

**DO EFFORT AND EXCELLENCE MATTER EQUALLY? EXPLORING GENDER
BIAS IN CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND SALARY AMONG UNIVERSITY
ADMINISTRATION IN UZBEKISTAN**

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Abstract: This research investigates gender bias in career advancement and salary distribution among administrative staff in Uzbekistan's higher education institutions. Despite the growing participation of women in academia, persistent inequalities remain visible in leadership representation and income levels. Using a mixed-method design that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews from four major universities, the study explores whether effort and professional excellence are valued equally for men and women. The findings indicate that female administrators, despite demonstrating equivalent or superior performance, experience slower promotion rates and lower compensation compared to their male counterparts. The research concludes that institutional culture, traditional gender norms, and restricted access to professional networks impede gender equity within university administration. Recommendations are provided for transparent promotion systems, gender-sensitivity training, and mentorship initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and fairness in higher education governance.

Keywords: gender bias, higher education, career advancement, salary inequality, Uzbekistan, university administration

Gender equality continues to represent a major challenge in higher education systems across the globe, including Uzbekistan. Although women account for nearly half of the educational workforce, their presence in senior management and leadership positions remains disproportionately low. This imbalance raises a critical question: Are effort and excellence valued equally for men and women in university administration?

This study aims to examine how gender influences professional development, promotion rates, and salary distribution in higher education institutions. It further seeks to assess whether merit-based evaluation systems operate fairly or if implicit biases shape administrative outcomes. The significance of this research lies in uncovering structural and cultural barriers that constrain women's professional advancement in post-Soviet academic environments. In Uzbekistan—a country undergoing rapid educational reforms—the interplay between modernization and traditional gender norms provides a compelling context for such investigation.

Extensive research has documented the persistence of gender inequality in academia. Eagly and Carli (2007) conceptualize women's career trajectories as a "labyrinth" of obstacles, suggesting that advancement is not linear but fraught with invisible barriers. Similarly, Acker (2012) characterizes universities as gendered organizations, where formal equality frameworks coexist with informal discriminatory practices.

In the Central Asian context, Temirova (2020) and Khodjaeva (2021) emphasize that although women's access to education has expanded, male dominance persists within academic hierarchies. Leadership roles such as rectors, vice-rectors, and deans are overwhelmingly occupied by men, while women tend to remain in mid-level administrative positions.

Internationally, OECD (2023) data indicate that women in the education sector earn 15–20% less than men, even when qualifications and job performance are equivalent. However, empirical

evidence from Uzbekistan remains scarce, highlighting the need for localized analysis. This research contributes to bridging that gap by offering original data on gendered disparities in university administration.

A **mixed-method approach** was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of gender disparities.

- **Quantitative Component:** A structured survey was conducted among 120 administrative employees (60 men and 60 women) from four public universities in Tashkent and Samarkand. The survey assessed salary levels, promotion history, workload, and perceptions of fairness in performance evaluation.
- **Qualitative Component:** Twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with department heads, deans, and human resources officers to explore institutional attitudes and decision-making dynamics.

Quantitative data were analyzed using **SPSS** for statistical correlations, while qualitative data underwent thematic coding to identify recurring narratives. The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent and participant confidentiality.

The quantitative results reveal a consistent gender wage gap. Male administrators earn on average **18%** more than women in equivalent roles. When controlling for variables such as education level, experience, and workload, the adjusted gap remains around **10%**, suggesting that gender-based disparities cannot be explained solely by professional background.

Promotion trajectories exhibit similar inequality. Male respondents reported receiving promotions approximately every **4.5 years**, while women advanced on average every **6.2 years**. These findings align with international research indicating the existence of a “glass ceiling” in academic administration.

Qualitative interviews provide contextual explanations for these patterns. Respondents highlighted that informal professional networks—often dominated by men—play a decisive role in promotion decisions. Women are frequently perceived as less “career-oriented” due to societal expectations regarding family obligations, which in turn limits their access to leadership roles.

When participants were asked whether excellence and effort were equally rewarded, **72% of women** and **38% of men** responded negatively. Female respondents frequently described being overlooked despite superior performance evaluations. Several interviewees noted that recognition and career progression often depend on the approval of male-dominated decision-making boards.

These findings corroborate Kanter’s (1977) concept of tokenism, which posits that women in male-majority environments must demonstrate disproportionately high competence to gain equivalent recognition.

The study concludes that within Uzbekistan’s higher education administration, **effort and excellence do not translate equally into career rewards across genders**. Despite women’s proven academic and managerial competence, institutional and cultural mechanisms continue to undermine their progress.

To achieve genuine meritocracy, higher education institutions must:

1. Establish **transparent and gender-neutral promotion and salary criteria**;
2. Implement **gender-sensitivity and bias-awareness training** for leadership and HR staff;
3. Strengthen **mentorship and professional networking programs** for women;
4. Encourage **data-driven monitoring** of gender balance in administrative structures.

Such initiatives are not only essential for fairness but also for institutional efficiency. Research consistently shows that diversity in leadership enhances innovation, decision quality, and organizational performance. Therefore, addressing gender bias is both an ethical imperative and a strategic necessity for the modernization of Uzbekistan’s higher education system.

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