

Full Length Research Paper

From Policy to Practice: Assessing the Impact of Higher Education Transformation on Gender Equity at Gauteng University of Technology

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The need for more equitable workplace opportunities for employees is a well-documented area in management literature. More recently, research on the role of gender equity strategies is also prominent in the literature. An important lacuna in the equal employment opportunities (EEO) literature appears, however, to be the lack of focus on gender equity in higher education. Specifically, the in-attention to the influence of organizational policies, practices and processes on equity. This study applies a case study approach to study gender equity in South Africa, as a means of measuring the progress of gender equity in the South African higher education sector. The study examines pre- and post- level attainment of gender equity using gender representation as a measure of progress. Using gender profiling, findings suggests that current gender equity strategies may be at odds with the intentions of the transformational agenda in post-apartheid South Africa. As such, the paper highlights the need to fully utilize gender mainstreaming strategies as a means of guiding, planning and monitoring achievements of gender equity in South African Higher Education Institutions.

Key words: Equity, gender, transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Since the abolition of apartheid, significant attention in the higher education sector in South Africa has been directed towards addressing the problem of gender equity. Special attention has particularly been channelled at addressing this problem at the previously white-male dominated publicly-financed institutions, with a view to correcting the decades-long institutionalised in-equitable practices of the yesteryear.

Although gender equity experts such as (Acker, 1990; McCall, 2003; Mabokela, 2001; Kloot 2004; Noble and Mears, 2000 and Morley, 2005) have identified this issue as a deficiency in strategies for attaining full democratisation, its resolution has continued to present an insurmountable challenge to most governments, including South Africa. In South

Africa, it was only in 2002 that practicable strategies began yielding significant outcomes. Noteworthy were the promulgation of the Higher Education Act, 2002 (Act No. 63 of 2002) and the subsequent reconfiguration of higher education institutions through mergers and incorporations resulted in unprecedented transformations in the country's institutions of higher learning (reference needed).

This higher education transformation initiative, it would appear, was the brainchild of the National Commission for Higher Education in 1998. The Commission had two central priorities: 1) to rid higher education of the negative aberration of apartheid and 2) to modernise the higher education sector introducing international talent and best practices (Maasen and Cloete, 2002). Consequently, a task team referred to as the "Size and Shape Task Team" was formed and mandated by the National Commission for Higher Education to study all public higher education institutions with the view of coming up with concrete

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proposals on how best to reconfigure these institutions (NHCE Report,1996).The Size and Shape Task Team identified the issue of equity as one of the most important and urgent challenges to be faced in the process of reconfiguring higher education institutions which commenced in 2005 (NPHE, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine pre- and post-merger level attainment of gender equity using gender representation as a means of measurement. The paper discusses the merits and limitations of this measure. It subsequently proposes recommendations for how the 3 R tool of gender mainstreaming can be used to dissect the underlying structures, mechanisms and processes that explain disparities in gender equity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant literature suggests unequivocally that gender equity within higher education is a global challenge (Morley, 2005). Countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the United States have legislated gender equity decades before South Africa. Literature shows that in most of these countries gender equity in both the public and private sector is still a major challenge (Fletcher, 2007; Noble and Mears, 2004; Kloot, 2004; Curtis, 2005). The necessary legislative and policy framework required to promote equity including gender equity was only introduced in South Africa in the last decade. Eagly and Carly (2007) posit, irrespective of the presence of the gender equity promoting legislative and policy frameworks, the progress made towards achieving gender equity in the employment sector is still relatively slow in most countries. This is precisely the case in South Africa.

An important observation is that the literature on gender equity generally has concentrated on gender representation as an indicator of gender equity. For example Noble and Mears (2004), Kloot (2004) conducted separate studies in two Australian universities on gender equity. Both studies identified the existence of gender equity problems in these institutions. The findings from these studies suggest that women in higher education face barriers such as obtaining tenure, being promoted to higher positions, gaining access to resources, as well as in obtaining networks required developing as scholars and researchers when compared to their male counterparts. Both studies attribute this finding to the male-dominated culture of these institutions (Pillay, 2006). Similar conclusions have been reached by researchers such as Curtis (2005), who argues that higher education in particular is not only male-dominated but that the gender profiles of academic institutions generally are skewed particularly at the levels of higher managerial positions in both academic and administrative categories.

