



STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF GIRLCHILD AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN HIGH SCHOOLS IN MASVINGO URBAN, ZIMBABWE

Maxwell Constantine Chando Musingafi¹ - - - Rachael Mafumbate²

¹Programme Coordinator, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Development Studies, Zimbabwe Open University, Masvingo Regional Campus, Zimbabwe

²Programme Coordinator, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences; Counselling, Zimbabwe Open University, Masvingo Regional Campus, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the girlchild affirmative action policy in secondary schools in Zimbabwe using Christian and Ndarama high schools as case studies. Both theoretical study and empirical research methods were used to ensure a balanced evaluation of the problem. Ninety nine of the 230 Form six students at the two schools were used as questionnaire respondents, and 2 focal point teachers of the 20 A level teachers at the schools were sampled for the interviews. Case study, descriptive survey and qualitative participatory approaches were used as the main research methodologies. The study established that male students are more than female students in all advanced level disciplines studied at the schools; both male and female students do not support the idea of affirmative action in their schools; authorities are not doing enough to conscientise both teachers and their students on the need for affirmative action in schools; the affirmative action policy is not being implemented in secondary schools in Zimbabwe and thus the policy is not yet effective in meeting the desired goals. The main challenge faced by secondary schools in the implementation of affirmative action was found to be mainly the issue of negative attitudes towards affirmative action. Entering school at lower points than boys reinforces the idea that women are academically weaker than men. The study recommends intensive awareness campaigns and advocacy to remove negative attitudes towards affirmative action; formal training sessions on affirmative action in the schools to help students contextualize the concept of affirmative action; government monitoring and follow-ups to ensure that the affirmative action policy is being implemented; among other recommendations.

Keywords: Affirmative action, Students, Girlchild, High school, Perception, Gender disparities, Education.

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Contribution/ Originality

The overall aim of this study is to contribute a theoretical framework that will help towards the implementation of the affirmative action policy in Zimbabwean high schools. The study aims at enlarging considerably the knowledge base and understanding of the affirmative action policy in Zimbabwe.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Constitution of Zimbabwe adopted in 2013 is widely acknowledged for its firm commitment to gender equality. The affirmative action provisions further assert the new constitution's resolve for gender inequality redress. The Constitution reaffirms earlier commitments shown by the 2005 Constitutional Amendment 17 which prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex. Chapter 2 on national objectives spells out gender balance as one of the objectives to guide the state, all institutions and agencies of government. Throughout the statement of 26 national objectives, equality is emphasized and where appropriate women and girls are specifically mentioned. The Bill of Rights in chapter 4 of the new constitution recognizes that men and women have a right to equal treatment, including right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. It makes void all laws, customs, cultural practices and traditions that infringe on the rights of women and girls ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2013](#)).

One of the several approaches to rectifying gender imbalances has been identified as affirmative action. Affirmative action includes the steps taken by the government of a country to create opportunities for the disadvantaged groups like blacks in colonial Africa or women throughout the world. These disadvantaged groups are provided with benefits in the educational system and job sector. Thus affirmative action consists of the provision of special advantages through laws and policies to address discrimination suffered by disadvantaged groups ([Chabaya, 2011](#)). It is done with the aim of creating a more equal society. The concept of affirmative action is prevalent in many countries. In the United Kingdom, it is called positive discrimination, whereas in India, it manifests itself in the form of caste-based reservation ([Chabaya, 2011](#)). Every country has its own set of rules and regulations on formulating policies to uplift the neglected sections of the society. The argument for affirmative action is that while there are instances where all citizens can and ought to be treated the same, there are equally instances where, in order to level the playing field, those who have been marginalised need to be treated differently. An overall 'gender neutral' approach or equal treatment of persons in unequal situations would result in continuing rather than removing injustices ([Musingafi et al., 2013](#)).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite achievements outlined above, Zimbabwe is still ranking lowly in gender equality ranking. According to [Runhare and Gordon \(2004\)](#), serious disparities and inequalities persist in the Zimbabwean education system with gender being a key contributory factor. As a motivation and justification of affirmative action and other policies that seem to favour women ahead of men,

the [Government of Zimbabwe \(2005\)](#) argues that gender inequality has remained one of the persistent causes of disparities in education. Deep-rooted negative attitudes against girls' education militate against their active participation particularly in maths and science subjects. The current national gender policy (2013-2017) argues that gender parity achieved in some areas in the education sector need to be sustained through addressing the factors that may reverse the status quo especially problems that result in school dropouts. It further argues that increased attention to training and capacity building for all, particularly for women to enable them to fully take on new opportunities is imperative. These new gender related learning and skills development priorities have to be pursued through reinforcing supportive gender policies and strategies. Affirmative action has been found to be one of such policies. But, as put forward by [Hall \(1992\)](#) laws and policies may be there but still at loggerheads with practice. Globally, although there are very good policies around gender equalities, there are gaps in implementation ([ZWRN, 2007](#)). In Zimbabwe it is more like tradition that girls school dropout is higher than boys school dropout. For example, [Gaidzanwa et al. \(2010\)](#) observe that in 2003 the net enrolment ratio for secondary school for boys was 50% and for girls was 48%. They further observe that by 2006, this had reduced to 47% for boys and 45% for girls. The completion rate at 'O' level shows the gap widen between boys and girls, with 93% of boys completing in 2006, compared to 83% of girls. Girls clearly become more disadvantaged as secondary school progresses ([Gaidzanwa et al., 2010](#)). This study, thus, seeks to establish the extent to which girlchild affirmative action is being implemented at high school level using Masvingo Urban as a case study.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions helped in determining the relationship between the gender affirmative action policy and its implementation and enforcement in high schools in Zimbabwe:

- What are the common and differing perspectives of high school students regarding the girlchild affirmative action policy and its implementation in high schools in Zimbabwe?
- To what extent has the policy of girlchild affirmative action been implemented in Zimbabwean high schools?
- Is the policy of girlchild affirmative action effective in eradicating gender disparities in Zimbabwean education?

