GENDER DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: PERCEPTIONS AND POLICY PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

In the past four decades, it is interesting to note that the issue of gender diversity management (GDM) in education has attracted scholarly and policy attention. However, there has been little or no study on the perceptions and policy practices of GDM in Ethiopian public higher education institutions (HEIs). Therefore, the purpose of this article was to explore the perceptions and policy practices of the GDM in the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs. It was also aimed to provide insights that might guide practical and successful interventions as well as ideas for improvements.

Employing mixed methods, a total of 395 regular undergraduate students (N=395) were recruited to take part in the quantitative phase of the study, while an additional group of 34 individuals (N=34) was sought to participate in the qualitative part. In total, (N=429) respondents participated in the study. A survey questionnaire comprising fourteen items was developed and subsequently analyzed using SPSS version 25. A narrative inquiry approach was also used for semi-structured interview analysis that allowed participants to present their tales. To substantiate data generated through questionnaires & interviews, further document analysis was also conducted.

The results show that inadequate GDM policy is being implemented on top of a lower perception of it, even in an environment where policy is generally positive. Additionally, this survey offered a substantial amount of new insight into perceptions and policy practices regarding GDM. Ethiopian public HEIs need to identify areas for improvement and revise and implement policies that are aligned with the needs and expectations of twenty first century's GDM issues.

INTRODUCTION

In the past four decades, it is interesting to note that the issue of gender diversity management (GDM) in education has attracted scholarly and policy attention (Wieczorek-Szymańska, 2020). Since then, efforts to narrow the gender diversity gap in HEIs have risen in favor of promoting equitable education for men and women (Hurst, 2020). Gender diversity refers to the existence of diverse gender identities within a community or organization (Kaur & Arora, 2020). GDM in higher education institutions (HEIs) involves intentional steps to promote equality, inclusion, and equitable opportunities for all genders (Klein, 2016). Promoting gender equality in education is crucial for reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and building good governance, as emphasized by Kofi Annan, the UN's seventh Secretary-General, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance" (UNDP, 2018, p,1). However, despite efforts, a gender gap still exists in HEIs, favoring men in many developing nations, particularly in Africa (Allan, 2012).

Female's involvement in HEIs varies across national, disciplinary and institutional borders, both in developed and developing countries (David, 2015). Studies indicate that female students' participation in HEIs tends to decline as they progress from secondary education (UNESCO, 2016). Obstacles such as double home responsibilities, low self-esteem, limited GDM practices, and lack of family support can impede female students' progress (Lin, 2016). These challenges often lead to dropout rates among female students (Paudel, 2019).

Perceptions play a significant role in shaping individuals' understanding of reality (Rudhumbu & Chawawal, 2014). Students' perceptions of diversity management are critical, regardless of whether they align with the actual situation. Assessing perceptions related to GDM is vital for making informed decisions that benefit HEIs and their members (Henry et al., 2011).

GDM policies in HEIs aim to promote and support gender diversity within these institutions (Pandit & Paul, 2023). While efforts have been made to implement such policies, challenges and problems persist (Peterson & Jordansson, 2022). Continuous evaluation, stakeholder involvement, and adaptability are necessary to address these issues (Ruggi & Duvvury, 2023). Inclusive participation of students, faculty, staff, and community members is crucial for developing, implementing, and evaluating gender diversity policies (May & Bridger, 2010).

In Ethiopia, where patriarchal culture has historically limited women's access to HEIs, various initiatives have been undertaken to promote gender diversity (Alemayehu, 2020). The government has established scholarship programs specifically for female students, aiming to reduce financial barriers and encourage higher education enrollment (Amente, 2019). NGOs and organizations also provide mentorship programs and support networks for female students, empowering them academically and personally (Alemu et al., 2022).

Despite these efforts, GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs remains challenging due to sociocultural issues, budgetary constraints, and gender-based discrimination (Abate, 2023). Continued efforts are necessary to achieve long-term sustainable progress in promoting gender diversity and empowering women in HEIs (Bayeh, 2016). In spite of the sector's growth being very encouraging, achieving gender diversity equality has remained a difficult task. And still, according to the new education development road map report, "there is a huge gender gap in enrolment among male and female" students in the Ethiopian HEIs (MoE, 2018, p. 49). As noted by Semela et al. (2020), studies identified that there are different obstacles to females in HEIs in Ethiopia.

