



Full Length Research Paper

Female leadership stereotypes: The perception of the leadership of female heads of senior high schools in Ashanti region

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ABSTRACT

The study discussed the perception of the female leadership stereotypes of heads of selected Senior High Schools in Ashanti Region. A census survey was conducted to select eighty-eight heads of Senior High Schools. A descriptive survey design was employed and focused on the administering of open and closed ended questionnaires to 80 headmasters and headmistresses. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.826. SPSS was used to analyze the data and the results were presented in tables and graphs. The study revealed that majority of the respondents disagreed on all the stereotypes associated with women on traditional beliefs/practices. Moreover, family responsibility is a leading factor that impedes female advancement to attaining leadership positions. In addition, the appointment to headship was rather based on professional and academic qualification rather than on gender as the perceived stereotypes will engender. Consequently, women also need to strive to higher positions like their male colleagues.

Keywords: Women leadership, female leadership stereotypes, perception, secondary school heads, traditional beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the lack of women in the top managerial positions, including educational leadership, has been the subject of much debate. Today, not only in the less developed countries, but also in the developed ones, there are some stereotypical images about women managers that become obstacles to their advancement as professionals. Traditionally, men have been seen as better suited than women to hold executive positions. The qualities associated with being a successful manager have been associated with masculinity; such as ambition, objectivity, and acting in an authoritative manner. Women have been seen as different from men, universally lacking the necessary personal characteristics, as they are dependent, submissive, and conforming (Burns, 1978),

and therefore lack the abilities to make them good managers.

Review of Literature

The entry of women into senior levels within organizations over the last decade or so has brought this stereotype into question (Wackman, 1996, Owen and Todor 1993). Some of the perceptions which project stereotypical images of women leadership have been offered as follows:

1. Women tend to place family demands above work considerations.
2. Women work for supplemental income; as a result they lack the necessary drive to succeed in business.

3. Women tend to mix their personal and professional beliefs and feelings, and for this reason, they are accepted as emotionally not professional.
4. Women are unsuitable for top managerial positions because they are too emotional and lack some qualities necessary for managerial positions such as aggressiveness, risk-taking and decisiveness etc.
5. Women managers have self-confidence problems.
6. Women managers are not motivated through power needs but affiliation motives.
7. Women are perceived as too soft or too tough but never just right (Gune et al., 2006, p. 194)

As a result of these negative beliefs, women make slow progress up the organizational hierarchy. In addition to these stereotypes, there are some other obstacles that prevent women from reaching managerial positions, such as low participation in male networks that limits their access to decision-making processes about promotion, discrimination against women in hiring and promoting policies, and the negative attitudes of employers and subordinates towards women managers.

Aside from these negatives, the issue of under representation of women has been considered. Researchers from different parts of the world (Cubillo and Brown 2003, Fitzgerald 2003; Madsen, 2008) have given attention to the topic of women in educational leadership positions at various levels of the education ladder. Most of these studies have concluded that women are under-represented in educational leadership, and that they face various challenges in their aspirations to attain and maintain these positions.

Moreover, with the exception of a few countries, the teaching profession is dominated by women; but despite the large numbers of women in the profession, they are greatly under-represented in positions of management (Cubillo and Brown 2003). Gender gaps in the appointment of school heads in Ghana are glaring (Addo-Adeku, 1992). The management of basic and senior high schools, including the appointment of head teachers, indicates the trend of male dominance. This disadvantaged workplace status of women is due to a set of historical, social, economic and organizational factors (Powell and Graves 2003, Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011), although the reasons for these persistent and pervasive inequalities vary somehow across national, cultural and occupational contexts. These stereotypical perceptions against women have made it difficult for most women to be appointed as heads of Senior High School in Ashanti Region. Though some women already hold leadership positions in educational institutions, the number is not proportionate compared to number of men in leadership positions.

