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CHAPTER 8

Female students' perspectives on being included in curriculum transformation: a case study in a higher education institution

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Abstract

Drawing from a feminist theoretical lens to make its argument, the chapter explores the extent to which higher education curriculum transformation considers the needs of female students. To achieve its purposes, it reports on a selected group of female students' perspectives on curriculum transformation at a South African University of Technology. Thematic content analysis of documentary evidence was applied to analyse data qualitatively from the feminist theory perspective. Three themes emerged from data: power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production.

Keywords: curriculum transformation, feminist perspective, University of Technology, knowledge production.

8.1 Introduction

In 2005, Barnett and Coate argued that the terminology “curriculum” is often excluded in higher education policy, in the UK as well as internationally. Since then, higher education literature exploded with studies on curriculum reform or transformation. Internationally, globalisation and internationalisation have been some of the key drivers of curriculum transformation (Watson, 2009). Other drivers include the worldwide shift to ‘knowledge-based economies’ and the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ that has led to national and institutional curriculum debates on how best to prepare graduates for a knowledge economy. A curriculum could also be transformed to address challenges at higher education institutions such as articulation gaps between secondary and higher education, equity in education delivery, employability matters, massification and lack of funding (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). While these international challenges play a significant role locally, additional challenges in South African higher education are evident due to the country’s history.

Oppression has been a concern in South Africa's higher education system from as early as 1951 and females in general were excluded from higher education (Badat, 2010; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021). The post-apartheid government of South Africa which became democratic in 1994, strived towards transformation in all aspects of the country, including higher education (CHE, 2000; Reddy, 2004). Nonetheless, despite the government's efforts to address inequalities and issues of social justice in higher education, the goal of transformation in higher education continues to remain ‘work-in-progress’ (Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021).

In the transformation processes, curriculum is an area that is often overlooked as most of the higher education transformation conversations in South Africa focus on counting numbers, increasing

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access and democratic student intake (Ramrathan, 2016). The definition of curriculum transformation in this context is based on the concept of ‘transform’ which refers to change and evolution (Du Preez, Simmonds & Verhoef, 2016), and the broad definition of curriculum as the totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process (Wiles, 2008). Globally, factors such as internationalisation and the shift towards ‘knowledge-based economies’ drive curriculum transformation. In the South African context, one of the main reasons for the curriculum to be reimaged (transformed) is the apartheid legacy of unequal educational provision that has resulted in a higher education system that failed the majority of its population (Shay, 2015). In this context, curriculum transformation is traditionally based on how academic developers and staff can reimagine the curriculum.

While all these foci on curriculum transformation are valid and urgent, this critiques this traditional curriculum approach and shares Quin’s (2019) view that curriculum design and redesign should include other stakeholders such as students and professionals. Therefore students who have previously been excluded should have the right to speak up and play an active role in curriculum transformation (Higgs, 2016; Lundy *et al.*, 2015; Marquis, 2016). Incorporating students’ perspectives in curriculum transformation will not only benefit the curriculum itself but will also aid in the pursuit of equity in higher education. This chapter thus responds to the calls by Quin (2019) to include the perspectives of students in curriculum transformation, and in the context of this chapter, female students.

More specifically, the chapter sought to shed new light on the perspectives of silenced female students’ voice on curriculum transformation conversations within a University of Technology (UoT) environment. The objectives of the study reported in this chapter were to examine the perspectives of a selected group of female students on

curriculum transformation at a UoT in South Africa, and to suggest a transformation framework from a feminist point of view.

8.2 Conceptual framework

The chapter is written from a feminist angle but will not make any new additions to the present feminist ideas of transformation in higher education. Rather, the goal of the feminist angle is social transformation. Social transformation in this context aims at a shift in the collective consciousness of society towards the important perspectives of women, more specifically female students. Therefore the feminist principles adopted in the research offer an opportunity for previously excluded females to provide their perspectives from lived realities (Salo & Mama, 2001). Various definitions of feminism exist, while the chapter is written in context from one overarching definition.

