

FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER IMBALANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN NGOMA DISTRICT, RWANDA

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality persists in many countries and regions of the world. In the domain of education, especially in teaching and leadership, Coleman (2001: 1) and Ribbins (2008:70) confirm the dominance of men in school leadership positions. In Rwanda, the existing statistic shows that men dominate women in school leadership positions. Only 16.7% of head teachers in public schools are women, and men represent 83.3%. In Ngoma District, in the Eastern Province of Rwanda, men have a huge majority in leadership positions in secondary schools; among 53 head teachers, only 13 or 24.5% are women and 40 or 75.5 % are men. This study investigates why women, even when they are qualified, do not apply for leadership positions in spite of a political structure that promotes women's empowerment in Rwanda.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Global data demonstrate that gender inequality persists in many countries and regions of the world. Research by Coleman (2002) indicates 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 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 counterparts and the older the age group of students the less likely this becomes" (p.2) . Coleman (2004) updated her research for the then National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and her findings confirm that "Most teachers in both secondary and primary schools are female, but most heads of secondary schools

are male, and the proportion of male heads in primary schools is large in comparison with the overall number of women in primary teaching” (Coleman, 2004: 1).

Ribbins (2008: 70) presents evidence that in 21 out of 29 European Union states there are more women teachers than men in upper secondary schools, but male head teachers outnumber women in 13 of the states for which data is available.

In Rwanda, despite the efforts of government to encourage gender balance, the problem of imbalance persists in different positions. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) (2012), women are outnumbered by men in secondary and higher education leadership roles. Only 16.7% of head teachers in public schools are women, and men represent 83.3%. In Ngoma District the males dominate leadership positions in secondary schools; among 53 head teachers, only 13 or 24.5% are women and 40 or 75.5 % are men (see Table 1.1 in the appendix).

Many studies discuss the factors that influence gender imbalance especially in school leadership. **Kirk (2004)** examines the level of education. For this author, **many women in many developing countries do not have the skills, training and competencies necessary for professional and managerial positions in education.**

For **Jayawera (1997)**, even when the women and men have the same educational qualifications, **the men have easier access to managerial and technical jobs because of the men’s tendency and interest in holding power and authority.** In other words, the author observed that negative self-perception and low self-esteem impede women’s personal development. In the same way, **Kiri (2004)**, **Allison & Randell (2007)** add **cultural and social values** like religious beliefs as barriers to women’s quest for leadership positions.

The family responsibilities that the majority of women hold, especially in developing countries, is taken into consideration as a factor that prevents women from seeking leadership positions, which require long working hours and difficult conditions (**Celkten, 2005**). For **Ombonyo (2005:5)**, some **employers discriminate against women because they fear that the female employees would not concentrate on their job because of their family responsibilities.**

In developing countries, especially in Africa, the research conducted by Ombonyo (2005:21) show that the women still suffer from serious differences in literacy and school enrolment. Consequently, the women are under-represented in school leadership positions.

It is in this context that I conducted the present study with the objective of identifying the factors influencing gender imbalance in school leadership in secondary schools and determining the strategies to insure gender balance in secondary school leadership in Ngoma District.

PART 2: METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study is mainly qualitative, but it is completed also by some quantitative aspects such as the frequency of responses from participants which is taken into consideration in data analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003: 155-156), qualitative research include designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discrete numerical data on the one hand and on the other hand, quantitative research includes designs, techniques and measures that produce discrete numerical data.

Study population and sampling procedure

The population is defined as the complete set of subjects studied (Kothari, 2004).

For this study, the target population includes 53 head teachers in the secondary schools of Ngoma District.

Purposive and theoretical sampling was used to determine the sample of this study. According to Silverman (2005:129), the purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested and demands that the researcher thinks critically about parameters of the population the researcher is studying and chooses the sample case carefully on this basis. The theoretical sampling, according to Mason (1996) in Silverman (2005: 131), involves “selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, the theoretical positions and mostly the explanations which the researcher is developing.”

