

The status of females' representation in academic leadership positions of selected universities of Ethiopia

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Abstract: Women make up just half of the Ethiopian population, yet continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. Though their representation is low, current updated studies that show Ethiopian women's share in academic leadership positions of universities are scarce. Thus, this study sought to investigate the statuses of females' representations in the academic leadership of Ethiopia's universities. For this purpose, five public universities namely, Adigrat University, Mekelle University, Aksum University, Weldya University, and Samara University were purposively selected. The required data for this study was collected from the human resources management staff profile of the universities through the means of document analysis and from some selected academic leaders and gender office directorates that coordinate and oversee the gender issue in the universities through the means of interview. The collected data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, it was found that females remain seriously underrepresented in leadership positions of lower, middle, and higher levels of leadership positions across the universities understudy. This was also true in academic commission and senate representations of decision making. Having observed all these problems, recommendations were suggested to identify and alleviate the genesis of organizational barriers at ground that stifles females' representation in leadership positions and realize the representation of women in leadership positions as equal as their male counterparts through the proper implementation of gender policy provisions, affirmative actions, gender laws, and regulations.

IndexTerms – status, leadership, representation, decision making

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Equality of women with men in leadership can be achieved when the status of men and women in education could be equal. However, the education of girls in a traditional society like Ethiopia did not take place without resistance (Balsvik 1985:54). However, as time goes on, the gender enrollment disparity was narrowed and educational attainment achieved. Despite gender equality commitments and women's educational attainment, still, women are disproportionately underrepresented in higher education leadership. Regions and countries may vary in term of culture, achievements, and development, but barriers for women's representation in academia and leadership are surprisingly similar in many regions (Anteneh Tadesse, 2017)

As a global phenomenon, the participation of women in various leadership levels and decision-making positions lags behind that of men. Even if women exercise public functions on equal terms with men at local, national and international levels, they participate only marginally at the highest level of decision making. Among the major barriers that hinder women not to reach at higher ladders and play significant roles in leadership and decision making are cultural factors; lack of access to resources; multiple roles of women; glass ceiling effect; gender-based violence; lack of role models; and poverty (Meron, 2003).

Although the number of Ethiopian women in leadership positions varies by sector, 26% of all managers were women in 2013, but when examining sub-divisions of managers such as chief executives, senior officials, and legislators, women accounted for only 14% and among legislators and senior officials, less than 10% (Helina Beyene, 2015:68). However, after the new government reform, Ethiopia is now the only African state after Rwanda to have equal gender representation in the cabinet. Female appointees form half of Ethiopia's new cabinet in the ministry level. However, the reform is not cascaded to the positions below the ministry level especially to higher education institutions and as a result their share in the leadership and decision is still low.

Although there are not many studies that show Ethiopian women's share in academic leadership positions, on 2014 a study tracked the share of women leaders in 13 Second generation universities in Ethiopia. Women accounted for 9% of directors, less than 5% of management, and 0% of presidents or vice presidents. Furthermore, of the 105 college deans 5(less than 5%) were women and only 3% of department heads were women. Women in other decision-making positions fared only slightly better; they accounted for 10% of total decision makers, with only 20 of 283 senators and 73 of the 657 academic commissioners being female (Eerdwikk, Wong, Fetenu Bekele, Lenesil Asfaw, Mahlet Mariam, 2014:19). This disparity shows that as women have low status in the universities, the activities that they perform tend to be less valued and women's low status is also perpetuated through the low value placed on their activities (Marshal et.al, 1999:14).

At this time, little is known about to what extent females are represented in the academic leadership and decision making

positions. Therefore, to know their status of representation in the Ethiopian university leadership, there is a need of conducting an updated periodical research since no scientific research is currently conducted by any researcher about them. Thus, the researcher was initiated to conduct this study about the statuses of females' leadership representation in the universities of Ethiopia.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Some women have been leaders throughout history. From the pharaohs of Egypt to the queens of England, women leaders are found in nearly every culture and time period. Yet, in almost all circumstances, male leaders greatly outnumber female leaders. Moreover, customs and laws against female leadership can be found throughout history, most notably in every major religion (Christ, 2014).

