



Research Article

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The Impact of Gender on Women's Interest in Taking Leadership Positions in Secondary Schools in Chirumanzu District of Zimbabwe

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Abstract: This study explored the impact of gender on women's advancement in secondary school leadership. This study was prompted by the low visibility of women in secondary schools leadership in Chirumanzu District of Zimbabwe. The Feminist Theory undergirded this study because the intention was to increase women participation in secondary schools leadership. Desktop research was used for data generation. The research's major findings were that cultural and gender factors have a huge effect on the under-representation of women in secondary schools leadership. It was realised that most women preferred to perform family roles to leadership roles in secondary schools and this has resulted in men dominating leadership posts in secondary schools. Women have been seen to be hesitant when it comes to applying for and assuming headship positions such as school heads or deputy heads. The major conclusions of this study are that women's low involvement in secondary schools leadership is caused by gender and cultural factors distressing women. Women are normally conferred less strenuous responsibilities and they prefer to dedicate themselves to their family roles at the expense of executing management roles in secondary schools. The study recommends that government should continue supporting the advancement of women to leadership positions in secondary schools. Women are encouraged to compete for leadership positions so that they attain a gender balance leadership of secondary schools. The government should also use the quota system where some leadership positions are reserved for female teachers who apply for promotion to headship positions in secondary schools.

Keywords: Gender & leadership, Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The study sought to explore the impact of gender on women's interest in taking leadership positions in secondary schools and unpacks the theoretical framework that underpins the study, and within this context, discussed the under-representation of women in secondary school leadership in the Chirumanzu District in Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The study discussed women leadership styles; collaborative, participatory and instructional leadership, transformational and androgynous leadership styles. The last section of the paper is comprised of the conclusion and recommendations.

women occupied lighter work at homes while men performed challenging work. Women under-representation exists because women believe that leadership is masculine role in society.

In patriarchal families, wives went to live with their husbands and lost control of the products of their labour. Men took control of production of goods for the family (Dube, 2016). This suggests that women became under-represented due to this division of roles between men and women. Women's roles were defined to be based in the home, bearing and caring for children. Women were therefore socialised as the property of men.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marxist and Socialist Feminism

This study adopted the theoretical lens informed by the feminist theory, Marxist and socialist feminism. Moyo (2003, p.66) says: "...the origin of gender inequality is based on historical events". According to Engel (1982, p. 80) quoted by Moyo (2003) gender development emanated in the earliest phases of society which he describes as savagery and barbarism. During this time women were discriminated against men at workplaces. Division of labour by sex determined male and female roles. This suggests that

... "Marxist and Socialist feminist educators appear to have less faith in the role of education in social change" (Weiner, 1994 p.72). They see the role of education in society as a forum for sex and class struggle in which patterns of social domination and subordination are reproduced and sustained. Girls are doubly disadvantaged in the society as they experience social inequality and in school, they are accorded lower status than boys (Weiner, 1994, p. 72).

The fact that girls are accorded lower status as compared to their male counterparts led to women

under-representation in educational leadership. This implies that boys were accorded more value and opportunities to access education at school than the girl child. The girl child therefore lagged behind in attaining educational qualifications that could pave her way to leadership posts in secondary schools.

Concerning educational research, Weiner (1994,p.68) says Marxist and socialist feminists are concerned with examining the degree to which education and schooling have been effective in producing sexual inequality, just like the reproduction of class inequality. This implies that they focused on gender and power relationships in educational institutions. The feminist researcher therefore looks at the process by which working-class men and women become working class women and men. Schools therefore play a critical role in exacerbating gender and class inequalities by sending strong messages, encoded in practice, concerning women's inferiority at work. The researcher of this study adopted the Marxist and Socialist feminism because it is relevant to the education system in Zimbabwe. It clearly explains why women are under-represented in secondary school leadership in Chirumanzu District. It outlines class struggle and power struggle between men and women where the women are doubly disadvantaged at work while men are accorded more value at the work place. This results in under-representation of women in educational leadership in secondary schools.

Problem Statement

The problem under investigation is the impact of gender on women's advancement in secondary schools leadership. The problem rests on secondary schools in Chirumanzu District where women are under-represented in secondary schools leadership. Women are failing to strike a balance in participating in secondary schools leadership with their male colleagues.

