

Full Length Research Paper

Effect of gender and societal factors in the choice of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district, Kenya

*Mwai B. Leakey, Gurinder G. Karua and Joyce M. Chadha

Department of Curriculum Studies, Maseno University, Kisumu, Kenya. E-mail:leakey_mwai@maseno.ac.ke

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Women are under-represented in school headship in many parts of the world. Social-cultural reasons have been used to explain this discrepancy, particularly in Western countries. In Vihiga District in the Republic of Kenya, the situation is that only 24% of head-teachers in mixed secondary schools were women. Social-cultural factors contributing to this scenario were unknown. A descriptive survey design was used to establish perceptions of stakeholders on social-cultural factors that influence gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga District, Western Province, Kenya. The study involved 34 Head teachers, 34 Board of Governors Chairpersons, 34 Parent Teacher Association Chairpersons, 465 teachers (310 males and 155 females) and one District Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (DQASO). Questionnaire and In-depth interview were used to collect data. The study found out that school location, school leadership traditions, male dominance, dual role and spouse attitude were perceived as influences on gender imbalance in the appointment of head teachers. Based on the findings, it is recommended that improvement of infrastructure and accessibility of the upcoming schools should be done to attract and retain female head-teachers in these schools, communities should be sensitized on gender equality and to respect female head teachers and advocacy should be enhanced for the girl child education.

Keywords: Social-cultural factors, Gender imbalance, Head teachers.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the advances made in many areas of public service appointment in the past two decades, women still have a long way to go in order to participate on the same footing as men. Male colleagues heavily outnumber them. The global picture is one of men outnumbering women at about 20:1 at senior management level (Dines, 1993). One explanation might be that equality of opportunities goes unnoticed by decision makers, or is not an issue of concern, and is therefore not acted upon (Fiona, 1995).

Some employers discriminate against women by refusing to hire them even when opportunities existed. Most employers preferred to hire men who had the necessary education and skills than women because they feared that the female employees would not concentrate on their jobs because of their family responsibilities thus woman ended up taking low paying jobs or being second in position to men in most secondary schools (Obonyo et al., 2005). American Association of school administration reported that where as in 1981-1982 some 25 percent of

American school administrators were females by 1984-1985 the figure had raised to only 26 percent. Moreover, the higher the administrative position the lower the proportion of women being appointed (Owen, 1991).

Edson (1998) conducted a nation wide study in which she followed for a period of 5 years the careers of 142 women who wanted to get into educational administration. Her conclusion from the research was that some women have high aspirations for administrative work but their enrollments in preparatory courses were soaring. She also found out that the attitude of administrators towards women who wished to become administrators was becoming more supportive and helpful, for many women in the study credited them for initiating their interest, being helpful and being their mentors.

Featherman cited in Dines (1993) noted that women still carried the burden of domestic responsibility and planned their own career around their husband though Dines says this pattern is changing albeit exceedingly slowly

slowly with more couples sharing domestic responsibilities and juggling careers with great Ingenuity. For many women professional career dependent on the grace and favour of the husband. Married women who had excelled academically lacked independence in decision making because they had to seek consent from their husbands. Unfortunately some husbands did not grant the consent for their own reasons (Mackenzie et al., 1997).

Stereotyping of men and women is one of the social processes taking place of which we seem to have little awareness. Women are seen as different and are often evaluated less favourably than men (Fiona, 1995). Doubts still lingered as to whether or not women were as able as men to be effective in school administration or posed the toughness necessary to maintain discipline in high school, Women in some culture found it difficult to exert authority over males, they still suffer from the myth that women were too emotional or too illogical for senior management or best suited to the domestic maintaining aspect of administration (Owen, 1991). According to Suda (2002) men are commonly rated higher than women on traits associated with competence and instrumentality such as leadership.

Organizations tend to be patriarchal by nature thus leaders lead in the way they were led and so men continue to collude with fellow males and exacerbate male entitlement (Nostrand, 1993). In UK, a survey (Fiona, 1995) showed that the majority of men responsible for recruitment and hiring employees held the view that a woman is likely to be inferior to a man as an employee.

