

An exploration of gender representation in Zimbabwe's Updated 'O' level Family and Religious Studies syllabus

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Abstract

Zimbabwe has developed an updated curriculum framework in order to revamp the education sector and ensure that products that come out of the education system are relevant to the 21st century needs. One of the 21st century educational goals is to address gender imbalances, so as to enhance equitable national development. This study focuses on the 'updated 'O' level syllabus for Family and Religious Studies using three selected secondary schools in Masvingo urban. The new syllabus takes cognisance of gender issues that sensitise learners on gender equality and equity. The aim of this paper is to appraise the role of the new curriculum in addressing gender issues in Zimbabwe and the implementation modalities with specific reference to Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus. The qualitative approach was employed whereby interviews and document analysis were used to collect data from school heads, teachers and gender experts on gender reforms in the new curriculum and how they have impacted on education in Zimbabwe. The findings revealed that the updated Family and Religious Studies curriculum attempted to redress gender imbalances in secondary schools. The study, however, concluded that continued gender bias in textbooks, lack of resources and lack of knowledge and technical skills on the part of the teachers affected the successful implementation of the Family and Religious Studies curriculum. The study recommends provision of gender sensitive learning materials and textbooks relevant to the new content in the Family and Religious studies and use of a more constructive approach in the teaching and learning of the subject and gender mainstreaming.

Keywords: *Gender; Updated Curriculum; Education; Policy Learning; Family and Religious Studies Curriculum.*

Introduction

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited an education system plagued with negative legacies. As such, Zimbabwe was faced with the task to transform her education system into a more responsive one so as to wholly address the concerns and wishes of all Zimbabweans. In recent years, there has been a loud call for gender inclusivity, particularly in the education sector, which is one of the foundations of socialisation.

This study examines how the 'updated' Family and Religious Studies curriculum has fared in the context of the Government's focus on preparing Zimbabwean learners for the needs of the

21st century, and the changes in global education trends. The updated curriculum seeks to inculcate critical foundation skills in learners so that they can appreciate issues of gender equity and gender equality. This was contrary to the 'old' curriculum which acted as a catalyst in promoting gender classes and marginalisation. The old curriculum perpetuated gender imbalances and reinforced societal beliefs about distinction between men and women, with men being considered superior. The introduction of the updated curriculum challenged societal beliefs and attitudes towards women by including gender issues as the basis of women's emancipation, and by removing emphasis from gender roles and stereotypes. The study examines selected Masvingo urban schools and how they have fared in the implementation of gender equity and gender equality as espoused in the updated (2015-2022) Family and Religious Studies syllabus.

Background of the study

The Zimbabwean updated curriculum (2015-2022), was crafted to revolutionise the "colonial" education system the country had been using since independence. Women in the colonial education system as well as all spheres of life were subjected to patriarchal dominance which promoted sexism. The colonial school curriculum was gender biased which meant that girls were taught cooking and typing while boys were taught 'manly' subjects like carpentry. Girls' socialisation and home activities were summarised to surround confinement to the kitchen, lack of freedom of expression and activities centred on serving other people (Runhare & Gordon, 2004). The Curriculum was segregatory and promoted stereotyping in society. While analysing the influence of gender ideology in school curriculum, Mutekwe and Mutekwe(2012) point out that children learn at a very early age in their schooling to identify masculine and feminine roles particularly in relation to broad categories of behaviour, characteristics of the division of labour both in the home and in the occupational structure of society.

Zimbabwean independence ushered in new platforms for women to participate equally together with men on both the private and domestic spheres, an opportunity women had lost due to colonialism (Gudhlanga, 2011). There have been some educational policies formulated to deal with issues of gender imbalance and inequality. These policies were derived from the Education for all policy adopted in 1980 which made education a basic human right. To support this, Mutepfa, Mpofo and Chataika (2007) argue that, the Education secretary's policy Circular Number 12 of 1987 made primary education a basic education for all to ensure that there was functional literacy and numeracy. According to the Education for all

policy, primary education was offered for free to all Zimbabweans. This rapid expansion was a welcome development as the majority of marginalised people could finally access the education they had yearned for, for a long time (Mubika & Bukaliya, 2011). It is because of this increase in enrolment which saw many girls being enrolled in schools as compared to the colonial period. Furthermore, the Education Secretary policy 36 of 1990 ensured that learners were to master the national curriculum at all levels of schooling regardless of ability.

