Navigating marginality: Reclaiming and understanding the status and experiences of Zimbabwean women who occupy educational leadership roles

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Abstract

The twenty-first century has seen very few women profiled in educational leadership positions. Women need to break through the glass ceilings in order to navigate marginality. Many African governments are signatories to the convention of gender equity and equality and vowed to fight against any forms of discrimination that bar women from positions and hinder their career development. Yet real obstacles remain. Women are still concentrated in the lower ranks of educational leadership positions with the majority as deputy heads of schools while a minority take the headship positions. Breaking through the glass ceiling still appears elusive for all but a select few. This study was meant to analyse the experiences of those women who are already in leadership positions in education. A qualitative research was carried out to establish experiences and opportunities by women to break the glass ceilings that affect their statuses in educational organisations. Interviews were used to generate data from women in management positions in the education department in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. Purposeful sampling was employed to select 10 women leaders. The study recommends creation of positive attitudes towards women, minimising gender stereotypes; crafting policies that promote gender equity, among others.

Key terms: leadership; management; marginality; glass ceilings; women; gender

Introduction

Prior to the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe, women were given scant attention as a subject of scholarly inquiry and were entirely ignored. Given the option to send children to school, parents opted to send the boy child at the expense of the girl child because they had the belief that the girl would get married and enrich the husband. Over and above these traditional strings, the shortage of places and the considerable financial constraints made parents to send only a few children to school, and the few were boys. Promotions to positions of authority were a dream for women. Women worked as part time in education particularly in Zimbabwe.
because they were made to resign in order to go on maternity leave. Such conditions could not put them on the platform for promotion for they remained junior teachers in the profession all the time. With the attainment of independence, Zimbabwe like other African countries took heed of the conventions of human rights and adopted the philosophy of equity and equality at work places. Women were given an equal share in terms of promotional opportunities at policy level. The promulgation of a policy does not mean its effective implementation. Lip service could be paid to the implementation of the policy because many women are still struggling to break through to top leadership in many African countries. This study was concentrated to Masvingo province in Zimbabwe because the percentage of women in positions of authority is very low.

Karl Marx argues that people are born equal and their inequality comes entirely from the social environment. In line with Marx’s thinking, there is no cause for women marginality. Women have to fight and reclaim the lost opportunities and regain their status in society. Marx further argues that if inequality was created by man, it can be remade by man (Marx as cited in Vodolazov, 1988). There is a general trend of preventing women from breaking through their glass ceilings in leadership (Wirth, 2001). In the same vein, it is argued that there is general lack of women in senior leadership positions in most work organisations (Baxter (2014). As if it is not their right to take leadership positions in schools and other educational institutions, women find blockages into leadership. This kind of thinking is influenced partly by the previous experiences where the role of the women in society was the home and any woman who was seen trying to take a leadership position was associated with being immoral, unfit and unworthy of a family person. Society is not used to seeing women in top leadership roles, yet man is born equal and it is the environment that brings about differences.

Female leadership in society is not a common phenomenon (Quader and Oplatka, 2008, p. 401). Political leadership illustrates this trend: In history only 42 women have ever served as presidents or prime ministers, and 25 of those came to office in the 1990s (Adler, 1999). Public interest in women’s potential as leaders is fuelling today. Women are demanding for an equal share in terms of leadership positions. However, some women feel that they cannot make it on their own, they need to be mentored. Such notions paralyse the idea of women advancement. In line with these notions, Woolf had this to say:

Even when the path is nominally open, when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant, there are many phantoms and obstacles, I believe, looming in her way. To discuss and define them is I think of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved (Woolf, quoted in Grogan, 2010, p. 783).

Whereas there are growing numbers of studies about women and leadership in America and other Western countries, there remains a dearth of literature about women’s leadership in Africa (Ngunjiri, 2010; Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009). It is argued that in the twenty-first century the rate at which African women have been integrated in educational leadership positions has been very slow (Dibie and Dibie, 2012). In the same vein, it is argued that although educational attainment by women has increased, women continue to be underrepresented in senior administrative positions in the education sector (Longman and Lafreniere, 2012).