Aims of the Study

This study aims at alleviating the problems of untiring women under-representation in secondary schools leadership in Chirumanzu District of Zimbabwe.

Guiding Research Question

In which ways do gender impact on women's interest in taking leadership positions in secondary schools leadership?

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was qualitative in nature engrained in interpretivism or ant-positivism philosophy which sought to explore the opinions of the people about the impact of gender on women's interest in taking leadership positions in secondary schools. The researcher adopted the desktop research for gathering

data on the impact of gender on women advancement in secondary schools leadership.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gender Impact on Women's Interest in Taking Leadership Positions in Secondary Schools

Dube (2016); & Coleman (2017) concur that women remain likely to plan careers that include senior roles, and still appear to have less confidence in applying for promotion than their male colleagues. Women are afraid of challenges in big institutions. Sometimes women do not have confidence especially when they are to head males, and also lack of self-esteem (Dube, 2016).

Dube (2016, p. 163) submits that:

Low confidence of women on other women – presented with an opportunity, groups of subordinate women would never support another woman and in a case where they are the majority it is discouraging for prospective management post seekers. Most women lack confidence in themselves and lack boldness to be felt and therefore cannot succeed during interviews.

Wadesango *et al.* (2017, p.244) says low esteem and lack of confidence explain why some women do not apply for school leadership and most of those who did only applied after being encouraged by someone else. Wadesango (2017) concurs with Logan (2003, p.4) who reveals that in some cases women do not apply for promotion posts because they lack confidence to venture into leadership roles. Women under-representation in educational leadership in secondary schools is due to lack of confidence and low esteem by women.

Capper (2016, p. 95) avers that:

As far as I can determine from my work and the work of others, one's biological identification as male or female has very little to do with how people behave and the work they do in school. One's gender identification however, has a tremendous influence on behaviour, perceptions and effectiveness.

This suggests that the biological make up of men and women does not generally count in actual leadership. Differences emerge only in gender socialisation. Wadesango *et al.* (2017, p.244) say gender is socially acquired, in some cases riddled with stereotypes, influences the perceived capabilities and aspirations of individuals. The researcher therefore deduced that due to the way women are socialised, they just assume that they cannot operate in the so called male territories. Greyvestein (1990) say intrinsic barriers are said to manifest as deficiencies and inadequacies inherent in women.

In the survey conducted by Coleman (2017), women heads stated that they have never planned to be head teachers and most of the women heads did not show interest of occupying senior leadership positions. This implies that women lack confidence in themselves, they fear retribution from their fellow women. Women lack confidence in leading men, they were socialised to be subordinate to men in all aspects of life. This contributes immensely to under-representation of women in secondary school leadership. Dube (2016) say women lack the confidence and assertiveness required for a management role. The researcher deduce that women may be reluctant to apply for senior roles and to have lower aspirations and inappropriate expectations, about their capacity to combine family and work successfully.

Generally, it had been the case that, as an upshot of the restrictive time-honored patriarchal society within which Zimbabwean women were acculturated, they were deprived of befitting opportunities (Dube, 2016).

Nziramasanga (1999, p. 177) confers that:

It was submitted that many parents were not keen to send their daughters to school, especially beyond the primary school level, as they attach more importance to the education of their sons than that of their daughters. Sons are generally considered heirs who will perpetuate the family name while daughters were expected to move away upon marriage and promote the well-being of their new marital home. When experiencing financial difficulties, some parents would sacrifice the education of their daughters for the same reasons.

According to the findings of Nziramasanga (1999), girls were not accorded equal opportunities as boys in education. Girls lag behind in terms of qualifications attainment and they could not plan on their career to be leaders at the workplace. This justifies the existence of disparity in accessing leadership position between men and women where men dominate in educational leadership.

Hae & Seung (2013, p. 4) submits that:

Individual factors: the sense of diminished self-efficacy is often shaped by the social context in which they are limited role models and highly gendered professional and stereotypes and notions of leadership. For example, women are less likely to promote themselves; when they are successful, they are more likely to credit the team or circumstance and when they fail, they are more likely to blame themselves.

