Barriers to women managers’ advancement in education in Uganda

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Attempts to explain women’s lack of achievement in educational management, both in countries in the developed world and in Africa, particularly Uganda. Suggests that women are hindered by both internal and external barriers which keep them from advancing; internally in the main owing to the effects of socialization and sex stereotyping, and externally because organizations so structure the behaviour of their workforce that women limit their performance because they are locked into low-power, low-visibility, dead-end jobs. Points out that these barriers are particularly applicable to women educational managers in Uganda, whose advancement is further impeded by the cultural imperatives of male dominance and suppression. Highlights a number of strategies which can help Ugandan women to overcome these barriers such as a sensitization programme to alert women to the opportunities available, and affirmative action by the government to put equality of opportunity as a high priority on the Ugandan national agenda.

Most of the literature on women in educational management relates to research and observations made in the UK, western Europe, Australia and the USA. It suggests that, although women form a majority among teachers in both primary and secondary schools, they are seriously under-represented in senior management positions. This is not just a UK or European phenomenon but is to be found in the research literature on the USA and other countries where women’s under-representation in school management and administration has been highlighted in recent research. In general management, at senior levels, women are showing that they have the potential to emerge as an extraordinarily valuable resource in management teams. Their traditional realm of experience has been the private sphere, in which values of interconnectedness and relationships have always held primary importance, but these skills are now assuming importance in the management of organizations at all levels.

Disparities among schools in terms of size, location and facilities demand differentiation in responsibilities and management styles. Vinnings talks of an “androgy nous” administrator or administration, which is sensitive, empathetic in dealing with people, assertive and able to manage power and conflict, to mention but a few characteristics. The androgy nous management style combines male and female leadership characteristics. Since it may be difficult to locate these characteristics in one person, any institutional leadership structure should have a combination of management, administration and organizational roles which can promote an androgy nous administration. The leader, in turn, should be an effective collaborator who can ensure collaboration at all levels.

There still appears to be a gender bias operating in many educational organizations in terms of recruitment to senior management teams. A study examining the selection and preparation of school administrators, commissioned by the US National Institute of Education in 1983 (Baltzell and Dentier, cited by McCurdy), specifically examined the selection of school principals for gender bias. The study found that there was an “old boy network” operating in many parts of the country, and that this network was responsible for most of the present day educators in management positions in the USA. After examining typical selection procedures, the researchers remarked that these processes are probably not merit-based enough to result in leaders who can meet the many emerging needs of the times. This situation, which is replicated in other countries, is exacerbated by the current and growing need to ensure that the changing demographics of schools and society are appropriately reflected in the leadership of schools.

Twenty years ago, when schools were expanding, gaining promotion seemed almost automatic. Planning a career appeared almost a superfluous exercise, since most ambitious teachers had a series of jobs which took them rapidly towards management posts. Today’s generation of teachers needs to be rather more systematic in its approach to promotion, especially if the ultimate aim is a headship. The vast majority of senior staff have worked their way steadily through a constructive series of jobs in order to become suitably prepared for senior management roles. This is a difficult task for any teacher but it is especially difficult for women. We would not suggest that there is some sort of deliberate exclusion of women from senior posts, which would be illegal in any case, but that many women perceive they are being denied access to such positions.

Research into school effectiveness and school improvement, both in the UK and developing countries, would suggest that development and improvement of schools is a matter not only for individuals but for the whole school staff working together towards the shared goals of the school. This way of working presupposes a collegiate approach to teaching, which is often overlooked in the development of hierarchies of leadership in schools. This can lead to a situation in which women are confined to particular management areas deemed appropriate for them, e.g. pastoral or “caring”, and only ever achieve lower status posts of responsibility, carrying lower responsibility allowances. Where a school has this particular type of leadership arrangement, women’s influence...
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Internal and external barriers to progress

