

Gender Based Leadership and School Administration: A Case study of Mbale District Local Government

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Abstract

Female head teachers in Uganda primary schools are affected by their earlier socialization and cultural understanding of their roles. Quite often women have been sidelined and their contributions in schools have not been recognized. Accordingly, there are very few female head teachers in Government Grant-Aided primary schools. These minimal numbers of women in decision making positions make Africa lose human resource in development. It is against this background that this study was aimed to explore the challenges faced female head teachers in Government Grant-Aided primary schools. The general question of the study was, 'which unique challenges do female administrators face in Government Grant-Aided primary schools in Uganda? The findings of the study will act as a reference to other researchers within the same field of study and also provide a voice for female head teachers. The Descriptive Survey Research Design was used in this study. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. The study used questionnaires and interviews to collect data. Data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and frequencies. The study population included 25 female head teachers, 340 teachers, and 25 chairpersons of school management committees of primary schools. The study sample size included 24 female head teachers, 24 chairpersons of the School Management Committees and 181 teachers. The findings for this study included, insubordination by some members of staff, being marginalized by male teachers, being under looked by subordinates, financial constraints, managing discipline among staff and students, Having double responsibilities at home and at school, lack of enough staff, biasness by male counterparts, stigmatized by male teachers and a lot of work. Although there are other challenges faced by administrators of primary schools in general, the most common to the population understudy was insubordination by some members of self representing. The purpose of the study was to establish challenges related to gender based leadership and school administration in Mbale district and to determine how the head teachers have responded to these challenges.

Key Words: Women, administrators, management, leadership, Gender, head teachers, primary schools, Government-Grant Aided and Government.

INTRODUCTION

Women participation in educational leadership has brought about a positive change in the modern administration of schools worldwide. However, their pronounced representation and participation has brought with it challenges which need to be identified and addressed.

Most of the challenges female administrators face include partially rooted in the pattern of gender socialization and belief systems (Dorsey, 1989). The bulk of the studies have been carried out in western settings like the United States (Paechter, 2001) or done in developing countries but interpreted through the Western worldview or gender and leadership (Opatka, 2002).

Uganda is a patriarchal and matrilineal society (Obbo, 1995) and it is highly probable that the female head teachers in Uganda primary schools are affected by their earlier socialization and cultural understanding of their roles. Coleman (2000) alludes to cultural perception as a factor leading to the female leaders experiencing burnout because of the constant need to prove their worth.

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While the bulk of the research on women in educational administration, studies have provided limited insights into the nature of the unique challenges women face in administering schools efficiently and effectively. Traditionally and culturally, men have been favored to access management jobs including leadership of schools. Nevertheless, the government of Uganda is encouraging women to access management jobs in all institutions. For example, the Government of Uganda has brought a number of policy documents and has declared her commitment to redressing the disparities that characterize the provision of Education of girls and consequently for women leadership.

Protective laws against gender bias to the opportunities of employment have been enacted to reduce the challenges that are caused by cultural associated pressure. As a result, more women are advancing in the leadership positions. Some notable achievements in this regard have been the preferential 1.5 points accorded to the senior six girls who qualify, to gain admission to universities. Similar preferential treatment is accorded to women in political participation and leadership. However, these efforts cannot exempt them from experiencing such challenges. Women are appointed to these leadership positions, enter existing social groups, which already have established norms, beliefs and assumption that impact on their day-to-day leadership functions. The researcher's interest was to find out these challenges and establish how they are being overcome.

Mbale district like any other African state has many gender discriminating norms, beliefs, assumptions and traditions which are a source of challenges to female head teachers' administration. There is a considerable body of work on gender and women in educational management and leadership. Most of the studies have been influenced by feminist theory, or at least by the concepts of equal opportunities, liberal feminism and sometimes radical feminism where the category of 'woman' is questioned (Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2001 & Schein 1994).

Hubbard and Datnov (2000) have argued that looking at the question of women in educational leadership should not be separated from their cultural social positions. They state that the cultural understanding of male and female in any given society affects the way the women and men respond to their roles in educational settings. They argue that women approach their work from a gendered perspective of the cultural understanding of the women's work.

This research on women in educational leadership is evolving from the importance of the concept of patriarchy and the distinction that underpins our thinking about men and women. As stated by Hubbard and Datnov (2000) above, these understandings influence perceptions of worth for both genders. Some of these perceptions are embedded in stereotypical understandings of leadership as a domain for males. Schein (1994) has shown that unconscious or semi-conscious assumptions about maleness in leadership are held by most men, to a lesser extent by women, and by both younger and older age groups in a range of international settings. These views shape the way women leaders are perceived and perceive themselves.

