

Effects of Institutional Support Systems on Female Academics Experience and Satisfaction in The University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Eva Annan^{1*}

¹ Gender Mainstreaming Directorate, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Email Address

eannan@uew.edu.gh (Eva Annan)

*Correspondence: evaannan@uew.edu.gh

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Abstract:

This study explores the institutional support systems available in the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and its effects on female academic staff experiences and satisfaction. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select participants for the study. In all, twenty (20) female academics were interviewed. An interview guide was used for the study. The transcripts were coded using thematic analysis. The study revealed that existing institutional policies are non-discriminatory. The institutional supports received were study leave, donor sponsored mentoring scheme, sponsorships for PhDs and conference attendance as well as maternity leave packages. The Research Fund indicate funding schemes such as conference travel grants and publication grant available to senior members, participants observed that more resources should be devoted to supporting a much wider population of senior members asking for various degrees of support to complete their terminal degrees and be effective at work. It was suggested that, it is important to expand on the institutional support packages to include the establishment of gender responsive structures such as creche, orientation for those returning from study leave to re-orient the senior member to re-adjust to work, emphasising the gender differentials in coping with work demands after study leaves. Assigning a mentor for the career growth and advancement of female senior members and finally creating special thesis grant for female academics on terminal degrees.

Keywords:

Experiences, Female Academics, Institutional, Institutional Support Systems, Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Debates on gender issues in the educational arena have been in existence for a very long time. Research has shown that global debates on gender inequities and inequalities in institutions of higher learning have continued for a while now [1, 2-3]. There has been an increased presence of females in higher education as students [3, 4].

However, this is not reflected in the female participation rate in senior management roles [5]. Revealing statistics further indicate that only 22 percent of the professors at 120 Universities in Germany, and a little more than 10 percent of all rectors are women [3]. Also, 12.8 percent of 41 Ugandan universities are female-headed and there are only three (3) female chancellors [3].

The situation of women in Ghanaian universities is not entirely different from other universities worldwide. It was not until 2008 that the University of Cape Coast, for instance appointed a female Vice-Chancellor (VC) in Ghana which paved the way for many other universities in Ghana to also follow. Similarly, a statistical overview report of Ghanaian Universities revealed that in Ghana the percentage on women in teaching and non-teaching roles were low as they climbed the various career ladders [6]. Opportunities for leadership and career growth exist for women in higher educational institutions but it takes qualified women to make use of those opportunities. Hence, the focus of this study is to ascertain the kinds of institutional assistance that exist and are accessed by female academics in the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) to improve on their qualifications in preparation for future leadership positions in the University.

1.1. Institutional Support Systems Available to Senior Members at UEW

The University of Education, Winneba has in place the Research, Innovation and Staff Development Fund for senior members since 2016 [7]. This Fund is part of the University's effort at improving research culture in the University. The establishment of this is to strategically overcome the University's challenge of limited research facilities and financial resources for research. The Fund is to meet four objectives. These are to provide funding and other resources for staff research activities and to manage their outputs and outcomes. Second, the Fund seeks to provide funding and other resources for staff conferences and training. Third, to provide funding for faculty development in the areas of doctoral, post-doctoral and other fellowships. Fourth, to give meaning to the University's drive to ensure that all faculty members have PhD or other terminal qualifications. The four main grants under the Research Fund are as follows: starter grant, small grant, medium grant and large grant [7]. Though, all grants are open to all Senior Members with certain criteria for applying for funds, only the starter grant funds are available to PhD students at the final stages of their studies with the direct support of their supervisors and departments. Study leave packages are also available to Senior Members. The Conditions of Service for Senior Members of the Public Universities of Ghana indicates that there are study leave packages for Senior Members. The two basic types of study leave packages were stated: Study leave with pay and part-time study leave. Other institutional support stated in the Conditions of Service include maternity leave.

Over the past few decades, the gender balance in students and staff numbers in the higher education sector in the developing and developed societies has seen a lot of progress, however, such institutions are still gendered settings [4,8]. Despite educational policies introduced to improve the gender situation, the statistics still indicate that females lag behind their male counterparts in senior rankings and leadership positions in universities. The situation in Africa is not any different. Females are under-represented in academic leadership circles such as Professors, Associate Professors and Senior Administrators. Recent statistics show that UEW shares similar trend of having few female academics at the higher academic ladder as

seen in most of these higher education institutions, globally. Females form less than 10 per cent of the professoriate in the University of Education, Winneba [9].

