

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Gendering the Decision-Making Positions in Higher Education: A Cross-Sectional Gender Audit in Three Selected Universities in Malawi

Juliet Chiwaya Kamwendo¹

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Abstract

Malawi is one of the countries that has doubled its efforts to narrow the gender gap since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The country ratified both international and regional gender protocols as well as enacting the national gender policy to safeguard gender equality at all levels to empower women. The participation of women in decision-making positions is therefore critical at this point. Many researchers globally have claimed that having more women in strategic leadership roles would help to reduce workplace restrictions and influence policies. This paper therefore discusses the gender representation of women in decision-making in higher education at University of Malawi, the Malawi University of Science and Technology, and Mzuzu University. The findings reveal a stagnated culture of colonial regime sustained by with patriarchal structure which continue to favor men in decision-making positions at the expense of women. In addition, all three institutions suffer gender-blind promotion criteria and systematic institutional resistance which makes it difficult for women to ascend to decision-making positions hence the hierarchy is highly dominated by males. The paper provides recommendations as follows: (i) promoting women in research in order to allow more women in positions of decision-making, (ii) repurposing the institution gender policies, (iii) women agency change of mindset and make concerted efforts to emancipate themselves from negative stereotypes and barriers in institutions.

Keywords: gender representation; decision-making; higher education; Malawi

Introduction

Malawi is one of the countries that has doubled its efforts to narrow the gender gap since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Over some decades now, the Government of Malawi has ratified the gender protocols and enacted the gender policy to safeguard gender equality at all levels to empower women. The participation of women in decision-making positions is critical at this point. Under-representation of women in decision-making has been an area of concern at global, regional, and national levels. Given their knowledge of these barriers, several researchers have claimed that having more women in strategic leadership roles would help to reduce workplace restrictions and influence policies. They also believe that by enhancing networking opportunities, more women would be able to participate equally in academia. The distribution of men and women in decision-making is the main topic of this study, which also discusses gender auditing. The study takes an empirical cross-sectional design to establish the gender representation at University of Malawi (UNIMA)-Chancellor College, the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST), and Mzuzu University. Despite the limitation that the study only focused on three universities and that the findings cannot be generalised, the rigidity of patriarchal systems in Malawi is deeply entrenched. All three institutions suffer gender-blind promotion criteria and systematic institutional resistance which makes it difficult for women to ascend to decision-making positions hence the hierarchy is highly dominated by males.

¹University of Free-State, KamwendoJC@ufs.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-00015737-8539>

The gender representation of women in top positions in organisations and institutions has been a long-standing problem worldwide that has not really achieved much attraction. Because there is still a significant gender disparity in decision-making in many nations, the topic has drawn attention in higher education. The basic assumption is that both gender, patriarchy, cultural, historical and institutional structures continue to exacerbate the situation. Although there has been an increase in the female percentage in the labour force, in some parts of the world the challenge remains in the distribution of leadership in the labour force. Women are normally concentrated at the bottom of the social and institutional hierarchy. With the recognition that sustainable development cannot be achieved without maximum participation of both women and men at all levels be it public or private, many countries globally are signatories to numerous international, continental, and regional protocols, intending to redress the problem of unequal opportunity between men and women. Malawi is one of the Sub-Saharan countries that launched a national gender policy in 2000, a few years after the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The gender policy was guided by the national constitution which has gender-related provisions within its growth and development strategy to uphold gender equality and the empowerment of women; the gender-sensitive education policy, higher education policy; as well as the gender equality policy on some of the Higher institutions of learning for example, University of Malawi (UNIMA). The gender protocols and instruments were developed to guide gender mainstreaming and women empowerment initiatives for the attainment of gender equity and reduce gender power relations that hinder women's economic empowerment and other opportunities in Malawi. There is dearth of literature on genderising decision-making in higher education to redress the gender gaps. This has necessitated this study which examines how far the institutions of higher learning are implementing the provision for equitable gender distribution of males and females in decision-making. The study further discusses some of the possible challenges inhibiting efforts for equitable gender distribution in decision-making in higher education institutions in Malawi. The paper ends with recommendations that could possibly influence changes in the respective and other institutions of higher learning with reference to equitable gender distribution in decision-making.

