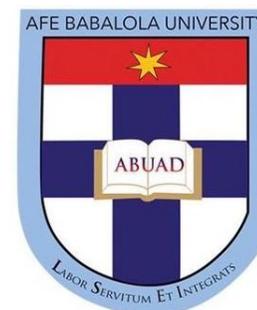




The Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy



ISSN: 2467-8406 (Print) 2467-8392 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsdlp>

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To cite this article: Abgirl Muleya & Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane (2023). Exploring policies and laws on gender mainstreaming and the criteria for promotions in institutions of higher learning: A case study of a rural-based University in Limpopo, South Africa. *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy*. Vol. 14:2. 107-125, DOI: [10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.6](https://doi.org/10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.6)

To link this article: DOI: [10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.6](https://doi.org/10.4314/jsdlp.v14i2.6)



Published online: December 1, 2023.

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EXPLORING POLICIES AND LAWS ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND THE CRITERIA FOR PROMOTIONS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF A RURAL-BASED UNIVERSITY IN LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA.

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Citation:

Abgirl Muleya & Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane (2023). Exploring policies and laws on gender mainstreaming and the criteria for promotions in institutions of higher learning: A case study of a rural-based University in Limpopo, South Africa. *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy*. Vol. 14:2. 107-125.

Submitted:

06 August 2023

Final version received:

30 October 2023

ISSN: 2467-8406 (Print)

2467-8392 (Online)

ABSTRACT

This article examines the intricate relationship between sustainable development, policy formulation, and legal instruments that address gender disparities in promotions within institutions of higher learning around the world, and South Africa in particular. In this article we explore the conundrum of gender inequalities and policies that seem to promote gender equity and the inability by institutions of higher learning, to implement them. Promotion criteria in these institutions are also looked at to ascertain whether they are still skewed towards male academics or not. The South African Constitution addresses gender equality and employment equity. However, female academics are barely visible in senior positions, thus prompting us to question whether this democratic constitution is being adhered to. A qualitative analysis was used to measure the gendered-ness of the promotion criteria at a particular institution of higher learning in the Northern part of South Africa called Limpopo. The study uses a qualitative approach in collecting and analysing the data. Also, a focused ethnographic research was embarked upon as this method is applicable to any discipline whenever there is a desire to explore specific cultural perspectives held by groups of people (in this instance, female academics) within a specific problem-focused framework such as those female academics who are facing challenges when it comes to promotions. Findings from the study reveal that most of the female academics were aware of the requirement of the promotion criteria and that it was applied in the same manner for both males and females. However, Female academics were few in senior positions due to the fact that the promotion criteria were very stringent and that institutions of higher learning fail to recognize that men and women have dissimilar needs, interests, and responsibilities. Furthermore, there were academics who were frustrated with not progressing and opted to settle in their current positions because they disliked being tasked with handling complicated responsibilities that would disturb them from their household duties. The study therefore recommends that community leaders and policymakers should also work together in advocating for gender-inclusive policies and legislation that promote equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life, including in institutions of higher learning and TVET's (Technical and Vocational Educational Training Institutions)

Keywords: Inequalities, Academic promotions, women academics, university Leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities within academia, particularly in promotions, persist despite global efforts to draft policies and laws that are geared towards the promotion of gender equality and sustainable development. The lack of women in prominent positions such as professorship, deanship, heads of department, and directorship positions, are a well-documented reality. Most the female academics find it enormously difficult for them to excel to the point of reaching most these levels.¹ According to previous research findings, the taxing work requirements and promotion criteria are barriers to women's professional progression and are a stark illustration of the battles that women confront before they can be considered for promotion in any field of work.² Although gender differences have become of less significance within the society, they are nevertheless employed to draw critical distinctions between men and women.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PROMOTION CRITERIA IN DIFERENT INSTITUTIONS

Academic promotions provide a mechanism for the recognition of staff achievements and development. These can also be a device that creates or reflect inequalities as other groups (particularly men) have been proven to rise to top positions readily than others.³ Academic promotion is a process that facilitates upward staff mobility.⁴ The inclusion of teaching in academic promotions

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¹ Barbara Zuckerman, 'The advancement of women faculty at very high Research Universities in the United States' (Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 2017)

² Masingita V. Mahlala, 'Black African Women Academics at Gauteng Universities: Experiences, Challenges and Aspirations for the Future' (2019) University of Johannesburg.