Previous studies have touched on the significance of higher academic qualifications as an essential requirement for the career advancement of academics, globally [1,2-10]. However, it has been noticed that higher educational institutions are often under-resourced and as such are unable to meet up with the huge requests from staff for sponsorships that come to them periodically [3]. It is on the basis of this issue that this study seeks to examine the extent of institutional support available to female academics and their perceptions of supports received. The objective of this study was to explore the institutional support systems available in UEW and its effects on female academic experiences and satisfaction. The study was guided by these research questions – (1) What are the institutional support systems available to Female Academics in UEW? (2) What are the effects of those institutional support systems on the experiences and satisfaction of Female Academics?

1.2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

In places such as Africa, women are socialized in “acceptable” behaviours for an African woman and this have an influence on their leadership potentials, which often than not, remains under-developed [3]. A case study of the Uganda higher education system shows that the process for leadership career development in higher education institution of Uganda is structured, lengthy and merit-based and shares resemblance with higher educational institutions worldwide. Once recruited, the next hurdle is in academic growth and development from Masters to Ph.D. and post-doctoral level in an often unresourced environment where there is a lack of funds, power, research equipment and infrastructure [1,3]. The literature further reveals that more women drop-out in their mid-academic career point compared to their male counterparts [3]. Drop-outs can be due to financial, reproductive or social constraints. Studies reiterates that due to family responsibilities, female academics make less time than their male counterparts to socialize with colleagues who could provide support [2,11]. Some are easily discouraged from elective leadership positions due to the abrasive social stresses associated with campaigns [3].

A researcher revealed that academic women’s lower classification levels and therefore lower remuneration are directly due to having few years overall in university employment and being less likely to have a Ph.D. than male academics [1]. Again, for example recent Australian research identified that 36 percent of women compared with 56 percent of male academics had a Ph.D., and that they had 8.9 years of university employment compared with men’s 13.8 years [10]. These outcomes arise from the gender related pattern those women academics typically begin and/or finish their doctoral qualifications later, are more likely to work part-time for a period or throughout their careers, and tend to have more career interruptions than male academics, a pattern directly related to childbearing and women’s greater responsibility for child rearing [1]. In addition, as the data analysed the Australian study reveal, family related career breaks not only delay academic women starting or progressing their careers, but often lead to their movement down the career ladder [1].

Additionally, a study further echoes that in places like South Africa, lack of proper alignment between personal and institutional values affect the progression of women in academia [2]. Institutional identities are anchored in the intersection of the individuals’ educational beliefs and practices, institutional policies, sectorial

boundaries, and the socio-cultural, economic and political context in which their profession is embedded [2]. Other researchers revealed that institutional policies such as mentoring are needed to assist in the institutional development of female Academics [12,13]. They noted that mentoring seemed to play an important role in the acquisition of institutional academic identities by staff. They cautioned that although mentors should not regulate the identities of mentees, mentors help mentees to develop their skills and attain important understandings. Scholars have indicated that mentors are experienced academics who establish more intimate relationships with the mentees and consciously contribute to their institutional socialisation [14]. Female academics need mentorship to accelerate their ascension on the institutional/ career ladder in higher education [15,16]. That notwithstanding, a literature indicated that limited time, insufficient resources and inadequate support inhibits the development of robust institutional academic identities. Furthermore, the researchers indicated that lack of meaningful socialisation in the academic world, an absence of effective mentoring; and the inability to articulate a sustainable research agenda are some of the hurdles encountered by academic staff, especially females [17].

The Social Justice Theoretical Framework is applied to this study. The concept of social justice explains that all people should have equal access to wealth, justice, privileges, and opportunity regardless of their legal, political, economic or other circumstances [18]. This theory calls for the redistribution of societal resources and opportunities from the oppressor group to the oppressed group [18]. This theory relates to this study in a manner that suggest that all resources available in the University of Education, Winneba should be shared equally and equitably among all staff to the benefits of all. Resources such as staff development and institutional support should be evenly distributed across board. This would aid female academic staff to advance in their academic qualifications and enter into leadership circles in later life in the institution. In this theoretical framework, redistribution of societal resources should be to the advantage of the most vulnerable members of society.

