

## Gender Discrimination in Transnational Academic Mobility of Lecturers: A Zimbabwean Case

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### Abstract

*Academic terrains in Zimbabwe universities, and indeed in universities everywhere, are undergoing unprecedented change as they face the many challenges brought about by new economies of knowledge, efficiency and excellence. The issues of academic excellence in particular, have seen many lecturers at the universities embark on research and further study. Based on academic mobility paths of PhD students at one of the most leading universities in Zimbabwe, this paper is concerned with identifying and examining gender inequalities in transnational academic mobility of lecturers, as well as, strategies to confront these barriers. A preliminary survey by the researcher had recognized a glaring deficiency of female lecturers in the transnational mobility paths of the lecturers. It was with this background that this study sought to unpack the nature of conditions and constraints inhibiting transnational education of the female lecturers at this institution. A combination of the social constructionist approach and the feminist theory was preferred for this study because of the need to put participants at the centre in search for their views, experiences and voices in defining reality, and at the same time examining and critiquing social relations. Purposive sampling was used to select research participants. Only lecturers currently pursuing their doctoral studies were targeted. Semi-structured interviews, complemented with closed and open-ended questionnaires were the main instruments for data collection. These were felt to provide rich data that could give solid material for building a significant analysis of participants' views. The study findings revealed that gender norms are important to understand transnational lecturers' academic choices. Mounting empowerment programmes for female lecturers in particular and for the university community in general, as well as improving basic infrastructure, was suggested as a major pathway that can make the transnational academic mobility of female lecturers comparable with that of their male colleagues.*

**Key terms:** Gender, Gender discrimination, Academic excellence, Academic mobility, Transnational Education.

### Introduction

The implications of academic excellence of a university cannot be overlooked. Lecturer academic quality is often used as an index of this academic excellence. Towards the end of the year 2011, driven by this desire for excellence, coupled

with the realization that human resources are central to all types of development and should, therefore, be increased in value and productivity in their education, all state universities in Zimbabwe made a PhD a requirement for lecturer career progression. The move has seen non-PhD holder lecturers crossing territorial borders in search for the PhDs. Prior to this, those academics that went outside Zimbabwe did so primarily from a sense of personal urgency (Kim, 2007), and mostly the need to realize professional ambition, but today the drive for this transnational academic mobility is mainly attributable to the new universities' administration imperatives. The view of increasing human resource value and productivity has been shown to hold considerable merit both from the view of justice and as a contributor to sustainable development. A preliminary survey at Midlands State University, one of Zimbabwe's leading state universities showed that the academic worlds of females were less transnational than that of their male counterparts. Out of an identified population of 91 lecturers, only one quarter was females. Against the background, the aim of this study was to contribute to the discussion of possible reasons for female lecturers' limited academic mobility. Using the empirically and contextually grounded evidence, possible improvements are proffered. Using this state university as a case, the study seeks to unpack the conditions and constraints inhibiting female lecturer cross-border academic mobility. To pursue the issue to its logical conclusion, three research questions guided the study. These were:

- What factors inhibit female lecturers' cross-border academic mobility at the institution?
- What determines the factors that limit female academic mobility?
- What strategies can be used to enhance female lecturer academic mobility?

This paper begins by this introduction which introduces the reader to the research problem. The paper then goes on to give a brief theoretical perspective that guided the study before delving on a brief literature related to the study. A note on the methodology used to gather and analyze the data follows. The findings yielded by the study then follow and are also in turn followed by a discussion of the results, before giving recommendations that emanated from the findings.

### **Theoretical framework**

Insights underpinning the study were borrowed from the social constructionist theory as well as from the feminist perspective. A combination of these two theories facilitated a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of factors inhibiting

female lecturer educational mobility. The social constructionist theory as espoused by Burr (2003) was chosen because of the need to put the lecturers at the entire centre of the study, piercing through their hearts in search of their views, experiences and voices in defining reality concerning their educational mobility. The feminist theory (Morgan, Heeks & Arun, 2004) was chosen because of its recognition of the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life and its examination and critiquing of social relations.

