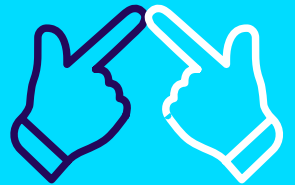


Schools Connect

Evaluation of the British Council pilot



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Evaluation of the British Council pilot ‘Leading Learning for Gender Equality (LL4GE)’ programme in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

In 2021 the British Council introduced a new programme, Leading Learning for Gender Equality (LL4GE), targeted initially at 1,083 Zimbabwean schools identified as low performing, many of which are in rural areas, with poor infrastructure and limited access to technology. An initial pilot (November 2021–March 2022) was run with 300 of these schools in three Zimbabwean districts: Beitbridge; Muzarabani; Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe (UMP). The pilot programme had four phases: 1. Three concurrent workshops, each for 100 school leaders (principals and teachers-in-charge), lasting for four days. 2. School-based projects. 3. Webinars. 4. Reflective workshops (two days). The programme included sessions on gender equality, with a particular focus on improving educational outcomes for girls, and a session on instructional leadership.

Research was undertaken to assess whether the LL4GE pilot was successful and to establish whether a full-scale programme could be implemented in Zimbabwe and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The evaluation examined four areas:

1 Relevance of the LL4GE programme

The extent to which the quality of teaching and learning improved, whether and how teachers are able to use the knowledge and skills to improve the learning of girls, and the relevance of the programme to the needs of leaders and teachers.

2 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the training, including the strategies and tools used, in responding to the needs of female learners in the classroom, and in delivering the desired results for LL4GE. Assessment is based on indirect measures, such as leader perceptions, and participants’ projects, rather than direct evidence.

3 Efficiency

How well the online platforms work and whether there are more efficient ways of delivering the desired results with the available resources.

4 Sustainability

The extent to which the benefits of the project are likely to be sustained after its completion, as well as the main lessons to emerge from the initiative, leading to recommendations for similar future programmes. A related issue concerns the scalability of the programme, given the target number of 1,083 schools and the ambition to extend the programme to other sub-Saharan countries.

This insight note presents the results of the evaluation of the LL4GE pilot and makes recommendations for how the programme might most effectively be developed.



Key Points

- An initial pilot was run with 300 schools in three Zimbabwean districts of the British Council's new programme, Leading Learning for Gender Equality (LL4GE). The programme included sessions on gender equality, with a particular focus on instructional leadership and improving educational outcomes for girls.
- Issues highlighted by the pilot include: unbalanced numbers of male and female participants and facilitators; lack of continuity of participation and facilitation; unbalanced representation of Zimbabwe and international sources in resources used; rushed delivery of the programme due to time constraints; lack of connectivity for webinars and accessing pre-reading materials.
- Recommendations are: the programme should be extended to other parts of Zimbabwe and to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as resources allow; recruitment of participants and facilitators should ensure gender equity; participants and facilitators should take part in all phases of the programme, to promote learning continuity; the LL4GE curriculum should include more materials and resources based on the Zimbabwe context, or on research from other parts of sub-Saharan Africa; the initial workshops should run for the full four days and the reflective workshops for the full two days; participant involvement in webinars should have regard to internet connectivity and offer a space free from interruptions; the programme should ensure at least three months between initial and reflective workshops, to allow more time for project planning and implementation; facilitators should stress the need for projects to have an explicit focus on instructional leadership and/or gender equality; the impact of the programme on instructional leadership and gender equality practice should be assessed through selective school-based case-studies.

Outcomes of the Assessment:

1 Initial baseline survey of pilot participants

An initial survey sought to understand participants' context, experience, motivation for involvement in the programme and inhibitors for gender equality in their schools. There was an exceptionally high response to the survey (87%), but interpretation needs caution. The majority of respondents were male (73%), raising issues of gender equality in senior appointments and the criteria for participation in the programme, and some respondents were not head teachers. The expressed needs for personal development showed a strong wish to know more about gender equality issues and leadership. Anticipated school gains from course participation were the acquisition of leadership skills and greater understanding of gender equality. The inhibitors of progress were seen as local interpretations of cultural practice. Respondents were aware of the possible career enhancements from the LL4GE programme and sought certification to help with this.