A number of models have been used by researchers to explain women’s lack of achievement in this field. Hansot and Tyack[12] have suggested three models. The first is based on the premise that women are hindered by internal barriers which keep them from advancing, in the main owing to the effects of socialization and sex stereotyping. In this model women are seen as victims, needing to be resocialized so that they can fit into a male world. The second model is based on the belief that organizations structure the behaviour of their members, so that women limit their performance because they are locked into low-power, low visibility, dead-end jobs. The third model is based on the premise that the world is male defined and male run, and that male dominance suppresses women. Shakeshaft[13] favours the third model as the most useful for explaining women’s low achievement in school management. She feels that internal barriers, such as low self-image, lack of confidence and lack of motivation or aspiration, result from the social context of men holding power and privilege over women.

Shakeshaft offers two models to help with the discussion of female aspirations. First, she suggests that women do aspire but in a different way to men and, if judged by the traditional male definition, may not appear to aspire. Second, women aspire but organizational and societal barriers prevent women from acknowledging or acting on their aspirations, so it appears that they lack aspiration. If aspiration is measured against male experience, then women do aspire, but to different posts than men. The trend is for women to aspire to be competent, experienced teachers and for men to aspire to be managers and administrators.

Whatever the reasons, a number of studies support the notion that the motivation for entering teaching differs for men and women: most enter teaching to teach but most men enter teaching to administer[13, p. 87].

She also describes barriers of overt and covert sex discrimination. These can be more subtle, but no less powerful in their effect in hindering the progress of women. Shakeshaft[13] lists the following factors:

- lack of focus on female students;
- lack of female role models;
- lack of child care;
- poor medical services for female problems;
- gender-biased reading material;
- less career support from family and peers for women than men;
- male networking excluding women;
- women having more financial restrictions placed on them than men;
- the difficulties of combining a high status job with the role of wife and mother;
- because of an androcentric world view, traditional female qualities not being highly valued, “competent and female do not go together”[14];
- male employers feeling that women cannot cope with the emotional and physical stress found in school management[15];
- employers expecting women to do things differently, and in a less effective way than men.

In many research studies it has been found that women who do achieve are most likely to be those who conform to stereotypes of the achieving woman. Davidson and Cooper[16] share the opinion of Shakeshaft regarding the similarity of male and female managers.

They consider that women managers are frequently put under a great deal of stress by the conflicting roles that they assume. As well as their work and domestic roles, they may have the additional taxing role of being treated as a “token woman”, or a test case for future women. Isolation, lack of female role models, exclusion from male groups and working to resist traditional female sex roles can all exacerbate the stress. These issues are not just applicable to women seeking management posts in western countries but are also likely to be experienced by women in developing countries such as Uganda.
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We would now like to focus on some of the most significant barriers that effect women's entry into educational management in Uganda. We need to begin by looking at the educational histories of girls and women in that country. UNICEF[17] reports that in Uganda, girls and boys have an equal right to schooling in principle. However, in practice girls are less likely to attend schools. In the earliest years of primary schooling, primary years one and two, there is a good attendance by both girls and boys and the numbers are roughly similar. However, as girls continue through their education, more and more drop out, especially as they reach primary years five to seven. The drop-out rate is much higher for girls, as evidenced by the negative correlation between the ratio of girls enrolled to boys by grade level. In 1990, for example, girls constituted 46 per cent of pupils in primary one but only 38 per cent of pupils in primary seven[17]. Girls face more problems of drop out in Ugandan schools than boys, but it is a problem for both sexes. Students are currently dropping out of school at every level. For instance, out of the children who enrolled in primary one in 1975, 90 per cent reached primary seven. By 1992, 70 per cent of the children who began primary one in 1986 had dropped out. This means that only 30 per cent reached primary seven. This drop-out rate had increased to 47 per cent by 1991[18].

