

Challenging gender inequality in higher education: Attitudes and perceptions of teaching staff and administrators at the University of Buea, Cameroon

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Introduction

It has been noted that “the provision of a safe and inclusive environment is the responsibility of the university in order to allow all to achieve their potential” (FAWE, 1998: 6). This paper inquires into the challenges of building a gender-responsive culture in higher education institutions, using the University of Buea (UB) as a case study.

The University of Buea

UB is one of six state universities in Cameroon and the only one that uses English as the principal medium of teaching and learning. It is located in the South West Province, one of two provinces with an Anglo-Saxon culture. UB is situated in Molyko quarter of Buea town, the provincial headquarters of the province. In 1993, UB was transformed from a “University Centre of Translators and Interpreters” into a fully-fledged university. In 2002, when our research was performed, UB had five faculties offering approximately 58 degree programmes in arts, education, health sciences, sciences, social and management sciences and the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI). Since 2002, several new programmes have been created, including a degree programme in medicine, which became operational in the 2006/7 academic year. Though the population of teaching staff has stagnated over the years, this is not the case for the student population, which has increased by about 63%, from 6 519 to 10 203 students.

It is worth noting that UB registered a higher female than male population – 5 202 females and 5 001 males. The classic disparity by gender in the

population of teaching staff in tertiary educational institutions, with women as a minority, is to be observed in UB.

Table 1: Distribution of the University of Buea teaching staff by gender, rank and year (2002 and 2007)

Rank of teachers	2002				Total		2007				Total	
	Male		Female				Male		Female			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Professor	6	2.6	2	0.9	8	3.5	12	5.0	1	0.4	13	5.4
Assistant Professor	11	4.9	2	0.9	13	5.8	9	3.7	4	1.7	13	5.4
Lecturer	44	19.5	8	3.5	52	23	91	37.6	17	7.0	108	44.6
Assistant Lecturer	107	47.3	40	17.7	147	65	56	23.1	29	12	85	35.1
Instructor	5	2.2	1	0.4	6	2.6	17	7.0	6	2.5	23	9.5
Total	173	76.6	53	23.4	226	100	185	76.4	57	23.6	242	100

Analysis of the academic rank of teachers revealed that over the years both male and female teachers have improved their academic rank, even though men dominate at all ranks, particularly that of professor (Table 1). With regard to highest educational qualification, 43,2% were holders of the doctor of philosophy (PhD) degree, 51,7% had a master’s degree and 5% had the *doctorat de troisième cycle* (equivalent to a master of philosophy). While in 2002, at the time of the study, the majority of the teaching staff did not have a terminal degree, this percentage is currently on the decline due to staff development and a higher education policy to give employment priority to holders of PhDs.¹

UB remains unique among universities in Cameroon as it is the only one to offer (and train students in) the discipline of Women and Gender Studies. So what has ensued from this uniqueness?

This study expands on the work of Endeley and Ardener (2004) and Endeley (2004), and makes a first attempt at examining if the creation of a Department of Women and Gender Studies, having had a female vice-chancellor, and government endorsement of gender equality and the promotion of women’s advancement in society, is making any difference in the gendered culture at UB. The creation of institutions to promote feminist/gender/women’s scholarship does not suffice, of course, to create a gender-

responsive culture, so this paper examines other elements needed to build such a culture.

A more truly gender-responsive culture would be characterised by gender equity in access, redressing structural barriers that influence the access and participation of both sexes, and women's active role in decision-making in the management and administration of higher education (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999:10). We must also find strategies to consolidate gains achieved by institutions in the promotion of gender-responsive practices on campus.

That said, we have chosen not to document the existence of gender policies and practices at UB, but to interrogate the disposition and attitudes of teaching and administrative staff to the concept of feminism, indicators that denote gender-responsive practices. We also attempt a classification of UB gender practices within a conceptual framework of gender culture. Our approach is based on the presumption that feminism is a discourse, therefore we have to understand what sense teachers and senior administrators make of the concept and other feminist/gender actions and practices. Do they have a positive disposition and attitude to engendering knowledge and life on campus? Are they willing to assume responsibility for, support and participate in actions that build a gender-responsive culture?