One of the major gender challenges during this period of transformation and renewal is the issue of women's representation in decision-making. The under-representation of women in decision-making is a broad and multifaceted issue and a global phenomenon that needs to be placed in the context of several policy efforts aimed at improving gender equality and women empowerment. Gender representation and women empowerment go beyond numbers but also cover women's voices in decision-making positions. However, observation globally shows that the top positions are still overwhelmingly held by men in European Union (EU) nations, despite women's progress in corporate leadership progressively increasing. Although there is a tremendous change that the largest publicly traded corporations in the EU have a female board representation of about 30%, and as of October 2021, 8.5% and 7.8%, respectively, of board chair and chief executive officer posts were held by women, still, the top jobs are overwhelmingly held by men, notwithstanding the good work that women have done to advance in leadership, which has gradually expanded globally across all economic domains. It has been well documented that women make up more than half the population and yet they continue to be underrepresented in decision-making in all fields. The participation of women in decision-making ensures their recognition as contributors to the institution's well-being, policies as well sustainable development. The basic assumption is that if more women are strategic in leadership positions, they would influence the improvement of work policy obstacles, given their experience of these barriers, and they would likely improve networking possibilities that might facilitate more equal participation of women within the organisation or institution (European Union Gender Equality Report 2021).

Within the same principle, higher education institutions have a crucial role to play in promoting women empowerment and social change by promoting diversity, inclusion, and gender equality. Universities are powerful institutions for promoting these values, not only in higher education but also in society at large. Aboim (2022) argues that gender binary systems are being politically challenged, undermining hegemonic gender patterns, despite the fact that males continue to hold the majority of authority in academia. Despite this, it is important to recognize the gendered disparities that come from the normative roles that are assigned to men and women. Through institutional and cultural practices, gender comes to sustain a social structure in which women and the feminine stay in a subservient position. To advance gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, it is essential to give women's participation in decision-making a priority and to criticize gender binary structures. The African Union (AU) Agenda (2063) is a component of the transformational project that intends to lessen, if not completely eradicate, the major obstacles standing in the way of gender equality

and women's empowerment (GEWE), allowing women to fully engage in all social, economic, and political undertakings. In response to international political frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 5, the African Union (AU) committed to achieving equal representation of men and women in decision-making (African Union, 2020).