The proportion of the sample was determined without taking into account any other criteria. Therefore, in this study the sample was made of 14 head teachers, 9 males and 5 females combined, both groups having benefited, for a year, from the training on “School Leadership” provided by the University of Rwanda College of Education in collaboration with the Rwanda Education Board and a Belgian Development organization called VVOB, from April 2015 to July 2016. The resource persons to the research were selected on the basis of gender balance and their ability to provide sufficient information about the research.

Primary data collection

Primary data was collected through survey questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was developed and addressed to the selected head teachers. The questionnaire included close-ended and open-ended questions and focused on different parameters related to the factors influencing imbalance in secondary school leadership. These parameters include:

- Qualification; because the researcher wanted to know if the women had the skills and training to hold leadership positions.
- Application to the school leadership positions to determine if men and women have the same interest to apply for school leadership positions.
- Performance in selecting tests for the job to help the researcher to verify if men and women performed at the same level in jobs’ selecting tests.
- Competence at working area: this parameter permitted to the researcher to examine if the women were equally competent as men in school leadership positions in order to check if there is any link between competence and gender imbalance.

Secondary data collection

Concerning the secondary data, the researcher consulted some documents related to the topic and consulted documents such as books, reports, and journals in various domains of interest to the current research.

Data analysis and interpretation

After data collection, the analysis and interpretation were done with analytical methods especially with thematic analysis which permit to discuss the results theme by theme through frequencies of responses for each question.

The synthetic method was also taken into consideration to allow the synthesis of different results in a set and draw conclusions from them.

Ethical considerations

In this investigation, confidentiality was ensured by collecting data anonymously. The need to maintain confidentiality in order to protect participants' rights was a matter of concern of the study.

PART 3: RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the respondents. The responses to different questions addressed to the respondents are presented in different tables in order to facilitate the researcher's analysis of the findings.

3.1 Gender imbalance in school leadership positions in Ngoma Ditric

The table below shows the opinions participants have about the situation of gender balance in school leadership in secondary schools in Ngoma District.

Table 3.1: Opinions of respondents about gender imbalance in school leadership

Question	Response	Frequency of response	Percentage(Participants: 14)
How many women occupy school leadership positions in secondary schools in	13 women are head teachers	14	100

NGOMA District?			
How many men are head teachers in secondary schools in Ngoma District?	40 men are head teachers in secondary schools	14	100
Considering the 2 questions above, is there any gender balance in terms of school leadership positions in secondary schools in your District?	There is no gender balance in secondary school leadership	14	100

Source: Primary data, June 2016

From the table above, all respondents confirm gender imbalance in school leadership in Secondary schools in Ngoma District, because among 53 head teachers in Ngoma District, only 13 are women while 40 are men.

3.2. Qualification and gender in school leadership

In order to know the causes of gender imbalance in school leadership, the researcher wanted to know if women, comparatively to men, have the required qualifications for the position of head teacher in Rwandan secondary schools.

Table 3.2: Qualification and gender in school leadership

Question	Response	Frequency of response	Percentage(Participants: 14)
Are women qualified to be school leaders?	Women are qualified to be head teachers	5	28
	The number of qualified women is still low compared to the number of men.	9	72

Source: Primary Data, June 2016

Considering the findings in Table 3.2, the majority of respondents mention low number of qualified women comparatively to the number of men who are qualified to be head teachers in secondary schools.

3.3. Interest of women in school leadership

The researcher wanted to know if women are or not interested in school leadership. Their respective opinions are presented in the table below.

Table 3.3: Interest of women in school leadership

Question	Response	Frequency of response	Percentage (Participants:14)
Are women interested in being head teachers? YES/NO (Justify your answer)	Women are not interested; they don't want to leave their children alone. Leadership demands too much time	7	50
	They are not interested; they are not self-confident	5	35.7
	Women are interested in leadership positions because they apply.	2	14.3

Source: Primary data, June 2016

As the table above shows, most respondents (85.7%) observed that women are not interested in being head teachers. Fifty percent of them underscore family responsibilities, women's fear of leaving their children alone because of the high probability of investing too much time in leadership; while 35.7 consider the lack of interest for women as a consequence of low self-confidence.

Only 2 respondents, that is, 14.5% ascertain that women are interested in being head teachers, and they justified their answer by pointing out that indeed women submit their applications for these positions of leadership.