There are two gender related policies in the education sector and these include P35 and P77 which focus on issues of discipline and curriculum implementation. The P35 of October 1999 provides continued access to education by girls who would have fallen pregnant at school. This assisted girls to remain at school and can only take leave three months before delivery (MOESC, 1999 Policy Circular Minute P35). As such, this policy protects the girl child from being disadvantaged by pregnancy. The second policy related to gender is the P77 which provides greater equality in subject selection and educational paths by ensuring equal access to all subjects including technical vocational subjects (Chitiga & Chinoona, 2011). It is from this context that the P77 breaks the systematic barriers which confined girls to academic subjects like Shona, English Language and Humanities subjects (MOESC, 2006 Policy Circular Minute P77). The policy ensured that girls could also do science subjects as well as practical subjects which were deemed as men's territory because of their perceived masculine form.

The new constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013 supports the updated curriculum. There was re-alignment of key tenets of the new constitution to the education curriculum. Gender sensitivity which was lacking in the old constitution became a salient characteristic of the new constitution. According to the new constitution (2013), the State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society, and in particular:

- the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men;
- the State must take all measures, including legislative measures, needed to ensure that both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level;

- women to constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament;
- the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take practical measures to ensure that women have access to resources, including land, on the basis of equality with men; and,
- the State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies.

(The Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013)

In light of the above constitution provisions, efforts were made towards including female perspectives in all areas of school curriculum (Tagwirei, 2013). An analysis of the constitution of Zimbabwe reflects that there are practical ways of solving gender discrimination and imbalances that may emanate from the curriculum policy as well as pedagogical practices in the classroom. Thus, the new constitution paved way for the development of a gender inclined curriculum which has the positive impact of developing Zimbabwe's economy.

The gender policies were not well supported by the educational curriculum and as a result gender disparities persisted at all levels of education (Nziramanga Commission Report, 1999). Furthermore, Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) argue that the existing literature on gender imbalances in Zimbabwean school curriculum tends to point to the influence of textbooks in propagating the patriarchal ideology. UNICEF affirms that, while gender parity has improved, barriers and bottlenecks around gender disparities and discrimination remain in place, especially at the secondary school level (http://www.unicef.org/education/bege_70640.html). Thus, there was need for the review of the curriculum adopted soon after independence as a mechanism through which gender stereotypes were to be removed.

After a process of nationwide consultations, the government of Zimbabwe started implementation of the updated school curriculum from January 2017, being guided by the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary schools draft document(2015-2022).The aim of the updated curriculum was not only to make the education relevant to the needs of the 21st century learning, but also to reverse patriarchal values deeply embedded in the curriculum adopted in 1980 which always gave advantage to men thereby leaving an indelible mark of female subjugation and invalidity. According to the implementation matrix,

the first phase of implementation focused attention to areas such as preparation and syllabus development and interpretation for teachers and supervisors. It also encompassed development of learning materials (text books, handbooks and manuals) and induction of all teachers into the updated curriculum.

Statement of the Problem

The study explores the extent to which the updated 'O' Level Family and Religious Studies syllabus (2015-2022) addresses gender imbalances given the deep-seated disparities of the previous syllabus. The aim is to establish the extent to which the issue of gender is being promoted in the updated Family and Religious Studies syllabus by identifying strengths, growth areas and weaknesses in terms of knowledge, skills and resources to ensure increased effectiveness in the implementation of the curriculum. The study examines the capacity of teachers and preparedness of selected secondary schools in Masvingo urban to successfully implement the updated (2015-2022) Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus given the government's undue haste and unrealistic expectations.

Research questions

The key research questions which give a synopsis of the study are as follows:

1. What are the gender issues addressed by the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus?
2. Can the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus be regarded as a mechanism by which gender based inequalities can be lessened?
3. What are the challenges in implementing the updated Religious Studies curriculum?