Specifically, we examined the attitudes and perceptions of the teaching staff, who often double as administrators, in relation to practices of a gender-inclusive culture. We probed lecturers' comprehension and receptivity to key feminist concepts in order to describe their attitudes and disposition to variables that denote and promote a gender-inclusive culture. The paper also analyses current actions by UB, including the Department of Women and Gender Studies, towards building a gender-responsive campus.²

The importance of this study arises from the need to assess and address gender issues on campus. These include sexual harassment, violence against girls and female teachers, unhealthy relationships between teachers and students, inequality in the number of women vis-à-vis men in senior management positions and higher academic ranks. We chart a way for the Department of Women and Gender Studies on the UB campus to step up feminist activism (and gender consciousness-raising). It is hoped that the paper will throw more light on how the UB administration has addressed women's and gender concerns, issues and the engendering of knowledge.

Literature review and conceptual framework

The situation of women vis-à-vis men, particularly in universities in Africa, is inseparable from women's position in society at large. Kyomuhendo (2001: 1) notes that women's role and progress in the university can only be understood through an analysis of the sociology that situates the university in the society and defines its existence, goals and values. If universities, by virtue of the great role they play in the production of knowledge and research, still to a large extent perpetuate gender bias, then there is a need to examine the systems, structures, norms and values of society that govern and define the universities and their ways of operation, which are significantly patriarchal.

Ironically, Unesco (1998a: 2) argues that today, although there are no formal obstacles preventing women from reaching high positions in colleges and universities, men still dominate at all levels of influence. The document gives the example of Sweden, regarded as one of the most advanced countries in respect of gender equality; yet in 1994, 93% of the professors in Swedish colleges and universities were men. This, despite the fact that women have been admitted to higher education in Sweden for 120 years, and more than 60% of Swedish university students are women.

Stating the importance of engendering education, Jackson (1997: 466) notes that an educational theory which fails to take into account feminist critiques and gender analysis is doing a disservice to both men and women by not considering the ways in which existing pedagogies can be enriched. Jackson (1997: 458) argues for the possibility of inculcating a feminist pedagogy. She makes reference to the views of Welch (1994), Weiner (1994), and Weiler (1991), who posit that feminist pedagogy is based on three principles: to strive for egalitarian relationships in the classroom; to try to make all students feel valued as individuals; and to use the experience of students as a learning resource in order to bring about social transformation.

Does UB promote these values?

Our research is based on a conceptual framework developed by the authors that brings together practical and development principles. The following nine indicators were identified as important indicators of the existence of a gender-inclusive culture:³

- Support for interventions or actions that will reduce female students' and women's overall labour; for example, the provision of crèches (day nurseries) on campus, and a subsidised nursery school to encourage the investment of more time in academics;

- The identification of appropriate targets, indicators, time frames, and monitoring and evaluation strategies sensitive enough to promote the advancement of women in higher education;
- Support for the use of gender-sensitive language in all oral and written communication, for example he/she; chairperson instead of chairman etc;
- Advocacy for pedagogic training in order to mainstream gender in all the courses in the existing faculties and schools in higher education;
- Encouragement of punishment for persons guilty of sexual harassment;⁴
- Encouragement of research on the level of sexual harassment on campus, its impact on both men and women, and how it can be addressed and redressed.
- Support for a gendered perspective to be considered in research proposals; that is, research should focus on how both women and men are affected by societal change, technological development or other phenomena under study;
- Organisation of seminars/workshops to encourage academics (women and men) to share household management and childrearing, in order to give women enough time to pursue academic careers;
- Advocating that the state provide grants and other resources to support men and women who opt to pursue academic careers. This is because many persons in the domain of higher education do not attain their academic goals due to financial and other material constraints.

These nine indicators were then grouped into the following larger principles: empowerment, co-operation, equity, sustainability and security:⁵

- **Empowerment:** having control or gaining further control over oneself; having a say and being listened to; and being able to influence social choices and decisions within one's environment;
- **Co-operation:** the ability of women to gain the support of men in their day-to-day activities;
- **Equity:** "fairness", "justice" and comparable access to all spheres of the higher education system for men and women;
- **Sustainability:** means that women and men in the realm of higher education should, at present and in the future, be able to work together peacefully, with respect given to everybody's rights;
- **Security:** establishing rules and regulations governing the rights of women and men, especially in relation to sexual harassment.

