

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Ambitious but constrained: An exploration of the plight of the Zimbabwean girl child towards gender sensitivity as a 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogical imperative for education

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The 2004 Gender Policy in Zimbabwe was formulated to promote the attainment of social justice, equality and equity in all spheres of society. However, gender biased practices have remained rampant in education. Patriarchal practices and the educational curriculum are used to maintain the status quo of patriarchy as a form of gender imbalance within society. This paper reports on a study that examined gender insensitivity in classroom instruction. Lesson observations and focus group interviews were used to gather data from a sample size of 20 female student teachers purposively sampled from four teacher education colleges in Zimbabwe. Data analysis was conducted through the use of simple lesson content in a hybrid-grounded process and critical discourse analysis of the views of both lecturers and students in classroom interaction situations. Their practices reflected in lessons and views expressed in focus group discussions revealed taken-for-granted patriarchal dispositions. The conclusion pleads for pre and in-service professional teacher development programmes that can sensitize both trainee and practising teachers to the nature of their thinking and practices and help them devise strategies that are aligned to policy.

**Key words:** Teacher education curriculum, gender sensitivity, gender blind, discourses, inequality, structure and agency, social enactment approach, twenty first century pedagogical imperative.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite calls for equality world-wide, and despite Zimbabwe's assumed democracy, girls and women remain marginalized in educational leadership, training and classroom instruction. It is in this context that the current study posits that teacher education programmes need to be gender sensitive if they are to meet the Millennium Development as set out by the United Nations member states (Reed, 2006). The issue of gender

especially the status of women in professional occupations and organisations has been quite topical and controversial since the 1960s (Gaidzanwa, 1997). These writers contend that special emphasis on women's rights in organisations gained impetus in the second half of the 20th century due to the fact that substantive research had explored the role and status of women in organisations and had established that women are not only invisible but faced structural and cultural barriers. Though research on gender across the globe within the educational domain has been documented as suggested above, countries such as Zimbabwe have suffered a dearth of such

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discourses hence this study pays special attention to the situation of female students in institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education specifically in teacher training colleges. Of special interest in this study are the factors that affect female students' aspirations for leadership positions in learning institutions. However, it should be noted that factors that influence female students' aspirations for leadership cannot be examined in isolation from the realm of gender discourses but have to be placed within the broader spectrum of gender studies. Research findings (eg., Carli, 2001; Hughes and Kroeler, 2005; Momsen, 2008) have conceptualized barriers to women's leadership aspirations in terms of the metaphors of a glass ceiling and glass walls. Carli's (2001) glass ceiling metaphor refers to the invisible obstacles of discrimination and prejudices endured by women and which prevent them from getting to leadership positions. Emphasizing the issue of barriers

that impinge on girls' and women's leadership aspirations, Stephanie and Berzin (2010) suggest that environmental influences often have both a positive and negative impact on aspirations for girls or women. The environmental influences identified tend to gravitate around issues of gender role socialisation. These develop in humans as cultural schemata and direct beliefs, feelings, aspirations and thinking processes that affect boys' and girls' perceptions of leadership abilities or competencies. The perceptions that develop as a consequence of gender socialization often serve as either enablers or constraints for boys' or girls' leadership ambitions (Stephanie and Berzin, 2010). The gender role perceptions are often engendered in the family through primary socialization and are perpetuated by schools, colleges and universities through secondary socialization. The effects of these forms of socialization culminate in the polarization of boys' and girls' ambitions in their life courses. As in boys and girls, the above mentioned schemata also exist among teachers in the educational institutions (Plata, 2011). Since these schemata are culturally derived, they tend to rely on gender-based stereotypes. As a consequence, they have the potential not only to create a superiority or inferiority complex in students but also to perpetuate a self-fulfilling prophecy (Plata, 2011; Ogilvie and Dunn, 2010). This means that schools and colleges have the power to either build or destroy students' aspirations. Patkin and Gesser (2009) emphasise the influence of the social environment and suggest that even the professional development of teachers is a result of their cumulative experiences throughout their career starting from the training phase. In their study on factors that affect teacher-trainees to key positions, Patkin and Gesser (2009) established the importance of self-value, self-image and self-identity and contend that such conceptions provide the motivation and power to cope with goals over time and to overcome barriers and failures on the way to accomplishment. They established a link between self-esteem and

aspirations especially the fact that a negative self-image impacts negatively on one's future aspirations. Many feminist writers on the Zimbabwean school curriculum have tended to attribute the issue of gender insensitivity to the curriculum inherited by Zimbabwe at independence in 1980 claiming that it was modeled on the English system (Atkinson, Agere and Mambo, 1993; Kwinjeh, 2007). Their contention is that as in Britain, Zimbabwean girls were educated for domesticity, whilst boys were channeled for employment in the public sphere and the role of family head and breadwinner. As a result, the curriculum for boys and girls differed significantly. Boys were encouraged to take up technical subjects such as metal work, wood work, agriculture, technical graphics and building (Dorsey, 1996). On the contrary, their female counterparts channeled into domestic science subjects such as home economics, needle work, typing and shorthand. They were also encouraged to take up the arts subjects (Machingura, 2006). Atkinson, et al., (1993) support aforementioned view by saying the gender polarized nature of many educational programmes offered to Zimbabwean students is reflective of the perception or influence of the former colonial settler government education officials, who tended to visualize girls and women in terms of a Victorian image of what a woman should be, instead of observing their actual capabilities, leadership potential and functions alongside their male counterparts. Because they equated men with breadwinners, they introduced technologies to men and recruited them for leadership positions and better paying and highly esteemed jobs, which often took them away from the homes, farms and their tribal trust lands (Mavhunga, 2009; Momsen, 2008).