³ Philip G. Altbach, Liz Reisberg, and Laura E. Rumbley, 'Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution' (2019) 85 Brill

⁴ Hassan Sadiq, Barnes Karen I, Max Price, Freedom Gumedze and Robert G. Morrell. 'Academic promotions at a South African university: questions of bias, politics and transformation' (2019)78 Higher education 423, 442

has recently gained prominence in South Africa. Nine of the 25 South African universities have reported that they accommodate teaching in academic promotions, although teaching evaluations differ from one university to the other.⁵ Men continue to dominate senior positions in institutions of higher learning and in this article, trends in promotions and policy statements at the University of Venda (Univen) will be reflected through presentations of findings regarding the promotion process. Also, the Employment Equity Act of South Africa is probed to see as to whether it caters to the rights of women in as much as it does to people with disabilities. South Africa's history of structural and political exclusion based on race and its negative consequences are well known. Also, the history of gender inequality is well known. But this is not wholly covered by the act and other policies about equality. Four years into the new constitutional dispensation, this act was passed to promote the right to equality and to ensure that all employees receive equal opportunities and are treated fairly by their employers. A core focus of the EEA is the implementation of employment equity and affirmative action to redress the effects of historical discrimination.

The proportion of women in academia at senior levels in developed countries, such as Australia, has not altered despite the rise in female involvement in higher education. This is also true of other Western nations.⁶ In comparison to their male counterparts, academic women in Australia experience a lower level of career stagnation. For instance, an Australian institution created and implemented a career progression program to encourage women's promotion from senior lecturer to associate professor positions out of concern that they take time to be considered for promotion⁷. The United Kingdom is similar to that of the rest of the European member states. In Africa, Women make up only one in every five professors, despite accounting for nearly 50 percent

⁵ Reshma Subbaya and Renuka Vithal. 'Gender, teaching and academic promotions in higher education' (2017)29 *Gender and Education* 926, 951

⁶ Sarah J. Aiston and Jisun Jung. 'Women academics and research productivity: An international comparison.' In *Globalised re/gendering of the academy and leadership*, (2016) pp. 17-32. Routledge,

⁷ Polly Parker Belinda Hewitt, Jennifer Witheriff and Amy Cooper. "Frank and fearless: Supporting academic career progression for women in an Australian program. (2018) 5" *Administrative Sciences* 8, no. 1

of the non-professorial academic workforce.⁸ Women were under-represented at all levels of university leadership in England, with only about 13% of women promoted to full professorship.⁹ A similar situation exists throughout the world, and in developing countries like South Africa the situation is dire.

Among South Africa's various institutions of higher learning, there are currently many highly educated and brilliant black women, yet very few of them hold strategic positions. The number of women in executive positions in South Africa's 23 universities has slightly increased, although there is still a need to capacitate women to reach these positions.¹⁰ ¹¹ Argued that the selection system should be both fair to individual applicants and should also reflect equitable success for all groups. Given the platform, women may perform at least as well as qualified males if decision-making processes are consistent and defined in an unbiased way regarding gender mainstreaming policies. When procedures are not standardized or when the standards for promotion are unclear or ambiguous, women may be compromised.¹² Indicate that the biasness of the promotion criteria often focuses on giving undue weight to research achievement (which of-course is often held to advantage men) rather than teaching. This may be because research output is more easily measured. However, promotion criteria varies within institutions of higher learning where other Universities place greater emphasis on teaching and engaged scholarship in the assessment of promotability.

⁸ Rizwana Yousaf and Rudi Schmiede. 'Barriers to women's representation in academic excellence and positions of power.' (2017): 1-13. *Asian Journal of German and European Studies* 2.

