



An Analysis of the Perceptions of Academics regarding the Reward for Excellence in Teaching and Learning versus Excellence in Research through the Lens of Critical Theory

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Abstract

Introduction: This paper focuses on the perceptions of academics with respect to the rewards for teaching and learning compared to the rewards for research and their expressed need for training and development in these areas. Under the pretext of enhancing a knowledge society, educational transformation promotes a polarization between excellence in teaching and learning and excellence in research through a system that favours research. For example, academics who may be good teachers but who are not research active may be seen as incompetent. Through the lens of critical theory, this paper argues that this polarization has created an oppressive hegemonic working environment for academics.

Method: The epistemological approach that was used was two-fold in that a qualitative and a quantitative study were undertaken. The quantitative study involved academics as the target group and included the application of self-administered questionnaires which contained structured and unstructured items. A qualitative study involving interviews with deans and heads of departments was also conducted in order to triangulate the data and obtain a different perspective to the research problem.

Results, discussion and conclusion: Although many of the respondents perceived teaching and learning to be under-rewarded, they did not support the institution's stance on this skewed reward system. Nevertheless, they indicated that they were still committed to pursuing excellence in teaching despite the unbalanced reward system towards research. This sense of "calling" could make them vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. Arguably, when they take on an increasingly heavy workload in the absence of limited resources and lack of rewards for the purpose of pursuing excellence, they are contributing to their own oppression and self-destruction.