## **Problem statement**

The challenge confronting girls or women in Zimbabwe is that in most families the gender role socialization practices tend to engender patriarchy. This trend is perpetuated schools, colleges and universities through the hidden culture curriculum. The dissemination of the patriarchal ideology continues to undermine the girls' and women's capabilities, leadership potential and consequently locks them in social roles traditionally stereotyped as female domains. It is in this sense that the role of schools, colleges and universities remains that of cultural reproduction. As structures, these institutions reproduce inequalities of gender which tend to exclude women in leadership aspirations. Many leaders in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education are males who were socialized into believing that only men can be effective institutional leaders. Despite the enactment of legislative reforms such as the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1987 and the Matrimonial Causes Act repealed in 2008 purported to recognize

women's rights and to recognize them as capable adults who can effectively lead social institutions, the challenges of gender discrimination have remained rampant in the country's institutions.

### **Goal of the Study**

The study was designed to explore the manifestations of patriarchal practices in the teacher education curriculum and how the gender imbalance in educational leadership is maintained through learning and instruction in the teacher education classrooms. Research questions:

- How does the curriculum offered to students in Zimbabwe's Teacher training colleges engender imbalances in educational leadership positions?
- How is the status quo of gender inequality in leadership for learning and instruction maintained?
- What strategies are necessary for colleges to mitigate the effects of gender insensitivity in students' leadership aspirations?

### **Theoretical perspectives used as the lens for the study**

Among the interwoven political, historical and socio-cultural strands that affect gender sensitivity in leadership and instruction in Teacher Education in Zimbabwe are explanations of the constraints imposed on girls or women by the social structures in which they live. The thesis is that problems besetting girls or women's leadership ambition in teacher education programmes can be conceived in terms of the debate on agency and structure (Giddens, 2001; Wright-Mills, 2000) as discussed below.

### **Constraints imposed on women's leadership ambitions: The interplay of structure and agency**

The discussion in this part of the study is informed by the theoretical view that social structures that are not evidently gender sensitive or neutral can in practice constitute constraints which limit girls or women's leadership ambitions (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). This means that the gender-based constraints imposed on girls or women by society can certainly illuminate dimensions of agency and structure, which are premised on such questions as: What leadership capacity do individual girls or women have to act independently of their structural constraints? From this stems a further question: What are structural constraints when these refer not to material or biological structures but to deeply ingrained patterns of social interaction? The

above-mentioned clearly shows that this section of the study draws its literature from a tradition of research and theory which takes as its starting point the idea that human beings make their own history, along with others, though not in circumstances of their choosing (Christie, 2008). The interplay of human agency with social structure in time and place is essentially the chief source of human identity and the meanings they attach to issues of leadership and subordination in virtually all spheres of life (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). According to debates on the interplay of structure and agency (eg., Archer, 2005; Apter and Garnsey, 2004) there is frequently a polarisation in explanations of gender inequalities in which either structure or agency is emphasized. Whether the focus is primarily on male power, overt or institutionalised, or on the effects of female psychology on action, the effects of the other set of factors remains blurred.

Adopting the insights from Wright-Mills' (2000) sociological imagination as a way of conceptualizing structure, agency and history and their influence on the leadership prospects of male and female student teachers, I argue that social actions contain a reference not only to one's own stream of experiences but to that of another or of others and through mutuality give rise to a high or low ambition, be it in leadership or achievement in general. This notion of action as embodying reflection and the emphasis on interaction as shaped by shared meanings has implications linking girls' or women's outlook to the structural constraints which they encounter in leadership ambitions (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). Drawing on the debates on structure and agency especially the view that although each human being may have his or her own hopes, dreams and career aspirations or preferences, the fact that they live in a particular society at a particular time implies that there will always be a likelihood that they are not always able to shape their lives as they would like (Wright Mills, 2000). As a result, many people's opportunities can be said to be shaped positively or negatively by the circumstances they are born into (Mutekwe and Modiba, 2012; Giddens, 2001). This means that some people may be destined for failure not because of lack of ability but because structural circumstances are against them. In terms of leadership ambitions in teacher education, the above implies that male and female student teachers wittingly or unwittingly fit into the social structural categories predetermined for them by society and as a consequence they often experience structures of opportunities that are similar to others of their own genders (Apter and Garnsey, 2004; Dorsey, 1996). This is usually because, as argued by Mills, people cannot really make sense of their own experiences and life chances until they are aware of others in the same circumstances as them. The sociological imagination, Mills suggests, helps us to understand the relationship between our own lives, the lives of others and the times in which we live. In Mills'

words, it helps people to grasp what is going on in the world and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of intersection of biography and history within society (2000:7). Seen in this light, it follows that the challenges faced by female students in their quest for equality of leadership positions fall into two broad categories: The first one concerns their constraints as enforced by male power or patriarchy within the structures in which they live, families and schools. The second one is that girls or women are limited by their own outlook. Apter and Garnsey (2004) are of the opinion that this male power and female psychology polarity is also a version of the debate on structure and agency. The evidence of the subjective experiences of constraint and action is apparent in the literature by writers such as Reed (2006), Apter and Garnsey (2004), Chodorow (2006) and Coward (2008) who have deployed the social enactment approach to explore how girls and women are both constrained by the social structure in which live.