### **Literature Review**

The global realization of the need to pay closer attention to differentiated positions of men and women in society, be it in resource allocation, rights or opportunities, have resulted in many global gender undertakings. The target of these global undertakings is gender equality and a quick realization of them all is that gender equality does not equal gender neutrality. They all agree that the unintended consequence of a gender neutrality approach is gender discrimination. A gender neutral approach refers to a way of acting that is free of explicit reference to sex. In this approach gender is not considered relevant to the development outcome, (Kabeer, 2003). That is why Miller (2005) calls gender neutrality 'One Size Fits All', claiming and justifying that treating men and women the same avoids discrimination and distinctions arising from the impression that there are social roles, behaviours and expectations more suitable to one gender. Study after study (Miller, 2005; Kabeer, 2003) reveal that treating males and females, in a gendered society, the same way perpetuates gender gaps, hence the call for gender specific and power dynamics approaches.

Despite these global realizations and undertakings, and their subsequent implementations, gender disparities (subtle or otherwise) still persist, putting women more than men in systematically sub-coordinated positions in society (Dejene 2010; Leemann 2010). Gender thus continues to structure the life courses unequally for men and women in society in general, and in academic career paths in particular. In education in particular and of interest to this study is that literature shows that though open gender discrimination is narrowing, women are still discriminated against in transnational academic engagements (Mpinganjira, 2011; Leemann, 2010). Some studies have found the discriminating factors rather personal and individualistic (Onsongo, 2004). Personal factors are where and when the disadvantage is attributed to an individual personal characteristic like self doubt, low self esteem and self drive, lack of assertiveness, resourcefulness and creativity (Onsongo, 2004). Other studies

have found discriminating factors a result of organizational or institutional structures (Grown, Bahadur, Handbury, & Elson, 2005). Here, discrimination against women is a result of organizational structures, processes, practices and procedures which explicitly or implicitly shape and define the behaviours and positions of men and women in society. Yet other studies have found discriminating factors purely a result of cultural factors (Bello 1992 in Onsongo, 2004). Within this group are factors to do with beliefs as a major barrier. The beliefs form an integral part of the gender socialization process which all men and women are exposed to from birth. No one is born with these beliefs, but everyone is born into these beliefs. In patriarchal societies such as Zimbabwe, male superiority and female subordination are sustained with conformity of both men and women through this process of socialisation. Based on the concept of role expectancy, an individual develops and internalizes the beliefs, values, norms, expectations and aspirations of his/her society, (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008; Onsongo, 2004). Thus studies on gender discrimination vary from society to society because systems of social operations differ considerably with communities and societies. This study is the first at the chosen institution and aims to bring out contextually grounded factors that inhibit female lecturers' academic mobility.

### **Gender and gender equality as performative functions**

This study takes the definition of the word gender provided by Reeves and Baden (2000) and gender equality by Grown, Bahadur, Handbury & Elson (2005). Reeves and Baden define gender as learnt behaviours, expectations and roles of men and women. These roles, expectations and behaviours define the relationships, determine the rights, resources and decision making powers between men and women. By so doing, Chauraya (2011) asserts that gender, as a significant social cleavage, plays a performative function of granting meaning to the fact of sex and of determining one's life options and participation in various sectors of society.

Gender equality, like gender, has an operational function which it achieves through achieving three domains: capacities domain, opportunities domain and security domain (Grown *et al* 2005, Kabeer, 2001). The capacities domain encompasses basic human abilities such as health, education e.t.c. The opportunities domain involves opportunity to apply basic capabilities. The security domain involves issues that limit an individual from reaching full potential. If one of these domains is lacking, then true or substantive gender equality is not achieved (*ibid*). This view of gender equality is taken by this study not only for its multiplicity, comprehensiveness and complexes, but more so because of the dynamics of the vision of gender equality it brings about.

### **Gender equality is pathway to empowerment and mobility**

Taking an excursion into the growing board of literature on gender and gender equality, this researcher has found a great fit between attainment of gender equality and empowerment. Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as an expansion of freedom of choice, actions, authority and control over resources and decision making. Empowerment thus de-restricts own civil liberties. Included in the expansion of freedom is also increased ownership and control of own life. Like gender equality, empowerment involves processes and opportunities for expanding 'capabilities' (Kabeer, 2003). Gender equality is a necessary building block for empowerment and vice-versa. Developing a sense of self worth and the right to control one's own life involves gaining ability to generate choices and exercising bargaining power. But this can only happen in a society free of discriminations. Thus though empowerment depends on the individual, it can be facilitated by a conducive environment. It is only an empowered person who can stand for own freedoms in the political, economic, social, academic or any other fields. Guided by this, the study sought to find how empowered the female lectures were, and how empowering the institution was to its lecturers.