Another explanation advanced for the under-representation of women in school headship positions is concerned with women's low self-esteem, and lack of confidence. Interestingly, myths, stereotypes and

prejudices relating to the abilities and attitudes of women were seen to be among obstacles encountered for a higher representation of women in management positions. Coleman (2004) observes that in surveys conducted in the 1990s and in 2004 in the UK, women were found to be more likely than men to refer to lack of confidence or their own perceived faults that stopped them from thinking they could become school heads. Such responses were also noted by Coleman (1994) when she commented that studies that look at the reasons why women were less likely than men to become head teachers, revealed lack of confidence on the part of women in applying for jobs and a relative hesitancy in developing career plans. Some people perceive women in leadership positions as more emotional, affectionate, talkative, patient, creative and less courageous than men (Bass, 2008).

Accentuating the limited women representation regarding the myth and stereotypical images of women concerns the responsibility imposed on women leaders, as they relate to family issues. Research conducted by Dorsey (1996) in Zimbabwe revealed that family attachment was found to be the major reason why women teachers did not apply for school headship positions. Women were found not to be prepared to take up positions away from their husbands and children. In fact, given a choice between career advancement at places away from the family and staying with ones' family, most women appeared to prefer the latter. Dorsey (1996, 1998) explains that from an early age, daughters are groomed for their marriage roles of wife, mother and food provider and so they are conditioned from an early age to believe that a woman is inferior to a man and that her place is in the home.

Clearly, the above research attributed lack of support from the family as one of the factors that contribute to the persistent under-representation of women in school headship positions. It also surfaced in the research that women had problems in applying for headship posts because they needed to consult their husbands before applying. If a husband does not approve, then she will not apply.

There are also examples of stereotypes that relate to the identification of the female with domesticity and the stereotypical prejudice about an unmarried woman. Coleman (2002) noted with interest that there are no equivalent sets of stereotypes about men. Nevertheless, gender and roles stereotypes continue because it creates and sustains them through some actions and practices. In saying that, stereotypes should not be used as an excuse to exclude women from leadership. Stereotypes resulted in self-imposed attitudinal barriers to women's entrance into positions of leadership (Bass, 2008). Stromquist (1993) observed that cultural values also affect the participation of females in leadership position. Nukunya (1998) asserted that in many Ghanaian

societies, the traditional position is that a woman is never wholly independent. He postulated that a woman must always be under the guardianship of a man, and when she marries, her original guardian hands over some or all of his responsibilities for her to her husband-

Nevertheless, the situation of women in leadership of educational institution may not be that worst off as current research indicates. Research conducted by Howson (2008) in Britain shows that women are breaking through mainly in primary and special schools (McNamara et al., 2008). However, in secondary schools the situation is different as Howson reported that the 40% barrier to the number of women who have been appointed to headships was not only maintained in the 2008 study but also fell back to 32%. In secondary schools, men have the edge in their participation in national training programmes (McNamara et al. 2008). It could be explained that career progression on the leadership scale is slower for women than for men.

Published research confirms McNamara et al. (2008)'s study that the majority of teachers in England are women, yet relatively there are a greater proportion of male teachers in senior positions although the women are academically and professionally qualified, and in most cases have more experience than their male counterparts (Acker, 1992; Coleman, 2001). Research by Coleman (2002) leads her to conclude that women numerically dominate the teaching profession in most countries, but they hold a minority of the management positions in education. Apart from schools which cater for very young children, which are more often managed by women, women teachers in junior, middle and secondary schools, and in colleges and universities are less likely to achieve management positions than their male peers.

In the light of these above, one is inclined to believe that there are obvious negative attitudes and gender discrimination towards women as managers around the world. Women make up approximately half of the workforce globally, and the number of women graduates from universities increase tremendously each year. However, the ratio of women managers is still too low especially for top managerial positions.

To explore these beliefs and stereotypes therefore, the researchers sought to find out from heads in second cycle institutions in the Ashanti region about their perception of female' heads leadership.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study was to investigate and explore the stereotypical perception of Senior High School heads' towards female heads working in Ashanti Region, on issues such as traditional practices, level of educational attainment of women, discrimination of women, women

behavior, such as, being less courageous, lack of career orientation and lack of emotional stability (Bass, 2008).

