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(An Autonomous Institute)

University Road, Kolhapur - 416004, Maharashtra State, India.



website : www.siberindia.edu.in

E-mail : editorsajmr@siberindia.edu.in

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Gender Representation in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities of Assam, India

Frola Kayuki
Research Scholar,
Dibrugarh University, Assam, India

Daisy Bora Talukdar
Professor
Dibrugarh University, Assam, India

Abstract

This paper sought to study gender status in leadership positions in the universities of Assam, India. The study also assessed the number of male and female university teachers because academic leaders are selected among university teachers. Moreover, the study aimed to determine the causes of gender disparities. This study employed descriptive survey research. The study also used purposive and stratified sampling techniques to sample universities and respondents. Assam state was purposively selected for the study based on the number of available universities. Among the eight states of Northeast India, Assam has many universities compared to the other seven remaining states. With this regard, the study included a total of five universities, three of which were public and two were private. The study included only three academic leadership positions: dean, head of the department, and chairperson/director of the center.

The study found that females were few compared to males in university teaching and academic leadership positions in the universities of Assam, India. Regarding the overall status of males and females in university teaching positions the results were (41.83%) females compared to males (58.17%). Additionally, regarding gender status in academic leadership positions, males were (66.33%) compared to females (33.67%). In position-wise based on three academic positions studied, the results showed that (83.33%) of males and (16.67%) of females held the positions of dean and director/chairperson of the center. The position of head of department was held by (57.69%) males and (42.31%) females. Conversely, the study found that family and work responsibilities, male-dominated structures, and negative perceptions about females are the causes of gender disparity in academic leadership positions in the universities of Assam, India. The study recommends university management employ different strategies for gender parity in academic leadership positions. The more females are underrepresented in leadership positions, the more they lack representatives in decision-making

Key Words: Gender Representation, Gender Disparities, Academic Leadership, Universities

Introduction

The presence of gender inequalities or differences in any area between males and females results in a gender disparity/gap that means separating males and females regarding opportunities and access to positions (Rincon et al., 2017). According to Elbers and Grigore (2019), Rights, duties, and opportunities should not depend on whether a person was born a male or female; both should be treated equally in rights, opportunities, and responsibilities regardless of gender. The gender gap exists in all countries worldwide. Gender disparities have decreased in high- and middle-income countries, but they are still significant in low-income countries, females are still disadvantaged in several sectors, including education and employment (Macis, 2017).

According to Jain (2020), in India, males control economics, politics, religion, and social institutions. Females are highly underrepresented in leadership, as in many other occupations; males dominate senior leadership positions in all phases of education, except in nursery and infant schools (Bush, 2003). The study by Nyoni et al. (2017) demonstrated that females in universities are negatively perceived in leadership issues and masculine concepts dominate the leadership system.

Academic leadership is crucial in developing universities and research institutes; it includes various educational roles, positions, and titles (Yue et al., 2021). According to Saroyan et al. (2011), academic leadership occurs in an academic setting, communicates vision, direction, inspiration, and support, and guides the team toward achieving a common purpose. Academic leadership in universities includes positions, roles, and titles of Heads of Academic Departments, Deans of Faculty/Schools, Directors/Chairpersons of Centres, Academic Registrar, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, and Vice-Chancellor.

This paper seeks to analyze and compare the status of gender representation in academic leadership in universities of Assam, India specifically in the positions of deans, heads of departments, and directors/chairpersons of centers. Based on the fact that Academic leaders are selected or appointed among

university teachers. Hence, the study assessed the number of male and female university teachers. Furthermore, the study determined the causes of gender disparities in academic leadership positions.

Literature Review

The status of gender in academic leadership in universities

Several studies investigated gender representation in university academic leadership and found that females are underrepresented compared to males. Gender disparity in academic leadership positions is a worldwide problem.

Nguyen, et al. (2022) conducted a study in the United States; out of 157 deans, the study found that males were 124, equal to 79.9%, while females were 33, equal to 21.0%. Azizi et al. (2022) conducted a study in North America and found that males were 63.7% while females were 36.3% in the position of Vice-Chancellor: 61.5% were males and 38.5% were females in the position of dean. Sethi et al. (2022) conducted a study to address gender disparity in the United States. The study found that in the position of directors, males were 76% while females were 24%; in the position of chairman, males were 86%, while females were 14%.

