Women In Higher Education Leadership Positions in Zimbabwe: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities.

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ABSTRACT

The study set to analyse challenges faced by women in their higher education leadership. Since the beginning of history, women have always been denied equal opportunities in terms of access to leadership opportunities. Research has shown that women have no lesser capabilities in terms of leadership qualities as compared to men. Some authors have even argued that women actually are more critical in the execution of their leadership duties as compared to men. The inequality in access to leadership roles has not left the higher education sector, in Zimbabwe. In this article we argue that women in leadership face multiple challenges in their daily operations. Further, the opportunities that are available for leadership of women in higher education in Zimbabwe are also explored. We conclude that women should be accorded equal opportunities in leadership positions. We also recommend that strategies should be set up for developmental programs for women in leadership positions.

Consequently the aim of this systematic review is to assess the challenges faced by women who are holding leadership positions in higher education in higher education. The search is conducted through Scopus and Web of Science data bases yielding several articles that meet the inclusion criteria. The systematic literature review which is based on a qualitative analysis of several articles is based on the following research questions:

- What if at all are the challenges facing women in leadership?
- What are the common women leadership styles in higher education?
- What if at all are the structural, agential and cultural barriers to advancement to leadership positions.

Key words: Women in leadership, higher education, challenges, cultural, structural, gender.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of women in higher education plays a significant role in building the human capital and the overall socio-cultural, economic development of a country to make it sustainable (Shaukat & Pell, 2015: 101). However, globally, women and men in higher education are largely placed differently, with different access to leadership and hence to influencing meanings, discourses and practices (Marshall, 2007 in Morley, 2013: 15). However, fifty percent (50%) of the population is women, so they need equal opportunities in employment in higher educational institutions. (Irum, Bhatti & Munshi, 2015:175). It is important to note that women have great potential in bringing transformative change to higher education. While numbers of women in leadership are increasing in some countries, it is disputed that women are still under-represented in senior leadership positions (Morley, 2013: 15). Women are deprived of their due share and empowerment in the educational sector, sometimes being treated poorly and often being victims of sexual and verbal

harassment during working and studies (Irum, Bhatti & Munshi, 2015:175). Higher education leadership is not a simple process. It requires multiple strategies and abilities, whether assumed by men or women. Education systems are ever changing and these changes demand for visionary school leaders who understand that its culture is rigid, inhibiting and progressive. A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) reported (2000) that globally, women were grossly underrepresented in education management with men out numbering women at about five to one at middle management level. Women on the other hand have limited ambitions, they lack confidence in themselves and their work is affected by discontinuity in the work place (Abu-Khdair, 2012). Among the concerns of the UNFEM and UNICEF (2002) were the elimination of all forms of prejudice and discrimination against women especially in assuming leadership positions in preservation of the woman's rights and her role in the inclusive development. In response to the concerns of UNFEM and UNICEF, there has been a considerable expansion in the role of women in school leadership. Prior to these developments, the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 also marked radical changes towards achieving gender equity. The government alluded to several national and international gender declarations and conventions. These include but not limited to: 1965 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD):the 1979 United Nations Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) (Shava & Ndebele) Responding to the conventions, several policy initiatives were put in place in Zimbabwe, for example Affirmative Action Policy of 1992, Public Service Commission Circular No 11 of 1992; Public Service Commission Circular No 22 of 1996; Public Service Commission Circular No 1 of 1997, and the National Gender Policy of 2004 (Shava & Ndebele 2014). In all these policy and circular initiatives, the key issues were on the elimination of negative economic, social, political cultural and structural practices that impede equality and equity of sexes and the promotion of equal opportunities for both men and women in leadership positions. Despite the considerable expansion and promotion of women to leadership position the review of literature established that, women are facing a different reality from their male counterparts due to various structural and cultural factors that impede their effectiveness as leaders

