

Responses to Feminist Literature: Lecturers' Engagement with Feminist Literary Texts at a University in Zimbabwe

by

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Abstract

This article reports on a qualitative study of the views of university lecturers on the feminist literary texts they engaged with at a selected university in Zimbabwe. Through the lenses of the feminist and critical paradigms, this study examined how university lecturers react to feminist ideologies that are observable in the feminist literary texts that they engaged with vis-à-vis their patriarchal orientation. Their reactions to feminist ideologies were viewed from the reader response theory perspective. From a liberal feminist perspective, this study suggests the need to add more feminist literary texts in the selected university's undergraduate English curriculum. This study also utilised semi-structured interviews and observations as methods of gathering data. It recommends that lecturers take into consideration the addition of more feminist literary texts in the university undergraduate English curriculum because these feminist literary texts address important gender issues that are topical in this generation of feminism.

Introduction

This article presents and discusses data that was elicited from ten lecturers from a selected university in Zimbabwe. Individual interviews and observations were used to elicit data in this paper. The purpose of this study is to examine university lecturers' views towards the feminist literary texts they were teaching at undergraduate level. By engaging lecturers with feminist literary texts, the study hoped to conscientise them on the need to add more feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum at their university. The undergraduate English curriculum reflected an under-representation of feminist literary texts. Out of the twelve literary texts in the English curriculum, only three were feminist. These texts are important in the sense that they address gender issues that are topical in different countries in general and Zimbabwe in particular. So, this study advocated for an addition of more of these texts in the undergraduate curriculum.

This study revolves around the reflection on how I made sense of the data from the voices recorded during the interviews and data recorded from lecture observations. I attempted to keep data in the participants' own language. The common questions used in the interviews were informed by the critical research question which guided me in this study. As I have reiterated earlier, this section is dedicated to the presentation of data elicited from interviews and observations. Interview data was presented first then corroborated by data from observations. The participants' views were recorded and analysed from a reader response theory in general and the transactional reader response theory in particular. However, this did not disqualify them from this research. The reader response theory states that a reader can have different interpretations of the same text at different times. So, despite their experience with these texts, the reader response theory approach was still applicable to these lecturers. On this issue, Tyson (2006) posits that, whether as an individual or as an expert reader now, his/her background knowledge and even his/her present desires will affect his latest reading of the same work; a point of interest even for the reader once he/she discovers so many new and exciting codes within the unwritten lines of the story he/she is reading. Thus, it was important to get lecturers' views from a reader response perspective, despite their experiences with one of the texts.

Literature Review

The fields of gender and feminism have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers. The current study focused on gender attitudes towards feminist literature and more specifically towards feminist literary texts. Local as well as literature from around the globe was sourced and adopted to provide a coherent understanding of the phenomenon under discussion. Below are the themes that were discussed in the literature reviewed.

Gender Perceptions in Western Countries

Most liberal feminists contend that there is inequality in the treatment of men and women by society. They believe that women are not given the same opportunities as men. As a result, women are accorded a second class status. These are the issues that many researchers of feminism and gender studies are addressing currently. The researchers are concerned with how women and men view each other in different societies. On this issue of gender, Bettencourt, Haase and Byrne (2011) conducted a study in the United States of America. They explored gender attitudes towards feminism between intergenerational groups of family members in the United States College students and their older relatives. Their study found that gender had nothing to do with attitudes towards feminism but that other variables come into play. Their study investigated how variables like gender, religion, education, generational cohorts and others affected individuals' perceptions towards feminism. On the contrary, the current study focused on the views of lecturers' and students' attitudes towards selected feminist literary texts. It was from the views that variables like religion, education, and generational cohorts arose.

Some studies exploring feminism in Western countries which have concentrated on college students, established that, attending college tends to have a liberalising effect on individuals in several realms related to gender attitudes (Bryant, 2003). In other words, the studies identified education as one of the key factors that influenced university students' attitudes towards feminism. Their findings differ from those carried out in Africa south of the Sahara where negative attitudes towards females are influenced by the way an individual is socialised, at home, society and at school. Most studies carried out in Africa south of the Sahara were carried out on primary and secondary school pupils. Most studies cited above were carried out with university students in Western countries. Therefore, this might account for the difference in the results yielded.

On the same issue on gender, McCracken (2002) also conducted a study with undergraduate students at a university in the United States of America. He wanted to find out how gender influences the interpretation of literary texts, that is, to find out whether males and females read texts differently. McCracken (2002) was surprised by the results he got from his male and female students. From the reading the students had done, he had expected male students to side with male characters and female students to side with female characters.