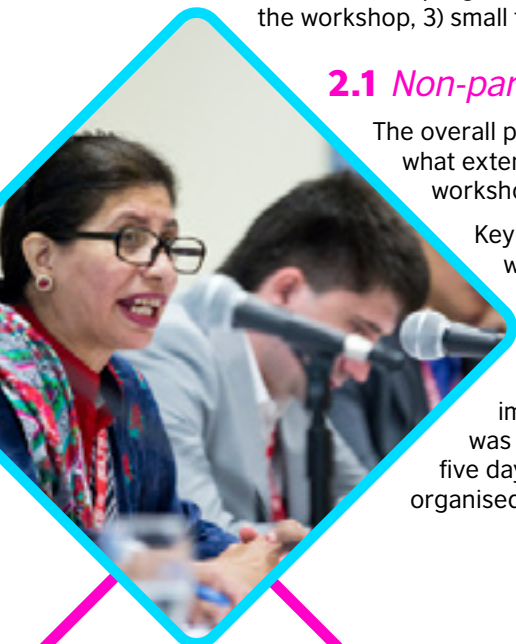
2 Feedback on the LL4GE pilot programme

Feedback on the programme was gathered from 1) non-participant observers, 2) facilitators of the workshop, 3) small focus groups with participants, 4) an impact survey with participants.

2.1 Non-participant observers

The overall purpose of these observations was to establish whether, how, and to what extent, participant learning matched the intended outcomes of the workshops and the wider programme.

Key findings reported across the three locations for the four-day workshops were: male participants significantly outnumbered female participants (78%, 81%, 75%) and in each workshop there was one female facilitator of four/five. The length of sessions was too demanding for the participants. Participants had not accessed pre-reading materials on WhatsApp due to connection challenges and that also impacted the time available for discussion. In two locations, the final day was curtailed to allow participants travelling time. In the third, it was felt that five days were needed to cover the course content. The workshop was well organised; the activities were appropriate to achieve the programme outcomes.



They were based on genuine practical challenges in different schools. There was more use of international sources as compared to local ones, but examples were also drawn from the local contexts – real practical issues in schools. The activities allowed participants to reflect on their own attitudes and perceptions about gender equality.

Three follow up webinars provided participants with the platform to receive feedback on their school-based projects while also gaining new insights on instructional leadership and gender equality. Female participants dominated in contributing to the webinars, however, attendance was relatively low. (For one, the absence of many leaders could be attributed to coinciding with national activities such as training for the national census and the voter registration exercise.) The webinars were delivered with a number of challenges: intrusive noises rendered the facilitator inaudible; limited ICT skills and access to the internet made it difficult for the participants to report their progress; one facilitator had difficulty in creating breakout rooms for discussions; there were interruptions to participants' engagement from teachers and learners entering their offices; participants joined late; some were unable to unmute themselves; pre-reading materials had not been accessed.

The programme concluded with two days of reflective workshops, in which participants reviewed their learning and presented their school-based projects. Many of the participants were new to the programme, representing their Heads who were unable to attend. Also, few of the facilitators of the initial workshops were present, and they were replaced by new (male) facilitators. Time constraints meant that the workshops were rushed and not everyone presented their project.

2.2 Facilitators

The facilitators were interviewed for their feedback on the pilot programme. They welcomed the opportunity to join the LL4GE programme, requiring them to integrate teaching and learning with instructional leadership, and stressed that the potential to learn from the facilitation was a source of motivation for them. The facilitators all acknowledged the importance and relevance of the programme for school leaders in Zimbabwe. They recommended extending the programme across the country and beyond school leaders to heads of departments and teachers. The facilitators agreed on the areas that require attention to improve the programme. These include programme duration – they agreed that there was not sufficient time to cover the content of the workshops and that the school project needed months, rather than weeks, to complete – addressing the challenges related to connectivity and webinars (especially in rural areas), and training more leaders. They were concerned about the gender balance of participants and facilitators, though pointed out that this balance reflects the composition of school leadership in the country. The facilitators agreed that there is a need to balance international literature and examples, and local literature and examples, to show participants that the LL4GE programme is not bringing in foreign ideas and concepts that do not apply to local situations.