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative research centres on the experiences and views of twenty (20) female academics in the University of Education, Winneba, who were pursuing their terminal degrees (PhD) or had completed their studies, on the institutional support systems offered by the University to enhance their career progression. This study is a case study that employed purposive and convenient sampling techniques to select twenty (20) participants for this study. To ensure fair representation of female academic staff in the study, at least one (1) participant was purposively and conveniently selected from faculties with the dominant numbers of Ph.D. enrolled candidates and those who have completed (UEW Basic Statistics, 2020). Consequently, participants from the Faculty of Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Science Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, School of Communication and Media Studies, and the School of Business Education within the University of Education, Winneba were selected for the Interview. An interview guide was used to gather the data through individual face to face semi-structured interviews with female academics. Questions were asked about their perceptions of the institutional support given by the University to enhance their career progression. After completing the interviews. All the audio recorded interviews were transcribed. All the transcripts and field notes were read several times to improve the researcher's understanding of the data. The transcripts were coded and the data was managed manually. The data were examined using content

analysis to categorize the data into themes and interpreted as findings for the study. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics of research participants (Author's Field Study, UEW).*

Characteristics	Variables	Frequency (n)
Age	30-40	3
	41-50	12
	51-60	5
Highest Qualification	PhD (Various levels of the programme)	14
	PhD (Completed)	6
Marital Status	Single	2
	Married	17
	Widowed	1
Department	Social Studies	2
	Geography	1
	Chemistry	1
	Health Administration	1
	Basic Education	2
	Human Resource Management	1
	Communication and Media Studies	3
	Special Education	3
	English	4
	Mathematics	2

3. Findings

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of the female academics are presented in Table 1. More than half of these women were between 41-50 years. Fourteen (14) had reached various stages of completion of their PhDs. Nearly all the women were married with children (19), except one who was a widow. There was a fair representation of the various departments in the interviews conducted. Purposive sampling was used to select all those who had enrolled in a terminal degree programme or had completed it. This aided in the selection of the sample size of 20 for the study. The findings are categorised under the key research themes: Institutional support systems in UEW, limitations and suggestions to improve on the institutional support systems.

3.2. Institutional Support System Available to Female Academic Staff in UEW

3.2.1. Mentorship

A key institutional support indicated by most of the participants was mentorship. Most participants, more than half (75%) who had experienced mentorship observed that they benefited a lot from the Carnegie Sponsored mentorship programme and had these views to share:

One of the female academics remarked that:

... I have enjoyed some of the support and those I can talk about includes mentorship. When as a lecturer, I got the opportunity to be invited by the Gender Directorate to be one of the mentees for a programme that was sponsored by Carnegie. Carnegie was an international funding group that supported several institutional operational areas including gender

mainstreaming. In fact, it helped me a lot, I was able to set some targets and at the end of the day, I achieved my targets. One of the targets that I had set, was to publish papers and through the mentorship I was able to publish two papers out of the research that I conducted. And I used those papers for my promotion to senior lecturer and so I was able to get the promotion on my fifth year of my appointment. It all boils down to mentorship. If you are given a mentor, it will help you to plan your life well.

Additionally, another female academic responded that:

...Mentoring programmes should be established as a way of fully mainstreaming gender into UEW academic community. I enrolled on the programme when I joined UEW and this helped me in publishing some papers. I later learned it was funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. I think we will have to advocate for UEW to institutionalised mentorship, if that hasn't been done yet. If there is a policy document on mentorship, then the heads will be compelled to mentor females in the faculty and departments.

Again, a female academic responded that:

.... attainment of PhDs though essential is not the only important thing we need. We also need to have mentoring to develop our full institutional identities as academics.

3.2.2. Sponsorship Support

Another institutional support received from the University has to do with study-leave and sponsorships to attend local and international conferences. Most of the participants (85%) acknowledged this form of support had been in existence in the University since its inception as a fully-fledged University. Divergent views were however expressed by participants on the subject of sponsorships. One participant remarked that:

... I can also talk about sponsorship in terms of assistance provided for academic staff to attend conferences. All that you have to do is to follow procedures. You present your work at departmental and faculty levels for their input and write to the research, sponsorship and scholarship committee for support. All that would have to be done on time so that one can follow the due procedures to access funding. The number of times I have applied for assistance to attend conferences, I always get the nod. With the national one or the local conference, normally, they don't cost so much. It is an encouragement to have exposure outside the university. To converse and share ideas with other academics from other countries in one's area.

