

Advancing gender parity in educational leadership: Insights from selected secondary schools in Shinyanga Municipality

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Abstract

This study had two objectives: firstly, it examined the factors contributing to women's underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Shinyanga Municipality. Secondly, it explores strategies to ensure gender parity in schools' leadership positions. While previous studies have investigated factors contributing to women's underrepresentation, there is still little information on strategies to ensure gender equality in schools' leadership positions. To ensure equality in school leadership positions, it is significant to determine factors contributing to women's underrepresentation and to identify strategies to promote gender equality. To attain the study objectives, data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A total of 137 respondents participated in filling in the questionnaires, while 6 participants were involved in the semi-structured interviews. The quantitative part of the data was analysed using a logistic regression model, while the qualitative data underwent analysis using thematic methods. The findings revealed several factors impeding women from accessing leadership positions. These were: lack of confidence, low educational qualification, work-life interface, lack of mentorship, inaccessibility to leadership opportunities, women's disengagement in decision-making, societal expectations, inflexible work plans, unsupportive networks, and individual unwillingness. The findings also revealed several strategies to ensure gender equality in school leadership positions such as adequate implementation of policy advocating for fair appointment, training on leadership skills, formation of platforms and forums for women's participation in educational leadership, and shaping societal views and expectations. This study recommends the formation of concrete policies that will guide the relevant educational authority in appointing teachers into managerial positions in secondary schools. The presence of such policies will help to minimise the gender gap in school management.

Keywords: Gender parity, women underrepresentation, educational leadership positions, strategies to promote gender, and schools

Introduction

Gender equality in leadership positions is an important mechanism for involving people of both genders in educational institutions and other spheres of life. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in women's representation in managerial roles in the workplace (Islam et al., 2023). Despite these increases, women continue to face substantial

barriers and challenges in accessing senior leadership positions in the educational domain (Mbepera, 2017). Studies have revealed that in the workplace, women have less status, less freedom, and less influence compared to men, and their possibility of being elevated is not equal to that of men who have similar education and social standing (Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002; Chabaya et al., 2009). Additionally, women have low representation in executive roles; within the organisational structure; their positions are less elevated, and they are underrepresented in decision-making processes.

In numerous nations, such as the United States, Australia, and England, the ratio of women teachers is relatively high. However, they are comparatively underrepresented in administrative roles within the educational sector (Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002). These managerial roles, such as supervision, heads of local educational departments, and higher school principals, are given to men for executing responsibilities compared to women, who are mainly promoted to lower positions within educational institutions (Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002). In addition, the elevation of women and men unveil notable differences. Male teachers obtain their administrative experiences via various managerial experiences, such as vice principals, compared to female teachers who gain managerial expertise through pedagogical responsibilities like counselling, and they tend to dedicate more time to intermediate positions (Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002; Shauman, 2016).

The underrepresentation of women in schools' administrative positions is a complex issue caused by various administrative, individual, and socio-cultural factors that can lead to various types of discrimination (Gabaldon et al., 2016). Regarding administrative factors, appointment procedures and administrative issues are among the major influencing factors for females' limited access to senior leadership hierarchies within and outside the education sector (Nyoni & He, 2019). Sanderson and Whitehead (2016) claim that organisational internal appointments and promotion procedures are normally conducted by the male gender and made available to the same sex, thus causing women limited representation in senior leadership positions despite the higher levels of education they attained. This happens because of the lack of support from the administrators as a result of rigid protocols and procedures, complicated processes of promotions within the organisations, inadequate training resources, and insufficient policies to empower women, inflexibility, as well as limited prospects for women's career growth (Coleman, 2007; Nyoni & He, 2019; Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016).