⁹ Sue Shepherd, 'Why are there so few female leaders in higher education: A case of structure or agency?' (2017)31 *Management in Education* 82,87

¹⁰ *Ibid* 3,5.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² *Ibid* 926,951

3. INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

As this research was conducted at the University of Venda, located in the Northern Province of South Africa, we had to study the university's policy on promotions and to also check how many women were promoted from 2000 up until 2023. The University of Venda started a Gender Equity Unit in 1996 which was composed of the department of gender studies and the Human Resources department, drafted and adopted equity and sexual harassment rules in May 2009 to build a more formalized support framework on promoting gender equity and parity on campus.

The University as a designated employer now applies employment equity policies to all staff members appointed on permanent and fixed terms, part-time staff as well as other employees. The University also acknowledges that there is inadequate diversity in its workforce. Hence the drafting of a policy which is designed to rectify the past imbalances by consciously developing and implementing an employment equity plan (called the Policy on Employment Equity, 2015). The policy places particular emphasis on the following areas: recruiting, selecting, and deploying employees; utilizing and managing diversity; promoting and advancing equal opportunities; eradicating unfair discrimination; and implementing a focused affirmative action approach.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Gender Discrimination in Higher Education

The roots of gender disparity can be found in the workforce at particular times and in cultural backgrounds. Women still experience gender-based discrimination in employment opportunities.¹³ Women's promotion rates in South Africa have consistently lagged behind men's promotion rates despite numerous government initiatives to increase women's

¹³ Deanna R.Davis and Cecilia Maldonado, 'Shattering the glass ceiling: The leadership development of African American women in higher education.'(2015)35 *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal* 48,64

participation in the workforce. However in 2022 the number of female chancellors increased as advocate Gumbi became chancellor at the University of Venda and Dr Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka joined the University of Johannesburg as the chancellor recently. This only shows that despite all the attempts made by women, there is still much to do in mainstreaming gender in higher institutions of learning.

The lack of female academics in senior positions can be seen at the University of Venda, where most management positions are filled by men, not because no woman is qualified for these positions, but because the institution may still be adhering to gender stereotypical approaches that may suggest that it is only those hegemonic masculinities that are important in the selection of good leaders. However, this article notes that the University has progressive policies which are gender sensitive. ¹⁴Assert that, although more women are assuming leadership roles than before, the notion of a woman as a leader is still a foreign concept to many individuals. This proves that women are not under-represented in senior positions due to not qualifying but rather because of their gender. Discussing gender discrimination and policies that mainstream gender is essential to understand policies that guide promotion criteria in institutions of higher learning, especially at the University of Venda.

4.2. Perceptions of Leadership and Gender Differences

Men are thought to be better leaders than women because of their masculinity. According to¹⁵, women held 18.7% of full professorships and only 19.3% of presidency positions (Vice-Chancellors of colleges and universities). Statistics by ¹⁶ reflect that, out of 26 institutions of higher learning in South Africa, only four are led by women, showing that men clearly dominate the governing and managerial levels of higher institutions of learning. More sobering is the possibility that women's interest in these

¹⁴ Samantha C. Paustian-Underdahl, Lisa S. Walker and David J. Woehr. 'Gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness: A meta-analysis of contextual moderators' (2014)99 *Journal of applied psychology* 1129

¹⁵ Thembelihle I Maseko, 'A comparative study of challenges faced by women in leadership: a case of Foskor and the Department of Labour in Mhlathuze Municipality' (PhD diss., University of Zululand, 2013)

¹⁶ Mangoloth B. 'Advancing gender equality in academia' (2019) *Mail & Guardian* Accessed October 2022.

institutions are not adequately protected, and that women will have few or no role models and mentors; something that could have far-reaching implications for the development of future female leaders. Other experts think that women must be provided with equal opportunity and training in order to thrive and compete with their male counterparts. ¹⁷Claim that women, despite holding equivalent educational degrees, are under-promoted in comparison to men. It is argued that investing time, money, or effort in the success of one's academic career is not something women are cognitively or naturally inclined to do. However, tables are slowly turning as more women are dedicating their time to their careers. Hence we are able to notice some women who have succeeded in being promoted to positions leadership.

