Gender policy implementation process in higher education institutions in Ghana

Proses implementasi kebijakan gender di lembaga pendidikan tinggi di Ghana

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Abstract

To achieve gender equality, domestic and international organisations have developed gender policies to integrate gender equality considerations into development processes. However, gender inequality persists in most spheres of society. Some higher education institutions have developed and implemented gender policies to address the gender gap. The scholarly literature available pays scant attention to how gender policies are implemented in higher learning institutions. This study, therefore, aims to understand how gender policies in higher education institutions are implemented to bridge the gender gap in female participation and representation in leadership positions. Using the qualitative approach of in-depth interviews, the analysed data reveal that universities use various strategies such as mentoring female staff, gender awareness and sensitisation, creation of gender centres and institutional support, and continuous gender education as means of implementing gender policies. These strategies lead to resilient and gender-inclusive systems and promote full participation of women in the various sectors and subject areas of higher education in Ghana. It is concluded that effective implementation of gender policies in higher education institutions, through well-articulated strategies, is crucial for promoting female participation, challenging ingrained gender norms, and achieving gender equality and inclusivity.

Keywords: gender policy implementation; higher education institutions; international legal instruments

Abstrak

Untuk mencapai kesetaraan gender, organisasi domestik dan internasional telah mengembangkan kebijakan gender untuk mengintegrasikan pertimbangan kesetaraan gender ke dalam proses pembangunan. Namun, ketidaksetaraan gender tetap ada di sebagian besar bidang masyarakat. Beberapa institusi pendidikan tinggi telah mengembangkan dan menerapkan kebijakan gender untuk mengatasi kesenjangan gender. Literatur ilmiah yang tersedia hampir tidak memperhatikan bagaimana kebijakan gender diterapkan di institusi pendidikan tinggi. Oleh karena itu, studi ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana kebijakan gender di lembaga pendidikan tinggi diterapkan untuk menjembatani kesenjangan gender dalam partisipasi dan representasi perempuan di posisi kepemimpinan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam, data yang dianalisis mengungkapkan bahwa universitas menggunakan berbagai strategi seperti mentoring staf perempuan, kesadaran dan sensitasi gender, pembentukan pusat gender dan dukungan institusional, serta pendidikan gender berkelanjutan sebagai cara untuk menerapkan kebijakan gender. Strategi-strategi ini menghasilkan sistem yang tangguh dan inklusif gender serta mendorong partisipasi penuh perempuan di berbagai sektor dan bidang studi pendidikan tinggi di Ghana. Disimpulkan bahwa implementasi kebijakan gender yang efektif di institusi pendidikan tinggi, melalui strategi yang terencana dengan baik, sangat penting untuk mempromosikan partisipasi perempuan, menantang norma gender yang sudah mengakar, dan mencapai kesetaraan gender serta inklusivitas.

Kata kunci: *implementasi kebijakan gender; institusi pendidikan tinggi; instrumen hukum internasional*

Introduction

Many scholars have attempted to define the concept of policy. According to Daneke & Steiss (1978), a policy is a comprehensive framework for making decisions, chosen based on specific circumstances from various options. It encompasses the actual decisions made to implement the chosen course of action, as well as a planned programme that includes desired objectives and the methods for achieving them. Bates & Eldredge (1980:12) define policy as a "statement that provides a guide for decision-making by members of the organisation charged with the responsibility of operating the organisation as a system". Meanwhile, Dodd & Michelle (2000:2) defined the concept of policy as a commitment to a certain course or plan of action that is agreed upon by persons authorised to implement it. Based on the aforementioned definitions, a policy can be defined as a structured collection of guidelines or a declaration of objectives that directs the actions taken within an organisation to resolve a specific problem or set of problems, with the aim of ensuring uniformity in decision-making processes.

According to Ball et al. (2012:8), the implementation of policies often involves ad-hockery, borrowing, re-ordering, displacing, making do and re-invention. They also note that very few policies are fully developed from the beginning because some of them require a degree of governance, expertise, mobilisation and policy control that is rarely achievable in the real world. Additionally, some policies lack a solid economic foundation and exhibit conflicting objectives. This coincides with the understanding espoused by Ham & Hill (1993) that a policy is beyond a mere discrete entity or the output of a political entity, to policy as a process that converts certain ideas into practice. To achieve a policy objective requires a strong policy implementation strategy.

