Issues and Challenges around Low Representation of Women in Administrative Posts in Schools[1]

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KEYWORDS Stereotypes. Gender Sensitive Policies. Equity. Principals

ABSTRACT This study aimed at establishing factors that contribute to low representation of women in administrative posts in primary schools in Lower Gweru District. This study reviews literature on issues and concepts related to the study as put forward by other writers and researchers within which the problem of the study was discussed and analyzed. The review of the related literature was done mainly to indicate why few women are found in administrative positions in primary schools in Lower Gweru District. The researchers reviewed the related literature so that an understanding of major issues on women and administration would be grasped. The literature review showed that there were gender disparities in educational management in schools. Women should accept change and perceive taking headship positions as a way of climbing to the upper echelons of educational organization.

INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at establishing factors that contribute to low representation of women in administrative posts in primary schools in Lower Gweru District. This study reviewed literature on issues and concepts related to the study as put forward by other writers and researchers within which the problem of the study was discussed and analyzed. The review of the related literature was done mainly to indicate why few women are found in administrative positions in primary schools in Lower Gweru District.

Female Education in Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa there has been unprecedented expansion in education in the last three decades. This reflects the whole recognition that education contributes to national and economic development. This expansion has not been matched with equal access and opportunity to education. The education of female still lags behind that of males in most developing countries and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular (Hyde 1992; Mulenga 2005).

In many African countries education was started by missionaries (Stefanos 1977). Curricula in Mission schools for girls focused on general literacy and subjects that upheld stereotyp-

ical role of women with home economics or domestic science as principal subjects (Stefanos 1977). Such curricula included topics on sewing and cooking. This form of education socialized girls to be obedient and industrious (Stefanos 1977) and better housewives (Gordon 1995). The African woman was thus pushed to the limits of subordination with the power and autonomy she had previously eroded (Tumale 1996).

At independence, African countries declared education a basic human right and also a way of correcting the imbalances of the past. The net enrolment ratios in Sub-Saharan Africa in 1996 were only 52.3 percent girls and 60.7 percent boys of primary school. Hoffman et al. (1999) point out that the secondary level gross enrollment ratios in Sub-Saharan Africa during 1985 to 1995 increased from 21.7 percent to 24.3 percent for boys and from 17.6 percent to twenty-one percent for girls. Girls' enrolment is still low compared to the world total of 58.1 percent for boys and 53.4 percent for girls.

It is clear that there is a marked decrease in the percentage of girls who attend and complete secondary school compared to their attendance in primary school. Female enrolment doubled since 1965 in primary schools but less than fifteen percent of girls attend secondary school in Sub-Saharan African Countries (Chabaya et al. 2009). Approximately twenty three percent of primary school female graduates enter secondary school while less than three percent of those who leave secondary school continue tertiary levels of education (UNESCO 2000). Generally, there are fewer women than men in educational

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institutions, especially at post primary levels with enrolment decreasing as one progress from primary to secondary to tertiary education (UNESCO 2000). This decrease in the number of women continues to be noted even in the employment sector.

A number of reasons have been advanced for low enrolments of females in educational institutions. Girls have a higher dropout rate from school than boys (UNESCO 2000). This is due to early marriages and unwanted pregnancies (Swainson 2000; UNESCO 2000). Secondly, Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes introduced in many African countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund hit poor families with most countries partially or fully withdrawing government funding of education. Atherton (2002) says, since in most countries education is subsidized by the government, withdrawal of subsidies meant parents have to pay for education for their children. Such families from their cultural beliefs would rather educate boys than girls (UNESCO 2000). Traditionally, most African societies give preference to boys when it comes to education because they believe that education for girls may benefit families into which they marry.

Kaziboni (2002) identifies culture as the single most inclusive factor inhibiting the education of girls. African tradition attaches higher value to a man than a woman, whose place is believed to be in the kitchen. The imbalance in boys and girls participation in schooling was linked to the African tradition that promoted female subordination. This situation was further aggravated by patriarchal practices that gave women no traditional rights to succession. Therefore, the patriarchal practices encouraged preference to be given to the education for boys rather than that of girls. Mlenga (2005) contends that research studies in Africa show that many people, cultures and societies do not value highly the education of girls. Most African cultures believe that the woman's place is in the home and girls are withdrawn from school to do household chores, care for the siblings and sick (Gordon 1995).