### **Methodology**

The study was wholly qualitative, and the chosen design was an exploratory case study. The case study was chosen because it involves an empirical enquiry into a phenomenon within its real life context (Yin, 1994:13). Throughout the study, efforts were made to hear the participants within their own contexts. The sample was purposively selected, so as to include only the desired elements critical to providing answers to the research questions. The respondents were non- PhD holder lecturers who were currently pursuing PhD studies as of April 2012. Having gained entry into the institution, information of lecturers currently pursuing their PhD studies was supplied by the office of Research and Postgraduate Studies. These lecturers were of interest to the study since they best enabled answering the research questions. In all, 91 lecturers were undertaking PhD studies. First, these 91 lecturers were classified by faculty (there were 7 faculties) and using the simple random sampling (hat system) (Leedy, 1997), 5 lecturers were selected (balancing numbers by gender and cautious of not picking from the same department) from each of the six large faculties. Three members were randomly selected from the one relatively small faculty. In the final analysis 33 lecturers (14 females and 19 males) constituted the study sample. The study recorded more widows (3) than widowers (0) and more female single parents (4) than male single parents (0). The one single

male lecturer in the sample was not a parent while all the four single lecturers were parents. The modal age range for both the male and female groups of participants was 45-50 years. The modal marital status for both groups was married. The following tables 1 and 2 give the distribution of the sample by faculty and sex and by age.

**Table 1. Distribution of the sample, by faculty and sex**

Faculty	Male	Female	Total
Law	3	0	3
Commerce	3	2	5
Education	1	4	5
Arts	3	2	5
Social Sciences	2	3	5
Hard Sciences	3	2	5
Natural Resource Management	4	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>33</b>

**Table 2. Distribution of sample, by age**

Age	Frequency	
	Male	Female
26-30	0	1
31-35	1	1
36-40	4	2
41-45	4	4
46-50	4	3
51-56	4	2
Above 56	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>

Open ended questionnaires and semi structured interviews were the instruments used to collect data. These two instruments solicited the same type of information and data from the two instruments were analyzed combined. All the 33 lecturers in the sample completed questionnaires. Since part of the sample included lecturers currently on full time studies with universities outside Zimbabwe, 6 questionnaires were emailed to the participants. Otherwise all the other questionnaires were

physically handed and collected from the participants. The questionnaire comprised 12 questions. The first five questions dealt with bio-data of the lecturers, to do with their sex, age, marital status, parent and mobility status. (If married, a sub question asked for the occupation of the spouse). The next three questions centered on how the lecturers considered their choices of universities of study. The last four questions dwelt on the subjective views, perceptions and opinions of the lecturers concerning the motivating or limiting issues of their mobility status. The number of questions on the questionnaire was limited in order to encourage the respondents to complete the questionnaire. A sub sample was selected for interview purposes. This was after completed questionnaires had been returned. From the returned questionnaires, lecturers were put into two groups depending on their mobility status. The two groups were mobile lecturers (21, of which 15 were males and 6 were females) and lecturers not interested in being mobile (12, of which 4 were males and 8 were females). Of the 6 mobile female lecturers, 2 were married, 2 were widowed and the other two were single. From these two groups (mobile and not interested in being mobile), a sub sample of 9 lecturers (4 males and 5 females) was interviewed. Semi structured interviews were held with the sub sample. Telephone interviews were held with 2 lecturers currently full time students in universities outside Zimbabwe. Otherwise all other interviews were face to face and feedback was immediate. All interviews were audio-taped. Allowing for probing was the primary advantage of this instrument as the researcher could pursue leads for elaboration of points and clarified questions that appeared misunderstood. Incidental comments from the lecturers, reluctances, body language and tone of voice gave indicators and unspoken information which was useful for this study.