4.3. Promotion Criteria at the University of Venda

The promotion criteria at the university of Venda is equal for both men and women academics. The criteria for promotion was stipulated without any consideration for the duties than women already have besides their careers. Lamentably, according to¹⁸, most of these female academics end up with role conflict. ¹⁹ Reiterate that in augmentation to the duties many women hold in Universities, they also continue to serve as the primary caretakers of their families. As a result, it is highly challenging for them to advance academically because doing so would need more of their time and attention of which they barely have. Furthermore ²⁰ discovered that long working hours expected at the workplace was a vital contributing hurdle to promotions for majority of female academics in Universities.

¹⁷ Abgirl Muleya, 'Exploring experiences of female academics at a higher education institution Limpopo Province, South Africa' (2017) Accessed September 2022

¹⁸ Sondra Beall-Davis, 'African American women in America: Underrepresentation, intersectionality, and leadership development experiences' (PhD dissertation, Walden University, 2017)

¹⁹ Sharon Pierce, 'Taking our seat at the table': A narrative inquiry of the experiences of seven Latina administrative leaders in higher education' (2017)51

²⁰ Kiana Hui, 'The obstacles of female entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley' (2014)7 Intersect The Stanford Journal of Science, Technology, and Society

Table for promotion criteria at Univen

| | Junior lecturer | Lecturer | Senior lecturer | Associate professor | Professor | Senior professor |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|--|---|---|
| Qualification | Honours degree | Master's degree | Doctoral degree + 5years teaching experience | Doctoral degree +10 years teaching experience +10 articles | Doctoral degree+10 years teaching experience +15 articles | Doctoral degree +10 years of teaching experience+ 30 articles |

The promotion criteria shown above is designed for both men and women who want to climb the academic ladder and is in line with the University of Venda's employment and promotion policies. If you study the graph closely, you will notice the number of articles needed for promotion from a senior lecturer to associate professor, and from associate professor to full professor. This is the reason why female academics are still struggling to be well represented at the University of Venda especially in senior positions as they fail to meet the promotion criteria, mostly with regard to article writing as their lives are consumed with so much pressure of excessive work of teaching many modules as well as to perform household chores.

4.4. Academic Posts by Gender

According to ²¹ women are under-represented in highest senior positions. These positions are dominated by their male counterparts. In deanship positions men consisted of 62.5% while women are 37.5%. With regard to the vice dean positions men covered 75% while women covered 25%, while men consists of 78.4% regarding Heads of department positions while women are a mere 21.6%. In professorship positions, men dominated with 83.2% while women are 16%. There are 75% of male associate professors while women associate professors are only 25%. For senior lecturer positions, men cover 68.8% and women a mere

²¹ Ndivhuwo Munyai, 'Experiences of academic employees in relation to gender equality in leadership positions: A case study of semi-urban University in Limpopo Province, South Africa' (PhD dissertation, University in Limpopo 2018)

31.2%.²² However there is a slight change in these figures which shows that although it is difficult for women to manuver to higher positions, some have been able to succeed.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article we use the lens of the masculinity theory to argue about the constructiveness of the promotion criteria which secures the highest positions for male academics in institutions of higher learning while women continue to struggle in the process of getting promoted. Masculinity theory relate to preconceived conceptions and ideals about how men should or are supposed to behave in a given society.²³ There are certain characteristics that distinguish men such as dominance, competition, aggression, muscular stamina, vulnerability, bravery and gender expression. Males in the workplace have historically represented female academics due to the conventional views that a man should always be the leader, which is also a necessary quality for masculinity²⁴. Despite the fact that the majority of females are assuming management positions, several people, both male and female, still are unaccustomed to the idea of a woman as a leader. It appears that when women hold leadership positions, they are more likely to receive criticism for allegedly transgressing gender roles.²⁵ The concept that leadership is synonymous with masculinity is still firmly ingrained in our thinking and language, thus, competitiveness, aggression, and dominance are all masculine words that are frequently used to describe leaders who are largely male. According to ²⁶ it is difficult for women to enter and flourish in these environments since the centers of power and excellence in South African colleges and universities are occupied and controlled by men.

