

DOES THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROMOTE FEMALE ACADEMICS TO POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP? EVIDENCE FROM TWO STATE UNIVERSITIES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Implementation of affirmative action is critical for establishing those distinctive benefits through laws and policies for redress of inequality suffered by underprivileged individuals. As a result, affirmative action has become an inescapable aspect of the recruitment process and enhancement of females in institutions particularly, in leadership positions. In this article, a qualitative approach was adopted. Semi-structured interviews and document review were used to collect data. Findings showed that affirmative action was an ideal strategy for giving females academics the opportunity to display their capabilities but should not be implemented as tokenism to maintain quality and standard in universities. Moreover, merit, skill and qualities of growth and leadership were identified as imperative. However, lack of transparency and clear lines of communications in implementing this strategy were cited as an obstacle. It was recommended that, transparency and accountability in implementing affirmative action in all university structures was critical. Training that targets gender equality issues should be on-going and be used as a strategy for promoting visibility of females in leadership positions. Merit, skill, qualities of growth and an acumen of leadership should be incorporated to maintain high quality and standard of leadership in universities regardless of gender.

Keywords: Affirmative Action; Female Academics; Implementation; Leadership; Universities.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of affirmative action entails the establishment of distinctive benefits through laws and policies to address inequality suffered by underprivileged individuals (Chabaya, 2011; Musingafi & Mafumbate, 2015). Affirmative action has become an inescapable aspect of the recruitment process and enhancement of females in institutions particularly, in leadership positions. It has been put into place to assist in eradicating the institutionalized discrimination and redress of gender inequality that intrinsically exists in universities due to dominance, devoicing and segregation experienced by females globally (Kennedy, 2015; Kenschaft, Clark, & Ciambone, 2015; Oyeniran, 2018). However, promoting gender equality including affirmative action continues to be a complex and multi-dimensional issue in spite of policy developments in practices and discourses (Shah 2018, p299).

Definition of Affirmative Action

Affirmative action has been defined as a policy designed to amend historical injustices against women, ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged groups (Gu, McFerran, Aquino, & Kim, 2014).

Whereas, Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) define affirmative action as positive steps taken to increase the representation of women in areas of employment and education from which they have been historically excluded. Therefore, affirmative action is a method of prevention and elimination of discrimination (Chabaya, 2011). The definition by (Musingafi & Mafumbate, 2014) mirrors the position adopted in this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Affirmative action is an important tool for bridging the gender gap in universities (Abagre & Bukari, 2013). In other words, it is a strategy that can be used as a transformational tool to enhance visibility of females in universities. Affirmative action does not solely stop with the hiring of underrepresented applicants; its goal is also to facilitate their growth and advancement within an organization into leadership positions. However, the problem is that the balance of power continues to be in the hands of male academics (Neale & White, 2004; Nguyen, 2015). These views are supported by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which acknowledges gender imbalances as the most 'observable discrimination' (UNDP 2015, p37). Hence, this strategy is designed to make equal employment opportunities a reality for female academics. It strives to provide a counteractive resolution to those who have been previously oppressed due to the truism that, the conditions that led to its implementation decades ago still subsists in universities.

A study by Mugweni, Mufanechiya, and Dhloomo (2011) observes that some universities are promoting good practices through their policies and use affirmative action as a way of advancing female academics to powerful academic positions. But, Osongo (2011) in her study showed discontent with the usage of affirmative action to promote visibility of female in universities. This is because the beneficiaries are often labelled as objects and viewed as individuals who cannot make it on their own. Moreover, the prevailing opinion among scholars is that using affirmative action to enhance female leadership perpetuates the myth that females are inferior (Lihamba & Mwaipopo, 2003). Morley (2014) and Hussein (2016) also note that affirmative action is accused of lowering self-esteem and self-worthiness. As a result, the implementation of affirmative action is often viewed as not self-sustaining. Reason being, there continues to be misconception to what is affirmative action and this tends to sway universities on what it entails (Peter, 2018).

However, Maxwell, Nget, An, Peon, and You (2015) writing within the Cambodian context, posit that universities need to educate their employees about the positive initiatives of affirmative action to avoid promoting suspicion towards female academics with top positions. In addition Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) concluded that affirmative action in Zimbabwe was fraught with negative attitudes because university leadership had not taken time to sensitize their employees affirmative action issues. Morley, (2014) also suggests that to avoid affirmative action being fraught with challenges, explicit measures on how it should be implemented to promote gender equity and equality need to be identified. Moreover, there is a convergence of literature which acknowledges that, affirmative action is effective when it is strictly enforced; implemented with complimentary skill development policies and support programs; when there is provision of maternity/parental leave; support for females academics returning to work after maternity leave; dedicated research fellowships for female academics; mentoring and hard quotas, and with

growing female participation and representation in top positions which should be supported by leadership (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Deizmann, 2018; Klasen & Minasyan, 2018; Marcus, 2007; Oyeniran, 2018) .

