



Exploring Sustainable Strategies for Improving Women's Leadership Development in Primary Schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify sustainable strategies for improving women's leadership development in primary schools in Kenya. It used quantitative and qualitative methodologies and adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population were education officers, headteachers and teachers, with 364 respondents. Data was collected using structured and open-ended questionnaires, structured interviews, and document analysis. The study recommended that there is a need to stop cultural practices hindering women from progressing into leadership, challenging traditional beliefs, having self-confidence and seeking mentorship, training and coaching from female leaders. It also recommended an integrated organizational management approach to integrate all leadership systems and processes. Finally, teacher education and training should be structured to incorporate the development of leadership knowledge and skills.

Keywords: Sustainable Strategies, Women Leadership Development,

Introduction

Promoting women leaders creates an environment where they can develop their leadership skills. Despite numerous efforts to empower women and place them in leadership roles, the global representation of women in such roles is disappointing. Women make up 4% of CEOs in the 500 largest companies, according to research. (Storberg& Madsen,2017). The lack of women in leadership positions slows development in all areas and costs the global economy. If women are excluded from recruitment, corporate companies and houses will never have the best leadership. Public and private sector research has identified the barriers to women in senior management. (Peart, 2017). Many studies have proposed ways to help agencies increase senior-level women's representation. This study proposes several strategies. It suggests reversing stereotyping to promote gender parity. It emphasizes transforming experiences. Mentoring girls could boost their life goals. Employment equity at all levels would give girls more chances to realize their dreams. (Pittaway&Bartolomei, 2018).

According to a Federation of Women Lawyers and NDI report, Kenya's first female senators and governors were elected. (Federation of Women Lawyers & NDI, 2017). Women held 172 of 1883 elected seats in the 2017 general elections, 29 per cent more than in 2013. (Federation of Women Lawyers & NDI, 2017). Despite these gains, women's representation falls short of the 2010 constitution's one-third requirement for elected and appointed bodies. Women hold 23% of the Senate and national assembly seats, including women's representative seats. (Federation of Women Lawyers & NDI, 2017).

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in primary schools is a pressing issue that deserves research attention (Federation of Women Lawyers & NDI, 2017). The benefits of having more women in leadership roles in primary schools include improved student outcomes and more diverse perspectives (Shapira-Lishchinsky&Tscholl, 2021). However, common barriers that prevent women from advancing into leadership positions in primary schools include gender bias, lack of mentorship opportunities, and work-life balance challenges (Wang &Degol, 2017). Sustainable strategies, such as transforming stereotyping, encouraging mentorship, and providing employment equity, can help address these barriers and improve women's representation in leadership positions (Pittaway&Bartolomei, 2018). Successful programs and initiatives have implemented these strategies in primary schools (Choge, 2015).

According to a recent study, transformative experiences have a significant impact on girls' and women's leadership development (Jackson, 2018). The study suggests that the key interactions with role models and mentors play a crucial role in this transformational process, including individual interventions, counselling, laboratory projects, and interpersonal relationships (Jackson, 2018). Furthermore, the study found that even when other factors such as scientific aptitude and parental support are present, a transformative experience may produce the self-assurance and tenacity required to initiate and pursue a career in science (Jackson, 2018). A transforming experience also affects the other inputs and the double-headed arrows in the model indicate this. For example, with the encouragement of a mentor, a girl might be able to challenge family or personal gender stereotypes, surmount external obstacles or confront classroom harassment to reach her goal of career and eventually leadership (Miller, 2017). This argument only

gives a summary of a study without going into specific details and therefore, judging the calibre of the research or the veracity of the conclusions is challenging. There is a need to evaluate or offer a critical analysis regarding sustainable strategies for improving Women's Leadership Development, hence this study.

