



Language, Religion, and Gender in a Marketised Educational Landscape: A Case Study of Marymount Teachers College

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of language, religion, and gender on the experiences of students and staff within a marketised teacher education environment at Marymount Teachers College in Zimbabwe. The primary aim was to examine how these socio-cultural factors intersect to shape access, participation, and institutional culture in a commodified educational setting. Anchored in the interpretivist research paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative approach and employed a case study design to gain in-depth insights into lived experiences. A purposive sample of 30 participants—including student teachers, lecturers, and administrative staff—was selected using maximum variation sampling to ensure diversity in terms of gender, language background, and religious affiliation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed five key findings: (1) Language use and policy heavily favour English, disadvantaging students from non-dominant linguistic backgrounds; (2) Institutional religious practices promote Christianity, resulting in subtle exclusion of non-Christian students; (3) Gendered power dynamics continue to limit female participation in leadership and academic spaces; (4) These identities intersect to amplify marginalisation, particularly among students who belong to multiple disadvantaged groups; and (5) The marketisation of teacher education exacerbates inequalities by prioritising performance over inclusion. Recommendations include promoting multilingual support and linguistic equity, fostering religious pluralism, mainstreaming gender equity through training and leadership development, recognising intersectionality in support services, and resisting the exclusionary effects of marketisation by re-centering values of equity and social justice. The study concludes that sustainable transformation in teacher education requires deliberate, systemic efforts to address entrenched inequalities across language, religion, and gender. These insights are essential for policymakers, teacher educators, and institutional leaders striving for inclusive, socially just teacher education in Zimbabwe and similar contexts.

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BACKGROUND

The marketisation of education, a global trend driven by neoliberal policies, has transformed educational institutions into competitive spaces where students, staff, and institutions are commodified (Ball, 2007). In Zimbabwe, the higher education sector, including teacher training institutions like Marymount Teachers College, has not been immune to this shift. The introduction of market-driven policies, cost-recovery mechanisms, and the commodification of knowledge has redefined the roles and experiences of students and educators alike (Chikodzi, 2013). However, these transformations do not occur in a vacuum; they intersect with deeply embedded cultural and social factors, notably language, religion, and gender.

Language plays a central role in access to and the delivery of education. In Zimbabwe, English remains the primary language of instruction in tertiary institutions, despite the country's multilingual heritage. This dominance often marginalizes indigenous languages and the identities of students who speak them (Nkomo, 2010). At Marymount Teachers College, where trainees come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, language becomes both a gatekeeper and a marker of educational legitimacy. Language hierarchies may perpetuate inequalities by privileging those who are fluent in English while side-lining others, thereby impacting confidence, participation, and overall academic performance.

Religion, as a pervasive cultural force, also shapes institutional values, codes of conduct, and educational practices. Marymount Teachers College, like many mission-origin institutions in Zimbabwe, maintains a legacy of Catholic ethos, which subtly governs moral expectations, curricular content, and behavioural norms (Zvobgo, 1996). While religious values can offer moral guidance and community cohesion, they may also limit freedom of expression, particularly for those from minority religious groups or those with secular or liberal viewpoints. In a marketised environment that champions diversity and individual autonomy, this tension becomes increasingly pronounced.

Gender dynamics within teacher training colleges reveal systemic inequalities in both access and experience. Although Zimbabwe has made strides toward gender parity in education, subtle forms of gender discrimination persist—ranging from stereotypical expectations to unequal opportunities in leadership and classroom interactions (Chabaya, Rembe, & Wadesango, 2009). In marketised systems, women may face additional pressures, including the commodification of their appearance, heightened vulnerability to sexual harassment, and challenges balancing academic responsibilities with domestic roles. Marymount Teachers College, as a microcosm of the broader Zimbabwean society, reflects these tensions, raising important questions about equity, empowerment, and institutional support structures.

In marketised educational environments, the interplay of language, religion, and gender becomes more complex. Market forces tend to reward individual

performance, competitiveness, and consumer-driven choices, dynamics that may exacerbate existing inequalities rather than mitigate them (Harvey, 2005). Consequently, the college's policies, practices, and ethos must be critically examined to understand how these socio-cultural dimensions intersect with economic imperatives in shaping students' academic journeys.

This study seeks to explore how language, religion, and gender manifest and interact within the increasingly commodified space of Marymount Teachers College. By grounding the investigation in local context while drawing on broader theoretical perspectives, the research aims to contribute to debates on equity, access, and identity in Zimbabwean higher education.

Statement of the Problem

The shift towards marketisation in Zimbabwe's higher education system has transformed the ethos, operations, and expectations of institutions like Marymount Teachers College. While this transformation aims to improve efficiency, responsiveness, and competitiveness, it often overlooks the nuanced and intersecting influences of language, religion, and gender on student and staff experiences. English remains the dominant medium of instruction, disadvantaging learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds who may struggle to express themselves confidently and engage meaningfully in academic discourse. Similarly, the enduring influence of religious traditions, especially Catholic norms within mission-founded colleges like Marymount, can impose rigid moral expectations that marginalize students from non-dominant religious affiliations or progressive worldviews.