In another study cited by Toller and Stuter (2005) on men's and women's attitudes towards "feminists" and "housewives," Haddock and Zanna (2003) found that men in the United States assessed feminists more negatively than housewives. Haddock and Zanna categorised these men as "highly authoritarian" because they presented the strongest negative attitude toward feminists because the value structures of feminists contradict the value structures of highly authoritarian men. This study differs from the studies cited above that showed that, attitudes towards feminism had nothing to do with an individual's gender. However, the study by Haddock and Zanna showed that the gender of an individual had an impact on his negative attitude towards feminists. The difference might be that the other researches were carried out with university students and the study by Haddock and Zanna was carried out with male adults who were not university students. The idea of authority that was alluded to by Haddock and Zanna points to male superiority which stems from patriarchy.

However, all the studies were carried out in America. This might indicate that patriarchal ideologies are inherent in adult men in America. This concurs with Chancer and Watkins' (2006) argument that, most European and American countries still remain male-dominated. After reviewing gender perceptions in Western countries, it is important to also review gender in Africa as the study was carried out in Zimbabwe.

Gender Perceptions in Africa

Africa is notorious for its patriarchal values. The waves of feminism that started in western countries did not spare Africa south of the Sahara. Literature on feminism spread to Africa during the nineteenth century. Researchers from Africa south of the Sahara saw the need to research on gender issues.

An example is Morojele's (2009) research in Lesotho, where he studied how parents, teachers, and pupils living in and around the schools where he was carrying out his study, reasoned, performed, and felt in relation to gender in their academic and social reality and the denotations they construct to being girls and boys. The fact that there was a female principal in one of his male participant's (teacher) school was not in conflict to how Basotho boys and girls were socialized. Therefore, it was no surprise that the male participant was uncomfortable with this arrangement.

Like Morojele, Maphaha (1996) conducted a study in South Africa on gender perceptions towards female principals, based on mostly interviews, that male and female students had negative attitudes towards female principals. Their studies show that, their participants were not hesitant to openly show their ill-feelings towards female principals. These researches were carried in different eras; Maphaha's study was carried out in the twentieth century in South Africa and Morojele's in the twenty-first century in Lesotho. Their studies were carried out on primary and secondary school teachers and pupils respectively. They focused on gender attitude towards women. This current research focused on gender attitudes towards literary works written by women. My study was carried out with university lecturers and students, in twenty-first century in Zimbabwe, five years after Morojele's study and sixteen years after Maphaha's study.

Another stereotypic perception that Morojele (2009) found contradictory in his study was the "softer" and "gentler" attributes that are given to girls by society. In the schools where he carried out his study, he found out that girls had developed a stance of protecting themselves against boys by fighting them. Therefore, girls in Morojele's study mostly engaged in such fights as a means to defend themselves. When the researcher asked one of the girls who had witnessed the fight, she said; we are tired of these boys; they always beat us when we pass by. And we must beat them so they will fear us, however, the girls showed resistance.

In support of Morojele's findings on girls being violent, a study carried out by Gill and Remahl (2005) found that women in Sweden cause violence to their male partners. They claimed that Swedish women strike first and ultimately resorted to violence just like men. However, Gill and Remahl assert that, this is something that is beginning in Sweden. Echoing Gill and Remahl's claims, Strauss (2007) examined the United States found that there were high rates of violence were found in the nation's families and that wives were as violent as husbands. On the same issue, Kimmel (2002) claimed that, there are one hundred realistic studies and reports that suggest that rates of domestic violence are the same (men and women causing violence). As a result, such claims have posed challenges to feminists on the claims of violence against men since they claim that women are always violated by men (Hester, 2010).

However, feminist proponents have since responded that women's violent deeds were committed in self-protection. This has been found to be one of the women's chief reasons for using violence (Bair-Merrit, et al., 2010). Saunders (2002) asserts that women resort to violence after they have exhausted all available sources of aid because they feel stuck in their lives at the time. This is what Morojele (2009) found in his study, that Lesotho school girls resorted to violence to defend themselves from being attacked by the school boys.

They felt it was too much for them, so they fought. Morojele's study of girls committed violent acts has been verified through studies by Strauss (2007), Gill and Remahl (2005) and Kimmel (2002), which concurs with feminist researchers such as Bair-Meritt, et al. (2010) and Saunders (2002) finding that women do commit violent acts because they want to protect themselves from being violated by men, and thus, the social construct of stereotyping women as weak has been proved wrong by these studies.

This study used a qualitative case study approach. A qualitative paradigm is any kind of research that produces findings from "real –world settings, wherein the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally" (Patton, 2001:39). Grix (2004) gives a more detailed definition of qualitative studies as research that involves the interpretation of data whereby the researcher analyses cases in their social and cultural context.

Purposive sampling was done to select university lecturers who were engaged with the female feminist literary texts which were used in this study. The texts selected were prescribed texts that lecturers were already teaching.

The semi-structured interview is commonly used in research projects to corroborate data emerging from other data sources. Vos et al. (2012) assert that semi-structured interviews are used by researchers to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about or perceptions or accounts of a particular topic. The perceptions of lecturers were gathered through the use of the transactional reader response theory. The phenomenon under study is controversial, so there was need for the researcher to give participants the freedom to express themselves. On the other hand, the liberal feminist theory which was used as a lens to view this study gave the participants a voice to articulate their views on the phenomenon that was under discussion.

