Women and Leadership in Education Agencies in Tanzania: Empirical Study on Challenges Facing Women Education Leaders

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Abstract: *This study focused on the challenges facing women education leaders in education agencies in Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach with case study design as a method of inquiry. The study employed purpose sampling technique to obtain 15 participants from various education agencies. Interviews and documentary review were used to gather information from the participants. The study findings revealed that women leaders face several challenges when implementing their leadership roles in education institutions. These include negative self-image, family engagements, and fear of failure, lack of role models and mentorship and patriarchal system of leadership in the society. This study contributes to a better understanding of challenges facing women education leaders in Tanzania. The findings are consistent with the "role congruity theory" which emphasizes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluating behavior that fulfils the prescriptions of a leader's role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. Similarly, the findings are in line with the "liberal feminist theory" which emphasizes that individuals should use their own abilities and the democratic process to help women and men become more equal in the eyes of the law, in society and in the workplace. This study recommends that organizations should shift from the traditional masculine outlook on leadership towards a more transformational and feminine view of leadership. Women empowerment should be done through educating the society on gender issues as well as valuing and respecting school leaders without considering gender differences.*

Keywords: *Leadership, Female education leadership, Underrepresentation, Cultural values, Tanzania*

1. Introduction

Around the globe, in the last five decades, women representation in leadership positions has been widely discussed and emphasized (Karuu, 2020; Miller, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). Similarly, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership has been a long-standing problem (Riaz et al., 2021; Lu, 2020). In the UK, although 64 percent of teachers are women, women constituted only 40% of head teachers. In secondary schools (2015–2016), the percentage of female head teachers was only 38 percent (Fuller, 2017). Moreover, many studies indicate that in United States of America, 29 percent of all senior management posts are held by women in private and public organizations. Although this evidence points to some improvement, the percentage of women in leadership positions remains lower compared to their male counterparts, particularly in the education sector (Abd El Basset., 2022; Cilingir, Karaoglu & Onbas, 2019). In Canada, female head teachers comprised only 42.1 percent (Holt, 2012). Moreover, in Russia, female teachers comprised only 19 percent of all primary school head teachers (Shimalungwe, 2016). According to UNESCO (2018), in Australia, females in all educational workplaces were unable to secure educational leadership positions in spite of expressing

desire to do so and having qualifications which support their suitability. In developed nations the degree of female underrepresentation in top managerial positions is not promising.

This disparity between the high proportion of women in educational roles and the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is also witnessed in Asian countries. Abd El Basset et al. (2022) report that despite the efforts made to achieve equal rights for women and men in India, the current situation still shows that women are underrepresented, especially in leadership positions in the education sector. The society has a perception that women are getting to the position of equity while the actual sense is that this is far from being achieved (Lu, 2020). A distributed leadership study in Bhutanese schools carried out by Karuu (2020) found that, compared to male teachers, female teachers had a lower engagement with distributed leadership practices, as was the case with senior teachers, especially those with higher levels of qualification. In Pakistan, teaching is regarded as one of the best professions for women, but top positions are less likely to be occupied by women (Riaz et al., 2021). As Riaz et al. (2021) point out, where a female is a principal, her role and power may be limited to managing daily affairs rather than making long-term decisions. The situation may be worse in the Asian Chinese context, where a male-dominated tradition rooted in the feudal system has been prevailing for thousands of years (Mashele & alagidede, 2022).

Likewise, statistics in Africa on female underrepresentation in leadership indicate that in primary schools, men outnumber women. In Ivory Coast, for example, in 2016, there were about 12,125 male head teachers while female head teachers were only 923, and in May 2017, of 15547 primary school head teachers, 1710 (11%) were female (MoE, 2017), which was still low compared to men's representation. The same situation has been observed in Uganda where 12 percent of head teachers were reported to be female (Hungi, 2019). Similarly, in Malawi, female head teachers comprised only 8 percent (Moorosi, 2017). A similar situation is observed in Tanzania as more men than women hold leadership positions. The statistics show in the Ilala District of Dar es Salaam Region, female teachers in primary schools constituted 84.1 percent but only 38 percent of them were heads of schools (Omboko & Oyoo, 2019).