Educational Provision in Zimbabwe and Participation of Girls in School: An Overview

According to Swainson et al. (1998) when Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, the ZANU [PF] government initiated free primary education to eradicate educational inequalities that existed during the colonial period. More schools had to be built, and this resulted in massive expansion of schools mainly in rural areas. Similar developments took place in secondary education. The number of secondary schools in the country rose from 197 in 1980 to 1535 in 1995 (Zvobgo 1995). Despite the increase for both boys and girls, fewer girls were enrolled than boys although the gender gap has narrowed during 2000.

In 1992, school fees were introduced for urban primary schools. The introduction of school fees and the sizeable increases in examination fees raised the cost of education in Zimbabwe at a time when incomes were being eroded (Swainson et al. 1998). This, in a way affected the education of the girl child as parents had to decide who to educate between a boy child and a girl child. Fewer girls than boys complete primary education in Zimbabwe and this implies that fewer girls reach the level required for transition to secondary school. Swainson (2000) reports that the attrition rate in the transition from primary to secondary school for girls has increased from twenty one percent in 1985 to well over thirty percent since 1990. This can be attributed to the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Although there has been an increase in the proportion of girls attending secondary school since 1980, progressively fewer girls are enrolled in higher secondary school grades. The dropout rate in secondary schools continues to be higher than that of boys. Once having dropped out of school girls are less likely to re-enter the formal education system. There are more boys than girls in tertiary education and the number continues to fall in the professional sectors of the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe.

The Situation of Women in Traditional Societies in Zimbabwe

Women in traditional Zimbabwean society were accorded a low status. It was within their culture that all decisions were made for them by male figures (Tomasevski 1993). Before marriage women are under the care of their fathers, brothers or other relatives. After marriage and payment of bride price, the woman comes under the care of the husband and male figures in the new

family (Cheater 1986). A woman was not an independent person and had a low self image. With the exception of spirit mediums, women were restricted to minor roles and were not expected to assume leadership capacity even if they had the capability. Where women were concerned the culture was one of silence (Chineman 1990). Zimbabwean women were not so much recognized in the colonial period. They could not vote, open bank accounts or sign any official documents. The work they did at home was not recognized as it did not have any monetary value attached to it. As such women were considered non workers (Chinemana 1990). That people respect you when you bring money is universal as supported by Martin (1988) in her study of Australian women. Mulenga (2005) commenting on the situation of Indian and Pakistan women expressed similar views. It can be concluded that women were not valued because of the nature of their roles and even to date some women because of that stereotype belief have no confidence in the roles they play. Education was not readily available as the girl child was discriminated against. Cultural practices such as inheritance influenced most parents to invest more in males rather than females. Stereotypical arguments such as "education makes the woman too bold and rude" have been advanced ostensibly as an excuse for not promoting and educating females (Nyawaranda 2003). Women were disadvantaged economically, educationally and otherwise, when they began to enter the labour market, they found themselves in the traditional careers such as nursing, secretarial and teaching. Such careers were considered as caring jobs and the financial remuneration was so low because society considered them fragile and less intelligent and as such the nature of subjects offered to girls at school channeled them into those careers (Moses 1993). The home and school perpetuated this status quo and thus the confidence of the girl child was destroyed and thus resulting in women not questioning their status.

The ego needs of women are not satisfied within the home, school, the workplace or social circles because of the relatively low status accorded to women as indicated in the discussion. Thus today's women seem to have realized their potential and are striving to upgrade their status in society. Women also strive to achieve. According to Maslow, the desire "… for pres-

tige dominance, recognition, independence, attention, appreciation are important contributors for self-esteem which women must achieve for themselves" (Martin 1998).

Situational Barriers Encountered by Women

In the battle to improve the situation of low numbers of women in high posts there are many barriers encountered ranging from heavy workload within the family, lack of resources to develop themselves, lack of support from society, particularly in societies where there is strong patriarchal systems (Makura 2005). Educational institutions still look down upon women learners and work places view women as more of an inefficient group of workers (Moses 1993). Chabaya et al. (2009) classify barriers faced by women as follows:

Time Constraints

Conflicts between home responsibilities and self development of women often rise. This dual role is seen as a major contributing factor to the lower achievement and advancement of women. Time management becomes of paramount importance. Most women sacrifice their development as they try hard to do vital household roles and personal development to avoid friction from family members who feel the woman is neglecting her household duties (Martin 1988).