While there is a universal consensus that gender equity should exist in leadership, evidence shows a lack of women leaders in professional and managerial roles. Therefore, In order to stay as competitive as possible, organizations must capitalize on the strengths of all members of the organization (Pfeffer, 2005). This is particularly true for those in leader positions. The presence of women in top leader positions is shown to have a positive correlation with firm value (Carter, Simkins & Simpson, 2003). Furthermore, a study from Campell and Mínguez-Vera (2008) indicates that having the representations of both genders on the top management positions in a balanced ratio is a key factor for a firm's value.

Although a number of policies are emerging that support and encourage women's participation in leadership and decision-making process, it they are underrepresented. However, no scientific research assured the actual status of females' representation in the academic leadership position and decision making representations. Therefore, this research is aimed at investigating the contemporary status of females' representation in leadership positions and decision making processes of Ethiopia's universities.

1.3. Research questions

- What is the status of females' representation in academic leadership positions and decision makings of the universities?

1.4. Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to:

- Examine the status of females' representation in academic leadership positions and decision makings of the universities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In this study, descriptive survey method was employed to depict the actual status of females' representation in leadership positions of public universities of Ethiopia. Descriptive survey is designed to obtain information about the current status of the phenomenon or about the phenomenon of the immediate past.

3.2. Sources of Data

Under this study, primary and secondary sources of data were included. The primary data was obtained from the gender office directors and academic leaders of the university through the means of interview. The secondary data was collected from the staff profile documents of the human resource management office of the universities under study, annual abstracts of Ministry of Education, reports of ministry of women, children and youth, and other relevant documents through the means of document analysis.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Techniques

This study was conducted on five selected public universities of Ethiopia. of the thirty three 1st-3rd generation public universities of Ethiopia, five universities were selected purposively. These were Adigrat University, Mekelle University, Aksum University, Weldya University, and Samara University. These universities were selected for the reason that they are at a near radius distance of the work place of the researcher. Moreover, relatively they are close to each other and this is an opportunity for financial efficiency of the researcher. All staff profile documents of these universities was checked out to identify the status of women representation in academic leadership. Furthermore, all gender office directors, some selected deans, vice presidents and vice-chancellors were also selected for interview.

3.4. Instruments of Data Collection

The required data for this study were collected through the means of document analysis and interview. Document review was the major instrument of data collection used for this study. It was used to collect the statistical information that indicates the statuses of female academic employees representation in the leadership positions of the university. With this in mind, data regarding the status of females' leadership representation was calculated from the HRM staff profile of each university understudy, annual abstracts of Ministry of Education, ministry of women, children and youths, and other relevant documents and the proportion of

women in academia and leadership as compared to men was identified. The second data collection instrument was interview. The main aim of using interview in this study was to supplement, strengthen and enhance the precision of the information obtained through document analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

After the quantitative data was collected through the document analysis from human resources directorate of the universities understudy, annual abstracts of Ministry of Education, ministry of children, women and youth, and other relevant documents it was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The data obtained from the interviews, was also analyzed qualitatively through interpretation, description, and appreciation of facts.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Status of females' leadership representation

Documented list of academic staff profile from the human resources management (HRM) offices of each university were used to find out the positions women occupied in the universities' academic leadership as compared to their men counterparts. Gender wise leadership positions of three levels i.e., lower, middle, and higher leadership position and two decision making power memberships (Academic commission and senate) were collected. Analysis of the obtained data from the documents revealed to what extent females were represented in these positions. Thus, the statuses of female representation in leadership as documented in the HRM office documents along with the result of the interview are compiled and analyzed in this chapter.

4.1.2. Females' representation in lower level leadership positions

This level of leadership position shows the representation of female leaders in department headship, coordinator, and team leadership as compared with their male counterparts. These levels of leadership are mostly found at the bottom leadership structure of the universities.

Table-1

Table showing females' representation in lower leadership positions (department head, coordinator, and team leader)

S/n	University's name	Positions occupied by Male		Positions occupied by female		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Aksum	69	98.6	1	1.4	70	100
2	Mekele	60	75.9	19	24.05	79	100
3	Weldia	53	96.36	2	3.63	55	100
4	Samara	52	96.3	2	3.7	54	100
5	Adigrat	58	90.6	6	9.4	64	100
Total		292	90.7	30	9.3	322	100