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were

- to determine the criteria for the appointment of heads of educational institutions
- to investigate the traditional beliefs and practices that mostly affect women in educational leadership in schools
- to assess the views of heads of schools on women in educational leadership
- to identify the barriers that confront women in educational leadership and measures to overcome them.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the criteria for the appointment of heads of educational institutions?
2. What are the views of heads of schools on women in educational leadership?
3. What traditional beliefs affect women in educational leadership in schools?
4. What are the barriers and constraints that affect women in educational leadership, and the measures to overcome them?

METHODOLOGY

The population for the study included all heads of second cycle institutions in the Ashanti region. The total population was 88. The study was a census survey since all the heads of the 88 public second cycle institutions were used for the study. The main instruments used for the study was open-ended and close-ended questionnaire consisting of 15 major items. The closed ended-items were in the form of Likert type with a range of between 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

The questionnaires were personally administered by the researchers. The researchers were able to meet most of the respondents, who were given one week to complete the questionnaires. Out of the 88 questionnaires administered, 80 were retrieved constituting 90.9% return rate.

RESULTS

The result of the analysis shows that 55(69%) of the respondents were males while 25 (31%) were females,

Table 1. Extent to which selected variables affect the selection of heads of second cycle institutions

N=80		Gender	4	3	2	1	Mean(X)
Academic Qualification Experience	Male		35 (45%)	20 (25%)	-	-	3.64
	Female		15 (18.8)	9(11.3%)			
Professional Qualification	Male		22(27.5%)	29(36.3%)	4(6.3%)		3.48
	Female		9(11.3)	13(16.3)	3(2.60%)		
Gender	Male		41(51.3%)	14(18.75%)	-	-	3.7
	Female		17(22.3%)	8(8.8%)			
Age	Male		1(1.3%)	4(5%)	14(18.8%)	36(47.5%)	1.38
	Female		-	-	2(12.5%)	23(13.8%)	
Age	Male		1(1.3%)	7(8.8%)	22(27.5%)	25(32.5%)	1.73
	Female		4(5%)	1(1.3%)	5(6.25%)	15(17.5)	

Table 2. Views of heads of schools about women participation in Educational Leadership

Gender	Women lack self-confidence	Women are less courageous	Women are more dependable	Women lack emotional stability	Women lack career orientation	Women lack leadership potential	Total
Male	29(39.7%)	10 (13.7%)	3 (4.1%)	9 (12.3%)	1 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	52(71.2%)
Female	9 (12.3%)	2 (2.7%)	3 (4.1%)	4 (5.5%)	2 (2.7%)	1 (1.4%)	21(28.8%)
Total	38(52.1%)	12 (16.4%)	6 (8.2%)	13(17.8%)	3 (4.1%)	1 (1.4%)	73 (100%)

an indication that there were more male heads than female heads. The qualification of the respondents ranged from bachelor degree to master degree holders. The analysis shows that out of the 55males, 7 (8.8%) are not married, while 48(87.2%) are married. With regard to the 25 female heads, all of them, that is, 100% were married and have children. The analysis shows that majority of the participants were married and have children. The number of years of teaching by the participants ranged from seven to twenty-five. Out of the 55 male participants, 37 (67.2%) hold first degree, and 18 (32.8%) hold second degree. Out of the 25 female heads, 17 (68%) hold first degree while 8(32%) hold second degree. This indicates that majority of the respondents hold first degree.

Criteria for selecting school heads

In the selection of heads of school, the following factors were considered; academic qualification, years of experience as a teacher, professional qualification, gender and age. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which these factors in their view affect the selection of heads of second cycle institutions. These factors were posed on a four point Likert scale ranging

from 4 =Strongly agree; 3=Agree; 2 =Disagree and 1 =Strongly disagree.