Individuals, institutions, and policies must combat gender stereotyping to achieve employment equity in primary school headship. Despite almost three decades of gender equity efforts since the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Khan & Ahmad, 2019) and the 1995 Beijing Conference, women remain underrepresented in school leadership in Kenya. There is no single way to increase women in leadership schools. To succeed in school leadership, women need opportunities, encouragement, and support. A growing body of literature on women administrators supports the image of competent, successful, career-minded female leaders. (Grogan, 2017). Gender-sensitive education is needed. To achieve gender equity in school headship, stereotypes must be overcome. The school is one of the main socializing agents and teaches students social norms and values. (Burton & Weiner, 2016).

Furthermore, mentoring was identified as a specific strategy that they employed to break through the glass ceiling (Baker, J., & Cangemi, 2016). This has led to Baker, J., & Cangemi (2016) claim that mentoring may be the 'ice pick' for breaking through the 'glass ceiling.' Research has, however, highlighted that women are likely to encounter barriers when acquiring mentors. For these reasons, formal mentoring relationships may be particularly useful when addressing issues of diversity (Woolnough, H. M., & Fielden, 2017). It is also important to note that mentoring is a reciprocal relationship and that mentors can learn a lot from their mentees, particularly concerning career barriers (Woolnough, H. M., & Fielden, 2017). Mentoring and hands-on experience are recommended by scholars and the popular press for retaining women in science, math, and engineering. (Hall, 2018). Hernandez et al. (2017) found that protégés, especially females informally mentored, are more satisfied with their mentors, receive more career help, and receive more psychosocial benefits like friendship, social support, role modelling, and acceptance. However, Enriquez et al. (2019) stated that preparatory administrative training, whether through informal in-services or formal university graduate programs, may help women achieve their goals.

Miller (2017), suggested a model which outlined key factors involved in leadership and career choices in non-traditional fields for women, girls and women pursuing scientific careers and leadership needs to include key gender-related variables at least while women are still a visible minority in the field. Wang & Degol (2017) noted that schools should offer courses for both boys and girls that address sexuality in its social context and the social dynamics of sexuality and how they tend to affect women. According to Baker and Cangemi (2016), women identified four key career strategies for success, including consistently exceeding performance standards, adopting a leadership style that male managers could relate to, proactively taking on difficult assignments, and having powerful mentors. Even though the statements emphasize how crucial mentors are to women's career success, there is little research on the best ways to assist and mentor women in science. Research on effective mentoring techniques that support gender equity and diversity in science and other fields is necessary.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to identify and explore sustainable strategies that can be applied to enhance the development of female leadership in primary schools. The study aims to investigate individual and social factors, such as self-efficacy, mentoring, cultural norms, and organizational policies, that affect the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. The ultimate objective is to make actionable suggestions that can help women advance into leadership positions and overcome obstacles in their career paths.

Research questions

The study is based on the following research question:

What are the most effective and sustainable strategies for increasing the number of women in leadership positions in primary schools? With the research question, this study sought to investigate various interventions, including training/seminars for women's empowerment, the availability of positive role models, financial support for additional training, the implementation of the 2010 Constitution and affirmative action policies, educational and qualification standards, high pay and better benefits, and leadership education in the curriculum. The overall objective is to identify and recommend strategies that can be used to enhance women's leadership development in primary schools.

Significance of the study

This study is significant because it attempts to address the global issue of the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in primary schools. The results of this study can guide decision-making and policy development processes by offering evidence-based suggestions on the best and most long-lasting ways to increase the representation of women in leadership roles in primary schools. The research can also add to the body of knowledge already available on women's leadership development and gender equity in the classroom. In the end, women may benefit from the successful application of sustainable strategies to enhance women's leadership development, including increased career opportunities, improved job satisfaction, and increased economic independence. Additionally, it can have a positive impact on students' academic performance, school climate, and exposure to a wider range of role models.

Theoretical framework

A psychological theory called social cognitive theory (SCT) emphasizes the interaction between a person's personality, environment, and behaviour. (Bandura, 2016). Albert Bandura advanced SCT when he suggested that people learn by imitating the behaviour of others. Self-efficacy, or confidence in one's ability to carry out a particular task, is said to be developed by individuals based on their observation and evaluation of their skills and the skills of others, according to SCT. (Bandura, 2019).