Observation is an everyday activity whereby we use our senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting, but also our intuition to gather bits of data. Maree (2012) defines observation as the orderly process of recording the interactive patterns of participants, objects, and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them.

Findings

The following section presents data that were elicited from lecturers through interviews and observations. The presentation was done thematically. The categories that emanated from the data formed the basic units of our analysis. The themes that emerged from the data were grouped according to the critical research questions which dealt with specific aspects in the study. In this article I wanted to understand participants' definitions of reality from their views. What they defined as truth or facts in their situation (Denscombe, 2003). To achieve this, the transactional reader response theory was employed. I also wanted to get the knowledge that was constructed by these participants (Cresswell, 2009).

I discussed the following themes to answer the critical question, what are lecturers' views on feminist literary texts? Letters of the alphabet were adopted in this study to identify participants.

Male lecturer A=M-LA
Female lecturer D=F-LD
Lecturers' views on feminist literary texts

Below are the themes that emanated from the interviews;

- Conscientisation of males and females
- Representation of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum.

The twentieth century saw many women writers emerging who brought up sensitive issues on women that had not been talked about previously. Amongst the female authors, feminist writers emerged who tackled women issues in a way that unsettled different societies. The themes they discuss as well as their portrayal of male and female characters contest patriarchal ideologies in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular (Chindedza, 2012). The issues are controversial and have attracted the attention of many scholars. In this study, we wanted to investigate university lecturers' views on the feminist ideologies that are observable in the texts they were teaching, with the aim of transforming the selected university undergraduate English curriculum. The transactional reader response theory was used to elicit data from participants. It allows the reader to bring his or her experiences; emotions and knowledge into the texts, thereby allowing the reader to come up with his/her own interpretations of the texts (Rosenblatt, 1995). This promoted participants to express their real feelings towards the phenomenon that was being discussed, thereby providing the researcher with rich data. The discussions held in this study, through the transactional reader response theory, break the silence and transform it into a deafening roar as participants narrate their own experiences. It is through sharing and understanding men's power in women's lives that people help each other continue to live peacefully as men and women. The liberal feminist theory advocates for an understanding between the two sexes.

The reading of these texts was done by lecturers during the research process. These texts were prescribed by these lecturers. I discovered that one of the novels, *Nervous Conditions* had been done by three lecturers with the previous groups but the other two, *Second Class Citizen* and *So Long A Letter* were not done. [The previous sentence needs to be reworked for focus and clarity] Lecturers' views were viewed through the reader response theory in general and the transactional reader response in particular and their views were analysed through the feminist theory lens in general and the liberal feminist lens in particular.

The reader response theory allows for multiple interpretations of the text. It also allows for diversity of interpretations, depending on the emotions and knowledge of the reader on the phenomenon under discussion. An individual can have different interpretations of the text depending on his or her emotional state (Tyson, 2006). Therefore, in recording participants' views, inconsistencies and contradictions were found in individuals. In some cases, the participant contradicted himself/herself.

The liberal feminist theory was used as a lens to analyse data because it allows discussion and negotiation of both parties. This study takes a liberal stance in trying to understand lecturers' views on the texts they were teaching. It also advocates for the change of the status quo in the undergraduate English curriculum by adding more feminist literary texts. The critical and feminist paradigms that were adopted empowered lecturers by giving them a voice to speak out their views on the feminist ideologies observable in the feminist literary texts.

Below are lecturers' views on the themes that emerged from the data. These themes emerged as data were gathered from participants. Conscientisation of males and females emerged as a theme. The theme is discussed below.

Conscientisation of Males and Females

What emerged was that; most lecturers believe that feminist literary texts are appropriately set because they conscientise males and females on the problems that befall women in a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe. Much feminist literary criticism is intent upon examination of texts with the purpose of improving real lives, not knowledge for knowledge's sake and many feminist critics might not ask what a work means, but what it does to make the world a better place for real people (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The themes that emerge from these texts are a testimony that women need to be looked at from a perspective of social justice. Most participants sympathised with female characters. However, because of some participants' patriarchal orientation, they were caught in some cases criticising female characters, especially female characters that left their matrimonial homes. Generally, participants supported female characters where they felt that they were downtrodden. For example, participants made such comments as; women should not remain in abusive marriages, they should walk out on these men like what female characters in the three texts do. This showed some conscientisation in both female and male participants. Most male and female lecturers identified with female characters in *Nervous Conditions*, *So Long A Letter* and *Second Class Citizen*.

Most feminist literary criticism contends that women in literature were historically presented as objects seen from a male perspective (Villaverde, 2008). The advent of feminism brought in a new dimension where women are seen from a female perspective as human beings. The participants gave examples of women who contributed financially in their families. Adah, in *Second Class Citizen*, Aissotou, in *So Long A Letter*, and Maiguru, in *Nervous Conditions*, are educated and contribute to the economic development of their families. The participants observed that these women are intelligent and hardworking. But, what they need is recognition from their husbands and relatives. In the texts under study, these women are not given due attention and their efforts are not appreciated. *Maiguru in Nervous Conditions comes back, not because she longed to be in her matrimonial home but because she is a victim of patriarchy*. This comment was made by a male participant pertaining to the position of women in society.