The definition that this chapter is based upon, is feminism as Salo and Mama (2001) describe the meaning and function thereof. Their description of feminism is indicative of the “refusal of oppression, and commitment to struggling for women’s freedom from all forms of oppression – internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical.” Feminist scholars argue for this act of refusal to be the centre of the transformation of higher education institutions and the pedagogical environment (Elenes, 1995; Prah & Maggott, 2020; Safarik, 2003). The current chapter agrees with these scholars and argues for female voices to be heard within the higher education transformation arena.

In research, feminist approaches exist that are defined and applied in various ways. The current chapter adopted a feminist standpoint theory approach. During the 1970s this feminist standpoint theory arose from the Marxist feminist and feminist critical theoretical approaches. The

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approach offers epistemological and methodological approaches in various fields of study with a common goal to acknowledge, analyse and draw on power relationships, as well as bring about change in societies. Various feminist scholars, such as Smith, Hartsock, Rose and Harding, have argued for using the lived experiences of women as the starting point of scientific enquiry (Harding, 2004).

The feminist standpoint theory is both descriptive and prescriptive, describing and analysing the underlying effects of power structures on knowledge while arguing a specific course of investigation. The course of investigation commences from viewpoints that emerged from the struggle within the lives of marginalised groups. As a result, the feminist standpoint theory includes the following principles: knowledge has a social context; due to the social position marginalised groups are more aware of things and raise questions different from non-marginalised groups; and research should be started with the lives of the marginalised, especially power relations research (Bowell, 2010; Gurung, 2020). Therefore the theory theorizes that women, particularly those from marginalised groups, have unique insights into power dynamics, social structures, and knowledge production due to their distinct positions within society. As a result, the chapter investigates a selected group of females, previously marginalised, to gain knowledge on their perspective of curriculum transformation with specific reference to the three themes emerging from the theory: 1) power dynamics, 2) social structures and 3) knowledge production.

8.3 Literature review

In 1994, South Africa reached a milestone which was the turning point of an era of a colonial and apartheid-driven country. Oppression, from as early as the 1950s, has probably been the strongest driver in the strive towards a new South Africa. During the era of the colonial and

apartheid-driven South Africa, the country was dominated by a White, male system (Badat, 2010; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021). The system affected all aspects of society as individuals of colour and females were oppressed in many areas, including higher education. The new democratic government of South Africa strives towards transformation in all aspects of the country, as well as in higher education (CHE, 2000; Reddy, 2004).

Transformation can be defined as “a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Within the South African context, transformation relates to societal change aiming at both overcoming the colonial apartheid era and addressing technological and environmental change with goals that include more job creation, economic improvement, gender and racial equity and social inclusivity (Musonda *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO, 2017; South African Government, 2019). Higher education is a key role player in this societal change. The transformation of higher education thus is crucial for the success of a transformative process and societal change (Harvey & Knight, 1996).

In 1996 the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) reviewed the higher education sector in the light of the post-apartheid era (DoE, 1996). The report from the review highlighted two main challenges in higher education to be addressed by transformation. Firstly, the historical fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency need transformation using increasing access to Black students and women. Consequently, such an increase in access will necessitate a change in teaching and learning models to accommodate the larger and more diverse student population. The second challenge is to transform higher education to meet the needs of the increasingly technologically oriented economy. The first challenge is one of the drivers of the current

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chapter that focuses on women, who previously did not have access to higher education.

The government documents published proposed a policy framework to drive the transformation process amongst higher education institutions. The policy framework can be categorized into three focus areas, namely participation, responsiveness and cooperation and partnerships. Each of these focus areas is aimed at overcoming the two challenges identified during the higher education review. Participation is aimed at overcoming fragmentation, inequality and efficiency. Responsiveness includes accountability and relates to the needs of the technological economy and society. Lastly, cooperation and partnerships emphasize cooperation and partnerships in governance structures and operations of higher education. The cooperation and partnerships aim to optimize the use of scarce resources and increase funding (Cloete & Muller, 1998; Reddy, 2004). The chapter affords female students the opportunity of participating in the transformation process of the specific institution and, as a result, respond to the participation focus area of the policy framework.

