

Gender Discrimination in Educational Personnel: A Case Study of Gweru Urban District Secondary Schools, Zimbabwe

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Gender discrimination in educational institutions persists, despite the vigorous pursuit of policies and programmes to reduce the varying degrees of gender inequity in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a signatory to international agreements and conventions which promote gender equity with a thrust towards increased access to education for girls and females. The creation of a healthy educational and social environment in which all people irrespective of gender are encouraged to fully utilize their skills and talents would be an effective tool to eliminate discriminatory practices and tendencies in the education system. Using a survey design and document analysis, this study investigated the practices perceived to constitute discrimination among educational personnel in secondary schools in Gweru Urban District. A total of 120 educational personnel drawn from 12 secondary schools responded to questionnaire and a sample out of 20 with face-to-face interviews. Analyzed data revealed that gender discrimination in learning institutions exists and is manifested in the appointments, promotion and assignment of duties and responsibilities. As a result, women seem to be negatively affected, in the low uptake of administrative positions. The government and the Ministries of Education need to implement professional development programmes on gender issues which raise awareness on the status, role, and contribution of both females and males in education and educational management. This effort would promote a cultural climate, within which females see themselves as leaders and males see women as capable leaders and decision-makers. This effort would promote gender equality and gender empowerment, and minimize gender prejudices in educational institutions. It is envisaged that this would help build a critical mass of females in decision-making processes as well as gender equity initiatives which are visible and vibrant with gender disaggregated data available in all educational institutions.

Keywords: gender discrimination, gender equity, female educational personnel

Introduction

The Nziramasanga Commission on Education (1999) recommended the building of a critical mass of females in decision-making processes through educational empowerment especially at higher education and the creating of a cultural climate, within which females see themselves as leaders and males see females themselves as leaders and males see females also as potential leaders. Research has shown that gender discrimination among educational personnel is evident and is caused by a wide range of factors which hinder female participation in school leadership. The National Gender Policy (2004) defined gender discrimination as unequal or preferential treatment of individual or groups based on their gender that results in reducing access to or control of resources and opportunities. The issue of gender discrimination is a human resource challenge.

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Gender stereotypes, sexist language, sexual harassment among others contribute to making the unfavourable for the female employees especially.

Gender discrimination among educational personnel is evident in the recruitment, appointment, deployment, and promotion in school. It is evident that few females are in administrative posts, despite government's efforts to implement the pronouncements of the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) Protocol on the third of posts to be held by females. The subject of gender equity is one which has received a great deal of attention internationally especially after the UN (United Nations) identified it as a key factor in development of nations. In developing countries, governments and communities are vigorously pursuing policies and programmes to reduce various degrees of gender inequity. In line with this, Zimbabwe is a party of the following: the UN CEDAW (United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women) (1979), the World on Education for All (1990) which emphasized most urgent priority to ensure access to and improve quality of education for girls, the 5th African Regional Conference on Women (1995) and declaration of OAU (Organisation of African Unity) (now AU (African Union)) of 1997, 2006 African Decade for Education, The Kampala Declaration Framework for Action (1996). These policies and protocols demonstrated the government's thrust to bridge the gender gap. Gender equity empowers females and males to equally play their parts in development.

In 1999, the Nziramasanga Commission on Education had recommended that a Gender Equity Council or Commission was set up to monitor and advised on the implementation of gender equity practices in both private and public sector activities and programs. To date, this has not been fully realized and gender discrimination has been persisting. However, the National Gender Policy (2004) recognized that gender equality was a key to the Millenium Development Goals and proposed to strengthen educational personnel at all levels to address gender issues. One of the strategies that have been implemented is affirmative action, through which, more females are promoted into important and influential positions of leadership.