Most lecturers supported Aissotou in *So Long A Letter* and Adah in *Second Class Citizen* decisions to move away from their matrimonial homes, and castigated Maiguru who initially had made a good decision to run away but eventually comes back. The radical feminist theory advocates for self-emancipation of women like what Adah and Aissotou do in *Second Class Citizen* and *So Long A Letter*, respectively. Most lecturers' views were in agreement with the feminist ideologies that men should be conscientised on the capabilities of women. Below are lecturers' views on conscientisation:

Men need to change their way of thinking towards women, In Nervous Conditions, Maiguru is not recognised although she has the same qualifications with her husband, Babamukuru. In Second Class Citizen, Adah is beaten by Francis almost every day. Francis does not work, he and the children depend on Adah's income but he does not appreciate her. But with these feminist ideologies coming up, I think men will realise that women need equal treatment in society and also to consider them as human beings with capabilities (M-LA).

The same sentiments relating to conscientisation were echoed by female lecturer D:

These feminist literary texts are conscientising men and women on the importance of respecting the women folk. Babamukuru in Nervous Conditions is able to spoil the extended family because of Maiguru who is contributing financially to the Sigauke family. Jeremiah is lazy and the wife fends for the family, what he is good at is drinking beer and womanising. In Second Class Citizen, Adah takes care of the family including Francis, her husband and in So Long A Letter, Aissotou and Ramatoulaye takes care of the family while their husbands are busy chasing after young girls. This is very painful. The woman's condition has to be changed urgently. (F-LD).

Female lecturer F who strongly advocated for women's emancipation lamented:

It is unfair for Babamukuru to treat Maiguru (referring to a female character in Nervous Conditions) that way when she also works and brings money in the family. He is an example of a typical patriarchal figure that is entrapped in traditional practices. (she hates male-domination). That is why she runs away at a certain point in the novel because she is not happy with the way Babamukuru behaves, she rebels. But after a day or two, she comes back. She made a mistake; If it were me, I would not have come back, I would have done what Aissotou and Adah did. These men need to be conscientised, and thank God, these feminist authors are just doing that. I hope the gospel would also reach the society at large. (F-LF).

The above three lecturers showed that they were not happy with the way women in the literary texts are treated. They said these women work very hard but their husbands do not appreciate their good work. Their argument was that, there is need for conscientisation of society, especially men. Men need to appreciate the efforts that women put in the development of their families. The lecturers gave examples of female characters that work very hard but at the end of the day, their spouses do not recognise who they are. Male lecturer A gave an example of Adah and Maiguru who bring food to the table but they are not recognised by both husbands and relatives. Babamukuru is praised for being provident when in actual fact it is Maiguru's salary that enables him to spoil the extended family. Adah on the other hand, sends her husband to school but in both cases, the male lecturer observed that their husbands do not appreciate their efforts. Female lecturer D gave an example of Ramatoulaye and Aissotou who are left with the burden of taking care of the children while their husbands enjoy life outside the home. The female lecturer expressed concern on how these women work and at the end of the day, they are abused by their husbands. Female lecturer F showed anger towards the treatment of women; she gave Maiguru as an example. She blamed Maiguru for coming back after she had left her husband. To show that she was not happy by the decision taken by Maiguru, she said if it was her, she would not have come back.

Female lecturer D took a radical stance when she said she was not going to come back. Radical feminists advocate for separatism because they view men as the source of women oppression. The liberal feminist theory which was used as a lens to view this study, seeks to empower women and give them a voice to speak out about their experiences of gender oppression (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, the female lecturer had the freedom to articulate what she thought was right. The transactional reader response theory allows for such views and feelings. However, this study takes a liberal stance; it advocates for negotiation between men and women.

The lecturers lamented the position of women in society. They said that the best way to end the situation of women in society is to conscientise women and men. Radical feminists advocate for a conscientisation of society, concerning the oppressed group in society. This 'consciousness raising' is a fundamental strategy for this strand of feminists; for, without understanding, one lives with false consciousness and cannot adequately question the dominant oppressive culture (Otkin, 2009). The lecturers also believe that, these feminist authors are conscientising society through their literary texts. They also believed that, if men are conscientised, then it will be easier for both men and women to fight the oppressive systems in society. This is one of the concerns of liberal feminists, that men and women should come together to negotiate and appreciate one another (Abbey, 2011).