While diversity management in HEIs has been widely studied (e.g., Adamu 2014; Adamu, 2013; Adamu & Bejitual, 2007; Ambisa, 2010), there is no research specifically focusing on students' perceptions and policy practices related to GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs. Therefore, this study was aimed to address this gap and to explore the perceptions and policy practices of the students GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs. It was also aimed to provide insights that might guide practical and successful interventions as well as ideas for improvements.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The findings of this study addressed the following two basic research questions:

1. What are the respondents' overall perception regarding students GDM at Ethiopian public HEIs?

2. How are policies for managing the diversity of gender practiced at Ethiopian public HEIs?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The Diversified Learning Environment (DLE) model, developed by Hurtado et al. (2012), offers a theoretical foundation for understanding and evaluating diversity management in HEIs. It aims to assess the level of support provided by the HEI environment for diverse students, faculty, and staff, while also examine whether the environment fosters structures, beliefs, and behaviors that positively influence the learning outcomes of all students (Hurtado et al., 2012).

The DLE model considers two contextual dimensions: internal and external. At the institutional level, it examines factors such as the institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, the composition of students, faculty, and staff, and organizational structures like

policies and curricula (Hurtado, 2008). At the individual level, it takes into account psychological impressions, attitudes, and behaviors related to diversity (Hurtado et al., 2012; Dawson, 2007).

In the study of GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs, the DLE model's internal context is relevant. It explores individuals' psychological impressions and attitudes toward gender diversity on campus, as well as behaviors and experiences within intergroup encounters (Hurtado, 2008). Additionally, it examines the institutions' historical legacy, composition, and organizational structures related to gender diversity (Hurtado et al., 2012).

The DLE model's external context focuses on broader societal and policy factors. It considers governmental and policy frameworks influencing diversity management in HEIs, as well as sociohistorical factors shaping the overall diversity landscape (Wann, 2013; Hurtado et al., 2012).

Applying the DLE model to the study on GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs allows for a comprehensive assessment of internal and external factors. It examines the institutions' climate, historical legacy, composition, and organizational structures related to gender diversity (Hurtado et al., 2012). Furthermore, it considers governmental policies and sociohistorical factors influencing gender diversity management (Hurtado et al., 2012).

In conclusion, the DLE model provides a structured framework for understanding and evaluating diversity management in HEIs. By applying this model to the study of GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs, researchers can assess various dimensions of the institutions' climate, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies for creating an inclusive environment. This approach promotes gender diversity and enhances educational experiences within these institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014) to comprehensively address the research questions. Pragmatism, as defined by Morgan (2007), guided the selection of multiple methodologies, perspectives, and assumptions to gain a practical understanding of the study issue. Qualitative techniques, such as document analysis and interviews, were used to explore participants' perceptions and experiences related to GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs. Quantitative data from surveys were statistically analyzed to provide numerical insights. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study aimed to triangulate data, validate findings, and gain a deeper understanding of the research subject (Johnson et al., 2007). This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis and ensured that multiple perspectives were considered.

The use of mixed methods was guided by influential scholars such as Creswell (2014) and Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), highlighting the commitment to a thorough and comprehensive investigation. By blending various methodologies, perspectives, and assumptions, the study aimed to provide robust insights for practical interventions and improvements. Overall, the mixed-methods approach allowed for the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, resulting in a comprehensive analysis that addressed the research questions from different angles and provided a richer understanding of GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs.

Population and Samples of the Study

In 2020, the Ministry of Education categorized Ethiopian public HEIs into Research Universities, University of Applied Sciences, and Comprehensive Universities. Adama Science and Technology University and Addis Ababa Science and Technology University were science and technology universities not included in the categories (MOE, 2020). Additionally, Kotebe Education University was proclaimed as the first Education University in Ethiopia (FDRE, 2022). For the

study, five HEIs were chosen: one from each category, one from science and technology universities, and the Education University. The selection was based on proximity to the researchers and budget constraints. The selected HEIs were Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Kotebe University of Education, Debre Birhan University, and Selale University.

A total of 39,962 undergraduate regular students are enrolled in the selected five Ethiopian HEIs, with 25,081 male and 14,881 female students. Using the Yamane formula, a sample size of 395 regular students (79 from each university) was determined. The sample size was distributed proportionately based on the number of male and female students in each HEI, resulting in 216 male and 179 female undergraduate students participating in the study through questionnaire responses.