### **Social enactment theory of gender inequality in leadership ambitions**

An important tenet of the social enactment theory is that social structures are daily reinforced and sustained by expectations and interactions (Hewlett, 2007; Veran, 2010). The roles the members of the social system learn are largely tacit, sometimes unacknowledged, but their participation in them is especially influential to their reinforcement (Reed, 2006). Social enactment theory thus explains why progress toward gender equality in many spheres of human life including occupations is slow by locating the problem in the structures that constrain girls' or women's conditions arguing that they interlock with one another (Warner, 2007). The theory draws on work of this kind to provide a means of understanding the reproduction of gender relations in areas such as leadership as having features in common with the enactment of other inequalities (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). In Chodorow's (2006) perspective about the reproduction of motherhood, the domestic structure in which women are left as sole caretakers of their children while men are leaders and breadwinners in the workforce has consequences for leadership aspirations for both boys and girls. Sons acquire a sense of identity by dissociating from their mothers and view themselves as separate, different, disengaged, whereas daughters develop a maternal (caring, responsive, connected) identity (Chodorow, 2006). The biological aspects of motherhood can be taken as constant but it is the social enactment of motherhood that sustains many of its features. Social structures reinforce themselves as children raised within them are likely to develop identities which appear to justify them. Another important example of an integrative approach

can be seen in Gilligan's work, wherein developing girls and women try to perform according to the standards set by masculine structures in education and in leadership but suffer an ambivalence about their aims or value of their goals and the validity of their own responses, which are out of kilter with what they perceive to be the norms (Gilligan, 1990). Hence male structures confuse women as agents who, as they come to understand male norms better, are less committed to participating in them. Marshall's (2002) work on women in management positions reveals a similar dynamic whereby the experiences of the masculine cultures in organizations leads women to change their equality goals in terms of leadership aspirations.

Other social enactment theorists such as Handy (2004) point out structures are enacted through the outlook and actions of the girls or women. She draws her examples from conventional working hours and occupational arrangements to argue that despite the publicity given to gender equity in leadership positions, innovations in working hours, fulltime work and uninterrupted careers are still perceived as the norm in industrialised societies. However, as the burdens of child care fall naturally to the mother, who herself has been socialised by a mother, many women take this into consideration in their rejection of leadership positions. As a result they tend to aspire for positions that allow them to fulfil the primary responsibility of child care (Reed, 2006; Handy, 2004). However well trained or educated, girls or women may have difficulty finding alternative child care, and hence need a job which will have some flexibility (Handy, 2004). This often takes them away from leadership aspirations. Having chosen a job to suit their domestic commitments, but which offer neither security nor challenge nor future opportunities, some women may be more inclined to cease work when the demands of children and home increase (Chodorow, 2006). Meanwhile, their husbands may be working longer hours to keep up with the growing families' financial needs and to earn at favourable overtime rates or to strive to secure promotion to leadership positions.

The social enactment approach asks how constraints binding girls or women are reinforced by structures reproduced through their compliance and explores the scope for change in modern social structures (Reed, 2006). The perspective also explores the ways in which new understanding can empower girls or women to compete on the same footing with boys or men. This perspective does not claim to provide recipes for eliminating injustices, but helps advance our understanding of the dimensions of inequality in our various spheres of life and also shows that our enhanced understanding of the gender disparities in our societies can be empowering (Hames, Koen and Handley, 2006). Archer (2005), Chodorow (2006) and Reed (2006) are unanimous that there is an need for equality of opportunities for men and women in virtually all spheres of life private or public but they, however, wonder why

progress toward this is slow and why prospects for the future also appear bleak to many girls and women the world over. According to Apter and Garnsey (2004) and Hames et al., (2006), these questions have been posed and answered in various ways. These authors also note that the specific causes emphasized vary widely, though in their most extreme forms their explanations fall into distinct and apparently opposing categories one of which locates the causes of persistent disparities between males and females in male power. According to these arguments, prejudice against girls or women sustains not just occupational but also leadership segregation (Reed, 2006). According to this view men directly or indirectly wield power not only in the private sphere of the home but in virtually all human social structures. In many societies the power and patterns of interaction are so stable and embedded that they are taken for granted and not perceived as relations of domination and subordination (Gramsci, 1994; Woolf, 2004). The next section looks at how male power (patriarchy) and social structures influence men and women's leadership prospects in education and other spheres of life The influence of male power on girls and women's leadership prospects.

Explanations couched in terms of male power rest on the assumption that society is structured to support male interests (Bailyn, 2006; Christie, 2008). Though some feminists (eg., Gordon, 1995; Woolf, 2004) view the ultimate cause of gender inequality in leadership aspirations as rooted in men's malice toward women, the explanations that refer to male power are generally concerned with structures and society's gender role expectations, rules and norms. In one set of explanations women are viewed as largely powerless when faced with such structures as the educational system and job or career segregation, which appear in crucial ways to embody male power (Coward, 2008). The other type of explanation of women's lack of progress towards gender equity with men in leadership aspirations sets issues of male power to one side (Archer, 2005). Without denying that women's lives are shaped by men's wishes, these approaches find psychological reasons as to why women allow men to have their way (Dowling, 1998; Horner, 2000). In more positive accounts, women are seen from this perspective as taking a shrewd measure of the cost of success in male terms in a male world and accordingly, to choose different goals and other means of achieving them. The implication of this argument is that if women ceased to sabotage themselves and learn to assert their rights and needs, then they could achieve gender equity in all spheres society including in educational leadership (Hames, et al., 2006). According to this view, if women freed themselves psychologically, if they changed their outlook, they could take action to remedy the gender inequalities in their leadership chances (Archer, 2005; Coward, 2005). This means that through their own agency they could free themselves of

constraints which bind them. Here constraints are seen as, in part, of women's making; structures reinforcing male power could crumble if recognised to be phony obstacles which help to mislead women into believing in their own weakness.