Table 2: Conceptual framework on gender-inclusive culture: Principles and indicators

Principle for fostering a gender-inclusive culture	Gender-inclusive indicators
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for interventions that reduce female students' and women's labour in order that more time can be invested in academic work. • Support for a gender perspective being considered in research proposals. • Support for appropriate targets, indicators, time frames and monitoring and evaluation strategies that are sensitive to promoting the advancement of women.
Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for women and men sharing household management and childrearing in order that women have enough time to pursue academic careers.
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the use of gender-sensitive language in all oral and written communication, for example he/she; chairperson instead of chairman etc.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for pedagogic training in order to mainstream gender in all the courses in the existing faculties and schools in higher education. • Advocacy for the state to provide grants and other resources to support men and women who opt to pursue academic careers.
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging the punishment of persons guilty of sexual harassment. • Encouraging research on the level of sexual harassment on campus, its impact on both men and women and how it can be redressed.

An analysis of the actions used by UB to foster a gender-inclusive culture vis-à-vis this conceptual framework and of teachers' attitudes towards a gender-inclusive culture will be given in greater detail below.

Methodology

Primary data via a questionnaire was gathered from 185 teachers, from a target population of 226 teachers, in 2002. Teachers from the Department of Women and Gender Studies were interviewed. Most of the UB teaching staff (26,5%) had been teaching at the University of Buea for eight years or more. About twenty-four per cent (23,9%) had been teaching for six to seven years, 17,1% for four to five years, 24,8% for two to three years and 7,7% for less than one year. The data indicate that a majority (at least 50,4%) of the teachers were no strangers to the UB environment.

Secondary data was gathered from university records, and other literature was reviewed on related themes of the study. This being a descriptive research survey, both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were employed. The research instruments examined lecturers' understandings of the concept of feminism; their receptivity to feminism; the place of feminism in the Cameroon context; feminism as a subject in academia; alternatives to the concept of feminism; and lecturers' disposition to the stance, measures and actions of feminism that constitute and foster a gender-inclusive culture.

Brief overview of UB's effort to integrate and address gender concerns in management and campus

What measures have been put in place to close the gender gap at UB?

A distinctive aspect that set the University of Buea apart from other universities in Cameroon for many years is that it had a female vice-chancellor, from its inception in 1993 until 2005, in the person of Dr Dorothy Limunga Njeuma. Her leadership style has been described as "being essentially interactive, but mixed with some traits of command-and-control and transformative feminist models."⁶ These authors have attributed UB's progress in the promotion of gender equality, equity and gender-friendly actions to the positive disposition she had on the subject as a gender-sensitive person. UB has since become a leader in gender parity in student enrolment and performance, and UB has more women in senior level management than other universities in Cameroon and many other African countries (*UB Standard*, 2002: 3).

Understanding the benefits to be derived through collective empowerment and sisterhood, Dr Njeuma encouraged the formation of an organisation called the Forum for the Professionalisation of the Woman (FOPROW-UB) (*The BUN* 2001: 30). It was hoped that this association would encourage the professionalisation of female staff and students alike, and help them to participate in building a comfortable work and learning environment by paying particular attention to women's practical and strategic needs. Unfortunately, despite its great ambition, FOPROW-UB's effective existence was short-lived. When in 2005 Dr Njeuma moved on to become the vice-chancellor of Cameroon's first and most populous state university, differences of class, rank, aspirations, needs and vision among the women in the association overwhelmed the movement for sisterhood. Yet, despite the demise of FOPROW-UB, a tradition of collective empowerment remains central in how women progress in the university circles.

In addition, the combination of a gender-aware leadership and a Department of Women and Gender Studies (WGS) is definitely a plus for UB. These factors not only create an enabling environment but have made available people with knowledge and skills in gender who are able to assist management and the larger public in mainstreaming gender. The UB culture continues to informally promote gender equality, building from the foundation that was laid from 1993. Endeley, Ardener, Goodridge, and Lyonga (2004: 71-72) affirm that the presence of the Department of Women and Gender Studies has influenced the promotion of gender awareness in academics. In the basic day-to-day management of the university, gender concerns everyone. UB never loses sight of an opportunity during gatherings such as matriculation, convocation, Women's Day or African University Day to raise issues of gender inequality and women's oppression and subordination; women are encouraged to be assertive, to succeed and refrain from perpetuating the stereotyping of women as sex objects.