²² Ibid 40

²³ Nonzwakazi L. Maqubela, TshilidziP. Mulaudzi, Abgiri Muleya and Nange R. Raselekoane, 'Attitudes of academicians towards gender equality at institutions of higher learning in South Africa' (2017)9 African Journal of Development Studies 27

²⁴ Jamie Birdwell, 'Navigating the Glass Ladder: A Qualitative Exploration of the Challenges Women Leaders Experience throughout the Process of Promotion in the Manufacturing Industry' (PhD dissertation, Florida Institute of Technology)

²⁵ Ibid p 1129

²⁶ Ibid p 27

At first it was believed that masculinity was a natural trait; however, this has become problematic as a result of cultural comparisons and observations of variances in masculinity across contexts. Researchers have also found that, like femininity, masculinity is socially and historically produced, flexible, and not fixed. The rise of feminism has challenged the historical connections between leadership and the notion that males make great leaders than females in recent times²⁷. Women confront specific problems and difficulties that limit the efficacy of their leadership, according to authors like²⁸, who have demonstrated that women have distinctive strengths and talents in leading particularly in educational institutions. These strengths can be harnessed and incorporated into policies geared towards equity with regard to promotion criteria.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology brought forward, different experiences of female academics regarding the promotion criteria. One on one interviews were used as the main data collecting tool to explore the uniquely contextualised nature of the gendered-ness of the promotion criteria. The study sample included twenty female academics selected from the University of Venda. A purposeful and convenient sampling method was used to select the respondents. In particular, focused ethnographic research was embarked upon as this method is applicable to any discipline whenever there is a desire to explore specific cultural perspectives held by groups of people (in this instance, female academics) within a specific problem-focused framework such as those female academics who are facing challenges when it comes to promotions.

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis and the study adhered to strict ethical requirements whereby consent was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of Venda.

²⁷ Kolobe P. Makgoka, 'The leadership experiences of female secondary school principals in Sekhukhune District, Limpopo' (PhD dissation, 2016)

²⁸ George N. Shava and D. Chasokela. 'Women in higher education leadership and parenthood, experiences from a university in Zimbabwe: So few women in leadership positions.' (2020) 1 *The Education Systems of Africa* 15

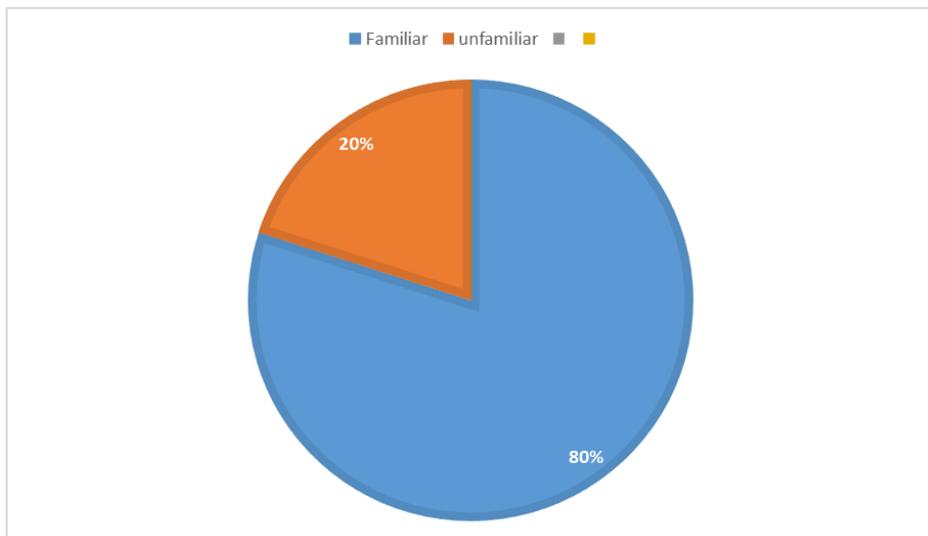
The participants were ensured anonymity and were also made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Knowledge of the Promotion Criteria