Consequently, what is sought in affirmative action is to ensure that it is rooted in justice and equality and can be used as a point of reference; revision of standards and practices. This will ensure that universities draw from the largest market place of human resources in staffing their faculties (Beaurain & Masclat, 2016). As such, Abagre and Bukari (2013) are quick to remind us that affirmative action should be seen as part of the answer that has led to some level of transformation in universities, particularly in leadership positions. However, research conducted by Hlatyswayo, Hlatyswayo, and Muranda (2014) and seconded by Shah (2018) points out that in policy documents, affirmative action might work but in practical terms, the status quo subsists. Understandably so, it is still important that universities are explicit on how affirmative action will be implemented to promote a more diverse environment (Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014). Velasquez (2002, p155) purports that if a university is not vigilant in the implementation of affirmative action to enhance female leadership, “it can easily turn into a moral minefield that can destroy precisely what it intended to cure”. It is imperative that universities realize that effective implementation of affirmative action may act as a mirror image of how their institutions promote gender equality. For instance, Mareva (2014) states that some universities in Zimbabwe have made tremendous efforts in promoting visibility of females in top positions, promoting gender equality and striving for equal male-female ratio through affirmative action.

Additionally, (Kaimenyi, Kinya, and Samuel, 2013) using a qualitative design in their study in Kenya, concluded that affirmative action is important because universities can use it as a weapon to destroy the deeply engrossed male prominence in university leadership. Accordingly, Tudge (2004) and Bacchi (1996) state that affirmative action means that an employer has the duty to take positive measures to undo the effects of unfair practices and come up with ways of preventing them in future. Therefore, the aim of affirmative action as a means of enhancing female leadership in universities is not to substitute one form of discrimination with another. Instead, it is to get rid of discrimination altogether in an environment which is characterized by past inequalities. As such, Doverspike, Taylor, and Author (2006) suggest that universities should place more emphasis on merits and competencies to curb negative notions from those who oppose affirmative action as being used to enhance female leadership. This brings us to Tudge’s (2004); Charlton (1994) observations that, for substantive results to be realized, affirmative action should be a planned process, must not be superficial and should spell out proportionality what must prevail among the qualified labour pool. Thus, affirmative action is not about assimilation but about harmonization meant to promote optimum utilisation of opportunities so that a level playing ground for both genders can be realized in universities.

Ndlovu and Mutale (2014) posit that since female academics are yet to be fully recognized and acknowledged as equals to their male counterparts, universities have to walk the talk on affirmative action issues if female academics are to compete on an equal footing. However, Chuma and Ncube (2010) argue that there is little difference in Zimbabwe with regard to females in areas of public life because they still remain on the edge of the ranks of decision makers. This is despite the fact that the introduction of affirmative action in Zimbabwe was aimed at correcting the existing imbalances and promoting females into positions leadership through a reinforcement and support of affirmative action policies and strategies in place (Matope, 2012). Thus, it is against

this milieu that this article seeks to examine promotion of female leadership through implementation of affirmative action in Zimbabwean universities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The interpretive paradigm which is located within the constructivist tradition was adopted for this study to source rich and in-depth, nuanced and detailed data (Taylor & Medina 2013) with the regard to promotion of female leadership in universities through implementation of affirmative action.

Research design

The case study design was utilised because it enabled the researcher to use numerous data collection techniques (Creswell, 2015) to give room for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood as a way of promoting credibility of the phenomenon under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Sample

Owing to the small size of the sample, purposive sampling was adopted using organogram. The participants in this study comprised 11 participants and these were: 2 PVCs, 2 Deputy Registrars; 2 Faculty Deans; 1 Director of School of Gender Studies; 2 Senior/ Assistant Registrars; 2 Chairpersons of Departments. Selection was done with help of the Faculty Deans who were requested to act as gatekeepers. These participants were deemed fit because they all play a critical role in the implementation of university policies that are meant to enhance female visibility in leadership positions. Therefore, their first-hand information on what is taking place in universities, what had and still needs to be done to promote visibility of female academics in leadership positions was of importance with regard to the phenomenon under study.