Although the Employment Act of Malawi No. 6 (2000) does not expressly forbid sex-based discrimination, it does not forbid any provision, program, or activity that aims to improve the conditions of those who are disadvantaged, including those who are disadvantaged for the reasons listed in subsection in the national constitution. In this sense, all organisations in Malawi, especially the institutions of higher learning, have the responsibility to ensure that jobs are distributed equitably and without bias. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the gender distribution of males and females in decision-making in UNIMA, MUST; and MZUNI as well as possible cultural and institutional obstacles that may lead the situation being established. At this stage, it is crucial that women hold positions of decision-making. Given their knowledge of these barriers and their experience with them, many researchers have argued that having more women in strategic leadership roles would reduce workplace barriers. They would also probably enhance networking opportunities, which could lead to more equal participation of women in academia. The paper adopts an empirical cross-sectional audit to determine the gender representation and distribution of men and women in decision-making at the University of Malawi (UNIMA-Chancellor college), MUST, and Mzuzu University using intersectionality as the theoretical lens.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Considering the gender dynamics and institutional differences in various contexts, this study deploys the intersectionality framework as coined by Kimberley Crenshaw in 1985 as cited by Carastathis (2019) to unpack some of the issues. Using an intersectional lens helps to understand some of the issues such as historical contexts and cultural and traditional issues surrounding gender issues in Malawi and higher education. The intersectionality framework recognises that women and men are not homogenous but differ in identity markers such as race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, marital status, age, ethnicity, economic status, historical background, political affiliation and other binaries which influence the lived experience of power and privileges. In addition, the study uses "*glass ceiling metaphor*" which refers to obstacles to obtaining top managerial jobs. The 'glass ceiling' concept has gained popularity as a means of explaining why few women are unable to hold leadership positions, why they do not appear to advance as quickly within organisations as men do, and why they frequently have to meet more demanding promotion criteria. Akpinar-Sposito (2013) explains that early childhood socialisation patterns, wherein young girls and boys are taught at a young age to value what society perceives as female and male characteristics, are frequently used to explain the under-representation of women in management and leadership positions in the literature. The socialisation pattern leads to girls and boys believing, for example, that being aggressive, assertive, independent, rational, and task-oriented are male characteristics, whereas being modest, submissive, affectionate, nurturing, people-oriented, and emotionally expressive are considered to be female traits. Girls learn from an early age that showing male qualities is inappropriate, while young boys are also discouraged from showing what society considers to be female features. The alternative literature, on the other hand, describes institutional systems that are male-oriented and dominated, defending the territory and prohibiting women from achieving higher positions.

The paper adopts the mixed model approach in which the data was sourced empirically from the registrars at UNIMA and MUST. Arrangements and appointments were made via WhatsApp with the registrars of UNIMA and MUST. On the agreed time, the researcher talked to the registrars and sourced the required data with regard to decision-making positions in the institutions. For MZUNI, all efforts to talk to the registrar failed and the author had to rely on the University's current web site which is well-documented and up to date. This study acknowledges that the data was collected from only three universities in Malawi, which may not be representative of the entire higher education sector in the country. Future research should, therefore, consider a larger sample size from diverse universities in the country to ensure that the findings are more generalisable. The data presentation and analysis are presented in descriptive manner. Tables are utilised to illustrate the findings.

Presentation of Data

The University of Malawi is the oldest public university which was founded in 1965 a few months after Malawi's independence under Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda who was the first democratic president after the colonial regime. The first door of the University was opened in Kabula, present-day Blantyre, at a place that is now Soche Technical School. In 1974, the University then moved to Zomba which was the then Capital of Malawi. Dr Hasting Kamuzu Banda became the first Chancellor of the University with Dr Ian Michael as the Vice Chancellor. Because of the growth of enrolment and with the aim to increase the enrolment and faculties, UNIMA opened up other four additional campuses namely, Chancellor College situated in the old capital city -Zomba, The Polytechnic, which is situated in Blantyre now known as the Malawi University of Business and Applied Science, Bunda College of Agriculture in Lilongwe, currently Lilongwe University of Agriculture (LUANAR), College of Medicine in Blantyre as well as Kamuzu college of Nursing. All the constituencies fall under one umbrella-University of Malawi. Eventually, there was a split of the constituencies, and some have experienced name changes and Chancellor College also known as 'Chanco' has maintained its name and still remains the oldest and largest of all constituencies (<https://unima.ac.mw>).

Chancellor College – gender distribution in decision-making

From the information gathered from the office of the registrar, there are five faculties at Chancellor College: the faculties of education, law, social science, science, and humanities. Currently, it was established during data collection that these Faculties are going through transition and are known as Schools hence the data presented illustrate such a transition model. Table 1 illustrates how UNIMA has not evolved in terms of Vice-chancellors from colonial to the present.