Data was analyzed according to Strauss and Corbin (1998)'s stages of qualitative data analysis. In this analysis, data was exposed to a level of scrutiny that exposed both its explicit and implicit gender dimensions. First the data was coded, and then key categories were generated from the coded data. These key categories formed broad themes that were consistent with the identified research questions. From these themes, conclusions were drawn.

### **Research Findings**

In reporting the findings, consistent with Leedy (1997:158)'s encouragement on qualitative data reporting, vivid descriptions are provided to an extent that the interviewees "are palpably felt" by the reader. To achieve this, direct quotations that provide the voice of the researcher are given.

Several factors that prevent women from being as academic mobile as their male counterparts were brought to the fore. In classifying these factors, the study was

guided by a feminist classification of inhibiting factors in the literature study. By comparison, 12/33 (36.4%) of the lecturers took their studies with the parent institution. Of these, 8/12 (66,7%) were female. The remaining 21 (63.6%) took their PhD studies with universities outside Zimbabwe (all except one with South African universities). Of the 21 (63.6%), only 6 (28.6%) were female. The results, thus, showed that the academic world of the female lecturers was less cross-border than that of their male colleagues.

### **What factors inhibited female lecturers' academic mobility**

#### *Institutional constraints*

Nothing explicit from the institution could be picked as a woman-specific barrier to academic mobility. The demand for a PhD was made on both male and female lecturers in the same way. The choice of which university to pursue studies with was left to the individual lecturer and all terms and conditions equally applied. Finances were not cited as a barrier by both male and female lecturers. Male and female lecturers enjoyed same scholarship and funding from the parent institution. Thus one can safely conclude that the institution was not gender-specific in its PhD approach towards its lecturers. Rather, the institution was gender neutral in approach because there were no obvious distinctions between male and female lecturers. The approach seemed to assume that male and female lecturers had no difference as regards PhD acquirement, hence were affected by the policy move in the same way. But do they have same needs and interests? Why pretend that there is no difference between male and female lecturers when a difference is plainly there? These are some of the questions to be answered in the discussion section of the study.

#### *Individual factors*

Though presented here as distinct stand alone factors, in the analysis of findings, the individual factors were found to be inextricably intertwined with cultural factors. At a personal level, male and female lecturers offered contrasting personal attributes. The majority of the male lecturers, whether mobile or not, disposed a high sense of self- initiativeness, self worth, self satisfaction and confidence in their choices and in themselves as persons. Particularly those men who were mobile, they shared with the researcher the thorniness of some situations they faced outside the home country, but they took the challenges and obstacles as opportunities to increase their condition. *Madam, I went through tough times out there. I never thought of quitting. Why quit? The times brought out the best in me,* (interview mobile lecturer 4 on 4/04/12). Thus, these men stood firm in the battle for their studies outside home. *I have already registered with UKZN South Africa. I am rearing to go* (interview



male mobile lecturer 1). This is what is called 'assertiveness' (Kabeer, 2003). By huge contrast, the majority of the female lecturers, both the mobile and the not mobile, lacked the same self-drive. Self doubt and fear of the unknown characterized women feelings towards themselves. Even with the three married women who were full time students in South Africa, obstacles remained obstacles. None of them accepted the responsibility to do something to improve things as the men readily did. This could be a result of upbringing and socialization in a patriarchal society, where males are brought up to be die-harder, tough-time endurers and problem solvers, and females their direct opposites. The vast majority (89%) of the immobile female lecturers said they just did not believe in their own ability to be academic mobile no matter the duration of stay. Probed for any substantiating pointers, some of these women mostly said that it was just a feeling they held. The "I can't go away" though not spoken by 13% of the non mobile women, and openly spoken by 87% of the lot, was found to support the old saying that 'some people would rather stay miserable, than risk being happy'. Marriage did not affect this self-doubt because whether married, single, divorced or widowed, the feeling was generally the same. It would appear that female lecturers had a poor self image, and not as confident and determined as their male counterparts, a situation greatly attributed to their socialization.

### *Cultural factors*

Asked about any two considerations they made when making their study choices, 92% of the women cited caring for their children, and 4% cited caring for their parents. On the male side, 7% cited children and none cited parents or any other relative. When probed on the issue of caring, one of the males said: *Children? Why would I have worried? My wife is available. I thought I told you earlier on that I am married* (interview mobile male lecturer on 6 April 2012). This could be the reason why all the 15 male mobile lecturers were married. Culture could be critically linked to this, since culturally, in most marriages, it is the wife who provides the nurturing duties. The spouses of these fifteen lecturers were part-time workers (2), full time house wives (6), self employed (2) and the rest full time workers (4).