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a feminist theoretical framework. It is couched in the discourses of gender and development, which located their roots in the universal concept of human rights. Feminism, according to Lewin, cited in [Kolmar and Bartkowski \(2005\)](#), is "a theory that calls for women's attainment of social, political, and economic rights and opportunities equal to those possessed by men." Feminism basically challenges the hegemony of patriarchy, which poses as the major impediment to the advancement of women.

5. CONCEPTUALISING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Affirmative action policies have been in existence in the USA since 1941 when they were introduced to prohibit race discrimination (Gray, in [Tanton \(1994\)](#)). In 1964 affirmative action was extended to include sex discrimination ([Tanton, 1994](#)). A number of authors have developed various explanations of what affirmative action entails. For [Bodenhamer and Emly \(1993\)](#), affirmative action refers to government policies that award jobs, admission to colleges or professional schools and other social goods to individuals on the basis of membership in designated protected groups. Accordingly “affirmative action” refers to positive steps taken to increase the representation of women in areas of employment, education and business from which they have been historically excluded. Further, affirmative action policy is usually said to be in place when a company or an institution takes reasonable action to remedy any discriminatory behaviour which has occurred in the past, ([McElroy, 2004](#)). [Davis \(1993\)](#) states that affirmative action policies refer to any measure beyond non-discrimination, meant to remedy or compensate for past or present discrimination. Thus affirmative action gives preferential treatment to members of the traditionally disadvantaged group.

To demonstrate his support for the affirmative action concept, the then president of the USA, Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 observed:

You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race then say, “you are free to compete with all the others,” and still believe that you are being fair. It is not enough just to open gates of opportunity. All of our citizens must have the ability to walk through these gates, ([Davis, 1993](#)).

Affirmative action policy then is there to assist the disadvantaged groups to reach levels where they would be in a position to compete on equal terms with groups which have been advantaged for a long time. [Wajcman \(1998\)](#) noted that studies in the USA, Canada, Australia, Sweden, the Netherlands and Norway revealed that ‘the stated goals of labour market affirmative action programmes is to encourage women into non-traditional jobs, that is jobs traditionally performed by men, and to increase their access to positions of higher pay and status.’

Critics of affirmative action policies cite “double standards and inherent unfairness of the set programmes as well as the regressive usage of affirmative action policy in hiring, promotions, contracts and grants” ([Jackson, 1996](#)). In some studies carried out in the US, it was found that affirmative action policies moved employed blacks around in the labour pool, but did not lower black unemployment. In other words it implies that affirmative action does not automatically eradicate problems of inequality. Another argument against implementation of affirmative action policies is provided by [Davidson and Burke \(1994\)](#) when they say that ‘if women were seen as having special needs—— this may suggest that they have special needs and this was to label them different—— inferior to men’. In other words, the argument of critics in this line of thinking is that if women are as competent as are men, there is no need to give them extra mileage in the competitive world. Similarly, [Makamure \(1995\)](#) argues that affirmative action as applied at the

University of Zimbabwe in 1993, not only abused male students, but also stigmatized female intellectual ability in assuming that women may be seen to be intellectually inferior. In other words, affirmative action is taken to detrimentally affect the status and image of women in suggesting that they, as a group, are not capable of doing what men do unless they are given special assistance. Another criticism levelled against affirmative action programmes is that these programmes run counter to the principle of equal treatment under the law and give rise to reverse or positive discrimination (Claassen, 1993). While the targeted / disadvantaged person is being promoted, another person experiences reverse discrimination. For example, where one with lesser experience is promoted, another with more experience and greater claim to promotion is left out. It is argued that where affirmative action policies are implemented, negative responses from non-preferred groups have always been forthcoming (Claassen, 1993).

Affirmative action programmes have been put in place in many countries, but they have not achieved the intended levels of change for various reasons. Research shows that the levels of formulation and implementation of equality laws and affirmative action correlate with the improvement in levels of under-representation of women in management (Greyvenstein, 2000).

Not everyone involved understands the meaning and intentions of affirmative action policies. Greyvenstein (2000) pointed out that interpretation and implementation of affirmative action policies are difficult to monitor. Laws and policies may have more of an impact on women's aspirations than on actual institutional change. Furthermore, policies requiring changes in attitude seek to alter the value systems in individuals and institutions and these are known to resist change (Mathipa and Tsoka, 2000). Deeply entrenched attitudes are difficult to change. Furthermore equity-related policies are highly complex because they cannot operate in isolation (Greyvenstein, 2000). In view of the above, some researchers have advocated for a holistic approach involving both men and women. Shakeshaft (1989) suggested that research into gender and development should progress through six stages, the last of which is 'focus on understanding women's and men's experiences together.' Such a situation, it is hoped, would assist in developing strategies acceptable to both men and women and in providing lasting solutions.

Clearly, affirmative action policies introduced to compensate and remedy injustices have their own weaknesses in that they do not satisfy everybody affected by them. As Davis (1993) observed that 'affirmative action policy has emerged intact into the 1990's, but much remains to be done to realise the dream of equal employment opportunities for women.' This could be useful since it has been argued that women's leadership styles are also useful in creating effective organisations. In other words, the effective implementation of affirmative action is still awaited. A lot is still to be done before the programmes achieve their intended purpose.

5.1. Some Empirical Evidence: Affirmative Action in Practice

Affirmative action has been and is still being tried in several countries in the modern world. Some examples of such countries are the USA, Australia, Canada, India, Germany, Peru, Nigeria,

Sweden, Namibia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Northern Ireland and Yugoslavia. This section will look at the policy and practice of affirmative action in the USA and some African countries.

5.1.1. Affirmative Action in the United States of America (USA)

The term affirmative action, but not the practice, originated in the USA (Jauch, 1999). Initially the concept was developed to eliminate discriminatory employment practices against minority groups like blacks, indigenous groups and Hispanic Americans. It was later applied to women and other disadvantaged groups like the disabled.