Recently, the university senate revisited the issue of sexual harassment on campus and resolved to set up a committee to study the situation and to report to the vice-chancellor with recommendations. It is worth noting, however, that the current vice-chancellor is male – Professor Vincent Titanji. The committee is headed by a female gender-sensitive professor and other staff who are lawyers, feminist activists, educationalists and guidance counsellors. Without any doubt, UB is ahead of other universities in Cameroon in safeguarding practices towards building a gender-inclusive culture in the university campus and management, but do these measures suffice? UB has no gender policy or plan of action, which Endeley and Ardener (2004) note is a major weakness in UB's approach to gender mainstreaming.

The meaning teachers give to the concept of feminism

In this section, we shall focus on the meaning teachers give to the concept of feminism. Asked what they understand by "feminism", the largest proportion, almost a third of the teachers (31,6%) perceived feminism as "recognition of women's rights, equal to those of men". More than a quarter (29,1%) associated the concept with "women-related issues and opinions"; 18,8% considered feminism to be "action against gender inequality and oppression of women"; 11,1% saw it as "movement towards women's emancipation and empowerment"; 4,3% considered it to be "a concept relating to gender consciousness"; 3,4% believed it means having "strong feelings of belonging to the weaker sex", and 1,7% reported that it is "a recognition that women occupy a subordinate position."

Most of the reported responses are valid perspectives on feminism and do not contradict current feminist stances/arguments. Therefore, we can logically conclude that teachers have a fair understanding of the meaning of the concept of feminism, even if the depth and scope of understanding remains shallow. For example, associating feminism with “strong feelings of belonging to the weaker sex” as reported by 3,4% of the respondents, is restrictive. The phrase has a patriarchal undertone and seemingly connotes feminism as private and not public politics; the affair of the weaker sex, habitually associated with the female sex. The next section delves into greater depth and scope on teachers’ comprehension of the concept, by asking, are teachers receptive to the concept of feminism?

Receptivity to feminism and feminist practices and actions

By querying receptivity to feminism, we attempt to probe deeper into teachers’ opinions and attitudes about the place of feminism in the Cameroon context and academia, and their willingness to support measures and participate in actions against gender discrimination and inequality, and to foster a gender-friendly culture on campus.

The place of feminism in the Cameroon context

Our attempt to determine whether feminism has a place in Cameroon society was very encouraging. The majority (about 80%) of the teachers agreed with the statement that feminism should be promoted in Cameroon for these reasons: women should have the chance to exercise their talents and reduce poverty; gender inequality and discrimination exists in Cameroon; fostering gender equality in development is a concern for women and men; women have excelled in all domains of life; women have greatly contributed to development; and women constitute more than 50% of the workforce. More explicitly, some teachers reported that “feminism would bring women’s problems to the limelight” and “feminism is part of African thought and practice”. These responses reveal a positive disposition, which if exploited is likely to ease the incorporation of gender-aware policy and enhance UB’s effort in mainstreaming gender in the management and administration of the university. It is also clear that teachers do recognise women as well as men as development actors who are constrained in different and often unequal ways as participants in and beneficiaries of development.

In contrast, one fifth of the teachers (20%) said feminism has no place in Cameroon. These respondents hold the following opinions: “feminism gives

the wrong impression that women have been discriminated against” (6%); “feminism has no place in the African context” (3,4%); “it has created a lot of conflict, especially in marital relations” (3,4%); “it does not give room for appropriate competition between the sexes” (3,4%); “it is a reaction against established structures, thus importing Western values” (1,7%); “it is often misunderstood by women as liberty to misbehave” (1,7%); and “women have always been naturally protected by men” (0,9%).

These responses illustrate that some teachers are in complete denial of the existence of gender inequality and unequal power relations by gender, class and ethnicity. This is not atypical but reflective of societal opinions about women’s quest for gender equality, empowerment and advancement in Cameroon and other societies, especially in Africa and other developing countries. Yet gender inequality is recognised and publicly challenged by the government of Cameroon, civil society, professional groups and the population at large. The fact that 20% of the teaching core continued to display this sort of negative attitude towards feminism is worrisome because of the roles these teachers are expected to play in human resource development. How then are men and women portrayed in the subjects taught by this group of teachers?