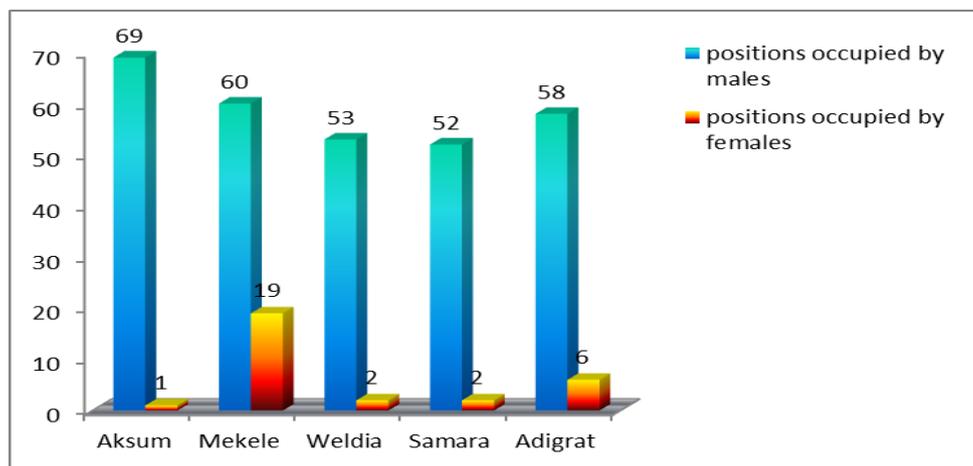
Source; HRM offices of the five universities

As it can be understood from table 1 above, the evidence collected from the HRM staff profiles of the universities understudy indicates that, out of the 70(100%) lower level leadership positions of Aksum University, male leaders occupied 69(98.6%) while female leaders occupied 1(1.4%); out of the 79(100%) leadership positions in Mekele University, male leaders occupied 60(75.9%) while female leaders occupied 19(24.05%); out of the 55(100%) leadership positions in Weldya University, male leaders occupied 53(96.36%) while female leaders occupied only 2(3.63%); out of the 54(100%) leadership positions in Samara University, male leaders occupied 52(96.3%) while female leaders occupied only 2(3.7%); out of the 64(100%) positions in Adigrat University, male leaders occupied 58(90.6%) while female leaders occupied only 6(9.4%) of the total lower level leadership positions.

In general, female leaders occupied 30(9.3%) of the total lower level leadership positions. Hence, though female leadership representation is still very low in all the universities understudy, Mekele University is relatively good while female position holders in lower position of Aksum University is the lowest one. This implies disproportionate representation of females in the lower academic leadership positions.

Figure- 1

Graph showing females' representation in lower level leadership positions



4.1.3. Females’ representation in middle level leadership positions

This is a leadership position level between lower level and higher level leadership positions. According to the universities’ academic leadership structure, leadership positions included in this category are director, dean, and manager.

Table-2
Table showing females’ representation in middle level leadership positions (director, dean, and manager)

S / n	University’s name	Positions occupied by Males		Positions occupied by females		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Aksum	17	80.95	4	19.05	21	100
2	Mekele	24	80	6	20	30	100
3	Weldia	24	100	0	0	24	100
4	Samara	28	100	0	0	28	100
5	Adigrat	19	90.5	2	9.5	21	100
Total		112	90.3	12	9.7	124	100

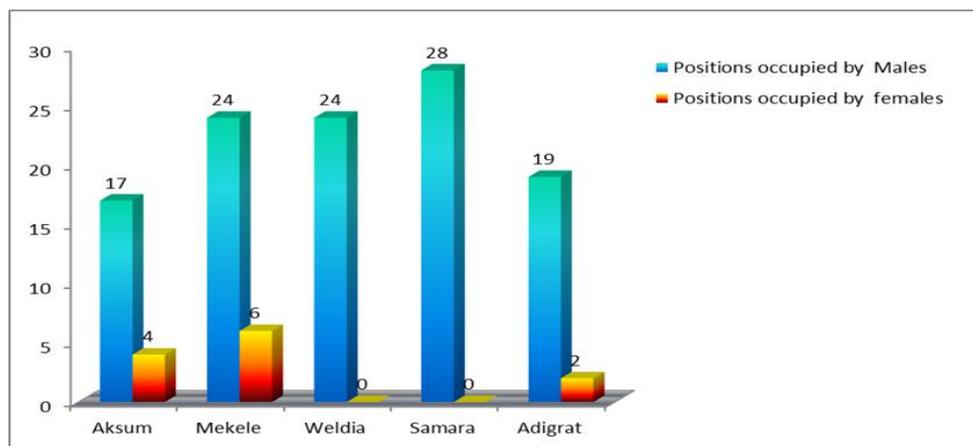
Source; HRM offices of the five universities