While there are extraordinary women who successfully navigate all domains of corporate culture, they are the exceptions (Piterman, 2008). As Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) argued, African women leaders are missing from the discussions and this is cause for concern. The talent in women should be exploited in order to resolve the myriad of issues facing the African continent. It is argued that there is need to explore avenues on how
women can navigate exclusion from senior leadership positions in educational institutions and the argument is advanced as follows:

Scholars cannot afford to neglect understanding the status and experiences of African women who occupy leadership and management roles in African organisations, or the barriers to their success (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009, p. 50).

Women, generally, remain under-represented at managerial levels (Palermo, 2005). There road to leadership is very narrow and there is lack of parity in some conditions of treatment at work places as regards women leadership (Still, 2002). Stories of isolation and sense of marginality at their places of work are always told. To that end, women have a strong and urgent need to know about each other's experiences and how they can relinquish themselves from such experiences of a continuing fundamental inequity (Sheppard, 1992, p. 166).

Women are marginalised to the extent that they are often perceived as subordinates, outsiders or deficient (Alfred, 2001). This kind of marginality disrupts women identity. They are considered as people with low self-esteem, impoverished social relationships and isolation, and negative emotional states. Unless women fight against the male dominated work structures, they will remain supressed and oppressed and will find it a rocky road to move to break the glass ceilings created for them. Some school communities shun women leadership and treat them unfairly, especially those that have never seen a woman leading a school (Peters, 2011).

**Statement of the problem**

Society seems to look down upon women occupying leadership positions in various educational institutions. A very small number of women take up leadership positions and thus fail to break through glass ceilings. Although governments have devoted much thought and energy to overcoming the attitudinal and institutional discrimination that bars women from certain positions and hinders their career development, many of the results fall short of expectations. Real and live obstacles remain normally rooted in the fabrics of the institutions. Women are still concentrated in the lower ranks throughout the world and breaking through the glass ceiling still appears elusive for all but a select few. Women hold a very low percentage of top executive jobs. A lot of hidden strings still mar women from reaching the top without meeting stumps and blocks. Many educational institutions are led by men, as if leadership is the sovereignty of men alone. Go to universities, colleges of education, directorate of education, schools, you find men leading. Marginalisation of women to positions of authority in educational leadership and management is still rife, hence this study.

**Main research question**

To what extent can women navigate marginality and reclaim their leadership and management roles in educational organisations in Zimbabwe?

**Research questions**

They sought to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of women who occupy leadership and management roles in educational organisations?
2. To what extent do women in leadership positions navigate marginality in educational organisations?
3. What strategies can be used by women leaders to reclaiming their statuses in educational organisations?
Conceptual frameworks

The term the glass ceiling was originally coined by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in a Wall Street Journal report in 1986 to represent the barriers that women who attempted and aspired to senior management positions faced (Lockwood, 2004). The term was used to keep executive level leadership positions in the hands of males (Wilson, 2014). Glass ceiling is a term coined to refer to invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organisational prejudices, which block women from senior executive positions. Glass ceiling is a form of social and economic gender inequality. With the advent of independence in most countries it has been assumed that women will untangle themselves from the ropes but this has proved hard to achieve and no more so than at the top, where the prevalence of male executives tends to perpetuate the glass ceiling. Women are just knocked out by lack of experience required for senior executive positions (Antal and Izraeli, 1993). The argument advanced for breaking the glass ceiling is that there is no objective reason for women not rising to the very top (Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2000). Women should not be stopped by any means to access senior leadership positions in education (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2000).

Theoretical frameworks

This study employs two theoretical frameworks that relate to women marginality and emancipation. The Africana woman theory is employed in here to demonstrate lack of exposure by women to engage in top leadership positions. The second theory is the standpoint theory which demonstrates the need for women to employ strategies that emancipate them from the bondages of marginality in order to reach the unreached.