The South African higher education policy frameworks were comprehensive but not flawless (Badat, 2010). International and national experts raised concerns about the transformation documents that included limited information on implementation, lack of coherent philosophy of education, limited guidelines on curriculum development and marginalizing and excluding some stakeholders, including women (Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021; Reddy, 2004; Saltzburg Seminar, 1996). Moreover, the #MustFall movement which sought to increase higher education access to marginalised groups (BBC News, 2019), also highlighted the lack of African identity in the education philosophy, curriculum and content, in line with the concerns raised by experts (Jansen, 2009; Lange, 2012). The similar concerns from experts and

students alike may be indicative that students, despite often being excluded, can make valuable contributions towards higher education's transformation.

In addition to the concerns with higher education transformation and access the #MustFall movements also mirrored the intense need of students to have a voice and be included (Lange, 2017). The South African Higher Education institutions focused on the government's policy frameworks and unintentionally silenced the students in the endeavours towards transformation, while it is envisaged that the government policy frameworks were developed in consultation with students as active partners. Similarly, students were also excluded in other specific processes of higher education such as curriculum transformation. Curriculum transformation mainly involved academic developers and staff, while critiques such as Reddy (2004) indicated that some stakeholders were excluded in South Africa's higher education transformation policies and processes. Quin (2019) questions the curriculum redesign being the sole responsibility of academic staff and argues for the involvement of all stakeholders, including students.

Based on the discussion above, the chapter argues for a more inclusive curriculum transformation process where students' voices are appreciated. In support of this argument are scholars such as Higgs (2016), Lundy *et al.* (2015), Marquis (2016), Moletsane (2012) and Quin (2019). The notion of the research that incorporates students' perspectives in curriculum transformation will not only benefit the curricula at the specific institution but will contribute to South African higher education's pursuit to eliminate inequalities.

In addition to the exclusion of students in higher education transformation, females specifically are also often excluded. The inequalities in higher education before 1994, did not only affect individuals of colour but predominantly females. This oppression and

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marginalization of females has not yet changed substantially, despite the mentioned progress by the South African policies and procedures for higher education transformation (Akala & Divala, 2016; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021). At a recent higher education transformation summit the South African deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Prof. Mkhize, highlighted how shameful it is that patriarchy is still suppressing the rights of women. She reasoned: “We need to go back to basics and think very deeply about the empowerment of women”. Similarly, various scholars argue for the inclusion of previously silenced women in the transformation of higher education (Badat, 2010). Therefore the chapter focused not only on the perspectives of students but particularly on those of female students. The perspectives were analysed through a feminist lens, as the chapter supports the viewpoint of Praha and Maggott (2020) that the feminist theory possesses restorative potential within curriculum transformation.

The feminist standpoint theory that underpins the chapter is said to offer both epistemological and methodological approaches. The theory thus not only informs the knowledge production and needed change in society, but also informs the methodology of the chapter. Aligned with the principles of the standpoint theory: research, particularly power relations research, should begin with the lives of the marginalised (Bowell, 2010) which in this case is the female students.

Further motivation for the inclusion of females only is to prevent bias. Historically, White male researchers claimed their research to be objective, unbiased, and factual. On the contrary, feminists believe that an unconscious bias may exist that may influence the claimed neutral research process and often result in skewed results. It is seldom that the distinctive experiences of different genders are explored (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy & Sweetman, 2019). The chapter commences with

investigating females as an oppressed group from where further research can be conducted among males to explore distinctive and different perspectives between the two genders. This notion is aligned with the feminist theory that suggests the process of investigation should commence from the information that emerged from the struggle within the lives of marginalised groups (Bowell, 2010).

8.4 Methodology

Two short research questions underpin the chapter: Firstly, what are the perspectives of selected female students regarding curriculum transformation, with specific reference to power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production? Secondly, what will a curriculum transformation framework look like from a feminist standpoint theory stance? Various research methods were considered, and the following methodology was deemed fit for answering the two research questions.

Aim: To examine the perspectives of a selected group of female students on their involvement and needs in curriculum transformation at a UoT in South Africa and to suggest a transformation framework from a feminist standpoint stance.

Objectives: The four objectives of this study were:

- To investigate female students' perspective on curriculum transformation with specific reference to power dynamics and inclusivity.
- To assess female students' perspective on curriculum transformation with specific reference to social structures and their position within them.
- To explore female students' perspective on knowledge production and their specific needs.

