

Factors that Hinder Females from Accessing Senior Leadership Positions in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Solwezi District, Zambia.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the factors that hinder females from accessing senior leadership roles in selected public secondary schools in Solwezi district. To achieve the research purpose, a qualitative approach was employed in order to undertake a direct exploration, analysis and interpretation anchored on a narrative research design. The study revealed that some women could not assume senior job titles owing to a low level of academic qualifications as well as a lack of administrative prowess coupled with inexperience. The study also revealed that some women fail to ascend to senior positions on account of endocentric patriarchal ideology which disregards the rights of women. The study therefore concluded that government authorities should construct inclusive identities with incentives that motivate different groups to embrace collective governance in senior leadership positions; this should be based on merit regardless of gender. The researchers recommend that societal and customary norms, beliefs and culture that prevent females from occupying decision-making positions should be discouraged.

Keywords: female representation, gender, leadership, secondary school, senior leadership position.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of gender differentiation and leadership is a heated topic of interest not only at national level, but also the regional and global levels. Mention can be made at the outset that owing to the intense debate about who reigns supreme – males or females – and also with regard to participation and work opportunities, scholarly work has been extensively advanced by various scholars expressing different problematic perspectives at different levels of society within the Zambian setting. The current paper focuses on the question of stereotyped and observable inequalities in female leadership roles. The blight of more males holding positions of influence at almost all levels of society is no longer a disputable proposition as overwhelming evidence to this effect abounds. For instance, the political landscape in Zambia and many other African countries may arguably be said to prohibit females from being at the helm of national leadership. Unfortunately, in many societies, leadership is construed as masculine (Visser, 2011). This can clearly be seen through the eyes of Achebe (1958) in his book, *Things Fall Apart*, in which women cannot question a man's actions nor can they step the ground where men sit without being viewed negatively. In this milieu, women are expected to perform household duties relating to child rearing and other domestic functions. As such, working in a formal institution is more often than not perceived as an affront to the national and global perspective, leading to very few females filling influential leadership positions.

Background to the Study

An appropriated divide would appear to exist between men and women, with the former seemingly dominating the latter in almost all aspects of life. Unfortunately, this dominance thwarts the rights and power of womanhood. Such trends in dominance manifest even in the way both men and women respond to

a male leader's name when asked to describe something about such names. For instance, names such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Barrack Obama, among others, are dotted all over the world, having hospitals or schools named after them. In sharp contrast, female names are generally neglected. Even though history has recorded certain women such as Joan of Arc, Marie Curie, Simone de Beauvoir and Mother Theresa as important figures, they attract little such attention, and less interest is expressed. It should be noted that the most common way by which people are categorised, stereotyped and sorted is based on gender (Eagly & Karau, 2002). According to Hentschel et al. (2019), gender stereotypes were found to be no different in instrumental competence, independence and sociability self-ratings for men and women. Further, gender stereotypes are also evident in self-characterisations, with female raters rating themselves as less agentic than male raters and male raters rating themselves as less communal than female raters, although there were some exceptions.

Statement of the Problem

Zambia's Ministry of Education (MOE) prides itself on having more female employees in classrooms but ironically fewer in leadership positions (Kelly et al., 2017). Mosala agrees with Kelly and provocatively states: "When men are oppressed, it's a tragedy, when women are oppressed, it's tradition." These data present the picture that women representation in leadership roles in Zambia, and probably elsewhere, is still lamentably low and thus remains a problem worth investigating. Therefore, the current research undertook to explore factors which prevent women from ascending to positions of influence in selected public secondary schools in Solwezi District.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to explore the factors that hinder females from accessing senior leadership positions in selected public secondary schools in Solwezi district.

