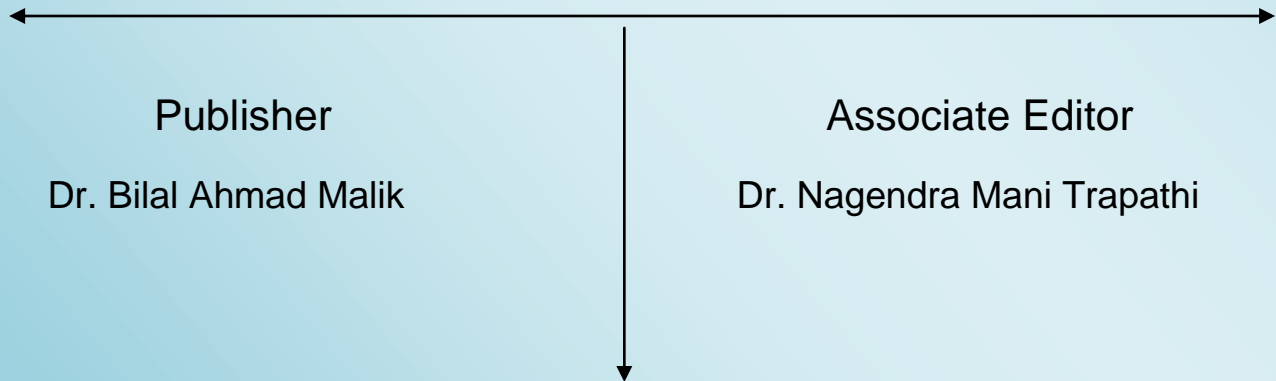


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## CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE SCHOOL HEADS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Women continue to aspire for leadership positions in all spheres of governance in both the public and private sectors. However, it has not been easy for them to acquire leadership positions. The study examined the challenges women face in taking leadership positions with specific reference to women in the management positions in selected secondary schools. The research was a quantitative approach and it used descriptive survey design as its research design. Closed ended questionnaires were used to collect data. Stratified random sampling was preferred for this study.*

*Findings revealed that the majority of women were facing a number of problems in management positions as they suffered marginalization, regarded inferior and despised as compared to men. It was also established that women have the qualifications to manage and lead institutions like their male counterparts. Recommendations were made to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to correct imbalances between male and female leaders and to ensure that incentives are increased to attract more qualified and potential women to take up managerial posts. There should be intensified gender education programmes that will encourage women who qualify, to apply for advertised posts.*

**Key words:** *education, female, management, leadership, gender, culture, profession*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study sought to reveal the specific dilemmas confronting female secondary school heads as they strive to manage their schools efficiently and effectively. The study comes on the back of people's perceptions attuned to associate leadership with males (Manwa 2002). Concerns about women representation in positions of decision

making, strategic planning, organizational development and their performance within educational institutions has been a major focus of debates in the transformation of the Southern African Development Communities and education landscape (Reardon 2003). In Zimbabwe previously, men had a monopoly of access to higher managerial positions and power in organisations and public spheres while women were either restricted to the home or lower positions. With the advent of the women's liberation movements, the Beijing Conference of 1995, the girl child campaign and gender affirmative action have the social perception that women have been slowly changing for the better. However, nowadays, there is recognition of the woman as an equal partner with man. Developments towards improving the status of women have gained momentum since the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe. The legal Age of Majority Act Number 15 of 1983 stipulated that people, had the right to act independently as soon as they attained the age of 18 years. This effectively removed the gender differences between men and women and gave women some autonomy. The Finance Act of 1988 introduced a system of separate taxation. Men and women were taxed independently even if they were married. This gave women a sense of independence.

As a result of these developments, some talented and competent women in Zimbabwe have emerged to occupy senior management positions in the public and private sectors and educational institutions. Teaching and education management were seen as the few accepted occupations for women, presumably, because of their traditional association with female roles of socializing and caring for the young. However the number of women who achieved senior management positions was disproportionate to the number of women employed in education. Despite the success achieved in the training and education of women and the increased reservoir of highly and suitably qualified women in Zimbabwe, there is little increase in the number of women in senior management positions. It was the purpose of this research to seek to establish the factors that accounted for this.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

A negligible number of women have been advanced to senior management positions in education. This could be attributed to the efforts that have been made through the gender affirmative action policy which called for at least a quota of women to be promoted in each group of people promoted. As a result of inherent social stereotypes, the promoted women have been subjected to critical public scrutiny where their capability, ability, integrity and endurance have been chief concerns. This perception about women created an interesting comparison between the managerial efficiency and effectiveness of the male and female officers and the challenges they faced in their day to day work.