The suggestion is that resources and opportunities are

unequally distributed in these institutions based on gender; the practices applied are institutionalized to an extent where they are perceived as gender neutral. Higher Education globally is extremely gendered. The practices, processes and the way these institutions define merit is biased towards the dominant gender within the institution. The bias is evident in the way performance is assessed, the way work practices are defined and promotion criteria adopted 2006 (Eagly and Carli, 2007). (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998) refer to gender subtext, which they define as gendering processes that are power based and concealed within organisations, systematically reproducing gender distinctions. The result is continued gender inequities irrespective of some efforts by some institution to address gender representation as a means of promoting gender equity.

The majority of South African studies available rely on female narratives to gain insights into the progress of the institutions in addressing gender equity Mabokela (2001), Mabokela and Magubane (2003), Shackleton et al. (2006) and Sehoole (2005). Hence, Cassim (2005) decries the lack of focus of higher education research on gender equity and its apparent in-attention to the influence of gender on the achievements of equity. This gap in the literature is important given the significant role that women are playing and are capable of improving upon in the higher education sectors around the world and certainly in South Africa particularly given its recent past. With respect to the latter, a telling statistic shows that as at 2007, there were only three female vice chancellors out of the twenty-three South African universities (Shackleton, 2007).

Gender equity in higher education in South Africa

The recent statistics depicting the gender profiles of South African Universities (Table 1) were compiled for Higher Education Resource Services South Africa, HERS-SA, a non government organization aimed at promoting gender equity in the Higher Education sector of South Africa (Riordan, 2007). The statistics show a ratio of male to female of 20:3 for Vice Chancellors, 57:

14 Deputy Vice Chancellors 13:5 Registrars, 80; 21 Executive Directors and 110; 41 Executive Deans. The above shows a picture of a high representation of males at the highest position and a very low representation of females in the same categories.

Even though it is true that most academics are selected for senior executive positions such as Vice Chancellors are appointed on the basis of their academic accomplishment, it is also true that the transformation of higher education involves change; change management skills are very significant for ensuring desired outcomes. Change management is normally a module or a whole course in management qualifications; it is interesting to note that none of the Vice Chancellors shown in Table 1

Table 1. South African public universities: April, 2007.

University	VC	DVC		Reg.	Ex Dir		Deans		VC Discipline	
		T	F		T	F	T	F		
Traditional										
UCT	M	4	1	M	8	3	8	4	Literature	
UFH	M	1	0	F	2	0	6	1	Sociology	
UFS	M	3	1	M	2	0	7	1	Economics	
UKZN	M	6	3	F	4	2	8	2	Micro-biology	
UL	M	3	0	F	3	1	3	0	Zoology	
NWU	M	3	1	M	6	2	14	3	Theology	
UP	M	4*	1	M	3	0	9	2	Engineering	
RU	M	1	0	M	6	3	9	1	Sociology	
US	M	3	0	M	2	1	11	2	Theology	
UWC	M	3	1	F	4	1	9	3	Education	
UWW	M	3	1	M	2	0	6	4	Mathematics	
Comprehensive										
aUJ	M	5	1	F	9	1	9	4	Pharmacy, Polit. Sociol	
NMMU	M	2	0	M	5	0	7	2	Statistics	
UNISA	M	7***	3	M	16	4	6	1	Law	
UV	M****	1	0	M	3	0	3	2	Social Anthropology	
WSU	M****	3	0	M	Unclear, interim		4	1	Sociology	
UZ	F	1	0	M	7	0	4	1	Nursing	
Technology										
CPUT	F	3	0	M	2	0	6*	1	Geography	
CUT	M	3	0	M	2	0	3	1	Mathematics	
DUT	F****	3	0	M	2	1	4	1	Geography	
Mangosuthu	M	2	0	M	5**	0	4	2	Public Mgt	
TUT	M	4	1	M	4	1	7	1	Bio Chemistry	
VUT	F	3*	0	M	4*	1	4**	1	Education	
Total	19 M	4 F	71	14	18M	5F	101	21	151	41

T=Total, M=Male, F=Female

* 1 position vacant, ** 2 positions vacant; ***Various titles all reporting to VC and in Mgt team, **** Acting position

In most cases, 'Deans' include one Dean of Students.

Stats compiled by Dr. Sarah Riordan for HERS-SA, April 2007.

“had management qualifications,” per se. Ellington, (2009) observed the paucity of leadership capacity in and management expertise in higher education globally. Also interestingly even the few women that are available are mostly in positions that are regarded as feminine. Deans of Students and Registrar positions are consistent with a perceived maternal role (source). This is consistent in all the positions reviewed.

