Exploring Female Academics Underrepresentation in Senior Leadership Positions: A case of Public and Private Universities in Tanzania

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Abstract

Tanzania recognizes that gender equality and female empowerment are important for sustainable development of the country. The revised frameworks for EFA in the 2030 education agenda and the SDG5 give a central position to gender equality to ensure effective participation for leadership and decision making. This paper set out to comparatively examine the reasons to explain the under-representation of female academics at senior leadership positions in public and private universities in Tanzania. Although evident in Higher Education Institutions throughout the world, the specific drivers of under-representation are locally situated and context-dependent, thus requiring embedded case study analysis of institutional contexts, ethos, and progression patterns. This paper shares insight gained from forty eight (48) participants in four universities who were purposively selected from senior positions, female leaders, academic staff and university management. Interview method and Focus group discussions for data collection were employed to collect primary data and secondary data were collected through documentary review. The study used thematic analysis in data analysis. The selected Intersectionality framework guided the conduct of the study, as well as the discussion and interpretation of the findings. The data collected reveals that, cultural factors, institutional barriers and individuals' constraints were factors that discourage female academics to senior positions in both private and public universities. The findings implied that few female academicians managed to reach senior positions and majorities are struggling to move up. Their failures were associated with traditional gender role, societal expectations, institutional ethos and harmful gender stereotypes. The study points to the need for universities to go beyond basic policy mainstreaming to support transformative understandings of equitable gender relations and norms.

Key words: gender equality, leadership, higher education, Tanzania

Introduction:

Gender inequalities have been a global concern and agenda for development for decades. Female underrepresentation is widest in senior positions (Morley, 2013), while women represented 39 per cent of world employment, only 27 per cent of managerial positions in the world were occupied by women in 2018 (Willis, 2018). In Tanzania, the number of all academic staff in both public and private universities is alarming and female only make up 30 per cent of academic staff in higher education (World Bank, 2020). A report on the subject, names some universities that suffer from the shortage of academic staff, some having an acute deficiency of up to the record-breaking 65 per cent while others only have as low as two per cent shortage of the much sought after cadre (Citizen, 2021). The report notes that the shortage is more acute among females in both public and private universities; and more in the privately-run higher education. Data from the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) put the number of academic staff currently teaching at various higher education institutions at 5,933 male and 2,523 female (TCU, 2021) see table 1. Despite the fact more females are entering the teaching profession whilst top educational leadership positions are being dominated by males (Fuller, 2017; Mukolwe et al., 2018).

Gender	Private	Public	Total
Male	1908	4025	5933
Female	833	1690	2523

| | Total | 2741 | 5715 | 8456 |

Table 1: Academic staff in university institutions by ownership and Sex, 2021

Data from the University of Dar es salaam for example indicate that there were only 4 female full professors out of 33 professors and 21 female associate professors out of 55 associate professors and 30 female senior lecturers out of 147 senior lecturers (UDSM, 2020). At the Open University of Tanzania, there were no female professors out of 3 professors and 1 female associate professor out of 8 associate professors and 4 female senior lecturers out of 21 senior lecturers, however, the number of lecturers is impressive as is greater than that of male (OUT, 2021). This fewer number of females with higher academic rankings implies fewer females even in senior leadership positions, because leadership in higher education is equivalent to achievement in academic qualifications (TCU, 2021).

The benefit of bringing gender equality in leadership positions is that it leads to the overall development of a country. The government of Tanzania recognizes that among the major barrier to development is gender inequality as it leads to lower aspiration of female to climb leadership ladder (Bandiho, 2009). According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) demonstrated that female leaders are considered to be more participatory and democratic in decision making than males which facilitates the achievement of development goals. Similarly World bank (2012) asserted that gender equality enables more females to participate in decision making when they are in leadership positions to allow a diversity of voices in the institutions. In fact, scholars have repeatedly documented the benefits of having diverse perspectives around the leadership table (Catalyst, 2013). Thus, without gender equality decisions are taken with less or without any input from females, as well as not considering the aspects of gender equality and equity. The gap in gender equity is profoundly evident in academia, particularly in the area senior leadership for women, and, although a global phenomena, it is particularly acute in Tanzania. Therefore, this paper mainly intends to explore reasons for female academics underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in private and public Tanzanian universities. Specifically the study aspires to:

a) To explore female academics representation in senior leadership positions in Tanzania

b) To investigate factors that hinder female representation in senior leadership positions in higher learning institutions in Tanzania