## OBJECTIVES

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the challenges faced by female school heads in the management of secondary schools.
2. To find out if cultural and social barriers interfered with management of secondary schools by female heads.
3. To establish the attitudes of staff members and other stakeholders towards female heads

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was informed by the liberal strand of feminism. This theoretical framework, in collaboration with other strands of feminism has given rise to a large body of knowledge which attempts to explain gender inequalities and the subjugation of women. Liberal feminists tend to focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means. This theory seeks to achieve the emancipation and empowerment of women through the existing system of bringing about reforms in a gradual way (Grant, 2003). It is both a theory and a movement which challenges all forms of prejudice in the context of patriarchy and capitalism. It agitates and advocates for the recognition of women as humans equal to men and the consequent abolition of privileges and prejudices that follow the possession of any biological reproductive organ (Oakley, 1981). Women are also considered to be weak and having limited ambitions. The consequence was that women were elbowed out of decision-making and were 'naturally' subordinated to men. The unshackling of women from male domination, as well as restoring their full humanity accounted for feminists' preoccupation with fighting gender discrimination. There was need for gender equity in economic, social and political developments as pointed out by feminist liberal theory (Hojgaard 2002).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years there has been a considerable shift from the traditional perception of a woman as a subordinate to a man. This has resulted in a lot of mobilization worldwide, to put the position of women at par with that of men, socially, economically and politically (Beijing declaration and platform for Action 2006). In 1995, United Nations World Conference on women which marked the United Nation's decade for women revealed that the position of women in society was worse than before (Beijing declaration and platform for Action 2006).

Culture and tradition have a noticeable impact on women managers. Osumba (2010) defines culture as the habits, traditions and beliefs of a country, society or group of people. The school is an extended organ of the community

and cultural beliefs also manifest themselves in the school situation. When teachers enter schools, they do not leave behind their cultural belief systems at home. Some cultural beliefs hold that women are inferior to men and cannot manage over men.

According to Kethusegile, Kwaramba and Lop (2000) many patriarchal societies in the region of Southern Africa stress the value of sons as opposed to daughters. The views of Agassy (2013) on the issues of equality and equity are significant in this study because they focus on the root causes of the imbalances which are found in the education and employment sectors. This has had adverse effects on the educational achievement of girls. The trend to shift educational costs from government to parents in the name of cost sharing is proving to work against the girl's education.

Gender inequality in management positions in various sectors of employment has received great attention in many countries worldwide, particularly at legislative and research levels (Kiamba, 2008). It was generally accepted that women were underrepresented in management positions virtually in all spheres of employment and education is no exception to this widely held position (Carmen, 2012).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this research, the researcher used the deductive approach because as it is believed to be the best approach that has a link with research methods to answer the research questions. The deductive research approach is concerned with quantitative data. Since the study is quantitative in nature, deductive research approach was found to be the best approach for the current study.

### **Research Design**

A research design is a strategic plan for a study, which sets out the broad structure and features of scientific investigation (Cresswell 2007). The descriptive survey design chosen was found to be the most appropriate design over others designs since it could easily and effectively be used to measure opinions and attitudes on factors that affect female heads in management of secondary schools.

## Research Population and sample size

The population of interest for this study was drawn from 50 secondary schools in Bulawayo with a target population of 95 participants from which a sample size of 50 female secondary school heads and the deputies were drawn.

The sample selection of fifty (50) respondents was selected using non probability sampling method called convenience sampling. The number of respondents involved in this study (n=50) was believed to be representative since the population was 95 female secondary school heads. According to Sekeran (2011), in descriptive research, anything from 10% to 20% of the population in question is representative enough to warrant generalization of results. Fifty respondents out of a target population of ninety-five represent more than 20%; hence, the sample was representative of the whole population.

## Sampling Procedure

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012), postulate that, there is no single correct procedure for sampling, the methods chosen depend on the purpose of enquiry and type of analysis to be made. Convenience sampling technique is a method used for identifying cases for certain characteristics in order to maximise variation (Sekaran, 2011). This method was used by the researcher to understand the challenges that were faced by female heads in management of secondary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. This method is the most common nowadays in academic research because of the need to reach many respondents in a short space of time (Rubin and Babbie, 2011).

## Data collection procedure

Data was collected by use of the questionnaire. The drop and pick technique was adopted to ensure a higher response rate for the research to be successful. Secondary data was collected by use of archival research where female secondary school heads placement records were studied including secondary school heads management performance reports were perused. The researcher obtained consent from selected respondents to collect information using the questionnaire.