Policy implementation refers to the steps taken to implement a government programme. It involves the complete procedure of translating a legal directive into workable procedures and organisational structures that generate goods and services (Adams 2021). Pressman & Wildavsky (1973), developers of the field of implementation studies, describe policy implementation in terms of its relationship to the policy as defined in legislative documents. They argue that policy implementation is a stage in the interaction between goal formulation and the steps taken to realise them. Globally, policy implementation has been identified as essential to accomplishing any institutional objective since no policy can be successful without its connection to the policymakers' original aim (Rahmat 2015). However, policy implementation, according to Seraw & Lu (2020:13), is perceived as one of the most difficult activities. There is often a 'slip-twixt cup and lip' problem, implying a gap exists between what is to be implemented and what is executed. The political sensitivity nature of implementing certain policies creates significant challenges (Seraw & Lu 2020). Ahmed & Dantata (2016) note that many governments and organisations in both developed and developing nations have recognised policy implementation as their biggest challenge.

Gender policy is a strategy for making the concerns of women and men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Developing and implementing gender policies in organisations is crucial for the overall development and outlook of the organisation. The primary goal of any gender policy is to achieve gender equality and social justice (Halabisky 2023). Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (Alvesson & Billing 2009). Gender equality as a human right issue has further been echoed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2017) as an essential human right for societies and institutions, and a cornerstone for comprehensive development. According to Kardam (2002) and Makondo (2019), gender equality is a goal endorsed by states and international organisations and is reflected in the commitments made in international accords. Improved gender equality has been associated with improved productivity, enhancement of development outcomes for the next generation, and making institutions more representative. According to the World Development Report (2012), gender equality ensures that both men and women have equal opportunities and freedoms to engage in economic, political, social and cultural developments for the advancement of humanity. With this realisation, there has been a remarkable increase in the global commitment to achieving gender equality over the last three decades, as evident in the world leaders' ratification of several treaties and conventions of which Ghana is not an exception.

In 2015, Ghana formulated a National Gender Policy (NGP) under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection. The primary objective of this policy is to integrate gender equality considerations into the national development processes by enhancing the social, legal, civic, political, economic, and socio-cultural circumstances of the population of Ghana, with a particular focus on women, girls, children, vulnerable individuals, people with special needs, persons with disabilities, and marginalised groups. The policy aims to address several important issues, including disparities in extreme poverty, education and skilled training. It also seeks to reduce maternal mortality rates and ensure equal access to social and economic opportunities. Additionally, the policy aims to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls and address inequalities in power and decision-making between men and women as well as to address security threats faced by women and girls.

As the policy aims to attain gender equality, it is guided by various international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW OP) 1999, the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women 1985, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, etc. The policy also aligns with the 1992 Constitution and national development frameworks. Article 17 (1) and (2) of the 1992 Constitution explicitly safeguards gender equality and protects women, men, girls, and boys from discrimination based on factors such as social or economic standing. Ghana's commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women, men, girls, and boys is evident in international indices such as the Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a score of 0.565, the Human Development Index (HDI) with a score of 0.558, and the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) with a score of 0.262. Regardless of the progress achieved thus far, these disparities, as described, are profoundly ingrained in the social structure and are notably evident in areas such as education, access to justice, finance, politics, and environmental management systems, among others. Evaluations imply these explanations are due to patriarchal tendencies and socialisation (Acker 1990).

These disparities, as indicated above, are even more ingrained in the space of higher education, as most decision-making portfolios are headed by men (Hearn 2020, Aboim & Vasconcelos 2021). In Africa, the issue of gender disparities in higher education institutions (HEIs) appears worse against women. In response to issues of gender equality in HEIs in Africa, the Association of African Universities (AAU) has encouraged African universities to make gender issues integral in their activities. As a result, some universities have developed gender policies and created gender equality and equity directorates and centres, while others have tried incorporating gender into their curriculum and administration (Association of African Universities 2015).