Moreover, gender inequalities persist despite formal commitments to gender equity. Female students and staff often navigate unspoken biases, limited representation in leadership, and exposure to gender-based discrimination in both academic and social settings. These dynamics are further exacerbated by the commodification of education, where market forces tend to reward conformity, competition, and performance over inclusivity, equity, and social justice.

Despite the visibility of these challenges, there is limited empirical research exploring how language, religion, and gender collectively shape the lived experiences of students and educators within marketised teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Without this understanding, institutional reforms may fail to address the root causes of exclusion, thereby undermining efforts toward inclusive and equitable education. This study seeks to fill this gap by critically examining how these socio-cultural factors intersect and manifest at Marymount Teachers College in the context of a market-driven educational landscape.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how language use and language policy impact student learning and participation in

a marketised teacher education environment at Marymount Teachers College.

2. To explore the role of religion in shaping institutional culture, student identity, and educational experience within the college.
3. To investigate gender dynamics and their influence on access, equity, and participation in academic and leadership spaces at the college.
4. To analyse how the intersection of language, religion, and gender affects student and staff experiences in a commodified educational context.
5. To propose strategies for promoting inclusivity, equity, and social justice in teacher education within a marketised framework.

Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences within specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Interpretivism emphasizes subjectivity, meaning-making, and the role of context in shaping human behaviour (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given that the study explores how language, religion, and gender interact in a marketised educational landscape, the interpretivist approach is appropriate as it allows for the exploration of participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in rich detail.

Interpretivism rejects the notion of a single objective reality and instead acknowledges multiple socially constructed realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the context of Marymount Teachers College, students and staff are likely to have diverse perspectives shaped by their linguistic backgrounds, religious affiliations, and gender identities. The paradigm allows the researcher to uncover these complex realities and understand how they are negotiated within an institution influenced by neoliberal educational policies.

Moreover, the paradigm aligns with qualitative case study methodology, which supports in-depth exploration of real-life contexts where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2018). This paradigm enables the researcher to interpret how institutional structures and socio-cultural dynamics interact and impact individuals' experiences in the college setting.

By embracing the interpretivist paradigm, the study aims to generate rich, context-sensitive insights that can inform inclusive educational practices and policy reforms in teacher education institutions within Zimbabwe and beyond.

RESEARCH METHODOOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena, particularly where the aim is to understand participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of reality. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture the depth and nuance of how language, religion, and gender

intersect and influence experiences within a marketised educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The qualitative approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this study, as it seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning within specific social and institutional contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through techniques such as interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the study will explore how students and staff at Marymount Teachers College perceive and experience institutional practices shaped by market forces, religious values, gender norms, and language dynamics.

This approach is also appropriate for a case study design, which allows for an in-depth, context-rich investigation of a single institution. The qualitative nature of the research ensures that the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as women, non-native English speakers, or students from minority religions, are meaningfully included and understood in their own terms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

By focusing on lived experiences rather than statistical generalizations, the qualitative research approach enables the study to generate insights that can inform inclusive policy formulation and socially just practices in teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe.

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative case study design to explore how language, religion, and gender intersect within a marketised educational environment at Marymount Teachers College. A case study design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to conduct an in-depth and holistic investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018).

This design allows for an intensive examination of Marymount Teachers College as a bounded system, enabling the researcher to uncover how institutional policies, cultural norms, and individual experiences are shaped by broader socio-economic forces such as marketisation. By focusing on this single case, the study aims to provide rich, context-specific insights rather than generalisable findings, which is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach.

The case study design also facilitates the use of multiple data sources, such as interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis, which helps to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings through triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This methodological flexibility is particularly important for examining sensitive and intersecting issues related to identity, power, and institutional culture.

Furthermore, a descriptive and exploratory case study approach is adopted, as the research aims not only to describe the current realities within the college but also to explore how deeply rooted socio-

cultural constructs like language, religion, and gender interact with neoliberal educational reforms. This design provides a framework for capturing the lived realities of students and staff, identifying patterns, and proposing contextually relevant strategies for inclusive and equitable education.

Population

The population of this study comprises all academic staff, student teachers, and selected administrative personnel at Marymount Teachers College in Mutare, Zimbabwe. This population was chosen because the institution represents a microcosm of Zimbabwe's teacher education sector, particularly one that is historically influenced by religious values (being a former Catholic mission), and currently undergoing transformation under marketised higher education policies.

The total population includes:

- Student teachers from various departments and levels, representing diverse linguistic, religious, and gender backgrounds.
- Lecturers and tutors who play a key role in shaping institutional culture and classroom experiences.
- Administrative and management staff, including those involved in student affairs, academic planning, and policy implementation.