Students were chosen as the primary data source due to their firsthand experience and understanding of GDM challenges and practices in HEIs. Their perspectives shed light on gender-based discrimination, unequal treatment, and the effectiveness of existing policies. Involving students allows for a more comprehensive understanding of GDM in Ethiopian HEIs. Additionally, as key stakeholders in the HEIs system, their experiences and perceptions directly impact their education and overall development. Engaging them in the study raises awareness of gender equality and inclusivity, encouraging them to advocate for positive change within their institutions and society as a whole. Qualitative data were collected from one gender office director, academic vice presidents, and student deans from each university, as well as two instructors and students from each university (see Table 1). However, one academic vice president declined to participate. These participants were chosen because they hold key administrative positions and possess firsthand knowledge of gender-related policies, practices, and challenges. They play a vital role in shaping and implementing GDM policies and programs. Including them provides insights into decision-making processes and strategies for managing gender diversity.

Instructors and students were selected to gain insights into students' day-to-day experiences and challenges related to gender diversity. Their perspectives identify areas of concern and inform targeted interventions. Participants were selected using purposive (gender office director, academic vice presidents, and student deans) and snowball (instructors and students) sampling techniques.

Table 1: *Total Participants from Ethiopian public HEIs*

Participants	Type of Participation	Male	Female	Total
Undergraduate Students	Questionnaire (quantitiative)	216	179	395
Undergraduate Students	Interviews (qualitative)	5	5	10
Academic Vice Presidents	Interviews (qualitative)	4		4
Students' Deans	Interviews (qualitative)		5	5
Instructors	Interviews (qualitative)	5	5	10
Gender office Heads	Interviews (qualitative)		5	5
	Total	**230**	**199**	**429**

Qualitative data were also generated from official documents including the constitution, the education and training policy, the growth and transformation plans the higher education proclamation, the education development roadmap, the education sector development plans, and MoE's five-year strategic framework for enhancing women's participation in tertiary education in Ethiopia institutions. These documents help to better understand the policy context related to GDM.

Data Collection Instrument

The survey is divided into two sections: Section I gathers demographic information (gender, age, and education), and Section II uses a 5-point Likert scale to assess GDM policies and views. Thirty respondents that made up the pilot sample examined the questionnaire. The computed and real variances were compared in order to evaluate reliability. High dependability is indicated by an alpha value close to 1. Correlating each item with the total allowed us to assess each item's correctness. Ninety-nine percent accuracy was indicated by correlation coefficients for all items being less than 0.01. The SPSS analysis revealed a significant level of association. Following the pilot study, recommendations and adjustments were made.

Document analysis and interviews provided the qualitative data for the study. Protocols derived from GDM perception and policy practices were applied to in-depth interviews. During personal interviews, students and the remaining participants were generally not asked the same questions. While there may be some overlap in general interview questions, the focus and level of detail differ based on the role being interviewed for. Research questions, literature reviews, prior studies, and background information were used to produce the guidelines. Using a guide on gender and gender diversity management concerns, document data were generated through review.

Data Analysis

We checked survey responses for mistakes, gaps, and missing information. Descriptive statistics (frequency, standard deviation, mean and grand mean) were reported by using SPSS. Interview-derived qualitative data were organized and coded. Coding, statistics, and response reviews guaranteed correct data, compiled dataset, and exposed trends. The process of coding assigned themes to qualitative data. It aided in highlighting discoveries, drawing conclusions, and identifying reoccurring themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of Participants on Gender Diversity Management

Research Question 1:
What are the respondents' overall perception regarding students GDM at Ethiopian public HEIs?

The research group's response on overall perceptions of GDM was evaluated in terms of mean and standard deviation values based on the data acquired from the quantitative survey responses. The data that pertains to the research subjects are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: *Overall Perceptions for Gender Diversity Management*

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	There is respect and support for gender diversity.	395	2.57	1.077
2	This university makes gender diversity management a priority.	395	2.57	.973
3	Both genders treated fairly and equitably in this campus in general.	395	4.25	1.046
4	I believe that both genders have the same opportunities on this university regardless of their identities.	395	4.04	.980
5	I believe that this university has an inclusive environment for people of all gender.	395	3.89	1.138
6	Students value making friends with other students who have a different gender than them.	395	3.99	1.098
7	I feel comfortable around students whose gender is different from mine.	395	3.24	1.089
	Overall Average	395	3.50	

Perception on Respect and Support

The mean and standard deviation score for Item 1 (M=2.57, SD=1.077) indicated that most respondents had a negative opinion of the situation since there is less support and respect for gender diversity. This suggests that the atmosphere is less favorable and that inclusion, equality, and gender diversity are not as readily embraced. HEIs should take advantage of these results to push for more programs and regulations that support gender diversity, respect, and inclusion for all people.