Conceptual review of women leadership

Leadership has been part of human experience since people formed groups to survive threats from the environment, dangerous animals, other groups of people, work cooperatively to achieve goals beyond the abilities of individuals and create families and various social groups to achieve affiliative needs (Eklund, Barry & Glunberg, 2017, p.129). Leadership has continued to evolve and is an essential part of the operation of organisations today. Leadership is closely related to management, both being indispensable in the operation of higher education institutions. Leadership is the ability to direct others to complete specific tasks (Terry 2012). According to Angezo (2011), cited in Gandolfi and Stone (2017), a leader can be defined as one who has abilities, skills and talents that enable them to equip, influence and coordinated followers to accomplish organisational goals. These definitions do not discriminate anyone in terms of gender or any qualifications to become a leader.

For the optimisation of effectiveness of leadership, gender is one variable and both men and women must be leaders (Eklund, Barry & Glunberg, 2017:129). Gender refers to the socially constructed behaviours and physiological characteristics that define men and women. Gender is determinant to how people think about themselves, are thought by others, and act in various situations. It is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to different roles, responsibilities, limitations and experiences. While it is natural that sex is linked to gender stereotypes during growth of human beings, it is mistakenly believed that women have less leadership qualities than men. Several movements have therefore manoeuvred to empower women in education, workplaces and to take leadership roles in organisations. However, despite making significant strides into the workforce, the frequency with which women occupy top level positions is still less than that of men. Alqahtani (2019: 34) concurs that despite the fact that women are making inroads into boardrooms, they are still underrepresented in higher management positions in companies, politics and institutions of

higher education. In Zimbabwe, several studies concur that women are still underrepresented in leadership structures, including in higher education. These include Shava and Chasokela, 2021: 13; Chigudu, 2021: 1). Hlatshwayo, Hlatshwayo and Muranda 2014:35. Despite women representing a larger pool of managerial endowment, their high presence at higher levels of management in public institutions or in business is unnoticeable

Morley, (2013) argue that, while overt gender discrimination is no longer as prevalent the world over, it is being replaced by more subtle forms of institutional discrimination in the form of, institutional practices, structural arrangements, cultural ideologies, and gendered roles that recreate patriarchal ideologies that are oppressive to women. Institutional discrimination refers to the policies, practices, norms, and traditions of the dominant racial, ethnic or gender group and the implementation of policies that disadvantage one social group for the advantage of another group (Tsegay, 2013). Another form of institutional discrimination involves gendered roles, a practice that marginalizes women in less appreciated professional activities, such as teaching infant classes. On the other hand structural discrimination involves policies and actions that are neutral in intent yet disadvantages other groups of people (Kiamba, 2008). Martin (2011) and Klein (2007) remark that other challenges facing women in leadership positions include a negative institutional climate, patriarchal leadership, an absence of peer mentoring and networking, a lack of understanding of the unwritten rules of organizational culture, and the need to develop a professional communication.

Psychologists have noted that prescriptive gender stereotyping- assumptions about the roles that women play often conflict with the role of leadership (Prime et al., (2009). Women leaders are seen often seen as violating their prescribed feminine roles, while men in leadership positions are perceived as acting in compliance with their prescribed masculine roles Prime et al., (2009). In the view of Martin (2011) for women leaders, gender labeling is particularly problematic. For example, men who assert themselves as strong leaders are respectfully addressed as the "boss" whereas women with similar traits may be called a disparaging name. Ideologies of male supremacy are so ingrained in many countries that they are taken as the natural order of things, while suggestions to established new definitions are rejected as ludicrous, illogical or an attack on cultural norms (Stromquist, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The overarching methodology within which this article can be located is that of meta analysis of literature on women in leadership. The search is conducted through Scopus and Web of Science data bases yielding several articles that meet the inclusion criteria. The systematic literature review which is based on a qualitative analysis of several articles. Meta-analysis is an empirical, knowledge building strategy that enables researchers to analyse a phenomenon indeepth. The desk top literature review allows a comparison of findings derived from defferent analytic views of researchers. The desk top analysis provided a systematic treatment of different relevant studies and produced key findings for our study. In this study there was a careful qualitative analysis of relevant literature. The analysis of our literature began with a search of the international literature for publications in English that empirically examined the links between leadership and gender. Our search strategy involved examining electronic databases using a combination of key words around leadership. Our search also involved electronic searches of the tables of contents and abstracts of educational leadership.