Coleman (2002) found that though the head teachers perceive themselves as leaders, the majority of the women were unconscious of the tension between their sex and their power role. The study was done in a patriarchal setting where men's work in public and women's work is considered private. He further states that the tension was related to the "natural" leadership status of men and the association of women with the private sphere of home and family. The study showed that women in leadership experience sexism, isolation and the need to justify their existence as head teachers.

According to Bratton, *et al* (2005), female managers have less freedom than men to display when it comes to leadership styles because of the stereotype African societies have.

The question this research sets to address is, what perceptions do the female head teachers in Ugandan primary schools have on their role as educational leaders? This was to be clarified from the challenges they face as female head teachers. This is of great importance today because any policy advocating for women leadership needs to be based on the experience of women already in leadership. It is against such a background that the current study was designed.

Women participation in educational leadership has brought about a positive change in the modern administration of schools worldwide. However, their pronounced representation and participation has brought with it challenges which need to be identified and addressed. While the bulk of the research on women in educational administration, studies have provided limited insights into the nature of the unique challenges women face in administering schools efficiently and effectively. Traditionally and culturally, men have been favored to access management jobs including leadership of schools. Nevertheless, the government of Uganda is encouraging women to access management jobs in all institutions. For example, the Government of Uganda has brought a number of policy documents and has declared her commitment to redressing the disparities that characterize the provision of Education of girls and consequently for women leadership.

Despite all these, Collins (1998) states that women are generally good administrators because they have strong religious or spiritual faith that gives them their guiding force to lead, educate themselves and others as well as change the repressive conditions. Rosalind (2002) confirms that women are trusted and transparent. Besides, women are role models in places they lead. Educational system needs to tap a vital leadership source of women. This can be achieved through enhancing women participation in primary school leadership position to help strengthen the moral fiber that has decayed. According to Paddock (1981), women leadership positions are traditionally viewed as anomalies and as deficient in respect of the traditional male models of leadership. It is perceived that the unequal position of women arises from the systematic discrimination against them in patriarchal societies.

In Mbale district, a number of women professionals have now been appointed to administer primary schools, some of which were previously headed by only men for a period of over 40 years. In view of the above traditional bias about women leaders, there are many gender based and school administration challenges that are affecting their careers as school administrators. However, not much research has been done to establish reasons for persistent existence of insubordination by male teachers, and male counterparts. In addition, limited research has been published on the unique challenges that female head teachers face and how they address them. This disturbing trend prompted the researcher to question, what challenges did female head teachers experience in executing their duties?, and whether the government of Uganda has put in place other strategies for enhancing the existing ones in order to minimize or eliminate these challenges that women encounter when carrying out their duties? Therefore, there is need to establish gender based leadership and school administration related challenges.

The purpose of the study was to establish challenges related to gender based leadership and school administration in Mbale district and to determine how the head teachers have responded to these

challenges. The researcher also sought to explore whether there are strengths of women leadership that may be developed to promote transformational leadership in Uganda Schools

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives; establish the leadership challenges faced by female head teachers in primary schools, explore how the female head teachers cope with the unique leadership challenges they face, and investigate the effect of female leadership on school administration

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research findings will provide an understanding of the challenges female head teachers in Mbale district face. It is envisaged that the study will enhance female participation in the management of schools. Besides, the insight in this area of research is therefore significant because it will not only fill the gap in literature, but will provide a voice for the female head teachers to share their experiences. It is also hoped that the study will highlight the strengths of women leadership that should be acknowledged and developed. The stakeholders will the findings for the purpose of strengthening female Head teachers in particular and women leader in general.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on the 24 selected Government Grant-Aided primary schools headed by female head teachers in Mbale Districts, Uganda.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Descriptive survey research design was used in this study. It enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (Amin, 2003). This was used to ascertain the perception of women on management in Government Grant-Aided primary schools in Mbale district.

The area of study was Mbale district is the study area. It is found in the Eastern part of Uganda; is bordered by the republic of Kenya to the East, Tororo district to the South, Sironko district to the North West and Pallisa district to the West.

The population of the study was 25 female primary head teachers, 340 primary school teachers, and 25 chairpersons of School Management Committee. Purposive sampling and simple random was used to select the sample. Female head teachers and chairmen of school management committees were purposively selected for the study because they have pertinent information for the study. This allowed the researcher to get the richest information (Best & Kahn, 2006). The sample of the study was 24 female head teachers of primary teachers, 181 teachers, and 24 school management chairpersons. The instruments used in data collection were questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis.