This population is suitable because it directly experiences the interplay of language, religion, and gender within the institutional setting, making them well-positioned to provide relevant insights into the study's focus. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), a population in research refers to the entire group of individuals or elements that meet the criteria for inclusion in a given study. In this case, the focus is on those immersed in the daily academic, social, and administrative life of Marymount Teachers College.

Focusing on this specific population enables the researcher to explore lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices that are uniquely shaped by the college's socio-cultural and economic context. Additionally, the diversity within the population enhances the study's ability to reflect a wide range of perspectives relevant to language use, religious identity, and gender dynamics.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

Sample

The sample for this study will consist of 30 participants, purposefully selected from the population of Marymount Teachers College. This includes:

- 15 student teachers from different departments and year levels, representing a

diversity of linguistic backgrounds, religious affiliations, and gender identities.

- 10 lecturers/tutors, both male and female, with experience in teaching and interacting with student teachers in various subject areas.
- 5 administrative staff members, including those in student affairs, academic administration, and management, who are involved in policy implementation and institutional governance.

The sample size is considered sufficient for a qualitative case study, where the goal is not statistical generalisation but rather in-depth exploration of participant experiences and perspectives (Mason, 2010). This purposive sample ensures a range of views are captured while maintaining depth and manageability in data collection and analysis.

Sampling Procedure

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. This approach involves deliberately selecting individuals who are knowledgeable about or directly affected by the issues under investigation, namely language use, religious influence, and gender dynamics in a marketised institutional setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Their role within the college (student, lecturer, or administrator);
- Their willingness and availability to participate;
- Their diverse backgrounds in terms of language, religion, and gender to ensure variation in perspectives.

In addition, maximum variation sampling, a type of purposive sampling, will be used to capture the broadest possible range of experiences across gender, religious orientation, and language groups (Patton, 2015). This ensures that the data reflect the complexity and diversity of experiences within the college environment.

Permission to access participants will be sought from the college authorities, and ethical protocols such as informed consent and confidentiality will be strictly adhered to throughout the sampling and data collection process.

RESULTS

Demographic Data Analysis

The demographic data of the participants were collected to ensure diversity in terms of gender, language background, religious affiliation, role within the institution, and years of experience (for staff). This data provides important context for interpreting the findings, particularly in understanding how lived experiences may vary across different social identities.

The study included a total of 30 participants drawn from student teachers, lecturers, and administrative staff at Marymount Teachers College.

Table 1 below presents the demographic breakdown of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 30)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	14	46.7%
	Female	16	53.3%
Role	Student Teachers	15	50.0%
	Lecturers/Tutors	10	33.3%
	Administrative Staff	5	16.7%
Language Background	Shona	20	66.7%
	Ndebele	6	20.0%
	Other (e.g., Tonga, Kalanga, English)	4	13.3%
Religious Affiliation	Christianity (Catholic, Protestant)	24	80.0%
	Traditional African Religion	3	10.0%
	Other (e.g., Islam, None)	3	10.0%
Years of Experience (Staff only)	1–5 years	4	26.7%*
	6–10 years	6	40.0%*
	Over 10 years	5	33.3%*

*Percentages for "Years of Experience" are based on the 15 staff members only.

Overview of the Sample

- **Gender Balance:** The sample was nearly gender-balanced, with a slight majority of female participants (53.3%). This is reflective of the gender composition typically found in teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe.
- **Roles Represented:** The study ensured equal representation of student voices (50%) and adequate representation of staff (both academic and administrative), who are crucial for understanding institutional culture and policy dynamics.
- **Linguistic Diversity:** Although Shona speakers formed the majority, the inclusion of Ndebele and other language groups enhanced the richness of linguistic perspectives regarding language use in education.
- **Religious Affiliation:** Most participants identified with Christianity, consistent with the religious composition of the country and the Catholic roots of Marymount Teachers College. However, minority religious identities were also included to capture diverse spiritual experiences.
- **Staff Experience:** Among staff, a balance between early-career and more experienced professionals helped illuminate how length of service may influence perspectives on gender, religion, and language in a marketised educational setting.

This demographic data confirms the sample's adequacy in reflecting the diversity needed to address the study's objectives and ensures the reliability of the findings through representation across key social and institutional categories.

Sub-theme 1: Language Use and Policy as Drivers of Student Inclusion and Exclusion

Presentation of Results

Data collected from interviews and focus group discussions with students and lecturers at Marymount Teachers College revealed that language use and policy significantly shape students' learning experiences and levels of participation in both academic and social spaces. English is the official language of instruction and communication at the college, consistent with Zimbabwe's broader educational policy. However, this policy poses challenges for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Several students expressed difficulties in understanding academic content delivered in English, especially during the first year of their training. A Shona-speaking first-year student noted:

"Sometimes I understand the concepts better when my lecturer uses Shona, but in exams or group discussions, I struggle to express myself fully in English."