A strand of what is herein termed enactment theory has been developed to explain the fate of women as an oppressed group and their collusion with men as their oppressors (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). According to this view, girls and women are socialised to adopt the patriarchal values of their society. Individual girls or women thus develop a negative identity of their leadership ability, seeing themselves as their oppressors (boys and men) see them, and experience the low self esteem that accompanies sympathy with the view that they are inferior (Brittan and Maynard, 2004). Whether an individual's adherence to the oppressor's stereotype of the oppressed group's leadership abilities is a self-fulfilling prophecy or an adaptation to a mask behind which he can feel safe, unknown and real (Goldin, 2009), the assumption is that the low self esteem into which girls are socialised in a patriarchal society maintains their actual inferiority as supposed by the dominant culture. With low self esteem and limited leadership aspirations many girls' or women's motivation is undermined. Thus they fulfil the expectations of those who expect that they will follow particular leadership in their social structures including education and occupation (Brittan and Maynard, 2004).

Despite the insight in this perspective whereby a powerless group (girls or women) is seen to adopt the destructive view of itself, which another group (boys or men) uses to justify its suppression, this approach tends to stop short of exploring the range of processes whereby perceptions enacted reproduce oppressive structures (Mutekwe 2008; Sundstrom, 2008; Taylor, 2002). The girl or woman who defeats herself through a low self esteem takes part in only a strand of a wider process. The implication here is that if a woman's self esteem were high, she could escape the constraints of structure and aim high in her educational achievement and leadership abilities. According to this view, collusion implies conformity with the interests of the powerful in non-coerced participation (Reed, 2006). Thus an enactment approach recognises that there are conditions where constraints are such as to eliminate aspirations or ambitions, where sanctions imposed on non-conformity are so oppressive as to close off all options (Brittan and Maynard, 2004).

### **Interrogating the agency-structure dichotomy and gender sensitivity in leadership**

Theoretical perspectives that question the agency-structure dichotomy acknowledge implicitly the enactment

processes as reproducing gender inequalities in all spheres of society and allowing scope for change (Giddens, 2001; Gilligan, 1990).

To make this acknowledgement explicit, it may be better to start by giving an account of ordinary experiences of what is so obvious, common sense or taken for granted (Gramsci, 1994) that it may be overlooked. As human beings we are aware that we are both active and passive in our lives, that we make choices, but not in contexts of our own choosing (Wright-Mills, 2000). Nor do we expect to control the consequences of actions through our knowledge and intentions. In making choices we draw on the conceptual map we have created for ourselves, based in part on shared assumptions we make as members of a culture with deep-seated conventions. We interpret the world in these terms; we act in accordance with our interpretation of what is possible and desirable. In making choices we anticipate outcomes; our expectations influence our actions. In both the envisaging and experiencing of outcomes, there is a cycle wherein cognitions are enacted (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). We and others enact our expectations through multiple outcomes of actions based on our perceptions. In these ways interactions are structured and choices prompted by the unintended consequences of actions in a set of processes that is referred to as social enactment (Chodorow, 2006). Through this process choices are constrained, sometimes eliminated by circumstances, but understanding can expand our range of options because when awareness is widened, more possibilities are envisaged and consequences better understood. Outlook can change the context of aspiration and action; some constraints remain immovable, but the nature of others can be reassessed. When constraints are structural, we are inclined to treat them as if they were solid, as natural forces. We come up against a tendency to reify the social structures which impact on our lives (Apter and Garnsey, 2004). Yet social structures are never more than stable patterns of interaction sustained by mutual expectations (Giddens, 1994; Mutekwe and Modiba, 2012). When girls or women for example, feel constrained by the structures of the education system and labour market, they are constrained not by ineluctable forces but by recursive forms of action and interaction (Apter and

Garnsey, 2004). Gender polarised analyses of leadership roles tend to cloud the very issues they address, issues of responsibility, power and the potential for change (Bailyn, 2006; Chodorow, 2006). These can be explored in a perspective in which social and economic structures are seen as reinforced by the individuals and groups whose beliefs and actions help to reproduce them. Understanding the connections between structure and agency can for some purposes be a matter of shifting levels of analysis. Structures represent that aggregate outcomes of multiple activity. But structure is not merely a statistical aggregation; it can be manifest to the individual in specific experiences shaping outlook and

action (Apter and Garnsey, 2004; Giddens, 2001). For the individual, structure may be experienced as a phenomenon in which agency is obscured by the complexity of related chains of actions and interaction. When we deal with women's leadership abilities and challenges we are therefore dealing with patterns of interactions so routinised, so embedded in power bases, so common sense or taken for granted (Giddens, 1994; Gramsci, 1994) in shared interpretive schemes, that outcomes are experienced as divorced from causal network of prior action.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

This was a qualitative interpretive research utilizing a phenomenological case study as the design genre (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). We used four teacher education colleges as our sites for the study to establish how the status quo of gender inequality is engendered and maintained through the teacher education curriculum.

### **Sample of study**

The research participants came from four teacher educational institutions conveniently and purposively selected as a cross section of the thirteen teacher education colleges in the country. A total of forty participants were thus interviewed. While twenty of them were girl students interviewed as two separate focus groups comprising 10 participants in each group, the category of lecturers was interviewed individually. Each of the interview sessions was for about an hour long.

## **METHODS**

The instruments for data collection (focus groups and individual phenomenological interviews and observations) were first piloted with a group of lecturers and students from teacher education colleges in a different province so as to guarantee their authenticity (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The pilot study thus ensured the transferability of the methods to different teacher education colleges. As a result, their dependability could not be doubted (Hesse-Biber, 2010), as the differences amongst the teacher education institutions, lecturers and student populations proved insignificant when the main study was eventually conducted. The patterns of interactions and attitudes within the teacher education colleges were generally the same.