## Research Instruments

In this study, the questionnaire was used to collect data and was personally administered on participants. The questionnaire had only closed ended questions.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The questionnaire was administered to 50 respondents in Bulawayo. The researcher self-administered questionnaires and the response rate was 45(90%). The study attributed the high response rate to the effectiveness of the research instruments for data collection and the manner in which the research instruments were administered, confirming validity and reliability in collection of relevant data for the study.

Out of 45 respondents who answered and returned the questionnaire, a group representing 1(2%) said they were aged between 20-30 years; a group representing 16(36%) were in the age group of 31-40 years and those aged 41-50 years represents 20 (44%) while a group aged 51-60 years represents 8 (18%) of respondents. The study established that, management of schools appear to be in favour of appointing mature people as evidenced by the statistics. On the marital status of respondents the study established that 5 (11%) of respondents were single; 6(13%) separated; 5 (11%) were widows, 4 (8%) were widows and 25 (56%) were married.

A question was asked to find out education qualifications of respondents. A group of respondents representing 4 (8%) were Master in Education Degree Holders, 5 (11%) were holders of Bachelor of Science Degrees, 6(13%) were holders of Bachelor of Arts Degrees and 10 (22%) were holders of Graduate Certificate in Education. However, a group representing 20 (44%) was holders of Diploma in Secondary School Education. Basing on the above figures, the study found out that, all participants surveyed attained various standards of education acceptable to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to head a school.

Respondents were asked to find out whether female professionals shun leadership positions. Out of the 45 respondents, a group representing 2(4%) strongly disagreed female professionals shun leadership positions while 3 (7%) disagreed. However, a group representing 25(56%) strongly agreed while 15(33%) agreed. Basing on the above, the study found out that, female professionals shun senior and leadership positions in education management. This could be attributed to their roles as mothers and wives. Female professionals shun leadership positions that will keep them away from their homes.



Participants were asked on husbands' perceptions of women as weaker leaders. Out of 45 respondents, a group representing 10(22%) agreed with the assertion that husbands perceive women as weaker leaders to lead school. A group representing 30 (67%) strongly agreed. However, 5 (11%) disagreed with this assertion. Basing on the above results, husbands perceive women as weaker to lead schools. The significance here was that decisions women made about their career paths had to be tied to family interests. In the process, this could thwart their professional growth. Their male counterparts on the other hand enjoyed their freedom as regards their choice of work.

Respondents were asked to establish whether culture perpetuate female as inferior to man resulting in male subordinates despising female bosses. Out of 45 actual respondents who returned the questionnaire, a group representing 30(67%) strongly agreed that male subordinates despise female bosses. Another group representing 5 (11%) agreed. However, a group representing 10(22%) disagreed. The study submits that, men look down upon female leaders than they do to male leaders. Simpson (1991) support this by asserting that, culture perpetuated the position of women as inferior to that of men even from the way mothers groomed their boys and girls. This study therefore assumed that women would naturally find it difficult to work in previously male dominated domains.

A question was asked on how men relate to their female supervisors at work. A group representing 4(9%) agreed with the statement that male superiors have negative attitudes towards their female subordinates. Another group representing 3 (7%) strongly agreed. However, a group representing 33(73%) disagreed that male superiors have negative attitude towards their female subordinates while 5 (11%) strongly disagreed. Basing on the above, the study found out that, the majority of respondents disagreed with the statement that male superiors showed little faith in their female subordinates. The fact that, male superiors look down upon their female subordinates raised that issue of feminism (Mackinnon 1997).

Respondents were asked a question which sought to establish how female heads were promoted in secondary schools education system. Results for this question showed that a group representing 8 (18%) indicated that, female heads for secondary schools in Bulawayo were promoted on other means. However, a group representing 37 (82%) disputed that by stating that, all female heads promoted in Bulawayo Secondary Schools were promoted on merit. Basing on these figures, the promotion of female heads for Secondary Schools were on merit of academic and professional qualifications, experience and on exhibited leadership qualities that maybe displayed during interviews for the vacant posts.

The study sought to ascertain whether females were being abused by their male counterparts at the work place. Responses received and recorded showed that, respondents represented by 8(18%) were of the belief that, women agree to have affairs. Other respondents represented by 12(27%) were of the view that, women were abused for turning down proposals. However, a group represented by 25(56%) denied that women were abused. Basing on data presentation above, women were not suffering abuse from their male counterparts at work.