As alluded to earlier, at least one significant aim of the South African reconfiguration process was and is to promote equity, more specifically gender equity. The main purpose of this study therefore, is to clarify the extent to which the transformation of the Higher Education sector in South Africa has impacted upon or affected the process of Gender Equity. This study is particularly important because a significant aspect of the transformation agenda was to oversee that past workplace injustices such as gender in-balances were addressed in

an effective way. As discussed above, the literature suggests that barriers to improvements in Gender balancing are a phenomenon that exists in Higher Education Institutions around the world (Noble and Mears, 2004; Kloot, 2004; Curtis, 2005). The net result is that higher education institutions are ignoring and obviously losing contributions from a significant section of human capital potential as a consequence of these glass ceilings. This study seeks to determine the extent to which this problem has been addressed in Higher Education institutions in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Gender equity theoretical framework

Numerous approaches have been utilised to study and measure gender equity owing to the multiplicity of definitions of gender equity. The concept is fast evolving, as new paradigms emerge from different schools of

thought. This study adopts the South African National Gender Framework definition, which is a social constructionist view that defines gender equity as a “fair and just distribution of all means of opportunities and resources between men and women” (South African National Gender Policy Framework (year)). Proponents of this approach support the adoption of gender mainstreaming as measurement proxy for gender equity. Gender mainstreaming is a network of structures, mechanisms and processes that are put in place within an organization’s framework to guide, plan, and monitor and evaluate gender equity (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

Gender mainstreaming uses the 3R tool as adopted by the United Nations. The tool looks at the 3R’s, namely representation, realities and resources. Even all three when utilised are meritorious, this study uses representation only as a measurement to analyse gender equity in higher education. Representation is one of the three criteria used in gender mainstreaming to assess gender equity.

The other two are resources and realities. Representation requires an analysis of the gender profiles of the organisations, resource allocation analysis the extent to which organisational resources are used to promote gender equity, realities looks into the actual processes, practices and procedures used to promote gender equity (Council of Europe, 2005). All three could have been ideal to use in analysing, gender equity. Resources and Realities as part of gender equity measurement are used as part of the broader study currently in progress. The methodology also uses document analysis, including the analysis of national statistics through the Higher Education Management Information System data, institutional policies and procedures.

The approach concentrates on the progress of gender equity strategies that are being implemented and hence goes beyond defining gender in terms of anatomical differences or as a demographic trait.

The adopted approach does not look at the interdisciplinary nature of gender, which requires the researcher to look at race, social class as organising principles of gender (McCall, 2003). The latter are outside the scope of the study. The latter approach acknowledges that gender is not a historical, race or class static (Glenn, 1994), but a socially embedded construct. It is in this context that the study of Gender equity is expected to provide further insights. Specifically the study applies the process of gender mainstreaming as a mechanism of assessing the sorts of structures, mechanisms and processes being introduced in organizations as a means of guiding planning and monitoring achievements of gender equity in selected South African institutions.

Measurement of gender equity

Central to the study of gender equity is its measurement.

The progress of gender equity implementation can be measured in terms of using a process of gender mainstreaming. An organization that adopts gender mainstreaming is able to plan, monitor and evaluate the progress of gender equity. In this respect an instrument named the 3R, may be used as a tool for measuring gender equity. The 3R’s mentioned in the previous section is utilized the following are used to measure gender equity; organizations needs to look at the ratio of males to females (representation), the barriers to gender equity including attitudes, perceptions, practices, processes, organization culture among others (realities) and finally the infrastructure put in place for gender equity promotion, including financial resources, capacity building, gender structures, gender equity plans and gender monitoring systems or resources (Centre for Women Studies, 2007). For the purposes of exploration, this study intends to only examine one of the three (or 3Rs to be consistent?) R’s namely representations as discussed above to gauge gender equity in the Higher education sector.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses a case study methodology. The aim of the present case study is to measure the progress of the Gauteng University of Technology within the current transformation of higher education in South Africa. For this research, a case study methodology was preferred because case studies are effective at investigating real-life contemporary phenomenon, especially when the bounds of information sought are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003).

The particular approach is what Yin (2003) refers to as an exploratory case study design, whose objectives are the generation of questions for further exploration of phenomena. For data collection, this study relies on secondary data on gender profiles in South African Universities as well as document analysis from part literature.

Unit of analysis

In keeping with the exploratory case study approach, the study focuses on a single higher education institution in Gauteng Province. For maintaining anonymity, the institution under study will be referred to as the Gauteng University of Technology (GUT). As with other universities of technology, GUT is a product of a merger of three former *Technikons*. Thus, GUT forms the unit of analysis for this present study (Graunbaum, 2007).

The choice of GUT as a unit of analysis was motivated by the fact that it was convenient and easily accessible to the researcher.