Following from the pilot study, we held focus group discussions with 20 female student teachers and conducted individual phenomenological interviews with

An equal number of lecturers to establish their perceptions of gender sensitivity in leadership positions in their teacher education programmes. We questioned both categories of participants about their perceptions regarding 'appropriate' gender and leadership roles in teaching and learning. Finally, we observed how the classroom and school yard interactions of lecturers and their students unmasked discourses of inequality and gender insensitivity which needs to be changed if the teacher education curriculum offered to Zimbabwean students is to be consistent with the imperative global approach to the role of the teacher in the 21st century. The use of multiple data collection techniques was driven by the need for methods triangulation to enhance the credibility of the results (Ivankova, Creswell and Clark, 2010; Mutekwe and Modiba, 2012).

The data collection process was conducted for two months. Its duration was influenced by the time of the year we were allowed into schools after obtaining the ethical clearances. We began the data collection process two months before the commencement of the year-end examinations, during which time we could not collect more data without disrupting the examinations. Despite this challenge through the use FGDS we were able to engage participants in ways that enabled us to collect data that proved useful to answer the questions we posed. The classroom and school yard observations and FGDS used facilitated an in-depth understanding of the messages conveyed to the girls in lessons and the meanings they attached to them (see Merriam, 1998 on the significance of process, context and discovery when probing a phenomenon).

### **Focus group discussion sessions**

We held focus group discussions with female student teachers from the four teacher education colleges so as to give them an opportunity to answer, comment, and ask questions to other participants or to respond to questions and comments made by others. A focus group interview as a research technique implies a semi-structured group discussion, moderated by a discussion leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of obtaining information by means of group interaction on a designated topic (Dreyer, 2010). The type of questions used was basically of a structured nature. The objective was to allow respondents an opportunity not just to respond in short but also to provide more explanations, justifications and evaluations of issues contained in the interview questions (Dreyer, 2010). This method produced data rich in detail that is often difficult to achieve with other research methods, because participants built on each other's ideas and comments to provide in-depth and value-added insights (Dzvimbo et al. 2010).

Each of the two focus groups had 10 members and

was interviewed four times for the purpose of enhancing constant reflection on their own and others' views. It also ensured the validity of the design used in the study by establishing it as a tool for obtaining credible data (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Each interview session was for an average of 60 minutes to enable sufficient coverage of the focus group discussion items and give each female student teacher a chance to express a view. A structured interview guide was used to ensure that the participants dealt with the same questions and issues. FGDS were used to capture the group dynamics and to allow a small group of female students guided by the researchers into increasing levels of focus and depth on key issues that needed to be discussed (Mutekwe 2008; Odimegwu, 2000). The open conversations helped us to obtain data that clarified the attitudes, motivations, concerns and problems related to how the status quo of gender inequality and sensitivity is produced and reproduced in teacher education colleges through teaching and learning programmes (curriculum).

### **OBSERVATIONS**

The role of the researchers was that of overt participant observers who interacted with the participants for two months. The observations were used to gain close and intimate familiarity with the interactions between the lecturers and their students. There was intensive involvement with them in the classrooms and schoolyard. Participants were thus observed in action in the classroom and during general extra-curricular activities in the colleges. The approach was informed by a key principle of this method, requiring us to observe and identify a role in which to partake (Fayisetan, 2004; Mutekwe and Modiba, 2012). We watched lecture-student interactions of both verbal and visual behaviour, and noted physical characteristics during lessons. These observations involved listening and recording the verbal interactions for later reflection and transcription, as well as looking at structures and patterns in the social interaction between lecturers and the female student teachers. To understand these interactions it was important to look at them as reflecting the culture of the teacher education institution in which they occurred (Fayisetan 2004). We employed anecdotal and running records in the process. In order to ensure that the observations remained focused, a guide was used as part of the advance protocols (Mutekwe and Modiba, 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Classroom interactions were recorded where permitted, using audio and video gadgets. Although doing so had ethical implications and the impact of being filmed could have had unpredictable effects on participants (Odimegwu, 2000), they proved useful. When not allowed, field-notes were made by the researchers.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The interviews sessions unfolded with the researcher clarifying the purpose of the research and the interviews so as to alert participants to the principle of informed consent as well as reassuring them of their rights during participation in the study. Participants were also assured of the confidential nature of their responses as well as their rights to withdraw from the research at any time should they deem it fit and that there would be no penalty should they decide to withdraw from the study. However, none of them withdrew. The researcher had to also obtain all the necessary ethical clearance for the permission to conduct the study from the various

stakeholders: provincial and district education departments, parental consent as well as the participants' assent before going into the schools. These measures formed part of the researcher's advance protocols for the study. The participants had to be at ease before the interview proceedings commenced, especially in the face of a voice or audio recorder that was used to record the data for all the interview proceedings.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The process involved adopting simple content and discourse analyses of participants' interaction patterns and conversations emerging from classroom observations and FGDS. It was guided by Fairclough's (2003) notion of discourses as transcending language to encompass ways of interacting and believing. Following the data coding process, patterns of emerging issues were identified for interpretation and reduced into discernible themes for discussion. Fairclough's conception of discourse analysis was thus useful in identifying elements of the gender and patriarchal ideologies embedded in the school curricula. In this study discourses were conceived of as texts encompassing both the spoken and written modes of communicating for disseminating cultural beliefs, gender based inequalities, ideologies, values, stereotypes and prejudices that engender and disseminate biased leadership role perceptions.

## **RESULTS**

The following section reports the findings of classroom observations, FGDS and the individual interviews held with the participants for this study. The findings are presented according to emerging themes, which are clustered under headings that link with the research questions that steered the study: How does the curriculum offered to students in Zimbabwe's Teacher training colleges engender imbalances in educational leadership aspirations? How is the status quo of gender

inequality in leadership for learning and instruction maintained through the teacher education curriculum?