The women's condition that has been described above is not observable in these three feminist texts only but also in other feminist texts that were not included in this study. In Andreas' *The purple violet of Oshaantu*, women suffer whilst their husbands are busy drinking and womanising. In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Celie is just more than a servant but Mr- , her husband, does not even recognise who she is. This illustrates the oppressive nature of patriarchy and the need for conscientisation of society. Male lecturer G also echoed similar sentiments:

It's to do with consciousness, you have to fight and conscientise on the importance of both males and females, you do it gradually, you help to raise consciousness in both males and females, help people to understand that there is need to change the status quo. Both females and males are important and issues of equality come up. We have to do something about the status quo that favours males (M-L G).

Female lecturer B supported the conscientisation of men:

Economically, Adah has everything, and she is stronger than Francis, it implies from the title that women are taken as second class citizens, in the end, the male has the voice even if the female works, Francis makes the decisions even if he does not have anything, the truth is those who are taken as second class citizens are not but because of patriarchy, the male assumes a supremacy role. Society should be conscientised on these issues; our females are in a pathetic position. What Maiguru does is wrong, she should have confronted Babamukuru. However, what Adah, Maiguru and Aissotou do in the novels is a conscientisation to the male species (F-LB).

Lecturers continued to register the same sentiments, male lecturer E reiterated:

Male role in the novels is raising awareness on the conditions of women. Women should be involved in the economic production of the country, there is some progress and this is what the feminist writers are hammering home. It's important to raise that awareness but it takes time though but there is need for equality (M-LE).

Male lecturer H had this to say:

The problem emanates from patriarchy, the authors are conscientising the society, that we are supposed to look at women with a different eye, women have a role to play, and through this literature, women should be empowered to voice out their problems (M-LH).

Female lecturer F added:

There are male students who sympathise with women and are happy to be doing these literary texts as they give them an insight into women's problems. This comes as an awakening to these male students and as teachers, they are going to impart this knowledge to their students and at the end of the day, this conscientisation message will get to the society at large (F-LB).

The lecturers continued to register the same sentiments that conscientisation of society is very important. Male lecturer G stated that this conscientisation should be done to both males and females. He strongly believed that, if society is conscientised, the woman's condition would change. Female lecturer B gave an example of Adah who has the economic power in the home but Francis; her husband looks at her as a second class citizen.

The lecturer had the view that it is not Adah who is a second class citizen but Francis. Her argument was, Adah cannot be a second class citizen because she is economically stronger than Francis. She thought that Francis imposes himself on Adah just because he is a man. Many Marxist feminists claim that the main reason for women's lower status in relation to men is the fact that they are generally economically dependent upon their male partner. Male power over women is consolidated by beliefs about women that, they are naturally passive, and that they have maternal instincts (Baehr, 2013). However, in this case, Adah does not rely on Francis for any material support, but Francis uses the power that was bestowed on him by society to abuse Adah. The female lecturer sympathised with women who work hard in their families and do not receive recognition at the end of the day.

Male lecturer E continued with female lecturer B's argument that women do play an important role in society. He had the view that, the authors are conscientising society on the contributions women make in their families. However, male lecturer E thought that, it might take long but the message should be carried to the world. Male lecturer H put the blame on patriarchy; he thought that all women's problems emanated from patriarchy and once patriarchy is fought, then women's condition in society would change. Female lecturer B continued with her argument by saying that she has observed in her lectures that, there are male students who sympathise with females in the texts they were studying. To her, the way these male students sympathised with female characters meant that these literary texts are conscientising these male students, which implies that these students have become aware of gender discrepancies in society.

The lecturers have shown that these literary texts are a conscientisation to both males and females, though most of them felt that it was conscientisation of males. The lecturers acknowledged that the condition of women in society needs attention. They seemed to suggest that, both men and women should work together to improve the status of women. This is what liberal feminists advocate. This conscientisation should also include women because they have also accepted their subservient position in society.

It's not about conscientising men only but also women themselves because they have accepted their subservient position in society, Maiguru in Nervous Conditions is educated, but she lets Babamukuru take her salary without her consent. The same applies to Adah in Second Class Citizen, she is beaten by Francis although she is the one who is working, Ramatoulaye in So Long A Letter cannot move away from her matrimonial home after her husband marries a second wife, the age of her daughter. She strictly adheres to tradition. Women are also being conscientised by these feminist authors to make a move in order to free themselves from patriarchal bondage (M-LC).

On the same issue of female conscientisation, male lecturer F further added that:

These feminist authors are also conscientising women by advocating for sisterhood. Sisterhood is a kind of consciousness call for women. They are advocating for unity in their fight for recognition, because if they are divided, they can't fight the system. It's a battle and it's going on, but it should start from within. It seems the female characters in the literary texts are silently helping each other. There is some sisterhood in these women but it is lying low, Tambu pities her mother, Maiguru and Nyasha. She seems to be saying look at what patriarchy's doing to us. So, the authors are also conscientising women and not men only (M-LF).

Male lecturers C and F strongly felt that women have accepted their condition in society; therefore, they need an awakening. They felt that the feminist authors are doing that so women should hearken to the call of these authors. Male lecturer C suggested that women should have a spirit of sisterhood as is being done by the female characters in the literary texts. He observed that although sisterhood is lying low in the texts, however, it is there, and he seemed to say the authors are encouraging women to uplift each other in order to win the battle.