In response to this question, respondents felt that, while there is some trial in offering respect and assistance, it is insufficient in the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs. One participant said,

> *Yes, respect and support are indeed essential in a given HEIs. The support is based on the capacity and budget of our university. We support with what we have and it may not be satisfactory. ... Since the need and expectation are high, it may not be of course sufficient.*
>
> *(Interviewee, #22, May 2023, Own translation)*

In this regard, this investigation replicates the recommendations of educational psychology in other countries' contexts where because substantial student achievement gaps are tied to learners' socioeconomic situation, respect with support helped educational success at all levels (Sternberg

& Williams, 2002). The issue of respect and support was similarly emphasized in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) document, which stated that as a result of active affirmative action (admission criteria, as well as financial support such as a pilot scholarship program and tutorial support programs) and general expansion, the gender parity index (GPI) has significantly increased in favor of females (FDRE, 2010).

Perception on Prioritizing GDM

The quantitative respondents were asked about their perception concerning whether their HEIs make gender diversity management a priority or not, as indicated in Table 2, Item 2, and the results indicated that the majority of them perceived that their HEIs failed to make gender diversity management a priority highly having the mean and standard deviation value of (M= 2.56, SD=.973). These results suggest that most respondents thought their HEIs had not succeeded in providing GDM with the attention it deserved. It also suggests that the respondents were worried about how much time and energy is spent encouraging gender diversity in their HEIs. This also implies that the HEIs must recognize these perceptions and respond appropriately to allay the fears.

Consistent with the findings, the Ouagadougou Declaration and Framework for Action (1993) documents stated that among various regional (African) instruments, regional, bilateral, and international organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, are advised to make females' education a high priority in their development efforts (UNESCO & UNICEF, 1993). The tendency to not prioritize gender diversity management is consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Semela, 2006), in which the gender issue was discovered to rely on the least priority task of HEIs' what to-do list, which was expected to create and maintain an environment by prioritizing GDM at HEIs for both genders as one of the GDM processes.

Perception on Ensuring Fairness and Equity

Item 3 in Table 2 had a mean and standard deviation score of (M=4.25, SD=1.046), suggesting that most respondents perceived that both genders were generally treated equally and fairly on HEIs. This suggests that respondents had a favorable opinion of how both genders were treated in the HEI setting. It also implies that there is a degree of trust in the justice and equity of gender-related practices, policies, and interactions on these HEIs. In a previous study by Kurtz-Costes et al. (2006), a few students reported unequal treatment of male and female students. The findings do not corroborate with the findings of this study. In the qualitative findings of Interviewee # 22, the following was discussed:

> *Still now, I have never heard a question of fairness in this university. The system and structure that we have will not allow everyone to be unfair. But as human needs are unlimited, we may not fulfill every need of our students. We are limited in budget. Perhaps, from the accessibility point of view, we have limitations.*

> *(Interviewee, #22, May 2023, Own translation)*

Perception on Equal Opportunities for All Genders

The responders' average score and standard deviation for Item 4 in Table 2, were (M= 4.04, SD= 0.980). As a result of this, it is highly reasonable to assume that the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs respondents perceived that both genders had the same opportunities on campus regardless of their identities which was expected by HEIs to create and maintain an environment

where both genders have the same opportunities as one of the GDM tasks. For example, Interviewee Number 22 stated:

> *Yes, I think that we are providing the same opportunities. Even legally, it is strictly forbidden not to provide the same opportunities. We are good in this regard. I never heard a complaint on this agenda. Perhaps in the lower office may be raised.*

> *(Interviewee, #22, May 2023, Own translation)*

This appears to have no obvious violation of Article 26.1 of the United Nations (UN) human rights statement, which states that HEIs should be equally accessible to everyone (UN, 1948). In line with this, the worldwide aim for gender equality under ESDP IV needs to include fostering equal access and achievement in education and training for women and girls (FDRE, 2010). Supporting the idea of equal opportunity for both gender diversity, McDuff et al., (2020) also suggested that HEIs developed more inclusive processes and curricula to enhance equality of opportunity for all students.