Literature review

Most studies in the world have found out that there is bias in favour of men in the majority of course books in which women are underrepresented (Aydinoglu, 2014). In an analysis of Asian history books used in the Philippines, Saigol (1995, as quoted in Quezada-Reyes 2007) found out that the texts in the books represent a patriarchal and therefore gender-biased construction of gender (Saigol, 1995, as quoted in Quezada-Reyes 2007). Similarly, in Austria, the Australian Education Council started the *Gender Equity in Curriculum Reform Project* on the premise that the current curriculum in Australian schools was not serving the interests of females as well as those of males. The project was aimed to ensure that teachers recognise possible content and practices that harden gender role clichés and called for

elimination of such gender-specific prejudice and discrimination: (https://www.bmbf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/1995_77.html). Research has established that the curricula and teaching materials used in schools across sub-Saharan Africa remain gender-biased to a large degree, and are rarely sensitive to the specific needs of girls and women (Clark & Elaine, 1998).

According to Runhare and Gordon (2004), the oppression, inequality and injustice which has characterised the gender landscape the world over became the norm of the pre-independent Zimbabwe as well as post independent Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe as a member of regional and international committees has shown commitment to social justice by signing, ratifying and acceding to several declarations, conventions and protocols targeted at creating an enabling environment for the attainment of gender equity and gender equality (Mawere, 2013). These declarations, conventions and protocols were put in place to redress gender issues in the learning environment. This is because the girl child has been prejudiced by educational opportunities which tend to favour boys more than girls (Ncube & Mudau, 2017). Furthermore, the Zimbabwean formal education acquired in schools has frequently been perceived as a mechanism by which gender, sex, race and ethnic based inequalities can be lessened or even eradicated (Mutekwe & Mutekwe, 2012).

The study also used concepts related to gender so as to illuminate issues tackled in the Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus. There has been a tendency of using the term gender loosely, therefore it is imperative to define gender, gender equity and gender equality in the context of the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus. Simmonds (2017) states that sameness and differences in discourses come into play in engagements with the constituents of gender and its various interpretation. Gender is a complex term with a wide variety range of definitions from various disciplines. More importantly, the Commission of Gender Equality (2007) defines gender as an array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviour, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on differential basis. This shows that gender is a social construct of what a man is and what a woman is. As previously alluded to, gender refers to the maleness and femaleness of different sexes. According to Mawere (2013), gender equity denotes fairness of treatment of women and men, as well as girls and boys, according to their respective needs and in terms of realisation of their rights, access to benefits, obligations and opportunities. One of the fundamentals of equality in society is gender parity and equity

which have been supported by policies since independence. Chauraya (2012) articulates that gender policies are developed out of the recognition that there are gender deficiencies in operations of institutions.

Theoretical framework

The research drew from the feminist theory. Unger and Crawford (2004) regard the feminist approach as crucial in explaining women's experiences. This study was guided by liberal feminism which focuses on issues of equality, reforms, rights and transformation for the betterment of women in spheres like education, economy and polity. Liberal feminism places the value of women as human beings even in the educational spaces where the humanness of women is largely undermined by admonishing for the liberative paradigm for women as well as pushing for social change which is the foundation of women's freedom. Feminism is defined by Unger and Crawford (2004) as a movement designed to end sexism and sexist oppression through the empowerment of those being oppressed. On a similar note, Giddens (2001:692) defines liberal theory as a "feminist theory that believes gender inequality is produced by reduced access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment". This shows that this theory acknowledges the existence of disparities in society that are gender related. In essence, liberal feminism is premised on the understanding that gender prejudice can be addressed through gradual reforms that promote equal rights for all.

This article is largely premised on feminism since it seeks to interrogate the liberation of women from systematic oppression as found in the educational curriculum which disempowers the girl child.

Methodology

The research was conducted within the qualitative paradigm which was considered appropriate since the researchers were more interested in studying social phenomena and human problems. According to Creswell's (2013), qualitative research has a strong inclination towards plan of action used to study problems relating to society within a given framework. The qualitative case study design was employed to solicit views of different stakeholders like teachers, administrators and gender experts on the challenges and prospects of implementing the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus. This approach used document analysis and individual interviews as data-collection instruments. Three

selected Masvingo urban secondary schools with their respective school heads and teachers were purposefully selected to participate in the study to solicit views on the challenges and prospects of implementing the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus. In addition, two education administrators and three gender experts were also purposely selected for interviews. Ten secondary school students each from each of the three schools were also engaged in focus group discussions.