The data collected for the study was adopted and coded for completeness and accuracy of information at the end of every field data collection day and before storage. Descriptive statistics was calculated and summarized by use of frequency tables.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

TYPE AND NATURE OF SCHOOLS

Different female head teachers provided background information on the type and nature of schools they headed. The various types of schools also have helped the researcher in analyzing the data in search for common themes and also unique challenges faced by different female Head teachers. The demographics of the responses and the nature of the schools have been tallied against the respondents. The total of each parameter has been given in order to show the distribution of responses.

HEAD TEACHERS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The information was necessary to establish the Head teacher's experience as leaders. The female Head teachers in this study had varied years of service as indicated on table 1.

Table 1: experience and number of schools served:

Experience in years	Number of Head teachers	No. of schools served
1 to 3	12	1
4 to 6	8	1
7 to 10	3	2
15+	1	2+

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE HEAD TEACHERS

Challenges faced by female head teachers	RESPONSES AND PERCENTAGES					
	24 Female head teachers		24 CMS Chairpersons		181 Teachers	
	Response scores	Percentage	Response scores	Percentage	Response scores	Percentage
Insubordination by some members of staff	23	95	19	79	89	49
Being marginalized by male teachers	19	79	17	71	76	42
Being under looked by subordinates	15	63	11	46	80	44

Financial constrains	11	46	9	38	60	33
Managing discipline among staff and students	9	38	10	42	45	25
Having double responsibilities at home and at school	19	79	18	75	46	25
Lack of enough staff	8	33	10	42	70	39
Biasness by male counterparts	12	50	9	38	30	17
Stigmatized by male teachers	20	83	12	50	40	22
A lot of work	8	33	7	29	20	11

Table 2: Challenges faced by female head teachers

Although there are other challenges faced by administrators of primary schools in general, like Being marginalized by male teachers, Being under looked by subordinates, Having double responsibilities at home and at school, Stigmatized by male teachers, Biasness by male counterparts, the most common to the population under study was insubordination by some members of staff. (table 2). This in itself shows the members of school communities do not respect their code of conduct. The 1994 statutory instruments supplement (No. 15) regulation II on discipline (section d) states that a teacher commits a disciplinary offence if he/she is insubordinate, rude or un-co-operative. And regulation 22 spells out the types of punishments. These include dismissal, reduction in rank, reduction in salary, stoppage of increment, severe reprimand or reprimand.

However, the matter becomes more difficult for a female headteacher to implement what is recommended when this insubordination is a result of gender bias and discrimination as shall be discussed under objective two. Indeed moral legacy in Ugandan schools can be blamed to staff as these head teachers printed out that lack of co-operation by some male teachers and even deputies' prompts indiscipline among the students.

It would seem that with the present government encouraging women to take on leadership roles, there would be general acceptance but that is not the case according to these participants of the study. There is still a lot to be done to break the barriers between the cultural beliefs of what a woman can do and what the government is advocating for.

Probably this is due to the fact that the government began by posting women to girls' schools only which gave the impression that they are fit to head teachers in mixed schools setting and this could count for the rejection some of the head teachers face. It is also important to note that some female head teachers were rejected even when they were posted to girls' schools and just because of the cultural setting where "women cannot be leaders."

Those women who have achieved positions which are held predominantly by men have realized, consciously or unconsciously, that there are social roles and expectations governing the role of females from the culture. They must become "abnormal" women, they must transcend the social expectations of femaleness in order to aspire to the socially prescribed role of leader. And because they do not fit the expectations of the attributes of leaders, they are also abnormal administrators.

Their position as administrators make them insiders to the organization but their abnormal status as administrators makes them outsiders in their organizations. There are many dilemmas that particularly complicate roles for the women. These are:

1. Balancing work and family. While family responsibilities influence the careers of all women (particularly those with new born and school goers) may have misappropriate work in case of children at home.
2. Taking work too seriously: Depending on personal style. This tendency may create problems for anyone but it is possible that criticism directed to a woman leader may take a more professional tone than that for a man.
3. Difficulty in finding a mentor, particularly at the beginning of a new assignment. The administrator needs the guidance of a seasoned role model. This is lacking in our educational system in Uganda today.
4. Too little representative ranks. This is another major cry for our managers. The few women may be the ones that are scrutinized more than man. This makes women in administration lack trusted persons in whom to confide for the purpose of vetting their frustrations.