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- To propose a transformation framework based on female students' perspectives from a feminist point of view.

8.4.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was not necessary as secondary data was utilised for this chapter, although basic principles of ethics (including anonymity, beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, justice and fidelity) were adhered to throughout the research. The secondary data were anonymised, and no participant was identifiable from the reports and transcriptions. Moreover, the original data's consent and usage permissions were not violated. The ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence were high priority in the current research where the participants were not merely protected from harm, but where the purpose and suggestions included in the chapter was aimed at benefiting and improving the welfare of the participants together with other female students. The participants voluntarily participated in the discussions which was aligned to autonomy as ethical principle. The research adhered to principles of justice and fidelity and participants were not remunerated or harmed during their involvement in the discussions.

8.4.2. Study design and setting

The chapter is based on a qualitative, descriptive study design as described by Clarke and Braun (2017). Secondary data in the form of reports and focus group discussion recordings collected by the curriculum development unit of the specific university of technology was utilised. The nature of data collected by the curriculum department was based on a qualitative research approach, which also forms the basis of this chapter. The objective of the curriculum units' endeavour was to explore the perspectives of students regarding the possibility of

being included in curriculum transformation as well as curriculum transformations that the students desired.

Qualitative research methods are based on an understanding of the significance of subjective meaning, which can be brought to research by individual participants and is mindful of their reality's social construction (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Furthermore, a qualitative research approach explores participants' views and experiences concerning their context in a way that captures their voices (Creswell, 2014). In response, Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman (2019) suggested that qualitative research methods with the ability to generate rich data are ideal for investigating human experiences unbiased and allow the researcher to develop an understanding of the typical experience of a specific group, for instance females. Given the objective of understanding female students' personal and individual perspectives on curriculum transformation at the higher education institution where they are studying, this approach was deemed most appropriate. Due to the researcher selecting specific data from two “female only” focus groups, this chapter has a case study nature.

8.4.3. Study population and sampling

The secondary data utilized were purposively selected to include interviews and reports from two specific “female-only” focus groups. This target population represented a sample of students from a single program within the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences. The secondary data reflected in this chapter included data from two focus group interviews with a total of fifteen female students who participated in the focus group discussions.

8.4.4. Recruitment and data collection

An invitation comprising the information letter, consent form and draft interview schedule was electronically emailed by the curriculum development unit to the specific institutions' community of practice members. The members are situated in different positions of employment and within different departments. However, most focus group interviews were conducted by academics with whom the students are familiar and comfortable. Interviewers, mainly academics, distributed the information to students and invited them to participate in a 30-minute focus group interview during a free period. Those who were willing were then allowed to participate in the focus group discussions. A semi-structured discussion guide was used to guide the data collection process. The interview schedule comprised key points on the possibility of being part of the institution's curriculum transformation, as well as suggested types of transformations of the curriculum being sought by participants. Participants were informed about the key definitions of "curriculum, transformation and curriculum transformation" and were then requested to share their perspectives on being included in the process of curriculum transformation and transformations that they felt were necessary at the specific UoT. In addition, they were invited to share their concerns related to the transformation of curriculum, and how they see a transformed institution in future. Semi-structured discussions are "knowledge-producing conversations" (Hesse-Biber, 2017) in which the openness of the discussion will enable the participants to move the conversation in a direction that is personal, while simultaneously creating a boundary for the researcher to pursue information related to the research questions. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed from where data were analysed and then compiled into reports. These anonymised transcriptions and reports were utilized to compile this chapter.

8.4.5. Data analysis

The qualitative descriptive research process of the chapter was underpinned by content and thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017, Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the feminist standpoint theory (Bowell, 2010; Gurung, 2020) provides the language to define, describe and interpret the findings.

The thematic analysis will thus assist in initially identifying, analysing and organising themes from the data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the three themes from the feminist standpoint theory will guide further analysis, as well as discussion and interpretation of findings. The three themes represent the three areas, according to the feminist standpoint theory, that women from marginalised groups have unique insight into 1) power dynamics, 2) social structures, and 3) knowledge production.