Financial Constraints

The idea of spending money on women's development often culminates in conflicts over priorities as there is competition with home needs, even if in the end it is the family that tends to benefit when the woman's earning bracket is elevated.

Lack of Support

Other family members who regard her advancement as secondary to her caring duties often restrict self development of women. As such other members fail to give the woman the support she needs to succeed (Nussbaum 2000).

Institutional Barriers

Providers of programmes or policy makers sub consciously erect institutional barriers.

They include lack of support from the government or other institutions such as banks resulting in fewer women progressing.

Dispositional Barriers

These are factors related to attitudes and self-perception. Some women are more despondent as a result of their culture, and socialization. Some feel guilty when they spend time working on higher posts and developing themselves and neglecting what they consider to be their primary role of wife and mother. Such women compromise their self image. They feel guilty about opting for higher posts in education as they have been conditioned to believe that a woman should be a mother with boundless devotion (Martin 1988).

Society's Attitudes towards Professional Women

In various ways society perpetuates the myth or stereotype that the primary role of women is that of wives and mothers. These beliefs as Bradley (1999) states are societal perceptions that promote men domination over women. Fegurson (1993) further posits that society perceives a woman's chief role in life as mother with her base in the family home. These gender differences are initially learned in the first social group the family and later reinforced by other social institutions in society. Schools and universities are involved in reinforcing characteristics of masculinity and femininity in their students through their curriculum. When women deviate from what society views as their primary role and take up paid professional employment, it is often seen as secondary to their "real" role as wives and mothers. Career choices are frequently determined by ideas about the kind of jobs which are considered compatible with women's presumed basic personality, characteristics and thus restricted to such jobs as teaching, nursing, social work and secretarial which society deem as proper (Dorsey 1989). The type of caring work which a woman does is concerned with the welfare of others rather than the development of the individual herself. This is considered more suitable for the woman by the society at large. There is little doubt that societal expectations particularly in strongly oriented patriar-

chal systems influence women's choice of a career and account for the paucity of women in high status male dominated professions. Academic women who have obviously chosen to enter a high status of male dominated profession are still affected by their perception of themselves and their role in society. If a woman is married her husband's career tends to take precedence. To behave otherwise would be considered by society as being unfeminine for the woman, unmasculine for the men. Women are often immobilized at the beginning of a profession by husband and family (Simeone 1989). A number of studies have indicated that in most societies professional women have in addition to their career the responsibility of managing the household and caring for the children (Bernard 1990). Very few women show interest in high professional posts. High posts demand extensive work which requires planning, and control of the activities in the organisation. As a result women do not opt for the posts as they fill this would be an extra responsibility to what they already have when they are at home looking after children and doing household chores.

Research on Female Under-representation in Administrative Positions

In most African countries women tend to take up traditional careers such as typing, secretarial, fashion and design, domestic science (Marangu 1985) and other minor posts in humanities (Dorsey 1989). Women's participation in non traditional courses like administration is very minimal (UNESCO 2000). Changes which have occurred in the education sector such as the implementation of the gender policy have encouraged more women to take up different careers. Most women have risen within the employment structures slowly but the majority still remain in the low levels (Bradley 1999). A number of studies have been done to unearth the factors that contribute to low representation of women in administrative posts in African countries (Balogun 1985). Marangu (1985) cited the following factors: inadequate preparations to take administrative posts when they are advertised, cultural attitudes among women (Amara 1985) and negative expectations of society towards women's ability to carry out administrative duties (Eshiwani 1985). However, Makura (2005) reporting on research studies done in Zimbabwe views