This conscientisation message is also evident in other feminist texts that were not used in this study. In *The Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene does not appreciate the good work that his wife, Beatrice, is doing. The wife, tired of her husband's dictatorship, poisons him with the help of the maid. There is some conscientisation to men. Although this is illegal, however, a point is made. Men are being conscientised on the effects of not appreciating women in their lives. The bad treatment of wives by husbands has been a matter of concern in different societies. Men treat their wives because they think they were given divine authority to treat their wives like that. The female character in *Purple Hibiscus* does not poison her husband because she does not love him, but she sees the root of her suffering as emanating from men. So, she thinks that best way to end her suffering is to get rid of the source, 'men'. Separatism from men (Otkin, 2011), this is what this female character wants. Separatism is advocated for by radical feminists because they believe that all women's problems are caused by men. Mary Astell, one of the earliest true feminist writers, admitted reluctantly in her writings that a wife is often simply 'a man's upper servant.'

However, male lecturer F had a different view from others although in some cases, he agreed on the conscientisation of women and men, he had other reservations:

If men take this conscientisation seriously, these women will mistake our sympathy and turn the world upside down. We will be in trouble I tell you. I think these feminist authors have a hidden agenda, that is, to overthrow men. Why should we change the status quo? This submission of women started in the Garden of Eden and who are we to change this? (M-LF)

Male lecturer F had a different view from the one that he gave in the above excerpt. The reader response theory posits that a reader can interpret the same text differently depending on the phenomenon under discussion (Tyson, 2006). A text has no single meaning, so male lecturer F on this issue on conscientisation, had different views. Although in the above excerpt, he supported the idea of conscientisation, he however thought that, if this conscientisation is taken seriously, men will lose their status in society. He seemed afraid that women will upset the existing power relations. He seemed to feel secure if women remain in their subservient positions. The male lecturer showed that he was not comfortable with these feminist authors because he thought that the feminist authors have a hidden agenda. This is what Chitando (2011) referred to when she said men feel that such literature is dangerous to society. This is what seems to be manifesting in male lecturer F. To him, the hidden agenda seems to be, women taking over from men. He argued that the submission of women started in the Garden of Eden and the condition of women in society cannot be changed. To him, women's subservient position in society is God ordained and he has also been acculturated into this mind set.

The theme of conscientisation that runs throughout the literary texts is an awakening to society. Below is a discussion on the representation of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate curriculum.

Representation of Feminist Literary Texts in the Undergraduate English Curriculum

During interviews, some lecturers confessed that they had never bothered to look at the ratio of feminist literary texts to other texts. They said traditionally, they are used to study mainly male-authored texts. The moment they sit down to select literary texts for the following semester, they just find themselves choosing mainly male-authored texts. One male lecturer said this was something he had never thought about. He only realised it when I asked him about the feminist literary texts they were studying with students. This is what he said to me in his indigenous language; *Koi mi makambozvifunga seiko kuita study yakadai?* (Literally transferred, it means, how did you think of carrying out such a study)? I told him that I had discovered it during my Master's studies, when I was analysing feminist literary texts. I noticed that they were not very popular at university level, yet they deal with important gender issues that are topical which can change society in a positive way. So, I told him that I had come to find out their views on the few feminist literary texts they were teaching. He said he was going to make sure that there was adequate representation of feminist voices in the English curriculum because such texts address critical gender issues. I promised him that I was going to make a follow up study to see whether he and others would have implemented that at the university.

Lecturers showed that the inadequate representation of feminist literary texts is due to how women's works were viewed in the traditional literary canon. The idea of inadequate representation of women's works is due to the inferior status that is accorded women in society. Chitando (2011) argues that African women writers have protested against this in African literature. African literature was male dominated. With the passage of time, she laments, women writers appeared on the scene.

Aidoo (2007) laments that; women's works are inadequately represented in institutions of higher learning. This is also visible in universities in Zimbabwe, as is the case of the inadequate representation of feminist literary texts in the selected university undergraduate English curriculum. The universities should be seen advocating for equality in all spheres of life because most policies start with higher institutions of learning such as universities. Liberal Feminists believe that women have been and are marginalised in society because of their sex.

From the literature reviewed, Nkomo and Ngambi's (2009) discussions on Zimbabwean universities are that, higher education is a major site of cultural practice, identity formation and symbolic control. Shabalala (2009) cites Austin and Austin (2000, p.2) who say the challenge for higher education is to "empower students, by helping them develop those special talents and attitudes that will enable them to become effective social change agents." They also observed that, students are not likely to commit to making changes in society unless the institutions in which they have been trained display similar commitment. Universities have always presented possibilities and problems for women, being the sites both of the reproduction of modernist patriarchal and colonial relations as well as of the production of feminist, postmodern, postcolonial critiques of the universal (Blackmore, 2002).