African feminism/womanism

African feminism is defined as “the exposure of gender inequalities and gender-oppressive behaviour” (Chilisa and Preece 2005 p. 211). The theory of African feminism is informed by the African women’s stance of the need to challenge the oppression of women without alienating African men and not rejecting African culture. It is defined as: a discourse that takes care to delineate those concerns peculiar to the African situation. It also questions features of traditional African values without denigrating them, understanding that these might be viewed differently to the different classes of women, (Mekgwe 2008, p. 167).

African scholars argue that western feminism does not represent African realities. It is opposed to western feminism which dichotomizes human relations placing males against females, as well as the individualism and competitiveness (Arndt, 2002; Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009; Nnaemeka, 2003; Oyewumi, 2003). African feminism recognizes that African women’s realities demand a more holistic perspective that has to root out the unjust social arrangements between men and women, particularly those involving abuses of culture, traditions and contemporary economic compacts. African feminism emphasises consciousness and recognises the realities of the social, cultural, historical, economic and cultural context of African women (Oyewumi, 2003). There is need for African perspectives, theories and concepts in the academic marketplace of ideas, to ensure better interpretations of African realities (Arndt, 2002; Hudson-Weems, 1997). African feminists are committed to “giving voice” to African women (Konate, 2007; Ntseane, 2011). The African Feminist cultural lenses have been used as the theoretical framework in this study.

The standpoint theory

The standpoint theoretical framework is useful
in understanding Black feminist thought. Standpoint theory highly focuses on the production of knowledge that is emancipatory, anti-oppressive, non-hierarchical, negotiated, and politically focused (Bloom and Erlandson, 2003).

Yonezawa posits that

Standpoint theory proposes that people gain knowledge through their positions or social locations. They use the term positionality to capture how people’s positions in the larger social structure like race, class, gender, and sexuality influence what they are aware of and their interpretations of events (Yonezawa, 2000, p. 111)

This means that women need to interpret the experiences they get at work places as opportunities to create new knowledge about work, family, and society using a privileged epistemology. They have to understand these experiences in a better and informed way so that they create opportunities to navigate marginality in work situations and break the glass ceilings.

**Literature**

African governments try by all means to implement gender equality in state institutions by putting in place policies, strategies and mechanisms. Despite all these efforts, it is argued that educational leadership favours males and resists change in most institutions. In a study carried out in South Africa of females who managed to break through into the leadership of the Department of Education, Chisholm as cited in Diko (2014) discovered that some of those who were promoted became frustrated and ultimately left the education sector. This is pointing to the fact that space is not created and opened for women to exercise their leadership rights and leadership is considered as the sovereign field of men.

Most organisations consider African women as outsiders within their academic work places and lock them out of leadership positions (Johnson and Thomas, 2012). They are put at the margins and considered a forgotten tribe in terms of leadership positions. African women are normally invisible and voiceless and this kind of exclusion causes them to be overshadowed. They lack visibility. Literature points to the fact that women of substance, of great minds, of fibre are invisible simply because some people’s eyes have a peculiar disposition of those with whom they come in contact (Bloom and Erlandson, 2003).

Leadership has traditionally been construed as a masculine enterprise with special challenges and pitfalls for women (Carli and Eagly, 2001). This perception raises the very interesting question of how women lead. Researchers have found evidence of consistent marginality and discrimination shown to women in leadership (Maxwell as cited in Kleiner, 2005, p. 54). This is pointing to women marginality. It appears as if women are said not to possess the necessary characteristics of effective leaders. This study aims at clearing such negative perceptions about women leadership capabilities. In a study utilising in-depth interviews and a national survey, Davidson and Cooper (1992) proposed that discrimination in a ‘male organisational climate’ acted to limit ambition for women, creating job dissatisfaction with work and mobility problems. In another study involving in depth interviews, Sheppard (1992) found isolation and discrimination to be recurring themes in women’s descriptions. Women are marginalised because they are perceived to be unfamiliar with the organisational protocol, and therefore may feel like ‘foreigners’ to the dominant group (Ragins, 1995).