low participation of women in administrative posts as a result of lack of relevant qualifications, home and school environments, attitudinal or motivational variables and learning environments. According to Swainson (2000), research studies carried in Zimbabwe further revealed that most traditional parents regard education as more necessary for boys than girls. Many also believe that the levels and types of education necessary for boys and girls differ. Girls marry and join their husbands while boys are regarded as heirs to their families. Parents see themselves as non beneficiaries in the education of girls. In addition parents believe that girls are less intelligent, physically weaker and less courageous than boys. As a result most women's belief, perceptions and aspirations almost mirror those of their parents. Another general belief is that the main role of women is that of wives and mothers. Women are involved in domestic labour and chores that leave them with less interest to take up more challenging posts like administration (UNESCO 2000). According to a 1995 UNESCO report, women lack interest when it comes to taking up administrative posts in schools. This lack of interest remains the principal barrier to their orientation towards administration positions in schools. Hyde (1989) observes that since administration involves leading most African societies view the roles involved in administration as unfeminine, and lack of access by women into administration is usually permanent because such beliefs that women cannot be administrators are transmitted from one generation to the other. Women through such stereotype beliefs are perceived to be less ambitious career wise and accept that men should be in control all the time. Bradley (1999) also states that women are accustomed to having men in authority over them and accept this situation as normal and that they themselves are unfit to hold leadership positions and this promotes the situation of few women in administrative positions in primary schools.

Lack of Role Models

The 2000 UNESCO report observes that the number of women in administration is significantly small. Although this factor may not have direct bearing on the performance of women on the job, it certainly has some effect on their attitudes towards administrative posts. According to Katjavivi (1998), having women role models in key academic institutions will sensitize the learning institutions on how best to develop education system curricula so as to encourage more women to pursue careers in administration. Most primary schools in Zimbabwe are headed by men. Young women are not attracted in anyway to become educational administrators (FANE 1998). Interviews and anecdotal evidence in some countries suggest that increasing the number of females in administration will boost other teachers' interest in administration. Mulenoa (2005) observes that women do not see many role models in management posts as compared to men. Mulenga (2005) also observes that in Zimbabwe one of the consequences of the lower number of women in entering tertiary education, particularly in the areas of educational management is that there are few role models for young women to emulate. Lemmer (1998) argues that role models should be seen by young women as early as their days at primary school. The school as the most important formal socializing agent should promote values in pupils that provide them with opportunities to see through others.

Studies on the relationship between women teachers and women administrators have produced mixed results according to a UNESCO 2000 report. The report points out evidence to suggest that female teachers in administration are often promoters of cultural stereotypes. King and Hill (1991) observe that much importance is accorded to the supply of female administrators in discussions of improving the education for girls and promotion of women to administrative positions. There is need for more role models and in that way role models are a positive force for raising female education. Mulenga (2005) further states that increase in role models plays a pivotal role in motivating women intrinsically in their attitudes towards administrative posts. More women will be seen applying when posts are advertised.

Social Experiences and Career Aspirations of Women

Erinosho (1999) observes that background experience influences interest in any career choice. Erinosho further contends that there is a relationship between one's experiences and his

or her aspirations. Etta (1994) observes that there is a marked difference in the way men and women are brought up. Etta further observes boys' childhood activities provide them with more opportunities to manipulate the environment than girls and therefore enhances the development and attributes that promote administrative skills such as creativity, and critical thinking. Boys are further socialized to be inquiring, adventurous, conquer and understand nature, while girls are expected to be obedient, malleable (Etta 1994). Etta further observes that boys and girls enter the school system with different attributes, some more congenial to success, which have been to a significant extent shaped by socialization experiences. Administrative exposure of students is a function of the home and this is minimal for girls (Mulenga 2005). Given the relatively protected upbringing of girls compared to boys in many African cultures, the women are also likely to experience anxiety when tasked to take up administrative roles. Men perform many administrative roles as they grow such as leading, planning and controlling. These roles they bring them to school and they are wide chances of them operating better than women when it comes to careers in administration. Catsambis (1995), reports that early childhood experiences, such as the environment at home or in the local community, exposure to media and advertising play a pivotal role in shaping a child's interest and self-image. This early socialization, also known as the cultural theory may lead women away from challenging tasks like administrative duties. Women would rather be comfortable with household chores they are used to perform. Mulenga (2005) argued that certain childhood experiences may have an influence on the formation of future personality traits, with leadership qualities. The early social experiences may foster the development of attributes that are theorised to be suited to the pursuit of interest and becoming leaders. The authors further observe that experimental background of young women in educational administration provides them with prior sense of comfort, curiosity and competence in managing schools which is not enjoyed by most women. The authors further observe that there is evidence that administrative experiences such as managing home activities have an impact on administrative career selection.