In table 2 above, the evidence collected from the HRM staff profiles of the universities understudy indicates that, out of the 21(100%) middle level leadership positions of Aksum University; male leaders occupied 17(80.95%) while female leaders occupied 4(19.05%); out of the 30(100%) middle level leadership positions in Mekele University, male leaders occupied 24(80%) while female leaders occupied only 6(20%); out of the 24(100%) middle level leadership positions of Weldya University, male leaders occupied 24(100%) while female leaders occupied 0(0%); out of the 28 leadership positions in Samara University, male leaders occupied 28(100%) while females occupied 0(0%); out of the 21(100%) positions in Adigrat University, male leaders occupied 19(90.5%) while female leaders occupied only 2(9.5%).

In general, female leaders occupied 12(9.7%) of the total middle level academic leadership positions. Hence, though female leadership representation is still very low in all universities understudy, Mekele University is relatively good while female position holders in weldya and Samara Universities are none. This result implies unbalanced representation of female in the academic leadership positions.

Figure- 2

Graph showing females’ representation in middle level leadership positions



4.1.4. Females’ representation in higher level leadership positions

According to the universities structure, this leadership position is the highest level of the three leadership structures in the universities. It is constituted of presidents/vice chancellors, and vice presidents.

Table-3

Table showing females’ representation in higher level leadership positions (presidents/vice chancellor, and vice presidents,)

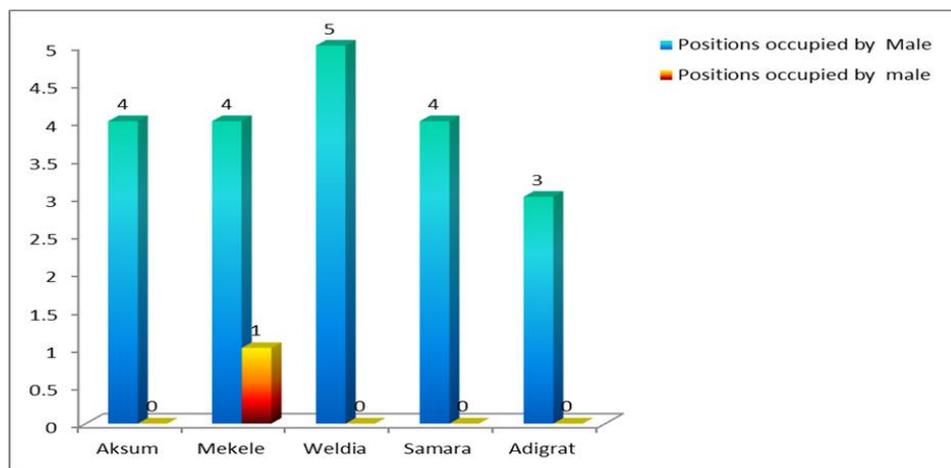
S/n	Universit y’s name	Positions occupied by Male		Positions occupied by females		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Aksum	4	100	0	0	4	100
2	Mekele	4	80	1	20	5	100
3	Weldia	5	100	0	0	5	100
4	Samara	4	100	0	0	4	100
5	Adigrat	3	100	0	0	3	100
Total		20	95.2	1	4.8	21	100

Source; HRM offices of the five universities

As presented in table 3 above, women are non-existent in higher academic leadership position across all universities and they are extremely low in all the universities understudy. Only 1(20%) female leader at a vice president level existed in Mekele University. However, there is no president/vice-chancellor in the universities understudy and other universities of Ethiopia in general. Of the 21(100%) higher leadership positions in the universities under study, only 1(4.8%) was occupied by women leader which is very low despite the national policy (ESDP IV) of Ethiopia to raise the number of female presidents and Vice presidents from 3% to 16% by 2015. Therefore, though a goal to raise females to leadership at the national policy was set, it is not more than a verbal commitment. In short, it is a form of tokenism. Consequently, it is fair to say females are by far underrepresented in leadership positions of the universities understudy. This terribly limits the number of females available to assume leadership positions in higher education institutions. This finding is consistent with the theory of glass ceiling. This result is consistent with SCA, (2004) which Women make up 25% and 18% of the leadership and professional job categories respectively, indicating that upper and middle level positions are overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Figure-3

Table showing females’ representation in higher level leadership positions



4.1.5. Females’ total leadership representation in each university

This is the conglomeration of the above discussed three levels of leadership positions (lower, middle, and higher levels of leadership positions). It discusses the total leadership positions occupied by female leaders in each university.