The lack of women in powerful positions used to be explained by many as a “pipeline problem,” that is, the interpretation that women with the appropriate education and background were not available. In explaining the continuing dearth of women in senior administrative positions, UNESCO (2002)
identified three perspectives. These include among others, the personality of the individual, the organisational structure and the culture as factors inhibiting women from breaking the glass ceilings. It is further argued that some women lack self-esteem and self-confidence; have limited aspirations in the field of management, lack motivation and ambition to accept challenges to go up the ladder. Among structural factors are discriminatory appointments and promotion practices; male resistance to women in management positions; absence of policies and legislation to ensure participation of women; and limited opportunities for leadership training and for demonstrating competence as a result of the power structure in the workplace. The cultural perceptions determine the attitudes and behaviours of individual men and women and this forms barriers to the equal participation of women in senior management (UNESCO, 2002).

This study argues that people should not hide behind the non-existent fact of lack of education by women. The present leaders should not put benchmarks that hinder women promotion. The present leaders must identify talent and potential among women and nurture that. Leadership is not the province of men alone. Because the pipeline is full of men, this idea has blocked women from breaking the glass ceiling (Carli and Eagly, 2001). Marginality experienced by women may be further heightened by a lack of accessible mentors willing to initiate them into influential social networks in the workplace (Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Still, 1996). Marginalisation comes in the sense that most men do not want to associate with women to scaffold their leadership skills. To that end, women remain in a closed circle where they get the least help to sharpen their leadership skills. Therefore, due to the shortage of potential female mentors, women may find it more difficult to initiate mentoring relationships. As mentors are likely to be men in positions of authority, if women are seen getting closer to such men, society attaches certain negative connotations to that closeness. Such cultural barriers will never free women from the bondages of leadership discrimination.

It argued that African women who seek for leadership positions lack ubuntu by some people who carry misconceptions about women leadership. Some parents go to the extent of influencing their sons not to marry women with interest in leadership citing that such women are not cultured. Such negative perceptions are created in the name of ubuntuism. These have to be challenged so that women can break through glass ceilings. The African worldview is sometimes described in terms of Ubuntu, that is, the essence of being fully human. African worldview demands that people recognise and relate to each other as people who share a common humanity. Desmond Tutu observed that as a human being through other human beings, it follows that what we do to others affects us through the interwoven fabric of social, economic and political relationships (Tutu, 1999, p. 34). Slavery, Colonialism, Western education and missionary Christianity all but destroyed this cultural worldview, but conscious African men and women should find a way to renegotiate and reclaim their African identity with Ubuntu in mind (Ngunjiri, 2010). Colonisation of the mind and of other segments in society should be guarded against in order to put women on an equal footing with men.

Most women face numerous cultural dilemmas when they aspire for success. Few women are able to seamlessly navigate organisational life. Women are subjected to intense scrutiny and some societal members feel that they have borrowed power. They are judged on appearance and communication style. Highly-talented women can be sidelined and excluded from leadership positions based on a perception of poor cultural fit (Pieterman, 2008). Women then feel that they are not receiving proper accommodation in the field of educational leadership. Their visibility...
renders them highly vulnerable. Women's failure to gain the full strategic benefit from work relationships results in their exclusion from the opportunities that these relationships afford. Meritocracy and transparency remain statements of policy; idealised notions that are difficult to operationalise in the face of corridor politics and informal communication systems in educational organisations (EOWA, 2006a).

Literature that relates to women in management suggests that gender discrimination is so deeply embedded in organisational life. It points to unspoken 'rules and arrangements' and 'a plethora of work practices and cultural norms' that govern workplace structure and gender dynamics (Liff & Ward, 2001). These elements of organisational culture have the potential to limit women's promotional opportunities and undermine their experience at the workplace. A number of studies have identified correlations between a multitude of structural and cultural rules and the under-representation of women at senior levels (Beck & Davis, 2005; Hewlett & Luce 2005). Significant research around the rules of leadership and authority in corporate environments has revealed the role of gender, sexuality and power in shaping and limiting opportunities for women (Chesterman et. al., 2005). Women need to emancipate themselves from such hard rule. Women need to be aware of the strings that are being put around them not to reach the highest echelons of society. They have to struggle and emancipate themselves by using their current positions to influence what they are aware of (Bloom and Erlandson, 2003).

