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GENDER AND EMPLOYABILITY IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA: IMPLICATION FOR LEADERSHIP AND POLICY

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Abstract

Education is a key factor in human capital, social, economic, technological and political development of the society. Higher education institutions helps in producing high level manpower needed to attain speedy, purposeful and sustainable development in modern society. It provides students with skills and technical knowledge needed in coping with difficulties in the changing society. For higher learning institutions to perform their duties as expected, the need to employ skilled and competent experts in academic community is indispensable. This paper aims to overview the issues in regard to employability and gender in higher learning institutions. Moreover it tries to clarify the roles of policy makers and academic leaders in ensuring equal opportunity for all as a way of ensuring sustainable development. In order to achieve the goals

of higher education globally, there is a need for re-orientation of people on gender disparity. Policy makers and academic leaders need to set a pace for others to follow by promulgating laws and guidelines that will ensure reasonable representation of skilled and competent personnel in academic community and eradicate gender segregation in employment process. Universities should be help and encourage students to develop their skills and capabilities. Concise effort must be made in supervising , guiding and evaluating students training program from time to time. This is to help students to thrive and compete favourable with their counterpart at workplace without facing the issues of gender and segregation.

Keywords

Gender, Employability, Higher Learning Institutions, Policy, Education, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Education has been identified an important factor in human existence. It is responsible for economic, social, political development of a nation(Wobbekind, 2012).It was found to be accountable for the scientific and technological development in modern day society (Orji &Job,2013).Higher learning institutions are responsible for training skilled personnel and providing the right, required human capital needed to attain economic growth. It is also responsible for repositioning the economy and facilitating sustainable development (Kruss et al., 2015; Sterling, 2014). Higher learning institutions are responsible for producing and preparing students for the world of work (Humburg et al., 2013). In order to make higher education intuitions productive and responsive to needs of the society and achieve the purpose of its establishment, there is need to recruit qualified and skilled personnel in academic community. Higher education institutions need to carefully select its personnel in a manner that will enhance intellectualism, creativity and sustainable educational development (McCaffery, 2004). This selection must not be based on any form of disparity. Skilled, competent, able people who can contribute towards improving the quality of teaching, learning and research should be given priority in recruitment process in higher learning institutions most especially in this competing, changing and dynamic era of technology (Moore & Diamond, 2000).

The variation and inequality in gender across some disciplines in higher learning institutions in most countries of the world call for a serious concern. It was noted that in the area of Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, the rate of women intake in these fields

is insignificant. People ascribe these disciplines and fields to male counterpart and some called it no go area for female which should not be. Similarly, female are not given administrative role in higher institutions. Some people believe that female role is restricted solely to the home while they work in the academic environment, they are better to work as a supporter to the administrators. Furthermore, gender employability is also noticed in the area of promotion, ranking and other areas in the workplace (Gracia, 2009). Preference is usually giving to male over their female counterpart when it comes to administrative appointment in universities. Taking a critical look at most of the developed universities in the world, few of them have female as leaders.

Malaysia is a country in South-East Asia which has a high rate of illiteracy. The country has a vision to be among the developed country by year 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). Therefore, the government of Malaysia has institutionalized higher education institutions as a means of achieving this goal (Grapragasem et al., 2014). In order to attain the goals of public services in Malaysia, leaders must rise up to their task by ensuring recruitment of competent personnel, enhance staff job satisfaction and promote health work environment which will stimulate economic growth and development (Ismail, 2007). To ensure meaningful development in academic community in Malaysia and other developing countries, the issue of gender employability must be well treated and addressed.

In order to avoid imbalance in gender, unwholesome treatment of people in the workplace, enhance productive, reduce disparity and ensure equal representation of all in the development of educational sector and attainment of educational goals in Malaysia. Therefore, this conceptual paper intends to investigate the effects of gender employability among students in Malaysian universities, bring out the roles of educational leaders and policy makers in addressing this issue with the aim of achieving the goals of higher education and improving the quality of service delivery in the country. More specifically for proper understanding of the phenomenon in this study, the following questions have guided the authors in doing justice to the topic:

- i. What are the factors responsible for variation in employment opportunities in higher learning institutions?
- ii. What are the consequences of gender disparity in employment on the development of education?

- iii. What are the roles of educational leaders and policy makers in controlling and eradicating gender disparity in employment in higher learning institutions?

2. Concept of Employability

The definition of the term employability has caused a lot of variation among researchers and writers (Lees, 2002; Hartshorn & Sear, 2005). As Gazier (1998), opined that the meaning of the concept employability has gone through seven stages which include: dichotomy employability, social-medical employability, manpower policy employability, flow employability, labor market performance employability, initiative employability and interactive employability. Its components are difficult to assess and define because skill implies different meaning to different people (Kumar, 2009). Despite the controversy and variation, some researchers came up with some definitions. Yorke (2006) defined the term employability as the skills and knowledge possessed by individual which enable them secure jobs, excel in the workplace and productive in the society. Hillage and Pollard (1998) defined employability as the ability of individual to gain employment, maintain the gained job, rise between different roles with the organization, and secure any suitable and self-fulfilling work. Moreover, Mc Quaid et al. (2005) conceived employability from economic perspective when they defined it as the influence of labor demand and supply.