Data Collection

Semi Structured interviews were used. Document analysis was also used as one of the instruments to collect data because they are good source for triangulating a study's findings. University Strategic Plan Document was used for document analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of identifying, coding and categorizing patterns found in the data (Petty, 2017). Data from this study was analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis and identification codes were as follows:

University 1 was coded as **North University - NU** and represented as follows:

Pro Vice Chancellor – PVC1;

Faculty Dean FD1;

Director of School of Gender – DSG;

Deputy Registrar Human Resources – DRHR1;
Senior Assistant Registrar, SAR1;
Chairpersons of Department – COD1

University 2 was coded as **West University – WU** and represented as follows:
Pro Vice Chancellor – PVC2;
Faculty Dean - FD2;
Deputy Registrar Human Resources – DRHR2;
Senior Assistant Registrar - SAR2;
Chairpersons of Department – COD2

RESEARCH FINDING

Incorporating affirmative to promote female leadership in Universities

In the interviews held with the participants, the researcher sought their views on why affirmative action should be incorporated in universities to promote female leadership. The participants' responses showed addressing disparities and promoting female empowerment were critical in implementing affirmative action. Below are the remarks of the participants. PVC2 said,

It is a way of sensitizing and educating the university community that we have a disadvantaged group and affirmative action will be used to uplift them so that they may be at par with their male counterparts at all levels in the work place.

DGS1 added that,

Affirmative action should be used because the girl child continues to be burdened with societal responsibilities and is denied the opportunity to compete with the boy child.

FD2 stated,

We are saying female leadership in universities is dotted here and there and so this is one way of fixing these long standing disparities.

The DRHR1 explained why it was important for affirmative action to be incorporated in universities to promote female leadership,

We need affirmative action in universities for gender parity. Gender equality needs to be practiced from grass roots so that both genders learn how to share leadership from a tender age. This will avoid a situation whereby the girl child has to benefit from affirmative action instead of being promoted through merit because academia is now a cut throat industry which promotes excellence.

Though COD1 and COD2 expressed the need for affirmative action in universities, COD1 noted that affirmative action was being used due to the societal beliefs exposed to the girl child as alluded by DGS and DRHR1. Whereas, COD2 lamented that affirmative action was being incorporated on students rather than the university employees.

Unfortunately, we see more of affirmative action at student level. We continue to see less women in leadership positions, need affirmative action because this would show that the university has female issues at heart.

The above findings further substantiate that affirmative action is an ideal strategy for addressing the existing gender disparities in universities and promoting female empowerment and their

inclusion in the decision making processes. Hence, the fair implementation of affirmative action still demands great efforts in handling the irremediable and complex reality of females being excluded from the decision making processes.

Applying affirmative action through selection and recruitment to promote female leadership in Universities

The participants were requested to state the manner in which affirmative action was being implemented as a way of enhancing female leadership and who was responsible for its implementation. It emerged from the participants that affirmative action was being applied through selection, recruitment and promotion of staff and it was the Human Resources Department's responsibility to ensure that this strategy was carried out. PVC1 explained,

We practice affirmative action through the enrolment of students, staff development programs (SDP), selection, hiring and promotion of staff members and Human Resources Department (HRD) in this case, plays a major role in ensuring that affirmative action is implemented.

PVC2 stated this was dependent on the performance of the individual during interviews.

It is through the selection, hiring and promotion of staff members and if a female has done equally well during the interviews and has the qualifications, we use affirmative action. As for who is responsible, well it depends, but HRD is largely involved with the issues of affirmative action.

DGS1 supported the above and stated that everyone was obliged to implement this strategy,

Affirmative action is applied by promoting a diversity of workforce and also through our adverts where we state that females are encouraged to apply for these positions. It is also through selection and hiring. This is everyone's responsibility which, in my belief, should be spearheaded by the HRD.

FD1 explained that there were regulations that had to be followed in implementing affirmative action.

Normally, we follow the set rules that have to applied in selection and hiring. If a female has scored just a little below the male candidate, we normally choose the female to take up the post and this should be in agreement with the whole interview panel. I believe the HRD and the top management are the ones who are responsible.

However, FD2 felt not much was being done to implement this strategy at faculty level. DRHR1 and DRHR2 had similar sentiments and added that everyone was responsible for implementing this strategy. Below is the response from DRHR2 who stated,

Well, I have seen it being implemented for our students but for the staff members we mostly use merit for recruitment after emphasis that females are encouraged to apply so that we have a university which has a diversified manpower.