Research methodology

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology because it allowed the researcher to get the data directly from the subjects themselves by sitting with the participants and hearing their views, voices, perceptions and expectations in detail (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). The qualitative interpretive methodology helped to reveal to the researchers the nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relation systems or people (Leeds and Ormond, 2001 p. 148). This strategy contends that knowledge is subjective and ideographic, and truth is context-dependent and can only be obtained after entry into participants' reality. The researcher recognised several nuances of attitude and behaviour that could not have been noticed if other methods had been used. This was a case-study research design and gave the research the latitude to investigate the issue of women marginality in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001).

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from women in leadership positions in the education department in Masvingo Province. The researcher interviewed all the ten women to make situations come alive. The researcher booked to interview the participants at their convenient time. Each interview session lasted between 45-90 minutes. Over and above tape recording, field notes were also taken. Borg and Gall (1983:81) say “an interview involves the collection of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals.” The researcher carried out the interviews with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the participants.

Sampling procedure

Purposeful sampling was done to select 10 women leaders in Masvingo, who were information rich cases, to answer interview questions. Patton (2002) argues that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth. Hoberg (1999: p. 59) says purposeful sampling is done at random and is inclusive of sampling by case (researcher here selects at
random certain cases that will in all probability yield the information that is required). The information rich participants who were selected were knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher was investigating. The participants were willing to talk (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). In the process of data analysis, substantive themes were deduced after reading through the responses from the participants.

Data analysis

For data analysis and coding, the researchers followed Miles and Huberman’s (1984) reiterative approach. The main research question was trying to explore how women can reclaim their status and navigate marginality. This research question guided how the researcher generated the emerging themes as he continuously read and reread the interview transcriptions. For ease of data analysis, emergent themes were used. Constant comparative analysis technique was used to identify the themes.

Findings

Removing cultural dictates

The issue of cultural dictates seem to emerge as one of the barriers to women leadership in education. Participants had this to say:

P1: Women can navigate marginality if cultural dictates are removed from work institutions.

P2: You know what! There are various institutions of power that work against women empowerment silently. These are detrimental to women rise and such kind of power monopoly is not good at all.

P3: The way people accept decisions that a woman passes in schools and even at district level is questionable. I really do not know why some people doubt women leadership. I think this kind of doubt is only perpetuated in order to widen the gap between women and leadership positions in education. Our culture should not put such strings, hei.

P4: Culturally, most people believe that women cannot lead and their place is in the home. Most people seem to give negative connotations to women who involve themselves in top leadership.

P5: Culture is a big blockage to our rising to top positions

Culture continues to be a challenging issue within the ranks of many organisations (Wilson, 2014). Cultural beliefs are transferred from the home to the work environments. Literature argues strongly that unhelpful cultural expectations about women are prevailing to the present day. The blame of women under-representation in educational leadership and management is levelled on culture (Moorosi, 2008). It is also argued that gender stereotyping is one of the major causes of under-representation of women in educational leadership (Chabaya et al., 2009).

Failure to put in place conducive working climate and organisational culture

Educational organisations are being blamed for surrounding themselves with poor working climate for women leadership. Failure to put in place conducive school organisational culture is being pointed to as a strong barrier. Participants had this to say:

P1: When you realise that the culture in the organisation is against your effective functioning as a leader, you do not feel like going to the top anymore.

P2: You know what! Cold climates are created for you such that you will regret to be a leader. Frowning faces look at you and you almost feel out of place.

P3: Some people go to the extent of organizing private meetings to fight against women’s authority.