This suggest that women were found to lack confidence in themselves when occupying leadership positions. They blame themselves if they are not successful and praise the team if they are successful. Women became under-represented in educational leadership due to this social context in which they are limited roles models and highly gendered professional and stereotypes and notions of leadership.

Hae & Seung (2013, p. 4) contends that:

Communication style: another actor that has far reaching implications is difference in communication styles and the fact that women are less likely to negotiate for what they want. When women do assert themselves and negotiate, they are considered less socially attractive, less likable, and less hireable.

This suggests that women were found to have poor communication style as compared to their male counterparts at work. Women found it difficult to negotiate what they want. Women are considered to be less socially attractive, likeable and hireable at the workplace. Women are disadvantaged in terms of their poor communication style; this gives men advantages in attaining leadership positions in education. This justifies why women are under-represented in educational leadership in secondary schools.

Dube (2016, p .162) say:

...lack of requisite qualifications as men continue to advance when women attend to family issues, childbearing etc. And issues of achieving positions based on seniority, most women delayed acquiring higher qualification before affirmative action.

Dube (2016) concurs with Coleman (2017) who found out that in educational set ups, what hinders women mostly for participation is the academic empowerment but to a lesser extent low qualifications and lack of qualifications due to family commitments. Dube (2016, p.162) say it was noted that women who were supposed to be taking up these senior roles delayed acquiring higher qualifications because of the oppressive education system against women. It was established that men had a competitive edge over females in terms of academic achievements because they had relatively less responsibilities at home than females (Coleman 2017). This implies that while women spent time attending to family needs, men would be advancing their education. Men could stand better chances for accessing leadership positions in education as compared to females. Therefore, women became under-represented in educational leadership, specifically in secondary schools in Chirumanzu District.

Wadesango (2017, p. 239) say:

Family attachment was found to be the major reason why women teachers did not apply for school headship positions. Women were found not to be prepared to take up positions away from their husbands and children. In fact, given a chance to choose between career advancement in places away from their family and staying with ones' family, most women appeared to prefer the later.

Wadesango *et al.* (2017) concurs with Dorsey (1996, p.30) who say; "from an early age, daughters are groomed for their marriage roles of wife, mother and food provider...and they are conditioned from an early age to believe that a woman is inferior to a man and that her place is in the home". Wadesang *et al.* (2017, p.239) conducted interview with one participant and found out the following about family attachment:

Most women do not apply for the posts perhaps I will be posted somewhere far away from my family. That is the major reason why I talked to some female teachers who are now qualified to be heads and they are saying they are not eager to take the posts because of the location of the school (Wadesango, 2017, p.239).

The response suggests that preference for staying with one's family discouraged some women from applying for school headship. In the research conducted by Wadesango *et al.* (2017, p.239) one of the interviewee ,included the dimension of Human Immune Virus &Acquired Immune Deficiency syndrome among the reasons advanced by women teachers for not taking up headship posts away from their families. The interviewee was quoted as:

The first reason is family attachment. Women do not want to leave their husbands. Even if both are teachers, the wife will be given a school away from the husband. You hear ladies saying I do not want to apply because I do not want to leave my husband especially these days with Human Immune Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome pandemic. People want to stay with their spouses (Wadesango, 2017, p. 239).

This suggest that women tend to turn down promotion posts associated with geographical mobility in fear of exposing their spouses and themselves to Human Immune Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). Women avoided working far away from their families fearing that their spouses may be tempted to go for other women during their absence and this might lead to contracting of Human Immune Virus and acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The researcher viewed this personal factor as one of the major contributing factor for under-representation of women in educational leadership in secondary schools. Women who are

teaching at the same schools with their husbands may not want to leave them as they go to resume headship positions at stations far away from their husbands. Quite the necessary support from their families and from the education system itself. That is why some of them did not apply for headship posts or if they did, they did not readily accept them (Wadesango *et al.* 2017, p.242).

This suggests that women lack support from their husbands and other family members when they want to apply for headship positions in education. The stands as one of the factors for the persistent under-representation in school leadership positions. Women need to consult their husbands before applying for headship positions. If their husbands do not approve, then women will not apply (Wadesango, 2017).