Regarding the knowledge of the promotion criteria, the majority of the participants were acquainted with the criteria. Although only a few were able to give the full description of the promotion criteria for academics at their institution. Participants said the following:

“Promotion from Junior lecturer to lecturer has its own criteria, from lecturer to senior lecturer requires one to have a doctoral degree. However, from senior lecturer to associate professor, one should have 10 publications (under review). From associate professor to full professor, one should have published 15 articles (under review). For the two promotions that require publication, leadership is also required together with supervision of both master’s and doctoral students to graduation. Candidates for Associate and professor position also undergo interviews”. At least this is as per the policy of the University (**Participant 1**)



Participant 2 added the following:

“Yes. The university lists the criteria according to the description of the post. For example, a lecturer must have a master's degree, a senior lecturer must have a doctorate, and at least five articles must be published. This is usually tailored according to the University's organogram and gender mainstreaming policies. A professor position must be applied for if one has many articles. This explains why most professors take sabbatical leave to focus on publications”.

The above reactions highlight that female academics are well aware of policies regarding promotions and what is needed of them in order to accelerate to higher positions. However, they are faced with the dilemma of being able to achieve the required criteria as explained by participant 1 that the most people who are capable of having sabbatical leave are those who are at a doctoral level and are also professors. Academics who are still pursuing their masters or are at first or second year in their PhD studies experience a challenge of balancing time as they are burdened with more modules and students to teach. This leads to their failure to publish. In explaining the negative experiences of female academics regarding the promotion criteria, Participant 3 specified that:

“When it comes to promotions, universities do not take women's needs and interests into account. Women struggle to excel in an environment that does not value them. The demands are too great, the criteria for promotion are too stringent, and these institutions fail to recognize that men and women have dissimilar needs, interests, and responsibilities. For example, men have women who cook and care for them. This gives them the chance to excel at work as they do not have to balance family needs and work” This factor is also not taken into cognizance especially by our employment equity Act and university policies. For instance, the act talks more about people with disabilities as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007. The act talks about “people who have a long-term or recurring physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may substantially limit their prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment”. The

act is therefore silent on us as women. We also view ourselves as historically disadvantaged (**Participant 3**).

This is in line with²⁹ who argued that universities were traditionally dominated by men and as a result, their traditions and standards were shaped by men's life experiences. This further indicates the evidence that female academics fall behind in their careers not due to being unaware of the promotion criteria but instead they argue that the promotion criteria favored their male counterparts as they barely had other responsibilities outside the working environment. However, when they were asked as to whether they wanted any special preference regarding the promotion criteria they refused arguing the following:

“It’s not like we want special treatment for we are capable to do exactly the same work that the men are doing, all we want is that there should be consideration on the roles and responsibilities that women have”. If we are given equal treatment, then I am confident that we can excel the same or even better than men. But these policies, as well as employment equity Act, do not take into consideration our peculiar situation as women (**participant 4**).

The participants were also asked about their views/opinions regarding what they thought should be done for the promotion criteria to be accessible for them. The majority of the participants responded as follows:

“Since our biggest challenge is having too much work which prevents us from acquiring the necessary qualifications for the promotion, the University should have a policy that allows us to have few modules and students to teach. In that way, we will be able to have time to write articles and supervise more students as per the promotion criteria”. Let’s face it, employers continue to see childbearing as a negative interruption and are not encouraged to employ young women who may fall pregnant. Even though South Africa has Labour laws protecting pregnant women, as seen by the Labour Relations

²⁹ Bahieh Mohajeri, Mahani Mokhtar and Farhad Balash, ‘Challenges encountering the participation of women in senior administrative status in higher education’ (2015)8 International education studies 9,16

Act, women generally still have a long way to go in attaining gender parity (**Participant 5**).