Studies done in developed countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands (Dawtrey, 1995), and USA (Gunier, Fine, & Balin, 1994) concluded that females were marginalized, as most schools were predominated by male teachers, and this made the female teachers to feel intimidated and alienated from their work and environment. Most studies seemed to suggest that both female and male employees do not have much confidence in female leaders. This emanated from a number of perceptions and stereotypes which continued to confine females in the private sphere. This paper explores the gender discrimination among educational personnel as well as the practices that hinder the empowerment of women and their impact on personnel in school. The study maintains that most females face discriminatory practices which hinder their full participation in leadership positions. Through the analysis of socio-cultural and economic factors, it is suggested that cultural beliefs and practices support, and sustain gender inequality. There are a lot of researches that provided evidence on the high incidence of gender discrimination amongst females. Females are mostly discriminated, because of race, class, disability and as a result of the clashes that were prioritized in the dominant society. Other studies stressed the impact of gender related expectations, attitudes and stereotypes as main factors in gender discrimination as well as patriarchal value systems which supported gender inequalities. Connell (1995) defined hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of gender practices which embodied the current legitimacy of patriarchy that involved the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

He maintained that hegemonic masculinities are not fixed types, but a configuration of practices which stemmed from concrete situations where may change. Studies which have been done also showed that prejudices, sexual innuendos at work, discriminatory practices may motivate decisions in hiring, promotion, and appraisal of personnel within the work environment and education is not an exception. According to McFadden (1998), putting relations of power and gender inequality at the forefront of African scholarship would cater for some of the inadequacies of mainstream theoretical frameworks.

As one of the major influences in the area of consciousness, Freire (2000), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, proposed a learning process that provided a context for people to critically examine their realities and actively participate in creating their own knowledge. The ultimate goal was to transform the individual and collective consciousness which resulted in action against oppressive structures in society. Within this critical consciousness, Freire viewed both the researcher and those who had been researched as equal partners in the research process and production of knowledge (Brydon-Miller, 2001). Therefore, as equal partners in the research process, the researcher continuously involved the participants in the research process.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and it sought to establish the discriminatory practices that hinder female empowerment and participation in schools. The study sought to gather the true and actual feelings, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of the respondents. Qualitative study was used, because it is interactive (Silverman, 2005). The study employed a qualitative case study research strategy. This case study was chosen, as it enables the author to study phenomena in greater depth so as to reach a deeper understanding (Cresswell, 2005). The author purposively sampled 120 educational personnel drawn from the 12 secondary schools in Gweru Urban District. Purposive sampling makes use of the research, participants who possess desirable research characteristics (Seale, 2006). The study employed the interview method which comprised open ended questions that sought for descriptive and narrative responses regarding the phenomena under study (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). Semi-structured in-depth interviews, ranging from one hour to two hours were conducted to access participants' subjective experiences and meanings often lost in quantitative research (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and checked for accuracy. After transcription, the interviewees were invited to add questions to interview protocol before and during data collection. Once transcribed, interview transcript was returned to the appropriate participants for clarification and final approval. All requested transcript changes were made to protect confidentiality and to preserve the intended original meaning of answers.

The analysis of interview data using grounded theory allows the discovery of new understandings of the phenomena under study. The inductive and data-driven nature of grounded theory approach to data analysis allows the consolidation of essence of experience (Strauss Corbin, 1990). Data analysis for generating grounded theory proceeded with open coding. Open coding involves naming and categorizing basic concepts, patterns, and themes from raw data itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to grounded theory, open coding provides an opportunity for data-based categories to emerge, categories and themes from existing theory may also be borrowed. The research data were analyzed and discussed, using themes that emerged

from the study.

There are 12 secondary schools in Gweru Urban District. From these, 10 school heads, 10 deputy heads, 10 School Development Committee chairpersons, 60 heads of department, 20 teachers, and 10 non-teaching staff were purposively sampled. The selected schools were run by government and council. The sample size was representative for the target population of the study. The sample had seven male heads, three female heads, 40 male heads of department, 20 female heads of department, equal numbers of males and females in the teaching and non-teaching respondents.

The purpose of the study and the participants' right not to participate in the study were explained verbally as well as in print form before the interviews were conducted. To respect privacy and the voluntary nature of participation, the instructions emphasized that the participants were free to omit any item that they did not feel comfortable. The author assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study after explanation about the study's objectives, confidentiality and ethical considerations with assurance regarding the voluntary nature of participation. The interviews solicited information regarding demographic characteristics, existence of gender nativity to several responsiveness of the academic, social environment, and sex preference of leaders.