8.5 Results

In response to the first research question regarding what the perspectives of selected female students are regarding curriculum transformation, with specific reference to power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production, findings indicated that female students felt they were not included. To include them and in response to the second research question, the curriculum transformation process must focus on the skills development of female students through extracurricular short courses or coping skills. This is intended to empower them to become involved and also to ensure the transformation caters for their needs as a previously disadvantaged group. Furthermore, curriculum transformation should enable a transformed curriculum that is focused on improving the self-confidence of female students taking into consideration their current challenges. Lastly, curriculum transformation should promote open

communication, especially for female students. A discussion on the four themes follows.

8.6 Discussion

The following five subthemes emerged within the three themes from the findings: representation and self-confidence (power dynamics); communication and support (social structures); and skills development (knowledge production).

8.6.1. Theme 1: Power dynamics

Representation

In line with Akala and Divala (2016), Meela, Libhaber and Kramer's (2021) argument that attention should still be paid to the marginalization and oppression of females in higher education, participants also identified 'representation and support' as one of the key challenges as they feel not represented in curriculum transformation initiatives. The discussions related to this theme were on the need to be heard and represented by an authoritative person or group. The students felt excluded, which is one of the signs of gender discrimination (Villine, 2021) and which supports claims that equity in higher education has not completely reached its goals as per the country's transformation policy framework (Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021; Reddy, 2004). The students uttered the feeling of exclusion with strong statements such as:

We want to be included!

Where everyone will be accommodated...

Self-confidence

Theme one relates to self-confidence, which was a theme that emerged directly from discussion, but also which may be a result of some of the other mentioned themes. Themes that may be a result of the identified poor self-confidence are extracurricular short courses and coping skills. Students felt a need for a transformed curriculum that would improve their self-confidence in both their studies and their workplace (experiential learning and/or part-time employment). The need for self-confidence may also relate to the scars of being part of the often marginalised and oppressed South African women. Self-image and self-esteem are related to self-confidence and may result in creating barriers to one's performance (Benabou & Tirole, 2000). Therefore students with maintained self-confidence may result in better-performing students with an improved quality of life. Due to the negative influence of the other themes on self-confidence, a transformed curriculum that attends to influencing themes may result in an improved confidence level of students. In turn, self-confident females may also be able to resist oppression. Some discussions on the theme of self-confidence follow:

When you go and work you are nervous

You don't know if you are doing it right

We don't dare to tell support what's wrong

8.6.2. Theme 2: Social structures

Support

Female students sensed a need to be supported financially, as well as with other aspects of their lives and studies. They acknowledge the current systems at the specific UoT in place but feel that these still do not meet all their needs. Suggestions included improved

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communication from the systems (services) on campus and more representatives of their calibre whom they do not feel intimidated to approach. The intimidated feeling of the students may be indicative of feelings of unimportance and inferiority which relates to gender discrimination. Gender discrimination with such feelings is a source of stress (Villine, 2021), which was evident from later discussions (refer to coping skills). This type of discrimination stands in direct contrast with feminist theories. Some of the extracts of these discussions follow:

We need someone where we can raise our concerns, not only subject concerns but in general...

Only in the first year there's someone, then the second and third year, there's no one

Students need more support

We need actual people from our departments where we can go to them and tell us as course students, this is what we need*

Most of the 1st=years are scared of the student representatives, for real, so we won't go to the student representatives* to tell them what's wrong but if we could have a representative from the course* departments then she can represent us and tell the student representatives* what our concerns are*

Improved Communication

Similar to self-confidence, improved communication is a theme that emerged directly from the focus group discussions but also concerns other identified themes. Female students believed a transformed curriculum should be based on open and clear communication. Themes that are integrated with improved communication are self-confidence representation and support. Students with poor self-confidence also voiced a feeling of intimidation by certain support systems and student

representatives. This results in the female students not being able to voice their concerns and in turn communication is influenced negatively. Furthermore, should representatives and support systems improve their communication with students, such students may be better informed about the support availability. Pre-1994, previously marginalised and oppressed groups experienced poor communication in the sense that they could not voice their concerns. Transformation initiatives of South Africa have been attending to this matter, for example, the higher education transformation policy framework that aims to increase equity. However, as mentioned earlier this goal is far from reached and female students may still be oppressed in certain manners (Akala & Divala, 2016; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021; Reddy, 2004). Even such less obvious oppression of females is directly against all feminist beliefs and principles. Pleads for better communication included:

We want to know what we did wrong.