By contrast, the majority of the women were found to give priority to the needs and interests of the family members more than their male counterparts. This could be drawn from African ways of living which accord women's first priority to the family. Even the husbands fall under the care of women. Thus while the male lecturers participated in the care economy, they were found far less involved than their female counterparts. One single non-mobile female lecturer said:

*I would have gone to South Africa last year October. I got a place with the University of Pretoria on full time basis. I stay with my mother who is capable of playing role of family care-taker. But my challenge has been issues of water*

*and electricity and pre-school. No maid can cope with such challenges. I drive to fetch water from here and firewood from the main market almost every other day. If I go who will do this- drive and maintain the car, the crèche? Studying with the parent institution allows me to combine these roles with studies. (interview non-mobile female lecturer 1 on 10 April 2012).*

Sifting through the responses, the advantage that male lecturers enjoyed that the female lecturers seemed not to enjoy was reliance on unpaid family labour. The study found that the female lecturers, were, themselves the unpaid labour. In the above extract, it is clear that the female lecture was torn between family care and studies with University of Pretoria. The woman avoided mobility in order to keep the family well supplied with practical needs. Thus the choice and/or balance between family upkeep and studies affected female lecturer mobility negatively and made their mobility chances less comparable with that of their male counterparts.

Asked specifically on marital barriers, all married women, even the only married out of the three currently full time students, suffered restraining barriers from her spouse. The following interview extracts captured some of their feelings concerning marriage. *I really wanted to study in South Africa. A friend had facilitated my application at JU but my husband refused that I go. (interview female non mobile lecturer 2 on 10 April 2012).*

*Ah!... (Scenically laughs), yes I wanted to study outside Zimbabwe like others are doing. Universities in South Africa are better developed. Those who go spend 3-4 yrs on their studies. With institutions inside the country, it's more that 5 years, at least for those students that I know. But I didn't even apply. I knew my husband was never going to allow me, let alone entertain the subject. Why would I do something that I know threatens my marriage? (interview female lecturer 4 on 11 April 2012).* This female lecture when probed further disclosed that her husband imposes restrictions on her movements as an element of control. From a scrutiny of this female lecturer's response, it is clear that the woman wanted to present herself as a good marriage material by not bringing up anything that could threaten her marriage. This is submissiveness and meekness at its best. This could also be a result of Christian principles (Christianity is the dominant religion in Zimbabwe) taken from the Bible where the duty of wives is total and unquestioning submission to their husbands. Women, thus, participated in their own subordination as concerned academic mobility choices.

Indeed the feeling from most married female lectures was that marriage is a barring factor to academic mobility. Responses from the married male lecturers showed that this group was substantially free of any marital restrictions as concerned their

academic mobility. In fact 71% of the male lecturers openly admitted that their wives were very supportive of their academic mobility and did not bother them with distractions from home. Thus marriage was found to diminish the married female lecturers' opportunities and denied them their academic mobility rights. Marriage was found to be an institution that the majority of female lecturers endured but not enjoyed when it came to academic mobility. Results were thus, illustrative of the academic cost of marriage for women. This could also be the reason why of the six mobile female lecturers, only two were married.

In the final analysis, the study found that men and women differed on factors affecting their choices and that women's choices were more constrained than men's. Though the constraining factors operated on both male and female lecturers, the degree to which they affected women was more intense. It was also clear that each of these issues (marriage, child-care, general care economy, limited infrastructure, self doubt, etc.) led to a cumulative disadvantage for female lecturers' academic mobility, resulting in restricted female lecturers' desire to become mobile.