Jauch (1999) observes that affirmative action in the USA has been viewed from two perspectives: some saw it as active effort to promote minorities and women in an attempt to end discriminatory practices. For example institutions of higher learning actively recruited minorities and women and created special programmes to improve their skills to compete in the labour market. To others affirmative action meant achieving mandatory results through quotas.

Johnson's Executive Order No. 11246 of 1965 prescribed affirmative action in employment and promotion for all Federal contractors, while the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission established quotas for certain minority groups in the early 1970's (Jauch, 1999). Employers had to ensure that the composition of their workforce reflected the composition of the population. For example if 10% of the population was Black, then at least 10% of the workforce had to be Black giving them a "proportionate share" in the workforce. During the first two centuries of higher education in the USA, women were excluded from higher education institutions (Graham, 1990). From 1636 when Harvard College was founded to the opening of Oberlin College in Ohio in 1837, women were not allowed to attend institutions of higher learning in the USA. For blacks it was even worse since it was official policy to 'keep blacks illiterate and thus prisoners of the caste system where they would be consigned to the bottom of American society' (Flanders, 1994). This was very much the case in Zimbabwe and other African countries where education should be such that it only prepared them for menial jobs. Prior to affirmative action in the USA, university positions were often filled by acquaintances of the dean or department chairman. Rarely were women or other minorities given the encouragement or job opportunities available to their white male counterparts. In view of this, many promising female and minority students lacked both role models and the encouragement to continue their studies (Flanders, 1994). Since 1961 several laws to encourage equal rights in the academic community for women and the minorities have been passed. Justifying the policy of affirmative action in the USA the then president of the USA Lynden B. Johnson in 1965 observed:

Imagine a 100 yard dash in which one of the two runners has his legs shackled together. He has progressed 10 yards while the unshackled runner has gone 50 yards. How do they rectify the situation? Do they merely remove the shackles and allow the race to proceed? Then they could say that 'equal opportunity' now prevailed. But one of the runners would still be 40 yards ahead of the other. Would it not be the better part of justice to allow the previously shackled

runner to make up the 40 yard gap; or to start the race all over again? That would be affirmative action towards equality (Flanders, 1994).

In an attempt to eliminate some of the inequities in institutions of higher learning preference was given to women and minorities to obtain higher and specialised education. Many graduate departments offered increased access to training programmes, pre- and postdoctoral fellowship opportunities, teaching assistantships and financial aid to women and minorities in fields in which they were underrepresented. But still the policy of affirmative action in the USA has not yet reached the desired destination mainly because of weaknesses in the implementation processes. Since the 1970s critics have been voicing their concerns. Some argue that affirmative action policies are a threat to academic standards as vast numbers of unqualified women and minorities are hired in order to comply with government regulations. Thus a major cause of the lack of vast improvement in the status of women and minorities in employment in higher education institutions has been the reactions and resistance to affirmative action as corrective strategy in employment and education. The issues around which most of the controversy revolves are preferential treatment, merit, reverse discrimination, loss of institutional autonomy and quotas.

The major weakness of the American affirmative action policy is that it benefited mainly the Black middle class as it was designed to help members of minority groups who met minimal job qualifications. While contributing to the enlargement of the Black middle class, affirmative action remained meaningless for the poorest sections of Black Americans. The policy was instrumental in narrowing the gap between groups in American society but it also contributed to an increasing gap within groups. Greater equality was only achieved in the sense that various racial groups were fairly represented in the privileged classes. In other words, affirmative action shifted the emphasis from racial inequality to class inequalities. It was merely concerned with making institutions more representative in their ethnic composition but it did not challenge institutional cultures, let alone become an instrument of redistribution.

5.1.2 Affirmative Action in African Institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education

Bunyi (2003) identifies the immediate constraint to increased enrolments for females in tertiary institutions in Africa as the poor quality of girls' secondary school education. She argues that in most countries female candidates perform poorly in the matriculation examinations. Consequently, few females attain high enough marks to compete on an equal footing with their male counterparts for the limited places in colleges and universities. In response to this problem, many African countries have instituted different forms of affirmative action policies. Lower admission cut off points and remedial classes for females are two of the more commonly used forms of affirmative action.

5.1.3. Lower Admission Cut-off Points for Females

To increase the number of women who enroll in tertiary institutions, some countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, among others, have articulated and

implemented affirmative action policies. Such policies allow female candidates who have attained the minimum required marks to enter public universities at between 1 and 1.5 points (and 2 points in the case of Zimbabwe) below males (Chivaura, 2000; Mlama, 2001; Joint Admissions Board, 2002). According to Bunyi (2003), lowering cut off admission points for females has increased their enrolments in these countries. Through this policy, a total of 462 females entered the six public universities in Kenya in the 2003/2003 academic year. In Ghana, female enrolments increased from 21 per cent to 27 per cent between 1990 and 1999. In Uganda, female participation in Makerere University increased from 27 per cent to 34 per cent between 1990 and 1999 and in the UDSM in Tanzania, the increase was from 19.5 percent to 27 per cent between 1997/98 and 2000/2001 academic years (Bunyi, 2003). However, as in the USA case discussed above, while lowering cut off points affirmative action intervention has increased women's enrolments, it faces the problem of acceptance. At Makerere University, lowering cut off points for female candidates has been resisted by both students and staff (male and female) (Mlama, 2001). Critics argue that the university or other tertiary institution is a meritocratic institution and therefore allowing women to enter at lower cut off points than their male counterparts dilutes standards. They further argue that giving these concessions to women endorses the notion of women as the intellectually weaker gender (Bunyi, 2003). Those who support the intervention on the other hand argue that the girls who enter the universities through this route first and foremost qualify to enter before they are considered under the scheme and that it is only due to the shortage of places that they would be otherwise locked out. Nammudu (1995) strongly argues for affirmative action pointing out further that affirmative action is not a gender activists' creation in post-independence Africa since through Africanisation policies many men have got scholarships and or high status jobs through similar policies. She posits that many such men have gone on to succeed and observes that there is no reason why women would not.