Coping strategies female administrators use:

The theoretical framework and the literature in chapter two had the view that make objectives three and four explicit hence the findings in chapter four show that the majority of women felt that they were put in positions where they had to justify their existence as head teachers because of their feminist.

The woman not only must effectively juggle all of her tasks, she must also commend with the bulk of male school board members who erroneously believe that not only is she unable to manage the balancing act but that it is inappropriate for her to even attempt it.

The difficulties faced by women with families seem to be dealt with most often by a separation on their part between family and work. The decision to work even harder so that there might be no criticism of them as leaders, for example, one woman headteacher's decision to "work extra-long hours, not taking time off for my own health. "In a way, women's roles in Uganda have not diminished in importance or changed in nature in recent years (Tadria 1985). As a result, women's roles are today often performed under stifling circumstances and they are frequently felt open is the possibility of further exploitation and oppression.

Stein (1994) has shown that unconscious or semi-conscious assumptions about maleness and leadership are held most by men, to a lesser extent by women, but it does not entirely stand true for the participants in this study. On the other hand, the head teachers feel they are suited for leadership but on the other hand, they are aware of the constraints their gender poses. The findings seem to resonate with what Coleman, (2003) who stated female head teachers though perceive themselves as leaders. the majority of them are conscious of the tension between their sex and their power role. This was evidenced through the head teachers' statement on how they were received in schools and how they are trying to cope with the challenges.

It is therefore safe to echo some of the researchers' findings on the challenges women in administration face. When women are appointed to leadership positions, they enter existing social groups with established norms, beliefs and assumptions that guide interactions and relationships.

This implies that leadership functions can be carried out in many different ways, depending on the individual leader the context and the nature of the goals being pursued. However, women will approach the tasks assigned in their position through a gendered perspective. This is evidenced from the women talking show about being referred to as mothers by their students and describing their work as that of caretaking. This enforces the view that the cultural milieu is a part of what these female head teachers are and so manifests in their work habits. The need to be called members could on the other hand be an extension of the view of women as nurturers, which contrasts the power associated with leadership.

Accordingly women's most common challenge was gender bias and discrimination, (70%). Head teachers in this category captured the view of others in this statement "people look more at failures than success, so in the end, very few sympathize or even appreciate the little being done." She added "this is exaggerated when you are a woman amidst a male dominated staff and a school governing body." It was further revealed during formal and informal interview that some female Head teachers had faced rejection from Boards of Governors (BOG) and male staff on the grounds of being female. Head teachers extended bias to parents who came seeking for a head teacher and when they realized it was female, they failed to respect her authority and instead demanded she shows respect to them. She wrote "the school population has dropped and some male teachers have left because the headteacher is a woman and even some students do not pay school fees. And when sent home the parents come quarrelling and using abusive words. Paddock (1981) reaffirms that women leadership positions are traditionally viewed as anomalies, and deficient in the eyes of traditional male models. This is typical of the patriarchal nature of the Ugandan society where it is believed that men are to control the women.

The results show that "fear of failure" was another major challenge female Head teachers face. Fear of failure was defined as ensuring that their gender is not taken as a point of weakness but of strength. The fear was said to be driven by the desire to prove that women were as capable as men in leadership for they had experienced utter insubordination from the male staff whose main intention was apparently to make them look incompetent. These respondents believed that once they established their abilities, then all would be well. Experienced Head teachers believed that it was important to maintain their achievement record and hence the fear of failure. Although their positions had been accepted by the communities in which they worked had been "an uphill task for them."

One respondent wrote: "was the only woman on the staff and as a head teacher she added

"I was always intimidated by these men who did not want to listen to me."

Another Head teacher gave her challenges in terms of general harassment/violence as the major challenge. This respondent argued that female administrators sometimes face harassment and even violence from their male counterparts because of the typical patriarchal nature of the Ugandan society where it is believed that men are to control the women. She wrote "wrong statements are uttered to intimidate especially when executing duty." The harassment was associated with men

feeling that women should not step into the man's world. For example men see it as underrating to be led by a woman.

In general, there were gender – specific challenges highlighted by the participants that ranged from the stereotype understanding of the roles of men and women to harassment of the females who seem to have gone against the norm of the cultural setting. Head teachers' challenges were not based on failure of performance of the duties, the researcher asked them to state generally the challenges they faced as female administrators. In this way, the researcher was able to isolate challenges that would have resulted from failure of performance from those that were deliberately based on the gender.