Gender policies in higher education institutions in Ghana are designed to promote equality, inclusivity and empowerment of women. These policies typically encompass strategies such as mentorship programmes, gender sensitisation and awareness initiatives, and the creation of gender centres to support female students and staff. However, despite the formulation and implementation of gender policies in some Ghanaian universities, issues of gender disparities persist, hindering equal participation and opportunities for women. These issues include ingrained gender norms and stereotypes, limited access to leadership roles, and hesitation among women to seek such positions due to societal expectations. Additionally, there is a lack of universal mentorship programmes, which are essential for supporting women's advancement. As already stated, some universities in Ghana have initiated and implemented institutional policies on gender, affirmative action, and mainstreaming of gender at all levels. This is evident in the establishment of various gender centres and directorates in those universities. For example, the University of Ghana (UG) has the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA), the University of Cape Coast (UCC) has the Centre for Gender Research, Advocacy, and Documentation, the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) has the Gender Centre, and University of Education Winneba (UEW) has the Gender Directorate, etc. All these measures taken are to address gender inequality.

Addressing gender inequalities in universities is not only a matter of developing gender policies and establishing gender centres but also seeing that these policies are implemented to achieve the intended objectives. Bagde et al. (2016) observes that the existence of gender centres does not necessarily imply that all universities with gender policies aim to address gender inequalities. This reveals the void in

the ideal of practice and theory. Bagde et al. (2016), therefore, argues that even though some public institutions invest in preparing gender policy documents, implementing the policy becomes a challenge. It is, therefore, not surprising that gender issues hardly feature in the innovations of HEIs in Ghana (Adusah-Karikari 2008). Nevertheless, gender policy implementation is essential to any institution that aims to develop as it translates into equal rights, opportunities, making use of one's full potential, and responsibilities. Implementing gender policy invariably affects the lives of women, children, men, girls, boys, and families (Beaujot et al. 2017). Unarguably, societies that place a premium on gender equality are considered healthier and safer than those that do not (Seraw & Lu 2020).

Taking cognisance of the above, implementing gender policies in institutions has become a topical issue. Various studies have contributed uniquely to the understanding of the process, achievements and challenges of gender policy implementation in universities (Shackleton et al. 2006, O'Connor 2015, Rose 2015, Loots & Walker 2016, Žalėnienė et al. 2016, Irvine 2019, Irish Research Council 2020). However, within the context of public universities in Ghana and many other African countries, academic studies on gender policy implementation process are virtually absent in published literature. As a result, this study aims to examine how gender policies are implemented in higher education institutions using GIMPA and UEW. Compared with other institutions at the time of the study, these selected institutions appear to be the only two public universities in Ghana with clearly defined and developed gender policies. The findings of this study have contributed to the literature on gender and policy studies, higher education and law, sociology of law and sociological jurisprudence.

Research Method

This research focused on GIMPA and UEW. The Management Development Institute (MDI), later GIMPA, was founded in 1961 by Executive Instrument 117 under Act 41. The Institute was established with full government funding to prepare graduates from universities and other similar institutions for entry into the public service of Ghana. It was designed to prepare potential employees and managers for the public administrative service (Arthur & Owoahene-Acheampong 2016). The Institute's name was changed to the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in 1969 to reflect its enlarged activities. Beginning with the original legislative instrument of 1961 and continuing with the present GIMPA Act of 2004 (section 676), GIMPA's activities have been governed by five successive mandates for more than 50 years. Each mandate reaffirmed the Institute's position as Ghana's national management development institute and its commitment to supporting the study of public administration and management. With the passage of its most recent mandate, the Act of Parliament in 2004, GIMPA was transformed into a public university and is now able to provide programmes in its core competencies that lead to the awarding of certificates, diplomas and degrees up to the doctoral level. The areas of competence include training and education in public administration, technology, leadership and management.