5.1.4. Remedial Courses

According to Bunyi (2003), in some countries, instead of or even as well as allowing women to enter tertiary institutions at lower cut off points, remedial courses are offered for particular tertiary programmes or subjects. For example, in Eritrea, to increase the number of women teachers as a strategy for increasing access and retention of girls in primary schools, a bridging course for female teacher trainees has been implemented. Within this initiative, women who are interested in joining teaching but who lack the required academic grades for admission into teachers' training programmes enroll for the bridging course at the end of which they are examined. Those who attain the required grades are admitted in the teachers' college (UNICEF, 2002). Bunyi (2003), on the other hand, experience in Kenya and Tanzania has shown that owing to the very poor performance of female candidates in subjects such as mathematics and science, not even lowering cut off points will get them into the very competitive science related programmes in tertiary institutions. For example, in Kenya, in the 2002 / 2003 academic year the Science and Technology Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology did not admit

any of the 462 females who entered public universities through the lower cut off points policy and none of them entered the highly competitive courses such as medicine, surgery, dental surgery, pharmacy, engineering and computer science in the other universities (Joint Admissions Board, 2002). In Tanzania, Masanja (2001) reports that in 2000 / 2001 admissions, very few females qualified for admission into the engineering and science programmes even after the lowering of cut off points. Consequently, to increase females' enrolments in the highly competitive science related programmes, in some countries; remedial courses in these subjects are offered. The University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) offers a six weeks remedial course in science and mathematics for borderline female candidates. Those who pass an examination given at the end of the course are admitted to the university. Remedial courses have increased the number of women enrolled in tertiary institutions. In the case of UDSM, for example, between 1997 and 2000, 214 female students entered highly competitive science related programmes such as engineering, medicine and architecture through this route (Masanja, 2001). Masanja further reports that these females were performing well in their chosen degree programmes. She indicates that in a performance assessment administered to the 1999 / 2000 3rd year Bachelor of Science Bed programme cohort of students (among whom were the first batch of the remedial programme entrants), some of the remedial programme entrants were among the top 20 students in the chemistry or biology subject combinations. In fact, overall, they were found to be performing better than their direct entry male and female peers. Masanja (2001) reports further that faculties such as Physical Education Sports and Culture, Arts, Law and Nursing have easily attained gender parity in admission through affirmative action policies – lowering of cut off points and remedial courses. Remedial courses as a form of affirmative action do not seem to attract as much controversy as the lowering of cut off entry points. They may also be more beneficial to the women candidates in that they could enable them fill in whatever knowledge gaps they may have in the relevant subjects.

Table-1. “O” Level National Pass Rate by Gender 2006 – 2009

Year	Gender	Total Number of Candidates	Number of Candidates who Passed 5 or More Subjects	National Pass Rate
2006	Female	74 363	12 902	17.35
	Male	79 866	18 345	22.97
	Total	154 229	31 247	20.16
2007	Female	85 291	10 354	12.14
	Male	93 983	15 319	16.30
	Total	179 274	25 673	14.32
2008	Female	71 450	8 910	12.47
	Male	71 390	11 722	16.42
	Total	142 840	20 632	14.44
2009	Female	44 209	7 472	16.90
	Male	42 992	9 381	21.82
	Total	87 201	16 853	19.33

Source: (Gaidzanwa *et al.*, 2010)

However, high user fee is a serious problem associated with the remedial courses intervention. When offered in private institutions and in the fee-paying programmes of public universities, remedial courses tend to be expensive and therefore inaccessible to the majority of

would be beneficiaries. To overcome this problem, some tertiary institutions have found ways of offering them without charging any user fees. In UDSM, the intervention was initially implemented in 1997 with a two-year Forum for African Women Educationalists' (FAWE).

5.1.5. Experiences in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean women and girls of African origin experienced double discrimination in education based on their race and gender in the pre-independence era. In 1980, when Zimbabwe became independent, gender gaps in literacy and all levels of the education system were therefore very wide. However, within a decade, the situation had changed dramatically with the gender gaps almost closing. According to Gaidzanwa *et al.* (2010), Zimbabwe achieved parity in the net enrolment ratio of boys and girls in primary schooling in 2004. At this time the average national enrolment ratio was 93%. They, however, observe that dropout rates were high with only 69% of females and 68% of males completing primary level in 2006. Gaidzanwa *et al.* (2010) further observe that the net enrolment ratio for secondary school had close parity in terms of gender, but showed a low transition rate from primary school enrolment, in line with the pass rate at Grade 7. For example, in 2003 the ratio for boys was 50% and for girls was 48%. By 2006, this had reduced to 47% for boys and 45% for girls. The completion rate at O' level shows the gap widen between boys and girls, with 93% of boys completing in 2006, compared to 83% of girls. The pass rate at O' level is extremely low – in 2000 it stood at 22.71%. The majority of students can no longer pass 5 O' levels, with those from low-density suburbs achieving the highest grades. Girls clearly become more disadvantaged as secondary school progresses (Gaidzanwa *et al.*, 2010). According to Gaidzanwa *et al.* (2010), the transition rate for girls into Form 6 was 6.99% and for boys was 8.18%. By Form 5, girls comprised only 35% of the total, disadvantaging girls in the labour market and in society in general. Most secondary school graduates cannot secure jobs or training and become unemployed between the ages of 16 and 18. For girls, the process is faster as some drop out due to early pregnancies, lack of fees and unsatisfactory school experiences (Gaidzanwa *et al.*, 2010).