On perceptions of the utility of their choices, male lecturers' (mobile or non-mobile) expressed that they found their choices the best they made. No male lecturer regretted the choice he made. However, a closer scrutiny of the responses from the male mobile lecturers revealed a clear divide on motivational or push factors by age. The 45 years and below, when probed further, made it apparent that one of the reasons that influenced their choice of a university outside Zimbabwe was hope that job opportunities may come up on the way and if so, they would take it up. None of the above 50 years made any reference to a likelihood of a job coming up, or intention to take it up. It would then seem that the above fifties were no longer interested in a job outside the country. This could be attributed to cultural beliefs that as men grow older they have to concentrate their talent on grooming the younger generation, thus the need and desire to be as close home as possible. Marital status of the male lot did not have an influence on the utility of their choices at all. The majority of the mobile male lecturers (13/15) preferred studies by block/visiting rather full time. The reason was found not to be influenced by marital status or age but by other logistic financial issues. Block/visiting mode of study allowed them the opportunity to be on the job, so they would still earn their full salaries and other financial benefits. Full time basis would not have them paid their monthly salaries until completion of studies.

On same issue of utility of choices made, a clear contrast of male lecturers' with female lecturers' responses existed. Mobile or not mobile, female lecturer's choices were characterized by dissatisfactions. The majority of the non-mobile (5/8) lot feared that the many challenges associated with home schooling would likely translate into work overload which might affect their completion rates.

*You see' you can't go around telling everyone that you are studying. They still visit you without invitation; expect you to entertain them, cook for them and the like, yet that's the time you want to study. Illnesses, deaths, church meetings, and social gatherings- you name it. They expect me there. When surely will I study? I tell you, this is the fourth month I am working on my concept paper but still not done with it. Very soon I will invite the wrath of the supervisor- what attitude is he having of me. Lazy (interview non mobile female lecturer 5 on 13 April 2012).*

*I wish I had taken my studies with my university. Things at home are not working. My children are under-performing ever since I came here in 2009. There is no one taking their homework seriously. (Interjection from researcher) Ah Husband! Do you think these men take children homework as seriously as we do? My maid has not even five O levels. I tell you I regret my choice. Money my dear cannot substitute mother care. If I ask my relatives and neighbor to help, they blame me for valuing school more than children (interview mobile female lecturer 1 on 5 April 2012).*

Thus mobility status did not have an effect on utility of choice. Women were generally not happy with their choices, whether mobile or not mobile. Marital status and age however showed some effect. Majority of the non-mobile women were contended with their choices because they said, that is what kept their marriages and families happy. However, though contended with the decisions they took, the majority of these felt unhappy about their choices. Marriage and family care seemed to have influenced the choices made by the majority of non-mobile, much against their wishes. The 25 years to 40 years mobile females, indicated that much as they wanted to be full time, they failed to do so because the ages of their children were limiting. Hence, even contended with their choice, they felt that it was not the best they could have done given their own way.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### ***What determines the factors that limited female academic mobility?***

The study found some lecturers studying outside Zimbabwe (62%), and others studying with the parent institution (38%). This, as literature points out was found positive for the institution. Literature indicates benefits of staying in and out of the institution. As a form of Human Resource Development, Mpinganjira, (2011) finds that a university endowed with diverse human capital experiences rapid academic development. The 62% lecturers would bring back diverse experiences. Also, the local institution was found to have an advantage of allowing female and male lecturers to combine both their studies and their responsibilities outside university, especially those with young children.

However, the gender imbalance in the numbers of men and women in relation to academic mobility may have repercussions on growth and sustainable development of the institution. Women, just like men play a critical portion of the human resource base, so their experiences and diversity is critical too. It has been shown by the findings that female lecturers have less autonomy and decision making on issues concerning their academic mobility. Reasons for this were found to be individually and culturally based. At an individual level, female lecturers were found to sabotage their academic mobility with self-doubt and fear of the unknown. However, growing body of literature has shown that the doubt and fear are a direct derivative of self low esteem and when one doubts oneself, one lets fear stand in one's way ( Kabeer 2003, Onsongo, 2004). Gender literature reports that behind the self doubt lie perceptions of what a "real" woman should be. Thus the studies point to the pervasive and engrained gendered culture into which men and women are born. So it is not self doubt which is the dreadful saboteur that resided within these female lecturers, but, it is the gendered culture that led to their transnational abandonment.