SAR1 had this to say,

I know we are meant to implement affirmative action through hiring and promotions but, we are weak in this area because there is little being said by management on how affirmative action should be implemented within the academic circles.

SAR2 said affirmative action was implemented by,

Identifying those females that show potential and capacity to lead. Affirmative action through human resources ensures that females are encouraged to lead and break the barriers by entering into male dominated fields,

COD1 was of the view that said,

Affirmative action is done through job advertisements, through selection, hiring, promotions and this is the human resources responsibility because they are the ones who are responsible for the hiring of the workforce. They are the ones who need to pinpoint where redress is needed through workshops and training so that affirmative action is used as a corrective tool.

COD2 noted that,

Though human resources is responsible for the implementation of affirmative action the university is not open on how it really works regarding recruitment promotion of its employees.

The foregoing comments draw attention to the fact that participants in both NU and WU universities unanimously agreed that selection, recruitment and promotion, and encouraging female candidates to apply for positions of leadership through adverts were elements that were utilized to implement affirmative action to promote female leadership. Relating to the above aspects, it could also be deduced from the responses that qualifications and experience of those who would be beneficiaries of affirmative action should not be overlooked so as to uphold merit and standards in two universities. The researcher also analysed the strategic plan documents and the issue of merit raised by participants from NU was in line with one of the core values of the university which emphasises excellence through merit and high standards. Whereas, the gender equality policy for WU highlighted that the HRD will be responsible for representing the national statistics through recruitment and promotions and this would be achieved by advocating increased recruitment, promotion and retention of female staff.

On the other hand, the emerging results show that to a certain extent implementation of affirmative action was not transparent. For instance, at WU one of their broad strategies in their gender equality policy is redress of gender imbalances through affirmative action. But, the policy is silent on who is going to be responsible for this initiative.

Lack of consultation in the implementation of affirmative action in Universities.

For every policy to be effective in meeting its desired outcomes, consultation with the policy implementers has to be conducted. The participants were questioned if there were consultations on how affirmative action should be implemented. The responses given by the participants indicated that there was scarcely any association with the management and academics on how affirmative action should be executed. This is evident from the participants' similar responses as indicated below, PVC1 stated,

I am not aware if there were any consultations on how affirmative action will be implemented especially on academics.

PVC2 concurred,

What people here know very well is about the gender equality policy. Besides affirmative action tends to be a sensitive approach to employment.

The faculty dean's responses also aligned with those of the foregoing participants. FD1 said,

Well, I am not sure if consultations cut across all levels among academics as with regard to students.

DRHR1 indicated,

I am not sure if the academics were consulted and DRHR2 simply said: not that I know of.

Responding to the same question, COD1 stated,

Yes, we are members to a number of bodies and organizations that deal with gender perspectives and we do have a strong education line with the Ministry locally, We have members that are sent out to target specific gender areas and through feedback we get ideas on how affirmative action should be implemented and improved so we are definitely involved. But this is at student level, on academics it is silent.

COD2 articulated that failure to be told how to implement this strategy meant that university leadership were indirectly buttressing patriarchal divide between both genders.

Well, there is very limited consultation in this regard. There seems to be irregularities and this should be looked at to avoid promoting an egregious practice.

The foregoing assertions show that lack of consultation on how to implement affirmative action continues hinder efforts towards gender parity both universities. There appeared to be a mismatch between theory and practice with regard to scanty visibility of females in leadership positions by consulting the policy implementers on what needs to be done. Furthermore, lack of consultation with the policy implementers on implementation of affirmative action aligns with the top-down theory to policy implementation by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975). This theory emphasises that the policy makers view the policy implementers as a threat to the order of the system and may appear chaotic and unpredictable.

The participants were also asked to give their views of whether affirmative action could be used as a tool for promoting female leadership in universities. The participants had this to say:

PVC2 said that

It is a bit tricky because affirmative action creates the impression that we can lower the standards as long as we are accommodating females to leadership positions. For example, when employing lecturers we don't start on the basis of affirmative action but will call out for minimum qualifications we state that female candidates are encouraged to apply. So, we are deliberately and openly telling the world that a female candidate with those qualifications will be at an advantage.

DGS explained that affirmative action was crucial because it gave a chance for creation of critical mass of females and their participation in decision making so that the needs of the females in universities can be equally represented. She explained,

Affirmative action for me is very important because it is a way of ensuring that we also have some representation of females in various sections. You have seen in politics they now talk of the quota system and it has really helped the women to be visible and enter positions in politics which was impossible before.