2.3 Small focus groups with participants

Overall, the participants in the focus groups believed that they were now better school leaders because of the knowledge and understanding of instructional leadership gained through the LL4GE programme, and that they had increased their knowledge and understanding of gender equality: They reported that there had been notable changes, for example, in employing new mechanisms for running their schools, such as collaborative leadership. These claims indicate a very positive impact of the LL4GE programme on school development, but the data should be interpreted with caution as it is self-reported. The common suggestions were that the programme needed to be extended to the whole country, and to teachers and across sectors, so as to equip school leaders and teachers with instructional leadership skills as well as gender equality awareness. They all felt that activities were rushed and suggested that more time be allocated for the programme. The factors inhibiting the implementation of LL4GE programme learning cited by the participants included societal cultural attitudes, financial challenges, time constraints, resource availability and other commitments, especially for teaching school leaders.



2.4 Impact survey with participants

This impact survey builds on the baseline work to provide a longitudinal approach. The impact survey questionnaire was completed fully by 164 respondents, and there were a further 28 incomplete submissions. The survey was developed with three main objectives:

1. To ascertain participant understanding of the philosophy, underlying theory, and consequent practices of instructional leadership and gender equality to be developed in schools in Zimbabwe.
2. To gauge opinion about the content, delivery, and support arising from facilitator involvement in the course.
3. To consider the possible application of instructional leadership and gender equality principles to policy and practice in Zimbabwean schools.

The first objective is captured in the survey in questions to ascertain how far the course programme met the anticipated needs of respondents. Table 1 shows this by gender, sector, and district groupings.

Table 1. Extent to which expectations were ‘fully met’ by course participants (percentages) Motivating factor

	Female	Male	Primary	Secondary	Beitbridge	Muzarabani	UMP
Number of responses	45	111	123	35	70	47	38
Understanding instructional leadership	44.4	52.5	48.7	52.9	50.0	55.6	43.5
Understanding gender equality	59.5	54.0	54.6	57.1	54.5	44.6	65.7
Supporting school improvement	56.1	45.2	47.3	50.0	47.5	40.3	60.5
To meet National Policy	52.6	52.8	52.3	51.6	48.2	58.7	46.8
To meet local policy	52.5	45.4	49.0	40.0	44.8	46.8	54.5
To secure community links	51.2	47.8	46.6	54.8	50.0	44.6	51.5
To equip for promotion	62.5	53.0	54.2	59.3	61.4	53.1	43.7

Table 1 Extent to which expectations were ‘fully met’ by course participants (percentages)

Table 1 shows that most factors were ranked as being fully met by half of the respondents – but there were significant differences between male and female understanding of instructional leadership and male understanding of gender equality.



Participants' views on the content, delivery, and support arising from facilitators' involvement are represented in Table 2 below.

Extent to which course elements were rated 'good' or 'inspiring' by course participants (percentage responses) Course elements

	Female	Male	Primary	Secondary	Beitbridge	Muzarabani	UMP
Number of respondents	109	45	115	37	59	83	35
Facilitator knowledge	13/80	31/68	19/78	16/75	18/79	19/76	15/78
Facilitator delivery	29/56	50/47	35/54	31/54	45/49	27/59	31/60
Workshop structure	55/32	57/37	55/35	54/27	58/35	54/32	60/25
Workshop content	41/51	54/34	47/46	38/50	50/41	42/51	57/42
Course materials	51/35	60/33	49/40	65/22	62/31	48/37	54/33
Project design	45/37	51/42	47/41	44/33	59/35	39/41	38/44
ion	41/38	52/32	41/42	51/21	65/29	29/44	37/37
Project impact	31/54	58/33	35/52	44/41	45/49	34/49	48/42
Instructional Leadership focus	30/60	51/32	34/57	33/52	37/56	32/57	36/58
Gender Equality focus	32/56	42/50	31/58	43/45	42/52	30/57	37/54
Gender Equality applications	40/50	42/44	40/53	45/37	43/54	40/44	52/36