Methods and Materials

To understand issues behind underrepresentation of female academics in higher learning institutions, this study employed a qualitative approach which is also guided by interpretivists' standpoint that people have different views of interpreting phenomenon. In order to capture different views and explain why people think the way they do; a qualitative approach was the best choice because of its strength in collecting in depth information based on the experiences, beliefs, feelings and behaviors of female academics in senior leadership positions (Alase, 2017). The study also adopted a multiple-case study design because the evidence provided from multiple cases is considered more rich and reliable than in a single case (Yin, 2017). It was conducted in Tanzania (East part of Africa). Within Tanzania, four universities were included in the study. The selection of these universities considered the following criteria; accreditation status, age of the institution, geographical location and ownership. Moreover, the reasons for this selection is that, apart from the fact that they are biggest and oldest universities still they had fewer representation of females in the senior leadership positions see table 2.

Gender	University A	University B	University C	University D
Male	43	35	58	34
Female	11	02	13	6
Total	54	37	71	40

Table 2: Number of senior leaders by gender in selected universities by 2020
Source: Prospectus of irrespective university (2019/2020)

The target population for this study was all female and male leaders in the respective institutions. This was due to the fact that they were considered to offer relevant information and knowledge on their experiences about the issue under study. The study sample comprised of 48 participants see table 3.

Table 3: Tentative Sample Size of the Study

Sample Category	Target Sample	Actual Sample
DVC/Principals	4	4
Deans/Directors/HODs	16	16
Female leaders	4	4
HRM	4	4
Academic staff	28 (7 in each university)	20
Grand Total	52	48

The study employed purposive sampling technique to select participants of the study. The technique allowed the researcher to select and access knowledgeable participants on female academics underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in Tanzanian universities (Yin, 2011). Two types of purposive sampling was used: criterion and convenience sampling techniques. Primary sources of evidence were used in order to obtain sufficient information and provide reasonable reliability of the results. Data and evidence collection was based on the analysis of primary data collected via interviews and focus group discussions. The interview protocol and semi structured interview guide questions were used to ensure that research questions were covered. All interviews were recorded in audio tape which provide the advantage of being played later for more understanding of conversations. Using these sources together it was possible to collect complete and reliable information and to obtain a clear picture of the study problem. The study conducted a thematic analysis of the dataset to address the objective. Deductive and inductive approaches were used to generate a codebook and later develop the categories. The deductive approach involved developing a list of codes based on the research objectives, literature and theory. In this case, the research questions played a crucial role in the initial development of the codes deductively. On the other hand, the inductive approach is based on rereading the subset of the interviews and focus group transcripts and developing the codes from the data. Moreover, crosscheck and verification of the data collected were done. For the purpose of protecting the participants, the researcher applied for a research clearance letter from the Research Review Board of the University of Dar es Salaam. The clearance letters helped the researcher get access to the institution. The researcher prepared informed consent forms to be filled in and signed by the individuals who consented to participate in the study. These forms contained information on the purpose, participant's rights (eg. right to withdraw from participation anytime), and observing privacy of the participants. To observe ethical issues in reporting, these universities are anonymised as University A, B, C and D.

Findings and Discussion

Female academics representation in senior leadership positions

The first objective of the study was to explore the representation of female academics in senior leadership positions. The findings obtained from interviews, FGDs and documentary reviews revealed that the representation of female academics was low as they were 34% female

academics with senior leadership positions. See the number of senior leaders in the visited universities in the table below:

University	Female	Male	Total
A	5	20	25
B	4	12	16
C	6	23	29
D	2	12	12

Source: Field Data, 2022

During interviews, the female leader in University A commented:

> 'Mmh in the case of female participation in leadership, we are very few because for one to be a VC for instance he/she needs to be a professor now how many women professors are there?'

Factors affecting Female Academics Underrepresentation in senior positions
The second objective of the study was to explore the factors affecting representation of female academics in senior leadership positions. The findings obtained from interviews and FGDs indicated four intersecting categories of factors: systemic factors, institutional factors, individual factors and socio-cultural factors.

Systemic factors
National issue where now more women are pursuing a postsecondary education than ever before. But as women climb the ranks, they drop off by the dozens—a "leaky pipeline. By the time they get to senior leadership roles, there are large inequalities. A typical response was 'Mmh in the case of female seniors in our university.., we are very few because for one to be a VC for instance he/she needs to be a professor now how many women professors are there?.' Female leader, Case 31, university C. This is supported by a study by Nupur, (2012) who said pipeline issue hinder female advancement to leadership positions.