Experiences of women in Zimbabwe's higher education leadership positions

In Zimbabwe and most probably the rest of Africa, the occupational and leadership status of women in higher education leadership is still suffering a wide gap as there is unequal representation in leadership positions between men and women. Although women have made substantial gains in higher education learning institutions, they have not achieved parity with men. Women in Zimbabwe higher education are

particularly underrepresented at higher levels of leadership and the percentage of female executives decline with increasing organizational rank. Despite the fact that women constitute the majority of workforce in universities in Zimbabwe, they remain poorly represented in high-level leadership positions. Ideologies of male supremacy are so ingrained in the Zimbabwean psyche that they are taken as the natural order of things, while suggestions to establish new definitions are rejected as indecorous, illogical, or an attack on the cultural norms. As a result of increasing enrolment of women in all levels of higher education and various fields of employment and aspects of public life in Zimbabwe, since the attainment of independence witnessed a growing participation of women in leadership positions and in high level decision making in public and private sector., personal and cultural challenges that impede their operations and effectiveness as education leaders. In the past, men were deemed as central to the purpose of academic work and as creators of knowledge, while women were relegated to more supportive private roles (Martin, 2011) as wives mother centered on the home and family. While more women are finding their way into higher education leadership as departmental chairpersons, deans and directors, they continue to feel alienated and marginalized. The road towards successful academic leadership remains a fraught and painful path for women due to parenthood responsibilities and other related challenges (Amondi, 2011). While overt gender discrimination is no longer as prevalent in higher education careers, it is replaced by more subtle forms of institutional discrimination in the form of institutional practices, structural arrangements, and gendered roles that recreate patriarchal ideologies like parenthood that are oppressive to women (Jaschick, 2006; Rampton, 2008; Martin, 2011; Amondi, 2011). According to Baumgarner et al., (2011) institutional discrimination refers to the policies, practices, norms and traditions of the dominant racial ethnic, or gender group and the implementation of policies that disadvantage one social group for the benefit of another group.

Challenges for women in higher education

While women strive in the path to success in higher education, several challenges engulf their efforts to make it to leadership positions. It is currently noticed that women managing higher education institutions face serious challenges in their day-to-day operations. Mama (2005:56) says that, "the inequalities in Senior Management positions are a major infringement of rights of women despite the challenges they face in these positions. Chuma and Ncube (2010) use the concept of "glass ceiling" to refer to the various barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing upward into management positions in their organizations. In the same vein Katuna (2014) argues but often, women can advance only so far before they hit a glass Ceiling that they cannot break due to either lack of mentoring or Sexists perceptions about women's ability to lead.

Some of the challenges discussed are:

- Gender dimensions to investment in human capital
- The gendered nature of management practice
- Family and cultural factors and
- Women managers' management styles.

Gender dimensions to investment in human capital

According to the theory of human capital, one of the factors that complicates the job promotion of women is their smaller investment in education, training and work experience (Rincon, Gonzalez & Barrero, 2017: 332). According to this theory, it is generally difficult for women to find time outside of working hours to invest in training. This is because of a negative relationship between the decisions that women take regarding fertility and their participation in the labour market. Women with children are less likely to participate in the labour market than women without children. Traditionally, there is a gender imbalance in the division of chores. Therefore, it is usually women who interrupt their professional careers or work part time in order to take care of their families. Further, an increase in the family size and an increase in family responsibilities results in women cutting on professional responsibilities, thereby reducing their probability

of being promoted. Most women are therefore naturally disadvantaged and excluded from promotion opportunities than their men counterparts.