P4: There are walls and fences that are put for you silently. Even if you try this and that, it is not easy for women to jump Dura walls. You end up lacking the strength.

The above findings are consistent with what literature points to as affecting the rise
of women to leadership positions in most educational organisations. In their assessment of how organisational culture prevents women from going beyond glass ceilings, Myerson and Fletcher (2000, p. 136) made a summary as follows:

It’s not the ceiling that’s holding women back; it’s the whole structure of the organisations in which we work: the foundation, the beams, the walls, the very air. The barriers to advancement are not just above women, they are all around them…We must ferret out the hidden barriers to equity and effectiveness one by one.

The road is bumpy and dusty
The issue of rocky, bumpy and dusty roads is emerging as a barrier to women leadership. Such kind of roads are difficult to travel and very few women have such shock absorbers to travel safely along such roads. Participants had this to say:

**P1:** Walking along this road is really difficult and I am finding it bumpy and dusty. With high negative perceptions against women leadership, I am always finding it difficult to work as a leader in this scenario.

**P2:** Of course I get encouragement from some people but still I am bogged down. It is a rocky road to work as a women deputy head particularly under the leadership of a man. You are considered inferior and normally you see a shadow male deputy being appointed. In all fairness this becomes thorny for a woman to travel.

**P3:** What a rocky road to travel. Had I known I could not have applied for such a post. You lose friends and people begin to run away.

On this note, Aribino (1996) argues that policy makers should not promote or advance women to positions of influence along gender lines but should consider merit, competence, academic and professional credentials. If policies are put in place that make women less valued by their competitors, then such policies cause women to side-lined and not respected when they are given positions of authority.

There is still some kind of oppression
The idea of oppressive behaviour is coming out strong as a barrier to women leadership. Women feel that they are still oppressed in an independent country to practice educational leadership. Participants had this to say:

**P1:** I try to navigate marginality but I cannot go anywhere because women are still oppressed.

**P2:** Women are struggling to go up and break out of the ceiling but you see they are not independent at all. Independence is not all about politics but power to do your work without obstacles.

**P3:** When people went for the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, one of the major reasons was oppression that led to lack of education by black majority. Lack of leadership power is a form of oppression too. Women must be liberated and given power in educational institutions to rule without fear. No form of strings must be attached.

In South Africa, women argue that although they were promoted to leadership positions, the context was not changed to accommodate them. People still bypassed and overlooked them, and ignored their work (Diko, 2014). This results in emotive behaviour among women leaders. It is argued that women leadership in the educational arena is full of emotions due to many critical incidents in the system like isolation, vulnerability and induced fear (Yamamoto, Gardiner and Tenuto, 2014).

Lack of situations of creating positive mentorship for women leaders
Lack of mentoring is riding high among factors that hinder the germination of women as leaders in education. Participants had this to say:

**P1:** There is general lack of mentorship programmes for women in order to sharpen their leadership skills.

**P2:** Women lack positive mentorship and this creates problems of incompetence by women.
P3: Most people are always witch-hunting mistakes done by women leaders and this is not fair.
P4: Most people work for the downfall of women leaders, yet there is need to create a conducive environment where proper mentoring is done in order for women to gain the mechanics of effective leadership in schools.

Mentoring would provide the knowledge, expertise, guidance, develop the novice and teach the women leaders so that they gain insight into all the mechanics of effective leadership. It is argued that the reasons why women do not hold leadership positions is due to their lack of education, experience and maturity (Frazier, 2005).

Developing gender sensitive human resource strategies

Women are raising important strategies that could liberate them from the bondages of marginality. They had this to say:
P1: If you want women to ride the horse, you have to provide them with support through policies that promote their practices.
P2: Networking, succession planning, among others, can help women to break the glass ceilings and reach the unreached.
P3: People should understand that women are a key resource in the race to create new developments in educational leadership and management and they are entrepreneurs as well.