Table-2. "A" Level National Pass Rate by Gender, 2007 – 2009

Year	Gender	Total Number of Candidates	Number of Candidates who Passed 2 or More Subjects	National Pass Rate
2007	Female	13 014	10 151	78.00
	Male	21 112	15 686	74.30
	Total	34 126	25 837	75.71
2008	Female	13 079	9 012	68.90
	Male	19 526	12 973	66.44
	Total	32 605	21 985	67.43
2009	Female	9 694	7 567	78.06
	Male	13 902	10 574	76.06
	Total	23 596	18 141	76.88

Source: (Gaidzanwa *et al.*, 2010)

Gaidzanwa *et al.* (2010) think that closing the gender gap in secondary school education is particularly important because, as demonstrated by UNAIDS study amongst 15-19 year olds in

17 African and 4 Latin American countries, better educated girls tend to postpone sexual debut in comparison to their less educated counterparts. The proportion of sexually experienced 18 year olds was 24% lower amongst girls with secondary education than amongst girls with primary (Gaidzanwa *et al.*, 2010).

6. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The plan was to target both Upper and Lower Sixth Forms students but the study was carried out during Lower Sixth students enrolment period (24-28 February 2014). They were thus excluded from the study. Only Upper Sixth students participated in the study. A target population of 250 people was used in this study. This population was composed of 230 Upper Sixth students (164 from Christian High School and 66 from Ndarama High School) and 20 Advanced Level teachers from the two schools (10 from each school). From this population a sample of 100 respondents (98 students and 2 focal point teachers), approximately 40% of the population was selected for the study. The researcher believed that a sample of 40% respondents was large enough to generalise the results of the study on condition that there would be a high response rate.

Table-3. Sampled research participants by school

School	Population	Questionnaire sample	Interview sample	Total Sample
Christian High School	174	63	1	64
Ndarama High School	76	35	1	36
Total	250	98	2	100

Source: Primary data

The participants (population and sample) were distributed as in Table 3 above. Sampling was done in three stages. First was selection of the two high schools (Christian and Ndarama) out of the five high schools in the city (Christian High School, Kyle College, Mucyhe Government High School, Ndarama Government High School and Victoria Government High School). A non-probability sampling technique based on judgement was employed for the selection of the schools, one church school representing private schools in the city (Christian High School) and one government school representing government schools in the city (Ndarama High School). There are only two private high schools in the city (Christian and Kyle College). The second stage was identification of two focal point Advanced Level teachers who would then act as points of call for reaching the students. The original plan was to use either the headmasters or their deputies as interviewees, but these proved to be very busy people. Hence the use of focal point teachers. These were supplied by the deputy headmasters of the two schools. Only these two teachers were sampled for the unstructured interviews. Both these teachers were male. In the third stage the plan was to categorise students into girls and boys so that proportional probability sampling would be done. Proportional simple random sampling would have translated into proportional representation of boys and girls. However, 63 questionnaires were given to the focal point teacher at Christian High School and 35 questionnaires were given to the other one at Ndarama High

School. It was these teachers who determined who would participate in the study. At Christian High School the focal point teacher sampled 29 out of 72 girls and 35 out of 92 boys to participate in the study. At Ndarama High School the focal point teacher sampled 25 out of 31 girls and 10 out of 35 boys to participate in the study.

7. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

In this study the researcher used questionnaires; unstructured interviews; and documentary evidence. A questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions to obtain respondents' qualitative opinions as well as quantitative data were designed to measure the extent to which the school has implemented affirmative action as per the national policy. In this study, interviews took the form of structured formal discussions with two representative or focal point teachers, one from each of the two participating schools. These interviews were designed to measure the impression of school authorities and other stakeholders on the affirmative action policy and its implementation. Documentary evidence comprised official documents in the relevant school information systems. These included policy documents, minutes, plans of action, and workshop reports. The researcher was given access to some of these documents before distributing the questionnaire and administering the interviews with focal point teachers. Thus some of the questions in the questionnaire and the structured interviews were derived from these organisational documents. Data from this source were also very useful in determining whether a respondent's perception of the situation was consistent with what was on record, and what was actually happening on the ground.

8. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Response rate was 100%. This was due to the fact that questionnaires were hand-delivered to focal point teachers who ensured that they were completed and collected back the same day. The teachers got the questionnaires on 24 February 2014. They then administered them on students on 25 February 2014 (Christian) and 26 February 2014 (Ndarama) so that the researcher collected them back on 26 and 27 February 2014 respectively.

Table 4 below shows that in both schools male students are more than female students. Thus the average population is approximately 55% for boys and 45% for girls. This implies that there is need for some measures to be taken to reach parity and equal representation of boys and girls in the two schools.

Table-4: Distribution of questionnaire respondents

School	Female		Male		Total	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Christian School	High 72 (31.3%)	29 (12.6%)	92 (40%)	35 (15.2%)	164 (71.3%)	64 (27.8%)
Ndarama School	High 31 (13.5%)	25 (10.9%)	35 (15.2%)	10 (4.3%)	66 (28.7%)	35 (15.2%)
Total	103 (44.8%)	54 (23.5%)	127 (55.2%)	45 (19.5%)	230 (100%)	99 (43%)

Source: Primary data

8.1. Students' Discipline of Study by Sex

Both schools do not offer Science subjects. They offer arts and commercials. Table 5 and Table 6 below show the distribution of students and respondents by sex and discipline of study respectively.

Table-5. Distribution of students by sex and discipline of study

School	Female		Male		Total	
	Arts	Commercials	Arts	Commercials	Arts	Commercials
Christian High	33 (14.3%)	38 (16.5%)	42 (18.3%)	50 (21.7%)	75 (32.6%)	88 (38.2%)
Ndarama High	16 (7%)	15 (6.5%)	12 (5.2%)	23 (10%)	28 (12.2%)	38 (16.5%)
Total	49 (21.3%)	53 (23%)	54 (23.5%)	73 (31.7%)	103 (44.8%)	126 (54.7%)

Source: Primary data

Table-6. Distribution of respondents by sex and discipline of study

School	Female		Male		Total	
	Arts	Commercials	Arts	Commercials	Arts	Commercials
Christian High	18 (7.8%)	9 (3.9%)	20 (8.7%)	17 (7.5%)	38 (16.5%)	26 (11.3%)
Ndarama High	15 (6.5%)	9 (3.9%)	2 (1%)	9 (3.9%)	17 (7.5%)	18 (7.8%)
Total	33 (14.3%)	18 (7.8%)	22 (9.7%)	26 (11.3%)	53 (23%)	44 (19.1%)

Source: Primary data

Table 5 above shows that there are more boys than girls in both the commercial and art subjects. It also shows that there are more students doing commercials than arts.