Document analysis was used to extract relevant data through prolonged engagement and exploration of reforms in the updated (2015-2022) Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus and how they have impacted on gender issues in Zimbabwe. The study strives to make a thorough exposition of the updated curriculum document, which is its primary source. A textual analysis of the content of the updated curriculum document, was made to determine how the updated curriculum document, views and exposes the shift in gender roles in Zimbabwe as a result of policy frameworks to remove discrimination against women.

Findings and Discussions

Issues of gender in the updated Family and Religious Studies 2015-2022 Curriculum

The vision for the broader Curriculum framework for Primary and Secondary education (2015-2022) is: *"To be the lead provider of inclusive quality education for socio-economic transformation by 2020."* In order to accomplish the vision, the Ministry's mission is as follows: *"to provide equitable, quality and inclusive relevant infant, junior and secondary education."* (Curriculum framework for Primary and Secondary education, 2015). This is a refreshing education position since if the mandate of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is to provide a wholesome education for all Zimbabweans, the education system would also be accessible, affordable and enable all citizens to participate in the socio-economic transformation of the nation regardless of gender, class or race (Curriculum framework for Primary and Secondary education, 2015). In the light of the ongoing argument, Ruzvidzo (2017: 28) states that, progressive curriculum reforms should be anchored on the notion of "inclusivity, accessibility, equity, quality, relevance, continuity, respect, gender sensitivity, transparency and accountability". This is an indication that, the updated curriculum's aim is to promote gender issues through inclusivity and respect of all humans regardless of gender differences.

The vision and mission of the updated curriculum are supported by the principles underpinning the updated curriculum which are: equity and fairness, gender sensitivity,

respect (*Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu*), balance and diversity among others (Curriculum framework for Primary and Secondary education, 2015). The curriculum framework shows that emphasis of the updated curriculum would be placed on promoting gender equity and equality in schools as levers of personal development and community prosperity. This means that, the updated curriculum's goal is to provide equal and fair access to information, learning and other resources to all learners regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, ability and residence. It calls for the absence of discrimination on the basis of gender in educational opportunities as well as in the allocation of educational resources. Its ultimate goal is gender sensitivity which is the equal treatment of boys and girls, men and women by taking into account and addressing the different learner's gender needs and abilities without disadvantaging any group or individual. It is within this context that Pinar (2012) argues that curriculum reform should involve finding the interrelationship of academic knowledge, subjectivity and society in considering the past, present and the future. Thus, a good curriculum should offer a platform whereby the same rights and privileges are given to boys and girls by treating them as equal as well as eliminating gender disparities.

The thrust of the learning content in Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus is on gender issues. This is in tandem with four thematic issues in the National Gender Policy which are:

- i. Women in politics and decision making.
- ii. Women and the economy.
- iii. Education and training of women.
- iv. Instruction mechanisms for the advancement of women.

The Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus has integrated these thematic issues in the learning content as well as in the methods of evaluation and assessment of learners. From the four thematic issues raised above, the education and training of learners is implemented through the educational curriculum which is gender sensitive and inclusive. Gordon (2000) cited in Chinyani (2007) argues that an important aspect of education, which channels children into gender roles, is the curriculum that they are permitted to study. The updated curriculum is underpinned in promoting education and training which eradicates discrimination and stigma.

The learning content of Family and Religious 'O' level syllabus in the updated curriculum has proved to be gender sensitive. Religion has a pervasive influence in our society including the life of learners, hence the need for learners to appreciate the diversity and practice of

various religions practiced in Zimbabwe. Topics in the Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus like: "*Religion and gender roles, Religion and Women empowerment, gender based violence, Religious beliefs, sexuality and behavior change*" show that, the Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus is significant in the development of social responsibility in learners since it facilitates the respect for human dignity and diversity. Mutekwe and Mutekwe (2012) observed that curriculum content should reinforce gender ideology and this culminates in the gender typing of school subjects and occupation. This shows that the Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus seeks to develop critical reflection of socio-economic and political issues, religious tolerance, and initiative in terms of formulating ideologies that help in transforming the learners to contribute to sustainable development.

The content of Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus has topics like: '*religion and gender*', '*women and politics*' as well '*Gender Based violence*' which are meant to conscientise society on the need to appreciate the role of women in society. This shows the liberative aspects in religions of the world. Chinyani (2007) argues that, the school curriculum can provide a fix to societal problems since once something becomes school knowledge its implementation is legitimised and is deemed worthwhile knowledge. It is for this reason that the updated curriculum resonates well with the contemporary discourse on gender equality. The content provides confidence and self-esteem in women or girls which makes them contribute meaningfully in transforming the society in which they live in. Furthermore, learning content contains a powerful vehicle of socialisation of learners to accept girls or women as human beings equal to men.