Feminism as an academic subject

Did UB teachers consider feminism to be important as a programme in higher education? Most of the teachers (78,8%) supported the idea, while 21,2% were against it. The former said feminism would strengthen academic institutions to address gender issues (13,6%); feminism would help women to know their rights (13,6%); feminist ideas would act as a booster for theories to be put into practice (12%); and a small number of teachers (10,3%) believe that since it is a political ideology, there is a need to study and analyse its content. These responses indicate that despite the absence of a clearly spelt-out policy on gender at the University of Buea, a good number of the teachers were aware of the contribution and benefits which feminism could bring to knowledge development and to portraying the realities of women’s and men’s lives in higher education and society at large.

The discussions so far echo the views of Jackson (1997: 466) who is of the opinion that an educational theory that fails to take feminist critiques and gender analyses into account is doing a disservice to both women and men by failing to consider ways in which existing pedagogies can be enriched.

The author notes that even though universities are in the realms of research and knowledge production, they are still significantly influenced by the patriarchal systems, structures, norms and values of society.

Conversely, 13,6% of the teachers were against the inclusion and teaching of feminism in academia. Some said “feminism does not deserve much attention” (8,5%); others think teaching feminism is a means by which “women want to override and control men” (3,4 %.); while still others believe that feminism in academia would disrupt its culture. These are commonly mentioned fears and reasons why men and patriarchy are resistant to feminist activism. In addition to biological determinism, Mukhopadhyay (1995, in IDS 1996: 9) notes that the “sanctity of culture” is often invoked as an excuse for resisting any attempt to rethink and challenge gender inequalities.

Teachers’ willingness to support networks for women on campus

Receptivity to feminism demands willingness to support feminist activism, as well as networks. Are UB teachers willing to do so? When asked if respondents would participate in the development of strong support networks for women on campus (an aspect of feminism), the majority (about 63%) responded in the affirmative: they would participate, especially as support networks are perceived by respondents as forums for exchanging knowledge, healthy for university campus life, and a means of helping women become more active, especially in their professional careers. Others say such support networks are justifiable because women are an integral category of life on campus.

In opposition, a sizeable proportion, more than a third of the teachers (about 37%), said they would not support the development of networks for women on campus. Reasons given included: support networks for women are not necessary; time is a constraint; they have no interest in women’s networks; support networks are for women only; women on campus are not part of the vulnerable group; the African society has always honoured women as mothers, contrary to what many people think; and there are women’s networks on campus already. While none of the respective percentages of these responses exceeded 11%, these responses reflect some of the well-established forms of covert bureaucratic resistance usually observed at institutional levels (Unicef, 1994). When some of the teachers (10,6%), for example, stated, “support networks for women are not necessary”, claiming that women already have equality of opportunity and the problem is merely to encourage women to take advantage of the opportunities given to them, it clearly illustrates denial

of the existence of a gender gap, gender issues and discrimination against women. Differences in staff ranking and other gender issues such as sexual harassment and gender violence justify supporting feminist networks on campus. No country in the world can boast of real parity in opportunities or truly equal status between men and women. It would seem this category of teachers did not want women to consolidate their efforts to challenge the hegemonic status quo on campus and in society at large.

A genuine constraint to supporting women's networks on campus, especially in the academic cycle, is the fact that UB faces a shortage of teaching staff, and female teachers in particular are constrained by their triple role. Nevertheless, some use time as an excuse and a polite way of not getting involved in feminist debates. Further investigation is needed to prove that this is not an act of shelving, a more honest overt and detectable form of delay in effecting change or challenging institutional policy, principles or goals to bring about gender equality.

Concept of feminism – is there a substitute?

This discussion looks into the fact that feminism is a discourse. As a discourse, feminism, whether in terms of its appellation, origin or construct, remains very unsettled. Its visibility is often denied in many traditional, cultural and patriarchal contexts, even when it is apparent. What do teachers at the tertiary level of education, who constitute the core of scholarship, think? In pointing out the contempt for feminism, Ogunyemi (1996:122) notes that the “masculinist” critic dismisses the woman who criticises society as “Woman Palava” (troublemaker) because she is making visible that (the woman) which was invisible; expressing the pain that was swallowed in silence; imbuing with pride that which is female and therefore considered contemptible. It is from this perspective that the teachers in this study were asked if there are preferred alternatives to the concept of feminism.