Perception on Inclusive Environment for All Genders

The respondents' mean and standard deviation score of Item 5 in Table 2 were (M= 3.89, SD= 1.138), demonstrating that respondents perceived favorably their university as an inclusive environment for people of all gender. One respondent in the survey's qualitative section provided the following responses, which matched with the quantitative value.

> *I think there is an environment at this campus that is welcoming to persons of all genders. As you can see, both gender groups are present here, which is the very best proof that all genders are included. Naturally, individuals admitted to HEIs are a prerequisite for entry. So, I see that an inclusive environment exists here.*

> *(Interviewee, #8, May 2023, Own translation)*

However, it appears that the opposite is true in other nations, where there have been many studies that have concentrated on gender diversity stereotypes, and they have often indicated that there were situations of inequality when gender diversity was addressed. For example, in research conducted by Kollmayer et al., (2018) course materials were analyzed, and it was discovered that male characters outnumbered female characters in the texts.

As a result, in Ethiopian public HEIs, consistent with other studies (e.g., Stentiford, & Koutsouris, 2021), although it was expected to create and maintain an environment where an inclusive atmosphere for people of all gender as one of the GDM tasks, because interviewee respondents strongly perceived their university as having no inclusive environment for people of all gender, there is still a long way to go towards achieving an inclusive environment for people of all gender.

Perception on Embracing Cross-Gender Friendships

Item 6 in Table 2 had a mean and a standard deviation score of (M = 3.99, SD = 1.098) suggesting that the majority of respondents had a high perception as students value making friends with other students who have a different gender than they in their HEIs. Here is an example from the

interview who had similar concern, claiming that:

> *Once they join our system, regardless of their gender diversity, they were the same. It is in my opinion. Students to make value across gender and disability, we have made the environment conducive for it. And since they are in the same environment, less likely there will be discrimination. But human being naturally does have some attractive issues and needs. So, the grouping survival will be to what they know earlier. For instance, when I was freshman years back, I asked one student and he said from Gojam and I was happy to be with him since I came from Wellega which is near to Gojam.*
>
> *Interviewee No. 11, May 2023 (Own translation)*

This shows that most respondents at Ethiopian public HEIs valued friendships with students in the opposite gender's HEI tremendously. This also indicates a favorable outlook on encouraging friendships and social ties between people of different genders in the context of HEIs. In addition, it implies that students at the five Ethiopian public HEIs understand the value of diversity and are willing to form bonds with people of other genders in order to further inclusion and broaden their social circles.

Perception on Comfort with Different Gender

The respondents were asked about their perceptions concerning whether they felt comfortable around students whose gender was different from theirs or not. As indicated in Item 7 of Table 2, item 7, the results of the analysis indicate that the majority of them perceived that they were feeling comfortable around students whose gender was different from theirs. The mean and standard deviation value of (M= 3.24, SD= 1.089) are shown in the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs. For example, in the survey's qualitative part, one respondent submitted the following responses, which matched the quantitative value:

> *For instance, in my class, we are 46(forty-six) but the number of females is only five. However, socializing with them was not challenging and was not uncomfortable".*
>
> *(Interviewee, # 14, May 2023, Own translation)*

Echoing an opposite concern, one participant from the interview decried that:

> *Yes, sometimes I feel discomfort when I am with other gender.*
> *(Interviewee, #2, May 2023, Own translation)*

This shows that, on the whole, students in these institutions are at ease and comfortable engaging with students of other genders. A welcoming and encouraging campus community where a range of gender identities are recognized and cherished must be fostered, and this requires a favorable perception. This result suggests that the five Ethiopian public HEIs have made strides in developing an inclusive environment that encourages constructive interactions amongst students of various gender identities. In this regard, this inquiry mirrors the findings of comparable studies in other country circumstances where students did not feel uncomfortable with students of a different gender diversity than their own (McLoughlin, 2005).

POLICY PRACTICE FOR GENDER DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

The study's particular goal was to empirically examine the GDM's perceptions & policy practices at Ethiopian public HEIs. It was also aimed to provide insights that might guide practical and successful interventions as well as ideas for improvements. The results of this study will draw the attention of policy makers to a few key elements that Ethiopian public HEIs' GDM policy approaches have in common.

Research Question 2:

How are policies for managing the diversity of gender practiced at Ethiopian public HEIs?