The study is pertinent to the SCT because it aims to identify the causes of the underrepresentation of women in Kenyan primary schools' leadership roles. The study's goal is to investigate the internal and external factors such as self-efficacy, mentoring, cultural norms, and organizational policies-that influence women's development as leaders. (Kemboi&Simatwa, 2021).

The main factors in this study are behavioural outcomes, like women's advancement into leadership roles, environmental factors, like mentoring and organizational policies, and personal factors, like self-efficacy and confidence. This theoretical framework raises the following research questions:

- What personal traits support women's self-efficacy and confidence in the development of their leadership skills?
- What are the environmental elements that help or hinder women's development as leaders?
- What are the most successful methods for coaching and mentoring female leaders?
- What organizational practices and cultural norms discourage or support the development of women leaders?
- What are the most successful methods for promoting gender equality in the advancement of leadership?

It is possible to divide the variables into independent and dependent groups. Self-efficacy and confidence are examples of personal factors that make up the independent variables. Mentoring and organizational policies are examples of environmental factors. The advancement of women in positions of leadership is the dependent variable.

Because they imply that environmental and personal factors have an impact on women's leadership development, the assumptions or propositions of the SCT are pertinent to this study. According to the theory, women's advancement in leadership can be enhanced by altering several environmental and individual factors, including self-efficacy, mentoring, and organizational policies.

The following recommendations are put forth to assist women in advancing into leadership roles in light of the research findings and SCT:

Schools should create more sensitive curricula to help boys and girls gain new perspectives on the functions and abilities of both men and women. To boost women's confidence and support them in maintaining their focus on leadership development, a mentoring system should be established within educational administrative preparatory programs. The study recommended changing cultural norms that prevent women from rising to positions of leadership and encouraging women to look to female leaders for mentoring, training, and coaching. (Kemboi&Simatwa, 2021).

Women should be more deliberate about addressing the internal barriers that prevent them from assuming their proper place in society by addressing issues with self-worth and confidence concerning professional advancement and leadership. Women who want to be leaders should actively seek mentoring and coaching from people who have achieved leadership success to be ready for the variety of challenges that come with leadership. (Girma, 2019).

Communities need to be made aware of the importance of female leadership so they can respect and support female head teachers. It is important to stop the cultural norms and traditional beliefs that prevent women from rising to positions of leadership. Women should learn to question the traditional gender roles, which place the majority of domestic duties in their hands, on an individual level. (Kemboi&Simatwa, 2021).

Universities should design and provide graduate programs that address the needs of female leaders with a focus on leadership abilities. Leadership development should be incorporated into the design of teacher education and training programs. (Girma, 2019).

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was adopted in this research. One of the characteristics of the design is that it is non-experimental and it deals with variables in a natural setting. Kerlinger (1978) states that survey research can be used to study large and small populations by selecting and studying samples chosen from the populations to discover the incidence, distribution and interrelations of sociological and psychological variables. The design is recommended for educational and social research. Most research problems, social and educational, do not lend themselves to experimental enquiry. According to Cohen and Marion (1983), descriptive research or "what is" involves the description, recording, analysis and interpretation of the condition that exists. It involves comparisons or contrasts and attempts to discover relationships between existing and manipulated variables. According to Best (1970), descriptive research is concerned with "how", "what is" or "what exists" and is related to preceding events that have influenced or affected a present condition or event. Therefore, this design was found appropriate for the study because it could generate data to suit the problem being investigated.

The philosophical paradigms underpinning this study were advocacy /participatory and constructivist worldviews. Creswell (2003) further illustrated the views in four dimensions: What is knowledge (ontology), how knowledge is created (epistemology), and what value goes into it (axiology) and, how it is written and presented (rhetoric)

The study also adopted the advocacy/ participatory paradigm to complement constructivist knowledge claims. The advocacy paradigm was necessary because it was found that constructivism does not go far enough in advocating for an action agenda to help marginalised people.

The study adopted the two paradigms because there is a need for research to be intertwined with politics and political agenda to bring about reforms that may bring change in the lives of the participants, and institutions in which the individuals work or live. Moreover, specific issues of the day such as women's leadership development needed to be addressed.