The word feminism often connotes resentment, fear and worry in many people, especially men. It is dreaded by those who benefit from unequal power relations, but it can be acceptable to groups that suffer from subordination, oppression, discrimination and inequality. Even then, it is not unusual for those who support feminism to suggest a different appellation to feminist ideologies, principles and practices. In the case of teachers in UB, slightly more than two-thirds (68,1%) of the teachers said there was no alternative to the concept of feminism. The rest (about 32%) thought that there were other names that could be used; suggestions included social studies; peaceful co-existence of

humankind; gender studies; humanity; family life education; studies on the evolution of women and men in society; and male adjustments to the new requirements of a balanced society. We note that with the exception of “gender studies,” the other labels are gender neutral, if not anti-feminist in nature. At face value the labels do not enforce engagement in women’s advancement and feminist activism. For example, appellations such as “peaceful co-existence” and “social studies” are too broad and subsuming to do justice to feminist thoughts, stance, goals, principles, approaches and methods.

Teachers’ disposition to actions aimed at promoting gender responsiveness at UB

This section describes teachers’ ability to identify elements that depict a gender-responsive culture on campus, state the advantages and disadvantages of a gender-inclusive culture, and identify the beneficiaries of such a strategy.

Given several decisions, rules and regulations, and actions by management, are teachers able to determine those that foster gender responsiveness? About three-quarters of the teachers (74,8%) affirmed that they were able to identify actions that could promote gender-responsive culture on campus, while 25,2% could not. The largest proportion of the lecturers, about 45%, cited the efforts aimed at attaining gender parity in students’ enrolment in some disciplines and the increasing proportion of female students. Other examples mentioned include: efforts in having women occupy top and senior administrative positions. They also mentioned the fact that the vice-chancellor was a woman and that some directors, deans, vice-deans, and heads of department were women. The existence of the Forum for the Professionalisation of the Woman (FOPROW-UB), the encouragement of girls/women in particular in science and academic excellence through prize awards and scholarships, and the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies were also mentioned.

Asked if there were any advantages in pursuing a gender-inclusive culture on campus, the responses were positive. The teachers cited a variety of advantages. The most frequent response was the statement that a gender-inclusive practice would encourage a conducive learning environment for all – both females and males (42,7%). It was also alleged that a gender-inclusive culture creates a more amicable and stable society; helps women become more confident; develops a greater sense of co-operation between women and men; creates equal opportunity for all; reduces discrimination against women; and enlightens the public about gender issues.

The teachers were also asked to give their opinion on whether there are any disadvantages in promoting a gender-inclusive culture. Slightly over half of them (52,5%) upheld the view that there are no disadvantages. This finding corroborates the positive impression of feminism held by most teachers. By implication, we can assume that the teachers are generally aware of the importance and benefit that can follow from a gender-responsive system to life on campus and its people – women/men and girls/boys. Most (about 70%) of the teachers said everybody – teachers, non-teachers, students and others – could be beneficiaries of this culture.

Nevertheless, a few teachers (the highest proportion being 17%) believe that it might lead to conflicts between women and men, since the practice of a gender-inclusive culture challenges male hegemony, patriarchy, women's subordination and discrimination. Others expressed fears and worries; they said measures aimed at promoting a gender-responsive culture would not give room for fair competition between the sexes, might encourage women to neglect their "traditional" roles, might exclude men completely and cause resistance to change, might intensify the envious nature of women against other women and might lead to the loss of some good cultural habits and traits. An insignificant percentage (4,3%) of teachers think nobody would benefit; whereas 2,5% are unable to determine who could benefit from the promotion of a gender-inclusive culture.

An assessment of UB actions vis-à-vis the indicators of gender-inclusive culture

The discussion in this section attempts to assess the actions of the University of Buea in relation to the indicators and principles (empowerment, co-operation, equity, sustainability and security) that we identified earlier as defining a gender-inclusive culture. The pertinent question is whether UB's actions conform with elements in the conceptual framework chosen for this study. This is followed by an analysis of teachers' attitudes to the nine indicators defining a gender-inclusive culture.

It is quite clear that UB is implementing activities that denote a gender-inclusive culture in the domains of empowerment, equity and security, and these are outlined below. We were unable to locate actions that fall in the areas of co-operation and sustainability.