3. Employability and Gender Disparity

Disparity and unequal treatment for female gender is observed in the world of work which is mostly affected by the disparity. Contreras Cueva et al. (2014) found that Mexican women are grossly segregated in the labor market. Similarly, Goulding (2013) revealed the level of disparity in employment in Comoros. This shows the importance of gender and employability as a global issue. Realizing the importance of labor in economic development, International Labor Organization (2012) called for the abolition of gender disparity in employment, wages, salaries, promotion, gratuity and other work benefit. This body urged all countries to imbibe equality in treatment of workforce without giving preference to one above the other. Similarly, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2010) joined the campaign when it launch and opined that agencies must treat employees equally irrespective of their sex, race, religion, social background and others.

4. Employability and Gender Issue in Higher Learning Institutions

The issue of employability is gaining momentum in the world today (Goulding, 2013). The dynamic change in human society has dragged higher learning institutions into including in their curriculum necessary skills, training, technical know-how and knowledge needed to cope in the world of work (United Nations Educational and Scientific Cultural Organization, 2009). In order to attract more students, attain high quality teaching and learning, gain public recognition and impact in the society, higher learning institutions must continuously strive to promote employability skills among students (Peck & Theodore, 2000). As a result, colleges and universities today are fast dancing to the tune of employability (Gleeson & Keep, 2004). Ironically, employment process in higher learning institutions in some parts of the world today are not objective (Shaukat et al., 2014). Some gender are favoured than others. Women are at the receiving end (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2007). Women are being discriminated against and marginalized in the employment process most especially in higher learning institutions in some parts of the world (Harvey et al., 2002; Neumark & McLennan, 1995).

5. Factors Influencing Gender and Employability in Higher Learning Institutions

A lot of factors are responsible for gender issue in the area of employability in higher learning institutions. These factors among others include: level of education, societal belief, natural factors, communication, and gender imbalance in certain fields. These factors shall be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs:

(i) Level of Education: The level of education attained by people play a vital role in their chances of getting job. In the past, male students' used to out- number female students in schools. In the past also, male students used to be many in postgraduate courses. This belief has made people to think that male have or seek education more than the female but the reverse is the case in this modern time (Shaukat et al., 2014; Abass et al., 2011; Petersen &Thea, 2006). The number of female in Malaysian universities is far more than their male counterpart. The misconception about gender and education has brought about a great disparity against the female fold which later led to their denial of placement in the employment process (Shaukat et al., 2014).

(ii) Social factor: This is another cause of variation in employability in higher learning institutions. Some society belief that certain sex are irrelevant, weak and non-productive (Abass et al., 2011). This societies are commonly found in developing countries where people still belief that women cannot contribute more to development of the nation (Petersen & Thea,2006). This type of thinking and philosophy affect their selection process. This has made some people to relegate their female fold to the homes and prevent them from doing any challenge task.

(iii) Natural factors: By nature, different sex displaces different character at certain period in life. The natural instinct like pregnancy, marital influence which is common to female has placed them at disadvantage in the quest of searching and getting suitable employment. These natural phenomenon have made some employers not to take female in their organization. Some even belief that when they employ female, they will take a lot of maternity leave, give complain about their family and may not be able to concentrate on their job (Petersen & Thea, 2006). This view was supported by Harvey et al. (1997) when they opined that selection by employers of labor is based on generic factor rather than technical competencies.

(iv) Physical factors: Women are often considered not physically strong like men. Hence, they are often discriminated against during employment process. Some work requires a strong person in the academic community. Example is the technical works in the university.

6. Consequences of Gender and Employability on Educational Development

Gender inequality and disparity has a great effect on economic development of a country (Klasen, 2002).The following are some of the effects and consequences of gender disparity in employability on higher education development.

(i) Low productivity: Gender disparity in educational institutions, will result into low level of productivity (Abass et al., 2011). Educational institutions would have discriminated against those who are more capable, technically competent and resourceful to the attainment of quality teaching and learning just on the basis of gender, race or religion (McCaffery, 2004). Once this happen, the level of productivity of higher learning institutions will be reduced. Students' level of achievement will be low. Also, some important units and departments in the academic community will be handled by low competence people.

(ii) Promotion barrier: This is another vital consequence of gender disparity in employability on the development of educational institutions. Often, some female staffs are

delayed in their promotion based on the misconception and female disparity (Shaukat et al., 2014). When staff who are competent and qualify for promotion are systematically and intentionally delayed, they will become angry and get frustrated (Owen & Valesky, 2011). This may account for the reasons why some staffs disobey some organizational rules and transfer aggression on students.

(iii) Decrease in staff commitment: Staff will tend to relent in their effort and commitment to attainment of organizational goals when there is high level of disparity or segregation (Petrson & Thea, 2006). Knowing that they will be discriminated against, some female staff will be force to do the little they can. Therefore, the role of leaders in stimulating and protecting the depressed group in attaining organizational goals is high required (Ibrahim et al., 2014). Therefore, academic leaders must strive to ensure that any form of disparity in the academic circle is curtailed.

