

RESEARCH REPORTS

The 4 small scale studies reported here have been included to indicate some of the complex processes emerging as part of an engagement with gender equality concerns in Commonwealth universities and the potential for larger and more in depth examination of these issues. The studies, mostly conducted as projects for Masters degree dissertations, highlight the potential of qualitative methodologies in casting light on the multiple spaces in which gender inequality persists despite some considerable expansion of student enrolment to include women. A number of the authors as post-graduate students examining gender issues in higher education remarked on the dearth of studies on this theme outside the UK, Australia and North America. Their own work, published here, is an attempt to redress that balance.

“PUBLISH OR PERISH”: AN INVESTIGATION INTO ACADEMIC WOMEN’S ACCESS TO RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION AS THE MAIN CRITERIA FOR PROMOTION IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

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The slogan “publish or perish” is commonly used in institutions of higher education in America, and it signals the fact that without concrete evidence of research and publications, an academic is unlikely to be promoted or given tenure and does not stand a good chance of keeping his/her job at the university (Mwamwenda, 1994c). Although the slogan is not openly used in Kenyan universities, there is a ‘hidden’ use of this requirement because upward mobility and salary increment are to a considerable degree dependent on one’s research and publications.

In view of this, the study reported here (Onsongo, 2000) was carried out to investigate the access women academic staff in Kenyan universities had to

research and publication and the extent to which this was the main criteria for promotion. The study was carried out in one Kenyan public university. At the time of the study Kenya had a total of 11 chartered universities (6 public and 5 private).

The data was collected between February and April 2000 from 14 men and 13 women at the rank of lecturer. The respondents were drawn from the faculties of Arts (7 men and 6 women), Education (3 men and 4 women) and Science (4 men and 3 women). These faculties were used because there were a good number of women at the rank of lecturer employed. The respondents were aged between 34-35 years and had university teaching experience ranging between 5-15 years. Most of them had been students in the case study university. Participants' highest qualifications were Masters' degrees (9 men and 6 men) and PhDs (8 men and 4 women). The majority of the respondents had been in their current rank (lecturer) for more than 5 years.

Two main criteria were used to select respondents in Kenyan universities. The first was rank in the academic hierarchy. Lecturer rank was chosen because it is the point at which research and publication are emphasised for promotion to senior lecturer. The second criterion was the number of years respondents had worked in a university. A minimum of five years university teaching experience was used to select respondents. Normally in the first two years academics are on probation, after which they are automatically promoted from the rank of assistant lecturer/ tutorial fellow to lecturer. On promotion to the rank of lecturer staff are expected to finish three years before they apply for promotion. Respondents were assumed to be ready for promotion.

Questionnaires were used to solicit information on the promotion practices of the university, respondents' current involvement in research and publication, access to resources for research and publication, obstacles faced and possible solutions. The study set out to answer three main questions.

- What access to research and publications do women in a Kenyan university have?
- What obstacles do women face in their attempt to do research and publish? How can they be overcome?
- Is there a gender dimension to research and publication?

The findings from the study revealed that many women employed as academics at the case study university were involved in some form of research. However, there were slightly more men involved in research than women. Access to publication for staff was assessed using the following: publication of a book, a chapter in a book, an article in a journal, or giving a paper in a conference. Access to publication was found to be limited for both men

and women. Almost half of the men and three quarters of the women had not published a book alone or in collaboration. The majority of the respondents, men and women, had not written a chapter in a book. Three-quarters of the male respondents had published an article in a journal and given papers at conferences alone or in collaboration.

The promotion criteria of this university stated that for one to be promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer one needed to:

Have a Ph.D., at least three years experiences as university lecturer/researcher, three articles in refereed journals, postgraduate student supervision, attendance and contribution at learned conferences, seminars and workshops, good quality teaching and leadership qualities.

The majority of the respondents felt that the promotion criteria were fairly followed by the university. A few respondents (2 men and 2 women) however, felt that nepotism influenced promotions to some extent. The implications of the qualification level of the women respondents, very few of whom had PhDs, and their publication histories, is that they are unlikely to be promoted to senior lecturer, associate professor and professor.

Women's access to research and publications at the case study university was hindered by limited access to resources, especially lack of knowledge about sources of funding. Most of the funding for research was given by non-governmental organisations and men seemed to be benefiting from the external funding due to their social networks where information on available funds circulated. The limited funds available were distributed unfairly. Women generally did not benefit from external funding because of their low status in the academic hierarchy. One woman confirmed this. "It is the professors who get first priority and outside funding."

Most women lacked sufficient time for research and publication because they had to divide their time between domestic responsibilities and heavy teaching loads. The pressure on their time has been compounded by the introduction of part-time degree programmes, which require them to teach throughout the year from Monday to Saturday.

Conclusion

Research and publication play an important role in the promotion of academic staff in universities in Kenya. This small-scale study revealed that academics (men and women) in the case study university had limited access to research and publication. However, women suffered a double disadvantage due to their low status in the academic hierarchy and their professional and domestic responsibilities. Because of this limited access it is unfair to use research and publication as currently defined and measured in most universities as the main criteria for promotion.

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