2. Literature Review

The Concept of Leadership

In any school organization, leadership is broadly considered as a predetermined factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their pupils. Thus, many scholars define leadership in various perspectives but all of them agree on the idea that a leader is always a facilitator and is the one who influences subordinates and supervises the effectiveness of a particular organization, specifically a school. Anchomese and Oyeniran (2018) define leadership as the art of motivating people or a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. Similarly, Riaz et al (2021) defines leadership as an art of motivating a group of people and controlling them in order to act on other available resources in order to achieve a common goal. Generally, from the definitions given above, one can conclude that leadership involves primary school heads supervising their subordinates by influencing and empowering them to achieve common educational goals.

Women in Education Leadership

Current statistics on women in education leadership are somehow encouraging yet disheartening. They are encouraging in that recent trend shows an increase in the proportion of women in different education leadership positions, yet they are disheartening as there are significant differences across areas of formal leadership, that is, school board directors (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). Maseshwari & Nayak (2021) argued that in education leadership, collaboration between male and female employees is very important in school organization as it ensures high performance in organizational activities. Collaboration increases knowledge, skills and experience among employees. Therefore, through collaboration, the provision of quality education is achieved as teachers work together to achieve teaching and learning objectivesas well as leadership goals. Qadir (2019) asserts that consideration of legal environment of human resource leadership with equal opportunity in leadership positions is vital to the workers because it provides job satisfaction and prosperity in school organization.

Generally, women education managers must be courageous, defy the status quo, believe in themselves, and work diligently toward focused goals in order to move into administrative leadership. Furthermore, for women to become strong education leaders, they must be well prepared, work hard, persevere, practice good skills, develop and maintain strong support systems, uphold and protect their personal integrity and believe in themselves (Bayaga & Mtosa 2021).

Cultural Values and Women Underrepresentation in Leadership

Social structures and values constitute major barriers to women's access to leadership positions. Entrenched norms inscribed in the culture of most of African societies assign certain tasks and spheres of responsibility to each gender, assuming that one must

behave in accordance with the social expectations of one's gender (Ideta *et* al, 2021). In this view, leadership positions belong to male members of the society and thus female members should refrain from attempting to attain such positions. In the traditional Chinese culture, for example, women always carried out submissive roles both at home and at work (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2017). The cultural and social assumption that females are less strong than males and therefore cannot hold leadership positions is common in most of the developing countries (Suter, 2017). According to this assumption, leadership positions belong to male members of the society; females should therefore refrain from attempting to attain leadership position, otherwise, they are susceptible to various social sanctions, such as reduced chances to marry (Gobaw, 2017; Nauman, 2021). Mukolwe, Michael and Jack (2018) stated that although women consider themselves equal to men, they value themselves as less effective compared to their male counterparts. For example, when men and women are offered leadership positions, men express higher desire to take these positions while women hesitate till, they find themselves ready for such positions. Cerna & Dugas (2022) found that Omani men value authority more than women do because males are more closely related to authority figures. In fact, strong women in leadership positions are considered as aggressive and they are more disliked than women. On the contrary, strong men are usually seen as effective leaders (Nauman et al., 2021). Bunch Boney (2022) highlighted that even though female education has increased, women in Oman tend to get married and start bearing children immediately after graduation. Women tend to change their view to life when they get children and they downplay their career growth to raising children.