Results and Discussion

Gender Disparity in Administrative Posts

The current study among other findings revealed that gender discrimination in learning institutions exists and is manifested in appointments, promotion, and assignment of duties and responsibilities. The narrative that follows was emerged from analysis and integration of the interviews.

The policy on equal opportunities needs to be developed and be in line with the National Gender Policy (2004). There is a need to have more female in leadership posts. There is gender discrimination on recruitment, transfers, and promotions as evidence by the 58.8% of the participants who agreed with the statement that recruitment is influenced by gender. Most of the documents at the Gweru Urban District office indicated that 70% of the administrative posts were occupied by male teachers. The validity of equating leadership with masculinity is questionable. Wood (2001) pointed out that research has shown that masculine qualities were not the only ones that could yield good leadership. Darling and Glendinning (1996) pointed out that in the school system, a great many decisions, large and small were taken by people who saw the world from a male point of view. The majority of people who determined teachers to be promoted are men who have already been promoted and these men thought that the people being most fit for promotion were those who closely resembled themselves. Furthermore, Darling and Glendinning (1996, pp. 54-55) said, "In Scotland, at the beginning of the present decade, for example, out of 415 local authority secondary schools, there were only 11 female teachers.... It is not, after all, uncommon for the only member of staff in a primary school to be the head teacher in this situation; a male head teacher is seen presiding over a group made up exclusively of female class teachers". In the current study, 70% of the schools were headed by males with 60% of the deputy heads being males, which showed a slight difference. However, all the six School Development Committee chairpersons in the study were males. Gender discrimination is still persistent as 30% of the school heads are females and 40% are female deputy heads.

Sex Preference of Head of School

The participants were asked about the sex of the head they preferred and the reasons why, and the followings are some of responses:

- I prefer a male school head because they are fair and do not listen to gossip.
- I prefer a male school head because men are the heads of family.
- It is natural for men to lead and they do make better leaders.
- Males rule the world so it follows that the schools should have males in the lead.

Cultural and societal expectations and norms create an environment where male headship is acceptable. In the current study, although 30% of the school heads were female, the fact that 70% of the school heads were male carried with it, some of these expectations as mentioned above of “normalizing” male “headship”. Both male and female respondents preferred to be led by a male head, although 20% preferred a female head. A few of the female participants made the following observations:

- Leadership is for men.
- Men are more efficient than women.
- Leadership and responsibility is for men.

The statements above showed that some of the females did not have confidence in being led by a female. Discrimination based on sex continues to obstruct the rights of female in leadership and post of responsibility as evidence in current study.

Gender Discrimination on Transfer of Personnel

In transferring school heads, male and female administrators at the district offices tend to favor female. There is a tacit agreement and understanding that the female employees need to be closer to their families and husbands. This may explain the number of female teachers in the district but the males dominate in key leadership posts. Female teachers whose husbands work in the city were given preference to work there too, so as to curb the spread of HIV (human immuno virus) and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), and some of them do not want to uptake administrative posts which may take them away from their families.

Under-Representation of Females

Darling and Glendinning (1996, pp. 61-62) said, “Women are under-represented in promoted posts not only in the school as a whole, but also within almost every subject department of the secondary school”. A study carried out by Levers (1982) cited in Darling and Glendinning (1996) in England revealed that most women were not interested in taking up administrative positions in schools. The above observations tally with the comments made by the female participants as follows:

- I was appointed a head of department but turned down the offer because I was uncomfortable to head six male teachers while I was the only female teacher in that department. I preferred to be an ordinary classroom teacher.
- I find responsibility to be taxing in terms of time.
- There is a lot of work with little or no payment.
- I do not feel comfortable to lead men.
- Some males do not want to be led by a woman.
- Some husbands do not want their wives to be in leadership.

Culture and religion do not allow some females to be leaders.

Most husbands feel threatened when a wife assumes a post equal to theirs. So some women pretend not to like administrative posts in order to safeguard their marriages.