## **Curricular factors that engender imbalances instudents' leadership role aspirations**

It emerged from the classroom and extra-curricular observations conducted that the prevalence of patriarchy and the gender role ideology is rampant in Zimbabwean lecturers' interaction with students. In a follow-up FGDS question asking participants whether or not they felt their lecturers were fair in their treatment of male and female students in their colleges, thirteen out of the twenty girl respondents confirmed what I had witnessed during lesson observations, that male students were more favoured by the lecturers. The following verbatim statements were made by three of the participants and supported by the majority of the girls as a response to the above question:

Participant 1 (P1): Our lecturers think that male students know better than us and as a result they tend to pose more questions to them, while sidelining us. More often than not male students are asked to lead us especially in group work. The lecturers appear to view leadership as a male domain.

Participant 2 (P2): Sometimes you hear a lecturer saying, 'boys please do not be as quiet as girls in classes'. To us this clearly shows that boys are encouraged to be more vocal than us girls in the classroom. A female student who tries to stand her ground and compete with male student may attract all sorts of labels or names just to discourage her into docility.

Participant 3 (P3): The surprising thing is that even female lecturers also tend to ridicule female students who want to compete with boys. They even go to the extent of dressing them down by such comments as 'you reason like a men' or other remarks like, ' if you continue behaving like a man, you may never get married as if to say marriage is all that matters for girls. If a female student dominates or surpasses male students in subject generally perceived as a male preserve such as in mathematics or the natural sciences, some lecturers even discourage them by alleging petticoat government in the subject areas concerned as if to say that mirrors what will happen in the girls' marital life. As a consequence, some female students end up slackening in their aspirations for fear of being labelled all sorts of names.

The participants' views expressed above represent some of the curricular factors that engender and perpetuate patriarchy and lead to the polarization of students' aspirations in leadership. These results or findings are consistent with those reported by Whyte, Deem and Cruickshank (2002) in a study of secondary teachers in Birmingham, where they discovered that generally teachers (both male and female) preferred to

teach boys because they were more active, outspoken and willing to exchange ideas than the girls.

The observation of lessons also revealed gender biases in curricular material particularly the charts displayed on the classroom walls. These portrayed men and women in traditionally gender stereotyped roles with some displaying men in distinct leadership positions while women were depicted in subordinate roles. In fact, in the analysed charts (curricula material) the central characters portrayed in leadership or prestigious positions were overwhelmingly masculine. Where women and girls did appear, they were portrayed as weak, sappy creatures, bearing little resemblance to real life females. The girls' response to FGDS questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 (Appendix B) revealed that discourses have a negative impact on their leadership aspirations. These findings correspond with those of Chodorow (2006) which also revealed that gendered discourses do disseminate messages regarding cultural definitions of male and female roles. The use of different discourses by college lecturers was found to contribute enormously to the low leadership aspirations of female students. Their responses revealed that the classroom discourses employed by their lecturers discouraged them from assuming leadership roles not only in their colleges but throughout their teaching career in general.

The FGDS and observations also revealed that three of the principals in the teachers' colleges chosen for the study were male, while only one teacher training college was headed by a woman. It became clear to the researcher that the participants were being educated in an environment in which men dominated in leadership or the exercising power and authority. Also noticeable through observation and FGDS was the view that the ratio of female to male lecturers in leadership positions in all four teacher education colleges did not offer the female students enough role models for inspiration. The situation in the four teacher education colleges studied epitomized the level of gender inequality and stratification characteristic of many social institutions in Zimbabwe.

Other curricular factors observed to impact on the leadership aspirations of female students concerned the proportion of female to male student leaders in the various teacher training colleges. Both the results of observations and focus group discussions revealed that female students dominate numerically in terms of leadership positions. This means the study revealed that there are more male than female students in leadership positions as members of the student executive council or class representatives. This underrepresentation of female students in college leadership positions implies that female students lack ideal role models for them to fully emulate. These findings collaborate the views expressed by Masarira (1998) and Chabaya (2006) following their surveys of the ratio of female to male leaders in teacher education colleges through which they inferred that in

educational institutions, leadership roles are demographically not equitably distributed. Citing a study by the American Association of School Administrators, Couse and Russo (2006) also revealed that while there were 86% male superintendents, only 14% were females. The female superintendents also cited the existence of gender related barriers and negative perceptions of women's abilities to lead men and fellow women. Other factors cited included a serious lack of suitable mentors and opportunities for mobility to leadership roles in education. Maintaining gender inequality in leadership through the teacher education curriculum.

The following themes emerged from the classroom observations and FGDS as factors in the teacher education curriculum that engender attitudes and aspirations of leadership and subordination in male and female students: The influence of lecturer attitudes and expectations of students' gender roles, the use of discourses of inequality in the classroom, images of men and women in curricular material and the gender stereotyping of subjects studied by male and female students.

### **The influence of the lecturers' attitudes and expectations**

The classroom and school yard observations employed in this study revealed that discourses inherent in the lecturers' attitudes and expectations of their students' appropriate gender roles as males or females compound the effects of the curricular material discussed above. Responding to the question of whether the participants felt that boys and girls should study the same subjects (question 5 Appendix B), eleven participants answered in the negative on the grounds that girls and boys were different and should thus pursue different subjects. This response confirmed assertions by social enactment theorists Apter and Garnsey (2004) that when constraints are structural, people tend to treat them as if they were solid or as natural forces. This means that there is usually a tendency to reify these structures. Yet they are never more than stable patterns of interaction sustained by mutual expectations.

Probed to state whether there are subjects or learning areas they considered more to male or female students (question 6, Appendix B), 15 of the 20 participants concurred that for them subjects like Mathematics and pure sciences (Physics, Chemistry and Biology) have traditionally been male domain, while those such Home Economics, Humanities and Typing are a female domain. It was thus clear that, as in the curricular material examined, participants tended to categorize their subjects as either feminine or masculine, a practice described by Gordon (1995) as gender typing. This observation also confirmed the contention by Brittan and Maynard (2004),

who noted that what students usually learn at school depends on the gender ideologies embedded in the curriculum in both its explicit and hidden forms.