Lecturers acknowledged this concern and reported occasionally using code-switching (mainly to Shona or Ndebele) to enhance comprehension, especially in Health and Life Skills or Inclusive Education classes. One lecturer stated:

"We're expected to teach in English, but honestly, when we switch to Shona or Ndebele, students engage more. It's the reality we work with."

Despite this adaptive practice, the formal policy remains rigid. Administrative staff confirmed that institutional documents, assessments, and official communication are strictly in English, which limits students' ability to participate in academic discourse, especially those from rural or non-dominant language communities.

The data also highlighted a linguistic hierarchy, where students fluent in English were perceived as more competent, confident, and often assumed leadership roles in group tasks. This was echoed in a focus group:

"Group leaders are always those who speak English well. Even when they don't have the right answers, people just listen to them."

Students from minority language backgrounds (e.g., Tonga, Venda) reported feeling marginalised, both socially and academically. One participant shared:

"I don't speak Shona or Ndebele, and my English is not strong. Sometimes I just stay quiet. It's like I don't exist in the class."

Analysis of Results

The findings indicate that language policy and practice at Marymount Teachers College, while intended to standardize academic communication, inadvertently privilege English-speaking students and marginalize others, reinforcing inequality in participation and academic success. The dominance of English aligns with Zimbabwe's post-colonial language policies but fails to accommodate the country's multilingual reality, especially in marketised institutions where competition, visibility, and individual performance are heightened.

Code-switching by lecturers, although unofficial, appears to be a coping mechanism that promotes comprehension and participation. However, without policy reform or institutional support for multilingual pedagogies, such practices remain informal and inconsistent.

The study supports arguments by Nkomo (2010) and Chimbganda (2015), who highlight the exclusionary effects of English-only instruction in Zimbabwean tertiary education. In a marketised education system, where success is often linked to visibility, presentation, and fluency, language becomes not just a medium of instruction but a social gatekeeper.

This sub-theme highlights that language use and policy at Marymount Teachers College play a critical role in either enabling or constraining student participation. While efforts such as code-switching demonstrate a grassroots push toward inclusive pedagogy, there is a need for institutional policies that reflect Zimbabwe's linguistic diversity and promote equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Sub-theme 2: Religious Ethos and Its Influence on Institutional Culture and Student Identity

Presentation of Results

Findings from interviews with students, lecturers, and administrators revealed that religion, particularly Catholicism, continues to significantly shape the institutional culture, moral expectations, and educational experiences at Marymount Teachers College. The college, founded as a Catholic mission institution, maintains visible religious traditions through prayer routines, religious instruction, and a moral code embedded in campus life.

Students described how religious symbols, values, and practices are integrated into daily activities. For example, assemblies and official events begin with Christian prayers, and Catholic festivals and liturgies are regularly observed. One administrative officer noted:

"The college has a Catholic background, so we uphold moral values inspired by that tradition. It gives the institution structure and discipline."

Some students appreciated this religious environment, saying it promotes discipline, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging. A third-year student commented:

"Being here has helped me grow spiritually. I feel grounded because the institution encourages us to live morally upright lives."

However, other participants—especially those from non-Catholic or non-Christian backgrounds, expressed discomfort and a sense of exclusion. A student who follows African Traditional Religion shared:

"I respect the college's values, but sometimes I feel like I have to hide my beliefs. Everything is centred around Christianity. We're never asked about our traditions."

Similarly, a student mentioned:

"There's no space or time provided for us to pray. It's like the system assumes we're all Christian. That's not inclusive."

Lecturers reported that while religion promotes cohesion, it can also unintentionally suppress diversity in student expression, especially around issues considered taboo in conservative religious circles (e.g., gender identity, sexuality, or reproductive rights). Some staff members acknowledged the tension between religious values and academic freedom, especially when teaching sensitive topics in Health and Life Skills Education.

Analysis of Results

The results reveal that religion plays a dual role at Marymount Teachers College. On one hand, it fosters a strong moral and spiritual foundation, contributing to

discipline and a shared institutional identity. This aligns with Zvobgo (1996), who observed that mission-founded institutions in Zimbabwe often retain religiously inspired codes of conduct that shape their ethos long after colonial rule.

On the other hand, the dominance of Christianity, especially Catholicism, within the college culture presents challenges to religious inclusivity and pluralism. Students from minority faiths or secular backgrounds may feel marginalised, silenced, or pressured to conform to dominant norms. This supports findings by Chitando (2013), who noted that Zimbabwean educational institutions often fail to provide religious spaces that reflect the country's diverse belief systems.

In a marketised education system where institutions are expected to be inclusive, competitive, and student-centred, the lack of formal recognition of religious diversity may hinder the development of a genuinely inclusive learning environment. The data suggests a need for institutional reflection and policy adjustments to embrace religious diversity without eroding foundational values.

Religion remains a powerful force in shaping the institutional culture and student identity at Marymount Teachers College. While the Catholic ethos offers structure and moral guidance, its dominance may inadvertently suppress religious diversity and freedom of expression. A more inclusive approach that acknowledges and accommodates different faiths could enhance student well-being and social cohesion in a marketised education context.