Institutional factors
Thematic analysis of the dataset found that institutional factors in all visited universities contribute to female academics' underrepresentation in senior leadership in higher learning institutions in the country. Thirty-five (35) out of forty-eight (48) study participants expressed that lack of academic qualifications are a major contributing factors to female underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in both government and private own Tanzanian universities.

A study participant said, "we do this as a strategy to get more educators in higher learning institutions but when it comes to retaining people, the majority of those who are going to be retained because there are criteria that have to be followed you find again very few females with qualifications," Case24, University B, Age group: 50-59, Education: PhD, Sex: Female, Position: Director postgraduate, Title: Dr. The response indicates that academic qualification also filters the number of females employed at higher learning institution. It means that the positions will be male-dominated because they have qualifications required for employment and promotion.
The qualification is a pointer for locating the eligible academicians for the positions. In case the person qualifies, she/he will be among the candidates and if she/he does not qualify, the person will not be included in the list for position candidacy. Another respondent further said,

> … you cannot promote someone who is not there, to become a vice chancellor you need to be full professor, to become deputy vice chancellor you need associate professor, to be a principal you need associate professor, to be the head of department you need a senior lecturer, if no senior lecturer you can go

for lecturer but you need a senior lecturer, now if I have a senior lecturer who is a male and I don't have a female senior lecturer what can I do? Case40, University C, Age group: 40-50, Education: PhD, Sex: male, Position: Senior lecturer, Title: Dr.

This is in line with what literature has found that women in academia are more likely than men to be in lower-ranked positions in higher education institutions (Miller, 1997). Interestingly, publication rates are more strongly correlated with academic rank than gender (Nakhaie, 2002). Academic rank, in turn, is impacted by publication rates, and as identified below, resource constraints act as a significant barrier against research performance where major determinant being publications and citations

Secondly, Of the 48 respondents, 22 said leadership activities are burdens to their academic career development. The activities have negative implications for the journey of academic seniority and professorship, making it hard for them to have required academic qualifications for top leadership positions. The administrative work is time-consuming and therefore, one must have extra time for writing and meet the submission deadlines. Thus, drains time and efforts for other academic paper writing for publications. A typical response was, for example,

… because of leadership positions which I have been dealing with so I didn't have much time to write papers because to be promoted… one has to publish and to attend international conferences, because of leadership position …I did not have time to sit and write books and all that but within six years I managed to have at least few papers published internationally and two books that is when I was promoted as senior lecturer and because achieved that level that is when I maintained the position of Dean because now I qualify for it. Case2, University D, Age group: 40-49, Education: PHD, Sex: Female, Positions: Dean, Faculty of Business, Title: Dr.

This sample quote shows how administrative responsibilities are dragging the process of seniority of the female academicians. The duties are challenging to carry out and, therefore, require the person to use even extra hours that would have been used for writing papers and attending conferences. Furthermore, the extra hours and efforts in writing administrative reports and dedication in leadership are not counted in academic seniority qualifications. Implicitly, the administrative reports have no value regarding progression to seniority. They are not considered for a promotion but the preparations of the reports are time-consuming and demanding.

The response implies that the heads of departments and other leaders who are not yet seniors cannot progress because they cannot publish because of their responsibilities. These findings concur with those of (Khan and Siriwardhane, 2021; O'Meara, et al 2017) who argue that academics globally have been confronted with workload challenges which have brought significant workload changes with great impact on career progression for women.

Thirdly, twenty (20) out of forty eight (48) respondents reported about poor institutional environment and motivation as a contributing factor for female underrepresentation in top leadership positions in higher learning institutions in Tanzanian universities. However, the institutional environment varied according the university. For instance, the environment at university A is different from that of B, C and D. Yet, there are still some commonalities among the visited universities. Institutional favoritism and violations of the appointment procedures were also observed. The appointment procedures like voting can be overturned and votes rejected by top management. The institution may appoint a person who it feels comfortable to work with. In other words, votes, qualifications and experiences may be ignored in this case. For example, a study respondent said,

"sometimes you may be having all the qualifications and experiences and you are capable of working but someone at the higher top position may not choose you to a

position because you are not a friend or you are not from a well-known family or because of any other reason, …in our department we were given the chance to select a dean, only four contestants were contesting for that position and majority of us wanted a specific particular candidate but the management wanted a different person, sometimes they look for someone when they know they are comfortable of working with so we selected a different person but they said we understand that you preferred candidate X but we think we can work with candidate Y, although they both had the same qualifications they picked the one that we didn't want. " Case28, University A, Age group: 30-40, Law: Master, Sex: Female, Position: Ass. Lecturer, Title: Ms.