Bunch Boney (2022) indicated that even though women have the opportunity to pursue a career, they perceive their main role as that of taking care of the family. They even find themselves conflicted when the government policies encourage female participation in the public life as they still have a traditional mind-set. Male domination on leadership positions discourages females from seeking leadership positions, as they prefer to promote their favorites who are unfortunately not females (Maheshwari &Nagak, 2022). In workplaces, especially in primary schools, the stereotypical frames of effective head teachers have worked against female teachers who aspire to become leaders (Mashele & Alagidede, 2022). Johnson (2021) adds that in the teaching profession, there are many female teachers, but these are not given leadership opportunities due to stereotypical assumption that females are weak and thus they cannot make good leaders.

International and Local Efforts for Women Empowerment for Leadership in Tanzania

Since women have become the focus of international and regional discussions, many countries have ratified international and regional conventions, advocating equality and dignity of all human beings. For example, the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000, following by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 have set up agendas to address key problems that concern human beings, including elimination of any kind of gender biases in education and other sectors (UNESCO, 2016). Other examples can be drawn from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which has gender equality monitoring mechanisms in place and reports on these regularly, although some of them are not specific to women's leadership (Fuller, 2017). Additionally, the Beijing Conference on women rights in 1995 was the cornerstone of women emancipation as it enabled them to know their rights and how to demand their denied rights. The conference was remarkable as it emphasized the role of governments in promoting women's rights, including those of inclusion in leaderships (Mukolwe, Michael& Jack, 2018). Lastly, the protocol for African Charter of Human Rights and people relative to women rights has been ratified by many African countries, including Tanzania (Cho *et* al, 2015).

In Tanzania, local efforts towards demanding the rights of women to take top managerial positions have been put in place through the constitution which insists on the equality and rights of every person (Nayeem, 2021). Moreover, from 1980s, non-government organizations increased pressure to the government to consider females in top leadership positions according to their level of education. Moreover, in 1992 the government introduced women development policy which established numerous strategies for women involvement in leadership. Furthermore, the government established the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children to improve women's participation in leadership in all sectors, including education sector (Mukolwe, Michael & Jack, 2018). Another effort to increase female participation in education leadership in Tanzania is realized through offering trainings to females to understand the cause of underrepresentation in top leadership positions. This role has been played by the radical feminists across the globe (McNae & Reilly, 2018; UNESCO, 2018).

The literature still indicates that though there are many efforts towards empowering females to take higher positions in leadership, women are still less involved in leadership positions in the education sector worldwide, particularly in Tanzania (Qadir, 2019). This situation calls for an inquiry, thus the present study aims at

bridging the gap in the literature by investigating the challenges facing women education leaders in Tanzania.

Theoretical Review

Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002)

This research was informed by the role congruity theory of prejudice towards females propounded by Nayeem (2021). This theory argues that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluating the behavior that fulfils the prescriptions of a leader's role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman (Chabaya et al., 2019; Sylvester, 2019). The role congruity theory contends that gender stereotypes contribute to biased evaluations in leadership that women take care and men take charge (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). It is also argued that positions of power and influence in society have traditionally been occupied by men, whereas women have historically held lower status positions (Qadir, 2019). Resultantly, it has become difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles especially in the developing world where information flow is slow and restricted.

Liberal Feminist Theory (Mary Wollstonecraft, 1759-1799)

Liberal feminism advocates for individuals to use their own abilities and the democratic process to help women and men become more equal in the eyes of the law, in the society and in the workplace (McNae & Reilly, 2018). By organizing women into larger groups that can speak at a higher level, lobbying legislators and raising awareness of issues, liberal feminists use available resources and tools to advocate for change (Mukolwe, Michael & Jack, 2018). Generally, the liberal feminist theory states that leadership should be a meritorious entitlement regardless of the gender to which one belongs.

3. Methodology

The study used the qualitative approach with case study research design as a method of inquiry to explore the challenges faced women leaders in educational agencies. Data were collected through interviews and documentary review. The qualitative approach was chosen in order to gain as much data as possible from a relatively small sample size. Moreover, the approach was used because it is flexible as 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 in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Mbeya regions. After reviewing the government documents about allocation of women leaders in educational agencies, the author purposively selected these regions because they have a good number of women leaders in education agencies. A total of 15 participants (five from each region) were interviewed. The information from interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis technique was employed to analyze the collected data. This 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. This method allowed the researcher to legitimately focus on analyzing meaning across the entire dataset.

