WOMEN IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP APPROACHES IN EDUCATION AGENCIES IN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Women representation in educational leadership has been documented globally over decades. Current statistics and literature on women in educational leadership is somehow encouraging. This is because recent trend shows an expansion in the proportion of women in different educational leadership positions. Women leadership has been acknowledged positively in all education agencies that are led by women. As a result, negative views regarding women's ability to lead have been proved wrong. Different leadership approaches adopted by women leaders have been a tool in enhancing successful leadership. This paper investigates women in education leadership and management with a focus on leadership approaches in education agencies in Tanzania. The study participants included women leaders in education agencies. Data was collected through interviews. The results show that women leaders employed different leadership approaches including the use of participative leadership, transformational leadership, assertive leadership, collaborative leadership, and instructional leadership. Therefore, this study recommends that women leaders should adjust themselves through the use of various leadership styles for the purpose of ensuring that education goals are achieved.

Keywords: Women leaders, leadership approaches, education agencies, leadership positions, Tanzania.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers are of the view that different groups have specialized leadership roles. A leader is the one who has influence and is expected to carry out the leadership role (Geiger & Kent, 2017). The other members of organization are followers (Lucas, 2017). Leadership is a social process that occurs naturally within a social system. Leadership, then, is a process or property of the organization rather than of the individual. According to Ogawa and Bossert (1995) the quality of school organization leadership flows broadly through social networks and roles (Mbepera, 2015).

The presence of women in top education leadership positions around the world offers a positive perception on women's ability to lead (Omboko & Oyoo, 2011). Leadership is distributed

among leaders, followers, and their situation (Mbepera, 2015). Three major components of leadership that clarify the controversy include: (a) an attribute of an office or position, (b) a characteristic of a person, and (c) a category of actual behavior (Machumu, 2011). Therefore, leadership can profitably be examined as a property of individuals or as roles and processes of the social system.

The trend of women leadership positions is manifested in education agencies in both developed and developing countries (Mbepera, 2015; Makala, 2022). In the United Kingdom (UK), Holt (2012) disclosed that female headmistresses comprised only 36.7%. In Bangladesh in 2006, 17.4% of college heads were women, and in secondary schools, women heads comprised 22.7% (Sperandio, 2017). In this regard, it is clear to argue that having women in senior leadership positions has considerable implications for education as women are a group that constitute almost half of the 18 world's population and a third of the labour force. The United Nations calls for women to be involved in decision making and other opportunities. Involving women in decision making accelerates development and improves the economy, as women are able to contribute their abilities and creativity (United Nations, 1995).

Under-utilization of the skills of capable and qualified women means a potential loss of economic growth. That is to say, women in the world constitute an under-utilized resource. The majority of capable and skilled women in the education system are not utilized (Mbilinyi, 1992). Not utilizing the skills, knowledge and experience of women leaders in education agencies in decision and policy making means ignoring the experience of the majority of the population (Mbilinyi, 1992). Involving more capable and qualified women in leadership may create leadership opportunities for other women, as female leaders serve as role models and mentors for other women and young girls in society. This would help to break society's stereotyping and negative perceptions on female leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In various contexts, numerous researchers agree that women have great ability to lead education agencies. From primary schools to universities, women who hold various leadership positions have demonstrated positive leadership abilities (Gaus, 2011; Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013; Mbalilaki & Onyango, 2021). Loyd (2009) argued that education leadership is important for supporting people to establish educational goals, and work honestly without the fear of blame and judgment. Concisely, the main concern of educational leadership is to guide and give direction to the process of teaching and ultimately improve the educational outcomes for the learner (Williams, 2015). The study conducted by Evans et al. (2019) found that in America, women perform well in their jobs and are rewarded for their work. However, they were surprised that the society had low trust on women leadership as a result, there are few women who get into leadership positions in the USA to the extent that some women even fail to report harassment they face at work place. Still, Denmar and Paludi (2018) reveal the imagined realities about females in the USA, arguing that they are not easily trusted to occupy high ranks of leadership, for instance in aircraft industry, simply because men have dominated such industries for years. Therefore schema and stereotypes tend to emerge during hiring of women into the industry.

The study by Hideg (2019) in India observed that society has an informal system of creating protectionism ideas for women, and feels good about such ideas but in reality women end up being exploited at their ignorance. Jones and Zhao (2017) add that that gender in China is shaped by language and social constructs, thus every man is expected to rule at least three at levels which are: father, husband, and son of authority to his mother after her husband's death.

In this case, female cannot get real or imagined leadership identities through such practices, in response to this applaud. However, the study by Uadir (2019) revealed that a small number of women trusted in leadership in education agencies performed very well. This shows that when women are trusted for education leadership, they can do the best.

Moreover, the study by Avgeri (2015) reiterates that in the field of educational management and leadership women's attempt to gain equal groundwork with men is quite evident but the former still face gender related barriers that hamper their progress. Those who break the ceiling grass are showing managerial maturity and are transforming education agencies into very successful institutions Mbepera (2015) adds that currently in Tanzanian education diversity in terms of gender has become more noticeable as women increasingly gain access into managerial posts. Many of them are trusted to hold education management positions through being appointed by the authorities.