Sub-theme 3: Gendered Opportunities and Barriers in Academic and Leadership Spaces

Presentation of Results

Data collected through interviews and focus group discussions revealed that gender dynamics continue to significantly influence students' and staff's access, equity, and participation in both academic and leadership activities at Marymount Teachers College. While formal institutional policies promote gender equality, the lived experiences of participants point to persistent gender-based disparities.

Several female students expressed that they felt underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in student government and academic group leadership. One second-year female student noted:

"When it comes to group work, most of the time a male student is chosen as leader even when women are capable. It's like we're seen as assistants, not leaders."

Similarly, female staff members reported limited representation in senior academic and administrative positions, with most top roles occupied by men. A female lecturer shared:

"There are many qualified women here, but the top positions are still male-dominated. It's subtle, but the system favours men in decision-making spaces."

Male participants, on the other hand, generally acknowledged gender equality as a stated institutional value, but some also held traditional views about gender roles. One male student said:

"Men are naturally expected to lead. Even at home, we're taught to take charge. It's nothing personal—it's just the way we were raised."

Moreover, several female students discussed gender-based discrimination and stereotyping, particularly in classroom discussions and practical teaching placements. Some lecturers were perceived to favour male students during technical or theoretical components of the course, while female students were often encouraged toward roles associated with care or nurturing, such as Early Childhood Education.

There were also reports, mostly from female participants, of subtle harassment and inappropriate comments, especially during field placements, which were not always formally reported due to fear of stigma or lack of trust in institutional reporting mechanisms.

Analysis of Results

The findings indicate that while gender equity policies exist on paper, their implementation and uptake at Marymount Teachers College remain inconsistent and are often undermined by deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender norms. These cultural undercurrents shape perceptions of leadership, decision-making, and professional potential within both academic and social spheres.

The gender disparities reported align with prior research by Chabaya, Rembe, and Wadesango (2009), who found that Zimbabwean educational institutions continue to exhibit gendered power dynamics that limit women's advancement. The influence of socialisation and institutional culture reinforces traditional gender roles, thereby reproducing inequality, especially in a context where competitive participation and visibility are key components of a marketised education system.

Furthermore, the lack of robust gender-sensitive mechanisms to prevent and address gender-based harassment and discrimination compromises women's safety, confidence, and engagement. These issues are exacerbated in a marketised context, where performance, competitiveness, and image are highly valued, traits often associated with masculinity.

However, the study also found signs of resilience and shifting attitudes among some younger participants who advocated for more inclusive leadership and equal representation in class and student governance.

Although formal structures promoting gender equality exist at Marymount Teachers College, gendered norms and informal practices continue to limit female participation and representation in academic and leadership spaces. To achieve genuine equity, the college must go beyond policy declarations and actively address the cultural and institutional factors that perpetuate gender disparities.

Sub-theme 4: Intersecting Identities in a Marketised Educational Environment

Presentation of Results

Data from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that the intersection of language, religion, and gender creates layered and often compounding forms of privilege or marginalisation among students and staff at Marymount Teachers College. In a marketised education system, characterised by competition, performance metrics, and image, these social categories strongly influence how individuals experience academic life, access opportunities, and navigate institutional expectations.

One female student from a minority language group (Venda) and a non-Christian background described feeling “invisible” and “misunderstood” both in class and in student social spaces:

“Most things are in English or Shona. I don't speak Shona, and I'm not Catholic. It's hard to participate. I just do my work and go.”

This experience reflects double marginalisation, linguistic and religious, compounded by her gender, which further limits her participation in student leadership and campus discussions.

Lecturers acknowledged that students who are fluent in English, Christian (particularly Catholic), and male often find it easier to assume visible roles such as class representatives, student leaders, or club heads. One tutor commented:

“Even when we say we're inclusive, it's usually the confident English-speaking male students who rise. That's just how the culture has evolved here.”

Another administrator noted that female students from rural or traditional religious backgrounds were less likely to seek academic support or challenge male-dominated spaces, due to internalised norms of submission and silence:

“Some girls don't even report harassment or speak up in discussions. They've been socialised that way—and our system unintentionally reinforces that.”

Furthermore, some male students expressed that marketisation has increased pressure to perform and maintain a certain image, which favours those who are articulate, outspoken, and socially aligned with dominant institutional values. A male student remarked:

“Here, if you don't speak good English or dress in a certain way, you're seen as backward. You have to market yourself.”

These findings show how language fluency, religious conformity, and gender norms intersect and are reinforced by market-driven educational models that reward confidence, performance, and visibility.

Analysis of Results

The results demonstrate that the intersectionality of language, religion, and gender creates complex hierarchies of privilege and disadvantage within the commodified educational space of Marymount Teachers College. Students and staff who embody the dominant identity markers, English-speaking, Christian (particularly Catholic), and male, enjoy smoother academic and social navigation, while those who diverge from this norm face structural and cultural barriers.