Challenges of implementing the Family and Religious Studies 'O' level curriculum

The updated curriculum is complex and involves a myriad of new demands and new technologies in a situation where it has not been supported financially for the requisite infrastructure and manpower development to most of the personnel. Areas such as preparation and development of learning materials (text books, handbook and manuals) and induction of all teachers into the updated curriculum are still very grey. Therefore, understanding teachers, their motives, and their motivation is crucial to meet the requirements of curriculum implementation.

Perpetuation of gender bias in textbooks

An analysis of the existing content in the Family and Religious Studies textbooks currently being used shows that they are replete with gender biases which must be removed from text books. The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) needs to vet the content of all text books

and examinations for gender stereotyping, and advising the text-book writers, publishers and examinations' items developers on how to eliminate the biases and develop gender responsive materials. There is also a need to put in place regular, periodic gender sensitisation and training opportunities for curriculum developers, publishers, text-book writers and examinations developers. Curriculum planners must also ensure that there is an attempt at equitable representation of models within textbooks and among authors, and other resource materials. Currently there are very few female models in instructional materials. Most textbooks are male authored. Chirimuuta (2006) rightly advises that it is the responsibility of curriculum planners to ensure that, where female thinkers have made contributions to scholarship, their works are added to the list of sources for instructional material, in order to provide the missing female input. Furthermore, women should be encouraged to write textbooks and novels for female students to have role models.

Secondly, learning methods in the old curriculum textbooks prove that the old curriculum did not provide lenses for the total emancipation of women. Images of women in these textbooks do not portray women in a positive manner. The language contained in teaching methods is not gender sensitive which makes learners not to appreciate gender differences as part of the natural order. The influence of learning methods in portraying women in a more human way and non-sexist terms ensure total liberation of women.

Teachers' knowledge and skills

Observations made showed that the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus has several new topics as compared to the 'old' one. New curricula content such as; *religion and gender roles, religion and women empowerment, gender in various in religions and religion and sexuality* among others, provide refreshing ideas in terms issues of gender equity. Teachers in Masvingo urban secondary schools reported a possession of rudiments of these attributes caused by failure to receive adequate in-service training necessary for the immediate implementation.

The updated curriculum has great emphasis on information and communication technology, yet the Ministry has not taken any contingent measures to train teachers in ICT so that they are not deskilled by the new curriculum. For instance, one of the interviewed teachers argued that the few irregular staff development sessions held in Masvingo district were usually ineffective since they equipped teachers with piecemeal, incoherent content and working knowledge. He said:

When we attend these in-servicing workshops, you see the problem is you are called once, next time another group is called. So I think they should be continuous.

Teachers' lack of capacity to deliver relevant content has led to superficial implementation of the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level curriculum.

The same sentiments were echoed by an administrator from one of the selected Masvingo urban secondary schools who said that besides the lack of in-service training to implement the updated curriculum, most teachers were badly equipped to teach the new subjects. She said:

Curriculum developers working under the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) worsen the plight of implementers by failing to provide us with meaningful staff development programs to help us better implement the new curriculum.

These views were corroborated by learners in focus group discussions who also revealed that there were unconscious of the expectations of the updated curriculum.

Headmasters interviewed were positive in the implementation of the updated Family and Religious Studies 'O' level syllabus arguing that the new content was not so different from the old syllabus except for a few topics. They raised the following sentiments:

Teachers are teachers along the way they will catch up with the new demands. Imagine if we are to wait for the so-called right conditions then nothing will ever take off the ground.

We should all be ready to embrace change even if it means the initial days would be chaotic. It's better than being stuck up to a 1960 curriculum.

The implication of the above sentiments is that, although teachers lack facilitative implementation support, there is need for them to embrace the change and be innovative enough since there is no going back in the implementation of this updated curriculum.