Table 1 presents the responses of participants on the extent to which these variables affect the selection of heads of schools.

Professional qualification (X=3.7) was found to influence to a very large extent the selection of heads of second cycle institutions. Academic qualification (X=3.64) and experience (X=3.48) were found to moderately affect the selection of heads of second cycle institutions. Gender (X=1.38) and age (1.73) were considered by the respondents as slightly influencing the selection of heads. Hence, these two variables gender and age were considered to have very little influence on the selection of heads of schools.

Views of heads of schools about women's participation in Educational leadership

Heads of schools were asked to share their views on how they perceive women's participation in educational leadership. Table 2 shows the distribution and the percentage of views of heads of schools about women in educational leadership.

Table 3. Traditional beliefs and practices that affect women in educational leadership

N=80	Gender	4	3	2	1	Mean (X)
(a) Women are supposed to defer to men	Male	48(61.25)	4 (.5%)	2 (2.5%)	1(1.25%)	3.2
	Female	20(23.8%)	1 (1.3%)	3 (3.8%)	1 (1.3%)	
(b) A woman is not a bread winner	Male	50(63.5%)	1 (1.25%)	2 (2.5%)	2(2.5%)	3.5
	Female	0 (0%)	22(26.3%)	1 (1.25%)	2 (2.5%)	
(c) A woman is not expected to hold a leadership position	Male	49(62.5%)	1 (1.25%)	3 (3.75%)	2 (2.5%)	3.88
	Female	23 (27.5%)	2 (2.5%)	-	-	
(d) A woman is expected to care for the family	Male	46 (58.8%)	4 (5.0%)	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.75%)	3.4
	Female	20 (23.8%)	2(2.5%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.5%)	
(e) Men are supposed to protect women	Male	45 (57.5%)	3 (3.8%)	2 (2.5%)	5 (6.3%)	3.7
	Female	18 (21.3%)	4 (5.0%)	1(2.3%)	2 (2.3%)	

The findings shows that out of a total of 73 respondents 7 (8.8%) did not answer the question; 38 (64.4%) made up of 29 (39.7%) males and 9 (12.3%) females indicated that one major view about women in educational leadership is lack of self confidence of the women.

With regard to the statement 'women are less courageous', 12 (16.4%), made up of 10 (13.7%) males and 2 (2.7%) chose the statement. Majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that women lack leadership qualities. Only 1 (1.4%) agreed with the statement; no male respondent agreed with the statement. This result is in line with studies conducted by Gupton (1998) who found that female administrators often express lack self- confidence about seeing themselves at the top.

Traditional beliefs and practices affecting women leadership

An issue that was also studied was the traditional beliefs and practices that affect women's advancement in educational leadership. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which these variables affect women advancement in heading a school. Table 3 reports what the respondents consider the extent to which these factors affect women's advancement in educational leadership.

The analysis shows that two of the variables, namely: A woman is not expected to hold a leadership position

($X=3.88$), and men are supposed to protect women ($X=3.7$), to a very large extent, affect women's advancement in educational leadership. The rest of the variables fairly affect the advancement of females in educational leadership. To sum-up, it is evident that all the respondents agreed that the listed variables associated with traditional beliefs about women hinder women's advancement in educational leadership. It is however surprising that at this point in the advancement of education in Ghana most of the heads-- male and female, believe that a woman is not expected to hold leadership position.

When the respondents were asked to indicate factors that served as constraints or barriers for women in educational leadership position; out of 51 (68%) of the males; 27 (36%) indicated "Family responsibility"; 16 (21.3%) indicated discrimination against women and 8 (10.7%) indicated cultural influence. Among the 24 (32%) females; 11 (14.7%) indicated "family responsibility"; 9 (12%) indicated "discrimination" and 4 (5.3%) indicated "cultural influence". Out of the 75 (93.7%) males and females respondents; 38 (50.6%) indicated "family responsibility", 25 (33.3%) indicated "discrimination against women", while 12 (16%) indicated "cultural influence". This trend shows that most of the respondents were of the view that family responsibility is the main constraint or barrier for women in educational leadership position. This result is in support of studies conducted by Shakeshaft (1987), who found that a direct impediment for females in attaining administrative position is the reality that family responsibility is a prominent factor.