Hanekom (2001) study entitled "Organizational barriers facing women school principals in Wynberg region of South Africa" found out that school organizations still preferred male candidates for senior positions and in addition women were to be unusually qualified and work twice as hard as male aspirants to have the same promotional opportunities. Political interference, influence by interested parties and patronage had denied schools the best managers. There had been also rampant practices of extending services for retiring head teachers due to lack of effective successors (Kihumba, 2008 & Silsil, 2008).

According to Teachers Service Commission (TSC, 2005), all headship vacancies are advertised and qualified candidates apply for the posts. The TSC agents at the provincial and district levels carry out interviews and qualifying candidates are appointed and promoted to head the schools. Conditions for the appointment are ; promotion on merit , discipline, must be in Job group " M" and above, must have attended Kenya Education Staff Institute Management Training (KESI) and under special circumstances be willing to take up the post (Ministry of Education, 1987) . It is also a mandatory requirement in Kenya that at least 30 percent of all government employment opportunities be reserved for women (Makura, 2000). Based on the above stated criteria,

both males and females of same qualifications and expertise apply and are interviewed for the appointment. However, the scenario on the ground shows that males dominate headship positions in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga District at an alarming rate of 76% while females were only 24% (District Education Office, 2009) which was still below the government policy of 30% representation of women in all public appointments. Factors influencing gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools are yet to be established. Therefore the objective of this study was to establish perceptions of stakeholders on social –cultural factors that influence gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga District.

This study was guided by twelve interacting variables: promotional discrimination, dual roles, spouse attitude, gender stereotyping, sponsors attitude, male dominancy, political interference, school leadership traditions, school location, school size, age and marital status. These factors were perceived to have either positively or negatively influenced the appointment of female head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study used descriptive survey design that encompassed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Descriptive survey design involves data collection in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study (Cohen and Manion, 1980). This design was chosen because of its appropriateness in educational fact finding which yields accurate information in a short period of time (Borg and Gall, 1996). The research aimed at accurate information on factors influencing gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district.

Sample and Venue

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 31 head teachers, 31 Board of governors (BOG) chairpersons, and 31 Parents teachers association (PTA) chairpersons from 34 mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district, Kenya, representing 91.1 % of each of the study population. This allowed each and every member an equal chance of being selected. Teachers were sampled using stratified random sampling. The strata were gender of the teachers. Stratified random sampling helped the researcher to come up with a study sample and information that was representative of the entire population. According to Nkpa (1997) stratified sampling procedure helps to reduce chance variations between a sample and the population it represents. It also allows each member of the target population to have an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample. Saturated sampling technique was used to sample the District Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (DQASO) as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Study Population and Sample

Category of Study Population	Study population	Sample size	Percentage %
Head teachers	34	31	91.1
Female teachers	155	46	33.3
Male teachers	310	93	33.3
DQASO	1	1	100

Instruments of Data Collection

Head teachers and teachers' questionnaires were used to collect data from the head teachers and teachers regarding social- cultural factors that influence gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools (Borg and Gall, 1996). Both of them had open- ended and closed –ended items. Open –ended questions gathered in depth information while closed-ended questions gave out structured respondents. Questionnaires were preferred to any other tool of data collection in the study because it allowed data to be collected from many respondents within a short period of time. In-depth interviews were used to obtain information the respondents would not reveal by any other method of data collection (Cohen and Manion, 1980). The researcher developed the questionnaires from the literature review.

Pilot Study

To establish reliability of research instruments, a pilot study was carried out in 3 mixed secondary schools. It involved 3 head teachers, 3 BOG chairpersons 3 PTA chairpersons and 47 teachers (10% of the study population) using test- retest method. The two tests were administered at an interval of two weeks. This was done to verify their accuracy and consistency. The researcher ensured that ambiguous information was removed while deficiencies and weaknesses were noted and corrected in the final instruments. This method was used because it was appropriate for the qualitative instrument of data collection (Joppe, 2000). To establish Validity of the instruments, three experts on the topic from Maseno University, examined the content of the instruments and advised the researcher on the content validity. Their feedback was used to revise the instruments.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher secured a research permit and authorization letter from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology in Nairobi before proceeding to the field for data collection. The researcher personally visited all the sampled schools and administered the questionnaires. Different dates were set for administering head teachers and DQASO interviews. The researcher scrutinized and analyzed relevant documents to ascertain their credibility. For example headship advertisements, application lists, short listed lists and appointment lists.