Another participant responded that:

...With study leave, I can say I enjoyed that partially not fully. I say this because I was working and studying at the same time. It wasn't easy though. To a large extent, I got paid. I was working and studying at the same time. ...so far as I was allowed to combine the two and was able to complete successfully then I praise institutional support for that opportunity. The fact that I was allowed to use some of my employment period for my PhD was a great support to my institutional development. Along the line, I got all my

fees paid by the university for my PhD. I paid for my fees in the first year but in the subsequent years when I got the study leave, the university paid for everything. I wrote for a refund and I was given back my money spent on my first year. Although, I didn't get money for the field work and books on the whole it was a good support from the university.

Moreso, another participant indicated that:

In terms of women's institutional development, I can say partial support is given not full support. This is because PhD is not all about school fees, especially when it comes to thesis writing. If there were avenues that we can source for smaller grants. Not only grants support coming from the university but if there could be other arrangements. It will be wrong on my part to say there are no such things. In my own view, I think that payment of fees is okay but after fees when the study requires some other support and there is none then it becomes tougher. It could be there are other avenues but I am not aware. After you have received fees and you get to thesis and it requires some other commitments then it gets tougher. I was told I could apply for a book allowance which I did and I was paid twice. That book allowance that I received was not enough to support the work but I was comforted because "half aloof is better than none." I know there is a specific book allowance for PhD candidates. I applied twice and was paid that amount twice. Where my concern is, is about the thesis grant. If anything, partial support will be helpful.

Also, one female academic shared that:

...I know the university has a support system that helps. A lot of people have benefitted from it. I got a scholarship to do my PhD outside the University. I got it at a time that I had not finished serving my probation period. I was frustrated. I went on a leave of absence for a year. It was after the first year that I realized that I could do my studies part-time. I think after serving probation, when one applies, they get it but not everyone can be supported because of financial constraints. It is not about qualification but the availability of funds.

3.3. Facilities

The participants again touched on the immeasurable benefits that gender sensitive structures tend to provide to them. Gender responsive structures such as crèches were lauded to have an indirect impact on the institutional development of female academic staff, especially, since they directly bear the reproductive responsibility of their households and families. Participants shared their views on the childhood care centre. The study revealed that the unavailability of an institutional day care centres was a major disincentive to the career development of female academics. A participant shared that:

... Getting support systems for staff will help females to come out properly to support the university system. Women need support... there is nothing like a crèche to support women. I have done some studies and I have realized that there is nothing like that. Investing in facilities like day cares would assist women to handle this domestic responsibility role that they have to play and be better able to concentrate at work.

3.4. Maternity Leave

Human resource policies for staff such as maternity leave was said to be very important in aiding women to combine their personal and institutional lives. All participants (100%) gave positive responses to this human resource policy in place. The following responses shed light on the views of the participants:

...when my second child came, because I had worked with the system for a while, I got maternity leave. I had six straight months in a way to care for the baby.

...I had my last child when I started working here. Three weeks after delivery, I left the baby at home to finish with my course outline. My Administrator was on maternity leave when she was transferred to my department. She closed early for one year. I didn't take formal maternity leave. I managed around it. I know the system support yet the realities of lecturers make it difficult for us to properly make use of that facility. Mampong campus will be setting up a nursery school soon. I think Winneba campus could also have something soon.

3.5. Limitations in Institutional Support

Most participants (75%) shared that the support they received from the University was somewhat limited. They therefore called for the granting of full-time study leave opportunities, lessened teaching loads and time-off work to finish up their PhDs. Situations where they would be allowed to study on a full-time basis with no or less teaching loads. Participants expressed the following viewpoints:

...the system as I know is a level playing field, what is given to the men is given to the women. I don't know anything differently being done, you want study leave, they give you study leave. But you see per our cultural circumstances, there are issues to consider, women play several roles which place a demand on their time. They are wives and mothers and fully employed too. It gets draining. ...it should be possible to ask for some months to finish up with one's PhD work and return to the office. Some negotiations should be made so that one can be off the teaching schedule for two to three months ago and finish up something like a PhD.

... just those that I know that applied for study-leave have all been given part-time. If we can take a month off to finish up what we are doing because in the long run it is to the credit of the University. I know that for a fact, accreditation of courses for instance, requires that academics have Ph.D.