In general, the literature has shown that women play vital roles in education transformations. They have shown positive attributes towards leading education agencies. In Tanzania, there is enough evidence to support women leaders' success in leading education agencies, but little is known about the leadership approaches that they employ. Therefore, this paper aimed to fill the gap in literature by addressing investigating the leadership approaches used by women in education agencies.

METHODOLGY

The study intended to investigate leadership approaches adopted by women leaders in education agencies in Tanzania. The study used the qualitative approach as a method of inquiry. Data were collected through interviews. The qualitative approach was chosen in order to gain as much data as possible from a relatively small sample size. Moreover, it is a more flexible approach since it enables participants to express themselves while providing data. Furthermore, it offers chance to develop specific insights. The way participants talk, the words that they use, and even on their non-verbal communication all create a foundation for the researcher to understand them better. Data for the study were collected from Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Mbeya regions. These regions were purposively selected because they have a good number of women leaders in managerial positions in education agencies. A total of 15 participants were interviewed (5 participants from each education institution). The information from interviews were audio recorded and later on transcribed verbatim.

Earlier on, before embarking on data collection, the researcher obtained a research permit from Open University of Tanzania. Thereafter, the researcher sought informed consent from participants and asked for their willingness to participate in the study. The researcher also assured participants of confidentiality of the information gathered and anonymity of the respondents were ensured

Data Analysis Process

Thematic analysis technique was employed to analyze the collected data. Thematic analysis is a method for reporting, identifying, and analyzing patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Rahi, 2017). The rationale for choosing thematic analysis was that it allows a researcher to focus on the data in numerous different ways. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to legitimately focus on analysing meaning across the entire dataset..

RESULTS

Several issues emerged from the interviews regarding women in education leadership and management in Tanzania, particularly the leadership approaches that they adopt. These are presented and discussed hereunder.

The Use of Participative Leadership Approach

Findings revealed that women leaders in education adopt participative leadership approach in leadership. Under this approach, women leaders were able to consult the subordinators and embody their suggestions in decision making. This approach helped the women leaders to cope with the subordinates' stereotypes at work. Some women leaders in education agencies who participated in the study disclosed the following:

> … as a woman, leading a group of people that include men can be a challenge. However, what I can tell you is that I have a positive attitude towards all my subordinates here. I make sure that before any implementation of projects at this institution, I engage everyone to let him/her know so that I can get their inputs before the implementation (Interview with a Women Leader, Institution C).
> On my side, I have been striving to make the best decisions based on the information and ideas that I get from my fellow workers. In this way stereotype against women leaders that most of the people have is eliminated. This makes us feel good and comfortable when we lead people who acknowledge the ability of women leaders (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution A).

The Use of Transformational Leadership Approach

Findings revealed that women leaders transformed education institutions' working environment into better places for working. Transformational process placed a high value on creating community bonds which enabled both women leaders and their subordinates to reach greater levels of achievement. Some women leaders explained that:

> I decided to transform this institution by creating a promising working environment for my co-workers. This transformation helps me as a leader to create an institutional vision, communicate the vision and build commitment to the vision. As a result, my work mates feel good and enjoy working at this institution as they are proud of my leadership approach (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution B).
> I feel good to use transformative leadership approach to lead my fellows in this department. This is because of my ambition to bring new ideas that will develop the institution. Moreover, it is important to disclose to you that through transformational leadership approach I have caused changes to individual workers; honesty, their working morale has been increasing day after day. In its ideal form, transformation leadership approach has created valuable and positive change among workers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution C).

The Use of Assertive Leadership Approach

Findings revealed that, in the face of women discrimination based on gender stereotypes, women leaders were embroiled with stress and anxiety. Subordinates chose to refer to women leaders by their names while male counterparts were often addressed by their titles. Thus, in this situation of women leaders facing minor assault in their daily administration, the choice of authoritative leadership appeared inevitable. Women leaders disclosed the following during interviews:

> I have given you the scenario where women leaders are mocked by some male workers. In this case, I decided to change my leadership approach and started to use assertive approach. This is because assertiveness adds power and conviction to a message and enables a leader's voice to be heard especially in a situation where a head teacher sees the importance of doing so (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution A).

> Yes, one of the leaders who prefer to use assertive leadership approach in this department is me. You know why? This is because assertiveness in leadership not only improves self-respect by being assertive but also helps earn respect from others, especially those who think that women have nothing new in leadership and they cannot add any values to the institution (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution C).

The Use of Collaborative Leadership Approaches

Findings revealed that women leaders collaborated with community members for issues pertaining to students' welfare so as to create an environment conducive for teaching and learning. Some women leaders who participated in the study gave the following explanations:

> For any leadership to be successful the leader must involve others so as to solve the emerging challenges. I thank God because the Dean of Students of this institution who is a woman, collaborates with parents and guardians especially on issues pertaining to students' welfare such as sickness, deaths or any psychological challenges that students encounters while at the campus (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution C).