In their response to the questions regarding the people who normally helped them in the choice of teaching subjects to study at college and whether they were treated the same as their male counterparts when choosing subjects (cf., Questions 1 and 2, Appendix B), the elicited responses revealed that through the gender typing of subjects, teacher education colleges channel students into gender polarized roles. As a result of this, prejudicial and biased attitudes and expectations are disseminated to students leading to a sustained pattern of disadvantage especially in aspirations for leadership positions..

To establish the ways through which the teacher education curriculum orients male students toward leadership roles in education, the following questions were posed: What leadership role do you prefer to have in your school when you graduate from college? How would you feel to be in a position of leading fellow women teachers as well as your male counterparts in an educational setting? (cf., Questions 3 and 4, Appendix B). Responding to question 3, only 7 out of the 20 participants expressed an interest in holding leadership roles as school principals or headmistresses, teachers in charge and heads of departments. The rest of them 13 out of 20 concurred that they prefer to be led by their male counterparts on the grounds that they do not wish to overwork themselves since they would be having some domestic or household chores awaiting them after work: cooking for their husbands and children after work. The seven respondents who claimed they would feel great to lead men and fellow women (response to question 4), claimed they wished to replace the patriarchal nature of educational institutions with matriarchy because in their opinion women have been marginalized by men for too long and some form of reverse discrimination in leadership positions would help compensate the women. These findings are consistent with the argument by social enactment theorists Handy (2004) and Reed (2006) who assert that due to the fact that the burden of domesticity and child care fall naturally on the mother, who herself has been socialised by a mother, many women take this into consideration in their rejection of leadership positions knowing that they have other duties after work. As a result they tend to aspire for occupational roles or positions that allow them to fulfil the dual responsibilities of work in both the private and public spheres.

### **The use of discourses of inequality in the classroom**

The results of classroom observations and FGDS revealed that the discourse typical of participants' interaction patterns and conversations were laden with gender and patriarchal ideologies. The use of these

value-laden discourses by lecturers in the classrooms fosters the development of a superiority and inferiority complex in the male and female students towards leadership roles. It also emerged from the observations and FGDS held that the discourses embedded in the curriculum particularly the spoken modes

of communication evidenced the lecturers' and students' cultural beliefs and perceptions of leadership roles, gender biases, stereotypes and prejudices that contribute to the development of leadership role aspirations by male and female students. Deserving special mention was the view that the classroom discourses revealed that the lecturers' beliefs about the feminine role as primarily domestic and the belief that men should be the providers and heads of families influenced their perceptions and treatment of female students and literally stifled their leadership aspirations in educational institutions. The following verbatim statements are examples of discourses captured during lesson observations and FGDS:

Lecturer 1 (L1): I wonder why you chose this subject (Mathematics) leaving out subjects like Shona, Home economics and English which are easy subjects for many female students. Mathematics is for those of a fertile mind; people who can follow formulae and apply theories. It is a subject for people who hope to become leaders who would be able to work with figures and to balance organizational books.

Lecturer 2 (L2): You guys surprise me. How can you allow these ladies girls to beat you in Mathematics, which is known to be a male subject? Why didn't you go for History, Divinity or English Literature and join other ladies (implying that they too were ladies). I wonder what calibre of leaders of institutions you intend to be; Petticoat government!! (Class laughs loudly). Are you going to allow yourselves to be led by women in organizations while you sit back and take orders from them?

Lecturer 3 (L3): As a woman I have to prepare you for one of the inescapable roles you will take in life. You did a good thing to choose Biology as one of your subjects at the college because it is particularly useful for you as a woman so that you learn about your bodies and avoid unprotected sex and unwanted pregnancy. You can also lead your children towards health living. For you guys, it is useful so that you can keep track when these women lie to you about pregnancy dates for you will be able to tell when conception would likely have taken place (class laughs uproariously).

The above discourse or statements clearly indicate that not only do the lecturers disseminate their stereotypical gender biases in their students' subject choices but also prejudices in their students' leadership role expectations as males or females. The prevalence of gender biases and discriminatory practices in leadership role expectations were also evident in the way the lecturers assigned responsibilities to their students. It was clear from the way orders

were given by most lecturers to students that most of their class representatives (monitors) were males. These were tasked with such roles as collecting assignments to and from the lecturers' offices. Only one of the four class representative was a lady whose leadership role was to oversee order in the lecturer's storeroom, a role also associated with domesticity.

### **The images of men and women as portrayed in curricular material**

The portrayal of women and men in some of the college curricular material evidenced how the Zimbabwean teacher education curriculum disseminates patriarchal ideologies and leadership values to students and thus discourage some especially female students from aspiring to be leaders in their educational institutions. In such situations male students often take advantage to sideline their female students counterparts by assuming most of the leadership positions in the colleges. A simple content and discourse analysis of the charts and pictures displayed in some of the students' classrooms revealed the patriarchal nature of the teacher education curriculum. The bulk of the material on display (eg, charts, pictures and messages written) disseminated the patriarchal ideology and in some cases clearly gave the impression that most leaders should be men. As a follow up to the observations we also posed a question (Question 10, Appendix B) to FGDS participants on whether or not they felt the educational material they used in schools contained gender-neutral content and illustrations. They were unanimous in their responses that negative stereotypes about females and beliefs and attitudes that only men are effective school leaders, were rampant in their teacher education curriculum. Participants also alleged that their lecturers' attitudes and expectations towards the compounded these negative stereotypes about female students' inability to lead institutions. These findings collaborated those of Meyer (2008), who found that the patriarchal values embodied in the school curriculum disadvantage girls as a whole. The findings also resonate with those of Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta and Bvukuvhani (2012) who found that in Zimbabwe, the school curriculum promotes the dominance of males at the expense of females by depicting the two genders in the traditionally stereotyped social roles.