Table 2 Extent to which course elements were rated 'good' or 'inspiring' by course participants (percentage responses)

Table 2 shows the responses to a question about whether course elements were 'good' or 'inspiring'. Facilitators were very highly regarded for both the content and delivery of the issues, whilst the workshops attracted more negative open comment because of time pressures. The figures for project impact are not as highly rated as those for design and support, again indicating that this is work in progress, and perhaps reflecting the shorter than planned gap between the introductory and reflective workshops. Overall, the twin objectives of instructional leadership and gender equality have been met for most survey respondents although females appear more critical of the coverage of instructional leadership and secondary leaders are less inclined to value project work.

Considerations of the possible application of instructional leadership and gender equality principles to policy and practice in Zimbabwean schools were addressed in a number of questions, including questions about priorities in schools, stakeholder involvement in developing policy, changes proposed in schools, and inhibiting factors in securing change. Aspirations for change as a result of the LL4GE programme are represented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Changes proposed in schools because of participating in LL4GE (possible multiple answers). Analysis by district. Area of comment

	Beitbridge (n=69)	Muzarabani (n=47)	UMP (n=37)	Total	Example
Staff development	14	4	3	21	Develop learner involvement in decision making (F, Muz, Pr)
Teaching and learning	9	7	4	20	Improving ways of giving feedback, improving lesson delivery and recrafting of the mission statement, involving all stakeholders (M, B, Pr)
Vision and mission	9	4	6	19	Designing a school vision, including gender issues in the school curriculum, involving girls in leadership skills in stem subjects (M, B, Pr)
Gender equality practices	9	5	5	19	Instead of only teaching infant and lower grades, like is the case at the moment, lady teachers will take higher grades that were previously reserved for male teachers (F, U, Pr)
Personal skills	6	5	6	17	Gender sensitive, delegation of teachers on school based projects, appreciating efforts by teachers, having an open door policy and walking the school (M, B, Pr)
Curriculum	5	7	4	16	Technical subjects to be learnt by both boys and girls (M, U,Sec)

	Beitbridge (n=69)	Muzarabani (n=47)	UMP (n=37)	Total	Example
Stakeholder involvement	6	6	3	15	To make equal learning opportunities for sexes, involving parents on activities that encourage gender equality, developing staff members on gender equality issues (F, B, Pr)
Culture change	4	6	4	14	Supervision is going to be reflective and collaborative, inclusive and gender sensitive (F, U, Pr)
Observation, monitoring	7	3	2	12	Supervision is going to be reflective and collaborative, inclusive and gender

Table 3 Changes proposed in schools because of participating in LL4GE (possible multiple answers). Analysis by district.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for how the LL4GE programme might most effectively be developed:

1. The programme should be extended to other parts of Zimbabwe and to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as resources allow.
2. Recruitment of participants should ensure gender equity.
3. Similarly, recruitment of facilitators should ensure gender equity.
4. Participants and facilitators should be expected to take part in all phases of the programme; initial workshops, project preparation, webinars, and reflective workshops, rather than being represented by other colleagues, to promote learning continuity.
5. The LL4GE curriculum should be reviewed to include more materials and resources based on the Zimbabwe context, or on research from other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.
6. Linked to the above, a systematic review of the literature is recommended to establish available sources on instructional leadership and gender equality in these contexts.
7. The initial workshops should run for the full four days, to avoid rushing through the content, and to promote more participant engagement in their learning.
8. Similarly, the reflective workshops should run for the full two days, to allow more participants to present their projects.
9. Participant involvement in webinars should have regard to internet connectivity and offer a space free from interruptions.
10. The programme should ensure at least three months between initial and reflective workshops, to allow more time for project planning and implementation.
11. Facilitators should stress the need for projects to have an explicit focus on instructional leadership and/or gender equality.
12. The impact of the programme on instructional leadership and gender equality practice should be assessed through selective school-based case-studies by the research team.