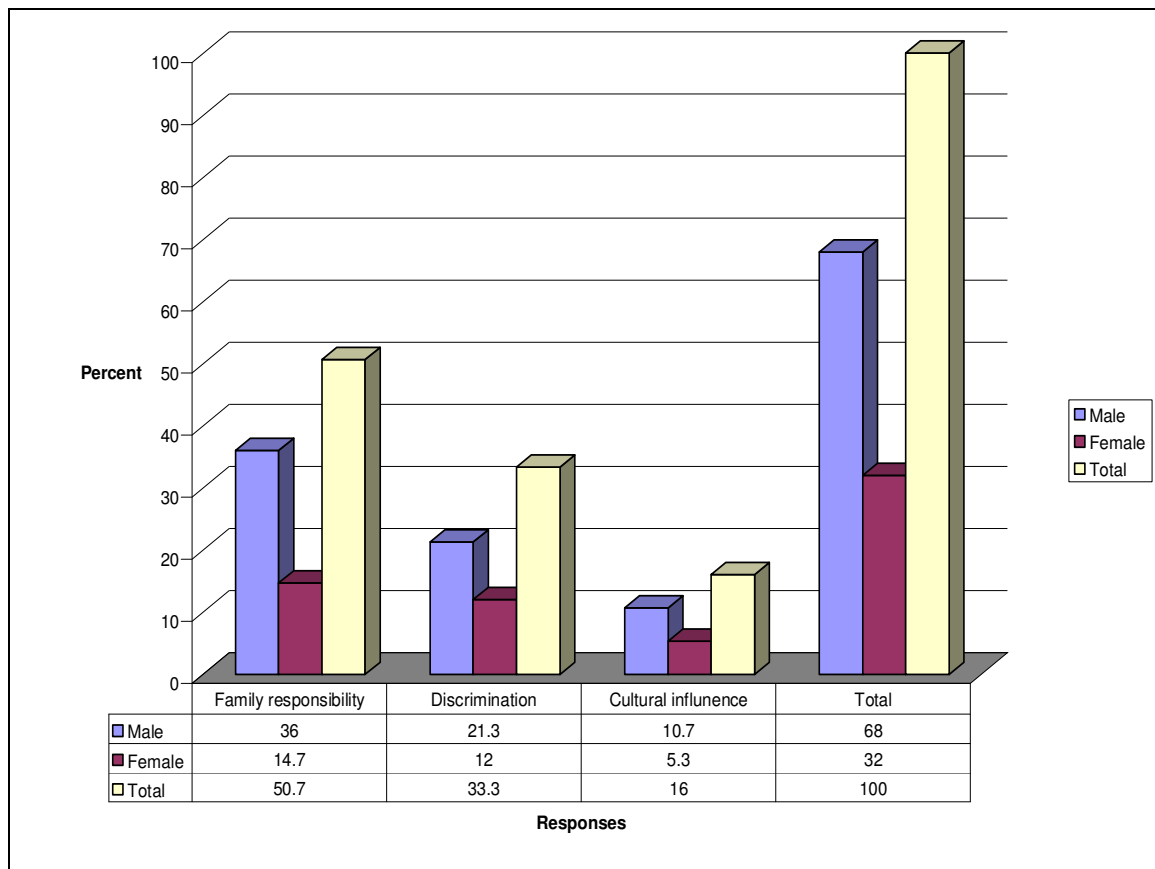


Figure 1. Barriers to women advancement in educational leadership

DISCUSSION

Criteria for selection of Heads of Schools

It is worth noting that the respondents were of the view that selection of heads of schools should be based first and foremost on professional qualification, followed by academic qualification and experience. They were of the view that age and gender should not count much in the selection of heads of schools. This finding was in line with that of McNamara, Howson, Gunther, Sprigade, and Onat-Stelma, (2008), whose research concluded that selection of heads of schools should be based on academic and professional qualifications as well as experience.