Some of the females pointed out that they did not want to assume any position of administration, because they were pre-occupied with personal activities. One female participant pointed out that her husband did not allow her to apply for any promotional post. Thus, the females were not in leadership because of these various reasons which stemmed from personal, societal, cultural, and ton religious pressures.

Out of the 60 heads of department in the 10 schools of this study, 45 were males. The females who were heads of department were mainly confined to the languages, humanities, and guidance and counseling and males were found in the sciences, maths, and practicals, in addition to the aforementioned for the females. This seems to suggest that females are still confined to areas that are deemed feminine. Furthermore, this demonstrates that duties are assigned according to gender. The impact of this phenomenon is that males and females continue to be confined to the same spaces, although 10% of the females were in areas deemed a male preserve. In daily work, outside the formal teaching role, females carry out duties which are primarily an extension of their domestic and caring functions in the home. In staff meetings, the secretaries are always females, they serve refreshments at meetings, and invariably the chairpersons are always males.

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes about female's roles spill over into the workplace, they are considered qualified in limited positions. Regarding females as sex objects contributes to sexual harassment and about 90% of the female workforce has experienced it in some forms (Wood, 2001). One female head mentioned how she had been a subject of sexual harassment by a teacher within the school. She pointed out how he criticized her leadership style and used language which was disrespectful. She attributed the remarks to her sex. Research has shown that sexual harassment devalues female's professional abilities and highlights their sex, which complicates women, all walks of life, male seldom experience (Wood, 2001). The sex object stereotype is also evident in how some co-workers and supervisors interact with female employees. Females are often defined by sex and gender rather than job qualification and performance. One male participant said about his female head of department:

She is a no nonsense lady who is result driven. All she cares about is that results in her department are consistently high.

A subtle and pervasive form of gender discrimination is stereotyping female into the role of mother which is a source of job segregation by gender. Society expects female employees to listen, support, and help others and female in the disciplinary committees tended to exhibit motherly care. In fact, females are constantly reminded of their motherly role through the use of endearments, such as "mothers", "mother" or "maiguru" (older brother's wife), and "ambuya" (mother-in-law). Therefore, conversations with female may highlight appearance and social status and obscure their performance, which reflected the cultural tendency to judge female by appearance than their competence on the job. On the other hand, male are also stereotyped and these reflected entrenched cultural views of masculinity which may limit them. The discriminatory practices within the schools may also overburden the males, as they may end up taking many responsibilities.

Policies and Quotas

Quotas specify that a number or percentage of female must be admitted to school, hired in certain positions or promoted. The government of Zimbabwe has stipulated that a third of the upper management posts should be assigned to female as laid out in the National Gender Policy (2004). In a study by Maranisi (1991), quotas and goals which can exclude female as the number specified may be interpreted and used as a maximum number of women, rather than the minimum. Therefore, the 30% of the school heads who are females maybe just a reflection of that maximum.

Other Roles and Responsibilities

Two of the female teachers were sports organizers, whilst another two females were examinations committee chairpersons. When it comes to promotional interviews, the issue of examination handling school-based and public is a major concern to the panel of interviewers. This may make some of the females not fare as they lack the experience. Females also hold other administrative posts, such as Home Craft Club organizer, School Health Director, and Scripture Union organizer, caring positions and by the large extension of domestic chores. These are informal administrative positions which do not enhance teachers' professional growth. On the other hand, males hold posts, such as chairperson for the Teachers' Club, chairperson for Schools' Functions, co-ordinator for heads of department, Exam Committee chairperson and sports director.

Recommendations

In the study's finding, it is recommended that the government put in place positive discrimination measures to counter imbalances in the system. Female workers need ongoing training and awareness about their workplace rights and channels for redress. It is important to include males in awareness training on the benefits of having female in the workplace. It is further suggested that ways of eliminating discrimination and bridging the gender gap need to be put in place, such as equal opportunity, affirmative action, quotas, and goals, and it also needs to increase sensitivity to gender issues in education processes.

Conclusions

This study explored gender discrimination among educational personnel in secondary schools. The research findings revealed that few females are in position of leadership, despite the government's attempt to bridge the gender gap through various policies, such as affirmative action, quota system.

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