This supports Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality, which argues that individual experiences are shaped not by single axes of identity, but by the interwoven effects of multiple social categories. In marketised environments, such as Marymount, these intersections are amplified by neoliberal values that promote individualism, competition, and performativity (Ball, 2007).

Moreover, the study aligns with Ahmed (2012), who notes that institutions often uphold a normative culture under the guise of neutrality, leading to the marginalisation of those who do not fit the dominant mould. At Marymount, while formal policy emphasizes equality, the institutional ethos inadvertently favours a particular linguistic, religious, and gendered identity.

The commodification of education has intensified these dynamics. Marketisation encourages meritocracy, but in practice, it rewards those whose identities align with dominant norms, thereby reinforcing systemic exclusion under the appearance of fairness and neutrality.

The intersection of language, religion, and gender in a commodified educational context produces unequal experiences and opportunities for students and staff at Marymount Teachers College. Those whose identities align with dominant norms enjoy greater visibility and participation, while others face layered exclusions. Addressing these issues requires intentional policy shifts, intersectional awareness, and a move toward inclusive pedagogical and institutional practices.

Sub-theme 5: Strategies for Fostering Inclusive and Equitable Teacher Education in a Marketised Context

Presentation of Results

Participants from across student, academic, and administrative groups at Marymount Teachers College shared various suggestions for promoting inclusivity, equity, and social justice within the institution, especially under the pressures of marketisation. Their responses reflected a collective recognition of systemic inequalities related to language, religion, and gender, and a call for more inclusive policies and practices.

Language Inclusion emerged as a key theme. Many student teachers recommended the formal integration of multilingual support, including the use of indigenous languages in tutorials or discussion groups. A third-year student remarked:

"Lecturers should be encouraged to allow us to speak our languages sometimes—especially when explaining difficult topics. It helps those who are shy in English."

Staff participants supported the creation of language bridging programs or language development workshops for students from rural or minority language backgrounds, to improve confidence and classroom participation.

In relation to religious inclusivity, several non-Christian students proposed the establishment of multi-faith prayer spaces and more inclusive religious representation during official events. One Muslim student shared:

"We're not asking to change the college culture, but we need recognition. A place to pray and to be acknowledged during programs would be a big step."

Administrators acknowledged this suggestion and expressed openness to policy adjustments that uphold the institution's founding values while embracing diversity.

Gender equity strategies were also strongly emphasized. Female students and staff proposed the implementation of:

- Gender sensitivity workshops for both staff and students,
- Anti-harassment policies with clear reporting channels and protections,
- Deliberate efforts to promote female representation in student leadership and college governance structures.

One lecturer noted:

"The college needs to make gender part of its leadership development model. Girls need to be empowered—not just protected."

In addition, both staff and students highlighted the need to reform the institutional culture, which many described as "traditional" and "conservative," and not fully aligned with the principles of modern, inclusive teacher education.

Analysis of Results

The results reveal a strong consensus that promoting inclusivity, equity, and social justice requires both structural and cultural transformation at Marymount Teachers College. Participants identified key leverage points: language accommodation, religious representation, gender mainstreaming, and institutional policy reform.

These strategies align with critical pedagogy as described by Freire (1970), which advocates for education that is dialogic, empowering, and responsive to the lived experiences of learners. In the context of marketised education, where economic efficiency and competitiveness often overshadow humanistic values,

there is a risk of neglecting marginalized voices. However, participants in this study demonstrated a clear desire for reforms that prioritise social justice alongside academic excellence.

This also echoes the view of Soudien (2010), who argues that transformative education must move beyond access and address deep-rooted inequalities in institutional culture, identity, and power. Participants' suggestions reflect a bottom-up call for equity-driven reform that is context-specific yet aligned with global trends toward inclusive teacher education.

Furthermore, these strategies challenge the assumptions of market-based models that equate success with performance and individualism. Instead, they promote collective empowerment, cultural recognition, and equitable resource distribution, which are essential for meaningful inclusion in post-colonial, multicultural contexts like Zimbabwe.

Participants proposed practical and contextually grounded strategies for promoting inclusivity, equity, and social justice at Marymount Teachers College. These include multilingual support systems, interfaith accommodations, gender-sensitive leadership initiatives, and cultural reforms within institutions. Implementing such strategies can help the college align its teacher education mission with both social justice ideals and the realities of a marketised higher education landscape.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study investigated how language, religion, and gender shape educational experiences within a marketised teacher training institution, using Marymount Teachers College as a case study. The data generated through interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires was categorised under five sub-themes aligned to the study's objectives. The findings reveal that intersecting social markers, language, religion, and gender, significantly influence inclusivity, equity, and access in teacher education, especially in environments where market logic dominates educational planning and delivery.

1. Language Use and Language Policy in a Marketised Educational Environment

The study found that students who are proficient in English or dominant local languages (Shona and Ndebele) tend to participate more actively in class discussions and leadership opportunities, while those from minority language groups often feel silenced or alienated. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, which posits that language proficiency is not just a tool for communication, but also a form of power that determines inclusion and success in academic spaces.