Better communication... we are not always aware of these things.

8.6.3. Theme 3: Knowledge production

Skills development

The third theme that emerged from discussions among the female students was curriculum transformation that includes more skills development. Two sub-themes emerged under the third theme, which includes extracurricular short courses and coping skills. These two theories link well with the 1st principle of feminism standpoint theory. Female students experienced a need for the mentioned skills due to their social context. Empowering female students in this way may assist in repositioning females within their social context.

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Extracurricular short courses

The female students experience a hunger for skills development. Despite them being enrolled for a formal qualification, they suggested transformation to attend to their need for more skills in the form of extracurricular courses. The type of short learning courses sought by the students do exist at the specific UoT. However, the students felt a need for more such opportunities. The related discussions included:

We want like an extra course.

Like I'm studying a course but I'm doing a short course in marketing or entrepreneurship.*

Like I'm studying course but I'm doing a short course for manicures also.*

Post-apartheid the government of South Africa did not only aim for equity amongst individuals of colour, but also gender equity. As men mainly dominated the higher education milieu, special efforts were made to empower women, such as the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS). While much progress has been made with the NSDS to empower women (Van der Byl, 2014), it was clear from the focus group discussions that female students felt a need for additional skills development.

Skills development has various benefits to women, ranging from self-sustainability to self-efficacy. In turn, a reduction of stressors may be experienced as associated benefits such as improved quality of life, a sense of purpose and self-confidence in society (Harley *et al.*, 2018). The lack of self-confidence is discussed in this chapter under theme 1.

Coping skills

The second subtheme of skills development and aspect to be covered by curriculum transformation according to participants were: coping

skills to deal with stress and emotional matters. Various matters have been identified by female students that contribute to the stress they experience, e.g. financial strains and funding issues, as well as assessments and academic pressures, as per discussions below. Other factors that contribute to their stress as per theme two the lack of support and theme two the poor communication. Some factors not mentioned by students but evident to influence the stress levels of especially female students are gender discrimination, unplanned pregnancies and social responsibilities such as caretaking (Moletsane, 2012; Van der Byl, 2014; Villine, 2021). The students voiced their need for a transformed curriculum that provides them with coping skills that will be able to alleviate stress and improve their quality of life together with academic performance and self-confidence (refer to theme 1). In support of the need for coping skills, participants stated:

It's the whole pressure, the whole academic pressure and it's a lot to take in.

Support tell you to come back in the next two days, what if in the next two days, I am not here anymore?*

You don't know if your funding is paid, and your landlord cuts your water and electricity.

We are worried about the systems and also assessments.

...most students go through a lot and many of them don't have the comfort or willingness to go to the support...*

We all need to attend a course on how to deal with stress because that's gonna help us be better in school.

8.6.4. A transformed curriculum framework from a feminist standpoint

Considering the three themes (power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production) along with subthemes, a figure of interaction and results has been constructed (figure 1). This figure aims to address the second research question: What would a curriculum transformation framework look like from a feminist standpoint theory perspective? This figure illustrates the suggested transformation framework of higher education based on female students' perspectives and feminist standpoint theory. Moreover, the interaction of suggested transformations with each other is also visualized in the figure. The two main results from the suggested transformation framework, in terms of a curriculum transformation process that is accommodating of the needs of female students, will be lowered stress with improved quality of life (happier) and improved performance. The mentioned results will have a ripple effect not only on higher education but also on the larger society and may reach as far as an improved economy. This effect is aligned with the objectives of the higher education transformation policy framework of South Africa, especially towards equity of women in higher education and supporting feminist theories (Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation, 1996; Reddy, 2004).