In summary, there are a number of means that the Head teachers have used to overcome the gender bias and discrimination they face in their places of work. Below is a general outline that the Head teachers proposed as having helped them overcome many challenges during formal and informal interviews. Being highly principled and let others know your strengths and boundaries, Being consistently able to deliver, Counseling staff and the entire community where needed, Practice professionalism, lead by example, Follow management principles and practices, Follow rules and regulations and law, Have frequent meetings of school management committee.

Coleman (2002) found that women in leadership experience sexism isolation and a need to justify their existence as Head teachers. From the responses above, the participants in this study are working hard to justify their existence. During the follow-up interview sessions, some of the Head teachers felt there was need to encourage women leaders because of futuristic advantages to the upcoming women leaders. Most of the suggestions also stem from the need to justify why they are in leadership positions with the belief that more women will mean less discrimination. That is what the participants had to say on why it is necessary for a woman in school leadership positions to model and reshape the institutions for the future." they wrote: "we want to prove that we can also perform the same tasks like men" one added, "we want to show that we can even perform better than the men."

However, this need for them to be acceptable is a hard task given that it can lead to burn out. Oplatka (2002) found that many women experienced burn out because of working extra hard as they try to portray their work to a patriarchal society. It is therefore some of these findings that made this research worth conducting. Nevertheless, there are studies like those conducted by Gray (1993) and Stein (1994) that suggest that women are suited to be in leadership positions.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges that the female head teachers face are sometimes based on the stereotype understanding of position of men and women in society. The challenges came from the staff, parents and the large community. These challenges have caused the head teachers to develop coping strategies which portray their need to be accepted as leaders. For some, they are at a point of acceptance while others, have to fight harder and that means putting in more working hours. These head teachers believe they are setting ground for the upcoming generation believing that it will be better for them.

The findings in the study have provided an explanation for the few women in top leadership positions in primary schools in Mbale District. Perhaps other Districts have even less number in

comparison. The information in this research has definitely provided a basis for the educational managers to plan for women leaders. It is hoped that more insight will be sought from other parts of the country in order to build a strong ground for intervention. Above all, strengths of women leadership should be acknowledged and developed if equity for all is to be achieved. Efforts to improve educational leadership would build upon the foundation of well documented and well accepted knowledge about women leadership that already exists of which this research is part. Women are painfully aware of the impact of gender in positions of power. Even though most administrators (both men and women) are aware of the pitfalls in gender labeling, there are many examples of differences. For instance a strong assertive male leader is respectively known as the “boss”, a woman as pushing a man is described as passionate, a woman is over emotional; a man is seen as shrewd negotiator, a woman as conniving.

In a nutshell, women had the following suggestions to education managers in Uganda:

The findings in this study have shown that most female head teachers have had their appointment to leadership positions in recent years. They need certain practical aspects of administration guidelines in order to run the schools in both an efficient and sustainable manner.

The community mentioned suggestion to the Ministry of Education and Sports was the need to appoint more women into leadership positions, perhaps society will begin to regard women as equal partners not opponents.

The female head teachers request that the Ministry of Education to organize workshops and seminars for female head teachers above to discuss issues affecting them. The greatest need is recognizing women leader’s efforts and educating the stakeholders and to try to neutralize these cultural beliefs that portray women as incapable leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for the interventions if female head teachers are to achieve equality: The Government of Uganda should acknowledging that women possess leadership skills and approaches that are different from that of men also is an important action skill for women to develop. This will encourage women to prepare to take risks and establish framework for assessing possible consequences, as well as benefits. Women need to prepare to take risks when encouraged to build on the strength of gender; Head teachers should set priorities as one of the critical attributes. Successful female Head teachers should develop a list of priorities and refuse to allow non productive tasks to take precedence over tasks high on the lists; Delegation is an important skill for all administrators. The action of delegation can help to mentor those who aspire to lead in future. Those who hope to be school administrators in future gain valuable insights from opportunities to identify all factors involved in completing an assignment or resolving a problem and experiencing the consequences for selecting the best option for the situation; and networking with other female school administrators is a measure that helps women deal with daily pressures of the job. The opportunity to voice concerns to others who understand and will respect confidence can help to place those concerns and difficulties in proper prospective. The Ministry of Education should organize seminars “just the women.” These sessions offer encouragement, information and the chance to meet professional women from different geographical regions of the country. Also women participants represent school Head teachers from different fields. Lists of contact

sometimes are developed during these conference sessions to provide communication network to participants to stay in touch.

Further research:

The researcher recommends that more research should be conducted on a similar topic in other parts of the country to strengthen the findings of this research.

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