4. Results and Discussion

Several concerns were raised by the respondents who expressed their opinions orally during interviews. The respondents' views on challenges facing women education leaders in Tanzania are presented and discussed hereunder.

Negative Self-image of Female Education Leaders

Interviews with the respondents revealed that female leaders perceived themselves as weak and incapable of leadings. Due to this negative perception, other members of the society, particularly men also perceive women as incapable. One of the participants gave the following explanation:

> *"It is true that negative perception is a barrier to female education leaders; they consider themselves as not fit for being leaders" (Interview with a female education leader from Institution A).*

On the same vein, another participant added the following:

> *"The issue is that some people compare women's leadership with that of men. To me I think this is very wrong. This is because, men have demonstrated their leadership capability which is different from that of women. This can be seen in all education agencies that are found in this city. Do some investigation and*

you will prove my claim" (Interview with a female education leader from institution G).

Family Engagements

Findings revealed that women leaders failed to deliver according to expectations because many of them had multiple roles to play, including family and work obligations. They were mostly engaged with household chores and consequently failed to balance their obligations. One of the participants said the following:

"The reality is that women leaders like me who are married are overwhelmed with family duties. These responsibilities put us in dilemma about whether to concentrate on leadership or family responsibilities. The situation becomes worse when we lack support from both male and female co-workers" (Interview with a female education leader from institution H).

Another participant added the following:

"In reality, being an education leader entails taking up extra responsibility. Husbands generally expect us to spend more time taking care of children and handling other home responsibilities instead of spending extra hours in workplaces" (Interview with a female education leader from institution B).

Fear of Failure

The findings show that despite the widely touted need for more women in leadership roles and the growing number of programs aimed at getting them to step up, fear of failure often remains an obstacle impeding their ascent. Fear of failure also affects women who are already in education leadership. This feeling is attributed to psychological challenges that female leaders face in their workplaces. An interview participant gave the following explanation:

"I wanted to do my best in leading this institution. My leadership draws the attention of the community because I am a woman; they think I cannot perform well. Due to this feeling among the community, I was not ready to fail because failure would mean I am not capable of leading" (Interview with a female education leader from institution D).

Another participant added the following:

"I fear to compete with anyone. This does not mean that I am weak. I know that failure is common to human beings, but I do not want to fail in leading this institution because I have been trusted by the management to lead" (Interview with a female education leader from institution G).

Lack of Role Models and Mentorship

Findings revealed that women prefer to be supported by their fellow women when fulfilling their administrative duties. Furthermore, the findings establish that women needed role models who would mentor them. However, this was not easy as participants disclosed that there were few women leaders who could be regarded as role models. Role models and mentors were important individuals to help women leaders in education institutions, as participants suggested:

"What I can say to you is that in leadership, role models and mentors are vital for improving women's career prospects. Shortage of role models and mentors leads to low participation of female teachers in leadership positions in primary schools" (Interview with a female education leader from institution G).

Another participant added the following:

"At the moment, there are few female education leaders in this city who could be positive role models for us. As a result, we lack role models and mentors to encourage us to climb up more leadership ladders" (Interview with a female education leader from institution C).

Patriarchal System of Leadership in the Society

The study found that patriarchy shapes women's behavior in ways that undermine their performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, the study found that patriarchal attitudes, often practiced at home, were frequently transferred to organizational settings. In this way, it was very difficult for the women leaders to achieve their leadership targets. The following testimonies were given by women leaders:

"Let me put my testimony in this way; culture which is reflected in the set of beliefs, values, practices and norms associated with the local community and workplace, can adversely affect the operation of women leaders and their ability to exercise a positive leadership role. Some traditional

beliefs are reflected in associating leadership abilities and positions with men rather than women" (Interview with a female education leader from institution A).