Bush & Westhuizen (1994) say women are characterised with feminine characteristics which do not enable them to take leadership positions. Dube (2016) concurs with Bush & Westhuizen (1994) who point out that the psychological attributes of women are; non-competitive, informal, highly emotional, tolerant, subjective, soft, gossipy, low-esteemed and caring. Men possess the following psychological attributes; firm, high esteemed, highly regulated, objective, firm, competitive, formal and hard-hearted. (Harris, 1991, p.37). According to Bush & Westhuizen (1994); & Harris (1994) women were found out as lacking relevant leadership qualities as compared with their male counterparts. Males were viewed to possess relevant attributes for leadership. This implies that those who recruited and promoted teachers viewed women as not suitable for occupying leadership positions in all aspects of life and therefore women were discriminated or excluded for promotion.

Some researchers found out women's leadership styles that are highly acceptable for organizational effectiveness at workplace. Dodo & Mwale (2017) say work of female leadership style tend to conclude that "women are better educational leaders" than men. Female leadership in Greek was interpreted more positively than that of men. Women lead more flexibly, intuitively, and holistically (Lyman *et al.*, 2009). Dodo & Mwale (2017) stated as follows: collaborative, participative and instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and androgynous leadership.

Collaborative, Participative, and Instructional Leadership

Women prefer teamwork, and tend to be more accessible, caring and supportive. They emphasise student learning through instructional leadership (Dodo & Mwale, 2017). Lyman *et al.* (2009) concur with Coleman (2009) who say women employ a collaborative and participative leadership styles. When adopting this style women encourage inclusiveness and use collaborative decision making. (Coleman, 2009).

Noddings (1984) cited in Coleman (2003) says it could be argued that women's stereotype as "nurturing, caring and people orientated" might account for it. Dodo & Mwale (2017, p. 14) argue that it may be "the attitudinal bias against female leaders that arises from the incongruity of the female gender role and many leader roles" that renders democracy and participatory styles more favourable to women than men. This personal factor of women suggests that women are good leaders if they are awarded the opportunity to lead. The researcher should fill in the temporal knowledge gap and population in his study as the research studies were conducted some years ago in different geographical areas to Chirumanzu District. Female gender roles are associated with communal behaviours such as nurturing, supporting others and being helpful. In contrast, leadership roles have been associated with argentic characteristics such as "assertiveness, ambition, competing for attention, and making problem-focused suggestions. Incongruity appears when women leaders act in contradiction to their gender roles stereotypes or typical leader roles. Consequently, their behaviours may be evaluated negatively due to their subordinates' prejudice (Dodo & Mwale, 2017).

This suggests that the stereotypes for women make them adopt the participatory leadership style for them to be accepted by their subordinates at work. Women may obtain more self-confidence resulting from their collaborative decisions which are in accordance with their subordinates' expectations (Dodo & Mwale, 2017). The researcher found out from participants sampled for the study in Chirumanzu District their views and experience on the use of participative leadership style in leading secondary schools.

Transformational Leadership

There are researchers who found out that women's leadership styles are superior to men's which is associated with transformational leadership (Dodo & Mwale, 2017).

Kauppi (2019, p. 231) submitted that: Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders. Enacted in its authentic form, transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity for the organisation; being a role model for followers that inspires them; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so

the leader can align followers with tasks that optimise their performance.

The adoption of such type of leadership seems to be highly recommended for attaining organisational effectiveness. The researcher therefore deduced that female leaders can be effective leaders. This defeats the idea that women do not possess relevant personal attribute for taking up leadership positions. The leadership is consultative and democratic, this implies that women can lead effectively as compared with their male counterparts.

Androgynous leadership

The debate on leadership styles is further complicated by the concept of androgynous leadership, which combines both masculine and feminine styles (Dube, 2016). Coleman (2010) concurs with Davis & Johanson (2005) claim that good leaders have both masculine and feminine characteristics available to them and can select the most appropriate for a particular situation. A school leadership and management that draws on behaviours that are exclusive property of neither men nor women (Hall, 1999). Interestingly, the Singaporean female principals tended to choose more "masculine" attributes of leadership than their English counterparts (Coleman, 2010). This suggests that women leaders can collaborate masculinity and feminine in leadership, they consider both masculine and feminine leadership styles. Debate on female leadership style is oncoming, but the argument that women can lead at least as well as men is persuasive. With regard to androgyny, whilst it is inescapable that leadership style is influenced by gender, what forces women to cross their stereotype boundaries to adopt a more masculine style? (Dube, 2016).