(iv) Celebration of mediocrity in educational system: The issue of mediocrity is vital in higher learning institutions. Higher learning institutions are meant to celebrate intellectualism, innovation and hard work. When academic leaders accept and imbibe unhealthy disparity in recruiting right and competent people, then, there will be a lot of incompetent staff in the academic circle(Shaukat, et al., 2014). The effect of this is that higher learning institutions will lose its value as centre for intellectualism and virtues (McCaferry, 2004)

(v) Demotivation and psychological trauma: People who are discriminated against will feel demotivated, depressed and may lose their self-control. This disparity shows in many cases like salary. As Gonzalez de la Rocha (1999) observed that household headed by women with low salary income usually have lower disposable income. The effect of these psychological imbalances is that it endangers staffs' health and wellbeing in the workplace. Also the demotivation could lead to low self- esteem. As Green et al. (2004) opined that the low self-esteem in women affects their employability level.

7. Gender and Employability Implications: Academic Leaders and Policy Makers Role

Academic leaders and policy makers are essential in attaining educational goals and objectives. They can make or mar the development of education. Their role cannot be over emphasized in addressing salient issue like gender disparity and employability (Department of

Business, Innovation & Skills, 2012). In order to curb gender disparity in employability in higher learning institutions, policy makers must formulate policies that will cater for equal representation of skilled personnel in higher learning institutions in Malaysia irrespective of gender. No one should be discriminate against in terms of employment based on the gender. Once, a female possess requisite skill, knowledge and technical know-how, they should be allow to deliver. As a matter of fact, academic leaders and policy makers must ensure representation of all in the employment policy (Morey et al., 2003). Also, policy makers must organize public enlightenment program to change people's orientation and philosophy about sex most especially female gender. With the enlightenment campaign, people will know that there is no point discriminating and depriving ourselves. Furthermore, academic leaders should ensure that their organizational culture is all involving. It must provide room for creativity and ensure equal opportunity for all. Creating a dynamic and sustainable organizational culture that will respect the difference in every individual is the essential role of a leader (Owen &Velesky, 2011). It therefore implies that academic leaders must set guidelines in their employment policy in a manner that will eradicate gender disparity and create opportunity for all (Watt, 2006).

In addition, policy makers and academic leaders are mirror through which people project the educational system. They must be fair and exhibit some degree of transparency most especially in relation to sensitive issue like gender. Government as a major policy maker must help citizens to develop their skills through well packaged technical and vocational training. More so, academic leaders must ensure that university curriculum is loaded in line with the skills, knowledge and expertise needed in the world of work (Ismail et al., 2011). Their role is not only limited to setting a good curriculum but also monitoring and ensuring successful implementation of the curriculum across all the higher learning institutions in the country. Concise effort must be put in place by various academic leaders in supervising skills and entrepreneurial education courses and students training programs as a way of ensuring that students get the requisite knowledge and skill which will not put them as disadvantage with their colleague. This will help to reduce the rate of disparity in the area of gender when it comes to seeking employment after successful completion of university education.

Furthermore, academic leaders need to create awareness of possibility of disparity in the workplace among students and prepare them ahead of such disparity. This will enable students to be conscious of their activities, develop positive attitude towards learning soft skills and re-

strategies their plans in creating enabling environment for themselves upon successful completion of their study (Webb et al., 2002). More so, government can organize meetings with employers of labor and academic leaders to instruct them on employment guidelines and procedure. Strict measure must also be placed on anyone who discriminate any gender or deprive a skilled personnel opportunity of contributing to the development of the economic across all sectors.

8. Conclusion

Recruitment and selection into various offices, departments and units in higher learning institutions is essential. In order to achieve the goals of higher education, universities need to get right, skilled and competent personnel who can promote effective teaching and learning. Discriminating against people in terms of gender has a negative effect on sourcing for right and competent personnel in higher learning institutions. Therefore, issue of gender disparity in employment in higher learning institutions must be abolished as soon as possible. Policy makers must promulgate laws, set guidelines that will ensure equal and sizeable representation of both gender in higher learning institutions. Academic leaders must also create a welcoming and supportive environment for people to display their expertise in order to ensure speedy growth of universities and enhance students' achievement. They also need to provide adequate skill, knowledge and training needed by students to compete favorable in the workplace. With this, they will not be discriminated against based on gender or race. They can even decide to create jobs for themselves without running after white collar jobs. Similarly, government as policy makers must engineering the Minister of Women Affairs in providing soft skills and entrepreneurial skills to all women and graduates in areas needed. With this, graduates will no longer rely on white-collar jobs or continue to think of working under any private individual. They will be eager to establish their own business and reduce the rate of dependency in the country. Finally, people need to be re-orientated on gender disparity. Therefore, to curb this situation and stop continuous deprivation of qualified personnel in the workplace, government, policy makers, academic leaders and all stakeholders must join hands together to fight against gender disparity and maltreatment in the society. If all these are done, we will have a balanced society where everyone will achieve more, ensure increase level of creativity and above all a peaceful and harmonious society with love, fairness and cooperation.

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