DRHR2 also commented,

I have seen this work through our vice chancellor whereby he tries to elevate females by putting them on acting capacity to ascertain if they are capable for a period of time until he is satisfied. So yes, affirmative action is being practiced but to a lesser extent.

SAR2 also concurred with the above and stated,

Affirmative action is the best move that can be used because it gives females prospects to showcase their abilities and talent and it can actually open up all the opportunities which ordinarily females would not have been able to enter.

Meanwhile, COD1 had the same sentiments as COD2 that affirmative action was ideal because universities inherited numerous societal glitches, but care had to be taken that the existing policies were correctly implemented so that affirmative action could be operational. Below is the response from the COD1s,

Can we say it works? Why do I ask this? It's because the university absorbs hiccups and aftermaths of what transpires within the society, so in the short term we are saying immediately we must give precedence to females. This is a correctional tool and it should not be used more than necessary.

Some participants were of the view that affirmative action was not necessary in academia because females were no longer as disadvantaged as before within the academic circles. The remarks mentioned below embody the participants' views from both universities. PVC1 commented,

Well, I don't believe in the efficacy of this strategy being used because it gives people false comfort. Besides affirmative action in this country is weaker as compared to developed countries. In this country, the problem needs to be addressed from the grassroots level. I think people want a quick fix on the matter of female leadership.

SAR1 said,

I don't believe females are still disadvantaged as compared to long ago. Such an ideal in this day is thoroughly odious, we have to use merit because once you are working at university it shows you are capable and have the ability to realise career mobility.

DRHR1 also highlighted,

I think females should work hard to be promoted. You don't get a job because you have a pretty face, females nowadays are in a position to compete fair and square with men.

FD1 also posited,

Honestly, I don't go for it because I believe the females are not as disadvantaged as they were previously. It's like we are forcing them into the system yet most of the time they fail to withstand the heat in these positions of leadership on their own and step down.

FD2 echoed,

I strongly believe people should be given equal opportunities to compete for top positions. Let the person go in on merit and if that person is a women you can be assured everyone will have respect for her instead of using affirmative action then we are not being fair.

FD2 further explained,

It can be used yes but, we have to be careful not to disadvantage those benefiting from it. I don't know how this can be done but one staunch gender activist recently said "to hell with affirmative action" because it really belittles women and argued that very soon women will even be accused of getting professorship though affirmative action, at lower levels, affirmative action can work but in top positions it's a bit tricky.

It is evident from the responses that the participants had mixed feelings on affirmative action being used as a tool for promoting female leadership in universities. The majority of the participants felt that this strategy should be utilized because it contributes to diversity in the workplace. Therefore, it may be concluded that use of this strategy may create feelings of alienation among male

academics and this can lead to discrimination towards those females who will have benefited position of leadership through affirmative action.

DISCUSSION

Affirmative action serves the purpose of altering processes and practices that isolated the disadvantaged groups in society, such as females. The study sought to find out why affirmative action was used. The findings show that there was need to have an equal representation at all levels and positions by both genders due to gender imbalance in decision making processes in NU and WU universities respectively. The findings of the study concur with Mugweni's (2014) idea that affirmative action is used because it entails much more than equal opportunities and removes barriers that limit females from participating in decision making processes. Literature suggests that affirmative action is also an emancipatory tool that countries have adopted to curtail the gender disparities in positions of leadership in universities (Peters, 2018).

It also emerged from the study that though affirmative action was ideal in promoting female leadership the participants felt knowledge and skills of the beneficiaries should also be taken into account. Thus, if diversity is to be embraced in universities through affirmative action, then knowledge, skills and potential of the beneficiaries is paramount. Contrary to the findings of the study, Coetzee and Bezuidenhout (2011) highlight that the problem is that individuals are appointed in affirmative action positions as merely cosmetic appointments or window dressing without due consideration of their suitability for the positions. Hence, these beneficiaries are usually not taken seriously, seen as intrusive and opportunists. Further, it emerged from the study that affirmative action should not be used as tokenism without addressing the real problems relating to lack of female leadership. Razin-Anisman and Saguy (2016) are not in agreement with the findings of the study. These authors argue that tokenism is healthy because it is viewed as an uncensored practice which universities can adopt to reach their target numbers. But, Seshamani and Shalumba (2011) in their study in Zambia, confirm that gender equality in universities is just about tokenism which they metaphorically call gender gestures, used as cover-up, yet universities continue to promote gender blindness.