7.2 Gender Dimensions in Promotion

The purpose of this inquiry was to ascertain whether academic men and women were subject to the same promotion standards as shown in the policies regarding promotions. The following question was asked: “Are men and women held to the same promotion criteria? Many of the participants said they utilized the same promotion criteria.

“Yes, the promotion criteria used are the same, although there are procedures and processes that should be considered for promotions, however, these are not gender-sensitive in that they do not consider the unique challenges that are faced by women. These challenges have to do with child-rearing, taking care of family needs, and doing house chores”. (**Participant 1**)

Similarly, Participant J was in line with others as she said:

“Criteria for promotions are the same for both men and women, as if they have the same responsibilities at home. Women come to work already exhausted after making sure that their children have washed and have also eaten their breakfast before going to school. They also clean the house and make sure that the husband has also eaten his breakfast and has his lunchbox ready”.

In explaining the negative experience faced by female academics regarding the gendered-ness of the promotion criteria, some participants acknowledged that the promotion criteria used were the same, although they argued that there should be consideration of the workload burdens experienced by women. Participant 2 specified that:

“Yes, these guys do not care about the fact that women have so many burdens outside work. Men can come and work at night and we can't. We have to look after the house. They find everything ready at home and it is early for them to travel anywhere and for any type of work”.

Participant 3 added the following:

“Yes, they are the same without consideration of other gender-based responsibilities; sometimes I feel like it is a curse to be a woman because this looks like a position that exposes us to underpayments and exploitation. It is even more disheartening that those in power do not see anything wrong with the way the status quo in higher echelons of power is designed. The system must be fought so that it can change”. We continue to face consequences of gender norms and the unequal division of Labour where we are seen as caregivers within the family, while men are viewed as breadwinners. We spend an amount of time doing unpaid work as compared to men who spend more time in remunerative employment. When this work is done, we are so tired that we do not have time to concentrate on our research as academics (**Participant 3**).

This view is in line with³⁰ who argued that promotional requirements were a stumbling block that did not recognize women's multiple positions as well as did not apply to their needs. The argument that is often made is:” How can the promotion criteria consider women’s needs when the policymakers are males?. “Definitely they wouldn’t know what suits the women the most unless and until they involve them in the decision-making process.³¹

In contrast to the above, the other participants did not hesitate to highlight that they were unaware of whether the promotion criteria used within the institution was the same for both male and female academics. This shows that some female academics did not have any zeal of climbing the academic ladder. That is why they never bothered on familiarizing themselves with the promotion guidelines. Instead they were comfortable with their positions.³²

³⁰ Ibid 423-442

³¹ Mncedisi C Maphalala and Nhlanhla Mpofu, ‘Are we there yet? A literature study of the challenges of women academics in institutions of higher education.’(2017)15 *Gender and Behaviour* 9216,9224

³² Semere Haile, Tsegai Emmanuel and Augustine Dzathor. ‘Barriers and challenges confronting women for leadership and management positions: Review and Analysis. (2016)13 *International Journal of Business & Public Administration*

This is captured in the following statement:

“Honestly I do not know, I have never checked whether the promotion criteria in place differ or the same for both men and women” (**Participant 4**)

Participant 5 sounded very bitter when adding her own views:

“I have never bothered by checking or wanting to know what happens when one is promoted. Since I joined this university, I have taught myself to only concentrate on doing my work, the rest I do not care as long as I am getting paid for the work that I do”

The above statement aligns with³³ who found that female academics who barely made any progress become discouraged and leave only to be replaced by other female lecturers, thus creating a revolving door syndrome.

7.3 Reasons why Female Academics Occupied Lower Positions

The results of the study show that female academics were not stagnant in their lower positions, rather it was due to the rigidity which contributed to the failure of women as the institutional environment was not too conducive for them. This is aptly captured by participant 3 who said:

“When it comes to promotions, universities do not take women’s needs and interests into account. Women continue to show some encouraging results in spite of the fact that their work environment is hostile to them.

Participant 6 supported the above sentiment.

“The promotion criteria are very challenging to women, and most female academics fail to meet the requirements as stipulated in these policies on promotions”.