Methods of Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of percentages, frequencies and means. Qualitative data obtained from interview schedules was transcribed, organized into categories, sub categories and themes as they emerged from the

field and presented in prose form and peoples quoted words according to the themes and objectives of the study.

RESULTS

The objective of the study was to establish perception of stakeholders on social -cultural factors influencing gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools. The head teachers and teachers responded with a tick to social- cultural factors in a Likert scale. The responses were scored and analyzed as shown in Tables 2 and 3

Table 2 shows head teacher's perceptions on social-cultural factors influencing gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district. From the mean responses it was revealed that political interference (MR=4.06); school location (MR=3.96); school leadership traditions (MR=3.6); spouses attitude (MR=3.4); sponsors attitude (MR=3.29); discrimination (MR=3.2); patriarchal society (MR=3.19); school size (MR=3.16); dual roles (MR=3.12); marital status (MR=3.03); and, gender stereotyping (MR=3.01) influenced gender imbalance since their mean responses were above 3.0 while age (MR=2.58); and, glass ceiling (MR=2.6) did not since their mean responses were below 3.0.

Twenty two (71%) of head teachers agreed that political interference influenced gender imbalance. They revealed that politician had caused transfers of same head teachers. Eight (25.8%) disagreed saying that as much as the politicians had caused transfers of same of their colleagues they had recommended female for headship while 1(3.2%) was undecided. Twenty three (74.2%) head teachers agreed that school location influenced gender imbalance for same female teachers declined to take up posts of schools that were in the interior. 1(3.2%) disagreed while three (9.7%) were undecided. Twenty one (67.7%) head teachers agreed that school leadership traditions influenced gender imbalance for same schools had never been lead by a female head teacher. Eight (25.8%) disagreed while two (6.5%) were undecided. Nineteen (61.2%) head teachers agreed that spouse attitude influenced gender imbalance since same husbands had declined to give consent to their wives to be head teachers. Eleven (35.5%) head teachers disagreed while 1(3.2%) remained neutral.

Table 2. Perceptions of head teachers

Staffing Norms	SA f %	A f %	U f %	D f %	SD f %	MR
Discrimination	11(35.5)	5(16.1)	3(9.7)	7(22.6)	5(16.1)	3.20
Dual roles	8(25.8)	12(38.7)	0(0)	8(25.8)	3(9.7)	3.12
Spouse attitude	9(29)	10(32.2)	1(3.2)	7(22.6)	4(12.9)	3.40
Gender stereotyping	9(29)	6(19.4)	3(9.7)	7(22.6)	5(16.1)	3.01
Sponsor	7(22.6)	10(32.3)	3(9.7)	7(22.6)	4(12.9)	3.29
Male leadership dominance	6(19.4)	10(32.3)	3(9.7)	8(25.8)	4(12.9)	3.19
Political interference	15(48.4)	7(22.6)	1(3.2)	5(16.1)	3(9.7)	4.06
School leadership tradition	12(38.7)	9(29)	2(6.5)	4(12.9)	4(12.9)	3.60
School location	13(41.9)	10(32.3)	3(9.7)	0(0)	1(3.2)	3.96
School size	7(22.6)	10(32.3)	1(3.2)	7(22.6)	6(19.4)	3.16
Age	5(16.1)	3(9.7)	5(16.1)	10(32.3)	8(25.8)	2.58
Marital status	4(12.9)	10(32.3)	6(19.4)	5(16.1)	6(19.4)	3.03