### **Strategies for mitigating gender insensitivity in students' leadership aspirations**

The results of this study show that gender equality in leadership can be achieved if constraining structures are reformed and in particular when education and the

professions are fully opened to all girls and women. Other mechanisms that can be effected to alleviate the effects of gender insensitivity in the teacher education curriculum include sensitizing lecturers on the need to constantly expose students to programmes based on selected life stories and experiences of successful female leaders, to serve as ideal role models so that they can successfully alter their students' preconceived notions of the leadership role, which in patriarchal societies tends to be seen as a male domain. It also emerged from the findings of this research that female students themselves also have a responsibility in the deconstruction of the gender-based role stereotypes engendered by their families and perpetuated by educators through their attitudes and expectations towards the different genders. To do this they need defy the social odds stacked on them. This is possible if they take up or pursue learning areas and leadership roles traditionally stereotyped as masculine and prove to society that girls and boys or women and men are not intellectually different as patriarchal societies tend to imply.

## **DISCUSSION**

Drawing from the findings reported in the preceding sections of this study it is unequivocally true that lecturer attitudes and expectations of their students as males or females contain biases against female students' leadership capacities. These attitudes clearly point to an imperative need for teacher education programmes to incorporate gender sensitivity as an integral component of the teacher education curriculum if female students are to be equally empowered along with their male student counterparts in all spheres of life. Discriminating against them in leadership positions is not only a sign of male chauvinism and dictatorship but also an anti-thesis to democracy and the changing global perspective on the role of the teacher and teacher education. The findings also revealed that the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean educational and occupational structure manifests itself in a variety of ways including through the fact that women are underrepresented in many leadership positions in the economy's public spheres, for example, in education, politics and science and technology. The findings of this research are also consistent with the views of theorists who locate women's constrained leadership ambitions in social structures. Among the findings of this study, the following emerged to be of paramount importance: social institutions, schools, colleges and the labour markets are not neutral sites that offer equal opportunities to boys and girls or men and women. People do not enter these structures as equal participants. Neither are they simply given equal life chances through them. The problems are more complex that. People do not always get the roles they want. They may be ambitious but encounter

constraints along the way. Sometimes it is what Mills would call personal troubles and at other times it is a social problem. As Mills' sociological imagination asserts, there is a structure of opportunities and constraints that individuals encounter at any historical time and among these is gender.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that what lecturers and students consider as appropriate gender roles for men and women have an impact on their leadership aspirations. The results of the study also attest to the view that teachers' colleges as some of the modern apparatuses of social regulation, not only defines what shall be taught and what knowledge is, but also defines and regulates both what a male or female student is and how learning and teaching are to be considered for him or her. It does so by an ensemble of apparatuses, from the architecture of the college, lecturer attitudes and expectations of gender roles as well as their treatment of students, to the individualized work cards and wall charts in the classrooms. This study has revealed that some curricular material or literature needs to be reviewed in order to deconstruct the gender role stereotypes, ideologies and values embedded in them.

By way of a call for action towards gender equality in leadership in the 21st century teacher education programmes, the following recommendations are made: The results of this study point to an imperative need for teacher education programmes to be utilised in support of the development of leaders through the employment of practices and strategies that make leadership more representative to both genders. By providing meaningful experiences in leadership roles for both male and female students, teacher education programmes can be able to deconstruct the traditional practices of viewing leadership in male terms. Furthermore, teacher educators certainly need formal training in promoting gender sensitivity in the curriculum and to foster as well as sensitize their students on the need to develop their leadership potential.

Teacher educators thus need to play an important role in closing the ranks and gaps created by the gender role stereotyping experienced by their students in the home and those incorporated in the curricular material or reinforced through the hidden culture curriculum. Understanding both the overt and covert ways in which gender ideologies operate and are manifest in the curriculum is a necessary, though not a sufficient condition for alleviating the effects of gender inequality in leadership for learning and instruction by promoting learning equity. To be able to empower both genders, the teacher education curriculum needs to be gender sensitive as opposed to being gender blind to the plight of female students. It is my hope that the results of

this study will draw attention to the importance of gender equality in Zimbabwe's educational institutions so as to bring the country closer to achieving the gender equity to which it aspires.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Observation protocol

Focus of observation	Rationale/purpose
Subjects specialised in by the girls	To establish the differences and possible link of factors that contribute to gender role stereotypes and the polarized role aspirations and choices
Proportion of female to male students in subjects of specializations	To establish the ratio of boys to girls in Sciences, Arts, commercials and humanities
How roles are allocated to female and male students	Investigating elements of gender biases in the curriculum and pedagogy
Forms of discourses used	To establish factors that contribute to gender role discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices
Wall charts	To identify gender biases, ideologies and stereotypes embedded in curricular material
Sample of text books used by the students	To detect some gender role biases, ideologies, values and stereotypes embedded or embodied in students' literature
Male and female students' involvement in co-curricular activities	To establish elements of gender polarization in social roles
Proportion of male to female lecturers in the colleges and in the leadership hierarchy	To establish whether or not both male and female students have adequate or ideal role models to motivate them towards unbiased aspirations or ambitions

### Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide

S/N	Questions
1	What subjects are you studying to teach?
2	Who helped you in choosing these subjects and to pursue teaching as a career?
3	Why did you decide to choose teaching as a career?
4	What do you wish to achieve in life as a teacher?
5	Should male and female students study the same subjects at college?
6	Are there any subjects you consider best suited for male students and for female ones?
7	What challenges do you encounter as female student teachers during the course of your training in the college?
8	How do your Lecturers allocate duties to you as girls in the school?