The above statements reflect that the promotion criteria put in place is hardly achievable by female academics. Also the studies of

³³ Ibid 1129

³⁴reveal that gender inequities continue to persist in institutions of higher learning, and in all areas of academia, female faculty members are excluded, sidelined, and discriminated against because leadership is popularly attached to masculinity. Sustainable development goal number 5 specifically highlights the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. However, gender disparities in higher education undermine these goals, as they hinder the full participation and contribution of women in academia. Promoting gender equality in promotions within higher education institutions should align with the broader vision of sustainable development.³⁵

This further supports the findings of³⁶ who argue that universities remain gendered institutions. Participant 8 sadly explained her experience when it comes to the promotion criteria and said:

“These promotion criteria are male-oriented; they do not cater for female needs, therefore when they are being established, they should consider all the females’ needs, for instance, the roles and responsibilities that women have at home besides being academics”.

From the above, it can be deduced that although the promotion criteria was framed fairly, it failed to scrutinize its achievability. For instance promotion criteria included or required having publications which is a barrier to most female academics as they barely have time for article writings. This is in line with³⁷ who proposed that policies which focused primarily on research as a criterion for promotion disadvantaged women and such policies constituted barriers to their promotion. Female academics suggested that the current policies meant for promotion should be reviewed as explained by participant 8:

³⁴ Lwando Mdleleni, Lindokuhle Mandyoli and Jose Frantz. ‘Tenacity of Gender Inequality in South Africa: A Higher Education Perspective.’ (2021)33 *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review* 119, 134

³⁵ Adesuwa V. Agbedahin, ‘Sustainable Development, Education for Sustainable Development, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Emergence, efficacy, eminence, and future’ (2019)27 *Sustainable Development* 669,680

³⁶ Adele Moodly and Noluthando Toni. ‘Re-imagining higher education leadership—in conversation with South African female deputy vice-chancellors’ (2017)35 *Perspectives in education*

³⁷ *Ibid* p 423-442

“The promotion criteria should be reviewed and made more flexible. It has to be less stringent so that we are able to meet the requirements stipulated therein.

Participant 9 also explained that:

“Corrections of the system should be made a higher priority by the University. Thus far it is skewed towards male academics and the processes of application are not clear, and so tiring as well as time consuming.

8. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to explore the gender aspects of the promotion policies and practices in institutions of higher learning, using the University of Venda as a site for the collection of data. The study's conclusions demonstrate that both men and women were subject to the same set of promotion standards; this means that the criteria do not consider the high work load that women already have but expected them to publish lot of articles which strain female academics and contribute to their failure in achieving the requirements for their promotions. Furthermore it is also revealed that most female academics were stagnant in the same positions for so many years as they fail to adhere to the stringent promotion criteria, therefore were compelled to remain in the same positions for many years.

The promotion criteria in place failed to accommodate women's needs or interests but rather they seemed to be favouring males, testifying that the requirements are not gender-sensitive. They rather serve as stumbling blocks for most women who had too many responsibilities. The Employment Equity Act has been criticised as being too silent on the peculiar needs of women and as such should be re-visited to include the unique needs of women in as far as employability is concerned, as well as promotions. It was reported that the promotion criteria were designed by males, hence, they had put rules and regulations/policies that suited best their own interest, thereby, creating inequalities.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The promotion criteria at universities must uphold democratic ideals and should promote a welcoming climate that is considerate

of women's concerns rather than one that impedes their advancement in terms of their personal, academic, and professional careers. Due to a lack of policies that embrace or cover women's specific needs, these institutions must develop a gender-equality policy in which it must make a commitment, in consultation with the gender unit but particularly with female academics, to ensure that the institution understands clearly what they require. Males and women (especially men) must collaborate to accomplish this goal to organize a gender-sensitization program for a sex-role socialization campaigns that will educate entrenched patriarchal adherents and traditional thinkers among men. Furthermore, institutions should explore differing promotion standards for men and women. Policies and acts governing employment strategies should be revisited so that gender mainstreaming can also be included in all the laws that guide employment equities between men and women.