Empowerment

There are measures in place to encourage the enrolment of female students into male-dominated disciplines such as physics, mathematics and computer science. One of the goals stated in the *University of Buea Strategic Plan* (1998: 21) is the need to increase the number of female students in general and in the sciences in particular, especially in subjects such as physics, mathematics and computer science. *UB Standard* (2002: 8) reports that from 1993 to 2001, programmes such as educational foundations and administration, curriculum studies, English, English/French, journalism and mass communication, nursing, political science, sociology and anthropology, and women and gender studies were generally female-dominated. By contrast, physics, mathematics and computer science, accounting, banking and finance, chemistry, economics, environmental science, geography, geology, life sciences, management, medical laboratory sciences, history and law have been male-dominated. It is assumed that teachers' support for strategies that enable women and men to excel in any discipline of their choice means they will go the extra mile in taking the initiative to close the gender gap caused by discrimination and oppression or bias that act as barriers.

Table 3: Extent of UB's implementation of actions that promote gender-inclusive culture

Gender-inclusive culture – indicator	Level of implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for interventions that reduce female students' and women's labour in order for more time to be invested in academics. 	No action has been taken.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for a gender perspective to be considered in research proposals. 	No university policy that demands the gender consideration in all research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for appropriate targets, indicators, time frames and monitoring and evaluation strategies that are sensitive to promoting the advancement of women. 	Partial action, e.g. encouragement of female students in male-dominated disciplines, of more women in management and administrative positions, use of gender-disaggregated data in management of staff and student records as well as for making decisions concerning scholarship to female students, and respect for laws governing women's reproductive rights.

Gender-inclusive culture – indicator	Level of implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for women and men to take part in household management and childrearing in order for women to have enough time to pursue academic careers. 	Very little has been done.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for the use of gender-sensitive language in all oral and written communication, for example he/she; chairperson instead of chairman etc. 	This measure is being carried out even though there is no formal policy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy for pedagogic training in order to mainstream gender in all the courses in the existing faculties and schools in higher education. 	Very little has been done.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy for the state to provide grants and other resources to support men and women who choose to pursue academic careers. 	This has been partially done.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging the punishment of persons guilty of sexual harassment. 	No action has been taken.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging research on the level of sexual harassment on campus, its impact on both men and women and how it can be redressed. 	This has recently been done.

The *UB Standard* (2002: 3) reports that a relatively higher proportion of females in senior management positions (such as vice-chancellor [rector], deputy-vice chancellors, directors, deans, vice-deans, heads of department, faculty officers and chiefs of service) are found in the University of Buea than in other universities in Cameroon. The increase, in our opinion, is closely associated with the fact that in the past UB had a gender-sensitive leader who aspired to having competent men as well as women in decision-making positions.

Equity

In the arena of equity, the university presents all relevant records using gender-disaggregated statistics so as to identify and address gender imbalance in all spheres. The *UB Standard* (2002: 5) magazine reports that a prominent place is given to gender-disaggregated data in most statistics and records that deal

with admission, enrolment, performance, staff, scholarship and other areas of interest at the University of Buea.

Security

University management always frowns on and punishes perpetrators of sexual harassment, violence, battery and rape. Culprits, especially students, are dismissed and handed over to the police, or receive suspension from studies ranging from one semester to one academic year, depending on the gravity of the case.

While the punishment for students is well-defined, this is not the case for teaching staff. Yet teachers are major actors in exploiting students, especially female students. However, in August 2007 the senate demanded that a committee be set up to study and come up with proposals regarding the incidence of sexual harassment on campus. This committee has since become operational.

Analysis so far shows that UB is on track and has made substantial efforts to build a gender-inclusive culture on campus. However, it still has the daunting task of consolidating and institutionalising gender-sensitive measures in all five principles. Only then will gender-inclusive culture become a reality.

Teachers' attitudes towards indicators of gender-inclusive culture

In general, regardless of gender, UB teachers had a positive attitude towards all attributes of gender-inclusive culture described in this paper. They agreed to encourage or support all nine actions listed in Table 3. Their levels of agreement are described in Table 4 below. Female teachers, understandably, strongly agreed to advocate pedagogic training that mainstreams gender in all courses in the existing faculties and schools in higher education institutes (3,52); that the state should provide grants and other resources to support men and women who opt to pursue academic careers (3,89); and that the punishment of persons guilty of sexual harassment should be encouraged (3,96). The strong feelings expressed by women reflect how much women suffer and would like to have lasting solutions to these debilitating gender issues. The findings thus far indicate that an enabling environment exists for management to create a gender policy and plan of action; these measures would help in the establishment of a gender-inclusive culture. It would become a reality and not a myth.