Table- 4
Females’ total leadership representation in each university

S / n	University's name	Total positions occupied by males		Total positions occupied by females		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Aksum	90	94.7	5	5.3	95	100
2	Mekele	88	77.19	26	22.8	114	100
3	Weldia	82	97.6	2	2.4	84	100
4	Samara	84	97.7	2	2.3	86	100
5	Adigrat	80	90.9	8	9.1	88	100
Total		424	90.8	43	9.2	467	100

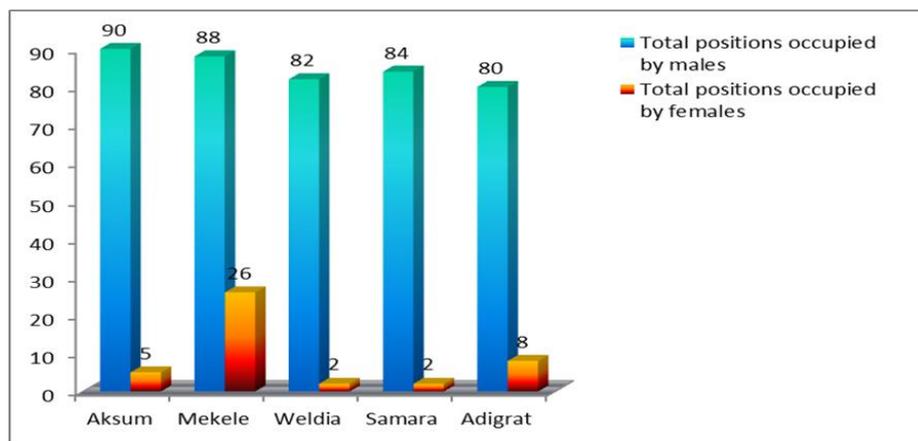
Source; HRM offices of the five universities

Table 4 above, presents the total representation of female leaders in each university. To this end, their representation in the three leadership levels (i.e., higher, middle, and lower level of leadership position) was added to have a holistic picture of their leadership representations in each university. Thus, of the 95(100%) leadership positions of Aksum University, male leaders occupied 90(94.7%) while female leaders occupied only 5(5.3%); of the 114(100%) leadership positions of Mekele University, male leaders occupied 88(77.19%) while women leaders occupied 26(22.8%); of the 84(100%) leadership positions of Weldya University, male leaders occupied 82(97.6%) while female leaders occupied only 2(2.4%); of the 86(100%) leadership positions of Samara University, male leaders occupied 84(97.7%) while female leaders occupied only 2(2.3%); of the 88 leadership positions in Adigrat University, male leaders occupied 80(90.9%) while female leaders occupied only 8(9.1%)

Thus, it is evident that though female leadership representation is still very low in all the universities understudy, Mekele University is relatively good while female position holders in Samara and Weldya Universities are almost none. Generally, in the universities understudy, female academic leaders constitute 43(9.2%) of the total academic leadership positions. Thus, Women are marginalized in leadership positions at all leadership of the universities. The phenomenon is not only confined to the high level leadership position but it is also prevalent even in the lower and middle level leadership positions. The proportion is imperatively low in all universities which call for a critical consideration by the universities management to mitigate the gap.

Figure-4

Graph showing Females’ total leadership representation in each university



The result of the interview overlaps with the above finding. Interviewees reflected that since male and female staffing is not balanced in number in the universities, it could make the leadership balance worse. Interviewees reported that the number of female position holders in the higher leader position like president and vice president is almost none. In the history of Ethiopia, there was only one president/vice chancellor in university leadership. In the universities understudy, there was only one female in the higher level leadership position (i.e, research and community services vice president) in Mekelle University.

