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Aspects of academic work that discriminate between white, black and expatriate South African academics

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Abstract: This article reports findings on relationships between academic work and ethnicity and nationality. The findings are derived from extensive data on the relationship between social group and views on the composition and distribution of aspects of academic work, determinants of teaching load, determinants of remuneration, and the purpose of staff development programmes.

The identification of social group on racial or ethnic bases is a fraught question, especially in South Africa where such identification has been the basis of social injustice. However, as South Africa continues to try and create a non-racist educational system, it is important to detect relationships between academic work and such identification. This research identifies several aspects of academic work that are good discriminators between the three groups of South African academics identified - White South Africans, Black South Africans, and expatriate or Non-South Africans. The findings have implications for international academic mobility.

Keywords: academic work, values, nationality

Introduction

This article reports findings on the relationships between academic work and ethnicity and nationality. The findings are derived from a more extensive study on the relationship between social group and views on the composition and distribution of aspects of academic work, determinants of teaching load, determinants of remuneration, and the purpose of staff development programmes. How people perceive their situation and their workload has implications for performance appraisal and staff development. For example, how does one compensate, in the face of the need for redress, for experience gained in a past context of unjust privilege? The problem of what is to be attributed to social conditions and what to personal effort is an issue that affects marginalized groups in particular.

The identification of social group on racial or ethnic bases is a fraught question, especially in South Africa where such identification has been the basis of social injustice. However, as South Africa continues to try and create a non-racist educational system, it is important to detect relationships between academic work and such identification. This research confirms several aspects of academic work that are good discriminators between the three groups of South African academics identified —White South Africans, Black South Africans, and expatriate or Non-South Africans. The rationale for the categories of black South African (BSA), white South African (WSA) and non-South African (NSA) – treated as levels of a variable labeled ‘social group’ – is presented below. The policy context and some of the changes effected in the 10 years since 1994 when the ‘New South Africa’ was born is also described below.

It was hoped this research might help answer such questions as: Is there a consistent difference between the views of BSAs and WSAs on the relative importance of teaching

versus research in academia? Is there a difference between their views and those of NSAs? Would the aims of staff development programmes be rated differently by the different groups? Such clarification may enable departments to approach the distribution of workload in a more sensitive way than they might otherwise have been able to do, and it might also illuminate some of the difficulties involved in the systemic transformation of South African higher education. The findings would also have implications for international academic mobility (Teferra, 2005; Tremblay, 2005).

The focus on remuneration rests on the assumption that teasing out what academics think should determine their remuneration would access what relative value is placed on the different aspects of academic work. A similar motivation lay behind the focus on staff development programmes. To what purpose(s) should academics engage in professional development? This focus on remuneration and staff development, it was felt, might give some insight into the motivation and reward for academic work. With respect to remuneration we also sought to tease out the differences between what academics thought should be the case as opposed to what actually was the case. The revealed difference between normative views and what transpires is difficult to understand when it is academics themselves at the level of departments who make many of the decisions about workload. We may also differentiate the three social groups on the basis of what they value in academic work as revealed by their choices as to what should determine remuneration (teaching and years of service) and on what the aims of staff development programmes should be (improve qualifications and promotion). This should be of interest to administrators in the South African educational systems and any other system that has different population groups.

The issue of identity as ethnicity, race and social group

There were several reasons for focusing on social group in this study. The first and obvious reason is that South African society and its educational system were organised on racial and ethnic lines, and despite legal changes in practice they largely remain so. Apartheid was thorough. Hofstede's research (1980, 1984, 1985) indicates that country and national value systems are often the dominant variable in perceptions of work life. More specifically, country has been identified as an important variable in many academic characteristics (Teichler, 1996) and the variable with the most explanatory power in terms of academic governance (Geurts & Maassen, 1996: 82). Since 1994, there have been an increasing number of immigrants entering South African academia particularly from other African countries. They constitute a sizeable enough group to provide a sectoral opinion (Ruth, 2000). Furthermore, in a society where one group is manifestly more privileged than another, the conditions of such privilege are often opaque, if not invisible, to members of the privileged group. The result, as Hyde (1995: 88) points out, is that this 'failure to recognize whiteness explicitly allows white individuals to ignore how race shapes their lives and by extension how race privileges are accrued'. It was with this in mind that respondents were asked, where feasible, to indicate not only what they thought *should be* the case, but also what they perceived to *actually be* the case. The findings suggest that in several instances this was a useful distinction to pursue.