Key: SA- Strongly Agree A- Agree D- Disagree SD- Strongly Disagree
U- Un decided f- Frequency %- Percentage MR-Mean Rate

Table 3. Perceptions of teacher's

Social-Cultural Factors	SA f %	A f %	U f %	D f %	SD f %	MR
Discrimination	40(28.8)	37(26.6)	22(15.8)	25(17.9)	15(10.8)	3.44
Dual roles	41(29.5)	36(25.9)	16(11.5)	30(21.6)	26(18.7)	3.47
Spouse attitude	36(22.6)	50(36)	18(12.9)	31(22.3)	14(10.1)	3.67
Gender stereotyping	26(18.7)	45(32.4)	24(17.3)	22(15.8)	18(12.9)	3.19
Sponsor	26(18.7)	52(37.4)	27(19.4)	21(15.1)	13(9.4)	3.40
Male leadership dominance	40(28.8)	43(30.9)	20(14.4)	18(12.9)	18(12.9)	3.49
Political interference	51(36.7)	36(25.9)	26(16.5)	17(12.2)	6(4.3)	3.60
School leadership tradition	21(15.1)	58(42.7)	25(17.9)	26(18.7)	6(4.3)	3.50
School location	52(37.4)	38(27.3)	30(21.6)	14(10.1)	5(3.4)	3.84
School size	35(25.2)	44(31.7)	16(11.5)	28(20.1)	16(11.5)	3.30
Age	17(12.2)	37(26.6)	25(17.9)	35(25.2)	25(18)	2.89
Marital status	33(23.7)	38(27.3)	25(17.9)	27(19.4)	16(11.5)	3.32

Key: SA- Strongly Agree A- Agree D- Disagree SD- Strongly Disagree
U- Un decided f- Frequency %- Percentage MR-Mean Rate

Seventeen (54.9%) head teachers agreed that sponsor attitude influence gender imbalance since they had a say in the school leadership. Eleven (35.5%) disagreed saying most of the sponsors had recommended females for headship since they were trusted, while three (9.7%) were neutral. Sixteen (51.6%) head teachers agreed that discrimination influenced gender imbalance since same interview panelist preferred males since they were believed to be great disciplinarians than women. Twelve (38.7%) disagreed while three (9.7%) were undecided. Sixteen (51.7%) head teachers agreed that male leadership dominance influenced gender imbalance because men continued to collude with their fellow men to remain in leadership. Twelve (38.7%) disagreed while three (9.7%) were undecided. Seventeen (54.9%) head

teachers agreed that school size schools were led by males while most of the females in headship positions headed single streamed schools. Thirteen (42%) disagreed saying that the affirmative policy of 1/3 of headship appointment had seen the recent rise of females in mixed secondary schools. while 1(3.2%) was neutral. Twenty (61.5%) head teachers agreed that dual roles influenced gender imbalance in that it affected women more than the males thus contributing to their drop out, while eleven (35.5%) disagreed. saying it this affected both the males and the female. Fourteen (45.2%) head teachers agreed that marital status influenced gender imbalance since most of the head teachers were married. Eleven (35.5%) disagreed saying that marital status had nothing to do with headship appoi-

ment provided one qualified while six (19.6%) were undecided. Fifteen (48.4%) head teachers agreed that gender stereotyping influenced gender imbalance since females were looked down upon as less leaders thus unfit to head mixed secondary school. Twelve (38.7%) disagreed saying nowadays this trend was not there thus women had featured in mixed secondary school leadership unlike before when there was non, while three were undecided.

Data from in-depth interviews on social- cultural factors influencing gender imbalance revealed that dual roles affected majority of the head teachers both fathers and mothers. One of the respondents said that "It is sometimes difficulty to balance your office work with domestic chores, for you are on duty twenty four hours until you forget about yourself". It was revealed that due to work pressure two female head teachers had opted out. It was revealed that dual roles of being a wife/husband, mother/father and head teacher affected the females more than the males.