The research group's response to diversity-related policy practices for GDM was evaluated in terms of mean and standard deviation values together with qualitative data using information from the quantitative survey responses. A list of the data relevant to the research subjects may be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender Diversity Management Related Policy Practice

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	This HEI's mission statement specifically refers to the value of having gender diversity.	395	3.95	1.122
2	By the HEI's legislation, related policies and internal code of conduct, it is clearly written that discrimination against gender is not allowed.	395	4.21	.946
3	This university has clear disciplinary procedures for anyone to report prejudice or discriminatory experiences on gender issues.	395	4.26	1.022
4	In this university, gender diversity related policies, legislations and guidelines are effectively communicated to both gender students.	395	2.51	.935
5	The implementation of policy, rules and regulation that protect gender diversity is weak in this university.	395	4.16	.969
6	This campus is using affirmative action policy to manage gender diversity fairly.	395	4.20	.996
7	This university has specific policies, programs or initiatives to help gender diversity.	395	3.85	.913
	Overall Average	395	3.87	

Policy Practice 1:   Inclusive Gender Diversity Mission

The majority of respondents stated that their campus's mission statement particularly mentions the benefit of having gender diversity on campus. This is shown by the mean and standard deviation scores for GDM-related policy practice Item 1 in Table 3 (M= 3.95, SD= 1.122). During the qualitative phase, however, one responder made the following comments, which contradicted the quantitative phase's findings:

As this will be an academic study, I must be completely honest with you and say that I have never noticed the issue of GDM in this university's goal statement. Perhaps it may be included in particular documents at offices, but not boldly advertised by posting around campus, which would be wonderful.

(Interviewee, #6, May 2023, Own translation)

This suggests that most participants perceived their HEI's mission statement emphasized the advantages of gender diversity. Additionally, it implies that the mission statements of the aforementioned HEIs clearly acknowledge and advocate for the value of gender diversity in their overarching vision and objectives. It also suggests that the HEIs' community is conducive to promoting fairness and inclusion. This is a promising finding since it implies that the HEIs have made efforts to include gender diversity as a valuable central mission statement and principle. It exhibits a proactive strategy for fostering an inclusive environment that respects and encourages a range of gender identities. The result is consistent with Krishnamurthi's (2003) finding that universities were under pressure to integrate gender and other diversity into their mission, although it was one common justification being the necessity for an inclusive learning environment.

Policy Practice 2:   Gender Discrimination Protection Policy

In Table 3 GDM related policy practice Item 2, respondents were questioned about whether or not gender diversity discrimination was explicitly prohibited by HEI's laws, associated regulations, and internal code of conduct. Most of them thought so, according to the data's mean and standard deviation (M= 4.21, SD= 0. 946).

These results indicate that most respondents talked about how the internal code of conduct, rules, and legislation of the five Ethiopian public HEIs specifically forbid discrimination based on gender diversity. This shows that the respondents were confident in the rules and regulations that are in place on HEIs to deal with and stop discrimination based on gender identity. It is a sign of the institution's good work in advancing equality, inclusion, and a conducive environment at HEIs for people of all genders. This inquiry replicates what is stated in the mentioned policy papers, which claim that one of the objectives of Ethiopia's Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE 2019, Article 6.2) is to enhance HEIs services that are free of any sort of gender discrimination. According to this agreement, entrance evaluation or admission techniques developed for any female student, among others, must be separate from the others (Article 6.33). This is in accordance with both the Constitution (FDRE, 1995) and the UNESCO Declaration on Higher Education (1998).

Policy Practice 3:   Gender Discrimination Reporting Procedures

The vast majority of survey participants strongly agreed that their university had clear disciplinary processes for anybody to report prejudice or encounters with discrimination based on gender diversity concerns. The respondents' responses to GDM related policy practice Item 3 in Table 3 had the following mean and standard deviation scores: (M= 4.26, SD= 1.022). Replies from the following respondent was consistent with the quantitative phase findings:

Yes, as you are aware, there will be instances of disciplinary misbehavior while you work at HEIs. Most of the time, we concentrate on actively preventing harm. However, if an issue arises, we have policies set by the previous MoSHE (the present MoE), and HEIs are

subject to disciplinary action. Additionally, this university has created a set of disciplinary guidelines. […] We will use this paper to take remedial action. We also have a discipline committee, and according to the rules and regulations, this body will take remedial action when disciplinary issues arise. This committee will make important choices like terminating people and refusing to provide them with documents after graduation. Additionally, students have the option of appealing to the university president.