At a cultural level, countless barriers were implied, but marriage, children, relatives and other social networks were openly said out. These findings from the study agree with the general picture painted in the literature about men and women and marriage and care economy. Literature reports that we live in a society which has made mothers the key figures in a child's upbringing. To take up a career or an academic endeavor and be successful, involves enormous amount of organization and planning in which men very rarely and unusually have much part to play, (Onsongo, 2004). Researches on societies and institutions, link most of these barriers to gender socialization (Kabeer 2003, Haralambos and Holborn 2008, World Bank, 2001a). Global strategies aimed at removing most of the barriers that limit the participation of women in developmental initiatives are outlined in most of the World Plan of Actions on gender equality. One of these strategies that this study finds particularly applying to it is included in the Nairobi- Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (United Nations, 1985). This strategy targets gender education of the population with which women work. The entire population with which women work in this study refers to the whole university community. The change is achieved through gender conscientisation of the whole community. The conscientisation or empowerment will shape new opinions and attitudes through countering of cultural resistance. The affected women and indeed the whole community will thus be transformed by the renewal of their attitudes and opinions. (Kabeer 2001; World Bank 2001b). Empowerment is the greatest tool that can eliminate self doubt from the collective conscience of the female lectures and give them confidence in their own capacity to decide their academic destiny, through widening their opinions and attitudes. The female lecturers in the study made do with power relations that subordinated their interests and

aspirations because of lack of empowerment, and it is this same lack of empowerment that made them conform and participate in their own subordination.

The study found the institutional approach to the issue of a PhD as a foundational qualification, gender neutral. This in itself perpetuates pervasive gender discrimination. Haralambos and Holborn (2008) and World Bank (2001b) show that whatever program, procedure, process or practice represented as gender neutral is likely to obscure the power relations of gender. In the same vein, Oakley (2001:1) in Haralambos and Holborn (2008) reiterates that gender neutrality is only "fiction" because in gender neutrality, gender biases and discriminations exist, often subtle and systemic. Kabeer (2001, 2003) and Jons, (2011) are very explicit that neutrality does not guarantee women and men same opportunities. Even the World Bank (2001a) scoffs at development approaches that act as if gender does not matter because growing literature shows that the past historical gender inequalities have come to shape the present realities. Gender, then, cannot be taken off the table. Neutrality in approach is different from equality in approach (Kabeer, 2003). Thus in neutrality, the institution was systematically excluding the female lecturers because neutrality cannot remove gender apartheid. What might have led to the gender neutral approach is lack of gender knowledge on the part of the decision and policy makers at the institution. Kabeer (2003) points out that lack of gender knowledge breeds neutral approaches.

The study found that availability of child care, limited infrastructures, especially piped water and electricity, posed barriers. Research has shown that improvements in infrastructure such as water, electricity and pre schools increase mobility agency of women (Mathipa & Tsoka, 2005). Making these available may remove some of the key barriers to women mobility and participation.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings and discussion, promising initiatives to overcome gendered barriers to female lecturer academic mobility were suggested. The following recommendations are made:

- The institution is encouraged to mount intensive empowerment programs for female lecturers in particular, and for the whole university community. Although empowerment depends on the individual, it can be facilitated through capacity building. Assertiveness and confidence are not skills one is born with, but are a developed capacity. The institution is therefore, urged to build capacity through mounting empowerment programs. The

recommendation 'for female lecturers in particular' is made out of the realization that they are the disadvantaged group. In any society and situation, it is those most affected who must bring about change. Those who benefit from a system that marginalizes others may not feel the need. Onsongo (2004:8), however, finds that "providing women with more education without changing the gender and power structures that perpetuate gender inequalities will not facilitate opportunities equal to those of their male counterparts." Hence the call by this study for empowerment of the whole university community. Involving the whole community is meant to make the self transformation process from empowerment sustainable (Kabeer, 2001; World Bank 2001a, Leemann, 2010). The simultaneous social participation of women and the entire university community can change not only perspectives, but lives also.

- In view of the fact that some lecturers revealed the difficulties of leaving their families in care taker hands in the absence of basic infrastructure, the study recommends making basics like water, electricity, pre schools e.t.c. readily available. It is a tall order in view of the crippling country's economy, but such limitations create conditions for social change difficult and constrain women more than men.
- The study is a case of only one institution. The case study design employed makes it impossible to make assertions about the female lecturer academic mobility in other Zimbabwe universities in general. A replication of the study in other universities in Zimbabwe to get a comparison of patterns, motivations and experiences is therefore necessary.

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