Currently, GIMPA is a stand-alone, nationally supported tertiary organisation with complete financial and administrative autonomy, and has developed into a top management development institute. By continuously enhancing the ability of middle and top-level executives in the public and private sectors as well as NGOs both in Ghana and internationally to manage their institutions and enterprises efficiently and effectively. GIMPA seeks to maintain its position as a centre of excellence for training in public and business administration. GIMPA is composed of six faculties and schools, namely: the School of Public Service and Governance, the School of Technology, the School of Business, the Faculty of Law, the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and the School of Research and Graduate Studies. GIMPA has 641 employees, of whom 28.3% are women, a gender imbalance that is disproportionately pronounced. GIMPA has a gender policy and centre and runs some courses related to gender.

The University of Education, Winneba Act 672 created UEW on May 14, 2004. The University College of Winneba (UCEW) was initially founded by PNDC Law 322 in 1992 through the merger of seven diploma-granting schools. Among these schools were the St. Andrews Agricultural Training College in Mampong-Ashanti, the Advanced Teacher Training College in Winneba, the National Academy of Music, and the College of Special Education in Akwapim-Mampong (UEW Statute). The University's mission is to train educators to steer Ghana towards a more rapid economic and social development

through a new national vision for education. The university is expected to take the lead in the country's attempt to train academics whose knowledge is fully responsive to the needs of modern Ghana and the West African sub-region. Both full-time and part-time programmes are available, as noted by Larson & Owusu-Acheaw (2016). The UEW currently has four campuses. The Vice-Chancellor and central administrative functional offices are located on the Winneba campus, which is made up of the North, Central, and South campuses, with Ajumako as a satellite (Okyere 2017). UEW has two institutes, four schools and six faculties. These include the Institute for Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development and the Institute for Educational Research and Innovation Studies. The schools and faculties are the School of Business, School of Creative Arts, School of Graduate Studies, School of Communication and Media Studies, Faculty of Social Science Education, Faculty of Home Economics Education, Faculty of Foreign Language Education, Faculty of Education in Ghanaian Languages, Faculty of Education in Educational Studies and Education in Science. Among other things, UEW has a gender policy and a sexual harassment policy.

The study focused on GIMPA and UEW because they had well-defined and developed gender policies among all the institutions considered. The sources of data were primary. According to Driscoll (2011) and Moser & Korstjens (2018), primary data are information obtained from participants by a researcher for the first time to address a scientific issue. The primary data obtained were from officials of the gender mainstreaming directorate, some officials of the university management, the human resource directorate, heads of departments, senior lecturers, senior assistant registrars, and deputy registrars. They comprised both senior members teaching and non-teaching in GIMPA and UEW. The deputy rector and the secretary of GIMPA were selected because they are members of the Institution's Council and Academic Board and must have been part of those who approved the gender policy. At UEW and GIMPA, the staff of the gender centres were included because they were part of the implementers of the gender policy. The directors in the human resource directorate were included in the study population because the directors are to ensure increased gender balance in recruitment as stipulated in the GIMPA Strategic Plan (2018 to 2022) as well as develop training and development programmes in collaboration with the gender centres to build the capacities of female workers in the universities. Senior lecturers in leadership positions were engaged in the study because they were directly involved in implementing programmes and strategies to increase gender balance among faculty members in the activities and functions of the universities. The heads of departments were also included as study participants to share their experiences, challenges, and how other workers could rise to leadership positions in the universities. It is important to state that some of these heads were senior lecturers.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for this study. According to Campbell et al. (2020), the focus of purposive sampling is to help get direct access to people with in-depth knowledge, experience and information about the phenomenon under investigation. The study's participants were selected based on the study's goals and research objectives, which aimed to explain how gender policies were implemented at the two institutions. The study recruited and interviewed 30 interviewees. Of the 30 participants, 15 (10 males and 5 females) were from GIMPA whereas 15 (10 males and 5 females) were from UEW. The majority of the males reflect the dominance of males in these two institutions. The participants interviewed were those willing to participate in the study and not based on saturation.