Çobanoğlu (2018) conducted a study in Turkey in the position of rectors; males were 92% while females were 8%; in the position of Vice-Chancellor, females were 17.39%, and 18.33% in the position of dean. Qamar et al. (2019) conducted a study in Canadian Universities and found that males were 70.45% while 29.55% were females. Morais, et al. (2022) studied leadership and gender distribution in Portuguese higher education institutions and found that male deans were 69.5% while females were 30.5%. Aiston and Yang (2017) conducted a study in Hong Kong and found that males were 81.0% while females were 18.7% and missing 0.2%.

Haidar (2018) conducted a study in Lebanon; out of 65 deans, there were only 15 (23%) females while the rest were males. Alsubaie and Jones (2017) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia, The study found that females were underrepresented in all leadership positions out of 34 directors, males were 33 while one (1) director represented females. Out of 140 Vice Presidents, males were 128 while females were 12; out of 391 deans of faculty males were 330 while females were 61; and out of 770 deputy deans of faculty, males were 542 and females were 228.

Rudhumbu (2016) conducted a study in South Africa and found males were 65.35% and females were 34.7% (head of departments), 75% for males, and 25% for females (deans). Eboiyehi et al. (2016) conducted a study in Nigeria and found that males were 70.8% while females were 29.2%. Moreover, the study demonstrated that most deans and vice deans were males, and in the position of vice-rector, only one female was a vice-rector of academic affairs. Adu-Oppong et al. (2017) conducted a study in Ghana and found that female heads of department were 18%. The deans of the faculty were all males and only one female. Omotos (2021) conducted a study on Nigeria's deans of faculties; in 2016, male dean faculties were 88%, while females were 12%. In 2017, the percentages remained the same: 88% for males and 12% for females. In the position of heads of department in 2016, males were 84% while females were 16%; in 2017, males were 53% while females were 47%.

Banker and Banker (2017) in India found that out of 810 higher education institutes or universities, only 6.67% of institutions were represented by females, while male representation was 89.52% and 3.83% unknown. Basantia and Devi (2022) conducted a study in Northeast India and found in the position of Vice Chancellor; males were 100%; in the head of the department, females were 9.85%, and males were 90.14%. Banker (2023), found that out of 1151 higher education institutions in India, 9.55% are led by females and 89.57% by males, and 0.86% of data on leadership is unavailable. Moreover, Kumari and Misra (2020) found that in Indian universities female representation has been seen to be 11.79% compared to males who were 83.32% in the position of Vice-Chancellor, dean, or director.

Nyoni and He (2019) conducted a study in Tanzania at the University of Dodoma and found that the representation of females was 8.2% and 91.8% for males; at Jordan University, the study found males were represented by 93.3% while females were represented by 6.97%. Mushi et al. (2021) conducted a study in Tanzania; the study found that, in top management, males represented 81% while females represented 19%; in the level of directors, males were 81% while females were 19%, in the level of heads of departments males were 68% while females were 32%.

Causes of Gender Disparities in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities

The study by Chliwniak (1997) found stereotypes, and the blocking of the career paths of females due to male-dominated structures, organizational norms, and systems are the causes behind unequal representation in university leadership. Oakley (2000) found gender-based stereotypes and the closed circle of the boy network. Moreover, Onsongo (2004) found a lack of confidence, discriminatory recruitment, appointment and promotion procedures, and discrimination against female child education as causes of unequal representation in academic leadership in universities. Also, the study by Shakeshaft et al. (2007) mentioned that family and home responsibilities affect the career patterns of females more than males. Moreover, it demonstrated that stereotypes and discrimination impede female leadership.

Özkanlı and White (2009) found that a lack of support, mentoring, and recruitment and selection processes causes the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions. Batool et al. (2013) found domestic responsibilities, females were limited from engaging in research activities, leading to a lack of publication and underrepresentation in leadership. Segkulu and Gyimah (2016) found that low education qualifications, traditional beliefs, and cultural practices limited females from occupying leadership in educational institutions. The study by Addama (2017) found the dominance of males in tertiary institutions causes unequal representation in academic leadership.