Regarding the implementation of affirmative action in universities, the participants in the study stated that affirmative action was implemented through recruitment and promotions. The outcomes of the study confirm findings from literature review that affirmative action in most institutions is implemented through offering employment opportunities to advance females. Nguyen (2016) and Chen and Hsieh (2018) state that because of negativity towards adoption of affirmative action, nowadays universities promote candidates based on their research, skills and potential. Heaton (2016) and Motileng, Wanger, and Cassimjee, (2016) also refute the findings of the study and posit that nowadays the culture of the university has changed to hiring employees who will bring with them sustainability, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards the gender agenda.

One of the concerns that was raised by the participants in both universities was that the whole process of implementing affirmative action was not transparent. The results align with extant literature from Lee (2012) from Malaysia, Tsikata (2009) in South Africa, Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) writing from Zimbabwe and current research from Australia by Osman & Mathews (2016). Twala (2004) states that to avoid resistance to affirmative action, there is need

to make sure that its programs are clear, improved and strengthened so that they appear to be fair and effective to avoid reserve discrimination (Kennedy, 2013).

It may be inferred that lack of transparency in implementing affirmative action may indicate that affirmative action elements in both universities under study are for adhoc purposes and carried out in an inconsequential way. Furthermore, the findings of the study are not in line with the bottom-up theory to policy implementation which highlights that if policy implementation captures the subtleties of initiatives at grassroots level, it will not be alien to the very implementers of the policy (Lipsky, 1980). Consequently, the current situation is buttressed by the fact that there are no explicit measures or systematic approaches on how affirmative action should be implemented in both universities to promote female leadership. It further emerged that the use of affirmative action should not create an impression that the standards and quality could be lowered just for the sake of accommodating females in decision making processes. In line with the findings of the study is Klein (2016) who states that the increase in females in top positions at the expense of quality may prove to be costly to the universities' image and academic scholarship in a bid to avoid being termed gender insensitive.

Information emerging from the study further revealed that females should be trained for leadership roles and given a time-frame to acquire further qualifications once they are identified as beneficiaries of affirmative action. Meanwhile, literature further shows that training of affirmative action appointees is not embraced by everyone (Basit & McNamara, 2004). Some responses highlighted that affirmative action was no longer viable because female academics were no longer as disadvantaged as long ago. This is commensurate with Twala, (2004) who states that affirmative action in which females are involved is controversial because they are no longer as disadvantaged in academic circles. However, the current research negates the foregoing and proposes that the current standing of university leaders in both universities under study is self-evident that in order to achieve equal opportunities, females have to be given preferential support so as to attain high levels of managerial capacity. Though affirmative action may have subtle and harmful consequences directed towards the same people that are meant to be enhanced into positions of power, there is need to have vigilance in implementing affirmative action to avoid what Valesquez (2002) terms a moral mine field that can destroy what it is meant to cure.

CONCLUSION

As indicated from the study, affirmative action is meant to address gender imbalances to create a level playing ground for all because of the continued male dominance in positions of leadership in universities. This study also highlighted that affirmative action was ideal because it gave the females the opportunity to display their capabilities but this had to be implemented at grassroots level. The study also revealed that while incorporating affirmative action factors such as merit, skill, leadership acumen should not be ignored and neither should this strategy be implemented as tokenism so as to maintain quality and standards of leadership in universities. Giving first preference to female academics through recruitment and promotion using affirmative action emerged as the main source of promoting visibility of females into positions of leadership. However, lack of transparency and clear lines of communications in implementing this strategy was cited as an obstacle to how the whole implementation process worked. However, these sentiments appeared to be squashed by the fact that the pool of female academics to choose for

positions of leadership through affirmative action was limited and this adversely hindered critical mass of female academics into leadership positions in both universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proffers the following recommendations that, there should be transparency in the implementation of affirmative action to promote female leadership and this should cut across all university structures. This may create a leeway and chances for females to lead in universities, thus promoting transformational leadership. Training that targets gender equality issues should be on-going and should focus on the importance of using affirmative as a stepping stone in promoting gender parity in leadership positions. Merit, skill and leadership acumen should be incorporated to maintain high standard of quality leadership and governance of universities regardless of gender. Giving first preference to deserving female academics through recruitment and promotion using affirmative action should be adopted as a means of promoting visibility of females into positions of leadership.

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