8.2. High School Students' Perspectives Regarding the Girlchild Affirmative Action Policy

Table 7 below shows that more than half had not yet heard about affirmative action. This implies that issues of gender and equity are not taken seriously in the schools. This is further reinforced by students' responses to the question that measured whether students know that sex and gender were not synonyms. The majority of students (approximately 75%) thought that sex and gender mean one and the same thing.

Table-7. Students awareness of the concept and policy of affirmative action

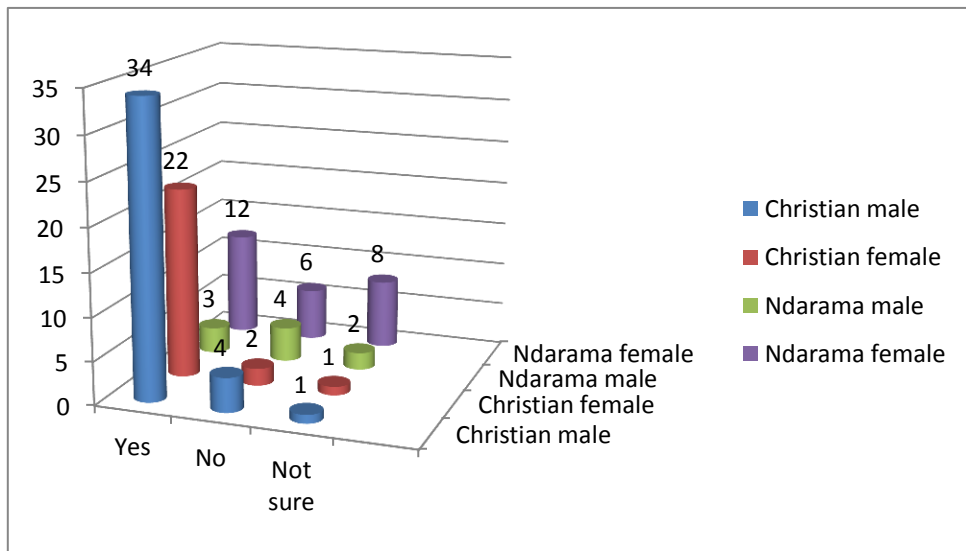
School	Responses					
	Male		Female		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Christian High School	24	12	18	10	42	22
Ndarama High School	2	7	3	23	5	30
Total	26	19	21	33	47	52

Source: Primary data

Answers to the question, 'If you were the headmaster would you offer girls study places at lower points than boys?' were mixed. Twenty four male and fourteen female respondents from Christian High School; and seven male and 16 female respondents from Ndarama High School said they would not offer female students study places at lower points than boys. This made a total of 61 no responses out of 99 possible responses. The remainder 38 respondents said yes. The implication here is that the majority of respondents, if given the opportunity, they would not implement the affirmative action policy. It is also important to note that the majority (30 out of

54) of female respondents answered the question in the negative. It is thus concluded that students are not conscientised of the concept of gender equity and its importance in the modern world, let alone affirmative action as a strategy for achieving parity in educational and development issues. Seventy-four of the 99 respondents would choose a woman for their leader. Of these 74 respondents who answered in the affirmative, 49 were female. No female respondent answered no to women leadership at Ndarama, and only 4 female respondents said no to women leadership at Christian. A total of 20 male respondents said no to women leadership. It is however important to note that the majority of both male and female respondents would not mind having a woman for their leader. Perhaps this is an acknowledgement of good leadership of the female leadership at the two schools: the headmistress at Ndarama and the deputy headmistress at Christian. In ideal situations leadership is earned, and therefore, perhaps their message was women should earn their position in society on merit not through affirmative action. That said, still this demonstrates lack of appreciation of the historical context that demands affirmative action to cater for centuries of injustice as argued by Johnson in the United States of America in 1965 (see the quotation above).

Figure-1. Perceptions on the necessity of girlchild affirmative action in schools



Source: Primary data

Figure 1 above shows that 69 of the 99 respondents thought that affirmative action was necessary, 16 thought it was not necessary and 12 were not sure. This seems contradictory to above impressions which are mainly aligned to the idea that the girlchild should earn the same points as the boychild to be offered study places in schools. This seemingly inconsistency may be a result of lack of formal discussion of gender issues in schools. In-depth analysis and comparison of this question and the question on study entry points may tell a different story. The entry point

question was too direct and blunt; it may have implied that the girlchild has weaker intellectual capacity than the boychild. If this is the case, then there is no inconsistency.

The following are unedited sample definitions of affirmative action by students from both schools:

Sample female students:

- Boys and girls should be equal in the community; they should all be offered same opportunities in the society.
- I understand that it caters for girls more than boys giving girls an opportunity to learn.
- Women are now being recognised as compared to the past. Affirmative action is necessary because we women should have same opportunities as men to make the world a better place.
- It is intended to promote equal opportunities of defined groups within a society to give them equal access to that of the privileged group. This promotes equality amongst people for gender is equality.
- Affirmative action for girls is giving equal opportunities to both boys and girls. In this modern world it is fair because girls are able to reveal their talents.
- I think it's an action based on ensuring equality of both girls and boys leading to empowerment of girls in schools and jobs;

Sample male students:

- Affirmative action are positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education and culture from which they had been previously excluded;
- I think girls are given equal opportunities as boys in high schools. Affirmative action is the equilibrium between boys and girls. So in this case boys and girls are offered same opportunities. Even on job opportunities everything is just equal.
- Girls are given the same opportunities as boys with regard to access to educational and job opportunities but it seems as if girls fail to take up their opportunities since it seems very true that girls are simply disturbed by uncontrolled emotions due to adolescence leading them to underperform.
- It is the offering of equal opportunities to all regardless of gender (male or female).
- It is a concept in which girls are taken at lower points than boys taking into consideration the fact that girls are overburdened with domestic work when compared to boys.