Table 4: Analyses of teachers' attitudes towards a gender-inclusive culture, on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

Indicators	Female mean	Male mean
Empowerment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for interventions that reduce female students' and women's labour in order for more time to be invested in academics. • Support for a gender perspective to be considered in research proposals. • Support for appropriate targets, indicators, time frames and monitoring and evaluation strategies that are sensitive to promoting the advancement of women. 	3,29 3,28 3,12	3,05 3,14 3,00
Co-operation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for women and men to take part in household management and childrearing in order for women to have enough time to pursue academic careers. 	3,12	3,08
Equity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the use of gender-sensitive language in all oral and written communication, for example he/she; chairperson instead of chairman etc. 	3,14	2,87
Sustainability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy of pedagogic training in order to mainstream gender in all the courses in the existing faculties and schools in higher education. • Advocacy of the state providing grants and other resources to support men and women who opt to pursue academic careers. 	3,52 3,89	3,10 3,38
Security: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging the punishment of persons guilty of sexual harassment. • Encouraging research on the level of sexual harassment on campus, its impact on both men and women and how it can be redressed. 	3,96 3,39	3,56 3,40

A gender-inclusive culture at UB

Data from the study reveal that the majority of the teachers (81,4%) perceive feminism positively, and most of them (74,8%) could identify aspects of a gender-inclusive culture on campus. Through the conceptual framework, we also see that both management and teachers, irrespective of gender, favour and desire measures that promote a gender-inclusive culture. In addition, UB and its teachers also support the appointment of more qualified women

to key academic and administrative positions and the encouragement of enrolment of female students into male-dominated disciplines such as physics, mathematics and computer sciences. However, we hold that the positive perception of feminism and actions that depict a gender-inclusive culture on campus are insufficient to assert that there is the practice of a gender-inclusive culture at UB. To ensure sustainability, a culture of this nature needs the support of a formal gender policy. Unfortunately, there is no such policy at UB; none is in the pipeline; there is not even a standing committee on affirmative action. Moreover, despite the fact that the Department of Women and Gender Studies has raised the need for gender research, activism is still timid.

While feminist and gender activism can be piloted by a department or critical mass of gender aware persons or feminists, building a gender-inclusive culture is a collective task. It is not a matter solely for the vice-chancellor or the Department of Women and Gender Studies, but for all. Now that UB has a male vice-chancellor, what will become of previous efforts to build a gender-inclusive culture? Regrettably, we note that to this vice-chancellor, women are second-class citizens who should take their traditional position under men. To him, an awareness of “gender” means only having women at the university as well as men – without acknowledging unequal power relations. This inevitably makes a mockery of Women’s Studies.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated one method of assessment of the existence of a gender-inclusive culture in higher education institution, and has shown that the University of Buea has made progress in changing aspects of its culture. The university has a Department of Women and Gender Studies and it had, for many years, a very dynamic and gender-sensitive female vice-chancellor. Our study established that there is a positive perception of feminism and a strong support for a gender-inclusive culture at the University of Buea. Nevertheless, this positive perception and strong support might fade away without an explicit gender policy to guarantee its implementation and furtherance for posterity. If the current leadership is not gender-responsive, what will happen to the efforts put in place by the previous vice-chancellor to consolidate a gender-inclusive culture? The practices which constitute the development of a gender-inclusive culture at the University of Buea will waver if they depend solely on the person at the helm of the institution being

a strong gender advocate. Rather than relying on one individual's interest and goodwill, the sustainable development of a gender-inclusive culture must be the responsibility of all stakeholders of the institution.

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Endnotes

- 1 We hold that this particular policy will reduce the number of women who are able to teach at university level in Cameroon since fewer women than men pursue or are in PhD programmes.
- 2 This paper is based on an original work by Ngaling (2004) entitled *The Impact of Lecturers' Perception of Feminism on the Promotion of a Gender-inclusive Culture at the University of Buea*.

The work is a master's dissertation under the supervision of Professor Endeley.

- 3 These were adapted from *Creating an Enabling and Empowering Environment for Women in Tertiary Education: A Handbook for African Universities* by FAWE (1998) and "Gender analysis in the field of education: A Zimbabwean example" by R. Gaidzanwa in Imam, A. *et al.* eds. *Engendering African Social Sciences*.
- 4 FAWE (2001: 12); FAWE (1998: 6).
- 5 Unesco (1998b: 3).
- 6 Lyonga and Endeley (2006: 57).