The above evidences about the representation of females in leadership positions in document analysis of staff profile and the result of the interview postulated that women were disproportionately underrepresented in in the universities leadership positions. In relation to this, studies conducted in Ethiopia continue to show that women are underrepresented in public universities as students, staff and leaders despite the international and national campaign for gender equality and equity in higher education (Education Strategic Center, 2015). This result also coincides with the finding of Gojjam Ademe and Singh,(2015). According to them, women in Ethiopia are recently under-represented in positions of academic leadership and management as well as in teaching professions of higher learning institutions despite gender sensitive policy frameworks. In terms of numerical equality, women lag far behind men in attainment of higher education leadership and management positions across all universities studied

4.2. Females’ representation in decision making

4.2.1. Academic commission

At the college level, the decision-making bodies in all academic matters is the academic commission (AC) of each college. The academic commission meets under the chairmanship of the dean of the college and consists of department heads, School/Centre Heads, college coordinators etc.

Table-5

Table showing females’ AC decision making representation

S/ n	University’s name	Male AC members		Females AC members		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Aksum	79	98.75	1	1.25	80	100
2	Mekele	86	80.4	21	19.6	107	100
3	Weldia	63	96.9	2	3.1	65	100
4	Samara	59	96.7	2	3.3	61	100
5	Adigrat	65	91.55	6	8.45	71	100
Total		352	91.7	32	8.3	384	100

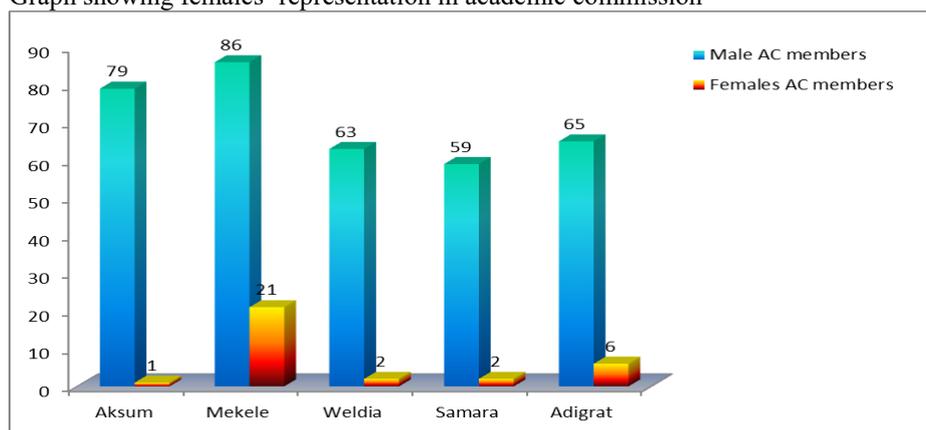
Source; HRM offices of the five universities

As it can be seen from table 5 above, the evidence collected from the HRM staff profiles confirms that out of the 80(100%) academic commission(AC) members of Aksum University, male AC members constitute 79(98.75) while female AC members constitute only 1(1.25%); of the 107(100%) AC members of Mekele University, male AC members constitute 86(80.4%) while female AC members constitute only 21(19.6%), of the 65(100%) AC members in Weldya University, male AC members constitute 63(96.9%) while female AC members constitute 2(3.1%); of the 61(100%) AC members in Samara University, male members constitute 59(96.7%) while females constitute 2(3.3%), and of the 71(100%) AC members in Adigrat University, male members constitute 65(91.55%) while female constitute only 6(8.45%).

Generally, the total females’ AC membership in all the universities understudy is 32(8.3%). This clearly indicates female representation in AC leadership is extremely low indicating that AC level decision making is overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Figure- 5

Graph showing females' representation in academic commission



4.2.1. Females representation in Senate decision making bodies

According to the Ethiopian higher education proclamation, senate decision making members include members of the middle level and higher level leadership position holders (deans, directors, managers, vice-presidents and vice-chancellors).