Theoretical Framework

The arguments advanced in this study are anchored on transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory. These have been selected as they attempt to combine thought and application. They also serve to highlight the relationship between key factors that hinder female access to senior leadership positions such as gender stereotyping, patriarchy-oriented factors and prejudice in secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors that Hinder Females from Accessing Senior Leadership Positions

Chabaya et al. (2009), in his study involving 13 female heads of schools in Zimbabwe, observed that the factors that prevent female teachers from being promoted to senior leadership positions lay within themselves as they lacked confidence and perceived themselves as not being suitable for promotion. Further Bubshait (2012), Mathipa and Tsoka (2001) and Moorosi (2010) contended that women lack the confidence to aspire to leadership positions. Other researchers (Watson, Hatton, Squires & Soliman, 1991; Mbepera, 2015), observed that female teachers had a higher level of satisfaction with their teaching than their male counterparts. They further observed that the women's priority was to put extra energy into their work of classroom teaching rather than eyeing higher positions in the ministry. Another study revealed that women in some work organisations put less effort into work than men (Bhalalusesa, 2003). Other researchers, such as Stevens et al (1978) contended that women were less committed to their work. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2013) added that young employees were less devoted to work than older ones. As regards women and leadership roles, Gaus (2011) commented that family issues in Indonesia were given first priority by female teachers rather than their career. Commenting on what happens in women and leadership in other contexts,

Bubshait (2012), Chabaya et al. (2009) and Mbepera (2015) concluded that the rejection of leadership posts by some women may be attributed to the many family tasks that deprive them of leadership experience. The other reason that hinders females from accessing senior leadership positions in secondary schools has been attributed to lack of support from the family, society and institutions (Bhalalusesa & Mboya, 2003; Chabaya et al., 2009). Sperandio (2011) reported that females had very little family support if they opted to seek senior leadership positions.

Other researchers contend that the factors that hinder females' access to senior leadership positions have a strong relationship with gender, leadership and society, because leadership is a culturally bound practice (Dimmock & Walker, 2006). That is, the behaviour of males and females is shaped by the culture in a society which ascribes roles for men and women. This entails that society classifies male and female roles, which in turn creates opportunities for men and women to have access to different opportunities such as involvement in leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Mbepera, 2015). These roles ascribed by society control females, while males are less controlled (Dimmock & Walker, 2006). Females are discouraged from accessing senior leadership positions and so obstacles are placed in their way by society because of the culture that hinders women from becoming leaders. These hurdles are the consequence of outdated beliefs about female roles (Onsongo, 2004). Society stereotypes females from a cultural perspective and assumes that the highest decision-making positions were for males (Onsongo, 2004). Cubillo and Brown (2003) added that stereotypes and social and cultural expectations devalue women. Nevertheless, society tends to classify females as inferior and as being supposed to take low posts, implying that they are incapable of accessing senior leadership positions in schools (Amondi, 2011). According to these studies, the factors that hinder female access to senior leadership positions in secondary schools have been a concern for various organisations particularly the governments of different countries.

Although many studies have shown a small amount of growth in the proportion of women occupying positions in middle management, there is still clear evidence that a gender gap exists in senior positions (De Cabo et al., 2019). This study hopes to bridge the gap in the literature.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach owing to the exploratory nature of the research. Njobvu and Simuyaba (2020) describe a qualitative approach as a systematic subjective approach that is used to describe life experiences and situations to give them meaning. This study utilised a narrative research design with the intention of conducting a "direct exploration, analysis, and interpretation of a particular phenomenon emphasizing the richness, breath, and depth investigation as interpreted by participants in detail (Creswell, 2009). With narrative research design therefore, the researchers were able to tap into the challenges regarding female access to senior leadership positions by applying the principle of 'epoche', their views thereby taking the information as it was reported by the participants verbatim.

Sampling Techniques

The study used purposive sampling techniques to select both the participants and the schools. Manion and Morisson (2007) and Simuyaba (2022) agree that in purposive sampling, a researcher uses his or her own judgement or intelligence to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristic being thought to meet the researcher's requirements. In view of this, a purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study.

Sample Size

The study comprised 30 research participants, with one District Education Board Secretary (DEBS), three education standard officers, three PTA chairpersons, three head teachers, three deputy head teachers, ten

female teachers and seven male teachers making up the total sample size.

Data Collection Tools and Data Analysis

The instruments used to collect primary data were interview guides and focus group discussion guides, with the former being used for the semi-structured interviews and the latter being used for the focus groups. Interviews included face-to-face verbal communication where the researcher asked another person the intended questions in order to obtain information (Kombo & Tromp, 2014). Since data were obtained through qualitative approaches, qualitative thematic analysis was used for data analysis. Thematic data analysis is used when interpreting responses to open-ended questions, as well as data obtained from histories or conversations (Kapembwa, Simuyaba, Njobvu, Muleya and Simui, 2020). As the data were interpreted, particular themes related to the primary concerns or objectives of the study were identified.