Traditional beliefs which affects Women participation in Educational Leadership

All the respondents indicated that there are some traditional beliefs which affects women's participation in educational leadership. One major traditional belief is that

a woman is not supposed to hold leadership position. This finding is in line with that of Eagly and Carli (2007) who said that many people hold the perception that an effective leader is a male. This is because more agentic traits (characterized by aggression, ambition, domination, self-confidence and force), are all thought to be indicative of an effective leader. This finding is also in line with the common assertion, that "women teach and men manage" in schools, still holds true despite a multitude of strategies to rectify the gender imbalance in educational management (Greyvenstein and Van der Westhuizen, 1992:271).

These beliefs are related to the stereotype position of societies. The most common stereotype is that relating to gender roles (Cubillo and Brown, 2003). Gender role stereotypes arise in response to the sexual division of labour and occupational segregation in the home and workplace. Evetts (1994) notes that gender stereotypes have come to constitute normative beliefs which people tend to conform to. Powell and Graves (2003) were of the view that the traditional beliefs which affects women participation in educational leadership is due to a set of historical, social, economic and organizational factors.

This finding also supports that of Nukunya (1998) who asserted that in many Ghanaian societies, the traditional position is that a woman is never wholly independent. He postulated that a woman must always be under the guardianship of a man, and when she marries, her original guardian hands over some or all of his responsibilities for her to her husband.

View of Heads of Schools about Women in Educational Leadership Position

The major views of the heads of schools were women lack self-confidence. Both male and female respondents agree with the statement. This result is in line with studies conducted by Gupton (1998) who found that female administrators often lack self-confidence about seeing themselves at the top. Another variable about how heads of schools view women in educational leadership was women are less courageous. This notion of females being less courageous is reiterated in a study by Cubillo and Brown, (2003), where it was found that women's so-called lack of courage was more to do with unfamiliarity with the territory than a lack of courage in their abilities. Women are more dependable, women lack emotional stability, women lack career orientation were all variables that affect women. One major variable that the respondents disagree with is the fact that women lack leadership positions.

Barriers and Constraints that affect Women in Educational Leadership

A major finding from the study with regards to barriers and constraints women face in educational leadership was family responsibilities. A significant number (50.7%) of the respondents agreed that this was a major barrier in women advancement to educational leadership positions. This result is in support of studies conducted by Shakeshaft (1987) who found that a direct impediment for females in attaining administrative position is family responsibility. Another factor was discrimination against women. This view is shared by Adler, Laney and Pocher (1993) who found that most of the literature on educational management and other theories of management and organization ignored women, either by making the assumption that all managers are male or by assuming a gender-free position. This view is also shared by Coleman (2002) who was of the belief that there is a natural order portrayed by male leadership and female.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to establish the perception stakeholders have about women who head second cycle

institutions in the Ashanti region of Ghana. The article has demonstrated that stakeholders still have negative views about the competency of women who are into educational leadership. From the study, it could also be concluded that males still feel that they are to manage while women teach.

Moreover, the criteria for selecting the head of an educational institution should be based on professional qualification, academic qualification and experience. The gender and age of the person should not be a matter of consideration. Traditional beliefs and practices that adversely affect women participation in leadership in schools should be discarded.

Thus, equal opportunities should be given to men and women in educational leadership positions, in mixed senior high schools, so that either a man or woman should be appointed to head any educational enterprise. In addition, G E S should organize in-service training for women in order to build or boost their confidence level so that they can take appointments as heads of Senior High Schools. Women in educational leadership could be offered additional support by given them an incentive, such as a house help, to help them in their house chores. This will lessen the burden imposed by traditional values on women who have to combine them even as they head schools.

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