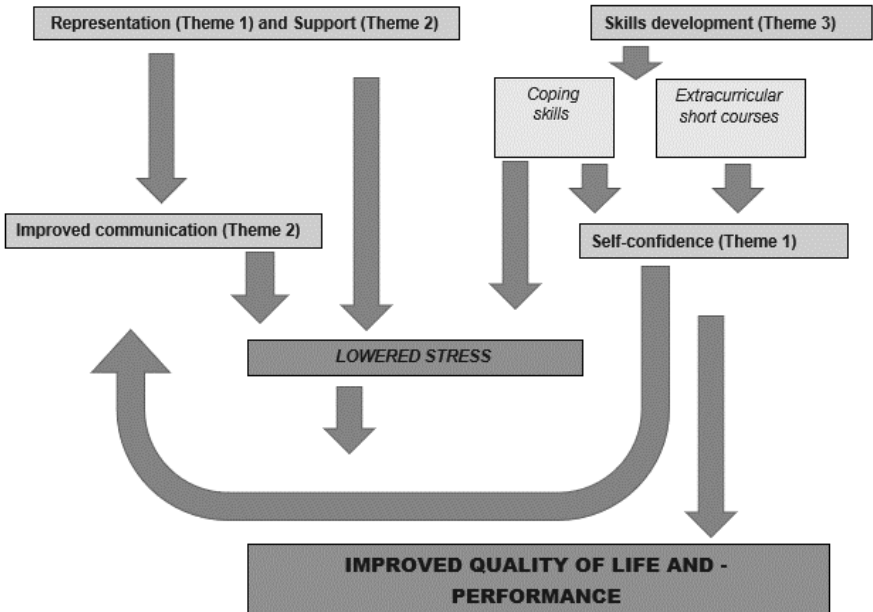


Figure 8.1: Suggested higher education curriculum transformation framework from a feminist standpoint

In addition to equity of women, women empowerment is central to this framework. Most of the suggested transformations suggested in the framework contribute towards the empowerment of women, namely the representation of female students, skills development, and improved self-confidence. Women empowerment as discussed here is also a goal of the South African government's transformation initiatives (Van der Byl, 2014), as well as feminism theories; therefore motivating the applicability of the suggested framework for higher education institutions in South Africa. In addition to the benefits of the suggested framework to higher education and the South African government, the benefit of females should remain a focus of the transformation process.

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Finally, by viewing the suggested framework (figure 1) through the lens of feminism the following findings were made. Three insights according to the feminist standpoint theory (Bowell, 2010; Gurung, 2020) were explored among female students and included in the suggested framework. Furthermore, considering the definition and function of feminism (Salo & Mama, 2001) the following forms of oppression are related to the suggested transformations: psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and moral. Psychological and emotional factors emerged in discussions on representation and support, coping skills and self-confidence. Moreover, the foreseen result of improved quality of life also relates to the psychological and emotional aspects of feminism. Similarly, socio-economic factors are included in the framework as another foreseen result of the suggested framework, namely improved performance. Lastly, the political and ethical aspects concerning the suggested transformations have been discussed in the previous paragraphs in alignment with government initiatives and goals.

8.7 Conclusion

The objectives of the chapter were met and the perspectives of the selected group of female students on curriculum transformation were discussed and utilized to suggest a transformation. It was evident that female students wanted to be part of the curriculum transformation process and longed for their voices to be heard and their needs to be met. Moreover, the female students felt a need for a transformed curriculum that would empower them, both emotionally and physically.

The perspectives of the female students in terms of how to be included and how their needs can be accommodated in the curriculum transformation process were aligned with three themes from the feminist standpoint theory and included the need for being represented and supported, skills development, self-confidence and improved

communication. These findings within the three themes were found to be interrelated and to aim collectively towards reduction of stress, improved quality of life and improved performance. As evident from the literature review, as well as the findings of the study, the gender equity goals of the post-apartheid initiatives have not been completely met. Moreover, the findings were aligned with the transformation goals of the government, as well as the definition and function of feminism. A framework for curriculum transformation from a feminist standpoint was proposed based on female students' perspectives. The framework serves as a point of departure to challenge traditional curriculum approaches and include not only student perspectives but specifically female student perspectives as a previously oppressed group. Hence further research on the perspectives of female students on curriculum transformation is proposed, specifically relating to power dynamics and their inclusion, social structures and their position, knowledge production and skills.

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