(Interviewee, #3, May 2023, Own translation)

These results suggest that the great majority of survey respondents firmly believed that their HEIs had explicit disciplinary procedures in place for reporting bias or instances of discrimination stemming from concerns about gender diversity. This suggests that respondents have a good opinion of the institution's dedication to recognizing and resolving incidents of bias or discrimination pertaining to gender diversity. The selected five Ethiopian public HEIs have demonstrated their ability to provide channels for students to report occurrences, get assistance, and take necessary action against discrimination based on gender when they have well defined disciplinary procedures in place.

However, concerning the HEIs specific policy environment, the opposite reported by both MoE, (2004) and Semela, (2006, b) that in Ethiopian public HEIs students, it appears, are not only victims of their parents and significant others but also victims of the HEIs environment (MoE, 2004). To yet, HEIs lack functioning, standard, and specific policies that safeguard female's rights and can be forcefully enforced against those who violate them (Semela, 2006, b).

Policy Practice 4: Effective GDM Policy Communication

The respondents strongly agreed that gender diversity-related policies, regulations, and guidelines were not successfully communicated to both gender students at their institution, as evidenced by the average response and standard deviation for GDM related policy practice Item 4 in Table 3 (M= 2.51, SD= .935). The finding indicates that male and female students at their HEIs were not effectively informed about policies, rules, and standards pertaining to gender diversity. This shows that information on rules and guidelines pertaining to gender diversity is not being adequately disseminated. This also implies that to guarantee knowledge, comprehension, and compliance among all members of the HEIs, gender diversity-related rules must be effectively communicated. Confusion, a lack of clarity, and possible gaps in the implementation and enforcement of these regulations can arise from ineffective policy communication.

This finding is consistent with UNESCO's (1998) World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century declaration document stating that among the priority actions that each country should take at the national level is establishing the legislative framework for the reform and further development of HEIs that HEIs shall be accessible to all (UNESCO, 1998 Article 1.a), defining, communicating and implementing policies to eliminate all gender stereotyping in HEIs, and consolidating women's participation at all levels and in all disciplines (UNESCO 1998 Article 1.i).

Policy Practice 5: Gender Diversity Management Policy Implementation

The majority of respondents indicated that their university's implementation of policies, rules, and regulations protecting gender diversity was inadequate, as evidenced by their mean and standard deviation scores for GDM related policy practice Item 5 in Table 3 (M= 4.16, SD=0.969).

This implies that insufficient efforts exist to ensure that gender diversity is protected in Ethiopian public HEIs and to successfully translate policy into practice. A lack of appropriate resources, enforcement mechanisms, and assistance for gender diversity-related issues can arise from the ineffective implementation of legislation and regulations. Gender identity or expression may give rise to situations where people are subjected to discrimination, exclusion, or unfair treatment. It also implies that these institutions must assess their implementation tactics closely and pinpoint areas that require improvement in order to allay this worry.

In this regard, this investigation replicates the findings of a related paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association addressing female educational problems. The gender diversity issue necessitates the formulation and implementation of enabling policies. In many countries, women's educational experiences have become a central focus of education policy and planning in a very short period (Samoff, 1999).

Policy Practice 6:   Fair Gender Diversity Affirmative Action

Affirmative action policy is being used by their campuses to equitably manage gender diversity, according to the majority of respondents, according to the mean and standard deviation scores for GDM related policy practice Item 6 in Table 3 (M = 4.20, SD = 0.996).

This shows that the majority of respondents said their HEIs handle gender diversity fairly by using affirmative action policies. This implies that the HEIs actively work to advance gender diversity and guarantee that people with a range of gender identities have equitable representation and opportunity. The replies of the following respondent during the qualitative phase matched the quantitative outcome as follows:

> *The affirmative action is provided despite the accessibility issue. For example, we created a library that is too close to the female dorms to protect women from harassment in the evening. Anytime they read, it benefits them. Due to the fact that even nature is hostile against men, we are working to give affirmative action to females. Furthermore, women do have a lot of dragging things. I'd say we're developed but not quite there if we added more items for women. It could not even be fulfilled by our future children. [...] Females may not study for three to four days at least because of their monthly administration. Nature prefers men. Not only in this country, but even all over the world, what is being done for females as compared to the burden that they have, not sufficient. I have two females and one male child and the amount of burden that we load in our females' children is heavier than our male ones.*

> *(Interviewee, #3, May 2023, Own translation)*

The above finding also implies that the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs show a dedication to fostering a more varied and inclusive atmosphere where people of all genders have equal access to education and other opportunities by putting affirmative action policies into practice. Ethiopian public HEIs need to monitor and evaluate affirmative action policies to ensure they are serving the intended purposes. This is consistent with the results of ESDP III, which stated that one of the purposes of the education sector was to take affirmative action to achieve parity of female participation in all education and training programs. Female students were supposed to be assigned based on their preferences, while those who were married and have families were supposed to be enrolled in HEIs closer to their home (FDRE, 2005).