3.4. Women's submission of application for the positions of secondary school leaders

Table 3.4 reflects the points of view of participants about women's application for the positions of school leadership.

Table 3.4: Women's application for positions in secondary school leadership

Question	Answer	Frequency of response	Percentage (Participants:14)
Are women applying for the positions of school leaders? YES/NO. If no, what could be the reasons?	Women apply for school leadership positions even if their number is still low comparatively to the number of men who apply	5	35,7
	They don't apply because they are afraid of working far from their families.	6	42,9
	They don't apply, because most of them are afraid of sitting for job tests	3	21,4

Source: Primary data, June 2016

The data in the table above indicate that only 5 participants i.e. 35.7 % state that women apply for head teachers leadership positions in secondary schools and they add that the number of women who apply is low comparatively to the number of men who apply for the same positions. 42.9% of respondents remark that women do not apply because they are afraid of working far from their families and 21.4% state that the women do not apply because most of them are afraid of sitting for job tests.

Performance on the job selecting test.

The question about the results on the job selecting test was addressed to the participants in order to check if women are not appointed to the post of Head Teacher after they fail the job selecting test. Table 3.5 presents the opinions of respondents.

Table 3.5 Performance on the job selecting test

Question	Answer	Frequency of response	Percentage(Participants: 14)
Do women perform well on the job selecting test comparatively to men?	Women do not perform well comparatively to men on the job selecting test	2	14.2
	There is no difference between women's and men's performance	10	71.6
	Women perform better than men on job selecting test	2	14.2

Source: Primary data, June 2016

The data in the table below reveal that on the job selecting test, there is no difference between the results of women and men. In other words, the women and men perform at the same level as indicated by the majority of respondents (71.6). Only 14.2% indicate that the women fail the job selecting test comparatively to men; and on the other hand, 14.2% respondent remark that the women perform well on the job selecting test comparatively to men.

3.6. Performance in the position of school leadership

The researcher wanted to know how women head teachers perform comparatively to men and addressed the related question to the respondents. Their opinions appear in the table below.

Table 3.6 Performance as head teachers

Question	Responses	Frequency of response	Percentage (Participants: 14)
When the women hold school leadership positions, do they perform	Women perform like men There is no difference between the schools managed by women and schools	3	21.4

well? YES/NO Justify your answer.	managed by men		
	Most women who manage schools are more competent than men	11	78.6
	Reasons: Women are honest, responsible like in their families	7	63.6
	The women are afraid of being blamed	4	36.4

Source: Primary data, June 2016

Among 14 Head teachers questioned, 3, i.e. 21.4% reveal that there is no difference between the schools managed by women and the schools managed by men. For this group, women perform well just like their male counterparts.

For others, 11 participants, i.e. 78.6 %, most women who manage secondary schools are more competent than men. Their opinion is justified by a higher level of honesty and responsibility mentioned by 7 respondents, i.e. 63.6% and the fear of being blamed as indicated by 4 respondents, i.e. 36.4%.

3.7. Factors influencing gender imbalance in secondary school leadership in Ngoma District.

The objective of this research was firstly to determine the factors influencing gender imbalance in secondary school leadership in Ngoma District. For this reason, the question put to the respondents required them to mention different factors and explain how they influence gender imbalance in school leadership. The table below indicates the points of views of respondents.

Table 3.7: Factors influencing gender imbalance in Secondary school leadership in Ngoma District

Question	Response	Frequency of response	Percentage (Participants:14)
Discuss the factors that influence gender imbalance in secondary school leadership in Ngoma District.	School location	9	64.3
	Academic qualification	5	35.7
	Social and family roles	13	92.8
	Pregnancy and childcare	8	57.1
	Low self-confidence for some women	9	62.3

Source: Primary data, June 2016

As mentioned in the table above, the major factors indicated by respondents are the following:

School location by 64.3% of participants, academic performance by 35.7%, social and family roles indicated by 92.8% of respondents, pregnancy and childcare highlighted by 57.1% of respondents and low self-confidence by 62.3% of participants.

PART 4: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the data presented in the previous paragraphs, we remarked that there is gender imbalance in school leadership caused by some factors as they are mentioned by participants.