The study made use of an interview guide to collect data from the participants. The use of interview guides allowed the researchers to probe further into issues shared by the participants since the guide contained open-ended questions with the opportunity to probe. The interview guide was categorised into demographics, achievements, challenges to the implementation of gender policies in promoting gender equality, and strategies for overcoming these challenges in UEW and GIMPA. Some of the questions asked were how is the gender policy being implemented to promote females to leadership and decision-making positions? How has funding affected the implementation processes? How has staff attitude affected the implementation of the gender policy? etc. The duration of each of the 30 informant interviews ranged from 30 to 50 minutes. Some of the interviewers were audio recorded per their permission. Through this, the researchers were able to gather first-hand information about what participants had to share on gender policy implementation. The interviews assisted the researchers in eliciting the right information from the participants to address the research objective of the study.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative data analysis is the process of gathering, organising and analysing qualitative data to determine what it means. This study employed a thematic approach to data analysis, which aided in retrieving themes from the data to help in answering the study objective. Relying on the six steps outlined by Braun et al. (2023), the researchers fully submerged themselves in the dataset and became familiar with the data allowing for a deep engagement with the data. We then examined the interview notes and transcribed the audio recordings. The interview transcripts and notes were repeatedly read for emerging themes. By categorising the themes according to their significance, the researchers went on to code the data. The researchers coded every piece of data pertinent to the study and finished this step by compiling all their codes under the themes. The themes that emerged in the gender implementation process are mentorship, sensitisation and awareness, gender centres and support, and continuous gender education. Constructing themes is an active process of formulating and identifying patterns and categories.

According to Gelling (2016), it is against the staff code of conduct at many educational institutions to collect data from human subjects for research without first obtaining ethical approval. The GIMPA Ethics Committee approved the terms of ethics. The objective was to guarantee that the methodological procedures and the substance of the questions complied with the ethics and principles of scientific research and did not hurt or physically or psychologically injure the study participants. Before beginning an interview, the researchers briefed each participant about the study's aim. The respondents were also informed of all data collection devices and activities. After which they were asked to sign a consent form. Those reluctant were voluntarily permitted to withdraw from the research. The participants were not forced to answer the interview questions. This ensured adherence to the principle of liberty of withdrawal from research. Additionally, to ensure the anonymity of interviewees, the study did not gather data on the personal identities of the participants. For instance, the ranks and titles of all the participants with assigned numbers were used instead of their names. The researchers addressed the confidentiality of the participants, which is the management of their private information. Verbatim transcription, written interpretations and reports were made available to them after the study, and their rights, wishes, and interests were considered first before reporting the data.

Results and Discussion

HEIs serve as the fulcrum and brooders for thought processes. Establishing HEIs with gender frameworks that promote gender equality norms, while prioritising the needs of women is one of the most effective means of advancing women's equality and empowerment globally. The effort to challenge unfavourable gender norms and promote a supportive educational environment for women in HEIs not only facilitates equal access to leadership positions but also promotes an equitable and stable society (Yin & Mariwah 2013, Mdlenleni et al. 2021, Leal Filho et al. 2023). Of critical interest to the study is how gender policies in HEIs are implemented to bridge the gender gap in female participation and representation in leadership and decision-making positions. The research participants shared a couple of responses that reflected the objective of the study.

According to some participants, mentorship was a key means of realising the implementation of gender policies. A senior lecturer and two assistant registrars stated:

> "The university or the gender centre arranges mentorship for female staff. In the past, the mentorship started with only female mentees, now we have males who are part of that mentoring programme. The mentoring of male staff is good but the focus on mentoring females is crucial for the advancement of gender equality in this university. …And that is what the university is doing". (Informants AME, DER, and WAN).

In the words of one assistant registrar:

> "Women are assisted by women professors in this university. Not only that, some young women are also assigned mentors from other universities. This tells you (referring to the interviewee) how the university aims to implement its gender policies. I can authoritatively indicate that mentoring is key to the development of females in the university and if we want to continue to see women in leadership positions, then we have to intensify the efforts of mentoring women". (Informant FED).

Another assistant registrar added:

> "In GIMPA, in some instances, we invite senior female lecturers from sister universities to present on gender-related topics. After which arrangements are made for them to serve as mentors to our female colleagues. I need to add that some male mentors are also assigned to female mentees for training and guidance. This is one of the important means through which our gender policy is implemented". (Informant AWA).