This suggests that leadership practice is strongly influenced by culture. Women by their nature regardless of cultural stereotypical labels can effectively lead school. It is against this back drop the researcher find out leadership styles chosen by women heads and deputy heads in dealing with masculine and feminine leadership roles in secondary schools. The research focused on the impact of under-representation of women in educational leadership due leadership styles they adopt in secondary schools.

It was against this backdrop, personal factors affecting women for accessing leadership positions, the researcher found out other personal factors affecting women for filling the temporal gap, geographical gap and sample gaps. The researcher found personal factors affecting women's access into leadership in secondary schools in the contemporary education system.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the paper unpacks the impact of gender on women's interest in taking leadership positions in secondary schools. The researcher

concludes that gender impact negatively on women's advancement secondary schools leadership. Women are under-represented in secondary schools leadership due to gender roles of women at home or in their families as defined by the culture. Most societies on the global village are patriarchal so women are accorded downgraded roles and they are subordinate to men. The paper also submits that women are capable of executing effective leadership if they are promoted in secondary schools. Women can perform better than their male colleagues as school administrators in secondary schools. Women lose interest in taking leadership positions in secondary schools due to their sex roles.

Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusion, a number of recommendations were crafted. The study enquired into the under-representation of women educational leadership in secondary schools. It offered the impact of gender on women's interest in taking leadership positions in secondary schools. The policy makers and Human Resources Managers in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should contemplate the factors when promoting teachers to headship positions in secondary schools so as attain gender equivalence.

To increase women representation in secondary schools leadership and address gender disparity. It is recommended that:

- The government should inspire female teachers by affording them the support they need and by creating an enabling environment for their progression to headship positions in secondary schools. Government and other stakeholders should incorporate patriarchal concerns in all its gender parity intrusion programmes.
- Inclusion of gender studies in primary, secondary and tertiary curricula to freeze gender stereotyping that bar women from taking up headship positions and to socialise women to take up governance positions in both private and public sectors.
- Government to expedite transfer of husbands to secondary schools where their wives are deployed as leaders.
- Sensitise women in secondary schools about equal rights at workplaces and to build confidence so that they cultivate interest in captivating headship posts in secondary schools through workshops, seminars and print media.
- Women should view themselves as capable of performing leadership duties in secondary schools just like their male counterparts. They should be assertive enough to use their qualifications and experience to apply for headship positions in secondary schools.
- Female heads in secondary schools who encounter great challenges with handling tough tasks should delegate to male co-workers who can handle such masculine tasks.

- Government should enforce the quota system in which leadership positions that arise in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for secondary school deputy heads and heads are rationed equally between women and men.
- Government to continue pressing for gender equality and equity in work places and communities so that women and men are fairly appointed to leadership positions in both private and public sectors.
- Government to continue reviewing the promotion criteria used by the Public Service Commission in the promotion of teachers so that it is done equitably, regardless of gender. This demystifies the gender stereotype that women are promoted through the use of their bottom powers, and favoritism practices.
- The government to review the gender policies so that women involvement in educational leadership surges up to where gender equivalence is realised in secondary schools.
- The government to deploy women as heads or deputy heads in secondary schools that are near their home area or their husbands' working place to encourage women to take up leadership positions.
- The Human Resources Directors in the Public Service Commission should ensure that advertisements for secondary school leadership contain clauses that encourage women to apply for the headship positions.

GENDER

Wood (2019, p. 3) defines gender as:

Either of the two sexes (male or female). It refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, boy or girl, as well as relationship with each other.

LEADERSHIP

Hannagan (2008, p.40) view leadership as:

...setting direction for others to move forward to future and motivate them to reach the set goals by certain way of functioning or acting. Great leaders do not just lead and say where to go, they have to participate in it themselves as well. Leaders need to act on their visions, as they are easily judged by their action, not by what they say. Leaders should have responsibility and authority, and they must have vision for the future and be confident enough to lead everyone there.

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