It is argued that in the twenty first century, the rate at which women are being integrated into senior leadership positions is very slow (Dibie and Dibie, 2012). This could be attributed to insensitive gender related policies which need a revamp in order to accelerate women advancement.

Creating policies that fully utilise women’s potential and talent to maximum levels

Concerns are being raised as to how women can be smoothly co-opted in leadership positions without any hassles. Participants had this to say:
P1: The government should create policies that can fully utilise the potential and talents of women.
P2: Women have the potential to do similar jobs that men do. The issue is of exposure and adequate opportunities are key factors to our break through.
P3: If we are given the chance to sun ourselves, really people will see how effective we are.
P4: Promotional policies have to emphasise our quarter. Providing for such opportunities should not be taken as a locury but as serious business in order to develop women’s talents and potential to the fullest.
P5: It is the responsibility of the government to level the ground by all means so that all players are not harmed in way. We need government protection, not only by putting policy in place but ensuring that the policy is implemented in the fabrics of schools and educational institutions.

Marshall (1997b) argues that women are placed at the margins of policy arenas, and mainstream policy privileges acts that maintain oppressive relations. Women need support in order to be freed from such kind of hidden oppression. It is argued that under representation of women in leadership positions is a result factors such as recruiting, hiring, pay, promotion practices, personal attitudes and women’s dual roles (Frazier, 2005). In the same vein, existentialist philosophy argues that whatever happens to an individual is a result of choice. Women chose not to lead in educational institutions. If they want to, then they have to overcome the hurdles.

Government to eradicate all forms of discrimination

Women seem to cry to the government to remove discriminatory practices that entangle them in the vicious cycle of marginality. Participants had this to say:
P1: There are certain forms of discrimination that are latent and these stop women from climbing the ladder.
P2: It is also necessary for the government to check whether lip-service is not paid to gender equality policies that already exist.
Removing the latent and manifest forms of discrimination against women in leadership is really a big issue to consider.

We really need protection from the government against all forms of discrimination.

Ayman and Korabik (2010) argue that there is evidence that subtle and systematic forms of discrimination still linger in most work situations against women. Empowering women to break through the glass ceiling requires action on many fronts. Changing social attitudes towards women’s roles can encourage women to break through glass ceilings.

Developing policies specific to women in leadership

Policy development is being suggested as a measure to cut unfairness in educational leadership. Participants had this to say:

P1: There is need to develop national policies and programmes promoting equality between men and women covering all walk of life.

P2: Policies provide an important framework and a basis for specific action in that area.

P3: Employers’ and workers’ organisations, should take it upon themselves and work as key actors in raising awareness, implementing national policies and developing innovative measures that enable women to attain and perform well in management positions.

Creation of positive attitudes towards women

Women are pointing to the need to create positive attitudes towards their leadership. They seem to point out that attitude change is a necessary condition for their sailing through to breaking glass ceilings. Participants had this to say:

P1: It looks like people even laugh at men who try to follow their partners who have been promoted to leadership positions. This stops women from breaking glass ceilings. Our husbands would feel that there is a snake in the house if other men laugh at him for letting his wife take a leadership position. Such attitudes are detrimental and destructive, you know.

P2: You can appear on the headline in local talks for doing that. I do not know why people have negative attitudes towards women like that.

P3: Most women whom you see working in the urban area followed their husbands who had been promoted to management positions.

P4: There are very few cases, if any, where you get a man who has followed his wife who has become an educational manager, even a manager in any other organisation. You see, people look down upon women in management.

P5: I have been to an educational organisation where I had been promoted to a deputy head. The head looked at me like a prostitute, a little girl and gave no weight to my suggestions and decisions. Instead, he even used a male teacher as a shadow deputy. To me, this was an insult and definitely, I transferred to another school.

People need to create positive attitudes towards women in management so that their chances of leadership are enhanced. It is argued that, the common assertion that “women teach and men manage” in schools, (Greyvenstein and Van der Westhuizen 1992, p. 271) has to discarded if women are to break glass ceilings in educational management. To that end, a multitude of strategies to rectify the gender imbalance in educational management are needed especially the creation of positive attitudes towards women in management.