Data analysis

Collected data was analysed in two phases – (1) document analysis and (2) analysis of gender profiles. These are discussed in more detail next.

Phase 1 of the analysis of data involved document analysis of the Higher Education documents including the Higher Education Management Information System, Institutional plans, the match and place documents of Gauteng University of Technology and the Higher Education Act (2002) and a sample of the advertisements

Table 2. The gender profiles of the three *technikons* before the merger: October, 2004.

Pre-merger gender of profiles of the merging partners of Gauteng University of Technology					
Merging partner	VC	DVC	Registrar	Deans	Executive Directors
<i>Technikon 1</i>	M	4M	1M	10M,1F	8M,1F
<i>Technikon 2</i>	M	2M	1M	5M,1F	4M,1F
<i>Technikon 3</i>	M	2M	1M	5M	5M,1FM

M-Male, F- Female.

for the senior positions. The analysis of the data looked at the ratios of males to females and adopts representation as measure to assess gender equity. The institutional plans were analysed in order to match plans and the actual implementation of the plans in terms of achievement in improving gender profile. The article also acknowledges the limitation of representation as the only measure of gender equity, that is, the ability to assess contextual issues that are central to the progress of gender equity in the case selected.

Phase 2 of the data analysis included an overview of the gender profiles of the Gauteng University of Technology both before the merger and after the merger. This has provided the article a basis for making comparisons in measuring the progress of gender equity. The researcher notes the importance of race, social class and contextual variables of the universities in an analysis of this nature given the approach adopted by this study of gender and also that representation is just one of the many indicators in measuring gender equity as proposed in the theoretical framework. The remaining two are used to suggest how to interrogate the underlying reasons for the representation patterns.

Gauteng University of Technology gender profile before the merger

The GUT is a product of a merger of three Technikons. A Technikon is a higher education institution that existed in the previous nomenclature of higher education institutions in South Africa (reference). The institutions were mainly diploma issuing institutions and they were career focused with a component of cooperative learning within the curricula of most of their programs. This institution differed from universities in the same system due to the fact that unlike universities they were not focused on academic research. Technikons in the new nomenclature of higher education after the implementation of the higher education plan are referred to as Universities of Technology (reference).

They have currently retained their career-focused characteristics and are required to redesign their curricula and programmes and adhere to the requirements of the new national qualification framework. The Department of Education also included academic research outputs as a funding requirement as is the case in universities.

Higher Education Institutions in South Africa were previous segregated along racial lines due to the pre-democracy apartheid policies, aimed at keeping black people in the periphery of both economic and educational development. The three Technikons that merged together to form Gauteng University of Technology were very close proximity, within a thirty kilometre radius in the in a Gauteng Metropolitan area. One of them is historically the most resourced of the three, with the second one relatively less-well resourced and the last one the least resourced in terms of infrastructure, access to funding and student access. The last two institutions were designed specifically for black students and the first for white students. Table 2 shows the gender profiles of the three separate institutions before the merger. Only senior and

executive managers are included Peromnes post level 1 - 5. These categories include the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, registrars, Deans Directors and professorial academic staff.

The average male to female ratio of three merging partners was an average of 9:1 male to female ratio before the merger. The trend is consistent with the national statistics provided in Table 1.

Gauteng University of Technology gender profiles after the merger

The merger of the three institutions resulted in a consolidation of staffing positions. The principle that was applied was what was called a "match and place process". This process was aimed at selecting only one candidate for the positions that were replicated due the merger. There were for example three Deans for Management, three Directors for Library Services three Vice Chancellors. Principles were put in place to ensure consistency and fairness in the match and place process. Criteria for placement included appointment dates, to prevent the contamination of the process by appointments that were made during the merger to in an attempt to fill in positions before the merger was finalized and deliberately exclude potential candidates for placement from the other merging partners.

The process also included qualifications and other position specific criteria like research outputs for senior academic positions. The first four positions in the Table 1 were also externally advertised.

This led to the previous incumbents in the three merging partners competing with outside applicants for the positions. The subsequent placements were finalized by committees' representative of all stakeholders in the institution. Table 3 shows the gender profiles after the merger.

Analysis of the gender profiles of the institution after merger

The analysis attempts to answer the question of how the institutions have progressed in improving the gender equity. Representation is a basic indicator of gender equity that is applied as a measure in this article.

The analysis yielded the following results, the VC position is still male, the DVC predominantly males, the registrar is a male, there is still one female Dean to a total of six males and one female executive director after the merger. A total of three females to sixteen males in the post levels that were reviewed as reflected in Table 3.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparing the statistics presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 and Figure 1 shows no significant improvement of the gender profile in the three entities after the mergers and

Table 3. The gender profiles of the university after the merger: October, 2007.