The gendered nature of management practices

The gendered nature of management practices has led to the situation where men are regarded as more capable of dealing with certain tasks than women. Shakeshaft (1993) mentions that there is a mismatch of values and practices coupled with standard and societal barriers to women operating as managers.

Brock and Cammish (1997) note that there are several constraints experienced by women managers within the work situation. In most cases there are constrains experienced through socially defined roles outside the work place, which tend to affect their operations at work. In same vein, Bilen-Green (2008) argues that an underlying problem is that of the gendered organization whereby work policies, interpersonal networks and embedded attitudes have evolved from the life experience from the traditional male breadwinner, creating an unequal playing field favoring line advancement of men.

This widespread operation of patriarchal system of social organization of heavier domestic and subsistence duties of females and a generally low regard for the values of women's life, well combined, adversely after the operation of women managers. (Coleman 199}. Katuna (2014: 6) advises that, by refraining from stereotypically placing women and men into fixed, socially constructed categories through our speech, interactions, and expectations we can move in the direction of a world that is not contained by these harmful characterization that reproduce gender inequality. This 'glass ceiling' which is a metaphor for the invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing in their organizations to senior leadership positions is created by invisible forces of culture, habit and gender that serve to keep women in their place but is subordinate to men (Dale 2007). In Zimbabwe we had characters like Mbuya Nehanda (Grandmother Nehanda) who was regarded as the spirit medium of the second chimurenga war of liberation and was highly regarded as the quintessence of the first Chimurenga of 1896 against whites settlers. Also a Nongquaze, a female Zulu chief is recorded to have resisted the penetration into Hinterland by the Boers.

Effects of culture on women leadership advancement.

Kautman (2003) notes that imbalances in leadership positions are perennial problems due to cultural values and this has been difficult to address. There is need in Zimbabwe and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region to confront stereotypical ideas which provide fertile ground for disadvantaging women and seek to address them with the aim of promoting the effective operations of women and men in management positions. Burgman (2005) in her research established that a major deterrent factor to women operations in leadership positions even when they were made available in a mere universal fundamental cultural bias in favour of males. It maybe indeed difficult for a woman to relinquish power in the home as it is for men to assume responsibilities for domestic home activities.

Olgen (1993) observed that the main problems faced by women in management positions include isolation and maginalisation. Comparing male and female support Goneley (2013) states that men can usually rely on their wives to support them in finding the extra time entailed in holding down leadership positions while many women lack the support they need to climb the career ladder. Educational management is one area in which women have achieved a measure of status and authority in Zimbabwe. This has largely been through deliberate government efforts at affirmative action in favor of women.

One challenge of accelerating women advancement through affirmative action policies however is that they tend to be sidelined by their male counterparts for rising up the management ladder not because of expertise but rather because of gender.

Women's historical negative evaluation from the management realm has also resulted in them developing a weak and different voice and one which constitutes a submerged discourse. As Tsegay 2014 shows, women are typically judged to have less leadership abilities than men with similar characteristics and the same actions performed by men and women in leadership situations are evaluated more negatively when women are the leaders. According to Chuma and Ncube 2010 premised on androcentricism, women's role is perceived as antithetical to public sphere activities informed by the process of socialization which in turn 'elbowed' women out of the educational, political and micro-economic spheres (2013,) further notes that women are seen as soft and weak and less committed to work than men and that they are left out of the "boys club". In the time face of these gender prejudices women find themselves needing to work harder than their male counterparts to prove their value in management.

Family support for women in leadership

Newman (1995) says women in management positions have problems of integrating home and work organizational lives and in matching the demands on their time. Because of failing to integrate home and work lives, some women have chosen not to marry to avoid difficulties of combining demand career with family. Gauthier (2013) contents that with married life and the additional of children, women are traditionally expected to like responsibility for most household tasks and in particular child care and that combining these responsibilities with furthering one's education and entering into positions of responsibility and leadership presents many demands and requires dedication. Kiamba [2008] further states that in African context the work and family dichotomy is filled with many contradictions for women that provoke stress and Morley [2013] notes that the moral imperative on women to care for children, the sick and the elderly means that women have negative equity in the workplace.