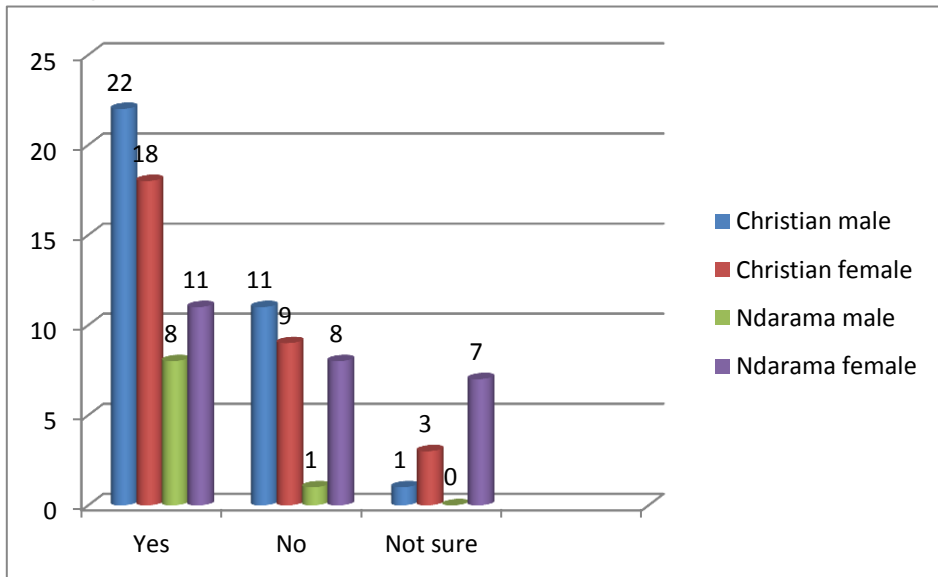
The above sample answers to the definition of affirmative action question show that most students simply equate affirmative action to gender equality. Only three students, all of them male students from Christian High School, were able to define affirmative action as preferential treatment of the formerly oppressed group to help them catch-up with the privileged groups. Two of these students have been captured above. It is however important to note that most of the respondents knew that affirmative action has something to do with gender equality.

In conclusion to this subsection, it is established that high schools are not doing enough to conscientise students on gender equity and affirmative action. Whilst students have some idea on issues to do with equal rights, most of them cannot distinguish between gender and sex; equality and equity; and equality, equity and affirmative action. Neither could they put the gender discourse into its historical context.

8.3. The Extent to Which the Policy of Girlchild Affirmative Action Has Been Implemented in Zimbabwean High Schools

We have already shown that most students have not yet heard about affirmative action. This means that affirmative action has not been implemented in Zimbabwean schools (as represented by the two case schools) even at the level of simple awareness.

Figure-2. Students perception on educational and job opportunities for girls



Source: Primary data

As shown in Figure 2 above, the majority of students (59 of the 99 respondents) said girls have equal educational and job opportunities as boys. However, the 29 who said they did not have equal opportunities as boys and 11 who were not sure constitute a significant number that cannot be just brushed aside. This may mean that there are families and communities within Zimbabwe that still do not offer equal educational and job opportunities as boys. Although this is an urban setting where educational and job opportunities are believed to have been opened equally for both sexes, a significant number of urban students have strong rural backgrounds where the situation is most likely to be different. Also, sometimes these opportunities may seem favourable at the surface, yet a deeper analysis would tell a different story. Some respondents raised issues of a thigh for educational and job opportunities. Thus perhaps those who said no and those who were

not sure whether girls have equal opportunities as boys were thinking of these exploitative scenarios. The majority (82 of the 99 respondents) said girls were offered study places at their school with the same entry points as boys. Only 17 respondents said they were offered study places with lower points. These may have been referring to cases where children of politicians and high rank officials might have bulldozed their way and got study places for their daughters even with lower points than the norm. Basing overall conclusion on majority responses, affirmative action is yet to be implemented at the two schools. Informal talks with the two focal point teachers revealed that both the two schools have not yet implemented the policy of affirmative action. They further claimed that they have not yet heard of any secondary school in Zimbabwe that have implemented this policy, let alone Masvingo urban. One of them claimed that perhaps at tertiary level it might be possible; he cited the example of the University of Zimbabwe where female students have been allowed to enter certain degree programmes than their male colleagues. Note that the teachers thought it was not possible to implement the policy at secondary school level. Thus a lot of work has to be done to change this mindset. Otherwise without the support of the implementers (teachers) nothing will be attained. In conclusion to this subsection, the above discussion has shown that policies might be formulated and sometimes well documented, but this does not mean that they are implemented. While the availability of acceptable and supportive public policy indicates the beginning of a commendable process of moving towards desired goals (in this case gender equity), this alone is not sufficient unless supported by effective systems and processes for effective delivery (Folifac, 2007). Formulation and adoption of a policy or piece of legislation does not automatically translate to its implementation and/or enforcement (Hall, 1992). Most African countries have developed plans to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on gender equity, but these often only exist as documents and are neither country-owned nor actively implemented (Kwabena, 2009).