From the narratives of the participants, mentorship is seen as a useful means of implementing the gender policies of GIMPA and UEW. The views expressed showed that the universities use different strategies to promote female representation in leadership and decision-making positions. These include mentorship of women by professors and senior lecturers with vast and advanced experience and knowledge. Based on the accounts of the participants, mentorship is perceived as an effective method for implementing the gender policies of some higher education institutions. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that certain gender regulations had been broadened to encompass both males and females in the roles of mentors and mentees. Participants explicitly demonstrated the effectiveness of mentoring as a tool for implementing gender policies and promoting gender equality in higher education institutions. It was promoted as a method for placing women in positions of leadership. The finding on the productive nature of mentorship is consistent with the work of Dashper (2020) that mentoring has been shown to yield a positive result in increased commitment and satisfaction, and has strong benefits for both women and men.

The results of this study also align with the research conducted by Shen & Kram (2011), Weimers et al. (2013), and Mcilongo & Strydom (2021), which suggest that mentors with extensive expertise and knowledge, who are dedicated to supporting the growth of their mentees, can have a substantial impact on women who aspire to become future leaders in organisations. The findings align with Smith's (2016) assertion that mentorship plays a crucial role in the career progression and achievement of black African women in professional settings. While females were assigned mentors in some higher education institutions to promote female participation in decision-making, the work of Merga & Mason (2021) found mentor-mentee practice not universal in higher education institutions in terms of promoting the works of early career researchers.

Another theme that emerged strongly was sensitisation and awareness creation as means of implementing gender policies in higher education institutions. According to a participant:

> "As a director, and as a way of promoting the course of women, when the directorship of human resources was declared vacant, I sensitised and encouraged the incoming director of human resources to apply. Even though she was a subordinate of the then-director of human resources, she was appointed to the head of the directorate. Meanwhile, initially, she was not willing to apply. Without sensitisation, it will be difficult for the school's gender policy to be implemented. We need women in leadership positions than ever before. That is why I keep creating gender awareness". (Informant TOR).

In sensitising and creating awareness, a senior assistant registrar with the gender centre added:

> "When we started rolling out gender programmes, some women were giving excuses as to why it was difficult for them to upgrade themselves. Some spoke about a lack of finances and reproductive issues. However, when we started sensitising them about the need to further their education and publish for promotion, we saw good results. They were made to understand that without a PhD and published research articles, their promotions were likely to lag. …and this meant they could not occupy any high office of decision-making". (Informants GED and LIV).

Adding on to the issue of sensitisation, another senior assistant registrar and a faculty member had this to say:

> "We do organise gender sensitisation workshops for staff, and we do that often...there is a global gender workshop for staff and a global gender calendar...a global gender calendar is the time we have International Women's Day. These things are global events, and every local gender organisation is supposed to come out with a policy...come out with programmes to commemorate the day and each of these days, we try on our own to organise programmes that aim at sensitising the entire university community on gender issues". (Informant TIN and RET).

For other participants, one way the university implements its gender policy is through sensitisation in the advertisement of vacant positions. A faculty member had this to say:

> "During the advertisement of vacant positions, it is often added to the adverts that women are encouraged to apply. This is one way of sensitising women to apply to occupy leadership positions in the university. This is how we can realise the gender policy in action". (Informant NET).

According to a participant:

> "In the implementation process, we sensitise and encourage female academics and administrators to attend leadership training programmes and conferences. In some instances, we create awareness of the need for these programmes during gender seminars. I know of situations where women were specifically selected to attend specific programmes. The selection was done on the basis that they are women. All of these are significant for the gender policy implementation process. The effect of this approach has yielded many positive results for women in this university. In my view, it has boosted their confidence". (Informant SEN).

One can deduce that the study institutions sensitise and create awareness for women to pursue higher education, apply for vacant positions, and participate in staff development and leadership programmes. Also, the data shows that there are deliberate efforts to promote the activities of women within the universities. Implicitly, the data also shows the reluctance of some women to apply for leadership positions. This further explains why sensitisation is important in the implementation process. Gender sensitisation pertains to raising knowledge and changing people's conduct regarding issues related to gender equality (Benería et al. 2015). The finding on the role of sensitisation and awareness corresponds with the work of Upadhyay et al. (2023) that gender sensitisation plays a crucial role in transforming and promoting gender equality. Muduli et al. (2019) also found that sensitisation through education and training reduced gender stereotypes and promoted equality. It is for this reason that Alba (2019) argued that a positive gender philosophy through sensitisation can serve as a tool to eliminate gender-related problems in society by fostering a gender-neutral environment. The finding of sensitising women through adverts coincides with Ardley (2017) who found that adapting recruitment strategies, such as encouragement and sensitisation, helped leaders attract and bring in more women. Despite the encouragement, the reluctance of some women to apply for leadership positions is also consistent with Ardley's (2017) finding that women were not putting themselves forward for opportunities, thus missing out on the career advancement their male co-workers achieved.