It was noted that teachers lack knowledge in assessment of students and preparation of scheme of work in line with the new format. During class observation, findings revealed the teacher capacity gap in conducting and recording continuous assessment. The methods of evaluation and assessment are giving teachers a lot of problems. The profile of the learner, which does not contribute to the final mark, can be problematic since it is compiled by the

teacher and passed on to the next teacher throughout the secondary course. Some teachers interviewed were not aware what ‘soft skills and other aspects’ entail. Others teachers were complaining that the updated curriculum was overburdening teachers who should be ‘practitioners’ instead of doing a lot of clerical work.

Commenting on the lack of teacher education, Schwartz (2006: 450) states that,

curriculum writers, with all good intentions, have compiled volumes of well-conceived educational action plans, choosing specific materials and activities for their pre-conceived target, curriculum receivers, students, only to find that the curriculum users, teachers, are not prepared for the innovations.

This study found out that, contrary to the need for possession of adequate intellectual capacity and skills to plan and teach the new topics in the updated Family and Religious Studies secondary school syllabus, the new content in the updated Family and Religious Studies ‘O’ level syllabus was not privy to Masvingo urban teachers’ knowledge.

Inadequate resources

The teaching material or textbooks for the updated Family and Religious Studies syllabus are not readily available, yet there are completely new subject topics which have been introduced. Educationists interviewed raised the following sentiments:

New books should be available before implementing the new syllabus content. How on earth are the schools going to teach when they are no books for the new syllabus?

On my part as a teacher the new content needs a lot of research and resource materials. It is quite difficult but you should try to extract the content from the syllabus but there is no back up of resource materials.

The relevant people with authority have not capacitated teachers adequately with the materials and resources to handle the new content like; *gender based violence, religious gender views and religious beliefs and societal attitudes on femininity and masculinity*. A teacher’s union leader interviewed said that, the updated curriculum was not necessary at the moment considering the lack of financial resources to develop these materials for the new content and supporting infrastructure in most rural schools. He equated this to fast foods education or rebuilding the aeroplane whilst flying it. He said:

Government has not invested money towards the new curriculum. There are no funds for textbooks, internet and staff developing teachers in most schools. Fundamentally, there was need for a gradual implementation of the new curriculum, punctuated by widespread consultations and engagement.

These sentiments were dismissed by one government official interviewed who preferred the ‘firefighting’ approach of implementing the updated curriculum and at the same time look for the requisite resources. Addressing the issue of whether it was wise to implement an updated curriculum without first capacitating rural schools, some of which do not have classroom blocks or furniture, one government official said that resources will never be enough. He said that if the ministry was to wait for adequate resources, nothing would ever get done. Chirume and Ngara (2018) raise valid concerns when they evaluated teachers’ readiness to implement the Family and Religious Studies updated curricula. They argue that teachers were displeased about lack of resource materials, inadequate infrastructure and lack of induction to enable them to implement the updated curriculum effectively.

Conclusion

Findings reflect that by and large, successes have been scored and challenges have been encountered in the implementation of a gender equity curriculum in the updated Family and Religious Studies ‘O’ level syllabus. The updated curriculum has dismantled the exclusionary effects of the colonial era by revising the curriculum which promotes inclusivity, gender responsive pedagogy and gender sensitive learning content as well as fair assessment tools. It is within this context that the updated education curriculum provides a good platform from which to articulate the complementary role of women in all spheres of life. Findings also show a catalogue of factors that impede the successful implementation of the updated Zimbabwean Family and Religious Studies ‘O’ level syllabus in Masvingo urban schools. This article has demonstrated the unavailability of any formal mechanisms or guidelines to engage and guide implementers from the onset.

Recommendations

Some of the measures which must be taken to address the impediments cited above are as follows:

- The updated Family and Religious Studies ‘O’ level syllabus should offer a career path to be followed that is gender inclusive thereby removing all stereotypes in a way which helps women to have self-awareness, selfhood, and self-identity at home, church, education institutions, politics and society.
- The government must ensure that learning materials and textbooks relevant to the new content in the Family and Religious Studies ‘O’ level syllabus are produced in adequate quantities while teachers should be encouraged to be creative and use the locally available materials for smooth implementation.
- A more constructive approach is needed in which there is continuous meaningful engagement with all relevant stakeholders, in-service training, production of teaching material and other contingent measures to be done concurrently with the implementation of these reforms. There is need for all concerned stakeholders to sit down and mitigate the challenges rather than throw away the whole plan.
- There is need to plan for more training sessions to bridge capacity gaps highlighted in pedagogy, assessment and preparation of teaching documents.

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