> Effective collaborative leadership isa very important strategy that I use as a leader for the purpose of accomplishing my daily tasks of leadership in this institution. Effective collaborative leadership is expected to provide our education stakeholders with opportunities for improved practices through increased leadership opportunities and feeling of being valued in a school environment (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution C).

The Use of Instructional Leadership Approach

The findings showed that education institutions had allocated financial resources for workers' capacity training to make them well equipped with the up to date knowledge. The findings further disclosed that through instructional leadership, human resources were supported financially to attend in-service training. The women leaders who participated in the study gave the following statements:

> In this institution we have a budget meant for staff development. Each year our staff members attend short-term and long-term trainings. This has been a good catalyst of making workers proud of their institution as they feel that they are secure and valued. This has made some of them to have permanent contracts with this institution (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution A).

> The reality is that when the institution supports workers for further studies, it empowers them to acquire leadership skills. Moreover, further studies proved to be a potential tool for helping workers realize their true potential for taking leadership positions in education agencies (Interview with a Woman Leader, Institution A).

DISCUSSION

This study found that women leaders were very potential in leadership. They have shown positive contributions towards institutional development as they were able to set goals and

accomplish them through different leadership approaches. One of the leadership approaches revealed was participative leadership. Under this approach, women leaders ensured that everyone works together for the decision-making process and addresses institution issues, sometimes employing an internal vote to address problems or challenges that affect the education agency. Mark (2019) maintained that though there are many advantages of participative leadership in education institutions, one of the remarkable advantages is that it involves followers in the decision making process, and this has many benefits to both the followers and the leader. Philemon (2021) adds that through participative leadership, workers become aware of what is taking place in their organization, hence they have a chance to make good suggestions of the anticipated organization policy that can be implemented. Mashare and Glinow (2012) suggested that women leaders should involve their deputies and other subordinates in the decision making. This is because delegation of some duties goes a long way to break subordinates' stereotypes of women leadership, which has been perceived by both men and women for a long time in our societies.

Participants of the study argued that they used transformational leadership approach for the purpose of creating valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders. Therefore, using their intuitive power, women leaders transformed education agencies into centers of excellence in leadership. One of the important tenets of transformational leadership sticks on idealized influences, productive commitment, and inspirational motivation. Matthew (2020) commented that women leaders tend to be more transformational in leadership than their male counterparts. This transformational ideal state has brought trust not only to the authorities who appoint them but also to the community members. Kanu (2019) concluded that women are indeed becoming good strategic managers of their schools and they are as competent as their male counterparts.

Moreover, the study findings revealed that women leaders also deployed assertive leadership approach. Dube (2015) observed that assertive leaders take responsibility for their thoughts feelings and behaviors. Samson (2017) added that women leaders recognize that they have choices about how they perceive a situation and how they engage with people. They do so with positive intent and focus on positive outcome in situations. This shows that through assertive leadership approach, women leaders express their thoughts, ideas and expectations with their teams in a self-assured and considerate way. This type of leadership involves collaboration with people at all levels of the education institutions. Edison (2018) noted that assertive leadership approach helps leaders communicate more confidently, deal with difficult situations with ease, and be more authentic in their interactions with other workers. Shava, Mpofu and Tlou (2019) asserted that assertiveness in leadership not only improves self-respect by being assertive but also helps earn respect from others.

Furthermore, the findings of the study disclosed that it was very important for the women leaders in the visited education agencies to use collaborative leadership approaches as it helps the members of the institutions' to carry out the institution' programmes without any friction. Julius (2019) argued that, once employed in the organization, collaborative leadership approach blurs the experience gaps and operates as if every member were peers. In this realm, the purpose of collaborative leadership is to value the ideas and opinions of team members and give everyone the possibility to contribute to the fulfillment of organization's goals. Sebastian (2016) contended that effective collaborative leadership was a very important strategy used by women leaders the purpose of accomplishing their tasks of leadership in education agencies. Effective collaborative leadership was expected to provide education stakeholders with an

opportunity to improve practices through increased leadership opportunities and feeling of being valued in a school environment.

Another leadership approach that was reported to be employed by women leaders in administering education agencies was the instructional leadership approach. This approach aimed to support workers through trainings and workshops. Lashway (2012) argued that instructional leadership approach include five important elements, namely promoting a vision; creating alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and standards; focusing on data; and maintaining a culture of continuous learning. James (2013) added that the essence of instructional leadership is to transform the school as an organization into an environment where teachers and learners may reach their full potential. Bob (2017) proposed that since an effective instructional leader is knowledgeable about research-based, student-centered instruction models, it is very important for the education institutions to use such approaches.

CONCLUSION

Generally, from the findings one can conclude that studies have proved that the use of different leadership approaches has been an effective tool for helping women to realize their potentials in leadership. The findings show that women have their skills and make real progress in leadership once they are given such leadership opportunities. Thus, with such women leadership potentialities, it is very important for the women leaders to adjust themselves through the use of various leadership styles for the purpose of ensuring that education goals are achieved.

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