Similar to findings by Makoni & Pennycook (2005), this study demonstrates that English maintains a hegemonic role, reinforced by marketised systems that equate fluency with professionalism and employability. The prioritisation of English as a medium of instruction, without robust multilingual support,

marginalises students who lack confidence in the language. While Zimbabwe's education policy acknowledges multilingualism, actual implementation lags behind, reflecting what Mazrui (1997) terms "linguistic apartheid."

2. Religion and Institutional Culture in Teacher Education

Religious affiliation, especially Christianity and more specifically, Catholicism, was found to shape student identity and institutional ethos at Marymount. While many students reported comfort in a faith-driven environment, others from non-Christian or minority denominations expressed exclusion and cultural alienation. This resonates with Apple (2001), who critiques how religious ideologies can be subtly institutionalised, reinforcing dominant cultural norms under the guise of neutrality.

Religion in this marketised context acts as both a moral compass and a social filter. Events, assemblies, and leadership roles often reflect Christian values, leaving those outside this framework on the margins. The study confirms Soudien's (2010) argument that institutional cultures in post-colonial education systems often fail to reflect the pluralism of their student populations, thereby limiting transformative and inclusive practice.

3. Gender Dynamics and Educational Equity

Findings revealed significant gender-based disparities in access to leadership, academic confidence, and classroom participation. Female students, especially those from rural backgrounds, were less likely to assume leadership roles or report gender-based discrimination due to deeply ingrained societal and institutional norms. This supports Stromquist's (1990) perspective that education systems often reproduce gender hierarchies unless actively disrupted.

Participants noted that marketisation intensified competition, which favoured assertive, outspoken, and confident students, traits often encouraged more in male learners than females. Similar findings were documented by Unterhalter (2005), who emphasized that gender parity does not automatically lead to gender justice without a shift in institutional culture and power relations.

4. Intersectionality of Language, Religion, and Gender in a Commodified Environment

The most profound finding was how intersectional disadvantages accumulate for students and staff who occupy multiple marginalised identities. For instance, a female, Venda-speaking, non-Christian student experiences triple exclusion, linguistic, religious, and gender-based. This confirms Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality, which argues that experiences of discrimination are not additive but multiplicative.

In marketised environments where performance, visibility, and professionalism are heavily rewarded, these marginalised identities often translate

into less access to opportunity, reduced participation, and limited voice. Ball (2007) warns that marketisation often disguises inequality through the language of merit and choice, while ignoring structural disadvantages. This study affirms that unless teacher education explicitly addresses intersecting inequalities, commodification will continue to deepen the exclusion of the most vulnerable.

5. Strategies for Inclusion and Social Justice in Teacher Education

Participants proposed practical reforms, such as gender sensitivity training, multi-faith spaces, and multilingual support programs, that reflect an emergent consciousness about inequality. These strategies align with Freire's (1970) notion of conscientisation, where the oppressed gain awareness of structural constraints and begin to challenge them.

While marketised systems tend to prioritise efficiency and measurable outcomes, participants called for a values-based educational model that incorporates equity, justice, and community. This mirrors the work of Giroux (2005), who asserts that education must be a site of democratic struggle, especially when under pressure from neoliberal reforms.

The results strongly indicate that in a marketised teacher education landscape such as that of Marymount Teachers College, language, religion, and gender intersect to shape educational experiences in deeply unequal ways. These experiences are not isolated but are reinforced by structural and institutional factors embedded in commodified education models.

While marketisation aims to improve performance and global competitiveness, it can also unintentionally entrench existing inequalities. Unless deliberate strategies are adopted to confront these disparities, educational reforms may only benefit those who already possess social and cultural capital.

However, the study also reveals a strong desire among students and staff for reform, suggesting that inclusive teacher education is both possible and necessary, provided it is grounded in equity-driven, context-specific, and participatory approaches.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore how language, religion, and gender shape experiences and participation within a market-driven teacher education environment, using Marymount Teachers College as a case study. Grounded in a qualitative case study design and underpinned by a critical paradigm, the study unearthed the complex, often invisible, dynamics through which social markers intersect to either promote or hinder equity and inclusion in teacher education.

1. Language and Linguistic Capital as a Gatekeeper

The findings revealed that language proficiency, especially in English, acts as a gatekeeper to educational success, participation, and leadership opportunities. Despite Zimbabwe's multilingual policies, institutional practices at Marymount continue to privilege English, marginalising students from minority language backgrounds. This reinforces Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, where certain language competencies are more valued than others, influencing one's academic identity and confidence.

2. Religion as a Cultural Force in Shaping Institutional Norms

Religion, particularly Christianity, was found to influence the institutional culture, disciplinary frameworks, and moral expectations of students and staff. While the college's religious foundation provided moral guidance and social cohesion for some, it alienated others, especially non-Christian students who reported subtle forms of exclusion and a lack of religious pluralism. This points to a hidden curriculum that reinforces dominant religious values at the expense of diversity and inclusion.