Girls in Ugandan primary and secondary schools do not receive adequate advice and counselling and are forced to make their own decisions or consult members of their peer group who may be ill informed. Having well-trained personnel, who have a good understanding of girls’ problems and are able to provide regular guidance and counselling would help to reduce the problem. This would help relieve such pressures for girls and also encourage them to progress academically and socially. Among a sample of Ugandan women surveyed in 1988, 64 per cent reported that they did not finish or go beyond primary school level owing to lack of school fees, while 8 per cent discontinued their schooling owing to pregnancy[17].

The results of the primary leaving certificate deter mine entry to secondary schools. Girls do less well than boys in this examination, except in English[17]. By the time they reach secondary school, the proportion of girls to boys is one half that found at the primary level. Many schools accept girls with lower qualifying marks than boys in order to attract girls, but there are many more boys-

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Girls do not actually need special schools[21] but it helps when they constitute a relatively large proportion of the school population in a co-educational institution. There is also need to create awareness in the community about the potential and abilities of girls. Parents especially need to be made aware of the need for girls to spend as much time on homework as boys do (instead of expecting them to engage in household chores while the boys do their homework). A policy review report by the Ugandan Ministry of Education[18] included a section on education for women. In the report the Commission identified factors which they saw as having an adverse effect on girls' education in general and contributing to the high rate of drop-out among girls at all levels of formal education. The factors were as follows:

(i) Because of the patrilineal society and other social and cultural factors, many parents in Uganda tend to prefer educating boys to girls;

(ii) Most coeducational institutions are not well equipped with separate facilities for girls. The coeducational boarding institutions generally have more boys than girls. Girls tend to suffer more from the natural physiological and psychological changes that render their academic performance in these coeducational institutions relatively poor;
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Strategies for improving women's access to educational management in Uganda

If parents lack sufficient money to pay for their children's education, which most do, they are more likely to send the boys rather than the girls to school. Many rural schools and lower fee band schools are of a low standard and do not provide a good experience, especially for girls. The physical environment, including toilet and dormitory facilities, are often particularly harsh for the female students. There are few role models provided by women staff, especially in science teaching and at managerial levels. Poorly educated parents are more likely to hold the traditional stereotype of the girl's place being restricted to that of wife, child-bearer and home manager. They cannot see any need for their girls to be educated in matters not directly related to the home, the family and the farm. The academic orientation of the curriculum may affect some parents' perceptions of the relevance of education for girls. Many children and parents consider the primary leaving examination subjects irrelevant to a girl's future career in a rural area. Gender stereotyping, too, is embodied in curriculum materials. A report of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, commissioned by the Ministry of Women in Development[22], noted that in social studies courses in schools all the traditional heroes cited were men.

It is against this background of discrimination, both overt and covert, that we need to consider the position of women in Uganda, as they seek to enter the higher echelons of the teaching profession. Many men, educated and uneducated, will have a vested interest in holding on to power and authority rather than sharing it with women. Because of the way women have been socialized they frequently have low self-esteem, and many will be underconfident in their abilities outside the domestic role.

Structural adjustment programmes, too, are tending to have a negative effect on women. For example, in the current reduction in numbers of the civil service, many lower-ranking employees are being retrenched (made redundant), which means that most of the women employed in the civil service are losing their jobs. Only a small proportion of the higher ranks, which are the most secure positions, have been given to women.

Strategies which aim to increase the numbers of girls and women in education include the ongoing sensitization programme, which is run at village level by the development secretaries of the RCs. The aim is to sensitize parents to the benefits of educating their girl children as well as their boy children. In 1989 Makerere University took the step of awarding additional points towards the qualifying mark of all women.
potential students, thus taking affirmative action to raise the number of females.

The Uganda Teaching Service Commission (UTSC), established by Statute of Parliament, is a body responsible for the selection, interviewing and appointment of officers deemed suitable to head educational institutions. Successful candidates are posted through the Commissioner of Education to various schools and headships. It is government policy to post a headteacher to any part of the country. However, the Ministry of Education is now giving due consideration to gender issues when posting a head of school. Where a male is posted, a female deputy is likely to be attached and vice versa. The Ministry is also trying to encourage female enrolment in co-educational post primary institutions by trying to provide adequate curriculum arrangements for girls, for example, by providing courses in home management, food nutrition, textiles and clothing etc. Ensuring that there is a female leader and leadership in coeducational schools, can also be considered a step forward. In so doing, the Ministry hopes to balance the enrolment of boys and girls and to reduce gender inequality.