While some participants talked about sensitisation and awareness, others also commented on the establishment and role of gender centres in promoting and implementing gender policies in higher education institutions. According to a senior lecturer who is also the head of a department, "The first step of implementing a gender policy is the creation of an office space for that purpose. This enables the officials to monitor the policy and the extent of achievement…" (Informant HAT).

The presence of a gender centre was seen as a means through which scholarships were facilitated. An official of the gender centre said:

> "As the gender centre attracts funding for research, it serves as a pivot for funding the cost of some female academics to conferences. Some even get PhD scholarships through the centre. This is why I believe that establishing the gender centre is pivotal to the implementation of the gender policy". (Informant TIN).

The role of gender centres in serving as sources of scholarship was collaborated by a senior academic faculty member. She stated that, "The gender directorate specifically competes for scholarships and selects females to attend conferences provided their abstracts are accepted. The centre also sponsors females for PhD programmes". (Informant ARM). The gender centre grants postgraduate female students scholarships to do their PhD so that when they complete successfully, they will be recruited to join the male-dominated institutions to bridge the gender gap. In the narrative of a participant:

> "The women faculty were allowed to upgrade themselves professionally by doing their terminal degrees. They are given scholarships to go abroad or study in Ghana, and the university caters for them. Others are sponsored to attend conferences to present academic papers, locally and internationally". (Informant HUR).

An administrator emphasised that she has benefitted from the support offered by the centre several times. She stated, "I think the University has sponsored me four or five times, later I sponsored myself because I wanted other females to enjoy these opportunities too". (Informant WAN). To a participant, organising retreats periodically for all staff on gender issues forms part of the activities aimed at implementing the gender policy of the university. An assistant registrar had this to say:

> "In Winneba, the gender centre organises periodic retreats and workshops for female staff, both teaching and non-teaching. Even on the 19th of June, there would be a conference where seasonal female professors have been invited to give a talk and share their experiences with participants. The experience or talk will be presented in a spate of three days". (Informant DER).

Corroborating the position of other participants, according to an academic staff:

> "We organise a series of workshops in collaboration with national and international organisations such as the Ministry of Gender, Women in Management, Children's Civil Service, African Women's Education Forum, etc. The essence of these workshops is to provide support for women in higher education to aspire to top decision-making positions. In effect, these workshops facilitate the implementation of our institution's gender policy". (Informant NET).

As a means of coordinating gender activities towards promoting the course of women in higher education, an assistant registrar had this to say:

> "Now, we have a gender mainstreaming directorate that spearheads and coordinates all the gender issues in the universities for career progression. Where there are lapses or where there are technicalities to be considered in terms of the composition of committees and representation on boards, the gender centre serves to remind management about the involvement of women. This bridges the male-female gap and hence promotes gender equality in higher institutions". (Informant WAN).

Reiterating the point by the administrator above, a management member added that:

> "The establishment of the gender centre has brought some light to the university. Not only that, it serves as an advisory centre on gender issues for the university management and the entire members of the university community. This makes the existence of the centre relevant to the means of implementing the gender policy of the school". (Informant AWA).

The creation of gender centres within the two study universities was found to be significant in the implementation of gender policies. Participants indicated that the offices enabled them to coordinate and oversee gender activities within the institutions. The centres also served as sources of advice to the management of the universities. As it turned out, for some participants, it served as a means of awarding scholarships to female staff. The findings of the creation of gender centres and their role are in line with the findings of Onsongo (2006) and Postorino (2020), as they identify the establishment of gender centres as a means of effective policy implementation. Ogunode et al. (2024) have also acknowledged the importance of instituting gender centres towards promoting gender policy implementation in tertiary

institutions. They added that the gender centres help in documenting gender violations which may aid effective future gender policy planning. Although gender centres are essential to gender policy implementation, Bagde et al. (2016) argues that the existence of gender centres does not mean institutions of higher learning aim to address gender inequality as the implementation of such policies may be hurdled by ideological and other institutional practices.