Systemic change in South Africa: The policy and reality

Since 1990, the educational landscape of South Africa has been changing dramatically. There has been a concerted effort to overcome the burden of apartheid in all levels and areas of education. In higher education specifically, there have been efforts to establish a new

institutional landscape, new forms of governance, and new qualifications frameworks. In this process one would expect much turmoil in the minds and hearts of those working in universities. Perceptions and values of individuals would play an important role in how they viewed this changing landscape. One would also expect that such perceptions and values would be embedded in the social identity of individuals, and that this would have particular force in a society attempting to overcome a legacy of discrimination based on many factors, but especially race.

The South African educational system was, until the post-apartheid era, legally structured in terms of different black ethnic groups (hence Historically Black Universities) and white language groups (hence English-medium and Afrikaans-medium universities). The policy for a new dispensation was provided by the National Commission on Higher Education (NHCE) 1996 report, which led to the Higher Education Act of 1997. It recognised the need to address 'gross discrepancies in the participation rates of students from different population groups, indefensible imbalances in the ratios of black and female staff compared to whites and males, and equally untenable disparities between historically black and historically white institutions in terms of facilities and capacities' (Hall, Symes, & Luescher, 2002). Despite this recognition and efforts to overcome the problems, the Annual Report of 1999 of the Council for Higher Education (CHE), mixed and uneven progress. The lack of progress was confirmed in a report on the new institutional landscape (South African Ministry of Education, 2002).

Methodology

The study was designed to answer questions arising from addressing the problem of distributing workload fairly as described in the introduction. The effort quickly revealed that this was not simply a matter of numbers and equal allocation of hours, or counting research outputs, but involved personal and sensitive concerns to do with race, age and experiential variables. For example, a member of a department felt he ought not to have the same workload as another member who was paid more. The fact that that other member was paid more on the basis of qualification and rank was deemed irrelevant; less pay should mean less work. Another member felt that qualification should outweigh all other considerations. Obviously perception and effect played a major role in what was deemed equitable. What seemed to matter was the way academic work was understood and valued. There was also the problem of redress and current advantage based on historical unjust privilege.

A combination of interaction with other researchers and results of the pre-tests led to the development of the final questionnaire, which was used as the survey instrument in this study. The use of structured questions helped to reduce any biases that could occur due to the influence of the interviewer and the respondent (Malhotra 2004). Fixed alternative questions were used rather than open-ended questions. Higher order scales such as interval scales are more powerful than nominal scales. They are more useful since they allow stronger comparison and stronger conclusions to be made. Hence ten-point interval scales ranging from 1 = Not Important to 10 = Important, were used.

Single-item measures are generally deficient both with respect to validity and reliability (Pedhazur & Schmelkin 1991). Hence multi-item scales were resorted to and the item pool was generated from a list of items that relate to the key constructs and is drawn from literature. Twelve factors that are relevant to the remuneration of academics were identified and respondents were asked to indicate how important these factors **should be** in determining remuneration of academics (Var 24.1 to Var 24.12). Following this, respondents were also

asked to indicate how important these factors **actually are** at their university in determining the remuneration of academics (Var 25.1 to Var 25.12). A set of six items measured the respondents' ratings of what they thought the most important aims of a staff development programme **should be** for members of their department (Var 26.1 to Var 26.6).

The final research design emerged from a pilot questionnaire distributed at one university, followed by a literature survey on the composition of academic work, followed by further research at the same university and then a modest comparative exploration at an overseas university. All the material and insight so gained was then presented at a methodology workshop held by the Association of African Universities, who were funding the study. At this workshop, the research questions were more finely focused and the questionnaire more or less finalized. Forty questionnaires were distributed to each of 11 universities (out of 21) in South Africa via coordinators at each university. These coordinators ensured a distribution across the variables of gender, race, age, rank and discipline. The method of distribution and collection did not seem to affect the level of response. There were 231 respondents from 46 different departments, fairly evenly spread across 4 (out of 4) historically white English-language universities and 3 (out of 6) Afrikaans-language universities, and 4 (out of 6) historically black universities.

Questions addressed different aspects of workload as listed in the introduction, and the difference between what academics think *should be* the case and what they perceived *is* the case. We consider significant differences and notable trends. We acknowledge there is controversy over the value of null hypothesis significance testing (Denis, 2003), but we are not relying solely on significance levels as a basis for discussion. We also acknowledge that, like all survey-based analyses, this one has its limitations, which we discuss after presenting the findings.

Analysis

Results as shown by the mean values in Table 1 ($n = 231$ in all cases) indicate that, in the view of our sample, the most important factors in determining the remuneration of academics **should be**, in order; actual ability to do the job (mean = 9.02); outcome of performance appraisals (mean = 8.32); level of responsibility (mean = 7.90); and, research output (mean = 7.78).