Cochran's sample size formula (Cochran in Bartlett, Kotrlík and Higgins, 2001) for categorical data was used to derive a sample size of 359 as the minimum expected returns teachers.

A questionnaire was administered to the sampled population of the study with the assistance of research assistants. The interview was administered to the five (5) Education Officers (EOs) in Nandi County. The interview schedule comprised questions which tested the knowledge of women's leadership development. The study successfully interviewed all the EOs because prior arrangements including early bookings for interviews were made by The study.

Data Analysis

Data was coded based on the variables which included the perception of both male and female teachers on women's leadership and strategies for enhancing women's leadership. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and means were used to analyse the data and facilitate interpretation and draw conclusions. The data collected from the interview schedules were qualitative and therefore, narrative analysis was employed to bring to light the underlying coherence of the respondents' personal views about the challenges facing women's leadership development and strategies to counter them in primary schools in Nandi County.

Results and Discussion

The study sought to determine the strategies needed to increase the number of women in leadership positions in primary schools. Table 1, below, presents a summary of responses proposed towards increasing the number of women teachers in leadership positions:

Table 1: Strategies needed to increase the number of women teachers in leadership positions

Strategies	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Seminars/training and empowerment of women for ladies on leadership/capacity building through gender mainstreaming in institutions and workplaces	125	33.4
Supporting by providing funds for further training	86	24
Development and availability of good role models	67	18.7
Implement Kenya 2010 constitution / Ministry to give women more chances/affirmative action/gender balance/ the 1/3 gender rule/	49	13.6
Women to further their education and apply and compete for administrative posts	21	5.9
High remuneration/ better pay	8	2.2
The curriculum should provide leadership education	8	2.2
Total	359	100.0

Findings from the study revealed the following strategies which were suggested by the respondents; 49 (13.6%) suggested that there should be a gender balance in the leadership, 120 (33.4%) of the respondents agreed that there should be seminars for ladies to support their quest for leadership, gender mainstreaming should be carried out in all institution and workplaces. 86 (24.9%) felt that women should be supported by being given funds for further training while 67 (18.7%) agreed that female leaders should have role models.

The study indicated that 49 (13.6%) of the respondents suggested that; there should be a fixed percentage for both genders during the promotion process, women should be empowered and more women should be trained for leadership posts respectively. Also, 21(5.9%) of the respondents agreed that women should be encouraged to further their education and apply for administrative posts and responsibility allowance be looked into respectively.

Eight (2.2%) of the respondents suggested the following; remuneration be increased, the new constitution be implemented, the Ministry of Education should give women more leadership chances, performance contracts be implemented, institutions should adhere to the new constitution, educate women on the importance of leadership and encourage more women to compete on the administrative positions respectively as shown in table 1.

According to the interview with EOs, EO (1) cited the following factors as challenges to women's leadership: culture, family responsibilities, fear of failure, community oppressing women with domestic and family chores, family stability and slow upward mobility with others taking over 15 years to rise from one position to another according to the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) scheme of service for the non-graduate teachers. These factors inhibit women's leadership development in the teaching profession, especially in primary schools in Nandi County.

From the interviews, all the respondents pointed out that although they are charged with the implementation of affirmative action during the recruitment of headteachers to bring about gender equity, one major challenge is that, female teachers do not meet the minimum qualifications making it difficult to enforce equality and therefore resulting into a continued underrepresentation of women in leadership.

It was also noted that since there were very few female headteachers, it was necessary to bring female headteachers on board to see if they would attract other female teachers to apply for the posts, even in rural areas. The respondents thought that this would prove to the aspiring female leaders that 'it can be done.' The lack of role models is also seen by Sherman (2000) as a contributing factor to the low number of female leaders. She states that women have had fewer women as role models and have been mentored less than men for certain leadership positions.