In a further effort to promote quality in schools, the Ministry of Education and Sports and other relevant bodies like the Uganda Management Institute now organize workshops, seminars and courses for school leaders, especially headteachers and their deputies, principals and deputy principals and potential holders of these posts. One of the strategies advocated in these workshops is that of collaborative leadership. Leaders are encouraged to share power, decision making and expertise but at the same time they are trained in the interpersonal skills of co-operation and communication which are now considered to be essential management skills. Hargreaves[23], looks at collaboration as a key to leadership quality in education. International moves towards equality of opportunity are having an effect in Uganda. At ministerial level, many politicians attend international meetings and are aware of the emphasis being put on women’s concerns and of the roles women take internationally. We believe that at all levels of society women and men are changing in their views and that traditional stereotyped roles and behaviour patterns are being eroded. This difference is shown in many ways; for example, it is now less common to see women kneeling to greet men in the street, and more common to hear of men taking an active role in the rearing of children.

Non-government organizations too are tending to focus on the primary roles of women related to family health care and the care of the environment. Their approach is two-pronged, meeting the practical daily needs of women and also their strategic ones. The practical needs include access to water and fuel; the strategic needs are more long term, such as higher status and position, and may be met through improved access to higher education.

Womens’ leadership is currently a subject of great debate and concern in Uganda, as the nation is coming to realize that to achieve quick and sustainable development, the gender factor can no longer continue to be ignored. The report of the Ugandan Education Policy Review Commission[18] made several recommendations which, if put into effect, should greatly enhance the situation of girls and women. Recommendation 162 stated that:

The Government should provide more secondary schools exclusively for girls to ensure security while receiving education[18, p. 162].

The Commission also recognized that many more boys than girls were being educated in both primary and secondary schools and that this had a knock-on effect on enrolment in tertiary institutions and universities. It recommended that:

In Co-educational schools, either the Head or the Deputy Head should be a woman in order to look after the special needs of girls properly[18, p. 163]. Adequate facilities should be provided for girls in co-educational post-primary institutions in order to allow for a balanced enrolment between boys and girls[18, p. 164].

The report stated that the number of women attaining university places was too low, but that the attainment of those women who were in university was in the main very good. It was expected that the number of women students would rise with improved provision for girls at the secondary stage.

Conclusions

Researchers have suggested that the barriers to women in the developed world result from the fact that society is male dominated, and through socialization, sex stereotyping and sex discrimination, women often have low self-image, low self-confidence and lack motivation. Many individuals hold negative opinions towards women in positions of power and there is a widely held belief that women make less effective managers than do men. Similar barriers affect women in Uganda with some additions. The most significant of these results from differentiation on the basis of gender and includes: reduced access to
education, including basic literacy, the experiences that females have in education which are different to the experiences of males, and the additional social responsibilities that the majority of girls and women hold.

Many different strategies are being used to overcome these barriers. It has been suggested here that the way in which one views the barriers will influence the change strategies which will be found to be most useful. We have suggested that a range of strategies is needed, including: improving the abilities and confidence of women and changing the organizations in which they work. In Uganda, strategies are being employed at different levels – individual, societal, organizational, national and international. Implementation of these can cause changes which have an effect at several levels.

The barriers, and the most appropriate strategies, must be viewed in the whole context of the life of an individual, the structure of an organization, and the needs, norms and values of society and culture. It appears that over the last two or three years the advancement of girls and women in education and in educational management in developed countries has slowed down considerably, and previous change may be in the process of consolidation. However, in Uganda, it appears that the prospects for girls and women are currently improving rapidly and may continue to do so for some time to come.

References