Concerning individual factors, women encounter distinct challenges during the process of performing their responsibilities as leaders in different sectors. It has been found that women often lack confidence due to a system that fails to empower them through adequate role models and fair promotion practices (Islam et al., 2023). This lack of support stands as a significant obstacle for women who aspire to become leaders. For instance, Chabaya et al., (2009) observed that women face difficulties when it comes to appointments or promotion into senior leadership positions as they consider themselves inadequate due to a lack of confidence. Mbepera (2017) emphasised that women's lack of confidence in their abilities within the educational institutions, poses a significant hurdle

for them when it comes to assuming leadership positions. This, in turn, contributes to individual challenges such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence among potential female leaders, as highlighted by Amondi, (2017). Some studies have revealed that there are women who reject administrative positions because of the burden of family responsibilities (Chabaya et al., 2009; Islam et al., 2023). Women's prioritisation of family duties over leadership positions is nurtured by cultural biases and discrimination that consider women, even when holding institutional administrative positions, to continue to endure a significant burden of family responsibilities. These women fear that their leadership roles might be perceived as refuting their cultural role as mothers; therefore, causing conflicts between family and work (Islam et al., 2023). It has further been noticed that negative stereotypes and biases held by both women and men cause a serious obstacle for women in accessing higher administrative positions within the organisation (Gaus, 2011). Amondi (2017) argues that such discrimination will have negative effects, as it limits women's ability to develop their talents and pursue their career goals. Additionally, the absence of female role models in the workplace discourages women from aspiring to leadership roles.

Regarding socio-cultural factors, studies have shown that socio-cultural norms as a product of a society often affect the possibility of women occupying leadership positions (Chabaya et al., 2009; Nyoni & He, 2019). It has been noted that one of the major obstacles to women's elevation into senior leadership positions is associated with cultural dominance, which naturally recognises men as leaders and puts emphasis on men's hegemony and dominance within the community. In this case, this culture places women in a weaker and subordinate position in society. It considers women as a group that is always led by men in the community and makes them feel inferior when it comes to accessing executive administrative positions. These cultural behaviours undermine women's talents as leaders and develop and strengthen a patriarchal system that promotes gender disparity in managerial leadership roles. To this end, it determines roles that are to be performed on the basis of gender and encourages gender stereotypes in the workplace. Therefore, women perform responsibilities that correspond to their feminine gender, such as family issues, devotion, and assisting men, among others, whereas men are involved in activities and work that demand energy, competition, authority, and critical reasoning. Men's superiority in the community negatively affects women's chances of obtaining leadership positions (Almaki et al., 2016). The authors give an example of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, where male dominance still exists. In these societies, men prevent women from becoming leaders but promote themselves in accessing leadership positions.

The situation of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles exists in Tanzania's secondary schools (Mbalilaki & Oduor Onyango, 2022). The statistics given by Mbalilaki and Oduor Onyango (2022) depict that out of 23 heads of secondary schools in the Pwani region, only 4.3% were women, whereas the remaining 95.7% were men. Interestingly, regardless of the large percentage of female educators having bachelor's degrees (74.5%) compared to their male counterparts, many school administrative

positions were still dominated by men. In 2013, in the Kagera region, women in school managerial roles accounted for 9.5%, with men occupying the remaining 90.5%. The statistics also show that in the Manyara region, 12.2% of the administrative positions in the education were occupied by women, while men dominated the majority, 80.8% (Mbalilaki & Oduor Onyango, 2022). In the Morogoro region, 17.9% of the female teachers occupied administrative positions, while male teachers accounted for 83.1%. In the Singida region, 18.5% of school leadership positions were held by women, while men held 81.5%. In the Arusha region, male head teachers comprised 81.7%, but the female head teachers represented only 18.3%. In the Manyara region, 88% of the head teachers were men, and only 12% were women (Mbalilaki & Oduor Onyango, 2022). These statistics depict the existing gap between women and men in education leadership positions in Tanzania's secondary schools. The existing literature reviewed further called for additional study and information to gain insight into understanding that will lead to the formation of concrete policies to ensure gender representation in education leadership roles (Joseph et al., 2016; Mbalilaki & Oduor Onyango, 2022; Mbepera, 2017; Mollel & Tshabangu, 2014). Moreover, most of the existing body of literature has focused on factors contributing to women's underrepresentation in education leadership positions, with few studies on strategies to promote equality in leadership positions. Therefore, our study not only focused on the factors contributing to women's limited representation in education leadership roles but also explored strategies to promote equal representation between women and men in schools' leadership positions.