Minimising gender stereotypes

Women are pointing to the need for reducing gender stereotypes as a means to break glass ceilings. Participants had this to say:

P1: Let me tell you one thing that is on the rise, gender stereotyping. Gender stereotyping still exists in many work situations regardless of policies that are put in place. Lip service is paid to their implementation.

P2: People really need to minimise gender stereotypes that are entrenched in society. Certain deeply rooted preconceived ideas are negatively affecting us as women to break through glass ceilings and reach the unreached.
P3: You notice that while people look at you, they portray that something is not normal in you if you are a woman leader, is that proper? You just wonder what the whole story is about and you get surprised.

P4: If ever there is going to be an occasion in the area, you notice that the level of involvement is peripheral and this is what we mean by gender inequality.

P5: People think that a woman lacks ability to lead. I really do not know where this is coming from. People have wrong mental pictures about women leadership and think that once you let leadership into the hands of women then power is out of bounds.

It is argued that assertion of power from a marginalised status is often a barrier to African women's transcendence into positions of leadership (Johnson and Thomas, 2012). The argument ventilated is that the mental pictures in our heads influence how we see women and because people find it difficult to accept change, the mental pictures affect how we see women in leadership positions. In other words, stereotypes unconsciously direct our choices and our world view.

Enforcing policies that promote gender equity

Gender equity in its real terms is what women are crying for. Fairness is what equity entails and this, in women's view, would take them to greater heights. Participants had this to say:

P1: What brings many questions to me is that after I pass on a decision, people think that it is not final just because it has been said by a woman. People think that women do not possess authority to pass final decisions here. Why is the situation created in such a manner that power is centralised on men as if it is owned by them?

P2: What is important is not for the government to craft policies that enforce gender equity. The issue of enforcing the policies is critical in promoting action in organisations.

P3: People should realise that the devil is in the details. What the government puts in place as policy is not the policy but what is implemented is the policy. To that end, certain checks have to be made to crying voices in the organisations to ensure that no discriminatory activities are done.

P4: When you call a male teacher for caution, some actually try to intimidate you and even tell you that you are failing to run the organisation.

P5: I actually experienced some form of harassment at one moment. I was told to mind my family business and never to say anything against some people who were failing to perform their duties effectively.

Literature points to the fact that despite the gains made in making education accessible by women and attempts to place them in positions of authority, concerns have persisted about the chilly climate in many work environments (Longman and Lefreniere, 2012). It is also argued that gender inequalities have penetrated all the fabrics of work institutions and have become subtly institutionalised, woven seamlessly into the daily, unquestioned workings of most school organisations (Joeckel and Chesnes, 2009).

Conclusions

The following conclusions were made from this research.

Some women cannot navigate marginality because they lack mentoring experiences. They are not given the chance to act as role models at the highest levels. There exist gender stereotyping and negative conceptions of women's roles and abilities. Women are considered as inferior and their decisions are not respected at work places. There is lack of provision of opportunities for career development and succession planning. Issues to do with sexual harassment are still rampant and prevalent and prevent women from reaching the top. Policies that promote gender equity and equality are not fully enforced and women are not recognised as effective leaders. Some people still think that they have borrowed authority and without the assistance from men, women cannot make it.
Recommendations

The study recommends creation of positive attitudes towards women, minimising gender stereotypes; crafting policies that promote gender equity, among others. Strategies to facilitate women’s progression to leadership and management positions require high-level commitment by current leadership to change the existing culture within educational institutions. Sensitisation programmes at all levels of the institutions should be given to remove the wage surrounding women as incapable. In order to compete on a par with men, it is also essential that women have access to management training and mentoring at work. Equal employment opportunity policies including recruitment, job assignment, career planning, grading, wages, transfer and promotion have to be closely monitored and that the procedures are transparent, objective and fair. There is need to ensure that unfair practices are not levelled against women so that they can break glass ceilings.

References


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