Table 1: UNIMA Historical Vice Chancellors from 1965-2022

Name	Gender	Tenure
Dr Ian Michael	M	1965-1973
Professor Gordon Hunnings	M	1973-1977
Dr David Kimble	M	1977-1986
Dr John Michael Dubbey	M	1987-1990
Professor Brown Beswick Chimphamba	M	1992-2000
Professor David Rubadiri	M	2000-2005
Professor Zimani David Kadzamira	M	2005-2010
Professor Emmanuel Fabiano	M	2010-2013
Professor John Saka	M	2013-2019

Source: www.unima.ac.mw

Table 2: UNIMA- Current Vice Chancellor and University registrar

Position	Gender	Other
Vice-Chancellor	M	
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	M	
University Registrar	F	
Deputy Registrar	M	

Source: WhatsApp interview with Registrar's office

Table 3: UNIMA-Chancellor College Executive Deans and Head of Schools

Position	Gender	Other
School of Arts and communication	M	
School of Education	M	
School of Humanities and social science	M	
School of Law, Economics and Governance	M	
School of Natural and Applied Science	M	

Table 4: UNIMA- Director of Centres

Position	Gender	Other
Director of Centre for Language Studies	F	
Director for Centre for Education Research and Training	F	
Director for Centre for Social Research	F	
Director of Quality Assurance	F	
Director of Natural Research Centre (NAREC)	M	

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 show a noticeable absence of women ascending to the highest administrative structure of Vice-Chancellors since the university opened its doors in 1965. Table 2 however shows that currently there is a female Registrar. On the other hand, Table 3 shows the current situation indicating 100% male dominance. However, Table 4 shows a positive and transformation wherein 4 of the 5 Directors are women.

MZUZU University – Gender distribution in decision-making positions

Mzuzu University was founded in 1997 at the time when Malawi was experiencing a new dawn of democracy under President Dr Bakili Muluzi. The University opened its doors and accepted its first intake in 1999 with President Dr Muluzi becoming the first Chancellor and Professor Terrence Davis Vice-Chancellor followed by Professor Peter Mwanza, who later entered politics and became a cabinet minister and an active member in establishing the University. Tables 5-8 shows the current organogram of the management team at the University from Vice-chancellor, to Deans and Directors of various departments. All the information about Mzuzu University were sourced through desktop research on the University's website (<https://www.mzuni.ac.mw>).

Table 5: Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and Registrars

Position	Gender	Other
Vice-Chancellor	M	
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	M	
University Registrar	M	
Senior assistant registrar	F	
Assistant Registrar Academic	M	
Assistant Registrar (HR)	M	
Assistant Registrar (ODEI)	M	
Assistant Registrar Public Relations	M	

Table 6: Dean of Faculties

Position	Gender	Other
Dean of Faculty of Education	M	
Dean of Environmental Sciences	M	
Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences	M	
Dean of Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality	M	
Dean of Faculty of Science, Technology and Innovations	M	
Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences	M	
Dean of Students	M	

Table 7: Finance

Position	Gender	Other
Finance Officer	M	
Finance Accountant	M	
Management Accountant	F	
Estate Development Officer	M	

Table 8: Centre Directors

Position	Gender	Other
Director of Research	M	
Director of ICT	-	
Director of Centre for Open Distance Learning	F	
Project and Development Manager	F	

Data presented in Table 5 shows the current gender distribution in the offices of the Vice-Chancellor to University Registrars wherein only the senior Assistants Registrar is female the rest are males. Table 6 shows a similar trend which reflects that all the Deans of Faculties are males. Table 7 on the other hand shows that the Finance office has (4) subsidiaries with one female serving as Management Accountant. Table 8 shows that out of 4 Directors, 2 are females.

Malawi university of Science and Technology (MUST): Gender distribution in decision-making positions

MUST is one of the newly established institutions in Malawi. In order to further the advancement, adaption, transfer, and application of science, technology, and innovation for Malawi's microeconomic development, the university was established. Metallurgy and Materials Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Biomedical Engineering were the only undergraduate programs offered when MUST first opened its doors in March 2014. Since then, there has been a progressive increase in bachelor's programmes such that currently the university offers (15) undergraduate programmes where 12 of them are in Science, Engineering and Water, while 3 are in Sports, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and African Musicology. Table 9-11 shows the current organogram of MUST. The data in this category were sourced through WhatsApp correspondence with the Registrar as well as the universities public domain website page.