Trustworthiness

The acceptability of the study in terms of it being a true and unique academic product was assessed using Guba's four trustworthy strategy which are ideal for all qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Gunawa, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

The study embraced a range of ethical considerations before the researchers started collecting data. A letter granting permission for conducting the research was obtained from the DEBS and verbal permission was granted by school managers after ideal protocols were established. In this research, none of the participants were allowed to participate in the research without their consent. Further, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured by not revealing the participants' names or personal details.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Findings for this study are presented according to the sub-categories formulated in relation to the objectives and the emerging themes.

Individual Factors

The first objective intended to ascertain the factors that hinder females from accessing senior leadership positions in secondary schools in the Solwezi district. The findings showed that lack of administrative experience was one of the individual factors that hinder females from accessing senior leadership positions in the district. During the interview, one male participant stated that:

The lack of administrative experience to be recruited, appointed and promoted to senior leadership positions, followed by publications and personal attributes were the main issues that affected participation in leadership positions.

However, one the female participants felt that:

Administrative experience requirement was seen to be the main hindrance since men dominantly occupied senior leadership positions in secondary schools. This shows that it is within ourselves, because women make us feel inferior.

It was further established that a lack of confidence hinders female access to senior leadership positions. One

of the participants revealed as follows:

The factors that prevent female teachers from being promoted to senior leadership positions were within themselves as they lacked confidence and they perceived themselves as not being suitable for promotion.

The findings of the study further revealed that female teachers experienced satisfaction with their teaching and their career. This was alluded to by some male participants, who mentioned that:

Yes, satisfaction with their teaching and career hindered females from accessing senior leadership positions. Female teachers have a higher level of satisfaction with their teaching than us (males), and that their priority is to put extra energy into their work, and that they were not interested in leadership positions.

It was further established that female teachers' lack of commitment to work had hindered female access to senior leadership positions. One participant had the following remark:

Most of us (women) put in less effort into work than men.

Females' lack of commitment to work and interest in accessing senior leadership positions is also associated with the benefits associated with the posts.

Another participant pointed out yet another factor that hinders female access to senior leadership positions. This involves females rejecting posts when appointed and is reflected in the following remarks by one of the male leaders:

Female teachers reject senior posts due to their low risk-taking propensity. It was stated that many family tasks also deprive them of leadership experience because family issues are given first priority by female teachers rather than their career. Female teachers also reject posts due to poor working environments in rural secondary schools. Most female teachers prefer working in urban areas unlike the male teachers who would not mind.

Societal Factors

The study found that married female teachers were facing issues related to gender, leadership and society that hindered their access to senior leadership positions. One of the female participants had this to say:

With our society, most of us married female teachers need to seek permission from our husbands to advance our education or career or even accept a promotion. If he is not of the idea, I cannot accept that promotion, this is because leadership is a culturally-bound practice and the roles ascribed by society control females, while males are less controlled.

It is clear from the above findings that social stereotypes are one of the factors that hinder females from accessing senior leadership positions. One participant had the following to say:

Yes, society and culture like pulling women down. Society stereotypes; social and cultural expectations devalue women. It is because of society, culture and tradition that the females are not trusted to lead organisations or lead schools. This has made female teachers inferior.

However, endocentric patriarchal ideology was considered to be a factor that denies females access to senior leadership positions. Endocentric patriarchal ideology characterises the privileges given to men over women. One male participant said in this regard:

Placing females to lead males was contrary to traditional norms and culture which says females were helpers

and as such they need to look after the families at home while men take on the role of searching for food and leading the family.

The above finding can be supported by socialisation factors which also hinder female access to senior leadership positions. A few male participants made remarks in this regard. In particular one of them stated:

Regardless of how educated a female teacher may be, her duty is to be a mother, submissive, and take care of those issues that require her to use her emotions. The males have been socialised to be strong, independent, breadwinners, household decision-makers and executives.

The above discussion supports the findings based on the societal factors that hinder females from accessing leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Solwezi district.

