



Review

Gender differences between faculty members in higher education: A literature review of selected higher education journals



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ABSTRACT

Gender issues in higher educational institutions have attracted increasing levels of attention from researchers in recent decades. As a result, many studies have called for greater gender equity between men and women in universities. However, there is a lack of sufficient literature review studies that investigate gender differences between faculty members of universities. This paper offers a review of the literature on gender differences between faculty members in higher education during the period from 2000 to 2013. The objectives of the review are to: identify and explore patterns and trends in publication outlets; collect, document, scrutinise and critically analyse the current literature on this field; to identify gaps in the literature; and make recommendations for further research in this field. To accomplish this task, we collected the data from fourteen specialist academic journals that focus on higher education.

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1. Introduction

Higher education studies only really started to emerge as an organized interdisciplinary field of study during the late-1960s and early-1970s. In its relatively short history, the field has been characterized by a bifurcation: scholars have generally coalesced around policy based studies or learning and teaching research (Bearman et al., 2012). Since the 1970s, the growth of higher education as a field has been evidenced by the emergence of dedicated research centres and professorial appointments across the world, as well as the burgeoning number of specialized higher education journals (MacFarlane & Grant, 2012). The evolution of higher education as a research field may be described with a contribution from Tight (2012) that made a comparative analysis of publication patterns across 15 specialized higher education journals between 2000 and 2010. He concluded there has been a marked increase in the volume of publications, with journals in the field now adopting an increasingly international perspective and women playing a more significant role as higher education researchers.

However, Bearman et al. (2012) pointed out that there has been relatively little use of systematic review studies among higher education researchers. This contrasts with the use of systematic reviews among healthcare and, to a lesser extent, health-professional education researchers. With respect to the subject of gender research on higher education, most previous studies have been aimed at analysing different topics, such as gender differences between faculty members in terms of earnings, tenure and promotion or higher education management (Silander, Haake, & Lindberg, 2013). Other common research topic focuses on gender issues related to student population and recruitment (Severiens & ten Dam, 2012). Nevertheless, we have not found many systematic reviews of the literature on gender research on higher education. For example, Townsend (1993) explored feminist scholarship in core higher education journals. This author found through the review of journal article titles in her sample that only 3.9% focused on topics related to women. The paper by Ward and Grant (1996) echoed the findings of Townsend (1993). These papers showed that over time, some improvements have been made with regard to the numbers of articles about women, but there might be gender biases that exist at various points in the publication process that negatively influence full participation of women. More recently, Hart (2006) investigated the academic literature in the field of higher education, using gender and feminism as lenses due, in part, to the increased presence of women in the academy. By analysing data collected from three leading journals in higher education, *The Journal of Higher Education (JHE)*, *The Review of Higher Education (RHE)*, and *Research in Higher Education (ResHE)*, the author found that women and, particularly feminism, were not prevalent themes in recent higher education scholarship over time.

Taking into account the previous considerations, this paper offers a review of the literature on gender differences between faculty members in higher education during the period from 2000 to 2013. The objectives of the review are to: identify and explore patterns and trends in publication outlets; collect, document, scrutinise and critically analyse the current literature on this field; to identify gaps in the literature; and make recommendations for further research in this field. To accomplish this task, we collected the data from fourteen specialist academic journals that focus on higher education.

2. Method

According to the paper by Bimrose, Barnes, and Brown (2005), the process used for this literature review is highly systematic and comprises a number of distinct phases:

- *Searching*: Identifying the potentially relevant studies.
- *Screening*: the application of pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria derived from the review question to report titles, abstracts and full texts.
- *Data-extraction*: the in-depth examination of studies, meeting the pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria, to assess the quality of the study and extract evidence in support of the in-depth reviews.
- *Synthesis*: the development of a framework for data analysis and identification of key themes.
- *Reporting and dissemination*: presentation of the review findings.

This process was conducted in three steps, namely, (1) journal identification, (2) keyword identification and search, and (3) article thematic analysis. Each step is described in further detail below.

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