"Political interference has affected five of my colleagues this year" one of the respondents said. 22 (71%) head teachers revealed that some politicians had vested interest in the running of the schools now that they controlled the constituency funds. DQASO disagreed with the respondents saying that political interference in Vihiga district had seen most of the male head teachers replaced by the female head teachers thus increasing their numbers from 4 to 8 therefore it was not a factor that had caused the low headship appointments. It was noted that some three teachers had declined to take up headship because the school they were appointed to head were either in the interior or just beginning. In-depth interviews revealed that most of the head teachers were married and aged between 40-50years. Among the 8 female head teachers 6 were married one was a widow while 1 was a single mother. Those married said that they had full support from their spouse but the DQASO revealed that some of the female head teachers had been forced to step down due to family pressure thus influencing gender imbalance. Most of the interviewed respondents revealed that some of the mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district had never been lead by females. It was revealed that 19 out of the 31 sampled schools had never been lead by female head teachers but were dominated by male leadership thus school leadership traditions and male leadership dominance influenced gender imbalance in Vihiga district. It was also revealed that only 2 out of the 8 female head teachers headed two streamed schools while the rest one streamed but the DQASO was quick to point out that the size of the school did not influence gender imbalance since both the males and females were affected. Interviews revealed that as much as the sponsors influenced school headship decisions most of them had literally requested for female head teachers because of their honesty and good financial management thus this had boosted the number

of female head teachers in the district. For it was evident that in 3 schools the sponsors had requested for the incoming principals to be females and not males.

Table 3 shows teacher's perceptions on social- cultural factors influencing gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district. From the mean response it was revealed that school location (MR=3.84); spouse attitude (MR=3.67); political interference (MR=3.6); school leadership traditions (MR=3.5); patriarchal society (MR=3.49); dual roles (MR=3.47); discrimination (MR=3.44); sponsors attitude (MR=3.4); marital status (MR=3.32); school size (MR=3.30); and, gender stereotyping (MR=3.19) influenced gender imbalance since their responses were above 3.0 while age (MR= 2.89); and, glass ceiling (MR=2.9) did not since their responses were below 3.0.

Ninety (64.7%) teachers indicated that school location influenced gender imbalance since most of the up coming schools in the interior had failed to attract female teachers thus they preferred to remain in classroom in provincial schools strategically located near the roads. Nineteen (13.5%) disagreed while thirty (21.6%) were undecided. Eighty seven (62.6%) teachers agreed that political interference influenced gender imbalance because some politicians had incited the local people to reject some of the head teachers posted to schools in their jurisdictions. Twenty three (16.5%) disagreed saying that they had helped increase the number of females since they had recommended them for headship while twenty six (18.7%) were undecided. Eighty six (58.6%) teachers agreed that spouse attitude influenced gender imbalance for some husbands were unwilling to allow their wives become heads especially in schools far away from their homes. Forty five (32.4%) disagreed while eighteen (12.9%) were undecided. Eighty three (59.7%) teachers agreed that male leadership dominance influenced gender imbalance because it was believed that women were inferior to men. Thirty six (25.8%) disagreed while twenty (14.4%) were neutral. Seventy nine (56.9%) teachers agreed that school size influenced gender imbalance saying majority of 3 streamed schools were given to men unlike females since it was believed that men were stronger than women. Forty four (31.6%) disagreed indicating that some of the female head teachers had been given the schools and moved them to greater heights than men while sixteen (11.5%) were undecided. Seventy eight (56.%) teachers agreed that sponsors influenced gender imbalance since they had a role to play when their schools fell vacant . Thirty four (24.5%) disagreed while twenty seven (19.4%) were undecided. Seventy seven (55.4%) teachers agreed that dual roles influenced gender imbalance because some female head teachers had given up and stepped down due to family pressures. Fifty six (40.3%) disagreed while sixteen (11.5%) were neutral. Seventy seven (55.4%) teachers agreed that discrimination influenced gender imbalance because some interviewer were hesitate appoi-

ning female teachers to schools that were in clash area for fear of them declining the posts thus selected males for such posts. Forty (28.7%) disagreed while twenty two (15.8%) were undecided. Seventy one (51%) teachers agreed that gender stereotyping influenced gender imbalance since men were mostly rated higher than women in leadership. Forty (28.7%) disagreed while twenty four (17.3%) were undecided. Seventy one (51%) teachers agreed that marital status influenced gender imbalance. forty three (30.9%) disagreed while twenty five (17.9%) were undecided.