Table-6

Table showing females' senate decision making representation

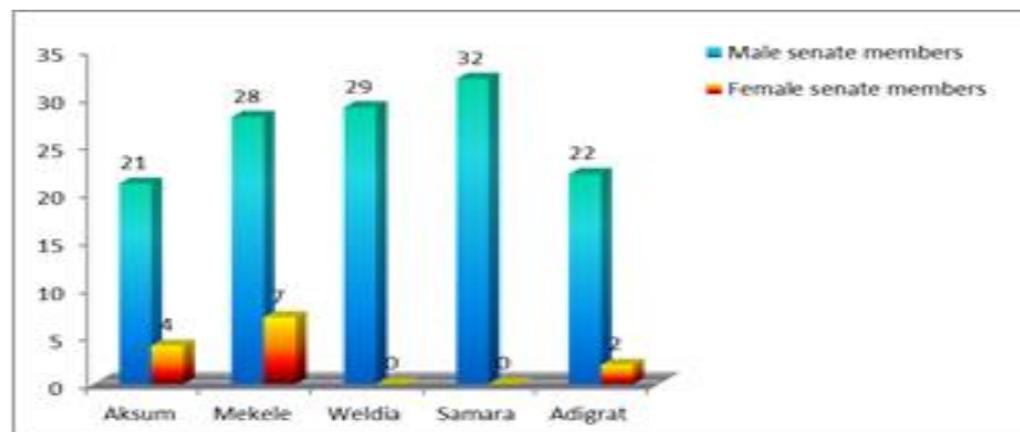
S/n	University's name	Male senate members		Females senate members		Totals	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Aksum	21	84	4	16	25	100
2	Mekele	28	80	7	20	35	100
3	Weldia	29	100	0	0	29	100
4	Samara	32	100	0	0	32	100
5	Adigrat	22	91.7	2	8.3	24	100
Total		132	91	13	9	145	100

Source; HRM offices of the five universities

As it is clearly shown in table 6 above, the evidence collected from the HRM staff profiles confirms that out of the 25(100%) senate members of Aksum University, male senate members constitute 21(84%) while female senate members constitute 4(16%); of the 35(100%) senate members of Mekele University, male senate members constitute 28(80%) while women senate members constitute only 7(20%); of the 29(100%) senate members in Weldya University, male senate members constitute 29(100%) while female members constitute nothing; of the 32(100%) senate members in Samara University, male senate members constitute 32(100%) while females constitute nothing; and of the 24(100%) senate members in Adigrat University, male members constitute 22(91.7%) while female constitute only 2(8.3%).

Figure-6

Graph showing females' senate membership representation



Generally, the total females' senate decision making membership in all the universities understudy is 13(9%) This clearly indicates female representation in senate leadership is extremely low indicating that senate level decision making is overwhelmingly dominated by men. This result contradicts with both the global policy and legal frameworks on gender equality and empowerment of women – the Beijing platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) which place great emphasis on women equal participation in decision making (Hannan, 2009). These two frameworks clearly indicate the need for both increasing the participation and representation of women and influencing the agendas, processes, and outcomes of decision-making bodies from a gender equality perspective.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

In light of the findings, the following conclusions were drawn.

It was found that females remain seriously underrepresented in leadership positions across the universities understudy. They are not only marginalized in top leadership positions but at every level of leadership. Female leaders occupied 30(9.3%) of the total lower level leadership positions, 12(9.7%) of the middle level leadership positions; and 1(4.8%) of the higher level leadership positions. Generally, in the universities understudy, female academic leaders constitute 43(9.2%) of the total academic leadership positions. The proportion was imperatively low in all universities which call for a critical consideration by the university management to mitigate the gap. As one goes upward to higher position the harder it is to find women with higher position. As a result, there is a tremendous gap of leadership representation between men and women in elected and appointed positions.

Women representations in decision-making membership are also chronically hampered. They accounted for 8.3% of total academic commission (AC) decision makers with share of only 32 of 384 total seats and 9% of the total senators with share of 13 of the 145 total senate decision making seats. Thus, lack of gender balance in decision-making positions was also highly persisted in the universities under study

5.2 Recommendations

Despite the progress women have made over years, ensuring equal opportunity for women in leadership and decision making remained an elusive goal. Thus, the following recommendations are forwarded to balance females' representation in leadership and decision making positions equally with their male counterparts.

- The universities should hire more female staff because the more the number of female staff exists the more competent female exist in leadership positions. Thus, there should be considerations on the employment gender compositions of the universities' academic staff.
- There should be transparent recruitment and selection criteria for leadership posts. The criteria should be explicit to the candidates so that females know against what they are weighted for. It also helps them to check if their affirmative action provisions are added to the recruitment and selection criteria.
- The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in society is continuing. As evidenced by this study, females' chronic representation in leadership positions still exists in the universities of Ethiopia. Thus, the universities, and other governmental sectors should realize the representation of women in leadership positions and decision making as equal as their male counterparts through the proper implementation of gender policy provisions, affirmative actions, and regulations.
- It is also recommended that gender office directorates and other concerned bodies should identify the genesis of organizational barriers at ground that stifles females' representation in leadership positions and should alleviate all or at least minimize the bottle necks in their organization.

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