The study sought to establish the major constraints faced by female school heads in their roles as managers of institutions. The results showed that 25 (56%) were of the view that, culture and tradition were the major constraints faced by female heads while 20(44%) believed that, roles at home and professional work conflict have a noticeable impact on female secondary school heads. Culture is the habits, traditions and beliefs of a country, society or group of people. The school is an extended organ of the community and cultural beliefs also manifest themselves in the school situation. When educators enter schools, they do not leave behind their cultural belief systems. Some cultural beliefs lead to perception of women as being inferior to men and cannot manage over men. Females are thus considered to be weak and not fit for management positions. The reasons for those indications that gender roles have an effect on professional work. Working as a school head is so involving and interferes with domestic issues and therefore conflict of interest arises. The professional role is tasking, hence much time is dedicated to the school administration, teacher management as well students and little time to the family. Doubling as a mother and a career woman is not easy especially when one has to be in school very early in the morning.

Basing on the analysis above, the study found out that, cultural and social issues as well as female heads' dual roles as housewives and also managers of institutions interfered with the management of school affairs. These results show that, culture and tradition as well as dual roles played by female heads were the major constraints faced by female heads and these constraints interfere with the management of the secondary schools negatively.

The study sought to effectively determine the cultural factors influencing the upward mobility of women in decision making positions in secondary schools within Bulawayo. Challenges faced by female heads in the management of secondary schools were basically associated with cultural stereotypes, and norms which place women as subordinate to men. Husbands disapproving their wives taking leadership appointments away from home and generally that men look down upon female heads of schools as inferior to male heads among other challenges. In addition the study revealed that there were more men than women heading secondary schools in

Bulawayo Metropolitan Province confirming that, there is the problem of gender inequity in management of secondary schools in the province.

## CONCLUSIONS

Any research is intended at arriving at some conclusions drawn from the findings of that research. These conclusions are directly derived from the data tendered by sources of data in that particular research given that, research is a systematic process of collecting and analyzing data in order to increase an understanding of the phenomena under investigation and communicating that which is discovered to, the larger scientific community as observed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012). This communication is also done in a systematic manner by encapsulating the findings into the conclusions enabling proffering relevant recommendations to the study in order to solve the research problem. Conclusions in this study are deduced from the data collected from research participants. This was done through an accurate reference to the research objectives and questions which forms the basis of the research.

The general conclusions drawn from the study were that education management, particularly secondary school management in Bulawayo secondary schools, is dominated by male school heads than female heads. The study concludes that, female secondary school heads make good and effective secondary school managers just like their male counterparts despite the fact that, they face challenges such as cultural stereotypes where men and society believe that men are better managers than women.

Female secondary school heads were not readily accepted as competent and best performers in secondary school management like male heads by society and their subordinates. However, the study concludes that, female secondary school heads are effective in the management of secondary schools since they were able to follow the laid down policies hence achieve the goals of their institutions. The study concludes that, cultural and social barriers interfere with the management of school affairs. Though there is no conflict between domestic roles and professional roles of female heads, the challenge faced by female heads emanate from the fact that husbands would not accept their wives to stay away from the family while heading a secondary school.

The study concludes that, the society and even the subordinates have negative attitude towards female heads as some felt that, these women managers were promoted using the affirmative action policy, promoted by other means yet their promotion was basically on merit.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings and conclusions made, the study made the following recommendations:

The Ministry of primary and secondary education should consider implementing Section 17 paragraph (b1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Chapter 2 which states that, the government must ensure that all national institutions have an equal representation of men and women. This is necessary if the country's education sector is to achieve gender sensitive policies such as the Affirmative Action Policy and the 50/50 policy in addressing gender equity issues. However, the appointments of female secondary school heads should be on merit.

The Ministry of Primary and secondary education is encouraged to put in place, intensified gender education programmes that will encourage women who qualify, to apply for advertised posts, as some of them are probably not aware of their potential to lead. This could be done through leadership workshops and staff development programmes on educational management. Furthermore, incentives should be increased to attract more qualified and potential women to take up managerial posts. there is need to appoint more female heads in secondary school management since they are also able to achieve the goals of their respective institutions. Although cultural and social barriers may interfere with the management of school affairs, there is need for female secondary school heads to be encouraged to achieve leadership positions since they can manage the roles of leaders and also domestic roles. There is need to encourage female teachers to apply for higher posts in education management.

Husbands are encouraged to give maximum support to their professional wives, and they should accept that, women are also effective managers; after all, they practice management daily in running the affairs of the families. Female secondary school heads are also encouraged to be active learners from others. When a school head is ready to learn from his followers, such leadership reveals more sub-characteristics like, tolerance, flexibility, and being proactive. Learning from others is important for understanding each subordinate as an individual to make a difference. Leading a school has enormous challenges that require high levels of patience and understanding of other people such as subordinates, parents, students and the community in general. The female secondary school heads are encouraged to exercise patience and tolerance and have participative leadership style that influence subordinates and the surrounding community to fully participate in the school development agenda.

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