Table 9: Vice Chancellor/ Registrar

Position	Gender	Other
Vice-Chancellor	F	
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	M	
University Registrar	M	
Deputy University Registrar	F	
Assistant University Registrar (Academic)	M	
Assistant University Registrar (Student affairs)	M	

Table 10: Directors

Position	Gender	Other
Director of Finance	M	
Director of Research Outreach	M	
Director of the Malawi Institute of Industrial Research and Innovations	M	
Director of BISCH	F	
Director of AMS	M	

Table 11: Heads of Departments

Position	Gender	Other
Head of Earth Science	M	
Head of Energy	M	
Head of Clinical Sciences	M	
Head of Indigenous Knowledge Systems	M	
Head of Biological Sciences	M	
Head of Engineering	M	
Head of Water Resources	M	
Head of Applied Sciences	M	

Table 9 shows a more gender-tolerant and transformative situation wherein for the first time in the history of Malawi, the university is headed by a female. The table also shows that the position of Deputy Registrar is headed by a female. However, Table 9 also reveals that out of the top management team of 6, only 2 are women. On the other hand, Table

10 shows that there 4 males with only one female Director. Table 11 reveals that all 8 Heads of Department are males.

Discussion

The paper acknowledges that one of the most significant societal shifts in Malawi's recent history has been women's overall success in earning university degrees since the 1970s. The gender revolution has been made possible by a variety of different forces and legislative developments. The first is that women's credentials have changed as a result of the development of education, the rising demand for educated employees, and the increased demand for female labour because of the rise of the service industry. For instance, the expansion of the service sector has contributed to a rise in interest in women's education. Recently, the spread of anti-discrimination laws, policies, and regulations made gender discrimination in education and the labour market illegal – another contributing factor to the expansion of women education. However, research on gender equity in leadership and decision-making in higher education in Malawi has revealed a gender dynamic that shows that Malawi still has a long way to go in order to close the gap. Data in the three public universities audited illustrate that there are still pockets of resistance when it comes to decision-making positions.

This discussion presents both extrinsic and intrinsic factors which act as barriers to women's advancement. Organisational structure, a person's place in the workplace, their level of influence, the proportion of women in these roles, and their number are only a few examples of extrinsic factors. While the proportion of males versus females in management in all three universities is male dominated, the general impression at first glance is that there have been some positive achievements that some women are now found in top administrative positions. With special reference to MUST, for the first time in the history of Malawi, the position of the Vice-chancellor is being held by a woman. In addition, the Deputy University registrar is also a woman. At UNIMA, the same case scenario applies, where the Registrar and four Directors of Centres, are females. This is an achievement that cannot be taken lightly. This shows the willingness, open-mindedness, and transformation in terms of attitudes in the university structures. I had a chance to interact with one of the Registrars who explained that, according to the university hiring policy, which requires certain inherent qualifications to assume higher positions such as Deans, Directors and Vice-Chancellors, it is sometimes hard to find female candidates of such qualifications.