This study was carried out at a university in Zimbabwe; and the following were lecturers' views on the representation of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum.

Male lecturer C had the following to say when I asked him how many literary texts they were teaching and how many were feminist texts:

We are doing about 12 texts, 3 are feminist literary texts by Dangarembga, Mariama Ba and Emecheta, most are male-authored and a few by female writers. There is the difference because female writers came late in the scene and male authors have been there since time immemorial and are established, therefore, feminist texts are not found on the market, there are many male authors, and female writers are a recent phenomenon, So, we draw from male authors. I will include as many feminist literary texts as I could, if they are available in the market, fifty-fifty, as long as they tackle topical issues, and meet our academic standards, and then they can be offered.

I asked him what he meant by their academic standards, this is what he said:

They deal with feminist issues which are topical these days, an area which is popular globally; whether they have tackled this area, and have discussed gender disparities. So, there would be need to include them in the undergraduate English curriculum. Now that you have brought out this, I am sure every time I am planning on literary texts that should be included, I will be very cautious of my deliberations (M-LC).

Male lecturer C explained that the inadequate representation of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum is not a deliberate move by lecturers who were teaching this course. As for him, it showed that he was ignorant about the importance of including the feminist literary texts in the curriculum. At the back of his mind, he was still thinking of the education that he went through, where prominence was given to male-authored texts. This is what (Blackmore, 2002) and other researchers were referring to when they said the school reproduces and reinforces patriarchal ideologies. It was only after engaging with him that he realised it was important to include as many feminist literary texts as is possible. In other words, he was conscientised on the need of adding more feminist literary texts in the English curriculum during the course of this study.

The introduction of women writings is a relatively new phenomenon in the Zimbabwean education curricula, so their representation has been observed by male lecturer C as normal. These texts were never considered in institutions of higher learning. Ama Ata Aidoo, one of the twenty-first century prominent feminist writers laments that women writings are underrepresented in institutions of higher learning (Aidoo, 2007). This is supported by the findings in this study. Some lecturers also gave other reasons for the inadequate representation of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum. Female lecturer I had this to say:

The underrepresentation of women is not a new thing in this university. So, it's not surprising that feminist writings are underrepresented in the undergraduate English curriculum because women here at this university are underrepresented. It's pathetic to see how patriarchy is engrained even in these academics. I would like to see women taking in significant positions of power in this university, a balanced sex representation of membership in different committees in this university. There is an insignificant figure of representation, so honestly, how do you expect to see equality in the number of texts written by females in the university undergraduate English curriculum? (F-LI).

Female lecturer I's argument was that, since this university is characterised by patriarchal influence, it follows suit that the feminist literary texts are inadequately represented in the undergraduate English curriculum. When I asked her how she selects the literary texts for her group, she said:

When I joined the university; the situation was like that, so I just maintained the status quo. Now, that this has been brought to our attention, there is need to sit down together, both male and female lecturers and map a way forward to have a fair representation of these texts. These texts are very important since they deal with topical issues. The students we teach here are future leaders, and they are also teachers, which mean that, they will also carry the gospel of equality to society. So, there is need for them to learn about gender equality (F-LI).

Female lecturer I showed that she was not happy to see women being marginalised in the university. She also explained that the reason why gender issues are not taken seriously at the university is because most influential positions are occupied by men. To her, the representation of feminist literary texts is a result of male dominance in the university. She further elaborated that most males are engrained in tradition, thereby believing in male superiority which leads them to select mainly male authors. Consciously or unconsciously, these male lecturers perpetuate gender inequality. Al-Ghafari (1999), Morojele (2009) and Singh (1998) found that, the school is a vehicle for the transmission of societal beliefs, norms and values, and therefore, perpetuate gender inequality. Therefore, the school is responsible for producing and reproducing gender socialisation.

However, she also mentioned that when she came to the university, the undergraduate English curriculum had more male-authors than feminist authors, so she just maintained the status quo. On her part, it was not a deliberate move to marginalise these feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum.

Male lecturer D had this to say on the representation of feminists literary texts:

It's the availability of male-authored literary texts that determines the choice; the feminist thrust is a new phenomenon in our society, the texts are most male authored. There are there but they are very few, feminist authors couldn't publish their works; their works are prejudiced against males. There is a niche towards culture, the culture we grew up is male- dominated, the Zimbabwean culture, so it is engraved in our hearts that males dominate and so the choice is influenced by patriarchal influence. (M-L D).

Male lecturer D stated that, the underrepresentation of feminist literary texts was due to the fact that women's works were traditionally prejudiced against males. The male-dominated publishing houses did not grant opportunities for women to publish, so women had to publish their works using male pseudonyms; one such example is Mary Ann Evans (George Elliot). Beside women's works being prejudiced in the publishing house, the lecturer also submits that they also find themselves choosing male-authored texts because of the influence of patriarchy. He however acknowledged that there was need for change of attitudes towards works written by women.