Haidar (2018) found stereotypes and discrimination as causes of unequal representation. Çobanoğlu (2018) found that social-cultural factors, academic working culture, and personal factors hinder females' progress to leadership compared to males. The study conducted by Dawa and Ugyen (2022) found gender biases, no incentives for females to take up leadership positions from authorities, and social-cultural factors like family responsibilities and lack of gender equality in assigned leadership positions cause unequal representation.

According to the study conducted by Nyoni and He (2019) society and organizations have determined that males are the only ones who make good leaders. In addition, Nyoni et al. (2017) demonstrated that the masculine concept dominates the leadership system. Furthermore, the study showed that females were discriminated against in appointments and promotions in universities. In contrast, males with equivalent qualifications were given better positions, resulting in unequal representation in university leadership positions. The study by Joseph and Joseph (2022) found organizational culture, discrimination in recruitment, and unequal power relations.

Objectives

- To find out the number of male and female university teachers in universities of Assam, India.
- To find out the status of gender representation in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India.
- To find out the causes of gender disparities in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India.

Research Methodology

The study used a descriptive research method. Purposive and stratified sampling procedures were used. Purposive sampling was used to select universities and the respondents from the Registrar's office. Furthermore, the study used stratified sampling to select university teachers.

Participants

The study included five universities from Assam India (one central, two states and two private universities) with a total of 175 university teachers and five (5) respondents from the registrar's office.

Data collection tools

To answer the first two objectives; a data schedule was used, which was filled by the offices of Registrars. Regarding the comparison of the causes of unequal representation in academic leadership; questionnaires were used, which were administered to university teachers.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program was used to analyze data collected through a questionnaire. Tables, simple percentages, and graphical representations were used in presenting data.

Analysis and Findings

The Number of University Teachers in Universities of Assam, India

To answer objective one (1), data were collected through a data schedule that the Registrar's office filled. The number of male and female university teachers in the universities of Assam, India, is presented in Table 1, UNI means university;

Table 1: The Number of Males and Females University Teachers in Universities of Assam, India

Name of university	Number of teachers	Males		Females	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
UNI 1	200	134	67%	66	33.00%
UNI 2	220	134	60.91%	86	39.09%
UNI 3	344	144	41.86%	200	58.14%
UNI 4	44	18	40.91%	26	59.09%
UNI 5	275	200	72.73%	75	27.27%

Table 1 shows the number of teachers in universities in Assam, India. At UNI 1 67.00% of teachers were males, and 33.00% were females (as per data collected in September 2023). At UNI 2 60.91% were males, while 39.09% were females (as per data collected in September 2023). At UNI 3 41.86% were males, and 58.14% were females (data collected in October 2023). At UNI 4 40.91% were males and 59.09% were females (as per data collected in November 2023). And UNI 5, 72.73% were males while 27.27% were females (as per data collected in February 2024).

Table 2 below shows the total number of male and female teachers in the universities of Assam, India.

Table 2: Total Number of Male and Female University Teachers in the Universities of Assam, India

Number of Teachers	Males		Females	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1083	630	58.17%	453	41.83%

Table 2 shows the total number of 1083 university teachers in Assam, India; 630 (58.17%) were males and 453 (41.83%) were females (as per data collected in academic year 2023/2024).

The Status of Gender Representations in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities of Assam, India.

Data were collected through a data schedule that was filled by the Registrar's office. The representation of males and females in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India is presented as shown in Table 3:

Table 3 : The Number of Male and Female Academic Leaders in Academic Leadership Positions in Assam, India (in university wise)

Name of university	Academic leadership position	Total Number	Males		Females	
			Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
UNI 1	Deans	09	06	66.67%	03	33.33%
	Heads of Department	17	11	64.71%	06	35.29%
	Directors/Chairpersons of Centers	17	14	82.35%	03	17.65%
UNI 2	Deans	05	05	100%	00	0%
	Heads of Department	25	16	64%	09	36%
	Directors/Chairpersons of	03	01	33.33%	02	66.67%

UNI 3	Centers					
	Deans	14	12	85.71%	02	14.29%
UNI 4	Heads of Department	42	19	45.24%	23	54.76%
	Head of Departments	15	6	40%	9	60%
UNI 5	Deans	8	7	87.5%	1	12.5%
	Heads of Department	31	23	74.19%	8	25.81%
	Directors of Centres	10	10	100%	0	0%

Table 3 summarizes the number of male and female academic leaders of five universities in Assam, India, based on academic leadership positions (as per data collected in academic year 2023/2024).

