview responses and the researchers’ scrutiny of lecture notes, which give an idea of the state of the infusion of gender issues in the module notes. The table shows that the infusion varied from little to no infusion at all. In addition, interview data corroborated these patterns of infusion. One lecturer’s observation, when referred to Chinyemba, Muchena and Hakutangwi’s (2006) work on agricultural topics with the potential to carry gender-related content, was indicative of the fact that many areas of agricultural content show that agricultural practices are biased towards males. This bias can be evidenced in such issues as women’s access to and ownership of land and draught animals. The researchers’ observations revealed that coverage of and emphasis on these practices and issues depended on the lecturer who was teaching the module. There was no coordinated effort to interrogate these issues systematically.

In addition, the cohort of students studied, being in their final term, could be expected to have covered some aspects of gender in other earlier modules. The research also worked on a general understanding that the depth of coverage of gender issues is bound to vary from one topic to another since the ability of each to carry gender content would vary.

The main LSMs were scrutinised to assess their coverage of gender issues. A number of the main textbooks used in some of the modules studied were also scrutinised. Our findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Some of the modules studied, the main textbooks and coverage of gender issues

MODULE	TEXTBOOK USED	COVERAGE OF GENDER ISSUES
Project Development	Downey, D & Erickson, S. 1987. <i>Agribusiness management</i> (2nd ed.). Hill, B. 1990. <i>An introduction to economics for students of agriculture</i> . (2nd ed.).	A very technical coverage with no gender issues.
Beef Production	Dalton, C. 1991. <i>An introduction to practical animal breeding</i> (2nd ed.). Lawrie, RA. 1991. <i>Meat Science</i> (5th ed.).	No coverage of gender issues.
Oil Seeds	Bowman, BA & Russel, RM. (Eds). 2004. <i>Present knowledge nutrition</i> (9th ed.). ILSI.	No reference to gender issues.

Table 2 shows that the texts emphasised a technical content coverage which made no reference to gender issues in the agriculture and science disciplines. This can be considered a gender-neutral curriculum that does not pit males against females or vice versa. In this regard the textbooks may be considered gender-neutral. There is, however, a view expressed by Cassese and Bos (2013) that there may be a technically biased coverage that perpetuates hidden curricular messages conveying scientific authority as being intrinsically technical, if not male. This also excludes the social basis of agricultural science with the capacity to take on board gender perspectives. Such silences on gender issues in textbook content suggest the need for a review of curricular materials so as to render them gender-sensitive. Alternatively, lecturers would need to infuse gender content into their teaching to make up for its lack of coverage in textbooks. The question of whether they have the capacity to do so is answered in the ensuing section.

Instructional milieu and practices that promote gender-sensitive training

The study sought to establish whether lecturers had the requisite content and pedagogical grounding to teach gender issues effectively. Consequently, the study interviewed lecturers to gauge their understanding of gender mainstreaming. The interviews with the lecturers revealed that only one out of 12 lecturers had had any formal exposure to gender issues in agriculture, and that was through a workshop he had attended. Furthermore, only one of the 12 lecturers was female, a situation which shows an acute lack of women's representation at this level of training; this despite the fact, ironically, that the male to female student ratio at the college was almost equal. A typical perception of gender mainstreaming held by the lecturers was evident in the words of one male interviewee, who said: 'We do practice gender equality since there is affirmative action which favours female applicants.' Like the college administrators, most lecturers were quick to associate gender equality with affirmative action linked to student recruitment and admission processes. However, such gender equalisation efforts were not evident in other areas of college life. This failure to apply issues of gender to other areas of college activity was compounded by the fact that the college had not held any

workshops to induct or sensitise its staff on gender issues. The recruitment of more female lecturers together with gender-related induction for staff could have enhanced the implementation of a curriculum in line with NGP policy stipulations.

Instructional methods used during teaching and learning

The study examined the instructional approaches used by lecturers to gauge their potential for fostering gender equality. Lesson observations showed that lectures, demonstrations and practical work were the most frequently used methods. During interviews, the lecturers indicated that they felt comfortable with these methods. Some lecturers observed that these methods enabled a quicker coverage of the training syllabus. The advantages of familiarity with the methods, easier management of a large student body and cost-effectiveness in terms of time and resources were also proffered as reasons for preferring these methods. During interviews with the lecturers on the methods they used in teaching it was noted that most lecturers were not comfortable discussing the details of their teaching–learning methods. This was apparently because most lacked a deeper understanding of the pedagogical and/or andragogical issues that underpin teaching. Eight of the 12 lecturers had no teaching or training qualifications, although they had obtained either a diploma or a degree in Agriculture. This most probably explains the limited use of what the literature calls ‘the more interactive methods’ such as discussions, drama, role play, group tasks, seminar presentations, field trips and the use of role models such as the Women’s and Gender Research Network (Patel-Campillo & Reyes, 2015). Such methods would ideally combine, all things being equal, with other factors, such as gender-sensitive content and LSMs to foster gender-sensitive training (Patel-Campillo & Reyes, 2015).