In other words, the top leadership positions are influenced by other factors-not academic qualifications alone. In the quotations, the participants mention family background and history of the person; management's interests are also used to get top leaders in academic institutions. This finding is contrary to what Khan, (2021) maintains that system of academic promotion is merit-based and requires the achievement of adequate research output and performance.

Traditional views of gender roles persisted, potential for women leadership overlooked
One respondent said 'Apart from service we provide, we also depend on fees for running the institution; I cannot put a female leader in position especially when I know she is at the age of marriage or giving birth. That will make me loose her when I need her to perform administrative duties, but when I know she is through with family obligations is okay'. Case 19, University A. This shows that Structures and practices support male domination knowingly or unknowingly. This observation was also indicated by Nielsen (2017) who notes that the patriarchal oppression and the mobilization of bias effectively silence women's demands to leadership.

Individual factors

Twenty six (26) out of 47 study participants expressed about un-readiness and self-distrust is part of the cause of female academics under-representation in top leadership in higher learning institutions in Tanzanian universities. Un-readiness includes refusal to hold leadership positions, scared, lack self-confidence and not interested in leadership positions. A typical response from a female academic staff was, "…I was not ready to take up the position but I told them I will have to take it after they insisted." Case30, University A, Age group: 40-50, Education: PhD, Sex: Female, Position: Lecturer, Title: Dr.
Also, "I think the attitude that women themselves have, because I know some women who have been approached to take certain positions they refused completely so sometimes they need to build up confidence." Case22, University B, Age group: 50-59, Education: Masters, Sex: Male, Position: DHRM, Title: Mr.

The responses indicate that some qualified female academics refuses to hold the positions because of several reasons such as lack of confidence. These findings correspond with those of Mukolwe et al. (2018); Mbogela & Kanukisya (2021) who argued that female leaders lacked a sense of themselves as leaders due to lack of confidence which is a key factor to a leadership journey. If the female academic is not ready the institution will have hard time getting female academics in top leadership positions.

Socio-Cultural factors

In African context culturally females are the doers of the most domestic activities than men and they cannot force for equal distribution of activities with their husbands. The demand for equal distributions of the activities the study found, may lead to disagreements and later divorce. Thus, females worry to keep their families intact. A study participant said,

"…I have said some of issues are not solved by the regulations but if you force me with the regulations that you should divide domestic chores with your wife in equal terms then I will divorce her and find someone else because social structure is the most important thing to me. I am the father, you are the mother, it is there and you will never change that…" Case40, University C, Age group: 40-50, Education: PhD, Sex: male, Position: Senior, lecturer, Title: Dr.

Results in this study signify that, structures and practices which have been applied in the society supports male domination and the bias which was established in the society inevitably silence women's aspirations towards leadership. Therefore, this study discovered the leading causes of gender leadership gap in higher education on the side of the society as lack of social support and inspiration, male dominance, gender stereotyping ideal as well as networking and self-image. This observation was also indicated by Tarimo & Swai, 2021; Mbepera, 2015 who notes that socio cultural factors silence women's demands to leadership.

Conclusion and Recommendation
Based on the findings, the study concludes that there were no differences of factors between public and private universities. Only few female academicians managed to reach senior positions in private and public universities and majorities are struggling to move up. Their failures were associated with cultural expectations, institutional ethos and harmful gender stereotypes. Therefore a need for gender responsive policy frameworks in institutions of higher learning, change of institutional and societal attitude towards gender equality in education, a revamped pedagogical approach to teaching and learning in higher learning institutions and a more gender responsive workplace is called for.

All research and knowledge to be generated should engage a gender lens while social responsibility and all forms of collaboration must consider gender equality as an integral part of sustainable development. Must go beyond mere acknowledgment of need for attention to existing inequalities but must address the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of all that is transformative aspect of leadership and policy making.

From this perspective, this paper adds to gender literature by reiterating the importance of institutional habitus in impacting the career paths of academics in the higher education sector. It is imperative that organizational decision makers recognize the overt and covert, as well as the individual and structural biases that prevent women from assuming leadership roles and reaching their full leadership potential.

Research Ethics
For the purpose of protecting the participants, the researcher applied for a research clearance letter from the Research Review Board of the University of Dar es Salaam. The clearance letters helped the researcher get access to the institutions. The researcher prepared informed consent forms to be filled in and signed by the individuals who consented to participate in the study. These forms contained information on the purpose, participant's rights (eg. right to withdraw from participation anytime), and observing privacy of the participants. To observe ethical issues in reporting, these universities are anonymised as University A, B, C and D.

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