Garland (cited in Sherman 2000: 141) also argues that "*women have had difficulty developing needed mentorship relationships because older male administrators typically prefer a male who are junior versions of themselves*". This sort of attitude constrains women's professional ambitions and career development. Reece and Brandt (1996: 430) also note the importance of role models for women, as it would help women break away from traditional expectations. They further see such role models as women who plan a career and prepare for continued advancement, know what they want and ask for it, make decisions, live with the consequences, and learn from the process, realize that with equal rights come equal responsibilities, seek out opportunities that increase their abilities and status and develop qualities of cooperation, dependability, self-control and expertise in some areas.

Such women are referred to by Hall (in Udjombala, 2002), as "prototypes of success". A role model is a person you most admire or are likely to emulate (Reece and Brand, 1996). Burke and Collins (2001) also note that transformational leaders serve as role models and their subordinates aspire to be like them.

The EOs made the following suggestions; the gender policy should be implemented to give men and women equal chances at leadership; training should also be encouraged in seminars to empower leaders. There is also a need to empower girls to enable the transition into leadership and also give the leaders allowances for their responsibility; Implement the constitution. The community should be sensitised on women's leadership so that they can be able to appreciate and support female headteachers. Leadership courses should be incorporated into teacher education. There is a need to introduce gender-sensitive programmes that foster awareness of barriers to women's promotion and advancement to management positions in all organizations. Teacher education and training curricula should also be redesigned to include leadership courses.

Fullan (2000) supports these suggestions by asserting that the headteacher is the agent of change. There is no improving school without a leader who is good at leading transformational improvement. Successful headteachers share leadership, they reach out to their parents and community and work hard to expand the professional 'capacity' of the teachers to develop a coherent professional community. Such leaders are relationship-centred, and able to develop a clear collegial value framework and individual accountability. They foster the conditions required for school growth and develop a commitment to a mutual purpose and a shared belief in ongoing common actions. By doing this, they develop school capacity which in turn affects the quality of the teaching within the school. Such individual and school-wide capacity development combat the fragmentation and curricula incoherence presented by multiple innovations, gender mainstreaming included.

Zikhali (2007) recommended that there is a need to stop cultural practices hindering women from progressing in their careers such as a woman's priority is to be a mother and wife. Women also need to challenge traditional beliefs by negotiating domestic responsibilities, having self-confidence and seeking mentorship and coaching from female leaders. An integrated organizational management approach should be used to integrate all leadership systems and processes into one complete framework, enabling people to work as a single unit, unified by organisational goals, shared vision and common values. The system should depend on a balanced mix of masculine and feminine attributes. The approach should put its weight towards the adoption of measures to attract, advance and empower women to benefit from their qualifications, experience and talent.

There should be more gender-sensitive courses in schools. Since stereotypes hinder the achievement of gender equity in school headship, there is a need to re-socialise individuals into a new order where gender equality is the norm. The school is one of the primary socializing agents and one of its core roles is to pass on societal norms and values to learners (Chabaya, O Symphorosa R and Newman W (2009).

Summary of the findings

The study further sought to determine the strategies needed to increase the number of women in leadership positions in primary schools. Forty-nine (13.6%) suggested that there should be a gender balance in the leadership, 120 (33.4%) agreed that there should be seminars for ladies to support their quest, 86 (24.9%) felt that women should be supported by being given funds to support professional development initiatives. Sixty-seven (18.7%) agreed that female leaders should have good role models.

Furthermore, 49 (13.6%) respondents suggested that there should be a fixed percentage for both genders during the promotion process in which women are empowered and trained for leadership posts. Also, 21(5.9%) of the respondents agreed that women should be encouraged to further their education and apply for administrative posts. A minority of the respondents numbering 8 (2.2%) suggested remuneration to be increased, the new constitution to be implemented, the Ministry of Education to give women more leadership chances, performance contracts to be implemented, the new constitution to

be adhered to and finally, they suggested that women should be educated on the importance of leadership and should be encouraged to compete for administrative positions.

During the interviews with EOs, they gave the following challenges to women's leadership development, fear of failure, community oppressing women with domestic and family chores, family stability and slow upward mobility with others taking 15 years to rise from one position to another according to the TSC scheme of service for the non-graduate teachers.