It can also be seen from Table 1 that, in the view of our sample, the most important factors that **actually do** determine the remuneration of academics are, again in order; rank (mean = 7.90); qualification (mean = 6.50); level of responsibility (mean = 5.90) and research output (mean = 5.90).

The mean responses of what the most important aims of a staff development programme **should be** for members of the department are given in Table 2. Although there are variations between the three groups it is evident that the ranking remains the same for each group.

Discriminant analysis was then conducted to identify the variables that contribute most to the discrimination between the three groups of South African academics. 27.2% were BSA, 60.3% were WSA and 12.5% were Non-SA. 30 independent variables pertaining to remuneration and staff development were used to conduct three-group discriminant analysis which is useful to assess whether group membership can be predicted from the set of predictor measures.

Table 1: Factors determining remuneration of academics as per sample

Factors	Should be		Actually is	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Actual ability to do the job	9.02	1	4.48	10
Outcome of performance appraisals	8.32	2	4.80	8/7
Level of responsibility	7.90	3	5.90	3=4
Research output	7.78	4	5.90	4=3
Qualifications	7.73	5	6.50	2
Rank	7.30	6	7.90	1
Teaching experience	7.14	7	5.13	6
Number of hours teaching	7.11	8	4.14	12
Contribution to the university/service	7.04	9	4.80	7/8
Administrative workload	5.88	10	4.70	8
Years of service at the institution	5.68	11	5.60	5
Professional non-teaching experience	5.52	12	4.40	11

Table 2: Purpose of staff development programmes

Rank*	Purpose	BSA	WSA	NSA	Sample
1	Increase capacity to do current job	8.93	8.63	8.90	8.74
2	Acquire research skills	8.80	8.59	8.79	8.67
3	Acquire teaching skills	8.60	8.37	8.55	8.45
4	Increase abilities, skills	8.22	7.70	8.28	7.91
5	Improve qualifications	8.25	7.51	7.43	7.69
6	Fulfilling criteria for promotion	7.40	6.91	5.69	6.87

*Rank is based on sample means

Results of the Box's M test of equality of covariance matrices is significant ($p = .000$). Therefore the groups do differ in their covariance matrices and the three groups are distinct and different. Since the dependent variable Group is made of three levels viz. BSA, WSA and NSA, two discriminant functions are computed. The first discriminant function accounts for 60.3% of the variance while the second discriminant function accounts for 39.7% of the variance. The overall Wilks Lambda = 0.526, and $p = .000$ for the first function and Wilks Lambda = 0.768, and $p = .036$ for the second function suggests that the two functions discriminate between the levels very well and there are significant differences across the predictor variables. The first discriminant function has a chi-square value of 107.063 and is highly significant at $p = .000$, whereas the second discriminant functions has a chi-square value of 44.032 and is significant at an alpha level of .05 ($p < .05$).

The classification table indicated that 70.4% of cases were correctly classified which implies that discriminant analysis was able to predict correct group membership for 70.4% of the cases. This satisfies the classification accuracy criterion suggested by Hair *et al* (1998) that the classification accuracy should be at least 25% greater than that achieved by chance. In our study the chance accuracy is 27.2% for BSA whereas the prediction was higher at 51.8%; the chance accuracy is 60.3% for WSA whereas the prediction was higher at 84.7% and the chance accuracy is 12.5% for NSA whereas the prediction was higher at 41.4%.

The results of the discriminant analysis show that seven variables are significant in differentiating the three groups of South African academics which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of the Discriminating Variables

Var. No.	Variable Description	Sig. Level	Wilks Lambda
24.4	Teaching experience should be important.	.004	.939
26.3	Promotion should be the most important aim of staff development.	.012	.952
24.7	Years of service should be important.	.047	.965
25.4	Teaching experience is actually important	.069	.971
26.1	Improve qualifications should be the most important aim of staff development.	.072	.971
25.7	Years of service is actually important	.105	.975
26.5	Teaching skills should be the most important aim of staff development.	.120	.977

Correctly classified 70.4% / Overall Wilks Lambda = 0.526, d.f. = 60, $p < 0.000$ / Canonical Correlation = 0.561 / % of variance explained by the function = 60.3%

As mentioned earlier the 30 original variables pertaining to remuneration and staff development were included in the discriminant analysis. Out of these, seven variables were entered into the discriminant function and these variables were identified as having the highest discriminatory power in truly distinguishing between the groups of South African Academics. The high percentage (70.4%) of cases correctly classified by the discriminating function suggests that these seven variables are good discriminators of the three groups of South African Academics.