This supports a study by the OECD and UNESCO that found that while more women are enrolling in universities, many of them are being forced out at the highest levels. For instance, more men than women pursue Master's, Doctoral, and Professorship degrees in the majority of OECD nations. This poses a hurdle in and of itself when employing someone for a position that might call for someone with more education. In a similar vein, research by UNESCO in South Africa reveals that only 27.5% of the 2,218 professorial jobs at one institution were held by women. The percentage was slightly higher for associate professors, where women held 39.5% of the available positions (2,131 in total). In Australia, women held more than half of all lecturers and below-lecturer roles but fewer senior lecturer and above posts than men. Women held 33.9% of faculty positions above senior lecturer level and 46.8% of senior lecturer level positions. 53.8% of lower-level faculty posts and 54.7% of lecturer faculty positions were held by women. The proportion of female PhD students increased from 44 to 51% between 1998 and 2018. Women made up 45.1% of senior lecturer positions (4,900 total), 53.3% of lecturer positions (8,498 total), and 56.6% of junior lecturer positions (1,035 total), respectively. As a result, although there are more women than men at the lecturer level, this is not the case at the senior level. Due to the fact that the majority of senior posts in colleges demand such a ranking, women are inherently barred from achieving top positions. The majority of women in Malawi's public universities cluster below senior lecturer level, therefore the aforementioned universities still have a long way to go if they want to reduce the gender gap.

Echoing the findings of global studies on the lack of women in decision-making positions, Professor John Kalenga Saka, the former Vice Chancellor of UNIMA and currently the Vice Chancellor of Mzuzu, conceded during the review meeting for UNIMA gender policy which was held in 2016. The following were the key issues noted in the gender policy:

- A low number of women professors leading to domination of top leadership by men.
- Gender blind promotion criteria and use of assumed domestic roles to exclude women from leadership.
- Lack of gender-sensitive leadership code to be used as a guide.
- Demeaning of females in leadership.

To align the gender policy with the mission and vision of the University Act, Professor Saka advocates for an overhaul of UNIMA gender policy to make it an instrument that will help in removing the barriers to women's advancement. For example, make it a non-discriminatory, gender-accountable, equal and effective policy without exclusion of women, as well as affirmative action to allow more women to advance to higher positions.

Malawi's cultural socialisation and practices consider the roles and environments that both male and female youngsters would occupy as adults. As such, male children are socialised to assume leadership roles beginning at the family level since they are viewed as natural leaders from birth. On the other hand, girls are raised to be decent women who can become mothers and wives. A lady or girl must be modest, submissive, affectionate, and emotionally restrained in order to successfully navigate this type of socialisation. This gendered stereotype, which has been internalised and normalised while being viewed as fitting for a certain gender, is this assignment of roles and features. Women are more often expected to exhibit expressive than instrumental traits, which may limit their opportunities to develop into professions where instrumental traits are viewed as the norm. People who get promoted are thought to be assertive, forceful, aggressive, competitive, self-assured, independent, and strong. Any woman who challenges this intellectual framework is seen as less attractive or as seeking to corrupt other women. Colonialism coupled with religion is another dimension in which gender roles are highly distributed and normalised. Pheko (2002) argues that during the colonial period in African colonies, men were the ones who preferred to go to school and do technical subjects, assume white-coloured jobs and work outside their homes as army recruits, while women did subjects such as home craft, cookery, and needlework. These were the subjects to help them in their responsibilities as spouses and mothers. Even those women who have succeeded in breaking the 'glass ceiling' still find themselves facing the conflict of being a woman (female) and expected to function in a traditionally male-oriented, male bound and defined position of leadership. Women are more likely than men to experience conflicts as a result of attempts to balance career and family. They are faced with having to enact both a sex role that of woman and an organisational role that of a leader. Although Malawi ratified the gender protocols with the aim to improve and close the equality gap between men and women, because of the internalised and normalisation of stereotypes, women still encounter barriers and are sometimes not supported when they attempt to enter leadership.