DISCUSSION

Overall rating of the respondents revealed that political interference in the running of the schools influenced gender imbalance to a large extent. (71%) of head teachers and (62.6%) said that same politicians interfered with the running of schools, but the office had addressed the issues with the relevant head teachers affected, they noted that as much as the politicians interfered with the running of the schools the female teachers were the beneficiaries since they had been recommended for replacement thus boosting their numbers. These findings differ with those of Gitonga (2008) who reported that a Member of Parliament (MP) incited Naivasha girls secondary school to demonstrate against their principal.

Most (74.2%) of the head teachers and (62.6%) teachers said that school location influenced gender imbalance. They revealed that some schools in Vihiga district were in remote area thus their accessibility was difficult, teachers promoted to head such schools declined the promotion and opted to go back to classroom teaching thus the office had to use the willing candidates irrespective of gender. It was revealed that the number of female teachers who declined headship promotions was higher than the males. This was against the TSC requirement that one had to be willing to take up the post within 30 days (TSC, 2005). Thus it was important for the ministry to appoint women to schools of their choice in order to increase their representation in the rural area while the government had to use the Constituency development funds (CDF) to improve roads in rural area to make the schools accessible.

Most of the respondents (67.7%) head teachers and (56.8%) said that school leadership traditions influenced gender imbalance. Headship charts displayed in the head teacher's offices in 19(61.3%) schools indicated a trend of male leadership throughout the years. It was believed that some communities believed in male leadership and even those interviewing still believed some big mixed schools should be lead by males who will be able to handle the boys than females. This finding concurs with Fiona (1995) and the Findings of the study concur with those of Barnge 'tuny (1999) who found out that doubts

still lingered as to whether or not women were as able as men to be effective in school administration or posed the toughness necessary to maintain discipline in high schools. Hanekom (2001) and Suda (2002) also found out that school organizations still preferred male candidates for senior position.

Results on spouse attitude shows that (61.2%) head teachers and (58.6%) teachers indicated that spouse attitude influenced gender imbalance. In –depth interviews revealed some family squabbles had made some head teachers not to perform their duties effectively as school administrators thus dropped out voluntarily or demoted by the office. This had affected more females than males. This finding concurs with Mackenzie et al. (1997) who noted that some husbands did not grant consent for their wives to be head teachers for their own reasons

Overall ratings on sponsors influence revealed that sponsors did not influenced gender imbalance. In depth interviews revealed that sponsors had even sometimes locked up the school gates to block male head teachers from landing especially if their past record was bad thus forced the office to either use force or appoint an alternative person to head the school. In some cases they had even requested the office to appoint a female head teacher since it was believed that they area good financial managers.

CONCLUSION

The following are the conclusions of the study:

i) School leadership traditions influence gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district. 19 headship charts displayed in the head teacher's offices indicated a trend of male leadership throughout the years.

ii) Schools location influenced gender imbalance in that some schools were in remote area or inaccessible thus most female teachers promoted to head such schools declined the appointments.

iii) It was also evident that male leadership dominance influence gender imbalance in that 74% of head teaches in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district were males while only 26% were females

iv) Dual roles also influence gender imbalance in that some of the female head teachers had opted out because of it.

v) Spouse attitude influenced gender imbalance in appointment of head teachers in mixed secondary schools in Vihiga district since some females had opted out because of family tensions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, this study recommends that:

i) There should be improvement of infrastructure of the upcoming schools and their accessibility and building of residential houses for the head teachers and deputies to attract and retain female head teachers.

ii) The community should be sensitized to respect and support the female head teachers in order for them to achieve their set goals.

iii) There should be advocacy for girls education among parents and communities, sensitizing them against negative social- cultural practices and facilitating re-entry of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy and early marriages.

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