An examination of the group means given in Table 4 reveals that BSA thought that teaching experience (*mean* = 7.88) *should be* an important determinant of remuneration as compared to WSA (*mean* = 6.83) and NSA (*mean* = 6.74). Additionally, BSA also thought of years of service at the institution *should be* more important (*mean* = 6.44) than WSA (*mean* = 5.67) whereas, the Non-SA did not consider this to be important (*mean* = 4.91).

Table 4: Group means

Var No.	Variable Description	BSA	WSA	NSA
24.4	Teaching experience should be important.	7.88	6.83	6.74
24.7	Years of service should be important.	6.44	5.67	4.91
25.4	Teaching experience is actually important	5.64	4.72	4.70
25.7	Years of service is actually important	5.60	5.18	6.52
26.1	Improve qualifications should be the most important aim of staff development.	8.30	7.51	7.35
26.3	Promotion should be the most important aim of staff development.	7.30	7.04	5.70
26.5	Teaching skills should be the most important aim of staff development.	8.58	8.31	9.04

The ratings of the respondents to the factors that are *actually* important in determining the remuneration are different with Non-SA stating that years of service is important (*mean* = 6.52), followed by BSA (*mean* = 5.60) and WSA more or less saying that this factor is not important (*mean* = 5.18). BSA have ascribed a higher level of importance to teaching experience (*mean* = 5.64) whereas both WSA (*mean* = 4.72) and Non-SA (*mean* = 4.70) do not view this as actually being an important consideration of remuneration in their universities.

In regards to the most important aims of staff development, all three groups have rated teaching skills as important — Non-SA (*mean* = 9.04), followed by BSA (*mean* = 8.58) and WSA (*mean* = 8.31). All three groups have stated that the aim of staff development is to improve qualifications — BSA (*mean* = 8.30), followed by WSA (*mean* = 7.51) and Non-SA (*mean* = 7.35). BSA's (*mean* = 7.30) and WSA's (*mean* = 7.04) concur that the aim of staff development is to enable members of the department to fulfill criteria for promotion, whereas Non-SA's tend to view this quite differently with (*mean* = 5.70).

Implications and conclusion

This research confirms that WSA, BSA and NSA are valid groups in SA academia. There are some interesting policy implications as an equitable Higher Education system for South Africans is established, what might lessen differences between WSAs and BSAs, and will large numbers of NSAs facilitate or hinder this process?

Considering what the differences between these groups suggest certain reflections on both the history and future of South African higher education. . BSAs rate it most highly that teaching experience **should be** an important factor determining the remuneration of academics. In interpreting this we may bear in mind that it was apartheid policy to restrict BSAs to teaching and exclude them from research. In other words, teaching experience was about the only way in which BSAs could accumulate 'academic capital'. This begs the question raised in the introduction; how does one establish redress in a context where, experience and status were unjustly acquired and the ability to gain it inaccurately ascribed?

The finding that teaching experience **actually is** an important factor determining the remuneration of academics, with the mean for BSAs being higher than the other groups, may reflect the situation that most Black respondents were at HBUs where teaching experience is in fact taken into account more than at HWUs. When this finding is considered along with the finding that years of service **should be** an important factor determining the remuneration of academics which has been more highly rated by BSAs than other groups, it appears that experience is equated with years of service. There are two further considerations here. One is that BSAs were legally restricted to certain areas, and because of local languages may have a preference for certain areas much more so than WSAs. Positive and negative views of mobility are influenced by culture, and we need to think through what value years of service should have in academic practice. Obviously, NSAs do not think years of service **should** contribute much to remuneration, yet, in perceiving it as **actually** contributing, their rating is higher than the other two groups.

On the purpose of staff development programmes, BSAs rate this higher than other groups. Perhaps this is because a group that has been historically discriminated against is most in need of what are at least apparently objective criteria – qualifications – by which value and worth is established. This finding relates to the fact that BSAs rate fulfilling the criteria for promotion as an aim for staff development programmes more highly than the other groups.

Considering as aims of staff development programmes qualifications and promotion on the one hand and improving teaching skills on the other raises questions about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and reward. Also, if teaching skills are so highly rated, how are they assessed? And why do NSAs rate them more highly than either SA group?

To what extent can we extrapolate from our findings? We would suggest that the universal nature of academic culture may be less than is generally supposed. More specifically, it may be that whilst academic conceptual development in disciplines may have a transnational or international quality, academic practice is local. Given the increasing internationalization of higher education, it will be worth developing more nuanced pictures of differences in academic practice and values in specific locales.

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