To support the above view, Chitando (2011) argues that, African women writers have protested against the marginalisation of women in African literature. Musvoto (2006) narrates how aspiring black Zimbabwean women writings were shunned by men due to patriarchal beliefs. He said publishers formed a counterproductive alliance detrimental to women's writing. He refers to one Zimbabwean woman writer who said her first manuscript was complete when her husband burnt it saying she was not giving him due attention. Julia Luwanda, a Shona woman writer, said Shona men tend to regard women's ideas, writings or literary attempts as not worthwhile for public digestion (Musvoto, 2006).

Female lecturer I had this to say:

People might not understand the way things work in society. We pass through the socialisation process and this influences us a lot in all the decisions and the choices we make in life. This underrepresentation of women did not start with us here at the university. This started long ago, so it is not surprising that when we choose literary texts, obviously our backgrounds influence us. This starts from home, then the school, the cycle goes on like that. True, women have been marginalised globally because of their sex. They are deemed inferior to men. So, the underrepresentation of feminist texts is not unique at all. Maybe you can advocate for the change of the status quo but first of all you have to re-socialise society (F-LI).

Female lecturer I, like her colleagues, blamed patriarchy for the choices they make in choosing literary texts. She blamed the socialisation process which she believes shapes the attitude of an individual towards the opposite gender. To her, it is not the lecturers' fault that they do not balance the number of male-authored texts with the number of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum, but it has all to do with the socialisation process. However, female lecturer D said:

I just want to be honest with you; I do not like the feminist ideologies that are inherent in these texts. So, I deliberately leave such texts out. I don't like some of their ideas that are too radical. Look at what Nyasha in Nervous Conditions does to her father; it's totally unacceptable in our Shona culture, the trio girls in So Long A Letter, smoking and Aissotou walking out of marriage, Adah in Second Class Citizen does the same, what is that real? What do these authors want to teach us, even the students themselves? Yes, their ideas are noble but at times they are too radical (F-LD).

The lecturer did not hesitate to show her dislike of the feminist literary texts. She said that she does not support the radical stance that these texts take. She was against the idea of presenting female role models who do not conform to societal expectations. She said such women are a threat to the societal thread that binds families. She did not support women who walk out of their matrimonial homes.

She said if all women do that, there would be a lot of chaos in our society, not only here in Zimbabwe, but also in the whole world. So, according to her, the underrepresentation of feminist literary texts in the undergraduate English curriculum is a deliberate ploy to curb feminist ideologies from spreading to society. These are the same lecturers who were supporting feminist ideologies above. However, the transactional reader response theory states that a reader can have different interpretations of the same text depending on the subject under discussion.

This might be indicative of how some lecturers deliberately choose male-authored texts for their male and female students. Since she confessed that she does not like feminist ideologies, obviously she will choose texts that will indoctrinate students, who will consciously or unconsciously develop a male perspective of looking at literary texts. On this issue of prejudicing feminist works against male works, Bressler(2011) laments that, during the 1940s, university professors were males, more frequent than not, female students were trained to read literature as if they were males. This shows the extent to which lecturers can influence their students. However, the liberal feminist theory that was used as a lens to view this study advocates for equality between men and women. There should be fairness in the undergraduate English curriculum. Therefore, the study advocates for a fair representation of literary texts in the English curriculum.

Conclusion

In this study, I presented data that was elicited from lecturers. Their views on the feminist literary texts were the main focus of this paper. Two major themes emerged and I presented them thematically, discussing each theme and quotations from what the lecturers said on each of the themes presented. This was done through the lenses of feminist theory in general and liberal feminism in particular and the reader response theory in general and the transactional reader response theory in particular. The reader response theory in general and the transactional reader response theory in particular prompted the contradictions and inconsistencies in the lecturers' views on the same texts as has been observed above. Lecturers showed different views on different themes that were discussed. The lecturers' knowledge, experiences, emotions, moods, likes dislikes and age, contributed to how they interpreted the phenomenon under study (Tyson, 2006). The feminist and critical paradigms that were adopted gave voice to lecturers, as a result, they advocated for change and transformation in the university undergraduate English curriculum. Through critically engaging these lecturers with the feminist literary texts, the lecturers discovered the importance of these texts and therefore, advocated for more feminist literary texts in the English curriculum. These lecturers have shown that these texts are an eye opener on critical gender issues in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

Feminist literary texts deal with topical and contemporary issues, so these texts should not be studied for literature's sake at the university but should be studied to initiate change in people's mind sets. University students who study these texts are capable of changing the future of the girl-child and women, and this can be initiated from university because universities are a microcosm of mainstream society. Therefore, I would like to urge lecturers to apply what is read in the texts to real life situations by adopting the reader response theory in the interpretation of texts. The reader response theory gives lecturers and students a platform to discuss social issues in detail. It is with due consideration then, that I encourage all universities in Zimbabwe to initiate change in society through their students by engaging them seriously with these feminist texts.

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