Organisational Factors

Regarding the organisational factors, the study established gender bias in terms of promotion. One female participant mentioned the following in this regard:

There were few chances and opportunities given to females to gain the experience required to move forward. More males are considered for appointments and promotions.

Among the other factors that hinder female access to senior leadership positions are prejudices and stereotypical gender expectations. The study established that prejudice is an organisational factor that hinders female access to senior leadership positions. One participant had the following to say in this regard:

The influencing perceptions of the general characteristics of men and women, gender stereotypes indicate the appropriate traits and behaviours they should have. Even in a workplace environment, there are certain things that are considered to be for men and not women. It is still believed that lack of encouragement for female from male managers hinders their access to senior leadership positions. The prevalence of gender stereotyping and the incidence of sexual harassment also remain as major threat to females especially those entering and remaining in senior leadership positions.

The evidence for the above statement is clear: gender differences hinder females' access to senior leadership positions. One female participant had the following to say:

Gender differences hinder our access to senior leadership positions. People have different beliefs that males and females have different leadership-related traits. It is because of this that there is reduced presence of the females in higher decision-making and senior leadership positions.

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ALLOW ACCESS BY FEMALES TO SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

It was established that gender diversity can provide better organisational goals. One participant mentioned that:

It is important for governments to establish policies to persuade the education sector of the importance of improving career development opportunities for the female counterparts. There is need to encourage diversity in the education sectors including schools.

A male participant also suggested:

Formulation and implementing supportive policies around parental leave, including offering paternity leave

to both genders can share caregiving responsibilities. Flexible, family-friendly arrangements can also enable more females in leadership positions. Furthermore, effort must be focused on creating inclusive work cultures and combating unconscious biases that hold females back and hence fail to ascend to senior positions in schools.

Furthermore, the study found that the establishment of policies on recruitment would be helpful in assisting females to access senior leadership positions. One participant gave the following remark:

It would be a good idea if policies are put in place and implemented. Those would help to recruit female counterparts on basis of their educational achievements. This should be changed by having legitimate requirements and equal opportunities policies. They can also make the recruitment and promotion processes transparent in order to provide equal chances for all qualified employees applying for vacancies.

The study established that females can access senior leadership positions if society discourages the societal and customary norms and beliefs that prevent females from occupying decision-making positions. For this reason many female teachers fail to access senior leadership positions. Fifteen participants that suggested sentiments depicting the following: 'The prejudice against the female should be eliminated; this would be done by adoption of structural measures. It is important to incorporate gender perspective at different levels of the educational system, in the media and in the workplace'. This would reduce prejudice and gender stereotype. This will help to change the attitudes through challenging the stereotypes and encouraging more females to access senior leadership positions.

Regarding strategies, the study established that career advancement would help females to access senior leadership positions. One participant had the following to say:

Female teachers should be provided with adequate training to improve and develop their competencies in order for them to easily access senior leadership positions based on merit. Discrimination should be avoided when institutions are providing different levels of training to male and female.

One female participant had the following to say in this regard:

There is need to provide leadership support such as mentoring of female teachers to take up senior positions in schools ... there must be deliberate policies to ensure that women have equal opportunity to gain the skills, knowledge, experience and mentorship which is required to rise to senior leadership positions.

Another female participant also suggested the following:

Leaders in governments, especially in the education sector must take immediate action to address the systemic causes of gender inequality and empower more females to hold senior leadership roles in school administration.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Factors that hinder females' access to senior leadership positions at selected secondary schools in Solwezi district

Despite the international campaigns for gender equality and equity in higher education institutions, studies conducted in several countries continue to show that women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions in universities. Women who seek leadership positions face barriers and often give up because they become overwhelmed in dealing with obvious barriers (Newman, 2016). According to Cunningham (2019), the biggest stumbling block to seeing more women in senior leadership roles in education is unconscious

bias. Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain people that form outside of conscious awareness. Unconscious bias, according to this study, is far more prevalent than conscious bias and is often incompatible with one's own conscious values.