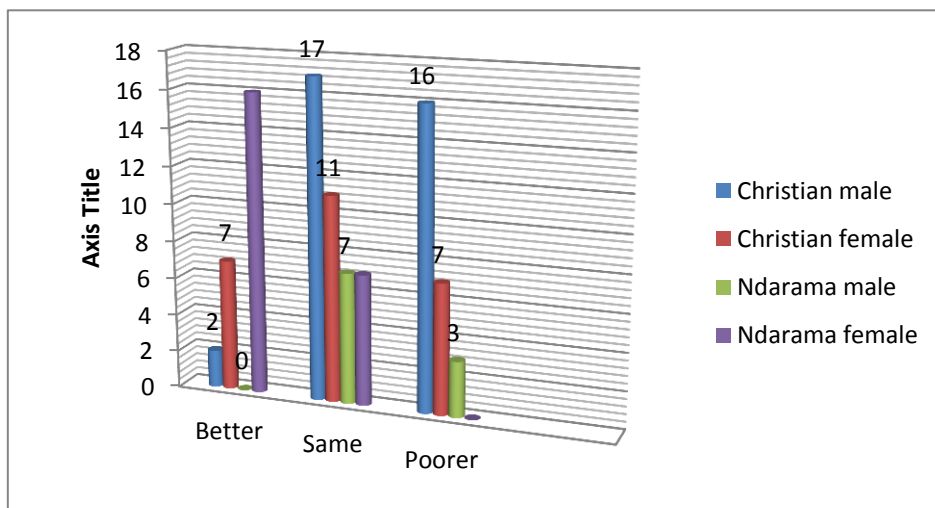
8.4. Performance of Female Students

The majority (42) of respondents said girls performed the same as boys; 25 (majority of which female) said girls performed better than boys; and 31 said they performed poorer than boys (see breakdown in Figure 3). These findings are consistent with those in question 6 where most students said entry points were pegged at the same level for both boys and girls. This explains the argument by the majority of the respondents that if they were the headmaster they would not offer girls study places at lower points than boys (see responses to question 8 above); and that affirmative action is not necessary (see question 11 above). Taking this line of argument, if female and male students are performing at the same level, then affirmative action is not necessary.

Note that although the majority of respondents who said they performed the same as boys were male, also the majority of those who said they performed poorer than boys were male and those who said they performed better than boys were female. Obviously there is some form of bias here. Among the male respondents, there is also an element of justification of not supporting

affirmative action; some of them have argued that affirmative action is subject to abuse as already discussed above.

Figure-3. Perceptions on performance of girls relative to that of boys



Source: Primary data

Also the informal discussions with the two focal point teachers established that there was no great difference between boys and girls academic performance in the schools. This finding was further reinforced by the researcher’s experiential observation. During the first term of 2014 (January to April), the researcher did his teaching practice at Christian High School where he taught A Level History classes. From this experiential observation he established that there was no much difference between male and female students academic performance. It is therefore concluded that academic performance was at the same level for both girls and boys at the studied case schools.

8.5. The Effectiveness of the Policy of Girlchild Affirmative Action in Eradicating Gender Disparities in Zimbabwean Education

The interviews with the focal point teachers demonstrated to the researcher that the affirmative action policy was not effective, at least in secondary schools. Of course, the availability of acceptable and supportive public policy indicates the beginning of a commendable process of moving towards desired goals (in this case gender equity). However, this alone is not sufficient unless supported by effective systems and processes for effective delivery. This study concludes that adoption of a policy does not automatically translate to its implementation and / or enforcement. As long as there are no enforcement mechanisms the affirmative action policy will not achieve the desired goals and thus remains ineffective in eradicating gender disparities in the Zimbabwean education system.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Sex of students at the schools: This study established that the average population of students at the two schools is approximately 55% for boys and 45% for girls. Also male students are more than female students in all advanced level disciplines studied at the schools. It is thus concluded that there is need for some measures to be taken to reach parity and equal representation of boys and girls in the two schools.

Subjects offered at the two case schools: The study established that the two case schools offer art and commercial subjects, but do not offer science subjects at A Level.

Students' awareness and understanding of the affirmative action policy: More than half of the respondents had not yet heard about affirmative action and thus they were not aware of the concept and policy of affirmative action. This finding further leads to the conclusion that issues of gender and equity are not taken seriously in the schools. It is thus established that high schools are not doing enough to conscientise students on gender equity and affirmative action. Whilst students have some idea on issues to do with equal rights, most of them cannot distinguish between gender and sex; equality and equity; and equality, equity and affirmative action. Neither could they put the gender discourse into its historical context.

Students' perspectives: It was established that both male and female students do not support the idea of affirmative action considering the connotations it comes with. They felt it implied that girls are academically weaker than boys. Thus the concept and policy has not been properly disseminated to the students concerned.

The gap between policies and practice: This study assumed that there are gaps in the implementation of the gender affirmative action policy in Zimbabwean high schools. The discussion above has reinforced this notion: affirmative action policy is not being implemented in Zimbabwean secondary schools as demonstrated by these two case studies. It is thus concluded that policies might be formulated and sometimes well documented, but this does not mean that they are implemented.

Authorities: The study established that authorities are not doing enough to conscientise both teachers and their students on the need for affirmative action in schools

Overall conclusion: It can therefore be concluded that, according to the findings of this study, the affirmative action policy is not being implemented in secondary schools in Zimbabwe and thus the policy is not yet effective in meeting the desired goals.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Affirmative action policy must be enforced: This study established that there is lack of enforcement of affirmative action. There is thus need for enforcement of the policy for it to achieve the desired goals.

Advocacy and training: There is an urgent need for communicating the policy to both teachers and students. They also need to be trained in the rationale and context of the policy so that they understand and actively participate in the implementation of the policy. Formal training

sessions on affirmative action in the schools to help students contextualize the concept of affirmative action are thus recommended. The study also recommends intensive awareness campaigns and advocacy to remove negative attitudes towards affirmative action.

Undertake regular reviews and check-ups: The government should undertake follow-ups, monitoring and performance evaluation. Such follow-ups ensure that the affirmative action policy is being implemented.

Further studies are required: The study was largely a case study. It is therefore recommended that more broad studies be carried out with other major cities and other rural communities in the country.

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