Attitudes of Women towards Administration/Leadership

Studies by Catsambis (1995) revealed that few women show interest in taking up posts in administration of schools. Men showed more positive attitudes. Research studies in Zimbabwe by Makura (2005) indicate that women have a negative attitude towards administration and this may explain their low participation in both primary and secondary schools. According to Swainson et al. (1998) in Zimbabwe women do not participate much in school administration due to the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society, and also the larger share of family responsibility makes a woman less interested in taking leadership posts. Women may also lack confidence when tasked to do administrative work. Eshwani (1985) points out that lack of confidence produces anxiety which affects performance. Negative social attitudes create lack of self confidence among women in their ability and motivation (Hoffman 1999). Mulenga (2005) further observes that women allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the negative filtering influences that they hear around them. They internalize these external impacts and simply allow their self confidence to be eroded. Some senior female teachers tend to be self conscious and erroneously believe that it is not feminine to take up administrative posts within the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe (Hoffman et al. 1999). Mulenga (2005) also observes that women lack self confidence in their ability because they have been subjected to situations which are transparent and cannot question anything but follow laid down procedures. Attitudes towards administrative posts particularly negative ones may result because of other factors that include geographical location of the school to the culture of the school, the conditions of service as prescribed by government and remuneration and patriarchal system that leads to gender inequality and power.

Gender Stereotyping

Gender differentiation and gender role socialization lead to gender stereotyping of school subjects and administrative activities in schools in most African countries (Chabaya et al. 2009). Mulenga (2005) reports that stereotyping of administration of schools as masculine affects

young women's expressed interest in becoming school administrators. According to Wadesango (2011) women's perception of managing schools as appropriate for man starts early in their lives and this belief continues and intensifies thus promoting stereotypic perceptions about school management. According to Swainson et al. (1999) gender typing of posts in the Ministry of Education remains pervasive in Zimbabwe. Most women remain teachers while men strive to become school administrators. Women in general will aspire to occupations that are perceived as appropriate and fitting for women. Government policies that reinforce gender stereotyping have come under scrutiny. This move has compelled changes to be implemented in manpower development that should see women being promoted to administrative posts in the school. In Zimbabwe, any advertised posts preference is given to women. In this way women are being encouraged to take up administrative posts and put aside gender stereotypic perceptions (Mulenga 2005). Much should be done in schools so that gender typing of school subject is eradicated. On the other hand, those who had less gender type attitudes and feminine self image tended to do better in managing schools. Gender stereotyping has an effect on women opting to take up administrative posts.

Behavior of Administrators

What administrators do greatly influences the thinking, actions and aspirations of their subordinates. Administrators can encourage or discourage future post taking and higher achievement in their day to day interactions with subordinates. Research studies in Zimbabwe according to Swainson (2000) indicate that within schools the attitudes of administrators are different. Male teaches are treated differently from female teachers and hence their interest towards taking up administrative posts differs. Administrators don't feel it within their power or responsibility to assist female teachers to take up administrative posts. Cultural beliefs that women are generally regarded as less intelligent and cannot cope up with administrative demands still linger amongst school administrators. This results in women becoming less ambitious and hence fears to break the barriers that hinder them from going up to the positions of management.

Administrators subscribe to gender stereotypes that favour man at the expense of women, while on the other hand women's internalizing self image militates against them (UNESCO 2000). Administrators should protect women especially when male counterparts resent women advancement. The resentment manifests itself in a number of forms. For instance, women have found some of their male subordinates unwilling to accept their authority. Administrators should not be stumbling blocks towards women who intend to advance themselves. UNESCO (2000) report contends that not enough has been done to highlight the impact of administrator's behavior on perpetuating gender stereotype in most African countries.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to establish issues and challenges around low representation of women in administrative posts in primary schools in Lower Gweru District. The researchers reviewed the related literature so that an understanding of major issues on women and administration would be grasped. The literature review showed gender disparities in educational management in schools. It is evident from the preceding review of literature that gender inequality is still affecting effective operation of school organizations. While a number of women have attempted to go up the promotion ladders but factors such as shortage of role models, gender stereotype and society's cultural beliefs continue to contribute to the fewer number of women in administrative positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the research findings of the study, the researcher has proposed the following recommendations.
- Women should accept change and perceive taking headship positions as a way of climbing to the upper echelons of educational organization.
- The government should set up proper salaries and benefits for school administrators so that more women see the need to take up administrative posts in primary schools.

NOTE

1. This article was extracted from a master's thesis submitted to the University of Zimbabwe by R. Karima.

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