In line with the views of the participants above, Mbepera (2017) suggested that females' ability to take on leadership, as well as the extent to which female representation in senior leadership positions in secondary schools, tends to display a distinct leadership style that shapes how they run the affairs of their teams. However, according to the findings of this study, the majority of the participants stated that female teachers were only to a low extent involved in senior leadership positions in secondary school administration. Additionally, some participants stated that to a limited extent female teachers were involved in senior leadership positions. They indicated that females' under-representation in these positions was partly the result of family commitments and slow professional development on their part, while other participants suggested that females were assigned by Zambian society to take on the weight of the overall domestic and childcare arrangements, as well as developing themselves professionally, but they only took on the latter roles to a limited extent (Beši?, 2022). Cultural aspects emerged as factors that influence the kind of positions women hold in leadership.

In patriarchal societies like Tanzania (Bhalalusesa & Mboya, 2003; Mbepera, 2017, women are viewed as inferior, resulting in discrimination when accessing various opportunities regardless of their experiences and qualifications. This therefore implies that cultural practices, patriarchal socialisation and religious beliefs promote the oppression and marginalisation of females by both society and organisations in most parts of the world (Govinden, 2008). An endocentric patriarchal ideology is an orientation that characterises the thinking of society based on its cultural norms. It describes or characterises a system, society or social organisation in which men are generally higher up in the hierarchy, thus constructing relations of domination of men over women. Accordingly, men use power to their advantage, dominating in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. Endocentric patriarchal ideology characterises the privileges given to men over women.

Madrid et al. (2012) highlighted the practice where female teachers fail to be promoted to leadership roles based on ethnicity, nepotism, sex and religion, rather than on academic qualifications. These practices seem to have negatively affected women's representation in senior leadership positions and perpetuate the discrimination of females. Thus, Gaus (2011) stressed that the interplay that exists between the cultural values and traditional stereotypes that undervalue women still exists in many societies. In this way, the chances of women becoming leaders in senior positions are continually inhibited, as men who normally dominate appointment committees favour and support themselves (Kagoda & Sperandio, 2009). Ethnicity has a strong influence on community status relations. However, lack of networking and ethnicity hinder females from getting jobs and occupying senior leadership positions (Kelly, 2016). Ethnicity can be understood as the identification of a group of people resulting from cultural ties and networking. It is also active interaction with others to exchange information and develop professional and social contacts. The marginalisation of poor females and people from different cultural backgrounds and race contributes to discrimination when it comes to senior leadership positions. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the creation of networks could enhance active the political participation, economic emancipation and social upliftment of females. This could increase the females in senior leadership positions. This view was supported by a response from one female teacher participant who stated that the factors which contribute to women's low participation in leadership positions may be categorised as societal, institutional (organisational) and individual factors (Yemenu, 2020; Bishu, 2022). It was observed that

women's career advancements are not affected by one factor alone but by a combination of different factors. Of these factors the current study found that three factors (institutional, sociocultural and individual) in particular had contributed to the low participation of women in leadership positions.

Other researchers have highlighted different factors affecting female representation in senior leadership positions. Hlatywayo et al. (2014) stated that lack of support from society and the institutional context are some of the causes of the under-representation of and the lack of career progress by women in school leadership positions. Eshete (2003) indicated that the reasons for women's low representation in higher education are of course many and complex (Eshete, 2003; Mushibwe & Simuka, 2021). Some are direct reflections of the personal, social and economic factors. Others are related to the structural, administrative and management structures of the institutions that may also become crucial points for intervention. The highlighted factors hindering the full participation of women in high-level leadership positions were also cited by participants in Solwezi district.

Possible Strategies for Females to Access Senior Leadership Positions

This section discusses literature related to possible strategies for female access to senior leadership positions at secondary school level. Commenting on a related subject, Voicila et al. (2018) argued that understanding the types of barrier that exist within organisations and the impact of these can help inform strategic directions and advancement of talent. In the long run, this may help manage unconscious bias in thinking when attempting to create a fair and equitable workplace.