Language use during instruction

Language use during instruction was studied through our observations of lessons or lectures. Excerpts and descriptions of observed classroom interactions highlight the salient features of language use, associated attitudes and reactions to classroom exchanges. Most lectures were teacher-dominated, question-and-answer sessions. Male students were more frequently chosen to answer questions as they tended to raise their hands more often. Consequently, male students dominated class discussions and were generally more vocal than their female counterparts. In most of the lecture sessions observed, it was noted that male lecturers neither encouraged females to participate in class discussions nor used gender-sensitive language. This is borne out by the episodes described below.

In one incident, a male lecturer was conducting a lecture and was mostly selecting male students to answer his questions. In the process, he posed an open, non-directed question to which a female student gave an answer that was inaudible to the instructor. In responding to this rare contribution from a female student, the lecturer said: ‘*Ko chimbuya chiri kuda kuti chinyiko?*’ (What does the grandma (old lady) want to say?) This remark was met with laughter from most members of the class. It was observed that the male members of the class,

in particular, gleefully applauded this remark. To the observing non-participant researcher the remark proved to be condescending and derogatory, a view also affirmed in a follow-up interview with female student X. When asked how she felt about the incident, the female student X told the researcher–observer:

It was a very disparaging remark. Anyway, we are used to this kind of language in our classes. The overall effect, however, is that female students keep quiet because this kind of language discourages us (females) from making contributions in the class. *Toita sei tichida chitupa?* (What can we do? We need the qualification!)

For his part, in a follow-up interview to explain his use of language in this incident, the lecturer said:

Well, I meant no harm really, only to provide some lighter moment. The class generally enjoys these kinds of jokes.

A similar incident was witnessed in yet another lecture, where a different male lecturer who was allocating practical assignments to both male and female students remarked, with regard to the set submission date:

Handina basa nekuti unoyamwisa, ndoda kuti basa rangu riitwe ripere nenguva yakatarwa. (I do not care whether you are breastfeeding or not, I want my task completed within the given timelines.)

A more gender-neutral use of language could have been along the lines of ‘I do not care what circumstances you are in, I want my task completed within the given timelines.’ In follow-up interviews with the female students of this class, the general response was encapsulated in a respondent’s remark:

The end is what we look at – that is, completion of the programme. This abuse is a passing phase. However, when delivered in Shona, some of these comments are at times painful! We need to be respected like any other human beings and not necessarily because we are women.

Follow-up interviews with female students about how they experienced these instances of language use yielded a consensus that they were generally on the receiving end of insensitive language use by male lecturers. The students felt that the remarks were more painful since they were delivered using the mother tongue (L1), Shona, which amplified the cultural and personalised meanings of being targets of sarcastic humour.

These two incidents underscore the use of inappropriate language towards female students in lessons where male lecturers were apparently oblivious to the negative effects of their choice of language. The female students felt that more gender-sensitive language could have been

adopted in these instances more out of respect for their feelings as human beings, than because they were women.

We contend that while these instances represent cases of sexual harassment and sexist language that could be dealt with accordingly, they were manifestations of situations in which gender-neutral practices were not being widely mainstreamed. The cases perhaps also underscore the importance of the universally accepted axiom of simply treating other human beings with respect as a way of ensuring respect all round. Furthermore, the female students felt powerless to do anything to redress the situation and were generally resigned to such abuse while holding on to the more important hope of completing the course. Such use of gender-insensitive language puts into question the form or lack of professional preparation these TVET lecturers receive for their job.

These findings on instructional techniques and language used by trainers in training sessions suggest the need for a policy on the professional preparation and development of TVET lecturers through a formalised pathway rather than leaving it to colleges and universities alone to play that role. This is a route which the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa has pursued to good effect (Van der Bijl & Taylor, 2020).

How out-of-class student activities reflect gender (in)equality

In the out-of-class college environment, sporting activities were examined as possible pointers to gender-sensitive practices in the college. These aspects of college life constitute hidden curriculum attributes which, although not part of the formal classroom-planned transactions or studied content, are important indicators of gender-sensitive practices. The focus on out-of-class activities for a college that provides campus accommodation for all students was important since there was a need to study this college community holistically.