It was noted that since there were very few female principals, it was necessary to bring female headteachers on board to see if they would attract other female teachers to apply for the posts, even in rural areas. They believed this would prove to inspire female leaders that 'it can be done. The lack of role models was seen by Sherman (2000) as a contributing factor to the low number of female leaders. She noted that women had fewer women role models and therefore they have been mentored less than men for certain leadership positions. Garland (cited in Sherman 2000) also argued that women have had difficulty developing needed mentorship relationships because older male administrators typically preferred males who were junior versions of themselves. This sort of attitude constrains women's professional ambitions and leadership development.

Reece and Brandt (1996) also noted the importance of role models for women as it would help women break away from traditional expectations. They further saw such role models as women who could plan a career and prepare for continued advancement, women who know what they want and ask for it, women who make decisions, live with the consequences, and learn from the process. Women realise that with equal rights come equal responsibilities. Women who seek out opportunities that increase their abilities and status and women develop qualities of cooperation, dependability, self-control and expertise in areas of leadership.

Such women are referred to by Hall (2002) as "prototypes of success". A role model is a person you most admire or are likely to emulate (Reece and Brandt, 1996). Burke and Collins (2001) also note that transformational leaders serve as role models and their subordinates aspire to be like them. During the interviews, the EOs gave the following as strategies for women's leadership development; policy should be implemented to give men and women equal chances of leadership, and the communities should be sensitised on women's leadership so that they can be able to appreciate and support female headteachers, Teacher education and training curriculum should be redesigned to include leadership courses and the new Kenyan Constitution should be implemented.

It was suggested that there is a need to stop cultural practices hindering women from progressing in their careers such as a woman's priority is to be a mother and wife. Women also need to challenge traditional beliefs by negotiating domestic responsibilities, having self-confidence and seeking mentorship and coaching from female leaders. An integrated organizational management approach should be used to integrate all leadership systems and processes into one complete framework, enabling people to work as a single unit, unified by organisational goals, shared vision and common values. The system should depend on a balanced mix of masculine and feminine attributes. The approach should put its weight towards the adoption of measures to attract, advance and empower women to benefit from their qualifications, experience and talent in a highly competitive environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the equal opportunities and chances availed to all teachers, female teachers, there is a need for sustainable strategies to mitigate glaring discrepancies in women's leadership development and promote sustainable strategies in improving women's leadership.

The study made the following recommendations:

Firstly, institutions of learning should leverage gender mainstreaming in all aspects of the organization to enhance equality and promote women's leadership

Secondly, Secure leadership and commit at the highest political level, at the appropriate level of government, to the development and implementation of a whole-of-government strategy for effective gender equality and mainstreaming, which would enable:

1. setting a rationale, action plans, priorities, timelines, objectives, expected outcomes and/or targets, and effective policy planning across public institutions for promoting gender equality. These measures should be accompanied by information and awareness campaigns, media strategies and regular reviews;
2. engaging relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to ensure an inclusive and comprehensive coverage of gender equality issues; and
3. adopting a dual approach to narrowing equality gaps through both gender mainstreaming and specific targeted actions to promote gender equality and women's leadership

Thirdly, widely disseminate and communicate the gender equality vision statement in simple terms both within and outside the government, including at the highest levels of politics and to society at large

Fourthly, Conduct broad consultations with stakeholders from both inside and outside the government, and with target groups from the public;

Strength, Weakness Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of proposed strategies can add important information on the expected impact; Include action-oriented recommendations to any assessment actions supporting policymakers in translating the findings into the government

Finally, there should be involvement and engagement of the National Statistics Bureau to ensure the collection of gender-disaggregated data across all sectors and in line with national gender impact indicators to ensure data and information on the outcomes of gender equality policies and programmes are collected, accessible and actively disseminated appropriately for decision and policy making to be gender-sensitive and evidence-based, it must rely on high quality, readily accessible gender-disaggregated data. Without such data, it is very difficult to understand the impact of gender equality and mainstreaming strategies and initiatives or the consequences of policies on women's leadership.

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