Globally, various strategies have been established to promote women in diverse executive positions within the educational domain. These strategies include the formulation of policies and legislation. These policies and rules offer a blueprint for eliminating gender inequalities in school leadership positions. These rules and policies should promote equal participation, eradicate gender-based stereotypes, and support women's empowerment in managerial roles (Hills, 1974; UNESCO, 2017; Wagner, 2013). Secondly, by developing gender ratios and targets, these gender ratios and targets intend to increase women's representation in leadership roles in the workplace. These initiatives identify a specific numerical number of women to be recruited and elevated to leadership roles to ensure equal representation of both genders (Schmallegger, 2012). Thirdly, mentorship and training programmes, leadership training, and mentorship programmes play a significant role in preparing female teachers to hold education leadership positions. Such training provides leadership skills, confidence, and networking opportunities to promote women and improve their managerial competencies (ILO, 2020). Fourthly, creating conducive work environments, this involves enforcing laws and policies that will ensure equal balance between professional work and family responsibilities, flexible schedules, and childcare amenities. These measures support women in equally balancing their family duties and professional roles, thus assisting their participation in leadership roles (Bank, 2016). Lastly, promoting gender equality in education curricula: incorporating gender equality and women's leadership into educational curricula helps challenge gender norms and stereotypes from an early age.

By promoting inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching practices, educational institutions can contribute to changing societal perceptions about women in leadership positions (UNESCO, 2017).

In Tanzania, higher leadership positions in many secondary schools are still occupied by men despite many efforts made by the government to eliminate gender underrepresentation in leadership roles (Mbepera, 2017). Tanzania has implemented various policies and acts to promote gender equality in leadership. These policies and acts include the Women's gender policy of 2002 and the Public Service Act of 1999. Additionally, Tanzania has adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Madaha, 2017) and the Beijing Platform for Action 1995. All these policies and acts intend to promote gender equality not in the educational sector only, but also in other spheres of life.

Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by feminist theory. The theory regards gender disparity as a product of social structures (Jackson & Scott, 2010). This inequality appears to be an outcome of social interaction and can be strengthened within a given community. During this process, gender responsibilities and perceptions become strongly established, and people are responsible to accomplish the societal anticipations allotted to them. Since the main objective of this research was to find out the factors that result to women's limited representation in managerial roles within community based secondary schools and explore strategies to promote gender equality in education leadership positions, this theory proved relevant as it describes the significance of promoting women and protecting their rights in society (Martin & Gobstein, 2015). Feminist theory provides a critical framework for examining and resolving gender gaps that exist in administrative positions within the educational domain. The theory opposes the patriarchal system, encourages gender-inclusive policies and supports empowerment and solidarity among female teachers.

Methodology

To obtain relevant information and achieve the desired end, the study employed a cross-sectional study design in which information on women's participation in educational leadership positions in secondary school was collected from the participants in the study area. The study area and iconic figures in the education sector were chosen purposefully for convenience, and a simple random sampling technique was used to select a total of 137 female teachers from public secondary schools who were selected and served with structured questionnaires. Out of 137 questionnaires served, upon cleaning, only 134 were valid for analysis. This is the sample that the study used during the analysis.

In this study, a high level of confidentiality and integrity was maintained. Participants' consent was obtained before they participated in the study. Moreover, the participants were assured that the information they provided would only be used for

study purposes and such participation is anonymous. The data was collected through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Regarding the questionnaire, both structured and unstructured questionnaires were developed following a focus group discussion that aimed to address the dearth of relevant information. These were used to collect information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents and structured individual views or opinions on various variables of the determinants of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. Among the objective questions were opinions about whether women were underrepresented in educational leadership (women are underrepresented in education leadership), and the responses were on a five-point scale that is either strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Respondents were also asked for their comments on a list of identified determinants and were required to respond on a five-point scale. Moreover, interviews were conducted with iconic figures in the educational sector: The Regional Educational Officer (REO), the District Educational Officer (DEO), and the Ward Educational Officers (WEO).