Policy Practice 7:   Gender Diversity Support Initiatives

The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that their institutions had specific policies, programs, or activities to support gender diversity, as shown by the average response and standard deviation for GDM related policy practice Item 7 in Table 3 (M= 3.85, SD= 0.913). On the importance of having policies, Interviewee Number 3 stated that:

> *Since diversity entails inclusivity, we must establish a policy that reflects that stance. The institution should assert that diversity is the wellspring of prosperity and growth. Then, [...] the practical aspects will start moving toward implementation in practice. Policy should thus emphasize it. When we observe numerous forms of diversity in a certain organization, we won't be afraid then.*

> *(Interviewee, #3, May 2023, Own translation)*

Based on this data, it can be inferred that the selected five HEIs are actively attempting to create an inclusive and equitable environment by establishing policies, programs, or activities that specifically foster gender diversity. These programs can include, but are not limited to, support groups, mentorship programs, gender identity and expression training, educational campaigns, and gender-inclusive toilets. HEIs recognize and respond to the special demands and problems of people with a variety of gender identities by putting such initiatives into practice. It conveys the idea that Ethiopian public HEIs respect diversity and are prepared to offer a secure and encouraging environment to all community members. The HEI's attempts to foster an open and encouraging atmosphere for people of both genders appear to be working well, as seen by the respondents' broad agreement that certain policies, programs, or activities exist to encourage GDM. Consistent with this finding, past critical studies on diversity management have emphasized that specific policies ought to be essential elements of diversity management (Noon, 2007).

CONCLUDING REMARK

This study is aimed to explore the perceptions and policy practices of the students GDM in Ethiopian public HEIs. It is also aimed to provide insights that might guide practical and successful interventions as well as ideas for improvements. We employed convergent parallel mixed research (QUAN + QUAL) methodologies by the pragmatic research paradigm in terms of philosophy. The general findings of the study indicate that inadequate GDM policy was being implemented on top of a lower perception of it, even in an environment where policy was generally positive.

In general, a many-sided strategy was needed to address the problems of inadequate GDM policy implementation and lower perception. Raising awareness, advancing an inclusive culture, offering resources and training, encouraging leadership dedication, and routinely assessing and modifying policies to satisfy changing requirements were all part of it. HEIs could foster more equitable and inclusive settings that benefited students, organizations, and society at large by emphasizing gender diversity and putting in place efficient GDM policies.

For tracking and assessing the effects of GDM policies over time, the results could be used as a baseline. HEIs could monitor success, pinpoint areas for development, and make data-driven choices to improve and fine-tune GDM policies and programs by routinely evaluating the perceptions and practices linked to gender diversity.

Out of fifty (50) public HEIs found in Ethiopia, the selection of only five public HEIs might not have provided a comprehensive representation of the entire landscape of GDM's perception

and policy practices in Ethiopian public HEIs. The findings and conclusions drawn from such a limited sample might not have accurately reflected the experiences and challenges faced by other government and private HEIs within the sector. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of GDM in Ethiopian HEIs, it was crucial to incorporate a larger and more diverse sample that included both government and private HEIs. This broader sampling approach could help address the identified gaps and provide a more nuanced analysis of the state of GDM across the entire higher education sector in Ethiopia.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

For educational planners at HEIs, the results of this mixed study on perceptions and policies around GDM might be quite helpful. These results can help educational planners create precise perceptions and incorporate GDM strategies in the following ways:

1. Informing Policy Development: The results can be used as a basis for creating or improving GDM procedures at HEIs. Educational planners may identify areas for development and create policies that are in line with the requirements and expectations of the institution's stakeholders by having an in-depth understanding of the current perceptions and policy practices around gender diversity.

2. Raising Awareness: The results of the study may be used by educational planners to educate instructors, staff, and students on the value of gender diversity and its advantages for the learning environment. Planners may create a culture that is supportive of GDM and help people realize its worth by disseminating study findings and encouraging dialogue.

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