3. Persistent Gender Disparities in Participation and Power

Despite formal policies promoting gender equality, patriarchal norms and unconscious gender biases persist within the college. Female students were less represented in leadership roles and often hesitated to challenge male authority, especially in academic settings. Gendered expectations also shaped how students navigated career choices, classroom discussions, and social relationships. The marketised environment appeared to intensify competition, disproportionately disadvantaging female students who lack assertiveness due to socio-cultural conditioning.

4. Intersectionality and the Layering of Disadvantage

The study's most significant insight lies in how language, religion, and gender intersect to amplify exclusion for students and staff occupying multiple marginalised identities. Those who are female, from minority language groups, and non-Christian often experience layered discrimination. These intersectional disadvantages are particularly pronounced in a commodified education system where performance, visibility, and professionalism are highly valued. As such, structural inequalities are obscured under the guise of meritocracy.

5. Demand for Inclusive and Transformative Reform

Despite these challenges, the study also found a strong awareness among students and staff of the need for transformation. Participants expressed a desire for policies and practices that promote

inclusivity, such as multilingual support, interfaith dialogue, and gender-sensitive pedagogy. There is growing recognition that marketisation must not come at the cost of social justice and that education should be a space for liberation, critical engagement, and equity.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings highlight that language, religion, and gender are not peripheral concerns but central to how students and staff experience, navigate, and make sense of teacher education in Zimbabwe. In the context of marketisation, these social identities become even more critical, often determining who thrives and who is left behind.

If Zimbabwean teacher education is to be truly inclusive and responsive, it must go beyond superficial reforms and actively challenge the deeper structural and cultural inequalities embedded in its institutions. Marymount Teachers College, and similar institutions, must embrace transformative education that is critically conscious, pluralistic, and socially just.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings on the influence of language, religion, and gender within a marketised teacher education landscape at Marymount Teachers College, the following recommendations are proposed to foster inclusivity, equity, and social justice:

1. Promote Multilingualism and Language Equity

- The College should integrate multilingual support systems into both academic and administrative functions, including:
 - Tutorials or discussion groups in indigenous languages.
 - Language bridging courses for students from underprivileged linguistic backgrounds.
- Institutional language policies should recognise the cultural capital of local languages, reducing over-reliance on English-only practices.
- Train lecturers in linguistic sensitivity and inclusive pedagogical strategies to support diverse learners.

2. Foster Religious Inclusivity and Intercultural Respect

- Establish multi-faith prayer spaces and acknowledge diverse religious calendars to accommodate students and staff of various faiths.
- Review institutional traditions (e.g., prayer at official events) to ensure they are inclusive and voluntary, rather than imposing a single religious identity.
- Integrate religious pluralism education into Life Skills or Ethics curricula to promote understanding and reduce prejudice.

3. Mainstream Gender Equity in Policy and Practice

- Implement gender awareness training for staff and students to address implicit bias and challenge patriarchal norms.
- Establish clear and confidential gender-based harassment reporting mechanisms, backed by strong policies and accountability.
- Promote female participation in leadership and decision-making roles, including student governance and academic committees.
- Review learning materials and practices to ensure they are gender-sensitive and non-stereotypical.

4. Address Intersectionality in Student and Staff Support

- Develop institutional frameworks that recognise overlapping disadvantages faced by students who are female, religious minorities, or from non-dominant language backgrounds.
- Appoint inclusion officers or diversity focal persons to monitor and support equity efforts across departments.
- Use disaggregated data (by gender, religion, language) to inform policy, planning, and resource allocation.

5. Resist the Negative Effects of Marketisation

- Re-orient college values and policies toward student well-being, diversity, and equity, rather than purely economic or performance metrics.
- Ensure that fee structures, access to academic resources, and support services are not exclusionary to disadvantaged students.
- Include social justice, inclusive pedagogy, and critical consciousness as core components in teacher education curricula.

6. Strengthen Institutional Accountability and Leadership

- Set up a Diversity and Inclusion Committee responsible for overseeing implementation of inclusive practices and monitoring progress.
- Conduct regular equity audits and stakeholder feedback surveys to evaluate the college's inclusivity across all domains.
- Encourage participatory governance by ensuring that students and staff from diverse backgrounds are represented in decision-making bodies.

7. Collaborate with External Partners

- Partner with ministries, NGOs, and faith-based organisations to mobilise resources and expertise on inclusive education.
- Engage in policy dialogue at national level to advocate for broader systemic reforms in

teacher education, addressing marketisation, inequality, and social justice.

Implementing these recommendations can help Marymount Teachers College become a model for equitable and inclusive teacher education in Zimbabwe. As the institution continues to navigate the pressures of a marketised system, deliberate and sustained efforts are necessary to ensure that no student or staff member is left behind due to their language, religion, or gender.

Conflict of interest

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