Madziyire and Mapolisa (2012) revealed that gender sensitisation programmes led by many parents in Zimbabwe helped to improve access to education for both boys and girls. Thus, in Zimbabwe, women with higher educational and professional qualifications were allowed to compete for senior positions. It was, however, found that females were occupying fewer challenging jobs in terms of management and decision-making in organisations in both the private and the public sectors. These findings resonate well with the findings of this study in that the female teachers in Solwezi district were found to be occupying fewer challenging positions. The most common leadership position held by female leaders in this district were heads of department and section heads. Moran and Walker (2019) suggested that leaders should encourage those in charge of hiring and promoting personnel to let go of the limiting beliefs pertaining to women in leadership roles. This can be achieved by educating leaders and by discussing success stories, reading books written by successful women and even attending entrepreneurial summits for women.

In the current study, the surveyed participants were asked whether they had any suggestions for how the appointment process should be done, with the majority making suggestions in this regard. Following the same argument, one male participant had this to say:

Placing females to lead males was contrary to traditional norms and culture which says females were helpers and as such need to look after the families at home while men take on searching for food and leading the family.

In a related study conducted in other contexts, Fernandez and Campero (2017) found that plans for mind-set shifts regarding the treatment of women at the organisational level were critical and hard to implement. The same study recommended that organisations should set clear expectations for the culture, values, beliefs, behaviours, and the roles and the career paths of its employees based on their gender. It is clear from the findings of this study that in changing the mind set of an organisation in respect to its expectations of gender

roles there has to be an organisational appetite for having females in senior leadership positions.

The findings of this study recommend strategies that discourage societal and customary norms and beliefs that prevent females from occupying decision-making positions. For example, some participants suggested that there was a need to develop policies, strategies and legislation to enhance female participation in decision-making at secondary schools. Other participants indicated that there was a need to encourage females to take up positions of leadership on merit and through competition with male counterparts, while still others proposed the element of training and appointing more qualified females on merit to senior positions. It was also recommended that gender balancing strategies should be developed and implemented for application by appointment committees to enhance female access to senior leadership positions.

In line with the above findings, Forbes (2018) suggested that there was a need to formulate and implement techniques that would include providing prospective women leaders with mentors, and utilising sponsors, role models and networking. Such strategies would enable women to obtain advice and moral support and would also serve as a means for providing constructive ways of dealing with frustration, sharing feelings about their work and giving encouragement. In line with the findings of Forbes (2018) above, one male participant in the current study also suggested the need to formulate “and implement supportive policies that were flexible, which could enable more females in leadership positions in Solwezi district”. The participants further recommended that an effort should be made to create inclusive work cultures and strategies meant to combat the unconscious biases that hold females back and result in them failing to ascend to senior position in schools.

In a related study, Meneghello (2021) mentioned that one of the strategies was to develop gender responsive budgets, with tools to analyse governmental budgets from the perspective of gender equality and the fulfilment of women’s rights. It was further recommended that these budgets should analyse the gender-differential impact of revenue-generation and allocation of national country budgets and development assistance, and ensure representation of women on financial management committees and steering groups. This, in the long run, would support leadership positions at the grassroots level and schools in particular.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study sought to document the factors that hinder female access to senior leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Solwezi district, Zambia. The researcher relied on the following objectives: to establish whether the individual factors affect female representation in senior leadership positions, to determine whether societal factors hinder female access to senior leadership positions, and to establish the strategies employed for females to access senior leadership positions. The study observed and concluded that gender stereotypes and discrimination based on traditional norms and culture were the major factors at play that marginalised females and characterised them as homemakers (helpers) and there was a perception that when in senior leadership positions, women were disrespectful to men. Therefore, the study could contribute by encouraging females to have smaller families and to share family responsibilities equally with their spouses in order to create ample time for their career progression and have access to senior leadership positions at secondary school level in Solwezi district. In this way, the gender gap could be reduced, allowing more females to access senior administrative positions at secondary schools.

Recommendations

From the conclusions arrived at and the revelations that there were problems causing gender gaps in females accessing senior leadership positions at secondary school levels in Solwezi district, the researchers wish to make the following recommendations:

- Discourage societal and customary norms, beliefs and culture that seem to prevent females from occupying senior decision-making positions.
- Develop policies, strategies and legislation to enhance female participation in decision-making at secondary schools.
- Encourage females to be trained and appointed to senior leadership positions on merit and through competition with male counterparts.
- Develop and implement gender balancing strategies in appointment and decision-making committees, ensuring a 50/50 balance of female and male professional administrators.

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