In a study in Zimbabwe by Zinyemba [2013] the challenges to do with gender role expectations included husbands feeling jealous and insecure with wives earning more than them and enjoying company benefits such as company vehicles and entertainment allowances. Having supportive husband as shown in a study by Murniati [2012] was vital to the carrier advancement of the women in their study as all the women agreed that it was very important that they obtained their husband's approval before they accepted an administrative position.

Opportunities for women in higher education in Zimbabwe

Research has shown that women are no less effective than men when performing leadership tasks, and neither are they less motivated to perform leadership functions (Rincon, Gonzalez & Barrero, 2017, p. 332). Kholis (2006), even observe that women have outperformed men counterparts in leadership especially in formulating and expressing vision, setting clear directions, carrying out tasks, being inspirational models, setting high standards of performance, and having responsibilities.

Successful leadership in higher education for women demand ability to make some personal adjustments as well as support from external structures (Flower 2019). Women who have succeeded in leadership in higher education attribute their success to training programs that have helped to build their confidence as well as avail opportunities for networking (Defrank-cole et al. 2016; Selzer et al. 2012). Having strong supportive networks of family, friends, and colleagues has contributed to the success of women in leadership in higher education (Khan et al. 2016). Leveraging of internal strengths such as self-motivation, determination, and sheer hard work have kept the few women in leadership in higher education firmly in their positions despite the challenges associated with leadership in higher education (Flower 2019; Khan et al. 2016). Deliberate policies that promote equality in higher education are needed as it is beneficial for higher education to have both men and women together in leadership as this increases morale and retention of human resources (Defrank-cole et al. 2016; Flower 2019; Mwale 2017). For example, Zimbabwe has signed and ratified

conventions around participation of women in leadership besides crafting out laws and policies toward the same goal. These include the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, the 2013–2017 National Gender Policy, and the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe. There is also the Millennium Development Goal Number 3, which promotes gender equality and women empowerment and the Southern Africa Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development (Mwale 2017). Defrankcole et al. (2016) argue that encouraging women to take up leadership roles in higher education is vital to effect a change in the way women are viewed as leaders and reduce inadvertent bias in all areas of employment for all women. Mentorship programs have also been found to be effective in boosting women aspiring to take up leadership roles in higher education (Defrank-cole et al. 2016; Selzer et al. 2012). Women depend on relationships to successfully climb the ladder of leadership and relationships with mentors is very important. The mentors can be both men and women but it is essential for women to learn from other women leaders in higher education (Defrank-cole et al. 2016; Selzer et al. 2012).

Women managers' management style

When it comes to supervision of subordinate's women managers operate within a face-to-face personnel management style. Goodman [1992] notes that women managers tend to pay special attention to elements such as honest, sobriety, industry, quietness, gentleness, compassion, cleanliness and neatness which are gendered and typically classified characteristics central to the smooth running of a well-ordered home and also characteristics thought to be desirable for a mother. It is however noted that most women managers usually penetrate a world where the manager is presented as he and where elements of effective leadership are extracted exclusively from the traits of past and present male leaders. As Elmuti et al [2009] so cogently put it, these past perceptions of leadership skills, competence, assertiveness, aggressiveness and task-orientation may hinder the ability of women to succeed in management.

CONCLUSION

It has been noted from the literature that women are no less able in tackling leadership roles in higher education in Zimbabwe as compared to their male counterparts. While a couple of opportunities exist for female leadership in higher education, a couple of challenges engulf their paths to leadership roles. It is imperative that the government, civil society, regulatory bodies and higher education institutions formulate, review and implement policies towards the eradication of these challenges towards the empowerment of women to positions of high authority and responsibility in higher education in Zimbabwe. Men and women in higher education must also be educated towards the elimination of gender stereotypes and motivation of women to take up leadership roles in higher education.

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