As part of the process of implementing gender policies in higher education institutions, another theme that emerged is continuing gender education through the integration of gender topics into both staff flyers and student curricula. Some participants expressed their opinions as follows:

> "…look, the university has integrated gender issues into the curricula. Students are taught various topics on gender. Not only students, academic and administrative staff are educated on how to address the questions of gender diversity and the use of gender-sensitive language during lectures". (Informants LIV and KEP).

The continuous circulation of the gender policy to staff and students and visitation to offices made the knowledge of the policy hands-on. Two participants had this to say:

> "It is part of our strategy, as instructed by the Rector, to make the policy available to all staff and students. We've spent about one month moving from faculty to faculty to share the policy along with gender-educative flyers to educate all. This strategy, in my view, has yielded results in keeping the flames of gender issues in the university community". (Informants PLA and TEE).

Despite some participants sharing that continuously educating the university community is a good step toward realising the gender policy, a participant, during the interviews, indicated that he was not aware of the gender policy. "…Unfortunately, I am not aware of the gender policy. I have not taken the pain to investigate more even though gender issues are spelled out in our strategic plan" (Informant ING). In response to addressing the unawareness of the policy by some staff, a participant recommended stating that, "Maybe there should be an intensification of awareness. The gender centre should continue to encourage staff and students to attend programmes on gender issues". (Informant RAS).

The narratives indicate that the incorporation of gender topics into curricula and the continuous education of faculty and students on gender issues help advance gender policy in Ghanaian universities. Even with ongoing training, some employees claim not to be aware of the policy. Thus, there is a need to improve the focus on gender policy awareness. The finding of continuous education of staff and students on gender issues as a means towards successful policy implementation was not poled apart from Tezera (2019), who also found that for the successful implementation of gender policies continuous education on gender issues was important in yielding results.

Our findings further corroborate the work of Upadhyay et al. (2023) that all-inclusive gender curriculum development can lead to significant changes in social structures. The study findings also validate the work of Ogunode et al. (2024), that the development of academic curricula on gender-related issues in tertiary institutions can aid in developing more professionals in a range of societal fields. The findings further support Barnard's (2017) assertion that gender equality-related policies and procedures ought to be incorporated into regular higher education operations. In effect, gender curricula promote gender knowledge for the operative management and development of institutions and society in general (Barnard 2017, Ogunode et al. 2024).

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of gender policies in HEIs to promote female participation. Using the qualitative approach of data gathering and analysis, we found that universities use various strategies, including mentorship by experienced professors and senior lecturers, which is seen as an effective method for implementing gender policies. Mentorship has been shown to yield positive results in increased commitment and satisfaction, benefiting both women and men. However, the study also found that mentor-mentee practice is not universal in higher education institutions.

Gender sensitisation is another important aspect of promoting gender equality, raising awareness and changing people's conduct regarding gender equality. The study institutions raise awareness about women seeking higher education, applying for open positions, and participating in leadership and staff development initiatives. However, some women are hesitant to seek leadership roles, highlighting the importance of sensitisation throughout the implementation phase.

The creation of gender centres within the two study universities was found to be significant in implementing gender policies. These centres coordinate and oversee gender activities within the institutions, serve as sources of advice to university management, and award scholarships to female staff. The study also highlights the need for continuous education on gender issues to advance gender policy in Ghanaian universities. The study supports the importance of incorporating gender topics into curricula and ongoing education of faculty and students on gender issues to advance gender policy in higher education institutions.

In a nutshell, we share that successfully implementing a gender policy at higher education institutions tends to address ingrained gender norms. In addition to having implications for resilient and gender-inclusive systems, which are essential to the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals set forth by the United Nations, good gender policies also have implications for the full participation of women and girls in the various subject areas of higher education.

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