Although in modern times traditional roles are rapidly transforming; women still experience conflict in the workplace between their duties as wives, mothers, and homemakers and as career women or leaders. They consequently gravitate toward less difficult jobs. These unfortunate jobs are at the bottom of the administrative ladder, while men occupy the positions of authority and management. Over time, women agency dies naturally and unintentionally they sabotage their own efforts at work because they lack self-esteem, confidence and competitiveness which at the end seem to facilitate men's advancement in their careers. Women either decide late that they would be establishing careers (hence initially choose jobs or positions with no room for advancement) or simply perceive their job as a stable job rather than as a career. According to Zulu (2003), institutions of higher education are dominated by strong 'hegemonic masculinities' as a result of the entrenched patriarchy in which many African societies, including South Africa, find themselves. Women do not have access to the same institutional networks for information sharing that men do, nor do they have as many female role models and mentors to help them 'learn the ropes' of leadership and advance their personal development. Women who want to be in leadership positions need to network and find mentors, and when they are excluded from these informal processes, they miss out on the benefits of "information sharing, career planning and strategizing, professional support and encouragement, increased visibility and upward mobility." The 'old boy network' makes sure that women are excluded from these crucial information networks where crucial decisions are occasionally made, frequently in settings where men are the majority. Nominations and recommendations for jobs are also made at these informal gatherings. It is hardly surprising that women are clustered at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy and are almost non-existent at the top. As if the existence of the glass ceiling and gender stereotypic tendencies are not enough to ensure that women do not move beyond middle management level, the exclusion of women from the networks presents another barrier for women.

According to Section 5(1) of Malawi's amended Employment Act of 2010, no person or employee may be discriminated against on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, property, birth, marital or other status, or family responsibilities with regard to hiring, training, promoting, terms and conditions of employment, terminating employment, or other matters arising out of the

employment relations. The Act's reference to discrimination does not specifically address concerns with decision improvement of conditions of disadvantaged persons, including those who are disadvantaged on the grounds enumerated in the provision. The Malawi Employment and Labour Acts are aimed at providing guidance to both public and private institutions, and departments, parastatal organisations to coordinate and facilitate their programs and activities in a more transformative manner which is intended to uplift the status of women. The Employment Act is a blueprint that provides a tool for monitoring and evaluating on the progress and agenda for what needs to be done and to control and ensure efficient use of the resources provided for the development of women.

The implementation of the mentioned policies and instruments requires the establishment of a comprehensive and gender-sensitive multi-sectoral framework involving active participation and will at the institutional level. Aligning the national gender policy and the Malawi Employment Act, with transformative strategies and projects in higher education has the prerogative to come up with various initiatives and programs with an aim to improve the status of women's representation in decision-making. Regrettably, some of the policies in Malawi are there to serve as a window dressing tool. The higher education under this discussion cannot celebrate having gender representation when only one woman is made a Vice Chancellor, Registrar or Director. In fact, some of the appointments are political, while the ordinary women find it hard to excel in decision making.

Conclusion

This paper undertook a gender audit on women's representation in decision-making in three selected universities in Malawi. The data gathered shows that for now, gender equality especially in decision-making in institutions appears to be a myth. It is evident that Malawi's higher learning in general has a mammoth task ahead of them because women are lagging behind in this area. Knowing the gender dynamics and institutional differences in Malawi in various institutions has helped us to unpack some of the issues which are unique to the context. The fact is that it appears there are no clear institutional gender policy in place to handle the problem of equitable hiring, particularly in decision-making. Malawi is still a long way from closing the gender gap, despite the institutions starting to employ more women in senior administrative positions like vice chancellor, university registrars, and directors.

This paper, therefore, recommends the following:

- i. Increased women's capacity through initiatives such as funding women researcher projects. This also calls for academic women themselves to undergo a transformation and decolonise their mindset and make concerted efforts to emancipate themselves of the negative stereotypes and preconceived notions that society has about their ability to lead. Women should seek to remove the barriers, which stand in their way and exploit all possible opportunities to advance themselves in their academic careers.
- ii. The gender policy within these institutions needs to be re-evaluated and repurposed to achieve what it was intended to achieve.
- iii. Future research is required to examine the University's promotion criteria. This extends to private universities-those owned by certain religious denominations are addressing gender imbalances and have succeeded in their institutions since the launch of their universities.
- iv. Finally, all initiatives to increase female representation in higher education management should be fully supported at the national level as well through monitoring and evaluation.

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