The analysis procedure involved thematic and empirical analysis. Various themes were extracted from the information and views of the participants were used to explain the objectives of the study. A binary logistic regression model was also employed in empirical analysis to test the study hypothesis of the various variables. A logistic regression model was applied in investigating the influence of various identified factors on women's access to leadership positions in schools. In estimation, we applied a logistic regression model since the response variable of women accessing leadership positions was binary with various identified cause variables. The model represents a logistic model, where Y represents women's access to leadership positions:

$$Y = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if Yes} \\ 0 & \text{if No} \end{cases}$$

The model can be expressed as follows;

$$\ln \frac{Pr(Yes)}{1 - Pr(Yes)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Eq + Cor\beta_2 + AOp\beta_3 + WLI\beta_4 + Mshp\beta_5 + DM\beta_6 + SE\beta_7 \\ + IWP\beta_8 + FrN\beta_9 + ON\beta_{10} + e_i$$

Where; Eq represents low educational qualification, Cor; lack of Individual courage, Aop; in access to opportunities, WLI; work life interface, Mshp; mentorship, DM; decision making, SE; societal expectation, IWP; inflexible work plans, FrN; fruitful support networks, ON; own willingness and e is the error term that accounts for all disturbances that may affect the model.

Results

Factors for women underrepresentation

Factors identified in the course of data collection include low educational qualification, inaccessibility to leadership opportunities, lack of personal confidence, work-life

interface, mentorship, women’s disengagement in decision-making, and expectations of the surrounding society, tight work plans, unsupportive personal networks and individual unwillingness. The relationship between these factors was tested against individual opinions on women’s access to leadership positions to see their influence or contribution towards intensifying women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. The results of the relation between the identified factors and women's representation in leadership positions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors influencing women's underrepresentation in leadership positions

Logistic regression					Number of obs	=	134
					LR chi ² (10)		113.03
					Prob > Chi ²		0.000
Log likelihood = -26.007876		0.6848			Pseudo R ²	=	0.6848
Wundrep	Coef	Std Err	Z	P>Z	95% Conf Interval		
EP	4.404534	1.075615	4.09	0.000	2.296367	6.512702	
Cor	2.617589	1.081575	2.42	0.016	0.4977421	4.737436	
Aop	-2.066428	0.739995	-2.79	0.005	-3.516792	-0.61606	
WII	2.301342	0.739346	3.11	0.002	0.852255	3.750433	
Mshp	-1.005184	0.443211	-2.27	0.023	-1.873862	-0.13651	
Dm	-1.037395	0.445299	-2.33	0.020	-0.1910164	-0.16463	
SE	2.302283	0.811419	2.84	0.005	0.7119314	3.892635	
IWP	1.547066	0.675988	2.29	0.022	0.222155	2.871978	
FrN	-4.226785	1.139653	-3.71	0.000	-6.460464	-1.99311	
On	-2.20009	1.084722	-2.03	0.043	-4.326106	-0.07407	
_Cons	-0.3179487	2.115321	-0.15	0.881	-4.463902	3.828005	

Source: Field data, 2023

Based on Table 1, the likelihood ratio (LR) statistic has a value of 113.03; it tests the null hypothesis that all the coefficients are simultaneously zero. It follows the 2 distribution, which in our model at ten degrees of freedom, the *p-value* is 0.000. Thus, it refutes the null hypothesis that the ten independent variables are zero as it is shown that a very highly statistically significant, practically signifies that all independent variables are decisive determinants of women’s representation in the educational leadership. The Pseudo R² of 0.6848 implies that 68.5% of the adequacy or inadequacy of women’s representation in educational leadership is explained by the variables included in the model. However, this R² is not meaningful for binary regression models (Porter et al., 1970). In assessing the factors influencing women’s representation in educational leadership, all identified factors were found to be statistically significant, as seen in their *p* values in Table 1.