To be a head teacher, academic qualification is required. Therefore, qualified women are still outnumbered by men who are qualified. In the past, girls did not have the chance to access institutions of higher learning, because they were considered as individuals destined to be mothers and caretakers of babies and husbands. Currently, the government of Rwanda supports girls' participation and achievement at all levels of education. The statistics from Rwanda's Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) show gender imbalance in tertiary education in Rwanda. Among 87,013 students who enroll the tertiary education, the women are 39146 or 44.9% while

the males are 47,867 or 55.1%. (MINEDUC, 2014: 5). In addition, concerning academic qualifications, among 18,593 qualified teachers, 13,569 or 72.9% are men and 5,024 or 27.1% are women (MINEDUC, 2014:27). This confirms the lack of required academic qualification mentioned by respondents as a factor that influences gender imbalance in school leadership and supported by the research conducted by Kirk (2004), which reveals that many women in many developing countries do not have the skills, training and competencies necessary for professional and managerial positions in education.

Some women are not interested in the position of head teacher in secondary schools. They are afraid of leaving their children alone because of the amount of time required for leadership. In most developing countries, women are considered as the first responsible for the education of their children and all family activities. In the same way, the location of the school seems to be in direct relationship with the lack of interest for some women to apply for school leadership positions. When the school is far from their families, the women hesitate to apply. This is confirmed by Celkten, (2005) who highlighted family responsibilities as a factor that discourages women from seeking leadership positions, which require long working hours and difficult conditions especially in developing countries.

Pregnancy and childcare were highlighted by respondents as another factor that influences gender imbalance in school leadership. This is true because, on one hand, when women are pregnant, they are physically weak, and sometimes it is not easy for them to apply and to sit for job tests. On the other hand, the test can take place when they are in maternity leave and sometimes with complications related to childbirth.

The low self-confidence and negative self-perceptions for some women could discourage them to apply and pass the test for the head teacher position, because they are afraid of failure. This is in the same line with the idea of Jayaweera (1997), who indicates men's tendency and interest in holding into power and authority comparatively to women even when the women and men have the same educational qualifications.

Despite these all barriers, the participants in this study reveal that when the women sit the job selecting test, their results are not significantly different from the results of men, which means that they perform like men, because they are able. Also, the majority of participants (78.6%)

state the competence of women in school leadership because of their honesty and the fear to be blamed. This is in the same context with the consideration of Porat (1991) according to whom women's personality, character and values, feminine mode of leadership are highly associated with the effective administration. In this situation, it should be important to increase the number of women in school administration in order to improve school administration.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender imbalance is remarkable in school leadership in Ngoma District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda. This imbalance is not caused by women's low performance or incompetence, but it is attributed to other factors. By their importance or their high influence, these factors are ordered as follows. The first factor is social and family roles. Second comes self-confidence for some women, and school location. Third is pregnancy and childcare. Fourth there is academic performance. Even if there are barriers for women's quest for school leadership positions, when they hold these, women are competent, and they perform as well as their male counterparts.

Some recommendations are in order in favor of gender balance and increase of the number of women in school leadership positions.

Increase awareness of the benefit of keeping girls in school

Considering the factors influencing gender imbalance in school leadership, the researcher recommends that there should be an increase in the role of local government and non-governmental organizations in mobilizing and supporting parents to keep girls in school. These actors should increase public awareness of the benefits of girls' education. There should be a social mobilization campaign whose aim is to change attitudes and behaviors affecting girls' education at the grass root level.

Find scholarships for girls and women

The Ministry of Education should increase the number of scholarships for women, so that they can attend higher learning institutions and increase their chance of acquiring the required academic qualifications for school leadership.

Community's interventions

The community should be sensitized to respect and support women in their family responsibilities, which sometimes discourage women from applying for leadership positions. The first concerned are husbands, who should assist the women in the daily family activities. The community should also encourage and motivate women and help them to increase their self-perceptions, self-esteem about seeking and holding leadership positions.

In appointing head teachers, the District should strive to encourage women by placing them not far from their families.

Areas for further research

The scope of the study was limited to one District among the 30 Districts of Rwanda in accordance with the objectives and research questions. It is therefore suggested that a national research covering the whole country be undertaken. There is also a need to make a comparative study on gender imbalance in school leadership in primary schools and secondary schools.

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