...The study leaves are open to both men and women. If we want to encourage women to go for Ph.Ds, then we should give percentages in funding to women. For instance, thesis grants should be given to women to finish their work on time. We need female mentors to guide female academics.

... I was not knowledgeable about the study leave policy and I did not enquire about it. I feel a lot of information is not available to staff. An orientation should be done by human resource division for staff to help them to settle properly into their work. If a presentation can be done and put on the website for staff to know what is available for them or programmes on

institutional development can be held periodically for staff to aid in their career progression.

...access to information from the right people will greatly help women to make progress. Nobody tells us what is expected of us as beginner lecturers. So, you will be in the system teaching alone without researching or publishing. But we need to have mentors who will set targets for us to achieve. Imagine that you enter the system and even though you know that you have three core mandates to deliver on: teaching, research and community service. In one's mind, teaching is what we are paid to do. So, we usually ignore the research aspect.

3.6. Ways of improving the Institutional Support available to women Mentorship Programmes

Participants shared the view that there was a need to build the capacity of females to be able to meet the requirements of their institutional developments. For instances, a participant remarked that:

...If we want to encourage women then we need to give percentages to anyone that applied. Maybe 40% or 60% of all the scholarship funds should be given to women. Women need to be mentored. If the directorate has money or not, people would have to avail themselves for money. To help women to improve on our performances. In some departments they push the people but for us no one taught us what is expected of us.

3.7. Study Leave Package

Participants suggested the need for the University to grant study leave with pay to them despite their status in the university. That is whether on probation or not. Moreso, ample information should be given on staff and institutional development issues that concerns females in their career progression.

...I know the University has a support system that helps. The University must circulate this information to staff and conduct periodic institutional development conferences to aid staff in their career development and progression.

4. Discussions

The discussions are held on the following themes: mentorship, sponsorships, study leave, facility support, limitations in institutional support and improving the situation.

The views shared on mentorship that it helped beneficiaries in their career progression affirmed the notion that mentoring and supportive environments are possible enablement for substantial representation of women in visible places [15,16]. The implementation of an effective mentoring scheme would therefore assist many women to ascend the institutional ladder in UEW. The finding is also in conformity with the view that mentoring can help academics to develop institutionally and provide them with the expertise to become productive researchers [2].

The findings of this study revealed that there is limited sponsorship support for many female academic staff to pursue PhDs and attending international conferences. A similar study also concluded that though there is financial support for career advancement purpose, in Ugandan Universities, more women drop-out at the point of

their mid-academic career point compared to their male counterparts [3]. These drop-outs are due to financial, reproductive or social constraints. Academics face the challenge of progressing in their qualifications from M.Phil to Ph.D. and post-doctoral level in an often unresourced environment including lack of funds, power, research equipment and infrastructure among others [3]. This indicate that financial constraints place a limit on the number of females that can be supported to pursue academic qualifications or attend international conferences.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings from this study, it was ended that, institutional support systems available in the University included: Mentorship, Sponsorship, Facilities and Maternity Leave. The study also revealed the following limitations in institutional support. These included: heavy teaching loads, lack of special percentage/ quota in funding for female academics and inadequate orientation on career expectations. To improve the institutional support systems, participants proposed at least 60% of all scholarship funds should be given to women. The need to grant study leave with pay to females and make available other grants packages such as thesis, publication and research grants to support women in their institutional space.

6. Recommendations

The need for institutional management to do the following activities would go a long way to improve the experiences and satisfaction of female academics in the higher education setting:

- Establish gender responsive structures such as creche to support females.
- Organise orientation for those returning from study leave to re-orient the senior member to adjust to work.
- Formally establish mentoring programmes to aid in the career progression of female academic.
- Increase the sponsorship budget to aid in the institutional development of females.
- Establish institutional links with foreign organisations/ universities that offer funding for PhDs in support of the institutional development of female academics.
- The Centre for International Programmes can be assigned to assist in establishing linkages with foreign universities that offer funding for females to pursue PhDs.
- The Office responsible for Institutional Advancement can also establish links with corporate organisations within and outside the country to provide funding support to Female Academics.
- Create special grants for female academics enrolled in PhD programmes. Grants such as thesis grants to alleviate them of the financial stress and burden associated with pursuing Ph.D.
- Organise frequent conferences and workshops on institutional support and professional development for the university community on the requirements for promotion and other accomplishments.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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