Another participant had the following to say:
"It is interesting to note that due to patriarchal system, female education leaders are very few in top managerial positions, and they are not respected by male co-workers due to influence from the society which considers women as incapable of leading" (Interview with a female education leader from institution I).

Based on the findings, it is obvious that women leaders are still facing a myriad of challenges while discharging their leadership duties. They have been shown that they lack confidence and competitiveness during leadership. Chabaya et al. (2019) observed that the factors that challenge women leaders in schools are within themselves as they lack confidence and see themselves as unsuitable for leadership. In a similar note, Kagoda and Sperandio (2019) added that women leaders lack confidence to deal with workers' difficulties in schools. This is supported by Cho et al (2021) who found that all women principals were indecisive about assuming leadership roles because they lacked confidence, but they were forced to become heads by others.

Regarding family engagements, the findings show that women leaders were overwhelmed with family engagements to the extent that some of them failed to execute their administrative duties in schools. Akdemir & Golge (2022) asserts that women leaders are considered as unfit because it is difficult for them to balance between family and office duties. In addition, Shava, Tlou and Mpofu (2019) added that with family engagements, women are responsible for household chores such as childcaring and other responsibilities that made them fail to execute well their administrative duties. Furthermore, Maheshwari & Nayak (2022) argue that females who are married are overwhelmed with family duties; as a result, they find themselves in dilemma about whether to concentrate in managerial or family responsibilities. In view of this situation, Sylvester (2019) advised that society should be educated in order to appreciate the multiple roles played by female leaders, and to understand that women need support. In this regard, men are urged to help women to perform house chores. This is very important as it will give women time to attend various administrative engagements.

The findings further disclosed that women leaders aimed to perform their administrative duties very perfectly, but they faced challenges when accomplishing their duties in schools. Mathika and

Tsoka (2017) argued that when women do not involve their subordinates in leadership, they are likely to fail in executing their leadership. Moorosi (2020) added that fear of failure is a very big psychological challenge affecting women leaders in educational institutions. Bubshait (2012) suggested that women leaders need support from their employers to understand that challenges in leadership are a common phenomenon as they help leaders to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

The findings of this study have shown that there is lack of role models and mentorship and this significantly affects the performance of female leaders in education institutions. It was thus suggested that mentoring was necessary for a new person in any post because it provides a roadmap for leadership. Ideta et al (2021) maintains that lack of victorious women role models and mentors was one of the factors which hinder women perform their educational leadership. Callahan & Hebert (2021) concluded that role models and mentors are vital for improving women's career prospects, and that shortage of role models and mentors leads to low participation of women leaders in school leadership positions.

Patriarchal system of leadership in the society was also revealed by the participants as one of the challenges facing women education leaders in the visited institutions. Gobaw (2017) argues that male domination in leadership positions discourages women leaders since the stereotype emanates from culture; women are regarded incapable of leading and are supposed to be at home, caring for their husbands and children. Johnson (2021) adds that although the number of female teachers is higher, very few female teachers occupy leadership positions. This is attributed to a wrong perception that females are weak and thus they cannot make good leaders.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study lead to a conclusion that is high time that socio-cultural factors that impede women's progress in leadership in education institutions are discarded. There must be measures that will be used to curb those negative socio-cultural issues affecting female prosperity. Moreover, education institutions have a role to play to empower women leaders so that they can perform their duties well since some of them can perform well in leading others.

Based on the foregoing findings, this study recommends that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should support women leaders in educational agencies in fulfilling their administrative roles. This can be done by providing them with service in educational management and leadership trainings. These trainings will help them improve their confidence and

competence in managing the institutions. Mentoring and networking is the powerful source of information and knowledge. These help to set critical goals and make accountable for leaders' work. Moreover, it is recommended that measures should be put in place to curb socio-cultural practices affecting women's prosperity.

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