Post merger gender profiles of Gauteng University of Technology				
VC	DVC	REGISTRAR	DEAN	Executive directors
1M	3M,1F	1M	7M,1F	4M, 1F

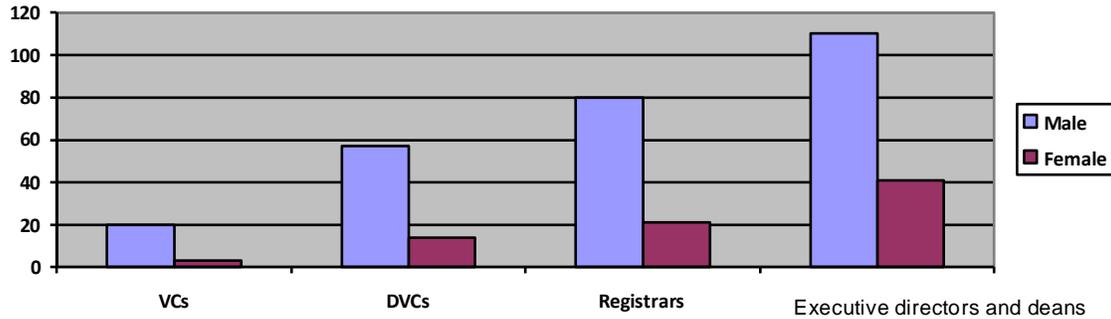


Figure 1. Comparative statistics: Male vs. Female appointments in senior positions in higher education.

the same trend is also applicable to the pre and post merger statistics of Gauteng University of Technology. It is worth noting that most of the positions at these levels were externally advertised. From the analysis, it is evident that irrespective of the opportunities provided by the changes in higher education for institutions to improve their gender profiles no significant changes were achieved. The results show a general trend in all the universities (Table 1). The question asked might be, "Was there a conscious and concerted effort to improve gender equity during the placement process by the decision makers as far as the positions under review is concerned?"

Conclusion

As previously discussed gender equity is a global challenge. The literature shows that most countries have put in place legislation and policies to promote equity and gender equity in particular. The progress achieved by most countries in achieving gender equity is slow irrespective of such efforts. Higher Education is one of the sectors where gender equity is still a challenge. The South African Higher Education scenario is no different.

The research question of interest in this study was what progress has Higher education institutions made in improving their gender profiles in senior governance levels of the institution after the merger? Conclusions reached from the analysis of the national statistics and specifically within Gauteng University of Technology is that irrespective of the government driven transformation of higher education very little progress has been achieved in the case of Gauteng University of Technology. There seem to be a similar trend in other South

African universities within the positions reviewed in this article. If the situation is left on its own the possibility is that these universities will continue registering insignificant change that will undermine the achievement of gender equity in real terms. Shackleton et al. (2006) refer to an implementation gap. The suggestion is that the institutions should mainstream its employment and capacity building practices to promote gender equity. Even though realities and resources of the institution were not part of this study, it is essential to reflect attempts of addressing gender equity. This is a gap between policy and practice which is the result of a gender equity supportive environment but a lack of supportive steering mechanisms to drive gender equity. Every year the institutions provide Equity and Skills Development Plans to the Department of Labour. The real challenge is in the actual mainstreaming of gender equity efforts of the universities to ensure coherence in all gender equity efforts. This includes putting in place a gender equity management processes and structures that will ensure planning, organizing, monitoring and the integration of all gender equity efforts university wide. The 3R mentioned referenced in this paper is one of the gender mainstreaming tools that can be used in the gender mainstreaming process. South Africa is relatively new to gender equity promotion. The universities might learn from adopting some of the best practices by countries that are at the forefront of gender equity like Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. The suggestion is not that they import such practices as they are, but that they adapt them to their own context and learn from the successes and failures of concerted efforts in these countries. Reflective practices on the universities current practices and how they impact on gender equity is a relatively good starting point. The study cannot be used

to generalise the gender equity progress of higher education institutions in South Africa, but it can be used as a basis of a full scale study of these institutions focusing not only on representation but also at the realities and resource allocation of the institution to obtain a better picture of all the 3R's.

If the South African government is to achieve its aims on gender equity in higher education, it needs to put in place some monitoring mechanisms that will trace the progress of these universities, assess and make recommendations on a case by case basis. The study has assessed the current status of Gauteng University of Technology on achieving gender equity and hopes to stimulate debate, encourage reflection on the current employment practices with the ultimate aim of improving gender equity within South African institutions.

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