Out-of-class student activities

The study examined the ways in which out-of-class student activities reflected the gender perspective. The major out-of-class social activities observed were drinking at the local recreational club, religious gatherings, dating or courtship and participation in environmental outreach programmes. Observations made about the college's out-of-class environment showed that the majority of male students chose to patronise the recreational club, on which they converged for occasional alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. It was also observed that the few potential female student patrons who chose to take alcoholic drinks did so in private. Interviews with some of these female students disclosed that they did this out of fear of stigmatisation or being labelled as prostitutes. These female students alleged that such stigmatisation derived from widely held socio-cultural beliefs in traditional society in Zimbabwe.

It was observed that more female students chose to attend church and religious gatherings compared to male students. Another observed contrast between male and female students

was their dating patterns. It was observed, and also confirmed through interviews, that male students could easily date more than one female student at a time without the practice being frowned upon. However, it was considered 'taboo' for a female student to date more than one male student at a time. Such gendered attitudes to socio-cultural activities were matters of individual choice which may, however, have been a reflection of wider social-cultural practices.

These patterns of entertainment, participation in religious worship and dating observed at the college were generally a reflection of those common in the wider Zimbabwean society. The generally patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society would probably explain some of the gendered practices observed in out-of-class activities at the college. However, an exception was the equal participation of both males and females in the college's environmental outreach programme, where students were required, as part of their training, to engage in community environmental awareness education of their choice. These patterns of out-of-class activities are significant to the study because they enable one to judge the holistic nature of gender-related issues at this particular college.

Dress code

Both male and female students were required to wear work suits, safety shoes or gumboots and sunhats while on campus or engaged in official training business. On other occasions, the students could dress the way they liked: the way men and women dressed reflected individual choices and perhaps the cultural meaning that individuals attach to dress. For example, it was observed that the students tended to associate different types of dressing with different occasions, whether religious, social, sporting or professional. Overall, this choice of dress on such occasions gave women and men some freedom, which it can be argued reflected gender equality.

Allocation of duties outside the classroom

Findings regarding the allocation of duties outside the classroom showed that duties and responsibilities were highly gendered. All the students were expected to take part in the general development and cleaning of the college premises on Wednesday afternoons. Female students were usually assigned cleaning duties in the college administration block, the hostels, the dining hall, the lecture rooms and the toilets. In contrast, male students were allocated labour-intensive tasks such as cutting firewood, cattle-dipping, branding and de-horning of animals, tractor driving and bush clearance. The allocation of duties reflected the societal practices of the gendered distribution of duties and tasks.

Participation in sport and recreation activities

It was observed that participation in sporting activities was a matter of individual choice and tended to be along gender lines. For example, soccer, darts and chess were for men, whereas

netball was the preserve of women. Sporting disciplines such as athletics and volleyball were for both women and men.

Discussion and conclusions

The NGP, through its 2004 and 2017 editions, requires ministries, departments and institutions to mainstream gender in their activities. This research sought to ascertain how this government policy of gender mainstreaming has been implemented in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), with particular reference to one Zimbabwean agricultural college. The study sought to ascertain *to what extent the agricultural education and training curriculum followed at a Zimbabwean agricultural college is gender sensitive.*

The study concluded that gender has not yet been adequately mainstreamed into the college with respect to the agricultural education and training curriculum, LSMs, training methods, classroom interactions and language use, and out-of-class student activities. These findings were arrived at and are presented here against a backdrop of existing pro-gender legal and policy frameworks, namely the National Gender Policies of 2004 and 2017. The situation at the college underscores the inadequate guidance, advocacy and information for enacting gender mainstreaming that pertains at a local level. Furthermore, this scenario reflects the limited translation and articulation of national policy downwards through ministerial, departmental and college levels for the requisite enactment of gender mainstreaming. The paradox of the existence of national policies on gender mainstreaming, on the one hand, and the lack of implementation at a local level, on the other, would suggest that colleges such as the one in this study have to be enabled to ‘walk the talk’. This injunction may entail offering specific guidance plus allocating financial and human resources to institutions in the education and training sector to enable them to implement national gender mainstreaming efforts effectively. The findings suggest that local actor training and induction are essential to ensuring effective gender mainstreaming. Put differently, the prospects for successful gender mainstreaming in agricultural education specifically, and in TVET generally, depend in part on proactive local initiatives that have the backing, where possible, of external support.

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