The coefficient of the educational qualification reveals that a higher level of low education qualification is more likely to increase women’s underrepresentation in educational leadership as seen in Table 1 with a *p*-value of 0.000. Women with low leadership skills have caused an increase in the gender leadership divide. In this case, experience also equips a person with practical skills. However, to get or obtain the

necessary skills for leadership, one has to first be in leadership. Individual courage is also revealed in Table 1 to have a significant positive effect on women's representation. This is because, results show that low courage is likely to cause women underrepresentation in women's leadership. Thus, a good leader requires a courageous trait to properly lead.

Access to opportunities has a significant negative relationship with women's underrepresentation in educational leadership as indicated in Table 1. It is revealed that the more women have access to leadership opportunities, the more likely they will be underrepresented in educational leadership. Leadership opportunities are more accessible to men compared to women, thus becoming a source of the gender leadership divide.

Work-life interface has also resulted in having a significant positive relationship with women's underrepresentation in educational leadership as depicted in Table 1. This shows the difficulties of women balancing between work and life responsibilities, which results in them not being ready to undertake leadership responsibilities, a situation that contributes to gender inequality. Mentorship has a significant negative relationship with women's underrepresentation in educational leadership as revealed in Table 1. This means that the more women receive mentorship, the more likely they will reduce their underrepresentation in education leadership. Involvement in decision-making as a result of having a negative relationship with women's underrepresentation in education leadership. Thus, the involvement of women in higher decision-making is likely to reduce women's underrepresentation in education leadership positions.

The expectations of society also have resulted in having a positive influence on women's representation in leadership positions as shown in Table 1. These reveal that societal expectations are likely to increase women's underrepresentation in educational leadership. Cultural practices highly influence the expectations of society and have been cited as a source of discouragement for those women who express themselves in their desire to undertake leadership positions.

Inflexible work plans are likely to increase women's underrepresentation in education leadership. As presented in Table 1, there is a significant positive relationship between inflexible work plans and women's underrepresentation in education leadership. Supportive networks have a negative relationship with women's underrepresentation in education leadership, as seen in Table 1. This means an increase in supportive networks will likely decrease women's underrepresentation in educational leadership. Individual willingness also has a significant negative relationship with women's representation in educational leadership as depicted in Table 1. This means that it is more likely that an increase in women's willingness to undertake leadership positions will subsequently reduce women's underrepresentation in education leadership.

Strategies to promote gender equality in school leadership positions

Following the primary data collection, all the interviewed respondents proposed a number of strategies to enable the attainment of gender equity. Further analysis of the

findings led the study to come up with a number of strategies to bridge the gender leadership divide. The strategies proposed by the study include the following:

Gender-inclusive school leadership policies are among the effective strategies for promoting equal participation of both women and men. Implementing such policies makes it mandatory for everyone to participate, thereby reducing gender bias in access to leadership positions. This was also stated by one of our interviewees when she said:

It should be stated clearly in policies, that there should be gender equality in appointing people to administrative positions in our secondary schools.

This response shows that to achieve equality in schools' administrative positions, educational policies and regulations should insist on women empowerment to ensure equal involvement of people of both genders in school managerial positions.

Advancement of women's leadership skills, having the leadership skills improves their courage, enables them to be identified out of a crowd, and helps them to make rightful decisions. Fear has been extensively reported as a destroyer of individual willingness due to inadequate skills and experience. This was also depicted by one of the participants in our focus group discussion as she stated:

Training is also important to equip women with leadership skills because many of them lack confidence to become heads of school.

This implies that training women is paramount to instilling in them the necessary leadership skills and experience, which in turn will impart confidence in them to hold various leadership positions in schools.

Formations of platforms and forums through which women can participate in educational leadership make the opportunities equally available to both men and women. This was also echoed by one of the women who said that:

In schools, women should be given opportunities as second mistresses to exercise leadership and eventually become heads of school.

These platforms will not only help them to acquire experiences, but also skills, as well as confidence to become leaders. This will minimise gender inequality in schools' managerial positions.