Table 4: The Representation of Males and Females in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities of Assam, India (in Leadership Position Wise).

Leadership Position	Total Number of Academic Leaders	Males		Females	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Deans	36	30	83.33%	6	16.67%
Directors/Chairpersons of Centres	30	25	83.33%	5	16.67%
HoD's	130	75	57.69%	55	42.31%

Table 4 shows the representation of males and females in academic leadership positions as follows: in the position of dean, males were 83.33%, and females were 16.67%; in the position of directors, males were 83.33%, and females were 16.67%; and in the position of head of department males were 57.69% and females were 42.31% (as per data collected in the academic year 2023/2024).

The overall representation of males and females in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India is presented in Table 5:

Table 5: Total number of Male and Female Academic Leaders in Universities of Assam, India

Number of Academic leaders	Males		Females	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
196	130	66.33%	66	33.67%

Table 5 shows that in universities found in Assam, India, the overall representation of in academic leadership positions; males were 66.33%, while females were 33.67% (as per data collected in the academic year 2023/2024).

The causes of gender disparities in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India

The questionnaires and interviews were used to answer this objective. The researcher administered 175 Questionnaires to university teachers 175 university teachers from Assam, India.

Through the questionnaire causes of gender disparity (unequal representation) in academic leadership in universities were grouped into three categories; individual, organizational, and social-cultural. The Statistical Package for Social Science software program was used to analyze data through multiple responses analysis.

Individual Causes of Gender Disparities in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities.

Table 6: Individual Causes of Gender Disparity in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities of Assam, India

Causes of gender disparity in academic leadership Positions		Respondents	
		N	Percent of Cases
I	Qualifications	14	8.0%
ii	Low self-confidence	20	11.4%
iii	Family and work responsibilities	142	81.1%
iv	Lack of role models in leadership	35	20.0%
V	Lack of interest in taking leadership positions	34	19.4%
	Others(please specify) (glass ceiling, mansplaining fear of conspiracy, back pulling and readiness)	05	2.9%

Table 6 shows Family and work responsibilities (81.1%) which was selected by 142 out of 175 university teachers as an individual cause of gender disparity in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India.

Institutional Causes of Gender Disparities in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities

Table 7: Institutional Causes of Gender Disparity in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities of Assam, India

Causes of gender disparity in academic leadership positions		Respondents	
		N	Percent
i	The presence of few female university teachers compared to males	51	29.1%
ii	Absence of policies ensuring equal participation of males and females in academic leadership positions	61	34.9%
iii	Discriminating against females over males	56	32.0%
iv	lack of gender consideration when appointing academic leaders	58	33.1%
V	Male-dominated structures	76	43.4%
vi	Others(please specify) (seniority, negative work environment, awareness, females are considered as non-fit)	6	3.4%

Table 7 shows that 76 university teachers out of 175 equal to 43.4% selected male-dominated structures as an institutional cause of gender disparity in academic leadership in universities in Assam, India.

Social- Cultural Causes of Gender Disparities in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities

Table 8: Social-Cultural Causes of Gender Disparity in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities of Assam, India

Causes of gender disparity in academic leadership positions		espondents	
			ercent of Cases
	egative perceptions about female	2	5.9%
	iving in male dominating society	7	3.3%
i	he culture of undermining female leadership capabilities	0	4.3%
r	ultural, religious beliefs and values	7	1.1%
	imited support from society	0	5.7%
i	thers (please specify) (gender prejudice, gender stigmatization, patriarch mindset and cultural aspects)	1	3%

Table 8 shows that 82 university teachers out of 175 equal to 46.9% selected negative perceptions about females as a social-cultural cause of unequal representation in academic leadership.