Shaping societal views and expectations; shaping society's perceptions and expectations will picture positive participation by both genders. Cultural practices in society that discourage the participation of women in leadership should be reshaped to enhance leadership equity in education. This was also revealed in interview discussion that:

.....it is also important for our society to change its negative attitude towards women and believe in them that they can effectively run administrative positions in schools.

This means that even those in authority who appoint people to become school leaders perpetuate this bias by appointing men only to become heads of schools, with the view that women cannot effectively fulfil the responsibility of being heads of schools since they have other family duties and responsibilities.

Discussion

The identified factors have been found to significantly influence women's representation in leadership positions. Thus, there is a need for the involvement of women in training on leadership skills, to enable them to achieve the required qualifications since without training, many women remain underrepresented. This relates to Mayer and Oosthuizen (2020) who states that leadership skills set a pre-qualification with given individual traits to ensure the appointment of a good leader. On the other hand, succession plans may undertake a significant role in enabling women representation in educational leadership, educational institutions with such plans are prone to achieve a better end. Such succession plans, when they are sensitive to gender, they will, in the end, ensure inclusivity among the members of the society.

Cultures and upbringings in the local communities are vital for the attainment of courageous traits that form a fundamental part of a good leader (Folkman & Zenger, 2019), especially in the Tanzanian communities where traditional practices have dragged away the achievement of leadership equity and created a gap in representation. The gender leadership divide is a product of limited access to leadership opportunities and bias in appointment in leadership positions among women, and has further been intensified by their family responsibilities that disable them in balancing multiple tasks and destroy their courage in undertaking leadership positions. Supportive and unfruitful networks may also lead to this disparity that builds to subjective willingness among women. Offermann and Foley (2020) have also coined the need for supportive connections and networks that are fruitful to enable women to easily access leadership positions.

This study has also suggested essential strategies to bridge the gap that resulted in women's underrepresentation in educational leadership positions. These strategies include formulation and implementation of policies to ensure gender inclusivity in leadership positions and policies that will guarantee representation for both genders. This finding relates to the findings by Khosa (2022) who among other issues, insisted on policy reformations to ensure effective gender leadership inclusivity in society. Moreover, due to common practices, the majority of women may lack confidence in accessing leadership positions. Therefore, this study recommends platforms and forums where women can participate, helping to instil and restore the courage and confidence necessary for occupying leadership positions.

Moreover, it is not just about pushing individuals to leadership positions, but it is crucial to ensure that the necessary skills and abilities to lead are developed without compromise. Therefore, it is important to provide training and enhance leadership knowledge to enable attainment of a good leader. This has also been advocated in Mayer

and Oosthuizen (2020) as they emphasised on enabling women to become creative leaders in this modern era by training them to realise their potential and talents as leaders.

Furthermore, changing societal expectations regarding occupying leadership positions begins with challenging the existing societal norms and expectations, and striving towards a better direction where both men and women can equally participate in leadership roles to achieve the expected outcomes. This corresponds with findings obtained by Wallin (1999) in Canada, as she found that the major impediment to women's representation in school leadership positions was sex discrimination by relevant authorities during the appointment process. This has led most women to refute contesting or requesting leadership positions due to their cultural upbringing, which has also led to gender discrimination in managerial positions within schools. Therefore, it is important to change society's negative attitudes towards women to ensure equal participation of both women and men in school administrative positions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, women have consistently demonstrated competence, skills, and effectiveness as leaders when provided with opportunities thus leading to positive outcomes across various sectors. Despite these capabilities, they continue to face challenges and barriers such as gender bias, stereotyping, limited opportunities for advancement, and work-life balance issues, especially in educational leadership. Efforts to promote equality to reduce the gender leadership divide are inevitable to ensure their contribution is harnessed in the education sector. These include access to mentoring programmes, leadership development opportunities in the education sector, and creating inclusive and supportive environments that value and recognise the contributions of women in leadership. This study recommends that it is crucial to continue supporting and empowering women in educational leadership, as their diverse perspectives and experiences will enrich educational institutions and foster more inclusive and equitable learning environments. By addressing the existing barriers and promoting equal opportunities, we can create a future where women can thrive and make significant contributions as educational leaders.

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