Discussion

Findings regarding the number of male and female university teachers, the study found that the percentage of male university teachers was 58.18% while that of females was 41.83%. The study's findings relate to the study conducted by Nidhinalwaya (2022), the study found that in Indian universities, female faculty members were 39% while male faculty members were 61%. Ghatge and Parasar (2022) found a ratio of 59 females per 100 university teachers. The findings also relate to studies conducted by Adu-Oppong, et al. (2012) and Lekve and Gunnes (2022); the studies found few female teachers compared to males in universities.

Regarding the status of gender representation in academic leadership positions; the study found that; 66.33% of academic leaders were males while 33.67% were females. In leadership positions-wise, males were 83.33% and females were 16.67% (dean position). 83.33% were males and 16.67% were females in the position of directors/ chairperson of center, males were 57.69% and females were 42.31% in the position of head of the department. The finding implies that females are underrepresented in all leadership positions. The findings relate to the studies conducted by Omotos (2021); the study found the representation of males in the position of deans was 88% while for females was 12%; in the position of head of department, males were 53% while females were 47%. Also, relates to the study conducted by Cho, et al. (2017) that found male deans were 88% while females were 12%. Nguyen et al. (2022) found that male deans were 79.9% while females were 21.0%. Moreover, the study's findings relate to the following studies: Basantia et al. (2021), Mayya, et al. (2021), Gandhi and Sen (2020), Dandan and Marques (2017), Eboiyehi, et al. (2016), and Batool, et al. (2013), the studies found that males are more represented compared to females in academic leadership in universities.

Regarding causes of gender disparities in academic leadership positions; the study found that family and work responsibility, male-dominated structures and negative perceptions about females contribute to the gender disparity (unequal representation) in academic leadership positions in universities in Assam, India.

Family and work responsibility personal factors contributing to the gender disparity in university academic leadership positions. The findings relate to Mushi, et al. (2021) found that family commitments contribute to gender disparities in leadership positions. Dawa and Ugyen (2022) found that family responsibilities cause a gender gap in leadership. Furthermore, Alemayehu (2021) found that females are more responsible for home and family concerns than males. Bernal et al. (2017) found that parenthood was a barrier to female career pathways, not males. Batool, et al. (2013) also found that due to domestic responsibilities, females were limited to engaging in research activities, leading to a lack of publication and underrepresentation in leadership. Moreover, Shakeshaft et al. (2007) found family and home responsibilities affect females than males in their careers.

The male-dominated structure; is the institutional factor contributing to the gender disparity in university academic leadership positions. The findings relate to Kohtamaki, et al. (2023), whose study found that male-dominated structures contribute to the gender gap across Bangladesh, China, and Finland. Nidhinalwaya (2022) demonstrated that the dominance of males in decision-making affects the growth of females. Moreover, Dandan and Margues (2017) found that male-dominated is a factor for unequal representation; the study explained that the world of males and females seemed different at Jordanian University regarding management and leadership positions.

Negative perceptions about females: based on the findings, the negative perception of females is a social-cultural factor that causes gender disparity in university academic leadership. The findings relate to the studies that were conducted by Khamis (2023), Mwakitalu, et al. (2018), and Segkulu and Gyimah (2016), their studies found negative perception about females is a factor causing the presence of few females compared to males in academic leadership in universities.

Conclusion

The study found that the overall representation of males and females in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India, males were 66.33% while females were 33.67%. In dean and director positions, the gap was too extensive, males were 83.33% while females were 16.67%; in the position of director, males were 83.33% while females were 16.67%. However, the status of males and females in the position of the head of the department in Assam, India, was promising, whereby males were 57.69% while females were 42.31%; soon, the gap might close. The study found that family and work responsibilities, male-dominated structures, and negative perceptions about females are the causes of gender disparities in academic leadership positions in universities of Assam, India

Recommendation

The study recommends universities employ different strategies for gender parity in academic leadership positions. The more females are underrepresented in leadership positions the more they lack representatives in decision-making.

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